

## Rethinking Study Practices Through Hybrid Learning Spaces in Higher Education

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We want to rethink study practices in higher education through a hybrid course collaboration between two universities. *Hybrid practices in higher education* are examined through theories on hybrid pedagogy, learning spaces, and media ecology to highlight five design principles: *Rhizomatic products and knowledge forms, dissolving dichotomies in education, creating a niche in the environment, breadth and depth of the collective and value sensitive spaces.*

The demarcations of the physical campus and classroom have been challenged by the rise of online and blended teaching and learning and a more diverse notion of learning spaces has emerged, indicating that learning cannot any longer be perceived of as tied to brick and mortar (Temple, 2014). But neither of these approaches to teaching and learning manage to grasp the radical implications of hybridity as a concept. As a realisation of ecological higher education that is concerned with its relations (Barnett, 2017), a Hybrid Learning Space challenges not only the online/offline dichotomy, but also divisions between teacher/student, formal/informal, analogue/digital and institution/society. As such, the introduction of complex hybridity opens a space of potential for dissolving dichotomies and creating new formats and remixes (Gunkel, 2016).

In hybrid acts of teaching and learning, the institution, space, teachers, scholars, students, citizens, employees, tools, contexts etc. enter into close dialogue and partnerships with each other. In doing so, the dimensions are allowing themselves to be networking and be networked. Hybrid pedagogy merges the dimensions to such an extent that they become part of the same ecological system. These interconnections and amalgamations have caused Barnett (2018) to call this form of higher education institution ‘the ecological university’.

Learning spaces impact and shape learning activities as well as encourage new learning activities (Bligh & Pearshouse, 2011). There are many instances of innovative practices in higher education which challenge traditional conceptions of learning spaces (e.g. Nørgård & Bengtsen, 2016; Nørgård & Bengtsen, 2018; Garrison & Vaughan, 2008). But a need remains to both theoretically underpin such realizations as well as develop hands-on design principles and patterns that might aid in the dissemination and eventual practical implementation across higher education on a larger scale, that moves beyond secluded islands of creativity scattered across institutions of higher education (Goodyear & Yang, 2009; Kali, Levin-Peled & Dori, 2009). Following this development, a need has arisen to reevaluate the nature of space in an educational context. The confines of the physical classroom have been challenged and a broader notion of learning spaces has emerged (Temple, 2008).

Here, a theoretical framework for Hybrid Learning Spaces is outlined and applied to a hybrid course collaboration in the spring of 2019 between three teachers and thirty students at Aarhus University in Denmark and Åbo Akademi University in Finland. Overall, Hybrid Learning Spaces have the potential of scaffolding and inviting for study practices in the world, with the world and for the world in a way that cuts across traditional dichotomies and

barriers traditionally upheld in higher education. Hybridity, as it is conceived in this article, is a concept which highlights mixture, fusion and transcendence of otherwise disparate phenomena. Following this, a Hybrid Learning Space is a context of learning that not only moves beyond distinctions between online and offline space, but also challenges divisions between for instance campus/world, teacher/student, formal/informal learning and otherwise segregated disciplines.

The joint course track was to constitute half of the teaching on the two courses, while the other half was to be taught individually by the teachers on the two respective courses. Pedagogically, the content, the learning goals, the learning environment and the teaching and learning methods of the courses were interlinked to transform the routines of teaching and learning (Harrison, 2018). Technology, pedagogy, learning space and media ecology were chosen and set up to support and promote the course design and aims of the interlinked courses. Together, the pedagogical and technological design constituted a Hybrid Learning Space for ‘Global Online Inter-university Teaching’ (GO: IT); a learning space for hybrid higher education and networked learning across courses and institutions. Google Drive (file-handling and text-collaboration platform), WordPress (blogging platform) and Zoom (video-conferencing tool) constituted a media ecology that supported online collaboration within different modalities between the universities. Resulting in a teacher and student co-authored digital book on Digital Change in Education: <https://digitalchange.home.blog/>

*Five design principles* were the result of this course collaboration:

1. *Rhizomatic places and knowledge forms*: In designing for Hybrid Learning Spaces the new hybrid needs to be a fusion, rather than a compilation, of separate parts that creates a coherent but rhizomatic whole.
2. *Dissolving dichotomies in education*: The composition of a Hybrid Learning Space is simultaneously the decomposition of dichotomies – rather than thinking in exclusive *ors*, the hybrid learning designer thinks in inclusive *ands*. It is a space of inclusion, not exclusion.
3. *Creating a niche in the environment*: The drawing together of a hybrid space for learning creates a media ecology given that a Hybrid Learning Space is not delimited to one configuration, system, platform or place, but forms across an array of elements, channels and layers. Creating a new Hybrid Learning Space is simultaneously the creation of a new ecological niche where new learning and life forms can take place.
4. *Breadth and depth of the collective*: In Hybrid Learning Spaces, depth emerges through breadth through the people holding it all together as they get together in working across media and platforms, touch base though running off together into the world, and share space, books and projects in break-out rooms, demarcated tasks, and individual exam papers.
5. *Value-sensitive spaces*: Hybridity and media ecologies carry with them certain virtues and values imbuing the learning space with an ‘ethics of teaching and learning’ characterized by open-endedness, risk-taking, experimentation, collaboration, dialogue, empathy, critical creativity, mutual care and commitment and ecological entanglement. Teaching and learning in hybrid ways open education up towards the world, fostering a sensitivity towards a value-based conception of learning spaces.

We find that these design principles are one way to structure the practices and processes in a Hybrid Learning Space.

When teaching and learning takes place in Hybrid Learning Spaces as described here, higher education has the potential of scaffolding and inviting for learning in and with the world in a way that cuts across traditional dichotomies and barriers. In order for this to happen, it is necessary that teachers and educational developers take on the challenge of becoming hybrid in their thinking and practice as well as undertake the ethical and pedagogical responsibilities that come with these new breeds. Participants in the Hybrid Learning Space need to work together and be there with and for their fellow participants to scaffold and sustain connectivity and belonging in partnerships, teams, collectives and networks as they work together by combining the digital and analogue, online and offline, process and product, university and world, synchronous and asynchronous, formal and informal dimensions of the shared learning space.

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