

Space to collaborate? Exploring student engagement with transitional space

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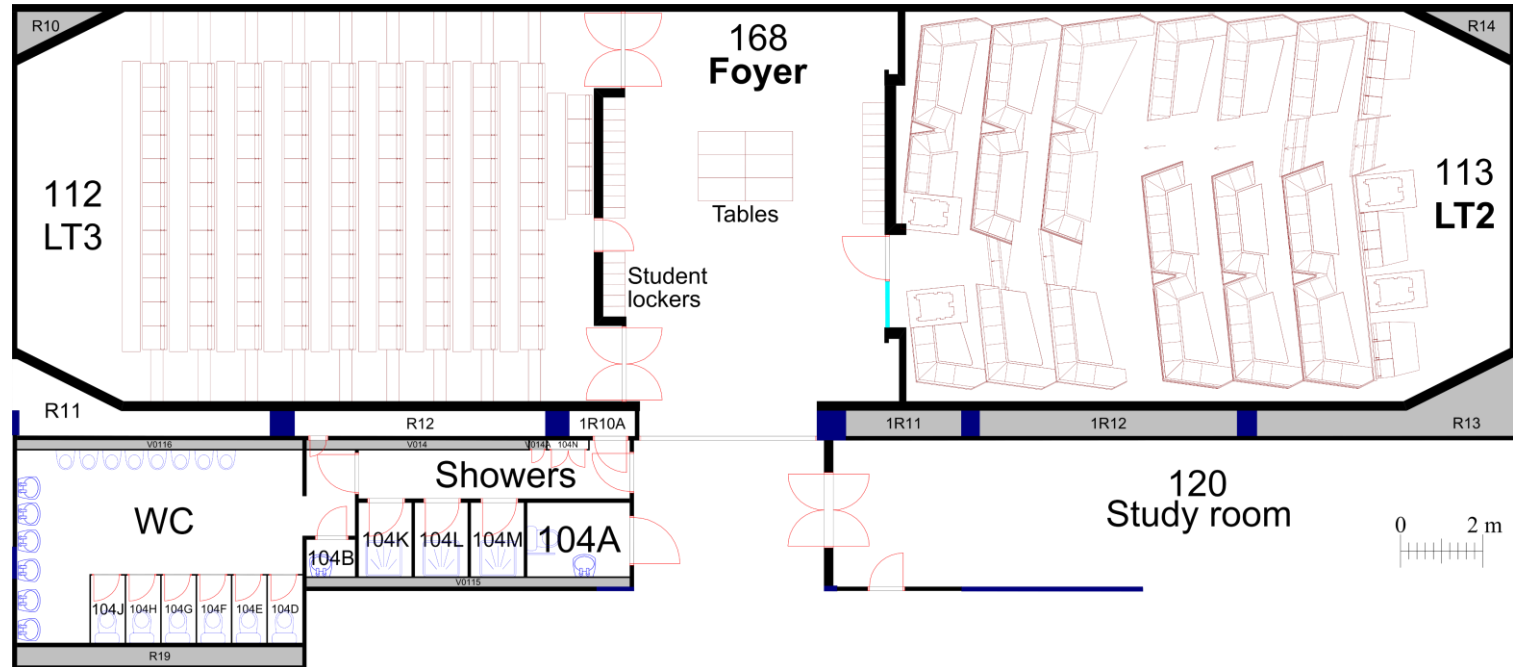
Background

- BSc and MSc student, Earth Science and Engineering
 - Deputy President (Education), Imperial College Union
 - Hall Warden, Wilson House
 - PhD, CHERS (Thesis DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25560/93793>)
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Research questions

- **How can we prepare students to be versed in individual academic merit for a more collaborative approach to learning at university?**
 - PhD research project (DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25560/93793>)
 - What can transitional space teach us about collaboration?
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Research setting



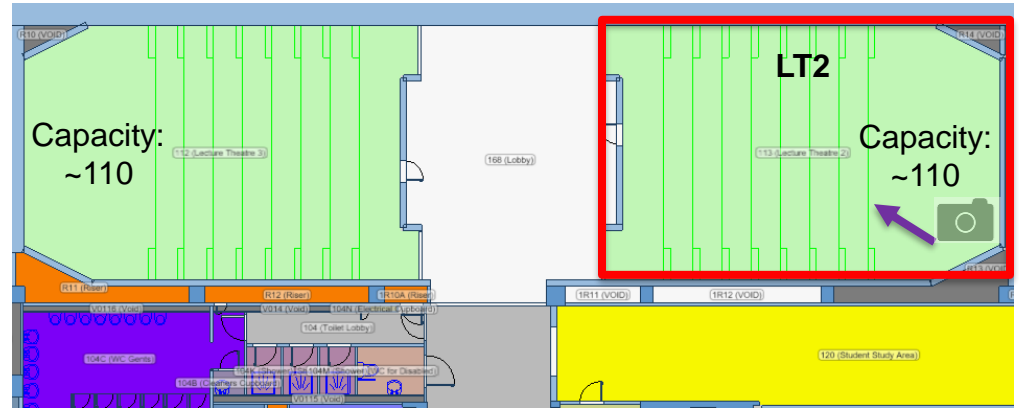
- Blackett Building, South Kensington Campus (Physics Department)
- Two mirrored lecture theatres with foyer space in-between
- Planned strategic refurbishment of Lecture Theatre 2

Data collection

Methods	Blackett Lecture Theatre 2	
	Pre-renovation	Post-renovation
Ethnographic observations	10	20
Field interviews (students)	6	10
Field interviews (lecturers)	2	7
In-depth interviews (students)	-	4
In-depth interviews (lecturers)	-	3

Teacher's space

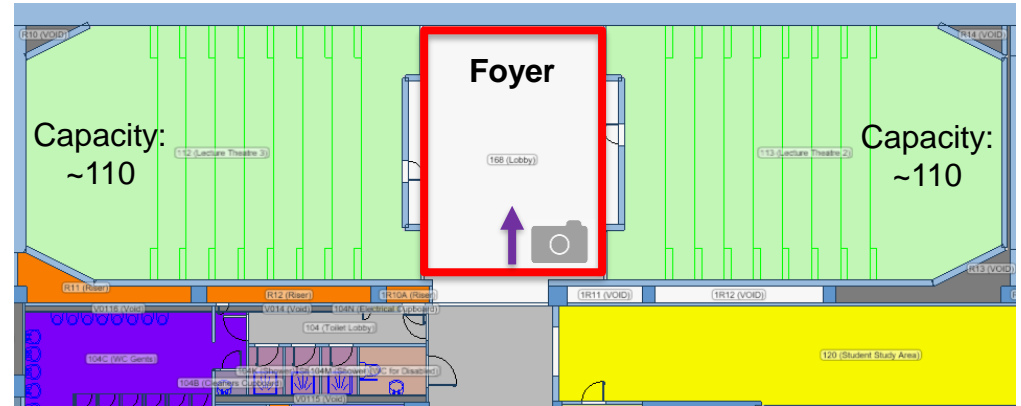
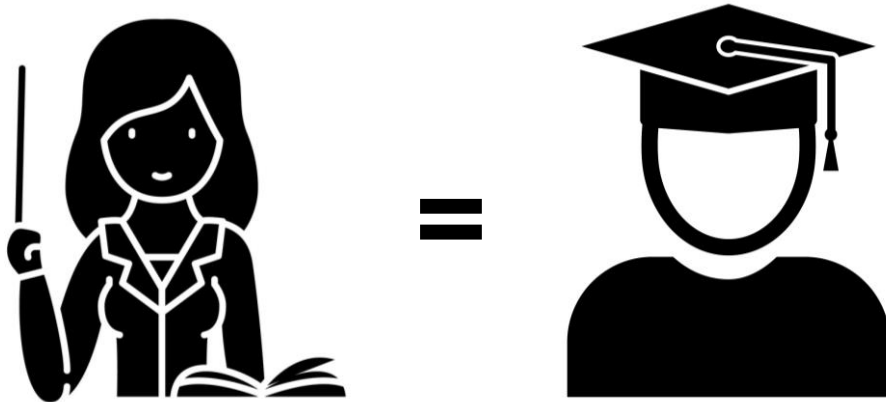
- Timetabled formal learning
- Teacher talks, student listens
- Performative environment



Blackett Lecture Theatre 2 (LT2)

Student's space

- Non-timetabled informal learning
- Student talks, teacher listens
- Serendipitous interaction
- Collaborative environment



Blackett Foyer space

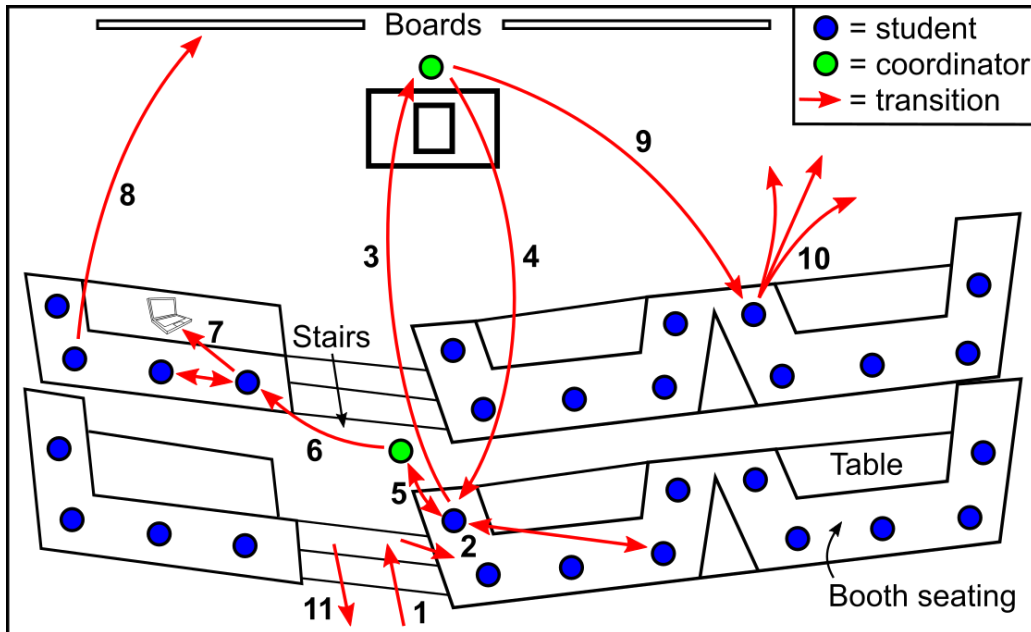
Designing for collaboration



- Connect-booth seating
- Improved acoustics
- 5-person booths
- New AV and display screens

Blackett Lecture Theatre 2 (refurbished)

LT2 transitions



Transitions between:

- Student-directed ↔ Teacher-directed interaction
- Active learning ↔ Passive learning

Easier to develop:

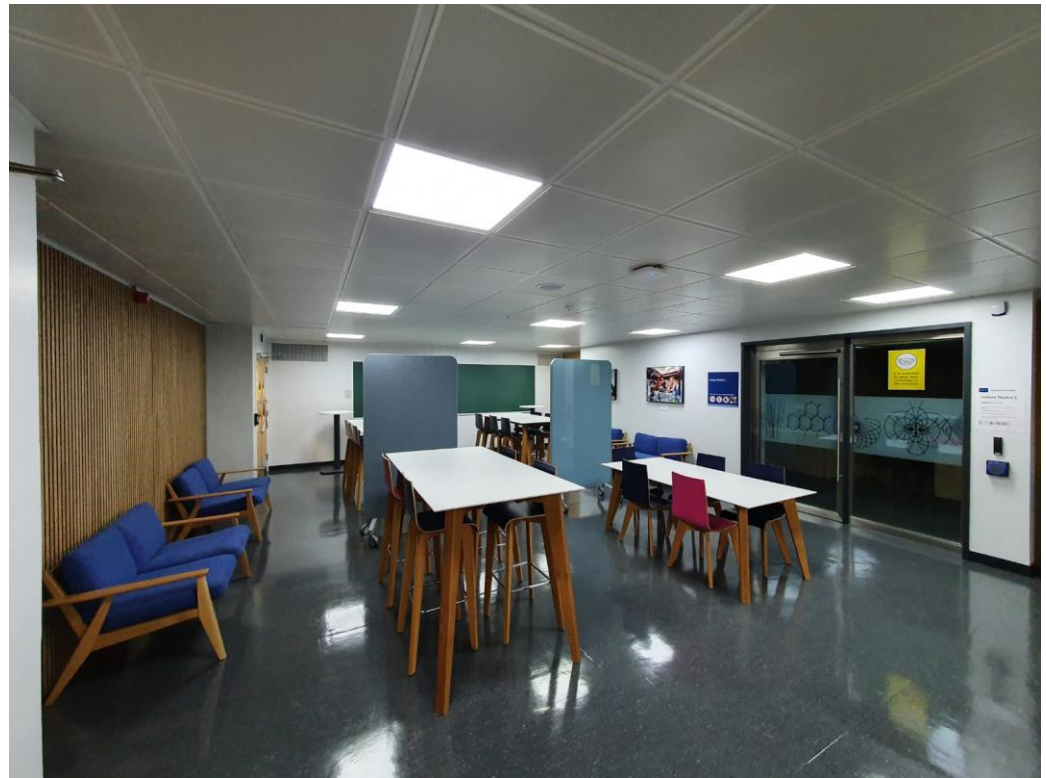
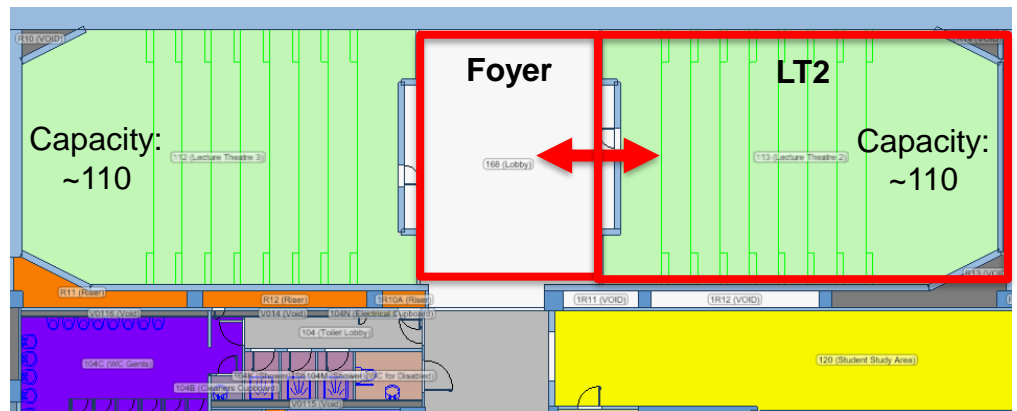
- Trust with peers and teachers
- Partnerships which supported learning

“...pull in students more easily for group discussions”

“...now thinking about introducing some group-based discussion into my transmission sessions”

Transitional space

- Contrasts in power
- Opportunity for collaboration
- Partnership-driven, low cost redesign



Blackett Foyer (refurbished)

StudentShapers

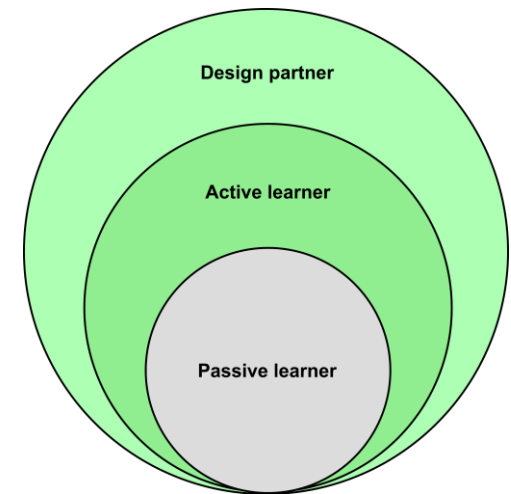
Supporting staff-student partnership
in learning and teaching

Preparing for collaborative learning



Blackett Foyer (refurbished)

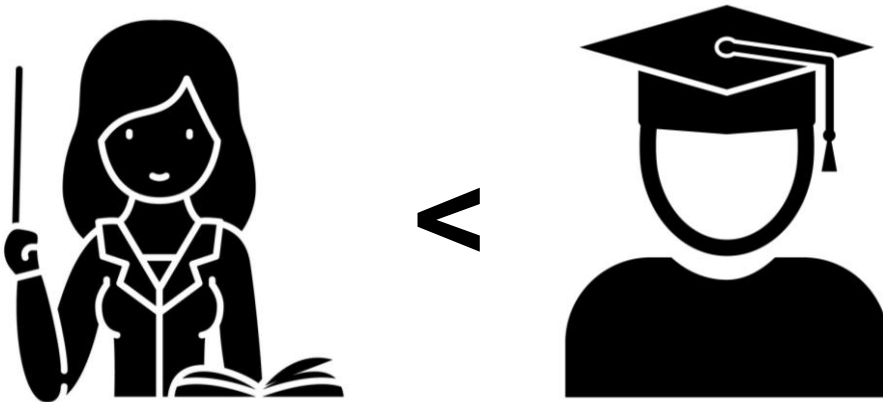
1. Reason to connect
2. Blending of spaces
3. Trust and partnership
4. Transitions in role
5. Suitable environment



Adapted from Martens *et al.* (2019)

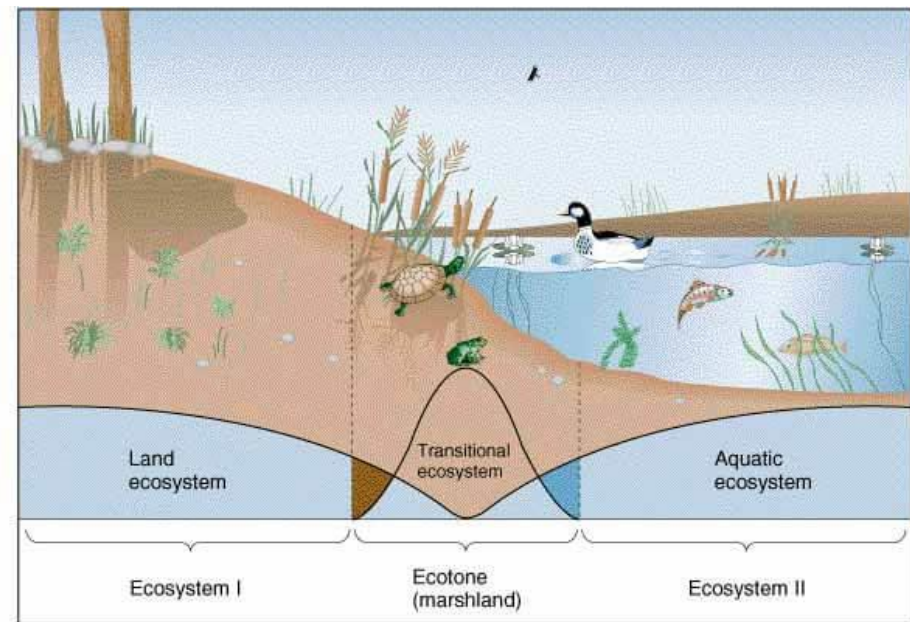
Enter the blend

- Formal learning in remote informal spaces
- Synchronous and asynchronous interaction
- Greater choice in how to interact (risks of isolation)
- When thinking about *blend*, we need to think about *transition*



Ecological thinking

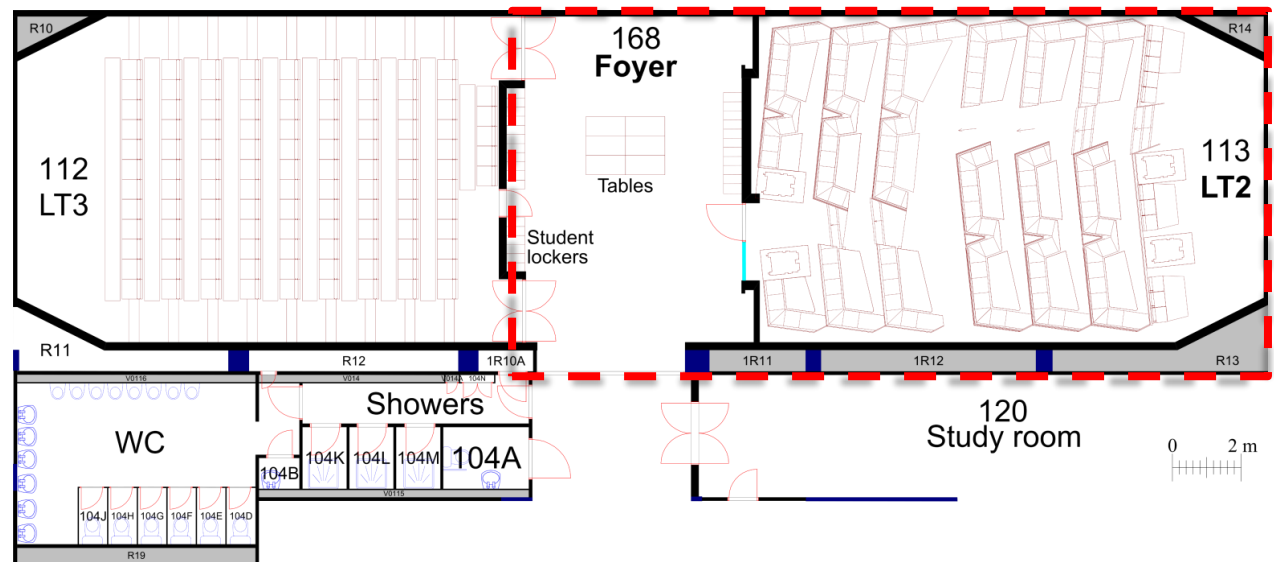
- Transitional spaces as **ecotones**
- Sites of tension, competition and innovation
- Sites of dispute between:
 - Timetable boundaries
 - Formal/informal space boundaries
 - Identity
- Edge effect (Hagel *et al.*, 2005)



Taken from: <https://www.pmfias.com/ecological-niche-ecotone-edge-effect/>

Considerations

- Reconceptualise what we mean by ‘classroom’
- Design **transitional zones** to:
 - Better harness adjacent space for transition and collaborative learning
 - Nurture blended ecotone spaces
 - Challenge expectation that learning/discovery stops at the classroom



References

Hagel, J., Hagel III III, J., & Brown, J. S. (2005). *The only sustainable edge: Why business strategy depends on productive friction and dynamic specialization*. Harvard Business Press.

Martens, S. E., Meeuwissen, S. N., Dolmans, D. H., Bovill, C., & Könings, K. D. (2019). Student participation in the design of learning and teaching: Disentangling the terminology and approaches. *Medical teacher*, *41*(10), 1203-1205.

Pendleton-Jullian, A. (2019). Education and innovation ecotones. *Ecologies for Learning and Practice: Emerging Ideas, Sightings, and Possibilities*. Abingdon: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351020268-8>.

Thank you for listening

Questions?

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