Symposium 1: Relations in Networks and Networked Learning

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This symposium focuses on the conference themes networking and networks and links to the further theme dialogue and dialogicality. The social world has been described as a networked society, a society in which the digital networks that help to link and organize society are seen as having a key influence on the character of modern sociality (Castells 1996, 2001). Networked individualism is dialectically related both to an increasing global interdependency and a development of social forms at the local and individual level that allow greater freedom. In this view network patterns are the characteristic of an emergent society and are likely to affect education and learning in significant ways. Researchers in networks and networking have moved away from a conception of networks that relied on a notion of random networks to more structured forms, such as scale free networks. Scale free networks suggest network forms that have a history and developmental process over time and a clustering that suggests implicit systems of power related to that developmental process.

A key question for networked learning is how these new ways of thinking about relationships may affect relationships in education and learning. This symposium brings together a number of perspectives interested in applying the idea of networked learning and exploring the implications of this approach. The four research papers report on a number of aspects regarding the dimensions of the relationships found in networks, both in educational environments and beyond in less formal learning locations. Three of the papers examine, from differing perspectives, a relational approach to networks and learning and the strength of the ties in networks and the nature of weak ties in particular (Enriquez, Ryberg and Larsen, Jones et al.) A further strand is developed by the fourth paper, (Dirckinck-Holmfeld) which examines the nature of boundaries and boundary objects in a collaborative and networked setting. The idea of boundaries and boundary crossing is a feature of weak links (Jones et al.) and the four papers taken together begin to specify how relational ties might be described and understood in a digitally networked environment.

REFERENCES

Castells, M. (1996). *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture Volume 1. The Rise of the Network Society*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Castells, M. (2001). *The Internet Galaxy: Reflections on the Internet, business, and Society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.