Building literacy: the relationship between academic literacy, emerging pedagogies and library design.

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Abstract
This paper will consider how the design of library buildings contributes to a complex and evolving range of academic literacies and emerging pedagogical frameworks. The paper will also consider the contribution these literacies make to the experience of students reading for a degree in an increasingly digital environment. To acquire academic literacy students need library buildings that take account of "what the student does" (Biggs 2007) and changing learning styles. Equally as academic staff develop innovative e-learning activities, library spaces need to accommodate new learning opportunities.

In 1998 Radford reminded us of the perceived rationality of the library. He described "a place where each item within it has a fixed place and stands in an a priori relationship with every other item." Radford goes on to challenge the library as a metaphor for order, and ends with a paraphrase of Anderson (1992, p.114 cited Radford 1998) "Freedom exists when the author/reader can build upon the linkages and paths of knowledge in a flexible, multi-faceted world". This describes with prescient accuracy the students of almost 20 years later, multi tasking and working in parallel processes, comfortable in both real and virtual spaces and rapidly assimilating information from a range of resources (Jukes and Dosaj 2006, p.37).

As Ball *et al* observed in 2007, the resulting discontinuity is here to stay and the seismic shift produced in the process is already having a profound effect on the literacies required to study in electronic environments. As the digital learning momentum of the 21st century gathers pace, the imperative to re-define existing literacies and develop new literacies cannot be ignored. The challenge for HE libraries in the UK has been to create different spaces so that places where individuals can study silently are available as well as spaces for social learning. Both group and individual study spaces will inevitably include the technologies that are transforming learning, and thereby impacting on the literacies required for successful study.

At Bournemouth University (BU) the design of The Sir Michael Cobham Library represents an holistic approach to meeting student expectations. In 2007 the building won the quinquennial SCONUL Library Design Award. This recognised the "intelligence" of the building and its ability to adapt. Shelia Cannell, Chair of the SCONUL Working Group on Space Planning, said "This building can continue to respond to changes in library service, because it is so flexible".

An important element of the flexibility described by Corrall is the recognition that amongst so much change some constants remain. For example literacies that existed in the era of print are still needed, but may have to be re-engineered to fully function in the digital environment.

Perhaps the most obvious in the context of libraries and learning is the literacy of reading for a degree, an activity that is no less valid in this century than it has been previously, but which now encompasses more varied activities than reading a book or journal. Students of the net generation (Oblinger 2005), the digital natives described by Prensky (2001), work simultaneously across different media. Students at BU can be seen using laptops, books and mobile phones as they work. Observing students working in groups around laptops and PCs inspired the introduction of 'techno booths' in Autumn 2008. These technology-rich spaces have proved to be extremely popular, enabling students to work in groups with a variety of media and Web 2.0 technologies.
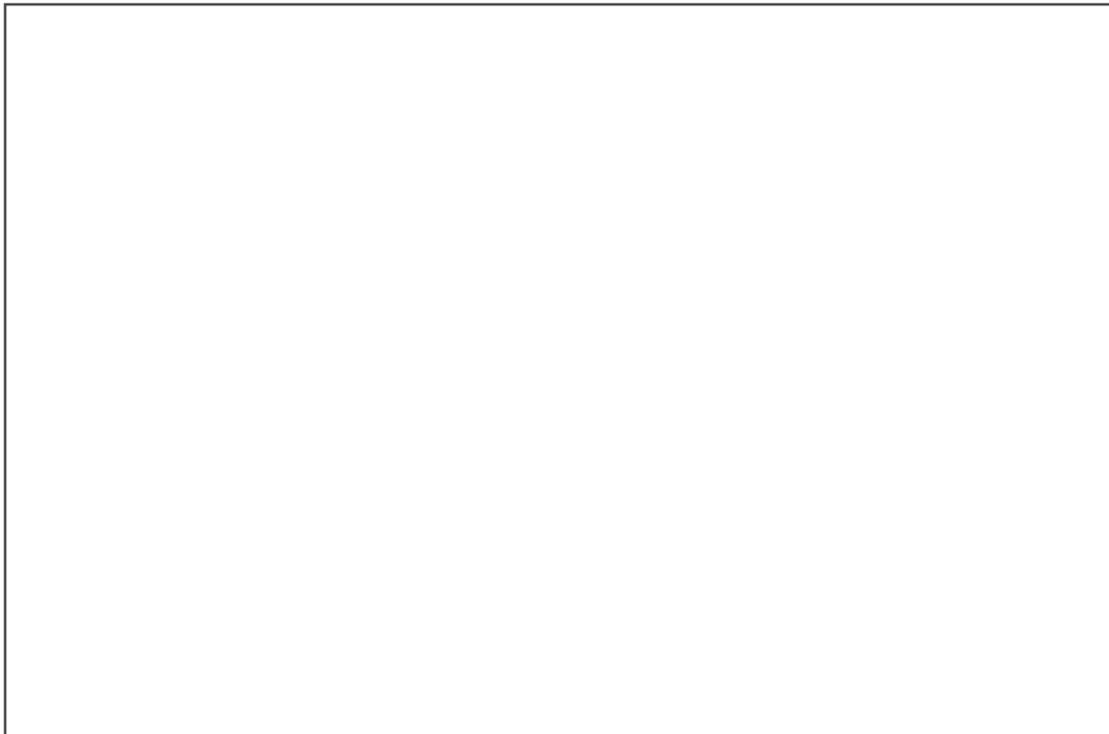
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Image 1: Techno-booths in The Sir Michael Cobham Library

Comments from the students show how popular the techno-booths are.

"…more relaxed environment, better all round, probably more productive"

"…more opportunities to do group work, we don't have to struggle to find space to get our work done"

To exploit the richness of the resources available to them students need a complex range of literacies. Kope (2006) listed a number of learning skills and strategies that she groups under the term "academic literacy". These range from critical thinking and advanced reading skills to learning with and from technology. Critical thinking is an essential skill in the print environment but is arguably even more vital in the digital learning environment. The plethora of electronic resources available demands a level of

discernment and evaluation on the part of students that earlier generations learning from books and a small selection of printed journals did not have to consider.

Librarians have in recent years, perhaps understandably, concentrated on information literacy (IL). Differing methods of teaching IL have been discussed and the relative merits of face-to-face contact and online tutorials provide a steady stream of conference papers and debate. Whilst recognising the continuing importance of IL, it is probably more productive to see it as a component of broader academic literacies. To encompass these, librarians need to step outside of their traditional areas and work with colleagues from other disciplines. For example, Subject Librarians have long worked in partnership with academic staff (Dale *et al* 2006); now they need to forge new alliances with other colleagues notably staff developers and learning technologists.

In 2008 the eRes project at BU enabled some of the many facets of learning, academic literacy and pedagogy in an increasingly digital environment to be explored and documented. eRes was funded by the Higher Education Academy and aimed to enhance the student learning experience by developing and disseminating:

1. innovative pedagogical frameworks which bring together learning activities and academically led quality e-resources within the unit of study

2. an e-reading strategy which encompasses models for resource discovery and e-literacy

3. guidelines on the appropriate support required by academics from librarians, staff developers and learning technologists

Enhancements made to pedagogic practices by new technologies were explored in 13 case studies, drawing on experiences from across BU.

Figure 1. The Student Learning Experience

Figure 1 shows how the student learning experience in a digital environment is enhanced when e-resources are made central to learning and literacies.

As academics increasingly use the VLE to deliver teaching materials, many need help to make the transition from simply using the VLE as a vehicle for PowerPoint presentations or a repository for Word documents, to exploiting its potential as an interactive learning resource. Some academics may be reluctant to engage with Web 2.0 technologies for all sorts of reasons. Time, or rather lack of it, was indicated as a problem by most of the academics who contributed to the eRes project. Most felt that the initial high commitment of time was a reasonable long term investment, given the advantages of students' positive responses to new technologies. However some recognised that they needed more support from librarians, learning technologists and staff developers to continually develop their resources.

Many of the academics involved with the eRes project were concerned about levels of research and reading amongst their students. To encourage students to find academic journals and use them critically, lecturers used a selection of Blackboard tools, notably wikis, blogs, discussion boards and the social bookmarking tool Scholar. They identified that many students needed help with these tools. They need a combination of literacies to work effectively in digital environments. Crook (2005) noted that "the context against which reading and writing occurs is often observed to be shifting" and he discusses how information/communication technology (ICT) can re-define and re-shape academic literacy.

[pic]

Image 2: Social Learning Space in The Sir Michael Cobham Library

As Ware and Warschauer (2005) point out, technology allows reading and writing to become "potentially interactive". Learning in libraries that are increasingly resourced by digital texts in one form or another demands that technology must be widely available; no less to the individual engaged with in-depth research than it is to the group requiring high levels of interactive media. Acquiring literacy is a more complex process than simply mastering a set of communication skills. As Crook (2005) identifies, "it (literacy) is also a matter of recognising… that the various possible designs of writing need to be crafted in relation to different social and cultural contexts of use." The library building constitutes one such "context", and how students use the space available to them contributes to their literacies. There has to be a balance between space for group learning and space for individual study. Students require access to both, depending on the type of learning they are undertaking.

Image 3: Silent Study Space in The Sir Michael Cobham Library

In 2007 BU celebrated 50 years of having a library in the University, and the institutions that preceded the establishment of the University. To mark this occasion the current University Librarian, David Ball, wrote

"The ability to succeed is the ability to adapt. It's about embracing and leading change, drawing on support from those around you. We must create an active learning environment not only by maximising space but also by ensuring it is sympathetic to the developing pedagogy and to students' expectations."

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