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a little bit about me

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The place of 'voice' in collaborative online learning

historical context to the study

- Tutor: MA Online and Distance Learning

- Collaborative Learning

- Historically: Text based forums

- Introduction of significant use of audio conferencing introduction to practice

online learning on TEL Course:

- **International**
  - Europe, Asia, Africa, North America
  - UK, Sweden, Italy, Spain, Ireland, Singapore, China (HK), New Zealand, Australia, Kenya, Namibia, Canada.

- **Engaged in a education practice: teaching in higher education, further education; compulsory education; learner support; training in an industrial or commercial context.**

- **Seek understanding about technology use, in particular networked technologies.**

- **The course is fully online, no face to face**

- **Use VLE and social media technologies**

- **Week by week structure with learners engaged in 5 or 6 activities per week**

'learning' in this context:

- "Learning is a socially mediated activity in the first instance, with concepts and skills being internalized only after they have been mastered in a collaborative context … opportunities for **dialogue** are considered crucial in most approaches to learning design" (Betham and Sharpe, 2007, p. 36).

- "… learning in which communication and information technology is used to promote **connections**: between one learner and other learners and tutors; between a learning community and its learning resources" (Jones, Ferreday & Hodgson et al, 2008, p.90).

strong theory: dialogue through 'text'

- Written word is unique and provides significant benefit for dialogue, particularly in relation to writing as a tool of thinking

- Benefits that the asynchronous shared written environment has for considered reflection drawing on Garrison (1997; et al., 2003) view that high order thinking as seldom possible without writing.

- More democratic than other forms of interaction, more ideal to discourse where others perspectives and points of view have equal access.

- The removal of visual affective cues that reflect power differences are seen as more ideal for equal discourse.

- External memory and more appropriate for a Networked Society
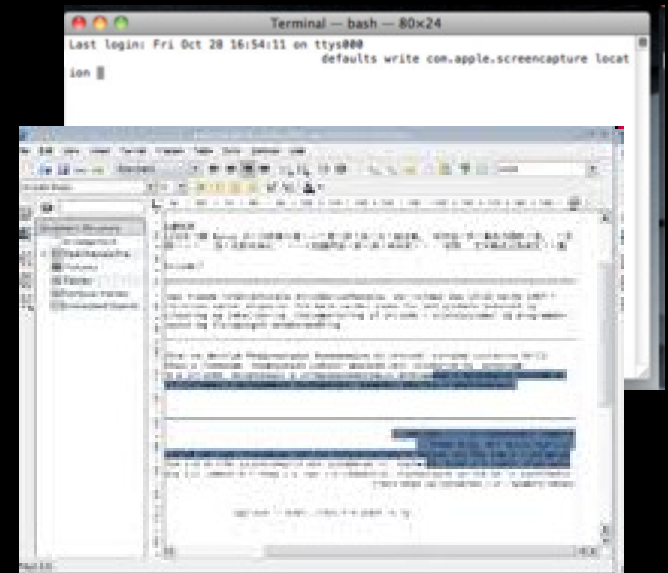
some critique of text

- McLuhan (1964) suggests that the written language allows us to act without reaction, without involvement, changing the culture of communication.

- Vygotsky (1978) despite seeing the benefits of written language for learning, also identified the main limiting factor of text in its abstractness from thought, 'a second order of abstraction', identifying speech as the most powerful and versatile in mediating action and as the chief means of "inner speech", remembering, thinking and reasoning.

- Garrison and Arbaugh (2007) in some experiences of asynchronous text-based discussions, describing them as bland serial monologues and personal declarations that take learning no further than information exchange.

- Text-based communication may not to be appropriate, suggesting that voice and video has only been held back by technological advancement. Dillenbourg and Schneider (1995)

New Status Quo for my practice: Introduction of audio-conferencing

- Structured tutor led audio-conference sessions across the program

- Encouragement of learners to use audio-conferencing in conducting collaborative learning

less strong theory: dialogue through 'voice'

- Wells (1999) describes how speech is often spontaneous, dyadic semiotic, dynamic and results in action, whereas text is reflective, individual, synoptic and abstract.

- "For it is when participants move back and forth between talk and text, using each mode to contextualise each other, and both modes as tools to make sense of the activity in which they are engaged, that we see the most important form of complementarily between them". (Wells, 1999, p.146).

- "speech is more suited to collaborative action." (Wells, p.142).

- Recent Work: De Freitas, S., & Neumann, T. (2009). Pedagogic strategies supporting the use of Synchronous Audiographic Conferencing: A review of the literature. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, *40*(6), 980-998. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8535.2008.00887.x

What kind of a 'place' is voice for collaborative online learning?

- Harrison and Dourish (1996) study of collaborative media space identify voice in terms of a shared 'virtual acoustic space', where each participant speaks and hears in the same audio space, not simply made available as visual media does but encompassing each of the participants.

- They describe an audio space as truly shared, "the space which the audio channel creates is one which we share".

- Harrison and Dourish (1996) identify collaborative places as essentially a cultural phenomenon, a communally held set of values and beliefs, a context for engaging in and interpreting action.

- Levy (2007) describes the essence of culture as one of shared space, shared histories and common understandings of people who have been part of and have experienced belonging to a particular cultural place.

The aim of my PhD research

- Improve my understanding of the use of voice in collaborative online learning

- Extend myself and my understanding as a researching practitioner through the learners' experiences of voice

- Consider the findings I take from the study in relation to the literature from research community

My research questions:

- What kind of a place is 'voice' in collaborative online learning?

  - How do learner experience 'voice'?
  - How do learners describe the experience of voice?
  - What is the essence of 'voice'?

- What is the place of voice for collaborative online learning?

Methodology

a phenomenology:

researching lived experiences

Husserl: the philosophical approach

- Developed a philosophical system rooted in subjective openness

- Asserted that "ultimately, all genuine, and, in particular, all scientific knowledge, rests on inner evidence"

- Posited Intentionality – the orientation of the mind to its object; the object exists in the mind in an intentional way.

- Knowledge of intentionality requires that we present to ourselves to things in the world, that we recognise that self and world are inseparable components of meaning

- Perception of reality of an object is dependent on its subject. What appears in consciousness is an absolute reality

- Whatever else may enter into my awareness, my intuitive knowing of myself and what presents itself of its own accord does not betray me.

taken from Moustakas (1999) and Giorgi (1997)

Phenomenology use as a methodology

- Philosophically has been used as a methodology for almost 40 years. Used often in anthropology, psychology, nursing and also sometimes in education (see van Manen, 1990)

- It has an established and acceptable set of methodological procedures for studying human experience.

- The challenge is to explicate the phenomenon in terms of its constituents and possible meanings, thus discerning the features of consciousness and arriving at an understanding of the essences of the experience.

- Experience for me seemed to be an important area of educational research.

- I found very little use of it in PhD dissertations here and also very little use in the past papers of the Networked Learning conference.

being a phenomenologist

- Suspend the natural attitude (suspend seeing things only in the physical sense)

- Although it does not deny the existence of the world

- Brackets past knowledge

- Look at things anew, with fresh eyes

- A return to things themselves

Three main features of a Husserlian phenomenology as a method.

- Epoche (stay away or abstain from):
  - to refrain from judgement, to abstain from or stay away from the every day, ordinary way of perceiving things … requires a new way of looking at things.

- Reduction
  - describing in textural language just what one sees; the qualities of the experience become the focus.

  - Look and describe; look again and describe; look again and describe always with reference to textural qualities; the meanings of "what" was experienced

- Imaginative variation
  - The task of imaginative variation is to seek possible meanings through the utilization of imagination, varying the frames of reference, employing reversals; by check the relationship works backwards.

  - The aim is to arrive at a more abstract theoretical descriptions; "essences" of the experience that account for what is being experienced; the "how" that speaks to conditions that illuminate the "what" of experience.

Decisions between two contemporary types of phenomenology

- **Empirical phenomenology**
  - research is a descriptive human science
  - focussing on a situation in which the experience investigated occurs.
  - sticking closely to the participants words, revealing them as they are.
  - not going to far beyond the data; not distancing the participants from the experience.
  - make the process open for others to see clearly
  - recognising that even description is interpretive.
  - analysis adopts a disciplinary attitude.

- **Hermeneutic phenomenology**
  - in addition to narrative description it seeks to incorporate a wider use of evidence and cultural influence
  - obtaining self-dialogues, stories, poems art-work, journals and diaries and personal documents.
  - Hermeneutic may also moved beyond verbal reflections and may interpret acts and visual emphasis or cues from participants.

Access to participant experience.

- The method through which the other becomes accessible to me is that of empathy, a thereness-for-me of others … my experience of others' experiences (Husserl, 1977)

- The other is not directly within me. Husserl (1977) asserts: the other an I would then be the same (p.109). Thus my relationship to the other is that of co-presence

    - Whenever I have an experience of you, this is still my own experience.

      However, this experience, while uniquely my own, still has, … a lived experience of yours which you are having at this very moment … I can grasp even those of your lived experiences which you have not yet noticed.

      This means that, whereas I can observe my own lived experiences once they are over and done with, I can observe yours as they actually take place.

      This in turn implies that you and I are in a specific sense "simultaneous" that we "coexist," that our respective streams of consciousness intersect. Schutz (1967)

Obtaining reflections on experience

- 12 interviews with participants

- Pre-interviews for arrangements, participation agreement, ethics and opportunity to withdraw without question.

- 1-2hr conversational open style interviews initiated by an invitation to "describe what happened"

- Semi-structured prompting questions taken from participants reflection on their use of audio-conferencing as part of the course

- Periodic summary discussion during interviews.

The analytical steps I am employing

- Like Husserl I have suspended the 'natural attitude'
  and will take a fresh look, focussing on the participants experiences.

- Entering in the spirit of 'bracketing' by abstaining as much as possible from conceptual and theoretical influence.

- Focussing and reading through each description entirely to get a sense of the whole. Immersing myself in the data. This also involved re-listening to audio transcripts.

- I then read the same descriptions more slowly with respect to the intention of discovering the meaning … listing a series of meaning units, eliminating redundancies.

- Reflected on the given units, still expressed in the concrete language of the participant. I developed a description of the experience. The 'what' of the participant's experience

- I have 12 participants that require more descriptions.

- In the second stage I plan to produce a final the essences of the phenomenon for all the subject's together.

- Each unit will be interpreted using free imagination, moving back and forth between the whole and the particular developing a theoretical description of the 'how' of the experience; the conditions that underlie the experience of the participants.

- Each meaning unit will be placed into themes and into language appropriate for the research discipline.

- The final synthesises is then and only then considered in relation to the extant literature of the research community and the subsequent discussion is made available to the research community, retaining as much as possible a view into the process of analysis.

The first description of a learner's experience:

Kim's experience of voice in collaborative online learning

Questions?

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