'Place', 'space' and 'dialogue': conceptualising dialogic spaciality in English faith-based universities

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'Place', 'Space' and 'Dialogue': conceptualising dialogic spaciality in English faith-based universities

This article proposes a conceptualisation of dialogic spaciality, and advances our understandings of the dynamic interplay of dialogic space (where meaningful conversations take place) and place (a geographic location) and the influence these have on academic life. The conceptualisation is developed from a qualitative study which focused on the relationship of dialogue, space and intellectual encounters in faith-based higher education settings in England. The article highlights the significance of dialogue in these institutions because of the emphasis traditionally placed on conversation in the Christian university tradition. It concludes that dialogic spaciality may counter elements of non-reflexive and performative ethos as something that is transferable to other universities.

Keywords: spaciality, dialogue, space, place, faith-based universities

> We learn to interpret the world through dialogue and we achieve dialogue through
> reciprocity and mutuality. (Nixon 2012, 14)

This article is a conceptually grounded study of the interplay of dialogue, space and intellectual encounters in faith-based higher education settings in England. The article explores and discusses the conceptual arguments which inform the reporting of the findings from a study that took place between 2014 and 2016. The research was a qualitative study with the overall concern to develop a conceptualisation of dialogic spaciality and to advance understandings of the dynamic interplay of space and place, underpinned by thinking drawn from the literature. I see dialogic spaciality for academics as a space for having meaningful conversations, for exchanging

different world views and having freedom to advance knowledge for the common good. This dialogic spaciality is based on relationships and trust among academics. Conditions are required to establish this intellectual space, and this article seeks to identify the ways of realising it in the particular context of a sample of English faith-based higher education institutions from the Cathedrals Group. The Cathedrals Group is an association of sixteen universities and university colleges with Church foundations in the UK. It was formed in 1989. Its members share a common faith heritage and a strong commitment to values such as social justice, respect for the individual and promoting the public good through their work with communities and charities (Cathedrals Group website 2017). It is a recent innovation to allow the Group to work together for the development of Christian principles in higher education in a diverse and inclusive society, which includes those of other faiths or of no faith. The formation of the Group is an attempt from Christian faith-based higher education institutions in the UK to continue the tradition in the contemporary time. The article argues for the importance of this study in advancing the case for the role and significance of dialogic spaces in the intellectual lives of academics.

My contention is that this study has a more wide-reaching relevance to the sector at this time, beyond the faith-based higher education contexts studied, given the dominance and threat posed by marketization to 'space' in academic life. Although their impact is not easily quantified, I maintain that spaces for dialogue exert an important influence on academic life which is not limited to faith-based institutions. Performativity and its potential to close down spaces for dialogue may be something to which academics in other institutions can recognise too. The traditional 'privilege' that faith-based institutions accord to these spaces has importance not just for these institutions but for the sector as a whole, especially at this time of significant changes in the wider environment in which higher education operates.

The Significance of 'Spaciality'

Dialogue is the intersubjective space which requires particular forums or places for its enactment and fulfilment. Massey (2008) argues that the way we think about space matters. It shapes our understandings of the world, our attitudes towards others, the way we develop and practice. Spaces for dialogue can be formal, informal, central to academic life or incidental to it. Tschumi (1996, 254) considers architecture as space and events, suggesting that 'architecture has always been as much about the event that takes place in a space as about the space itself'. Auge (1995, 77) terms a concept of 'non-places', that is, places which he conceptualises as non-places, and suggests that while places are 'relational, historical and concerned with identity', non-places do not have these features. He argues that the contemporary world has witnessed a growth in non-places, with airports and supermarkets as archetypal non-places. Unlike these, places, Auge avers, are replete and continuous with the past in the present; they have histories and evoke memories (cited by Lingard et al 2008, 16).

Oldenburg (1989) examines the importance of the 'great good places', informal places in society where opportunities exist for participation in community development. He refers to these as 'third places', the first being home and the workplace second. These third places 'serve community best to the extent that they are inclusive and local'. A third place is a 'mixer' where everyone is known and where each can contribute. Third places are places of conversation where people interact and support each other and are essential to community life and local democracy. They are places for association and sites for community learning. Oldenburg maintains that 'nothing contributes as much to one's sense of belonging to a community as much as "membership" in a third place'.

The importance of 'the great good places' in academic life in higher education is the substantive concern of this article. These are 'naturally occurring' spaces for dialogue and 'the joys of association' (Oldenburg 1989, 26) and may most usually take place on campus in the staff common room, the refectory, the coffee bar, the staff lounge, one another's offices or in the gardens and grounds. Such places and spaces are important in higher education today because they are related to ideas of public reasoning, democracy and justice which are elaborated and utilised by Sen in his work on human development (2010). Sen has argued for the role of interactive deliberations, reasoning and critical scrutiny:

> 'Reasoning is a robust source of hope and confidence in a world darkened by murky deed - past and present. It is not hard to see why this is so. Even when we find something immediately upsetting, we can question that response and ask whether it is an appropriate reaction and whether we should really be guided by it. Reasoning can be concerned with the right way of viewing and treating other people, other cultures, other claims, and with examining different grounds for respect and tolerance. We can also reason about our own mistakes and try to learn not to repeat them...' (46)

Drawing on these ideas, an argument could be made for the creation of opportunities for reasoned justification through dialogue within the fabric of academic life made possible by nurturing 'great good places and spaces'. My contention is that these great good places and spaces have value and perhaps particularly so given the direction of education policy at the present time. Ball (2013, 60) has suggested that 'the combination of management, the market and performativity has a number of implications for interpersonal and role relationships in education settings. For example, in terms of influence on professional relationships, these are impoverished by the diminution of communities and professional discourse'. There could be an important role

for 'great good places and spaces' in higher education as an important counter-balance to some of these effects.

This article explores the interplay of the dialogic spaces and the places within which dialogue can be encouraged in particular institution settings, each with Christian roots. In the current changing environment of higher education and the challenges facing church higher education institutions in England and the wider higher education sector, I was curious to investigate the role of dialogue and the 'relational' in the lives of academics in the faith-based contexts in this study. As Nixon (2004, 119) suggests that we live in a world of public and private pluralities. This study attempts to make sense of the linkages between these divided worlds and the interplay of relationships, dialogic spaces, contexts and the conditions for academics to learn. Savin-Baden (2008, 52) has defined dialogic spaces as 'spaces in which critical conversations occur and ones where change and challenge take place'. She has suggested that shifts in academic life in the direction of performativity and accountability have impacted negatively on dialogic spaces, a consequence of which is that 'the sense of space to discuss and debate seems to be one that is increasingly devalued'.

Both the dialogic spaces and the physical places in the faith-based university setting are the focus of my interest and the nature of engagement in dialogic encounters. My quest is to uncover how academics conceptualise these learning encounters and the places in which they situate these. Essential conversations occur in dialogic spaces when the places, opportunities and conditions for these exist. The places for these encounters in this study were five faith-based English higher education institutions from the Cathedrals grouping, the context for which is offered in the next section. I am aware too of course of the Christian heritage of the ancient Oxford and Cambridge universities (Francis 2004, 149).

English Faith-based Universities: What is different about these Institutions?

Jacobsen and Jacobsen (2012) argue that we need to pay attention to religion in the higher education context because it has the potential to enhance student and professional learning and improve higher education as a whole. They define religion broadly to include traditional religion, spirituality in its many different forms, and life's big questions of meaning, purpose, character, hope, and ethics, whether or not they are formulated in religious language. If we view region in its broader sense as suggested by Jacobsen and Jacobsen (2012), the faith-based universities share an essential feature of all universities as all acknowledge religious dimension of life. The five English higher education institutions on which the article was based are members of the Council of Church Universities and Colleges (CCUC), which is the official name of the Cathedrals Group. These were chosen for the purposes of this research as the author works in these institutional settings and therefore has first-hand experience and a direct interest in them. Furthermore, the emphasis on values in these institutions suggested to me that they may provide some interesting instances of reflective practice - instances from which the sector as a whole might well learn. One feature of the Christian university amongst the four features discussed by Markham (2004, 11) is 'the celebration of 'rationality' and 'conversation' in the quest for truth.' Learning from other perspectives and worldviews is arguably part of the Christian university as 'a place in which a range of vantage points are encouraged to engage in conversation and learn in humility from the process.' (11).

> This Cathedrals Group of higher education institutions is composed of Anglican Foundation universities and higher education institutions with Methodist and Roman Catholic Foundations. The group shares in common its basis in 'ethical principles informed by faith-based values' (Cathedrals Group website 2017).

The universities in this group are Bishop Grosseteste, Canterbury Christ Church, Heythrop College University of London, Leeds Trinity, Liverpool Hope, Newman, St Mary's Twickenham, Chester, Chichester, Cumbria, Gloucestershire, Roehampton, St Mark and St John, Trinity Saint David, Winchester, York St John. Whilst having common membership of this grouping of higher education institutions, these institutions also differ for example in terms of their size, curriculum coverage and history. They also differ in the extent to which they upfront their faith-based credentials.

There are other groupings of universities but the Cathedrals group is described as having a 'distinctively ethical perspective in higher education consistent with our Church foundations' (Cathedrals Group website 2017). Whilst the emphasis in having membership of a grouping is inevitably on faith and religion which the member institutions hold in common, however from Glanzer's (2008) research which focused on nine of these institutions, I also gain a sense of some of the different ways in which institutions within this grouping engage with their Christian foundations. In only one of the nine studied was there evidence of something approaching a 'critical mass' institution, understood as institutions which 'do not insist that all members of the community be believers in their tradition or even believers in the Christian tradition [but instead] insist that a critical mass of adherents from their tradition inhabit all the constituencies of the academic enterprise - board, administration, faculty, and student body' (Benne, 2001:50 in Glazner, 2008: 169). The institutions in the Cathedrals Group differ too in terms of size. They tend to be smaller. This then has implications for breadth of curricular coverage etc. As noted by Wooldridge and Newcomb 'although they have shared values and characteristics, they naturally differ in style, approach and emphasis' (2011:7).

It is claimed that one of the key features that give expression to the identity and character of Anglican Universities is the priority given to conversation, the rationale for this reflecting Christian faith principles:

> Anglicans will recognise that teaching, learning, research and good leadership all involve conversation. They do so not only in the light of good practice, but also drawing on Christian faith, rooted in a God who is Trinity, whose persons exist in ongoing dynamic conversation. Such a God engages the world in conversation through incarnation and the work of the Spirit (Heap and Law 2013).

I have situated dialogic encounters within faith-based higher education settings at the heart of my investigation. Given the focus of this article on faith-based contexts, it is important that the reader appreciates what is different about faith-based higher education institutions, and the extent to which the faith-based roots are still apparent today. The distinctiveness comes from their church foundations rooted in the Christian values (CCUC 2007). Their governing bodies have responsibility to 'uphold the trust objects and mission of the institution, fostering its Christian ethos and supporting the work of the chaplaincy' (2007, vii). The CCUC report is clear that 'a faith distinctive exists for these institutions' (19) as seen for example through the centrality of the chaplaincy in the life of the institution, the role of public worship and prayer, Christian representation in the leadership and governance of the institution and the foundation principles reflected across the range of its institutional activities and practices.

In one of the Cathedrals Group universities, the weekly 'Foundation Hour' is a tangible manifestation of the faith distinctive, by providing regular protected time when the whole institution is encouraged to engage actively with the mission, values and foundational principles. According to this particular university, the 'Foundation Hour' is when the university takes time

and space to pause and reflect on important issues beyond the curriculum. The issues range from cultural, religious, spiritual, also concentrating on major world news events. It is a unique opportunity to discuss relevant issues and maybe even gain a new insight and perspective on the events encompassing all of our lives today.

These faith-based institutions have of course changed considerably over the years as higher education and society have changed. Some may argue that whilst they are faith-based by origin, this is less evident in the lives of these universities today, with fewer Christians represented in key senior leadership and governance appointments in the institution. Whilst recognising the challenges these faith- based institutions have faced in maintaining their faith distinctiveness, the CCUC report saw these institutions 'emerging in the twenty-first century as renewed and transformed institutions, capable of playing new roles in society that build on and develop their inheritance and traditions' (2-3). Nonetheless some might question the extent to which these institutions are still strongly faith-based or whether they are simply faith-based by origin? Based on this study, it seems that the Christian principles and values inherent in the faith-based origins are still manifest today.

The Study

This was a qualitative research study using an interpretative approach through which the researcher aimed to develop understandings of the lived experiences of academics and how they use places and spaces available to them for their intellectual development in faith-based higher education settings. The context specificity of the faith-based settings is important in this research, whilst at the same time recognising that there are also transferable aspects which may be of wider interest to other higher education settings. Therefore, given the importance of the faith-based contexts for this research and my quest to understand in some depth the academics'

perspectives on their experiences of learning through dialogue with peers in the contexts and cultures in these settings, then 'thick' description was considered to be paramount.

There were eleven participants in the study drawn from five English universities with a Church foundation. Data was collected through qualitative semi-structured one-to-one interviews. In the interviews, participants were invited to responded to the following questions - (1) could you please say a few words about your professional background? (2) where do you feel you can talk together openly about your work? What do you talk about in these places? (3) which dialogic space is most important to you as an academic? Why? (4) Does your academic position, seniority or subject discipline affect your participation in certain dialogic spaces? (5) have the information technologies shaped certain spaces you have access to? (6) has the design of the campus had an impact on the creation of dialogic spaces? e.g. architecture and landscape; (7) what is the relationship between 'place and 'space' you identified? (8) what are the internal and external forces which pose challenges for you to participate in these dialogic spaces? (9) how 'bounded' are these places? (10) what is the influence of a faith-based institution on the dialogic spaces available to you? What is its influence on the relationship between 'place' and 'space', and on the boundaries between the two? (11) what is your overall experience of participating in these spaces in your institutional context? Each interview lasted up to an hour and each was transcribed.

The participants were at various stages in their careers and included professors, senior lecturers, lecturers and postdoctoral fellows across different faculties and disciplines in order to canvass the views of colleagues with different roles, positions of authority, experiences and stances. Please note that in the English higher education context there are a diversity of academic job titles such as lecturer, senior lecturer, assistant professor etc., these titles may have equivalent or

divergent meanings in other national contexts. The author makes no claim that this modest sample is representative of all faith-based higher education settings. As a non-probability purposive sample, it provides insights into the experiences of the participants in relation to the purposes of this study. Newby (2014:260) maintains that the choice of sampling method should be 'the method that gives us the best results for the circumstances of our research'. This sample of institutions within the Cathedrals Group and respondents in these settings were selected for reasons of ease of access and within the bounds of what was possible for the researcher working within the constraints of a small-scale study.

The eleven respondents taught different subjects and included male and female academics with a range of seniority of roles and experience which allowed the voices of academics to be heard. There was some element of guided (directed) sampling (Wellington, 2000) in that in some cases a knowledgeable guide helped with access to the setting. A coding system was devised in order to safeguard anonymity of the respondents who are therefore identified only in terms of gender and academic role for example 'Female Senior Lecturer'. Each also has a letter identifier to allow data to be attributed to individuals. The respondent's associated institution is also given a pseudonym.

As author I hold an academic post as a senior lecturer in a faith-based university which allows me insights from an 'insider' perspective but I am aware too of issues of researcher positionality. As a researcher, I have my own 'personal baggage' (Newby 2014, 483) especially as I am employed in faith-based setting. I recognise that this was part of the motivation for the choice of this field of study in the first place. I therefore acknowledge myself in relation to the study and have taken a reflective and reflexive approach to research (Wellington 2000). I was brought up in a very different secular tradition, but that I nevertheless share many of the values of the

institution within which I am now currently working. I was originally trained and qualified as an

Information Technology (IT) Specialist with a first degree in Computing. I had a wide range of

work experience in both the higher education and the IT industry in the UK and overseas before I

joined my current higher education institution in England (Su 2011).

What I Found

In the interviews, participants offered rich personal accounts on their experiences of places and

spaces in the faith-based institutions. I approached the task of data analysis inductively and the

findings are reported under three emergent themes.

Dialogic Spaces

As argued earlier in this article, dialogue is the intersubjective space which requires particular

forums or places for its enactment and fulfilment. 'Place' denotes a physical locale, which

becomes a 'space' through the purposeful activities that take place, for instance, dialogues.

Dialogic spaces emerge from the data as spaces of conversational encounter with others and

reflective encounters with the self. These were conceptualised by one participant as 'space for us

and space for me'. Both of these dialogic spaces he felt are needed (Male senior lecturer I,

University of Bruno). Dialogic spaces 'for us' enable academics to draw from the 'reservoirs of

discussion' (Female senior lecturer E, University of Paul) to which other respondents also

referred in terms of the spaces in academic life for conversational encounters with colleagues.

The importance of institutions creating spaces for these encounters with others and with the self,

was keenly sensed by respondents.

The availability of dialogic spaces for personal encounters with others was conceptualised as

necessary for a university to be a professional learning community. The textures of these spaces

for dialogic encounters were vividly conveyed in terms that suggested these spaces are sensed as 'living' spaces where ideas are shared and developed, places for 'deep intellectual encounter and creative thinking', (Female professor J, University of Anne) or 'cooling off' spaces for those 'pressure valve' moments where 'you get things off your chest' (Male senior lecturer C, University of Laura). These dialogic spaces for encounters with colleagues are social but also appeared to influence academics in personal ways, for example helping to 'give me a sense of identity and shape my sense of being an academic' (Female professor J, University of Anne) and described by another respondent as 'nurturing' spaces and collaborative spaces for mutual support (Female senior lecturer E, University of Paul). There was a clear sense in which these relational spaces for encounters with others exert a strong formative influence on academics and were seen as having important intellectual, personal and social functions.

> All effective education is based on relationships, and the essence of this is meeting for understanding 'the other'. An educated person understands that the views of the self and the other are always different. Having space to explore those differences lies at the heart of education. Sometimes that space is public; sometimes confidential and sometimes virtual. It is those exchanges that form people, as well as informing them. (Male professor D, University of Tuda).

It was found that there are many opportunities for dialogue on campus. One respondent expressed the view that his university has understood and attended to the question of how space in terms of the physical environment can influence and facilitate learning relationships on campus. The physical places and the spaces (the latter understood as the encounters in these places) for rich dialogue were readily identified. 'Quick fire' snatched conversations were distinguished from opportunities for more in-depth talk, the latter seen as 'learning exchanges'

which in turn were distinguished from the more formal and at times constrained conversations which take place in committee and board meetings. The places where dialogic spaces which were conceptualised as a form of 'learning exchange' were said to exist, included research conversation meetings and research seminars. learning and teaching days for academics, cafes, purpose-built discussion 'pods' designed for group work, purpose-built social learning spaces, the staff common room, the dining room, shared staff kitchens and office spaces. Often the dialogue in these settings was accompanied by refreshments and so food and drink were often shared at these times too. Interestingly, the university which one respondent felt had attended well to the influence of space on learning relationships on campus was a setting where free coffee is provided for staff at a set time in the common room each morning and this was seen as a 'prompt in the morning that encourages people to go in and meet and that's useful'.

The privilege of having a shared staff common room and free tea and coffee provision is not available in all institutions surveyed. Participants from another institution raised concerns that the staff common room was taken away and used instead for teaching space, due to factors linked to the expansion of the provision (for example limited teaching accommodation) together with the drive to provide a better student experience. It was felt that this had been at the cost of staff experience as a lecturer remarked:

> There is a lack of staff spaces on campus. One of things removed from staff is the staff common room where colleagues have lunch and conversation. It has now become teaching space because we've a lack of teaching space, even part of our canteen has turned into teaching space. There is a tension of getting more teaching space at the cost of staff's shared spaces. It has impact on staff experience. (Male lecturer G, University of Tuda)

15

This comment draws attention to the interdependence of 'space' and 'place', for without a place to meet it is very difficult to build a community space for staff. Formal dialogues about research and academic practice tend to exist through forums for lecturers to collaborate and talk about their practice including research seminars and institutional learning and teaching days. These events were regarded by participants as where a conscious effort is made to create space for dialogue and the formation of communities of practice.

In the interviews, participants were asked which dialogic space was most important to them. It was found that there was no single dialogic space more important than others but a combination of dialogic spaces. It appeared to be perceived as a much more fluid concept and dependent on the purpose and context of the dialogue.

Bounded Spaces

This study has found that dialogic spaces are sometimes bounded in terms of discipline, seniority, location and institutional context. Boundaries become counter-productive when they serve the purposes of enclosure and exclusion. For instance, one participant felt strongly about the discipline boundaries:

> The type of space for me often is instrumental in deciding how bounded or accessible
> it is. For example, I would personally feel reasonably comfortable to discuss things
> in social spaces like the cafeteria, staff room and in some instances my office.
> However, there are disciplinary boundaries I need to be mindful of when discussing
> things in meetings. The nature of the meeting might also sometimes decide the level
> of disciplinary boundaries. For example, I would feel reasonably comfortable to
> discuss things in a research meeting, seminar or conference; however in committee

16

meetings like Ethics committee meeting, there probably would be disciplinary

boundaries that I need to consider. (Female lecturer F, University of Tuda)

For some participants, spaces are also bounded by university policies, protocols and documents. In their views, many of these boundaries are paradoxical. Sometimes these boundaries are necessary and sometimes they are unnecessary and need to be broken. The boundaries are often imposed on the participants and they can be a source of frustration, as one participant argued:

I feel quite frustrated by the dominance of the systems, there's not enough of that

space or the facilitation of it to think freely, I just want to do some free thinking with

some colleagues, and let's argue and disagree and debate and discuss, isn't that what

should happen? (Female senior lecturer E, University of Paul)

It was also found that some respondents perceived a boundary to exist between dialogic space with others and dialogic space with the self. However, this boundary was also viewed as necessary and beneficial. Participants believed it to be important to have a private reflective space to enable them to have dialogue with themselves. This reflective space exists through alone time in private offices, on the way to work or whilst engaged in a range of other activities. Some participants warned against the danger of isolation if the right balance between dialogic space with others and dialogic space with the self is not struck. One participant argued that:

… pressure to produce research output can isolate - the way to get on is to close your

office door, work in your office and don't interact. That is the way to get on (career

wise) by doing research and publications and not interacting. These pressures are

pushing people towards more isolated experiences. (Male senior lecturer C,

University of Laura)

One respondent saw 'place' as primarily the physical location whereas 'space' was conceptualised as 'a freedom to meet and dialogue' and for this respondent space also has a spiritual connotation. This leads us into the next theme where I explore what the data appeared to tell us about spaces in faith-based places.

Faith-based Places

The influence of the faith-based institutional context was sensed particularly through the personal reflective places. One respondent suggested that the provision of reflective places 'really reflects the foundation and mission of the institution'. Another respondent suggested though that 'the faith-based context that comes through is less to do with the institution and more to do with the people … evidenced through their being and humility' (Female senior lecturer K, University of Anne). The relationship and balance between interior/internal 'spaces' and external places located in these institutions was apparent. In the faith context of the institution, the spaces and places for faith to be taken seriously, whether from the same faith perspective or not was suggested by this respondent to be something they valued. Physically these included the Church where weekly services are held and meditation sessions led by a chaplain. Another respondent likened the physical central location of the chaplaincy to the centrality of the chaplaincy within the life of the university, with the chaplaincy in this setting being located 'as close to the centre of the campus as it can be – it's on the main routeway, so it's at the centre, in the middle' (Male senior lecturer C, University of Laura). Whilst I recognise that many non faith-based institutions will also have a chapel or equivalent, nonetheless in the settings in this study, the Church / Chapel on the campus was seen as the clearest architectural acknowledgement of the faith-foundations.

On one campus this place included a contemplative garden behind the chapel which offers a quiet space for reflection. 'Having a church gives you a sense of being unique' one respondent said and another suggested that the Christian mission and values gives them this sense of belonging. One respondent (Female professor J, University of Anne) suggested that there was a link between aesthetically designed campuses with social spaces, quiet spaces and the conversations and interactions with others. One respondent said that this was a pleasant place to be in which she experienced a sense of belonging: 'I like being in this place… I'd probably want to stay here for what this place is' (Female lecturer F, University of Tuda). These conversational encounters were of a different nature than those which occur in places designed primarily for formal and regulatory functional use, such as committee meetings. One respondent suggested that:

> What this place does is create good opportunities for personal reflection outside of the strictly professional context. So for instance, if you're a Christian there is morning prayers which is a very useful 10-15 minutes to touch base, you can sit there thinking about other things. There is still during term time the weekly foundation hour which is where the institution is supposed to stop for one hour in the middle of the week and reflect upon other, higher order social justice type of things - across the whole university. (Male senior lecturer C, University of Laura)

The influence of faith is also shown on the fabric of the place. For example, there is a sculpture at one institution which represents the founding principles of faith. The faith roots and heritage were sensed by some as an influence. However, for few participants, working in a faith-based institution is no different from working in a non-faith based one, as a participant argued:

I've worked at two previous institutions that were purely secular and in the last five

or six years I'm not sure there's any difference between them and here in terms of

space and place and character and ethos. The whole thing about ethos, yes I do

wonder sometimes. (Female professor J, University of Anne)

Does a faith-based institution do a better job of providing places for different world of views

than other settings in relation to conversation for intellectual development? To most participants

it is the case. Their institutions have encouraged them to participate in the conversations with

others following the institution ethos and values. They have a clear understanding of faith-based

spaces and places available to them in their institutions. However, this understanding was not

universally shared, being less apparent for a minority of respondents due to their own prior

experiences of working in other non-faith based higher education institutions and they may not

have religious roots in their lives.

Discussion: Towards a Conceptualisation of Dialogic Spaciality in Faith-based Universities

<FIGURE 1 NEAR HERE>

The above Figure illustrates my conceptualisation of dialogic spaciality. The arrows convey my

understanding of the dynamic between faith-based 'places' and 'spaces', with a space understood

as a place filled with meaningful activity. A building, for example, can be a learning space, a

workshop space, a healing space or any other type of space depending on the collective activity

engaged in there. Dialogues occur in different spaces and places, and dialogues foster learning

for academics, contributing to their intellectual growth and development. This learning at

universities takes place in both formal, informal, planned and chanced conversations (Wood and

Su 2014). Within the sample of faith-based higher education institutions, there was evidence of

institutions striving to encourage academics by providing places for them to encounter and engage with different worldviews.

In my diagrammatic representation, dialogue is an intersubjective space of shared understanding which requires particular settings or places for its actualisation. My central argument is that faith-based settings are particularly favourable to ensuring a space for dialogue. The places are conceptualised as 'environments', which may be physical but they may also be understood as events, structures or opportunities. In understanding the physical environment in this way I argue for the realisation of its potential for what I have termed dialogic spaciality. The environments (the 'places') provide the 'spaces' for reflective dialogue. The dialogue is the activity synergising space and place. The spaces are conceptualised as 'encounters'. In the faith-based places with their Christian heritage and ethos, reflective dialogue has a defining role in these encounters with the self and others. Having time to spend together to interact with others or time to be alone is an important pre-requisite for this.

There is a strong sense of connection between the places, spaces and dialogic encounters. For example, in smaller institutions there appeared to be opportunities for more frequent and perhaps closer contact, meaning that colleagues tended to inhabit one another's spaces and lives. Many of the institutions in this study were indeed small and this may raise the question as to what extent size and scale are key ingredients too. Whilst I acknowledge that these may well be important constituent parts of the overall mix, I argue that there is also something distinctive in these faith-based settings. The physical places in these settings were important, as was illustrated by the findings reported: 'Physicality matters and places have that. It defines the spaces and how people behave'. The emergent motif of 'textured' spaces indicated that in these faith-based settings the texture was influenced by being woven into the values and ethos of the faith context. For some

respondents, it mirrored the 'Christian rootedness' of conversation, which I have explained previously with reference to Heap and Law (2013). For other respondents, it appeared to generate a sense of the 'at-homeness' which provided a focus for reflection and dialogue in the 'still' spaces shared with others and with the self. These 'still' spaces, whether for reflection alone or engagement with others, appeared as significant for respondents in these institutions as providing restorative spaces. Restorative spaces can also be places for dialogic encounters with others or the self and offer space for quiet encounter in between the 'busyness' of university life.

My conceptualisation of space and place shares some of the characteristics of the idea of 'third place' in the work of Oldenburg (1989). Whilst recognising that Oldenberg focused on the United States context and by 'third place' he referred to public gathering places 'beyond the realms of home and work'(16), nonetheless conversation as the sine qua non of 'third places' has resonance with my thinking about dialogic space. Unlike Oldenburg's notion of 'third places', the places for dialogue in my conceptualisation are within what Oldenberg terms the 'second place' i.e. the workplace setting. However, the dialogic space is characterised by communion with others and with the self and where there is a sense of the 'at-homeness' and the 'warmth' to which Oldenberg referred. The warmth 'emerges out of friendliness, support, and mutual concern. It radiates from the combination of cheerfulness and companionship, and it enhances the sense of being alive' (41). Dialogic space in my conceptualisation is a learning space. It is those reflective spaces for stillness, thinking and for regaining perspective. The value of the intellectual challenge of dialogic spaces in university life was acknowledged by participants in my study. In these spaces colleagues drew deeply from the 'reservoirs of discussion' as a source of stimulus for intellectual inquiry, the development of ideas and creative thought. More importantly such spaces require institutional places or settings if they are to be sustainable.

This article has pointed to the role of dialogical space in the faith-based university and the interdependency of 'space' and 'place'. The constraints such as staff social places being used for teaching purposes, workload and a lack of resources and opportunities of which the respondents spoke, may well be recognised sector-wide. For me, to understand the physical environment is to realise its potential for what I have called dialogic spaciality. The study raised an interesting issue of the inclusivity of dialogical space of the faith-based university. The centrality of a chaplaincy for example can be experienced very differently by people of different faiths and of no faith. In terms of what the sector as a whole might learn from faith-based universities, I could ask what in a secular university might be the equivalent of 'the centrality of the chaplaincy' as dialogic space? For me, it is those spaces for dialogue with the self or for community dialogue as a collective activity that define intellectual spaciality in higher education, whether in a faith-based setting or a secular one.

In my view, based on the study there are some specific implications for the wider sector -

- recognition of the importance of 'conversation' in being a reflective academic;
- provision of opportunities to enable conversational spaces to occur;
- attention to campus architectural and landscape design and appreciation of its impact on the creation of dialogic spaces.

I have conceptualised intellectual spaciality as a form of knowing the self and others through dialogic encounters. There are lessons to be learnt for the wider sector in the roles and importance of dialogue in the fabric of our academic lives. Conversational encounters can be restorative, they can bring us into communion with ourselves and others and stimulate

intellectual thought. I maintain that it is not just in the intellectual life of academics in the faith-based university that this has importance, but also more widely beyond this.

Conclusion

Intellectual development for academics requires environments ('places') which provide 'space' for dialogue. Faith-based institutions traditionally privilege such 'places' and offer us insights that would be of use to the sector as a whole in its promotion of academic identity and intellectual encounter. The founding principles of faith-based institutions might help to counter the trend of the non-reflexive, performative ethos of many universities influenced by the principles of neoliberalism. We need institutions to provide the conditions to create places and opportunities for dialogues in academics' development. This needs to be recognised by institutions for the inherent value of it, even with the pressures of other competing priorities. Since faith-based institutions are places which traditionally privilege such spaces, the study has important insights that would be of value to the sector as a whole in its promotion of intellectual spaciality. My contention is that there is much here that is transferable from faith-based institutions in terms of replicating dialogic spaces in other contexts such as secular higher education institutions.

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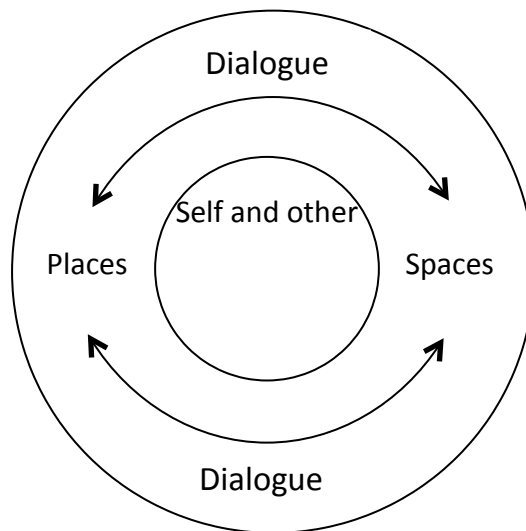Wellington. J. 2000. *Educational Research: Contemporary Issues and Approaches.* London: Continuum.

Figure 1: Conceptualisation of dialogic spaciality