ABSTRACT

In a constantly changing and increasingly globalised world high-quality education is pivotal. This poster presents ethnographic case study research on how expert instructors in the field of higher education design and bring to life student-centred learning environments that provide students with opportunities for deep learning. First, a conceptual framework was developed based on an expansive literature review. Secondly, three selected courses at Harvard Graduate School of Education (USA) were investigated between 2009 and 2011 to discern instructional surface-level and deeper-level quality features and to inform the development of a situative educational model. Implications for higher education policy and practice were derived to help educational managers, administrators, curriculum developers, instructors and faculty developers to navigate student-centred course design and implementation decisions.

CASE STUDY RESEARCH – DATA COLLECTION

The selected courses were designed by expert instructors and conducted repeatedly before this empirical study was carried out in these classrooms (e.g., Engle & Conant, 2002). Data collection methods involved:

Data collection methods | Collected data | Mixed-methods approach
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Participant observations | 41 class sessions (81% of class time) | Qualitative
Videotaping in the classroom | 84 hours (78% of class time) | Qualitative and quantitative
Semi-structured student interviews | 16 interviews, 27 interview hours | Qualitative
Semi-structured instructor interviews | 3 interviews, 8 interview hours | Qualitative
Course evaluations surveys (students) | N = 404; 12 student cohorts | Qualitative and quantitative

DATA ANALYSIS – DEEPER-LEVEL FEATURES

Synthesising and averaging the activities that took place in these three courses based on the video analysis, discussions (30%), student-led explorations (27%), lectures/metatalk (14%, of which 5% refers to metatalk) and teacher-led explorations (13%) were the most practised activities in these courses (see Figure below).

Course activities – total and case comparison (event sampling, Bakeman & Gottman, 1997)

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<tr>
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<th>Total</th>
<th>Duckworth</th>
<th>Blythe</th>
<th>Wilson</th>
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<td>Lectures and metatalk</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>34</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher-led explorations</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>23</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher demonstrations</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>Reading discussions</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Check-ins/Updates &amp; News</td>
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The situative data analysis of deeper-level quality features focused on how the instructors:

- scaffold students' knowledge construction processes,
- position students for participation in classroom interactions,
- cultivate a classroom community of learners over time,
- and on the challenges these classrooms present for instructors and/or students.

The qualitative data analysis applied a grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Interaction analysis was applied to relevant video sequences (Rex & Schiller, 2009).

RESULTS: DEEPER-LEVEL FEATURES

- Performances of understanding (concepts and practices)
- Self-regulated learning
- Identity development
- High cognitive demands and required agency of the learning tasks

IMPLICATIONS

- More impact of situative perspectives on learning and instruction (content and context) on higher education policy and practice
- More impact of situative perspectives on learning and instruction (content and context)
- Feedback and formative assessment cultures
- Positive emotional climate of mutual respect, trust and belonging

REFERENCES


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