A practice-grounded approach to 'engagement' and 'motivation' in networked learning

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to clarify and challenge contemporary views of motivation and engagement as they appear within the networked learning literature and to suggest an approach which takes into account the insights of the prevailing individualist-cognitivist and socio-cultural views whilst accommodating better to seemingly well-known everyday cases. This approach supplies a more adequate instrument for analysing networked learning activities in that it highlights the complex interplay of the socially negotiated and the self-directedly chosen in the determination of a person's motivation and engagement. I identify two different metaphors of context - as 'container' and as 'rope' - drawn on by the individualist approach and the socio-culturalist approach, respectively, and argue that we need both metaphors to analyse motivation and engagement in networked learning activities. Drawing on the concept of primary contexts, I argue for a practice-grounded intermediary position which makes it possible to investigate empirically how different practices take on the significance of 'rope' or 'container' to a person at different points in his/her life. The phenomena of motivation and engagement are characterised as a complex set of states and processes, anchored in the individual, but partly co-constituted through positioning and negotiation in social space. I illustrate how complexly these phenomena relate to practices regarded as 'ropes'/'containers'. Distinguishing between a level of discrimination between practices and a level of concrete actions, I pinpoint important questions to investigate when analysing networked learning. By way of concluding, I briefly consider some implications for the design of networked learning.

Keywords

Motivation, engagement, primary context, concepts of context, practice

A recurrent issue within the literature on ICT-mediated learning is how to engage or motivate learners to participate in the tasks of educational programs. Thus, at the 8th International Conference on Networked Learning held in Maastricht in 2012, 10 of the 69 papers (including symposium papers) raise this issue. Journal-specific searches combining the words "engagement", "motivation" and "participation" within the last 5 years (2008-2013) yield 26 hits in The International Journal of Computer-Supported Collaborative Learning, 66 in Journal of Computer Assisted Learning, and no less than 354 in Computers & Education. Salmon's much-used guides to e-learning have large sections devoted to the discussion of how student motivation and engagement in participation may be promoted (Salmon, 2003). Typical articulations of the issue are "To succeed in fully engaging the participants and promoting their active involvement…" (Salmon, 2003, p. 34), "The participant needs information and technical support to get online, and strong motivation and encouragement to put in the necessary time and effort" (ibid, p. 31), "Facilitating discourse during the course is critical to maintaining the interest, motivation and engagement of students in active learning" (Anderson, Rourke, Garrison, & Archer, 2001, p. 7) and "learners has [sic] to experience a sense of belonging, feel part of a community before engaging in interactions that come naturally in communities" (Brouns & Hsiao, 2012, p. 20). There is, however, some variance in the literature in (implicit) conceptions of motivation and engagement. Broadly speaking, the literature draws on individualist cognitivist motivation theory and/or socio-culturally inspired theories of engagement and identity, though theoretical underpinnings are not always made explicit and sometimes views pertaining to both approaches are juxtaposed without any discussions about how they relate or whether they are even compatible (e.g. Brouns & Hsiao, 2012). The result is a vagueness and ambiguity of the terms which carry over to specific analyses of networked learning and recommendations for design of educational tasks. On the other hand, the very fact that the two approaches often appear to have informed the writing of the same article, though they seem theoretically incongruent, would indicate that each of them has insights which intuitively seem relevant to understanding and designing for networked learning. More specifically, as the quotes suggest, such insights concern the focus on self-directedness and intrinsic/extrinsic motivation within individualist cognitivist motivation theories and the emphasis on participation and engagement as anchored in social practice

within socio-cultural ones. There thus seems to be a need for developing a theoretical approach which makes possible the consistent integration of these insights and remedies the vagueness of the terms.

In this paper I sketch out such an approach and identify significant focus areas for the analysis of networked learning. In addition, I point out how questions typically posed within analysis and design of networked learning transform on this basis. My argument takes the following course: First, to clarify at the outset how the subsequent theoretical analysis relates to networked learning, I state my understanding of the field and foreshadow a few of the questions which my analyses will allow to pose or pose differently. Second, I briefly articulate the theoretical underpinnings of individualist cognitivist motivation theory and socio-culturally inspired theories of engagement and identity. Third, I challenge the theoretical underpinnings with examples of everyday situations which, for each approach, seem clear cases that they cannot account adequately for. Fourth, I draw on my concept of primary contexts developed in (Dohn, 2013, 2014, in press) to argue for a practice-grounded intermediary position. I use this to further distinguish important questions in the analysis of networked learning at the level of discrimination between practices and at the level of participants' concrete actions. In conclusion, I briefly consider implications for the design of networked learning.

Initial clarification of theoretical outset

My concern with networked learning in this paper is first and foremost with the type of learning processes which involve educational design at some point or at least ensue as the result of such design. That is, I am less taken up with completely informal learning networks e.g. in workplaces where meetings and learning exclusively happens 'as they go along' without any attempt at designing for learning, neither at the level of tasks and social relations nor at the level of work environment. I am, however, taken up with the way other settings than the one in focus in educational design affect and pose resources for sense-making within the setting in focus. So much so that I have suggested an amendment to the widespread definition of networked learning presented in (Goodyear, Banks, Hodgson, & Steeples, 2004) which precisely adds this dimension. My understanding of networked learning thus is:

> Networked learning is 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; between the diverse contexts in which the learners participate. (Dohn, 2014, in press)

My point of departure for analysing networked learning is what I term a practice-grounded approach (Dohn, 2013, 2014, in press). A central claim is that we are always already in the world, coping with it as active embodied beings, before we start reflecting on it, and that when we do reflect, the words we use resonate with tacit meaning from our pre-reflective embodied doings. Of particular significance are our 'primary contexts', defined as contexts which carry significance for the person in question, in which s/he involves him-/herself as a person and which s/he considers important for who s/he is. The primary anchorage points for meaning will be our primary contexts. Given this outset, individualist analyses of students' intrinsic or extrinsic motivation for participating in networked learning overlook questions such as how students' intrinsic motivation relate to their primary contexts (no straightforward causal connection need be presupposed); how the tacit sense-making of the students' primary contexts are drawn upon in the learning tasks and how the fact that they are/are not affects their motivational stance. To give one simple example, when analysing the contributions of students in a forum discussion, one has to ask, not only how different 'incentives' such as acquiring points-for-grades or social status through activity measures affect motivation. One must also analyse any deeper sense such incentives may have for the students from the on-goings in their primary contexts and whether this deeper sense influences the way they will engage in the activities. On the other hand, socio-cultural analyses of community participation tend to overlook the self-directedness with which some students choose to enrol in networked learning courses, viewing these courses as 'primary contexts' because of their content matter, even before they are participants in them. They therefore also neglect questions about how self-directedness may influence the activity level of students, i.e. the amount of time and effort they put into getting 'a grip on' content matter (including the tacit aspects hereof). On my view, analysis of e.g. a forum debate should not only focus on issues such as positioning and opportunities to learn, but also on the influence of students' varying degrees of self-directed involvement.

Theoretical underpinnings: Individualist, cognitivist theories

A standard educational psychology textbook definition of motivation, concurring well with most of the statements above, runs "Motivation is the process whereby goal-directed activity is instigated and sustained"

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(Schunk, Pintrich, & Meece, 2008, p. 4). This definition is individualist and cognitivist in that it focuses on goals which the individual is more or less conscious of pursuing and identifies motivation with that which 'persuades' him or her to enter and keep up the pursuit. The persuasive force may come from thoughts, beliefs or emotions (ibid.) but the important cognitivist point is that the person is aware of the 'persuasion', i.e. s/he is aware not only of the goals s/he has but also of why s/he has them, at least to the level of being able to explicate the process that leads him/her to have them and thus to explain his/her actions as goal-directed activity. The definition does not actually say that the process of motivation is 'internal' to the individual, nor do the authors of the textbook explicitly state this. However, it is quite clear from the further treatment of the subject that motivation is seen as 'taking place' 'inside' the person. The very fact that this is not articulated as an assumption at all, but taken for granted, may testify to the fundamental status it has within the field of motivation.

A common point across different cognitivist approaches is a presupposition of agent self-directedness – agents choose for themselves which goals to pursue - as well as a lack of deeper inquiry into the background for why they choose goals as they do and have the motivations that they have: What decides whether a student will entertain a learning objective as a mastery or a performance goal (Ames, 1992)? How does it come about that a person becomes intrinsically motivated for pursuing precisely those activities or learning domains that s/he does (Ryan & Deci, 2000)? Research has been done for instance on how intrinsic motivation relates to certain intrapsychological needs (ibid.) and, in consequence, on what educators can do to support learners in developing intrinsic motivation for learning a given domain; yet the initial choice of goals and attitudes is taken to be something the individual just makes.

Another common point is that the concept of 'learning context' is often fully ignored and that, when it is taken into consideration, this is done in a way very much dominated by a container metaphor of 'context' (Lave, 1993): The 'learning context' with its requirements and possibilities ('boundaries', 'atmosphere', 'inventory' and 'open spaces') is there on beforehand, independently of the specific learners who are to 'step into it' and 'move within its open spaces'. The learners for their part are the self-contained beings that then interact within the boundaries given by the 'learning context' container. They may be influenced by the characteristics of the container - they will definitely be constrained by its boundaries and inventory - and they may strive to change the form and content of it, but they do so as the self-directed, self-contained 'elements'/'particles' in the container, giving and receiving 'input', without depending on the context as a significant medium for realizing their very being.

Theoretical underpinnings: Sociocultural theories

From quite another perspective, sociocultural theories, in particular situated learning theory, have theorized engagement as a matter of participation in social practices (Greeno & Gresalfi, 2008; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Packer & Goicoechea, 2000; Wenger, 1998). The term 'engagement' here is intended to cover simultaneously, inherently and constitutively, 'engagement in activities' and 'engagement with other people in the practice'. The basic premise is that "We are social beings" (Wenger, 1998, p. 4) who become who we are through mutual recognition between ourselves and others of our roles, possibilities, rights, and duties – a recognition which is mediated through and anchored in the material practices we partake in together. Inherent to this view is a very different understanding of 'context' than the one implicit in individualist theories: Individuals and contexts are woven together, each relying for their being – becoming what they are – through the co-constitutive interweaving. McDermott, citing Birdwhistell, provides an alternative metaphor for 'context', namely the rope, stressing that a rope is made up of fibres which are discontinuous (no fibre goes through all of the rope), yet the rope looks and behaves as a continuous unity (McDermott, 1993) And each individual fibre, one might add, has its place – becomes what it is – through its interlocking with the others.

A fundamental point for sociocultural theories is that what we strive to know, and how we go about knowing it, is bound up with who we see ourselves to be (Packer & Goicoechea, 2000). The assumption of an intricate relationship between issues of identity and issues of cognition is inherent in central terms such as 'positioning' and 'participatory identity' (Greeno & Gresalfi, 2008; Greeno & van de Sande, 2007). On this view, engagement is intrinsically related to belonging. Not just in the sense that a feeling of belonging to a community is conducive to the confidence with which a person ventures a contribution to it or promotes intrinsic motivation as Deci and Ryan would hold (Ryan & Deci, 2000). But in the stronger sense that within a community of practice, any participation in the form of negotiation of meaning of a resource, artefact, story or other of the community's "shared repertoire"(Wenger, 1998) will at the same time be a negotiation of one's status and identity in relation to the community, i.e. of one's way of belonging to it. And vice versa: any negotiation of one's identity in relation to the community will be a way of engaging with the people and resources in it. This goes, even when

the participation takes on the form of non-participation (Wenger, 1998): By the very fact that non-participation is positioned for a person – as opposed to the situation where the issue of participation does not arise for that person – interrelated issues of engagement and belonging are involved. One recognizes here the sense of necessary relation between participation and belonging posited in the Brouns & Hsiao quote above. It should be noted, however, that the 'necessary relation' is largely one of definition, not of causal fact: Nothing will count as participation within situated learning, if there are not issues of belonging and identity at stake.

Within this approach, questions such as where people's goals come from and what decides whether they pursue a learning objective as a mastery goal or a performance one will be reformulated as questions concerning who they seek to be and how the positionings and identity negotiations, as well as the 'shared repertoires', of current and former communities of practices to which they belong(ed) allow them to take up opportunities for learning in the present situation. In order to describe and account for the way people's participation within and across communities of practice change over time, situated learning theorists have introduced the term 'trajectories of participation' (Dreier, 2008; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998).

Challenging the theoretical approaches

For both individualist and sociocultural approaches there are important questions concerning motivation and engagement which cannot be posed as questions - which are either invisible or answered on beforehand by definitional fiat - because of the way issues are framed theoretically. Thus, individualist theories take self-directedness for granted. Even if one were to ask "where the self-directed motivation came from", the question would be phrased in terms of an 'inner' process or state, identifiable as an entity in itself, which might perhaps be influenced by 'outer' stimuli from the 'context as container' or the other entities 'in' it. Sociocultural approaches, on the other hand, posit engagement as per definition an intertwined issue of pursuing identity and knowledge. Even if one were to ask "how come this person joined this particular networked learning course as opposed to others on the same domain", the answer to the question would be phrased in terms of the negotiation of meaning in the person's communities of practices, past and present, and its significance for the identity which the person projects for him/herself. Yet, from a low-level common sense point of view, there seem to be clear cases which challenge the presuppositions behind each of the positions.

To start with the sociocultural view: There are ample cases where children (and grown-ups) take up a hobby not promoted by their family and indeed perhaps not even negotiated as acceptable by their peers, such as the amateur study of birds or the design of terrariums and aquariums. Of course, such hobbies do not exist in a void – the children will have been inspired by someone or someplace to take up the hobby. It is not impossible that issues of identity are involved – e.g. the choice of hobby may result from negotiated positionings by child, family and peers of the child as 'different', 'in opposition' or 'in need of further challenges'. On the other hand, it may not. It seems highly problematic to postulate at the outset that it has to be so, not just at the level of explaining that some non-promoted hobby is taken up, but at the level of explaining which one. And at some level of detail, the claim loses whatever credibility it may have at a general level: The only reason to say that identity issues definitely were at play in a child's hobby choice of coral reef aquariums over freshwater ones seems to be a commitment to the thesis that questions of engagement are always intertwined with identity issues. Without this commitment, it would seem much more plausible to explain the choice by reference to something in the domain (the object of the hobby) which attracted the child to it – say, the beauty of coral reefs as compared to freshwater plants. That is, it seems much more plausible to explain the choice with reference to individualist motivational concepts such as interest, intrinsic motivation or mastery goals. Similarly, when analysing networked learning it seems reasonable to leave open for empirical investigation how interest and self-directed choice might influence which courses learners commit to and how, without postulating at the outset that these issues must necessarily be understood on the basis of participation in certain communities of practice.

As for the individualist view: family, mandatory schooling, designated work units all constitute examples of settings into which one is more or less thrown, i.e. one does not come to be there by self-directed choice, where one is forced to participate – where non-participation is by the very fact that one is there at all a form of participation – and where one's mode of engagement is bound up with positionings and identity issues. To explain what goes on in these settings solely by reference to the participants' 'inner' states and processes such as intrinsic/extrinsic motivation, self-efficacy and goal orientation, fully neglects the complex ways in which self-efficacy etc. are negotiated as valuable (or the opposite) by the participants there. Several situated learning studies illustrate in detail how such notions, rather than being the explanation of interactions, are the outcome of them (e.g. Greeno & Gresalfi, 2008; Greeno & van de Sande, 2007). As concerns the analysis of networked

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learning, the implication is that one important issue to look at is how positioning and identity issues influence the way learners approach and take up opportunities to learn and interact with other learners.

These considerations indicate that we need a reframing of the issues of motivation and engagement which allows us to account both for situations in which agents approach new settings seemingly on their own self-directed accord and ones in which they find themselves submerged and positioned whether they would self-directedly have chosen to or not. More importantly, we need a reframing which allows us to investigate empirically how these different types of settings interplay – for the individual and for the people with whom s/he deals with. In terms of the different concepts of 'context' implicit in the individualist view and the socio-cultural one, respectively, we need a reframing which allows us to phrase questions which do not presuppose that we are always already co-constitutively involved (as threads in the rope) in any context we approach, nor that we are just elements in containers in existence independent of our being there. We need to be able to pose questions like "why do individuals approach some contexts with the intent of 'joining the rope'" (the self-directed case), "how is it that some persons act as if certain contexts were just containers to them?"(participation as non-participation), "how does a container become a rope for a person?", "how do different ropes interweave for a person? And how does it affect how they see new situations?" In terms of design of networked learning, these questions transform into questions such as "how can we design for containers to become ropes?" and "how can we build on existing ropes in our designs?" These issues must be approached at two distinct levels (at least):

1 The level of distinguishing between contexts which are "ropes" or "becoming ropes" for people and those which are mere "containers" (acknowledging that there will a continuum of context-states between the poles)
2 The level of activity where people in what they do weave in and out of contexts which have different kinds of import for them (some being more of a "rope" for them than others) and where they, within any given context, may care more about some tasks than others (in a range of different meanings of 'care about').

Articulating a practice-grounded intermediary position

In developing the required reframing of motivation and engagement, I build on the practice-grounded approach I introduced briefly above. This approach connects the concept of 'context' firmly to practices, understood as ways of going about the world and making sense of it on the background of our 'going-about'. According to it, a context is not delimited by its physical or virtual location, organizational affiliation or institutional realization, nor - in the first instance - by a particular set of people or social relations or by certain ways of describing or thinking about the world. Instead, it is delimited by what we do as embodied beings - by patterns and regularities in our dealings with the world. Of course there may be physical, social, organizational, institutional etc. prerequisites, constituents, and consequences of these 'dealings with' - the methodological point is that by taking the patterns and regularities of our 'dealings with' as outset we allow ourselves to investigate empirically what these prerequisites, constituents, and consequences are, rather than lay down their significance by decree. Furthermore, because it ties context to practice with a clear focus on the need to investigate the social mediation of practice, but leaves the form and degree of social mediation a question for empirical investigation, the practice-grounded approach opens a different, intermediary way into the question of motivation and engagement than the individualist-cognitivist and the sociocultural approaches, respectively.

Thus, the practice-grounded position acknowledges - in agreement with the socio-cultural approach - that we are born into practices which form the practical outset for our understanding of the world, which shapes how we see ourselves, and where we come to be who we are, in mutual recognition with others. The practices we are born into are always among our primary contexts, at least during childhood and probably for all our lives, if not in the sense of positive identification with them then in the sense that we may seek to contrastively distinguish ourselves from them. What makes these practices primary is, of course, in the first instance the social relations between child, caretaker and other 'significant others' participating in the practices, not the actual ongoings by themselves. However, since words take on meaning from actual doings, and in particular from doings in primary contexts, the way we go about the world in these early primary contexts will be an important anchorage point for our understanding and knowledge. Terms referring to eating will for example be deeply saturated with experiences of tackling knife, fork, and spoon for the Western child and of handling chopsticks for the Chinese. Conversely - in concurrence with the individualist view - the position allows that sometimes it may be the actual doings themselves that makes a specific practice primary for the person. That is, it allows that the explanation of for example a child's attraction to bird watching practices may be an intrinsic interest in birds which in some instances may not be in need of further explanation. It also allows that, especially as we grow up, some of the practices into which we are thrown, for example in education, do not take on a constitutive role for us, but stay a container (though it may be ropes to others around us): somewhere where we have to spend some, but which

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does not come to be important for who we are and where we only engage to the extent that we are - in the terms of the individualist - extrinsically motivated. In contrast to both individualist and socio-cultural approaches, the position conjectures that in many instances, especially as we grow older and are allowed some choice of and within practices, there will be an interweaving of social, domain-specific, activity-related, and identity-pursuit reasons for practices to become primary contexts for us. Finally, diverging from both approaches, it emphasizes the need for empirical investigations of these reasons, i.e. of how primary contexts of different kinds - grounded in pursuits of intrinsic interests, social relations, identity issues etc. as the case might be - come to be and relate to one another, acknowledging that what constitutes primary contexts for us changes over the course of our lives. In the terminology of rope and container: We need analyses of how the different ropes of our lives come to be, intertwine, entangle and come apart again whilst taking into account, firstly, that we at the outset meet some practices more as containers and some more as ropes, but that our attitude towards them may change over time (in either direction). And secondly, that traces of prior primary contexts may transform and be resituated in new ones because of their significance for our epistemological approach to and understanding of the world.

From the point of view of the practice-grounded position, neither of the terms 'motivation' and 'engagement' refer to any one type of state/process. Instead, both terms refer to a complex set of states and processes, anchored in the individual, but partly co-constituted through positioning and negotiation of interaction in social space and in that sense traversing the so-called 'inner' and 'outer' realms. The practices we are born into delineate ways of sense-making and participation. At this very general level, motivation and engagement are therefore practice-dependent, understood as 'possible to envisage within the space of these practices'. What it is possible to envisage is, however, not determinable on beforehand, and neither is the degree of social mediation versus self-directedness of the envisaging. Restricting 'motivation' to the so-called 'inner realm' denounces the constitutive role which social practice has at the very general level and may have at more detailed ones, too; effectively rendering 'the social' only a 'factor' delivering 'input' to 'influence' the individual, regarded as a pre-existing entity. On the other hand, focusing only on the so-called 'outer realm', i.e. on the constitutive role of social practice, amounts to ignoring the self-directedness which obviously is at play at least at some level of detail in some of our choices of practices. It also makes it difficult to account for the phenomenological experience we have of first person agency and intentionality as well as of our motivation and engagement being lived by us. Accepting a continuum of possible states and processes, anchored in the individual, as 'motivational' or 'engaging' from the very self-directed to the fully socially constituted amounts to taking the claim seriously that it is always an empirical question what 'sets us going' and how.

The implications of this view may be spelled out in the following way, addressing the abovementioned two levels in turn. First, the level of distinction between contexts that are "ropes" (primary contexts) and contexts that are mere containers: Motivation and engagement is inherently related to primary contexts, though not necessarily in any straightforward way: Since some of our primary contexts are ones we have been thrown into without self-directed choice and others are ones we may fight to disengage from, one cannot assume intrinsic motivation in the sense of Ryan and Deci to drive the way a person participates. One can, however, assume at least the form of engagement postulated by the socio-culturalist, where non-participation is one way of engaging, through negotiation of opposition and dismissal. One can also assume that persons care (positively or negatively or a complex of both) about their primary contexts and about phenomena, processes and ideas related to them. Finally, one can assume that the participants' epistemological take on the world is permeated with the tacit understandings of their primary contexts. By that fact alone, a person's primary contexts are important anchorage points and important resources for sense-making, even when s/he distances him-/herself from some of them. In contrast, practices which only take on the significance of container for us do not have the status of sense-making anchorage point, nor do they have an inherent relationship with motivation and engagement. This is not to say that a 'context as container' can have no motivational import. The degree to which it has depends on whether the person approaches the practice as a container for self-directed reasons - e.g. out of interest for the domain, possibly with the intent of "joining the rope", or even just with the intent of gaining a 'free space' away from the import of certain primary contexts. In analysing networked learning activities at this level, important questions include: To which degree do the activities constitute primary contexts for the participants - do they approach the networked learning practice as a rope or as a container? Are they there, in part or fully, for self-directed reasons, and how does this relate to their view of the practice as rope/container? How do their views on this point influence their participation in the networked learning activities - and vice versa? How does it affect interaction between participants if they differ in their view of the practice as rope/container? What other primary contexts do the participants have to draw on in sense-making and what is their motivational entanglement there? Do the networked learning activities require, support or hinder participants in making use of these other primary contexts in sense-making and how does this affect their view of and participation in the activities?

Second, the concrete level of activity: Within any given context, participants will like or care about some activities more than others. This goes for primary contexts, as well as for contexts of less or no importance to them, and it goes for contexts which they have self-directedly chosen at the general level as well as for ones they have been 'thrown' into. Taking out the garbage is a chore, whether done in the self-directedly chosen primary context of one's sports activities, in the primary context of the family one has been 'thrown into', or in the work group one has been assigned to. On the other hand, watching a funny movie may be entertaining in even the most 'container'-like of contexts such as a long-distance flight. Similarly, participants in networked learning may find some tasks more appealing than others, irrespective of the significance of the task for achieving a given learning outcome or complying with social expectations within a primary context. Engaging in the appealing ones 'for the fun of it' does not imply a commitment to the learning outcomes themselves or to the contexts they are pursued in. These points, though banal in their everydayness, are often overlooked from both the individualist-cognitive and the sociocultural approaches, focused as they are at a more general level on the significance of cognitive rationalization (doing the task because one understands its importance for overall goals) and social relations (doing the task as a natural part of participating in the community of practice). From the practice-grounded position, though such factors may be influential, they need not be decisive: Learners' attitudes towards tasks are neither determined solely by the tasks' localization in a space of content-to-be-learned, nor by their localization in social space. And though a context such as an educational programme may be self-directedly chosen at a general level, the status of self-directed choice need not carry over to all - or any - of the specific activities to take place there. Furthermore, any given task competes for learners' attention with a range of other things they might be doing: A characteristic of the networked world of today is that we can and often do participate in activities in more than one context at a time, e.g. taking part in a physical meeting, chatting with a friend on Facebook, checking emails, and browsing the internet. Thus, people do not necessarily stay in one context, primary or not, or stay focused on one task within the context, for a length of time. Instead, they may weave in and out of several contexts, some of them primary and some of them not, and their motivational entanglement, at both the general and the specific level, in other contexts may influence their engagement in the activities educators expect them to be undertaking. In analysing networked learning activities at this level, important questions include: Which activities do the participants care more about and which less - and why? Are explanations given in terms of domain, procedures, social relations, etc. - at a general or specific level? How does the epistemological approach which they have from their (other) primary contexts influence their view of given specific activities? Do they accept tasks they do not care about - and how does their attitude affect their participation? How do their views of the activities at the general level (as 'rope' versus 'container') influence their attitude towards given specific tasks? How is their engagement in specific tasks influenced by cognitive rationalization and social relations? Which other factors are at play in deciding their attitude towards them? What other contexts do they partake in whilst participating in the networked learning activities and how do these other activities affect their participation in the latter, cognitively and motivationally? Do they resituate meaning from these other contexts or undertake activities in parallel without relating them? Do these other contexts constitute resources or distractions for the participants? Could they be used (better) as resources?

Concluding remarks

The aim of this paper was to clarify and challenge contemporary views of motivation and engagement as they appear within the networked learning literature and to suggest an approach which takes into account the insights of the prevailing individualist-cognitivist and socio-cultural views whilst accommodating better to seemingly well-known everyday cases. In the first instance, this approach supplies a more adequate instrument for analysing networked learning activities in that it highlights the complex interplay of the socially negotiated and the self-directedly chosen in the determination of a person's motivation and engagement. I pointed out that the individualist and the socio-culturalist approaches draw on metaphorical understandings of 'context' as 'container' and 'rope', respectively, and that we need both metaphors to analyse how people approach different networked learning activities. Given the concept of primary contexts I argued for a practice-grounded intermediary position which makes it possible to investigate empirically how different practices take on the significance of 'rope' or 'container' to people at different points in their lives. I identified the phenomena of motivation and engagement as a complex set of states and processes, anchored in the individual, but partly co-constituted through positioning and negotiation in social space. I illustrated how complexly these phenomena relate to practices regarded as 'ropes'/'containers' and discerned important questions to investigate when analysing networked learning at the level of discrimination between practices as well as at the level of people's concrete actions. By way of rounding off, a few comments on the implications for the design of networked learning are apposite. First, the metaphor of 'virtual classroom', widely used in design thinking, builds very directly on the view of

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context as 'container', whereas the metaphor of 'community of practice', also in frequent use, leans on a 'rope' understanding of context. In designing for networked learning, it is important to explicitly consider one's expectations in this regard: Are participants viewed as independently existing elements to fill a pre-given educational container or as mutual co-constituents in an educational rope to be wrought? Have the learning tasks been designed in accordance with these expectations? Do one's expectations in this regard match those of the participants? If not, one needs to ensure at the very least that this fact - of different expectations - is brought to light. Second, the designer should consider how the participants' epistemological approach from and motivational entanglement in their diverse primary contexts may influence their approach to the learning tasks - and how, perhaps, they might be drawn on in resituated sense-making within these activities. Finally, the designer should take into account that agreeability of task need not coincide with conduciveness for learning; that cognitive rationalization and social mediation may not be sufficient to bring learners to care for unpleasant tasks; and that engagement in pleasant tasks does not commit the learner to the wider objective of the task. In sum, adequate design requires that one realizes the complex relationships between what learners care about, who they see themselves to be, how they make sense of new situations on the basis of their primary contexts, how self-directedness and social mediation interplay in their views of given practices as 'ropes' or 'containers', whilst acknowledging that some tasks may have to be carried out by the learners whether they like them or not. Instead of assuming that given the right design, cognitively and socially, any task may be made appealing to any learner. That would amount, in effect, to assuming that participants' motivation and engagement can be designed[1].

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