Designing for Dialogue and Digitality in Higher and Continuing Education

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Abstract

This study investigates and contrasts three scenarios of further education; presence lessons and two types of blended learning. It addresses the conceptual challenge of creating learning designs for online learning communities of practice (COPs) with a focus on 'collaborative digital dialogue as the curriculum' (CDDC). The aim of the study is to identify the mechanisms that spawn and maintain collaboration and dialogue in digital/online discussions. Emphasis is put on locating the essential pedagogic-didactic elements giving rise to peer-to-peer dialogue, collaborative knowledge building (CKB) and reflection. As a basis for exploring, identifying, assessing and discussing pertinent elements in pedagogic design of online learning in COPs, we apply as the analytical optic a framework of Critical Realism (CR). In exploring the notion 'nexus of cognition' (NOC) and the emergence of an 'open source learning stream' (OSLS) in digital dialogue (DD), unfolding in virtual learning environments (VLEs), the paper further investigates the appropriateness in this respect of diverse scaffolding mechanisms, reaching from phatic teacher comments to academic, scaffolding video-clips. The empirical basis for studying these design aspects is constituted by learning designs from, both a University context and a University College context. The findings and discussion resulting from the analysis suggest that a meta-communicative learning-to-learn (L2L) approach to dialogue in the pedagogic aspects of the learning design may be fruitful in highlighting and promoting the establishment and maintenance of a collaborative digital dialogue that is conducive to deep learning in digital CoPs unfolding in VLEs.

Keywords:

Learning Design (LD), Collaborative Knowledge Building (CKB); Digital Dialogue (DD); Dialogue as the Curriculum (DC); Open Source Learning Stream (OSLS); Dialogue and Digitality (DD); Nexus of Cognition (NOC); Communities of Practice (CoPs); Learning-to-Learn (L2L)

1. Introduction

This study investigates 'dialogue' in three contexts of further education; the traditional presence lesson at Teachers College (UCN), blended learning with teacher-produced video-clips + online discussions at continued education for teachers (UCN) and blended learning + synchronous video conference at masters programmes at university (AAU). The first context is claiming to be dialogic by nature whereas the latter is claimed to lack opportunity for dialogue by the teachers of the first context. This study looks into this conflict at tries to explore the quality of the dialogue in all three contexts.

Dialogue is often referred to – in particular in Scandinavian contexts - as an inescapable element of any learning process (Dysthe 2001; Dysthe 2002, 339-352). Dialogue is a fundamental human condition and activity of "coming into existence" (Sorensen, 2006). Also within the research fields of Computer Supported Collaborative Learning (CSCL) and Networked Learning (NL), digitally enabled dialogue is given a high rank. Yet a majority of learning designs seems to do little to implement and practice this insight, and the traditional ways of regarding teaching and learning processes as matters of transmission and delivery still flourishes in practice.

We therefore wish to explore, not only new ways of understanding learning and utilizing technology, but also generate new concepts and notions as vehicles for creating learning strategies and processes for the 21st Century teaching and learning. In view of the limited success of designs of online collaborative learning processes, we need to look for both alternative sources of theoretical inspiration and ways of understanding collaborative learning and collaborative knowledge building - and the challenge of creating innovative learning designs in virtual learning environments.

This study investigates ways of designing teaching that utilises digital technology to re-organize education and to re-design teaching. There are two main problems that this study addresses: 1) the ICT that students bring to college is not used expediently, and 2) the ICT that teachers use during presence lessons produce a symbolic world of headlines in PowerPoint that simplifies the topic of teaching.

The teachers who act as informants in this study state that *dialogue with students is the most important part of their teaching*, and that *dialogue is the element in teaching they appreciate the most*. Nonetheless, in the traditional presence lessons investigated in this study, the teacher initiates, motivates and controls the conversation, and the conversation is mostly verifying the information that the teacher presents.

The context of the research in this study is an e-learning/blended learning environment on Aalborg University and a blended learning environment at University College North (Programme for Continued Education for Teachers) both of which are contrasted by data from traditional presence oriented teaching. The study is a nomadic investigation of how the conditions for dialogue change as a lesson shifts from traditional presence in a specific amount of time (a lesson) to a digital task in an online network (e-tivity) (Salmon 2013). Nomadic refers to the way we follow dialogue and not agents, institutions or technologies. The focus is on understanding the contexts that poses entelechy to catalyse dialogue and not on a specific context (Semetsky 2008).

2. What motivates a focus on dialogue?

A very pragmatic answer could be that the teachers in this study unanimously agree that dialogue is the most valuable part of traditional, presence teaching in their everyday practice. In a related action research development project (Kjærgaard and Sorensen 2014a), the same body of teachers were asked about which element they treasured the most in a traditional face-to-face lesson. They all replied that *dialogue* was by far the most important element.

Research shows that it is through dialogue – and the dialogic power of "Now" (Sorensen, 2006) - that the inspiration of both teachers and students urges them to engage in collaborative knowledge building (CKB) (Nilakanta et al. 2006, 56-74). It is when engaged in a dialogic "Now" that we establish what we name "a nexus of cognition' (NOC).

> The collaborative dialogue space is where "the play of learning" comes into existence through a tapestry of dialogue. It is where the strongest collaborative dynamic dialogue and strongest energy between participants. (Sorensen, 2016 p. 236)

The notion of *nexus of cognition* should be understood as a kind of hybrid thought that combines 'nexus of practice' (NOP) (Scollon and Scollon 2004) and "distributed cognition" (DC) (Salomon 1997; Grudin 2000, 174-196). *Nexus* describes *a relation* between different but inter-depending elements in a network.
The NOC identifies the intersection where learners learn together in an asynchronous discussion forum. It is the intersection where the learners intercept each other's cognition of something mediated through language.

2.1 A definition of dialogue

Bachtin states that: "*The very being of man (both internal and external) is profound communication. To be means to communicate*" (Bakhtin and Emerson 1993 p: 12). That statement denotes the condition that we are in constant linguistic entanglement with our peers and our surrounding context (supported by Heidegger, 1927). Dialogue means 'through language' and it encapsulates a type of language use that seeks to generate a higher-level synthesis of two or more differing utterances. Gadamar (Gadamer 1983) combines dialogue and Plato's notion "phronesis" as a certain way of using language in relation to understanding the world. Phronesis refers to communication that is "virtuous", "wise", practical and relies on a moral understanding of community, context and content. In the writings of Aristotle, it is also referred to as a type of knowledge that resembles "competence". In Aristotles writings about Platos notion of the paradox of Meno (how can I investigate into what I don't know? If I don't know it I can't see it – if I know it I don't need to investigate it), he writes that phronesis is important in order to learn. In that context phronesis, means to reflect on one's own abilities and knowledge of things while learning new things in order to use the aprori knowledge to open new fields of knowledge (Gadamer 1983). Dialogue is the type of communication that conveys 'moral understanding' based

on a shared plateau in a shared nexus of cognition with a shared repertoire and a shared purpose, reified in new levels of shared knowledge.

3. Towards a Definition of the Open Source Learning Stream

This section describes and explains how our definition of dialogue applies to notions of dialogue and NOC and OSLS.

The notion of NOC is associated with the notion of OSLS, as suggested by (Kjærgaard and Sorensen 2014b). In short, we define the OSLS as: *learners engaging dialogically in each other's learning process in a digital network*. For instance, several fellow students comment when a learner posts a reply to a thread in an online discussion, and the reply on and the thread starts building into a dialogue. Another example could be organizing theoretical subjects through the use of hashtags in twitter. Then following a hashtag and contributing to a hashtag constitutes an OSLS. The same example is applicable also in Facebook groups. This opens for closed circuit in closed groups, which allows insecure learners to work in a safe environment and to gain confidence before venturing out in the open with twitter etc.

The open source-learning stream can manifest itself in various ways:
- Synchronous or asynchronous individual learning log on smartphone
- Synchronous shared learning stream in a rhizomatic, digital network (e.g. Twitter, Facebook, Edmodo)
- Asynchronous shared learning stream in a rhizomatic, digital network (e.g. VLE discussion fora)

The OSLS, as coined by (Kjærgaard and Sorensen 2014a; Kjærgaard and Sorensen 2014b; Kjærgaard 2015) - is identified as *the utilization of online networking tools to track and both shared and individual mediated learning instances (LI)*, in which an LI is defined as *any conscious expression of learning*. LI should be understood as signs of learning that serve as building blocks for a kind of open learning process, in which a group of learners collaboratively help constitute and develop each other's individual learning processes. It is, however, problematic to view learning as a conscious act. Hence we define the mediated expressions as 'learning instances' and not as learning as such.

The idea behind the OSLS is developed around Marlene Charlotte Larsen's notion of "The Open Source Networked Identity" (Larsen 2007; Larsen 2013). Larsen argues that today's youth co-create their identities in social media networks (SNS). She states, that when someone posts something in a SNS, then all the feedback from her/his network adds information to the original post and, in turn, develops or constitutes the original post. In other words, the SNS co-creates the users identity and tracks signs of identity building. The OSLS captures a Computer-Supported Collaborative Learning process (CSCL) (Dillenburg et al. 1996), in which the idea of CSCL is sustained - but also expanded to incorporate the aspect of "nexus of cognition" (NOC) is viewed to take place through OSLS.

The NOC describes the *synthesis of thought* in the OSLS. It is reified in text or images in a stream of inputs presented on a digital platform. The reifications of the NOC constitute the OSLS. The idea is inspired the old proverb 'By learning you teach and by teaching you learn' (Discebdo docebis, docendo disces) (Sandys 1908, in the introduction; Littleton and Howe 2010 p 72) (Littleton and Howe 2010 chapter 4 pp 69)
The OSLS is the mediated stream whereas the NOC is the exact point of contact between learners in the stream.

The traditional way of organizing an educational programme has an analogue DNA. It is developed through decades of educational practices that revolve around transmission of information to homogenous crowds. As the digital era slowly started to have an effect on traditional teaching in the 90ies, assimilation of analogue behaviour through digital technology became the dominating practice. This claim may be illustrated most evidently in technologies such as e.g. PowerPoint and LMS (Reedy 2008, 143-162; Huffman and Huffman 2012, 583-590). Even though PowerPoint and LMS do not automatically negate dialogue, the practices that we have observed indicate that the constellation of face-to-face lessons, PowerPoint and LMS does not catalyse dialogue (at UC of University). That is not due to malfunction in the digital technologies, rather it is due to an organisation of the 'presence' programmes in question that are congealed in fixed structures that can't free the potential dialogue in LMS. This is interesting because the LMS functionality that creates the dialogical backbone of CSCL, MOOCS and e-learning in general are also at hand in a traditional face-2-face lesson it is just not put to use

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ISBN 978-1-86220-324-2

105

On the basis of the theoretical thoughts and ideas elaborated above, the authors of this paper make a plea for developing the traditional presence-oriented branch of education that incorporates approaches and designs that have more digital DNA, such as e.g. the traditions of distance education (DE), Computer-Supported Collaborative Learning (CSCL) and e-learning. In educational programmes and designs within these traditions, teaching and learning has a what we call "authentic digital DNA", representing a kind of insights and practice regarding both the utilization and the growing functionality of digital technology in teaching and learning.

With a 21st century educational design optic focusing on opening up educational programmes and processes to include open and novel phenomena like OSLSs enabling NOCs, our educational architects of today may be dressed to inspire the creation of successful teaching/learning processes pointing towards the 21st century.

Inspired by Negroponte's notion of 'Digitality' ((Negroponte 1996), the authors of this paper suggest that the envisioned true nexus integration of technology into a productuve learning process suited for the 21st century, should be a NOC process where the technology plays a role as co-constructor in creating what we call "a fruitful collaborative learning digitality" (FCL-D).

4. From Methodological Assumptions to Analytical Optic

This section gives an account of, on the one hand, the methodological point of departure of this study, and, on the other hand, of the construction of the theoretically informed analytical perspective applied in the analysis of data.

4.1 Methodology

The underlying approach to ontology, knowledge and reasoning in this study is *critical realism* (Bhaskar 2008). Critical realism is a philosophical movement mostly used within the social sciences (Sayer 1992; Danermark 2002). But recent reviews show that critical realism becomes more and more used in education research (Scott 2005, 633-646; Clegg* 2005, 415-428; Archer and others 2013; Scott 2013).

This study uses two general approaches to reasoning:
- one where we abduct the foundation for a pedagogical design on the basis of our practical experience and theoretical knowledge (abduction), and
- one where we retrospectively investigate why the pedagogical design work or does not work (retroduction) (Chiasson 2005, 223-242).

These two approaches to reasoning stem from the philosophy of pragmatism (Peirce 1998) and they are widely used in Critical Realist research. Bhaskar's theory seeks to make a productive synthesis between philosophy and science. This leaves room for making plausible speculation based on a synthesis of empiric and theoretical knowledge. Critical realists are interested in identifying the ontological mechanisms that cause something to emerge as an observable event. The research design is backwards from more epistemological designs because a critical realist is not primarily looking for knowledge of something but rather the ontology of the thing. This means that a critical realist reasons retroductively like a judge (Kant's example (Kant and Guyer 1998 p: xiii)) or like a detective (Bhaskar's example) looking for evidence, testimonies or indices that reveal the reasons why something happened. In the case of this paper dialogue is on 'trail' and the research focuses on locating mechanisms that catalyse dialogue and maybe mechanisms that obstruct dialogue.

4.2 Pedagogic Design: The Open Source Learning Stream

In this study we have tried to create a pedagogical design that does not give the learners what they think they need in order to learn new practices or what evaluation of the programmes might suggest. Instead, we tried to create a design that would make the individual learners experience for themselves what he or she needed to learn as a metacognitive exercise.

Consequently, through the means of abduction we design the genre OSLS, and subsequently implement the notion of OSLS in a practical learning context. Having done that, we look at the OSLS retroductively using a variety of approaches to reason in order to extract the interesting causal mechanisms. When we extract and identify the causal mechanisms in the OSLSs, we most likely may be able to interpret how and why the causal mechanisms had their effects, and how the context influenced these causal mechanisms.

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ISBN 978-1-86220-324-2

106

4.3 Learning Perspective: Online Communities of Practice (O-CoPs)

The traditional, presence classroom may be viewed as a potential and unrealized community of practice. Hence, it is plausible that a design for learning, designed to catalyse a community of practice, might benefit from a synthesis of experiences from both *digital DNA teaching* and *analogue DNA teaching*. "Learning design" is a process-oriented notion, not a static product-oriented concept or other mis-nomenclature that might emerge in the discource of learning. "Learning cannot be designed: It can only be designed for - that is facilitated or frustrated" (Wenger 1998 p 229).

In this understanding of 'learning there is no direct association to be identified between information in the world and experience in the community or in the individual learner. It is the individual and socio-cultural processing of information that leads to both shared and individual experience. Hence, the design for learning must facilitate sharing, collaboration, processing of information, organization of information, documentation of experiences - and a fruitful dialogue as the overall "tapestry" (Sorensen & Takle, 2002; Sorensen, 2006)

The primary focus of Wenger's social theory of learning is the view of learning as social participation as a process of being active participants in the practices of social communities and constructing identities in relation to these communities. Wenger defines a community as "a way of talking about the social configurations, in which our enterprises are defined as worth while pursuing, and our participation is recognizable as competence" (Wenger 1998, p. 4).

To Wenger, learning takes place through engagement in actions and interactions/dialogues, through which it reproduces and transforms the social structure and practices, in which it is situated. While it is viewed as the carrier of the evolution of practices and the absorption of newcomers into those, it is thought to also be the carrier of the development and transformation of identities: "Participation refers to a process of taking part and also to the relations with other that reflects this process. It suggests both action and connection (...)" (Wenger, 1998, pp. 55-56) and "[Reification is] the process of giving form to our experience by producing objects that congeal this experience into "thingness"" (Wenger, 1998, p. 58). Wenger argues that reification can refer to both process and product that it can take different forms, that it occupies a great deal of our collective energy, and that it shapes our experience (Wenger, 1998).

Summing up, our theoretical optic used for the analysis of this study incorporates the methodological position of critical realism, the learning theoretical position of CoPs and, finally, the notion of OSLS as a basis for approaching our data.

5. The Voice of the Data

This section presents our empirical data and puts on the glasses of our combined theoretical perspective to form the optic for the analysis of the data. The basis for addressing dialogue as the overall foundation for all the aspects of freeing the potential of a community of practice in hybrid analogue DNA/digital DNA environment is found, partly, in the literature (sources) and partly in our data.

5.1 Dialogue – and the Context of presence teaching at University Colleges (UC)

The general perception of the role of dialogue amongst teachers at University Colleges is that it is the most valuable part of their practice. When asked "What is the most important part of your everyday teaching practice", the teachers highlight the term "dialogue" in 36% of the free text qualitative responses in the survey.
They also use terms such as "engage" and "inspire", and they convey affection for their academic subject. In the quantitative section of the survey, dialogue is also rated very highly. Most teachers (64%) strongly agree that motivating academic dialogue is valuable to them, whereas only some teachers (37%) strongly agree that including examples for practice is valuable to them, and only some teachers (36%) strongly agree that sharing teaching duties with colleagues or teaching assistants is important to them. Only some teachers state that developing (22%) and sharing (29%) are valuable processes to them. Furthermore, only some teachers stated that including digital technology in their teaching is valuable (21%), and only a few teachers state that helping students utilize the students' digital technology in teaching/learning situations is valuable (11%). This indicates that analogue individuals teaching, predominantly, their own subject, dominate the teaching milieu. And that the nature of the dialogue is centred around the teacher's affection for the academic subject.

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Sime JA.

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107

The participation rate of the dialogue was also addressed. This revealed a discrepancy between the teachers' assumptions regarding how many students participate in the different types of dialogue, and the students' assessments of their participation in the classroom dialogue.

Typology of dialogue in the presence lesson*:*
1 Clarifying questions to teachers' presentation is regarded very frequent by the teachers (43%), whereas only 14% of the students rate this type of dialogue as very frequent.
2 Discussion of subjects initiated by the teacher: 46% of the teachers think that this happens very frequently, whereas only 14% of the students think that this type of dialogue is very frequent.
3 Discussion of subjects that spontaneously arise: 23% of the teachers think that this happens very frequently, whereas only 9% of the students think that this type of dialogue is very frequent.
4 General frequency of participation in dialogue:
* 23% of the teachers assess that 75% of the students participate in most dialogues, however, only 13% of the students strongly agree on that assessment.
* 33% of the teachers assess that 25% of the students participate in most dialogues and 22% of the students strongly agree on that assessment

The general picture is that the teachers seem to overestimate the actual participation rate in the dialogues according to the students' assessment. Our observations from earlier studies indicate that both students and teachers overestimate the actual rate of participation. This suggests that although dialogue might be interpreted as the most significant part of a lesson in University College teaching by both teachers and students, the actual frequency, participation rate and amount of time spend on dialogue differs from the reality of the situation.

5.2 Dialogue – and the Context of an Online MS program in Integrating Technology in Teaching/Learning

We looked at one of the four modules of the Danish master program. The objectives of the course were that the participants were to acquire insight in the issues of quality and methodology in design and delivery of ICT-integrating processes, relying on a self-reflective experience of one exemplary model (their own course).
The module lasted 3 weeks. It was divided into a period of reading and preparation (10 days) and a succeeding period of debate (2 weeks). The way the course progressed is mirrored in the table below:

Table 1: The structure of the module ICT-integrating processes

Preparation (10 days)	- Individual reading - Preparation in small groups (focusing on one of the three themes) - Distribute roles in group - Meta-reflect (in meta-forum)
Debate (2 weeks)	- Present, in one of the three theme/plenum fora, a relevant problem related to literature and learning theory - Initiate, stimulate, and guide the discussion and (at the end) synthesize the debate that develops from the presentation of your own group - Use of roles in plenum debate - Meta-reflect (in meta-forum)
Wrapping-up	Synthesis – done by moderator

According to the assignment given, the participants, in the preparation period, had to read the literature individually. The literature was distributed according to three themes within the course subject, "ICT-Based Learning Processes". The participants were asked to distribute a set of roles among the members of their online group (on average consisting of 4 participants). The roles were supposed to form, support and guide (e.g. moderate) their later discussion and to give the participants a concrete point of departure in the discussion. Some were presenters, some were moderators, etc. The description of the roles was clarified in the assignment. Both teacher and students agreed on committing themselves to attending the virtual learning space for a minimum of five times a week over the two weeks of debate. In the debate period each of the groups was asked to present, in the plenum forum belonging to their theme, a commonly agreed problem that was related to the literature. They were asked to initiate, conduct and wrap up the succeeding online plenum discussion that evolved from the problem of their group. In parallel with the discussions, the participants and the teacher were engaged in meta-reflections and meta-communication in a meta-forum, to reflect on and discuss the experiences and processes of the participants, as they evolved. The participants were graded, as described, in terms of both quantity and

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Sime JA.

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108

quality of their contributions (Stahl, 1999; Sorensen & Takle, 2002; Sorensen et al., 2002), using the PAA assessment model.

5.3 Dialogue – and the Context of a University College Course for In-Service Teachers in the Course on Literacy in Primary Schools

The second cluster of data stems from a course at University College designed as part of a larger programme for continued education for In-service teachers. It is taken from a seminar/distance course (10 ECTS) theoretical and practical aspects of literacy in primary school. The design principles were derived from interviews with the teachers of the course: 1) Dialogue in focus, 2) inclusion, 3) the individual learner in focus and 4) the teachers as partners (not instructors) in dialogue (Kjærgaard and Sorensen 2014a). The course is intended for in-service teachers. It combines 2-day seminars with a 5 week e-learning course and it is designed to include less experienced students in the learning process.

In this course, the online dialogue is combined with video clips that explain the theoretical concepts and describe the tasks. This eliminates part of the frustration that sometimes occur in courses conducted through online discussion fora.

6. Findings

We found that what generally goes on in a presence lesson is another type of conversation then 'dialogue'. The sensation of being physically together has a certain quality to it that the informants appreciate, however, it is difficult to pin point what that quality is. The quality of being together is not necessarily tied to actually learning but more to the immediate plateau of intensity that it provides. The two other contexts does not provide the same immediate plateau of intensity, however, it hones in on actual dialogue on academic subjects. In that context, it is less pedagogical and more focused on learning.

Schematic overview of findings:

	Presence lesson	Blended learning in UC	Blended learning at university
Dialogue	Questionable educational effect but evaluated as very rich by the teachers	Moderate depth in dialogue but evaluated as very educational by the students	Deep arguments and relatively deep dialogues, evaluated as very educational by the students
Fixation in learning process	The students are relatively free to do as they please according to their own study ethics. The progression of the lesson is not affected by the individual student's engagement.	The students are fixated in their own learning process. There is no progression without their own engagement. The video clips and the dialogue in online forum have no entelechy in itself the entelechy belongs to the student.	The students are fixated in their own network of peers and supervisor. There is no progression without their own engagement.
Outcome	Social recognition + learning	Learning + academic recognition	Learning + academic recognition

The findings in the context of traditional presence lessons suggest that the dialogue that the teachers praise does not have the quality and characteristics that the teachers assume. It is questionable whether the dialogue is in fact dialogue (according to our definition) and furthermore the participation rates are not as high as the teachers assume. Hence, it might be beneficiary to the learning process if teachers develop other types of dialogue. A quote from a master student at the Danish MS that pinpoints some of the issues that regard students' background and general ability to engage in online discussion:

> To me the biggest challenge has been to build knowledge of the new theories introduced in the online dialogue. My pedagogical background is limited since I'm an engineer by trade so I knew form the beginning that it would be a challenge. It has been difficult to grasp and navigate through all the notions, posts, comments and theories that were brought up in the online dialogues. In connection to that it has been helpful to have a colleague that has completed the course before me

Proceedings of the 10th International Conference
on Networked Learning 2016, Edited by: 109
Cranmer S, Dohn NB, de Laat M, Ryberg T &
Sime JA.

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to talk to and being part of a workgroup has also been really good. The dialogues have taught me to reflect over my everyday work to an extent that I didn't even know was possible and also to connect theoretical notions to my teaching practice. (Student from the Danish MS programme)

In relation to this statement, the students form the UC course also express slight frustration in relation to the solitude of "learning behind the computer screen". A student puts it this way: '*I need to talk to co-students to clarify that I'm on the right track*'. However, on the positive note, 40% of the students say that they feel that they learn more from this pedagogic design than what they would have learned from traditional teaching.

We found that there were two key factors to the prosperity of the dialogue:
- Students could watch the video clips multiple times, and
- Teachers used phatic language to encourage the dialogue in the online discussion.

The students indicated that they watched the video once, just for being introduced to the topic, then a second time while taking notes, and then they would skip through the videos a third time while doing the activities for the lessons.

The students in the UC study were less academically trained that the students on the online MS programme in Integrating Technology in Teaching/Learning. In other words, scaffolding of the learning process with academic video-clips proved a good idea. The statistical dispersion shows that the students watch the videos between 2 and 6 times, with an average of 3 times. This actually means that a teacher in a traditional classroom should explain the same topic 3 times before the students could be expected to understand the content and engaging in activities on the basis of the topic. The stress and cognitive load of traditional classroom teaching is taken out of the context in an asynchronous digital dialogue.

The student has more in depth knowledge of the topic before venturing into the online dialogue. Thus, the dialogue becomes more focused. The fact that all students share the same basic theoretical understanding of the topic but have different experiences in practice makes the dialogue interesting, new and (potentially) innovative. We found that if the teacher makes a phatic comment in the beginning of the thread (after 3-4 number of posts), then the students start commenting on each other's posts, adapting a collaborative attitude, and generating a NOC that opens for more aspects on the theoretical topic, when applied to different practices.

7. Conclusion

The three educational contexts compared and contrasted in this study have somewhat similar curriculum, similar demography of students and comparable levels of depth and difficulty in learning objectives. However, the level and dialogic quality of the academic communication in either lesson or online forum differs.
The dialogic quality in the presence lesson is lower and actual dialogue is less frequent then in the online discussions.
The general assessment/presumption of the quantitative and qualitative state of the presence lesson dialogue appears overrated by the teachers in the lesson. The teachers in the survey seem to regard dialogue as very important to learning. Nevertheless, in essence, a pertinent question may arise: Are the face-to-face dialogues unfolding in classrooms actually dialogues? Viewed from the perspective of the present piece of research, the authors' answer to this question is negative.

The study also shows that teacher produced video clips are likely to be just as prone to facilitate learning as a presence instruction. In fact, it gives the student agency to determine how many times he/she needs to watch the clips in order for him/her to engage in dialogue. This gives the student the opportunity to reflect on what he/she actually needs to learn and by that create metacognitive awareness.

So, what we get from presence lessons is something else then dialogue; friends, romantic relations, a sense of 'going to work', a sense of working just by being present and the academic content that is in the PowerPoint etc. On the other hand, the study shows that the dialogue in the online discussion most certainly leads to learning if the students engage in the dialogue, but it is less likely to form sustaining relationships.

Consequently, we suggest development of hybrid designs that synthesise the dialogical advantages of online dialogue, the convenience of teacher-produced videos and the intensity of being together in actual reality.

Proceedings of the 10th International Conference
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Sime JA.

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110

We acknowledge the deleuzean point that the virtual is just as real as the actual (Colebrook 2002 p: 1) and in this context the virtual is even more real than the actual. The online dialogue becomes 'a pure place' (Scollon and Scollon 2003) while the conversation in the presence lesson becomes 'polluted'. The online dialogue achieves a virtual purity of 'one discourse' whereas the presence lesson contains multiple discourse of which some are relevant to the learning process and other have a more private character. We promote a hybrid design that put the students in the centre of the dialogue, which means that only when they engage in the dialogue will they be engaged in learning.

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112