

Exploring the Ecology of Teaching & Learning in Higher Education Responses to some of the questions/comments posted

Chrissi Nerantzi:@norman my question would be about diversity... and how we can make sure that this is an element of the different ecologies/eco-systems?

Dr Jenny Willis:The trouble comes when there are so many different sub-divisions that they become rivals. We see this in the NHS - when resources are limited, competition works to the detriment of the system.

I think the lifewide concept celebrates the diversity of life in all its glory. It recognises that life is full of different spaces and physical/social environments some for many hours others for a shorter time - family/home, work, travel to and from work, social spaces at work. We are the ones who give each space meaning who connect up the experiences to create a life. Learning ecologies actually often transgress many spaces as the illustration of the student showed. This is the norm.

Jayne Richards:spatial relationships? Use of the democratic circle? Listening to each other and sharing? Game-based activity?

Yes we need to develop a broad conception of the meaning of spaces to embrace practical, intellectual, psychological, emotional as well as physical and virtual.. eg spaces for inquiry, for making, for listening, for sharing, for empathising - so different pedagogic practices come into play like gaming and role play for example..

Dr Jenny Willis:For me, motivation is paramount.

Its critical Jenny without will nothing happens.. but perhaps more importantly is the source of motivation is it from within or without. There is a continuum from inhabiting an ecology that is entirely someone elses motivation is driven by the person(s) who create it (pedagogical relationship) to inhabiting your own ecology that you have determined.

Linda Robson:it is important to consider those that prevent or disrupt learning too! - a safe space with trust and engagement of everyone

Yes it is.. its very important for teachers to design learning ecologies that reduce impediments to learning.. but perhaps may also disrupt from time to time as a strategy for learning. Safe spaces in which people respect, openly share and trust are part of the local culture created by a teacher as part of the ecology.

Chrissi Nerantzi:@linda, important points you are making. How can we enable this in an HE context?

Towards the end of my talk I suggested how we might first become aware of learning ecologies - awareness is the first step before we can design and plan for them in a students programme. Also bearing in mind that students are creating their own ecologies outside their

programme.

Linda Robson:in a preschool environment it is often the children who set the agenda - they bring in the questions that then drive what they learn about

Hala Evans:We also need to respect what students know and encourage them to share it.

Linda Robson:I think it happens more at preschool - the kids arrive on Monday talking about what they did at the weekend and the teachers thre will pick up on something to explore further

Yes it is.. pre-school and early years offer some of the best examples of interactive learning ecologies created by teachers who are open and responsive to the contributions of participants. We can learn a lot about building such participator and responsive ecologies for learning from these teachers.

Peter Shukie:also the curricula, national and standardising, and expecations of what political drivers 'suggest' should be learned - a hidden presence of OFSTED too

Yes these forces are all part of macro system that shape what is possible but there is so much intelligence and creativity in teachers and their teaching that such things can be worked around in the interests of good education and learning.

Linda Robson:in HE you need to encourage students to network wiht their peers to develop self confidence and trust

You do and giving students more opportunity to build their own ecologies for learning would encourage this.. There's the problem work out how to solve it.. Some of the most significant developments in higher education are taking place in project-based learning environments such as Ecole42. See Jan issue of Creative Academic Magazine

<http://www.creativeacademic.uk/magazine.html>

Dr Jenny Willis:My problem is the different expectations of parents and my employer (most of whom come from the far East where cultural drives are so different.

Yes and that is why the professional role is so interesting and challenging... teachers have to think and work at all scales of the ecosystem .. macro, exo, meso and micro.. And I know that this is what you do.. you do take risks and create ecologies that try to meet their expectations and your educational values and ideals.

Dr Jenny Willis:Survival of the fittest may not mean the best for education!

Linda Robson:@Jenny, but is the purpose formal certified education a way to rank fitness for employers? (not saying it should be just throwing that out there as an idea)

Just a thought ...perhaps fitness might also be expressed in the willingness and capability to build ecologies to solve problems and challenges that we don't understand.. they have to be explored.. that is a time of fitness for the whitewater world we live in

Chrissi Nerantzi: learning does not exclusively happen within formal ed?

Well most learning outside HE does not need a formal process with scaffolding, instruction, pre-defined resources and dedicated support etc

This is the link to Ellie's clip where she describes how she used the framework to evaluate a specific teaching and learning situation. Please watch <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0lgEQNAHXLc&feature=youtu.be>

Dr Jenny Willis: Linda, we are increasingly expected to meet employability needs, whereas my own preference is the lifewide, not-necessarily utilitarian model.

Linda Robson: @Jenny, I'm with you on that, but when you add the economic element in then employability/ return on investment becomes a disruptive force and pushes us in that direction

Which is why I think raising awareness of the value of learning ecologies is really important. While not explicitly about employability being able to build an ecology to solve a significant problem in a work context is an absolutely essential capability of the highest order.. it runs across the whole of Blooms taxonomy.. At the same time it treats and values learning in a more holistic relational and respectful way than you need this bit of communication skill or teamworking.

Linda Robson: I'm struggling to see how this learning ecology framework couldn;t be applied to any learning situation

That is my own belief too but I would like others to confirm it and also to suggest ways it might be improved.

Peter Shukie: I think learning ecology thinking applies well to COOCs (www.coocs.co.uk) (Community Online Courses)

Peter Shukie: where learning is by anyone for anyone, not formal necessarily

Peter Shukie: COOCs is my research and is a free to all learning platform where anyone can create courses - it is a sort of non-institutional MOOC approach but not Massive but community

I think it does too Peter..thank you for introducing me to the idea which I picked up in a tweet you made last week. I think the #creative COOC is a great place to imagine how the ideas are related.. We did an issue of Creative Academic Magazine a year ago that explored this a bit but more could be done.. <http://www.creativeacademic.uk/magazine.html>

Linda Robson: Perhaps it is because my first degree was in Ecology that it seems too easy to me!

Sounds like you can bring some real insights to this discussion Linda

Sandra, LondonMet: Yes, @Jenny - I read your response in the Google+ group - and agree that building bonds and belonging amongst the students seems to be a key factor... An issue with this is the new arena of targets and tests - that implies a focus

on Content (only) - and forgets the human processes involved in being, being together and doing together...

Dr Jenny Willis: Is there a danger that our micro-ecology becomes engulfed by a predator?

Don't be so pessimistic..the spirit of mankind ALWAYS rises above such things and invents a new reality.. We are just one point on multiple trajectories and our contribution is nudge the ones we feel are right and tweak or subvert the ones that we feel are not right

Linda Robson: yes Jenny - that is evolution

***hala elmarsafy: yes I agree that this. model is applicable to classes i HE
Sandra, LondonMet: In our model creativity is part of the process of becoming...
becoming students, becoming academics - and becoming people with self-confidence...***

Absolutely Sandra.. its also part of being myself and creating new meaning through what I encounter and choose to interact with

Peter Shukie: I think the Alexander quote links toward Kanuka (2008) and Parchoma (2011) who talk of 'philosophies of practice' and being aware of these, not being driven by tech or curricular

I dont know these works but will take a look.. I think learning ecologies could well be my philosophy in practice. Thanks

Kanuka, H. (2008). Understanding e-learning technologies-in-practice through philosophies-in-practice. In T. Anderson & F. Elloumi (Eds.) *Theory and Practice of Online Learning*, Chapter 4 (pp. 91-118).

Linda Robson: Teachers need to be focused at the Meso level!! Think we have done that too much and it has disempowered academics who are now restricted for some senate level discussions and decisions and then we can;t shape the diection of the institution in the ways that we used to.

Thanks for raising Linda.. I was just highlighting that this as the level at which ideas are turned into concrete practices... To change a university ecosystem you have to influence the exosystem itself - policies , managers, leaders, structures, resources, CULTURE and that is bloomin difficult to do.. I have tried..

Jayne Richards: Perhaps what is missing is the trigger that fires the processes at each stage. Ecological systems are driven by cause.

Are they driven or do the form/emerge around affordance, circumstances, need, passion, vision

Linda Robson: @Jayne agree, in an ecosystem it is drive by life and death whilst in education it is driven by desire

Sandra, LondonMet: Good point about desire as a driver @Linda - which reminds me of Lillis and her

book - access, regulation, desire ... where the implicit thrust is that the implicit and explicit treatment of (non-traditional) students served to *regulate* that desire - rather than unleash it.

Yes ecosocial systems are certainly energised by something more than life and death. Perhaps its multiple desires - to be a successful business, to help people develop as much of their potential as possible, to develop new knowledge...+++ to reach number 10 in the league tables and score gold in TEF!

Dr Jenny Willis: Apprenticeships are not enough in an era when individuals will have several different career paths

Jenny the notion of apprenticeship in signature pedagogies is not about learning a particular skill but a complex package of ways of thinking and being that can be drawn upon and reused in many different careers.. But they are things that if you want to practice on a field you have to master and be good at.. Its a shorthand way of expressing complex ways of being.

This is a nice introduction

<https://www.creighton.edu/sites/www12.creighton.edu/files/TL-Signature%20Pedagogies.pdf>

Also

<http://www.signaturepedagogies.org.uk/>

Jayne Richards: I worry about the word "pedagogy" which is a limited description of the learner / mentor relationship.

That is not my intention Jayne. That is why I used Robin Alexander's (2008) concept.. I would see this as meaning that it could mean almost any sort of relationship between a teacher and learner including we are all learner's together.

'Pedagogy is more than teaching method, more than curriculum, more than assessment practice. It is all these things, but it is also how they are made into patterns of actions, activities and interactions by a particular teacher, with a particular group of students [in a particular context]'

Peter Shukie: I wonder Norman, does having roles of teacher & student already come with a set of connotations that define what follows?

Yes it does Peter.. and I have always thought that the first thing a HE teacher should say at the start of a course is WE ARE ALL IN IT TOGETHER.. WE'RE ALL LEARNERS.. and show then what he/she has had to do in order to learn to teach the course.. This is a simple but powerful way to show learners how a professional teacher learns and a great way to introduce the idea of learning ecologies.. But of course we prefer to keep all that messy stuff hidden don't we?

Dr Jenny Willis:The danger of individual disciplinary pedagogies is that they become closed shops, and merely reproduce more of the same than be creative and evolutionary.

Which is why Jenny most advances are made at the edges or when an approach is introduced from another discipline.. That is the way knowledge grows and in fact the way the HE ecosystem grows. Universities are the hosts for and maintain the disciplines.

Jayne Richards:What about signature andragogies or heutagogies?

Why not simply signature experiences?

Maria Gebbels University of Greenwich:Could the teacher/ lecturer be considered almost as a coach leading each individual to discover their own individual paths?

Yes Maria they can be.. anything from an instructor, facilitator, demonstrator, mentor, coach, co-worker..practitioner and the role they choose to play will reflect the ecology they create for the particular circumstances.

Peter Shukie:can there be benefit form using different approaches to revitalise disciplines? - like Capra and the 'web of life' approach to physics that created space for massive new directions

Yes but it requires leadership of the highest order to change a disciplinary paradigm and willing practitioners and managers to try something different in fields that are highly conservative resistant to change. That goes for HE teaching as a field or practice.

Jayne Richards:Pedagogy simply means "to lead by the hand" - is this appropriate for all types of learning at HE level?

How can it be? The Greek context was that it was to lead a child by the hand! We are dealing with learners who are adult or making the transition to adulthood..

Chrissi Nerantzi:@norman what about students who are less/not motivated?

Linda Robson:@Katharine and how did he fit in working an almost full time job on the side to pay towards he fees?

Dr Jenny Willis:Yes, the student is real! And if I am right, he is now working in a totally different field, which he is able to do due to his wide, lifewide experience.

Linda/Katherine he real.. he did work over 20h per week for 2 of his 3 years while doing his degree. Yes you would say he was a good student and used not only opportunities he had but created some for himself.

This is the nub of the challenge.. The best most motivated and engaged students will do all of this intuitively often in ways that leave you agog.. as I have been on many occasions. All our work on lifewide at Surrey was with volunteers - a self-selected group who were self-motivated and determined to make the most of the affordances in their life. In fact I believe that voluntary participation is an important value in these forms of institutional learning and it

would be wrong to coerce.. People must see the value for themselves.. its part of seeing affordance..

There are a number of tactics an HEI can use.. but fundamentally they need to change the paradigm they work with as to what counts as learning and devise the ways of recognising and valuing learning gained outside the formal curriculum. Many are already doing it. Perhaps over time you change the culture so that more students can see the value whether it is instrumental in getting a job or for reasons of self-actualisation. Unfortunately TEF is complicating the matter and seemingly devaluing these broader goals of education.

Academics tend to ignore anything that is done achieved outside the discipline but when I have shown them maps of what students' do outside the programme that they bring to bear in their disciplinary studies they suddenly get it.

Within programmes they can also use approaches to teaching and learning that are interactive that give students the opportunity to create their own ecologies.. like project-based, problem-based, inquiry-based, field-based and many others.. Students need to be in the contexts/problems domain that they haven't met before and they have to work out what to do - collaboratively.. These start us along the right pathway.. and this is the area we are exploring in our Creative Pedagogies for Creative Learning Ecologies project which I'd like to invite you all to participate in.

Thank you very much for all your comments and questions.. I apologise if I have not addressed your concerns.

INVITATIONS

I am gathering feedback on these ideas through an anonymous online questionnaire. If you can find the time I would be very grateful for your thoughts. We can provide a link to the results on the TLC website. You can access the survey at:

<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/6BDWH9K>

I am looking for practitioners willing to explore these ideas in the context of their own pedagogic practices. If you would like to collaborate by sharing your own pedagogic narrative, please get in touch normanjjackson@btinternet.com

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