Space in higher education - design and agency

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Campus space in higher education

Examples from a project

Ways to understand space and interaction

Conclusion - challenges
Photos from participants at international staff exchange, Malmö University
... so, if we put before the mind's eye the ordinary schoolroom,

with its rows of ugly desks placed in geometrical order,
crowded together so that there shall be as little moving room as possible,
desks almost all of the same size, with just space enough to hold books, pencils and paper,
and add a table, some chairs, the bare walls, and possibly a few pictures, we can reconstruct the only educational activity that can possibly go on in such a place.

It is all made “for listening”...

Space designed telling people what to do
(cf. Kirkeby, 2006).

While teachers usually have little agency over spatial arrangements at the fixed ranks of building and floor, there is much potential in the more dynamic ranks of room and element. Such work is the stuff of pedagogic design...
(Jones, 2008)

Space is negotiable and designed in interaction with the participants in the space
(cf. Jewitt, 2005)
my focus

how are students and teachers interacting using the resources afforded by the room?

how do the participants use space as a resource designing and re-designing their way in a meaning making process?
Agency

Agency - participation and ability to act in a certain situation (cf. Selander & Kress, 2010)

...learners as agentive, resourceful and creative meaning-makers who communicate using the communicative potential and multiple resources of their bodies and of their environment to interconnect (Stein, 2008: 122).
Space - designs for learning and in learning

(cf. Selander & Kress, 2010)
designs for learning

institutional framing, settings and conditions for learning, such as institutional norms, curricula and learning resources...
Designs for learning - some examples from teacher and specialist nurse education

Shared understanding what the space is about – genre

No explicit sense of agency in relation to space (teachers and students)

Schedule, no possibility to choose, time, colleagues' didactic design, accepting the room as it is...
Most teachers do not use space in the didactic design for learning

Focus on teacher agency, not student
teacher agency – orchestrating the seminar...
Re-designing the traditional academic space
Front- active place.
Back – a place for listening.

Designs for learning
Other aspects
Space - designs in learning

space as a resource in a meaning-making process

HOW?
Designs in learning

Teacher’s agency in transforming the space

The lecture

Transforming the lecture hall to a seminar room?
What about student agency?
Designs in learning

But what about student agency?

Choose where to be seated, how to respond to the teacher “dialogic mode”

Choose their place in the room, in relation to each other. How to interact with each other and the teacher. Accepting or not accepting the seminar...

Using the “limited” resources to transform the seminar to a lecture
To sum up designs for learning helps us to understand...

No explicit sense of agency in relation to space (teachers and students)

The design of the space is the result of the agency, the choices and the work of the teacher/s.

This become the prompt for the students’ engagement and frames the interaction.

The students go along with the the design but use their agency to interact (or not) in the different spaces (with limited resources).

The re-design is about re-producing a “traditional” learning space.

Space, as designed for learning, is something both teachers and students read, transform and re-design in action, designing their paths in learning in higher education.

The results points towards a need for ”space didactics”.
So, even if we want more of this...
This is what we have...
Different.
Flexible.
Wide range of resources.
Challenging.
Connect formal with informal.
Increase agency.

"It is important to include less regulated spaces in order to increase students’ choices and allow scope for reflection” (Archer, 2014, s.10).
Active space — the result of active didactic choices
References


Leijon, M. (forthcoming). Space as designs for and in learning: investigating the interplay between space, interaction and learning sequences in higher education. Visual communication. Accepted.
