Panel organised by Dr Sally Wiggins (Linköping University)

Discursive psychology in educational settings: Pedagogy in practice

McQuade, R., Mabley, S., Wiggins, S., Ventura-Medina, E. & Anderson, T. (July, 2018). *Using discursive psychology to investigate knowledge and task complexity formulations in student-led problem-based learning tutorials.* Oral presentation at ICCA 2018: 5th International Conference of Conversation Analysis, Loughborough University, UK.

Traditional didactic teaching has been criticised for placing students in overly submissive learning roles. As a result, more emphasis has been placed upon student-centred pedagogies, where students are placed at the core of learning as a means of developing autonomy and interpersonal capabilities. Despite these efforts, however, little research has considered the group learning experience at a fine-grained level. Without this insight, it remains unclear how active learning can best be exploited within educational contexts to develop 'best practice'. A thorough exploration of 'what works' in engineering teaching is therefore necessary, and through discursive psychology, attention can be given to the intricate psychological business which underlines student group interactions. The focus of this paper is on the ways in which students in tutor-less groups manage learning as an active process through formulations of knowledge and task complexity. The data comprise of video recordings of problem-based learning tutorials from a chemical engineering undergraduate programme in a UK university; 23 students were involved, and the data amassed is around 30 hours of video recordings. This naturalistic data was analysed using discursive psychology and conversation analysis, centring on the negotiation of task formulation, and in particular, instances where task complexity was resisted by the team. During task formulation, students continuously positioned knowledge complexity as problematic in terms of holding negative consequences for team productivity ("if we do use other stuff it's gonna make it a lot harder"). They made recurrent justifications for adhering to simplicity, where these arguments were co-constructed as being for the greater good of 'our team', and thus, individual accountability in opting for the 'easy option' was diminished. This 'clarification talk' followed a specific sequence, where proposals for task management were made, oriented to by the other group listeners, and then legitimised (or rejected) as a course of action (Stokoe, 2000). Rather than addressing the whole question, students tend to hone in on only one aspect of the problem and have a preference for dividing the tasks between each other. Previous research has shown that 'novice' learners tend to focus less on the processes and 'journey' of acquiring knowledge, and more on a 'quick fix' to the end solution (Camacho & Good, 1989). The paper will conclude with a discussion on the relevance of discursive psychology (DP) as a methodological approach for analysing knowledge and task complexity as an interactionally relevant concern. This attends to literatures in education on strategic learning, as much as it does to developing DP within pedagogical and educational practices.

References

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