

B2.2

Investigating Practical Learning Environments for lifelong learning - a case study

Sue Cross

UCL, London, United Kingdom

UCL's modular MA programme provides initial and continuing professional development for university staff studying with mid-career professionals practicing in a range of disciplines outside academia. By working together in this way professional academics and learning support staff (e.g administrators, librarians and educational technologists) engage actively with multi-contextual lifelong learning.

This contribution to the Rovaniemi conference will present a module which looks explicitly at the learning environment as a case study. This module turns attention onto the material and virtual environments in which adult learning and professional development take place. Formal, non-formal and informal contexts for learning may be explored in terms of their physical, social and cultural attributes. The module examines many of the things which are often taken for granted as well as the design and development of highly technical and learning specific places. It is likely that the environment is exerting an influence, for good or ill, in many ways. It will focus or distract attention, delight or disturb, enhance or inhibit learning. By exploring, investigating, enquiring and researching, participants discover more about this important topic and share their findings with their peers.

Participants work alone, in pairs and/or small groups to explore the influence of environments on learning. They design and conduct a small-scale investigative project into their immediate professional environment, or an environment of professional interest to them, as a site of practical learning. The environment is selected from the following list of examples (or an alternative agreed with the module leader):

- Fieldwork with undergraduate/postgraduate university students
- Collections of objects e.g. in museum, art gallery or library
- Retreat centre or other residential (secular or religious) community
- Theatre or concert hall
- Clinical or other professional training environment
- Virtual learning environment
- Outdoors
- Faith community or other context for informal learning

Individual, group, institutional and societal levels of analysis may be considered as environments are investigated in terms of claims made of their potential to support learning, any associated risks and issues of care, quality assurance and cost, hidden assumptions about values and cultural presuppositions, questions of design and technical specification. The module also considers equality of opportunity, access and anti-discriminatory practices appropriate to the environments being investigated.

In presenting this as a case study, I shall discuss the outcomes for the participants themselves, the insights we have gained into the impact an environment (material and/or virtual) can have on adult learning. Plans for further development of this work will be discussed.