

David John Clarke, University of Melbourne, Australia

Investigating the Social Essentials of Learning

Many of the processes by which educational phenomena are experienced and by which the products of the learning process are enacted are essentially social. Further, the institutions (e.g., schools) and the individuals (e.g., teachers), whose primary function is to promote learning, do so by means of social interaction. Contemporary learning theorists have attempted to integrate social interaction into their theories in ways that do more than relegate the social to simply a context for cognition. However, developing an empirical basis for such theoretical advances has proved highly challenging. Innovative research designs are needed to distinguish the social aspects of the learning process and, particularly, those for which “the social” represents the most fundamental and useful level of explanation and modelling. This presentation will report on some approaches to addressing this challenge.