Knud Illeris’s three-dimensional learning theory in CROSSLIFE

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Abstract

The human mind is the most complex machine on Earth. It is the source of all thought and behavior and also the site of our consciousness, allowing us to think, learn and create. The human body on the other hand is no less a simpler structure. It comprises organs, muscles, skeletons that make up our complex human body mechanics. In combination, the human mind and body have exclusively given us ‘some quite special learning possibilities that no other species has’ (Illeris, 2007). It is the purpose of this research paper to emphasize that because learning is such a ‘treasure within’ the human being, it is important for us in general and for educationists in particular to know how to identify, recognize, evaluate, and create good learning situations that could meet increasing learning demands posed by modern society and to function effectively as a human within it. To achieve this aim, the paper will explore how to evaluate a learning situation by using Knud Illeris’ three dimensions of learning theory in a practical case study named CROSSLIFE. In part 1, I will give a basic understanding of the concept of learning and the importance of recognizing learning situations in today’s societies as background information. In Part 2, I will introduce Knud Illeris’ three dimensions of learning as a theoretical framework for further analysis of a learning situation: CROSSLIFE - a specific learning program which I recently participated. Within this theoretical framework, I will then examine how this learning theory can be applied to evaluate the various learning dimensions in CROSSLIFE. Finally, the paper will summarize some research finding and raise question on Knud Illeris’ three-dimension learning model as a theoretical tool in understanding learning situations.
The problem encountered

November 2007, a group of five students from the European Masters of Lifelong Learning program returned from a one-week workshop called CROSSLIFE, feeling confused about its learning outcomes and processes. Something is wrong. We were uncertain of what we actually learned and whether or not we should continue with this learning program. What really went wrong? How do we identify where the learning problem is and analyze this learning situation scientifically and in a structured manner to avoid it from happening again in our future workshops? Is there a tool that we can use in cases like this? At this point, Knud Illeris’ thesis seems to offer an answer to those questions:

The fundamental thesis of this book [How we learn] is that all learning involves these three dimensions [the content, the incentive, and the social and societal dimension] which must be always considered if an understanding or analysis of a learning situation is to be adequate. (Illeris, 2007)

Introduction

This paper is my experiment with Knud Illeris’ three-dimension learning theory in the CROSSLIFE - a learning situation I have mentioned above. The purpose of this research paper is twofold: By applying Knud Illeris’ three-dimension learning theory into a practical case study named CROSSLIFE, I seek to understand the dimensions of learning involved and to identify in which learning dimension our learning problems lie. In doing so, I will structure the paper into three main parts:

In part 1, I will examine the learning concept, the importance of learning at the individual level and the socio-economic level at large, and its implications for understanding and creating good learning situations.

Against this background, I will move on to Part 2 to develop a theoretical framework based on Knud Illeris’ three-dimension learning theory in order to analyze the CROSSLIFE learning situation.

In part 3, I will discuss my reflections and questions relating to the three dimensions of learning in CROSSLIFE. Are there more dimensions to learning? Is there any other learning theory which can serve as an analysis tool to an understanding of learning situations? To do this, I will rely on another internationally renowned expert in the field of learning - Peter Jarvis and his ‘holistic approach on learning’ in order to see CROSSLIFE from another perspective. Next, I will zoom out and contrast it with Knud Illeris’ three-dimension learning theory to have a fuller understanding of CROSSLIFE learning situation.

Finally, I will draw conclusion on my research findings, point out some limitations in using learning models to analyze learning, and give some reflections on my early attempt in understanding learning.

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1 CROSSLIFE is a cross-cultural learning and collaboration pilot project organized by 6 universities (Zurich, Switzerland; Tempere, Finland; DPU, Denmark). Detailed information on CROSSLIFE can be found in Part II of this paper.
PART 1: LEARNING, ITS IMPORTANCE AND IMPLICATIONS FOR LEARNING ABOUT LEARNING

1.1 What is learning?

Within 0.21 second, Google produced a search result of 3,740,000 websites that has learning definitions. I will hereby quote the top 5 definitions on the search result list:

- The cognitive process of acquiring skill or knowledge; For example: "the child's acquisition of language".
- Learning is the acquisition and development of memories and behaviors, including skills, knowledge, understanding, values, and wisdom. It is the goal of education, and the product of experience.
- The acquisition of knowledge or skill. It occurs in, and may lead to changes in, the brain.
- The process of acquiring knowledge, attitudes, or skills from study, instruction, or experience. Source: Miller & Findlay 1996, p.167 (2) the knowledge, attitudes, or skills acquired.
- An exercise of constructing personal knowledge that requires the learner to be mentally active rather than passive; interpreting rather than recording information.

Acquisition or acquire is the key word that runs through four out of five definitions listed above. However, learning is not just only an acquisition of knowledge as commonly perceived. Knud Illeris, in his recent book ‘How we learn’ (2007:3) maintained that learning is a very complex and multidisciplinary matter that includes “any process in living organisms that leads to permanent capacity change and which is not solely due to biological maturation or aging”. He also explained that learning involves two different processes. One is the ‘interaction between the individual and his or her environment’. Second is the ‘acquisition process which takes place inside the individual learner’. These two processes when put together will form the three dimensions of learning: the content, the incentive dimensions which have to do with the individual acquisition process; and the social and society dimension which has to with the interaction process between the individual and the environment. But let us not go into details what the three dimensions of learning are at this stage. Rather, we should turn to another learning theorist to have a wider view of what learning is.

In Towards a Comprehensive Theory of Human Learning, Peter Jarvis, considered to be an internationally renowned expert in the field of adult learning and continued education, gives another definition on human learning – which he claims that he perhaps never fully understands. I will now quote in full:

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2 Google search conducted on December 21st, 2007.
3 wordnet.princeton.edu/perl/webwn
4 en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Learning
5 science-education.nih.gov/supplements/nih4/self/other/glossary.htm
6 www.dest.gov.au/sectors/training_skills/policy_issues_reviews/key_issues/nts/glo/ftol.htm
7 www.maine.gov/education/highered/Glossary/Glossary.htm
Human learning is the combination of processes whereby the whole person - body (genetic, physical and biological) and mind (knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, emotions, beliefs and senses) - experiences a social situation, the perceived content of which is then transformed cognitively, emotively or practically (or through any combination) and integrated into the person’s individual biography resulting in a changed (or more experienced) person. (Jarvis, 2006, p. 13)

He then pointed out five elements in the above definition on human learning: the person-in-the-world, the person experiencing the world; transforming the content of the experience; transforming the person experiencing the world; and the changed person in the world. Without going too much into details of these five elements we can still see a common pattern in both definitions of learning by Peter Jarvis and Knud Illeris. That is:

Learning is a very complex process. It is difficult to grasp a comprehensive understanding of learning. Yet, it contains at least four major elements:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements in learning</th>
<th>Knud Illeris</th>
<th>Peter Jarvis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The learner</td>
<td>The individual</td>
<td>The whole person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The learning process</td>
<td>Via the mental acquisition and interaction processes</td>
<td>Via experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The learning content</td>
<td>Capacity change</td>
<td>Changed person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The learning context</td>
<td>Society and social environment</td>
<td>The world</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In sum, there are numerous definitions on learning and in order for one to grasp a basic definition of human learning; one should take into consideration the four elements: There is a person who goes through a process to acquire some content occurred in some context.

1.2 Why is learning important?

There is a voluminous literature on the importance of learning by many organizations and authors. To avoid myself from spreading too far beyond the scope of my research, I will confine my findings on this matter into two categories: (1) the importance of learning at the individual level and (2) learning as a means to socio-economic growth at large.

1.2.1 Learning is a treasure within human

On the significance of human learning, Jarvis (2006:3) stated:

The processes of learning are a fundamental stimulus for life itself and without it the human body could never transcend its biological state, nor could the individual function effectively in the wider society. It is essential to our humanity and, in fact, it is an existential process.
His main argument throughout the book maintains that learning lies at the heart of our humanity - it is a driving force in human existence, for human change through which the human essence emerges and is nurtured (Jarvis, 2006, p. 5). In addition, as mentioned at the outset, the human body and mind is the most complex machine on earth that allows us to exercise the greatest learning capacity possible. Furthermore, human possesses talents which are like ‘hidden treasures’ and it is argued in a UNESCO report that none of these talents should be left untapped and must be realized to the fullest potential (Delors, 1996). And it is only through learning that this objective can be achieved. Hence, not to learn is not to realize and to waste our humanity nature and talents. The cost of which is too high for both the individual and the society at large.

1.2.2 Human and Social Capital are Keys to Well-Being and Economic Growth

In 1776, Adam Smith - a pioneering political economist - published an influential book, *The Wealth of Nations*. In it, he argues that the causes of improvements lie on three pillars: labor, land and capital. More than 200 years later, the principle still holds true. In 2001, the OCED published *The Well-Being of Nations: the Role of Human and Social Capital*, which identifies a clear economic pay-off from investment in education and training. This report reveals that one extra year of education leads in the long run to an increase in an individual’s output per capita of between 4 and 7 per cent in OECD countries. Education also has non-economic benefits such as higher civic participation, volunteering and charity giving and a reduction in the risk of criminal activity. Improvements in educational attainment are often carried forward from one generation to the next. Education often correlates, too, with improved levels of health and personal happiness. In short, education contributes not only to the wealth but also to the well-being of nations. (OECD, 2001)

1.2.3 Implications for learning about learning

The fact that learning and education play such a significant role to individual and socio-economic development implies that learning about learning is and will continue to be a crucial social humanity subject. This paper is regarded as one of my early attempts in my lifelong human learning project.

The above section has dealt extensively with learning definitions, its importance and implications for understanding learning situations. This mainly serves as background information for my study on understanding CROSSLIFE learning situation via Knud Illeris’ three-dimension learning theory.

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2  PART 2: KNUD ILLERIS’ THREE DIMENSIONS OF LEARNING IN CROSSLIFE

2.1  Theory: Illeris’ three dimensions of learning

2.1.1  Dimension 1: The content dimension of learning

In its shortest form, the content dimension of learning is about what is learned. Knowledge, skills, and attitudes are three conventional key words often referred to under this content dimension and they are very important aspects of learning content. However, Illeris stresses that the content dimension should be seen in a broader perspective. First of all, it also involves other aspects such as understanding, meaning, coherence and overview. This is because the human as a learner doesn’t simply stop at acquiring knowledge and skills, he or she will try to create meaning and understanding out of learning situations encountered. The understanding of the culture and social contexts in which the learner interacts also falls under this learning content. Lastly, self-knowledge, which is the understanding of oneself, one’s strengths and weaknesses, etc., is another crucial component in the learning content as it lays the foundation on which the learner develops his or her capacity to function appropriately in various contexts. (Illeris, 2007, pp. 25, 73, 74)

2.1.2  Dimension 2: The incentive dimension of learning

Learning’s incentive dimension concerns key terms such as: motivation, emotions, and volition. These are the ‘powerhouses’ for the learner to mobilize energy which drives learning processes. The incentive dimension is important and integrated in all learning situations. In fact, it is closely inter-related with the content dimension and these two dimensions are usually activated simultaneously by impulses sparked by interaction between the learner and the learning environment. To put it more vividly, the amount of the learning content depends on the ‘energy’ fuelled by the incentive dimension and similarly, a new understanding or an improved skill can inspire or alter the learner’s old emotional and motivational patterns. With this argument, Illeris combines the two dimensions in one double arrow and place it horizontally on top. See Figure 1 below. (Illeris, 2007, pp. 27, 73, 95)

2.1.3  Dimension 3: The interaction dimension of learning

Learning doesn’t happen in a vacuum. Instead, learning is always situated in a concrete social and societal context or a certain learning space. This interaction dimension has two levels: 1) the close social level in which the learner interacts directly with. For example: learning that takes place in a classroom or a working group. 2) the general societal level that establishes the premises for the interaction and is more influenced by the norms and structures of the society. Thus, learning reflects the social and societal conditions in which the learner can interact with. The form of interactions ranges from its simplest to more engaged forms such as perception, transmission, experience, imitation, participation. Key words grouped under this interaction dimension are action, communication, cooperation. (Illeris, 2007, pp. 27, 100, 122)
Having presented the three dimensions of learning independently, it is now useful to see how the three dimensions of learning are coming together in graphically illustrated model.

![Diagram of the three dimensions of learning](Figure 1: The three dimensions of learning)

As shown in this model, the vertical double arrow presents the external interaction process between the learner and the learning environment. The learning environment, which is the general basis, is placed at the bottom. The individual, who is the specific learner, is placed on top.

The internal acquisition process of learning is represented by the horizontal double arrow. Because there is an integrated interplay between the two content and incentive dimensions in any learning, thus the double arrow of the acquisition process is placed horizontally at the top of the interaction process and between the poles of content and incentive.

Finally, the triangle is placed inside a circle which represents the social and societal conditions where learning takes place.

In this section, I have summarized basic ideas on Knud Illeris’ three-dimension learning theory and presented it in a model. As pointed out by its author in his keynote speech at the 29th Congress in Stockholm (March 15-18, 2001), “the basic function of the model is to create an overview of the main features involved in the process of learning.”

This model can also be used as:

A sort of map or memorandum, showing what it is necessary to take into consideration when dealing with questions of learning. For instance when analyzing or evaluating an educational course or a learning process, examining what happened, what was good and bad, and perhaps how it could be improved, the model can ensure that attention is paid to all the elements involved seen from a
learning point of view. This also applies when educational measures are planned and practiced.

To test the validity of this claim, I will now start examining the practical learning program CROSSLIFE using the above theoretical framework and model.

2.2 Practice: Examining three dimensions of learning in CROSSLIFE

2.2.1 Briefings on CROSSLIFE

CROSSLIFE stands for cross-cultural collaboration in lifelong learning and work. It is a pilot study program that runs in approximately 18 months during the period of 2007-08, funded by the Erasmus Curriculum Development Program with the following aims:

1. To support students develop cross-national knowledge, skills and networks to enhance their understanding and capacity to work in globally interconnected lifelong learning
2. To build a partnership between universities active in research in lifelong learning and work
3. To build knowledge about cross-national lifelong learning and work
4. To develop a Master and PhD program of studies under VET & Culture

There are six universities involved in this project:

- Malta University in Malta
- Tampere University in Finland
- London University, Institute of Education in UK
- Zurich University in Switzerland
- Aarhus University, School of Education (DPU) in Denmark
- Monash University in Australia

2.2.2 The content dimension in CROSSLIFE: What we learn

The study-program, as described on CROSSLIFE website, consists of three thematic components and a final report/dissertation. The themes are:

1. Methodological challenges of cross-cultural collaboration in education, work and research
2. Theoretical challenges in conceptualizing cross-cultural collaboration in education, work and research
3. Challenges from politically integrating and economically globalizing world for education, work and research

10 http://www.ped.gu.se/projekt/nfpf/nfpfkongress01/illeristhethree.html (Date of retrieved: December 21, 2007)
11 VET & Culture Network is a voluntary association of senior and junior researchers and students, who wish to practice cross-cultural, independent and critical research, debate and academic teaching about relations between education, work and politics, with special focus on vocational education & training (VET) and adult education.
These themes are reflected in CROSSLIFE’s 5-step learning pathway in Figure 2 below:

**Step 1: Preparation**

**Step 2: Workshop 1: London - Travelling ideas**

Examining the way ideas are travelling globally today in the form of global policies; globally distributed books, websites, media images and stories, regulatory requirements (e.g. Quality manuals); global language practices and global-English; and globally mobile bodies (people) refugees, migrants, tourists, policy elites.

**Step 3: Workshop 2: Tampere - Disturbing work**

Examining the way occupational orders are being reconfigured so that everyday work practices and working lives are disturbed, experienced as disturbing, and how these challenges and contradictions in working life prompt individual and collective agency - a practical politics of working life.

**Step 4: Workshop 3: Malta - Cross-cultural learning and pedagogies**

Examining the way global interconnectedness, increased mobility of ideas and people, and reconfigurations of working lives require us to research and teach in new ways which address cultural difference, different ways of knowing and support productive cross-cultural relationships.

**Step 5: Finalization**

To sum up the main learning contents in CROSSLIFE, I’ve used major keywords such as understanding, knowledge, skills, attitudes, etc. grouped under the content dimension of learning in Knud Illeris’ to filter all thematic components and workshops outlined above and have arrived that this result below:

- Knowledge, skills, capacity, understanding on cross-cultural collaboration
- Knowledge about lifelong learning and work

Noted: Explanations/Definitions on these two learning contents were not available in any of the project documents.
2.2.3 The incentive dimension: Who we are and what drives us to CROSSLIFE

There were 27 participants with diverse interests and backgrounds coming from 6 partner universities at CROSSLIFE. They were selected based on the following criteria:

- competent in English
- have an interest in Vocational Education and Training (VET), preferably carrying out research on the topic
- personal interest in developing cross-cultural expertise

For this reason, I can assume that those who participated in CROSSLIFE share the above common interests. However, to further elaborate on the incentive dimension of learning in CROSSLIFE, I will use the Copenhagen group as a focus group and look into their detailed descriptions of motivations. Based on that, I will develop a list of learning motivations for CROSSLIFE, which will be used in Part 3 [Discussion and Analysis] to point out the potential learning problem in CROSSLIFE.

I have highlighted motivations of each individual in the Copenhagen group in Table 1. Although these individual motivations vary quite extensively there are some common ones such as:

- Work in group
- Travel
- Network
- Cross-cultural exchange, research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who we are</th>
<th>Where we come from</th>
<th>What motivates us to CROSSLIFE?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Que Anh Dang</td>
<td>Ha Noi, Vietnam</td>
<td>I find the project name very inspirational and I am curious to explore about the ‘European way’ and ‘international way’ of setting up and running an educational project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I want to network with people working on Lifelong learning, and see how ideas travel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I believe joining the project and working with MALLL fellow students and other colleagues in CROSSLIFE will help me to further develop my competences and will contribute to my dissertation next year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Statement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathrine Frank Procter</td>
<td>Copenhagen, Denmark</td>
<td>I am interested in joining the Cross Life Project because of the focus on researching on the process itself. I want to know more about development of group culture, leadership role and learning processes in general. The content of “travelling ideas” is broad and opens up for many interests to be included. VET as the study field makes sense to me because of the opportunity to explore different institutions and their learning cultures. I look forward to work with the group and hope we can develop a good learning atmosphere and reach our set goals (case studies, publishing etc.).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosa Lisa Iannone</td>
<td>Toronto, Canada</td>
<td>I'm looking for new and diverse perspectives in approaching Education. I am especially excited about cross-cultural exchanges, the possibility of meeting mentors, travelling to different cities and seeing first-hand how different educational institutions operate within different policy frameworks. Finally, I am interested in group work with my MA LLL colleagues; researching, and possibly publishing with them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Josephine Lau</td>
<td>Hong Kong, China</td>
<td>The project provides a platform for students and tutors with different cultural and educational backgrounds and research interests to exchange ideas and reflect on the educational issues, which is a good opportunity for me to interact with the people who are really active and devoted in the related field. Moreover, it provides visits in schools and centers for students in different places, and I am really interested in this multi-national approach in gaining real-life experiences. Last but not least, I want to travel, work, play etc.....with my fellow teammates, which is something extra and valuable for my 2 year MALLL study.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Xuan Nguyen           | Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam | **Academic goals:**  
  - To study current changes and challenges vocational training institutions in Europe are facing in the last 20 years and its implications on developing countries  
  - To understand how EU’s policy on vocational education is being implemented across countries within EU  
**Personal goals:**  
  - To work in a group of diverse backgrounds and personalities  
  - To open myself to new learning experiences apart from MALLL |
| Mark Norman Maca      | Manila, The Philippines | I am interested in the evolving nature of academic research, such as the CrossLife project, as institutions around the globe are getting "networked." I am looking forward to experiencing and understanding more of the elements and dynamics of this research approach in the field of education and social science. It is equally exciting to know how cross-cultural/national researchers (will) influence the ethics of international research. |
| Oleksandra Skrypnyk   | Kharkiv, Ukraine  | I want to see how they will develop a course out of a mess called CROSSLIFE, so basically observation of the methods used, or at least intended. This is something that I realized later; I am interested in the concept of employability. Do not know much about it at the moment, but I think I will research it more. Contacts, of course, and publication sound good as well. |
2.2.4 The interaction dimension: In what social - societal context do we learn?

As illustrated in Figure 3, there are three inter-related levels of learning at CROSSLIFE: individual, in the home groups, in the cross-cultural groups. The interaction dimension of learning in CROSSLIFE is shown in the home groups and in the cross cultural groups, where individuals interact and work on specific tasks. As such, interaction opportunities for CROSSLIFE participants are available in the following events:

- Home group meetings
- During 3 workshops mentioned in section 2.2.2 [The content dimension of learning in CROSSLIFE]
- Virtual online platforms such as the pedat.net intranet, Skype calls, email, etc.

I have recorded some statistics on learning interactions for the period of November - December 2007 in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interaction type</th>
<th>Number of interactions</th>
<th>Dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Copenhagen home group</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>November 8, 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>December 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email correspondence</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>November 7, 22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>December 20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PART 3: DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

3.1 The inter-relation between the content dimension and incentive dimension of learning in CROSSLIFE is weak

According to Knud Illeris’ three-dimension learning theory, the content dimension and the incentive dimension of learning are closely intertwined. The incentive dimension fuels the ‘energy’ and motivates the individual to acquire the learning content. In return, a useful, relevant, and interesting learning content can stimulate the individual to be more motivated in learning. In CROSSLIFE, unfortunately, there is a weak link between these two dimensions. The content of study program, themes, and workshops don’t match very much with the motivations of participants in the program.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The learning content</th>
<th>The incentive dimension</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Knowledge, skills, capacity, understanding on cross-cultural collaboration</td>
<td>• Work in group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Knowledge about lifelong learning and work</td>
<td>• Travel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Cross-cultural exchange, research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Vocational educational &amp; training</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This partly explains why there was mixed learning results among participants after returning from the London workshop. For those who have cross-interests in with CROSSLIFE, the experience and learning outcome was more positive while the others found it boring and refer to it as being ‘a mess’.

3.2 The interaction dimension of learning is limited in CROSSLIFE

As evidenced under the interaction dimension of learning in CROSSLIFE, this dimension of learning is extremely lacking. What is the main reason behind it? There are at least two factors to look into: the individual learner and the learning environment because they form the two ends of the interaction dimension of learning. First of all, the internet-based learning environment in itself is limited. A recent research project conducted by the Danish Research Unit for Industrial Dynamics (Working paper No. 2 - 2006) concluded:

ICT-connected networks can only be efficiently exploited and developed, when the people involved can meet face to face in order to exchange tacit knowledge, build codes of communication and establish mutual trust.\(^\text{12}\)

Thus, we should turn to the other end of the interaction dimension to examine the individual learner. Clearly, the learners are motivated in different degrees towards the learning content. Those who are more motivated might try to initiate interactions but if the others who are less motivated don’t respond, the arrow of interaction broke. Besides, virtual communication also requires a considerable measure of motivation and determination to participate. (Illeris, 2007, p. 228)

Up to this point, we have seen the validity of Knud Illeris’ claim about his three-dimension learning theory. This model does indeed give us a framework of analysis for CROSSLIFE. However, one danger of models is that it leaves out the totality of the reality. In Knud Illeris’s case, one might raise the question whether or not there are more dimensions to learning. Will the holistic approach to learning solve the problem stated in the beginning better? Or to put the question more directly, will Peter Jarvis’s holistic approach to learning offer a better answer?

### 3.3 Peter Jarvis’s holistic approach to learning in CROSSLIFE

Knud Illeris himself expresses openly that ‘there is no doubt that Peter Jarvis is the learning theorist who comes closest to the holistic perspective’ on learning. (Illeris, 2007, p. 146). Yet Illeris argues that although Jarvis’s point of departure is in man’s existence or being, [and certainly this is different from that of Illeris’] throughout the whole of his works, Jarvis has related to the interaction dimension extensively. The societal level in particular has occupied a prominent position. At the same time, Jarvis has also come close to the acquisition process via his learning model which shows that learning processes can take many different and winding paths and thus can also lead to many different learning outcomes.

![Figure 4: Peter Jarvis’s learning model (reproduce from Jarvis 1994)](image)

Hence, while this model represents another perspective on learning and that it looks significantly different from Knud Illeris’s three-dimension learning model, it also covers to some extent similar elements in learning. This means that even if I had chosen to use Peter Jarvis’s holistic learning theory instead of Knud Illeris’s three-dimension learning theory to analyze CROSSLIFE I would have arrived at his point with quite similar research findings.
4 CONCLUSION

The problem revisited

I started this research paper with a series of questions: What went wrong with CROSSLIFE? Why do we have mixed learning outcomes? How do we identify where the learning problem is? Is there a theoretical tool that we can use in cases like this?

It was in search for answers to these questions that I turned to Knud Illeris and his three-dimension learning theory to examine the CROSSLIFE case. I have used his learning theory and model as a ‘map’ to explore three different learning dimensions in CROSSLIFE, namely, the content dimension, the incentive dimension, and the interaction dimension. After thorough examination, I found a mismatch between the learning content in CrossLife program design and the motivations of participants who attended this learning situation. Given that these two dimensions are closely inter-related, if they don’t fit well together one of the consequences is a poor mix of learning outcomes depending on the level of motivations among these participants. Another finding is that the interaction dimension in the learning program is downplayed and this also resulted in poor learning outcome. Hence, the learning result is the sum of the external interaction between the individual and the learning environment plus the internal acquisition process between the incentive of the individual and the content of what is learned. It is the interplay of three dimensions of learning that determines final learning outcomes.

To give my analysis another perspective on understanding learning in CrossLife, I also turned briefly to Peter Jarvis, another leading theorist with his holistic approach to learning. Upon my initial comparison of these two learning models, I found that although they are different in size and shape both deal with quite similar learning elements in learning. Hence it doesn’t make much difference in analyzing the CROSSLIFE case using either of these learning theories.

My final reflection is that these research findings have humbled me. I’ve learned that learning is a ‘treasure within human’ and yet human can never understand learning to the full. Models and structures, much as they try, can only represent to the largest possible extent some part of the total reality. The reality of learning is complex and by implications, it suggests that we should not settle with what we’ve found, rather we should move on further down on the winding road of learning.
5 Bibliography


