Chapter 26

Development Curriculum for Knowledge-Based Organizations
Lessons from a Learning Network

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ABSTRACT

This article presents arguments for designing tutoring models for learning networks of knowledge-based organizations, whose tasks increasingly involve the development of expertise and knowing. The potential is examined of a curriculum, when the object of learning, in-house development, is deeply situated in the knowledge practices of organizations, is cross-disciplinary and is beyond formal education. A sociocultural understanding of a curriculum is used to analyze a model that the authors developed in collaboration with the learning network of the South Savo region in Finland. The model in question applies the theory of expansive learning and developmental work research (Engeström, 1987) by specifying it in a learning network setting. The cultural-historical activity theory approach is used to elaborate on the notion of multi-mediation as the main challenge for the pedagogical modeling of a learning network. The outcome of the analysis is summarized in terms of four tension-laden dimensions of learning to be mediated by a development curriculum.

INTRODUCTION

The activities in knowledge-based organizations increasingly involve the development of expertise. Typically, developmental activity is not exclusively designated as a separate function in these organizations. It is rather intertwined in the day-to-day activity of workers who may acquire additional roles as in-house developers. This new boundary-crossing function in workplaces is a suitable topic of training in and through interorganizational learning networks.

Interest in learning networks has risen worldwide. Even though the cases reported are culturally

diverse, they follow surprisingly similar patterns of activities and share similar problems. Morris, Bessant and Barnes (2006) point out that learning networks need a learning agenda that goes beyond "talking shop." They describe the network as a class that, to be successful, needs some form of curriculum and a framework to assess the achievements. But what is the potential of a curriculum for a learning network when the object of learning, in-house development, is deeply situated in the knowledge practices of organizations, is cross-disciplinary and is beyond formal education? In this article we move towards a sociocultural understanding of curriculum to analyze the model developed in collaboration with the Forum of In-house Development in the learning network of the South Savo region in Finland (Kerosuo, Toiviainen, & Syrjälä, 2011).

The sociocultural approach is based on cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT), in which the notion of *mediation* is one of the cornerstones (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 2007). The learning and development of a member of a community is mediated by and through cultural tools and symbolic signs created in the community during its history. It is suggested that a curriculum is a cultural artifact and tool that *mediates* knowing and expertise in network-based organizations and learning networks.

The CHAT approach highlights that the implementation of tools involves transformation. New tools bring change to an activity and affect the users, but the tools also change when used in different contexts and as meaning is given to them by users (Kaptelinin & Nardi, 2006). The emphasis on mediation and transformation makes learning a dialectical process best captured by analyzing the developmental contradictions and tensions of the object of research (*e.g.* Engeström, Lompscher, & Rückriem, 2005). We therefore analyze a curriculum for a learning network by

means of tensions that we see as socioculturally constructed.

We expect a growing body of pedagogical network models to appear in the research literature as the activity of learning networks becomes more common in knowledge-based organizations. Our initial motivation to write this article was to share our network pedagogic solutions with other "network interventionists." Contributing to curriculum theory is beyond our expertise; what we want to explore is to what extent our model can be seen as a curriculum for learning networks, what kind of curriculum it then might be and what kind of potential for use it may have in knowledge-based organizations. This comes close to a practical use of curriculum theory as *theorizing* (or *modeling*), which should attune closely to the given context of education (Vallance, 1982). Practice should be theoretically informed, as Michael Young (1998) has discussed. He argues that the "curriculum as practice" approach has evident limitations in bringing change to education, especially when confining practice to that of teachers in the classroom (p. 32).

We will first present the specific context and research methodology of the study. It is followed by a discussion on the meaning of knowledge-based work and organizations in this context. A review of the concept of curriculum forms a conceptual framework with which to analyze the model designed for the Forum of In-house Development. This framework is built on three sociocultural tensions of curriculum design. We are focusing on a literature that might help in understanding pedagogic modeling in multiorganizational settings. After the analysis of the model of the forum, the paper concludes with the lessons learned from designing and implementing a development curriculum for knowledge-based organizations.

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