



Excerpt from Chapter 3—The Hidden Wholeness: Paradox in Teaching and Learning—
Paradox and Pedagogical Design

1. *The space should be bounded and open.* The boundaries around a teaching and learning space are created by using a question, a text, or a body of data that keeps us focused on the subject at hand. Within those boundaries, students are free to speak, but their speaking is always guided toward the topic, not only by the teacher but also by the materials at hand. Those materials must be so clear and compelling that students will find it hard to wander from the subject—even when it confuses or frightens them and they would prefer to evade its demands. Space without boundaries is not space, it is a chaotic void, and in such a place no learning is likely to occur.

But for a space to be a space, it must be open as well as bounded—open to the many paths down which discovery may take us, to the surprises that always come with real learning. If boundaries remind us that our journey has a destination, openness reminds us that there are many ways to reach that end. Deeper still, the openness of a learning space reminds us that the destination we plotted at the outset of the journey may not be the one we will reach, that we must stay alert for clues to our true destination as we travel together.

2. *The space should be hospitable and “charged.”* Open space is liberating, but it also raises the fear of getting lost in the uncharted and the unknown. So a learning space must be hospitable—inviting as well as open, safe and trustworthy as well as free. The boundaries around the space offer some of that reassurance, but when those

boundaries hold us to difficult topics, additional reassurance is required. So a learning space must have features that help students deal with the dangers of an educational expedition: places to rest, places to find nourishment, even places to seek shelter when one feels overexposed.

But if that expedition is to take us somewhere, the space must also be charged. If students are to learn at the deepest levels, they must not feel so safe that they fall asleep: they need to feel the risks inherent in pursuing the deep things of the world or of the soul. No special effects are required to create this charge—it comes with the territory. We only need fence the space, fill it with topics of significance, and refuse to let anyone evade or trivialize them.