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Online interaction: Navigating 'third spaces' in Elluminate Live
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Abstract

Computer-mediated-communication has a long history in higher education and professional learning contexts, often seen as a beneficial addition or alternative to face-to-face interaction. This paper researches the use of new communication technologies such as *Elluminate Live* in learning contexts and argues that this technology has the potential to challenge and disrupt the conventions of face-to-face and computer-mediated 'spaces' giving rise to a possible 'third space' (Soja, 1996); a space which displaces traditions and bridges binaries to create "a new area of negotiation, meaning and representation" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 211). This paper uses data collected from two *Elluminate Live* sessions with beginning teachers within a professional education program in Victoria, Australia. It provides a case study of how beginning teachers navigated and utilised this third space. In doing so, this paper explores some of the learning potentials within third spaces, including: creating a space for learners to have more control over interaction; providing a bridge between the learners' experiences and content; and shifting the traditional power relationships present in traditional face-to-face contexts.

Keywords: Computer-mediated-communication, Beginning Teachers, Third Space, Professional Learning

Introduction

The recent development of on-line lecture software such as Elluminate, which enables synchronous multimedia and possible many-to-many interactions, has been greeted with some enthusiasm in computer-mediated-communication (CMC) and educational fields. Primarily, as Elluminate has the potential to provide a complement to asynchronous and synchronous technologies traditionally used in distance education and higher education. Within educational research, asynchronous communication (discussion or bulletin boards) is commonly perceived as beneficial to learning as participants can interact at a time and place that suits them, they can delay participation and return to it later, and are therefore more likely to engage in deep and thoughtful discussion (Johnson, 2008). Synchronous technologies, usually single media and often text-based such as chat and instant messaging, and have been used less within distance education and researched less (Murphy and Ciszewska-Carr, 2007). Perceived limitations relate to needing participants to be present at the one time, and the view that it is more of a social tool rather than an educational one (Johnson, 2008). CMC have historically been used as an addition to mainstream face-to-face practice (such as those associated with lectures or presentations in professional learning) and is characterised as taking place in one location, with participants being physically present and controlled by an instructor/teacher.

The recent development of on-line lecture software such as Elluminate, have been greeted with some enthusiasm in computer-mediated-communication (CMC) and educational fields. Elluminate while a synchronous technology also has asynchronous functionality. Asynchronous technologies which enable communication to occur in non-real time have long been valued in distance education and higher education contexts as alternatives and supplements to face-to-face instruction. By using

these technologies, participants have been able to interact at a time and place that suit them, to defer communication and to return to it later, thereby more likely to engage in deep and thoughtful discussion (Johnson, 2008). Synchronous technologies which enable communication in real-time, have also been used to value-add to conventional instruction, but have been use less often, as participants need to present at the one time and communication tends to be more conversational rather than educational (Johnson, 2008). Elluminate can potentially offer 'the best' of both functionalities, immediacy in communication using text and audio, as well as the capacity to access at a later time.

Within each of these settings – synchronous, asynchronous and face-to-face – interaction is characterised differently which in turn influences the way power, control and learner engagement is positioned. For instance, in conventional face-to-face lectures, interaction between instructor and participants is minimal as the role of the lecture/presentation is for information to be transferred from one to many participants. Control therefore rests with the instructor, as expert, and there is little capacity for participants to be involved. Asynchronous and synchronous communication technologies, depending on their capacities and designs and the intent of instructors, can enable a different level of interaction, one that is many to many, and one that is more controlled by participants, resulting in a more personal experience. However, this interaction is often guided by a moderator or facilitator who according to Tagg (1994) and Salmon (2000) takes on the role of leading, motivating and stimulating the interaction as well as guiding or weaving the topic to keep it on task.

The use of Elluminate as a means of facilitating interaction in education and professional learning contexts is under researched and in the main they relate broadly to participant perceptions of the technology. For example, Fuller (2009) used Elluminate to enhance the learning experience of university students in Australia. Interestingly, the instructors imposed limitations on the use of audio, in order to minimise possible 'traffic'; survey data revealed positive perceptions of Elluminate. Murphy and Ciszewska-Carr (2007) reported on the use of Elluminate to deliver lectures and e-presentations in a Distance Education program in Canada. The eight instructors were interviewed and gave generally positive feedback. However they reported that the chat tool was used to discuss technical issues and that the amount of social interaction on the chat distracted from course content.

As a recently developed technology, Elluminate has not been the subject of much research. That which has been produced, such as Fuller (2009) in Australia and Murphy and Ciszewska-Carr (2007) in Canada, have focused on participant perceptions of using the technology, and have reported positive outcomes. Both however have suggested that the multimedia functionality can be problematic. Fuller (2009) for example deciding to 'turn off' audio in order to minimise possible traffic and Ciszewska-Carr (2007) reporting that the chat tool distracted from course content.

For this paper, we extend this research by exploring the potential offered by the Elluminate software that enables multiple ways of engaging including full audio, text and chat, whiteboard, multimedia applications within a web browser interface. We argue that Elluminate in a sense brings together some characteristics of interaction from face-to-face and CMC settings but also opens up a third space. Therefore, this paper utilises third space theory to analyse the ways in which interactions are

controlled and shaped between beginning teachers and an instructor within an Elluminate professional learning session.

Third space theory

The notion of 'third space' has been used in different contexts, for various purposes and with different focuses, however, it is associated with exploring and understanding the space "in between" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 1) two or more discourses or conceptualizations. A productive way to explain third space is by drawing upon Soja's (1996) triad of: Firstspace, Secondspace and Thirdspace. In this explanation, thirdspace is a space where "everything comes together" (Soja, 1996, p. 56) by bringing together elements of Firstspace and Secondspace, but also by extending beyond these spaces. We have used this notion to conceptualise the different spaces of our research. For instance, first space is associated with face-to-face instruction and second spaces with single media synchronous CMC technologies. The third space we associate with Elluminate as we believe it "gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognisable, a new area of negotiation, meaning and representation" (Bhabha 1990, p. 211). This paper argues that Elluminate has the potential to bring together elements of first and second spaces such as the instructor presenting knowledge and synchronous discussion or chat. It suggests also that it may be possible to open up these first and second spaces, thereby disrupting the traditional model of instructor as expert or moderator as shaper and thus, shifting the power relationship traditionally present in face-to-face and online spaces.

Within learning contexts, Moje, Ciechanowski, Kramer, Ellis, Carrillo and Collazo (2004) summarised the three main ways that theorists have conceptualised third space which includes: as a bridge; navigational space; and a space of cultural, social, and epistemological change. Within this framing, third space is perceived is as space to build bridges between knowledge, helps learners see connections, and contradictions and bridge competing understanding (Moje et al. 2004). Third space can also be theorised as a navigational space in which participants can cross over or draw upon different binaries, discourses or discursive boundaries which enables participants to become more central to their learning and gain access to alterative knowledge (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, & Tejada, 1999). Finally, third space can be seen as a space of change or transformation where competing knowledge and ideas are brought into 'conversation' to challenge and reshape, leading to new understandings, alternative forms of learning (Moje et al., 2004). In doing so, there is the potential to resist cultural authority and challenge dominant conceptions of learners and learning.

In this paper, the concept of third space has been adapted to refer to the possibility of imagining (and inhabiting) an alternative space, where the traditional hierarchical relationships of expert/novice, instructor/learner in face-to-face and online conventions can be challenged and 'rewritten'. All three views of third space are drawn upon (i.e. bridge between competing knowledge, a navigational space to cross knowledge spaces and a transformative space where knowledge is challenged and reshaped), to achieve our research aim of analysing the ways in which learners (beginning teachers) and the instructor interacted. Therefore, we draw upon the theory of third space to analyse: where did the Elluminate technology allow participants to make connections that bridge their own experiences or practices? How did the beginning teachers attempt to shape, control or transform the original intent of the presentation? How did the voice and text transactions

lead to the production of new ways of talking, thinking and interacting? In what ways did beginning teachers interact with one another, and with the instructor?

Elluminating third spaces
This paper reports on the use of Elluminate within a larger Department of Education and Early Childhood, Victoria initiative, which aimed to support beginning teachers when facing the challenges of being new to the profession. This program used a blended approach to learning, which included face-to-face workshops, synchronous chat sessions facilitated by a moderator, an asynchronous discussion board, social networking spaces and Elluminate presentations.   Data for this paper is drawn from one of the three Elluminate presentations delivered as part of the program. These presentations were delivered by an instructor and moderated by another. Drawing on Fuller's (2009) experience, audio capacity was enabled, but confined to a selection of students who had volunteered for this role. To facilitate greater participation, several polls were used as well as icons (hand capping, and smiley faces) to gauge reaction to a question. Break-out rooms were also used to provide a directed discussion based in cognate groups (for example, primary and secondary school settings).

One Elluminate session, on the topic of feedback was purposively selected as the focus for this paper as it evoked opportunity to consider the presence of a possible third space. This session provided three sources of data: an electronic copy of the PowerPoint presentation uploaded into the Elluminate whiteboard, a transcript of audio and a transcript of the chat text. In this one hour session, 26 beginning teachers chose to participate, as well as, three online coaches, two moderators and one instructor. Some 256 chat posts were made in this session, with 247 posts being made by beginning teachers, 6 by online coaches, 3 by the moderators and none by the instructor.

The three sources of data, the PowerPoint presentation, the instructor transcript and the participant chat transcript were then analysed, with two key episodes identified for detailed analysis. According to Stacy and Gerbric (2003) there are practical difficulties in analysing large amounts of communication, as well as issues in selecting how to analyse content. We have taken their advice and adopted "a pragmatic but systematic approach" (p. 496) resulting in our decision to use analysis points as the message units to be analysed and Henri's (1992) system of classifying interactivity as explicit, implicit or unconnected as a guiding lens.

Episode 1: Who is the expert?
This episode illustrates how beginning teachers can navigate between first and second spaces, and in the process, create a third space which enables them to share their own ideas and experiences and ultimately taking control of this space (if for a while). The first analysis point occurs at the beginning of the presentation as the instructor explores the complexity of feedback. At this time, the instructor activates a PowerPoint slide with the phrase 'emptiness of a tick' to convey a key argument that the use of ticks have little value. Using the audio function, the instructor draws on her own experience from interviewing and surveying learners and outlines a number of strategies around feedback. At the same time in the chat window, some 9 beginning teachers interact with the content presented. A beginning teacher engages explicitly with the focus being explored by the instructor and comments that "a tick is really just saying 'yes' I have opened your book to this page"(Katie V). Another beginning teacher continues this line of conversation, until another poses the question "tick or tape?"(Linda N), which turns the conversation specifically onto taping as a

means of providing feedback. The instructor then talks about giving specific and original feedback to students, with several beginning teachers supporting this idea, until a beginning maths teacher, questions whether this strategy is appropriate in all discipline areas, posting, "What can we find that is original or unique about 2X2=4?"(Ben N). Other beginning teachers join in this conversation and provide advice and feedback about how this might be achieved, including the comment that, "well with maths it's more important to give feedback based on their misconceptions and what they have gotten incorrect"(Katie V).

Conventional lectures or first spaces are based on the notion of control of content by the instructor and limited interaction with participants. In this episode, Elluminate is used as a navigational space or bridge in which beginning teachers are able to cross over or disrupt the boundaries around the expert/novice binary, for example, challenging the instructor and providing peer feedback rather than waiting for the 'expert' response or clarification. The interactions between the beginning teachers demonstrate third spaces; spaces in which the beginning teachers work together, question each other, and share ideas without the traditional instructor correction. Ultimately these beginning teachers take ownership of the interaction and bring in their own contexts and concerns, and challenge what counts as important.

Episode 2: Who controls space?
The second episode demonstrates how when in third space, beginning teachers are able to take control of this space, if for a while, reshaping or transforming it into a new learning space. This episode occurs towards the beginning of the session. The instructor uploads a PowerPoint screen with a model of different types of feedback. As part of this discussion of this model, the instructor draws attention to how goal setting can be an important part of feedback. The instructor then illustrates this point by linking back to an earlier example and then moves on to another point. The beginning teachers respond specifically to a small part of what the instructor has just said and turn discussion explicitly onto goal setting. Some 40 interactions then result involving 14 beginning teachers (over half of the 26 participants in the session).

This episode highlights how participants use chat to respond to both the instructor and other participants, and how they navigate both the first space and second space, and introduce a third - one which they control and shape to suit their learning interests and needs. For instance, at the start of this episode, first space behaviours are evident, in that a formal environment has been created; the instructor is controlling the space, and the beginning teachers await knowledge to be imparted. But within several minutes, the instructor who continues to remain in this first space is deposed as there has been a shift in the power relationships and a new space emerges, a third space navigated by the beginning teachers. In this space, beginning teachers take control of the content, readily shaping it by drawing on their own experiences, providing a space for their often marginalised voices and stories in professional learning. This third space is interesting as there wasn't a moderator present to bring the chat 'back on track' or in line with the presentation which may have happened in synchronous CMC. Similarly, within a face-to-face setting this amount of 'chat' may become a behaviour management issue and therefore be discouraged. Interestingly, at times the participants interrupted the 'unofficial' chat discussion and referred back to the 'official' instructor content or audio. For instance, mid way through the discussion on goal setting, a beginning teacher adds the question "How do you spell Hilbricks?"(Bryony D) in the chat, as a reaction to some of the feedback strategies being discussed by the instructor, so it is assumed that the participants were still

listening and interacting on some level with the first space content. In this space, there is a sense that beginning teachers were empowered to destabilise what counts as official knowledge.

Conclusion

This paper has reported on the ways that 26 beginning teachers and an instructor interacted in one Elluminate session as part of a much larger professional learning program. Within this Elluminate presentation, there were various levels of interaction that the participants and facilitators engaged in. For instance there was evidence of: chat interaction between beginning teachers; chat discussion in response to presentation/content; instructor response to what was written in the chat; and beginning teachers' audio interaction in response to instructor. This paper, suggests that when using this technology, beginning teachers were able to navigate, bridge and transform spaces: first spaces associated with face-to-face instruction, second spaces associated with one media synchronous technologies, to create and take up hybrid or third spaces. When in this third space, beginning teachers were able to take control of this space, shaping it to suit their own needs which is not necessarily in line with that intended by the instructor. It suggests that the use of Elluminate, because of its multi modal capacities enables disruption of first and second spaces and ultimately challenges who controls the interactions and the space.

This small scale study has several implications for future practice. First it suggests that Elluminate can serve as a valuable tool for professional learning, as it does overcome some of the shortcomings of earlier CMC technologies. Second it suggests that Elluminate can serve as a bridge from 'first spaces' and 'second spaces', to allow participates to learn within third spaces that may provide a space to draw on their own contexts and stories. Third, Elluminate can provide a valuable space for learners to have more control of interaction and therefore better meet their needs, particularly when compared to the controlled spaces associated with first space and second space. Fourth, as it can enable a shift in traditional power relations between instructor and participants, Elluminate could therefore open up possible challenges to conventional notions of the instructor and moderator role, and how interaction is positioned within learning.

It is also important to support this process by asking: what are some of the risks and benefits for learner interacting within third spaces and breaking barriers? How can educators scaffold the third space experience? How do we research interaction and learning within this rapidly developing on-line environment? This study and the questions or implications it evokes highlights the need for further examination with an educational focus, as this research showed that the interaction within the Elluminate technology may provide a space where learners' experiences are taken up in productive ways and used to inform, enrich or transform their professional learning.

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