H809 TMA 02 – Extract for purposes of CMALT Portfolio

Comparison of research methods

[… Exploration of possible quantitative approach …]

An alternative, more qualitative approach would be to draw upon students' lecture note-taking as reification of the otherwise internalised learning processes of the students. As an example, Valtonen, et al. (2011) studied students' use of shared lecture note-taking using an online tool. Their coding to represent engagement was based on the content of text-only notes, including categories such as: reproduction, summarising, making connections, interpretation and questioning (p.581). The use of an online tool constrained some students who preferred non-text annotations on slides or handwriting (p.582). As such, in order to reduce the variables that may affect students' decisions to note-take, copies of notes in whatever form students made could be used in my research.

Sam (2012) suggests that research of activity systems favour situations where the researcher can become part of the practice environment, in order that they may "experience the activity in situ" (p.86). When trying to understand student preferences and engagement both within the classroom and through their independent study, such deep-rooted involvement would force an unwanted second disruptive element into the activity system (with the first being the provision of lecture recordings). Methods used by Bacon and Handley (2010) in their study of dyslexic students' reasoning depended on a laboratory-controlled experiment where subjects were requested to talk out loud their reasoning and to use pen and paper to record their working. A less invasive alternative is demonstrated by Conole, et al. (2008) who used audio log diaries, where students recorded their learning activities onto a telephone number voicemail, to enable them to capture "rich data about day-to-day events, as they happen, and contain a realistic account of the activities undertaken by the learners" (p.513). Importantly students could be asked to provide their rationale for their actions, offering meaningful context to complement copies of note-making previously mentioned.

[… Follow-up with semi-structured interviews within lens of Activity Theory …]

Conclusion

The two theoretical frameworks described here are contradictory in nature: learning occurs individually or within a social context. It appears that drawing heavily on one theoretical perspective can disproportionately limit the scope of a research project. However, without a solid theoretical backdrop, the purpose and methodologies of the research may be unfocused and lead to conclusions oblivious to any conceptual limitations (Richardson, 1987). As discussed above, each framework has contributed towards different aspects of understanding learner behaviour and either may equally apply to my research project.

References

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