

A tacit-knowledge perspective on networked learning

Nina Bonderup Dohn

IFKI, University of Southern Denmark, nina@sitkom.sdu.dk

Abstract

Within the field of networked learning, many researchers take their point of departure in "practice" theories, i.e. theories which stress that the meaning of actions, artefacts, and procedures are bound up with concrete contexts of activity. Important representatives of such "practice theories" are activity theory, expansive learning, and social learning theory. In this article I flesh out a "practice" view of knowledge. I integrate insights from Wittgenstein, phenomenology and situated learning to formulate a view of knowledge as tacit, situated, relational, practical, context-dependent, embodied doing. Building on this view of knowledge, I argue that insights and understandings from one context have to be resituated, transformed, and reactualized to be brought into use in other contexts. I also point out that a main task for educators today is to challenge their students to resituate their tacit, practical understandings across the different contexts they participate in - and to support them in learning to do so. Networked learning activities may play important roles here because they can be designed as "mediator activities" which are characterized by catalyzing the coupling of primary contexts, whilst not aiming at the attainment of educational ends themselves. Such mediator activities have their anchorage in the settings to be coupled, not in the coupling. In contrast, networked learning activities designed to be a "place" for the pursuit of educational goals tend to become stand-alone activities which seem somewhat 'abstract' and unrelated to 'what is really at stake' for the participants, i.e. what shows up for them as significant on the background of their tacit practical embodied understanding.

Keywords

Tacit knowledge, practice theory, networked learning activities, embodiment, practical knowledge

Setting the question - what's at issue?

Within the field of networked learning, many researchers take their point of departure in "practice" theories, i.e. theories which stress that the meaning of actions, artefacts, and procedures are bound up with concrete contexts of activity. More precisely, the basic view is that meaning is embedded in the activities people undertake in given contexts and that conversely these activities can only be understood in terms of the meaning they embody. Meaning is created and negotiated in activity and activity is formed by the meaning it instantiates and perpetuates. Among the "practice" theories most influential for the field of networked learning are activity theory, expansive learning, and social learning theory. Activity theory is rooted in the writings of Vygotsky (1978), with Cole (1990) and Wertsch (1998) as significant Western heirs and theory developers. Expansive learning theory is an independent development of activity theory and represented by Engeström (1987, 2001). Social learning theory, with Wenger as its prime representative, is inspired by activity theory and developed out of situated learning (Lave & Wenger 1991) into a theory which focuses on learning as a negotiation of meaning and identity in – and to some extent across – 'communities of practice' (Wenger, 1998).

The significance of these "practice" theories within the networked learning field is illustrated by the fact that the only plenary session at the 2010 Networked Learning Conference in Aalborg was devoted to a dialogue with Wenger and Engeström on the contribution of their theoretical perspectives to the understanding of networked learning (www.lanacs.ac.uk/fss/organisations/netlc). 15 of the papers presented at the conference included reference to Engeström, 34 referred to Wenger, and 9 referred to activity theory as such. Examples of recent articles within the field which draw on one or more of the theoretical approaches are Ryberg & Larsen (2008), Chen et al (2010), Pilkington & Guldberg (2009), Geithner & Schultz (2010), Vines & Dysthe (2009) Nielsen & Danielsen (2011), Jones et al (2006). Of these articles, the first two draw on Wenger and Engeström, the next one on both of them as well as on activity theory in general, the fourth on Engeström, the two next on activity theory and Wenger, and the last one on all three perspectives.

These "practice" theories are influential in large part through the conceptual tools they offer for analyzing communities of learners, the mediation of dialogue, the role of artefacts, and the establishment of meaning as an

ongoing social process. Central concepts which have been taken over from such theories are "activity system", "zone of proximal development", "mediation", "rules", "community of practice", "negotiation of meaning", "identity", "repertoire", "participation", and "reification". Interestingly, and somewhat ironically, the 'practice' side of the "practice" theories has been neglected to a large extent. Or rather, 'practice' tends to be taken as more or less synonymous with 'discourse'; 'participation' as synonymous with 'contributing with online posts' (or, less frequently, 'contributing orally'); and 'reification' as synonymous with 'writing down', 'concluding' or 'filing'. The 'repertoire' of a community of learners tends to be understood as a 'repertoire of concepts, phrases, and verbal communications'. Even in cases where the 'repertoire' is taken to include representations in other modes than writing, such as pictures and videos, these representations are viewed as carrying significance in virtue of the role they have in discourse. 'Mediation' in the context of networked learning of course refers first and foremost to ICT-mediation, i.e. to the fact that networked learning takes place in synchronous or asynchronous virtual settings with participants dispersed geographically. However, beneath this obvious meaning of 'mediation', and prerequisite for the establishment of ICT-mediated learning communities, is the presupposition that the mediation most interesting and fruitful to focus on when it comes to learning in general is the mediation of thought provided by language. In sum, the 'doing' in networked learning is biased in the directing of verbal doing and 'practice' in the direction of 'linguistic practice'.

Given that networked learning to a large extent takes place in virtual environments structured around reading and writing posts, this is perhaps not so surprising. However, it means that the underlying presuppositions and implications of understanding practice, not just as verbal doing, but as embodied activity in a material world, have been somewhat neglected. Similarly, though some thought has been given to the question of how virtual learning environments (VLE) might facilitate context crossings between work and educational practices (Dirckinck-Holmfeld & Fibiger, 2002, Dirckinck-Holmfeld et al, 2002), still, the more far-reaching implications have not been addressed of the practice theories' notion that significance and our understanding is always and fundamentally situated and locally realized.

Specifically, too little attention has been given to the view of knowledge incipient in the practice theories. For instance, Lave and Wenger (1991, p. 33-34) say that

...[E]ven so-called general knowledge only has power in specific circumstances...What is called general knowledge is not privileged with respect to other "kinds" of knowledge. It too can be gained only in specific circumstances. And it too must be brought into play in specific circumstances. The generality of any form of knowledge always lies in the power to renegotiate the meaning of the past and future in constructing the meaning of present circumstances.

The point of this article is to present an elaboration of the view of knowledge indicated by this statement and to raise the question what implications the view has for the viability of networked learning activities. First, I draw on prior work to argue for a view of knowledge as situated, relational, context-dependent, embodied doing. Next, I discuss how networked learning may be conceptualized given this view. I stress that networked learning activities in general risk having the role of artificial, stand-alone activities detached from the 'primary contexts' of the participants, i.e. contexts in which their knowing and understanding is fully realized. Such activities are not experienced as fully meaningful - they will appear somewhat 'off' from 'what is really at stake' in actual, full-fledged situations. In some cases, the networked learning setting may itself become a 'primary context', but this is rare and cannot be counted on. Examples are given of both case-types. The conclusion is that networked learning will in general be most successful if it is designed as "mediator activities" to facilitate the resituating of content between the 'primary contexts' of the learners, rather than to act as a 'primary context' itself.

Knowledge as tacit, situated, context-dependent, embodied doing

The Lave & Wenger-statement cited above echoes the hermeneutic point made by Gadamer that a statement (be this a law, a biblical phrase or a text) only gets its full, concrete meaning in the interpretation (Auslegung) given to it in the specific situation (Gadamer 1990, p. 338). In turn, it echoes the underlying Hegelian view that 'absolute' knowledge has full existence, not in abstract general idealizations, but in concrete realization (Hegel 1952). It further reminds one of the Wittgensteinian dictum that a rule does not itself show how it is to be applied, that any future behaviour might be interpreted as being in agreement with or in contradiction to it, and that for this reason practical examples are necessary in order to know how to apply the rule in any given situation (Wittgenstein 1984).

These convergences are no coincidence. As argued by Packer and Goicoechea (2000), "practice" theories have their roots in the philosophies of Hegel and Marx and have evolved through inspiration from (among others) the phenomenological tradition, especially Heidegger (who in turn inspired Gadamer) and Merleau-Ponty, and poststructuralism, notably Bourdieu (who is inspired by both Merleau-Ponty and Wittgenstein). In various ways, these thinkers have all articulated the ontological point that significance is 'built into' the human world at the outset, that it is holistic and that it finds concrete realization in the 'gestalt' of the specific situation. And that, correspondingly, knowledge is first and foremost an attunement to this gestalt - an attunement, which is primordial, practical, embodied and supplies the background upon which linguistic utterances can be made and understood. Only secondarily and derivatively is knowledge expressible in words.

I have developed this view of knowledge at length in a recent article, drawing in particular on the Scandinavian interpretation of Wittgenstein, on Merleau-Pontian phenomenology, and on considerations from distributed cognition and situated learning (Dohn 2011). To comply with length requirements, I must here restrict myself to recapitulate the basic points of the argument presented there. The argument takes the following line:

- 1 With Wittgenstein it is argued that since any future behaviour may be interpreted as in accord with/contradictory to a given rule, 'knowing how' to follow the rule is not a question of interpretation at all. Rather, it is a tacit, practical, embodied understanding present in the action itself - a 'feel for' the unique situation and for what amounts to 'following the rule' here. This is why examples are necessary for learning how to follow a rule - and why it is necessary for learners to work through examples themselves rather than just have them explained by a teacher: Only through doing applications of the rule - examples - can one acquire the practical 'feel for' the situation. This practical 'feel for', it should be noted, goes deeper than the rule-following itself: It is the 'gut feeling' whereby we (in practice, not intellectually) evaluate the rule and sometimes find that an exception to it has to be made. On this view, the hermeneutic point made by Gadamer should be read, not with an intellectualist emphasis on the term 'interpretation', but with a pragmatist underscoring of the significance of concrete realization.
- 2 The tacit, practical, embodied understanding is given a more positive characterization by drawing on Merleau-Pontian phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty 1962) and the use Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) make of it in articulating their five stage skill model. This characterization determines practical understanding as grounded in immediate (intuitive) recognition of the overall gestalt of the situation and "holistic pairing of new situations with associated responses produced by successful experiences in similar situations" (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986, p. 35). Gestalt recognition and response pairing are flexible forms of identification, i.e. they accommodate situational variations instead of grouping situation into rigid categories.
- 3 Leading on from this, it is argued that there is no reason - apart from a Cartesian legacy - to think that knowledge is constituted by mental or linguistic representation. On the contrary, since the primary ontology of knowledge is situated realization in the action it enables, representation necessarily involves fundamental ontological reconstruction, i.e. change in ontology. Of course thinking and language play large roles in human practices, but these are roles they have as part of exercising competence. I.e. thoughts and linguistic statements are grounded in the tacit situational 'feel for' the situation - and are made as part of enacting this 'feel for' - not the other way around.
- 4 Fleshing out the tacit understanding a bit more, it is argued with distributed cognition (Hutchins 1996) and situated learning (Lave 1988, Lave & Wenger 1991, Wenger 1998) that competence is a relationship-in-action between the agent and the environment, including tools and people present and that knowledge is always locally realized and negotiated. Knowledge therefore always has aspects of situational specificity which are essential to its realization and cannot be abstracted away. In consequence, complex processes of transformation and resituating are involved when content from one setting is utilized in another.
- 5 In conclusion, knowledge is characterized as tacit, situated, context-dependent, embodied doing, grounded in immediate recognition of and response pairing to the situation's gestalt. Thinking and communicating are phenomena of this doing and as such take their meaning in part from the situation in which they arise.
- 6 The implications of this view for the instantiation of reflective activities such as journal writing or professional dialogue groups are discussed. Basically, such reflective activities are problematic because they build on epistemological premises shown in the argument 1-5 not to hold. More specifically, reflective activities build on the problematic presupposition that one can 'get at' the competence in one kind of setting (the action practice) by representing it mentally or linguistically in another (the reflective setting or practice).
- 7 In contrast, on the view elaborated in 1-5, there is no easy path from one kind of practice to another. This does not mean that one can never be inspired in one type of settings by ongoing in another. It does mean the following, however: One, educational planners cannot design predictable routes of 'content transfer' or 'content transformation' from educational settings to practice settings. Two, inspiration to alter action

practice may come from unforeseen angles quite as much as from planned interventions, just by people traversing borders between practices and reacting to the situations of one on the background of the tacit understanding they have in the other. There need be no representation of the inspiration involved - and often there will not be since that would require a transformation of ontological status twice over (from practical embodied understanding in the one setting to representation to practical embodied understanding in the other setting). And three, when insights from one practice is to be made use of in another, it requires resituation, contextualization, and reactualization of these insights as well as (and building upon) a change in ontological status from representation to actionable knowledge. That is, it requires hard, non-predictable work, involving a significant renegotiation and transformation of the insights in question.

Where does this view of knowledge leave learning activities taking place within the formal educational system? What does it mean for the intention some teachers and educational planners have of supporting their students in context-crossings between formal and informal settings and of helping them see the relevance of content from the one in the other (and vice versa)? And above all, where does it leave networked learning activities?

As to the first question, the view of knowledge propounded here underlines the well-known situated learning point that learning activities within the formal educational system are framed, formed and given content by the settings they take place in (Lave 1988, Säljö and Wyndhamn 1996, Packer 2001). There is no simple transfer of content between settings; indeed, the very notion of transfer is unclear (cf. Packer 2001): Given that tasks are concretely realized in the specific situations in which they are encountered and therefore get structure and content from these situations, what constitutes 'the same task' across settings is not a simple, objective matter. It is a complex question of negotiation and resituating. This is no reason to despair as educator, though. Rather, it is a reason for an increased focus on the necessity of supporting students in developing their sensitivity towards the given situation and towards ways in which their understanding and perspectives from other situations might be resituated and reactualized there. This is an important focus for educators on behalf of their students, given that the latter, in the society we live in today, will most probably not spend their full professional life in one job in one organisational context but will traverse different settings and repeatedly have to resituate and transform their knowledge. Therefore, as regards the second question, the "practice" view of knowledge does not render spurious the intention of supporting students in context-crossing. It does point out the difficulties inherent in context-crossings - in particular, the non-predictability and non-linearity of content transformation - but at the same time, and partly because of the difficulties, it highlights the significance of actively encouraging students to learn to resituate their tacit, practical, embodied understanding from one context to another. Having made these two preliminary and general points, I shall turn to the third question in the next section.

Conceptualizing networked learning activities

Looking across the literature on cases of networked learning, common concerns are how to get students to participate (Dirckinck-Holmfeld & Fibiger 2002, Wasson et al 2003, Goodyear et al 2004, Fischer et al 2007); how to ensure relevance of the networked learning activities for the students (Dirckinck-Holmfeld et al 2002, Farmer et al. 2008); how to facilitate that the 'space' of the VLE becomes a 'place' for the students (Guldborg & Pilkington 2009, Ryberg & Wentzer 2011); and how one as teacher or VLE facilitator supports the emergence of "activity systems" or "communities of practices" revolving around the networked learning activities (Guldborg & Pilkington 2009, Nielsen & Danielsen 2011).

A few clear examples are reported where students and teachers have experienced their VLE as a "place of their own"; as an anchorage point for their learning, where the "presence" of participants in some cases actually was sensed more prominently than presence in physical encounters (Rudestam & Schoenholtz-Read 2002, Guldborg & Pilkington 2009). Stepping outside the educational world, there is no doubt that Facebook and MySpace are significant anchorage points for many young people - a "place" where they sense their own and other people's "presence" acutely (Boyd 2008). To a somewhat lesser extent, some online communities specialized to a certain domain (e.g. open source programming, reef aquariums, or MMORPGs like World of Warcraft) tend to be experienced as "places" or anchorage points for some of the participants, too. Such examples are existence proof that it is possible for virtual contexts to become 'primary contexts' for the participants involved, i.e. contexts which are significant for the participants, in which they involve themselves as persons and which they consider important for who they are. Still, within networked learning settings it is the exception rather than the rule for VLEs to take on the role of 'primary context' for the learners. The general impression one gets from an overview of the literature is that learners do not often or easily get a sense of belonging to a VLE/group on a VLE. Networked learning activities are reported to be viewed by participants as more or less instrumental for attaining

educational goals (Ryberg & Wentzer 2011, Farmer et al. 2008), but reports are much rarer of experiences of "feeling at home", of deep meaningfulness beyond the instrumental use of the activities, and/or of significance of the VLE for who the participants see themselves as being.

In general, as judged from the literature as well as from 10 years of experience with working with networked learning activities (as teacher, researcher and educational developer), networked learning activities tend for given participants to fall into one of three categories:

- Activities which in practice are 'stand-alone' activities and for which participants feel no great intrinsic motivation. The instrumental purpose and justification of the activities in terms of educational goals may be quite clear and they may be thematically quite well integrated with activities taking place in physical contexts (e.g. further course activities or practice experiences from informal everyday learning contexts). However, because they are designed to fulfil educational ends in themselves rather than be integrated practically with other activities, they tend to be experienced as somewhat artificial formalizations which do not quite 'hit the mark' (cf. e.g. Farmer et al. 2008 and Ryberg & Wentzer 2011 for student comments to this effect). A typical indicator that one has to do with activities of this kind is teacher worries of "how to involve the learners and get them to contribute". Extreme examples of such activities (bordering on not being 'activities' at all) are learning objects, posited as self-explanatory, stand-alone tools for learning, which the learner is expected to make use of and learn from without any further support on the part of the course (e.g. Open University's OpenLearn platform taken by itself, <http://openlearn.open.ac.uk/>). I.e. where learning is supposed to come from the object in itself rather than from course activities which centre on the use which learners should make of the object as a resource (on a par with books and other physical resources) in carrying out the activity. Further, not so extreme, examples are constituted by discussion forum activities where students are to have a stand-alone debate on a text they have read. Stand-alone in the sense that course activities are not designed so that this debate is to be directly taken up in future learning activities. I shall term this kind of activity "stand-alone activities".
- Activities which succeed in being (part of) a 'primary context' for the participants and which they therefore view as natural and rewarding for expressing and developing their knowledge. References to literature which present examples of such activities are given above. As indicated, few networked learning activities gain this significance. I shall term this kind of activity "primary context activities".
- Activities which do not aim at attaining educational ends in themselves, but which serve as "mediators" or "brokers" between primary contexts. They gain what significance they have by being catalysts for participants to remediate and resituate content across settings. The mediation may e.g. be between educational settings and other life contexts, between different study contexts within a course or between courses within an educational programme. Portfolios in professional education may take on this role (Klenowski 2002). So may web 2.0-mediated learning activities focused on facilitating flow and resituation of content across contexts (Farmer et al. 2008). I shall term this kind of activity "mediator activities". Many activities which are intended as mediator activities on the part of the teacher or course planner in point of fact end up being stand-alone activities for the learners. An example is the use of a blog in the Social Education Program at University College Lillebælt, Jelling. I acted as a consultant for the project. The report is published in Dohn (2009). The blog was intended as a mediator activity between educational and work settings during a period of internship for the students, but in effect only attained the status of a rather insignificant stand-alone activity for them.

In the following I present a philosophical analysis of what is at stake in each of the three kinds of activities, as viewed from the knowledge perspective presented above (henceforth KP). More specifically, I explain why most networked learning activities fall into the first group and argue that the third kind is worth aiming for (though difficult to attain). Toward the end I answer the philosophical question how it is possible at all for networked learning activities to become primary context activities if knowledge is tacit, embodied doing.

On the KP-view, stand-alone activities are activities which are not anchored in the life-worlds of the participants and which therefore do not present natural or regular ways for them to enact their knowledge. The dialogue in the stand-alone activities is correspondingly 'detached' from the material contexts in which words get their deeper, fully realized meaning for the participants. In turn, the dialogue may phenomenologically be experienced as 'abstract', lacking depth or reality, and 'off the mark'. The very characteristics which are often proposed as the strength of networked learning - their geographical and temporal flexibility and the 'distance' and 'moment of pause and reflection' they allegedly represent - are their most problematic, too: Their 'flexibility', combined with their self-contained stand-alone focus on educational ends not directly integrated as objectives in the primary contexts of the life-world, imply their non-essentiality for the participants in the

ongoings of these primary contexts. Indicative, though not conclusive empirical support for this philosophical point is supplied by studies of e-learning in Swedish industry (Svensson et al. 2004). Phenomenologically, the point is that participants, in their situated, embodied recognition of and response to the situational gestalts of their action practice, do not immediately see and feel the relevance of the stand-alone activities and the content presented through them. The networked learning activities do not spring to mind (or rather: spring to action) as compelling elements to be resituated in their actions in practice. Though participants may be convinced at some level of linguistic/mental representation of the relevance of the networked learning activities and the educational ends aimed at through them, this conviction in itself will be of little help given that there is no easy and direct route between mental/linguistic representations of practice and actions in practice. As indicated above, it requires hard non-predictable work to resituate content and insights across contexts. If this hard work is not supported at all (as it will not be in the case of learning objects presented as self-explanatory tools for learning) or only supported casually (e.g. through a non-committing invitation to contribute with practice examples to forum discussions), but not facilitated actively through anchoring the activities in the action practices of the participants, the risk is correspondingly great that the activities will be experienced as insignificant, only to be carried out 'because we have to' – or that they will simply be neglected and not carried out at all.

On the other hand, given that resituating insights across contexts is hard and difficult work, and given that it is important to support students in learning to resituate their tacit, embodied understanding from one context to another (cf. the last section), the significance of the third type of networked learning activities, the mediator activities, is clear. The point here is less to supply a "place" for activities such as reflecting on practice and more to make possible the coupling between contexts that are already significant for the participants and where their words thus have fully realized meaning. Mediator activities have their anchorage in the settings to be coupled and are centred on transforming meaning between them. As viewed from KP, a design focus on establishing a virtual "place" where the coupling can be done is misguided because such a "place" will necessarily be a representational space. That is, activities here will at most constitute representations of couplings rather than be couplings. For this reason, networked learning activities intended as mediator activities stands a clear risk of ending up as stand-alone activities, as in the case described in Dohn (2009). Conversely, when portfolios get the significance of mediator activity in teacher education (Klenowski 2002), it is precisely because the activity does not stop with the representation of professional practice in the portfolio, but is carried on into the classroom with a focus on resituating the tacit understanding of the teaching practice in classroom discussions of learning and teaching.

The question remains how it is at all possible for virtual contexts to succeed in becoming 'primary contexts' for at least some of the participants, i.e. how networked learning activities of the second kind are possible. The answer is that we involve ourselves as embodied beings even in settings where we do not physically meet the others. We engage ourselves as bodily beings placed in physical surroundings (at a desk, with keyboard and screen, with enough light to see etc.) and we enact our tacit understanding of the situation in corresponding virtually with others exactly as we do in other situations. A clear indicator that we in such situations are not "disembodiedly" involved as minds is the physical discomfort one may feel after reading an unpleasant comment in a virtual setting. One may acquire a 'feel for' the communication in a certain virtual setting with a certain group of people; slip-ups may make one squirm and blush alone in one's office; and one may become so proficient in corresponding virtually that the 'right thing to write' comes naturally and immediately to one. As such, corresponding virtually with others is as much an embodied action as any other action. However, since the physical location of this embodied action is displaced from the physical locations of the other participants, but most often identical to the physical location of one or more of our (other) primary contexts (at work or at home), it is easy to be distracted from involving oneself in a virtual setting. As Merleau-Ponty pointed out, being bodies in a world means an anchoring of our involvement in the world, where our body is "the unperceived term in the centre of the world towards which all objects turn their face" (Merleau-Ponty 1962, p. 82) and where: "The word 'here' applied to my body [refers to] the laying down of the first co-ordinates, the anchoring of the active body in an object, the situation of the body in face of its tasks." (ibid, p. 100).

Primary context network learning activities therefore are possible for the same reason as any involvement in practice is possible: We are bodily beings and as such may develop a tacit, embodied understanding of what constitutes adequate action in the given situation, virtual or physical. On the other hand, the reason why most networked learning activities do not succeed in becoming primary context activities is that we as bodily beings are always already engaged in many primary contexts (most of them physical, some perhaps virtual), the significance of which give anchorage to our being. Networked learning activities which do not directly relate to one or more of these primary contexts (as mediator activities) start out as stand-alone activities into which

participants' tacit embodied understandings from their primary contexts are not easily resituated (because they have not as yet developed a practice understanding hereof) and which for their part seem somewhat unrelated to 'what really matters', i.e. their primary context activities. These networked learning activities have yet to prove their worth in themselves for the participants (i.e. become a primary context) and the dialogue to acquire fuller, deeper meaning than the 'abstractions deficit of tacit practice understanding' with which it necessarily starts. And given the participants' already existing involvement in other primary contexts and the risk of being distracted by what goes on around 'here', chances are that despite initial motivation and resolve to engage in virtual activities, stand-alone activities will in practice appear 'off the mark' and be neglected.

In conclusion: Implications for the design of networked learning

In this article I have attempted to flesh out a "practice" view of knowledge, incipient though seldom fully articulated in the "practice theories" which many researchers within networked learning take as their point of departure. I have drawn on prior work which integrates insights from Wittgenstein, phenomenology and situated learning to formulate a view of knowledge as tacit, situated, context-dependent, embodied doing. Building on this view of knowledge I have pointed out that insights and understandings from one context have to be resituated, transformed, and reactualized to be brought into use in other contexts. Educators today should challenge their students to resituate their tacit, practical understandings across the different contexts they participate in - and support them in learning to do so. Networked learning activities may potentially play important roles here because they can be designed as "mediator activities" which are characterized by catalyzing the coupling of primary contexts, whilst not aiming at the attainment of educational ends themselves. Such mediator activities have their anchorage in the settings to be coupled, not in the coupling. On the other hand, networked learning activities designed to be a "place" for the pursuit of educational goals tend to become stand-alone activities which seem somewhat unrelated to 'what is really at stake' for the participants, i.e. what their tacit practical embodied understanding, anchored in the participants' primary contexts, show them as significant.

In conclusion, the implications of this view for the design of networked learning activities should be briefly mentioned. In most cases it is not advisable to plan networked learning activities as primary context activities. That is, it is not advisable to design activities which presuppose that learners engage in them for their own sake, because they consider the activities significant for who they are, and where the activities will only succeed if the participants develop fully realized tacit knowing and understanding of the virtual settings in which they take place. It is not impossible for networked learning activities to become primary context activities, but their geographical and temporal flexibility and their detachment from the participants' other primary contexts - often hailed as a great advantage and conducive to a "reflective stance" - may easily lead to the activities being experienced as insignificant or beside the point. Instead, networked learning activities should be designed to facilitate an anchorage in action in the already existing primary contexts of the participants, both educational and non-educational ones. This allows networked learning to bridge contexts and support students in resituating knowledge from their educational settings to their other life contexts - and vice versa. The requirement is that networked learning activities are not expected to be goals in themselves, but are allowed the role as necessary medium for activities crossing contexts. Learning activities designed in this way all things equal stand the best chance, not only of succeeding as activities, but of developing significance for the participants.

One last comment. Is this article not itself a stand-alone activity and if yes, is it not self-defeating to hope anyone might find it interesting? Not quite. Due to length restrictions, I have only pointed to, not elaborated on, specific examples. However, given the context - a conference on networked learning attended by researchers and practitioners within the field - it is perhaps not unreasonable to expect readers to be participants in primary contexts which supply examples such as the ones pointed to. Their resituation of the paper's arguments may be helped in this way and hopefully their interest awakened. On the other hand, resituating will be necessary. The paper taken by itself is just a resource and as argued above the interesting question concerning resources is what use they will be put to in concrete activities, not what they 'do' themselves. My clear hope is that the paper will lead to a lively discussion. This is at least the activity which I shall try to initiate at the conference.

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