THE SCHOLARSHIP FRAMEWORK

Scholarly spaces: research report

Context

This report synthesises information from two separate trial and test projects carried out during the academic year 2016-17. Conceptually, it is underpinned by the ideas presented by Neary and Beetham in Lea (2015) around 'Academic Space', and ideas of communities of practice (Wenger, 1998). The aims of the project was to create, develop and articulate spaces that enabled and supported staff to engage with scholarly activity within a college higher education (HE) environment.

Both trials and tests initially used an action research methodology, but developed more fluidly, in line with external contexts and informed by evidence as the projects developed.

Evidence has been collected using a mixed methods approach. Quantitative methods include surveys[1], key outputs and usage data. Quantitative methods include interviews, case studies and a research report[2] informed by Actor Network Theory which considers how a scholarly community of practice might be developed and identifies key actants in the process.

The project ran across three colleges - Hereford College of Arts (HCA), South Gloucestershire and Stroud College (SGSCol) and Gloucestershire College (Gloscol). However, the design and implementation of 'scholarly spaces' at each centre was context-specific and varied according to individual staff needs and the very different aims, values and structures of each college.

Limitations and strengths

Robust data capture was problematic at SGSCol and Gloscol with low returns on surveys, possibly due to the amount of survey data required at times by wider

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[1] An initial survey, mid-point survey and end-of-project survey

[2] Building Communities of Practice

project needs. A conscious decision was taken by the Scholarship Development Manager (SDM) to prioritise project-wide survey response collection over collection of local survey data for this project.

A key limitation of this project is that much of the work creating and developing scholarly spaces (and thus evidence of impact) has been carried out at the lead college (HCA), which, as a small, specialist college with a small dedicated HE staff team, represents only one strand of the diversity of college HE centres.

However, scholarly spaces of varying types have been created by all partners, and key outputs include dissemination activities from all colleges involved in the triad.

The different implementations and purposing of the scholarly spaces at each centre provide evidence for the need to contextualise what a scholarly space might look like; this supports a flexible output that might be useful for a diverse sector. Once decontextualised from the individual context, core principles in the creation of scholarly spaces can be created using inductive reasoning and used to create a tool which can then be re-contextualised to suit individual centres across a diverse sector.

Problem space: engaging in research and scholarship

Responses drawn from an initial staff survey and interviews with key managers at SGScol, HCA and Gloscol suggested the main perceived barrier to staff at college HE centres was lack of 'time' and 'space', as well as various practical applications considering resourcing.

Lea (2015) reveals that the nature of academic 'time' is both fluid and complex, and works in dimensions beyond that of contractual obligations. However, an investigation of scholarly space, as an action-research intervention across all centres, seemed more appropriate in terms of each centres being able to facilitate the creation of such spaces. Therefore, the project looked at ideas of scholarly space, breaking these down into three areas:

- Digital scholarly spaces
- Physical scholarly spaces
- Curricular scholarly spaces

Each college contributed ideas to what might be useful scholarly spaces across these dimensions in their contexts.

Results from the initial survey also suggested that scholarly space was perceived by staff to be a space which:

- Encouraged dialogue
- Was non-hierarchical
- Blended digital with analogue

Therefore, spaces across the dimensions were created which supported these ideas. Mid-point and end-of-project survey results suggest that staff were noticeably aware of the creation of such spaces, and that the next steps for the project in this particular centre should be considerations of 'time' and other practical resourcing, e.g. access to journals.[3]

Theoretical underpinnings

Theoretical underpinnings for the creation of scholarly spaces has been informed by Neary and Beetham's (2015) work on scholarly space and the wider concepts of academic time and space addressed in Lea (2015), Morgan and Houghton (2011) as well as Healey, Jenkins and Lea (2014).

Understanding of ideas of scholarship has been underpinned by Boyer (1999), Brockbank and McGill's 'Scholarly Dialogue Model' of discourse (2004), Eaton et al's (2016) work around partnership learning communities, and the idea of 'HE-ness' (Lea and Simmons, 2012) in college HE.

This, in turn, led to considerations of the importance of supporting staff and students self-efficacy and self-actualisation (Ritchie, 2016), (Maslow, 1965) as part of a self-sustaining community of practice (Wenger, 1998, 2002; Corso and Giacobbe, no date). The use of actor network theory (Latour, 1998, 2005) supported evidencing key factors in this process.

Work on digital scholarly spaces considered the work of Seimens (2008), Blascke (2012), Hase and Kenyon, (2001, 2007) and Gordon (2014), as well as Pentland and Feldman (2008).

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[3] An initial survey, mid-point survey and end-of-project survey

Work on physical scholarly spaces was underpinned by Neary's investigation (2010) of learning landscapes, but also by ideas of less formal learning, such as Eraut (2004), Boys' investigation of learning environments (2009) and the work of D-School.[4]

Digital scholarly spaces

Digital scholarly spaces created through the project included:

- A less formal teaching and learning project open to students and staff[5]
- A dialogic 'scholarship' space which included members across the triad (Basecamp group)
- A student-facing dialogic 'scholarship' space at SGScol (Basecamp group)
- A scholarship blog. [6]

A mixture of gated and open community spaces were created, including through the college VLE. The use of digital spaces was captured as case studies and disseminated through conference presentations, internal and external conference publications and case studies on the AoC webpages.

A key digital scholarly space in terms of creating a record of dissemination activity is the www.hcascholarship.com blog, which at the time of writing has had over 51,000 reads from over 21,000 visitors[7].

The blog served as an informal and fluid platform that could develop and be repurposed as the project developed: used for showcasing staff engaged with research, writing case studies of good practice and narratives of conference visits, the blog's content has become more critically reflective over the course of the project.

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[4] D-School, Stanford - https://dschool.stanford.edu/

[5] (#CClasses)

[6] http://hcascholarship.com/

[7] Statistical data drawn from http://hcascholarship.com/ WordPress analytics

Physical scholarly spaces

Physical scholarly spaces created or explicitly articulated as 'HE' spaces through the project include:

- The HCA research room space[8]
- Scholarship noticeboards at SGScol
- The 'HE common room' at Gloscol

A report[9] produced around HCA2 trial and test suggests that the creation of such spaces, however they are manifested, is key to developing a community of practice which supports scholarship at HCA.

Usage data shows that the HCA research room space proved invaluable in facilitating the creation of curriculum scholarly spaces for staff and students. Likewise, the HE common room at Gloscol provided a common space for HE staff to work during training days at a larger, FE-focussed centre which has embedded HE provision.

Visual discourse analysis[10] suggests that Bristol School of Art and Hereford College of Arts hold similar characteristics to those perceived as desirable in a 'scholarly space' in their studio environments. The studio environment as scholarly space might form an area of further investigation, and the structure of such environments might equally inform ideas of practice-as-research as scholarly activity.

Curriculum scholarly spaces

Curriculum scholarly spaces created include:

- HE discussion/training days as part of the '5 E's' programme at Gloscol[11]
- 'Creative Lunch' sessions
- Drop-in sessions at Gloscol and SGScol
- 'Creative Tea' sessions
- 'Festival of Practice' [12]

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[8] Details of the tracked through the scholarship blog

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[10] – the art college studio

[11] '5 E's' is a structure for developing HE provision created by Karlee Jarvis, Gloscol

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- L5 'Ideas in Culture and Society' module at HCA
- Pop-up lunchtime staff/student events
- 'Freedom spaces' at HCA[13]

It is noticeable that most of these 'find' space; they are 'extra-curricular', taking place either as a fluid format (drop-in sessions), over lunchtime (creative lunches) orin a twilight session (creative teas). The exceptions to this are formally acknowledged through college calendars, and include HE training days at SGScol and Gloscol and the 'Festival of Practice' at HCA.

In all centres, therefore, scholarly space is either re-purposed (through adapting existing college training sessions) or created in spaces between teaching timetables.

The only formalised curriculum scholarly space created is the L5 'Ideas in Culture and Society' 20 credit-assessed 'optional' module at HCA. Likewise, the 'freedom spaces' programme (yet to launch) of porous, unassessed curriculum time exists in space created by timetabling HE students and staff to leave Wednesday afternoons as a 'free' space for all students.

Impact

During the final survey at HCA a clear strand was expressed that - *'we have enough scholarly spaces'.* The next 'problem space' that is asked to be addressed is 'time'. Conversations have begun with senior leadership team (SLT) around the complexities of this area, and a position paper outlining the dimensions of academic time will be drafted.

Digital spaces
Impact of digital scholarly spaces can be seen through:
- Use data/statistics
- Growth of connections, networks and digital social capital[14]
- Teaching and learning opportunities[15]

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[13] Curriculum spaces internal position note

[14] Digital social capital can be difficult to evidence. However, this data visualisation from the cclasses project charts 'mentions' on twitter - the high ranking of HCA, the lead tutor at HCA and two students alongside lecturers from high profile HEI's suggests that social circles may have expanded.

[15] The cclasses project, (see reflection here) supported students in considering complex issues, but also in developing connections and a professional profile on social media.

- Key outputs - conference presentations, case studies on AoC webpages, internal presentations

Key findings in determining the most useful and successful purposing of digital social spaces suggest that a key purpose must be determined by the group before, or very shortly after, the space is created. Spaces that were created but did not have impact shared the common feature of lacking this purpose.

It is difficult to draw comparative use data from 'scholarship' pages on HCA's VLE, as through the projects duration they grew and moved. A key signifier of impact here might be the elevation of 'scholarship' from one sub-category in the Staffnet pages of 'Teaching and Learning' through to a current iteration, where 'scholarship' is hierarchically ranked alongside 'HE courses' 'FE courses' and 'Staffnet', and contains subsections for student and staff scholarship.

Physical spaces
The impact of physical scholarly spaces created through the project can be seen through:
- Use of data/statistics
- Amount of dissemination/curriculum scholarly spaces created[16]

Curriculum spaces
The impact of scholarly curriculum spaces (HCA only) can be evidenced through:
- Staff and student attendance at events[17][18]
- Staff and student engagement at events[19]
- Quantity of events created[20]
- Outputs from discussion sessions which support college-wide strategies[21]

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[16] Without the appropriate physical spaces needed to host peer-to-peer events, it is unlikely that so many could have been held, and this would have impacted on the overall impact of the project at HCA. An unexpectedly pleasant outcome has also been the appreciation of the space by external visitors in their forward-facing feedback

[17] 100% of full-time HE staff participated in scholarly spaces events (see table)

[18] 50% of all HE staff (FT and PT) at HCA contributed to external scholarly outputs

[19] Qualitative evidence of Staff and student engagement

[20] 24 bespoke internal scholarship events –see 'scholarship project internal events'

[21] Discussions in scholarly spaces have led to the draft scholarship policy, HEA fellowship applications, a draft peer observation of learning and teaching policy, the TEF, evaluation of TEF, 'HCA attributes and strategies' work.

- Other (for example, formal and informal feedback from validating body)[22]

Evaluation of impact

The aims of the trial and test and wider project are to 'embed and develop a culture of scholarship in college HE'. All colleges involved in the project had little or no evidence of this on a collegiate level, at least one beyond staff individual practice as discrete from college (i.e. as exhibiting artists) before the project start.

There is sufficient evidence in terms of outputs and internal and external dissemination activities (case studies, thinkpieces, conference presentations)[23] that the 'scholarly spaces' project was helpful in finding out which types of 'scholarly space' supported scholarly activities, and which were less successful.

The project has been tracked through the scholarship blog, and distinct progress can be seen in terms of how various scholarly spaces started, and how they developed. It would not, for example, have been possible to get enough staff members involved with a whole-day 'festival of practice' event should this have been suggested at the start of the project. Cultural change at HCA has been incremental and, in places, problematic. Cultural change at Gloscol has been equally impactful but driven by a very different set of processes and structures, of which the 'scholarly spaces' project has played a small part. Development at SGSCol has been affected by various external factors, including change to the learning environment, so is more difficult to quantify in terms of how/if the scholarly spaces project had impact on any meaningful level.

It is also worth mentioning that, although not a stated project aim, it has long been HCA's strategic goal to enable HE staff to engage with postgraduate courses. Since the project's inception, four staff have put in CPD requests for doctoral programmes, and three are currently PhD candidates at various institutions. 75% of HE staff at HCA are prepared to explicitly be called 'research-active'.

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[22] The role of the Scholarship Development Manager was formally praised and acknowledged during Validation by University of Wales Trinity St David. Informal feedback around the role of the blog, HCA symposium in the UWTSD WalesNEXUS conference, the festival of practice and Enhancement theme meetings has also been very positive.

[23] As of July, 19% of Case Studies published on the AoC Scholarship Project website have been contributed by HCA and partner colleges, and 7% of thinkpieces, with one further to be published. At the AOC 2016 Research and Scholarship Conference, 3 breakout sessions were presented by HCA (10%) and in 2017 5 submissions were accepted from across the HCA triad.

It might, therefore, be argued that developing a network of less-formal, accessible, facilitated, dialogic 'scholarly spaces' across domains supports staff unused to explicitly engaging with research and scholarship to engage - and articulate their engagement - with such activities. However, although generic lessons can be drawn, it also points to the importance of creating a resource that can be adapted to the particular context of different centres.

This forms the basis for the suggested scholarly spaces self-assessment for colleges, which might form a key project output.

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