Round table title: Can Networked Learning be defined - and should it be?

Host names: Nina Bonderup Dohn, Vivien Hodgson and David McConnell

Topic and questions to discuss at round table:

A recurrent question in the context of the Networked Learning Conference (NLC) is "what do we mean by 'networked learning'?" This question is raised not only before the conference, by potential submitters of papers to it, but is often discussed during the conferences, too. Several answers have been provided in the literature, and though they do not exactly collide, they do seem to vary somewhat on what they emphasize. A common outset is the early, often-quoted definition of Networked Learning by Goodyear, Banks, Hodgson, and McConnell (2004, p. 1) which stresses connections - between people, and between people and resources - as the defining characteristic of Networked Learning, and ICT as the medium that provides these connections. In later years, however, some researchers have focused more on persons and less on ICT as the loci of connections, understanding a person as networked to others, e.g. in the workplace (De Laat, 2012). Others have viewed the defining point of networked learning as the sociomaterial entanglement of physical, virtual, human, organizational "actants" (Fox, 2005; Wright & Parchoma, 2014), in effect arguing that all learning is networked learning and placing no priority on ICT-mediation.

Conversely, from early on, pedagogical characteristics supported through ICT-mediation of connections were seen as essential to networked learning, even if not represented in the name. A significant contribution was made in the Manifesto on Networked Learning (E-QualityNetwork, 2002) which stresses values of inclusivity, democratic processes, and critical inquiry and points out a pedagogical attitude towards learning as fostered through participation, collaboration and co-construction of knowledge. This characterization is echoed in later works (Dohn, Cranmer, Sime, Ryberg, & De Laat, 2018; McConnell, Hodgson, & Dirckinck-Holmfeld, 2012). Further, in a recent survey among delegates of the NLC underscores that the values and the pedagogical approach are indeed viewed by both long-time insiders and newcomers to the conference as essential aspects of networked learning, as well as to the community researching the field (Hodgson & McConnell, 2020, in press). However, these values and pedagogical approach are not exclusive to Networked Learning, but are found in other approaches to learning, too, such as Problem-Oriented Project Pedagogy (Illeris, 2004), some forms of Reflective Learning (Brockbank, McGill, & Beech, 2002), and variants of learning-oriented Action Research such as Co-operative Inquiry (Heron & Reason, 2001). Not to forget in the work of critical pedagogues of the likes of Stephen Brookfield, Henry Giroux and critical pedagogic feminist writers Elizabeth Ellsworth and Jennifer Gore (Brookfield, 2004; Giroux, 1992; Luke & Gore, 2014).

In this round table we shall take up the question of what defines Networked Learning - in all senses of 'defines':

- What is *characteristic* of Networked Learning?
- Are these characteristics (jointly) exclusive to Networked learning so that they serve to *distinguish* this field from other approaches to learning
- What *decides* what is characteristic of Networked Learning - e.g. an explicit definition such as the one from Goodyear et al. (2004); a characterization such as the Manifesto; or the actual practice (i.e. research focus) of researchers who recognize themselves and are recognized by others as "Networked Learning researchers".

- How can we define "networked" and "learning" to cover all focus areas currently recognized in practice (e.g. through acceptance to NLC 2020) as Networked Learning?

Goal of the round table

The goal of the round table is to develop clearer explications of what Networked Learning is today and to consider how it has changed and developed over the years. This will assist us explore whether a common ground may be established between participants on

1) The complexity of the field today
2) Overarching characteristics that apply across the complexity
3) Different emphases placed by different researchers within the overarching characteristics (leading to the complexity)

Engagement of participants

The round table will be kicked off by each of the hosts presenting a 5 minutes' "provocative pitch" of what - in their view - is characteristic of Networked Learning. The "provocative pitch" will be provocative in the sense that the hosts will formulate their pitch so as to clearly indicate differences in their perceptions, as well as similarities.

After the 5 minutes' pitch by each host, participants will be asked to briefly discuss (5 minutes) with their neighbor how they see their own view of Networked Learning reflected (or not) in the pitches. Following this, we shall have a general plenum discussion with participants and hosts. The session will end with each host doing a 2 minutes' sum up of what they have learned from the discussion.

References

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