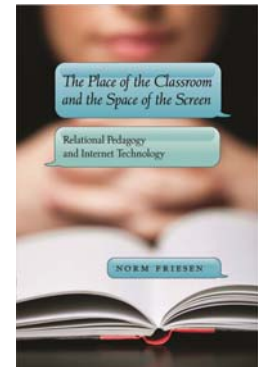


A Reader's Response to Norm Friesen's The Place of the Classroom and the Space of the Screen: Relational Pedagogy and Internet Technology.

Wendy Kraglund-Gauthier, St. Francis Xavier University (Antigonish, Nova Scotia, Canada) & The University of South Australia (Adelaide, Australia)
Email contact: wkraglun@stfx.ca



Many of us come from teaching backgrounds steeped in tradition, steeped in recollections of familiar pedagogical moments in which a clear and direct connection can be drawn between the dusty chalk, the worn desks of the classroom, and the students wriggling in their chairs. We can quickly confirm our teacher identity in that physical classroom space where the sound of bouncing basketballs echoes off concrete walls, where we hang colourful posters about frogs or the parts of speech, and where we proudly display our students' work.

When asked to think about the online classroom as a pedagogical place, these traditional ways of teacher thinking and knowing can come unglued. "*Before my first class, I asked myself, 'How can I teach people I cannot see?'*" I will always remember this question. It is stamped upon my consciousness and in my psyche. An esteemed colleague, Dr. Ottilia Chareka, spoke these words as we reminisced about her initial foray into the virtual classroom. From my former professional position as an instructional designer of online courses, I could understand her questioning and underlying concerns. Ottilia's poignant words spoke volumes in terms of how we, as educators, envision our place both in front of and alongside our students as we move through the educational process. From my position as a doctoral candidate and researcher, I am deeply curious about the pedagogical shifts that professors of education may make as they transition from face-to-face to online classrooms.

It is the disembodied space afforded by technology that Norm Friesen explores in *The Place of the Classroom and the Space of the Screen: Relational Pedagogy and Internet Technology*. Friesen carefully guides the reader through the complex, tangled questions of "the differences between online and offline education—between classroom and screen—and the significance of these differences for teaching and learning" (2011, p. ix). The reader is asked to engage in the nature of questioning, the nature of response, and the nature of being. More often than not, Friesen's questions lead to more questions about the nature of experience and of being in an online space.

Friesen's text is divided into four sections. Section 1: Setting up the Question, Questioning the Setup contains three chapters that indeed set up the question to be addressed and discuss how it will be addressed. In addition, these chapters question the set-up involved in online education, including the way technology is used, and the language that is employed to describe it. In these opening chapters, Friesen also describes the four dimensions of lived experience—lived time, space, body and relation—which are used to organize the remainder of the book's contents. He explains, "the general focus of this book begins with our involvement with objects and contexts, and moves to an analysis of our encounters and engagements with others" (pp. 27–28). The objects and contexts Friesen explores in the second section of this book include classrooms and computers, and engagement in physical and virtual laboratory dissections. At this stage, his emphasis is on the experience of time and space—the multiple times and spaces of the "anytime," "anyplace" experience of online education versus the unity of time and place offline. This discussion gradually leads to an examination of embodiment which is central to Section 3, Encountering the Other Online and Offline. The role of the body is central to Friesen's consideration of the lived dimension of relation and the presence or absence of the body is highlighted in a particular way in the experience of silence (both offline and online). His examination of the significance of silence forms the foundation for Section 4: Space of the Screen and Place of the Classroom. This concluding section considers pedagogical practice as a relational, receptive, and asymmetrical engagement with the other: the student. Throughout the text, Friesen threads his ideas together by drawing connections between concepts introduced in previous chapters and the topic at hand.

True to my nature and the nature of phenomenological research, I submersed myself in my own pedagogical, lived experience of engaging in this text. My journey through the pages is marked with stickies, dog-eared pages, florescent green highlighting, and barely legible words written with whatever pen found itself on my desk or in my knapsack. These markings signify my relationship with the ideas Friesen has presented. The relationship is coloured by my own experiences of and research into online spaces, pedagogical identity, and the nature of teaching in an online classroom. In this article, I present my response—my running dialogue with the text, as it were—to the words and ideas that live in the space between the covers of the book. My questions live alongside my responses as uncertainties that are laid bare for you, the reader, to note. At specific points, these questions were directed to the author. Friesen's responses, which enliven and add quite a different dimension to this dialogue, are included here so you can join our conversation.

Preface

Throughout the Preface, Friesen carefully contextualizes how the meanings we create during conversations can impact participants working together in an online space. In addition, Friesen also considers the engagement that the reader has with his own experience as an author. The idea that communication is so much more than sending and receiving signals is a telling reminder of our reliance on the spoken word, the nuances of inflection, and the subtle cues revealed by body, language, and demeanour. In light of Friesen's counter-explanation that experience is more than encoded and decoded data, surely a discussion on the lived experience in an online world must presuppose that an online classroom is, indeed, a "real" classroom in its own way.

Acknowledging this ephemeral space as a place of teaching and learning may require a shift in thinking about what it is that connects us as humans and what it means to feel a part of something. In Kraglund-Gauthier's words,

An increased focus on experience leads to a heightened awareness of the learning derived from that experience. Accordingly, when an individual recognizes an experience is significant, more evaluation tends to occur. This evaluation can result in deeper meanings. By making a connection between the material at hand and past material and experiences, a learner is applying critical awareness to the new knowledge and experience. (Kraglund-Gauthier, 2006, pp. 20–21)

I go back to the experience of writing narratively alongside my colleagues as we wrestled with what it means to teach online (Kraglund-Gauthier, Chareka, Murray Orr, & Foran, 2010). Ottilia, Anne Murray Orr, Andrew Foran and I each perceived our online experiences differently. Yet it was the shared experience of being online, albeit in different spaces, that drew us together. Kraglund-Gauthier et al. summarize such an experience in the following:

We discovered that we each felt we had stumbled onto something significant—a means of instruction that was much more than anticipated. These meanings helped us understand more about how we constructed our curricula and our identities as online instructors. (Kraglund-Gauthier et al., 2010, p. 4)

Section 1: Setting up the Question, Questioning the Set-Up

In Chapter 1, Friesen questions the very nature of place and location itself by inquiring into the binary opposition of the physical world and the online world. It is this dualistic view that lies at the centre of the debate about where the lines between the physical world and the virtual world are drawn.

QUESTION: Is it even necessary to debate whether one mode is better than the other? Is it not sufficient to acknowledge that each has its purposes?

NORM'S RESPONSE: The opposition of online and offline worlds in the book can indeed be seen as restrictively abstract and dualistic. Their abstract nature is evident in our present context in which the experiences of these two worlds are becoming increasingly inseparable. However, this simple opposition of worlds has heuristic value. Besides still appearing fairly consistently in research literature (as I show in the preface), the separation between online and offline serves as a way of demarcating sets of more particular and concrete experiences. One example might be writing a posting in order to cultivate a welcoming atmosphere online, or, engaging in a similarly welcoming manner with a class that is face-to-face. I look at examples of these kinds throughout the book, and, in doing so, I try to take the reader well past any one abstract opposition or any single comparison concerning the “effectiveness” or superiority of one context compared to the other. I delve into questions of crafting tone and expression in writing as opposed to realizing them bodily and dispositionally in front of a class; I look at the question of a mood or atmosphere prevailing in a room and the particular challenge of sensing and cultivating a shared

mood across a group of remote students, even if they are connected by microphones and Webcams. The difference between online and offline can obviously be understood in various ways, but as far as this book is concerned, it is not a question of a single pedagogy and two “modes” of putting it into action. It is not a matter of a single course and two modes of instruction and delivery. It is instead a question of two sets of possible, concrete practices and experiences that would appear similar or equivalent only when seen in the most general terms.

* * *

Friesen paraphrases Heidegger’s warning that “technology frames our experience and understanding in particular ways, ... [and] that technology had the potential to frame our world and our being in such a manner as to diminish our openness to the character of our own ‘being’” (p. 10). As instructional designer, I have often worked with instructors who have a pre-conceived notion—usually a negative one—of how technology will impact their curricular objectives and teaching priorities. More often than not, what gets lost in this conversation is the idea that the online classroom has, as Friesen indicates above, its own set of possible concrete practices and experiences. The physical classroom and the virtual classroom are both technologies but are technologically different. As Friesen shows, both in his book and below, the technology of the virtual classroom is one that tends to categorize action according to separate functions—such as logging on, chatting, discussing, or submitting assignments—and thus foreground its own technological nature. In a physical classroom space, these separate “functions” can play out simultaneously: entering the classroom, chatting, and submitting an assignment can occur as an unbroken flow, with many other shared experiences and meanings accompanying them.

QUESTION: All the same, I am tempted to ask: Are not physical and virtual classrooms a means to an end? Are we not spending too much time categorizing the differences between each classroom space, instead of celebrating the inherent similarities and the shared experiences? Can we not just “be” in the space?

NORM’S RESPONSE: In the book, I show that physical and virtual classrooms are not similarly technological. Each location is inhabited in a different manner. Each is associated with its own way of being or ontology. The virtual classroom can be inhabited only through an initial ontological division: one’s body, one’s physical self, remains in front of a screen or interface, while one’s mind and intentions are directed far beyond it—towards the metaphorical space shared by the others in the class. I believe this is the “reality” of the online classroom of which you speak. On the other hand, the ontology of the physical classroom allows both mind and body to be present together. Although this is not necessarily always achieved (the mind wanders, or the spirit may be willing but the flesh weak), when the two converge—particularly in experiences such as silence, laughter, or a shared atmosphere of openness—the reality of the physical classroom and its pedagogical potential is manifest. Experiences common to the two contexts become visible only when we pull back and speak in terms of theoretical constructions such as online “community building” or “transactional distances” between participants. However, in this book, my focus is not on theoretical constructions in e-learning scholarship, but on the micro level of concrete moments: The fingers on the mouse and keyboard, affirming words glowing on the screen, a chance meeting in the hallway, or a characteristic gesture

perceived by a student. On this level, there are many important differences to consider and categorize, and few similarities to be readily identified (particularly at opening stages of a phenomenological exploration).

In Chapter 2, Friesen explores the relational perspectives emerging from the use of the first-person “I” and “we,” the second-person “you,” and the third person “it” or “one.” It is important for readers to note that Friesen is using the term *relational* in an ontological sense by referring to a certain type of distance or a certain way of pedagogical knowing. The use of pronouns can serve to distance us or to draw us in closer to the subject at hand. In this essay, *I* acknowledge my deep connection to the text by relating it to my own experience. Yet I also invoke the use of *we* and *us* because I feel connected to the online experience shared by my colleagues, my participants, and me.

As indicated above, the main thrust of this chapter, and, in fact, the organizing principle of the entire text, is what Friesen refers to as the “life-world experience ... extending and unfolding along four axes, dimensions, or ‘existentials’ [:] ‘lived space,’ ‘lived time,’ ‘lived body,’ and ‘lived relation’” (p. 25). Friesen defines these dimensions with examples by laying them out for comparison in a helpful table (p. 27), organizing the chapters in which the ideas are explored in detail, and categorizing them in terms of the lifeworld dimensions most directly associated with them.

As distance education emerged, one of the first challenges was to define the distance between the instructor and the student. This challenge led to a pedagogical debate concerning relationships and interactions between individuals and has been theorized as “transactional distance” (Moore, 1997). An important point here is that:

Psychological and communications spaces between any one learner and that person’s instructor are never exactly the same. In other words, transactional distance is a continuous rather than a discrete variable, a relative rather than an absolute term. (Moore, 1997, p. 22)

When we engage in community building, when we take the time to build connections between each other while teaching and learning online, the transactional distance between us lessens and the sense of shared experience grows. In her reflections, Anne noted her “[pleasant] surprise with how the sense of community was developing” (Kraglund-Gauthier et al., 2010, p. 8) in her online classroom. In an “online teacher education program [it is important that] theory and practice are well-integrated, so that [participants] have multiple and ongoing opportunities to make connections between what they learn in their courses and what they do in [their own classrooms]” (Dell, Hobbs, & Miller, 2008, p. 609). The concept of “lived space” (Friesen, 2011, p. 25) becomes a shared place or a place where we can share experiences. I believe I live within Friesen’s “phenomenological world of the ‘we’ ... the ‘life-world:’ ... one that is available through a shared language, through collaborative action, and in common concerns” (p. 23). Surprisingly, Friesen does not take up the idea of community in this text. I suspect that developing an understanding of community through phenomenological questioning might bump

up against the concept of community often found in conversations between instructional designers and instructors.

QUESTION: Have our preconceived notions of community and what community encompasses kept pace with the evolving nature of online classrooms? This also raises the more basic question: What is a community-online or off?

NORM'S RESPONSE: I would believe that word or concept of "community" as it is used in e-learning today is problematic. In this sense, it is similar to terms like "cognitive tools" or "knowledge building environments." Phrases like "community of inquiry," "community of practice" or "learning community." The problem is similar to the one arising when we call certain technologies "cognitive tools" or "knowledge building environments" (e.g., pp. 50–51). Talk of communities of inquiry, like speaking of environments for knowledge building, says much more about what educators *want* to see happening or how technology *should* be used than about what happens or what is actually experienced. These phrases are good examples of characterizations that we need to watch out for in a phenomenological inquiry, since they distort or block access to experience, rather than providing closer contact with it.

On the face of it, community is, of course, a valuable thing. The problem arises when we go beyond face value and look at how it is actually defined—namely, as "a body of people who live in the same place, usually sharing a common cultural or ethnic identity" (OED, 2007). There are few of us who can claim to belong to such a body of people; and we know even from recent history that seeking and maintaining collective identities of culture and ethnicity can be dangerous. As sociologist Zygmunt Bauman observes, "community stands for the kind of world which is not, regrettably, available to us—but which we would dearly wish to inhabit..." (2000, p. 3). If the term "community" has real meaning today, it is not as an "anytime," "anywhere" experience of convenience. Instead, it would imply that person is actually *inconvenienced*, and asked to give up part of what makes him or her distinct, in order to move towards an experience "commonness" implied in community (Bauman says that "the price [of community] is paid in the currency of freedom" p. 4.). Given its powerfully attractive and potentially dangerous connotations—as well as its impossibility online, strictly or literally speaking—I deliberately steer clear of this seductive concept. Instead I speak of what we may have in common more cautiously: I explore aspects of "intersubjectivity" or experiences and meanings that can be said to be shared. It is on the possibility of these moments, such as experiences of atmosphere or shared silence, where my emphasis falls.

* * *

I found Friesen's notion of a "*lived body*" (p. 26) particularly engaging. For Friesen, the lived body "refers to the experience of our own bodies and those of others. ... it often disappears from awareness altogether when engaged in an absorbing task. It communicates and connects with others in powerful but elusive ways" (p. 26). While speaking recently with a colleague about this text, the topic moved to her imaginings of her upcoming online course. Laura-Lee Kearns revealed a sense of discontinuity between the seemingly static online classroom and her own relational images of teaching. "When I imagine teaching, it is connected to movement," Laura-Lee explained (personal communication, November 4, 2011). She then spoke about how she

moves within the physical space of her classroom and how her body and its movements becoming part of the way she delivers her curriculum. She cannot imagine not using proximity, non-verbal communication and gestures. She cannot imagine her students not moving either.

I suspect this imagining is related to Friesen's explanation of the empirical view of teaching, in which we reduce experience to a jumble of inputs that are processed through our five senses. We rely on feedback from our students, whether that is a slight nod of the head in agreement, a quizzical look when something needs to be explained, or the rigid body posture when in disagreement. The instructor must "learn to teach effectively without the visual control provided by direct eye contact" (Fein & Logan, 2003, p. 46). For some, a move to a virtual classroom also requires new skills and as Naidu (2006) observes, may also require "de-skilling" (p. 61) of engrained face-to-face practices. Subtly threaded throughout Friesen's text is the argument that teaching online is much more than mechanics and control. Yet for readers with experiences in instructional design and instructor training, this point may be lost. For some users, controlling the tools of the online classroom is paramount. Rather than providing a space for learning to happen, their concern may limit the experience to a mechanical exercise of timing movement to breakout rooms, clicking polling features, and controlling access to the shared presentation screen and the chat function.

As social animals, I wonder how we can possibly take on re-defining experiences in terms of the constructs of the online space. Under the tenets of phenomenology, the issue is not one of redefining others' experiences; rather, experiences are seen as defining us. In an educational context, experience is unavoidably instrumentalized in terms of educational ends. As an instructional designer, charged with the task of creating what we refer to as online learning experiences, the notion that experience is not something to be created, but rather, simply to be *experienced*, is challenging to accept. I would have liked Friesen to explore this notion further.

On another note, I am reminded of Marshall McLuhan's (1964/1994) phrase "the medium is the message." If we, as McLuhan warns, fail to evolve our thinking in terms of the technological realities embedded in our lives, we may miss how online spaces *are* necessary parts of our current educative processes, in and of themselves. Related to this, yet another question emerges from Friesen's comment that we are "subtly but irrevocably enframed by the functions of the tools, forums, roles, and permissions" (p. 54). The language Friesen uses to describe this enframing, I feel, can be difficult.

QUESTION: If in fact technology is not neutral, and it frames us, what are the practical implications of this? Does this mean that the very tools designed to connect us with each other are actually stifling our connections with each other, and are limiting our sense of place?

NORM'S RESPONSE: I can answer this question about technology "stifling our connections and limiting our sense of place," with a clear "yes." I'm not saying, of course, that Facebook, Skype or email don't help us to connect with distant friends and relatives. I'm saying that the types of connection offered by these technologies is limited in subtle but important ways—in some senses, precisely because of their very convenience and efficiency. In short: The potential for the experience of lived relation is attenuated in online spaces. This is because of the divided ontology of these spaces that I mentioned above: To enter a virtual space, we park our body in

front of a screen or interface, and we project our attention and intentions into the screen, via keyboard and mouse. In doing so however, we are deprived of our bodies for this remotely-realized intention and action. This is also the case when technologies like microphones and webcams are used in teaching a web class. Even when someone proudly shows their newborn, or narrates a tour of a new part of their house, those viewing and responding are still doing so from behind their screens and keyboards. They can't themselves engage the newborn or explore the house. Instead, this is done for them.

The presence and meanings of the body are more complex and irreducible than can be communicated via keyboard and mouse. I quote Merleau-Ponty to express this: The body, he says, "is always something other than what it is... Therefore [it] is not an object." Instead, the body presents "a unity [which] is always implicit and vague." (p. 231) Another's bodily presence, to illustrate, is both indisputable and ambiguous. Through her bodily presence in class, a student cannot not communicate: Just being there speaks of an implicit decision and commitment to the class over some other priority (the body is in this sense not experienced as anytime and anyplace). Simultaneously, the student's bodily presence would alternatively reveal and conceal other aspects of her presence and purpose. Her subsequent behaviour may indicate a concomitant presence of mind, or a countervailing absence of mind that further layers the meaning of her bodily presence. The embodied presences that fill the classroom are very different from the multiple disembodied voices and flickering webcam images that stand in for it in an Elluminate or other live session. Even if students, both online and offline, may populate (virtual) classroom whiteboard with colourful messages and doodles, they are not "present" in each type of classroom in the same way.

The ambiguity and power of embodied presence in the face-to-face classroom also extends to the way that the body helps realize our sense of place: Paper and pencil, chairs and table, can equip a room for a leisurely chat, a serious discussion (with note-taking), or a collaborative writing session. The body can readily inhabit such a space in a manner appropriate to all of these tasks. Online, as I've indicated above, undertaking any one of these activities would require a special tool or space: a chat room, a discussion forum, a word processor for note-taking or a Wiki environment for co-authorship. Instead of being accommodated through the implied unity of the body, each would require entry into a different, figurative, purpose-built space. In leaving the body in front of the screen and keyboard, in other words, the online world must do without something that is powerfully and unavoidably communicative and that ineluctably gives sense and purpose to the places it inhabits.

Section 2: Acting in Worlds: Online and Offline

In 1997, Rochlin wrote of how computers are "creating patterns of reliance and dependency through which our lives will be indirectly and irrevocably reshaped" (p. 7). As an inanimate object, the computer sits, requiring a human to input data. For some, it is merely a tool, a means to an end. For others, the computer, smart phone, or iPad can be a lifeline to an ever-expanding circle of friends, news, and learning. An individual's connection to that piece of metal, plastic, wires, and its seemingly magical ability to transform keystrokes or voice commands into ways to connect at a distance, can be quite compelling.

Our attachment to our computers is manifest in personalized desktops, screen savers, mice, case covers, and stickers. We use the tool to reveal our personality and even our values. My own desktop changes with the seasons and my mood. I also sometimes change the background on my classroom computer to suit my mood or the theme of the lesson. When settling in to teach a 3-hour online class, I arrange the space around my computer very carefully. As if embarking on a long road trip, I adjust my seat, angle the monitors, and check the volume. Friesen frames this somewhat ritualistic behaviour in terms of Rosenberger's "relational strategy" (as cited in Friesen, p. 77), an embodied connection between me and the keyboard and screen.

During a conversation for my doctoral research, one of my participants described a similar behaviour:

Some people, even some of my students, tell me that they like having their MEd courses online because they can relax at home. Some are even in their jammies! I know this because they won't turn on their webcams. Me, I couldn't imagine teaching in my jammies. I need to feel like I am in a classroom. It's like I need my teacher suit as armour, proving I have something to say [chuckling]. I know they can't see me, but I need to have that sense of ... I don't know ... maybe professionalism? I make sure I have all the materials laid out around me, my coffee is hot, and I mentally prepare myself. I even catch myself putting on my game face, you know, that inner dialogue designed to centre yourself in the moment that is to begin. (Interview, February 8, 2011)

For this participant, the world of the physical classroom and the world behind the computer screen evoked similar reactions and experiences. For her, and for others as Friesen shows us, this deep connection to the moment at hand is a "corporeal" (p. 86) experience. My daughter Morgan is like this with books. She sees the words as pictures in her head; the story is a lived experience in her head that drowns out her physical surroundings and mutes the sound of my voice.

Just as we can get lost in a book, we may also get lost in the screen. We may get immersed in the experience and become oblivious to the physical world around us. The immersion often involved in virtual games and simulated worlds, and the preoccupation of their participants, belies the notion that we use the computer as a conduit to another worldly experience. In fact, it *is* the world. In Chapter 5, Friesen takes these metaphors of online and offline worlds to heart in the context of an exploration of the relationship between education and simulation.

Many of us have witnessed or participated in a high school biology lab demonstration and the visceral experience of making that first scalpel cut into a bloated frog. Reading Friesen's descriptions collected from other researchers (provided from p. 90 onwards) summoned a number of visual and olfactory memories from my days as a high school student and later on as a biology teacher. I firmly believe in the power of hands-on learning; yet, I have also incorporated virtual dissections into my former teacher practice. I made this move for pragmatic reasons that are mainly related to shrinking budgets and the management of a lab containing squeamish students. Additionally, as Friesen notes, the lab is often "neither familiar nor comfortable, neither convenient nor accommodating" (p. 106), and in this sense, I see it as running the risk of actually

interfering with what needs to be learned. Now, after reading this chapter, I question my decision.

QUESTION: Did the apparent perfection of the online lab remove the element of risk from a slip of the scalpel? Did I somehow deprive my students of a lived experience, “a pedagogical ... experience between the self and the world” (Friesen, 2011, p. 107), or one that embodies the senses in favour of an engineered, sterile, but socially-conscious alternative?

NORM’S RESPONSE: In Chapter 5, I make the case that to use a simulation for a dissection exercise is to omit important experiential elements that are available only in the biology laboratory. Like any software, a simulation is carefully designed to consistently anticipate and accommodate the intention and habitual action of its users. In phenomenological terms, these interfaces are designed to cultivate the “natural attitude” or to sustain a kind of “business as usual,” experientially speaking. A simulation in this sense provides students with an on-screen experience of transparency and intentional flow with which they are likely already all too familiar from the many other interfaces in their lives. An animal carcass in a lab dissection, on the other hand, offers little to reinforce the natural attitude, or to sustain a “living-in-certainty-of-the-world,” to use Husserl’s phrase. Small, dark and withered, it imposes elements of disruption and deprival that are by definition eliminated in a designed computer interface (as designers of instruction or of user experiences will know). Of course, as an object of interaction and investigation, a carcass is not “designed” at all; it is not *intended* by someone to be either difficult or accommodating. The experiential elements of deprival and interruption that inhere in the laboratory dissection, I conclude, are in this way rendered unrecognizable in the rational processes of the design of an instructional simulation.

Section 3: Encountering the Other Online and Offline

In Chapter 6, Friesen explores embodiment and relational pedagogy. For Friesen, “the intersubjective, intercorporeal life-world is a reality that is collectively and socially constituted, and it comes into full existence only insofar as we share it with others and encounter and engage with others in it” (p. 111). Returning to Chapter 2’s discussion of pronoun demarcation, Friesen deepens this ontological distinction between the self and “you” in his account of reciprocal online experiences. In retrospect, this seems to explain why I consciously incorporate the term *participant* in my writings. Stemming from the interactions I have in my own online Master of Education classroom, in my research room and reading the ideas of others, for me, the term *user* seems to be too one-sided, too industrialized and too rationalized. This is reinforced in Friesen’s account of the way the “natural attitude,” the uninterrupted “living-in-certainty-of-the-world,” is built into user interfaces. The word “user” does not evoke the vision of a community of inquiry that I strive to attain.

In reading the discussion in Chapter 6 on the subject of setting the tone for an online space and the following chapter on the relational dimension of pedagogy, I am reminded of Patricia Cranton’s work in authentic teaching and transformative learning (see Cranton, 2000a; Cranton, 2006; Cranton & Carusetta, 2004). I was privileged to have had Patricia as my thesis advisor for one year of my Master of Adult Education degree (Kraglund-Gauthier, 2006). While reviewing

the literature and conducting my research in defining and benchmarking university program success, time and time again, success was defined in terms of the connections students had with their professors. Cranton (2006) explains this in terms of making spaces for students to develop their skills in critical self-reflection, to transform themselves through the ways they interpret their experiences. For Ottilia, Anne, Andrew, and I, this evoked the question “whether the modelling of practices will foster a pedagogical atmosphere (Kraglund-Gauthier et al., 2010, p. 9).

As an instructional designer, I would often spend a fair bit of time with professors and students while helping them navigate the intricacies of their online classroom. For the most part, this was done online; inside the boundaries of the software itself, I strove to offer spaces in which professors could discover their pedagogical selves, or, to transform as authentic educators (Cranton, 2000a).

If, as Marina Kostina, a distance learning expert, observes in one of her v-blog posts, “Our students will forgive us for almost anything except for not being authentic” (October 26, 2011), then Friesen’s explanations of the pedagogical power of atmosphere rings true. The challenge is to replicate the warm, inviting climate in an otherwise sterile place. I firmly believe students know when their professors are only paying lip-service to their ideas and their presence. In Chapter 7, Friesen presents a series of “recommendations and techniques for moderating online discussion” (p. 129). This is, from the author’s perspective, not intended to be a “how-to” list of strategies. For Friesen, the same or similar relational pedagogy can be seen as a priority both in online and face-to-face spaces. In both, an atmosphere of openness is of paramount importance.

Friesen emphasizes that the ways in which such an atmosphere is cultivated, offline and online, is different. For Friesen, in offline spaces atmosphere is cultivated in a rather different way. In fact, atmosphere is cultivated in a manner for which we do not have a vocabulary readily available. He explains how we can use concrete examples, and speak of things like embodiment in shared spaces, but atmosphere is literally so much in front of our faces that it is difficult to render it visible. In online asynchronous spaces, an instructor cultivates a positive atmosphere through his or her writing, by carefully crafting its tone and character, and by managing its frequency and timeliness.

QUESTION: Why is it that some of the professors I have worked with are so reluctant to use their webcams in their online classes, while at the same time, they worry that they are not connecting with their students? Is the embodied self on the screen created by the webcam in conflict with these teachers’ own perceptions of themselves and how they inhabit this space?

NORM’S RESPONSE: This question probes deeply into issues of selfhood, authenticity and the relation of self and other. I will address them by referring to the relationship between embodiment and online contexts introduced above, and by using a few sources that go beyond those referenced in my book. I quoted Merleau-Ponty above as saying that “the body is not an object;” however, the webcam insists on pushing the body (or the talking head) in precisely this direction. An image from another’s Webcam can be recorded, resized and turned on and off on my computer screen. There is little or none of the “perceptual reciprocity” (Abram, 1997, p. 69)

that normally characterizes vision and bodily proximity in the offline world, in which I see when I can also be seen, and in which my proximity to another is also his or her proximity to me. This lack of perceptual connection and balance presents a range of choices and challenges for teachers. One researcher has pointed out that it may lead to an emphasis on “the teacher’s performative choice” and that it may “intensify” teacher “reflexivity”—the “consciousness of his or her own position and [its] possible differentiation” (Buhl, 2008, n.p.). Having to choose between different performances and roles disrupts teacher authenticity. Understood as reliability, originality, genuineness and trustworthiness (i.e., being not a mere performance, guise or copy), authenticity would ideally not involve choices about performances and roles. The limited range of abbreviations and emoticons shared by users across chat platforms and sessions poses further challenges to authenticity: Except when we are deceiving or performing, a smile or frown is one’s own smile or frown. It is not the result of a generic combination of keystrokes.

* * *

I appreciate Friesen’s discussion on “lurkers” (pp. 133–134) and on the “pedagogical ‘praxis of silence’” (p. 145) in this chapter. “What is central to this notion of passive or receptive ability is the realization that inaction can be as important as—or even more important than—explicit acts, statements, cognitions, and communications” (p. 147). We may be logged into an online space but are we actually *present*? I, too, struggle to ignore the imaginary sound of crickets chirping in this deafening silence. I think back to the time I was physically sitting alongside a professor new to the online classroom experience. He had asked a provocative question to his class and was waiting for a response. When no hands rose, he turned to me in frustration, wondering, “Are they even there?” He activated his microphone and asked the group the question again. They remained silent, but one participant quickly responded in the instant chat: “Processing.”

QUESTION: I wonder, are the silences longer in the online world because we cannot “see” this thinking process?

NORM’S RESPONSE: I am inclined to agree with the notion that silences in the online world are experienced as longer than those occurring offline. Online silence may indeed be a result of not being able to see the other in thought. At the same time, though (and this is a central point in my chapter), they may arise from entirely different circumstances. Is the student truly in thought? Or is he distracted by more pressing problems around him? Or has he simply lost his connection? Both online and face-to-face, silences can be ambiguous, but this ambiguity is different in each case. Face-to-face, silence is contextualized through the body and shared surroundings; online, the ambiguity of silence is amplified by the physical separation or decontextualization of each interlocutor. The ambiguity of silence is further extended by the possibility of technical or other disruptions in communication.

Section 4: Space of the Screen and Place of the Classroom

The sole chapter of this final section is Friesen's conclusion to his experiential exploration of the "differences separating the screen and classroom as spaces (or places) for pedagogy" (p. 151). He presents a number of key points of opposition between online technologies and pedagogical practices that are based on his previous experiential explorations. Returning to previous discussions on technology as a tool, the categorization of web-based practices is again linked to the notion that the online classroom's imposing structure of permissions and buttons and file transfers impacts on individuals' experiences. By way of contrast to textual signs of presence online, Friesen points his readers to Logstrup's and Levinas's accounts of the encounter with the other via silence and "the face." In place of the explicit and at times specialized operations involved in online settings, Friesen emphasizes the "non-specialized" and even "non-intentional" character of some pedagogical practices. Instead of the convenient and routinized efficiency that Web interfaces are designed to provide, Friesen reminds us that there are forms of exertion—of inconvenience, inefficiency, and improvisation—that are pedagogically indispensable. The final issue raised by Friesen is less a comparison than a single point that focuses on the power of lexicon, voice and perspective. This is a fitting closing, serving as a reminder that we are, indeed, "enframed" (p. 54) by the tools and structure of the online space—more by how we envision their possibilities and their purpose, than by their explicit functions and purposes.

Above all, silence figures prominently in this chapter. Friesen describes silence in terms of embodied presence and questions whether the label of "lurking" is experientially valid. For me, "lurking" has negative connotations in and of itself, and somehow valorizes the kind of explicit participation that is outwardly noticeable. I prefer the phrase "silently present" to "lurking." There is something to be said for the intentional pauses. In the temporal online space, we cannot take back hitting the "send" button. Even the act of hovering over that key, debating whether to press it or not, requires a certain amount of introspection and critical thinking. The online queue, waiting for my turn to respond, is a silent opportunity to phrase my question or comment, to incorporate the ideas of participants who have preceded me and to dialogue with myself about the pedagogical implications of my next utterance.

QUESTION: Why is it that we view silence as something to be broken? How do we honor the deliberate communication of silence as experiential praxis rather than a problem to "fix"?

NORM'S RESPONSE: This is another question that goes deep into the problematic of the book and that opens up a wide range of issues and concerns. I believe that online, it is tempting to view silence as a problem to "fix" because it can in fact be simply a technical or practical matter: the connection may literally be broken or the other's attention may be drawn away from the chat box or the computer screen. The question of how to recognize and respond with patience and respect to others' deliberate silence in text-based online contexts, however, remains an open question: We might be able to move toward such a recognition and response by becoming familiar with the pace and pattern of the other's communication and engagement with technology. This may develop one-on-one over time, but can be much more challenging in a 13-week course with an online cohort of two dozen or more. Of course, the dynamic of silence and its potential meanings changes when students' vocal inflections and facial expressions are captured via an active microphone and webcam (as is mentioned in the conclusion of this

review). I deal with these newer possibilities only briefly in Chapter 7, “Pedagogy and the Relational Dimension” (especially pages 134-135). There, I talk about how technologies like chat windows, microphones and webcams reduce some of the many ambiguities that silence online opens up. However, I also make the point that certain ambiguities remain, regardless of the type of technology involved: “Is everyone actually engaged in the discussion” or are they multitasking? “Has someone said something to upset another person? Or is someone experiencing technical problems of some kind?” In different online contexts, teachers are expected to work in different ways to get a “feel” for these silences and to develop a disposition for engaging with them. As technology changes, and as different practices arise, there are more lived experiences of these kinds of silence to explore!

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Friesen’s explanation of “negative capability” from Chapter 7 becomes clearer in this context. Negative capability “refers to the capacity to be open, receptive, and available” (Friesen, 2007, p. 158). In light of the mechanized skill-sets required for interaction in online spaces and the craft of writing online responses, we need to understand this capacity, identified by Friesen in offline contexts, as it might be manifest online. We need to be able to cultivate it as an integral part of the lived experience online. As Laura-Lee notes, we need to “value the space as a place for learning... interestingly and creatively” (personal communication, November 4, 2011). I see our challenge as one of transforming the flat, one-dimensional place of the computer monitor into the three-dimensional living space of the classroom.

I question, as does Friesen, whether our online communications can be reduced to a rigid model communication of inputs and outputs and noise (p. 162) as described by the Shannon-Weaver model. In the 20th century, computers became commonplace in businesses and were accorded the power of increased efficiency and productivity, control, and communication (Rochlin, 1997). Their implementation is often an extension of Taylor’s scientific management of workflow; computer processes can be regarded as an ideal version of organizational and instructional ones—as logical means to an end. Yet, the factory model of assembly line learning does not function easily within the fluid dynamics of many online spaces. Learning is too messy; we rally for the ghost in the machine (Koestler, 1989) that permits us to exist in the space of our minds and in the online space of the classroom.

Conclusion

For Lindeman (1936/1961), the purpose of adult education is to give meaning to the experience rather than to work towards a predetermined end result. If phenomenology is concerned with understanding how those same experiences define us as we undergo them, then approaching this text with a dualistic emphasis will be beneficial. Although some potential readers may shy away from the philosophical lens Friesen has used, engaging with his words is an experience in and of itself. It is an exercise in reflective *praxis*.

I sense we are on the edge of something big in terms of how rapidly evolving technology impacts on our pedagogical ways of knowing and practice in online classrooms. I wonder how Friesen would respond to the way that online classroom atmospheres change because of the immediacy of online microphones and web cameras. In my experience, during heated online classroom discussions, microphones can relay tone and passion. The immediacy of the online chat enables listeners to engage simultaneously with the words, images, and sounds presented. Similar to a physical classroom space, tone of voice and inflections, facial expressions captured via an active microphone and webcam, and these instant responses via emoticons and chat, serve to create an engaging and welcoming atmosphere. I think back to my own experiences in the physical classroom, walking in to start the lesson and seeing the chalkboard filled with students' drawing and words as a visible sign of their presence and desire to be noted as present. In the online classroom, my initial whiteboard screen tends to serve the same function. My students doodle, place pictures, and write words. In fact, their physical presence is enhanced by font and colour, by digital imagery, and by the corresponding words from colleagues in the chat function and via the microphone. Our webcams provide the opportunity to proudly display new babies, beloved children and pets, and in one of my sessions, a walking tour of a new addition to a house.

Of course, online and physical classrooms cannot be equated. Similarly, one physical classroom can be a completely different experience from another physical classroom. I look forward to reading Friesen's and other phenomenologists' responses to the experiences afforded by new technology in online classes. I also welcome perspectives from practitioners and instructional designers who also wrestle with similar questions as I.

Throughout this text, Friesen's phenomenological perspective and questioning urge readers to consider how they experience the place of the classroom in relation to "the space of the screen". This is one of those books that raises many questions that are enlivened through a reflective examination of my own practice. This critical questioning has been a powerful force to help form and inform practice and to understand the perspectives and experiences of others.

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