

CONTRIBUTION TO SYMPOSIUM ON: Phenomenography and networked learning??

TITLE OF PAPER: Phenomenological Enquiry into Learning Orientation and Study Approach for Managers Learning with Technology

AUTHORS: Elizabeth Houldsworth and Vivien Hodgson

INSTITUTION: Henley Management College and Lancaster University

SESSION TYPE: Symposium

NAME AND ADDRESS OF CONTACT PERSON:

Dr. Elizabeth Houldsworth

Henley Management College

Greenlands

Henley-on-Thames

Oxfordshire

RG9 3AU

TELEPHONE: 01491 571454

EMAIL: Lzh@henleymc.ac.uk

NUMBER OF WORDS: 500

FIVE KEY WORDS: Phenomenography, educational orientation, study approach, managers experience.

PROPOSAL:

The subject of learning and how to promote it within organisations is increasingly under focus within academia, consultancies and organisations. Interest in networked learning and e-learning has proliferated without necessarily building on existing knowledge and frameworks, nor considering their applicability within particular spheres of study – for example much existing work looks at students within traditional Higher Educational contexts. This paper seeks to add to this discussion by focusing particularly on technology supported learning experienced by managers within an organisational setting/context.

In terms of theoretical basis it follows the approach of earlier work by the Phenomenography Research Group at the University of Gothenberg. This group first identified individual student's approach to study in terms of surface and deep approaches to learning (Marton and Saljo 1976 and Marton et al 1997). This research produced descriptions of learning approaches drawn from studies on students in fairly traditional academic environments and established that within this context 'deep' learning can be a fragile dimension. Within commercial environments it may perhaps be anticipated that deep learning is also desired as it is more likely to

result in longer-term understanding, applicability and change. Despite this and despite the fact that organisations have increasingly put their faith in technology to deliver personalised learning, we still know little about the interaction and learning approaches and processes of individuals whilst using innovatory teaching and learning methods.

Section one of the paper will thus explore surface and deep learning and more specifically the impact and role of educational orientation and study approach to this. As well as discussing these theories and frameworks the paper also considers their application in practice. Section two stresses that orientation and study approaches are not inherent qualities or traits of the learners, but change over time and with educational experience and context. Although educationalists have sought to identify and promote the methods and contexts which lead to deep learning, it is 'a fragile dimension' and hunting for its 'recipe' rather like alchemy. However, numerous authors have documented the practices that encourage surface learning (Biggs 1989, Marton, Hounsell and Entwistle 1984, Ramsden 1985, 1987, Watkins 1984, Dart and Clarke 1991).

Section three of the paper describes research into the experience of learning with multimedia by managers. This included research in two different contexts, one a global professional services firm using technology to support the delivery of a common curriculum and one a retail bank, utilising technology to support 'soft skill' development. Findings from these contexts suggest that learners in these contexts do report their experience of learning with technology differently and in ways that are not unrelated to the ideas of education orientation and learning approach. The paper presents three different groupings of learners which emerged from this research and links these to Bateson's (1972) work on levels of learning.

Section 4 provides a summary discussion and suggests ways of further describing the three different groupings of learners identified in the research. It then concludes with reference to possible applications of the

ideas discussed for practitioners responsible for supporting learning within organisations.

CONTRIBUTION TO SYMPOSIUM ON: Using Phenomenography to study learning on organisational technology supported courses

TITLE OF PAPER: Considering context for distance learning in a phenomenographic perspective

AUTHORS: Magnus Hultén and Shirley Booth

INSTITUTION: Centre for Educational Development, Chalmers University of Technology

SESSION TYPE:

NAME AND ADDRESS OF CONTACT PERSON: Magnus Hultén, Center for educational development, Chalmers University of Technology, Vera Sandbergs Allé 5B-C, S-412 96 Göteborg, Sweden.

TELEPHONE: +46 (0)31 772 5418

EMAIL: magnus.hulten@pedu.chalmers.se

NUMBER OF WORDS: 494

FIVE KEY WORDS: Phenomenography, activity system, Vygotsky, Engström

PROPOSAL:

Considering context for distance learning in a phenomenographic perspective

Learning has been the focus of a study when engineers in a vehicle manufacturing concern have taken part in a distance course on vehicle electronics and system design. The course is entirely web-based and is open to all the engineers in the concern.

The empirical study has an overriding phenomenographic perspective on learning –a number of participants were interviewed with a design aimed at revealing the variation in how certain phenomena covered in the course and certain aspects of the context for learning were experienced. The interviews have not yet been analysed as a phenomenographic pool of meaning, but have been analysed individually to get a better picture of which features of the learning context were important, and their potential significance for learning.

In order to relate the notion of context to a well-grounded theoretical framework, the learning context was initially conceptualised as an activity system. The description of context as activity system, as developed by Engeström, has its roots in the work of Vygotsky and his school of developmental psychology, and is most commonly used to describe the dynamics of activity in social settings. In our study, we have tried to re-describe the activity system in a phenomenographic spirit, in the sense of seeing it and describing it as it is experienced by its participants.

The *subject* (student) is in relation to the *object* of study (which can be the course as a whole in some situations, or a particular concept or principle in others). The student directs his or her attention to the object of study (which might be the course as a whole, or a particular part of it, or a specific item). In directing attention to it, activity theory says that the object is transformed in some way, but here we are saying that the relation between subject and object is transformed – and this is the outcome of the person's intention towards the object. This intentional act

is mediated by *tools* of various types – intellectual tools such as language or animations or previous knowledge, and artefactual tools such as texts and the computer. This is our adaptation of Vygotsky's original activity system: subject-object-mediating tools.

Now let us extend the triad by adding a layer of social factors, as Engeström has done to describe what he calls "learning by expansion". Central to this layer is the *community* that the individual relates to – possibly work-mates and/or fellow students, and/or teachers, and/or even the family – in such a way to affect the subject-object relationship. Relations to the community are directed in some way by *rules*, rules that are everyday rules of computer communication, possibly, or rules that are imposed by the course. And relations to the community are also directed by the *division of labour*, whether deliberate or accidental.

In the paper, an empirical study of learning in the course of study will be described and results from an analysis of interviews with participants will be used to illuminate this emerging theory.