

Title: **Spaces, places and technologies: can we know, value and shape policy to provide what students need to support their digital literacy practices?**

Presenters: **Martin Oliver and Lesley Gourlay**
Institute of Education, University of London

Abstract

The paper will report on a research project that analyses how students learn, in order to inform institutional policy.

SEDA Values

Indicate which SEDA Values may be relevant to your proposal:

| | | | |
|--|---|--|---|
| An understanding of how people learn | X | Scholarship, professionalism and ethical practice | X |
| Working and developing learning communities | | Working effectively with diversity and promoting inclusivity | X |
| Continuing reflection on professional practice | | Developing people and processes | |

Session Learning Outcomes

By the end of this session, delegates will be able to:

- Relate the idea that “technology is society made durable” (Latour, 1999) to values and politics in the practice of higher education
- Understand theoretical perspectives that address the situated, material elements of students’ learning experiences
- Recognise that the phrase, ‘the student experience’, implies a singular, homogeneous situation, whereas evidence shows diversity in students’ experiences
- See how qualitative data can that reveal values can be used to shape institutional policy in order to enhance the learning experiences of students

Session Outline

Key issues to be addressed are:

Values can be espoused; they can be enacted; but they can also be represented in the way that structures and systems are created (Feenberg, 1999). Students’ engagement with Higher Education is shaped in important ways by the spaces in which they study, the resources they

work with and the materials they produce, things that are widely overlooked in educational research (Fenwick, Edwards & Sawchuk, 2011). This lack of scrutiny limits our ability to understand the values of higher education, and how they vary not only by discipline but also setting – which is an issue, since technologies (including resources and designed spaces) are so much more durable than talk or action in the way that they shape society (Latour, 1999).

In this paper, we report on a research project that explored sociomaterial aspects of students' experiences of learning. 12 students (3 each of PGCE students, Masters' students, Doctoral students and Masters' students studying at a distance) undertook multimodal journaling over a period of 9 months to document the ways in which they used resources, technologies and spaces to be 'digitally literate', in order to achieve success in their studies. In addition to generating images, videos and field notes, the students were each interviewed three or more times to generate accounts of their studies.

The analysis of this dataset showed how markedly different 'success' was, in terms of resources and practices, to different students. It demonstrated that the phrase, "the student experience", is misleadingly singular: students' experiences varied considerably. It also revealed where and when their learning was or was not valued. Examples of such situations will be provided, to show how the configuration of spaces, technologies and other resources affects students' ability to succeed in their studies, and what individuals did to overcome these.

Finally, we will illustrate how these issues relate to institutional policy making, looking at an example of how evidence about student experience does (and does not) link through to institutional action.

Session Activities

The research paper will involve an initial presentation (30 minutes), followed by discussion (15 minutes).

The presentation will introduce background research into digital literacy (5 minutes); the theory that informs this (5 minutes); the approaches we have used to engage students and develop a better understanding of their experience (5 minutes); examples of the practices students engage in and the issues these raise (10 minutes); and how we have acted on the implications for institutional policy and practice (5 minutes).

Indicative questions for the discussion include:

- How values are shaped by the configuration of spaces, technologies and resources we provide for our students
- How qualitative research can reveal aspects of diversity and inclusivity
- How policies can be made more responsive to the varied experiences of students

References

Fenwick, T, Edwards, R. & Sawchuk, P. (2011) *Emerging Approaches to Educational Research: Tracing the Socio-material*. London: Routledge.

Feenberg, A. (1999) *Questioning Technology*. London: Routledge.

Latour, B. (1999) *Technology Is Society Made Durable*. In Law, J., ed., *Sociology of Monsters*.