

Different Ways of Knowing

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the concept and characteristic elements of motivational self systems, lifewide learning and the vital importance thereof for educators in regard to the facilitation of learners in becoming 'co-creators of knowledge'. In more recent times students have wanted a more active role in regard to knowledge creation in the undergraduate classroom (Mannix, 2008).

In this paper, it is advocated that engaging with the knowledge, interests and life situations of learners contributes not only to a collaborative teaching/learning process, but also facilitates learners in the reconstruction of how they perceive knowledge and of their own identities (possible and ideal selves). Furthermore, it is viewed that the further and deeper students are willing to think and draw on their knowledge and own experiences (different learning spaces in which students reside), the more creative and metacognitive they can become.

Educational goals of collaboration and empowerment of learners stand in contrast to teaching approaches placing more emphasis on behavioural control. These approaches place importance on the attainment only of specified learning outcomes. Focusing education reform effort on high academic standards does have its merits, but this approach often puts content, curriculum, and assessment, not students, at the centre.

Key words: Possible and Ideal selves; lifewide learning; co-creation of knowledge, skills, qualities and dispositions.

1. Introduction

This theoretical paper draws on a PhD research study (Mannix, 2008) which investigated the perceived sources of language learner and teacher motivation in the Institute of Technology sector, and a theoretical paper entitled 'Learning for the Future – Motivational Self Systems (Mannix, 2010), which focused on motivational self systems and lifewide learning.

It briefly discusses a key finding of the PhD research project, and in light of this aims to discuss learner engagement in the creation and dissemination of knowledge, skills and the enhancement of learner dispositions and qualities via motivational self systems and lifewide learning experiences. There is also a focus on the possible implications thereof for third level education.

To aid the discussion, the paper also presents an initial brief overview of the theory of motivational self systems and the concept of lifewide learning.

2. PhD research study – Possible and Ideal Selves and Lifewide Learning in the context of learning a Second Language.

My interest in the area of possible and ideal selves, and indeed its applicability with lifewide learning, stems from one of the key research findings of my PhD research (Mannix, 2008), which investigated the perceived sources of language learner and teacher motivation. In regard to language learners, it was found that students pursuing language studies at Waterford Institute of Technology were more motivated and self-determined in their learning, and had developed a more defined sense of self or future self, having spent an academic year abroad (alternative learning space).

Such students were more inclined to relate aspects of their previous learning experience to their current one and to use creative strategies in achieving their learning goals. Furthermore, they reported being able to identify more with the second language and culture, and their attitudes towards learning other languages and their perceptions of other cultures (alternative spaces of learning) had also been positively influenced (perceptions of their actual and future selves). Furthermore, having spent time in an L2 (second language) community, learners' perceptions of the difficulty of language learning and their perceptions of their ability to succeed in learning the language had also significantly changed in a positive way.

These results were in stark contrast to the results obtained from learners who did not partake in the academic year abroad (Mannix, 2010).

The results of this research project are not surprising as several international and renowned researchers in the field of second language acquisition have provided strong evidence that learners who encounter and draw on different spaces of learning are more self-determined in their learning and are more willing to engage in new and multiple spaces of learning (Dörnyei, 2009; Macintyre, 2009; Ushioda, 2009).

3. Motivational Self Systems (Markus and Nurius, 1986) – Possible and Ideal Selves

According to Markus and Nurius (1986:954), possible selves, a future self state rather than a current one, represents the ideas which an individual has regarding

what they could become (hoped for self), what they would like to become (ideal self) and what they are afraid of becoming (feared self). Information derived from past experiences also plays a significant role in this regard.

The work of Markus and Nurius has been of significant importance to researchers and practitioners. As Markus (2006:xi) summarises:

'By focusing on possible selves, we were given a licence to speculate about the remarkable power of imagination in human life. We also had room to think about the importance of the self-structure as a dynamic interpretive matrix for thought, feeling, and action, and to begin to theorize about the role of sociocultural contexts in behaviour. Finally the concept wove together our mutual interests in social psychology, social work, and clinical psychology.'

Indeed, Markus and Nurius (ibid. 957) provide a broad outline of the scope of possible selves, that is, multiple future orientated selves, but do not provide a finite taxonomy, in contrast to the work of Higgins (1985, 1987).

Such possible selves, as proposed by Markus and Nurius, that are hoped for might include: the successful self, the creative self, the rich self, or the loved or admired self. The dreaded or feared self could include the alone self; the depressed self, the incompetent self, the alcoholic self, or the unemployed self.

Furthermore, it could be assumed that each individual has a wide repertoire of self representations and that the working self-concept is 'an integrated subset of all the available self-representations'. It is also 'continually active', and is a 'shifting array of accessible self knowledge' (Ruvolo and Markus, 1992:98).

In this sense, according to Dörnyei (2009:11) possible selves are deemed to 'act as 'future self guides', reflecting a dynamic, forward moving conception that can explain how someone is moved from the present towards the future'.

4. Towards a systematic framework of the interrelations among different self-states.

In an attempt to create a 'systematic framework of the interrelations among the different self-states, Higgins et al. (1985) and Higgins (1987) also investigated the concepts of self states and proposed a self-discrepancy theory.

Higgins et al proposed three self domains (actual self, ideal self, and ought self) and two standpoints, which advocated a discrimination among self-state

representations by considering whose perspective on the self is involved (one's own standpoint and the standpoint of a significant other).

Dörnyei also highlights (ibid. 14):

'An important difference between Higgins's and Markus and Nurius's conceptualisations of the future-orientated self dimensions is that while the authors (Markus and Nurius) talk about multiple possible selves, including, for example, more than one ideal self, Higgins talks about a single ideal and a single ought self for each individual, viewing these as composite self guides that sum up all the relevant attributes.'

Higgins (1987:320) describes actual, ideal and ought selves in the following way: The actual self consists of representations of the attributes, which an individual (himself or another) believes he actually possesses. The ideal self consists of the representation of the attributes (hopes, aspirations or wishes for an individual), which someone (an individual or another) would like himself ideally to possess. The ought self is a representation of the attributes that an individual (himself or another) believes he should or ought to possess (sense of duty, obligations or responsibilities).

It could also be argued that the teacher-student relationship is a representation of the hopes, aspirations or wishes of the learner(s), and the hopes, wishes and aspirations which teachers hold for learners, which are representations of the ideal and ought self.

According to Dörnyei (ibid. 18), there are several implications of such self-state representations. Firstly, individuals differ as to which self-state they are motivated towards. Secondly, individuals are motivated to reach a condition which matches their personally relevant self-guides. Thirdly, applied to an educational context, the motivation to learn involves the desire to reduce the discrepancy between one's actual self and the projected behavioural standards of the ideal/ought self. Fourthly, the desire to reduce such a discrepancy would imply that future self-guides provide incentive, direction and impetus for action. Fifthly, the discrepancy between actual and future selves initiates self-regulatory strategies to reduce the discrepancy.

5. The promotion of possible and ideal selves (being and becoming through life learning and learning spaces – eliciting future possible selves (dispositions and qualities) and co-creation of knowledge and skills.

The concept of lifewide learning is described by Ronald Barnett as learning in different and multiple spaces simultaneously (Barnett, 2010:1). Such learning goes

beyond the boundaries of disciplines, as learners draw on various experiences in their learning. Indeed the argument could be made that the wider the array of contexts (spaces for learning – past, present and future), the more capable and willing individuals will be to generate possible and ideal selves.

Barnett (ibid.) provides a number of examples of learning spaces, where it could be deemed that individuals' multiple self-representations (actual, possible, feared and ideal selves) are to be found. Such spaces include work, non-work or occupational networks; family, leisure, social networks and engagements; manifold channels of news, information and communication; and physical and global mobility (actual and virtual).

Savin-Baden (2008:12) also provides a number of creative learning spaces which individuals may inhabit. Such spaces might include:

- bounded learning spaces (days away in which to think and reflect as a group);
- formal learning spaces (courses and conferences);
- social learning spaces (dialogue and debate in informal settings);
- silent learning spaces (away from noise that erodes creativity, innovation and space to think);
- writing space (places not only to write but to consider one's stances and ideas);
- dialogic spaces (critical conversations where the relationship between the oral and the written can be explored);
- reflective learning spaces (which reach beyond contemplation and reconsidering past thought, they are spaces of meaning-making and consciousness-raising);
- digital learning spaces (where explorations occur about new types of visuality, literacy, pedagogy, representations of knowledge, communication and embodiment).

With respect to learning spaces, Deleuze and Guattari (1998:478) differentiate between striated and smooth learning spaces. According to Savin-Badin (ibid. 13), Striated Learning Spaces are characterised by 'a strong sense of organisation and boundedness' and are typical of most higher education institutions. Such spaces could be deemed 'spaces of arrival or a strong sense of authorship'. Associated with such spaces is 'a clear definition of outcomes, of a point that one is expected to reach'.

Smooth learning, by contrast, occurs in 'open, flexible and contested spaces in which both learning and learners are always on the move' (Savin-Baden, ibid. 13).

Such spaces could be perceived as spaces of becoming. Associated with such spaces is also 'a sense of displacement of notions of time and place so that the learning space is not defined but is defined by the creator of the space' (ibid. 14).

There is, according to Barnett (ibid. 7), an onus on higher education institutions to contribute to the enhancement of students' lifewide learning, and there are also a number of forms of possible university response to this issue. Such responses would be of value in regard to the promotion of motivational self-systems (multiple selves).

Such possible forms may include:

- encouraging and facilitating students in gaining worthwhile experiences beyond their programme of studies.
- accrediting students' wider lifewide learning experiences.
- offering opportunities for systematic reflection on those learning experiences such that the learning and personal value of those experiences are enhanced.
- shaping the university's own courses so that they offer the student the best chance of maximising the learning potential of their lifewide experiences.

(ibid.7)

In order for such possible forms of response to be effective requires also an in-depth understanding of the precise categories of lifewide learning.

When categorising forms of lifewide learning, therefore, the language of knowledge and skills is insufficient, according to Barnett (ibid.) to capture the complexity of the learning process, which many individuals are undergoing. The domains of knowledge and skills need to be supplemented, Barnett advocates with a sense of a student's being and indeed, their continuing becoming. In this regard, the dispositions and qualities of learners, both in smooth and striated spaces of learning, are equally of significant importance.

This would imply that investment in learning through different spaces and in various forms is also an investment in the learner's complex identity. Further exploration of the possibilities for the creation of smooth spaces in striated environments is required for higher education.

6. The need for systematic reflection and feedback on the impact of the learning experience (multiple learning spaces) on the motivational self system.

According to Dörnyei (2009:37), most researchers in the area of possible/ideal selves highlight the fact that

future self-guides are only effective if they are accompanied by a set of concrete action plans. He also argues that 'good teachers in any subject matter seem to have the instinctive talent to provide an engaging framework that keeps the enthusiasts going and the less-than-enthusiasts thinking (ibid. 37).

In the field of second language acquisition (SLA), Dörnyei and Otto (1998) developed a process-orientated model of L2 motivation, which could be applied to any particular learning experience (including multiple, smooth and striated learning spaces).

This model differs from other motivational scaffolding techniques in that it passes the ownership of motivation from the teacher to the learner (Dörnyei, 2005: 114). Although there is scope for the teacher as facilitator of learning to provide effective feedback, which also could include feedback incorporating potential future possibilities throughout each stage of the model. The model includes a preactional, actional and postactional phase, but of particular relevance are the components of the actual phase. Some aspects of this particular phase include:

- satiation control strategies (adding a twist to a task; using one's fantasy to liven up the task);
- emotion control strategies (managing emotional states; self-encouragement; using relaxation and meditation techniques);
- environmental control strategies (eliminating negative environmental influences and exploiting positive environmental influences).

(ibid.,14).

Other potential models of systematic reflection include the Hock et al. (2006) possible selves' tree programme and Oyserman et al.'s (2006) self-training programme.

7. Pedagogical implications and recommendations

Promoting the notion of possible and ideal selves and lifewide learning, and in particular the encouragement of learning, particularly in smooth spaces in striated environments have manifold implications for pedagogy and curriculum development and assessment in higher education.

It could be argued that there needs to be a reconsideration of curricula and pedagogy to reflect the possible role of imaginative capacity in the formation of new learner identities, qualities, dispositions, knowledge formation and skills acquisition.

Associated with this is a promotion of visual learning styles and emotional intelligence competences (self and social awareness, self and social management).

There needs to be a reconsideration of curricula and pedagogy to include systematic reflection for learners regarding the possible creation and maintenance of smooth spaces in striated environments and subsequent postactional reflection.

This also implies that we as facilitators of learning are aware of ways in which striated spaces and systems have moulded our assumptions, perceptions and pedagogies.

There is a need for spatial ecology: the idea that staff and students come to understand how they interact with each other and the various learning spaces in which they live, work and learn.

Curriculum design needs to reflect learning intentions as opposed to outcomes pedagogy.

Reflective spaces need to be seen as transformative positions from which change, reflexivity and new stances can emerge. Dörnyei and Otto's (1998) process model of learning motivation may prove useful in this regard.

Using approaches to learning such as problem-based learning, project-based learning and action learning approaches, which enable students to see knowledge as being changeable and uncertain, could equip them to be independent enquirers who know how to find knowledge and develop capabilities for working in a shifting and uncertain world (liquid contestable knowledge).

Such approaches would need to take into consideration robust assessment procedures for liquid learning outcomes, which might include peer and self-assessment or the promotion of collaboration in learning and assessment.

The provision of feedback incorporating future possibilities is a vital step to changing perceptions of learning and the reconstruction of future identities.

8. Conclusion

In linking the notion of actual, possible and ideal selves with a categorisation of lifewide learning, which focuses on the notion of being and becoming, it is argued in this paper that knowledge and skill domains, as well as the development and enhancement of learner dispositions and qualities, is very much influenced by learners' personal self guides (Higgins et al, 1987; self-discrepancy theory) and the need to examine the world from a new and different perspective. This implies a different set of assumptions for learning, where the learner is an active agent, not constrained by set boundaries (variations or new examples of existing knowledge) and where there is

evidence of a promotion of an active self-reflection process in the construction of new knowledge. It also implies a view of learning, which 'involves not simply the human mind, but the living human being in continuous interaction with its environment' (Hodkinson et al, 2008:38).

Furthermore, it is advocated that changes in motivation to learn may partly be explained with reference to changing perceptions and the reconstruction of identities (such as the changing global reality), which impacts on the choices of the learner regarding the different spaces *and* forms of learning (creation of knowledge). It is, therefore, argued that investment in learning through different spaces and in various forms is also an investment in the learner's complex identity/*habitus* (Bourdieu, 1977) and indeed as is highlighted by Hodkinson (ibid. 38) that the social aspect of learning is not 'outside' the individual but 'exists in and through interaction, participation and communication'.

Several academics in the field of education have indeed advocated that students in third level education need 'an alternative epistemological view' of learning, one 'that enables them to see themselves as creators of 'personal knowledge' ...and that allows them to develop personal learning techniques' (Gamache, 2002: 277) and therefore it is imperative to 'escape a "one size-fits all" approach to teaching and learning' (ibid. 278).

Finally it is concluded that the teacher-student relationship is a representation of the hopes, aspirations or wishes of the learner(s), and the hopes, wishes and aspirations which teachers hold for learners, which are representations of the ideal and ought self. The paper advocates that there is a need for a domain of practice that creates positive relationships between learners and facilitators of learning. Such domains of practice require learning facilitators firstly to know and reflect on what they know about learners and learning both inside and outside formal educational settings; secondly to have the capacity to identify beliefs and discrepancies between their own perspectives and student perspectives on practices; and thirdly to identify staff development needs. It is advocated that developing self-assessment and reflection tools for facilitators of learning may be useful in that regard.

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