Lesley Gourlay, Martin Oliver
Institute of Education, UK

Technologies and text trajectories: the curriculum as emergent network (0253)

Programme number: L7

Research Domain: Digital University

The degree to which everyday social and professional practice is technologically mediated is not often recognized in the literature (e.g. Latour, 2005). Additionally, the extent to which textual practices permeate practice receive little recognition in mainstream accounts of academic practice and work. The university provides a striking case of this, as academic subjectivities and entities such as 'the discipline' are constituted primarily via textual practices - many of which are technologically-mediated. However, the textual nature of the curriculum is often overlooked in analyses which privilege abstract models over fine-grained analyses of how curriculum work is achieved in day-to-day academic practice.

Curriculum research in Higher Education has been relatively under-theorised, although work such as Barnett & Coate's analysis (2005) has developed less-recognised aspects of the curriculum, such as identities and being, in addition to addressing epistemological concerns around knowledge practices. Further, studies such as Fraser and Bosanquet's (2006) have contributed to the development of theoretical frames for curricula, using a phenomenographic approach to distinguish conceptions of the curriculum as unit, programme, student experience and learning and teaching process, and then theorising this by drawing on Habermas' knowledge-constitutive interests. However, there still remains a dearth of qualitative empirical evidence about the material and textual processes by which curricula are conceived of, created and sustained by academics and other social actors in the complex digitally-mediated domains of the contemporary academy..

This paper will report on a set of case studies addressing these processes on a day-to-day level, exploring how institutional policies, technologies and practices play out in academic work. We will argue that established frameworks such as Communities of Practice (e.g. Lave & Wenger 1991) are inadequate to frame this, since they fail to theorise the implicit, emergent and private nature of these practices (Lea, 2005, Gourlay 2011) and the agentive role of technologies. We adopt a sociomaterial perspective, drawing on concepts from Actor Network Theory (e.g. Latour 2005) to provide a more nuanced analysis of this complex area of practice in the academic workplace.

The analsyis will focus on data from a JISC-funded multimodal longitudinal journaling study exploring academics' engagements with technologies around the production of curricula, drawing on a methodology already deployed to study students' production of digitally-mediated academic texts (Gourlay & Oliver 2013). Through this, we will explore the translation and enrolment of technologies and text to curate, assemble and reconfigure the complex set of

social and semiotic resources and artifacts we call 'the curriculum'. We will also discuss how struggles around the production of professional identities take place via these practices which are highly complex, largely invisible and implicated in the operation of power. Drawing on the concept of 'text trajectories' (e.g. Blommaert 2001, 2005), we analyse how 'the curriculum' emerges via a process of movements of verbal, print and digital texts across a range of apparent boundaries, such as digital / analogue and verbal / written. We focus particularly on how texts perform multiple functions within the curriculum; how lecturers and students are positioned as social actors in various ways in relation to these texts; and how the texts themselves change functionalities as they move / reconfigure in different interactional settings and domains.

The paper will conclude that, rather than being simplistic or naïve, accounts of the materiality of curricula offer valuable insights into this otherwise neglected and undertheorised aspects of academic practice. Implications for research methodology, theory and practice around the development of curricula will be explored.

References

Blommaert, J. (2001) Context is/as critique. *Critique of Anthropology* 21(1), 13-32.
Blommaert, J. [2005] *Discourse: A Critical Introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Gourlay, L. and Oliver, M. (2013) Beyond 'the social': digital literacies as sociomaterial practice. In Goodfellow, R and Lea, M. (eds.) *Literacy in the Digital University: Learning as Social Practice in a Digital World.* London: Routledge/ Taylor and Francis.
Gourlay, L. (2011). New lecturers and the myth of 'communities of practice'. *Studies in Continuing Education*, *33*(1), 67-77.
Jones, C. (2010) Net generation students: agency and choice and the new technologies. *Journal of Computer-Assisted Language Learning* 26 (5): 344-356.
Latour, B. (2005) *Reassembling the Social*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
Lave, J. & Wenger. E. (1991) Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Lea, Mary (2005). 'Communities of practice' in Higher Education: useful heuristic or educational model? In Barton, David and Tusting, Karin (eds.) *Beyond Communities of Practice: Language, Power and Social Context*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 180–197.
Price, S. and Oliver, M. (2007) A Framework for Conceptualising the Impact of Technology on Teaching and Learning. *Educational Technology & Society*, 10 (1), 16-27.