

Methodological considerations for research on networked learning

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Introduction

In one of the earliest collective writings on networked learning, Goodyear et al (2004) introduces networked learning as an area of both practical and theoretical importance which is said to offer a site for advancing research in the learning sciences. This has indeed proved to be an introduction that has come to be a fact. Over the years the collective writings in the area has increased substantially, and today the Research in Networked Learning series of Springer is a key publication in the area.

In 2004, one of the chapter (Levy, 2004) provided a methodological framework specifically addressing research that was practice-based, and the framework rested on theoretical assumptions of constructivist nature and implications that led into an action research approach. The other chapters did not explicitly deal with issues of methodology, rather they gave accounts of research into different fields that can be said to belong to networked learning. In 2014, the first issue in the above mentioned book series on Springer was issued as a collection of papers selected and re-written from the 2012 Networked Learning Conference. The first chapter (Hogdson et al, 2014), is an introduction to the researching design, experience and practice of networked learning. This overview gives both theories and methods used in the research on networked learning present in the book, showing a variety of theories informing the choice of methods used and thus also a variety of methods. Theories range from phenomenology and phenomenography through different constructivist theories to ANT, and methods include ethnography and action research as well as design based research. There are no chapters in the 2014 issue dealing as explicitly with methodological issues such as Levy (2004) does.

In the 2019 issue of the series, Littlejohn et al, (2019), introduces the field of networked professional learning as a starting point to move beyond professional development as a base to frame global challenges into learning that is rather networked and informal. Goodyear (2019) positions the chapters in a framework of design for social innovation. Design, as it is described, becomes a methodology for researching the field of networked learning operating on two levels, an object level where the current problem is set and a meta level aimed at future improvements. What is interesting is to further the discussion on what these problems are, and thus what the methodological considerations they give rise to might be. In this symposium, we approach the idea of designing research into networked learning by taking our point of departure from the methodology section of six forthcoming phd-thesis's written within the framework of the Swedish National Graduate School for Digital Technologies in Education (GRADE). Each paper presented in this symposium is a timestamp, a snapshot of where these doctoral students are today in their respective thinking. The papers stem from a course given in the graduate school on methodology, and should be seen as examples of the diversity that may be present in a graduate school in which doctoral students are admitted to at least seven different disciplines or subject areas and at six different Swedish universities. The intention is that these variations and differences will feed into productive discussion on the boundaries of networked learning, on research as practice and stakeholders' positions, and on problems to be solved, wicked or not.

The first presenter reports on the theoretical framework and methodology of an empirical study of work-based training for cashier work - a study of instructional videos for cashier work spanning over a century. The three studies build on the theory of practice architectures (Kemmis et al., 2014; Mahon, Francisco, & Kemmis, 2017) and assumes that social reality consists of a variety of practices that we daily engage in and take for granted.

The second presenter follows the recent trend of defending behaviorism, and explores the valuable and useful functions of behaviorist philosophy that are integral to research associated with design, teacher professional development, and digital ubiquitous technology. The paper aims to provide a philosophical foundation for further discussion of a scientific methodology by relating basic conceptual underpinnings of behaviorism to different domains and levels of analysis integral to the networked sociocultural perspective.

The third presenter explores what the methodological considerations are for a study of educational practice and networked learning in technologically dense classrooms. The approach of the discussed study is informed by Actor-Network Theory (ANT) (Latour, 2005) and the paper outlines the methodological consequences for adopting principles associated with ANT and post-humanist critiques of representational epistemology.

The fourth presenter explores how philosophical ideas in an Indigenous research paradigm serve as relational 'spaces' for a boundary-crossing Strategy of Inquiry and how these underpinnings align with Wenger's expanded theory of Communities of Practice? By looking for relational 'spaces' between an Indigenous research paradigm and Networked Learning, this paper serves as a boundary-crossing object between different paradigms, providing an outline of an Indigenous Strategy of Inquiry for a research study on remote, 1-9, Sami language education where networked learning is promoted.

The fifth presenter particularly intends to discuss how a multimodal methodology can explain important parts of networked learning settings using multimodal layers. As such, the multimodal perspective includes things-to-things, things-to-human and human-to-human connections (Bonderup Dohn, Cranmer, Sime, de Laat, and Ryberg, 2018; Jones, 2015) and focus on the technologies and their functions.

The sixth and final presenter closes the symposium by outlining two pedagogical principles that carry specific weight into research aimed at understanding digital competence in schools in general. Networked learning is exemplified in terms of connecting teachers and learners through remote teaching in rural municipalities.

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