

Networked Learning as a Framing of Society

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Abstract

The main purpose of this paper is to explore the idea of conceptualising networked learning, not as a kind of human activity, but as a way of viewing human activities. The hope is to promote collaborations and connections between the field of networked learning and other fields, in ways that may ultimately transform, mutate, and hybridise the fields. To achieve this, four metaphors of society is outlined. These are named the biosphere, the distorted reality, the community, and the market. The metaphors serve as foundations for four different framings of society that directs attention and raises questions about learning. It is noted that by combining several frames, it may be possible to approach networked learning in a more thoughtful, nuanced, and well-balanced way. It is also noted that the use of frames could make it possible to move beyond what has been called the impasse of ideology in the field of networked learning.

Keywords

Networked learning, frames, metaphors, ideology.

Introduction

The Networked Learning Editorial Collective (NLEC, 2020) propose a revised definition of networked learning:

Networked learning involves processes of collaborative, co-operative and collective inquiry, knowledge-creation and knowledgeable action, underpinned by trusting relationships, motivated by a sense of shared challenge and enabled by convivial technologies. (p. 319)

They argue that one important consequence of this definition is that:

Networked learning promotes connections: between people, between sites of learning and action, between ideas, resources and solutions, across time, space and media. (NLEC, 2020, p. 319)

By using the concept of convivial technologies, the Networked Learning Editorial Collective stress the importance of critical and emancipatory studies of networked learning. They argue that the criticism within the field has often been reserved for “technological evangelism and the predatory commercial behaviours of players in the educational technology industry” (NLEC, 2020, p. 317). Although this kind of criticism may “provide a brake on education’s susceptibility to fads, fashions and quick fixes” (NLEC, 2020, p. 317), they also note that:

Scanning through the papers presented at networked learning conferences and through chapters in the corpus of networked learning books, one finds very little – not nothing, but surprisingly little – on such areas as critical race studies, postcolonialism, indigenous knowledge, class, gender studies, queer theory, disability studies, green and blue environmentalism and sustainability. Contributions and theory from disadvantaged spaces and the Global South are few and far between. (NLEC, 2020, p. 317)

Apparently, many stones are left unturned. This is why the Networked Learning Editorial Collective include the concept of convivial technologies in their definition. Convivial technologies are technologies that support shared social or political projects (Illich, 1973). However, as noted by several authors in a community response (Gourlay et. al, 2021), this is hardly a sufficient remedy. To attract researchers and practitioners from the field of critical and emancipatory studies, there is a more fundamental issue that needs to be addressed:

The Networked Learning Editorial Collective define networked learning by providing a set of characteristics that distinguishes human activities that are examples of networked learning from human activities that are not. If, for example, a certain human activity is not underpinned by trusting relationships and does not promote

connections, it is, according to the Networked Learning Editorial Collective's definition, not an example of networked learning. In other words, the definition provided by the Networked Learning Editorial Collective creates a social category that distinguishes human activities that are examples of networked learning from human activities that are not examples of networked learning. By extension, researchers and practitioners belonging to the field of networked learning are distinguished from those who do not belong to the field by their objects of study.

The social construction of reality by language and social categories is one of the main interests of researchers and practitioners in the field of critical and emancipatory studies. They may therefore be interested in studying how the field of networked learning is socially constructed and what the consequences of this are, but they might not be tempted to join forces with researchers and practitioners within a field that is perceived as a social category with clear boundaries. Consequently, it does not help to simply add the concept of convivial technologies in the definition of networked learning. Nor is it sufficient to remove some of the excluding characteristics listed in the definition given by the Networked Learning Editorial Collective. Even the overly inclusive definition that "networked learning is learning in networks" would create the same problem. It would still create a social category that distinguishes human activities that are examples of networked learning from those that are not, and, by extension, it would still distinguish insiders belonging to the field from outsiders that do not belong to the field.

A related issue is that researchers and practitioners from different fields may be interested in different social units. For example, in the field of networked learning, there is, of course, an interest in social networks, and in the field of critical and emancipatory studies there is an interest in social categories and the stratification of society. These are two very different ways of understanding the social world. Researchers and practitioners who argue, like Castells (2000), that social networks have come to constitute a new social morphology of society, also implicitly argue that social categories are no longer as important. This may not be the best way of attracting researchers and practitioners from the field of critical and emancipatory studies. Neither may it be the best way of attracting researchers and practitioners from fields where focus is on other social units, such as dyads, groups, organisations, or communities.

To attract researchers and practitioners from other fields, Knox (in Gourlay et. al, 2021, p. 359) proposes that the concept of networked learning must be allowed to become networked itself, in the sense that it is allowed to make connections, interrelate, transform, mutate, and hybridise in response to the pressing issues of our time. A similar idea is proposed in the current paper. The idea is to conceptualise networked learning, not as a certain kind of human activity, but as a way of viewing human activities. Put differently, "networked learning" will not be used to label human activities, but to label views on human activities. This idea implies

- that any human activity can be viewed from a networked learning view, even though not that every human activity may be very interesting to view from a networked learning view,
- that one way of viewing a human activity may be complemented with others, and, for example, a traditional networked learning view may be complemented by a critical and emancipatory one,
- that any human activity can be viewed as learning in multiple social units at the same time, including dyads, groups, organisations, networks, and communities, and
- that any view of a human activity may be revised at any time, in response to pressing issues or to accommodate for changing interests.

Consider, for example, a certain chat conversation between two people. When trying to understand this human activity, it is possible to ask questions about how and to what extent it promotes connections in networks, as well as asking questions about how and to what extent it produces, reproduces, or transforms social categories. In the first case, the view is similar to the one portrayed by the Networked Learning Editorial Collective. In the second case, a critical and emancipatory view on human activity is being used. Furthermore, it is possible to combine different views and for example ask questions about how the promotion of connections in networks produces, reproduces, or transforms social categories and vice versa. Consequently, researchers and practitioners that has a background in the field of critical and emancipatory studies, but are new to the field of networked learning, not only have something valuable to contribute to the field of networked learning but may also learn something that turns out to be a valuable contribution to their own field. This may promote collaborations and connections between the two fields in ways that ultimately may transform, mutate, and hybridise them.

If any human activity can be viewed from a networked learning view, there is no need for a definition of networked learning that distinguishes between human activities that are worth investigating and those who are not. On the contrary, it could, for example, be interesting to investigate when and how fads, fashions and quick fixes may become valuable against all odds, what learners learn when they struggle with isolation, troublesome relationships, or badly designed technologies, or what strategies teachers use when they try to resist predatory commercial behaviours of players in the educational technology industry. This also means that there is no need to draw a clear line between insiders and outsiders of the networked learning field.

In fact, there is no need for a definition at all. Instead, researchers and practitioners need to make clear what their view or views are. It is the chosen views that need to be described and made visible, not the defining characteristics of the study objects.

The main purpose of this paper is to explore the idea of conceptualising networked learning as a way of viewing human activities. With inspiration from Dewey (see Dreon, 2019) and Goffman (1974) this is done by using so called frames. The concept of a frame is introduced in the next section. In the section after that, a frame is introduced with the aim of capturing the networked learning view portrayed by the Networked Learning Editorial Collective. Then, three sections follow where three other frames are outlined. These are examples on other possible ways of viewing human activities that may be of interest when studying or designing for networked learning. All four frames should be understood as tentative and open for revision. Also, the list of proposed frames is not intended to be exhaustive. Other frames could be added. The paper ends with some concluding remarks.

The paper builds upon a chapter in a forthcoming book (Brandén, 2022).

Frames

The concept of a frame is a metaphor. Framing something is like looking at it through a picture frame. Depending on the positions of the observer and of the frame, different things appear.

Several examples of frames can be found in the textbook *Reframing Organizations* by Bolman and Deal (2021). They use four different framings of organisations:

- If an organisation is framed as a factory, it directs attention to the division of labour and the rules, routines, systems, and hierarchies that are used to coordinate activities.
- If an organisation is framed as a family, it directs attention to relationships between people and what needs, desires, skills, and limitations they have.
- If an organisation is framed as a jungle, it directs attention to how people create coalitions around different interests to compete for limited resources.
- If an organisation is framed as a temple, it directs attention to how different cultures are maintained through rituals, ceremonies, and the retelling of myths and stories.

The factory, the family, the jungle, and the temple are metaphors that Bolman and Deal (2021) use to direct the reader's attention. This is not only a convenient way of organising the material presented in the book, but also a way of relating to the material that may provide a better understanding of organisations. Consider, for example, a reorganisation. The factory framing then raises questions about how the relationship between roles and tasks changes in the organisation, the family framing raises questions about how the relationship between roles and people's needs changes, the jungle framing raises questions about how power is redistributed, and the temple framing raises questions about how the image of the organisation's management changes. Correspondingly, other events in an organisation, such as an evaluation, writing a vision statement, a meeting, or deciding something, can be framed in several different ways. Each framing directs attention and puts forward certain types of questions. With more frames, a more complex and multifaceted picture of an organisational event may emerge. This makes it easier for managers and employees to approach the organisation's complex challenges in a more thoughtful, nuanced, and well-balanced way.

Using a metaphor is one way of framing something. A metaphor contributes with a system of concepts that makes it possible to put experiences into words. At the same time, a metaphor also provides a symbolism that makes these experiences meaningful and comprehensible. This is true also for frames that does not build on metaphors. A frame is in this paper defined as

- a system of concepts that makes it possible to communicate about certain experiences and
- a symbolic system that makes such experiences comprehensible.

Bolman and Deal (2021) argue that a frame could be understood as a mental model. Such mental models are referred to in the literature under names such as maps, mindsets, schemas, or lenses. At the same time, Bolman and Deal’s four metaphors are not chosen arbitrarily, but derived from four different research traditions. This suggests that metaphors and frames may be shared among people and could consequently also be understood as social patterns. This seems to be closer to the way Dewey (see Dreon, 2019) or Goffman (1974) understand frames, as noted by the authors themselves.

How many frames are there? Bolman and Deal’s four frames are certainly not the only frames that have been used to study organisations. For example, Morgan (1997) uses machines, brains, organisms, cultures, psychic prisons, systems of politics, transformation, and tools of domination as different metaphors for organisations. It is also possible to introduce new frames that directs attention to gender equality, intersectionality, organisational learning, or anything else that is of interest. In other words, frames can be used both to capture past and ongoing activities within a field and to broaden a field by directing attention in new directions and to put forward new questions.

The approach in this paper is similar to that of Bolman and Deal (2021). In the next section, a metaphor is proposed with the intention of capturing a traditional networked learning view. The analysis in that section indicates that the associated tentative frame builds upon on a consensus theory as well as a theory of collectivism. A distinction between consensus and conflict theories and between theories of individualism and collectivism makes four different combinations possible, see Table 1. The frame derived in the next section is an example of what is labelled as Combination 1 in the table. In the upcoming sections, one possible frame is proposed for each one of the other three combinations.

Table 1: Four ways of framing society

	Consensus theories	Conflict theories
Theories of collectivism	Combination 1	Combination 2
Theories of individualism	Combination 3	Combination 4

The four different metaphors and their corresponding tentative frames are derived using inspiration from four different traditions. There is no ambition to be completely true to any of these traditions. Focus is not on sorting out the history, but to derive metaphors and frames that may serve the purpose of this paper.

The metaphors introduced by Bolman and Deal (2021) are metaphors of an organisation. The metaphors in this paper are metaphors of society. Since social networks are often understood as societal units, the society seems to be one suitable level of analysis.

The biosphere

Networked learning grew out of practices in open and distance learning where computer-mediated communication was being used. One early definition was given by Steeples and Jones (2001):

We define ‘networked learning’ as learning in which information and communications technology (ICT) is used to promote connections: between one learner and other learners, between learners and tutors; between a learning community and its learning resources.

This definition has persisted surprisingly well. At the same time, several authors have argued that promoting connections is not a sufficient criterion for networked learning (see for example Goodyear, 2001). The principle of collaboration has also been present for a long time. For example, Hodgson, Lewis, and McConnell (1989) wrote:

We have sought to take a ‘developmental’ orientation to our work and see open learning as allowing learners to define their own learning and personal development needs through processes of negotiation, collaboration and cooperation (p. 137).

This suggests that one original objective in the field of networked learning was to design courses in open and distance learning that promoted certain types of learning. Steeples and Jones (2001) talk about learning that promotes connections and Hodgson, Lewis, and McConnell (1989) want to allow learning through processes of negotiation, collaboration, and cooperation.

Gourlay (in Gourlay et. al, 2021) points out that these kinds of definitions, including the one proposed by the Networked Learning Editorial Collective (NLEC, 2020), are of a somewhat utopian nature, since they

implicitly favours a particular type of human – confident, articulate, orientated towards observable ‘connections’ – and implicitly unhindered by the frequent structural and symbolic violence suffered online by those of us considered less-than-human, such as women, people of colour, LGBTQ people, differently abled people and so on. (Gourlay et. al, 2021, p. 359)

One possible conclusion from the point made by Gourlay is that there are at least two implicit objectives embedded in this way of approaching networked learning. One objective seems to be to develop an understanding of networked learning that builds upon a consensus theory of society. Consensus theories view shared values and silent agreements as a foundation of social order, harmony, and the possibility of slow change. Such theories are often contrasted with conflict theories. Conflict theories focus on how differences in interests create tensions and conflicts. The prevailing social order is understood as a consequence of some people dominating others by consciously or unconsciously influencing or manipulating them, something that may change abruptly if those dominated manage to take control. The different focuses in consensus and conflict theories have been the subject of a recurring debate throughout the history of Western thought (Bernard, 1983).

Another objective seems to be to develop an understanding of networked learning that builds upon a theory of collectivism. Theories of collectivism put the collective before the individual based on the assumption that what is good for the collective is also good for the individual. They tend to argue that power should be put in the hands of the collective as a whole and that decision-making should be a collective process. Theories of collectivism are often contrasted with theories of individualism. Theories of individualism put the individual before the collective based on the assumption that what is good for the individual is also good for the collective. They tend to focus on human independence and are in general against external interference regarding personal choices. For an in-depth discussion about individualism and collectivism, see Triandis (1995).

One metaphor that directs attention to how shared values and silent agreements enable slow change and how the good of the collective benefits the individual can be found in the writings of Barnett and Bengtson (2017). They argue that universities of today need to become ecological universities that are sensitive to “at least seven ecosystems: those of knowledge, the economy, social institutions, learning, individual persons, culture, and the natural environment” (Barnett & Bengtson, 2017, p. 9). Drawing on this metaphor of ecosystems, the global society of today can be compared to the earth’s biosphere, which consists of ecosystems where actors and resources are connected in networks. This society is governed by natural selection. Actors, ideas, and activities that manage to adapt to changing circumstances and to utilise connections in different ecosystems flourish and grow stronger. Ideas and activities that are no longer fit for today’s society wither and eventually go extinct.

The framing of society as a biosphere is intended to direct attention to the type of questions that are portrayed in the definition of networked learning proposed by the Networked Learning Editorial Collective (NLEC, 2020): How does collaborative, co-operative and collective inquiry, knowledge-creation and knowledgeable action, trusting relationships, shared challenges, and convivial technologies (or communication technologies in general) promote connections?

The distorted reality

To derive a framing of society that is an example of Combination 2 in Table 1, the critical pedagogy of Freire (2018) seems to be a suitable source of inspiration. It directs attention to how differences in interests create tensions and conflicts and how joining forces benefits individuals.

Freire was active in Brazil in the 1960s and took part in a campaign against the country’s widespread illiteracy. For Freire, this was not just about teaching people to read and write. It was also a fight against poverty and hunger and, by extension, against a totalitarian military state that thrived at the expense of the population.

A central idea in Freire's pedagogical thinking is that education is never something neutral. An education is formed in relation to prevailing social and political conditions. This means that it explicitly or implicitly conveys a certain way of relating to such circumstances. Just as education can educate learners to obedience and submission to a prevailing system, education can encourage people to think for themselves and to form their own opinions. The latter is an important objective of Freire's critical pedagogy.

If change is sought, a challenge for teachers is to create hope so that students may start to believe that change is possible. To succeed, Freire believes that teachers cannot see learning as an object of teaching. Learning cannot be to fill empty bank accounts, to use one of Freire's most famous metaphors, and knowledge cannot be reduced to a currency that is deposited in students and withdrawn when needed. More generally, pedagogy cannot be created *for* those who study.

Freire's alternative is a pedagogy created *with* those who study. At the centre, Freire places the dyad and the dialogue between teachers and students. The student's role is to bring their preconceptions and perceived reality into this dialogue. The teacher's role is to be a co-investigator and, together with the student, critically explore the student's lifeworld by, for example, asking problematic questions.

Critical pedagogy can be viewed as an application of critical theory. Critical theory has its roots in the so-called Frankfurt School, which includes thinkers such as Fromm, Marcuse, Adorno, Horkheimer and Habermas. A central idea that can be found in early Frankfurt School theorists is that communication is never neutral. What people talk about and how they talk about it, distorts the perception of reality. According to this view, adopting a dominant way of communication can maintain a prevailing social order. To create change, what has been invisible first needs to be made visible and questioned.

Thus, one metaphor that depicts a critical view of society is that of the distorted reality. A society that is framed as a distorted reality is a society where oppressors establish metaphors like the biosphere to maintain a prevailing social and political order that benefits the oppressors at the expense of the oppressed. The metaphor of the distorted reality directs attention to communication and how it distorts people's perceptions. In the context of networked learning, attention is directed towards hidden and oppressive aspects of networked learning, how these aspects can be made visible, and how networked learning with shared efforts may become an emancipating force. Studying and challenging heteronormativity, sexism, racism, ableism, classism, and the like, for example by deliberating dialogues between teachers and students, could be one important part of this.

The community

To derive a framing of society that is an example of Combination 3 in Table 1, the German Bildung tradition is used as a source of inspiration in this section. It directs attention to how shared values and silent agreements enable slow change and how the good of the individual benefits the collective.

The modern idea of Bildung originated in Germany at the turn of the century 1800 (Östling, 2016). The concept was launched by Wilhelm von Humboldt and other humanists as an alternative to the goal-directed learning that the vocational education of the time had to offer. Inspired by Plato and Aristotle, Bildung was seen as synonymous with personal development and the realisation of an inner potential. Unlike the ancient Greeks, however, the German humanists believed that there was no end in sight for such a journey. On the contrary, realising oneself through studies and reflection was a lifelong process.

When the University of Berlin was founded in 1810, Humboldt was active in the Prussian Ministry of Education and came to play a crucial role in the establishment of the new university. Around the same time, he put his thoughts about Bildung on print. These included (Östling, 2016):

- First, research and teaching should go hand in hand. The teacher's role was not only to teach, but also to research and teach things that the teacher was researching. It should give the teaching a solid scientific basis. Thus, universities should not only reproduce knowledge, but also produce it. The view of knowledge was far from instrumental. Knowledge should be valued on the basis of scientific criteria, not on the basis of its possible usefulness. Thus, basic research was also valuable.
- Secondly, academic freedom should prevail (*Lehr- und Lernfreiheit*). Those who researched and taught were best suited to decide what research and teaching that should be done. The student's role was to choose the subjects to study. Great confidence was placed in the student's ability to decide what best served the

student's personal development. Furthermore, the student was assumed to be curious, interested in scientific issues, and have a strong will to learn.

- Thirdly, Bildung should be more important than vocational training. The student should be given the opportunity to realise their inherent potential and to develop as a person. Bildung required, among other things, a broad education. Thus, studies in philosophy, literature and history were valuable, even if the student studied to become an engineer or a medical doctor, for example.

Humboldt's idea of Bildung made it possible to talk about learning and education as a means to realise the inner potentials of individual students, teachers, or higher education institutions. Granting members of the academic community academic freedom was one important part of this. This could foster well educated, self-sufficient, and critical-thinking individuals who could contribute to the community. This idea parallels the ideals in ancient Greece, where well developed rhetorical skills distinguished a truly educated man and where the ability to persuade others was seen as crucial for a free citizen. This made it possible for a citizen to participate in public debates, exercise civil rights, and contribute to democracy.

However, given that higher education has historically excluded both women and those who do not belong to society's upper classes, it may be that the academic community that Humboldt was thinking about was not very inclusive. As with the democratic state in the ancient Greece, Humboldt's academic community could have been reserved for a selected few. To capture this way of thinking, society can be framed as the community (or the communities) one belongs to. In such a society, a community acts as a shield, protecting its members from outsiders. Also, members do not have many responsibilities for those who do not belong to one's community. This made the democratic state in ancient Greece possible. It may also be a contributing factor to higher education's long history of reproducing a prevailing social order in society (Bourdieu, 1998).

The framing of society as a community directs attention to how freedom given to individuals by the support from other members of the community and by protection from outsiders may help them realise their inner potentials, possibly as a lifelong learning process, and thereby becoming an increasingly valuable asset for society. In the context of networked learning, this place focus on creating and maintaining learning communities. Lave and Wenger's (1991) Community of Practice and Vaughan, Cleveland-Innes, and Garrison's (2013) Community of Inquiry are two theories that fit nicely into this frame. The frame may also direct attention to questions about transfer and boundary crossings (Akkermann & Bakker, 2011).

The market

The fourth and final metaphor of society that is introduced in this paper is the market. It is an example of Combination 4 in Table 1. It directs attention to how competition between individuals and organisations may benefit everyone in the long run.

In the 1980s, political leaders such as Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan argued that the public sector had become too costly. To make it more cost-effective, they proposed that public organisations, such as universities, should be governed in a more goal-oriented and hierarchical way. The idea was also to expose public organisations to competition. For example, universities should operate in a market where they competed for students, labour, and research funding. This was the beginning of a trend in the western world that is usually called New Public Management.

New Public Management has contributed to a market-oriented education model for higher education that has been called academic capitalism (see for example Münch, 2014). A metaphor that has been used to describe the university's societal role in academic capitalism is the knowledge factory. In the knowledge factory, it is important that education is produced in a rational and efficient way. A large number of students must be able to assimilate their educations in a short time and at low costs. The knowledge factory's productivity is measured in terms of throughput, that is, the proportion of students who complete their courses and educational programmes on time.

The educations that the knowledge factory produces need to be sold to students. Thus, the knowledge factory needs to promote its brand and market its educations to potential students. Advertising at bus stops, using influencers on social media, or recording commercials are some examples of how knowledge factories can market their products. More generally, the knowledge factory needs to develop strategies to survive in competition with other knowledge factories. It can, for example, focus on a niche where the competition for

students is not as big, to become very good at a certain type of education, or to offer a particularly attractive study environment.

The teacher's assignment in the knowledge factory is quite different from the researcher's. In large parts of the western world, administrators have been given increasing responsibility for the development and evaluation of courses and educational programmes. This trend is most pronounced in the USA, where a large part of the work on the courses is carried out by special development units. Thus, almost all teaching can be carried out by teachers with fixed-term employment who carry out already planned teaching activities.

The student's role is to be a consumer and to consume an education that the knowledge factory sells. The education that the student chooses is assumed to be the one of several pre-packaged products that best respond to the student's wishes. Not least, it is about the product being able to be resold in the labour market after completing education. The students who adopt the consumer metaphor typically see themselves as a recipient of education and knowledge.

In the knowledge factory, education is thus a product that is marketed and sold to students so that they in turn can sell it on in the labour market after completing their education. In this metaphor, the view of knowledge is instrumental. Knowledge has no value in itself but is only valuable if it can be used. It must make it possible to fulfil learning objectives in courses and degree objectives in education, as well as getting a job after graduation.

When higher education credits and diplomas are highly valued, specific subject knowledge and the ability to solve concrete problems in given situations tend to be prioritized. Little room is given for curiosity or to explore the unknown, as well as to develop critical thinking and independence. More generally, demanding elements in courses tend to be seen as obstacles and as an ineffective form of teaching, rather than as an opportunity to broaden or deepen their knowledge.

In other words, the market metaphor makes it possible to talk about knowledge, learning, and education with the help of a language that is taken from business management models. Education is marketed and produced, students are customers and consumers, and knowledge is a resource that can contribute to economic growth. The market as a metaphor of society consequently directs attention to how market forces and competition between individuals transform individuals, higher education institutions, and the society itself. In the context of networked learning, this may raise questions about why, how, and what teachers teach, as well as why, how, and what students learn when individualism and competition is encouraged.

The political discourse by leaders such as Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan was that individualism and competition benefit everyone in the long run. The most common critique against this claim is that New Public Management and the prevailing market-oriented education model has led to uninterested students, substitutable teachers, instrumental knowledge, and other negative consequences mentioned in this section.

Does this mean that learning never benefits from individualism and competition? Is it better to completely avoid using a market framing of society? Or are the negative consequences of New Public Management due to the fact that the market frame has become the *only* way of framing society when governing education? What would happen if several frames were used and were allowed to complement each other?

Concluding remarks

Four metaphors and framings of society have been outlined in this paper. These are the biosphere, the distorted reality, the community, and the market. The main purpose has been to explore the idea of conceptualising networked learning, not as a certain kind of human activity, but as a way of viewing human activities. The hope is that this will promote collaborations and connections between different fields in ways that ultimately may transform, mutate, and hybridise them.

The proposed frames can be used to direct attention. Consider, for example, the chat conversation mentioned in the introduction of this paper. If society is framed as a biosphere, it directs attention to how collaborative, co-operative, and collective inquiry promotes the connection between the two persons and vice versa. If society is framed as a distorted reality, it directs attention to how the language that the two persons use and learn produces, reproduces, and transforms social categories and vice versa. If society is framed as a community, it directs attention to the communities that the two persons are a part of and how these communities support the two

person's learning and vice versa. If society is framed as a market, it directs attention to how competition between the two persons and other actors transforms them and to whom this may be beneficial in the long run.

One consequence of moving from social categories to frames seems to be that different understandings of the field of networked learning may complement each other, instead of being mutually exclusive. Combining several views of networked learning could make it possible to approach the complexity of networked learning in a more thoughtful, nuanced, and well-balanced way. This idea is in line with an observation made by Bolman and Deal (2021): They argue that a lot of confusion and conflicts in organisations originate from the fact that different members of organisations unknowingly use different frames and consequently are unable to understand each other. If this is true, then problems arise not when a preferred frame is “bad” or “wrong”, but when it becomes the only one being used.

Another consequence of moving from social categories to frames seems to be that focus is changed from what networked learning is, or what it is for, to what the field of networked learning is for. This may encourage reflections about ideological assumptions. For example, the distinction between consensus and conflict theories, as well as the distinction between theories of collectivism and individualism, has been discussed in this paper. Furthermore, by combining frames, it may be possible “to move beyond the impasse of ideology” as Knox (in Gourlay et. al, 2021, p. 359) puts it. When there is no need to uphold a particular ideological position, an ideological standpoint may be transformed into one of several possible objectives within the field, objectives that may turn out to complement each other, or require some balancing, instead of being mutually exclusive.

One possible interpretation of the community response (Gourlay et. al, 2021) to the call from the Networked Learning Editorial Collective (NLEC, 2020) is that it is no longer possible to simply assimilate new ways of understanding networked learning into the traditional way of doing it. Instead, there is a need to accommodate and restructure the traditional understanding. Whether or not frames will be a part of the next paradigm remains to be seen.

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