

Stories of learning spaces from distant places

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Digitally mediated distance education is the fastest growing sector of tertiary education. However, online and distance education providers frequently report lower completion rates than traditional face-to-face providers for reasons that are subject to considerable speculation. Against this backdrop, the objective of the current study was to seek a deep understanding from first-time distance students about their learning experiences. The overarching methodology was Design-Based Research, within which the study drew on phenomenological data gathering methods. The lived experiences of 20 first-time distance learners were captured in their own words in over 22 hours of video diary data. A grounded theory approach was applied to the process of thematic data analysis. The discussion reflects on deep insights into the complexities of life as a distance learner. The paper concludes that institutions should not take for granted that students who choose distant learning spaces are intuitively able to transform them into effective places for formal learning.