

A theory-practice gap in online higher education:

A failure of constructivist learning theories or

A victory of paradigm shift rhetoric?

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Conclusion first

“It is a victory of the rhetoric!”



We shall see a gap in reality!

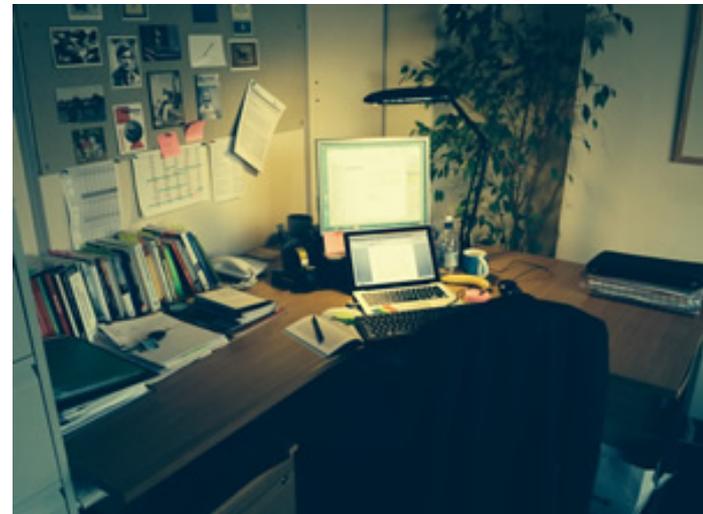
Research problem

What does the quality online higher education look like?

Constructivist Learning **Theory**



≠ Actual Learning **Practice**



Research problem

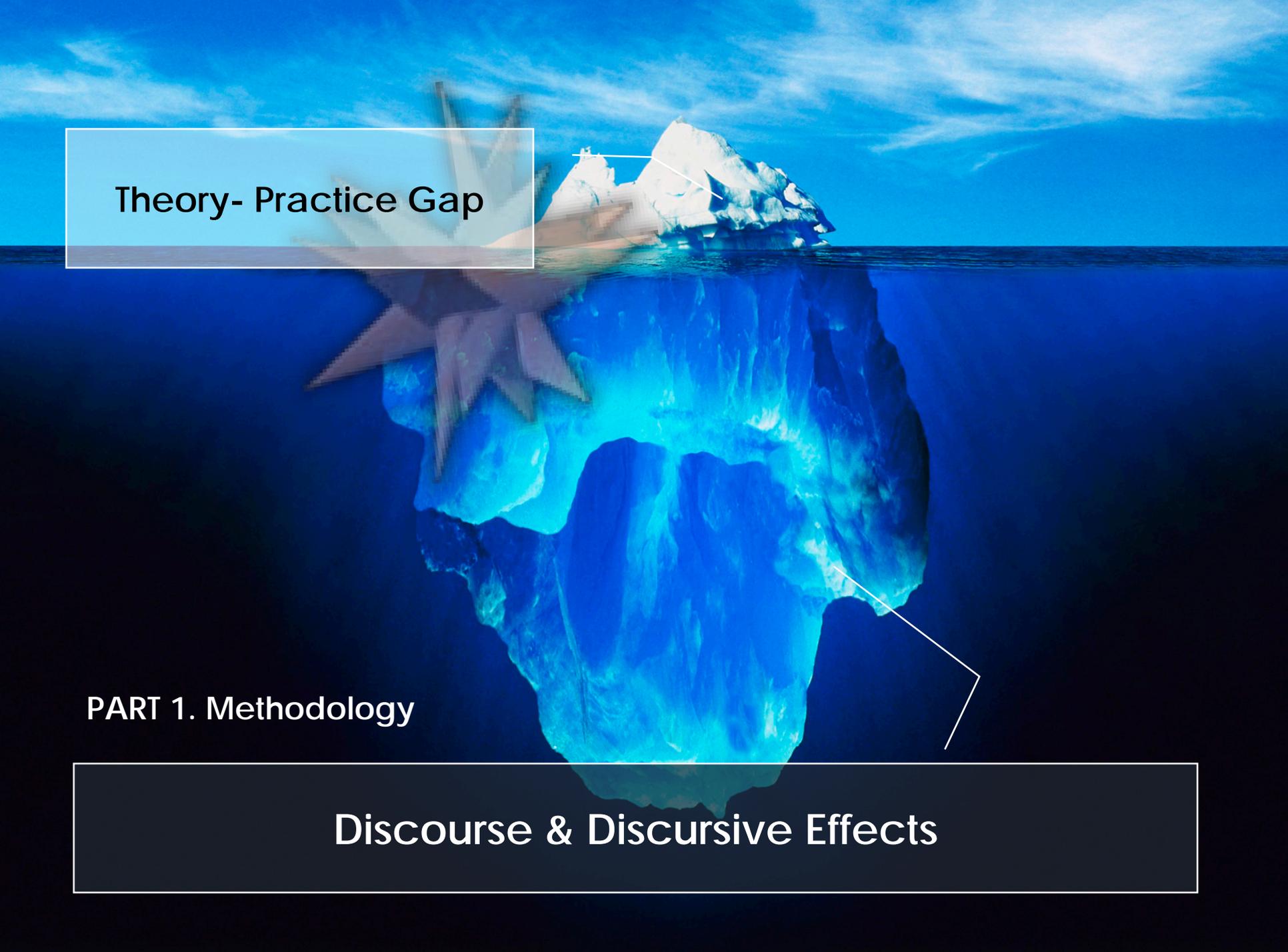
rarely questioned
or critically
examined



Tried to remove the
contextual barriers
and limitations

*Discourse & Knowledge
(Foucault, 1972)*

**“How and under which conditions has
the theory-practice gap arisen in online higher education (HE)?”**

An iceberg floating in a blue ocean under a blue sky with light clouds. The visible tip of the iceberg is small, while the submerged part is much larger and more complex. A white box with a thin border is positioned in the upper left, containing the text 'Theory- Practice Gap'. A white line points from this box to the tip of the iceberg. Another white line points from the submerged part of the iceberg down to a larger white box at the bottom of the slide, which contains the text 'Discourse & Discursive Effects'. The text 'PART 1. Methodology' is located in the lower left area of the slide.

Theory- Practice Gap

PART 1. Methodology

Discourse & Discursive Effects

Discourse of online higher education



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The World
of Knowledge
For You!

Learn more,
pay less

Click for info about higher education
at East Riding College



Discourse of online higher education

LEARN ANYWHERE.
LEARN ANYTIME.

Learn more,
pay less

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LEARN ANYWHERE.
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COLLABORATE



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3 (2000) 41–61

**THE INTERNET
AND HIGHER
EDUCATION**

Shift happens Online education as a new paradigm in learning

Linda Harasim*

*TeleLearning Network of Centres of Excellence, Simon Fraser University at Harbour Centre, 7th Floor,
Time Centre, 515 West Hastings Street, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada V6B 5K3*

What does Foucault tell us about discourse? (1/3)

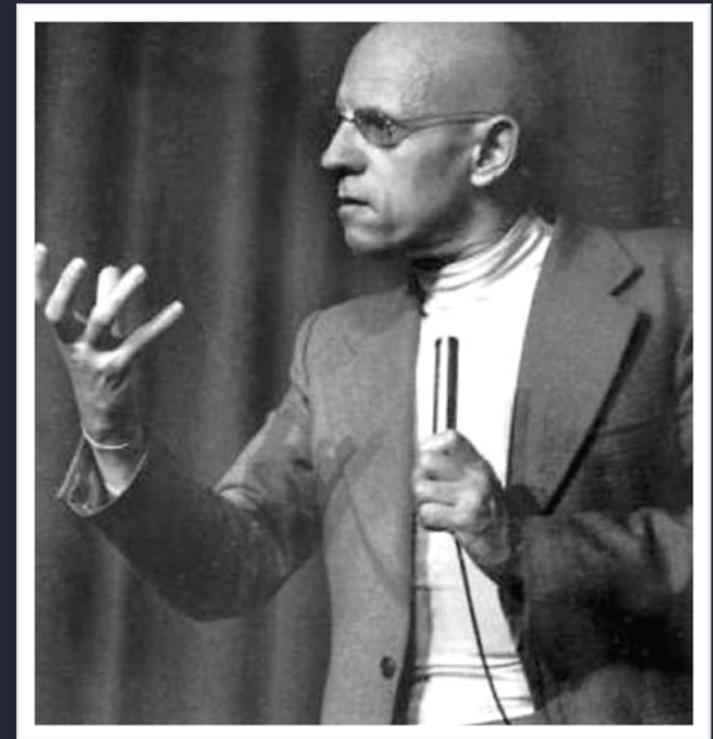
Discourse ≠ Truth

Discourse = Regime of Truth

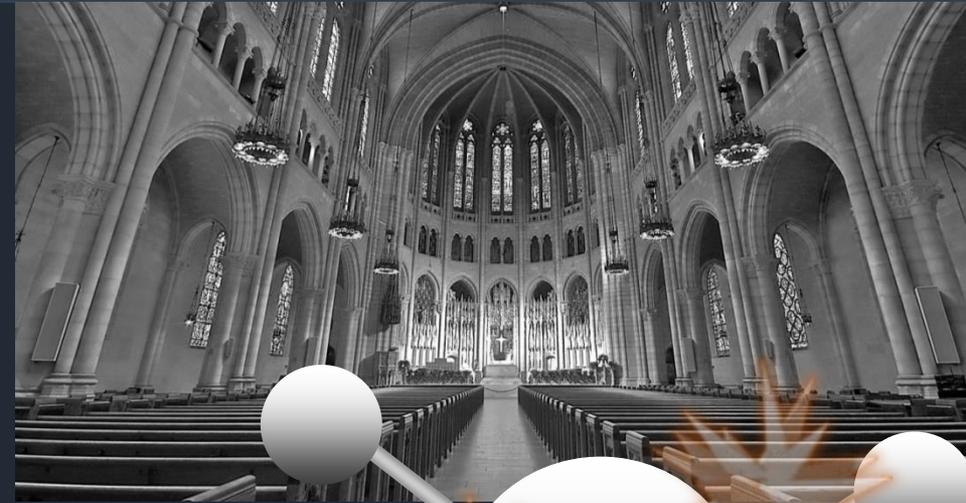
A Set of Knowledge, Rules and Regulations

“An institutionalized **WAY** of talking that **REGULATES** and reinforces action and thereby exerts **POWER**”

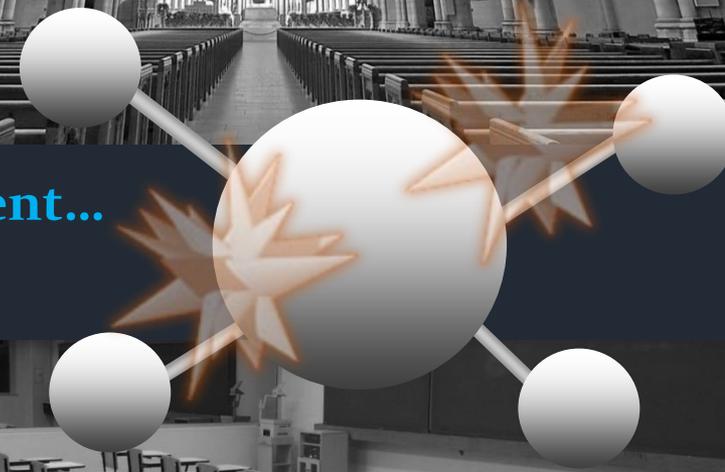
(Mills, 2003)



What does Foucault tell us about discourse? (2/3)



at a particular **institution** at a particular **moment...**
there are competing discourses



What does Foucault tell us about discourse? (3/3)

How does it work?

1. Dominant discourse produces...

2. A Set of Knowledge,
Rules and Regulations



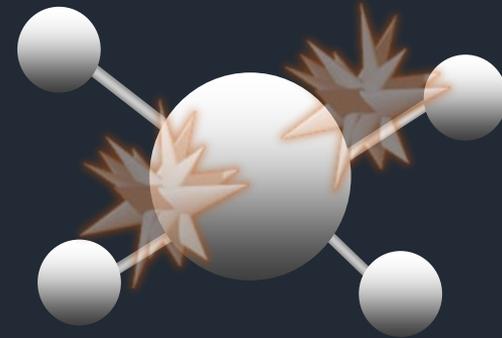
3. Normalisation vs. Problematisation



4. Unequal conditions -
Institutional benefits & penalties



5. Productive but oppressive
discursive effects



Foucault questioning dominant discourses

I. Discourse

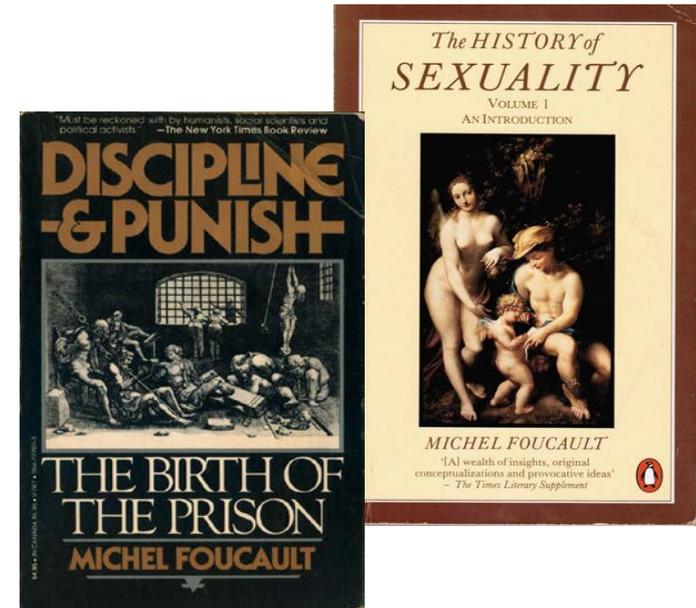
Archeological question

How and under which conditions, has a certain discourse emerged and become dominant?

II. Discursive Effects

Genealogical question

What are the effects of the dominant discourse on members' practices in a certain institution?



My study - critical discourse analysis

I. Discourse

Archeological question

How and under which conditions, has the **paradigm shift discourse** emerged and become dominant?

II. Discursive Effects

Genealogical question

What are the effects of the **paradigm shift discourse** on members' online HE practices in **two open universities**?"

Text Data

- Harasim's article (2000)
- Institutional document
- Interview transcripts

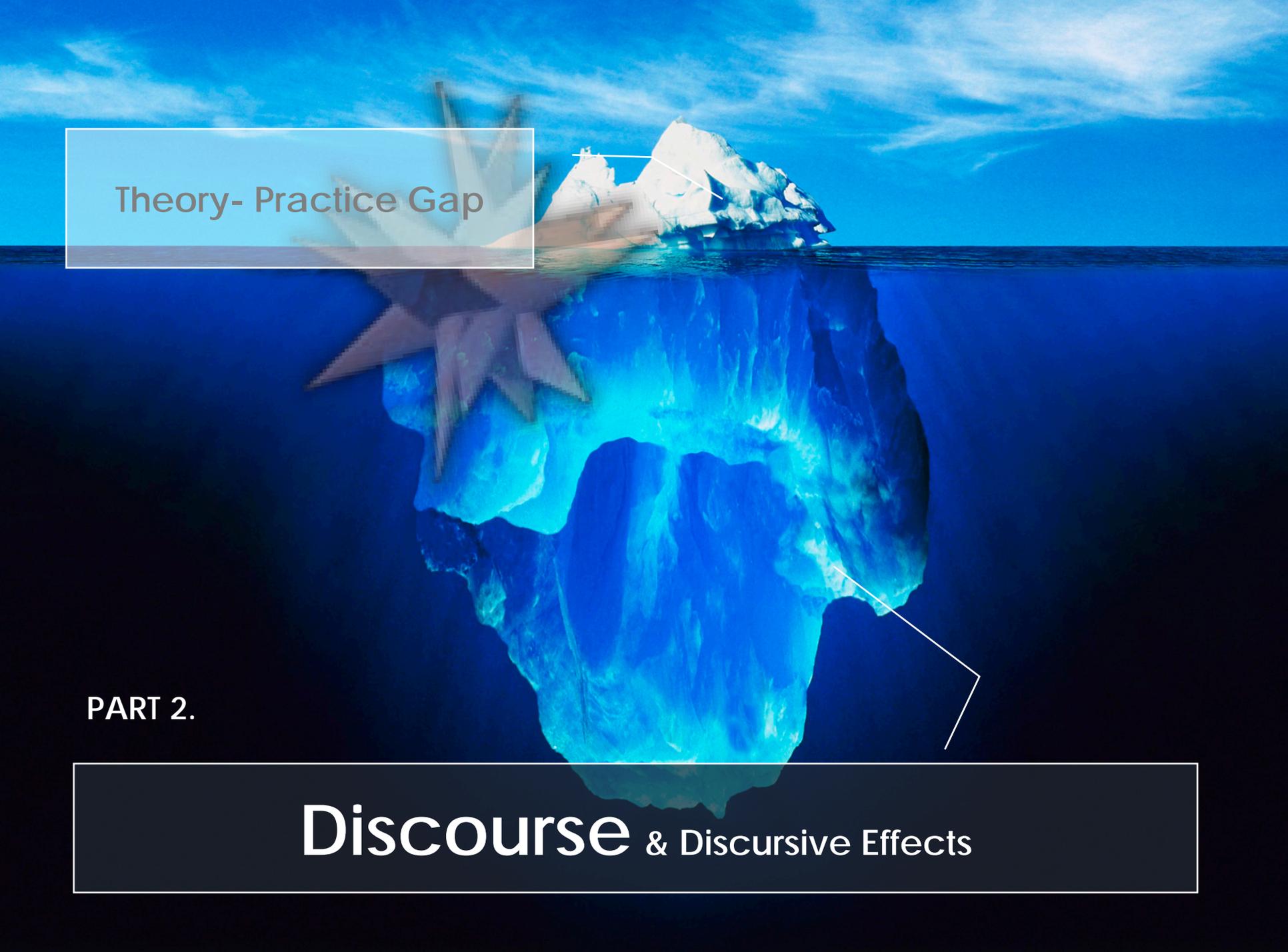
Semi-structured interviews with
12 learning designers
& 15 tutors

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Theory- Practice Gap

PART 2.

Discourse & Discursive Effects

Step 1: “Paradigm shift” claim made



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Shift happens

Online education as a new paradigm in learning

Linda Harasim*

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Online education *has shifted* a fundamental learning paradigm in higher education.

“Online education provides **new** modes of educational delivery, **new** learning domains, **new** principles of learning, **new** learning processes and outcomes, and **new** educational roles and entities”

(Harasim, 2000, p. 45)

Discursive Statement 1: Online Ed is an accessible and democratic group communication phenomenon.



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The World
of Knowledge
For You!

Online education provides “24/7 access expanded air time for discussion and reflection, allowing everyone to have a voice, overcoming challenges, and traditional discrimination factors, such as **ageism, sexism, and racism**” (p. 54).

Discursive Statement 2: Online learning is collaborative and interactive.



“... the concept of **producing knowledge by collaborating** in groups” encapsulates the essence of the new learning paradigm that online education has brought into higher education. (p. 54)

Discursive Statement 3: Instructors are not a knowledge provider but learners are responsible in knowledge construction.

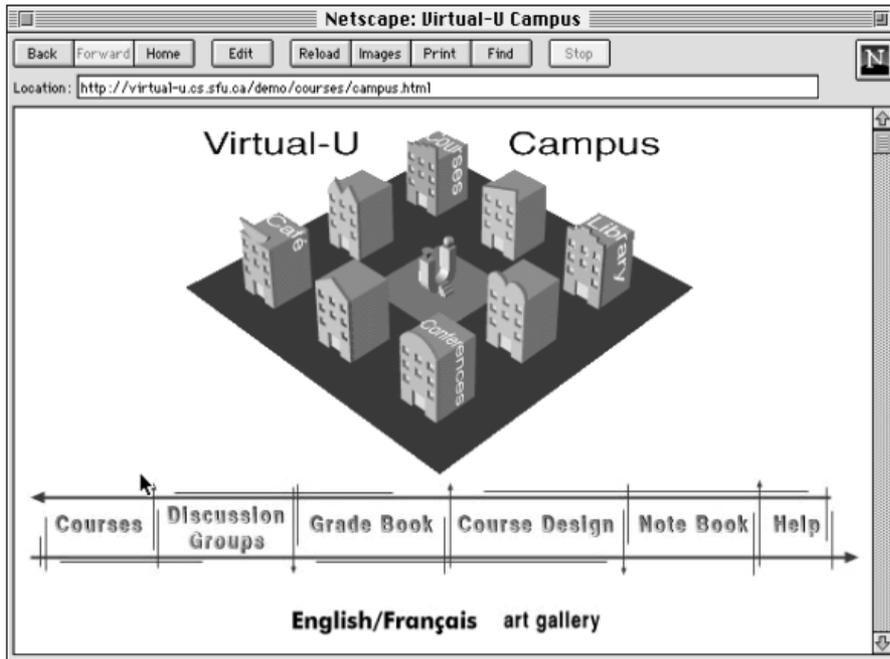


Figure2: The Virtual-U campus main page

“Over 15,000 students and 220 instructors participated in over 429 courses.” (p. 50)

100% of Virtual-U courses incorporated some form of networking and collaborative learning activities and students actively participated in those activities.

Step 2: “Paradigm shift” claim becomes rhetoric



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Three conditions...

Shift happens

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- A technological deterministic – essentialist view
- Pre-accepted constructivism – Neoliberal educational culture
- New millennium! Great excitement of – aspiration for progress



Step 3: The rhetoric becomes dominant discourse



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Cited, reinforced, and
taken-for-granted...

Shift happens

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“... shifts and paradigmatic changes in pedagogical practice resulting from the implementation of the new technologies... (Harasim, 2000)”

(Nachmias, 2002, p. 215).

“... enabling the creation of online learning communities for construction of shared knowledge across barriers of space and time... (Harasim, 2000)”

(Papastergiou, 2006, p. 595).

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Theory- Practice Gap

PART 3.

Discourse & **Discursive Effects**

Discursive effects 1: Categorisation

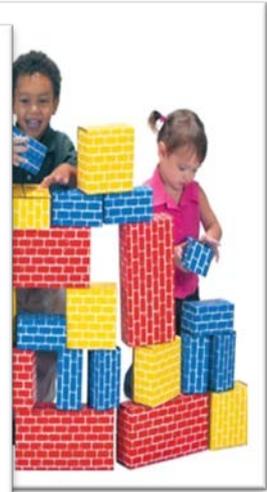
Behaviorism



Cognitivism



Constructivism



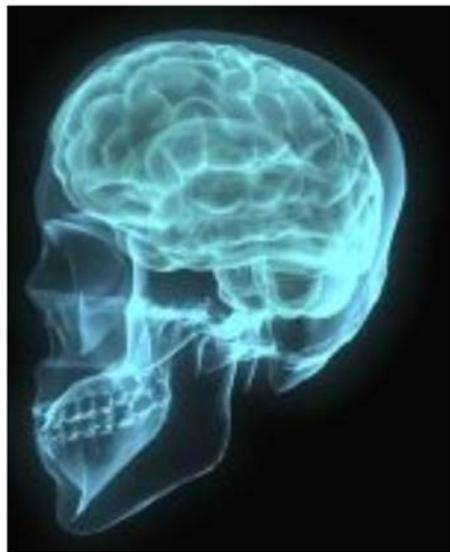
Discursive effects 2: Normalisation

OLD - BAD

Behaviorism



Cognitivism



NEW - GOOD

Constructivism



Social Constructivism

Discursive effects 3: Oversimplification

Oversimplification of	The rhetoric serves to dismiss
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• online HE practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• the diversity of the form of online HE<ul style="list-style-type: none">» the historicity of pedagogical practice» the specificity of context and participants
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• pedagogical changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• the complexity of any pedagogical and social changes

- **Online HE has been perceived as a singular enterprise so controlled by a singular paradigm.**
- **Pedagogical changes have been perceived as a simple adoption of new theory and technology.**

Discursive effects 4: Being prescriptive

- The **paradigm** shift discourse produces prescriptive knowledge, rules and regulations and so invite volitional changes.

There are incommensurable differences between the old paradigm and the new paradigm in terms of the “set of rules and standards about truth”.

(Popkewitz & Brennan, 1997, p.300)



Paradigm is often misused in school reform projects as a powerful tool to **force** teachers **as change agent** to accept and follow **authoritarian voices** in educational campaigns.

(Stickney, 2006)

- Constructivist learning theories have providing universal principles and n
- A gap emerged!



Discursive Statement 1: Online Ed is an accessible and democratic group communication phenomenon.



“It was all about how this online learning business was going to cut the cost. So once that started being a part of discourse well... that was it! I will say it’s more the economics of it than pedagogy.”

Discursive Statement 2: Online learning is collaborative and interactive.

“Online Ed has been developed more into an individualized and flexible educational mode with self-paced courses and any group communication... has been extremely restricted even though Internet communication technologies have been made available.”

“Interaction with peers... is for universities who have a cohort, but in our environment, [it is more important whether] it’s easy to navigate, the instruction is clear, the material is clear.”



Discursive Statement 3: Instructors are not a knowledge provider but learners are responsible in knowledge construction.



“You can allow marginal students or many even incompetent students into the system. So you reduce the barriers to get in but they are not going to get out, right? Because they are just not capable of doing university level...”

I face this numerous times... It’s my job to show that the [incapable] student has problems but can overcome those problems... Grammar Nazi (laughing)... the first thing for me is to take care of business for students.”

Conclusion

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Conclusion

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- We need to challenge the paradigm shift rhetoric in online HE and its discursive effects.
- Accepting the diverse learning paradigms and embracing pedagogical historicity and contextual specificity of different online HE practices.
- “Perception or apprehension of concrete particulars” (Kessels & Korthagen, 1996, p. 19) in their practice may reduce the theory-practice gap in online HE.



Lee, K. (2017). Rethinking the accessibility of online higher education: A historical review. *The Internet and Higher Education*, 33, 15-23.

Lee, K. (2018). Discursive effects of a paradigm shift rhetoric in online higher education: Implications on networked learning research and practice. In B. Nina, S. Cranmer, S. Julie-Ann, M. Laat, & T. Ryberg (Eds.), *Networked Learning: Looking Back - Moving Forward*. New York, NY: Springer.

