

# Making space to study: student experiences of managing time and space in an Online MPhil/PhD

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# Background

- Widening participation a growing priority in doctoral education (McCulloch & Thomas, 2013); flexible provision may be one way to achieve this (Barnett, 2014)
- Discussions about flexibility typically frame 'spaces' (e.g. the campus) as problems to be overcome, with technology as the solution (Oliver, 2015)
- Naïve, given the ongoing importance of campuses for most students (Cornford & Pollock, 2005)

# Sociomateriality

Humans, and what they take to be their learning and social processes, do not float, distinct, in container-like contexts of education, such as classrooms or community sites, that can be conceptualized and dismissed as simply a wash of material stuff and spaces. The things that assemble these contexts, and incidentally the actions and bodies including human ones that are part of these assemblages, are continuously acting upon each other to bring forth and distribute, as well as to obscure and deny, knowledge.

(Fenwick *et al*, 2011: vii)

# Distributed doctoral studying

Reading did not primarily occur in traditional ‘spaces of enclosure’: her office or even the university library. She found that she read the book while on the exercise bike in the gym, on the tram to and from her office, in a doctor’s waiting room, and on the bench in the park watching her son play. Usher and Edwards (2007) would probably describe this as a ‘deterritorialised’ learning practice, in that it involves a loosening up of traditionally conceived spaces for or of learning. (Barnacle & Mewburn, 2010)

- Digital mediation already permeates doctoral work (Esposito, 2014)

PhD Activities	Focus	Tools/venues
Updating	Searching for relevant materials	Google Scholar, Twitter, discipline-specific databases, Facebook
Networking	Seeking research bonds for future collaboration	Email, Facebook, research-focused SNs
Disseminating	Building reputation	Academia.edu, LinkedIn, Twitter, blogs
Discussing research issues	Increasing self- confidence	ResearchGate, LinkedIn groups, Skype
Pursuing personal development	Expanding knowledge and first hand experiences	MOOCs, YouTube

- How do doctoral students create the networks, spaces and infrastructure they need, when doctoral programmes are increasingly decoupled from campus-based provision?

## Study context: Online MPhil/PhD Oct '14

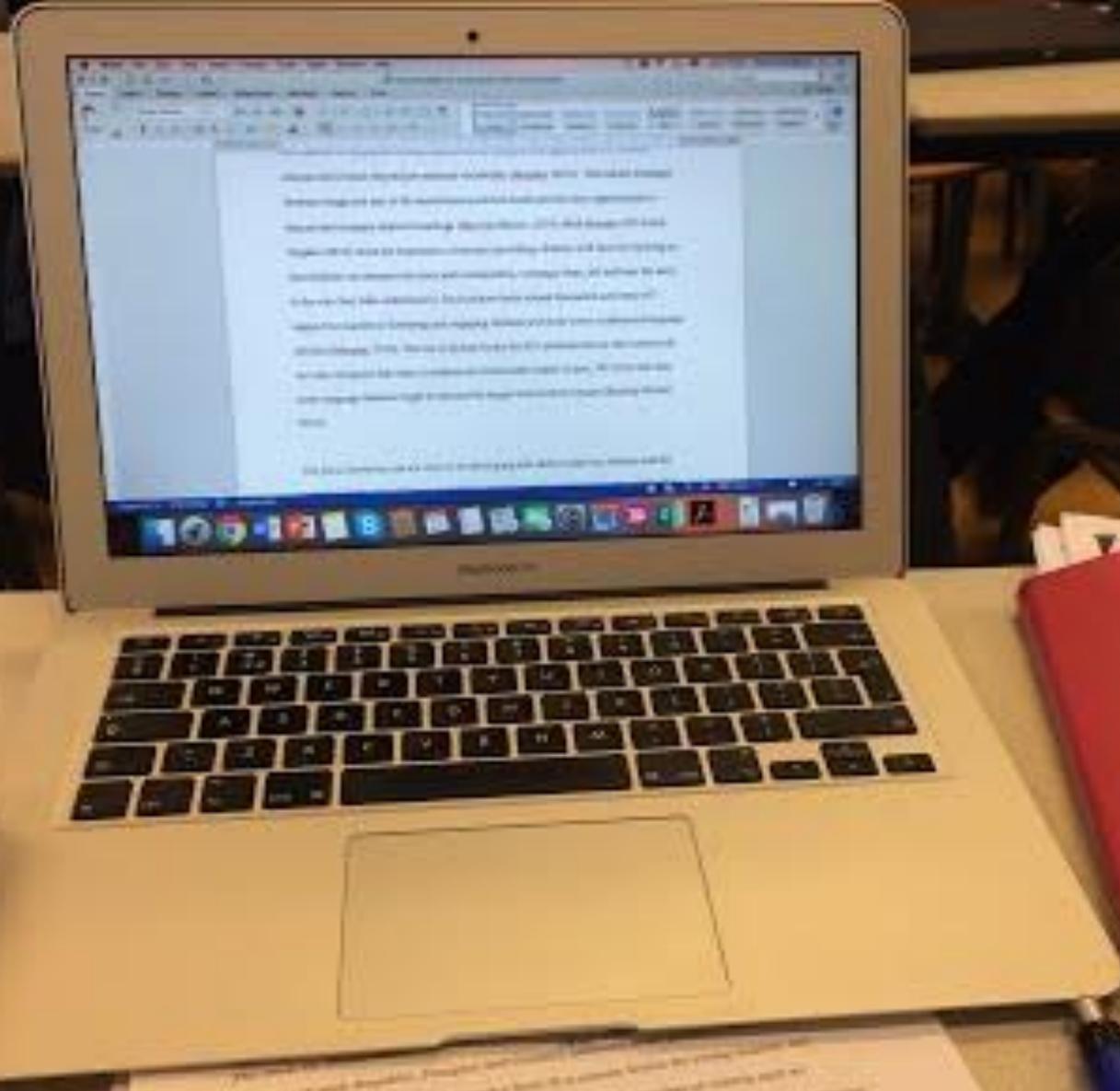
- Identical: Fees, Supervision, Certificate and modes (FT/PT)
- Moodle
  - Texts: ejournal articles; ebooks and PDFs
  - Activities: Forums; Blackboard Collaborate
  - Designed for synchronous and asynchronous study

# Methodology

- Participants recruited from the Online MPhil/PhD programme
- An ‘interview plus’ approach, developed for an earlier project on digital literacies (Gourlay & Oliver, 2016)
  - Asked to draw, in advance, a map/picture of where they studied
  - Interviewed about the image(s) they provided, and their patterns of study
  - Thematic analysis of transcripts, alongside provided images
- Institutional ethical approval, all data anonymised



Ballet: Monday



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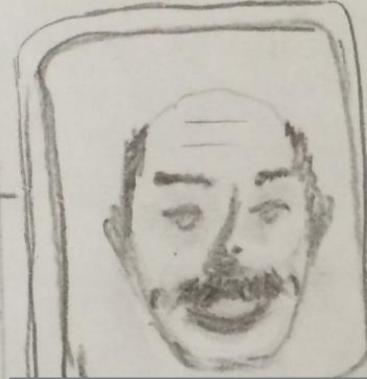


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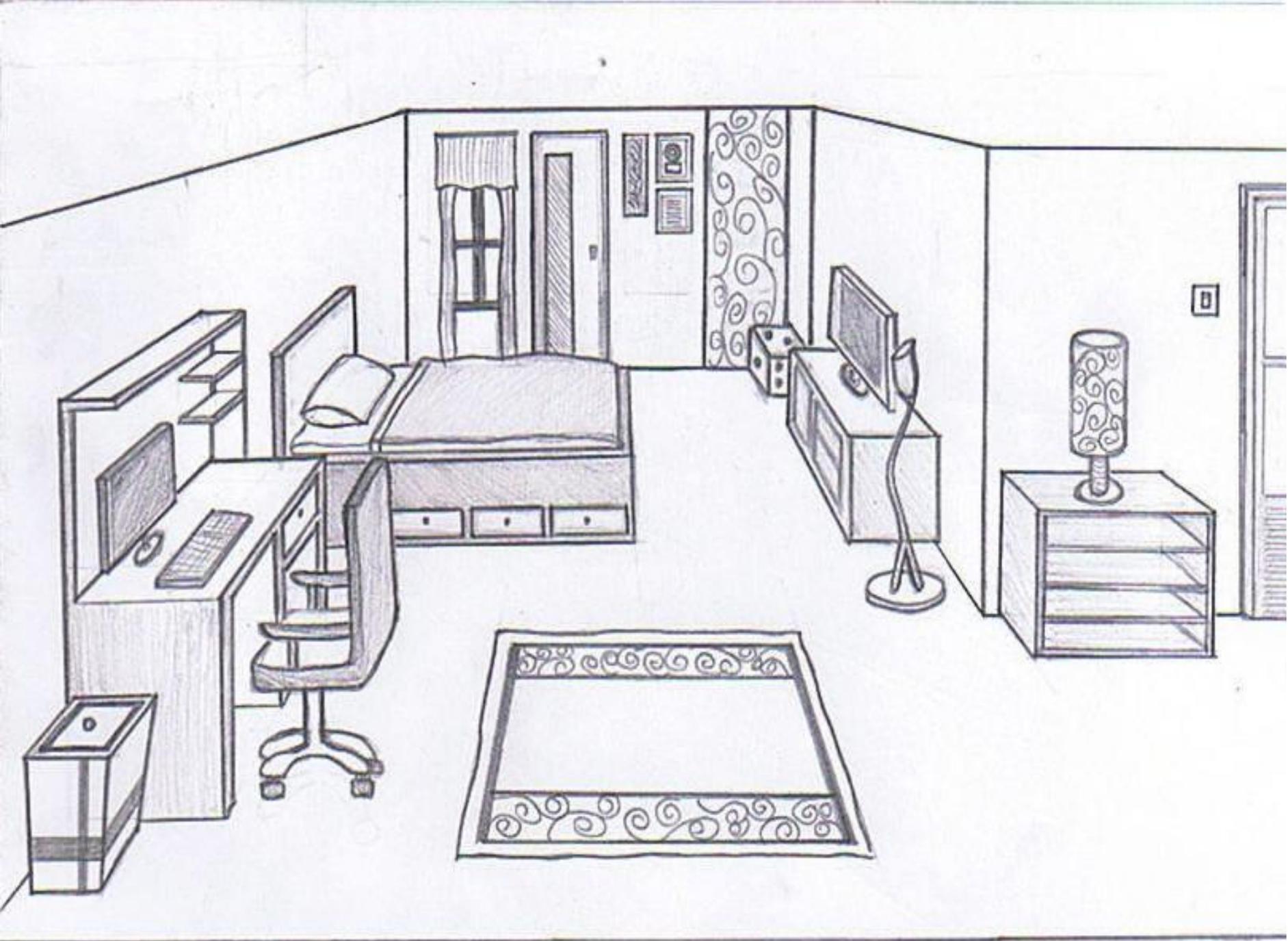


SKYPE

Search











# Conclusions

- Always an interplay between material, social and digital
- The constant creation of places to study where the student feels in control
- The institution through screens
- Rhythms of study, the use of 'dead' time

# References

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