

Is 'learning activity' the answer to the content/context question?

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In the tradition of 'instructional design' 'content' has been the focus of the learning process. But recently 'context' has been considered equally important – and maybe the most important feature for the learning process. Known researchers within e-learning have put forward key statements:

- "If content is all we need, why would we need universities? Libraries could do the job!" (D. Wiley).
- "If content is king, then context is queen!" (E. Duval).
- "Content is just another part of the learning environment" (P. Baumgartner).

In a small article from 2006 I present the following argument for shifting the focus from learning objects (content) to learning activities:

"Learning resources (learning objects) broadly taken only become active during the learning process when the learner is doing something useful with them. The creation of relevant learning activities becomes essential. Successful learning activities mobilise the capacities (present knowledge, cultural heritage, etc.) of learners and establish a dialogue with the new learning resource as the basis for learning. Hereby, teachers and tutors are reinstated in a position as responsible for organising the learning process. They are choosing relevant learning resources and creating learning activities needed in order to reach defined educational objectives." (Bang, 2006).

To fully grasp the potential of this shift of focus the dimension of reflection as formulated by Elkjaer - based on Dewey's thinking - should be taken into consideration:

"Thus, experience is not mere activity, mere doing, and it is not only change, but change that implies reflection on former actions in order to anticipate further consequences. The mere participation in practice, in action, does not create learning. Only a person who is able to reflect upon her/his own actions and reorganize as well as reconstruct experience by continuously employing reflection – thinking – as means of action is learning". (Elkjaer 2000: 353).

In my presentation I will elaborate on the relation between 'learning activities' and 'reflection' based on experiences with problem-based learning scenarios using large databases and mobile technologies. Especially the potentials for reflection through formulation (storytelling) via mobile devices will be explored in relation to both formal and informal learning.

References:

Bang, J. (2006): eLearning reconsidered. Have e-learning and virtual universities met the expectations? http://www.elearningeuropa.info/index.php?page=doc&doc_id=7778&doclng=6

Elkjær, B. (2000): Learning and getting to know: the case of knowledge workers. I: Human Resource Development International 3:3, Routledge, p. 343-359

Questions for discussion:

In his famous article Encoding/decoding from 1980 Stuart Hall formulates a paradox:

“In the moment when a historical event passes under the sign of discourse, it is subject to all the complex formal ‘rules’ by which language signifies. To put it paradoxically, the event must become a ‘story’ before it can become a *communicative event*.” (Hall 1980: 129).

Although Hall is primarily thinking about mass communication the paradox is essential for all communication including learning. Without the reflection incorporated into the storytelling process no learning takes place.

The mobile phone with all its different devices is a unique personalized communication tool available at all times and in all places. Taking into consideration that storytelling “...like myth, do not “tell it like it is”, but “tell it like it means”” (Bird & Dardenne, 1988), we are facing new possibilities for enhancing the learning process both in formal and informal surroundings. The challenging question is: How do we do it?

Bird & Dardenne: Media, Myth and Narratives, 1988

Hall, Stuart (1980): Encoding/decoding, I: Hall, S., Hobson, D., Lowe, A., Willis, P., eds.: *Culture, Media, Language*, Unwin Hyman, London p. 128-138