Chapter 2
Implications for Networked Learning of the 'Practice' Side of Social Practice Theories: A Tacit-Knowledge Perspective

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Introduction

In the first book of the present series on the theory, pedagogy, and practice of networked learning, the editors in their final chapter identify the ontology and epistemology of the networked learning approach as, broadly speaking, socio-constructionist and as seeking to transcend the dualism between abstract mind and concrete material social practice (Hodgson, McConnell, & Dirckinck-Holmfeld, 2012). That is, they put forward a view of the world and our human understanding of it as 'socio-culturally influenced and constructed' (p. 292) and of '[p]ractice as epistemic, as a way of seeing or acting' (p. 293). They stress that the approach implies a social theory of learning similar in many respects to the ones expressed in activity theory and the communities of practice approach, respectively. The similarity is, of course, not coincidental—rather it stems from the fact that many researchers within the field of networked learning have taken their point of departure in what might be termed 'social practice' theories, among which some of the most influential are activity theory, expansive learning, and the communities of practice approach, or social learning theory as I prefer to call it, following Wenger (1998).

In this chapter I wish to point out that the 'practice' side of 'social practice' theories has been somewhat neglected by networked learning and that as a consequence too little attention has been paid to the view of knowledge inherent in these theories and to the implications which this view has for the theoretical understanding and practical design of networked learning activities. I argue that networked learning activities in general risk taking on the role of artificial, stand-alone activities detached from the 'primary contexts' (Dohn, 2013) of the participants,

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i.e. contexts which carry significance for them, in which they involve themselves as persons and which they consider important for who they are. Networked learning activities which have this role are not experienced as fully meaningful—they appear somewhat 'off' from 'what is really at stake' in actual, full-fledged practical situations. In some cases, especially within distance learning programmes, the networked learning setting may itself become a 'primary context', but this cannot be counted on. The main claim of the chapter as it concerns designs for learning is that networked learning will in general be most successful if 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.

The conception of networked learning used in the chapter takes as a starting point the definition provided by Goodyear, Banks, Hodgson, and McConnell (2004) which is concerned with the facilitation of learning through some kind of structured educational activity (in a broad sense) involving information and communication technology. It states that 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. (p. 1)

Here, the 'structured educational activity' of networked learning may be in the form of more traditional educational courses designed to help learners fulfil specific predefined educational goals. A step removed, the term also covers the type of professional development and action learning courses which are designed to facilitate learners' reflection on their practice experiences and their formulation and pursuit of their own more specific learning objectives and practice development goals on this basis (for an example, cf. Smith, 2012). However, it is a consequence of the argument put out in the chapter that the definition needs supplementation in one crucial way: As it stands, it is focused solely on ICT-mediated contexts and on the learning taking place through engaging with resources, tutors, and other learners in such contexts. It therefore seems to miss the possibility of (and need for, I would contend) designing activities which help participants resituate course content in their existing physical and virtual primary contexts. A more apt definition which better highlights the possibility of utilising networked learning as 'mediator activities' between primary contexts would read:

> 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.

The chapter thus takes on the question of how best to conceptualise networked learning—including a development of the concept itself—given a view of knowledge which, it is claimed, is inherent but undeveloped and partly unacknowledged, in the way networked learning is made theoretical sense of within the research community. According to this view, knowledge is first and foremost an attunement to the 'gestalt' of the specific situation one is in—an attunement, which is primordial, practical, and embodied and supplies the background upon which linguistic utterances can be made and understood. Only secondarily and derivatively is knowledge expressible in words.

The Neglect of 'Practice' in Networked Learning's Use of 'Social Practice Theories'

'Social practice' theories such as activity theory and social learning theory converge on stressing that the meaning of actions, artefacts, and procedures are bound up with concrete social 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.

This basic view is put forward with a primary focus on the individual's appropriation of cultural meaning within 'activity systems' in *activity theory* with its roots in the writings of Vygotsky (1978) and Leont'ev (1978) and with Cole (1990), Hedegaard (1995), and Wertsch (1998) as significant Western heirs and theory developers. *Expansive learning theory*, developed by Engeström (1987, 2001), constitutes an important modification to the theory because it moves focus to the collective level and centres on 'expansion' or transgression of existing 'activity systems' and their limitations, rather than on development within an 'activity system'. The significance of this modification warrants treating Engeström's approach as a perspective of its own even though it is a branch of activity theory. Engeström's version of activity theory has influenced research within networked learning as a theory in its own right. *Social learning theory*, with Wenger as its prime representative, is inspired by activity theory and developed out of situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991) but articulates the basic view, not in terms of activity systems but of communities of practice, and conceptualises learning not as appropriation or expansion but as participation (Sfard, 1998), in the form of a negotiation of meaning and identity in—and to some extent across—communities of practice (Wenger, 1998).

The significance of these 'social 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 (http://nlc.ell.aau.dk). Fifteen of the papers presented at the conference included reference to Engeström, 34 referred to Wenger, and nine 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 and Larsen (2008); Chen, Chang, and Wang (2010); Geithner and Schulz (2010); Cousin and Deepwell (2005); Fulantelli (2009); Booth and Hultén (2004); Vines and Dysthe (2009); Nielsen and Danielsen (2011); Jones, Dirckinck-Holmfeld, and Lindström (2006); Pilkington and Guldberg (2009); and Jones and Dirckinck-Holmfeld (2009). Of these articles, the first two draw on Wenger and Engeström, the next one on Engeström, the fourth and fifth on Wenger, the sixth on activity theory, the next two on activity theory and Wenger, and the last three on all three perspectives.

The social practice theories are influential in large part through the conceptual tools they offer for analysing the 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 social practice theories has been neglected to a large extent. Or rather, 'practice' and 'activity' tend to be taken as more or less synonymous with 'discourse' and 'verbal activity', respectively; '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 direction of verbal doing and 'practice' in the direction of 'linguistic practice'.

A few examples will serve to illustrate the point. Cousin and Deepwell, in their application of a Wenger perspective to networked learning, say explicitly that 'Translated to the context of network learning, reification can be about shared assessment assignments and/or the generation of learning resources; it can also be about a set of ground rules ... and conventions for shared discussion' (Cousin & Deepwell, 2005, p. 63). That is, reification is a matter of saying or writing, i.e. of linguistic practice. Similarly, Fulantelli (2009) writes of a blended learning course that 'students and teachers became a community of practice, by sharing a common enterprise (the solution of real cases), through a mutual engagement and building a shared repertoire of cases and solutions' (p. 58). The 'real cases' in question, it should be noted, were *linguistic representations* of actual projects, not the projects themselves. That is, the students worked on producing linguistically formulated solutions to the representations of problems in practice, not on actually solving the problems *in* practice. It is, perhaps, symptomatic of the linguistic and representational bias of networked learning's utilisation of social practice theories that no comment is made whatsoever on this point.

To these examples of linguistic bias in the utilisation of social learning theory, the following quote from Booth and Hultén (2004) may be added. It illustrates a corresponding bias in the way activity theoretical concepts are used. They claim that

> One clear point for further investigation is the relation between activity and interactivity, or
> *in other words* the amount participants contribute to the discussion and the degree to which
> they listen to, think about, and act on what they find there. Wännman-Toresson's [2002]
> work indicated convincingly that activity is a prerequisite for interactivity: the greater the
> activity in a group the proportionally greater the interactivity she measured. (p. 170,
> emphasis added, NBD)

In the latter part of the quote, 'activity' and 'interactivity' clearly refer exclusively to what goes on in online environments. In the first part of the quote, Booth and Hultén do mention 'acting on' the interaction in the online discussions, but given that they explicate their view in terms of Wännman-Toresson's findings, it seems clear that the acts they have in mind are verbal ones, i.e. the acts of writing new comments to the discussion.

In line with this view, Pilkington and Guldberg, who as indicated draw on all three types of social practice theory, seem not to differentiate significantly between studies of communities of practice and studies of discourse (and therefore, by implication, between 'practice' and 'discourse') when they say that

> Common to both is the suggestion that to be a community, a community should show
> evidence of mutual engagement, joint enterprise toward shared goals and shared repertoires
> or mechanisms for inter-communication. (Pilkington & Guldberg, 2009, p. 65)

The last part of the quote bears additional, more concrete, witness to the linguistic bias when 'shared repertoires' are treated as equivalent to 'mechanisms for intercommunication'. In a similar fashion, Pilkington and Guldberg utilise Engeström's model of an activity system in ways which stress linguistic representation and verbal doings. Their use of the model thus depicts Engeström's node 'rules' as 'task instruction and interaction rules' which 'constrain/enable' the learner's 'co-construction' 'through discussion' of 'shared understanding and resources' when she/he 'interacts with' others (p. 66). Audio and visual material is supplied and integrated with assignments in order to facilitate 'pause-for-thought' and 'time-to-talk' activities (p. 72). That is, the material is seen as carrying significance precisely to the extent that it gets to play a role in (linguistically mediated) thought and discourse.

Finally, at a more basic level beneath the distinction between the concepts of different 'social practice theories', the following example is to be found in the final chapter of the first book in the present series on networked learning: The very next sentence after the one quoted above to the effect that the networked learning approach seeks to transcend the dualism between mind and 'concrete material social practice' reads: 'The epistemology of networked learning is in essence that knowledge emerges or is constructed in relational dialogue or collaborative interaction' (Hodgson et al., 2012, p. 293). The material side of practice thus seemingly slips out of focus from one sentence to the next.

Given that networked learning to a large extent takes place in virtual environments structured around reading and writing posts, the bias towards 'verbal doing' and 'linguistic practice'—in theorising about networked learning and, it would seem from the quotes, in the practice of networked learning as well—is perhaps

not so surprising. Theoretically, it also finds vindication in the so-called linguistic turn within philosophy and sociology, represented by the (first generation of the) Anglo-American reception of Wittgenstein's writings (e.g. Kenny, 1973; Kripke, 1982; Winch, 1990) in conjunction with post-structuralism exemplified by the works of Butler (1990), Foucault (1970), and Derrida (1997). This 'linguistic turn' argues for the ontological and epistemological significance of language and discourse for the construction of our world and of our understanding of it. However, the neglect of the material side of practice means that the underlying presuppositions and implications of 'social practice theories' as concerns the significance of embodied activity have been somewhat overlooked. This significance, on the other hand, is articulated in the contrasting 'practice turn' which, though inspired by (different) readings of some of the same thinkers (e.g. Wittgenstein and Foucault) (Schatzki, Knorr-Cetina, & von Savigny, 2001), focuses on 'practices as embodied, materially mediated arrays of human activity centrally organized around shared practical understanding' (Schatzki et al., 2001, p. 2) where the practical understanding is constituted in no small degree by non-propositional knowledge (ibid p. 1).

Furthermore, though some thought has been given to the question of how virtual learning environments (VLEs) might facilitate context crossings between work and educational practices (Dirckinck-Holmfeld & Fibiger, 2002; Dirckinck-Holmfeld & Jones, 2009; Dirckinck-Holmfeld, Tolsby, & Nyvang, 2002; Dohn & Kjær, 2009; Smith, 2012), still, the more far-reaching implications have not been addressed of the social practice theories' notion that significance and our understanding are always and fundamentally situated and locally realised.

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

And Dall'Alba and Sandberg argue on the basis of a number of empirical studies that

> . . . an embodied understanding of practice . . . forms the basis for professional skill and its development . . . [T]he knowledge and skills that professionals use in performing their work depend on their embodied understanding of the practice in question. The professionals' way of understanding their practice forms and organizes their knowledge and skills into a particular form of professional skill. (Dall'Alba & Sandberg, 2006, p. 390)

In what follows I shall present an elaboration of the view of knowledge indicated by statements such as these and discuss the implications it has for how networked learning may be conceptualised.

Knowledge as Tacit, Situated, Context-Dependent, Embodied Doing

The Lave and 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 idealisations, but in concrete realisation (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), social 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 post-structuralism, notably Bourdieu (who is inspired by both Merleau-Ponty and Wittgenstein). Schatzki et al. (2001) trace somewhat the same history of ideas, though they do not start as far back as Hegel and Marx nor end up explicitly discussing the learning theories under consideration here. In various ways, the said phenomenological and post-structuralist 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 realisation in the 'gestalt' of the specific situation. And that, correspondingly, knowledge is primordially an embodied and practical attunement to this gestalt—an attunement upon which linguistic utterances can be made and upon which, secondarily and derivatively, knowledge expressible in words may be had.

I have developed this view of knowledge at length in a recent article, drawing on the Scandinavian interpretation of Wittgenstein (Johannesen, 1988; Josefson, 1998; Molander, 1992), which—in contrast to the first generation of his Anglo-American reception—does not focus on rule-following and linguistic practice, but on the tacit understanding in and of practice which makes rule-following (among other phenomena) possible. As noted by Schatzki et al. (2001), some Anglo-American readers like Hubert Dreyfus and Charles Taylor have read Wittgenstein in a similar way. In addition, I draw 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' 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 realisation.

2. The tacit, practical, embodied understanding is given a more positive character-isation by drawing on Merleau-Pontian phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty, 1962) and the use Dreyfus and Dreyfus make of it (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986). This characterisation 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 situations into rigid categories. Inci-dentally, the critique which Dall'Alba and Sandberg (2006) aim at the stage model of skill development proposed by Dreyfus and Dreyfus does not concern their fundamental phenomenological premises, but only their claim that skill develops in definite stages which are the same across diverse professions.

3. Leading on from this, I argue that there is no reason—apart from a Cartesian legacy—to think that knowledge is constituted by mental or linguistic represen-tation. On the contrary, since the primary ontology of knowledge is situated realisation in the action it enables, representation necessarily involves funda-mental 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. That is, 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, I argue with distributed cognition (Hutch-ins, 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 realised and negotiated. Knowledge therefore always has aspects of situational specificity which are essential to its realisation and cannot be abstracted away. In consequence, complex processes of transformation and resituating are involved when content from one setting is utilised in another.

5. In conclusion, knowledge is characterised 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 ongoings 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 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, contextualisation, and reactualisation 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.

The considerations in 7 constitute a radicalisation of the point made by Goodyear, Jones, Asensio, Hodgson, and Steeples (2001) and Dirckinck-Holmfeld et al. (2009) that learning can never be directly designed but only designed *for*. My claim is not just that

> [t]he activities, spaces and organisations that we design rely on being inhabited by others, the particular teachers and learners who 'enact' our designs. Goodyear et al. [2001] argue that we can design the tasks, the organisation and the space, in which learning may take place, however we can't be sure how the tasks are carried out, organisation becomes community or spaces become places. (Dirckinck-Holmfeld et al., 2009, p. 162)

I fully agree with this claim, but my point is the further one that we a fortiori cannot know, predict, or design what sense—if any—participants will make of whatever they might have learned in the activities and spaces we have designed, once they involve themselves in other practice settings.

This point—and the view of knowledge it builds on—is in line with the well-known situated learning thesis that learning activities within the formal educational system are framed, formed, and given content by the settings they take place in (Lave, 1988; Packer, 2001; Säljö & Wyndhamn, 1996). 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 realised 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.

These claims should not lead one to despair as an educator, though. Rather, they constitute 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 reactualised there. The significance of such a focus is increased by the fact that students 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.

By way of contrast and for the sake of clarity, it is worth emphasising that these considerations differ somewhat from recommendations set forth by others noting the challenges posed by today's society—whether characterised as 'network society', 'knowledge society', 'learning society', or the like. Thus, in the last chapter of the first book in this series, Hodgson et al. (2012) summarise and discuss points made throughout the book and elsewhere, stressing critical reflexivity, the ability to judge one's own learning and that of others, and investment of self in the learning process as crucial to participation in today's society. To the extent that 'reflexivity' and 'ability to judge learning' are taken to be inherently dependent on reflection as a process of 'stepping back from' and thinking about/discussing/critically evaluating practice, such recommendations actually run counter to the view presented here: The sensitivity towards the concrete situation which is called for is not primarily one of reflection, but of openness and attunement towards the situation's gestalt in its complexity. Similarly, the resituation and reactualisation necessary for insights from one practice to become relevant to another are not brought about by reflection on differences between the practices, but by a flexible attuning in action of one's embodied expectations of situational gestalts. As for the investment of self in the situation, I do agree that this is an essential aspect—sensitivity and attunement would seem impossible without an investment of self, and conversely, such investment is a defining characteristic of the 'primary contexts' of a person.

Conceptualising 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; Fischer, Kollar, Mandl, & Haake, 2007; Goodyear et al., 2004; Salmon, 2000, 2002; Wasson, Ludvigsen, & Hoppe, 2003); how to ensure relevance of the networked learning activities for the students (Dirckinck-Holmfeld et al., 2002; Farmer, Yue, & Brooks, 2008; McConnell, 1994, 2006; McConnell, Hodgson, & Dirckinck-Holmfeld, 2012); how to facilitate that the 'space' of the VLE becomes a 'place' for the students (Pilkington & Guldberg, 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 (Nielsen & Danielsen, 2011; Pilkington & Guldberg, 2009).

In the literature, there are clear examples of students and teachers having experienced their VLE as a 'place of their own'; as an anchorage point for their learning, where the 'presence' of participants was sensed as prominently as presence in physical encounters—sometimes even more so (Hodgson, 2008; Pilkington & Guldberg, 2009; Rudestam & Schoenholtz-Read, 2002). 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 specialised 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 prove that it is possible for virtual contexts to become 'primary contexts' for the participants involved. Thus, no claim is being made here to the effect that only physical 'real life' settings can foster belonging and/or constitute a primary context. Quite the contrary, virtual settings may be just as much a part of 'real life' as physical settings, and risk taking, identity negotiation, and insecurity—contrary to what Dreyfus has claimed (Dreyfus, 2001)—can play as significant roles here as in face-to-face encounters, though sometimes in somewhat different ways (Land, 2004).

This said, the general impression one gets from an overview of the literature is that VLEs/groups on VLEs within networked learning settings are not among the virtual settings where its participants most often feel a sense of belonging. Even when tutors focus on facilitating the development of such a feeling, there seem to be a number of learners for whom it doesn't happen (Dohn, 2007; Dohn, Thorsen, & Larsen, 2013; Ryberg & Wentzer, 2011; Salmon, 2000, 2002). In particular, it would seem to be the exception rather than the rule for VLEs to take on the role of 'primary context' for the learners.

In general, as judged from the literature as well as from nearly 15 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 (Ryan & Deci, 2000). 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 formalisations which do not quite 'hit the mark' or lack 'common ground' (cf., e.g. Farmer et al., 2008; Ryberg & Wentzer, 2011; Salmon, 2002, p. 20, 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' (cf. Salmon, 2000, 2002). 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/). That is, 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. I shall term this kind of activity 'primary context activities'. As indicated, many networked learning activities do not succeed in becoming primary context activities even though they are designed with that aim.

- 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, for example, be between educational settings and other life contexts, between different study contexts within a course, between courses within an educational programme, or, in some professional development courses, between the participants' diverse action learning contexts in practice. Portfolios in professional education may take on this role (Klenowski, 2002) as may PBL activities which span virtual and physical study settings (Vines & Dysthe, 2009). Web 2.0-mediated learning activities focused on facilitating flow and resituation of content across contexts is another case in question (Farmer et al., 2008) as is the situated curriculum co-constructed by owner-managers of small businesses (SMEs) in the LEAD programme discussed by Smith (2012). In the latter case, action learning in each participant's own primary business context was integrated with physical meetings and discussions in an online space in a way which focused on the participants' need for renegotiation and resituation of content across the different contexts. 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. Examples concerning the use of a blog and of a Facebook group, respectively, are reported in Dohn (2009) and Andersen, Dohn, Irminger, and Vestergaard (2012).

The same activity need not fall in the same category for all of the participants involved in it. That is, a given activity may be experienced as a 'stand-alone' activity for some learners and as a 'primary context activity' for others. My own very first experiences with teaching networked learning activities may serve as example: A few students evaluated the activities as essentially 'a home for their learning' whereas a number of students hardly participated at all. Other examples are provided in Salmon (2002) and Dohn et al. (2013). Similarly, an activity may function as a 'mediator activity' for some students whereas others experience it as a 'stand-alone' activity. This was the case with the Facebook activities reported in Andersen et al. (2012).

As indicated in the beginning of the chapter, the concept of networked learning provided by Goodyear et al. (2004) does not really take into account the type of activity here designated as 'mediator activity'. As it stands, their definition seems implicitly to build on a paradigm of networked learning where the activities take place in a VLE or similar virtual setting, i.e. where the connections which the definition highlights are all connections within a relatively well-demarcated virtual context or (smaller) set of contexts. Though the definition does not *preclude* an interpretation where the 'learning resources' connected to are (from the point of view of the course) contingent resources dispersed across the many life contexts which course participants between them participate in, the definition seems focused on 'primary context activities' and 'stand-alone activities'. My suggested addition of the sentence 'connections between the diverse contexts in which the learners participate' on the other hand centres on the type of connections involved in 'mediator activities'. It thus affords thinking about how to design activities which support learners in resituating content across their existing physical and virtual 'primary contexts', educational and otherwise.

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). Towards the end I elaborate a bit on the philosophical question how it is possible at all for networked learning activities to become primary context activities if knowledge is a tacit, embodied doing.

From the KP view, stand-alone activities are activities which are not anchored in the lifeworlds of the participants, i.e. their familiar everyday world with its primary and near-primary, physical and virtual, contexts, the everyday world in which they engage and are absorbed and which constitutes the outset for their sensemaking (Heidegger, 1986; Schutz & Luckmann, 1973). Because of their lack of anchorage in the lifeworld, stand-alone activities do not present natural or regular ways for the participants to enact their knowledge. The dialogue in the stand-alone activities is correspondingly 'detached' from the contexts in which words get their deeper, fully realised meaning for the participants. In turn, the dialogue may phenomenologically be experienced as 'abstract', lacking depth or reality, as 'off the mark' or lacking 'common ground' (Salmon, 2002). 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 traits, 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 lifeworld, implies their non-essentiality for the participants in the ongoing 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, Ellström, & Åberg, 2004). Similarly, the problems of disconnectedness which academics (and learners) experience in making the transition from familiar face-to-face practices to teaching online (Boon & Sinclair, 2012) find their deeper explanation in the detachedness of the online discourse and the words used there from the primary contexts of the participants. As Boon and Sinclair note:

> In our own experience ... the seeming constants of language, identity, engagement, and time were shown to be inconstant and made unfamiliar through this transition or crossing. This inconstancy and unfamiliarity can be a very real barrier for academics and students alike. With one foot in the real and another in the virtual, users must come to terms with both difference and disquiet in order to participate effectively in networked learning environments.' (Boon & Sinclair, 2012, p. 278)

The simple point to be made from the viewpoint of KP is that not all participants can or are willing to 'come to terms with' this inconstancy—and, one might add, initial lack of significance—and that to those that do not 'come to terms' the networked learning activities will never evolve past being 'stand-alone activities' in which they only engage half-heartedly or not at all. Incidentally, Boon and Sinclair seem to imply that *all* virtual contexts show this inconstancy and consequently seem less 'real' than physical settings. Given the above mentioned significance which some virtual settings have for some people, I think this hard-drawn distinction between the physical and the virtual distorts the point somewhat. The problem is the detachment of 'stand-alone activities' from the primary contexts (be they physical or virtual) of the participants, not the virtuality per se.

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 noncommitting 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.

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 realised 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 run a clear risk of ending up as stand-alone activities, as in the case described in Dohn (2009) and in some of the Facebook activities reported in Andersen et al. (2012). Conversely, portfolios may get to be mediator activities in teacher education (Klenowski, 2002) precisely when the representation of professional practice in the portfolio is not treated as goal in itself, 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. Analogous points may be made for the role of the PBL activities in the case reported by Vines and Dysthe (2009) and of the online discussions in the LEAD case described by Smith (2012).

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. As Land has pointed out, one commits an 'incorporeal fallacy' if one thinks that cyberspace is a space of bodiless minds, just because bodies are not visible 'in' it (Land, 2004). The point is that 'the minds that meet' in cyberspace are not 'in' cyberspace at all, they are the embodied minds of material people. A clear indicator that we are not 'disembodiedly' involved as minds when communicating virtually 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 would say, 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). By which he meant that 'here' is always first and foremost the 'here' of our bodily being (which thereby sets the 'first co-ordinates', i.e. determines the 'zero' of the co-ordinate system of inhabited space). And, further, that our bodily being is always already engaged in the world and only experiences itself through this lived engagement—actually only experiences itself as 'here' through the 'here' of the objects with which it engages.

Primary context networked 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 the 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, 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. This is, I would claim, the deeper reason for the fact noted (and lamented) by McConnell et al. (2012) that

> For many present-day networked learning students and tutors, the perception that learning technologies lack social presence and do not match the experience of face-to-face meetings still persists. (p. 6)

As McConnell et al. go on to say, there is much evidence to the contrary. However, from the view of KP, the problem is precisely that networked learning discussions start out lacking the fuller, deeper meaning and that this lack is experienced as a 'social distance' between learners.

In Conclusion: Implications for the Design of Networked Learning

In this chapter I have attempted to flesh out a 'practice' view of knowledge, incipient though seldom fully articulated in the social practice theories which many researchers within networked learning take as their point of departure. I have drawn on prior work which integrates insights from the Scandinavian reception of 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 reactualised 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 characterised by catalysing 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 realised 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 inducive 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 noneducational 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 being equal, stand the best chance of not only succeeding as activities but also of developing significance for the participants.

One last comment, is this chapter 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 book on networked learning aimed at 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 resituating of the article'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 chapter may inspire lively discussion in the primary contexts of its readers.

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