



How Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) may help to inform ALL

Key Words

CHAT, ALL, Rules, Object, Academic Writing.

Abstract

Analysis of ALL practices in the literature is often accompanied by the use of various binaries; students and tutors, quality and deficit, and generic verses embedded. These binaries may diminish the complexity of ALL practice. Focusing on academic writing, this presentation provides a rationale for analysing ALL as part of a complex, dynamic, and changing system affected by and affecting multiple contributing factors. Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) is presented as suitable framework for understanding and investigating ALL practices, allowing a focus on stability, historicity, change and contradiction. CHAT is presented as capable of analysing an object of study (academic writing) within its socio-cultural and historical context. As a theoretical framework, CHAT affords writing to be viewed as an activity jointly constructed by tutors and students, according to institutional rules. Viewing writing as the object under scrutiny means a move away from students as objects, and a binary (tutors/students) approach to analysis. Viewing students and teachers as joint subjects of analysis is also a way to eliminate potential judgements relating to the quality of writing or teaching. The current diversification of higher education and the impact of neo-liberal policies, along with charges of compromised quality in student writing, necessitate the application of a theory which can account for complexity. CHAT's interaction between the components of rules, tools and division of labor, on the subject and object of study, allow for analysis of academic writing as an object situated within an institutional context. CHAT's ability to analyse dynamic activities makes it a suitable theory through which to view academic writing within the rapidly changing and complex higher education environment in Australia. Within this complex environment, the object of academic writing is being changed and is in turn affecting change. This presentation will demonstrate the usefulness of CHAT as a tool for investigating ALL practice.