

# My position on connectivism

Paper 1, CCK09 course  
Cindy De Smet  
23 October 2009

My view on connectivism and my position towards it still changes every day, as I keep on discovering new and interesting ideas. This paper represents only a short moment in time and is not a definitive statement.

## What is connectivism?

*“Connectivism is the application of network principles to define both knowledge and the process of learning. Knowledge is defined as a particular pattern of relationships and learning is defined as the creation of new connections and patterns as well as the ability to manoeuvre around existing networks/patterns”*(Siemens, 2008).

Siemens (2009) suggests that in order to understand learning we need to understand how and why connections are formed. He further states that *“connections are formed at various levels: neural, cognitive/conceptual, and social”*.

I do not want to talk about connectivism in a physical or biological sense, as I do not feel comfortable enough with the subject to do so. But I do have some thoughts on the conceptual and social level.

I would like to discuss the important role of technology and connections, networks and organisations (context) in our daily lives. These two components alone justify considering connectivism as a new starting point. It is clear that many more factors could be taken into consideration, but that would bring me too far from the scope of this assignment. I will also address three outstanding questions concerning connectivism.

## Technology

Technology is one of those important trends, if not the most important one, that brings up new challenges in society. Educators encounter how technology is changing our knowledge and the way we learn. This also results in the way we (should) teach. For example: is it still important that we learn our children useless figures and facts that can be Googled in a few seconds? Or is it more important to learn our children how they can find trustworthy information and interpret this?

Technology not only changes the way we act on knowledge, but also how we interact with others. Not so long ago interaction was geographically limited. Knowledge was transferred from the teacher in front of the class to the students, from parents to their children etc. Today the world is a global village. Forming social connections can not be considered something new, but the internet gives us the possibility to form connections just anytime, anywhere and with anyone. Especially the internet with its Web2.0 and social tools, and the semantic evolutions with regard to search engines, help us to connect and learn in total different ways.

## Context

Another aspect in favour of connectivism is the place where learning occurs. *“A central tenet of most learning theories is that learning occurs inside a person... These theories do not address learning that occurs outside of people (i.e. learning that is stored and manipulated by technology). They also fail to describe how learning happens within organizations”* (Siemens, 2004).

Knowledge is not restricted anymore and in possession of the happy few. Knowledge is out there, on the net and in our network. Learning should not be viewed as a linear process between persons, but as a process of forming and handling infinite connections. *“Chaos is the new reality* (Siemens 2004)“.

## Questions

Is connectivism, based on new perspectives like technology and context, a new theory of learning?

I am not sure connectivism should be considered as a new theory or as an updated view on learning (what are the conditions that need to be fulfilled to talk about a new theory?), but it definitely addresses some new trends in society that we need to adapt to and it forces us to rethink knowledge and learning. There is no way back and we need to focus on them as they are the new reality.

How do technology and networks influence the way I learn?

Let me start with myself and the learning part, and interpret the impact of technology and context on my own learning process. I follow more than 200 blogs via Google Reader and I learn via conversations on my own blogs (smetty.be, drsmetty.com and edublogs.be), the biweekly podcast I participate in and 2 Twitter accounts. Of course learning still happens through conversations with colleagues and students, by reading books and papers (just to name a few things), but the most important facilitator is definitely technology. Technology changed the way I receive and transfer knowledge and the way I learn. The connections I form and nourish with other people are crucial for my learning process.

I consider it easy and I feel very comfortable to learn this way. But this totally changed once I started participating in the Massive Open Online Course CCK09. The CCK09 instructors and participants differ almost for 99% from my traditional network. This means I had to find my way in a new subject and I had to form new connections. As the course is open and connections are not imposed, the responsibility has been given to the learner. But what was my initial feeling of the course? Let me describe it with a metaphor: it felt like a novice diver been thrown into water with huge waves. In the beginning I had to struggle, but once I got my breathing under control, I was able to go down and explore all the beauty below the surface.

My conclusion on the way I learn is that creating my network was a gradual and spontaneous process, but it was difficult in a totally new environment (CCK09) I couldn't control.

How can the connectivism theory influence the way we teach?

I wonder how we, as teachers, need to tackle learning within a network. There are a few questions that come into my mind. A network will have to be diverse, so will teaching become something that happens almost always outside the classroom doors? Will students choose and connect to networks as they progress in their own learning process? And when do you start to learn via a network? Should we follow Steven Verjans (2009) who considers learning theories as learning modes who are all related to different stages in human life? More questions than answers. There is definitely a need for net pedagogy.

## **Conclusion**

Our world is changing at an incredible speed. We will have to adapt ourselves and learn our students new skills to survive comfortably in this new world. Connectivism is definitely an asset to conquer the new challenges we face.

## **References**

Downes, S. (2006). Learning Networks and Connective Knowledge. <http://it.coe.uga.edu/itforum/paper92/paper92.html> [viewed 17-10-2009]

Downes, S. (2007). What connectivism is. <http://halfanhosur.blogspot.com/2007/02/what-connectivism-is.html> [viewed 09-10-2009]

Mackness, J., Mak, S.F.J., Williams, R. (2009). The Ideals and Reality of Participating in a MOOC. Not finalised conference paper <http://cck2009.ning.com/forum/topics/research-papers-on-cck08> [viewed 12-10-2009]

Siemens, G. (2004). Connectivism: A Learning Theory for the Digital Age. <http://www.elearnspace.org/Articles/connectivism.htm> [viewed 01-10-2009]

Siemens, G. (2008). What is the unique idea in Connectivism. <http://www.connectivism.ca/?p=116> [viewed 19-10-2009]

Siemens, G. (2009). Comparing connectivism with other learning theories. [http://docs.google.com/Doc?id=anw8wkk6fjc\\_14gpbqc2dt](http://docs.google.com/Doc?id=anw8wkk6fjc_14gpbqc2dt) [viewed 22-09-2009]

Verjans, S. (2009). Connectivism as one learning mode amongst others. <http://stievie.blogspot.com/2009/09/connectivism-as-one-learning-mode.html> [viewed 23-09-2009]

## **About**

Cindy De Smet (smetty) is currently working as lecturer media at the Ghent University College, Faculty of Teacher Training, and Ph.D. student at Ghent University, Department of Education.

Conversations: drsmetty.com (Eng), smetty.be and edublogs.be (Dutch), drsmetty (Twitter)