Monk, Nicholas, Carol Chillington Rutter, Jonathan Neelands, and Jonathan Heron. "Open-space Learning: Practice into Theory." *Open-space Learning: A Study in Transdisciplinary Pedagogy*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011. 116–134. The WISH List. *Bloomsbury Collections*. Web. 26 Apr. 2023. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781849662314.ch-005>>.

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CHAPTER FIVE

Open-space Learning: Practice into Theory

Genuine education comes about through experience.

(Dewey 1997: 25)

The preceding chapters all represent, in their different ways, the genesis and development of the various practical pedagogical methods that constitute OSL. All of them, in one way or another, are dealing with 'open' spaces, be these the spaces between disciplines (Shakespeare and the Law), the space between schools and higher education (the Postgraduate Certificates and the Learning and Performance Network), the 'real' spaces between performance space and classroom, and the space between performance and pedagogy (the Postgraduate Certificates, The Residency/Re-performing Performance, Shakespeare without Chairs). Each chapter has also dealt in serious ways with the idea of embodiment in teaching and learning, and addressed implicitly the profound challenges that OSL, and methodologies like it, offer to the ways universities think about and design spaces for teaching and learning. What these case studies have achieved, we hope, is to offer a real and performative insight into the way OSL has been 'done'. Their business has not been, however, to theorize the practice. It is the work of this closing chapter, therefore, to consider in a little more depth some of the ideas that have developed as a result of the practice of OSL, to draw out further some of the points elucidated in the case studies, to tie these to pedagogic theory more broadly, and to consider a number of challenges to our assertions concerning the efficacy and intellectual rationale of the methods we have merged and/or grouped under the banner of OSL.

We argue, on the basis of the case studies, that for strong intellectual and practical reasons that are already well established but are further supported here, there needs to be a move in higher education away from methods and systems of teaching and learning that are predicated upon notions of 'knowledge download'. We suggest that the dominant systems of teaching and learning in UK universities (and elsewhere) exist in their current form partly because there is little will to change them, but mostly because they

are cost effective: we have not yet managed, for example, to develop a way to use OSL to engage two hundred students in a lecture theatre using only one facilitator. Finally, we use the evidence gathered in the earlier chapters of this book to press for a recognition that higher education needs to match dynamism and originality in research with the same in pedagogy if it is to meet the challenges of a future that is sure to feature changed and heightened demands and expectations from fee-paying students, employers and governments. As Catherine Lambert writes, 'Universities recognize the importance of providing smart and exciting environments in order to attract and retain students. This is combined with a growing awareness of the educational value of providing spaces which enhance students' learning – in terms of both experience and outcomes' (Lambert 2007: 1). In the spirit of the openness that governs what we do, we welcome not only supporters but sceptics and antagonists – and invite those with an interest or investment in the work to engage us, using the forums and technologies available at the OSL website. Our intention is to activate in virtual form, for academic debate, some of the principles we use in the 'real' open spaces of higher education pedagogy.

These principles – many of which we mention in the introduction to this work – are further elucidated here and an argument generated for their application in one form or another across the disciplines in higher education. It is necessary, therefore, to start by reiterating the foundations of OSL in a generic workshop model of teaching and learning. A workshop is a teaching and learning session that takes place in an environment in which participants can engage actively with the learning materials that are that session's focus. To 'engage actively' means to participate in learning in a way that is not passive – in the sense of sitting and listening – but that requires both physical activity and/or discussion/debate. Workshops inevitably involve group work, and materials can mean anything from text to props, to objects to data communicated in an audio-visual form. Participants work with these materials in order to fashion or create their own knowledge. In this way they become the discoverers or producers of knowledge and in doing so its owners. There are a number of factors at work in the creation of this ownership, and these include a range of ideas around embodiment and kinaesthetic learning, notions concerning space and its hierarchical – or non-hierarchical – nature, and ideas concerning the creation of a learning ensemble.

Those participating in an OSL session will often begin by feeling uncomfortable. This is not a phenomenon to be shied away from. In OSL it is essential that participants begin to acknowledge their own physicality and to recognize that they are as much engaged in the process of learning in an embodied sense as they are in an intellectual one. The typical experience for students is one of vulnerability giving way to liberation: 'the fact that we learned to "loosen up" during our sessions and that we got rid of a lot of our shame, made this module one I'll never forget. A truly intense and satisfying experience!' The experience of a Law student exposed for the first time to OSL allows an insight into the process from the point of a view of a participant who has never before encountered embodied/kinaesthetic work. The student's response implies a relationship between mind and body that goes unfulfilled in the majority of teaching and learning – particularly in the Arts and Social Sciences: 'Ours are not the brains of disembodied spirits conveniently glued into ambulant, corporeal shells of flesh and blood. Rather they are *essentially* the brains of embodied agents capable of creating and exploiting structure in the world' (Clark 1997: 220). The radical Cartesian separation of mind and body has long been abandoned as a credible intellectual precept in most universities, but remains implicit in the way teaching and learning is conducted across much of the contemporary academy. The layouts of lecture halls and seminar rooms (with which we deal later) are perhaps the clearest manifestations of the unspoken preconception of the passive body as receptacle for the (supposedly) active brain.

There can be little doubt about the continuing disdain and fear with which 'embodied' learning is regularly treated in higher education. This is a problem common to both students and tutors. 'If I had wanted to act I would have taken a drama course' is a representative example of a response from a student possessing a particular mindset common to many who had not encountered OSL previously, but who had been offered the choice of 'Shakespeare with or without chairs'. These fears may have something to do with certain age-related insecurities common to many undergraduates, but resistance from those further on in their careers can be equally strong. Resistance is, however, framed differently, tending to focus on something that might be broadly categorized as 'intellectual value' – or the perceived lack thereof. OSL activities were understood as 'games' that do not require serious analytical engagement from participants. The literature on embodied learning reinforces the point that the notion of learning in an embodied

way is often perceived as somehow freakish, anti-intellectual, or otherwise marginal: 'Students of my generation were taught to view embodiment as a circus sideshow, a vulgar distraction like the fat man and the bearded lady who, we assumed, had nothing in common with the glittering flights of mind exhibited by the intellectual trapeze artists soaring high above the center ring of the educational circus tent' (Gregory 2006: 316).

Surveys of tutors using OSL, however, have reinforced the notion that the position Gregory describes is amenable to subversion. One Creative Writing tutor, on the University of Warwick's writing programme, for example, who regularly uses 'open' spaces in his work, notes that the 'practical exercises are greatly enriched here ... I've been able to use theatrical improvisation demonstrations to explore power roles in dialogue and physical character interaction, [and] conduct creative writing exercises while engaging in physical exertion'. As another student of Law remarked 'I feel like I've had physical and mental exercise. It's good for entrenching things in the understanding and memory' and 'it is easier to recall things when practiced, instead of just discussed'. The link between physicality, understanding and memory is a key one here, and seems to undermine the notion that OSL is in some way reductive or anti-intellectual.¹

Of course, without the physically open space itself, it is impossible for the body, understanding and memory to come together to produce the kind of learning the student implies. The OSL environment is fundamental here in preventing the re-formation of the rigidly hierarchical nature of lecture theatre and seminar room – spaces that determine the arrangement and posture of bodies within their confines in highly specific and directive ways through the position of seats and their relationship to each other. Each of the spaces used for OSL, however, exists in its first incarnation 'without chairs' – which forces any group entering the spaces to address their own physicality and that of others in relation to that of the space. There is no longer the security and reassurance of traditionally arranged furniture allowing students the protection of a seated posture and the expectation of the passive reception of information free of social interaction. The spaces, therefore, are no more seminar rooms and lecture halls, for the purposes of OSL pedagogy, than they are theatrical spaces. Although the 'white-box' rehearsal room and 'black-box' studio are designed as performance spaces, the trappings of theatrical performance are largely absent: there is little in the way of costume, for example; theatrical lighting is rarely deployed; there

is no set; and, most importantly, there is no audience external to the learning process. Participants in OSL work in a space that is always open, therefore, both figuratively and actually. What this permits is a particular freedom in which, if carefully managed by facilitator/tutor, individuals exist as neither performer nor passive listener and observer, but as full participant in the discovery and creation of knowledge.

As Catherine Lambert suggests, students become 'producers', and 'hierarchical academic/student relationships change to produce more fluid and elaborate collaborations between producers of scholarly work' (Lambert 2007: 1). Frequently, therefore, what emerges – almost by accident, or naturally – from these OSL environments is a facilitated ensemble in which students, working in groups, create their own knowledge. The development of student-centred learning or the student as producer can thus be greatly aided by OSL methodologies. The responses of participants in the Postgraduate Certificates, 'Shakespeare and the Law' and 'Shakespeare without Chairs' are testament to this. The open and provisional spaces between established realities suggested by OSL are precisely the environments in which creative learning of the kind necessary to shift participants from passive receptacles to active creators might best flourish. Learning in such a space is not demarcated by the rigidly imposed intellectual parameters of a tightly worded lecture, nor is its practical pedagogy over-determined by the presence of the usual configuration of the seminar room – not just chairs and tables, but the whiteboard and the omnipotent tutor at the head of the room. Such an arrangement cannot help but re-instantiate hierarchical forms of learning, in which students' discovery of knowledge is marginalized and the intellectual power of the tutor privileged. What such arrangements promote, particularly in lecture halls, is a 'monopticon', aligned from each individual consciousness towards the single focus of the lecturer, reversing the premise of Foucault's all-seeing 'panopticon'. Students thus internalize the notion of a master consciousness dictating learning material to those novitiate consciousnesses intent upon it. These arrangements favour certain kinds of student who are already confident speakers and for whom engaging with lecturers on a one-to-one basis in subsequent seminars holds no fears. Also, if research on learning styles and multiple intelligences is accepted, the lecture and seminar model will favour auditory learners and linguistic intelligences disproportionately.

It is interesting to note in this context that one of the key concerns of university academic training centres is how lecturers and tutors can better

engage students in these formats. To our certain knowledge hours of toil are spent devising new and intricate ways in which 'small' and 'large group teaching' can be made more inclusive, more effective in promoting student learning, and more engaging.² Rarely is the possibility considered that lectures and seminars might be re-thought in favour of something completely different.

This is not to say, of course, that the lecture and seminar model has become a system in which effective learning *cannot* take place. Years of creative work by thousands of academics across the sector on their own teaching has made such a position a caricature: use of group work, subtle methods of increasing student participation and the introduction of new technologies have all contributed to enhancing student learning. The fact remains, however, that the format can be one-dimensional, lacks versatility and can be a profoundly stale and dull experience for modern students.

It is important to begin to analyse why this might be so on a level that is not merely concerned with reporting student and tutor experience. For us the lecture and seminar represent particular models of understanding and working with consciousness that map onto the philosophical positions of empiricism and idealism respectively. We think it is possible to argue, however, that OSL straddles this philosophical dichotomy in teaching and learning in that it is capable of uniting empiricist and idealist modes of thought in a phenomenological method that permits both to function simultaneously. If, for example, I say to a student: 'here is a work of art, a proposition, a discursive piece, or the results of an experiment either practical or abstract. Allow it into your consciousness and create a representation in thought of what you think it means', I am asking the student to allow the work in some sense to create, or fashion, the mind. This, of course, is a soundly empiricist position deriving from Locke and, particularly, Hume. Conversely, if I say to a student, 'here is a work of art, a proposition, a discursive piece, or the results of an experiment either practical or abstract. Allow your consciousness to create a representation in thought of what it means', I am suggesting to the student that they allow their mind to fashion or create the nature of the work. Again, this is a philosophical position with a long history, but what we might recognize as Kantian idealism.

These categories are broadly similar to Kolb's division of understanding into apprehension and comprehension:

To begin with, notice that the abstract/concrete dialectic is one of *prehension*, representing two different and opposed processes of grasping and taking hold of experience in the world – either through reliance on conceptual interpretation and symbolic representation, a process I will call *comprehension*, or through reliance on the tangible, felt qualities of immediate experience, what I will call *apprehension*. (Kolb 1984: 39)

Our argument is that in lectures students *apprehend* information (the empiricist model), and in seminars they *comprehend* (the idealist model). In a lecture there is a rendering of material; an intellectual objectification of it for the purpose of allowing the student to understand all or part of the material as an external unity. The solidified abstraction that results then becomes that which impresses upon the mind. In seminars there is a similar rendering of intellectual material, but in student-centred seminar models it is student thinking – rather than tutor thinking – that acts upon the material to produce the solidified abstraction.

To some extent this may sound like an argument for maintaining the *status quo* – why, if students are learning in these different ways, do we need to tinker? The answer is that what we are proposing about OSL might allow us to combine both of the idealist and empiricist modes in a single session, thus overcoming vulgar embodiment and allowing the body to become more than merely an awkward carriage for the brain. One means of theorizing this, as we have suggested, is to consider the process of learning phenomenologically. As Robert Magliola argues: ‘for the phenomenologist (to use one of Husserl’s famous slogans), knowledge is the grasp of an object that is simultaneously gripping us’ (Magliola 1977: 17). At root, phenomenology lays heavy stress on the perceiver’s central and vital role in the creation of meaning whilst acknowledging that there is, indeed, a tangible world ‘out there’. What we might say, therefore, to students is: ‘here is a work of art, a proposition, a discursive piece, or the results of an experiment either practical or abstract, elements of which we are going to represent in three dimensions. Allow it to create a representation in thought in your consciousness at the same time as you are creating in your consciousness a thought representation of it’.³ This move allows us to map more closely the way in which phenomenology argues that the mind and body function together in consciousness. Merleau-Ponty’s analysis of the West’s imposition upon itself of a mind/body dichotomy is absolutely relevant here:

The 'I am' is ... a rhetorical affirmation of my belonging to the realm of being. Not that I situate myself among objects in a way analogous to the juxtapositions which obtain between things. For I cannot speak of these physical relations as external to me without instituting a relation of exteriority between myself and my body. Such indeed is the epistemological model of physical science. The latter suppresses the immediacy of the mind-body relation and constructs an abstract epistemological subject whose sole function is to survey a field of physical objects and relations. A phenomenological psychology rejects the subject-object dualism because it retrieves an ontological and epistemological unity prior to the disjunctions of natural science. The status of my body is privileged. I can never be detached from it, not even in the attitude of objectivity. (Magliola 1977: xvi)

The embodied nature of OSL begins, in very practical ways, to move us beyond the dilemmas and contradictions of idealism and empiricism, as mind and body, unified, promote an infinitely more memorable and integrated learning experience for students and tutors. Pedagogical theory and practice begin, perhaps, to catch up with recent thinking in psychology and neuroscience that increasingly foreground the holistic nature of body and brain.

This is to not to assert that pedagogic theory has not wrestled with these dilemmas before, and although OSL claims here to bridge the idealist/empiricist divide there are aspects of the work of many of the thinkers with whom we engage here – and frequently endorse – that fall squarely into one camp or another. Social constructivism is a good example. Jérôme Proulx argues, for example, that:

It is important, also, to acknowledge that acceptance of a constructivist position means that we have to abandon 'rightness'. The important shift here is that, within a constructivist perspective, learning and personal knowledge are not seen in terms of an internal construction or representation of an external world – as Descartes, Locke and other rational-empiricists asserted. Whereas rationalists and empiricists assert that they are able to obtain and prove a universal reality, a universal truth that would be independent of the learner (an objective reality), constructivism claims that we have no access to an objective truth and that all knowledge is subjective and dependent

on the learner. Instead of talking about an internal representation that reflects the external world, constructivism describes personal knowing in terms of fitting to and compatibility with the experiential world. (Proulx 2006: 2)

In these remarks are either implicit or explicit a number of important tenets of OSL: the willingness of the tutor or facilitator to 'uncrown' power, for example; the injunction to 'fail better'; and the identification of the experiential world as that version of reality that really matters. It is also true, however, that constructivism/constructionism of this kind is open to criticism from those who see it as an outgrowth of a fashion for linguistic philosophy that tends to ignore the embodied. As Roper and Davis argue: '[Social constructionism] seeks to reduce all, particularly mind and material reality, to its preferred medium of language, signifiers, discourse and so on' (Roper & Davis 2000: 226).

Equally a wholly cognitive approach to the problem, such as that advocated by neuroscience, can be perceived as similarly one-dimensional:

Where cognitive science reduces psychology to information and representation, social constructionism reduces it to language or discourse or the like. Where cognitivism only knows the images, information, and representations in minds, social constructionism only knows languages, discourses and signifiers in the social world. Both are equally unable to acknowledge or give a role to material reality apart from reducing it to its own terms. As, for example, in cognitive science, the human body becomes a set of ideas, self-perceptions or 'body-image', so, in social constructionism, it becomes a text, a set of discourses or an assembly of signifiers. (Roper & Davis 2000: 225)

Indeed, in this, Roper and Davis suggest the approach we have outlined above which seeks to dethrone the idealist/empiricist dichotomy from its position of dominance in philosophical discussions of consciousness, and its consequent reign of influence on teaching and learning practices in higher education.

What is missing from these discussions of mind and body, however, is one crucial aspect of OSL. To paraphrase a dreadful cliché from the world of business in the 1980s, 'there's no "I" in ensemble'. Neither phenomenology,

nor cognitivism, nor constructivism, at this level of philosophical abstraction, can attempt to move beyond the individual consciousness and its relationship with the world and cannot, therefore, address an important element of OSL – its particular focus on group work in the facilitated ensemble, which is deeply founded in the social (Neelands 1984; Nicholson 2002). It is true that the ensemble depends for its success on the individual, eccentric talent operating in an atmosphere of trust and support, but the ensemble is a collective, and one that allows the individual to flourish as a learner. As Vygotsky argues: ‘Mind emerges in the joint mediated activity of people. Mind is, then, in an important sense, co-constructed and distributed’ (Daniels 2001: 13). This echoes much of the practice of OSL. One of the reasons OSL seems able to bridge the gap is that it allows the individual to function in a social learning experience. Neither cognitivism nor constructivism are the answer, nor are idealism or empiricism/rationalism, because they fail to factor in the social aspects of learning. This is, perhaps, why Vygotsky remains the thinker towards whom academics who are also teachers turn so regularly. As Roper and Davis argue: ‘Vygotsky’s dialectical materialist approach seeks to place language and cultural tools in relationship to mind and material reality as a dialectical unity of opposites where none reduces to any of the others but each undergoes change within the conditions of interlocking environment, species, socio-cultural history and individual development’ (Roper & Davis 2000: 226). The suggestion is that, lacking a social and embodied context, individual learning can become attenuated, unreflective and solipsistic.

In the rehearsal room actors and directors constantly challenge and ‘dethrone’ authority yet maintain a culture of mutual confidence, and OSL replicates this in the willingness of the tutor or facilitator to cede varying measures of control of the learning process to participants. Without this willingness the space closes in, as the tutor inevitably takes the posture of lecturer and participants become note-takers and receivers of wisdom – absorbers of the tutor’s ‘rightness’. To quote Vygotsky again: ‘Teaching, or instruction, should create the possibilities for development, through the kind of active participation that characterises collaboration, that it should be socially negotiated and that it should entail transfer of control to the learner’ (Daniels 2001: 61). A tutor or facilitator who is brave enough to set aside power in these environments, and tolerate the measure of unruliness this may demand, is likely to be rewarded with engaged and committed

responses from students who are thoroughly invested in the work they are doing because they have determined its nature. To uncrown power in this way – to temporarily suspend hierarchies in the spaces, to create a laboratory in which knowledge is discovered and owned by the group as a whole – is to promote creative learning and to foreground the role of student as producer. As participants work as a group through experiment and play to make creative progress (a combination of ‘mindfulness’ and ‘playfulness’), their ownership of the knowledge that they have created becomes more fully embedded in their consciousness than might otherwise be possible. Properly socially contextualized in this fashion, students have the opportunity to test hypotheses without fear of ridicule, to reflect in a group and to rapidly extend their knowledge. In a university environment in which students are now increasingly required to come up with ‘a question worth answering’ (Jackson *et al.* 2006: xviii), OSL offers methodologies that actively help them to do precisely this.

The ideas detailed in the previous paragraph have been particularly important in the creation of the LPN (Chapter 3), the student ensemble (Chapter 4) and ‘Shakespeare and the Law’. What are produced in these environments of mindfulness and playfulness are ‘creative learners’. Students are offered the opportunity to create their own knowledge with the guidance of tutors. We recognize, of course, that this is a venerable position:

Winnicott argues that ‘in playing and only in playing, the child or adult is free to be creative’. Creativity, being engaged actively in interpreting the world and in shaping whatever one is doing, draws on the whole personality, and through this the individual gains a sense of self. Play is enabled to take place within the potential space between mother and baby, therapist and patient, teacher and learner, where that relationship is good enough. In other words, the possibility of play on the part of the child, client or student can only occur where the mother, therapist or teacher provides just enough support, neither too much nor too little, for the child to feel safe to play. (Mann 2001: 12–13)

What OSL does is to allow participants the space, the freedom and the social interaction that permits these kinds of creativity to flourish. Creativity, therefore, has come to mean for us a function, or output, of both space and embodiment that is entirely dependent on the central notion of openness,

which refers to both the physical characteristics of the spaces in which the work takes place and a metaphorical space that is liminal, and exists between and 'trans' other spaces.

Developing from the idea of openness is the notion of a 'third' or 'trans'-space as we have chosen to call it here. 'Trans' as a prefix is an important secondary term in theorizing OSL as it expresses the idea that those engaged in OSL, as either participant or facilitator, are frequently working in areas, figurative and literal, that are not the usual spaces of the academy. As we have said, they are other, between or liminal. The trans-space is often the outcome of a dialectical process between various theses and antitheses that, in the moment of their opposition, create an open space in which new syntheses develop. This is true, for example, of the teaching space that is neither theatrical space nor lecture theatre, and is the site of learning for the vast majority of the activities described in the preceding chapters. Another example is the relationship between participant and facilitator which can frequently be regarded as antithetical, yet in OSL, as the facilitator uncrowns power, given and received information become synthesized. As we have already suggested, the relationship between mind and body, long held to be antithetical, emerges in synthesis in a social-phenomenological experience of learning that promises a richer and fuller understanding of subject matter.

This is true, also, of the relationship between learning styles in OSL, and there are any number of examples in the case studies that show exercises featuring visual, auditory and kinaesthetic learning styles operating together – just one would be the examination in 'Shakespeare and the Law' in which students perform, observe and discuss the learning of their tutor group. It is our hope that these syntheses created in OSL's trans-spaces produce not only a positive effect on grades – as they have for students learning 'without chairs' in 'Shakespeare and Selected Dramatists' – but also on their wider academic careers and their lives beyond university.⁴ As we suggest in Chapter 3, we believe that OSL offers students skills that can match closely those sought by employers from university graduates.

To develop the 'trans' idea a little further, the open spaces created by the dialectic we describe may become *transgressive*, as the stereotypical roles of facilitator/tutor and participant/student are suspended in the active and reciprocal engagement with the creation of knowledge. The notion that 'failure' should be honoured is also transgressive, as is the idea of adults 'playing' in

open spaces. Related to this is the idea that proposes the *transitional* nature of OSL: the work exists between clearly defined spaces and, as such, is always in the process of dialectically forming and re-forming so is always provisional and never closed. Such a condition of permanent transition is essential to a space that lays any claim to a truly democratic and inclusive style of learning. The structure of OSL means that knowledge can no longer be the preserve of those whose power and rank within the institution allow it to reside within their gift – the provisional character of knowledge within an OSL framework disallows such a dominant role for any individual. OSL becomes, thereby, *transactional*, in the sense of an open and free exchange of ideas in which participants do not compete to bank knowledge as private capital but freely exchange and collectivize their learning. We are returned once more to the ‘germ of democracy’ in the *ekklesia* of fifth-century Athens, as the five principles of *isonomia*, *isegoria*, *isopsephia*, *parrhesia* and *autonomia*: (see Chapter 3) re-assert themselves in a modern context in a socially open environment.

OSL, because it is a pedagogy that creates knowledge *with* its participants rather than *for* them, allows individuals and groups who may well be silent in lecture and seminar environments to have a voice. A particularly strong example of this is the ‘networking’ sessions described in Chapter 4, in which participants from many different nationalities and social groups encounter a situation that allows them to respond to particular situations in a fully engaged fashion. In a very modest way, such encounters permit participants to develop what Freire calls their ‘ontological vocation’ to become more ‘fully human’. The *ne plus ultra* of such a process is a challenge to any dominating power. As Freire wrote:

As we put into practice an education that critically provokes the learner’s consciousness, we are necessarily working against myths that deform us. As we confront such myths, we also face the dominant power because these myths are nothing but the expression of this power, of its ideology. (Freire 1998: 41)

The networking sessions, and OSL more broadly, place student knowledge at the centre of the learning process. Indeed in many cases it is *only* the students’ creation of knowledge individually and in social learning groups that is important in a session. As such, OSL becomes *transcendent* and

transformative, as the work not only moves beyond the typical focus on auditory learning styles that dominates the modern university, but more importantly allows students to create their own intellectual breakthroughs more rapidly than might otherwise be possible, offering them the means to refuse received wisdom and challenge accepted ideas.

Students working with OSL gain early access to the third or liminal space that the methodology makes available. In these third spaces participants become *trans-rational*, as the spaces offer a mode of understanding that relies equally on an intuitive and physical response and the rational processing of information – although we do not seek to argue that OSL undermines rational thought in the postmodernist sense suggested by the likes of Baudrillard and Lyotard, and the Frankfurt School before them. Our claim is merely that in a trans-rational condition the intuitive and sensory contribute as much to learning in the environments we describe as the logical and cerebral and should be recognized for their practical effects. Students obtain through OSL another means of gaining access to, and passing beyond, threshold concepts.

Importantly, also, in the idea of a third or open space, and embedded in its group or social character, there is a crossing of borders, a trespassing on the territories of others, even a move towards a kind of miscegenation between subjects. At the level of social theory it is important to acknowledge the work of Homi Bhabha – as Rob Hulme, David Cracknell and Allan Owens have done in their work on third spaces and trans-professional understanding for use in applied theatre/drama:

Bhabha develops a notion of inter-disciplinarity through the 'liminal' or 'interstitial' category that occupies a space 'between' competing cultural traditions and critical methodologies, an 'innovative site of collaboration, and contestation' where 'border discourse' takes place (Mitchell 1995: 82; Perloff 1998). Bhabha goes on to develop a 'hybridity' paradigm, arguing that this third space is a 'hybrid' site that witnesses the production, rather than just the reflection, of cultural meaning (Bhabha 1994: 1). It is that Third Space, though unrepresentable in itself which constitutes the discursive condition of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, re-historicized and read anew. (Hulme 2009: 37)

Bhabha's third space stands for us as synonymous with the open space of OSL, as both exist as sites that are free of the reverberations of clashing ideologies and the clamour of competing interests (at least as far as any space *can* be free of these), and remain, therefore, full of possibility and potential. Our largest debt here, however, is to the theories of the Cuban sociologist Fernando Ortiz whose work on the process of 'transculturation' in the 1940s informs the work of recent social theory around colonialism and postcolonialism in significant ways, and adds another useful 'trans' prefix to our lexicon.⁵

Ortiz was concerned with the process of colonization and sought to distinguish between simple 'acculturation' – in which the subordinate culture is simply obliterated by the dominant – and what he perceived to be an infinitely more subtle process taking place at the interface between colonizer and colonized:

I am of the opinion that transculturation better expresses the different phases of the transition from one culture to another because this does not consist merely in acquiring another culture, which is what the English word acculturation really implies, but the process also necessarily involves the loss or uprooting of a previous culture, which could be defined as deculturation. In addition it carries the idea of the consequent creation of a new cultural phenomenon which could be called neoculturation. (Brydon 2000: 1783)

Transculturation exists in a new space, after colonialism, between older realities, and in which ideas of 'miscegenation, métissage, hybridization, syncretism, resemanticization, de and re-territorialization, heterogeneity, displacement, and "good" or creative translation', proposed by recent social theory, can develop (Spitta 1995: 2). For us these notions that are tangible processes in postcolonial activity become metaphors for the processes we see operating in the 'real' spaces in which OSL takes place. They are all suggestive of the dialectical model we mention above as they represent third or open spaces in which new phenomena of all kinds might develop. They allow OSL to become 'transcultural' in the sense that it permits different disciplines, faculties, kinds of learner – indeed 'cultures' of all kinds – to operate in creatively generative ways at least partially free from particular sets of restrictive practice that attach to academic identities and subject

conventions. The space of OSL becomes a transcultural space and as such cannot help but generate new learning that is 'owned' and created by groups of participants in the process.

Such transcultural work becomes *transdisciplinary*, as normally stable discipline boundaries are suspended in the interaction of participants' subject knowledge with OSL methodology. 'Trans' signifies for us the notion that, once open spaces have been established, they become sites in which barriers to creative learning might be deconstructed and the divisions between disciplines and modes bridged. Transdisciplinary work implies a stage beyond the traditionally recognized modes of cooperation in higher education and reaches towards a condition that promises an altogether more organic integration of elements of best practice from each discipline. An example of the process is 'Shakespeare and the Law'. Without the application of OSL such a module is a worthy collaboration between a Law department and an English/Theatre Studies department – both 'Shakespeare' and 'Law' have their own remit and their own areas of interest, and perhaps English or Theatre Studies can help aspiring lawyers to perform better, but the disciplines remain separate. This is 'collaborative pedagogy', or 'interdisciplinarity', in which the conventions, rules or tenets of one discipline are applied to the content of another. An intervention remains just that. The transdisciplinary stage is reached, however, at the point at which an examination in the Law takes the form of a theatrical performance, or the discipline's borders and boundaries become less easily identifiable (as is the case with 'Shakespeare and the Law'). A tutor teaching the module 'Law and Literature' remarked that:

We have ... used the space for the creation and performance of legal poetry and for the performance and recording of assessed creative work ... including poetry, dialogue, drama etc ... It has been said that traditional legal education sharpens students' minds by narrowing them. [OSL] provides spaces which allow law students to stretch their minds by broadening them. We have used the writer's room and the rehearsal room ... and even the lobby area. Every space is conducive to creative thinking, which is essential to the module assessment.

It is no longer possible to divide absolutely form and content in this description of the module, and in this way the activities become transdisciplinary.

Transdisciplinary pedagogy can be further distinguished from other examples of collaborative work by noting the existence of models of a *multidisciplinary* approach. An example of this is a module offered at the University of Warwick entitled the 'Faust Project', in which participants are drawn from a range of different disciplines from across the university and sessions are delivered by subject specialists from departments as diverse as Business, The Medical School (Psychiatry), German and Law. Participants collaborate in addressing a common challenge – drawing from their range of knowledges, experiences and perspectives in order to conduct a diverse exploration of the Faust myth.⁶ Other examples include modules at the National University of Singapore, and the Howard Hughes Medical Institute in Minnesota.⁷

The kind of socio-phenomenological, transdisciplinary approach that forms the philosophy of OSL begins to allow us another way of explaining what is taking place in a successful workshop. In combination with the theories and practical work already existing in this area, OSL has begun to allow facilitators to feel increasingly confident about shifting the methods of performance in teaching and learning from their 'natural' home in English and Theatre Studies into other areas of higher education. The transdisciplinary model we have proposed here continues to be extended across the university whenever and wherever willing collaborators can be found. Perhaps the most significant recent example is the work with the Department of Chemistry. The following is the abstract of an article from the October 2010 issue of the Royal Society of Chemistry's Journal *Chemistry Education: Research and Practice*:

In order to explore new and stimulating teaching and learning methods for undergraduates in Chemistry at the University of Warwick, interactive workshops based on the periodic table were devised by a team of chemists and theatre practitioners. In the first term of the academic year students attended a two to three hour workshop in one of Warwick's theatrical spaces. Prior to this, students had been assigned an element to research. They were required in the workshop to embody their knowledge of the behaviour of that element and interact with other students in role as 'their' element. These sessions were supported by lectures and the requirement that students submit unassessed research essays. The exercise was conducted with both the 2008 and 2009 student intakes. The details of the workshops are described and the pedagogical impact discussed.

The workshop has been compulsory for two successive first-year cohorts of Chemistry students and will form the basis for future collaborations. The workshops are run by one facilitator and one subject specialist, and have produced a number of interesting results – including the fact that 65–70 per cent of students attending the sessions say they have better understood inorganic chemistry as a result of their experience.

In spite of the work done in the CETL initiative (see Preface), and the increasing numbers of teaching spaces being designed and built around the UK, recent reports indicate that the dominant model continues to be the lecture theatre and seminar room. The download model of teaching continues, necessarily therefore, to hold sway. There remains more than a suspicion that this is not for sound pedagogic reasons, but for sound economic ones: plainly it is cheaper to ask an academic to lecture a single session of two or three hundred students every week than it is to ask that same academic to run seven or eight workshops. It is difficult to see how OSL or related pedagogies can wholly disrupt this situation without a sea-change in the way the efficacy of higher education is perceived in this country – and elsewhere for that matter. Until those allocating and distributing funding for British universities come to a real acceptance that pedagogies like OSL genuinely produce better educated students – both in the sense that they are both better equipped for the complexities of work in contemporary society, and are simply ‘better educated’ in the old liberal humanist sense that individuals should be, as far as possible, the free and autonomous authors of their own thought – then those of us who believe in the efficacy of these methods are destined to struggle against under-funding.

Of course, part of the responsibility for demonstrating our usefulness lies in our own ability to persuade, and to demonstrate to decision-makers that we can achieve what we say we can achieve. This requires an endless process of investment in good-quality work and good-quality practitioners to execute that work – and this, of course, lies at the root of our determination to offer a for-credit qualification in workshop delivery (the Postgraduate Certificate in HE Workshop Methods is currently under development at the University of Warwick). It depends also on the ability to continually (and continuously) develop better methods of research that allow us to convince the sceptical that what we do produces better *outcomes*. Whether or not we believe that this is a sufficient and necessary means to measure success, we have to respond to the demand to do so.

There is a second part of course, to this slow process of shifting attitudes, and that requires a willingness to abandon hitherto defensive postures. The onus to provide the proof of efficacy should shift from those of us who are committed to a 'non-traditional' mode of teaching and learning, to those who seek to maintain the seminar room and lecture model. Our questions to them should be: On what grounds do we continue to use this system? What are its benefits beyond university? Can you demonstrate to us ways in which the body is *not* implicated in learning? Can you offer a theoretical justification for the pedagogic methods that continue to dominate? How will you sustain this system in a new age of accountability in higher education?

We believe that there is great hope for the kinds of pedagogy we advocate, and we have encountered an enthusiastic response in the vast majority of places in which we have shown the work. As a colleague from the University of Hull remarks, 'Having experienced the work of the [OSL] team, and the glowing feedback which they received when demonstrating their techniques in my own institution, I can honestly say that I believe their approach to be effective, excellently presented and popular across a wide variety of disciplines' – although the same colleague's belief that 'the format is also exportable, and marketable outside the university' was perhaps as worthy of note. With recent very-well received sessions in the US at the universities of New York, North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Vanderbilt, as well as in Venice and Munich, we look forward with great optimism to the further development of what we believe to be a truly transformative and transdisciplinary pedagogy.