

POSTER PRESENTATION

An Exploration of Language Use in the Context of CMC

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Abstract

The purpose of this poster is to outline emerging work that is being undertaken at Glasgow Caledonian University to incorporate learning technology into an element of the first-year introduction to psychology module. Currently, for the initial pilot study, computer conferences have been set up for the students and their task is to generate ideas relevant to their essay topics and discuss them online. The students that participate in the online discussion groups are awarded bonus marks for their essays, depending on the extent and quality of their contribution. It is hoped that during the course of the investigation, the study will be repeated a number of times using a different sample of introductory psychology students each semester, with roughly fifty students in each sample. The learning strategy that has been adopted in this investigation is based upon constructivist and socio-cultural learning principles.

The focus of the first part of this investigation is on the exploration of language use in the context of computer-mediated communication (CMC), with regard to stylistic usage, rhetorical and linguistic strategies and patterns of variability and consistency in the content and form of the discourse. The consequences of using a particular style will be examined. Particular attention will be paid to gender differences in linguistic style and participation. If gender differences are found to exist, this has implications for the composition and effectiveness of learning groups in a CMC context. As CMC is becoming increasingly established as an important medium for teaching and learning, so there is a need to understand and manage this medium so that its learning potential may be optimised.

The rest of the investigation will explore the ways in which groups communicate online, addressing issues of group function and process as they occur in a meaningful setting. The relevance of established frameworks of group dynamics for examining the interaction in online discussion groups will be examined. Videoed focus groups and questionnaires will be used to investigate participant attitudes about group behaviour and the construction of learning relationships online. The potential usefulness of the conference transcripts as tertiary courseware will also be examined. The research takes on a naturalistic perspective and mainly uses the qualitative methods of ethnographic observation and discourse analysis. However, some quantitative methods will also be used, e.g. to examine rates of participation.