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Beyond the boundaries of the classroom: Interpersonal relationships in the transformation from (edu)room to (edu)room

Eva Alerby & Catrine Kostenius
Department of Art, Communication and Education
Department of Health Sciences
Luleå University of Technology
Luleå
Sweden

Research topic and aim

In the 21st century, the economies and technologies of countries in Western society have increasingly become knowledge- and information-based. Great value has been placed on education in order to enable these countries to compete on the global market. This therefore requires more people with higher levels of education. One starting point for this agenda is effective educational systems, which in turn requires places for teaching and learning, often located in special buildings that consist of classrooms of different shapes and functions. Not all education, however, takes place within the ordinary physical classroom. In an attempt to make education more accessible, with the ultimate goal being to rise to competitiveness in the contemporary global marketplace, formal education nowadays takes place more often beyond the physical classroom, as flexible online or web-based courses. In these cases, the horizon of the classroom is unlimited: the boundaries of the room become infinite. The aim of this paper is to conceptualise ways in which the horizons of the classroom are extended through flexible online or web-based courses, and to explore the materiality of digital, virtual classrooms and interpersonal relationships within them.

Theoretical framework and research design

We apply different perspectives to analyse interpersonal relationships when educational places – that is, classrooms – are transformed from physical spaces into Web spaces. Our analysis is based on the philosophies of Martin Buber, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Alfred Schutz. Buber's theory supports the exploration of interpersonal relationships, while Merleau-Ponty's life-world approach, with the addition of experienced social reality suggested by Schutz, supports a re-imagination of educational places through an ontological discussion of what a classroom is and can be.

Expected findings/conclusions

We illuminate and theorise interpersonal relationships in terms of being cared for, confirmed by, and connected to others as dimensions of significance for teaching and learning, and for the health and well-being of teachers and students. By moving beyond the unknown and uncertain, we explore the transformation of the classroom: from (edu)room to (edu)room.

Relevance to Nordic educational research

Flexible online or Web-based courses that create opportunities for students in remote areas or whose lifestyle does not fit with physically attending classes are of relevance to Nordic educational research.

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