

Editorial: My Classroom

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Normally we think of the classroom as a place contained within four walls, but for this issue I would like you to think of classrooms as any kind of learning environment where formal education occurs. Therefore, classrooms are not limited to the four walled structure but include laboratories, clinical practice placements, businesses and other work sites. What is common to all these environments is that in them teaching occurs and learning takes place. This is the definition of classroom accepted for this issue.

Teaching and learning occurs in any environment where the teacher has an end in view and manipulates the environment to facilitate knowledge and skill acquisition by a learner. In the process, both the learner and the educator learn from the event itself. Good educators draw from a repertoire of multiple teaching techniques in different environments to help accomplish learning. Some educators believe the process of learning is as important as the goal or end. As well the educators are aware of the diversity in students, subject matter, languages, families, types of learning environments and learning challenges. Some educators also acknowledge that they have their own assumptions and biases and are in power relations with their learners.

Classroom research has traditionally consisted of breaking the classroom into components using standard features such as experimental design, measurement and statistical analysis. Classrooms have been treated like laboratories and linked to the scientific paradigm of cause and effect. Researchers have tried to standardize classrooms and manipulate variables to improve outcomes. This is based on the assumption that there is a cause and effect. Although this type of research has value, it does not promote a “real” understanding of the classroom. The classroom can only be understood as a whole by examining all parts of the environment: the physical space, the students, the educator and the interactions between and amongst them. I agree with Gadamer (in Dunne, 1993) that the whole cannot be understand without all of its parts. As well, he believes that we all come to a situation with our own assumptions and history and that this plays a part in the learning environment. In a constructivist paradigm, meaning is co-created through interactions. Therefore, it becomes extremely important to be cognizant of what educators and learners bring to the interactions. As well, with the advance of technology and access to the internet on many post-secondary campuses, it becomes extremely important to recognize that classrooms have no walls and that the world itself is becoming a part of the classroom. I can be in a room with my class and have several international educators present on-line to converse with us.

The classroom is no longer a four walled structure; it is a learning environment without walls where individuals communicate with one another for the purpose of learning. The idea that we can research the classroom and infer a cause and effect model is slowly shifting. It is becoming recognized that there are communication networks that need to be considered and that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. This issue highlights a variety of experiences in a wide range of learning environments that point to these changing dynamics in education.