TITLE OF PAPER:
COMMUNAL CONSTRUCTIVISM AND NETWORKED LEARNING: REFLECTIONS ON A CASE STUDY

AUTHORS:
SADIE PARR, RICHARD POUNTNEY AND VIC WHITTAKER

INSTITUTION:
SHEFFIELD HALLAM UNIVERSITY

SESSION TYPE:
INDIVIDUAL RESEARCH PAPER

NAME AND ADDRESS OF CONTACT PERSON:
SADIE PARR
THE LEARNING AND TEACHING INSTITUTE
LEVEL SEVEN
ADSETTS CENTRE
SHEFFIELD HALLAM UNIVERSITY
POND STREET
SHEFFIELD
S1 1WB

TELEPHONE:
0114 2254735

EMAIL:
S.PARR@SHU.AC.UK

NUMBER OF WORDS:
344

FIVE KEY WORDS:
COMMUNAL CONSTRUCTIVISM, SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVISM, CASE STUDY, DESIGN AND PEDAGOGY

Communal Constructivism and Networked Learning: Reflections on a Case Study

Web-based learning environments are frequently heralded as being a medium particularly suitable for realising the goals of social constructivist learning (Oliver and Herrington, 2000). However, Holmes et al. (2001) have suggested that the advent of new educational technologies warrants a new kind of educational theory - 'communal constructivism.' Holmes suggests that learners should not only work together and learn from each other, but should also be active in the process of constructing knowledge *for* a larger learning community. Communal constructivism attempts to move beyond social constructivism and capture specific elements of the additional value that C&IT applications bring to the learning and teaching environment.

Our paper will critically evaluate the usefulness of Holmes et al's communal constructivism through a case study of the way in which Blackboard is currently being used to support students on a level three unit *ICT in an Educational Context* at Sheffield Hallam University.

The unit in question is taught over seven weeks and comprises of Education Studies students and students seeking qualified teacher status in primary education. As part of the unit, the students spend two days on placement in schools in the Sheffield area. The role of the students in these placements is to work as agents of change in ICT and, operating in groups, they are asked to identify the school's ICT needs and formulate a strategy for implementing an agreed solution. The support provided by Blackboard allowed for group-based discussion, peer evaluation, and the opportunity of contacting an expert working in the field. We discuss the ways in which this innovation might be thought of as an exemplar of communal constructivism and reflect on the usefulness of the theory in re-describing practice.

Our key questions are:

- Do Web-based learning environments actually generate a set of pedagogical strategies that the notion of social constructivism can not account for?
- Is the theory of communal constructivism convincing or are its fundamental tenets already contained within the definition of social constructivism?
- How do the issues raised modify our approach to the delivery and design of online learning?