

Session 7c

Paper

Usefulness happens while we do other things

Program text

In this paper, I suggest that an inquiring work with a subject matter makes usefulness happen in a way which opens the possibility for alternative use of teaching formats beyond their implicit manual.

Abstract

The conversation about analogue vs. digital easily gets caught in apriorist conclusions about what these formats can be used for. While the McLuhan truism “the medium is the message” always is worth a consideration, I suggest by synthesizing selected insights from non-utilitarian perspectives that an inquiring work with a subject matter makes usefulness happen in a way which opens the possibility for alternative use of formats beyond the implicit and explicit utility of their design.

Through a pragmatist theoretical consideration of the concept of utility, I explore how “the utility/tool discourse” can be expanded towards alternative perspectives on how we judge dilemmas of analogue vs. digital. In learning theories and didactical discourses, there is a widespread vernacular language about what this or that format or tool “can do” for something else (most often for student learning). Maybe we care too much about utility and the tools? What would happen if we treated the utility of things with benign neglect because we were occupied being curious about academic problems?

With such questions in mind, I ask what answers pragmatists Dewey and Rorty can give to the question of how “analogue vs. digital” affects experiences such as curiosity and presence. I include Hannah Arendt’s critique of the utility perspective and Sara Ahmed’s recent concept of “queer use” to expand on the pragmatist perspective.

Finally, while not advocating to ignore the constraints of the format, I will discuss how focusing on the format itself as instrumental for experiences of curiosity and presence includes the danger of overlooking the importance of the interests at the center of Higher Education, the inquiry and the subject matter. What could be the use of these formats which happen while we do other things?

Author(s)

Jakob Egholm Feldt, RUC

Literature

Ahmed, Sara. 2019. *What’s the Use?* Durham: Duke University Press

Arendt, Hannah. 2018 [1958]. *The Human Condition*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press

Dewey, John. 2008 [1922]. *Human Nature and Conduct*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press

Rorty, Richard. 1982. *Consequences of Pragmatism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press