Chapter 7

Challenges of Teaching with Technology in HE:
Towards a New Third Space?

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This chapter examines current debates and theoretical approaches to studying new media technology and learning in a Higher Education (HE) context. The authors interrogate the relationship between HE spaces, technological advantages, and engaging pedagogy to emphasize the importance of understanding complex inter-relationships between technology and learning. The findings of the multi-method ethnographic research with 30 lecturers reveal how shifting globalized paradigms have led to paradoxical perceptions which further impact perceptions of professionalism. The chapter draws on Latour's (1993) Actor Network Theory (ANT) approach to modernity, which, as a form of belonging, endorses democracy (Strathern, 1999). This ANT-inspired case study argues that we need to critically re-evaluate the hybridity of HE spaces and that the traditional distinctions between the social spheres of learning have become blurred, and that an ANT approach enables us to gain greater understanding of a new hybrid world.

ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

The recent bourgeoning interest in the relationship between higher education, student learning, and technology is reflected in the development of the *E*-learning strategies and numerous "enhancing learning and teaching through technology" initiatives abundant in the UK (Higher Education Academy, 2009). In 2010, for example, the theme of the JISC conference in the UK was "Technology: at the heart of education and research," confirming the widely held view that universities and colleges must integrate technology into all aspects of their future strategic planning. These technological developments associated with wider postmodern conditions, which Turner (1990) outlines as disorganised capitalism, consumer society, and mass cultural production, are viewed to have changed learning in contemporary western society. In an increasingly competitive and consumer-orientated market, universities are striving to exploit an increasingly media-rich environment to create greater accessibility to education. The use of technology, often viewed as a catalyst for change in educational environments, is underpinned by the demand for quality improvement in learning and teaching. However, "blended learning may be helping to create the appropriate space of learning for some students. But if it is, it is still largely serendipitous, because the space of learning is not currently a focus in blended learning design" (Oliver & Trigwell, 2005, p. 24). Space is articulated in wider debates about modernity and capitalist globalization (Massey, 2005) yet as Lee and Stanner (1999, p. 95) point out, "we produce the modern world by mixing natural and cultural things into productive hybrids who can then be promptly ignored thanks to the purifying tendencies of modern thought." It is, therefore, essential to understand how technologies develop, how people use them, and the implications that they have on learning spaces and social cohesion in the HE environment.

SETTING THE STAGE

The ethnographic research presented in this chapter took place in a relatively new university (opened in 2007) with purposefully designed modern buildings and learning environments which have technology thoroughly integrated within them. The annual review of the university in 2011 described a modern IT-rich environment appropriate for its students in the 21st century. The experiences of students' perceptions of technology in HE are well documented (Sharpe *et al.*, 2010), but lecturers' perceptions remain underexplored (Hanson, 2009). We draw on Massey's (2005, p. 13) argument that ordinary space, "the space and places through which, in the negotiation of relations within multiplicities," the social is constructed. In

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