Adding Person-Centered Goals to Idea-Centered Knowledge Building Communities: A Conceptual Framework, Design Insights, and Speculations about Learning

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Research Summary

This research seeks to elucidate the relationship between the way people (a) learn about knowledge building; (b) learn how to build knowledge; and (c) learn about themselves as knowledge builders. Based on the assumption that transformative learning involves an interplay between a person's knowing, doing, and being (Herrenkohl & Mertl, 2010), this research takes a holistic perspective and, in so doing, explicitly attends to all three within the design of a knowledge building community (KBC).

Theoretical Contribution

The theoretical contribution of this research is that it expands upon the notion of *KBCs as idea-centered* by considering person-centeredness as a complementary foci. KBCs have consistently been conceptualized as idea-centered (Bielaczyc, Kapur & Collins, 2013; Scardamalia & Bereiter, 2014), despite the humanistic threads that run through the theory, such as the community-growth, multiple-ways-to-participate, and democratizing knowledge principles (Bielaczyc & Collins, 1999; Zhang, Hong, Scardamalia, Teo, & Morley, 2011). This research argues that thinking of principles such as these as the person-centered aspects of KBCs offers new insights on the learning mechanisms involved, as well as how to best design for them (Hod & Ben-Zvi, under review).

Idea- and person-centeredness can be distinguished based on their respective goals, their theorized mechanisms of learning, and paragon designed activities. Idea-centeredness has a commitment of advancing collective knowledge. Participants learn as they enculturate the practices of the knowledge building community which is modelled after the way advanced knowledge building enterprises function (Zhang, Scardamalia, Reeve, & Messina, 2009). KBCs in classrooms are thus a paragon model of idea-centeredness. Conversely, person-centeredness has the goal of helping individuals within a learning community reach their highest potentials. This is based on humanistic goals and commitments of learning (Rogers, 1969). The mechanisms of change involve reflection based on participants' interpersonal relationships, which "appears to be one of the most central, intense, and change-producing aspects of group experience" (Rogers, 1970, p. 33). The encounter group is the paragon activity of person-centeredness. In both KBCs and encounter groups, participants bring their previous knowledge, experiences, and selves (there-and-then) into the new learning situations (here-and-now). The idea-centered focus on advancing knowledge through collective experience complements the person-centered focus on self-change through interpersonal experience (Figure 1).
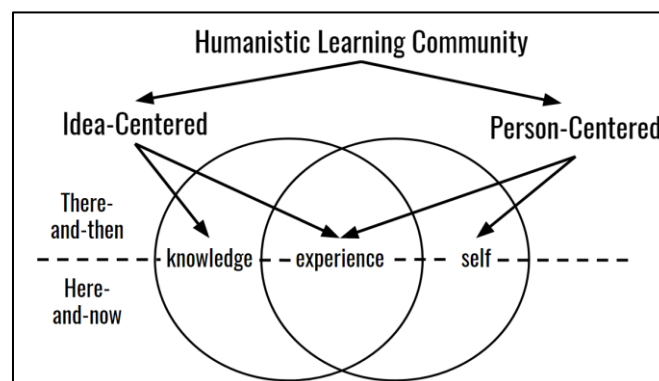

Figure 1. Learning in an integrated idea- and person-centered design (Humanistic Learning Community)

Design Implications

The design implications of a dual idea- and person-centered foci on KBCs are intricate. This requires designing activities that aim to advance community knowledge, as well as the personal growth of the participants. Whereas typical epistemic activities involve introducing new information, building-on others' ideas, or rising-above a group of ideas, person-centered activities focus on personal reflection of the self within the here-and-now of the KBC. The

social aspects of the community serve both the collective idea advancements as well as the search for full and meaningful participation of the KBC participants.

To illustrate, Figure 2 shows two spaces that play complementary roles within the KF in a graduate-level course designed as a KBC. On the left, students enter into a community page with links to their own personal views. These personal views provide students with the opportunity to reflect on their own learning and discuss themselves and the community with their peers. On the right, a view designed for students to advance their collective knowledge on a topic is divided into a discussion and knowledge space. In the former person-centered space, community members discuss how to build knowledge together. This is important as the challenges that arise serve as a basis for discussion on knowledge building norms that the students can then have. In the latter, community members actually build their knowledge.
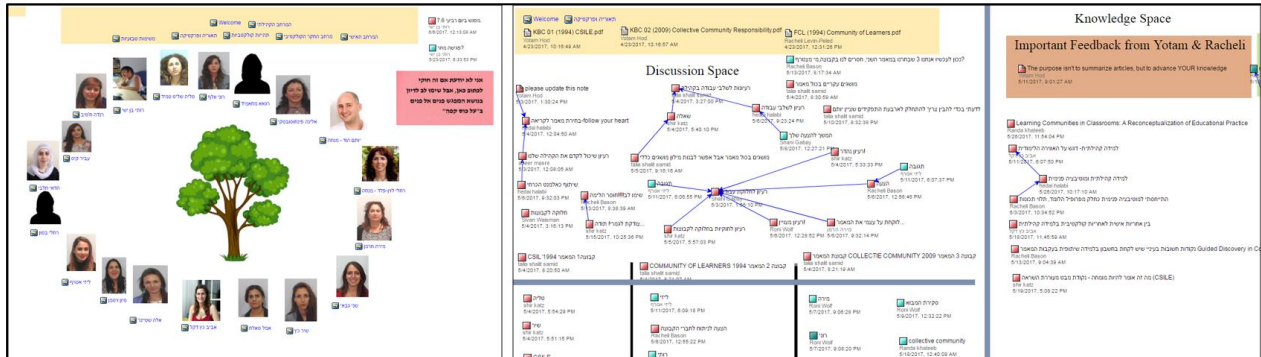

Figure 2. Person- and idea-centered views within the Knowledge Forum

Research Progress

This research is in an early phase. Progress-to-date has involved designing and enacting two consecutive graduate courses as KBCs that have integrated person-centered goals and activities. Likewise, a conceptual framework to examine the learning mechanisms within such designs has been recently articulated and tested (Hod & Ben-Zvi, under review), but not yet applied to KBCs. The knowledge-experience-self (KES) framework shows the different ways that learners connect prior knowledge, experience, and self with these three dimensions in the current knowledge building community. Using micro-genetic methods, we have found that transformational cases of learning involved active construction knowledge that span these three dimensions in the there-and-then and here-and-now. Similarly, Hod and Ben-Zvi found unique patterns of learning, such as students re-interpreting past learning experiences based on new knowledge, experiences, and reflection on self.

In summary, this poster describes a conceptual framework that explains the learning mechanisms involved in idea- and person-centered designs, and the theoretical and design advances made on KBCs based on this framework. Together, these lead to speculations as to the way people advance knowledge about building knowledge, develop knowledge building practices, and become knowledge builders – and the relationship between these.

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