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13. CONFIGURING LEARNING SPACES

Noticing the Invisible

INTRODUCTION

The idea of learning space has many attractions, but it holds traps for the unwary. The idea is at once educationally expansive, potentially emancipatory and even subversive. It opens up the hope of students becoming authors of their own learning in spaces that they claim as their own. But the idea of learning space, as it is being taken up, deserves to carry warning signs. There are invisibilities associated with it, invisibilities connected with a potential psychological overload on learners and with a possible down-valuing of knowledge as the student's own learning journey is given prominence. This, at least, is the argument I shall try to make in this chapter. To do that, we shall need, en route, to essay a brief exploration of the conceptual landscape of learning spaces and to attempt a preliminary taxonomy. Finally, having developed a somewhat cautionary account of learning spaces, I shall turn – via the idea of an ecology of learning spaces – to intimate a positive way forward that addresses the challenges sketched out.

VALUING LEARNING SPACES

The idea of learning spaces is – on the surface, at least – emancipatory. It conjures themes of freedom, openness, personal realisation and creativity on the part of the learner. It also conjures a dissolution of the boundaries that have hitherto characterised formal learning – between different forms of knowledge, between forms of knowledge and forms of practice and between the teacher and the taught. Now the learner is free to roam by herself where so ever she wishes, in whichever direction she prefers and in whichever mode of learning she enjoys. In its intimations of the breaking of boundaries of higher education, the idea of learning spaces is subversive as, in its wake, the fixities and barriers that are characteristically so much part of the academy are set aside. This is a pedagogy that offers a new conception of education, in which the learner is much more the designer of her learning experiences.

The idea of learning spaces, then, flies in with large and even universal themes attaching to its wings. It is not shy of its ethical pretensions but proclaims them boldly and loudly. In associating itself with such tropes as freedom, openness, personal realisation and creativity, it stakes large claims for itself, claims that are

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not only pedagogical and educational but also ethical. The idea of learning spaces is a kind of educational radicalism, an outrider in its energies, its claims and its hopes. It attempts to storm the ethical high ground, to secure a vantage point from which other educational doctrines and dogmas may easily be vanquished.

It has considerable right on its side. Only so long as students have some degree of space to themselves can they flourish. Only insofar as they have space to themselves can they acquire and be authentically themselves in their learning and their own development. The idea of learning space is a radical concept that seeks to grant the individual student – and students collectively – space in which to become truly themselves, free from constraint. There is both negative and positive freedom here (Berlin, 1969/1979): on the one hand, the limitations – of discipline, of bounded curricula and of tight pedagogical frames – are reduced as the student is freed from constraints; on the other hand, the student is thereby empowered and indeed encouraged to take their courage in their hands and to venture forth by and for themselves. There is an existential calling lurking in the idea of learning space.

We should note too that the terms 'learning space' and 'learning spaces' are often here treated as if they were synonymous. This is a telling insight into the way in which language has ideological force. The learning space opens into learning spaces (plural). The one leads naturally to the other; and various *forms of learning space* may be identified. It is not merely that students can have access to different rooms, as it were, of the educational mansion through which they may roam, in and through its different spaces. Rather, the students may now have access to quite different kinds of mansion, configured quite differently and affording quite different kinds of experience.

The idea of learning space, thereby, offers an unending opening up of pedagogical space. Its spaces are presumably – at least in theory – infinite in their scope. The idea heralds, as we may term it, a pedagogy of air (Barnett, 2007). It is a space in which students take off and fly and breathe for and by themselves. They fly with courage and with confidence, and direct their own flight. They become themselves in this space. It is a space not just for greater understanding but a space in which students' own re-becoming as persons becomes possible. It is a space that offers to change students' lives.

TOWARDS A TAXONOMY OF LEARNING SPACES

It is surely already evident that learning spaces are of multiple kinds. Let us, then, hazard an attempt at forming a preliminary taxonomy of learning spaces (cf. Savin-Baden, 2008). I would want to classify learning spaces as forming three broad domains:

– a. *Material space and physical space*: These two – material space and physical space – are intimately related but are crucially different. Or to put it another way, the terms point us to different aspects of the geography of learning space. In relation to the student's material space, we can inquire into the materiality of the student's learning experience, its technologies, and its material structures

(are there lecture halls?) and the spaces that they open (or close off). In relation to the student's physical space, we can inquire into the location of the student's learning (to what extent is it on campus or off it? To what degree are the tutors and other students visibly present?). Design can enter both forms of space here but it is the client and architect who come into play in the design of material space whereas it the educationalist as designer who acts in relation to physical space.

– b. *Educational space*: This is a set of intentional spaces that are revealed in the playing out of the curriculum and pedagogy. Curriculum spaces and pedagogical spaces are intertwined but again should be distinguished. *Curriculum spaces* are the spaces intentionally opened to the student, in the ordering of specific knowledge and its practice elements. *Pedagogical spaces* are the spaces of the relationship – the pedagogical relationship – between the tutor and student, and among the students. Curricula and pedagogical spaces are *both* structured and unstructured; but curricula spaces tend more by structure and pedagogical spaces more by improvisation. This is because, in higher education, curricula are formed crucially by assemblies from disciplinary fields that are, to some extent, given, whereas pedagogies are more open to experiment and innovation. Within both curricula and pedagogical spaces are to be found other spatial zones, in particular those of knowledge and of practices; so we can talk of *epistemological spaces* and of *practical spaces*. Issues arise as to the kinds of journey a student is being invited to make and as to the freedom extended to explore forms of knowledge. To what extent are the boundaries between forms of knowledge kept tight and even policed? Are there no-go areas? Issues also arise as to the kinds of actions that a student is enabled to conduct: with what freedom and in which direction might a student go? In some disciplines, related to life-threatening situations, there may be good reason for quite tight boundaries containing practical ventures.
– c. *The student's interior space*: This is a psychic space, but it is more than that. This is a kind of ontological space: it is the space of the student's being. It has a liquid character: her educational being flows in and out of her wider being as a person. It is a zone in which is to be found much of the meaning of that complex concept of *Bildung* (Lovlie, Mortenson & Nordenbo, 2003). Here, the student's own self-formation is implicated. To what extent does the student have a will to venture forth? How secure does she feel in doing so? Does she really wish to explore the spaces that are opened to her? What forms of explorations does she prefer? Concrete and practical or ideational and cognitive? Is she a nomadic learner or a stay-at-home learner? Is her world local or global – or both? How spacious is her interior space?

These three sets of spaces could be depicted as intersecting circles but that would be misleading. There is a dynamic between all three: each interacts with and influences the other two. But they are more like clouds, flowing into each other and setting up turbulences. The unbrokenness and the fixity of Venn diagram circles is far from this situation. The zones of the spaces outlined above are much more fuzzy, inchoate and fluid.

There is another difference between Venn diagrams and clouds. Characteristically, the circles of Venn diagrams are fairly empty; clouds on the other hand are more or less opaque; they are cloudy! Correspondingly, learning spaces may be populated; they may even be congested. There is perhaps too readily an assumption that learning spaces are open, uncluttered and readily available to the student's freely chosen explorations. But the opposite may be the case. Not infrequently, especially in the hard sciences and in the newer institutions of higher education, the learning spaces of the curriculum have been and are unduly full. Students have been sometimes been left with little room to reflect and hardly even to breathe, educationally speaking. So the arrival of the idea of 'learning spaces' is a call to the academic world to remove unnecessary clutter. The new dispensation is an implicit plea for more openness in the students' learning spaces.

LANGUAGES OF LEARNING SPACES

Trailing in the wake of the idea of learning spaces are the different languages through which it is articulated. There is a language that speaks to the pedagogical experience of students as they make their way amongst the learning spaces afforded to them and which they are increasingly invited to design and construct for themselves. There is a language, for example, of 'liminality', of the 'fluid' and 'liquid', of the 'transitional' and 'provisional', of the 'transgressing of borders' and of 'fragility'. There is 'risk' here, risk that learning may not advance effectively or even efficiently; risk that the student's will to learn may falter, as the personal load becomes unbearable. There is also a language of the student as 'traveller', as a 'voyager', as a 'nomad', a 'sojourner', hardly able to put down roots, as the student glides from one learning space (with its experiences) to another (with *its* experiences).

These two languages (of the absence of borders on the one hand and of the student's crossing of borders on the other hand) point to the ephemeralism of the student and her experiences as an ever-continuing traveller. The metaphors – at once of fragility and of personal travel – are metaphors of the contemporary age; or at least, of perceptions of it. For the current age, of 'post-modernity', of 'hyper-modernity', is seen precisely as a fluid age, somewhat rudderless, and lacking in the anchors of sure and uncontestable values and principles. As such, the individual is seen as bearing responsibility for making his or her way in the world, not just materially but also conceptually. A curriculum of learning spaces, accordingly, is a response to the challenges of a liquid world.

The educational philosophy – as we might term it – behind informal learning spaces is one that diminishes the place of knowledge and instead throws its weight behind *being* and *becoming*. Here, it is less important that the student knows or even that she is able to do particular things; what counts is that she is a certain kind of human being, able to take on unexpected challenges and move ahead even in murky waters. This is a philosophy not of filling up (with knowledge) nor even of filling out (with skills) but of opening out; opening out of the person, ready to take on the world; willing to go on a voyage of exploration by and for oneself.

Accordingly, the curriculum is to be characterised much more by relative open spaces, spaces both on and off campus, spaces of the mind and of body. There is a freedom here; it had better be termed not so much 'academic freedom' but a 'learning and personal freedom'. It is a space in which the student's voice can be developed and will be developed; it will be valued and will be heard and even heeded. (Witness the continuing and expanding efforts to monitor and evaluate students' 'satisfaction' with their courses and their entire university experience.)

There are ideological currents at work here. The idea of learning space implies an in-between space. It is a space that is not fully accounted for. Unforeseen experiences may arise in such spaces. There is a tension, therefore, between the idea of learning space and that of learning outcomes. The one speaks of spaciousness, of air, of freedom, of self-authorship; the other speaks of predictability, of control, of lack of freedom. So the idea of learning space is a subversive concept, containing the prospect of challenging the hegemony of contemporary dominant curricular thinking (which in the UK, for example, is predicated on a rigid structure of specific learning outcomes, explicitly linked to defined evaluation criteria which are then used to formally assess each teaching unit).

There are also other strains embedded in the idea of learning space. A key question is this: To what extent are learning spaces designed and who designs them? In other words, the idea of learning spaces could also herald a new kind of pedagogic control. It could presage a kind of Foucaultesque experiment, in which curricula and pedagogies are designed precisely to bring about the kinds of 'subjectivities' felt to be required by a globalised learning economy (Foucault, 1991). For such spaces might be designed and even engineered so as to elicit specifically desired qualities and dispositions – of venturousness, resilience, fortitude, self-endeavour and so forth. Far from heralding a critique of contemporary curricula, learning spaces may just be a device for bringing about a new order of student domestication.

The idea of learning spaces, then, is a discursive space in which different and perhaps somewhat antipathetic agendas come together. It is emancipatory, at least in its self-presentation; and it yet may serve as a pedagogic vehicle for the needs of the market and the global learning economy, and thereby serve the dominant interests in society. Its inner perception of the student as a free spirit, fearlessly exploring the learning spaces being opened may also here be coexisting with an educational response to calls for greater efficiency. And yet the idea of learning spaces, properly pursued, may lead to 'inefficient' learning as students are granted pedagogical space in which to make and to learn from their own mistakes. There is, therefore, in the idea of learning spaces an ideological complex, as competing educational philosophies jostle together.

THE POTENCY OF LEARNING SPACES

Higher education has long been associated with learning through subject disciplines. 'Disciplines' are aptly named: they require discipline for their study. They impose

limits (of reasoning, argumentation, truth claims and ways of proceeding) and require understandings, whether of a horizontal character (across a broad range of concepts and schemas, as in the humanities) or of a vertical character (going into a limited range of concepts in an ordered way and to ever greater depth, as in the natural sciences) (Bernstein, 1999; Wheelahan, 2010). Disciplines require that the learner yield to their demands, if learning is to take place. The learner has to displace him or herself, to some extent. Learning spaces, to the contrary, encourage the learner forward. Disciplines provide a kind of learning *super-ego*: they call the learner to account, inviting an internalisation of the standards and forms of life particular of each discipline. Learning spaces, on the other hand, sponsor a learning *ego*: they invite the learner to become more fully him or herself, independently of external expectations.

Within the idea of learning spaces, therefore, lurks a psycho-dynamic dimension in which the individual appears to be freed from the perceived impositional tyranny of disciplines and is instead encouraged to become their own person. But learning spaces are inert in themselves. Under certain conditions, however, they can take on an educational power: they can become potent. Learning spaces can provide – as we may term it – *educational energy*. They can elicit and encourage a self-realisation among students; a new *becoming*. It is through the provision of learning spaces that a student can testify to the fact that her experience at university has changed her life. Nor is this potency a *fixed* quality of learning spaces, even where it is present: learning spaces can be assessed as to their degree of potency. The following theorem therefore presents itself:

availability (of learning spaces) + a will to explore + pedagogical encouragement = potency (1)

Potency here, therefore, is a function of real openness for the student to make their own explorations, combined with a will on the part of the student to take advantage of that openness. This also requires an encouragement to do so from the pedagogical environment. Under such a set of circumstances, the idea of learning spaces can be realized.

But what is this potency? Potency of what? It is, as implied, a potency for student *becoming*. In the centre is the flowering of the student's learning ego. She comes to have confidence in herself and her own understandings. However, as implied too, there are epistemological implications. For, insofar as the student's becoming becomes the pedagogical fulcrum here, there is – or is liable to be – a consequent diminution in the extent to which the student yields to and is initiated into *the discipline of the discipline*. This may be an empty triumph for the onto-logical quest of the student's being and becoming. For, if it is at the cost of the student's effective appropriation of a discipline, the resulting ego may be educationally empty at best and downright dangerous – being full of assertive dogma and personal opinion – at worst.

Another way of expressing these reflections is to observe that the disciplines themselves help to form perspectives on the world. In that way, they illuminate the

world: they reveal it in ways not ordinarily perceived. They are themselves vistas of strangeness. They offer, in the words of Deleuze and Guattari, a set of 'striated' spaces as against the 'smooth' spaces of 'learning spaces' (Deleuze & Guattari, 2007). Disciplines are slices into the world; learning spaces are educational vehicles for traversing the world. A course of study, in and by the disciplines, is a programme that runs its course; it is channelled. Perspectives may be limited, therefore, but may run true and steady. Learning spaces offer excitement, a rare freedom and personal exploration; but the very open ended nature of the learning experience may be problematic. Not merely the learning spaces may be empty as the student is encouraged to make her own pedagogical journey; but the resulting experience may be largely empty as well. Without the insights of disciplinary perspectives, little understanding of any rigour may be gained. This is not so much a liquid learning as a glassy learning, in which the student skims across the learning surfaces and, in the process, accumulates very little.

NOTICING THE INVISIBLE

I have been hinting that there are hidden aspects in the idea of learning spaces. That thesis can now be brought more fully into the open. The idea of learning spaces is of its time. It offers – or seems to offer – the sponsoring of a learning 'subjectivity' in which the student embarks on a never-ending journey of self-learning. The learning, too, is a free-floating enterprise, that skates confidently over the existing representations of the world. Both these aspects of learning spaces have a pedagogical appropriateness in and for the 21st century; or so it may seem. The never-ending journey of self-learning that the idea of learning spaces seems to sponsor is a learning style fitting for a liquid world (Bauman, 2000), a world that seems to call forth a nomadism, a learning without roots, a learning that evinces disdain for disciplinary-bound learning. The world presents, so we are continually told, with changing, interdisciplinary and hybrid problems. It is, too, a world of fluid institutions, employment patterns, geographic movements and learning media. No one set of representations can sustain the kind of educational self-help that such a world requires; or so the argument seems to run.

There are a number of exclusions and hidden preferences in this ideology. Firstly, there is the exclusion of attachment. The contemporary world appears to call for a kind of learning promiscuousness in which the individual moves effortlessly from one topic to another, from one concept to another, and from one set of data to another. 'Multimodality' perhaps captures the hallmark of the discourse here and its appropriate learning processes (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001). Secondly, there is a preference for learning in the world and a down valuing of learning apart from the world. The reasoning runs this way. Effortless movement across situations – from which individuals learn – calls for a readiness to adopt different schemas. An education in a single discipline is thereby no longer useful. Such an education not merely restricts vision and access to learning tools; it severs the individual from the world, when what is desired is the capability and confidence

of negotiating the world in all its messiness. Thirdly, the learning spaces that are encouraged are spaces in which the student is active and preferably literally so; active in visible performances. Spaces for mere contemplation are largely off-limits here. Finally, there is an embedded set of assumptions to the effect that all 'employability' requires this framing of knowledge and skills and that students en masse are in turn open to such malleability.

So, within the working out of the rhetoric of learning spaces, issues arise as to the rules of inclusion and exclusion. Not all learning spaces are equal; some are more equal than others. Some planes of learning – the disciplinary, the visionary, the theoretical, the contemplative – may be largely hidden or occluded; or banished completely. In the curricula construction of these learning spaces, students are carefully enjoined to go on certain kinds of learning journey rather than others. There is thus a major dimension of invisibility attaching to the educational project of learning spaces.

We may distinguish two kinds of the invisible. Firstly, there is the kind of learning spaces that is excluded by reason of educational intention. Opening up learning spaces of action, of 'training', of 'professional education' or even of 'service', whether on or off campus, whether in formal or structured settings or in informal and unstructured settings, can diminish spaces which enable a deep engagement within disciplines. It is not merely disciplines which fade from sight; so too do their perspectives and their power to transform perceptions. Such spaces are closed off *intentionally*. This is a form of *ideological invisibility*: the liberal idea of higher education is implicitly repudiated and banished. Secondly, learning spaces of former kinds may remain but become unnoticed. In an age of increasing e-learning, and group-based projects, books may remain on the shelves of the library but become invisible – less a learning resource and more a symbolic emblem of a former idea of the academy. Students are oriented to the task, the collective and the here-and-now. Private, in-depth and reflective study – of which dedicated reading is an obvious example – is not outlawed as such but instead passes out of sight. We may term this a 'myopic invisibility'.

For Heidegger, 'being' strives for to become transparent to itself. It becomes 'cleared in itself' in such a way 'that it is itself the clearing' (Heidegger, 1962/ 1998, p. 171). A key question for learning spaces, therefore, is the extent to which they allow students a *clearing* to come into themselves, to be disclosed to themselves. Far from encouraging such 'disclosedness' (ibid.), learning spaces may shut off – intentionally or unintentionally – such clearings as would allow a student genuinely to come into themselves, to develop authentic understandings of the world for and by themselves. Far from opening up real and challenging vistas, learning spaces may consign students to the immediate, the familiar and the safe as they move rapidly from one learning space to yet another. The idea of learning spaces loses its meaning if it means yielding one set of closures for another. The very breadth of view, the interconnectedness and largeness of outlook, the vision and even the wisdom (Maxwell, 2009) that the idea of learning spaces holds out may be vitiated if it is implemented as an ideological vehicle for external interests.

AN ECOLOGY OF LEARNING SPACES

We can, therefore, speak of *an ecology of learning spaces*. An ecology of learning spaces points to interconnectedness between learning spaces and thence to modalities of that interconnectedness. Learning spaces primarily of knowing, learning spaces primarily of doing and learning spaces primarily of sheer being: what are their relationships? To what degree and in what ways does the student have freedom to roam across those spaces? What are the values informing the shaping of these various learning spaces? To speak of an ecology of learning spaces, therefore, is not only to advert to patterns and shapes in and between learning spaces, but also it is to underscore their ethical dimensions. What ends are these learning spaces intended to sustain? Which sustainabilities are favoured here? Do these learning spaces look outwards or at least open windows outwards, towards the learning economy perhaps, or to ideas of civic society? Or do they look inwards, to the student's own sustainability and development across her lifespan?

There is literally incredible complexity here. A student's programme of undergraduate studies typically runs its course over three or four years. Each is a set of learning spaces, with their own ecologies. There is a dynamic here, the modules and units in tension with each other, firing off each other, drawing from each other. They open spaces for the students, who take differential advantage of their opportunities. Some venture forward excitedly; others hold back. After all, students need courage to move into learning spaces of their own volition. This courage is a kind of gift on the part of the student to him or herself. But, because of the risks, it is a gift he or she can often barely come to bestow. It is an expression of goodwill, to make good of the open spaces, but the outcome is unclear.

This ecology is a complex of ecologies. It is a knowledge ecology, a learning ecology (itself a complex of learning modalities), an ecology of being and becoming and an ecology of praxis all at once, and all working in an extraordinary dynamic with each other. There is, too, as there has to be, all manner of inter-connectednesses across these domains. These inter-connectednesses are themselves constantly shifting, as curricula, pedagogies, students, learning opportunities on and off campus, changing members of course teams, disciplinary developments and alterations in resources all play their part in helping to shape the ecological landscape. The student makes her way in and across these learning spaces, perhaps hesitantly, perhaps with some confidence; but there is unpredictability here; there has to be. No matter how far some of the spaces are rule-bound – are 'striated' – still there is some glassiness here. The student slides across the 'smooth spaces', just hoping that the ice will not crack.

These are serious learning ventures. They are adventures, ventures of discovery. The potential discoveries are as much discoveries of self – of being in the world – as they are about knowledge and of practice. In these learning processes, there is room inevitably for misadventure, not only for wrong turnings but for learning encounters where the discoveries of self are even, at first, injurious (Meyer & Land, 2006). There has to be always a possibility of genuine learning spaces, but ecologies may founder; may not be sustained.

The idea of ecology, to use a term of Bernard Williams (2008), is a 'thick concept'. It is fact and value at once. So, too, are learning spaces considered as learning ecologies: we can inquire into them as sets of actual curricula and pedagogical spaces and we can inquire into the hopes and commitments circling in them and around them. Learning spaces are always pools of *learning–possible*. They are potentials for learning in all manner of directions, learning that has ultimately to be at least partly under the control of the student. They constitute a retort to the dominant ideologies encircling these learning spaces.

As ecologies, learning spaces are full of hopes for improvement, for the student's own personal improvement, for her being in the world, and for her knowing and for her practices in the world. They hold out the wish for some kind of existential liberation from the pulls and pushes that attend those spaces, even from the existing educational communities of knowers and would-be knowers (the other students) participating in those spaces. Learning spaces, even in their ecological moments, are sites of some anarchy (Barnett, 2010) as students take their chances and realise their own possibilities, amid the inter-connectivities that characterise the many ecologies at work.

To couple the ideas of learning spaces and learning ecologies is to inject both an intention and a value-component into what otherwise might be – *a priori* – a neutral concept, open to any manner of curricula aims. Now, seen as the formation and sustaining of learning ecologies, learning spaces are imbued with high and virtuous hopes and ideals. The idea of learning spaces, which (as noted) is itself inert, is now given a forward and progressive momentum. As the formation of a learning ecology, it is no longer blind to ideological presences (of the kind observed earlier). On the contrary, this ecology now keeps open a watchful eye for ideological presences and directly engages them in combat. This is not fanciful. Students these days are often very aware of ideological presences, of the state or corporations, of discourse and of power structures that affect their learning and their student experience (see Melhuish Chapter 6). As inhabitants of learning spaces, afforded their own autonomy to take some charge of their own learning, they become active and may even adopt a critical and radical stance as they forge their own learning situation, reflective of their own – doubtless developing – values. An ecology of learning spaces is dynamically in favour of improvement of and for a better world, even if just what is to count as a better world is kept under critical review.

CONCLUSION

The idea of learning spaces holds traps for the unwary. It comes full of promises and hopes, of liberation, emancipation and authenticity for the learner, now freed to take charge of her learning experiences and to win through to new stages of her own self-becoming. But its contemporary and forceful arrival as an idea isn't happenstance. It has taken off as an idea because multiple and indeed even antagonistic groupings find it a useful vehicle for furthering their various interests. As well as it being a vehicle for emancipatory hopes, it is also a vehicle for technical

and instrumental interests, in a context of mass post-compulsory education, rising student:staff ratios and an attunement to a global learning economy that calls for individuals to have powers of self-renewal throughout their lifespan. The single term 'learning spaces', therefore, denotes a contested ideological terrain.

There are also education pitfalls arising from learning spaces considered as an emancipatory project. If the student's learning spaces are initially empty, to be filled only by the student's creative endeavours, what becomes of knowledge, knowing and deep understanding? There is a risk here of epistemological superficiality as the educational enterprise focuses on the student's self-becoming.

In this complex of considerations, two further questions arise: what is to count as maturity on the part of the student? And, is it possible to derive a conception of learning spaces that, at once, addresses the three concerns of educational maturity, of knowing and understanding, and of potential ideological entrapment? I have suggested that a consideration of learning spaces as a *set* of ecologies may offer a way forward. This conception of learning spaces may turn out to be epistemologically, ontologically and practically efficacious. Learning spaces considered as a set of ecologies both opens up spaces and at the same time places severe epistemological burdens on the student as learner. The knowledge wanderings of students are still subject to the forms of life of academic disciplines, even as they find their own path through and form their own images of the world. Such a journey is precisely one means of achieving maturity as it opens up the prospect of the student coming into herself or himself in a totally new way; of 'finding' themselves, and of securing the personal resources through which to gain a genuine authenticity. And such a voyage of discovery, too, opens the prospect of a student engaging with the world and coming to form a care for the world. The sustainability of the world, the student and even of knowledges, can all be in evidence here.

Of course, the framing of curricula and the adoption of pedagogies that are going to do justice to all of these hopes is full of challenge. Fortunately, there are indications that such educational achievements are possible and, indeed, are already present. Not infrequently, students can be heard to say at graduation ceremonies, in introducing a tutor to the proud parents, not that 'I've gained a lot of knowledge on this course' or that 'I've acquired many skills on this course' but that 'this course has changed my life'. Is that not a shorthand and telling testimony to the presence of ecological learning spaces?

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