

Out of sight, out of mind?: Pedagogical and equity implications of videoconferencing for healthcare students' education in rural areas

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Project Summary

We began this research from the stance that as educators in a rural area we need critical awareness of using video-conferencing as an educational tool. Firstly, by being critically aware we can facilitate positive educational experiences in rural areas. Secondly, critical awareness can help prevent inadvertently reinforcing the 'problem that the solution is aiming to address', that is, that rural areas are all about 'disadvantage, challenge and difference'. Our research question was: What are pedagogical and equity implications of videoconferencing for healthcare students' education in rural areas?

The model we developed introduces the concept of "joining-via-technology-from..." and enables us to step back and discuss the parts of the concept while keeping the whole concept in view.

Key Points

Learning through "joining via technology from ..." is complex.

The term "joining-via-technology from..." reflects this complexity encompassing van Manen's (2014) existential dimensions: "joining" (relational and temporal), "via-technology" (techno-material), "from" (spatial), and "learning" (corporeal).

The whole view of "joining-via-technology from ..." has four interrelated domains (see Fig1):

- CURRENCY as value for acquiring ...
- CURREN(T)CY as up-to-dateness for ...
- CONNECTEDNESS between people and
- CADENCE OF CONVERSATION in relation to ...

Our model conceptualising these domains, and elements within them (see Fig 1), provides a foundation for ongoing conversations to prevent situations such as the following:

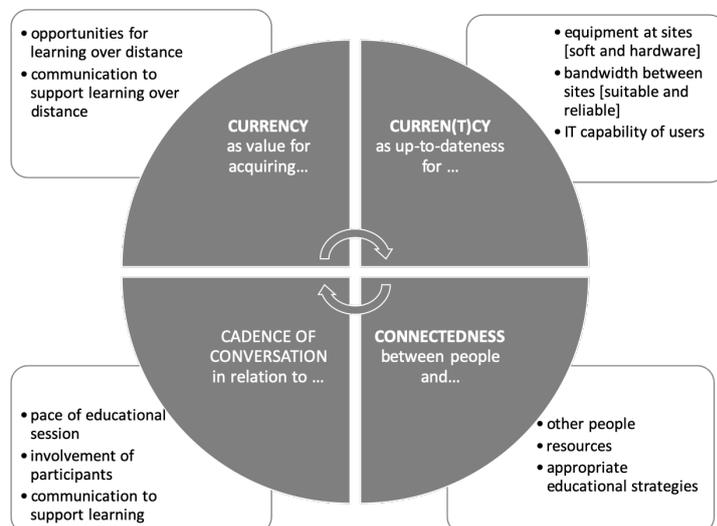
A usually calm educator rushed past my desk; dashing between the tutorial room and IT support desk, muttering in exasperation to me and my nearby colleague: "I am doing another (mild expletive) videoconference tutorial". After the whirlwind passed my colleague commented to me: "We can have a disempowering relationship with technology can't we".

My colleague continued his reflections: "Isn't it always the way that when you eventually have connection, you begin the videoconference by saying 'Sorry about that mix-up and delay. IT can be a bit out of our control. Can I apologise in advance for any further IT issues'. This sets the platform for negative interactions with technology and reinforces the divide between rural and metro."

On another occasion, an educator laughingly told me: "I wish you could have seen me the other day, I tried so many videoconferencing formats, none of them worked. Rather than cancelling we continued by phone. It was so difficult not being able to see the students' reactions."

Fig 1

Conceptual model of learning through "joining via technology from..."



Recommendations for Policy and Practice

In order to have ongoing conversations about these identified domains and elements, and grapple with issues and implications, we first need to focus on:

- (i) addressing divisions between us, including between academic and professional staff, and across different sites (in order to have begun these rich conversations)
- (ii) identifying and changing structures and systems that inhibit conversations (in order to continue these rich conversations).

An important aspiration arising from this research is for issues and implications related to IT be brought into the foreground in order that they can be discussed (resolved or held in tension for ongoing dialogue) and then become less visible in the learning experience.

Inquisitiveness within a community of praxis can fuel conversations inspired by the following questions:

- How can we shape our use of technology, rather than it shaping us (in order we have impetus to drive change)
- How can we ensure our ongoing critical awareness of learning and language, and its implications for being appropriate (in relation to use of resources) and meaningful (in relation to learning).
- How can these conversations be expanded to include all sectors within the university (in order to expand the community of praxis)?

Recommendations for Future Research

How might the conceptual model of learning through “joining-via-technology from ...” inform transformation of practice beyond rural settings and healthcare students?

How might the conceptual model of learning through “joining-via-technology from ...” address issues relating to misrecognition and misrepresentation in other situations and settings?

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