Monk, Nicholas, Carol Chillington Rutter, Jonathan Neelands, and Jonathan Heron.
"Introduction." *Open-space Learning: A Study in Transdisciplinary Pedagogy*. London:
Bloomsbury Academic, 2011. 1–9. The WISH List. *Bloomsbury Collections*. Web. 26 Apr. 2023.
<<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781849662314.0008>>.

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Introduction

The mind does not require filling like a bottle, but rather, like wood, it only requires kindling to create in it an impulse to think independently and an ardent desire for truth.

(Plutarch 1927: 259)

This is a book about space and performance, and their effects upon teaching and learning. It seeks to offer a transdisciplinary model of pedagogy that has the potential to transform the student experience in higher education by creating conditions in which learning is immediate, enactive and alive. This model is a collection of mutually dependent ideas and practices we have called Open-space Learning (OSL). At the academic level, OSL can stimulate students to produce work of exceptional quality and to achieve better grades; more broadly, OSL enhances the wider student experience by promoting creativity, by allowing students to bond in small groups and by allowing them to take responsibility for their own learning. Beyond this, we believe that the skills acquired by students in their contact with OSL equip them for life after formal education in ways considerably more potent than those fostered in the lecture and seminar format standard in most universities. Students exposed to OSL report significant rises in confidence, an enhanced ability to work in teams, a greater willingness to take personal responsibility and an increased openness to experiment and risk. We believe OSL methods are eminently transferable and what we offer the reader, therefore, is a description of OSL activities, evidence of their efficacy, some theoretical analysis and, most importantly, examples of good practice that can be extracted and developed for daily use by professionals in education across the sector and across the disciplines.

At a practical level, OSL is an example of what might be recognized as the 'workshop model' of teaching and learning. The workshop is the basic unit in pedagogic interaction between facilitator and participant in OSL. It is defined here as 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. Such materials might include text, but they might also include props, objects and audio-visual materials. Participants work independently or in small groups (normally fifteen to twenty-five) with these materials, in order to fashion or create their own knowledge. The workshop allows the participant to become the producer and discoverer of knowledge. Indeed, our experiences have often shown us that the very fact of working in a studio or rehearsal room space creates real physical engagement with the taught materials in ways that could not possibly happen in the lecture and seminar format. Students develop their subject expertise more rapidly and thoroughly, but the social constructivist nature of the work means that students also acquire and enhance 'soft' and transferable skills in areas such as collaboration, teamwork, dialogue, self-management and self-direction.

We have also found the term OSL useful in persuading those students and tutors who are reluctant to become involved in workshops that 'acting' is not the principal focus of the work. At a theoretical level OSL is informed by – but is not limited to – methods such as 'enactive' learning, 'kinaesthetic' learning and the various methods of teaching developed by practitioners such as Augusto Boal and Paulo Freire, and related to the work of thinkers like Lev Vygotsky, Howard Gardner and David A. Kolb. It also has affinities with 'applied drama', 'applied theatre' or 'applied performance'. In addition, theories around OSL are influenced by the work in neuroscience of academics like Andy Clark and Antonio Damasio, who seek to re-connect mind, body and word. Beyond this we have incorporated social theory and the ideas connected to a 'third space', in which teaching and learning are conducted in ways, and in spaces, that bring together knowledges and skills from students, subject experts and practitioners in the creation of understanding.

OSL came about as a result of a collaboration between a theatre company and a university in the physical and metaphorical space that existed between the two institutions, as well as in the physically real and 'empty' spaces of the rehearsal room and studio that were built at the start of the project. Into this hitherto empty space enters the 'ensemble', or its simulacrum. OSL is concerned with creating this ensemble – no matter how brief its duration – within a pedagogic space that is inclusive, creative and co-constructivist, and encourages the development of skills that can be applied both inside and outside academe.

There begins to exist a culture of learning in which a secure environment for group or ensemble work is created, without ever becoming a comfort zone. This notion forms a significant part of the discussion of the ensemble's relationship to OSL in Chapters 3 and 4. The open spaces draw participants into an acknowledgement of their embodied nature, which can lead to a complete engagement with it and that has the effect first of radically unsettling them (reactions of discomfort to the sheer vulnerability they feel through intense self-exposure), but then of liberating them. Working collaboratively, sharing ideas, moving around and through open space (doing their thinking not just intellectually but physically), they see themselves trying things out, rehearsing possibilities, freed to be provisional, to take risks, to offer and own ideas, but also to make mistakes and to change their minds.

Participants learn not only the detail of their academic speciality, but are also freed to discover for themselves an understanding of how to 'be' in an increasingly complex world. Employing practices borrowed from the theatre rehearsal room is crucial to this pedagogy. An ensemble is a collective – but one that depends on (and respects) the individual, eccentric talent. As a company in the rehearsal room, actors and directors constantly challenge and 'dethrone' authority yet maintain a culture of mutual trust. The open space replicates this in the willingness of the tutor or facilitator to 'uncrown' power. Without this willingness the space closes in as the tutor begins to lecture, and participants are trapped in a one-dimensional world of listening and note-taking. In an atmosphere of uncrowned power, learning takes place in the students' interactions with their peers, their tutors and, not least, their own and others' physical presence. They work through experiment and play to make creative progress – a combination of 'mindfulness' and 'playfulness'. At its best, the OSL work carried out in these open spaces echoes the best of the theatrical rehearsal room – in that 'failure' is honoured. Failure acknowledges experiment and recognizes risk: it is creativity's shadow. Students who have internalized intellectual self-protection, whose schooling has taught them to succeed by avoiding risk and minimizing failure, their default position being to play safe, are challenged to use performance to live dangerously. Above all, they are challenged to 'fail better' (Beckett 1984: 7).

The space itself is fundamental in preventing the re-formation of the hierarchical space of lecture theatre and seminar room. Each of the spaces used for OSL exists in its first incarnation 'without chairs', which forces any group entering the spaces to address their own physicality in relation to that

of the space – there is no longer the security and reassurance of traditionally arranged furniture. The spaces, therefore, are no more seminar rooms and lecture theatres, for the purposes of OSL pedagogy, than they are theatrical spaces. They exist in a space that is always ‘open’, 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, but full participant in the discovery and creation of knowledge.

This kind of open and provisional space between established realities is precisely the environment in which creative learning might best flourish, because learning in such a space is not demarcated by the rigidly imposed intellectual parameters of a tightly worded lecture, nor is its pedagogy over-determined by the presence of the usual trappings and configuration of the seminar room – not just chairs and tables, but the whiteboard and tutor at the head of the room facing the seated, subordinate class. Frequently, therefore, what emerges from these OSL environments is a ‘facilitated ensemble’ (central to the methodology, and revealed in action in later chapters of this book) that is entirely dependent on this central notion of ‘openness’. This includes both the physical characteristics of the spaces in which the work takes place, and a metaphorical space that is ‘liminal’, ‘empty’ and exists ‘between’ and ‘trans’ other spaces.

The prefix ‘trans’ is a particularly important secondary term in theorizing OSL, as it operates in close conjunction with the central notion of openness. ‘Trans’ expresses 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. The open space becomes *transgressive*, as traditional barriers between facilitator and participant are suspended in the active and reciprocal engagement of participants, and the idea of ‘failure’ is honoured; *transitional*, as the work exists between clearly defined spaces and, as such, is always in the process of forming and re-forming so it is always provisional and never closed; *transcendent*, as the work moves beyond the typical focus on auditory learning styles that dominates the modern university; *trans-rational*, as the space offers a mode of understanding that relies equally on an intuitive and physical response as it does on the rational processing of information; *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; and, most importantly, *transdisciplinary*, as normally stable discipline boundaries are suspended in the interaction of participants' subject knowledge with OSL methodology.¹

The trans-space exists by virtue 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 rehearsal room nor seminar room, the relationship between participant and facilitator, between subject and object, between learning styles, and between mind and body. Indeed on this last point we argue later in the book that OSL promotes a phenomenological experience of learning that follows an anti-Cartesian pattern of unity between mind and body, promoting a richer and fuller understanding of subject matter. In the words of a finalist on the University of Warwick's English Literature degree who has experience of OSL: 'I feel like I've had physical and mental exercise ... entrenching things in the understanding and memory'.

At the level of social theory it is important to acknowledge the work of thinkers like Homi Bhabha and Stuart Hall, and also to point to the work of Allan Owens *et al.* who have developed the notion of a third space, partly in relation to these theories, for use in applied theatre/drama. This third space stands for us as synonymous with the open space of OSL. We acknowledge a large debt here to the work 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. This is fully explored in Chapter 5 but, essentially, for us OSL becomes 'transcultural' in the sense that it permits different disciplines, faculties and kinds of learner to operate in creatively generative ways, free from particular sets of restrictive practice that attach to academic identities and subject conventions.

The purpose of this book, however, is not merely to identify the ideas that have led to a growing acceptance of OSL within the university in which it developed, but also to offer a series of case studies that bring to a wider audience models of good practice that can be immediately deployed by educators in their own teaching. We offer in each of the subsequent chapters a space in which there is both written material and data in a number of non-standard forms. This data represents important outcomes and illustrations of our activities, and includes step-by-step guides to delivering particular workshops, video recordings of these workshops, audio and video recordings

of teachers and practitioners discussing and describing their activities, sample assessment and feedback forms, examples of innovative practice and video assessments of practical work. The first chapter is a case study of the University of Warwick third-year module 'Shakespeare and Selected Dramatists of His Time', in which important elements of OSL were first developed. The module is compulsory for the majority of students whose degrees feature an English Literature component. Students are invited to choose either a practical or a non-practical method of study ('without chairs' and 'with chairs').

The 'without chairs' practical option takes place in weekly two-hour sessions in open teaching and learning spaces. Students are required to participate in a range of practical activities, from theatrical warm-up exercises to workshopping of scenes. The 'with chairs' non-practical version is studied in small seated groups, usually fifteen students, in traditional seminar rooms and involves discussion of the plays led by seminar tutors. Introducing practical methods of teaching Shakespeare across a cohort of final-year students studying Shakespeare in an English department in a major British university might not seem, superficially, to be particularly ground-breaking, given that the plays are essentially 'performance texts', but it is unusual in British universities for practical sessions to form part of the teaching of Shakespeare. Neil Thew's 2006 survey, for example, of fifty-one higher education institutions in Britain revealed that 'performance activities are relatively little used [in the teaching of Shakespeare] at present' (Thew 2006: 18). A two-year study of this module has produced significant results that are published for the first time here, alongside an analysis of the four student surveys carried out to date; an analysis that offers strong factual evidence to accompany the anecdotal material concerning the efficacy of OSL.

Chapter 2 traces the movement of OSL beyond English Literature into another discipline, through the work of academics from the departments of English and Law working collaboratively to create the honours module 'On Trial: Shakespeare and the Law'. The chapter deals in detail with the delivery of the module's content in ways particular to OSL. The module focussed on key areas of Tudor law, as reflected in *The Winter's Tale*, *The Merchant of Venice* and *Measure for Measure*. In terms of its pedagogy, the module offered students the chance to experience OSL methods, challenging them to re-imagine the standard academic seminar. The active workshop replaced

desk-bound discussion, the rehearsal room replaced the classroom and the ensemble replaced the tutor group. Students were expected to explore ideas by putting texts on their feet, a move that instantly transforms them from passive to active learners. Like the other chapters, this one features video, interviews and assessment materials.

The development of OSL in schools is analysed in Chapter 3, through a detailed study of the Learning and Performance Network (LPN). As mentioned in the Preface, this was an initiative developed by the University of Warwick and the RSC to improve Shakespeare pedagogy in primary and secondary schools. Supporting this initiative was the development of the Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching Shakespeare, designed to provide accreditation for English and drama teachers in the LPN. The analysis includes a discussion of the certificate's effectiveness in improving the quality of teaching and learning in schools and colleges, and considers in greater detail the idea of ensemble as a link between the rehearsal room, the classroom and OSL in the context of higher education. The chapter explores significant overlaps between best rehearsal room practice and best classroom or seminar room practice, and how rehearsing, teaching and learning might be mutually transformed. The approach is rooted in OSL and is active and exploratory, using problem-solving methods and requiring young people to be on their feet, moving around, exploring the feelings and ideas that emerge.

Such an approach requires teachers who are confident at managing group work in open spaces, and who are skilled in constructing scaffolding for practical work, including being skilled in asking questions and personalizing learning. It requires teachers who are concerned with the emotional, cultural and social as well as academic development of learners. The intention of devising the certificate was to offer a recognized qualification which would provide participants with models of practice informed by leading-edge academic, performance and other practical approaches to the teaching of Shakespeare (models based on the internationally respected resources of the RSC and the Department of English at Warwick), as well as the expertise in drama pedagogy offered by Warwick's Institute of Education. Here OSL becomes firmly embedded not only in schools, but also in teacher training.

The final part of the process of embedding OSL, explored in Chapter 4, analyses a transferable model of cross-fertilization between the arts and pedagogy through a theatrical residency within a research-intensive university; a process which has made a significant contribution to the

development of OSL. An important function of such a residency is to provide a creative project each year which features professionals working alongside students. Uniquely, this involves a theatre company re-positioning its artistic output: locating itself, for the duration of the residency, in The CAPITAL Centre, to serve student projects, to offer a learning experience enabling undergraduates to engage in collaborative practice. The detail of this process is examined, where a strong focus is on giving an account of the 'student ensemble' and the work it did in marking the residency's first creative project, Lorca's *Play without a Title*. The chapter goes on to consider the ways in which the residency's reach has surpassed expectations, with the development of new work for the stage involving a wide range of students and staff from a number of disciplines, using the Lorca project to meet a range of academic purposes. It also reviews the provision of interdisciplinary practical workshops across the university, including an example of a session provided for postgraduates and early career academics centred upon the idea of 'networking' that relies for its success on the student ensemble.

The chapter includes description and analysis of a 'live' archive. The project Re-performing Performance: Shakespeare Archives in Teaching and Learning is a digital resource, forming a collaboration between The CAPITAL Centre, Warwick Arts Centre, Footsbarn Theatre Company, Northern Broadsides and the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust. It represents a further strand of OSL in the sense that it offers another 'open' space between the already established spaces of theatre and the academy. The space offers a range of possibilities for using theatre records in performance-based learning experiences, and encourages students to engage practically with the complexities surrounding performance as well as offering downloadable introductions to specific collections. Users of the website are challenged to generate their own content 'live' by browsing the resources and 're-performing performance' in their own teaching and learning spaces. Re-performing Performance is a readily transferable example of collaboration between a university and theatre companies that benefits not only the institutions themselves but also the wide range of students accessing the resource.

These case studies and analyses are all very different from each other, but we seek to make a virtue of this diversity in the final chapter of the book as we develop a theoretical model that offers an intellectual rationale to cover all these activities and processes, and present a series of related ideas that might begin to explain the success of OSL already evident in empirical studies and

in anecdote. The chapter develops a more detailed theoretical analysis of OSL, elaborating the ideas of 'openness', 'third space' and the function of 'trans spaces'. It concerns itself with the idea of 'transdisciplinary' work as opposed to 'interdisciplinary' and 'multidisciplinary' modes. This final chapter attempts, wherever possible, to allow practice to inform theory. It addresses the challenge of reassuring students and tutors that OSL is a legitimate and effective pedagogical method that permits learning to flourish in ways not available in more traditional forms of study. It also develops an argument that proposes OSL as a method of teaching and learning to challenge the fundamentals of the lecture/seminar format dominating the vast majority of higher education institutions at present. We look forward, also, to new transdisciplinary projects involving OSL which include work in university departments such as Chemistry, Academic Training and Philosophy. And finally, in the spirit of OSL, there is an open invitation for readers to participate in the creation of knowledge in the open space of the OSL website.