Chapter 9
A Practice-Grounded Approach to 'Engagement' and 'Motivation' in Networked Learning

Nina Bonderup Dohn

Engagement and Motivation: Widespread, Yet Unclear Concerns

A recurrent issue within the literature on ICT-mediated learning is how to engage or motivate learners to participate in the tasks of educational programs. Salmon's much-used guides to e-learning for this reason have large sections devoted to the discussion of how student motivation and engagement in participation may be promoted (Salmon, 2003, 2013). Her articulations of the issue and how to deal with it are quite typical:

- Quote 1: *To succeed in fully engaging the participants and promoting their active involvement…* (Salmon, 2003: 34).
- Quote 2: *The participant needs information and technical support to get online, and strong motivation and encouragement to put in the necessary time and effort* (Salmon, 2003: 31).

Similar formulations are found in papers from the Networked Learning conferences, e.g.:

- Quote 3: *The main reason for using Web 2.0 discussions was as a means to involve all students and force* [*sic*] *them to engage in a more active and reflective way …* [*though*] *the shift in control from teacher to students is only recommendable if students is* [*sic*] *mature enough and have the motivation to take over the responsibility* (Nicolajsen, 2012: 552).

N.B. Dohn (✉)
Department of Design and Communication, University of Southern Denmark, Kolding, Denmark
e-mail: nina@sdu.dk

© Springer International Publishing Switzerland 2016
T. Ryberg et al. (eds.), *Research, Boundaries, and Policy in Networked Learning*, Research in Networked Learning, DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-31130-2_9

- Quote 4: *The students do need to be self-motivated to do this* [*respond to each other*] *and synchronous communication does give extra impetus to this*. (Basquill, 2014: 344).
- Quote 5: *The peer rating system enables the participants to see what individual peers think about a response. The medals awarded to good responses act as* "*tokens of appreciation*" *and partake of a mechanism aimed at supporting motivation*, *engagement*, *and commitment to participation in the study group*. (Ponti, 2014: 234).
- Quote 6: *The peer support system needs to provide not only a communication and interaction structure*, *but needs to provide the affordances that motivate learners to use these to actively engage in interactions and actively promote sustainability of interactions* (Brouns & Hsiao, 2012: 23).

Other formulations stress the significance of community for 'engagement' and 'motivation', e.g.

- Quote 7: [*L*]*earners has* [*sic*] *to experience a sense of belonging*, *feel part of a community before engaging in interactions that come naturally in communities* (Brouns & Hsiao, 2012: 20).
- Quote 8: *The aim of using the JBT* [*an icebreaker tool*] *was to build a sense of community and thus increase engagement by providing a forum through which to foster the development of an online community. If this is looked at more closely*, *a sense of community develops when a common interest or environment is shared* (Carson, 2014: 54)

These quotes illustrate some variance in (implicit) understandings about motivation and engagement. Broadly speaking, the majority of the quotes appear inspired by individualist cognitivist motivation theory, in that they draw upon an understanding of motivation as a 'something' (an entity, state or process—its nature is not quite clear) which the individual 'has' 'inside' which drives him or her forward and which may be influenced—reinforced or weakened—by 'outside' stimulations. In some of the quotes, outside stimulations seem able to 'install' the 'something' in the individual by 'motivating' him or her. 'Engagement' similarly equivocates between something students have, show or do on the one hand and something we as educators do to them on the other. Or, alternatively, something we establish in them or make them do by 'motivating' them—there is some diversity in the views on the relationship between 'motivation' and 'engagement', too. The last two quotes on the other hand are more in line with socio-culturally inspired theories where engagement is treated as anchored in the social settings (community or cultural practices) in which the learner participates. This suggests—or at least opens the door to—another approach to motivation which centres less on what is 'inside' the individual and more on what is negotiated between people.

The variance in (implicit or explicit) understandings is found in the broader research literature, too. Compare, for instance, the following statements:

- Quote 9: *Facilitating discourse during the course is critical to maintaining the interest*, *motivation and engagement of students in active learning* (Anderson, Rourke, Garrison, & Archer, 2001: 7)

- Quote 10: *Communities' language use and ways of interacting have long been recognized as practices that bind people together across time and that serve as critical sources of group identity and coherence. As critical resources, they can be extremely influential in either inviting or excluding students in classroom interactions, providing key avenues for students' motivation to engage in learning activities* (Ares, 2008: 316).

However, as exemplified by contrasting Quotes 6 and 7, both from Brouns and Hsiao (2012), authors seem not always to be aware that there are divergent views at play here. The result is a vagueness and ambiguity of the terms which carry over to specific analyses of networked learning and recommendations for design of educational tasks. To illustrate with Brouns and Hsiao's specific case, there are thus different implications and presuppositions involved in speaking of engagement as something which can be motivated by a system's affordances (i.e. 'installed' in the individual) as opposed to being a trait which is inherently bound up with belonging to a community. The former calls for designing tasks and systems which utilize the right causal 'triggers' of 'inner' motivation. In line with this, the authors explicitly refer to social exchange theory which builds on the presupposition that "people weigh their benefits against the investment of participation" (23). Design principles would concern ways in which to maximize the benefits, cognitively and perhaps in terms of reputation and extrinsic rewards (ibid.).

Taking the communities perspective on engagement seriously would on the other hand imply making the issues of belonging and of learners' habituated practices the design starting point, not just a possible add-on to cognitive tasks. And it would imply doing so not only in terms of designing tasks which aim at establishing 'new common practices' for the given group of learners and help nurture a sense of belonging to the group. Depending on how large a part of the learners' life the course is meant to be, this kind of design considerations may certainly be relevant. Still, quite as important are considerations of the communities to which the learners already belong and the practices to which they are already habituated, because these are the 'critical resources' (cf. Quote 10) with which the learners come. And, according to the socio-culturalist, the 'critical resources' with which the learners come will have decisive influence on how they respond to the opportunities to learn presented in the course.

The paper by Brouns and Hsiao is in no way unique in apparently drawing on both the individualist cognitivist approach and the socio-cultural one. This very fact indicates that each of the approaches has insights which intuitively seem relevant to understanding and designing for networked learning, despite their theoretical incongruence. More specifically, the insights drawn from individualist cognitivist motivation theories are a) the significance of self-directedness and b) the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. The insights coming from the socio-cultural theories concern c) that participation and engagement are anchored in social practice. Thus, there seems to be a need for developing a theoretical approach which makes possible the consistent integration of these insights and remedies the vagueness of the terms.

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

Initial Clarification of Theoretical Outset

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

> Networked learning is learning in which information and communications technology (ICT) is used to promote connections: between one learner and other learners; between learners and tutors; between a learning community and its learning resources; between the diverse contexts in which the learners participate. (Dohn, 2014: 30)

My point of departure for analysing networked learning is what I term a practice-grounded approach (Dohn, 2013, 2014). This approach is inspired by socio-cultural theories, in particular activity theory (Engeström, 1987; Säljö, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978) and situated learning (Greeno, 1997; Greeno & Middle School Mathematics Through Applications Project Group, 1998; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Even more, it is inspired by the philosophers whose work lie at the root of the socio-cultural view (Packer & Goicoechea, 2000), i.e. Hegel, Marx, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty. Additional sources of inspiration are the later Wittgenstein and contemporary philosophical heirs to Wittgenstein and phenomenology such as

Hubert Dreyfus and Charles Taylor (Dreyfus, 1979, 2001, 2002; Taylor, 1985a, 1985b). A central claim is that we are always already in the world, coping with it as active embodied beings, before we start reflecting on it, and that when we do reflect, the words we use resonate with tacit meaning from our pre-reflective embodied doings. Of particular significance are our 'primary contexts', because they supply the principal anchorage points for meaning, though not the only ones. 'Primary contexts' I define as contexts which carry significance for the person in question, in which s/he involves him-/herself as a person and which s/he considers important for who s/he is.

When strangers at social gatherings ask us who we are, some or all of our primary contexts will usually be implicated in the answers we give. Family; profession; workplace; the specific department or professional group one works in; educational background (including perhaps the specific educational institution); social movement, religious community, or political party in which one participates actively; volunteer working context; and sports club are typical examples of contexts which are primary to us at least for a period of our lives. In a similar vein, Jarvis notes that when asked to complete the answer "I am (a)…" ten times in response to the question "Who am I?", most respondents place their occupation high on the list. He goes on to comment:

> The point is that we do identify with our work and the process of identification seems to move from performing a role to a sense of belonging to one of identifying with either the role or the organisation, or both. At the same time, since the respondents were able to put down several answers, if not all ten, indicates [sic] that there are a number of other social identities – indicating that they belonged to a number of communities of practice, some of which were more important than work, such as the nation, the ethnic people, the faith community and even leisure communities (Jarvis, 2007: 151–152).

My concept of 'primary contexts' is inspired by the way Jarvis here uses Wenger's term communities of practice to highlight, on the one hand that we all belong to several such communities, but that they on the other hand are not all equally important to us. I do wish to stress two differences between my view and Jarvis', though.

Firstly, I find the term 'social identity' too biased as the prime characteristic of what it is the 'primary contexts' supply us with. It seems to imply that social role—who we are or negotiate ourselves to be in relation to others in the practice—is what makes a primary context important to us. The domain of the primary context—the 'what' or content matter with which one engages in the practice—seems of less or no importance in itself. But if someone writes 'enthusiastic bird watcher' as one of the ten answers to who he or she is, the domain of birds, and ways of engaging with them, clearly is an essential part of what they are referring to. It is less clear that a social role is being described. In contrast to the terms 'communities of practice' and 'social identity' the term 'primary context' does not make any initial implicit presuppositions as to relative importance of a) the domain of the practice and b) the social relations of the people who engage in it.

Second, we do not necessarily identify with all of our primary contexts—we may also at points in our lives try to distance ourselves from them or even revolt against

them. Examples would be the family (parents and siblings) for the young person who has just moved away from home, or a given religious faith for someone who has just converted to another faith. The struggle which a person may have in freeing him/herself from the influence of the home context or religion and 'finding him/herself' shows precisely how important those contexts are to him/her—even if negatively so. For the religious converters from, say, Danish Lutheran Christianity to Tibetan Buddhism, both of these religious practices will be 'primary contexts' for at least a period of time after the conversion. In contrast, their social identity (as described by Jarvis) will be determined only by the latter religious faith, because this was the only one they belonged to after the conversion.

Given my theoretical outset in the practice-grounded approach, individualist analyses of students' intrinsic or extrinsic motivation for participating in networked learning overlook questions such as i) how students' intrinsic motivation relate to their primary contexts (no straightforward causal connection or even a correlation need be presupposed as I shall show below); ii) how the tacit sense-making of the students' primary contexts are drawn upon in the learning tasks and iii) how the fact that they are/are not affects their motivational stance. To give one simple example, when analysing the contributions of students in a forum discussion, one has to ask, not only how different 'incentives' such as acquiring points-for-grades or social status through activity measures affect motivation. One must also analyse any deeper sense such incentives may have for the students from the practices in their primary contexts. This is important for understanding whether and how such a deeper sense may influence the way they will engage in the activities.

On the other hand, socio-cultural analyses of community participation tend to overlook the self-directedness with which some students choose to enrol in networked learning courses. Arguably, for very self-directed students such courses will be 'primary contexts' because of their content matter, even before they are participants in them. In consequence, socio-cultural analyses neglect questions about how self-directedness may influence the activity level of students, i.e. the amount of time and effort they put into getting 'a grip on' content matter (including the tacit aspects hereof). On my view, analysis of e.g. a forum debate should not only focus on issues such as positioning and opportunities to learn, but also on the influence of students' varying degrees of self-directed involvement.

Theoretical Underpinnings: Individualist, Cognitivist Theories

A standard educational psychology textbook definition of motivation, concurring well with most of the statements above, runs "Motivation is the process whereby goal-directed activity is instigated and sustained" (Schunk, Pintrich, & Meece, 2008: 4). This definition is individualist and cognitivist in that it focuses on goals which individuals are more or less conscious of pursuing and identifies motivation with that which 'persuades' them to enter and keep up the pursuit. The persuasive force may come from thoughts, beliefs or emotions (ibid.) but the important

cognitivist point is that people are aware of the 'persuasion': They are aware, not only of the goals they have, but also of why they have them. At least to the level of being able to explicate the process that leads them to have the goals and thus to explain their actions as goal-directed activity. The definition does not actually say that the process of motivation is 'internal' to the individual, nor do the authors of the textbook explicitly state this. However, it is quite clear from the further treatment of the subject that motivation is seen as 'taking place' 'inside' the person. The very fact that this is not articulated as an assumption at all, but taken for granted, may testify to the fundamental status it has within the field of motivation.

A common point across different cognitivist approaches is a presupposition of agent self-directedness—agents choose for themselves which goals to pursue—as well as a lack of deeper inquiry into the background for why they choose goals as they do and have the motivations that they have: What decides whether a student will entertain a learning objective as a mastery or a performance goal (Ames, 1992)? How does it come about that a person becomes intrinsically motivated for pursuing precisely those activities or learning domains that s/he does (Ryan & Deci, 2000)? Even social cognitive theory which emphasises the role of social models for the individual's learning (Bandura, 1986, 1997) constrains focus to specific models in specific settings, rather than raising the background issue e.g. of why a teacher may come to be a model for one student and not for another. Research has been done for instance on how intrinsic motivation relates to certain intrapsychological needs (Ryan & Deci, 2000) and, in consequence, on what educators can do to support learners in developing intrinsic motivation for learning a given domain; yet the initial choice of goals, attitudes and models is taken to be something the individual just makes.

Another common point is that the concept of 'learning context' is often fully ignored. When it is taken into consideration, it is dominantly conceptualized through an implicit container metaphor of 'context' (Lave, 1993): The 'learning context' is for instance described as having 'boundaries', 'open' versus 'closed' 'spaces', with inventories and atmospheres. It is understood to be 'built' or 'established' on beforehand, independently of the specific learners who are to 'step into it' and 'move within its spaces'. The learners for their part are the self-contained beings that then interact within the boundaries given by the 'learning context' container. They will be constrained by its boundaries and inventory, may be influenced by its characteristics and may strive to change the form and content of it. But they do so as the self-directed, self-contained 'elements'/'particles' in the container, giving and receiving 'input'. They do not depend on the context as a significant medium for realizing their very being.

Theoretical Underpinnings: Sociocultural Theories

From quite another perspective, sociocultural theories, in particular situated learning theory, have theorized engagement as a matter of participation in social practices (Greeno & Gresalfi, 2008; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Packer & Goicoechea, 2000; Wenger, 1998). The term 'engagement' here is intended to cover simultaneously,

inherently and constitutively, 'engagement in activities' and 'engagement with other people in the practice'. The basic premise is that "We are social beings" (Wenger, 1998: 4) who become who we are through mutual recognition between ourselves and others of our roles, possibilities, rights, and duties. This recognition, furthermore, is mediated through and anchored in the material practices we partake in together. Intellectual ancestry may be attributed to Hegel and Marx, the first stressing reciprocal recognition, the other materiality. The concept of self is the

> communal self [which] is always embedded in a co-constitutive self-other, self-societal dialectic… a self that is cut from the fabric of those sociocultural conventions and ways of life into which we are born as biophysical human beings… (Martin, 2007: 83).

Inherent to this view is therefore a very different understanding of 'context' to the one implicit in individualist theories: Individuals and contexts are woven together, each relying for their being—becoming what they are—through the co-constitutive interweaving. McDermott, citing Birdwhistell, provides an alternative metaphor for 'context' which is appropriate for this perspective, namely the rope. He stresses that a rope is made up of fibres which are discontinuous (no fibre goes through all of the rope), yet the rope looks and behaves as a continuous unity (McDermott, 1993). McDermott goes on to argue that, at the level of the rope, the fibres disappear as units of analysis, and that similarly for human practices, individuals disappear as units of analysis. Instead, they are ascribed traits on the basis of the organization of the whole:

> People mutually constitute contexts for each other by erasing themselves, by giving themselves over to a new level of organization, which, in turn, acquires them and keeps them informed of what they are doing together. (McDermott, 1993: 274).

McDermott uses this insight to argue that a certain child, Adam, who has been diagnosed with a learning disability (LD), is, in fact better understood as having been "acquired" by it:

> Adam is a fiber, which, when joined by other fibers, helps to make the rope, or in this case the category LD, into the unit of analysis. It is not so much that Adam is disabled as that he participates in a scene well organized for the institutional designation of someone as LD… [I]n this sense … LD is a context that acquires children (274–275).

One important aspect of the rope metaphor is therefore the way context designates possible stances and actions of its participants—and the meaning which these stances and actions can have. The significance and place of each individual fibre is given to it through its interlocking with the others. However, the fact that fibres 'arrange themselves' to disappear because 'the scene is well organized' does not imply that the context's designation of stances and actions is deterministic. The process of 'self-arrangement' is quite as important. Each fibre has a part in the interlocking—does part of the arranging and interweaving. Therefore, though a fibre is enabled, constrained, and generally 'held in place' by the surrounding fibres, it and its significance and how it can interrelate is still partly negotiable. This focus on the role of the fibre-in-the-rope is somewhat lost in McDermott's description of how LD acquires Adam, but is a main point in the way I shall use the metaphor in the

following. In contrast to McDermott (and many other socio-culturalists), I find that the metaphor of the rope makes it possible to uphold a double-sided unit of analysis, that of the 'person-in-context' (Järvelä, Volet, & Järvenoja, 2010; Nolen & Ward, 2008).

A fundamental point for sociocultural theories is that what we strive to know, and how we go about knowing it, is bound up with who we see ourselves to be. Packer and Goicoechea go so far as to say that "[K]nowing is not an end in itself, but a means to the ends of recognition and identity. The search for these ends is what leads people to "participate in communities in many different ways"" (Packer & Goicoechea, 2000: 235, for their part citing Greeno & Middle School Mathematics Through Applications Project Group, 1998: 10). Though not all situated learning theorists will accept this rather extreme formulation, still, the assumption of an intricate relationship between issues of identity and issues of cognition is inherent in central terms such as 'positioning' and 'participatory identity' (Greeno & Gresalfi, 2008; Greeno & van de Sande, 2007). 'Positioning' here refers to the degree of socio-cognitive status as a legitimate and knowledgeable contributor which is accorded in practice to a person in interaction with others—through the interaction itself—and to the corresponding opportunities for contributing to the interaction. 'Participatory identity', on the other hand refers to emerging patterns in the way participants take up such opportunities.

Given this interwovenness of issues of cognition and identity, engagement is viewed within situated learning as intrinsically related to belonging. Not just in the sense that a feeling of belonging to a community is conducive to the confidence with which a person ventures a contribution to it or promotes intrinsic motivation as Ryan and Deci would hold (Ryan & Deci, 2000). But in the stronger sense that within a community of practice, any participation in the form of negotiation of meaning of a resource, artefact, story or other of the community's "shared repertoire"(Wenger, 1998) will at the same time be a negotiation of one's status and identity in relation to the community, i.e. of one's way of belonging to it. And vice versa: any negotiation of one's identity in relation to the community will be a way of engaging with the people and resources in it. This goes, even when the participation takes on the form of non-participation (Wenger, 1998). Non-participation should here be differentiated from the situation where an issue of participation does not arise for the person in question. In the first instance, the person is formally and/or informally supposed to participate, but does not. Either because others in practice do not allow it (e.g. by ignoring a certain networked learner's posts) or because s/he chooses not to (e.g. by not contributing to an online discussion when supposed to do so). In the second instance, the person is not supposed to participate (a person not enrolled in a course is for example not supposed to post in the closed, online forum pertaining to the course).

The point here for situated learning theorists is that the very fact that non-participation is positioned for a person means that interrelated issues of engagement and belonging are involved. One recognizes here the sense of necessary relation between participation and belonging posited in Quote 7 by Brouns and Hsiao above. It should be noted, however, that the 'necessary relation' is largely one of definition,

not of causal fact: Nothing will count as participation within situated learning, if there are not issues of belonging and identity at stake. To some extent, therefore, the seemingly provocative claims of situated learning are based on an ambiguity in the status of these claims as definitional versus empirical statements.

Within this approach, the questions raised in relation to individualist cognitivist motivation theories (such as where people's goals come from and what decides whether they pursue a learning objective as a mastery goal or a performance one) will be reformulated as questions concerning

- Who they seek to be
- How the positionings and identity negotiations of current and former communities of practices to which they belong(ed) allow them to take up opportunities for learning in the present situation
- How their prior engagement with the 'shared repertoires' of current and former communities of practice constitute affordances and constraints on their taking up of such learning opportunities.

Quote 10 from Ares above exemplifies a reformulation of the questions. To answer the reformulated questions, situated learning theorists have introduced the term 'trajectories of participation' (Dreier, 2008; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). In Wenger's words:

> As we go through a succession of forms of participation, our identities form trajectories, both within and across communities of practice… To me, the term trajectory suggests not a path that can be foreseen or charted but a continuous motion – one that has a momentum of its own in addition to a field of influences. It has a coherence through time that connects the past, the present, and the future. (Wenger, 1998: 154).

Examples of 'trajectory analyses' include Nielsen's research on music academy students (Nielsen, 1999), Østerlund's investigation of sales apprentices (Østerlund, 1997), Dreier's analysis of how people make psychotherapy matter in their everyday lives (Dreier, 2008), and Sfard's and Prusak's comparison of native and immigrant Israeli students' math practices (Sfard & Prusak, 2005). In all these cases, the authors investigate the different ways in which people project their futures and take up opportunities to learn, dependent on their participation, past and present, in different communities of practices and the negotiation of meaningful activity going on there. In individualist motivation theorist terms they thus investigate the construction and development of personal goals, on the presupposition that the construction and development is necessarily anchored in negotiation of social relations.

Challenging the Theoretical Approaches

As indicated by a few of the remarks above, for both individualist and sociocultural approaches there are important questions concerning motivation and engagement which cannot be posed as questions. The way issues are framed theoretically make

them either invisible or answered on beforehand by definitional fiat. Thus, individualist theories take self-directedness for granted. Even if one were to ask "where the self-directed motivation came from", the question would be phrased in terms of an 'inner' process or state, identifiable as an entity in itself, which might perhaps be influenced by 'outer' stimuli from the 'context as container' or the other entities 'in' it. Sociocultural approaches, on the other hand, posit engagement as per definition an intertwined issue of pursuing identity and knowledge. Even if one were to ask "how come this person joined this particular networked learning course as opposed to others on the same domain", the answer to the question would be phrased in terms of the negotiation of meaning in the person's communities of practices, past and present, and its significance for the identity which the person projects for him/herself. Yet, from a low-level common sense point of view, there seem to be clear cases which challenge the presuppositions behind each of the positions.

To start with the sociocultural view: There are ample cases where children (and grown-ups) take up a hobby not promoted by their family and indeed perhaps not even negotiated as acceptable by their peers. Examples would be the amateur study of birds, the design of terrariums and aquariums, or the practice of Tai Chi. Of course, such hobbies do not exist in a void—the children will have been inspired by someone or someplace to take up the hobby. It is not *impossible* that issues of identity are involved. The choice of hobby may for instance be the result of negotiated positionings by child, family and peers of the child as 'different', 'in opposition' or 'in need of further challenges'. Or alternatively, of projections of the child, negotiated with the surroundings, to be like the Tai Chi master or a famous ornithologist. On the other hand, it may not. It seems highly problematic to postulate at the outset that such identity issues have to be involved, not just at the level of explaining that some non-promoted hobby is taken up, but at the level of explaining which one.

At some level of detail, the claim loses whatever credibility it may have at a general level: The only reason to say that identity issues definitely were at play in a child's hobby choice of coral reef aquariums over freshwater ones is a commitment to the thesis that questions of engagement are always intertwined with identity issues. Without this commitment, it seems much more plausible to explain the choice by reference to something in the domain (the object of the hobby) which attracted the child to it—say, the beauty of coral reefs as compared to freshwater plants. That is, it seems much more plausible to explain the choice with reference to individualist motivational concepts such as interest, intrinsic motivation or mastery goals.

Similarly, when analysing networked learning it seems reasonable to leave open for empirical investigation how interest and self-directed choice might influence which courses learners commit to and how. It appears biased to say the least to postulate at the outset that these issues must necessarily be understood on the basis of participation in certain communities of practice.

As for the individualist view: family, mandatory schooling, designated work units all constitute examples of settings into which one is more or less thrown, i.e. one does not come to be there by self-directed choice. One is forced to participate in these settings, i.e. non-participation is by the very fact that one is there at all a

form of participation. One's mode of engagement is bound up with positionings and identity issues. To explain what goes on in these settings solely by reference to the participants' 'inner' states and processes fully neglects that the existence and value of these supposed states are themselves important issues of negotiation for the participants there. Several situated learning studies illustrate in detail how notions such as intrinsic/extrinsic motivation, self-efficacy and goal orientation, rather than being the *explanation* of interactions, are the *outcome* of them (e.g. Greeno & Gresalfi, 2008; Greeno & van de Sande, 2007). The implication for networked learning is that one should investigate how positioning and identity issues influence the way learners approach and take up opportunities to learn and interact with other learners.

The upshot of these considerations is that we need a reframing of the issues of motivation and engagement. This reframing should allow us to account both for situations in which agents approach new settings seemingly on their own self-directed accord and for ones in which they find themselves submerged and positioned whether they would self-directedly have chosen to or not. More importantly, it should allow us to investigate empirically how these different types of settings interplay—for individuals and for the people with whom they deal.

In terms of the different concepts of 'context' implicit in the individualist view and the socio-cultural one, respectively, the reframing should allow us to phrase questions which do not presuppose that we are always already co-constitutively involved (as fibres in the rope) in any context we partake in, nor that we are just elements in containers in existence independent of our being there. We need to be able to pose questions like "why do individuals approach some contexts with the intent of 'joining the rope'" (the self-directed case), "how is it that some persons act as if certain contexts were just containers to them?"(participation as non-participation), "how does a container become a rope for a person?", "how do different ropes interweave for a person? And how does it affect how they see new situations?"

In terms of design for networked learning, these questions transform into questions such as "should we design for courses that are containers or ropes for our participants?", "how can we design for containers to become ropes?", "how do we support people in interlocking as fibres in the rope, and how much space for negotiation of the interlocking process and result should we design?" and "how can we build on existing ropes in our designs?" These issues must be approached at two distinct levels (at least):

1. *The level of contexts*: we have to distinguish between contexts which are "ropes" or "becoming ropes" for people and those which are mere "containers". Quite as important we must acknowledge that there will be a continuum of context-states between the poles and that a given course may be a "rope" to some participants but a container to others.
2. *The level of activity*: in their actual doings, people weave in and out of contexts which have different kinds of import for them, some being more of a "rope" for them than others. Further, within any given context, they may care more about some tasks than others (in a range of different meanings of 'care about').

Articulating a Practice-Grounded Intermediary Position

In developing the required reframing of motivation and engagement, I build on the practice-grounded approach I introduced briefly above. This approach connects the concept of 'context' firmly to practices, understood as ways of going about the world and making sense of it on the background of our 'going-about'. According to it, a context is not delimited by its physical or virtual location, organizational affiliation or institutional realization, nor—in the first instance—by a particular set of people or social relations or by certain ways of describing or thinking about the world. Instead, it is delimited by what we do as embodied beings—by patterns and regularities in our dealings with the world.

These 'dealings with' may, of course, have physical, social, organizational, institutional etc. prerequisites, constituents, and consequences. However, the methodological point is that by taking the patterns and regularities of our 'dealings with' as outset we allow ourselves to investigate empirically what these prerequisites, constituents, and consequences *are*, rather than lay down their significance by decree. The practice-grounded approach accordingly points out the need to investigate the social mediation of practice, but leaves the form and degree of social mediation a question for empirical investigation. In consequence, it opens a different, intermediary way into the question of motivation and engagement than the individualist-cognitivist and the sociocultural approaches, respectively.

Thus, the practice-grounded position acknowledges—in agreement with the socio-cultural approach—that we are born into practices which form the practical outset for our understanding of the world, which shapes how we see ourselves, and where we come to be who we are, in mutual recognition with others. The practices we are born into are always among our primary contexts, at least during childhood and probably for all our lives. If not in the sense of positive identification with them then in the sense of contrastive differentiation from them. What makes these practices primary is, of course, in the first instance the social relations between child, caretaker and other 'significant others' participating in the practices, not what we do in terms of specific activities. However, since words take on meaning from actual doings, and in particular from doings in primary contexts, the way we go about the world in these early primary contexts will be an important anchorage point for our understanding and knowledge. Terms referring to eating will for example be deeply saturated with experiences of tackling knife, fork, and spoon for the Western child and of handling chopsticks for the Chinese.

Conversely—in concurrence with the individualist view—the position allows that sometimes it may be the actual doings themselves that make a specific practice primary for the person. That is, it allows that the explanation of for example a child's attraction to bird watching practices may be an intrinsic interest in birds which in some instances may not be in need of further explanation. It also allows that, especially as we grow up, some of the practices into which we are thrown, for example in education, do not take on a constitutive role for us. Instead, they start out and they stay containers to us (though they may be ropes to others around us). They are, that

is, settings where we may have to spend some time, but which never become important to whom we are and where we only engage to the extent that we are—in the terms of the individualist—extrinsically motivated.

In contrast to both individualist and socio-cultural approaches, the position conjectures that in many instances, there will be an interweaving of social, domain-specific, activity-related, and identity-pursuit reasons for practices to become primary contexts for us. And, further, that this will increasingly be the case as we grow older and are allowed some choice of and within practices. Finally, diverging from both approaches, the position emphasizes the need for empirical investigations of these reasons: How are primary contexts of different kinds grounded in the pursuit of intrinsic interests, in social relations, in identity issues etc.? How do they come to be related to one another? What changes occur over the course of our lives in what constitutes primary contexts for us? In the terminology of rope and container: We need analyses of how the different ropes of our lives come to be, intertwine, entangle and come apart again. These accounts must take into account, firstly, that we at the outset meet some practices more as containers and some more as ropes, but that our attitude towards them may change over time (in either direction). And secondly, that traces of prior primary contexts may transform and be resituated in new ones because of their significance for our approach to and understanding of the world.

From the point of view of the practice-grounded position, neither of the terms 'motivation' and 'engagement' refer to any one type of state/process. Instead, both terms refer to a complex set of states and processes, anchored in the individual, but partly co-constituted through positioning and negotiation of interaction in social space. In this sense, they refer to phenomena located across the span of the so-called 'inner' and 'outer' realms. More specifically, this means the following: The practices we are born into delineate ways of sense-making and participation. At this very general level, motivation and engagement are therefore practice-dependent, understood as 'possible to envisage within the space of these practices'. But what it is possible to envisage is not determinable on beforehand, and neither is the degree of social mediation versus self-directedness of the envisaging. Restricting 'motivation' to the so-called 'inner realm' denounces the constitutive role which social practice has at the very general level and may have at more detailed ones, too. In effect, such a restriction renders 'the social' only a 'factor' delivering 'input' to 'influence' the individual, regarded as a pre-existing entity.

On the other hand, focusing only on the so-called 'outer realm', i.e. on the constitutive role of social practice, amounts to ignoring the self-directedness which obviously is at play at least at *some* level of detail in *some* of our choices of practices. It also makes it difficult to account for the phenomenological experience we have of first person agency and intentionality as well as of our motivation and engagement being lived by us.

The overall point is that we need to accept a continuum of possible states and processes, anchored in the individual, as 'motivational' or 'engaging'. This continuum will range from the very self-directed to the fully socially constituted. Accepting this amounts to taking the claim seriously that it is always an empirical question what 'sets us going' and how.

The implications of this view may be spelled out in the following way, addressing the abovementioned two levels in turn. First, at *the level of contexts*: Motivation and engagement are inherently related to contexts which are ropes to us (primary contexts), though not necessarily in any straightforward way. Some of our primary contexts are ones we have been thrown into without self-directed choice and others are ones we may fight to disengage from. Therefore, one cannot assume intrinsic motivation, as described by Ryan and Deci (2000) to drive the way people participate in their primary contexts: There is no reason to assume that people experience inherent satisfaction by participating in the activities of primary contexts which they would not self-directly have chosen. This is one reason why there need not be a correlation between people's primary contexts and their intrinsic motivation. One can, however, assume at least the form of engagement postulated by the socio-culturalist, where non-participation is one way of engaging, through negotiation of opposition and dismissal. One can also assume that persons care (positively or negatively or a complex of both) about their primary contexts and about phenomena, processes and ideas related to them. Finally, one can assume that the participants' epistemological take on the world is permeated with the tacit understandings of their primary contexts. By that fact alone, people's primary contexts are important anchorage points and important resources for sense-making, even when they distance themselves from some of them.

In contrast, practices which only take on the significance of container for us do not have the status of sense-making anchorage point, nor do they have an inherent relationship with motivation and engagement. This is not to say that a 'context as container' can have no motivational import. The degree to which it will have such import depends on whether the person in question approaches the practice as a container for self-directed reasons. Does s/he for example come out of interest for the domain, possibly with the intent of "joining the rope"? Or maybe with the intent of gaining a 'free space' away from the import of certain primary contexts? In analysing networked learning activities at this level, important questions include:

- To which degree do the activities constitute primary contexts for the participants—do they approach the networked learning practice as a rope or as a container?
- Are the participants there, in part or fully, for self-directed reasons, and how does this relate to their view of the practice as rope/container?
- How do their views on the practice as rope/container influence their participation in the networked learning activities—and vice versa?
- How does it affect interaction between participants if they differ in their view of the practice as rope/container?
- What other primary contexts do the participants have to draw on in sense-making and what is their motivational entanglement there?
- Do the networked learning activities require, support or hinder participants in making use of these other primary contexts in sense-making and how does this affect their view of and participation in the activities?

Second, *the concrete level of activity*: Within any given context, participants will like or care about some activities more than others. This goes for primary contexts, as well as for contexts of less or no importance to them, and it goes for contexts which they have self-directedly chosen at the general level as well as for ones they have been 'thrown' into. Taking out the garbage is a chore, whether done in the self-directedly chosen primary context of one's sports activities, in the primary context of the family one has been 'thrown into', or in the work group one has been assigned to. On the other hand, watching a funny movie may be entertaining in even the most 'container'-like of contexts such as a long-distance flight. This is another reason why there need not be a correlation between people's primary contexts and their intrinsic motivation: Some activities are simply not inherently satisfactory and others simply are, almost no matter which situation they take place in. Similarly, participants in networked learning may find some tasks more appealing than others, irrespective of the significance of the task for achieving a given learning outcome or complying with social expectations within a primary context. Engaging in the appealing ones 'for the fun of it' does not imply a commitment to the learning outcomes themselves or to the contexts they are pursued in.

These points, though banal in their everydayness, are often overlooked from both the individualist-cognitive and the sociocultural approaches. This is so, because of their focus on, respectively, the significance of cognitive rationalization (doing the task because one understands its importance for overall goals) and social relations (doing the task as a natural part of participating in the community of practice). From the practice-grounded position, though such factors may be influential, they need not be decisive: Learners' attitudes towards tasks are neither determined solely by the tasks' localization in a space of content-to-be-learned, nor by their localization in social space. And though a context such as an educational programme may be self-directedly chosen at a general level, the status of self-directed choice need not carry over to all—or any—of the specific activities to take place there.

Furthermore, any given task competes for learners' attention with a range of other things they might be doing: A characteristic of the networked world of today is that we can and often do participate in activities in more than one context at a time, e.g. taking part in a physical meeting, chatting with a friend on Facebook, checking emails, and browsing the internet. Thus, people do not necessarily stay in one context, primary or not, or stay focused on one task within the context, for a length of time. Instead, they may weave in and out of several contexts, some of them primary and some of them not. Their motivational entanglement, at both the general and the specific level, in other contexts may influence their engagement in the activities educators expect them to undertake. In analysing networked learning activities at this level, important questions include:

- Which activities do the participants care more about and which less—and why?
- Are explanations of 'care' given in terms of domain, procedures, social relations, etc.—and are they given at a general or specific level?
- How does the epistemological approach which they have from their (other) primary contexts influence their view of given specific activities?

- Do they accept tasks they do not care about—and how does their attitude affect their participation?
- How do their views of the activities at the general level (as 'rope' versus 'container') influence their attitude towards given specific tasks?
- How is their engagement in specific tasks influenced by cognitive rationalization and social relations?
- Which other factors are at play in deciding their attitude towards them?
- What other contexts do they partake in whilst participating in the networked learning activities? How do these other activities affect their participation in the latter, cognitively and motivationally?
- Do they resituate meaning from these other contexts or undertake activities in parallel without relating them?
- Do these other contexts constitute resources or distractions for the participants?
- Could these other contexts be used (better) as resources?

Concluding Remarks

This paper clarifies and challenges contemporary views of motivation and engagement as they appear within the networked learning literature. In particular, I suggest an approach which takes into account the insights of the prevailing individualist-cognitivist and socio-cultural views but accommodates better to seemingly well-known everyday cases. This approach, I argue, supplies a more adequate instrument for analysing networked learning activities. This is so because it highlights the complex interplay of the socially negotiated and the self-directedly chosen in the determination of a person's motivation and engagement. I point out that the individualist and the socio-culturalist approaches draw on metaphorical understandings of 'context' as 'container' and 'rope', respectively. I proposed that we need both metaphors to analyse how people approach different networked learning activities.

Further, on the basis of the concept of primary contexts I argue for a practice-grounded intermediary position. This position makes it possible to investigate empirically how different practices take on the significance of 'rope' or 'container' to people at different points in their lives. I identify the phenomena of motivation and engagement as a complex set of states and processes, anchored in the individual, but partly co-constituted through positioning and negotiation in social space. I illustrate how complexly these phenomena relate to practices regarded as 'ropes'/'containers'. Finally I discern important questions to investigate when analysing networked learning at the level of discrimination between practices and at the level of people's concrete actions.

By way of rounding off, a few comments on the implications for the design of networked learning are apposite. First, the metaphor of 'virtual classroom', widely used in design thinking, builds very directly on the view of context as 'container'. In contrast, the metaphor of 'community of practice', also in frequent use, leans on a 'rope' understanding of context. In designing for networked learning, it is important

to explicitly consider one's expectations in this regard: Are participants viewed as independently existing elements to fill a pre-given educational container or as mutual co-constituents in an educational rope to be wrought? Have the learning tasks been designed in accordance with these expectations? Do one's expectations in this regard match those of the participants? If not, one needs to ensure at the very least that this fact—of different expectations—is brought to light.

Second, the designer should consider how the participants' epistemological approach from and motivational entanglement in their diverse primary contexts may influence their approach to the learning tasks. In addition, it is worth considering in each specific case, whether and how these primary contexts might be drawn on in resituated sense-making within the learning activities.

Finally, the designer should take into account that i) agreeability of task need not coincide with conduciveness for learning; ii) cognitive rationalization and social mediation may not be sufficient to bring learners to care for unpleasant tasks; and iii) engagement in pleasant tasks does not commit the learner to the wider objective of the task.

In sum, adequate design requires that one realizes the complex relationships between what learners care about, who they see themselves to be, how they make sense of new situations on the basis of their primary contexts, and how self-directedness and social mediation interplay in their views of given practices as 'ropes' or 'containers'. Quite as important, one has to acknowledge that some tasks may have to be carried out by the learners whether they like them or not. One *cannot* assume, as is often implicitly or explicitly done, that given the right cognitive and social design, any task may be made appealing to any learner. That would amount, in effect, to assuming that participants' motivation and engagement could be designed.

Acknowledgement Research for this article has been partly funded by a research grant from The Danish Council for Independent Research, Humanities, Grant No. DFF-4180-00062.

References

Ames, C. (1992). Classrooms: Goals, structures, and student motivation. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 84*(3), 261–271.

Anderson, T., Rourke, L., Garrison, D. R., & Archer, W. (2001). Assessing teaching presence in a computer conferencing context. *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks, 5*(2), 1–17.

Ares, N. (2008). Cultural practices in networked classroom learning environments. *International Journal of Computer-Supported Collaborative Learning, 3*(3), 301–326.

Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. New York, NY: Freeman.

Basquill, J. (2014). Synchronous or asynchronous? That is the question: Are online classrooms the answer? In S. Bayne, C. Jones, M. de Laat, T. Ryberg, & C. Sinclair (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 9th International Conference on Networked Learning 2014* (pp. 343–346). Lancaster: Lancaster University.

Brouns, F., & Hsiao, A. (2012). Social learning in learning networks through peer support: Research findings and pitfalls. In V. Hodgson, C. Jones, M. de Laat, D. McConnell, T. Ryberg, & P. Sloep (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 8th International Conference on Networked Learning* (pp. 18–25). Lancaster: Lancaster University.

Carson, M. (2014). Promoting a community of practice online: How important is social presence? In S. Bayne, C. Jones, M. de Laat, T. Ryberg, & C. Sinclair (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 9th International Conference on Networked Learning 2014*. Lancaster: Lancaster University.

Dohn, N. B. (2013). "Viden i praksis" - Implikationer for it-baseret læring. *Res Cogitans, 1*, 94–128.

Dohn, N. B. (2014). Implications for networked learning of the 'practice' side of social practice theories - A tacit-knowledge perspective. In V. Hodgson, M. de Laat, D. McConnell, & T. Ryberg (Eds.), *The design, experience and practice of networked learning* (pp. 29–49). Dordrecht: Springer.

Dreier, O. (2008). *Psychotherapy in everyday life*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Dreyfus, H. (1979). *What computers still can't do*. New York, NY: Harper & Row.

Dreyfus, H. (2001). Phenomenological description versus rational reconstruction. *Revue Internationale de Philosophie, 55*(2), 181–196.

Dreyfus, H. (2002). Intelligence without representation–Merleau-Ponty's critique of mental representation the relevance of phenomenology to scientific explanation. *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences, 1*(4), 367–383.

Engeström, Y. (1987). *Learning by expanding: An activity-theoretical approach to developmental research*. Helsinki: Orienta-Konsultit.

Goodyear, P., Banks, S., Hodgson, V., & McConnell, D. (Eds.). (2004). *Advances in research on networked learning*. Dordrecht: Kluwer.

Greeno, J. G. (1997). On claims that answer the wrong questions. *Educational Researcher, 26*(1), 5–17.

Greeno, J. G., & Gresalfi, M. S. (2008). Opportunities to learn in practice and identity. In P. A. Moss, D. C. Pullin, J. P. Gee, E. H. Haertel, & L. J. Young (Eds.), *Assessment, equity, and opportunity to learn* (pp. 170–199). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Greeno, J. G., & Middle School Mathematics Through Applications Project Group. (1998). The situativity of knowing, learning, and research. *American Psychologist, 53*(1), 5–26.

Greeno, J. G., & van de Sande, C. (2007). Perspectival understanding of conceptions and conceptual growth in interaction. *Educational Psychologist, 42*(1), 9–23.

Järvelä, S., Volet, S., & Järvenoja, H. (2010). Research on motivation in collaborative learning: Moving beyond the cognitive–situative divide and combining individual and social processes. *Educational Psychologist, 45*(1), 15–27. doi:10.1080/00461520903433539.

Jarvis, P. (2007). *Globalization, lifelong learning and the learning society: Sociological perspectives*. London: Routledge.

Lave, J. (1993). The practice of learning. In J. Lave & S. Chaiklin (Eds.), *Understanding practice: Perspectives on activity and context* (pp. 3–32). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning - Legitimate peripheral participation*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Martin, J. (2007). The selves of educational psychology: Conceptions, contexts, and critical considerations. *Educational Psychologist, 42*(2), 79–89.

McDermott, R. (1993). The acquisition of a child by a learning disability. In J. Lave & S. Chaiklin (Eds.), *Understanding practice: Perspectives on activity and context* (pp. 269–305). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Nicolajsen, H. W. (2012). Changing the rules of the game-experiences with Web 2.0 learning in higher education. In V. Hodgson, C. Jones, M. de Laat, D. McConnell, T. Ryberg, & P. Sloep (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 8th International Conference on Networked Learning* (pp. 551–558). Lancaster: Lancaster University.

Nielsen, K. (1999). *Musical apprenticeship: Learning at the academy of music as socially situated*. Ph.D. dissertation. Psykologisk Institut, Aarhus Univeristet, Aarhus.

Nolen, S. B., & Ward, C. J. (2008). Sociocultural and situative approaches to studying motivation. In M. Maehr, S. Karabenick, & T. Urdan (Eds.), *Social psychological perspectives on motivation and achievement. Advances in motivation and achievement* (Vol. 15, pp. 428–460). London: Esmerald Group.

Østerlund, C. (1997). Sales apprentices on the move. A multi-contextual perspective on situated learning. *Nordisk Pedagogik, 17*(3), 169–177.

Packer, M. J., & Goicoechea, J. (2000). Sociocultural and constructivist theories of learning: Ontology, not just epistemology. *Educational Psychologist, 35*(4), 227–241.

Ponti, M. (2014). "Remember to hand out medals": Value and peer rating in an online open study group. In S. Bayne, C. Jones, M. de Laat, T. Ryberg, & C. Sinclair (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 9th International Conference on Networked Learning 2014* (pp. 228–235). Lancaster: Lancaster University.

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations: Classic definitions and new directions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 25*(1), 54–67.

Säljö, R. (2000). *Læring i praksis - Et sociokulturelt perspektiv*. København: Hans Reitzels Forlag.

Salmon, G. (2003). *E-moderating: The key to teaching and learning online* (2nd ed.). London: Routledge.

Salmon, G. (2013). *E-tivities* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Taylor & Francis.

Schunk, D. H., Pintrich, P. R., & Meece, J. L. (2008). *Motivation in education: Theory, research, and applications*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall.

Sfard, A., & Prusak, A. (2005). Telling identities: In search of an analytic tool for investigating learning as a culturally shaped activity. *Educational Researcher, 34*(4), 14–22.

Taylor, C. (1985a). *Philosophical papers: Volume 1, Human agency and language* (Vol. 1). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Taylor, C. (1985b). *Philosophical papers: Volume 2, Philosophy and the human sciences*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.