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Learning Spaces in Academic Libraries: Research and Assessment Methods

Bryony Ramsden, University of Huddersfield

Abstract

How can learning processes and the influence of environment on learning be measured and assessed successfully, while accurately representing student learning? This presentation will examine research into evaluation of academic library learning spaces, examining the variety of evaluation methods (including work conducted at the University of Huddersfield), with a particular focus on the move towards ethnographic research. Learning space evaluation literature is very much based on basic assessment and use of spaces, such as in gathering usage statistics, and practical issues. However, ethnographic methods (i.e. observational techniques) are emerging as key methods in discovering learning processes and whether learning successfully takes place, and currently comparatively underutilised in libraries in particular.

The session will consider the range of literature discussing learning space assessment as a whole, with a core section considering academic library space assessment. The problematic nature of defining and measuring learning processes will also be discussed. Academic library learning spaces in particular are being modified to provide more informal and social learning spaces incorporating soft furnishings and group study areas to reflect the changing nature of the modern student. However, creating new learning spaces can be problematic. Several issues will be addressed here, including: whether spaces are used in the way the design intended; whether high technology facilities are used to the best of their capacity with regards to learning task design; how learning support staff may have difficulty understanding social learning and other less formal learning processes.

Presenters

Bryony Ramsden, Subject Librarian (Human and Health Sciences) and PhD student.