

2-1B What we talk about when we talk about independent learning

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The term 'independent learning' is highly contested, although research does show that it takes in aspects of both informal and social learning (O'Doherty, 2006; Meyer, 2010). Nevertheless, that which fosters informal, social and/or independent learning (both within and beyond the University) remains somewhat elusive.

Beyond the University's more formal spaces, then, we only have limited, often anecdotal evidence of the places that students inhabit in order to learn 'independently'. This presentation attempts to address this in some detail, and ask where students seem to learn more independently and how that process takes place. Indeed, it asks: what are we talking about when we talk about independent learning?

The Lancaster University Executive MBA students undertake a blended course over 2 years and across 3 continents. Students have access to the Moodle VLE and attend intensive campus-based 3-day workshops for most modules. However, these together only form part of their learning experience. By asking students to contribute images, sketches and descriptions of where and how they learn, we seek to further question the notion of (independent) learning spaces. In doing this we refer to, and offer an evolution of, Peter Goodyear's work on 'design for learning', and respond to his call for a clearer idea of what really happens when and where students learn (Goodyear, 2017).

Goodyear states that learning is 'neither random nor determinate'; this suggests a certain unpredictable, unknowable element haunting the learning event to such a degree that it will always undermine any attempt at its design. Nevertheless, learning can be anticipated through categories such as infrastructure, task (episteme) and its social context. We suggest, however, that it is the unknowable quality of learning that remains its potential to be, or become, independent, and that design for learning, must itself learn to come to terms with its inherent impossibility.

References

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