

Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](#)

Learning, Culture and Social Interaction

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/lcsi

Full length article

Learning in parking lots: Affinity spaces as a framework for understanding knowledge construction in informal settings

Anthony D. Neely*, Vittorio Marone

University of Texas at San Antonio, Department of Interdisciplinary Learning and Teaching, 1 UTSA Circle, San Antonio, TX 78249, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 19 November 2015

Received in revised form 1 April 2016

Accepted 8 May 2016

Available online xxxx

Keywords:

Affinity space

Fandom

Social learning

Situated learning

Informal learning

Interdisciplinary

ABSTRACT

Before, during, and after concerts, fans of The Grateful Dead, Phish, Widespread Panic, and other improvisation-oriented jam bands, gather in venues' parking lots to share experiences, debate band related lore, buy and sell fan made goods, listen to music, and participate in numerous other scene-related activities. The interaction within these spaces, and with these spaces, fosters the social construction of knowledge, language, skills, norms, behaviors, and identities. By applying Gee's construct of "affinity space," this article analyzes the different trajectories to learning and participation associated with one the most influential fandoms in the United States. The conceptualization of parking lots as affinity spaces sheds lights on informal learning practices experienced in physical settings that transcend the affordances offered by virtual communities, social media, and, more broadly, computer-mediated communication. Focusing on situated learning endeavors enacted in jam band parking lots in relation to formal educational practices, this study advocates for a renewed and joined approach to education and fandom studies through a sociocultural lens.

© 2016 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

The aim of this article is to conceptually explore a form of physical affinity space (jam band parking lots) through the dimension of learning. Gee's framework of "affinity space" (Gee, 2004) is proposed as a conceptual and practical tool to make sense of affinity-driven interactions and social learning in jam band parking lots. These contexts have previously been studied from the perspectives of business and social psychology, but there is a lack of interdisciplinary studies examining what kind of learning occurs in such environments and how this takes place. The goal of the article is to suggest new venues for research on virtual and physical affinity spaces, and how they can be analyzed and compared through insights from rarely considered interdisciplinary perspectives of fandom studies, popular culture research, and learning sciences. More broadly, the purpose of this article is to find tools for understanding informal learning in physical affinity spaces and contribute to the agenda for future studies of informal learning environments.

2. Jam band parking lots

Before, during, and after concerts, fans of The Grateful Dead, their associated acts (e.g., Furthur, Phil & Friends, Ratdog), Phish, Widespread Panic, and other jam bands (musical groups that blend different styles and include extended improvisations, or "jams," in their live performances), flock to venues' parking lots to share experiences, construct fantasy set lists, debate band related lore, buy and sell fan-made goods, listen to music, and participate in numerous other communal activities (Hunt, 2008). This

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: anthonydneely@gmail.com (A.D. Neely), vittorio.marone@utsa.edu (V. Marone).

tradition, characterized by a carnivalesque and bazaar-like atmosphere, was popularized by Deadheads (i.e., fans of The Grateful Dead) in the mid-1960s, and has become a seminal ritual within jam band fan culture (Hunt, 2008; Pattacini, 2000).

Although the relationship between jam band fan culture and parking lots has previously been examined from academic lenses such as business (Sheptoski, 2000) and social psychology (Hunt, 2008), this paper provides a novel interdisciplinary framework that connects fandom studies, popular culture research, and learning sciences. Specifically, this study conceptualizes jam band parking lots as physical affinity spaces, or sites in which people who share a common interest participate in informal social and learning activities (Gee, 2004; Lammers, Curwood, & Magnifico, 2012). The paper draws on Gee's framework of affinity spaces, educational research, and the authors' experiences as teachers and participants in tens of jam band concerts and related parking lots gatherings (one of the authors).

3. Learning as situated participation

In their typology of learning, Alexander, Schallert, and Reynolds (2009) propose learning does not occur in a vacuum, but rather is a social endeavor in which “learners are influenced by, and at the same time push back, take from, change, control, and create the environment in which learning is situated” (p. 180). This view poses teaching and learning within a situated, constructivist, and socio-cultural framework. Socioculturalism is a theory and philosophical approach to learning influenced by the work of Lev S. Vygotsky (1978) that posits knowledge, skills, and abilities are constructed through social interactions with others. This framework holds that learning is optimized when a novice learner interacts with a more knowledgeable peer, or a person who possesses more advanced knowledge and skills. Learning, therefore, is not intended merely as the processing and acquisition of information, but rather as an identity-formation process in which the individual explores and discovers the world by means of social interaction and appropriation of meaning-making practices, signs, and tools of any given culture (Bruner, 1996; Smagorinsky, 2013; Vygotsky, 1978). In this sense, learning can be better understood as a situated and active form of participation shaped by the interactions among learners and the context of learning (Anderson, Reder, & Simon, 1996; Cobb & Bowers, 1999; Jenkins, Purushotma, Weigel, Clinton, & Robison, 2009; Sfard, 1998).

According to Eshach (2007), learning can occur in three modes: formal, non-formal, and informal. Formal learning refers to a transmission of knowledge based around an established curriculum with defined objectives in which learning is measured through set, often quantitative, means. The traditional compulsory school setting is the most salient example of formal learning. In this context, a teacher helps students develop specific knowledge, skills, and abilities that align with a pre-determined curriculum with measured outcomes.

Non-formal learning is a “planned but highly adaptable” (Eshach, 2007, p. 173) endeavor that takes place in institutions and organizations outside of traditional school settings. An example of non-formal learning is attending a song writing workshop organized by a local church. In this setting, learning activities and presentations are designed by a more knowledgeable other (e.g., an expert lyricist); however, there is no formal assessment of attendees' learning or mastery of objectives.

Informal learning refers to the unstructured and often learner-guided construction of knowledge that can occur anywhere and at any time (Eshach, 2007). In informal learning settings, no formal curricula are implemented or followed. Learning objectives and activities are voluntarily established by each individual learner. Further, learning in such environments involves the use of shared cognition, tool manipulation, contextualized reasoning, and situation-specific competencies, as opposed to individual cognition, pure mentation, symbol manipulation, and generalized learning, which are typical of formal learning settings such as school (Resnick, 1987).

While they can occur independently as poles on a learning continuum, these three forms of learning often overlap (i.e., occur simultaneously) in one's education (Folkestad, 2006). One such example that demonstrates this intersecting relationship is learning to play a musical instrument. While classically trained musicians pursue formal education in conservatories or private lessons (i.e., formal learning) most who also play popular music further hone their craft through more informal means such as improvisational jamming with friends or figuring out riffs by repeatedly playing along with their favorite albums (Green, 2002). In her study exploring the relationship between formal and informal learning in music education, Green (2008) contends an informal approach to learning a musical instrument helps young musicians build strong bonds with others by practicing and writing songs together, learn to play multiple genres of music (e.g., rock, country, funk), and expand their abilities to critique music. Green (2008) also contends students who develop their musicianship via informal means tend to demonstrate a deep passion for music, internal motivation to practice, and high levels of enjoyment. Likewise, formal training has external influences (e.g., parents, instructors) who encourage rehearsal, proper technique, and hold young musicians accountable for expanding their knowledge, skills, and abilities through proficiency and theory exams, and recitals (Folkestad, 2006; Green, 2008). Attending a song writing workshop was presented above as an example of non-formal learning in expanding musical aptitude. The present paper primarily discusses formal and informal learning environments.

One instance of informal learning in social environments is the participation within communities of practice, in which members with different levels of expertise and experience learn from each other by sharing competences and negotiating meanings (Lave & Wenger, 1991). While the construct of “community of practice” has well served the understanding and conceptualization of informal learning practices in professional settings, the related framework of “affinity space” was introduced by Gee (2004, 2005) in order to make sense of interest-driven social environments in which participants engage in passionate, self-directed, and intrinsically motivating activities. According to Gee (2005), the framework of communities of practice can be problematic outside professional or formal learning contexts. First, the idea of “community” recalls notions of belonging and personal ties among people. Second, being part of a community requires some kind of “membership,” which is a term too vague to describe different,

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/4939895>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/4939895>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)