

Collaboration and Technology

Concluding Remarks

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ALT-C Manchester September 8



The View from G Level

The Mandate...

- What was the point (I was asked) of being here at this conference?
- What was the point of *coming together*?
- Do we critically reflect on theory, practice, or do we merely reinforce our existing prejudices?
- What do we *take home*?

The Process...

- Opening remarks...
- Three days of short papers, research papers, posters, informal discussions
- Summaries collected by the Chairs and passed on to me
- This summary...

The Terrain...

- Institutional Collaboration
 - E-College Wales, Kingston College, JISC, CAMEL, League of European Research Universities
- Learner Collaboration
 - Talk2Learn, UKeU+York, CABWeb, BOGLE, CALL
- Teacher Collaboration
 - COLA repository, LAMS, Critical Writing Skills



James

Watt

The Question...

- Is there a *technology* of collaboration?
 - (as in the wider sense of ‘technology’)
- Factors: trust, abilities, distance and infrastructure, funding...
- Methodologies: process, analysis, collaboration types
- Tools: Moodle WebCT, portals, conferencing, wikis...

Presumptions (or Observations)

- Size of group... small groups are better, large groups “too chaotic” (too much conversation)
- Fixed (and short) duration
- Structured (sometimes heavily structured)

Contrast this with the concept of *community*...

Cases in Point...

- Designing and Realising Collaborative Student Activities on CABWEB
- COLEG On Line Assessment Project
- *The Question*: can collaboration be reduced to filling out fields in a form?
- If not...
 - *Why not*, but more importantly...
 - Why would it be treated as if it could?

The Collaborative Gene...

- Terri Kinnison: “What characteristics does an organization or system possess (and display) at a particular stage of collaborative partnership? Is there a collective ‘style’ that determines what collaboration is possible?”

A Question of Methodology?

- Contrasting approaches to requirements gathering:
 - Barry Jones – build something and see what users do
 - Janet McCracken – close study of users' current practices, plus interviews to explain
- “Monolithic projects require monolithic methodology?” ... ADDIE “Where was the creativity going to come from?”



Canal Street

A Question of Ontology?

- Is there an *essence* of collaboration that can be understood independently of...
 - The players?
 - The technology?
- Does what we are looking for reflect our theoretical stance? Do we *need* a theoretical stance?
 - Logical Positivist? Behaviourist? vs
 - Phenomenology? Critical Theory? Feminism?

...Does Not Want to be Joined Up

- *Why* we think collaboration is a good idea... various suggestions offered by authors (share resources, learn new perspectives, etc.)
- *Motivation*... various motivations described included paying people, funding, grading people, funding, etc

Disconnect between these two?

This Conference...

- An observation so common as to be hackneyed... once again, the vast majority of sessions were lectures
- *Why?* (Let's not simply assume that what we are doing is *inherently* dysfunctional, but rather, that there is a *reason* for this)
- Contrast with the groans in the collaborative session – “We’re locking the doors”



Chaos....

You Are Free to Leave...

- In *my* view, the question of collaboration is a question of governance
- Parallel between collaboration theory and political theory, with descriptions ranging from authoritarianism to anarchy
- Anarchy was universally considered 'bad'
- Can there be 'too much' conversation'?
- Are you free to leave?

The Lecture...

- May be the form that (counterintuitively) offers maximal freedom to the audience
- And hence, may be favoured by learning professionals (at least in their *own* learning) because it preserves this degree of freedom
- Contrast: learning design, LAMS, linear design.....

Two Theories of Collaboration

- The essentialist theory... collaboration is based on some sort of *sameness* – same value, same outcome, same tool, same funding body ... needs external motivation
- The exchange theory... collaboration is based on interaction between *autonomous* and *diverse* entities ... based on intrinsic motivation

Cold Cures...

- With this cure, you can cure a cold in only seven days, which left untreated would last as long as *a week!*
- The question: would collaboration occur even if we did nothing?
- And if so... is *collaboration* actually the objective of collaboration theory...



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