

Chapter Eight

Online Dialogues with Participants on the Collaborative Online

Learning Environments Module

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the potentiality, limitations and possible pitfalls of moving from an online learning environment with predominating teacher/student interchange to an online learning environment involving student learners in a much wider range of dialogues with members of their peer group and other sources. This new phase in my research enquiry more or less coincided with a change in my academic location and of the teaching programme that was the main source of my practice-based research. In September 2002 I moved from the School of Computer Applications DCU to the School of Education Studies DCU. The M.Sc. in Computer Applications for Education was no longer offered in the School of Computer Applications. I believed that it was still important to offer such a programme. In moving to Education Studies, I set about creating a new Masters strand in ICT in Education for grafting onto the existing M.Sc. in Education and Training Management programme. The latter programme, like the M.Sc. programme in the School of Computer Applications, was part-time and ran over a two-year period. It offered a Leadership strand only. I realised that while the new ICT strand needed its own focus, it also had to integrate into the existing Masters structure. The new ICT in Education strand was warmly welcomed and accredited by the Academic Council of DCU in 2002. I succeeded in transferring the three Masters modules, (*Interactive Multimedia and Design, Computer Applications in Education and*

Network Information Management) that I had formerly taught, to the new Education Studies programme. I subsequently renamed the module titles. *Interactive Multimedia and Design* became *Educational Development of Multimedia*, *Computer Applications in Education* became *Emerging Pedagogies* and *Network Information Management* became *Collaborative Online Learning Environments*. This reflected the educational direction I intended to take in the ICT Masters in Education programme.

Below, I set out a chart that serves to illustrate the modules that I taught on the Masters in Education and Training (ICT) in Education Studies, DCU.

Teaching Context

Date	Department	Programme Title
2003	Education Studies.	M.Sc. ICT in Education and Training Management (ICT)

Modules Taught

Educational Applications of Multimedia
Emerging Pedagogies
Collaborative Online Learning Environments

Duration of each modules: **12 weeks**

Programme Participants: Teachers from primary, post-primary and further education. Trainers from industry.

Table 8.1

The Masters programme was now in a new setting within the Education Studies Department. During the following modules, *Educational Applications of Multimedia*

and *Emerging Pedagogies*, the participants had the opportunity to develop multimedia and web based artefacts for use in their teaching.

The focus of the two enquires in this chapter is the *Collaborative Online Learning Environments* module that took place in semester one, year two of 2003. In chapter six, I demonstrated how I made use of online learning journal writing that provided participants with opportunities to document their own learning and educational development through the use of WebCT. I noted that, at the end of the module, I was aware that the online dialogue had taken place chiefly between myself and each participant rather than with the group as a whole and there had been minimal student/student dialogue. In other words, the participants had engaged with me rather than with one another.

I was determined that I would endeavour to bring about a more collaborative approach during the *Collaborative Online Learning Environments* module, hence the name change from *Network Information Management* to *Collaborative Online Learning Environments*. Much of the subject matter of the *Collaborative Online Learning Environments* module was the same as the *Network Information Management* module. It involved participants in building on their learning from the Educational Development of Multimedia and Emerging Pedagogies modules. There was a shift, however, toward the use of online learning environments (Appendix C).

The project brief for *Collaborative Online Learning Environments* module involved the participants in designing and developing an online learning environment for use in their own context.

Enquiry One: Collaborative social approach with ICT

At the start of the *Collaborative Online Learning Environments* module 2003, I suggested to the group that we would make use of the online learning environment to document concerns in practice and work through an action research process. I explained that I had used WebCT online learning environment to document learning in the programme in the past, but that dialogue had mainly been between myself and participants. I showed, through examples, how I had made use of WebCT during the *Network Information Management* module in 2001. I suggested that we could try to use the online learning environment in a more collaborative way. I explained to the group that the online learning journals were not assessed. But my past experience had led me to believe that participants found it useful to document their learning throughout the course of the 12 week module and that this helped them in the final write up of assignments. We discussed how we could make use of online learning in a more collaborative way involving shared understanding and how we could bring about a more collaborative approach in general into our work contexts.

The purpose of the following enquiry is to explore some of the social dimensions of participant learning during the *Collaborative Online Learning Environments* module between October and December 2003. The image of the threaded discussion (Figure 8.1) from WebCT shows, in visual form, real postings by members of the group.

Although each person was carrying out his/her individual self-studies, each was contributing to the 'web of betweenness'. Zander & Zander (2000) claim that the 'We' story defines the human being in a specific way. "*It points to a relationship rather than to individuals, to communication patterns, gestures, and movement rather than to discrete objects and identities. It attests to the 'in-between'*".

After a face-to-face class discussion, Darragh (participant) initiated a new discussion forum on WebCT called 'Politics'. His grappling with his concern and our discussions with him online, reflects my value of the significance of the 'web of betweenness' in my pedagogy of the unique. Pedagogy of the unique is a standard of judgment that recognises the importance of singularity and a 'web of betweenness' is a standard that recognises the relational dynamic of human existence.

From the diagram (Figure 8.1) entitled **Politics**, it is evident that problems were not shared solely between myself and each participant, as in 2001, but, in a more collaborative way, among participants themselves. The threaded dialogues reflect this more social and collaborative approach which was beginning to emerge. It is evident that there was more a sense of 'betweenness' in the forum as participants responded to each other's online journal postings. The fostering of such 'webs of betweenness' is an aspiration that for some time had lain at the back of my teaching mind. My commitment to this endeavour reflects my belief that learning is a social interactive process involving members of the class as a community of sharing participants who can develop new understandings through dialogue. My wish to create an environment where learning might be a social process rather than the absorption by students of pre-set content signified the living of my educational values in practice. Bohm's (1996) view on 'Dialogue' is relevant. In defining dialogue, Bohm refers to the Greek word *dialogos*. Logos means 'the word' and *dia* means 'through' - it doesn't mean 'two'. A dialogue can be among any number of people not just two (Bohm, 1996, p. 6). I believe that dialogue is fundamental to the learning process. It is a way of opening up to questions and assumptions rather than accepting ready-made solutions. It is about

mutual participation. In dialogues, I believe that we attempt to develop our individual educational practices in collaboration with others. Through the use of ICT, in this case, a collaborative online learning environment, I believe that we can activate wider dialogue and for those committed to learning as a social project, get closer to the meanings of our embodied values.

Winter (2003) points to collaboration and cooperation as necessary in order to heal the *“distorted or inadequate communication processes that so often limit the effectiveness of professional situations and roles”* (Winter, 2003, p.144). In the following dialogues, I hope to show how I have been able to help in some way to address his question, *“How do we learn to converse “harmoniously” and in a climate of “mutual helpfulness” when we live so much of our lives in settings where competition and conflict are normal and good arguments are frequently ignored?”*

In the first posting, Darragh grapples with how he can achieve a collaborative approach within a competitive culture. He articulates the perceived struggle between the financial and educational goals within the company that he works. Through online dialogue, we are able to help him to move from this state to an understanding that research is not about hiding conflict, but that it is about how to work through tensions and to resolve them, in a limited way, in one's own practice. He articulates his value of the wish to offer people "the opportunity to be involved.....to defend and work the process for myself and those who want to participate in it, through provision of evidence etc." Trudy Corrigan, offers support by referring to literature in this context and Realtan Ní Leannain (a previous participant of M.Sc. programme) observes that his thinking may relate to Wenger's idea of a ‘community of practice’ that was

originally developed in a training context. This is an area that Darragh decided to explore further in his research.

Threaded Discussion on WebCT (Politics 168)

- € 168. Darragh Christopher Patrick Power (powerd3) (Sat Nov 22, 2003 14:20)
- € 171. Fionnbarra Seamus Hallissey (hallisf2) (Sat Nov 22, 2003 15:36)
- € 174. Darragh Christopher Patrick Power (powerd3) (Mon Nov 24, 2003 09:15)
- € 176. Trudy Corrigan (corrigt3) (Mon Nov 24, 2003 10:26)
- € 180. Margaret Farren (es572) (Mon Nov 24, 2003 12:26)
- € 185. Darragh Christopher Patrick Power (powerd3) (Mon Nov 24, 2003 14:57)
- € 191. Margaret Farren (es572) (Mon Nov 24, 2003 16:59)
- € 192. Darragh Christopher Patrick Power (powerd3) (Tue Nov 25, 2003 08:56)
- € 194. Trudy Corrigan (corrigt3) (Tue Nov 25, 2003 11:30)
- € 195. Darragh Christopher Patrick Power (powerd3) (Tue Nov 25, 2003 12:23)
- € 205. Realtan nileannain (leannai_n) (Wed Nov 26, 2003 18:18)

Figure 8.1

For the purpose of clarity, I provide a colour reference code to represent the various speakers in the following dialogues:

Colour Reference Code

Darragh's response in blue
Fionbarra's response in green
Margaret's response in dark red
Trudy's response in violet
Realtan's response in sea green
My reflections on the learning process in black

Posted by Darragh Power

Sat Nov 22, 2003 14:20

Hi All,

Following on my polemic this morning, the aspect that concerns me in relation to the combination of a collaborative social approach with the use of ICT is the politics of the way this approach is perceived. My personal values as a practitioner of Training and Development are part of what Lincoln and Guba would call the post-positivist paradigm. i.e. everyone has a contribution to make and collaboratively we achieve more than we could competitively.....My role is an informal one in that I am a training mentor - there is no job description for this and as a result I am always fighting the battle for more space in which to allow development activities to emerge. Positive outcomes such as a colleague becoming more confident in task needs to be explained in the language of, we are reducing error in the output generated by the team. There are two differing languages at work here. The financial operational one and the educational development one. I sometimes feel the need for a translator!!!!

This is bringing me towards the question how do we as a group achieve a collaborative approach, valuing diversity and differing opinions, while collaborating on differing goals, and how can I affect this through my practice.

Its all very confusing!!!

Darragh

Posted by Fionnbarra Hallissey

Sat Nov 22, 2003 15:36

Hi Daragh

Daragh said "There are two differing languages at work here. The financial operational one and the educational development one. I sometimes feel the need for a translator!!!!"

I'll translate for you (for free on this occasion only): one language is neo-liberalist (financial return, consumers, the economy, profit etc.) and the other is social democratic (citizens and citizenship, society, rights, obligations etc.). Noam Chomsky wrote a brilliant essay on this called 'Democracy and education'. The thing that drives me bananas is that people don't even recognise there is a debate anymore.

Good bye

Fionbarra

Posted by Darragh Power

Mon Nov 24, 2003 09:15

Hi Fionbarra

Thanks for the response that echoes exactly what is going on much of the time in my workplace, the conflict between those in power "Manufacturing Consent" to borrow a Chomsky phrase, and generating a situation where there is not even a debate to be had, the parameters for discussion are already set. Another great example of this is Necessary Illusions: Thought Control in a Democratic Society which is another piece of work by Chomsky. For me, to employ a collaborative approach in order to improve a situation, not being in a managerial position, can mean I am viewed as a threat, a radical, almost as a trade unionist, and this is not my intention, as my intention is to get everyone collaborating.

To rephrase it in my own language the question I have is that this is a real situation, with real people, in positions of real power, how can I effect change in this environment to benefit everyone, even those who do not subscribe to the belief that a collaborative approach can be effective. I think this is where action research struggles in its "emancipatory" intent. There is a debate in action research about "victory narratives" (See McNiff and Whitehead 2000 action research in Organisations for the reference) - IE – Action Researchers can sometimes say This is what I do in my practice, and hide the struggle they have gone through and in particular the struggle with power (not me!!).

At this stage I am taking it as a gimme that my position is one where I am in conflict with the values of the organisation, the cultural hegemony, the naturalised values of

the organisation, and the challenge is how I deal with it to improve it. I think Action Research leaving it all up to the practitioner, can serve as an isolating methodology in this case, unless collaboration with people holding conflicting values can be developed.

Thanks for the comment, I think the point about neo-liberal individualism versus social democratic values is well made.

Darragh

Posted by Trudy Corrigan

Mon Nov 24, 2003 10:26

Darragh,

I will use my own previous experience as an example to hopefully help you with your current situation.

I have through my studies on the M.Sc. programme and my experience of teaching adults within the VEC found that the collaborative approach is best practice since it brings together a diversity of experience,talents,ability and expertise.

Then I found myself in a work environment which did not subscribe to this theory at organisational level i.e. each staff member had their own role to play but not in a collaborative way.

It was a very difficult lesson for me to learn at a personal level but a hugely beneficial one that you may not be able to change an organisation in its thinking on this but you

can change the environment around you i.e. being collaborative with your fellow colleagues and other staff, students etc. Sometimes the greatest lesson to be learned for "reflective practitioners" is that you cannot change an organisation but you can provide them with an opportunity to reflect on your practice of collaboration.

This collaborative approach has been reaffirmed for me in this master's programme but I also have a better understanding of what I can and cannot change within an organisation/school environment. Hope this is of some help.

Trudy

My reflections on the learning process (MF)

Trudy's response to Darragh shows how a member of the group is prepared to take an initiative to help him resolve his problem and reflects the interactive nature of the learning process that I want to promote.

Posted by Margaret Farren

Mon Nov 24, 2003 12:26

Hi All,

You know, after the Saturday session, I thought... I must set up a learning forum.

Darragh, Fionbarra and Trudy, I am delighted to see that you have already continued the dialogue. Now there is collaboration!! Just responding to some of your points.

Darragh - You say: "There is a debate in action research about "victory narratives" (See McNiff and Whitehead 2000 action research in Organisations for the reference) - i.e. - Action Researchers can sometimes say - This is what I do in my practice, and

hide the struggle they have gone through and in particular the struggle with power (not me!!)".

On Thursday evening last, Jean Mc Niff did point to the need for the researcher to be truthful. This would answer your question re: hiding the struggle. Certainly within a 'living educational theory' approach, you cannot gloss over the conflicts. These are integral to the approach and central to the creation of your own 'living educational theory'. Gadotti points out that dialogue cannot exclude conflict. Indeed conflict is at the heart of all pedagogy. "There is always conflict and rupture with something, with, prejudices, habits, types of behaviours and the like. It is only in taking on the risk that we become educators." (Will send the Gadotti reference).

Darragh you says: "I think Action Research leaving it all up to the practitioner, can serve as an isolating methodology in this case, unless collaboration with people holding conflicting values can be developed."

My own PhD research uses a 'living educational theory' approach and it does include dialogue with conflicting values. I want to bring to the fore the idea of a 'pedagogy of the unique', to highlight the differences and not just the equality. I do think that it is up to the individual in the end. And yet, how do we hold to our own values while engaging with people who hold conflicting values? How do we engage with the other person and not undermine the values they subscribe to?

To do this comes close to a value called empathy or what I am coming close to understanding in my own educational practice as an empathetic connectivity. And yet we are faced with - which knowledge forms part of the 'cultural arbitrary' (Bourdieu) or

the cultural preference of the dominant group. Trudy mentioned the importance of changing your own small space. I think Gramsci or Gadotti (will check out!) also recognised that it was the small changes that made the difference.

Darragh - your challenge may be one of 'creative compliance' (John Elliot), how do you engage with the values of the company in a way that still allows you to realise your own educational values and goals within the company. You have made a start and now for the dialogue.

Margaret

Posted by Darragh ower

Mon Nov 24, 2003 14:57

Margaret said: "There is always conflict and rupture with something, with, prejudices, habits, types of behaviours and the like. It is only in taking on the risk that we become educators." (Gadotti)

Herein lies the crux of the issue for me, I have a recognition about the parameters of my own practice, where the acceptable boundaries of the discourse I can engage in are drawn. I absolutely agree with Trudy in the sense of it being a development of a collaborative approach in my own practice I can effect change in my immediate surroundings. This is a perfectly reasonable expectation and a reasonable 'risk' to take.

As a person, a living "I" to borrow Whiteheads term, I can influence and effect the situation I am in for all. I agree with the principle of Elliots of 'creative compliance'

and am trying in my practice to move the debate away from an us vs them conflict perspective, where everyone guards their territory fiercely.....

As I do not have an official role as a trainer, but rather the job of a mentor, with no job description, in addition to my operational workload, my own practice as an educator / trainer (though not as a person) is limited in terms of resources and time, and also in terms of credibility. I think the idea of 'rupturing habits' is an interesting one, because it may be a case that I have to rock the boat....Thanks for the responses!!

Darragh

Posted by Margaret Farren

Mon Nov 24, 2003 16:59

Hi Daragh,

You say... "As a person, a living "I" to borrow Whiteheads term, I can influence and effect the situation I am in for all. I agree with the principle of Elliotts of 'creative compliance' and am trying in my practice to move the debate away from an us vs them conflict perspective, where everyone guards their territory fiercely. This siege mentality to me reflects an underlying insecurity or fear factor, which can be eased through collaboration, through not having to always be in control, through not always having to be the boss etc." Darragh, as a living "I", researching your own practice as you relate to others in the workplace, what type of question do you intend to ask - "How can I improve??" Margaret

Posted by Darragh Power

Tue Nov 25, 2003 08:56

QUESTION IS: How can I improve my practice through collaboration and offer the opportunity (not a forced situation - no coercion involved - its an offer) to all the people I work with to contribute to the collaboration process to benefit everyone in the situation?

In some ways I think I've answered my own question now. All I can do in terms of collaboration is offer people the opportunity to be involved and if they choose to be hostile to it that's a valid choice, my responsibility is to defend and work the process for myself and those who want to participate in it, through provision of evidence, showing development etc. Through gathering evidence, showing influence etc, the methodology may gain more credibility, and this may in itself change the situation towards a more collaborative working environment.

Darragh

Posted by Trudy Corrigan

Tue Nov 25, 2003 08:56

Darragh,

I have just been reading "Action Research in Ireland", introduction by Jean Mc Niff page 21 and I found a quote which related to my last email to you so I thought I would share it with you. This is also a quote for your thesis database!!

Jean Mc Niff says "I love Iris Murdoch's observation that Jesus' commandment "Be ye therefore perfect" could be interpreted as "Be ye therefore slightly improved"

(Murdoch, 1985:62). This gives me hope, stuck as I am with my great tendency for making mistakes. Working towards slight improvement is enough for today."

I think this is central to Action Research and indeed your collaborative efforts. You are taking some personal risks i.e. will it work/will it not work but if it makes a "slight improvement" then you have achieved a lot. I hope this is of some help.

Trudy

Posted by Darragh Power

Tue Nov 25, 2003 12:23

Thanks Trudy - that is an interesting angle to action research - evolution vs revolution - or creative compliance - I think what that hangs on in a commercial context is what slight or small improvements are, who agrees that its an improvement, what proof exists for such an improvement, is it a lasting improvement or a temporary one and how do you measure it. The personal approach of the post positivist paradigm is great for peer review, but justifying this to the technical rationalist epistemology (Schons terms) of an organisation is very difficult, just to get things done from day-to-day with operational demands on time is a task in itself, without adding to it - See Zubber-Skerrit on the trade off of resources. I guess it comes back to the Action Research shop and picking up an approach that works. Darragh

Posted by Realtan Nileannain

Wed Nov 26, 2003 18:18

I have just read through this thread.... I think that collaborative work amongst educators is one area of education where Wenger's 'Community of Practice' works!

CoP is the premise first mooted in the business world that collaboration and problem-solving on an informal or formal level amongst members of a common interest group generally leads to a sum of all the members put together, in terms of creativity and productivity. Anyone wants more details, I'll post them.

Realtan

Reflections on the learning process (MF)

In this enquiry, I show how a collaborative learning environment emerged through practice. The collaborative online learning dialogues, as documented in the enquiry, complement the learning process that took place in the classroom. As the process evolved it became clear how the learning environment supported participants to articulate and reflect upon their concerns and grapple with them in practice. It also shows how it allowed participants, through online discussion, to move their learning forward. My theory of learning emerges as one that involves constructing and developing understanding through interactions with others and that learning involves reflection and dialogue. The learning environment that I value in my teaching involves creating the necessary space and appropriate learning environment that allows participants to build knowledge together through appropriate face-to-face and online learning. Literature is seen as a way of enabling participants to relate their work to that of a wider framework of reference and to deepen their understandings. In this enquiry practitioners interact more actively with each other in what I refer to as a 'web of betweenness'. The online learning dialogues show the different contributions and the engaged and appreciative responses of each individual to the others' contribution. (Project work developed by participants for the Collaborative Online Learning Environments module 2003 – [WWW8] [DVD1]).



Validation meeting March 2004. From left: Miriam Fitzpatrick, Fionnbarra Hallissey, Margaret Farren, Enda Lydon, Darragh Power, Realtan Ni Leannain, Aoife O'Brien, Fiona Williams and Claire Thomas.

Photo 8.2

Darragh Power's evaluation of the teaching and learning process in the context of the Masters degree in ICT in Education and Training programme

Subsequent to our discussions, Darragh joined an online discussion forum in order to learn more about a 'living educational theory' approach to research. Jack Whitehead also participated in this forum. The following comments emerged in the context of their discussion with respect to Darragh's experience of my influence, as an educator, on his learning in the context of the M.Sc. in ICT in Education and Training Management. Darragh sent a copy of his comments to me on Tuesday 3rd, February, 2004. I include it here with a view to presenting his perspective on my influence in his learning. It serves to validate claims that I have made with respect to influencing the learning of others.

From: "Power, Darragh" <Darragh.Power@irl.xerox.com>
To: "'Jack Whitehead'" <A.J.Whitehead@bath.ac.uk>
Cc: Margaret.Farren@dcu.ie
Subject: RE: one example
Sent: Tue, 3 Feb 2004 10:37:33 -0000

I would say there are many factors involved in Margaret's influence on my own learning, and that of the group.

Background

Initially on starting the M.Sc. programme, I was unsure whether to specialise in the use of ICT or do the Leadership stream. One of the factors influencing my decision was the fact that Margaret asked us what we wanted to learn, and that a programme would be constructed around what we felt would be useful as a group. This was pretty unique in my experience of learning, and was a big factor in me taking the ICT route. It's a nice thing to do to ask people what they are interested in, and need and meeting them on their terms, which I think would reflect the idea of a 'pedagogy of the unique.'

We are from diverse backgrounds - I work in training in a large multi-national, we have several teachers (primary, secondary and third level), a professional footballer and we all have used different technologies. I have tended to use HTML, Websites, and Webquests, while some of the others have used Digital Video, Stage Cast, Macromedia Flash, Hyperstudio are other authoring programmes used by people. In other words we have diverse interests and are responsible for different types of learners. We also have different technical requirements but I feel that my learning needs are much better addressed than if the course was a traditional didactic model,

and this would be a general consensus.

I don't think this diversity would be catered for without the approach of a 'pedagogy of the unique'. Certainly any one of the technical resources could be a semester long course in itself, before any of the pedagogical concerns would be covered. This is particularly true given our different practice contexts. This experience of being met on our terms as learners has been reinforced throughout the course where if we ask for something to be covered it is covered, which brings me onto another influence.

Specialists / Former students

Technical knowledge is becoming increasingly specialist and throughout the course Margaret has brought in specialists in various areas, Ken Maher on HTML, Fionnuala Flanagan on Flash, Cathal Gurrin on Databases, and former students of the course, such as Realtan ni Leanain, Chris Garvey and Denice Byrne, and often there have been several of these people present at lectures. This co-operative approach is on which combines technical specialists with the practical applications by other learners many of whom are similarly employed as teachers etc. This approach is on which caters for my own unique circumstances and learning styles, and the requirements of my practice context. The other members of the class would echo these sentiments.

Ongoing Support

These specialists are available not merely in a lecturing capacity but also as a support through out the course for those experiencing technical, political or theoretical difficulties, which we all have found useful. The WebCT environment

shows evidence of this with James Finnegan giving myself and Barra Hallissey a few thoughts, and Realtan Ni Leannain among others, contributing to the debate and helping out with resources like Etienne Wenger's idea of a community of practice which I am going to do some research on in the coming months.

Also on WebCT, Margaret's availability and contributions throughout the programme are evidence of the continual involvement in supporting the process of individual and group learning, which is a very evident personal commitment to meeting learners where we are. Further evidence of a 'pedagogy of the unique' on WebCT would be Realtan's contribution to Fiona Williams Webquest on Northern Ireland, where the children in Fiona's religion class got to ask Realtan about life in the north, which grounded the theory of the Webquest in the real world. In other words, through availing of specialists in various fields, Margaret allowed us to work on our own different projects at the same time, and have the support we need. This group approach is an influence on me, which I would say is a 'pedagogy of the unique', supporting individuals where we are in our learning.

Class culture

This, from a personal perspective, I value most of all. As a group we tend to help each other out, and work with each other rather than feeling we are in a competitive environment which has often happened in my educational experience - this might tie into the spirit of Ubuntu which is a concept I resonate very strongly with (I previously did an MA in Culture and Colonialism in UCG and have studied post-colonial theory

etc as a result - though my practice of what I know varies!!!). One of the values I cherish most as a human being is the idea that I am always in relationship, and being in relationship to others, myself, life is better if I share and collaborate, rather than be competitive as competitiveness closes off rather than opens up avenues. I have learned a lot as a direct result of conversations with my classmates and lecturers which have hugely influenced my learning and approach to learning, particularly in relation to opening up new worlds of technical resources, theories and approaches to me.

I think this collaborative and open approach is largely due to Margaret in facilitating each of us talking about our own work, and being given the space to discuss our ideas, and discuss with each other how we can improve on what we are doing. I would say this is different from other academic experiences I've had in that the view of knowledge underlying this approach is that we construct our meanings, and knowledge, and that it doesn't just appear in a book. In other words the classroom is a pretty democratic place, characterised by open discussion. I think there are two influences here.

First - *the classroom is a place of learning facilitation, where everyone facilitates everyone else's learning - which reflects a view of knowledge and power that I think is very helpful in terms of a pedagogy of the unique. I feel that my unique perspective is heard, and also the unique perspectives of every one within the group are heard and developed. The implication being that everyone's knowledge is valued.*

Second - *the success of any facilitation depends on the facilitator and Margaret is*

excellent in this regard, in giving everyone the opportunity to express their learning, in listening to what is going on and in suggesting alternative perspectives, resources and pedagogical considerations.

A major factor in this facilitation is Margaret's clarity on her own values as an educator, and the trust that this clarity establishes, which is an influence for me in my learning to clarify my own educational values. This group facilitation is also supported on an individual basis by Margaret, Realtan, Cathal etc discussing with each of us our ideas, and work, throughout the course. This ongoing support process and dialogic process is a major influence on my thinking of what I should be doing in my own practice in training and development.

I really enjoy the course and the general consensus is that we are very glad we chose the area of ICT as a specialty. I would have no hesitation in saying that this is largely due to Margaret's influence, and ongoing support, and encouragement, which we have said to Margaret on many occasions. Many of the resources I've used on the website are as a direct result of conversations with Margaret, such as reading Vygostky, Dewey, Polyani, Van Manen, Reigeluth, Bloom, Gagne, and yourselves, Jack and Paul etc. I think the biggest influence is Margaret's willingness to be inclusional, and think about what learners need first, and ask us for our own thoughts, and find the right solution for meeting our needs, and bring in assistance.

If you want a critical perspective, I would say that sometimes some people prefer a more directed and didactic style, and don't feel comfortable doing things themselves. Personally I think this is due to a lack of confidence, and a fear factor, as a result of

traditional educational models where you have to pass the exam first, and think about what your learning second, which was the case for me, in my educational experience up to now. I much prefer the way Margaret is doing things, and I find it creatively liberating. I've always felt constrained by the expectations of education, and passing exams, and have tended to limit what I've tried to do as a result. I would always be interested in other things on a course but would have definitely focus on what was being sought rather than what I wanted to learn.

Darragh Power

Enquiry Two: Reflecting on teaching through video

Fionnbarra Hallissey was a participant on the M.Sc. Education and Training Management (ICT). He had developed a video for the Emerging Pedagogies module assignment in the previous semester. He expressed an interest in continuing his research into the use of video in education during the *Collaborative Online Learning Environments* module (2003). His assignment involved him in videotaping his teaching, editing and compressing the video and finally uploading the video to a server. He then invited fellow class participants to evaluate the video through use of WebCT discussion forum. The following dialogues serve as an example of how Fionnbarra makes use of the discussion forum to share his teaching and ask for comments and feedback from his peers.

For the purpose of clarity, I provide a colour reference code to represent the various speakers in the following dialogues:

Colour Reference Code

Fionbarra Hallissey dark blue
Jack Whitehead seagreen
Brendan Ryan light blue
Trudy Corrigan violet
Miriam Fitzpatrick brown
Margaret Farren dark red
My reflection on the learning process in black

Posted by Fionbarra Hallissey

Tue Dec 16, 2003 15:44

Hi Folks,

I hope to show my work in progress during Saturday's session. I videoed myself teaching and would like to share my reflections with you on my own practice and would welcome any thoughts you might have in relation to same. I've spoken to Margaret about this, and she told me she would be able to facilitate same. It would be absolutely wonderful if you could post your reflections onto this thread in WebCT, that would save time and allow time for reflection rather than ping ponging during the session and taking over everybody's time. The video links are available at the following URL's, accessible unfortunately only on DCU's intranet - you can look at them anywhere within DCU - don't forget you'll need headphones for the machine!

Regards

Fionbarra

My comments on the learning process (MF)

I replied to Fionbarra and asked if he could provide us some idea of what particular areas he wanted us to review/reflect on during his presentation. He posted the following response to the group.

Posted by Fionbarra Hallissey

Sat Dec 20, 2003 01:57

Hi Folks,

To lend a focus to the video presentation of my own work I decided to juxtapose a definition of teacher professionalism by Schön against the evidence of my own practice.

“The heart of professionalism is the capacity to exercise discretionary judgements in situations of unavoidable uncertainty.” (Schön, 1983)

I don't wish to exclude any comments/reflections on anything that anybody in the group might find of interest. However I think Schön's definition serves as a useful starting point ... presumably he was referring to teaching rather than driving a motor propelled vehicle!

My comments on the learning process (MF)

I invited Jack Whitehead to respond to Fionbarra's message. In the following example, Jack points to how technology can contribute to presenting the knowledge of professional educators.

Posted by Jack Whitehead

Mon Dec 22, 2003 14:25

The use of the video-clips together with the reflective commentary seems to me to mark a breakthrough in presenting the educational knowledge of professional educators.

It seems to me that Fionbarra has opened up the possibility of sharing our understandings of new living educational standards of judgement as we share our understandings of what counts as evidence in statements such as the following:

" The evidence of my own videoed practice demonstrates that teacher professionalism involves more than 'the capacity to make judgements in conditions of unavoidable uncertainty', though this capacity is not insignificant. The exercise of premeditated discretionary judgements is an important component of my own professionalism. The absence of premeditated judgement would create a degree of avoidable uncertainty that I would find unmanageable and intolerable."

Love Jack.

My comments on the learning process

Other members of the group responded to Fionbarra's videos. They could see a relationship between his work and their own work. They were also clarifying for themselves through dialogue how ICT could help inform them of what was happening

in their own educational practice. It is interesting to note that each of the following responses come from participants who work in different contexts from primary, secondary and adult education. Relating to Tullio Maranhao's (1991, p.236) idea on dialogue "*Dialogue is indispensable for reflection, for it is in the face of other's reaction that self-evaluates his utterances*".

Brendan Ryan is a post-primary school teacher and he made the following response to Fionbarra's video.

Posted by Brendan Ryan

Tue Dec 23, 2003 22:47

Fionbarra,

It's great that you decided to video yourself teaching in class. What a pity that there isn't more video observation available! I think video provides an excellent means for us, as teachers, to reflect on our practice - exactly what Schön looked for by "turning thought back on action". You can now reflect on, for example, why you decided to ask a particular question or why you intervened or did not intervene at a critical moment. I found it an interesting exercise myself last semester. I was interested in seeing how relaxed your students were with the video recording going on and how real learning seemed to be taking place. There are, of course, some differences between your class and (say) one of mine in so far as you are teaching adults who are well motivated and are in a smaller group setting. This allows for little or no curtailment of group interaction. Good luck with your own reflections on the videos.

Brendan

Trudy Corrigan, a teacher of a group of active-retired learners responds.

Posted by Trudy Corrigan

Mon Dec 29, 2003 00:47

Fionbarra,

Just to be absolutely accurate re Jack and Brendan's comments:

Jack said "the use of the video-clips together with the reflective commentary seems to me to mark a breakthrough in presenting the educational knowledge of professional educators."

Brendan stated "I think video provides an excellent means for us as teachers to reflect on our practice."

I feel that your video certainly provided me with an opportunity to reflect on my own practice and to seek out innovative possibilities i.e. "Can I provide a learning framework where the older students can work collaboratively with the younger students in the transferral of knowledge and skills?"

The breakthrough is that the video visually presents what a thousand words could not say i.e. "presenting the educational knowledge of professional educators."

Trudy

The following response is from Miriam Fitzpatrick, a primary school teacher.

Posted by Miriam Fitzpatrick (fitzpam8)

Tue Jan 06, 2004 19:06

Hi Fionbarra,

Her are some reflections on clip three;

1. The clips proved very interesting - both from a personal point of view in comparing aspects of your practice with mine and also your willingness to post them online is very brave and shows great potential for real reflection. I am very interested in the idea of the life cycle of a teacher in which teachers reach new levels of expertise throughout their career. It seems that you have reached a stage of being comfortable with your practice - one I aspire to reach soon hopefully.

I agree with Brendan when he talks about motivation and class size. Teaching a large class of six year olds contrasts significantly with your environment. I think motivation is primarily intrinsic - your adult learners appeared be highly motivated and co-operative and a lot of real learning seemed to be taking place.

2. With regards to Schon's 'unavoidable uncertainty', there are several unavoidable situations in your clip -the number of attendees as you pointed out and the seating arrangements. Perhaps in other environments, seating can be arranged in groups so that students have no choice but to interact. This may lead to a more artificial form of social interaction than the one you instigated.

3. The students seem to be learning a lot through social interaction and your timely intervention was very appropriate in the circumstances. By merely approaching the

student, your action led to her inclusion without embarrassment. In my situation, my pupils would be more vocal about who they would rather not sit beside! I think this type of approach particularly lends itself to adult learning where the learners can stay on task and enhance learning through discussion and dialogue. Having worked myself with adults, I found it a very effective approach. The fact that you withdrew to your seat with the students hardly noticing shows how you 'facilitated' the establishment of a learning situation effectively. However, the students were aware of your presence if they needed assistance.

A final thought that strikes me from your clip is the notion of lifelong learning - coming from 'Early Childhood' Education and looking at Trudy's situation where she works with an 'active retired' group, the cyclical nature of education is reinforced.

Hope this is of some help!

Happy New Year

Miriam

My reflections on the learning process (MF)

In my supervision of 'living educational theory' enquiries, I have referred participants to Winter's criteria of rigour as a way of showing rigour in their action research enquiries. In responding to Fionbarra's reflection on his classroom video, I ask him how he is going to invite his own students to comment on his practice. In the beginning, Fionbarra had a certain amount of reservation about sharing his reflection about the video with his students. However, in the following response, he is coming to see the importance of including the voice of the learner in the research.

Posted by Margaret Farren

Wed Dec 31, 2003 13:35

Fionbarra - Will you have the opportunity to invite and include responses from your own students? It would be interesting to hear their comments.

Winter (1989) defines six key principles in carrying out an action research study.

Collaborative resource is one criteria - participants are seen as co-researchers in the enquiry. It includes the possibility of including different viewpoints.

I don't know if you will have the opportunity to share your own reflections with them?

Margaret

My reflections on the learning process (MF)

I do value the creativity and originality of each participant and I value their enquiring mind. While I support them, I also encourage them to show how they are producing valid evidence of their educational practice as they ask, research and answer the question; 'How do I improve my practice?' In the above dialogue, I ask Fionnbarra how he is going to validate the claims that he is making.

Posted by Fionbarra Hallissey

Wed Jan 14, 2004 14:05

I would like to convey my heartfelt gratitude to people who have taken the time and trouble to post to this subject thread. I realise this time and trouble has been taken at a time when a lot of us are under pressure with assignments etc.

Margaret suggested the following:

"Fionbarra - Will you have the opportunity to invite and include responses from your own students? It would be interesting to hear their comments.

Winter (1989) defines six key principles in carrying out an action research study. Collaborative resource is one criteria - participants are seen as co-researchers in the enquiry. It includes the possibility of including different viewpoints".

Readers will note from my response, I expressed some reservations about sharing my own reflections on my work with the students. I think Margaret is right that the voice of the learners shouldn't be absent from research. It wouldn't have been possible to conduct this project without their agreement and co-operation.

The compromise I arrived at was to show the student group the three video clips and ask them to commit their reflections in writing on two questions.

1. Is what is happening educationally beneficial in your view? Why?
2. Would you recommend any improvements or changes?

I organised the student group into three groups of three and asked each group to reflect on a different clip. I will post their reflections onto WebCT asap.

Regards

Fionbarra

My reflections on the learning process (MF)

In the above extract, Fionbarra shows a progression in his learning as he realises the importance of including the voices of his learners in the evaluation of his teaching. In these online dialogues, I have shown my own learning as I engage participants more fully and collaboratively in self-study of their educational practice. I have shown how I value the creativity and originality of mind, critical judgement, values and desire for enquiry learning on the part of participants, and support them to use ICT in a way that is meaningful for their practice; and enable them to construct their own narrative of their learning in relation to others. I understand education as being an holistic process involving various dimensions: cognitive, emotional, spiritual, aesthetic and social interaction. I asked Fionbarra for feedback on how participants supported his learning through WebCT. This reflects the value that I attach to dialogue and to examining how ICT can support ongoing dialogue.

Conclusions

This chapter seeks to show how I have attempted to develop a knowledge base of practice in collaboration with participants. In enquiry one, participants can be seen interacting more actively with one another in what I refer to as a ‘web of betweenness’. In enquiry two, Fionbarra can be seen to take the initiative by videotaping his practice and opening his teaching to critical appraisal by others. I believe that I have shown through my practice how I have developed the capacity of participants to engage in dialogue through the use of ICT and to accept increasing responsibility in developing their own practice-based research in collaboration with their peers. I hope that these documented accounts of the development of a new

approach to teaching practice can bring to life the strengths of a ‘web of betweenness’ and how it has supported my development of pedagogy of the unique.