

## 16. Symposium: Towards an Ecology of Networked Learning

### INTRODUCTION

This Symposium is part of the work of a Special Interest Group (SIG) in the EU funded project “EQUEL” – e-quality in e-learning. The SIG is interested in the application of technology and development of theory as developed within the research community on networked learning environments.

This research community commonly acknowledges that human interaction and communication as well as technological tools are key factors to developing an *ecology* of collaboration, in which social and communicative processes and mediating technology integrate into a uniquely situated learning context. Following Nardi and O'Day (1999), ecology is the evolving environment that supports collaborative learning, integrates artefacts, technologies, and spaces for acting, and allows for diverse individual roles and technical functions.

However, in our opinion, a key challenge is that this integration is often assumed to occur naturally, when in reality the process of arriving at an ecology that supports collaborative learning is far from being straightforward.

In the Symposium, we will focus on exploring the following issues:

- The impact of network environments in mediating human activity, particularly the development of dialogue, identity and social presence.
- The use of the network metaphor as a unifying concept that allows us to theorise the broad context in which learning occurs in a society reliant on computer networks.

The purpose of our Symposium is to develop analysis and reflection upon the use of the network metaphor in learning technology and the idea that developing dialogue, online identities, and social presence is an essential activity which learners have to undertake to knit the learning network and avoid the risk of reducing humans to individual “nodes” or “agents” in the network.

The symposium will be a highly interactive session and will consist of three short presentations of key issues from the papers, followed by discussion with the conference participants. Discussants may be from the SIG or the wider EQUEL group.

### REFERENCE

Nardi, B. A. & O'Day V. (1999). *Information ecologies: Using technology with heart*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

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