The Situatedness and Mobility of Learning: Pedagogical, Theoretical and Research Issues

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Introduction

This TLRP Thematic Seminar Series (www.gcal.ac.uk/) is exploring the question of what constitutes a learning context and the relationship between learning and context across the life course. Fundamental to the discussions is whether a context is seen as pre-existing the activity that takes place within it, i.e. learning or/and emerging through the practices that are fashioned as ‘learning’. Further, if learning takes place in a variety of contexts, we are then faced with the challenge of not only understanding the nature of that learning, but also the possible relationships between learning in different domains and the values and politics in pedagogically seeking to exploit learning from one domain within another. Does such mobility of learning constitute the transfer of existing learning or/and new learning? These issues have often been framed within a discourse of transfer, but work in the areas of situated learning, activity theory and actor-network theory has engendered different framings of boundary-crossing, boundary zones and boundary objects.

How these issues play out pedagogically and theoretically in different situations is being explored within the Series, as the dynamics of learning, school, curriculum and children are different to those of adults learning in a community centre with less structured outcomes to be achieved. And, of course, examining issues of context also reflexively brings to the fore important questions for research practices. What are the contexts of educational research and how are those contexts framed? How are units of data collection and analysis contextualised?

This paper seeks to draw upon the seminars, papers and discussions to date to outline some of the major pedagogical, theoretical and research issues raised. We also wish to pose questions and gather further data from the discussions at the TLRP conference.

The pedagogical implications of learning contexts

Pedagogy is conventionally associated with educational contexts and specifically with the most directed forms of study in such contexts. Pedagogy for example is not seen as associated with the learning that researchers may engage in as a by-product of the research they undertake. Pedagogy is taken to be what teachers do, whether in schools, colleges or universities, and by extension to trainers, when they set up explicit programmes of learning to support work-related skills and knowledge. Defined thus, the role of pedagogy appears to be a minority concern within our remit of analysing learning contexts in all their diversity, both within and especially out with, educational institutions.

However, there is a need to challenge such a narrow definition of pedagogy, and to ask whether, by starting from the perspective of non-educational contexts, we can identify approaches to pedagogy that are still relevant, even where there is no teacher, no curriculum and no measurement of learning outcomes.
One of the conditions of pedagogy for example, is that expertise is assumed to be unequally distributed within the learning context. A pedagogue is assumed to possess more expertise or knowledge than the learner. However, situated conceptions of learning have revealed the way in which learning in natural settings such as the workplace, results from participation in socially valued activity within communities where expertise is distributed and not the possession of individuals. While those at the heart of a practice may be perceived to have more expertise than the novice, this expertise is embedded within community relationships of mutual engagement and accountability (Wenger 1998). The community of practice approach embeds learning within a trajectory of participation, taking the novice from the boundary into the heart of the practice, if the learning proceeds successfully, without the intervention of a teacher.

Nevertheless, a novice may learn from particularly skilled members of the community, and some novices are more successful than others. A communities of practice approach does not guarantee the learner success. The issue of process – how best to support learning embedded in practice – still arises. Indeed, Wenger stresses process through giving equal status to participation alongside reification, emphasising the importance of forms of activity and interactive experience, and a choreography of participation over time. Such process has to be initiated, designed even, and this may be considered a form of pedagogy. However, the community’s function is primarily about sustaining and developing the practice, with learning as a by-product. The boundary worker may have particular expertise in managing the discourse challenges of different communities but can this expertise be relabelled as pedagogy?

However, research from the TLRP Project Learning as Work: Teaching and Learning Processes in the Contemporary Work Organisation, introduces workplaces as more diverse sites for learning than the communities of practice model sets out. Unwin et al (2005) first situate learning within a context much wider than the local community of practice, arguing that national, even global market pressures influence work organisation and performance. Furthermore, empirical research in a range of workplaces identifies strong relationships of association between individual learning opportunities, work organisation and company performance. The current emphasis on employee involvement (EI) as a strategy for increasing performance is a focus for this research, since it is assumed to foster learning and has played a strong role since ‘at least the 1930’s’ (Handel and Levine, quoted in Unwin et al, 2005). EI involves management recognition of the importance of worker engagement and identification with company goals. It is not assumed that individuals at the boundary of the practice are motivated to develop into core members, as is the assumption with Wenger’s communities of practice model.

Pedagogy as a discourse typically works within the constraints of particular institutional or assessment contexts, and focuses on content and appropriate method. While the learner’s motivation cannot be assumed, the cost of failure will typically be experienced by the learner not the pedagogue. Workplace learning has to address the issue of motivation and worker engagement with the demands of increasing job performance, because the costs of failure are borne by the employer at least as much as by the worker. EI, through strategies of team briefing, profit sharing, promotion and job flexibility and security and so on, is in effect manipulating or shaping the context in order to engineer worker engagement and commitment. Enhanced involvement need not mean reduced control by employers.

While it is not helpful to stretch the meaning of pedagogy to incorporate such strategies, Unwin et al(2005) raise the issue of workplaces as undoubted sites for pedagogy. First pedagogy is explicit within formal training that might be given around technically complex job roles, both on and off the job. But second, in less
recognised forms, pedagogy is implicit through informal roles such as mentoring, 
assessing and coaching, often between employees with no status differences as 
well as between line manager and employee. Such relationships are seen as key 
elements influencing worker response to learning opportunities. Unwin et al refer 
to this as ‘a specific pedagogical remit’ although it may be important that such a 
role is only part of the relationships involved. In workplace contexts, learning and 
job performance work in tandem. This does not necessarily narrow the pedagogy 
remit, so much as diffuse it across a range of situations where it is one strand in 
the experience rather than the sole activity.

Workplaces may at first sight appear pedagogy free, but, as Unwin et al suggest, 
‘the extent to which workplaces exhibit the formal trappings of the traditional 
educational institution can certainly be surprising’, in a reference to artefacts that 
codify knowledge and act as boundary objects between practices (Unwin et al 
p.7).

However learning in the very different setting of interprofessional practice, 
reveals new challenges for any concept of pedagogy. Anne Edwards’ paper for the 
opening seminar in the Seminar Series, describes the learning of practitioners 
from social work, childcare, health and education, as a process of highly tentative 
network building, sharing information formally at a stage where building trust 
was as salient as learning (Edwards, 2005). The object of such work was 
providing high quality care for disadvantaged young people within a specific local 
area. Distributed knowledge was constructed but not within a defined system 
such as cultural historical activity theory assumes. Edwards comments thus: 
‘Activity Theory’s focus on learning at the level of the system and on the 
transformation of existing systems can only point towards the learning that 
occurs in more fluid and open systems.’ (Edwards, 2005, p.12)

Such learning, lacks the strong boundary of the enterprise or institution, and may 
or may not develop in the gaps between social groups, occupations and 
professional networks. Here classification and framing are weak, as a region of 
knowledge building is negotiated between the various groups (Bernstein 1996). It 
has growing importance however, not least because of the new potential ICT 
brings for network development and connection that breaks down traditional 
boundaries, though without necessarily building strong new communities. 
Networks of loose connection may be the prevailing form. Edwards speaks in this 
context not of pedagogy but of ‘relational agency as capacity to both seek and 
offer support for object oriented action.’ (Edwards, op cit p12). While teachers 
cannot ignore the quality of their relationships with learners, it is not helpful to 
stretch the concept of pedagogy here by seeing ‘relational agency’ purely as 
another form of pedagogy. However delicately treated or even disguised, 
pedagogy implies inequality in expertise and in the contexts that Edwards’ TLRP 
research engages with, explicit claims to expertise based upon differential 
professional status seem likely to close down learning rather than open it up.

Interestingly location and direction of movement play into the language of the 
network building observed. The origins begin with a move out of the primary 
workplaces of a range of practitioners, meeting therefore in a new place for all, 
and their learning is described as ‘horizontal learning’ (NECF 2004). It is 
important for the beginning of new learning that particular shared teams and 
discursive groups are constructed and that these begin away from familiar work 
sites. New types of activity in new settings are key to the beginning of change. 
Only if we reconceptualise pedagogy as being about the design of this activity, 
might we see it as having a role to play here. However to do so would also be to 
invite risks, given our lack of knowledge about how such processes can be 
brought about successfully, and the evidence that equality of role status and 
building of trust is crucial.
These ‘third spaces’ where learning outside of institutional settings can form hybrid learning contexts and fuse knowledge and practices of different domains are one way of exploring the possibilities of new forms of pedagogy. Lankshear and Knobel (2003) point to the importance of social practices that are evolving beyond the school within digitally saturated milieux that seem to be privileging modes of knowing that are more performance and procedure orientated than propositional. They point to the collaborative rather than individualistic mode of conceiving of learning; and pedagogy that emphasises development of expertise and competence through performance and not through absorbing content.

They give the example of a project carried out at the Yanga Headlands State High School. The pedagogical approach followed a logic of transcendence because it purposefully transcended pursuit of atomised competencies or learning outcomes that have been abstracted from larger social practices and taught in decontextualised or disembodied ways. The capacities that might appear as a list of learning outcomes emerged as by-products of a much more rounded pedagogical approach and learning experience. The space that this project inhabited was classrooms but the time was after school and the relationships between the teacher, researchers and pupils were deliberately not conventional in the sense of being positioned as experts or novices. The researchers explained the project and the students’ participation in terms of teachers wanting to learn from students how to teach computing effectively to their students.

Jewett and Jones (2005) in their paper talk about the multimodal interpretation of textuality. Their paper drew attention to how the classroom can be viewed as a woven dynamic network where the threads spin right out to government and policy initiatives which are inflected in micro mechanisms. She draws attention to how micro analysis of semiotic resources such as space, movement and body posture, visual resources, speech and voice quality, writing, gaze and gesture can be utilised in the classroom by teachers to draw in pupils’ experiences out side of school to help them access the curriculum and pass assessments. The point illustrated by this paper is that some teachers, while still curriculum and examination focused, have found strategies which give them space to connect texts and the experiences of their students. The example given in this paper demonstrates how the teacher makes links to wider social and moral issues by drawing on her own and her students’ life experiences, to make cultural connections with the texts studied.

Northedge (2003a) takes this further, in a socio-cultural account of knowledge and learning that presents both new opportunities and new challenges for pedagogy in the context of higher education. If knowledge is ‘constituted in the flow of meaning produced between knowledgeable people’ (Northedge, 2003a, p.19), then pedagogy is the expertise enabling non-discourse speakers to participate within the discourse and become increasingly confident speakers and writers within it. A key aspect of this approach is that it does not adopt a deficit model of the learner. It recognises learners as experienced meaning makers within their own discourse communities, with the highly developed skills adults possess for meaning making through inter-subjectivity – the sharing of frames of reference through which utterances make sense and develop the discourse taking place.

The challenge is to enable the learner to move outside of the discourse communities of daily life, and in many cases, work and professional roles, in order to participate within an academic discourse using appropriate modes of analysis, critique, evidence and argument. Exemplars and narratives drawn from non-academic discourse however, are a resource that learners can use to begin to break into what could otherwise be a closed world of unknown frames of reference and meaningless statements. Pedagogy here is about the selection and deployment within a closely structured argument, of a rich range of resources.
from daily life as well as academic discourse. The design of the structure and the tasks set for students enable them to participate in a discourse where they start to make connections between the frame of reference of familiar everyday discourse, and the abstractions and critique of the academic discourse (Northedge, 2003b). The course 'within which' this happens, becomes therefore a context in which learners participate in discourse through which they develop both knowledgability and confidence in communicating within academic frames of reference. While genres such as narrative offer familiar modes to help in this process, there is a strong role for a pedagogue in terms of the design of the learning experience, the scaffolding of the process (lending the novice the lecturer’s frame of reference) and coaching them through regular practice of the discourse of the target community.

Martin Hughes (2005) contrasts the continued emphasis within the school domain on learning as acquisition, in contrast to the dominance in other domains of a participation model of learning. Through research carried out for the 'Exchange in Knowledge Between Home and School to Enhance Children’s Learning’ project it was found that many practices which have a strong school-like quality are present in out-of-school contexts. Activities such as: children working with tutors, playing ‘educational’ computer games or doing puzzles in children’s magazines, have been attributed to the development of the culture of assessment and testing in schools. The colonisation of home contexts by school practices which parents collude with was noted. Hughes raises the distinction between domain and site in relation to these types of colonising practices which appear to belong to the domain of school but are located in the physical site of home. This raises questions as to what it is about an activity or event which determines why we should locate it within a particular domain.

A concern that arises from research that focuses on the use of home events and what they can offer in terms of acquiring the skills and knowledge valued in schools is that it reinforces the subservient value of out of school activities simply as a means of accessing the school curriculum. Research carried out by the LfLIFE project has noted that students do not always view college learning solely as a means of gaining qualifications or employment but that college learning can be viewed as a means of enriching or facilitating activities that are important to them in other domains of their lives. Educationalists may wrongly assume the centrality of education in people’s lives, unaware that it is not always viewed with such importance by the students themselves.

In a consideration of pedagogy as brief as this, issues can only be raised selectively. However, three general points can be made in concluding this section. The first is to point towards evidence of pedagogical relationships in contexts where pedagogy appears at first sight irrelevant. Calls for a reconceptualisation of pedagogy are common, but what we see in research into enterprise learning contexts is that learning is fostered in a range of practices that extend from the familiar pedagogic forms to social relationships that have pedagogic functions embedded within broader functions of work performance. Reconceptualising pedagogy here might be to emphasise identity building and emotional support aspects of teaching rather than new technologies or content expertise.

Second, within educational institutional contexts, pedagogy is challenged by socio-cultural approaches to learning that demonstrate the impact on learners of what happens outside the educational context. Pedagogy is as a result being developed through teachers building connections between the classroom and experiences outside it. Others are finding ways to mobilise the resources that students bring from their own discourse communities, to help them participate in the unfamiliar modes of academic discourse communities.
Third, it may be unhelpful to try to introduce a pedagogical role into all learning contexts. The important response to highly fluid and tentative learning contexts such as networks across lay and professional practices, might be to recognise our lack of expertise and to place priority on supporting progressive processes of interaction as a priority. Pedagogy may have no role in relational agency but may come to have a role, once the processes brought underway through relational agency reach a stage where formal expertise in understanding what can be learned and how to support that learning, are both possible and productive.

Theoretical Issues in Framing a Learning Context

Much of the discussion in the Seminar Series to date has drawn upon situated learning theory and activity theory. There has also been some references to actor-network theory (ANT), given the concept borrowing by activity and situated learning theory from ANT. In addition, when exploring the mediation of context through language, Russell (2005) and Jewitt (2005) have drawn from genre theory and semiotics. This has resulted in rich discussion, if still at the stage of exploration.

A conventional view of context views it as a bounded container into which something else is placed.

In all commonsense uses of the term, context refers to an empty slot, a container, into which other things are placed. It is the ‘con’ that contains the ‘text’, the bowl that contains the soup. As such, it shapes the contours of its contents: it has its effects only at the borders of the phenomenon under analysis... A static sense of context delivers a stable world. (McDermott, 1996: 282)

Conventionally we might view an education institution as a learning context. What goes on in it is learning. What goes on outside it is something else. The relationship between the two may be weak or even non-existent. Indeed this concept of a context as a container for learning fuels practices in educational institutions that value precisely decontextualised and generalised knowledge, where we might say that the degree to which the learning can travel is in proportion to its level of abstraction. In this sense, it is the decontextualisation of knowledge that results in increased transferability. The context as setting provides a boundary, learning is separated from that which goes on outside educational institutions and abstraction and generalised knowledge become valued (Chaiklin and Lave, 1996). We therefore witness two ways in which the question of context can be articulated, as knowledge and as setting.

It is the concept of context as bounded setting or container which has been problematised by those working with situated theories of learning in attempts to account for the valuing of decontextualised knowledge within the socially situated practices of educational institutions. As Lave (1996: 24) suggests, ‘a theoretical account of (de)contextualisation as situated practice should account for how such formalist views of the world are sustained in practice’.

The notion of context as container is problematic when all social practices can be framed as learning contexts: ‘participation in everyday life may be thought of as a process of changing understanding in practice, that is, learning’ (Lave, 1996: 6).... Other domains can be conceived as separate contexts in their own rights of course, e.g. home, workplace, but they trouble the sense of boundedness in conventional understandings of context and the value invested in decontextualised knowledge. Fundamental to the conception of learning in these domains is a framing of context as a ‘weaving together of people and their tools in complex networks. The network is the context’ (Russell and Yanez, 2003: 336, emphasis in original).
What results from this is a focus on contextualisation as an emergent outcome of practice, rather than context as a pre-existing container for practice. Here ‘context is not so much something into which someone is put, but an order of behaviour of which one is part’ (McDermott, 1996: 290). The relational nature of practice also points to the ways in which, at an explanatory level, contexts cannot be simply separated out from one another, despite the many attempts to do this. Any context therefore has traces of other practices, which, points the their polycontextuality (Tuomi-Grohn, et al., 2003) and exercises of power inscribed within them.

The question then is how theoretically we can frame the relating of learning between situations and whether there is the transfer of existing learning, the modification of learning and/or new learning. There has been much debate over the years about the gap between learning in different contexts and how to overcome it, informed in many instances by a container-like view of context, where learning has to escape over the boundary. To a great extent, this is formulated as an issue of transfer, from classroom to classroom, course to course, school to school, college to university, college to work, work to college, etc. Here people move from one container-like context to another and the extent to which they do or can transfer their learning from one context to another is a crucial educational issue.

However, in practice-based views of learning it is suggested that, as learning is situated/contextualised, there is a requirement for disembedding/decontextualisation and resituating/recontextualisation for learning across and between practices. The extent to which the decontextualising and recontextualising involve both setting and knowledge is relevant here, as moving may or may not involve abstraction in both senses of context. Discourses of boundary zones, boundary-crossing and boundary objects have emerged (see Tuomi-Grohn and Engestrom, 2003). This is to make explicit the practices and artefacts through which learning is mediated, but also to identify that objects may be part of many contexts, given that the latter are not containers. Rather than focus on transfer of an existing skills set, the practices themselves, while identifiable as the same at some level, take on a different significance when networked into a different set of practices. These are networked practices, which give rise to alternative framings and metaphors, specifically those that focus on the boundary as a zone rather than a wall between contexts, and where it is through mediation rather than abstraction that learning travels. In some senses, certain notions of simulations, contextualised learning and authentic learning attempt to do this relational work within specific settings.

Here the notion of a boundary object is useful to help us conceptualise learning as relational and polycontextual. The notion of boundary objects was developed in actor-network theory (ANT) (Star, 1989), but has also been taken up by Wenger (1998) in his conceptualisation of communities of practice. In ANT, ‘like the blackboard, a boundary object “sits in the middle” of a group of actors with divergent viewpoints’ (Star, 1989: 46). Boundary objects circulate through networks playing different roles in different situations and are not merely material. They can be ‘stuff and things, tools, artefacts and techniques, and ideas, stories and memories’ (Bowker and Star, 2000: 298). They are objects which are not necessarily contained or containable by context, but are mobile and networked between differing situations, dependent on the various affordances at play. These can be based upon specific pedagogic performances which seek to make connections rather than deny them, or simply take place because they are the tokens through which people relate their practices from one setting to another. They do not pre-exist practices, but rely on those practices to make them into boundary objects.
For Wenger (1998: 107) boundary objects work at the edges of communities of practice mediating their external relationships; ‘they enable co-ordination, but they can do so without actually creating a bridge between the perspectives and the meanings of various communities’. There are some possible pedagogical implications here, not least because ‘using an artefact as a boundary object requires processes of coordination and translation between each form of partial jurisdiction’ (Wenger, 1998: 108). This requires brokers. However, there is a danger that boundary objects in Wenger’s formulation are re-situated in a concept of context, in his case communities of practice, as container. The boundary object is that which exists between rather than that which sits in the centre, as is the case with ANT.

While the theoretical issues surrounding the framing of learning and context are unresolved, in part resting on the differing theoretical traditions informing different positions, there is clearly some consensus that relational understandings and metaphors of networks and boundaries are more fruitful than conceptualising context as a container.

**Research Implications**

The theoretical framing of a research project has consequences for the unit of analysis and the units of data. The methodological approach and methods used to investigate the research questions reflect the theoretical orientation of the research. If one starts with an idea of context as container then research practices are shaped by the relevant containers envisaged as the contexts under study. Cognitive approaches to learning focus analytically on the individual. Situated approaches to learning also take the individual as the unit of analysis though sociocultural factors are given weight and distributed cognition takes the team or group as the focus for learning and knowledge. ANT and Activity theory move from the individual to the interaction between the individual and the collective so that the network or activity systems become the unit of analysis. This obviously calls for a different methodological focus. If the learning context is envisaged as a container then looking at what happens within that context is limited by the boundaries of the container. If the unit of analysis is the relationships and networks between actors and actants and the context is shaped by the social practices engaged in by these actors and actants then it is difficult to know where the limits of the unit of analysis are. This also raises ethical questions concerning how far the researcher should go in terms of investigating these in between spaces and boundary zones of people’s lives.

When researching learning in educational domains the institution or organization that is organizing the learning acts as a relatively clearly defined context if we are working with a container type view of context. In which case, research can be carried out relatively easily within the bounds of that learning context. If research is being carried out on learning in a school or college then the institutional trappings will to some extent shape the type of research methods. They will tend to be formalized to at least some extent and the relations of power between researcher and subjects are relatively clearly defined so that each know where they stand in relation to the other. However, if we accept that educational institutions do not exist as isolated islands of their own but that what goes on in them is intimately related to other domains of people’s lives, then we have to consider how far we should go in tracing the complicated strands of people’s lives that go into shaping these learning contexts.

If we take the ‘network’ as a metaphor for context and consider people and their tools through their interactions as actively shaping these learning contexts, then we have a complex and in some ways fuzzy model of what constitutes a learning
context. The problem is that it is hard to know what to focus on in our analysis. There is a need to relate local practices to wider macro-structures and consider the relationship between structure and agency. To understand these local events and the networks of practices that link them, ethnographic methods, sometimes loosely construed, are often employed in order to explore how participants in these networks view their own practice in relation to others and the wider macro structures in which they operate.

The practicalities of research in terms of time and money however limit an ethnographic approach to particular time slots in particular settings. It is not often possible to spend extended periods of time with subjects and become sufficiently integrated into the various domains of their lives to capture a rich insider perspective. The alternative is to utilize ethnographic type methods that elicit information about a range of practices that subjects engage in across the varied domains of their often complex and intricate lives. The researcher may benefit from interacting with the subjects in settings which are less formal than the classroom, and finding ways of playing down the possible perceived uneven relations of power that can limit the scope and flow of any interactions.

If we take a relational view of context and view context not as something that pre-exists practice but rather something that is produced through practice then research practices will also be implicated in the forming of that context.

The ethical questions arising from this understanding of context are more complicated than if we view research as something that is done impartially. Objectivist research traditions have taken the view that if the research impacts on the unit of analysis then this is a problem in terms of validity of the research. This is referred to as ‘the observers paradox’ (Labov, 1966) in sociolinguistic research or ‘the Hawthorne effect’ in sociological research (Draper, 2003). The ideal in this type of research is to minimise the effects of the researcher on the research context. The researcher is supposed to be neutral and objective in relation to the research context.

In the Literacies for Learning in Further Education Project some members of the research team, who are also practitioners in Further Education colleges, have expressed their interest in some of the research methods as pedagogical tools themselves. They have adapted particular research methods which explore students’ literacy practices in various domains of their lives for use in a classroom setting. This information has started to inform changes in teaching practice in particular curriculum areas. It was also noted that the social background information that was offered by the students to the researchers has proved invaluable in terms of understanding students and their interactions with teaching texts and teaching practices. This has enabled teachers to develop that ‘third space’ in the classroom more effectively. When teachers know more about their students lives in other domains they are more able to identify boundary objects that can be used as pedagogic devices. It has been noted that the students’ involvement in the research process in some cases has made them more aware of ways that they can improve their own learning in college by using literacy practices developed outside of college. On the other hand, what might appear to the researcher as an obvious bordering practice between different domains of a student’s life might not be given any importance or consequence by the student. There are also times when students actively try to keep some of the domains of their life as separate as possible and have good reason for wanting to do so.

However, if we accept that the research process is going to impact on social practice and be a part of the shaping of learning contexts then the ethical implications of how we carry out that research and what we do with it are even more important. Whereas research roles are relatively easily defined in an educational institutional setting when we start to investigate learning outside of
the public domain and asking about practices that relate to learning in other
domains of students' lives the relationships between researcher and subjects can
be become less clear. Subjects may offer up information that is sensitive and
could be prejudicial in the wrong hands but also could be of significance in terms
of the overall research.

A relational understanding of context means that when researching learning
contexts it is necessary to follow the threads that form the pattern of the learning
context. Each thread that is part of the woven cloth will have its own trajectory
and be significant to some degree in terms of the overall pattern. By following
these threads out of educational institutions into the varying aspects of students'lives we can better understand the relationship between social practices in
various domains and the formation of learning contexts. Research methodologies
that are formulated from a container view of context are likely to limit the ability
to follow the threads and examine the relationships inherent in the combining of
those threads. Any theoretical preconceptions will limit the possible scope of a
given methodology so it is important to be aware of this and be flexible in terms
of an iterative process and allow our theoretical understanding to grow from the
data and not limit our analysis unduly.

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