Aligning Student Discourse with Expansive Framing in Online Teacher Education

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Abstract: This study explored how transfer of the theories of learning may be encouraged in an online undergraduate Educational Psychology for Teachers course by implementing a theoretical conjecture called expansive framing (Engle, 2006) with technology-supported social annotation tools. Expansive framing refers to prompts or cues, usually given by the instructor, that encourage learners to connect their current learning context to other settings across time, place, and people (past/future contexts) and positions learners as authors of their own ideas (Engle, 2006; Engle et al., 2012). Engle argued that making enough connections between contexts, via expansive framing, creates an intercontextuality which improves the likelihood that transfer of learning will occur.

One way to encourage intercontextuality and aid in expansive framing is through social annotation tools. Social annotation tools evolved from the common practice of annotating physical documents, such as highlighting, underlining, and writing notes in the margins (Kalir & Dean, 2017). Social annotation software has the ability to layer these contextual connections directly on top of the content students are learning, potentially strengthening expansive framing's capacity to develop intercontextuality.

This study examines preliminary results of pre-service teachers' alignment of their interaction in social annotations of course readings with aspects of expansive framing in an online undergraduate Educational Psychology course. This study draws on design-based research (Cobb, Confrey, diSessa, Lehrer, & Schauble, 2003) in developing design principles for using expansive framing and social annotation to encourage transfer in online teacher education courses. The participants included 15 students and one instructor (the author) in an undergraduate online Educational Psychology for Teachers course that took place during the Spring 2018 semester. To determine which aspects of expansive framing are aligning with student discourse, I coded each student's annotations for usage of or reference to the elements of expansive framing (time, place, people, authors).

Preliminary analyses show that students aligned their discourse in the annotations across time and place (such as their past experiences and future classrooms), which is promising. In contrast, students did not promote each other as authors as often as was expected. The designed emphasis on connecting their annotations across contexts may have inhibited students from taking up that aspect of expansive framing.

While this study is in progress and represents only a portion of the analyses, this study is important because Engle and her colleagues have suggested that students who are able to expansively frame their interactions are well positioned to transfer their learning to new situations (Engle, 2006; Engle et al., 2012). If students are taking up expansive framing in their discourse, then this study could provide additional empirical support for the use of explicit expansive framing. This study can also provide new insights in applying expansive framing to online courses, which has rarely been addressed in the literature (e.g., Fasso & Knight, 2015; Hickey & Andrews, 2018). This could help instructors who teach online and other teacher educators to design learning activities and environments that attend to expansive framing, particularly because expansive framing is relatively easy to implement with existing curriculum.

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