



The Perception of Using Objects of Personal Value in Personal Tutorials

Bradley Howe BA/BSc, Dr. Harriet Richmond, Dr. Maged Zakher



The Project



The project explores using objects of personal value in personal tutorials. Tutees were invited to bring an item of personal value and discuss it within these tutorials. The personal tutor was then interviewed about his experience.

Recommendations and further research

Objects have been used in teaching and learning in different contexts and using them with Personal Tutees can have some positive results. They, for example, can:

- Add some elements of uniqueness to the students' experience (since each student brings their own choice of objects that have personal value to them)
- Add a sense of belonging to a learning community (if object-based discussions are done in groups).
- Enhance the Personal Tutors' memory, helping them to remember certain aspects of importance to their personal tutees. Students' satisfaction is known to improve when a student feels 'known' as a person.
- Enable students to articulate dimensions of their previous experiences, that they may otherwise not share with a Personal Tutor.

The expansion of Personal Academic Tutoring will create more focus and priority surrounding the meeting. Faculty calendars should be accessible to demonstrate the idea of openness and accessibility to students.

This contributes to a social constructivist model of Personal Academic Tutoring through shared spaces and dedicated learning environments. Through objects, more agency is exerted to/by tutees, developed by 2-way knowledge sharing.

Reflection



As a final year researcher, this project has been very different to anything I have encountered during my undergraduate degree at The University of Northampton. This project has explored informed ways to articulate and understand how researchers govern not only themselves, but also the research process, and how important collaboration and knowledge sharing is. It is about understanding, not only what can be learnt from the research, but also listening to the research from multiple perspectives conversed by others. A platform for constant discussion has been crucial throughout this process and has enabled a persistent dialogue to develop new ideas and potential avenues for research. Through the power of teamwork and openness, this project has taught me how to conduct myself in a more coherent and academic way, and how not knowing the answer can sometimes be the most interesting outcome.

Power & the tutees

As researched by Davis, et al. (2010), the biggest factor in adolescents which changes the power dynamic is how they form answers that avoids their self-created pressure. Their responses 'have' to be socially desirable for them to be accepted. Baiardi (2015) and Drahota & Dewey (2008) both mention how there is minimal evidence on 'perceived' and 'actual' positions of power and how they can reduce the quality of conversations, focus groups and interviews. Furthermore, Colucci (2007) explains how adolescents find talking about themselves intimately or on topics that have negative connotations, a very challenging thing to do. Most likely, this is due to the vulnerability, as discussed by Crane (2001), and the necessity for acceptance within new groups and a decline in unknown social trust.



Some of the tutees bought with them these items during the Personal Academic Tutoring sessions. These items were later recalled by the tutor in a research interview.



References

Abell, J. and Myers, G. (2008) 'Analyzing research interviews', in Wodak, R. and Krzyżanowski, M. (eds.). *Qualitative Discourse Analysis in the Social Sciences*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 145-161.

Albano, C. (2007) 'Displaying Lives: The Narrative of Objects in Biographical Exhibitions', *Museum and Society*, 5(1), pp. 15-28.

Baiardi, J. M., 2015. Using Sociograms to Enhance Power and Voice in Focus Groups. *Public Health Nursing*, 32(5), pp. 584-591.

Barthes, R. (1999) *Camera Lucida: Reflections on photography*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux Inc.

Beckstead, Z. et al. (2011) 'Collective Remembering Through The Materiality and Organization of War Memorials', *Journal of Material Culture*, 16(2), pp. 193-213.

Colucci, E., 2007. "Focus groups can be fun": The use of activity-oriented questions in focus group discussions. *Qualitative Health Research*, 17(10), pp. 1422-1433.

Crane, T. F., 2001. *Adolescence in America: An Encyclopedia*. 1st ed. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO.

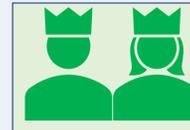
Davis, R. E. et al., 2010. Interviewer effects in public health surveys.. *Health Education Research*, 25(1), pp. 14-26.

Drahota, A. & Dewey, A., 2008. The sociogram: A useful tool in the analysis of focus groups.. *Nursing Research*, 57(4), pp. 293-297.

Hemer, S. R. (2012) Informality, power and relationships in postgraduate supervision: supervising PhD candidates over coffee, *Higher Education Research & Development*, 31: 6, 827-839, DOI: 10.1080/07294360.2012.674011

Hirsch, M. and Spitzer, L. (2006) 'Testimonial Objects: Memory, Gender, and Transmission', *Poetics Today*, 27(2), pp. 353-383.

Oldenburg, R. (1989). *The great good place: Cafe's, coffee shops, community centres, beauty parlours, general stores, bars, hangouts and how they get you through the day*. New York: Paragon House



Agency & Structure

Abell and Myers (2008) (in their discussion of qualitative research interviews) recommend an 'information gap' where the interviewee brings to the discussion a topic in which they are the expert. It could be argued that the same could benefit personal tutorials, giving confidence to tutees as they guide the discussion using their personal objects.

While tutorials are still held in spaces that are largely controlled by the tutor (in a classroom or university space), bringing items from their home environments can provide tutees with an opportunity for some control, erasing some of the boundaries between home and the classroom.

With the challenge of structuring personal tutorials beyond 'how is everything going with your studies?', adding an anchor around which a natural conversation can be had provides some structure which can be helpful. This is especially useful in first tutorials where it can take longer to establish some rapport and conduct honest conversations.

Through the research, one of the findings was how 'perceived power' could negatively effect the quality of conversations. Students typically view higher 'year groups' as a position of power. Additionally, UK Education is a static, 15-year long treadmill of an 'us-and-them' relationship between teacher and student, whereby this mindset is continued into university. This is of relative scale, as per the graph, the more power is perceived, quality of conversations is reduced



Memory

Beckstead *et al.* (2011, p. 195) suggest that 'memory is not only 'stored in brains' but also distributed through social artefacts and. Albano (2007, p. 17) suggests that objects can hold narratives from the past, as a way of making sense of the present. In this way they function as 'biographical objects'. In *Camera Lucida*, Barthes describes two effects of photographs on the spectator; 'studium' and 'punctum'. Studium is intentional and 'coded', revealing the photographer's deliberate choices (Barthes, 1999, p. 51). It represents an attentive encounter with the photographer's intentions. In contrast, the punctum is a cut. A photograph's punctum is that accident...which pricks me (...is poignant to me) (Barthes, 1999, p. 27). Hirsch and Spitzer (2006) apply the concept of punctum to objects: [W]hile some remnants merely give information about the past, like the studium, others grab and puncture, like the punctum - unsettling assumptions, exposing the unexpected. (Hirsch and Spitzer, 2006, p. 358)

Objects appear to possess that same quality of 'punctum' that Barthes describes here, with the capacity to contain personal narratives, that are displaced onto and into the object, mitigating any awkwardness that might arise in the discussion of personal topics given the power relations between tutors and tutees. Furthermore, there appears to be a relationship between materiality and memory, with some evidence to suggest that objects used in this way enable a personal tutor to more readily recall, and subsequently relate to, their personal tutees.