1. **Title:** *Illustration Space*

2. **Author(s):** Chris Barr, Christine Blaney, Jonathan Cummins, Pat Griffin

3. **Overview, Aims and Context**

   Our aim was to create an enriched, dynamic studio environment, maximising student interaction and belonging across year groups/disciplines alongside prominent alumni/mentors/European contributors in the production of a digital magazine (Belfast/Zagreb/Germany/Finland). In line with the University’s Learning & Teaching Strategy, the project aimed to “Provide transformative, high quality, learning experience through the promotion of meaningful staff student partnerships that engender a shared responsibility.”

4. **Description**

   *Illustration Space* is a project that creates a professional work-simulated space for student editorial teams in the production of a digital magazine. The space has been designed to promote interactions and conversations among students, artist/designers-in–residence, staff and industry professionals, encouraging the sharing of knowledge skills, ideas and practice. This is a flexible learning space, multipurpose, including for the hands-on creation of work, informal meetings, mentoring sessions etc.

   The editorial team compromises undergraduate students from years 1, 2 and 3, artists/designers-in-residence and international exchange students, all from the BDes Hons Graphic Design and Illustration course.

   **Two Digs Design Studio**, Belfast and internationally renowned illustrator, Barry Falls provide professional mentoring and support for the team throughout the process.

   The student learning experience is at the heart of the project. Our aim is to facilitate a flexible learning environment, which provides opportunities for our students to learn and gain experience within a more interactive, informal and social environment. Outlined by the University’s Teaching and Learning Strategy we aim to provide “appropriate learning opportunities, which are flexible, responsive to, and inclusive of, the needs of students, professions, industry and the wider community,”

5. **Design**

   **Methodology** In creating a space, we aimed to develop a student-centred learning experience by providing a context where the artists/designers in residence aligned to the course, and a small group of students (from all year groups) could work as a team to produce a digital magazine. To do this we:

   - Created a physical space simulating a workplace environment for the project work to take place in.
   - Created a workplace context that provides opportunities to experience:
     1. Working as part of a team
     2. Working on the creation of a specific product

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1 University of Ulster, Teaching and Learning, (online) available: http://www.ulster.ac.uk/teachingandlearning/
2 University of Ulster, Teaching and Learning, (online) available: http://www.ulster.ac.uk/teachingandlearning/
3. Working with digital technologies to support enterprise.
4. Working to tight deadlines, attending meetings, etc.
5. Working with industry professionals, presenting ideas, responding to feedback, making revisions etc.
6. Building and strengthening collaborative links with International/Erasmus students
7. An alternative ecology, running in parallel with day-to-day studio life, which is fully focused on professional quality output for which students take full responsibility.

- Provided training, advice and feedback for the team from industry professionals.
- Provided the team with the opportunity to avail of new technologies and approaches (the use of online tools to create digital products, using Skype to facilitate industry mentoring sessions etc.)
- Encouraged a self and peer directed learning experience, student centred, but fully supported by the illustration staff team.

Evaluation A substantial number of students were actively involved in the project in a range of ways:
- Becoming a key member of the editorial team
- Engaging in learning new technology to design the product
- Documenting the project through taking photos of the sessions/meetings
- Organising and carrying out interviews with industry professional to include in the magazine

We had a very strong response to the open call for illustration work to be considered for inclusion in the magazine from a range of courses throughout the School of Art and Design.

Positive feedback from the students, staff and external professional mentors on the initiative. The quality of the work produced and the commitment of the students were particularly noted.

We are in the process of preparing the Digital Magazine to be sent out to FE colleges and Schools and hope to collect feedback from those recipients.

6. Findings and Conclusions: (provide information on results/findings, evidence and conclusions)

We created a physical space, which promoted interactions and conversations among students, artists/designers-in-residence, staff and industry professionals, encouraging the sharing of knowledge, skills, ideas and practice. This is a flexible learning space, multipurpose, including for the hands-on creation of work, informal meetings, mentoring sessions etc.

The student learning experience is at the heart of the project. Our aim is to facilitate a flexible learning environment, which provides opportunities for our students to learn and gain experience within a more interactive, informal and social environment. Outlined by the University’s Teaching and Learning Strategy we aim to provide “appropriate learning opportunities, which are flexible, responsive to, and inclusive of, the needs of students, professions, industry and the wider community,” 3

Outputs:

- Digital Magazine (attached)
- Poster in relation to the project (attached)

3 University of Ulster, Teaching and Learning, (online) available: http://www.ulster.ac.uk/teachingandlearning/
Reflective Commentary (this should draw from your experience and identify what worked well and what were the key challenges;)

- The project was particularly successful in bringing together a range of students from different year groups who may not have the opportunity to meet or work together otherwise.
- The industry/professional mentoring aspect of the project was very successful as the student’s creative and practical decisions were actively mediated by a professional they respect and trust. This gave the project a sense of real world immediacy.
- The project provided a sense of autonomy and responsibility that demanded urgency, attention to detail, a sense of craft and professional pride.
- We were ambitious in relation to the amount of work and the time scale. Aspects of the project took longer than anticipated. The breaks in the semester (Easter, Summer holidays etc.) had a much greater impact than we anticipated. As did student participants other commitments.
- The ordering of furniture, equipment etc. took longer than anticipated.
- We had a much greater response to the open call for work – although this was positive the processing of this was more time consuming than expected.
- We had aimed to disseminate material at the beginning of semester 1 (2016-2017) however dissemination is taking place at the beginning of semester 2 (2016-2017)
- Teamwork always presents some difficulties. Decisions around content for the magazine was difficult for the students to agree on and staff felt it would be counterproductive to take over these decisions. The professional mentor taking the students through the selecting and editing process resolved this. This was a key learning experience for the participants.

Student Engagement (to be completed by the student partner): Impact on learning experience and sense of belonging;

The project was a great opportunity for me to meet and work with other year groups on the course, at present there is not much interaction between the year groups. It also gave me the chance to build upon the relationships with my tutors that in turn created a more comfortable experience working within the university. (Conor Barbour)

As a first year student, working as part of a collective group on this project helped give me a greater sense of community and importance within the course. It was a comfortable and easy way to build relationships with more experienced students, which in turn helped me learn new skills as well as get closer to my tutors. (Caelim Boyle)

Learning Environment and Engagement: your views on the appropriateness and effectiveness of physical spaces for engagement and virtual spaces to enhance learning.

In creating a space, we developed a student-centred learning experience by providing a context where the artists/designers in residence aligned to the course, and a small group of students (from all year groups) were able to work as a team to produce a digital magazine. A simulated workplace environment. An alternative ecology, running in parallel with day-to-day studio life, which is fully focused on professional quality output for which students take full responsibility.

Impact (please provide evidence of the impact on learning and/or teaching)

- The simulation of a workplace environment, working experience and networking
opportunities is excellent preparation for future employability.

- A hands-on, self and peer directed learning opportunity for the students and the artists/designers-in-residence encouraged the participants to take responsibility and control of their learning.
- This “blending” of the student year groups, broke down hierarchy etc. and enabled soft skills that many students possessed, to be employed (regardless of subject specific skills yet to be learned). They also learned from more experienced students.
- An output that can showcase the work of the School and be delivered to schools, colleges etc. to promote the course and increase interest/applications.
- Links between current students, Erasmus/International will be strengthened; building international links for future collaboration.

Transferability (consider how this activity might be used by colleagues in other schools/faculties and if it could be developed for a further Faculty interdisciplinary learning project)

- Project format could be used by many other course as an opportunity to promote their work
- The student-centered activity could also be utilised in other subject areas – taking responsibility for their own learning was a key component of the project.
- The industry/professional mentoring aspect of the project was particularly successful and this could also be replicated within other subject areas.

Dissemination (internal and external)

- The Digital Magazine will be circulated throughout the School of Art and Design
- The Digital Magazine will be sent to a range of potential employers, schools, and FE colleges
- Social media will be utilised to further disseminate the project.

References (using Harvard style, list literature and other resources that influenced your work)

'In short the design of our learning spaces should become a physical representation of the institution's vision and strategy for learning — responsive, inclusive, and supportive of attainment by all'. (JISC 2014 p4)


Hook, A., Rethinking Vocational Learning and Teaching Spaces for Media Curriculums in Higher Education. Academia. (Online) Available: https://www.academia.edu/10830800/Rethinking_Vocational_Learning_and_Teaching_Spaces_for_Media_Curriculums_in_Higher_Education


“It is important to realise that the quality of any physical creative space in itself will only enable learning and creativity to happen if co-operative, democratic and facilitative approaches to the learning and creative process are adopted by both learners and teachers. It is these attitudes and approaches to the learning and creative processes which enable the construction of shared meaning, knowledge and understanding.” (Martin, 2010, p. 25)


Keywords (Max 4)
Illustration, editorial, student engagement

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