



SITUATED LEARNING, COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE AND PEDAGOGICAL INNOVATION

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Abstract

This article reflects on situated learning as a result of interactions between learners and contexts. It starts from the concept of community and its relationship with the learning processes. The article defines community of practice and recognizes the social and situated nature of cognition. It recognizes that knowledge materializes in the form of situated experiences and not just in mental contexts.

It addresses the study of students' learning, the type of participation in school activity and in the social contexts of intervention. It identifies

pedagogical innovation in a disruptive perspective, which foresees profound changes in the traditional pedagogical relationship that understands the subject as co-builder of his knowledge.

Situated learning and communities of practice

Understanding the phenomenon of learning as an active process facilitated by constructivist activities linked to the environment, context and, above all, to others, fits the constructivist approach advocated by Vygotsky.

The author defends an active participation of the social, cultural and historical component, in a learning perspective that is based on the construction of knowledge in community, that is, from collaboration and interaction with individuals. It assumes the importance of the social context in the acquisition and construction of knowledge and considers shared activity an intrinsic learning process.

In opposition to learning models that focus on one of the parties, that is, on who teaches or learns passively. Rogoff (1994) defined the concept of

community referring to the learning processes that occur when individuals participate in ventures shared with other people, so that they all play active roles in sociocultural activity, although often asymmetrical.

With the contributions of Lave and Wenger (Lave, 1988; Lave & Wenger 1991; Wenger, 1998), the concept of community of practice gains visibility and the social and situated character of cognition is recognized. Lave (1988; 1996) identifies the relationships between cognition and the pedagogical action contexts in which it is studied, with evident implications for learning. It argues that knowledge is mobilized in forms of situated experiences (in the relationships between people and contexts) and not just in mental contexts. Learning takes place in social contexts, which influence the types of knowledge and practices that are constructed. Participation in cultural

practice, in which knowledge exists, is an epistemological principle of learning.

Learning thus defined is a process of transforming the participation of individuals and its development results from the roles played and the understanding of the activities in which they participate. In this sense, the social models of learning understand it as something social and collective. Its fundamental principle is the participation of students in socially situated practices (contrary to theories that reduce learning to the mental capacity of individuals); which value individual differences, establish comparison mechanisms and determine upper and lower limits, defining standards of excellence that individuals should achieve.

These perspectives focused on the social and contextual nature of knowledge came to be called “situated”. The situated nature of learning triggers a more focused look at the communities of practice, not only focusing on the person-in-action, but also on the forms of participation in the communities of practice in which this action takes place. Community of practice is:

(...) set of relationships between people, activity and world, understood in a time and in connection with other communities of practice that culminate and touch each other (...) It implies participation in a system of activities, about which participants share perceptions relatively to what they do and to what it represents in

their lives and for their communities (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 98).

In these spaces of interaction, the concept of situated learning is important, based on a notion of knowledge that emerges from action, activity, context and culture. The situated idea of learning is seen by the authors as a dynamic process of progressive transition, which evolves from a peripheral participation, to a more centripetal participation, in the learning community, belonging to the student.

Educational contexts are valued and are mobilized around authentic learning processes, which lead to the production of knowledge from the interactions carried out by learners. This contextualized and meaningful knowledge for those who learn implies pedagogical innovation processes of a disruptive nature.

Wenger (2001) recognizes that learning is a characteristic of practice and a source of social structure, with practice being produced by members through the negotiation of meaning. The practice in the communities refers to a tacit knowledge, implicit and supported by a reflective practice. In this sense, the community of practice is a learning community, as the practice is based on an implicit organization in the service of collaborative learning. The author says that communities of practice arise spontaneously and informally, and their evolution results from interaction and negotiation between members.

The structural elements of a community of practice are: domain, community and practice (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002). The domain is what allows the creation of a common base and a sense of development of an identity, validating the existence of the community through the affirmation of its objectives; The community is the social fabric of learning. It is the central element in which people interact, learn together, build relationships with each other, and develop a sense of belonging. These interactions, in the long term, allow the creation of a community identity, as well as the differentiation between its members who assume different roles and create certain styles. Practice is formed by a set of “work schemes, ideas, information, styles, language, stories and documents that are shared by community members. (...) the practice is the specific knowledge that the community develops, shares and maintains” (p. 29). Its evolution translates into a collective product integrated into the participants' task, that is, into a useful knowledge for the participants themselves.

Lave (1996) recognizes that many curricular reforms ended up failing because they did not recognize the existing communities of practice in the school and proposes the study of the communities of practice (inside and outside the school) to which students belong. It recommends that more importance be given to the way they learn, what they learn, how they relate to each other and what kind of participation they

assume in school activities and in the social contexts of intervention.

Knowledge and learning are located in communities of practice, which is “(...) an intrinsic condition for the existence of knowledge” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 98). A community of practice provides for the continued construction of knowledge, based on previously acquired learning and progresses according to the needs and perceptions of its members, who progressively add new perspectives to the community.

A community of practice must stimulate evolution, establish dialogue between multiple perspectives, appeal to different levels of participation and experience, develop spaces for the community, show its value, combine familiarity and enthusiasm, create rhythm for the community (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002).

Lave (1993) addresses the different learning models present in different communities and also in schools, and highlights that the concept of learning is inseparable from the notion of practice, so that the learner not only gets closer to knowledge, but also to all social practices and their values. It also recognizes that individuals develop higher psychic processes and build significant knowledge from the activities performed. The dialectic of the relationships that constitute the human experience is accentuated and it is assumed that knowledge is formed through the mind, the body and

the environment. Learning is participating in a community of practice where knowledge exists, not as an individual achievement acquired through teaching, but as a product shared by the community itself.

This approach proposes the alteration of some traditional principles: 1) elimination of the polarity of values that makes it possible to place the school in the first place in relation to any other form of education; 2) to go beyond the concept of transmission that supposes unidirectionality between those who learn and those who teach; 3) acceptance that learning is a socially situated activity.

As Rodríguez Illera (2007) recognizes, what is at stake in the conception of communities of practice is not just learning, from a didactic perspective as a mere output of the effectiveness of teaching processes, but the relationship between learning and personal and Social. The reference to the community, as the origin of social life, that is, as the main context of reference for any subject, changes the vision of learning, which is no longer seen as an end, but as an element of interconnection between aspects that have the same importance for the subject, to the detriment of simply improving performance or acquiring certain skills. This social theory of learning allows reflection on what is learned and how it is learned at school. It is, therefore, a great contribution to the theoretical line of situated learning.

The situated learning emerges as a transitory concept, where, on the one hand, there are primary cognitive processes, and on the other, social practice as a generating phenomenon, with learning being one of its characteristics. Learning is an integral aspect of generative social practice. The focus of the analysis shifts from the individual as the learner to learning as participation in the social world. Learning is not understood as a type of activity, but rather as an aspect of any activity (Brazão, 2008).

The concept of situated learning indicates the creation of new dynamics and approaches, based on interaction, mutual assistance and communication, in the development and construction of knowledge, based on the idea that learning is a social phenomenon, situated in the context of lived experience that can be shared. In effect, shared practice is a learning space that allows learners to reach higher levels of learning than if they did it alone. On the other hand, the importance of involving students in meaningful practices is increasingly recognized, as opposed to approaches that give importance to their passivity. It is in this context that the community of practice increasingly plays an important and significant role. Pedagogical innovation stands out in these environments that facilitate skills such as: information and communication, reasoning and problem solving and personal development and autonomy.

Pedagogical Innovation Pathways

According to Fino (2015) the expression pedagogical innovation is usually the target of some misunderstandings, resulting from the lack of reflection on what pedagogy means and what pedagogical innovation will be. For the author, this is:

a conscious and critical act, which implies a rupture with the pedagogical practices crystallized throughout the period of the school of modernity, shaped by the industrial production mode, and which seeks to redefine the relationships between people (learners and facilitators), trying to favor the processes that trigger learning and the social environments in which it takes place or of which it is a consequence (p. 127).

When we approach pedagogical innovation, the active nature of learning is recognized – of those who guide and of those who learn – thus identifying innovation processes in terms of pedagogical praxis developed and dynamic learning contexts. The change in pedagogical practices is assumed, in a critical and dialectical exercise promoted by the tutor, in a disruptive perspective.

The disruptive meaning of pedagogical innovation is opposed to the merely incremental view. According to Fino (2015), the meaning of pedagogical innovation is that of heterodoxy, which empowers the learner and simultaneously imposes the rupture of the roles traditionally assigned to teachers and students .

That is why isolated changes, even if they aim to improve school “performance”, including or not the incorporation of technology, cannot be considered pedagogical innovation, as they do not imply a critical positioning of traditional pedagogical practice, nor do they have a specific nature. Emancipatory. “pedagogical innovation, understood as a rupture, implies changes in the foundations of the traditional pedagogical relationship, through the creation of unusual learning contexts” (Fino, 2015, p. 127).

The deconstruction of the pedagogical culture of passivity (Formosinho, 1987) requires practice of participation and the simultaneous work of the various levels that compose it: the vision of the world (a progressive, democratic and participatory vision); the epistemological paradigm (a paradigm of complexity); the theory of education (a socio-constructive and socio-cultural theory) and participatory pedagogy (a new role for the student and the teacher, a new conception of the educational environment, new methodologies and evaluation processes). (Oliveira-Formosinho & Formosinho, 2017).

In this way, the integration of participatory pedagogies contributes to the creation of new contexts for situated learning, where educational actors interact and stimulate a new praxis.

Final conclusions

Theorizing about communities of practice presupposes an important change in the conceptions of learning in which learning is sought to be understood in a more general context, that of the educational institution, but above all that of the very lives of the people who learn. It implies a new dynamic based on interaction, participation, mutual assistance, and communication.

School learning seen as situated is based on a multifaceted approach to knowledge and learning as integral elements of a social and cultural-historical practice, which provides for the whole of the learner and their relationship with the community in which they live. Rejects traditional orientations and passivity of the learner.

It is believed that situated learning favors the emergence of metacognitive skills, in which subjects bring their own structures of knowledge. In this sense, the use of the concept of communities of practice to promote more favorable learning environments is gaining more and more consistency. The creation of significant projects that situate and give meaning to students' learning can naturally create favorable conditions for the emergence of pedagogical innovation and the transformation of the entire school reality, as it can become a more welcoming and democratic institution, in which the experiences lived at

school are closer to other social experiences lived by the students.

The sharing of common motivations, similar interests, knowledge, shared projects, in cooperation processes and social interactions between schools and community institutions transform schools into true learning communities, in which learners assume great relevance and autonomy in their learnings.

The great challenge that is imposed is to recognize the subject who learns in his personal and cultural singularities, as a builder of his knowledge. Learning environments are enhancers of this construction of knowledge and development.

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