

Putting Bourdieu's Concepts of Habitus and Field to Work: Exploring Blended Learning

Wai Man Vivienne Leung¹, Lok Tin, Tse² & Elizabeth Jones Liz³

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to examine blended learning as an integral component of a learning culture. By drawing on two concepts- habitus and field - we consider the cultural learning experiences of postgraduate students within the context of a Hong Kong University. It is an examination that allows for an appreciation of both an individual as well as a collective experience of blended learning and in so doing it demonstrates how power is (always) an issue within learning cultures. The paper goes on to argue that if blended learning is to achieve its goal in terms of enhancing learning there is a need to have a better understanding of learning itself where questions are asked concerning the learner, the locations where learning occurs and processes of learning

Keywords: Bourdieu; habitus; field; cultural learning experiences; blended learning; Hong Kong

1. Introduction

Garrison and Kanuka (2004) sagely note that whilst blended learning is an opportunity to enhance the campus experience in that it can extend thinking and learning through the innovative use of Information and Communications Technology it nevertheless has to be undertaken thoughtfully. In subsequent sections of this paper we attempt to contribute to this discussion where by drawing on two concepts- habitus and field –by Pierre Bourdieu (1985). We consider the cultural learning experiences of postgraduate students within the context of a Hong Kong University. It is an examination that allows for an appreciation of both the individual as well as a collective experience of blended learning and in so doing it demonstrates how power is always an issue within learning cultures. The paper goes on to argue that if blended learning is to achieve its goal in terms of enhancing learning there is a need to have a better understanding of learning itself where questions are asked concerning the learner, the locations where learning occurs and processes of learning.

Thus, in the first section of the paper we offer a context in order to situate this paper where we both describe the programme of study that was being pursued by the postgraduate students as well as detail the sorts of blended learning systems that were being incorporated into the learning experience. We also offer reasons as to why certain systems were being followed. In the second section of the paper we present a brief but necessary introduction to two concepts drawn for the sociological work of Pierre Bourdieu: habitus and field. These, as we go onto detail in subsequent sections of the paper, become important tools for unpicking the qualitative data that emerged from a small-scale research project. Specifically, it allowed us to appreciate how the promise of blended learning for developing a collaborative, participatory and a reflective learning culture was at times thwarted. In the concluding sections of the paper we question how to contend with power relations so as to enable more effective forms of blended learning.

¹ Department of Early Childhood Education, The Education University of Hong Kong, 10 Lo Ping Rd, Tai Po, Hong Kong, China.

² Department of Early Childhood Education, The Education University of Hong Kong, 10 Lo Ping Rd, Tai Po, Hong Kong, China.

³ The Education and Social Research Institute, The Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, England. Phone No.: (0161)2471792 Email: e.jones@mmu.ac.uk

1.1 Contextually situating the paper

In this paper, we draw on data from a research study that the three authors undertook across a two year period, which focused on postgraduate students who were undertaking a Postgraduate Diploma in Early Childhood Education. The Diploma allows the graduates to work within Hong Kong's early years' sector as qualified teachers (The Education University of Hong Kong, 2012). The specific element of the Diploma, which the authors had academic responsibility for was "Teaching and Learning". Here the core intentions are to foster the students' ability to integrate theories of learning and teaching with practice and to critically translate programme content into workplace practice.

Students entering the programme can choose a medium of instruction, which is either Cantonese (the home language of Hong Kong) or English. The students that were undertaking the Diploma and who were involved in our study reflected both the colonial history of Hong Kong as well as its current manifestation as an international economic hub. Thus, besides those who identified themselves as "Hong Kongers" (i.e. born and raised in Hong Kong with the majority being Hong Kong Chinese) the participants also included British, Nepalese, Indian, Pakistani, mainland Chinese, Filipino, Thai, Canadian and Japanese students. The study also included students who whilst being born and raised in the UK, New Zealand and Canada had returned to Hong Kong so as to reconnect with their Hong Kong Chinese families.

As said, the students were all degree holders but in different disciplines. All were working full-time in the early years sector as either language teachers (English and Mandarin) or Teaching Assistants.

Blended learning has been implemented around the world. Barbour et al. (2011) reported that online learning has already changed the education state for every country. Blended learning takes a lot of benefits. According to Dziuban, Hartman, Cavanagh and Moskal (2011), blended learning is able to promote students' engagement in learning and result in a better learning outcome. Also, using blended learning not only helps to enhance interaction between students and teachers, also improve students' motivation to learn that they have more autonomy with blended learning, which also results in higher satisfaction reported by students (Snodin, 2013). For students in higher education specifically, blended learning provides a opportunity to students access to learning more convenient so that their learning not limit in classroom, but also learn by internet (Graham, Woodfield, & Harrison, 2013). A literature review conducted by Sharpe, Benfield, Roberts and Francis (2006) pointed that there are many problems when implement blended learning in UK mainly because of the pressure of implement, which leads to lack enough pedagogy, evaluation and research about how to successfully implement blended learning. In some developing countries in Asia like Philippines, lacking enough infrastructure (e.g. internet access) related to use of internet learning is common is a big reason which limit the development of blended learning (Barbour, 2011). Besides, country like Pakistan have problem in electricity especially in village, which also limit the development of blended learning in these countries (Barbour, 2011).

In Hong Kong, blended learning is implemented by almost every university that expect face-to-face lecture, there are much internet-based support to students (McNaught, Lam, & Cheng, 2012). Thus, educators are trying to use different types of technology to facilitate students' learning in higher education. For example, Lam (2012) found that the use of Facebook helps to enhance interaction, communication between students and teaching staff, but also improve students' motivation toward learning, which results in higher participation. There is an increasing expectation that academic tutors such as us will include blended learning when teaching. The drivers for blended learning are succinctly captured by Morris (2014) who notes that "blended learning is perceived to have many advantages for the learner, including anytime, anywhere access, self-paced learning, enquiry led learning and collaborative learning" (Ruiz, Mintzer, & Leipzig, 2006; Soong, Chan, Cheers & Hu, 2006). From our perspective, these advantages of anytime/anywhere access, self-paced as well as collaborative learning were particularly attractive given that our student body were part-time students who completed a day's work, then had to make what for many was a long and tedious journey out to the university campus. This lies in a relatively rural area of the New Territories in Hong Kong and has limited transport facilities - a factor that becomes particularly acute at 9.30 pm when face-to-face teaching finishes.

Blended learning resources were provided as additional learning resources during face-to-face teaching sessions. These included: short videoed lectures with associated presentational materials and self-assessment quizzes with instant feedback (Rooney, 2003; Sands, 2002; Ward & LaBranche, 2003; Young, 2002, Graham, Allen & Ure, 2005). On line resources were also hosted on Moodle, our university's virtual learning environment. These included relevant academic articles, references, PowerPoint presentations of each of the face-to-face teaching sessions and pertinent videos.

Following a number of commentators (e.g. Brotherton & Abowd 2004; Clark, Westcott, & Taylor, 2007) we were hoping that the inclusion of PowerPoint presentations of our teaching would offer degrees of flexibility in terms

of learning where the students could return to the slides in their own time in order to reconsider and reflect further on teaching content.

Two out of the nine sessions of the “Teaching and Learning” course were concerned with small group collaborative presentations. Students were given the space and the time to work with their groups off campus. Forums were provided for each group on Moodle, which offered a secure environment in order to exchange ideas and content for the final presentation. Students were also encouraged to use other technologies including email and WhatsApp. Following Horn and Staker (2015) we hoped that by providing off-campus opportunities it would allow for more student-centric personalised learning, greater degrees of collaboration and increased productivity.

Finally, throughout the duration of the “Teaching and Learning” course the students were encouraged to design and build an elearning portfolio so as to enable them to both document and reflect on their teaching practice particularly in terms of implementing different theories of teaching and learning (Oakley, Pegrum & Johnston, 2014). Although the overall design of the elearning portfolio was left to the students a number of guiding questions were offered. In the main, this was to ensure that the content of the portfolio satisfied the university’s assessment criteria. Such questions covered areas including: pedagogical subject knowledge and effective teaching (Shulman, 1987; Niess, 2005); monitoring and assessing children’s progress (Bredenkamp & Copple, 2009); developing an inclusive classroom (Booth & Ainscow, 2002; UNICEF, 2012) and classroom management (Levin & Nolan, 2000; Marzano, Marzano, & Pickering, 2003)

To briefly summarise, besides hoping that blended learning would enrich the learning experience of the students we also hoped that it would allow for flexibility so as to enable them to: maintain their full-time work commitments; integrate and manage their studies and undertake other social commitments including caring for families.

1.2 Thinking about a learning culture using Bourdieu’s tools: habitus and field

As a first step we turn to Raymond Williams’s definition of culture where he states that ‘culture is ordinary’. He then goes on to elaborate further: ‘...every society has its own shape, its own purposes, its own meanings’ and that every society expresses these ‘in institutions, and in arts and in learning’. He also adds that the making of a society ‘is the finding of common meanings and directions’, and that changes or growth in culture occurs as a consequence of ‘an active debate and amendment under the pressures of experience, contact and discovery’ (Williams, 1989). In this paper, our intentions are to use the concepts of habitus and field in order to transform ‘ordinary experiences’ into something more extraordinary and we do this by highlighting some of the meanings, directions and pressures that circulate within a learning culture.

The concepts of habitus and field emerge from the sociological work of Pierre Bourdieu. As Dianne Reay highlights, ‘Bourdieu developed the concept of habitus to demonstrate the ways in which not only is the body in the social world, but also the ways in which the social world is in the body!’ (Reay, 2004a, p. 432; Bourdieu, 1983). ‘Field’ meanwhile is a particular sector of the social world and it is the interrelationship between habitus and field, which structures both our perceptions and also our actions. Bourdieu clarifies habitus further when he writes that it is: A system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks, thanks to analogical transfers of schemes permitting the solution of similarly shaped problems (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 95). In what is probably one of his last statements concerning habitus Bourdieu wrote:

[Habitus is] Systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. Objectively “regulated” and “regular” without being in any way the product of obedience to rules, they can be collectively orchestrated without being the product of the organizing action of a conductor (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 53).

Hodkinson, Biesta and James (2004) stated that with this definition:

The habitus is a battery of dispositions to all aspects of life that are often sub-conscious or tacit. They develop from our social positions, and throughout our lives. The habitus can also be seen as social structures operating within and through individuals, rather than being something outside of us ... Just as mind and body are not separated, neither are the individual and social structures (p. 7).

Hence the habitus is written or inscribed on bodies where it is expressed in ways of ‘standing, speaking, walking, and thereby of feeling and thinking’ (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 70).

In further sections of the paper we will continue to edge closer to the meanings that circulate around habitus as we use it to draw out a number of significant thoughts in relation to learning but for now we would like to consider Bourdieu’s concept of field.

As Hodkinson, Biesta and James make clear in a number of publications (2007a; 2007b; 2007c;2008) the concept of field is profoundly useful because it allows for a study of learning culture rather than simply learning in a particular site. As they put it, ‘while learning sites can have relatively clear boundaries, the factors that constitute the learning culture in a particular site do not’ (2007c, p. 421). They go on to suggest that Bourdieu adopted the term ‘field’ from its connotation in physics of a field of forces, ‘thereby focusing on the social, cultural, economic and symbolic forces at play within an arena of social practice’ (Reed-Danahay, 2005, p. 133). Field then, is a relational concept, where the particular forces or forms of capital in a field (e.g. social, economic and cultural capital) determine the positions or ranges of strategies available to an individual. ‘Bourdieu compares the structure of a field to that of a poker game where the pile of chips reflects the unequal distribution of capital that both summarizes the results of previous struggles and orient strategies for the future’ (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 98-99). As a game, the field is always concerned with power. The position of the agent is a result of the interaction between the individual’s habitus and his or her place within the position of the field and how much capital that person has accumulated (Calhoun, 1993). This accumulation of economic, cultural, and as we shall go on to argue, emotional capital (Colley, 2006; Reay, 2004b; Skeggs, 2004) decides whether people are subordinate or dominant in the fields. Bourdieu acknowledges that ‘Positions in fields can to some extent be shaped by the habitus that actors bring with them’ (Bourdieu & Boltanski, as cited in Swartz & Zolberg, 2006). The field is then a site of struggle whereby individuals have to ‘struggle over the power to define each field’ (Calhoun 1993, p. 64). While participants process capitals that can or cannot be operationalised within the field, capitals are not always operationalised with equal ease. There is, therefore, a need for skill in order to play the game successfully and secure one’s own value (Albright & Hartman, 2018; Nash, 2018).

At this point we offer a description of the research project that underpins this paper as well as detail the methodology that was used to collect and analyse the data.

2. Method

The research project was undertaken for two year and there were two parallel cohorts of 72 students in total. Besides undertaking two sets of interviews with a designated group of 6 students we were also able to draw on more ethnographic oriented data that includes classroom observations, student-tutor conversations and the e-learning portfolios. Classroom observations were documented in note form. Participants observations allowed researcher to study specific events within the context of the university classroom (Denzin& Lincoln, 2000; Delamont, 2007). Besides aiding recall of particular instances of classroom experiences participant observations also became the basis for discussion between the authors (author(s), 2010). We begin with a participant observation, which centres on events immediately prior to a group presentation that was to be undertaken within the context of the university classroom. As noted above, preparation for the presentation had been undertaken off campus.

The students that were interviewed and were selected on the basis that they were representative of both cohorts. There were, therefore, three students from the class where Cantonese was the language of instruction as well as three from the class where English was used. Additionally, between the six students there was a range of classroom experience, which varied between seven years and ten months. Finally the sample included one male (Table 1).

Table 1. Participants Characteristics (age, gender, teaching experience, position and ethnicity)

Name	Ethnicity	Age	Position in School	Gender	Teaching Experience

Christ	Chinese	28	Mandarin Teacher	F	3 years
Lucy	Chinese	30's	Mandarin Class Teacher	F	2.5 years
Dave	Chinese	27	Teaching Assistant	M	3 years
Amy	English	30's	Music teacher	F	1 year
Hazel	English	30's	Class Teacher	F	7 years
Joyce	English	30's	Class Teacher	F	4 years

One of the researchers was responsible for interviewing students because of being fluent in both English and Cantonese. The researcher also undertook transcriptions of the interview data. There were two sets of interviews: participants in the first one set are during the first year of the study and participants are during the end year in another set. This made it possible to draw on excerpts from the first interview in order to introduce and extend further a particular line of inquiry in the second interview.

Explanations concerning the aims and intentions of the research were shared with all the students and their consent to participate was also secured. In this paper we pay close attention to a classroom observation as well as drawing on interview data.

Using the concepts of habitus and field as analytic tool, which stems from Bourdieu's own ethnographic work with Algerian farmers where he sought to understand the shifts they had to make when transitioning from farming to more urban life styles (Bourdieu, 2000a). In this instance, Bourdieu was attempting to uncover the facts that can often remain hidden because it cannot easily be made explicit (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 94). For Bourdieu, such facts included 'ordinary behaviour'. Similarly, we were hoping that as analytical tools, habitus and field would allow us to detect 'the contingent and arbitrary character of [the] ordinary behaviours that we perform' (Bourdieu, 2000a, p. 23).

In a great number of respects, we have taken inspiration as well as degrees of guidance from the work of Dianne Reay (Reay, 2004a) who regards habitus in particular as a 'conceptual tool to be used in empirical research' and moreover a helpful tool in 'activating the sociological imagination' (Reay, 2004a, p. 439). In her view, habitus should not be used to merely add gravitas. Rather it can be operationalised so that it becomes a means 'of viewing structure as occurring within small-scale interactions and activity within large scale settings' (2004a, p. 439).

3. Findings and discussion

3.1 Putting habitus and field to work

The academic tutor, in order to ensure that each of the groups reflected the ethnic diversity of the classroom, had grouped the students. The task was located around the work and legacies of significant pioneers in the field of early years' education and included amongst others Montessori, Dewey, Froebel and Piaget. The assignment was designed to enable effective integration of Information and Communications Technology so that students could work both independently as well as collaboratively whilst off campus (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004).

3.2 The observation

Moments before the first group were to present a member of the group, Alison (who self-identified as Hong Kong Chinese) approached the tutor to ask whether it would be possible to talk to her outside of the classroom. Once outside of the room she struggled to hold back her tears whilst she requested permission to opt out of the group presentation.

She then proceeded to describe how her particular work and domestic situation had not allowed her to participate in the WhatsApp group that had been set up to help the group communicate about the assignment. As she put it:

The WhatsApp messages arrived when I was at school when it's impossible for me to get to them. Then they would continue just at a time when I need to be with my two children. I have two young children so when I get in from

work I want to be with them...they need me. I help them with their homework. I read to them. (Field notes, November 2015).

She then went on to describe how she had worked “*really, really hard on five power point slides ...and I’ve done Internet searches and I read those articles*” [that were available on Moodle] but because the final presentation only included one of her slides she felt “*ignored*”.

By this point the student was openly crying and the tutor made the decision to allow the group to proceed without Alison having to participate.

Taking this observation as a point of departure and by drawing on the concepts of habitus and field our aim is to unpick the constituents of a learning culture, which we believe can be glimpsed within the observation. As noted previously, a learning culture is not the same as a learning site. Hodkinson, Biesta and James (2004; 2007a;) draw out some of the characteristics of a learning culture when they note that it is a ‘practice constituted by the actions, dispositions and interpretations of the participants’ (2007c, p.418). They go on to argue that learning cultures exist in and through interaction and communication. They also note that ‘cultures are (re)produced by individuals, just as much as individuals are (re)produced by cultures’ (2007c, p.419). However, they emphasize that ‘individuals are differently positioned with regard to shaping and changing a culture’ and as a consequence ‘differences in power are always an issue too’ (Hodkinson, Biesta & James, 2007c, p. 419).

If we turn to Alison at this point and if we summon both habitus and field we can begin to draw out a number of points. As noted previously habitus refers to a person’s taken for granted, largely habitual way of thinking and acting. In other words, as a ‘structuring structure’ the habitus works at shaping understandings, attitudes, behaviour and the body. Given too that the habitus is a system of durable and transferrable dispositions integrating all past experience the fields of both motherhood as well as teaching are implicated. Both motherhood and teaching will have contributed to the dynamic of habitus. As Bourdieu notes:

The relation between habitus and field operates in two ways. On one side, it is a relation of conditioning: the field structures the habitus, which is the product of the embodiment of the immanent necessity of the field (or of a hierarchy of intersecting fields). On the other side, it is a relation of knowledge or cognitive construction: habitus contributes to constituting the field as a meaningful world, a world endowed with sense or with value, in which it is worth investing one’s energy. (Bourdieu, as cited in Wacquant, 1989, p. 44).

As a background matrix the habitus will be shaping Alison’s decisions, intentions and judgements. It will (pre)dispose her to see some things as right whilst others will be considered as wrong. As the data suggests, replying to the WhatsApp messages whilst teaching is for Alison ‘*impossible*’. It is an action that is outside of her common sense understandings of what she can and cannot do. So whilst other members of her group can participate Alison cannot. Both in terms of her acquired disposition and in terms of her position within the field Alison is out of kilter with her learning group. There is a sense of dislocation that Alison feels that she does not belong to her learning group. As Schinkel and Noordegraaf (2011) note the ‘better adjusted one’s habitus is to the field in which one occupies a position, the better one’s “sense of the game”’ (2011, p. 79). So whilst on the surface it is possible to understand WhatsApp messaging as implicated in inclusive and participatory practices and where the speed with which a group can communicate could serve transformations in learning (Sharpe, 2010; Littlejohn & Pegler, 2007; Garrison & Vaughan, 2008) it can also be seen as contributing towards alienation and isolation (Rovai & Wighting, 2005).

Similarly, when at home Alison prioritises caring for her children over responding to messages. Bourdieu’s concept of habitus again helps us to appreciate why notions of care appear to be privileged over participation in the WhatsApp group. Arguably, Alison has throughout her life internalized practices and structures that are appropriate in terms of her gender where to care becomes “second nature” (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 56). Thus, the habitus predisposes Alison to read to her children, help them with their homework and simply *to be with them*. As Leander (2008) highlights, ‘to some extent the habitus is field specific, reflecting and reproducing the rules and discourses in the field including those rules that come with the specific position of a person in a given field’ (Leander, 2009, p. 6).

It should also be recalled that this research is located within Hong Kong where ‘the shape of its society, its own purposes and its own meanings’ (Williams, 1989) have to some extent been fashioned by Confucianism (Littlejohn, 2010). Confucius, the founder of Confucianism placed value on the social order where social harmony was to some extent secured through a clear understanding of social duty and roles (Zhang, 2002; Emery, Nguyen, & Kim, 2014). Lam, Ho and Wong’s (2002) study indicates that the academic success that has been globally recognized since the mid-

eighties of Confucian Heritage Children has been attributed, at least partially, to the effort parents put into their children's education and to the value that these parents place on education. Huang and Gove (2012) make the point that although children are responsible for their own educational success, Chinese parents believe that their children's educational achievement is greatly influenced by their parenting practices as well. However, as we can see from the data the parenting practices within Alison's family appear to fall on her shoulders. As several commentators note (Sekiguchi, 2010; Koh, 2008) what it means to be a wife and a mother within Confucian culture are roles that are played out on a field of hierarchical relations. As Wrisley and Wrisley (2016) highlight, "it is at home that one learns that being a good Confucian means endeavouring within the family to make ritual propriety and consummate conduct one's own and second nature" (2016, p.78). Responding to her children has, within Bourdieu's terms, become engrained on Alison's bodily habits. Such habits are fuelled by the belief that educational success will lead to a better life for her children, including securing higher social status (Cheon, 2006; Hildebrand, Phenice, Gray, & Hines, 2008; Louie, 2004; Lien, 2006).

So whilst Alison understands her positioning as 'mother' her understanding of herself within the learning culture in which she finds herself is problematic. For Alison, moving out of the classroom into a group situation where there is reliance on mobile technology positions her in ways where she feels dislocated. She is experiencing a mismatch or disjuncture within her learning group. Bourdieu refers to this schism between habitus and field as *hysteresis*. As Leander (2008) writes:

The field specific nature of the habitus becomes particularly clear when people move into new fields. Until they acquire the dispositions tied to the new field their behaviour appears odd and out of place (Leander, 2008, p. 6).

Hysteresis is then a profound sense of 'lagging behind' where individuals feel 'dysfunctional' and experience 'failure' (Bourdieu, 2000b, p. 161). It would seem that whilst other members of the learning group were efficient users of WhatsApp, Alison had as yet, to learn this particular rule of the game. She has neither a working understanding of the game nor a disposition that would allow her to be efficient. In Bourdieu terms, she lacks forms of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) that is symbolic resources (e.g. skills and knowledge) that would assist in determining her position within the group. Moreover, despite producing five slides for the group presentation her input was reduced to one slide. Thus, rather than receiving mutual recognition from the group in terms of her input she was left feeling ignored. Within Chinese culture to feel ignored is "to lose face". Losing face equates to a sense of shame where one's social position including that within the learning group is severely jeopardised (Hu, 1944).

Whilst for Alison her experiences around the WhatsApp application were negative research does suggest that a group situation improves communication, and fosters dialogue and collaboration (Bouhnik & Deshen, 2014). Certainly for those students we interviewed this seemed to be the case. Henna, for example, an Indian student who was born in Hong Kong stated that she used WhatsApp when preparing for the group work presentation because *it was instant and convenient*. For her, using WhatsApp was an *informal* means for communicating with her group whilst Moodle was *too formal*. Meanwhile David - who was in the cohort where Chinese is the medium of instruction - felt that WhatsApp allowed you *to see what each participant of the group had said* and that he used Moodle *just to access the power points*. Meanwhile Liu - who was also in the cohort where Chinese is the medium of instruction - spoke about using *more paper-based learning materials in the past but now I will discuss with classmates on WhatsApp*. Interestingly, she had tried to use Moodle in order to discuss a question with other students but *nobody else participated*. Similarly, Jill, a Canadian student had also posted questions on Moodle but again nobody had responded. However, by using WhatsApp she was able *to exchange ideas and information*. Meanwhile Ada, who spent her school years in New Zealand but had returned to Hong Kong to be closer to her Hong Kong family, stated that her group, *uses WhatsApp or we meet up in Starbucks*.

What is clear then is that these students have dispositions, which are sympathetic to and conducive with the demands imposed by the WhatsApp tool. What also became clear from the interviews was that they had established inter-relationships with other group members that allowed for dialogue and collaboration. As Jill put it she was *comfortable with her group* and they had *got to know one another*.

Similarly Liu stated, *I am in the same group because our attitudes are similar so it's more comfortable with them*. Cheng, who was in the same cohort as Liu and David also spoke positively about WhatsApp but she also emphasised that in my group we all share the work evenly.

It would appear then that the students that we interviewed had a far more positive experience than Alison both in terms of working in a group as well as using WhatsApp. The tool clearly provided the students with the means of

interacting and communicating and it is through such practices that a learning culture is constituted (Hodkinson, Biesta & James, 2007a;2007b; 2007c; Biesta, 1994, 1995, 2004; Carey, 1992). So whilst we gain a sense from the interview data of there being degrees of ‘connectedness’ (Abrams, Hogg, & Marques, 2005; Allman, 2013; Grieve, Indian, Witteveen, Tolan&Marrington, 2013) for Alison there is ‘disconnection’. All of this press us to consider what does the culture in which blended learning is situated afford and, importantly what does it constrain. Moreover, given that there was a decided preference for those students we interviewed to use WhatsApp rather than Moodle we are left wondering whether our professional commitments to Moodle are out of kilter with the dynamics of the learning culture? Interestingly, Jill one of the students we interviewed stated that for her Moodle was “*the official bit and that she likes to be perfect on it rather than posting an uncertain answer*”. Finally, we are also left recognizing that our own preferences as tutors for organizing the students into groups stem from a range of idealized notions. These include the idea that group work encourages collaborative learning, where through interaction, collaboration and the utilization of the group’s competencies learning will occur (Webb & Palincsar, 1996). And whilst we do get a sense that there were degrees of collaborative learning occurring amongst the groups Alison is nevertheless a timely reminder that the learning culture of the groups can have more toxic consequences. This obliges us to consider what our own role as tutors should be in terms of the dynamics of the group given that we are mutually constitutive parts of the learning culture.

4. Conclusion

In this paper, by putting Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus and field to work we have examined some of the realities of inhabiting a learning culture. We have tried to draw out how individual and collective dispositions infect and infuse learning. We have also tried to use both concepts in order to draw to the surface aspects of a learning culture which often remain obscured and which to some extent we choose to ignore. So whilst we might assume that, for example, participation, collaboration and cooperation are worthy elements to foster within a learning culture we also have to recognize that learning can also include pain, shame and humiliation. Finally, habitus and field have helped us to see that the students we encounter are complex beings who bring with them the experiences of overlapping cultural experiences, that means when students cooperate, different culture from each student coexist. Thus, whilst the tools that are associated with blended learning can and do enhance the learning experience they are nevertheless also capable of puncturing one’s belief in oneself as a learner.

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