

13 Lived experience of connected practice: Clavier

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Abstract

Actors in a large scale Online Intercultural Exchange (OIE) (O'Dowd, 2016) known as Clavier (MacKinnon, 2016) took time to reflect on their personal experiences of an OIE Network (OIN) through creating auto ethnographic accounts (Nunan & Choi, 2010). Data reflect different contexts, roles and identities. The data were analysed using a grounded theory method to explore the various perspectives, convergences, and divergences. Through this analysis, “[t]he researcher creates an explication, organisation and presentation of the data rather than discovering order *within* the data. The discovery process consists of discovering the ideas the *researcher* has about the data after interacting with it” (Charmaz, 1990, p. 1169, cited in Willig, 2013, p. 77, emphasis in original). This ‘discovery process’ was followed by a series of online discussions where we grappled with the question of how best to present this complex picture with its many facets given the short period of presentation time in the conference. An account emerged of the transformative nature of connected practice. The process of preparing this performance for the UNICollaboration conference in Krakow took the actors to a new point in their professional lives.

Keywords: connected practice, complexity, impact, co-creation.

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1. Introduction

Communicating the various perspectives of practitioners who have designed and delivered a large-scale virtual exchange in their various contexts over several years to an audience who may be unfamiliar with the subject matter within a short presentation could be confusing and ultimately fail to achieve our objectives. The presentation was to combine our analysis with visualisations produced as a result of open interactions through social media, sharing insights into the factors that have contributed to the richness and challenges of connected practice and how this can forge professional identities through the relationships within a network. The constraints of time and place, the richness of the story we had to tell led to a decision to turn the presentation into a performance. We decided that if our audience were to understand the transformative nature of our lived experience, we would need to involve them in an unexpected event which would allow a real insight into the nature of virtual exchanges. Here I will explain the process of collaborative script writing and share the product we co-created.

2. Methodology

The ‘discovery process’ used by the practitioners, as described in the abstract, was the first step to uncover how each of us perceived our lived experience of implementing virtual exchange. Our aim was to arrive at a deeper shared understanding arising from reading each other’s individual auto ethnographic accounts, which we published online and shared through Google Docs. These accounts were encoded for synergies and points of divergence using a system devised by each individual practitioner in order to allow for individual meaning making. The terminology used by each practitioner to thematically describe their perceptions of the accounts was then the focus of our online discussions and informed our decision making when creating the script for our performance. Aware of the importance of conveying a clear understanding of what it meant to live through a virtual exchange, we agreed to use a multimedia approach to communicating the experience. Clavier’s virtual exchange tasks were multimodal, these were compiled onto a Padlet board – a virtual notice board –

so that audience members and those outside the conference could explore and comment on them. We started to script our performance in order to place our audience in the midst of some of the lived experiences of Clavier, offering them an opportunity to witness first hand some of the challenges, frustrations, and epiphanies experienced to create space for them to draw their own conclusions about the nature of virtual exchange and the impact it has on one's physical existence. The script was accompanied by a set of slides including video clips and images which presented visual metaphors to support the concepts emerging from the data analysis. Our performance space was a university classroom with a data projector, screen, and conventional seating.

3. Results

The auto ethnographies and further information about the practitioners revealed different interpretations and experiences as seen in [Table 1](#) below.

Table 1. Auto ethnographies

Teresa	Institutional profile ²	Stories of connection : http://teresa-nextsteps.blogspot.co.uk/2017/11/stories-of-connection.html More stories of connection: http://teresa-nextsteps.blogspot.co.uk/2017/11/more-stories-of-connection.html
Marcin	Institutional profile ³	https://tinyurl.com/y7zzhho6
Claude	Institutional profile ⁴	https://tinyurl.com/y9av5pk7
Simon	Institutional profile ⁵	http://tachesdesens.blogspot.co.uk/2018/02/what-shines-out.html http://tachesdesens.blogspot.co.uk/2018/02/defining-clavier_11.html

2. <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/modernlanguages/academic/teresa-mackinnon/>

3. <http://www.ifa.filg.uj.edu.pl/marcin-kleban>

4. <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/modernlanguages/academic/claude-tregoat/>

5. <http://lrl.uca.fr/rubrique46.html>

The encoding produced the following shown in [Table 2](#).

Table 2. Encoding the data

Teresa	https://tinyurl.com/y94tq37t
Simon	https://tinyurl.com/yaaugf5l
Claude	https://tinyurl.com/y8xfxvg5

The script planning was undertaken using a negotiated framework built upon the themes that had emerged from the auto ethnographies:

- spaces, identities, and affinities,
- unpredictable growth,
- gardening – teacher roles, and
- connections and mutations,

The script emerged through discussing each of these themes as encoded during the discovery process in order to unpack the meaning making each of us had thematically identified and defining ways to make our audience experience them and draw their own conclusions. This sociocultural approach ([Vygotsky, 1998](#)) was adopted in order to communicate our professional development through the virtual exchange to others in a way that they could also be impacted ([Shabani, 2016](#)). The resultant slides present three phases that incorporated the themes above:

- spaces, identities,
- nature, nurture, network, and
- criss-crossing.

The collaborative script writing experience was a lively one. It was carried out through several online synchronous meetings and shared Google Docs. It consisted of a debate on the terminology used in the encoding process towards a shared conceptualisation of the results of our earlier data analysis. The resultant script is available in the annex and includes references to slide numbers and multimedia as it was shown during the performance.

The last words should be left to those who experienced the performance. Feedback from audience members surveyed anonymously online after the event described the performance as “thought provoking” and “interesting”. It would appear that the performance was sufficiently challenging to provoke reflection. When asked to reflect on the experience, the responses showed audience members had engaged in the sense making we had hoped for:

“Confusing at first even if I realised that it was a role play and was a little sceptical to the style. As it progressed I began to accept the format and found the latter stages very interesting”.

“The presentation was puzzling at the beginning as I did not expect the presentation to be in such a different/theatrical format... However, the format was particularly effective in conveying the ‘lived experience’ and thus perfectly matched the aim of this presentation”.

4. Conclusions

The most important aspects of our understanding of the lived experience of OIE reveal similarities with understanding our physical existence and agency in the real world. Understanding of context, situatedness, and identity matter to our ability to connect with others effectively. In the virtual world, this includes the digital skills to manage our presence. The willingness to be open to the ideas of others and to review our role as a teacher or a learner can speed progress and innovation. A commitment to experiment and reflect both alone and with others provides fertile ground for network growth. It would appear that, as in life itself, resilience and positivity contribute to overcoming the many barriers we face.

The script writing process drew on the various strengths of the Clavier team. It combined the digital creativity which had featured throughout the Clavier virtual exchange with the metaphors and reflections of the actors involved. The process of reflecting on our own experiences, followed by reading and analysing each other’s reflections, and then coming together in order to co-create and perform a

play took us all beyond our comfort zones. However, collaborating over the past seven years in the Clavier project had familiarised us with the skills and qualities needed to achieve a shared goal. The mutual respect and trust which had been nurtured over that time made the shared creative process possible. Co-creation is the most complex and demanding of telecollaborative activities (O’Dowd & Ware, 2009), and in committing to this participation at the conference we had proven to ourselves how professionally transformative the virtual exchange experience had been for us all.

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