



How Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) may help to inform ALL

Key Words

CHAT, ALL, Rules, Object, Academic Writing.

Abstract

Analysis of ALL practices in the literature is often accompanied by the use of various binaries; students and tutors (Brockman, Taylor, Crawford & Kreth, 2010; Coffin et al., 2003), quality and deficit (Richardson & Skinner 1990; Sultan, 2013) and generic verses embedded (Wingate, Andon & Cogo, 2011; Beckman & Rayner, 2011; McWilliams & Allen, 2014). These binaries may diminish the complexity of ALL practice. Focusing on academic writing, this presentation provides a rationale for analysing ALL as part of a complex, dynamic, and changing system affected by and affecting multiple contributing factors. Cultural Historical Activity Theory (Engeström, 1987) (henceforth CHAT) is presented as suitable framework for the analysis of ALL practices, allowing a focus on stability, historicity, change and contradiction. CHAT affords the analysis of academic writing as an object of study within its socio-cultural and historical context. Positioning writing (rather than students) as the object of enquiry, signals a move away from the binaries of tutors/students and quality/deficit. CHAT promotes a complex understanding of activity through the theory's interacting components of: subject, object, tools, rules, community, and division of labour. The current diversification of higher education and the impact of neo liberal policies necessitate the application of a theory which can encompass change, challenge and contradiction. This presentation will demonstrate the usefulness of CHAT as a tool for understanding ALL practice.

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