Understanding the professional development needs of online educators: Expansive learning and transformative agency in a Change Laboratory intervention

Session 1 – 10 November 2020

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Outline of Session

- Introductions, recap of background, concepts & research questions

- Task 1: Expansive Learning Cycle – Step 1 - Questioning

- Task 2: Identifying tensions in the Activity Systems model

- Task 3: Reflection

- Questions, close & next steps

Change Laboratory - Organisation
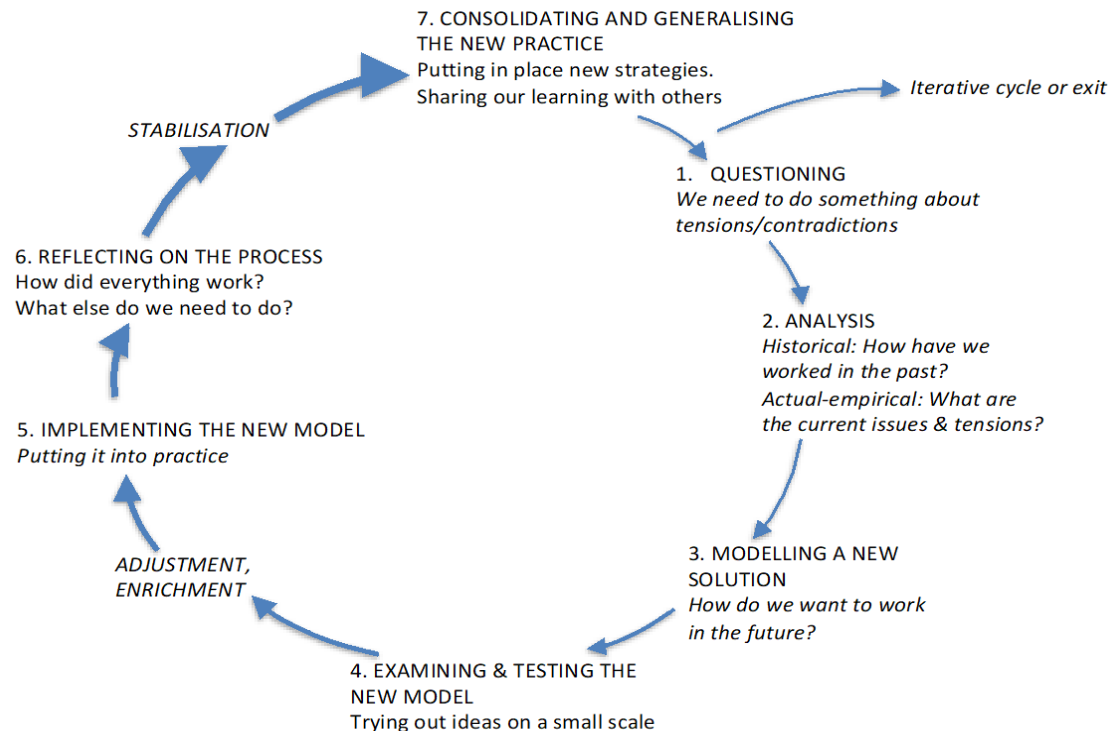
Three boards
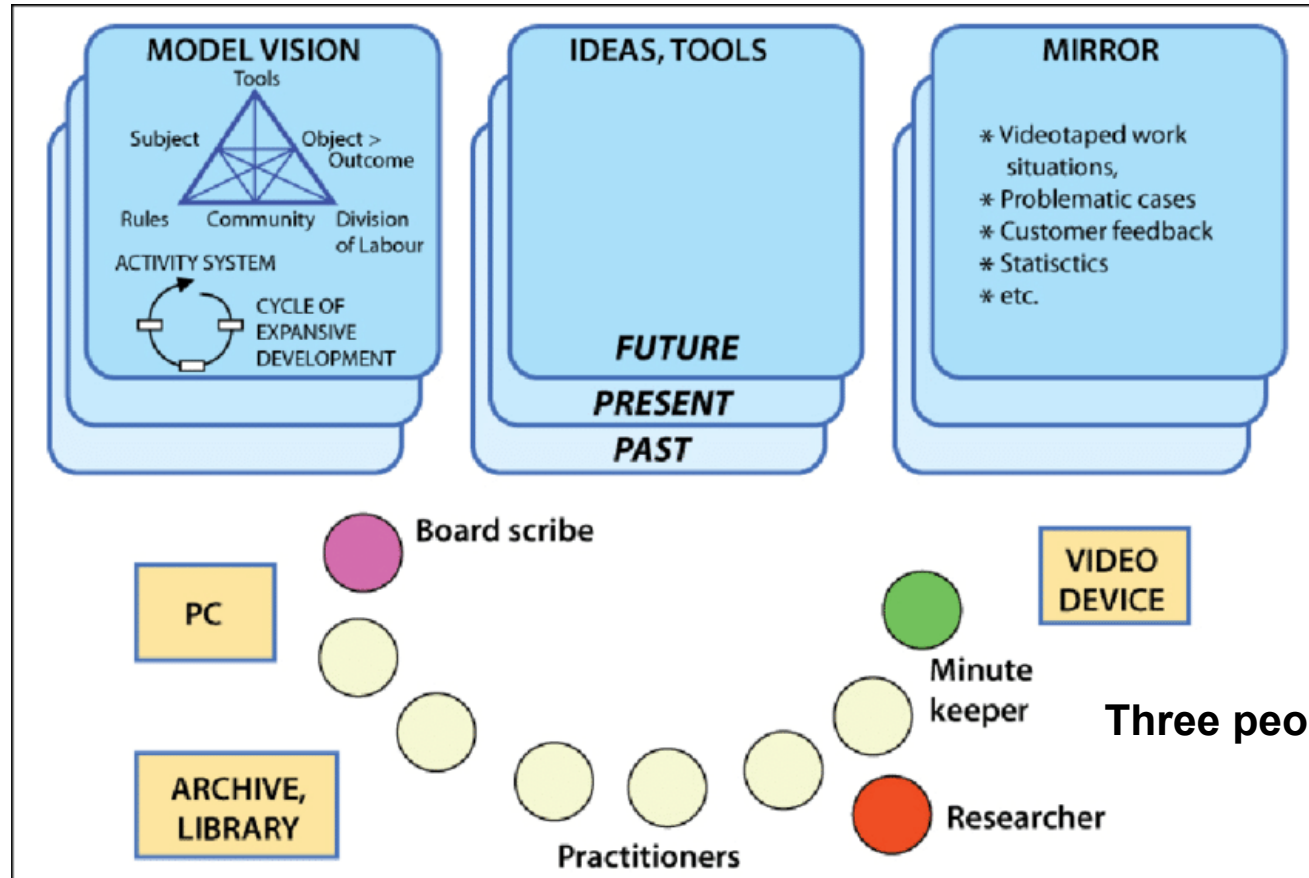
Three people

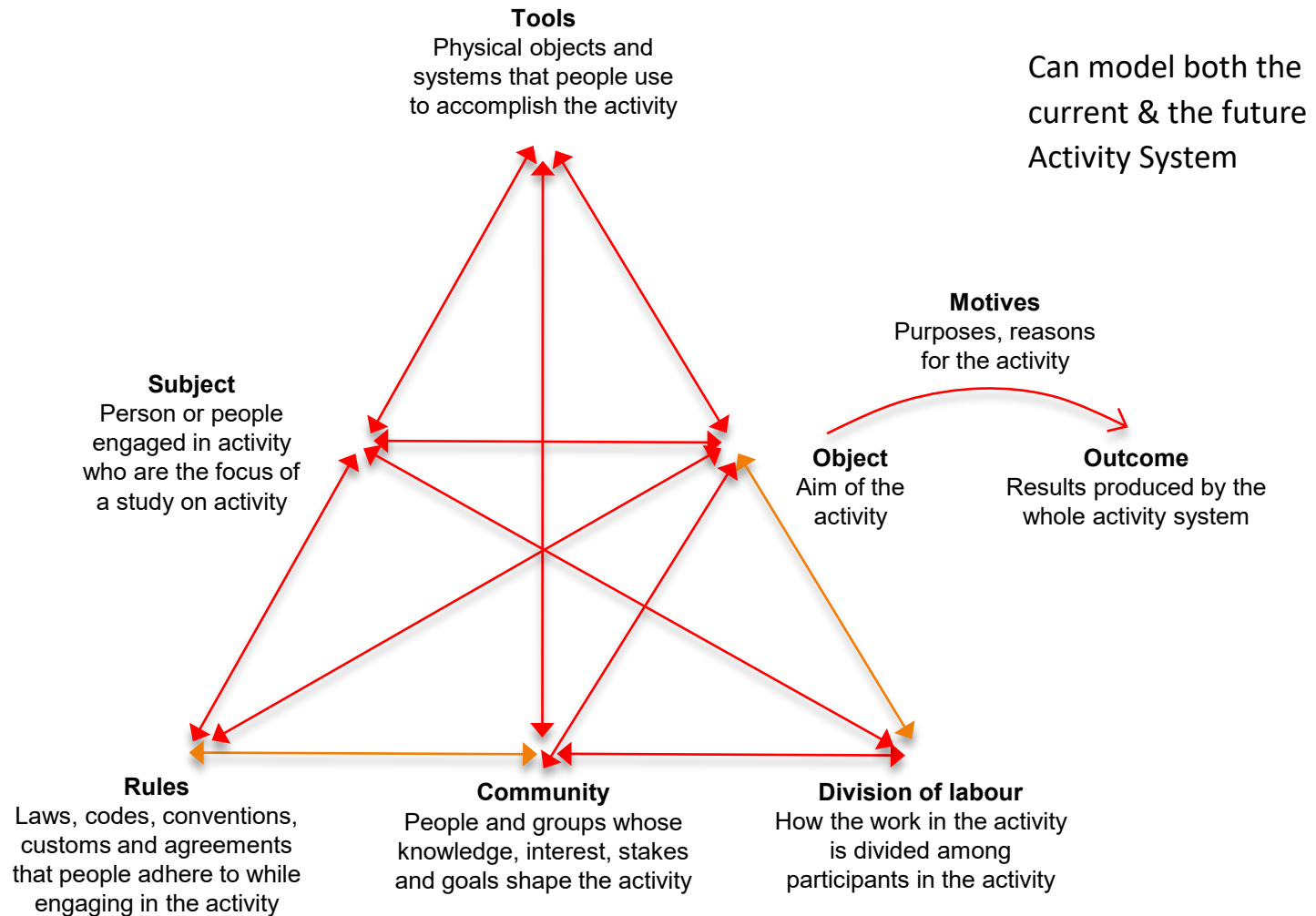(Source: Santally, Cooshna-Naik & Conruyt, 2014)

Engeström's Cycle of Expansive Learning

- fosters collective engagement & moves from the 'abstract to the concrete' (Engeström et al., 1996)

- allows people to consciously re-imagine their activity

Adapted from: Virkunnen and Newnham, 2013, p51; Engeström, Virkkunen,Helle, Pihlaja & Poikela, (1996); Englund, 2018, p701

Engeström's Activity System model

Tools
Physical objects and
systems that people use
to accomplish the activity

Can model both the
current & the future
Activity System

Motives
Purposes, reasons
for the activity

Subject
Person or people
engaged in activity
who are the focus of
a study on activity

Object
Aim of the
activity

Outcome
Results produced by the
whole activity system

Rules
Laws, codes, conventions,
customs and agreements
that people adhere to while
engaging in the activity

Community
People and groups whose
knowledge, interest, stakes
and goals shape the activity

Division of labour
How the work in the activity
is divided among
participants in the activity

Adapted from: Engeström, 1987

Research Questions

Designed to identify:

- how online educators in UK HEIs use a CL intervention to generate an understanding of the factors that influence their professional development needs at different career stages

- how a CL intervention helps online educators develop collective transformative agency for innovating practice regarding professional development within & across Activity Systems

- how the CL can be developed for synchronous use in the online research environment

Mirror Data (Example)

Well-developed professional development programmes may increase faculty loyalty & satisfaction & are key to the continued success of HE	A strategic approach to professional development encourages structured, ongoing input as part of an online educator's role & responsibilities

Supporting online educators to master the complexity of their role throughout their careers:

- improves efficiency & effectiveness

- increases job satisfaction & wellbeing

- builds organisational capacity

- provides a richer overall T&L experience for learners & educators

Mirror Data (Example) – Professional Development of Online Educators

Overall, professional development for online educators has not kept pace with the increasing shift towards online education

Most new online instructors start with little to no preparation for the online classroom

Amongst 821 institutions:
- 90% offered a website with resources and some form of tech support
- 53% offered synchronous training
- 32% offered formal mentoring

Herman (2012)

Online educators who are not prepared are less likely to help students engage with peers, collaborate on learning activities & cultivate a sense of community

Most professional development for online educators has been somewhat ad hoc, ineffective and disconnected to their teaching goals and needs

Educators are particularly looking for:
- support with online pedagogy & how to design their teaching for an online format.
- space to reflect on how to teach & create collaborative activities that engage students online
- strategies for building online presence

Educators are often left to their own devices to figure out what it means to be an effective online instructor. Many feel limited in their ability to teach & support online learners.

Challenges of the online T&L environment can leave the most experienced classroom educator feeling somewhat unprepared to create & develop their online presence.

Mirror Data (Example) – Professional Development of Online Educators

Competency frameworks, strategies & models have not been designed **for** online educators **by** online educators

Many initiatives focus on individual institutions missing opportunities to move beyond the culture of one organisation

Overall lack of practical tools for online educators to analyse their individual development needs & identify solutions during their career

Little focus on those factors that drive the PD needs of more experienced online educators at different stages in their career.

Focus of PD often somewhat ad-hoc & disjointed with an emphasis on a 'one size fits all', top-down model of training in technology & tools for instructional design
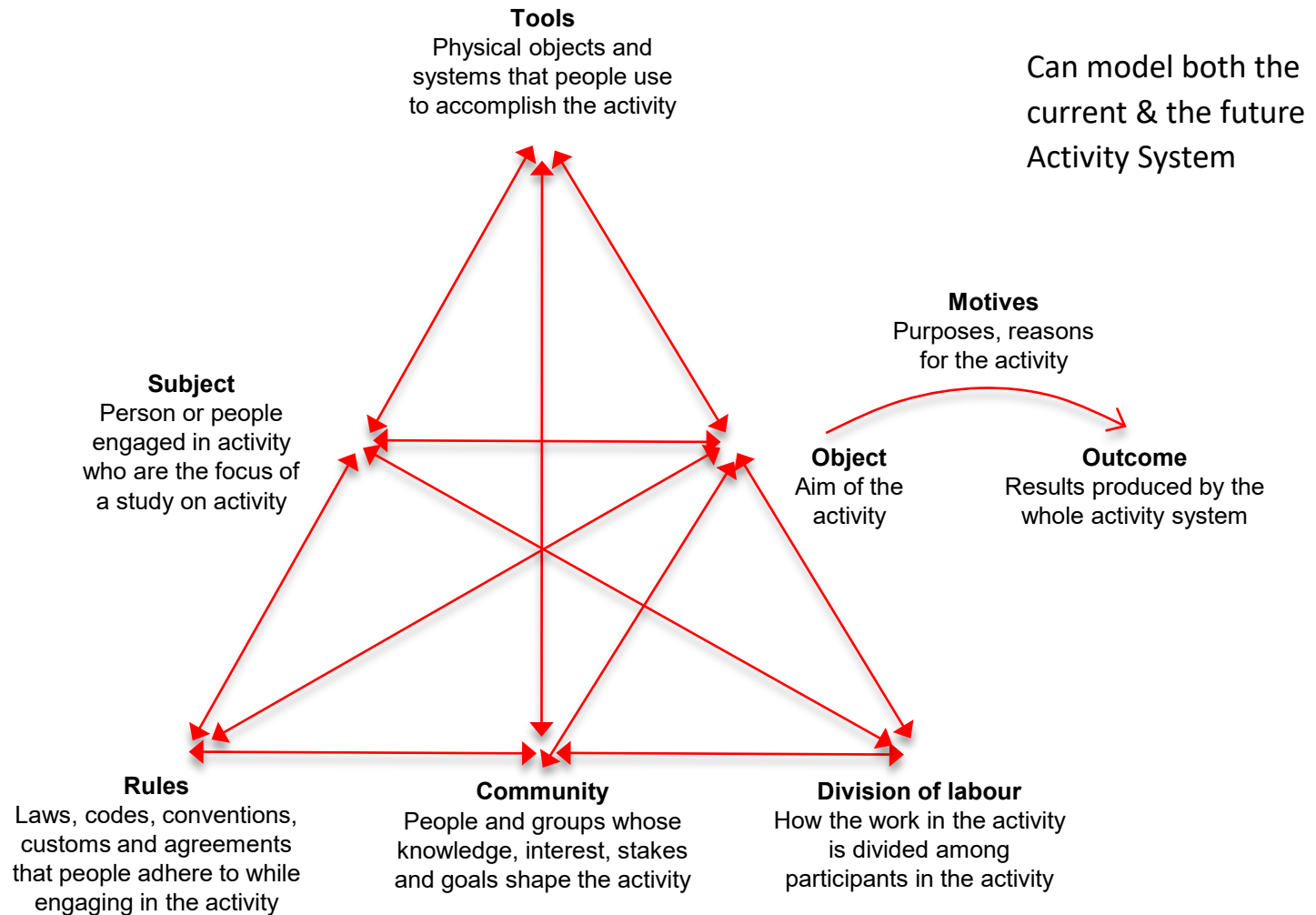
Many interventions direct educators to generic training & development resources involving self-paced, independent study. Reduces potential to connect online educators in a learning community

On-campus delivery of PD initiatives arguably unsuitable for educators working entirely online who are often geographically dispersed without access to a physical space

Task 1:   Step 1 in the Expansive Learning Cycle: Questioning

- What sparked your interest in exploring the topic of professional development for online educators in this Change Lab?

- What would you like to gain from your time in this Change Lab?

- Are there elements of the mirror data that resonate with your own experience of professional development as an online educator? If so, which?

- Can you share a concrete example of your experience of professional development as an online educator?

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Task 2:   Plotting the Activity System(s) Model

- What works well with regard to your professional development as an online educator?

- Where do you see the main tensions in your role & institution with regard to your professional development as an online educator?

Personal reflection – 5-10 mins
Group discussion – 10-15 mins

Task 3:   Step 6: Reflection on the CL intervention

- How did you find this CL experience?

- What was helpful/worked well?

- What was less helpful/worked less well?

- How did you find the online process?

Next Steps & Questions

- add outputs from scribe to Googledrive folder for sharing
- reflection on session & next session (analysis)
- if you wish (not compulsory) – keep notes of any thoughts/reflections that come to mind before the next session
- date of next session: 24 Nov 2020, 10am-12 noon

References

- Engestrom, Y. (1987). Learning by Expanding: An Activity Theoretical Approach to Developmental Research. Helsinki, Finland: Orienta-Konsultit.

- http://lchc.ucsd.edu/mca/Paper/Engestrom/Learning-by-Expanding.pdf

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- Englund, C. (2018). Exploring interdisciplinary academic development: the Change Laboratory as an approach to team-based practice. Higher Education Research & Development, 37(4), p701

- Santally, M. I., Cooshna-Naik, D., & Conruyt, N. (2014). A model for the transformation of the Mauritian classroom based on the Living Lab concept. In 2014 IST-Africa Conference Proceedings (pp. 1-10). IEEE. DOI: 10.1109/ISTAFRICA.2014.688060

- Virkkunen, J. & Newnham, C. S. (2013). The Change Laboratory: A tool for collaborative development of work and education. Sense Publishers. Rotterdam

Thank You

Any Questions:

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