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LEARNING DIFFERENT CONTEXTS IN TEACHING SECOND LANGUAGE.

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Abstract: *This paper gives information and concerns with the questions in the field of “learning contexts”, a subject that gained strength and shape in the course of development of education. Most research efforts in online learning tend to concentrate more on content than context.*

Keywords: *Content, context, learning environment, pattern, portfolio, assessment, social networking. Virtual setting, ESL, EFL, ESOL*

Introduction

Learning is a situation where an individual learns. We can say that a learning context is the set of circumstances that are relevant when someone learns something. The English language is learnt and taught in many different contexts, and it will have a considerable effect on how and what we will teach. Up until the 18th century, before school systems were created in response to the requirements of mass education, most people learned with each other in the context of their daily activities, whenever problems and difficulties arose. Even when they wanted to become professionals, they started out as apprentices who learned a craft in the context of their master's workshop. Thus, learning took place in context. When mass schooling started to materialize, at the dawn of the Industrial Age, the ruling values were those of the mechanical world. It was the time when the management principles of Frederick Taylor transformed the factories into machines, and the workers into parts of those machines. The same principles applied to schools, which became the assembly-lines that mass-produced manpower for the Industrial Society. This mechanistic vision of education saw knowledge, not as something that could be built by

the learners, themselves, in appropriate contexts, but as “content”, or subject “matter”, some sort of material fluid that could be “transferred” from the minds of the teachers into the minds of the learners. Knowledge was broken up into disparate subjects, most of them with little visible application, and started being “transferred”, largely by telling and questioning. As this happened, real learning contexts gradually disappeared from education [4;89]. One of the major thrusts is to stress that beyond the delivery of content we need to take systematically into account the term “contexts” that completely changed social and cultural understandings which our education is calling for and the technology is able to offer us in our modern life. I can't deny that the part of the future of education is to be found on content. I argue, however, that a significant part of the future of learning, the most important part, will be found on context. It will make the learning event activity rich, interaction rich, culturally rich. It can be possible by means of intelligent technology. The topic relates the learner with content and context in learning event. Content is information which has been structured and encoded as text, audio materials, or spoken word of the teacher. Context is the set of circumstances that are relevant for the learner to build

knowledge when referring to content. Here the role of the teacher or moderator is seen as both content and context, technological infrastructure will belong to the context. The learner can learn just in the absence of the content just by interacting with context. This usually happens outside of the school mostly informally. This small world is normally inhabited by other actors, besides the learner, such as colleagues or partners, when the learning event takes place in a classroom or in a community of practice [1;56].

A web-site offering online courses is a learning context. In the classroom, a lecture, a laboratory assignment, the discussion of a case study, project work, debate all are considered to be contexts. All types of learning and teaching strategies are learning contexts. Nowadays, hundreds of expressions are currently used in education sphere, such as project based learning, action learning, learning by doing, case studies, scenario building, simulations, panel discussions, role playing to define the issues of learning contexts. Many theoretical schools, concerned both with face-to-face and with online learning, have been used to understand learning contexts and make them operational. Some concentrate on the concept of community of practice [3;10]. Others, inspired by the work of Lev Vigotsky and his colleagues, are concerned with the relationships between contextual constraints and the acquisition of knowledge. If learning conditions can be made more successful in good learning contexts, main question is that can those contexts be designed and managed? This is indeed, a central issue in the research agendas of scholars. They are not just interested in understanding how learning contexts function but also in design and management of learning contexts.). One such framework is provided by Actor Network Theory (ANT), a sociological theory used to help understanding social networks made up of human and non-human actors that create relationships of mutual dependence, mobilize other actors and resort to artifacts to reinforce their alliances and satisfy their interests. In the perspective of Actor-network theory the design of favorable learning environment is a process of "translation" The designers start their work by translating the learner objectives into a number of requirements. The requirements then are

translated into a combination of activities and materials that make up context. The design process is connected with various actors: learners, teachers, protocols, contents. They are specific roles that actors are expected to play during the learning process. In other words, designers present inscription of program of action which is supposed to be fulfilled by actors. This can be done by various means, such as the four phases of a translation process proposed by Callon (1986): problematization, interessement, enrolment, and mobilization. In problematization, the focal actor (the designer) defines, for the other actors, identities and interests consistent with his/her own and creates a context that encourages their acceptance.

This context is called an obligatory passage point. In the example of a community of learners following an online course, a regular online meeting that everyone must attend, or the organization of a learning portfolio that everyone must build, are examples of obligatory passage points. Interessement is the set of activities and processes that attempt to persuade the actors to accept the roles that have been assigned to them by the focal actor. Enrolment is the acceptance, by an usually small part of the actors, of the commitment to carry out a set of tasks, recognizing the interests that have been assigned to them by the focal actor. Finally, mobilization, is the generalization of adherence of all the other actors to the commitment to carry out their tasks, so that that their acting becomes generalized, predictable and in agreement with the intents of the focal actor.

Today many researchers are concentrating on a variety of challenges posed by the use of contextual assessment in online and mixed learning contexts. It is done in a perspective where assessment is seen, not just as means of analyzing learner's performance, but also, above all as a core element in the process of teaching-learning. This effort is leading us to the establishment of detailed pedagogical, social and technical requirements and specifications for electronic portfolio tools capable of transforming the management of portfolios and learning contracts into an easy, pleasurable and very effective task. We have to specify the contextual platform to get better understanding. What specific features should learning platform include in

order to strengthen the creation, exploration and management of learning contexts? Two distinct kinds of learning platforms are popular today: the so called Learning Management Systems (LMSs), used to manage the learners and keep track of their progress, and the Learning Content Management Systems (LCMSs), which enable content (or “learning objects”) to be effectively managed by authors and learners. These two kinds of platforms, which often coalesce into a single LMS, tend to be driven by visions of online learning that are strongly attached to the concept of content. Our research interests go into a different direction, toward the specification of what we call LXMSs, Learning Context Management Systems. An LXMS is, above all, a platform for the creation of learning communities and for the management of collaboration. Of course, it can be made to integrate, in addition, the features of conventional LMSs and LCMSs, in which case it becomes a platform satisfying both the content and context needs of online learning. The balanced integration of all these kinds of facilities into the specification of the ideal LXMS is being carried out in light of the theories described above, with particular reference, for the technical component of the specification. Indeed, the specification is being expressed as a network of design patterns that interact with each other to form the whole specification of the platform. Concepts with different degrees of generality – such as collaboration, learning portfolios, learning contracts, peer assessment, project assessment, essay assessment, or external annotation – are being organically combined into a growing network of patterns which is becoming our specification of the ideal LXMS, as well a rich ground for reflection and discussion on the multiple issues pertaining to the improvement of learning

Conclusion.

As a conclusion, I can say that works done in this research field will inspire other research groups and spark future collaborations for exploration of the “learning contexts”. And we should acknowledge the importance of context comparing to content, which is dependent on context. We can sum up that learning contexts can be designed, and main issue is how that

design can be carried out. I would recommend to look closer to the issues of contextual assessment, which is the core of any attempt to improve constructivist teaching and learning. The question of contextual platforms or Learning Context Management Systems is also important. It is not just a technical question, we should view it as ground for debating the multitude of socio-cultural dimensions that underlie improved learning contexts.

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