COLWRIT – Collaborative Online Writing in Google Docs

Presenting a Research Design

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Study purpose
The emergence of online collaborative writing tools (e.g. Google Docs) opens up new opportunities when students are co-producing texts
The COLWRIT study (Collaborative Online Writing) explores how the collaboration and writing processes of university students are affected, when creating their shared text through the use of collaborative writing tools like Google Docs.

Collaborative writing processes
- CW [collaborative writing] is an iterative and social process that involves a team focused on a common objective that negotiates, coordinates, and communicates during the creation of a common document. The potential scope of CW goes beyond the more basic act of joint composition to include the likelihood of pre- and post task activities, team formation, and planning.
- Furthermore, based on the desired writing task, CW includes the possibility of many different writing strategies, activities, document control approaches, team roles, and work modes.

Mixed methods
- Logging of all changes as well as all comments in student Google Docs
- Automatic analysis and visualisation of collected data
- Logging and analysis of project related closed facebook posts → visualisation
- Pre and post surveys
- Observation & video to capture complex interpersonal on/offline working processes
- Interviews & focus groups to get students’ opinions and feedback
- Diaries to capture students’ own reflections and important moments
- Different student groups involved as informants and co-researchers
- Study to be carried out during 12 weeks of problem based project work in fall 2014

Expected results
We expect to be able to:
- Describe significant variation in the students’ approaches to collaborative online writing, especially in relation to the students’ different roles and different phases of the writing process
- Understand different aspects of the groups’ collaboration and negotiation in relation to coordinating and creating a shared text
- Understand the meaning and interplay of different online and offline resources (e.g. Google Docs, whiteboards, handwritten notes etc.) in relation to collaborative writing
- Develop pedagogical guidelines for the use of Google Docs in relation to project work and collaborative online writing processes

Ethical implications
- Agreed consent will be obtained from all informants (students) in relation to data logging and observations
- All data will be anonymized
- All informants (students) are invited to participate in a research seminar, where we present and invite for discussion of the preliminary findings of the study

The tyranny of participation – the dark side of collaboration
- To think that collaborative participation is always a liberating and emancipating mode or strategy is both a naïve and a utopian point of view.
- Collaborative participation can lead to tyranny of the dominant and hence the reinforcement of oppression and control.
- Especially in the absence of reflexivity and understanding of different ways and approaches to participation.

So what is being negotiated during the writing process: work and writing strategies? Or personal and participative legitimacy?
And how is it being negotiated: by open arguments or subtle indications?

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