Forms of Learning Spaces

Introduction

This chapter presents the notion of learning spaces and explores ideas and literature related to this concept. It outlines different forms of learning spaces, and examines the relationship between different kinds of learning spaces and the impact one may have on another. The first section of the chapter examines a range of understandings of space and draws on the work of a number of theorists. It focuses on Lefebvre’s notions of space (Lefebvre, 1991) and explores the concepts of smooth and striated space as outlined by Deleuze and Guattari (1988). The second section presents the notion of learning spaces and explores how they might be located, understood and engaged with in the context of the academy.

Delineating learning spaces

The concept of learning spaces expresses the idea that there are diverse forms of spaces within the life and life world of the academic where opportunities to reflect and analyse their own learning position occur. The notion of life world is based on both Husserl (1937/1970) and Habermas (1987) and represents the idea that as human beings we have a culturally transmitted stock of taken-for-granted perspectives and interpretations that are organized in a communicative way. Such learning spaces are places of engagement where often disconnected thoughts and ideas, that have been inchoate, begin to cohere as a result of the creation of some kind of suspension from daily life. In such spaces, staff often recognize that their perceptions of learning, teaching, knowledge and identity are being challenged and realize that they have to make a decision about their response to such challenges. Yet such often hidden spaces are invariably not valued by university leadership and industrious colleagues, nor recognized as being important in our media-populated culture.
The consideration of learning spaces presented here emerged from a realization that my most generative work occurred at times in my academic life when I was dislocated from the ‘noise’ of the academic community in which I worked. Phipps (2005) has discussed the notion of ‘sounds’ in academia and argues that the changes in sounds are having a somewhat unhelpful impact on the quality of academic life experiences. Phipps’s work, although located in a deconstruction of sounds, in many ways refers to the impact of noise on learning spaces. For example, understandings and constructions of the concept of learning spaces argued for in this book are seen not only as the creation of mental and physical dislocation from academic noise, but also as the location or creation of spaces in which one can hear things differently. Learning spaces may be, and often are, different for each person, in diverse ways at contrasting points in their lives, but it seems there are some common elements that occur in the interstices and the overlaps of people’s experiences. Common types of learning spaces may occur through:

- Physical and/or psychological removal from the normal learning environment. For example, attending conferences, writing retreats or working overseas. New environments often prompt new ways of seeing issues, providing opportunities for reflection and presenting challenges to current ways of thinking
- The creation of specific time for writing or reflection
- Using social learning spaces for dialogue and debate
- Accessing digital spaces for discussion and reflection with and through others.

The notion of learning spaces, then, stretches beyond the idea of just finding or making time to think and write. The kinds of spaces I am referring to include the physical spaces in which we place ourselves, but what is important, vital even, about learning spaces is that they have a different kind of temporality and different ways of thinking. Authors such as Baudrillard (1994) have discussed the space/time implosion, and perhaps more helpfully, Castells (1996). Castells argued that flows of capital, information, technology, organizational interaction, images, sounds and symbols go from one disjointed position to another and gradually replace a space of locales ‘whose form, function and meaning are self-contained within the boundaries of physical contiguity’ (Castells, 1996: 423). Space is inseparable from time; it is ‘crystallized time’ (Castells, 1996: 411). What I am referring to is not merely about managing time, finding time or rearranging one’s day, although these are important factors in working towards what Eriksen refers to as ‘slow time’ (Eriksen, 2001: 50). Instead I am arguing for locating oneself in spaces where ideas and creativity can grow and flourish, spaces where being with our thoughts offers opportunities to rearrange them in spaces where the values of being are more central than the values of doing.

Learning spaces are often places of transition, and sometimes transformation, where the individual experiences some kind of shift or reorientation in their life world. Engagement in learning spaces does not necessarily result
in the displacement of identity (in the sense of a shift causing such a sense of
disjunction that it results in costs personally and pedagogically, and hence
has a life cost) but rather a shift in identity or role perception so that issues
and concerns are seen and heard in new and different ways. Learning spaces
might also be seen as liminal in nature in that they can be seen as betwixt
and between states that generally occur because of a particular need of an
individual to gain or create a learning space.

**Notions of space**

There has been an increasing interest in the notion of space in higher educa-
tion and more recently on physical space. For example, a study funded by
the Higher Education Academy in the UK has undertaken a literature review
to ‘inform the design of learning spaces for the future, to facilitate chang-
ing pedagogical practices to support a mass higher education system, and
greater student diversity’ (Temple et al., 2007). The review focuses on
research into the built environment; the organizational nature of higher
education in terms of how universities are governed and managed, including
changing relations with their students, research relating to how students
learn and factors influencing the learning process. However, there has been
relatively little consideration of the ways in which space is seen both as a
site of learning and more particularly as a site of power. Universities and
university leadership in particular seem to take little notice of the under-
standings, formulations and functions of space. For instance, the social
architecture of universities tends to represent different ideologies – the
lecture theatres of tradition and knowledge, the carpets and beanbags of
innovation. Yet the control of space and the way in which it is valued and
represented is evident through timetables, meetings, teaching and office
spaces and organizational practices. This very ordering belies the way that
university learning spaces shape not only student learning and staff practices,
but also the very nature of higher education itself, as Lefebvre has argued:
‘*(Social) space is a (social) product . . . space thus produced also serves as a tool
of thought and of action; that in addition to being a means of production it is
also a means of control, and hence domination, of power; yet that as such
escapes in part from those who would make use of it*’ (Lefebvre, 1991: 26,
original emphasis). However, there are other kinds of spaces that are part of,
but also overlay the notion of learning spaces. For example, Lefebvre (1991)
has suggested social space might be seen as comprising of a conceptual triad
of spatial practice, representations of space and representational spaces.

**Spatial practice** represents the way in which space is produced and repro-
duced in particular locations and social formations. Yet it is a space that is
located between daily routine and the practices and infrastructure of daily
life that affect it, impact on it and ultimately organize it. This formulation of
space has created spatial zones and imaginary geographies; boundaries
around conceptions of time and space have moved and so we have created
different kinds of 'spaces'. For example, learning, knowledge, relationships, communication, home and work places are no longer seen by staff and students as static, bounded and uniform but instead as ongoing, variable and emergent.

*Representations of space* are related to the relationships between sites of production and the way in which signs and codes are used within those representations. These spaces are conceived spaces and are the spaces of the planners and architects. These 'real' spaces are defined by the physical world, such as the design of the buildings and the space that exists between and within structures shaped by the organization's function and activity – past and present. With the rise of telework there is now a shift towards a notion of flexible spaces in homes, therefore the notion of representations of space no longer engenders an integrated idea of the use of space but, rather, is a space of change.

*Representational spaces* embody symbolisms, some of which may be coded, but importantly the representation is linked to what is hidden, what is clandestine. The notion of representational spaces is symbolized by activities that necessarily occur within them, while at the same time they embody complexity and symbolism. Representational spaces are not therefore integrated concepts, but symbolic and covert. Put more simply, representational spaces can be seen in formulations of lived spaces, which may, for example, change according to the weather when workers move indoors from the outside office (shed). Alternatively it may change with time when the children go to bed and the laptop is put on the kitchen worktop so that one partner can work while the other cooks. In the main, domestic life tends to shape representational space in the home, yet with the blurring of boundaries between home and work the meaning of 'lived space' and the symbolism attached to particularly areas of representational space have shifted. Yet this understanding of representational space remains problematic when the change in use of a space is not recognized by all who utilize that space. For example, many complaints are made about learning groups in campus bars and about the noise in the library – the latter is no longer a symbolic, nor an actual, silent workspace.

Lefebvre's constitution of spaces, along with territorial, disciplinary and institutional spaces impact on learning spaces by preventing the development of creative spaces, yet an understanding of the diversity and complexity of learning spaces can also inform the ways that they are (re-)created and managed. For example, spaces between people and places are important learning spaces.

*Territorial spaces*: the spaces between the tribes of academia, whether disciplinary tribes or departmental tribes, are places in which understandings about issues of power, status and emphasis are important. For example, academics who wish to appoint new staff quickly become impatient with the practices of the personnel department where issues of law and equity are primary human resource concerns. Further, the concerns of the managers to promote the profile of the university and manage the purse effectively are
seen as important sites, but for many staff the gaining of research grants and the effectiveness of their teaching are more important territories.

Space between learner and teacher: the concerns and agendas of staff and students are inevitably different spaces with diverse emphases, but such spaces are often complex and difficult to manage. Often these spaces are not just different in territory but also in language and social practices. The notion of translation is perhaps useful here in understanding the complexity of these forms of space. Translation is normally seen as finding parallels between two languages or as a means of mediation between languages. Yet in the process of translation, words, discourse and practices change and their meanings are often mislaid and misunderstood. The difficulty with attempting to translate academics’ ideas into something simplified and accessible to students often makes matters worse, but perhaps the ways of managing these spaces between learners and teachers should not be managed through translation, but as Burbules has suggested, through acknowledging that there are no clear lines, except for those of uncertainty and difficulty:

We must move from the idea of a translation to the idea of an aporetic encounter – finding our way through a labyrinth with no clear lines to follow. Uncertainty, difficulty, and discomfort in such an encounter are intrinsic. And because the failure of translation in practical contexts of communication is related to the inability to act or coordinate action, such difficulties are moral difficulties as well. The challenge of moral responsiveness in the face of radical difference is as much a part of the feeling of aporia as are epistemic or linguistic limits. Here even the possibility of communication, let alone translation, is put at risk. (Burbules, 1997: 5, original emphasis)

Spaces between learners: with the changes in higher education over the past 30 years, particularly with the global widening of access, it is acknowledged that the student body comprises greater diversity than in former years. Although much has been done to support this in terms of mathematics and literacy support units and academic writing centres, difficulties still arise. Acknowledging the importance of learning spaces introduces questions to do with our understandings of learner conception, stances and experiences, and prompts considerations about expectations and assumptions about students. For example, there is a tendency in higher education to make assumptions that students have similar wants, needs, aspirations and approaches to learning. Haggis has argued:

If it is accepted that students are likely to be different both from each other and from academics themselves, then there are arguably problems with assumptions such as the following:

- that it is acceptable practice to give out a reading list or set of essay questions expecting that students will know how to think, read and write in response to these
- that university teaching is, and should be, about exploring and
conveying key features of disciplinary content, rather than examining and modelling processes of thought and ways of interacting with/producing texts

• that essay feedback which refers to ‘structure’, ‘evidence’ and ‘argument’ is transparent and self-explanatory. (Haggis, 2004: 349–50)

Such differences must be acknowledged as we design more innovative learning spaces that meet the needs and aspirations of learners and teachers. Further, in the process of such engagement it is vital that we also acknowledge the importance of how ‘texts’ are conceived of, used and managed in academic life.

**Textual spaces** are spaces in which ‘texts’ must be engaged with in academic life. Texts here include not only written or digital texts but also the text of lectures, tutorials and seminars. While this area of textuality and understanding of text has been much discussed in literacy and academic writing fields, the notion of the ‘imported text’ (Boughey, 2006) is one that is discussed little between academics. Understanding what counts as a text and the space in which such texts are located are important sites of dialogic understanding. For example, rules of academic engagement, particularly related to disciplinary rules, pedagogical signatures and discipline-based pedagogy are located both within and beyond the text. Yet these spaces are problematic because of the ways in which staff interpret for each other, and for students. As staff create and re-create textual spaces for students, they often ignore students’ choices, the choice to disengage with the rules, such as working for a pass rather than a ‘good’ degree or leaving the course because it prevents them from engaging with particular social practices they believe in. There is often a sense that academics within disciplines forget that texts are not asocial, apolitical and that in drawing on text we draw on located contexts. It is through dialogue that engagement with texts and textual spaces are constructed, which is discussed in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4.

However, learning spaces can be ‘created’ spaces, spaces that just occur or ‘unexpected’ learning spaces such as:

• Bounded learning spaces: days away in which to think and reflect, alone or in a group
• Formal learning spaces: courses and conferences
• Social learning spaces: where dialogue and debate can occur in informal and less bounded settings
• Silent learning spaces: away from ‘sounds’ that get in the way of creativity, innovation and space to think
• Writing spaces: places not only to write but to reconsider one’s stances and ideas
• Dialogic spaces: in which critical conversations can occur but also where the relationship between the oral and the written can be explored
• Reflective learning spaces: which reach beyond contemplation and reconsidering past thoughts, they are spaces of meaning-making, and consciousness-raising
• Digital learning spaces: where explorations occur about new types of visuality, literacy, pedagogy, representations of knowledge, communication and embodiment.

Learning spaces as smooth and striated cultural spaces

Learning spaces could then be delineated in particular ways, seen as bounded by time, place, institutional and disciplinary culture. However, work by Deleuze and Guattari is helpful in examining learning spaces from a different perspective to those already considered in this chapter. They argue for smooth and striated cultural spaces. For them the notion of smooth space is one of becoming, it is a nomadic space where the movement is more important than the arrival. Whereas in a striated space, the focal point is one of arrival, arrival at the point towards which one is oriented: ‘In striated space, lines or trajectories tend to be subordinated to points: one goes from one point to another. In the smooth, it is the opposite: the points are subordinated to the trajectory’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 478). Striated learning spaces and smooth learning spaces are depicted below in somewhat stark utopian terms in order to illustrate their difference. However, as will be seen later in the chapter, there is doubtless more overlap than is immediately suggested here.

**Striated learning spaces**

These spaces are characterized by a strong sense of organization and boundedness. Learning in such spaces is epitomized though course attendance, defined learning places such as lecture theatres and classrooms, and with the use of (often set) books. These spaces may not be necessarily located in an institution – the learning spaces may be in the work place. However, what is common to these kinds of spaces is the strong sense of authorship, a sense of clear definition, of outcomes, of a point that one is expected to reach. Such spaces are therefore authored in design (whether inked or virtual) and in the way they are enacted in classroom practices, with a sense of subordination to a body of knowledge and the power of the expert. In such spaces students will be expected, for example, to take notes in lectures and learn and subsume disciplinary practices, rather than challenge them.

**Smooth learning spaces**

Smooth learning spaces are open, flexible and contested, spaces in which both learning and learners are always on the move. Students here would be
encouraged to contest knowledge and ideas proffered by lecturers and in doing so create their own stance toward knowledge(s). Yet the movement is not towards a given trajectory, instead, there is a sense of displacement of notions of time and place so that the learning space is not defined, but becomes defined by the creator of the space. The location of learning spaces in a variety of sites and spheres results in the learner and learning being displaced from and within striated contexts, and therefore such displacement might be seen by some academics and managers as dubious and risky. Moreover, such displacement also involves new and shifting ways of placing one’s self in smooth learning spaces, which may be troublesome since such learning spaces become a constant challenge to identity and may result in a recurrent sense of disjunction. Students located in smooth spaces may be seen as a threat to the stability of disciplinary practices because their disjunction will prompt them to question what is allowed and disallowed within the discipline. For this reason smooth learning spaces are often seen as suspect, or as privileged spaces for the undisciplined, and to be partisan about such activity can set up challenges to other academics about what counts as legitimate learning space. However, this is not to say that striated spaces cannot contain smooth spaces, yet when they do this presents difficulties about the relationship between the two spaces and the relative value of each.

The interplay of striated and smooth learning spaces

The contrast between smooth and striated learning spaces introduces questions about the role and identity of universities and academics in terms of what counts as a legitimate learning space and who makes such decisions of legitimacy. For many academics, the boundaries between smooth and striated learning spaces will be troublesome because smooth spaces are not always without boundaries but instead are framed differently. For example, in striated learning spaces, it is possible to frame the learning in terms of conference or course attendance, the striated space is clear – although the smoothness within it may not be. Yet undefined scholarly activity where the purpose is to think and write is invariably complex and contested, particularly given that a feature of smooth learning spaces is flexibility, a characteristic increasingly subsumed by busyness and accountability in a performative academic culture. The ‘difference’ associated with smooth spaces means that they will be problematic locations to inhabit and the opportunity for disjunction to occur is likely. Many staff have described disjunction as being a little like hitting a brick wall, there is an overwhelming sense of ‘stuckness’ and they have then used various strategies to try to deal with it. It has similarities with troublesome knowledge; Perkins (1999: 10) describes conceptually difficult knowledge as ‘troublesome knowledge’. This is knowledge that appears, for example, counter-intuitive, alien (emanating from another culture or discourse) or incoherent (discrete aspects are unproblematic but there is no organizing principle). Disjunction, then, is not only a form of
troublesome knowledge but also a ‘space’ or ‘position’ reached through the realization that the knowledge is troublesome. Disjunction might therefore be seen as a ‘troublesome learning space’ that emerges from smooth learning spaces, indeed Deleuze and Guattari, have argued: ‘Of course, smooth spaces are not in themselves liberatory. But the struggle is changed or displaced in them, and life reconstitutes its stakes, confronts new obstacles, invents new paces, switches adversaries. Never believe that a smooth space will suffice to save us’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 500).

However, at the same time there is a sense that smooth and striated spaces also pervade one another, and possibly emerge from each other and invade one another. This sense of pervasion and appropriation brings with it a sense that subversion occurs in both spaces. Thus, there is a sense that whatever one does to subvert striated spaces, routines and rituals will still be enacted and re-enacted. For example, authors such as Rosenberg (1994) have argued that hypertext is both art and pedagogy, but despite this both creator and user can only re-enact logocentrism since hypertext is necessarily driven by its rules and system. While there are many such cogent arguments, what is problematic about many of them is the assumption that identities are always necessarily ‘positioned’ by the way in which such spaces are created. Certainly, Bayne’s insightful analysis (Bayne, 2005b) suggests virtual learning environments (VLEs) such as WebCT affirm notions of how teaching and learning should be. As Cousin (2005: 121) has pointed out too, these VLEs are fraught with images that are deeply problematic, such as ‘a little white male professor’ that adorns WebCT as its premier logo. These images of scaffolding, structure and safety suggest stability and control. Further, these systems also encourage staff not only to manage knowledge, but also to manage discussions and possibly even to think and teach in linear ways. Clearly, in such striated spaces one is ‘being’ positioned. Yet to position one’s self in a smooth learning space in a striated learning environment is surely to position oneself as other than one is expected to ‘be’. If, however, there are possibilities for the creation of smooth spaces in striated environments, then there needs to be an acknowledgement that we are aware of the ways in which striated spaces and systems have moulded our assumptions, perceptions and pedagogies. Such perspective transformation will mean that it is possible to see and use striated spaces differently and critically, while acknowledging which interruption, disruption and disturbance, which are features of smooth spaces, will continue to render the smooth on the striated intensely problematic.

Learning spaces as the construction of pedagogy?

It is argued in this section that learning spaces offer opportunities to re-examine and possibly reconstruct our disciplinary and institutional pedagogies. Such opportunities might occur by examining conceptions of learning
and teaching, by shifting from notions of generalizable learning styles to identity-located learning stances and by embracing the idea of spatial ecology in the context of higher education. Spatial ecology is defined here as the creation of balance between and across spaces in higher education, so that account is taken of not merely knowledge, content, conceptions and acquisition, but also of ontology, of values and beliefs, uncertainty and complexity.

Learning stances

It is suggested here that instead of adopting conceptions of learning or learning styles it is vital that learning is located with/in the identities of the learner. In the early 2000s there has been increasing debate about the value of learning styles, although as an idea they remain popular with many in staff development and in business communities. To move away from the idea of learning styles removes possibilities for generalizing learner approaches and instead presents the notion that learning is complex and specific to the learner and must therefore be located in the context of their lives and their stories. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 2. The notion of stance is used here to indicate that the learners, at different times and in different spaces, 'locate' themselves as individual learners. To some extent stances in and towards learning are invariably formulated through school experiences and parental expectations. However, this model of learning stances (Savin-Baden, 2000) stands against the notion of learning styles and deep and surface approaches, arguing instead that stances relate not only to cognitive perspectives but also to ontological positioning within learning environments. Conflict between expectation, identity and belief in a learning context can result in staff and students becoming stuck: experiencing disjunction in learning and in teaching, either personally, pedagogically or interactionally.

Stance is used here in the sense of one's attitude, belief or disposition towards a particular context, person or experience. It refers to a particular position one takes up in life towards something, at a particular point in time. Stance is not just a matter of attitude; it encompasses our unconscious beliefs and prejudices, our prior learning experiences, our perceptions of tutors, peers and learning situations, and our past, present and future selves. Each stance contains a number of domains and movement between them is diverse, depending on each individual and set of circumstances. The borders of the domains are somewhat blurred, as in the edges of colours in the spectrum. Movement can take place within domains as well as across them.

The stances are presented in Figure 1.1 and are defined briefly as follows:

- Personal stance: the way in which staff and students see themselves in relation to the learning context and give their own distinctive meaning to their experience of that context
• Pedagogical stance: the ways in which people see themselves as learners in particular educational environments
• Interactional stance: the ways in which learners work and learn in groups and construct meaning in relation to one another.

My research into students’ experiences found that transitions in students’ personal, pedagogical and interactional stances were often sites of struggle (Savin-Baden, 2000). For example, students who had previously experienced learning as knowledge that was located by and defined through the teacher, experienced a challenge to their pedagogical stance when faced with seeing knowledge as something that was to be contested in the context of problem-based learning. Transitions were sometimes difficult and disturbing; yet in many cases they were places where personal change took place. Yet students did not just have a stance, it was something that they constructed and which related to issues of identity, relationships with others and the learning context. Staff stances also impact not only on student learning, but on other staff and on staff’s own identities as teachers. In particular, staff pedagogical stances affect the kinds of teaching and learning opportunities they offer and the types of learning behaviour they affirm and reward. The choices and interventions that tutors make within a learning environment and the particular concerns they bring to a learning environment all emerge from their pedagogical stances. Tutors’ stances emerge from their prior learning experiences, and their often taken-for-granted notions of learning

Figure 1.1 Learning stances
and teaching. The four domains within the concept of pedagogical stance are reproductive pedagogy, strategic pedagogy, pedagogical autonomy and reflective pedagogy:

- **Reproductive pedagogy** staff see themselves as the suppliers of all legitimate knowledge and therefore as facilitators they act as gap fillers.
- **Strategic pedagogy** staff employ tactics that prompt in students cue-seeking behaviour.
- **Pedagogical autonomy** staff enable students to meet their own personally defined needs as learners, while also ensuring that they will pass the course.
- **Reflective pedagogy** staff help students to realize that learning is a flexible entity and that there are also other valid ways of seeing things besides their own perspective.

It is important to note that the borders of the domains merge with one another, and therefore shifts between domains represent transitional areas where particular kinds of transitional learning and teaching occur. Further, it is important to note that movement across domains within a stance can occur from one domain to any other and that transitions between domains is not ordered or hierarchical in any way. In the context of learning spaces, staff need to recognize and explore their own pedagogical stances in order to examine the impact they have on the learning context and student stances and experiences.

**Spatial ecology**

The difficulty associated with locating both learners and teachers as possessing only a particular conception of learning and teaching, is that it seems to imply a deficiency model of higher education. This suggests that they only have the ability to see, understand and locate particular components, and therefore the perspectives and knowledge they have gained are then at best only partial. To accept such models is to accept the view that learning styles and conception largely represent what people are not and have not, rather than seeing them as operating in complex systems located in a diverse spatial ecology. While the model of learning stances could be seen as being overly simplistic, it not only represents learners and teachers as having more than one style, but also a spatial locale from which they operate. Thus the notion of spatial ecology reflects the idea that staff and students come to understand how they interact with one another and the various learning spaces in which they live, work and learn. Further, to date much of the literature that has explored learning context has been somewhat narrowly construed. For example, Ramsden (1984; 1992) suggested learning context is created through students’ experience of the constituents of the programmes on which they are studying, namely, teaching methods, assessment mechanisms and the overall design of the curriculum. Whereas spatial ecology is a
concept which captures the sense of there needing to be a balance between and across spaces in higher education, so that account is taken of not merely knowledge, content, conceptions and acquisition but also of ontology, values and beliefs, uncertainty and complexity.

The idea of spatial ecology captures the idea that it is recognized that staff and students operate on diverse trajectories and when they collide learning spaces emerge and often learning occurs. For example, differences in staff and students’ stances towards particular concepts such as family or gender prompt staff and students to consider the diverse spaces in which they live, work and learn and the impact of their life world on their learning. It is through discussion and exploration that notions of translation, shifting spaces and spaces of representation along with diverse and difficult territorial positions are recognized. Yet in order to create learning spaces in which it is possible to realize chronic uncertainty, there is also recognition that a tentative balance occurs through which staff and students come to manage learning. As learners and teachers we are not apolitical, acultural or disembodied beings, but we are often disturbed and uncomfortable, and need to have a sense of how our presuppositions impact on and interact with those of others in other spaces.

Learning spaces as an ideology

Barnett (2003) has argued that ideologies have entered and taken a grip on universities in ways that are both virtuous and pernicious, but that it is not possible to remove such ideologies. He suggests that what is needed is the development of positive ideologies, which he terms ‘idealologies’ that can prevent the corrosion of positive ideologies and which embrace and promote the ideals the university possesses. ‘Amid the ideologies that threaten to overwhelm it, the university can find itself again through virtuous idealologies. Such idealologies call for a leadership that can stand apart from the rhythms of the age and can forge alternative sources of being in the university’ (Barnett, 2003: 131, original emphasis). Barnett therefore argues for qualities such as reasonableness, and willingness to learn, which will enable the university to operate in, and with a flexible structure in, the context of a fluid world. In order to shift from ideology to idealogy it is important to recognize the increasing number of performative practices, which pervade the lives of students and academics. These focus on Bloom (1956), behaviourism, lesson plans and learning outcomes and are surely mechanisms that regulate and delimit learning spaces. Just as the focus on outcomes pedagogy has created a particular type of curriculum, this pedagogy has also occluded academics’ visions about possible alternatives. Curricula designed using behavioural objectives rather than learning intentions close down opportunities for creative and innovative forms of learning, and in turn occlude the vision to create smooth learning spaces. Pernicious performativity pervades judgement, and academics see themselves as being required to replicate the same
narrow practices in their own learning spaces. For example, Nespor has argued that the notion of the classroom being ‘center’ is:

an image at once familiar and problematic: there are, after all, different kinds of centers, from cherry pits to doughnut holes. On the one hand, many researchers – and policymakers in the U.S. government – adopt what could be called an ‘internalist’ perspective, in which the classroom is treated as a bounded container of teaching and learning – it’s a center in the sense that the important things are endogenously generated there and then transferred or moved outwards. (Nespor, 2006: 1)

However, those individuals who choose to adopt such striated positions invariably engage less with learning spaces and those with which they do engage are more likely to be formal and principally striated in nature. Yet it might also be the case that those who create smooth learning spaces are those who value reflection and so work to shore up and sustain a nomadic academic identity. As Deleuze and Guattari assert, ‘one is never “in front of”, any more than one is “in” smooth space – rather, one is “on” it’ (1988: 493). Yet similarly, students would not say they are ‘in’ a course, rather they are ‘on’ it, they and we are essentially always part of a structure or a curriculum. There are some similarities here with Bayne’s critique of virtual learning environments, where she argues ‘e-learning systems promise “seamlessness” of integration with other university information systems – the elimination of gaps into the unregulated unknown and the delimiting of space is their very purpose’ (Bayne, 2004: 313). Despite this there seem to be instances where unexpected learning spaces emerge. For example, there is evidence that learning spaces can occur in the process of role transition, such as shifting from the role of a lecturer to a facilitator of learning. Earlier work (Savin-Baden, 2003) illustrates how staff experiences of role change resulted in unexpected shifts. For many staff engaged in interactive forms of learning, the transition from lecturer to facilitator demanded revising their assumptions about what it means to be a teacher in higher education. This is a challenge to many since it invariably demands recognition of a loss of power and control when moving towards being a facilitator. The conflict for many staff is in allowing students to manage knowledge for themselves, when staff have in previous roles and relationships with students been the controllers and patrollers of knowledge. For example, the catalyst for transition for many staff becoming involved in problem-based learning has been attending a course designed to equip them to be facilitators of problem-based learning seminars (see, for example, Savin-Baden, 2003). Although such courses are invariably striated learning spaces, many seminar participants found smooth learning spaces also occurred on the striated ones; therefore the notion of transition within learning spaces is an important concern. As Deleuze and Guattari have argued, ‘it is possible to live striated on the deserts, steppes, or seas; it is possible to live smooth even in the cities, to be an urban nomad’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 482). Being an urban nomad may therefore be common in programmes and courses where both staff and students are
offered opportunities to reposition themselves away from the city and move into the desert, if only for moments in time. The term ‘learning spaces’, then, is used as both an ideology, as a way of being in higher education, and as a means of practising as an academic. This is captured through Giroux and Giroux’s perspective that:

In opposition to the commodification, privatization and commercialization of everything educational, educators need to define higher education as a resource vital to the democratic and civic life of the nation. The challenge is thus for academics, cultural workers, students and labour organizers to join together and oppose the transformation of higher education into a commercial sphere . . . (Giroux and Giroux, 2004: 120)

Conclusion

The creation of learning spaces might be something that is a choice. Perhaps, too, it is a choice that requires discipline. Those who are successful at finding, creating and using such spaces have discovered how to use them best for themselves. Thus such individuals find diverse ways of creating learning spaces such as generating opportunities for debate and ensuring they have space for writing – even if this demands rescheduling the working day to guarantee such space. Perhaps, then, finding and generating learning spaces is about the creation of an academic identity, whether smooth or striated.