











Vocational teaching spaces

Vocational spaces are diverse, and have highly specialised requirements for equipment, room size and supporting infrastructure. As a result, the use of learning technologies within these environments has not always been given priority. Vocational areas have often lagged behind other parts of the institution in providing a technology-rich learning experience, apart from the use of digital equipment in particular activities.

However, a higher priority is being given in the 21st century to developing learners' creativity, adaptability and wider skills. Learning technologies embedded into the design of vocational teaching spaces can make a difference by providing immediate access to learning resources, diversifying routes to understanding, and supporting opportunities for on-the-spot recording and assessment of skills.

Rethinking vocational spaces

The JISC eSpaces Study of the influence of technology on learning space design by

Birmingham University identifies two key drivers – pedagogic and operational. Operational drivers may have particular relevance for vocational areas – the need to refurbish ageing or scattered estate, and the impact of changes in the economy and in demand for types of courses have frequently prompted institutions to reassess their provision.

Pedagogic drivers matter too. Laboratory or workshop-based learning and outreach classes can all too often be a narrowly-focused experience which takes place in outdated environments at a distance from the main campus. But this need not be the case.





Teaching spaces

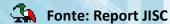
General teaching spaces have been dominated in the last century by one type of design: tutor-focused, one-way facing and presentational, with seating arranged in either a U shape or in straight rows. Technologies have subsequently been added – interactive or conventional whiteboards mounted on the wall behind the main speaker, ceiling-mounted projectors with cabling to a laptop, a wireless network and/or wired computers – but these have rarely altered the dynamics of the design.

The prevailing pedagogic approach has swung towards active and collaborative learning, but room design and staff skills sets do not always reflect this.

Pedagogy first

To resolve what is the best way forward for the institution, effective dialogues are needed to establish what will be required from the spaces, what changes in pedagogic approach are desirable, and why. Investment in developing the skills of staff also needs to be matched by fostering their ownership of the proposed changes. Visits by staff to other institutions have proved beneficial in supporting change.

The design of most general teaching spaces will usually need to support both tutor-led and learner-led activities. These will include presentations, discussion, collaborative project work, and information





Learning centres

The concept of the learning centre is still evolving, usually blending with other previously distinct spaces to absorb more of their functions. Rethinking the learning centre has led to substantial new-build projects in universities especially, where this space is envisaged as the social and academic hub of the campus. However, smaller scale learning centres are also appearing – connected to teaching accommodation to form curricular clusters, for example, or as a separate high-tech, highly personalised learning environment in addition to the library.



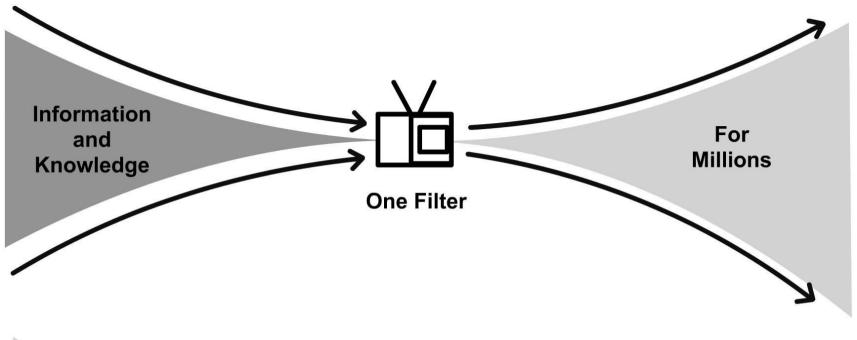
Form and purpose

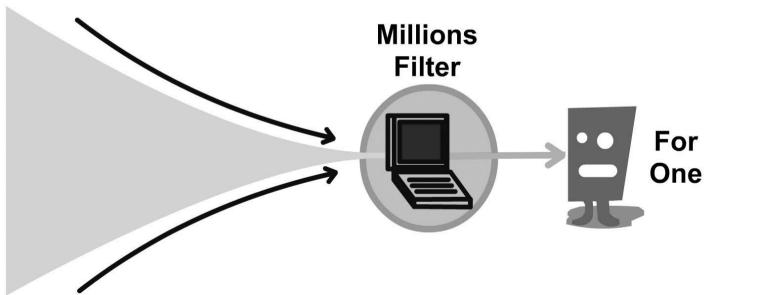
We now expect that learning will involve many different activities, each having different behaviours associated with it. This can make the learning centre the most multifunctional of spaces. A large central learning centre in a university, for example, provides social spaces, student services and study support, book and laptop loan, access to IT, and different kinds of working environments, from comfortable seating for collaborative group work, to 'board rooms' for practice presentations. Some elements of teaching may also take place within a learning centre environment.

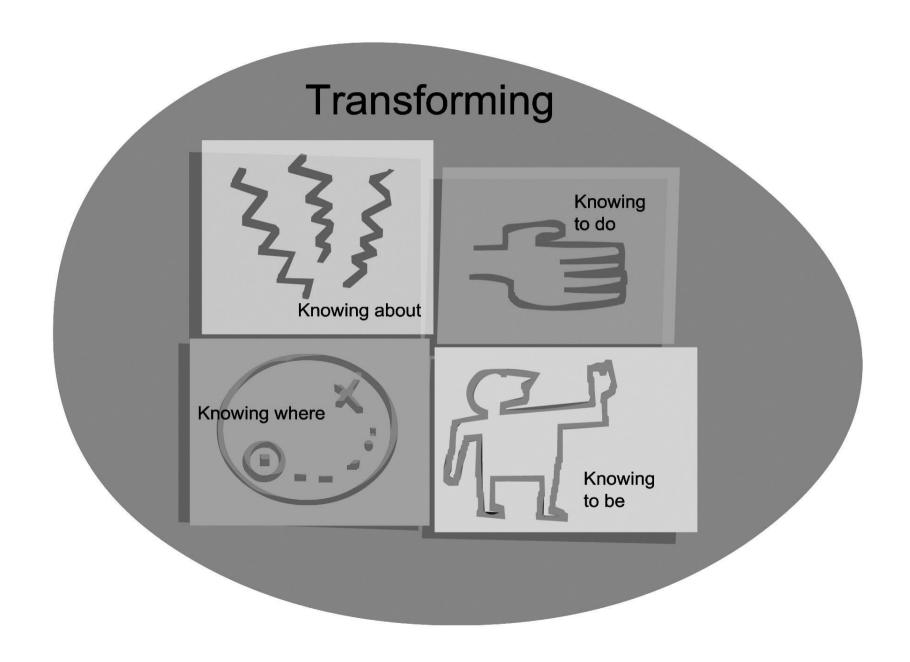
These varied purposes demand a clear vision for each area within the centre. Zones, or different floors for different modes of learning, are

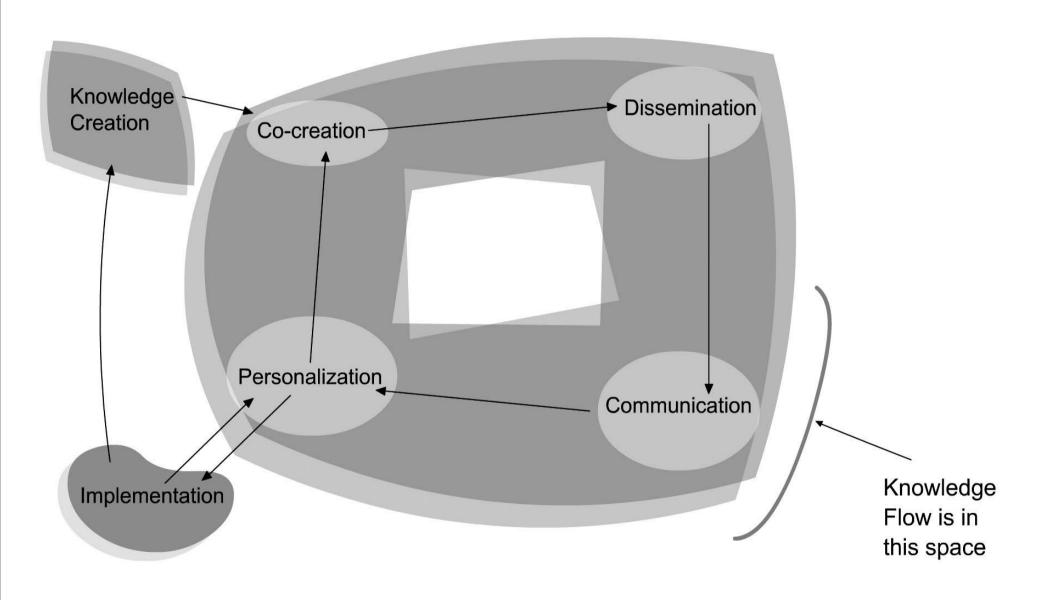










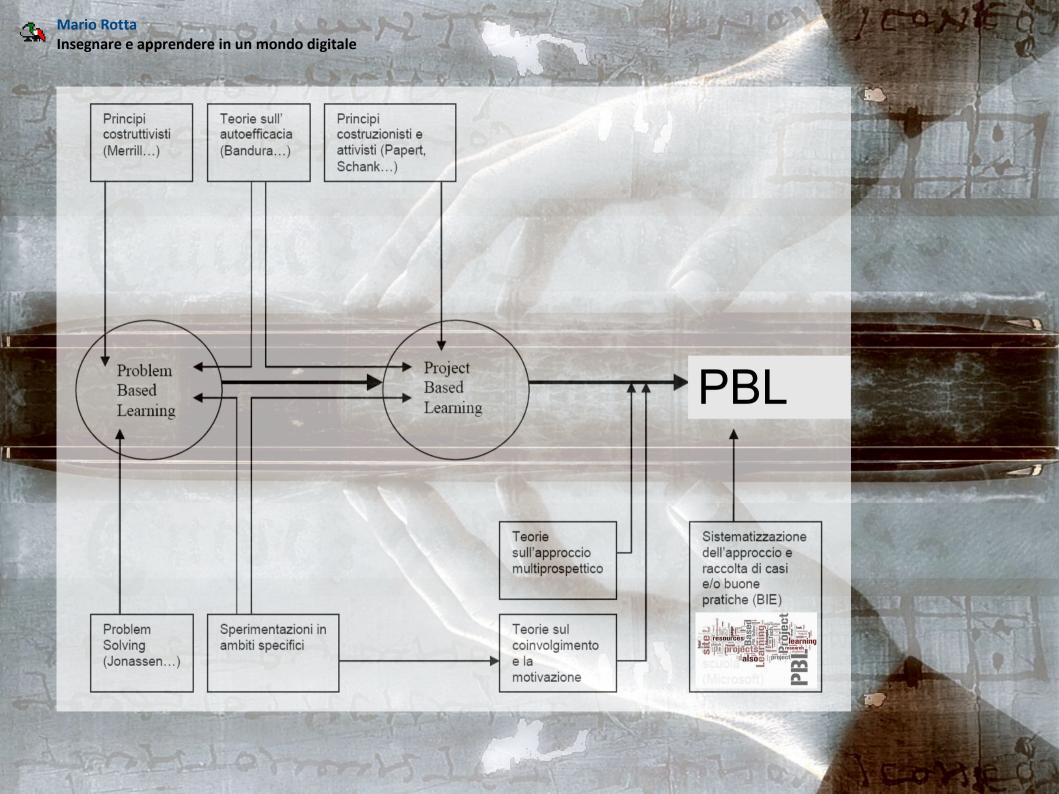




















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