

## **Humanistic Learning Communities: Integrating Person- and Idea-Centeredness**

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**Abstract:** In this article, we attend to the work of Carl Rogers and his person-centered therapy and education to show how it can inform the theory and practice of learning communities. Our conceptualization is inspired and informed by a decade-long design experiment around an innovative course for graduate students in an educational technologies program. The course has the double aim of, first, introducing the participants to what is known today about human learning, and second, to have the students experience the myriad challenges and approaches of technology-enhanced collaborative learning. With the eye towards integrating these objectives, participants engage in various person- and idea-centered activities in what we frame as a ‘*humanistic learning community*’. After showing how the course design serves to integrate person- and idea-centeredness, we consider a case study of a student who initially rejected many of the ideas of the learning community and later came to become an active and long-term participant within it. Micro-analyzing a mid-semester activity that figured prominently in her transforming participation, we show how considering person- and idea-centeredness explains the significant insights that she made. We conclude with a discussion about what this conceptualization of learning offers sociocultural perspectives of learning, and how the design of humanistic learning communities can inform educational practice.

**Keywords:** Humanistic education; idea-centered; learning communities; learning sciences; person-centered; sociocultural

*After a lot of excitement, anticipation and a long drive, I went to class and got a piece of paper and markers. Draw yourself as a learner! What? Well, I thought this was an opening activity and then we will start the real thing. Friends, I found out that this is the real thing! What is going to happen here will apparently be different and unique. -Jon, CATELT student*

## **Introduction**

This paper is the outcome of a design experiment that we<sup>1</sup> have been engaged with for a decade, and the unintended by-products that we have realized it has been bringing. In 2006-2007, the second author of this paper introduced a semester-long course that taught the foundations of the learning sciences, as an introductory requirement in the two-year program for graduate students in an educational technologies program (the students were predominantly in-service teachers, but also included educators in informal and industry settings). The intended aim of this course was to broaden students' understanding of learning and get them started in developing educational research that would be continued in future semesters. More than that, it was an introduction to students' participation in the broader educational technologies community, both within the program and across Israel. As such, the course was designed as a classroom learning community, creating the foundations for the students to become actively involved participants. In the ten years of running this course it became clear that it also had been achieving other, previously non-envisioned goals, and this added-value seemed to be due mainly to the unusual way in which the learning in the course was organized.

The original course design was based upon the instructor's background in the Israeli kibbutz<sup>2</sup> movement's young leadership workshops, where the idea of integrating reflection on personal identity and groups' learning processes with the interdisciplinary content of study were design principles (Shner, 2010; Wortman, 2010). For example, as participants in the workshops implemented community educational projects together, they studied a combination of texts from Jewish and kibbutz resources speaking of one's

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<sup>1</sup> The second author of this paper, later joined by the first author and then additional researchers.

<sup>2</sup> A kibbutz is a collective community in Israel that began as utopian community, a combination of socialism and Zionism. It was traditionally based on agriculture, but today, farming has been partly supplanted by other economic branches, including industrial plants and high-tech enterprises. In recent decades, some kibbutzim have been privatized and changes have been made in the communal lifestyle.

role in the community (e.g., Talmud, Buber, A. D. Gordon). Participants would then reflect upon their experiences as they discussed the texts, recursively moving between their experiences and the content of learning as they more deeply engaged in both.

The approach of the kibbutz movement's young leadership workshops were rooted in humanistic psychology and education (Hod & Ben-Zvi, 2014; Rogers, 1970; Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). Historically, the approach had origins in Israel based on a community renewal project in the 1970's, led by humanistic psychologists (Shelhav, 1976; Tannenbaum, 1973). The same participants from this project went on to form the young leadership workshops where the second author received significant training (Tsur, 2014).

Borrowing this humanistic approach and extending it to include socioculturally minded ideas advanced during his doctoral studies in math education (Ben-Zvi, 2001), the second author designed and moderated the introductory course to the learning sciences. Called "Challenges and Approaches to Technology-Enhanced Learning and Teaching" (CATELT), the students were asked to learn collaboratively as a learning community as they studied related ideas based on chapters and articles from the learning sciences (e.g., Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000; Brown & Campione, 1994). The course was designed such that students spent significant amounts of time reflecting upon their learning as individuals and as a learning community, both in relation to their collaborative learning experiences in the course as well as in relation to the content of studies.

Over the years, CATELT had become a popular course within the program, prompting an ongoing research effort that has included questions about collaborative and epistemic norms (Barzilai, Ben-Zvi, & Duek 2015; Hod & Ben-Zvi, 2015; Basil-Shachar, Hod & Ben-Zvi, 2015; Konja & Ben-Zvi, 2008), enculturation (Hod, 2015; Hod & Ben-Zvi, 2014; Hod & Sagy, 2016), dialogic-reflective discourse (Hagani & Ben-Zvi, 2014), group metacognition (Gofer & Ben-Zvi, 2012), and computer supported collaborative learning (Ben-Zvi, 2007; Novik, Ben-Zvi & Hod, 2014). Evidence, both empirical and anecdotal, from participants and departmental faculty over the years attest to several exemplary features of this course, including (a) unusually robust student motivation and effort; (b) regular references by individual students to the course as being both unique and life-changing (Hod & Ben-Zvi, 2014); (c) learning community norms

that emphasize respect for individual differences, careful listening, and learning for understanding (Hod & Ben-Zvi, 2015); and (d) cohesiveness among members despite underlying ethnic or religious tensions<sup>3</sup>. Yet, we still had the nagging intuition there was something lurking underneath that could contribute to scholarship on learning and instruction.

Through a process that has involved re-reviewing data and discussions within our research team as well as consultations with a number of learning scientists<sup>4</sup>, we came to understand that the dual associations of the second author may help explain the phenomena we were observing. We realized that the potential contribution may be in re-attending the learning sciences community to Carl Rogers, one of the most influential psychologists of all times, founder of the person-centered approach to psychotherapy and education, a champion in the development of encounter groups, and overall a pioneer of the widely-influencing humanistic movement in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Rogers, Kirschenbaum, & Henderson, 1989). Considering the Rogerian person-centered approach in the context of contemporary scholarship on learning leads to some new notions that we think can advance the learning sciences community. Specifically, in this paper we introduce the notions of person- and idea-centeredness as having distinct goals and a different set of activities designed to realize them. Out of this, we claim that human learning, of the sort where people make significant changes to their lives when transforming their participation in learning communities, involves an integration of these two centers. We provide evidence to show how these changes were fostered in a student within CATELT, in a design that we call a ‘*humanistic learning community*’ (HLC).

### **Person and Idea-Centeredness**

Fundamental to our claim that transforming participation involves person- and idea-centeredness is that each of these is committed to different goals and has established specialized designed forms of activities to

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<sup>3</sup> Every year, the course has included participants with various religious beliefs, mother tongues, and self-identified nationalities that are aspects of the region’s intractable political conflict (Salomon, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> See acknowledgements section.

realize them. For person-centeredness, this is based on goals of self-actualization within the context of a person's life trajectory. To best realize these goals, a person must be given unconditional positive regard and the opportunity to explore questions about their life either in one-to-one relationships or in encounter groups. For idea-centeredness, this is based on the goals of advancing knowledge, modeled after the advance criterion of the scientific enterprise. Realizing these goals involves participating in learning communities. In the sections that follow, we delve into these two centerednesses. We first trace their development within distinct disciplines, explain some of the mechanisms involved in achieving their respective goals, and describe why the particular designs are suited to realize them. We then show three examples on the way that person- and idea-centeredness are integrated in existing lines of learning sciences research, strengthening our argument that re-attending to Rogers is a valuable endeavor. Based on this background, we describe how CATELT is designed to integrate person- and idea-centeredness and we present a case study of a student to exemplify this.

### **Person-centeredness**

The modern humanistic movement<sup>5</sup> was institutionalized in the early 1960's, when humanistic psychology conferences and journals were formed under the leadership of Abraham Maslow (DeCarvalho, 1990). Basic tenets included seeing the person as whole, and being concerned with questions of existence and the human condition (Lundin, 1985; Schneider, Bugental, & Pierson, 2001). Over time, the movement branched out extensively in both therapeutic and educational domains, from contemporary group psychotherapy (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005), counseling (Hansen, Speciale, & Lemberger, 2014), and Deweyan forms of process-oriented education (Schmuck & Schmuck, 1975) like affective, open, progressive, character, and democratic education (Aloni, 2013; Biesta, 2015; Robinson, Jones, & Hayes, 2000). Perhaps more than any other scholar, Carl Rogers laid out some of the most influential theories and practices of the modern humanistic movement. After being stigmatized as anti-Christian due to a misperceived association with

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<sup>5</sup> Humanistic psychology and education are both rooted within the modern humanistic movement, with many of the same proponents, goals and activities in each.

‘secular humanism’, Rogers was part of an effort to rebrand his work as person-centered therapy and education (Lyon, 2014).

Central in the Rogerian perspective is that human life has an inherent motivation to expand and develop (Rogers, 1959). So inherent was this belief that therapists and educators didn’t need to inspire self-fulfillment in patients or students, but rather served the purpose of removing the obstacles that blocked personal growth (Rogers, 1969). Free from interpersonal, societal, and cultural restrictions, people could fully-function or actualize themselves in an ongoing process of self-discovery. So far reaching were the implications of these ideas, they spread into nearly every form of modern organization (Rogers, 1970). This included the scientific establishment, which increasingly accepted post-positivistic perspectives and methodologies, such as those of Piaget’s naturalistic observations of children (Rogers, 1985).

The commitment of person-centeredness towards human growth, largely influenced by the psychoanalyst Otto Rank, was relational (Barrett-Lennard, 2007). Accordingly, the mechanisms that were theorized by Rogers as leading to personality or behavior change began with the unconditional positive regard, or prizing, toward the patient or student (Rogers, 1967). Over time, people feel free to express their feelings or attitudes towards themselves and others, gradually shedding away the facades they initially present. By becoming deeply acquainted with one’s inner self, people learn to better relate to others first in the present interpersonal relationship, and later in their everyday life (Rogers, 1970).

Although individual therapy and counseling was the large focus of the early part of Rogers’s career, he was deeply interested in intensive group experiences for a large part of his later career. Influenced by Gestalt Psychology and Kurt Lewin, who opened the Research Center for Group Dynamics at MIT in the 1940s (Webb & Palincsar, 1996), Rogers championed the encounter group (Rogers, 1970). There have been various forms of such groups, such as sensitivity training (or T-), human relations, or personal growth groups, and they have been applied in therapeutic, personal (i.e., normative populations seeking to understand their existence more deeply), and educational settings. But, these all shared the common goals of seeking personal change through generally non-directed human interactions in groups (Leiberman, Yalom, & Miles, 1973).

The mechanisms of change in process-oriented groups are based on the same relational foundations as individual therapy, yet are amplified by the multiple members of the group. As members increasingly get to know one another, they also learn how they appear in others' eyes and what feelings their behaviors evoke in them. The feedback that participants get about their increasingly close relationships to others "appears to be one of the most central, intense, and change-producing aspects of group experience" (Rogers, 1970, p. 33). Over time, this relational focus between members of the group came to be known as the process-focus in the *here-and-now* of the group (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). This is in contrast to conversations that deal with content and are often depersonalized and abstract.

Rogers applied these process-oriented concepts of encounter groups in educational contexts, too. He articulated these same principles to person-centered education, where he sought to transform classrooms into a "community of learners" (Rogers, 1969, p. 105). He was very explicit about the encounter group approach as a way to conduct teacher professional development. For younger students, the same principles of the inherent motivation to expand and develop [1], unconditional positive regard [2], and a focus on the here-and-now [3] is evident in his writing:

First of all is a transparent realness in the facilitator [teacher], a willingness to be a person, to be and live the feelings and thoughts of the moment [3]. When this realness includes a prizing, a caring, a trust and respect of the learner [2], the climate for learning is enhanced. When it includes a sensitive and accurate empathic listening [2], then indeed a freeing climate, stimulative of self-initiated learning and growth, exists [1]. The student is trusted to develop [1]. (Rogers, 1969, p. 126)

It is clear there are numerous variations to Rogerian thought and practice that can be considered person-centered, that his ideas were a continuation of those before him, and that those following him built upon his insights (Warner, 2000). Yet, as a hugely influential figure in the humanistic movement and without dismissing other important contributors, we safely argue that the basic notions thus far presented can be considered Rogerian. In summary, the goal of person-centeredness is self-actualization within the context of a person's life experiences. Encounter groups, which give people the opportunity to explore how they are perceived by others, is a paragon social activity designed to realize this goal.

## **Idea-centeredness**

For a large part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, American education was broadly described as falling into two categories: student-centered or teacher-centered. The teacher-centered category consisted of classical, traditional, or instructionist pedagogies, whereas the student-centered category was associated with progressive, open, and constructivist education. This was based on the belief in the good individual seeking to reach his or her potential (Chall, 2000). Rogers' perspective, despite its unique emphasis and characteristics, clearly fell into the student-centered category.

In the late 1980's, in the midst of a "sociocultural turn" of research on learning, a third way was being articulated<sup>6</sup>. In comparison to viewing learning based on a transmission of knowledge (teacher-centered) or knowledge acquisition (student-centered) metaphor, learning became conceptualized as a process of transforming participation (Rogoff, 1994; Sfard, 1998). Rooted in Vygotsky's mediational view of human-environment interaction (Vygotsky, 1978), a number of related perspectives were being advanced, such as mind-as-action (Wertsch, 1998), distributed or socially shared cognition (Resnick, Levine, & Teasley, 1991; Salomon, 1993), and socially situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

While learning communities were not an entirely new concept, the term having been used by Rogers himself (1969) and in a wide range of contexts (e.g., Hill, 1985), modern socioculturalists interested in education and learning offered this new conception of the school (e.g., Rogoff, Turkonis, & Bartlett, 2001), classroom (e.g., CTGV, 1994, Brown & Campione, 1994; Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1994), and more recently in informal and online settings (e.g., Kafai & Fields, 2013; Resnick, et al., 2009). By and large, the socioculturally minded thinking behind these learning communities was informed by the notion of giving students access to the authentic practices of intended cultures (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989). So that students can learn useful knowledge and practices that are relevant for the demands of the innovation society, learning communities have been modeled upon the type of progressive knowledge advancement

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<sup>6</sup> This "third way" did not negate the student and teacher-centered approaches, but rather than seeing them as a dichotomy, viewed them both as important. In addition, it reframed the design of learning environments into four centers: learner, knowledge, assessment and community (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000).



that occurs in authentic expert communities (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1993; Edelson & Reiser, 2006). To guide participation into these authentic communities, learning communities simulate (through tools, activities, discourse, etc.) and/or give direct access to the members of the practicing communities (Radinsky, Bouillion, Lento, & Gomez, 2001). These approaches have been a central theme of the learning sciences (Hod & Sagy, under review; Lee, Yuan, Ye, & Recker, 2016).

While the participationist metaphor is central in the learning sciences perspective of learning communities, in practice oftentimes they have emphasized the knowledge component of the socially-situated learning. In a review of several historically influential learning communities, Bielaczyc, Kapur and Collins (2013) show how learning communities are framed as idea-centered: “putting students’ ideas at the *center* of the community work communicates to students that their ideas matter to others and that they have a position of responsibility in contributing to the community’s advancement” (p. 4). Idea-centeredness is even an explicitly stated principle in knowledge building communities (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 2006). The Knowledge Forum (KF), to illustrate, is an online tool used for collective idea advancement. Participants post both their ideas on the KF, as well as metadiscursive markers that state the relationship of their idea (e.g., new information, rise-above, etc.) to the growing, collective database of ideas.

This emphasis leads us to define idea-centeredness as the advancement of knowledge, or the knowledge goals, realized within a learning community. The emphasis on this component in the practice of learning communities does not mean it is the only component attended to. Certainly, there are many efforts to build a respectful and failure-safe culture (Bielaczyc & Collins, 1999), to develop a social infrastructure (Bielaczyc, 2006), and to establish norms of sharing and collective responsibility (Zhang, Scardamalia, Reeve, & Messina, 2009). But, as we turn now to considering how person- and idea-centeredness are integrated within other lines of research, we can see how this is a useful distinction to make and how it sharpens what a Rogerian perspective can offer the learning sciences.

## **The integration of person- and idea-centeredness**

Since creating this conceptualization, we have found it to be ever-present in educational discourse, both outside and inside literature that is either person- or idea-centered. Schön's work on the reflective practitioner, from outside these fields, shows a clear integration of people's experiences (person-centered) with disciplinary ideas (idea-centered):

If the entire experience is long enough to allow free time for reflection on course work, if simulated practice occurs when students are equipped to use it to try out ideas and methods they have learned in the classroom, and if we create opportunities for students to connect classroom knowledge to their prior experience, then we may be able to combine faculty-generated ideas about what students need to learn with students' active management of their own learning. (Schön, 1987, p. 342)

This type of integration is found within person-centered approaches from two perspectives. First, this as a reaction against those who argue there is no basis for idea-centeredness:

Much encounter group practice attacks cognitive functioning as sheer rationalization and defensiveness and stresses the importance of "gut" feelings as the basic coin of exchange. Yet the study repeatedly demonstrates that thought is an essential part of the learning process... Self-disclosure and the expression of positive feeling led to personal gain primarily when accompanied by cognitive insight. (Leiberman, Yalom, & Miles, 1973, p. 423)

Second, this is found in person-centered literature on the limits of idea-centeredness:

Building a bridge between the understanding of group processes and their effective use can be exasperating and frustrating. Knowledge does not necessarily, or even easily lead to changes in behavior. Behavioral change is a very complex phenomenon involving cognitive change, emotional involvement, behavioral tryouts, and feedback. (Schmuk & Schmuk, 1975, p. 11)

In the learning sciences, there are many examples of the integration of person- and idea-centeredness. Scratch is a cutting-edge example, as an online community that has blossomed into having millions of users and projects worldwide. Historically, it was introduced in the Computer Clubhouse, which can be considered person-centered in its aim to "help young people learn to express themselves and gain confidence in themselves as learners" (Resnick, 2002, p. 34). In 2005, Scratch, at its core an idea-centered

platform based on block based programming used to “facilitate media manipulation for novice programmers” (Maloney, Peppler, Kafai, Resnick, & Rusk, 2008, p. 367), was introduced to the Computer Clubhouse. Features like remixing, where users can see other users’ codes and adapt them for their own use, were built into the platform to allow for advancement of ideas and the development of a community. A great deal of excitement around Scratch was not just that youths were learning how to program, but that they were bringing in their personal lives to their learning. This can be seen in an example of one student who programmed the “Hollaback Girl”, expressing her interests in hip-hop. Additionally, the process of learning programming ideas was integrated to the user’s life experiences:

They may experience obstacles, such as conflict, misunderstandings, and mutual disappointment (for example, when a collaborative project does not turn out as planned). However, despite—and sometimes through the process of working through—these challenges, young people can learn valuable things about themselves as creators and collaborators (Roque, Rusk, & Resnick, 2016, p. 242).

Another example comes from a “broad view of learning”, a 15 year effort based on the work of Leslie Herrenkohl to articulate the theoretical basis for how students come to be, know, and do (Herrenkohl & Mertl, 2010). We note that Herrenkohl works in a department at Washington University that combines scholarship on human development and the learning sciences, hinting at the dual centerednesses. Based on a complex instructional model in a New England elementary school, Herrenkohl and Mertl carefully trace the transforming participation of four students throughout a unit of study on balance and building. For example, in an analysis of Rich, they show how his “at risk” behavioral issues changed into highly nuanced academic practices, such as respectfully challenging others. Or, in an analysis of Denise, they describe how her arrogant behavior at the start of the study, where she offered to explain things for her peers, transformed into her role as a junior teacher where she facilitated opportunities for others to present their own ideas. Thus, Herrenkohl and Mertl integrate person- and idea-centeredness in their broad view of learning by examining students’ personal experiences in the classroom (coming to be: person-centeredness) as they engage in the study of scientific concepts (coming to know: idea-centeredness).

Identity research is another example where person- and idea-centeredness are clearly evident. Influenced heavily by situated views of learning, identity is seen as an inseparable aspect of the “person-in-the-world, as member of a sociocultural community” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 52). In 2005, Sfard and Prusak suggested a discursive definition in an effort to bring the cognitive, affective, social, interpersonal, and intrapersonal aspects of the construct into a unifying framework, based on a common ontology (Heyd-Metzuyanim & Sfard, 2012). The methodological benefits of doing so allowed identity to be operationalized with an integrated system of tools. In analyzing the learning of mathematics, the authors found an interplay of two unique discourses: mathematizing (idea-centered), and subjectifying (person-centered). For example, this interplay is shown in the case of a student, Mira, who was involved in a calculation: “3000 minus 1000 is 2000... I have to think now... 2000 minus 200 is 1800... My brain is so slow...” (Ben-Yehuda, Lavy, Linchevski, & Sfard, 2005, p. 226). Having gone on to examine students in intricate learning activities, person- and idea-centeredness are clearly evident in their conceptualization:

...we believe our data support the conclusion that the way the learner chooses to participate in a mathematical discourse is affected not only, and perhaps even not mainly, by her mathematical competence and mathematical activity, but also by the question of whether the actions she and others perform are in concert with their self-told identities, with the identity others describe to them, and with the identities they ascribe to others (Heyd-Metzuyanim & Sfard, 2012, p. 144).

The examples above show that the dual emphasis on person- and idea-centeredness is an existing, but hidden, conceptualization found in a wide range of inquiry on learning. But, our purpose in showing these goes further than that. In each of the three examples from the learning sciences, the activities or the learning environment did not have aspects of an encounter group design. Rather, the person-centeredness was facilitated through the use of online tools on topics that interested youths (i.e., Scratch), guidance from the teacher (i.e., broad view of learning), or was simply found in analysis of naturalistic collaborative learning (i.e., discursive identity). From our Rogerian standpoint, we therefore ask what would have happened had the students engaged in encounter group experiences as part of these learning environments? What if personal reflection, both in relation to the students’ lives outside the class and their experiences

within, was given more time and nurturing? Is it possible that existing potentials for transformative learning experiences are being left untapped? To shed light on these questions we will now turn our attention to our own design experiment, in a concept we suitably name *'humanistic learning communities'*.

### **CATELT: A Humanistic Learning Community**

In this section, we move to the exposition of our own HLC, where the key design principle is based on the integration of person- and idea-centeredness. As we have already described the context and components of CATELT elsewhere, we refer the reader to those studies for fuller accounts (Hod & Ben-Zvi 2014; 2015). Here, we take a more narrow view by focusing upon the person- and idea-centerednesses, with an emphasis on the former because the latter involves typical learning community practices (e.g., Brown & Campione, 1994). In our description below, we find it useful to separate between the face-to-face (ftf) and virtual meetings (in a wiki environment) that alternate in a blended design. To be consistent, we present the 2011/2012 iteration as described in previous studies. We note that despite annual variations, the balance between person and idea-centeredness has generally remained the same.

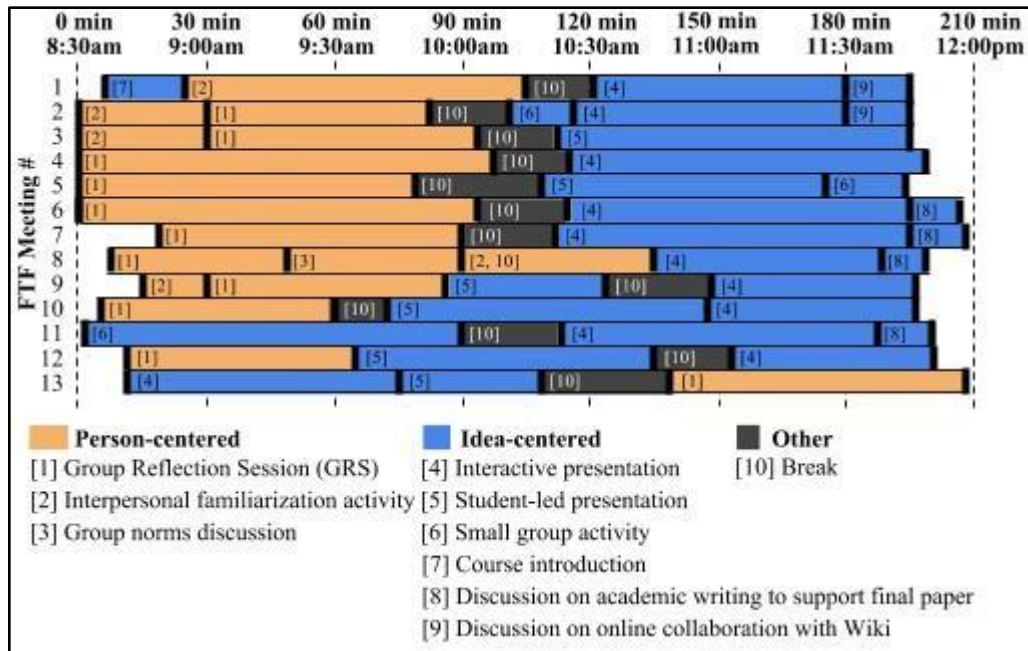
The criss-crossing dimensions of person- and idea-centeredness across the physical and virtual spaces are alluded to upfront in the course by the moderators at the start of the first few weekly face-to-face (ftf) meetings. For example, in his introduction to the first group reflection session (GRS) in week 2, the moderator explained:

We live in different worlds... Simply, there are things that happen to us during the class, and things that happen between classes – in our wiki world. The reflection is simply a bridge between what happened during the learning process during the week, and what is happening here. How everyone who has gone through the same assignments goes through something else. To listen, to understand what is happening to each person, how did it happen to them, who have different feelings, different initiatives, and different understandings... The materials that will come out during the reflection will flow with the other parts of the learning and all the other materials, which we will do at home, then we will meet next week, and we will see what happens during that reflection.

This flow is an essential part of the integration of person- and idea-centeredness, such that no activity is purely one form or the other. However, we will categorize the activities based on the center they emphasize to show how the course design has this dual focus.

Ftf meetings consist of three types of person- and idea-centered activities, respectively. The most prominent person-centered activities are the weekly GRSs, which generally start ftf meetings and last for 60 to 90 minutes (of the total 180 minute instructional time). Additional person-centered activities include interpersonal familiarization activities to facilitate closer relationships in structured pair or small group discussions, or group level norm discussions which only occur if and when students request them. Generally, these discussions are scheduled once or twice per semester, towards the mid-way point, when inter-group tensions have escalated and students make an explicit request to negotiate their norms (see Hod & Ben-Zvi, 2015).

There are two prominent types of idea-centered activities. The first is a moderator-led interactive discussion around the contents of the weekly reading assignments. The second prominent type involves student-led discussions around either the content of the readings or on students' final papers (which they begin presenting by week 9 of the course). Figure 1 depicts the precise chronology and ratio of person- and idea-centered activities during ftf meetings:



**Figure 1.** Chronology and type of person- and idea-centered activities during ftf meetings in CATELT (2011/2012)<sup>7</sup>.

In between ftf meetings, students collaborate throughout the week on a wiki platform. Based on the events of the ftf meeting, that same evening the moderators post their own reflection of the ftf meeting, as well as an assignment to start the weekly collaborative learning process. These collaborative assignments generally require students to read an article then collaboratively edit related wiki pages, reorganize the content of existing pages, or hyperlink ideas to other ideas on the wiki. The wiki is intergenerational in that each year's cohort continues refining the wiki from previous years. Assignments generally ask students to divide themselves into groups and either focus on a part of the reading, or deal with cross-cutting themes within the reading. Students are given a great deal of freedom and responsibility to decide how and on what to collaborate, which they generally discuss using the accompanying discussion pages.

<sup>7</sup> During week 11, there was a large traffic jam, leading about half the students to trickle in significantly late. In place of the GRS, the students were given an opportunity to continue their small group collaboration which they started online the previous week. During week 13, the order of the person- and idea-centered activities were swapped so that the course could end with a GRS.

While wikis are generally idea-centric, several person-centered features are built into it for the purposes of the course. The most prominent of these are the personal reflective diaries. After each five meeting, students are asked to write and post their diaries on a personal space that they keep on the wiki, which are all linked to a community page from the fixed navigation bar. Diaries are given loose instructions, such that students can be free to write about their feelings and thoughts at the moment. Their public nature on the wiki allows students to also to read and discuss others' posts, which is something they are encouraged to do. In addition to the reflective diaries, a norms page is linked to the fixed navigation bar as a space for the group to negotiate how they ought to collaborate. Finally, an announcements page is linked to the navigation bar as a way for students to stay up-to-date with happenings in the learning community, such as birthdays, important milestones, and notices such as expected absences.

Of all the activities, the GRSs and the online personal reflective diaries most closely resemble the encounter group. These activities continue between the physical and online spaces such that person-centered stories are continuously being told and developed throughout the duration of the course. The focus of these reflections revolve around the question, "who am I as a learner?" Students are encouraged to share their thoughts and feelings about the way they learn in the learning community, particularly based on their experiences doing collaborative assignments during the week. Over time, this here-and-now focus weaves into aspects of their broader lives, outside of the course. For example, Hod & Ben-Zvi (2014) described a student named Sara who felt uncomfortable because she had not yet developed close relationships with her peers. Sara worked very hard and took leadership positions during collaborative assignments to compensate for her discomfort. She related her behavior to aspects of her personal life, such as taking on numerous responsibilities in her career despite advice of colleagues or family members. Having realized how her motivations in the here-and-now of the course reflected her life experiences, she began slowing down and refocused her efforts on building meaningful relationships.

A vital aspect of motivating the students to make these connections between their experiences in the course with their broader lives has to do with building a learning community culture where participants are given unconditional positive regard. This means students are all trusted to do their best and are accepted



without judgment, even if they have difficulty dealing with the technology, face language barriers, or take the liberty to not complete the task as assigned. While the moderator gives large freedom for the group to develop their own norms on how they collaborate, he both enforces and models several key behaviors to facilitate the person-centeredness. These include enforcing students to sit as part of the circle during GRSs and not outside of it, requiring students to address each other directly with their names instead of in the third person, modeling careful listening to students when it is their turn to speak, and asking questions about their feelings and thoughts to give them the opportunities to express themselves.

Over the years, we have observed scores of students making meaningful transformations of participation into our community. We believe that an HLC like CATELT provides the fertile grounds for these transformations. By focusing on ideas, it goes beyond encounter group experiences where the goal is to talk about yourself and self-actualize. By focusing on people's experiences, it goes beyond knowledge building by helping a person understand new concepts, ideas, theories, and practices through the personal prisms related to their experiences and lives. Having now articulated our concept and design, we move on to our empirical examination, asking the question: How are person- and idea-centeredness expressed within students' transforming participation?

### **Methods to Examine the Integration of Person- and Idea-Centeredness**

Our methodological approach built on the work of Rogoff (1995) and Herrenkohl and Mertl (2010), who analyzed sociocultural activity at the contextual, community, interpersonal, and personal planes of analysis. When starting this study, we had already foregrounded each of these mutually constituting planes at different times, namely in two previous articles on the same iteration of CATELT (Hod & Ben-Zvi, 2014; 2015). Here, we returned to one of our subjects, Abby, whom we had already shown transformed her participation throughout a semester of study. Likewise, from a contextual perspective, we had little doubt that Abby's transformation entailed a change of experiences and ideas, as she was later accepted into the master's thesis track and then to the doctoral studies program. As submitting a research proposal (idea-centered) was a formal requirement to gain further entry and experiences in the community (person-

centered), the context already suggested that some level of person- and idea-centeredness were part of her overall transformation into the educational technologies program.

For this analysis, we went down to the finest level of detail that we found possible to distinguish between Abby's utterances (spoken or written) that were about her experiences or ideas. Initially, it was not readily apparent where the integration of these centers occurred, as not every utterance a person makes is about an abstract idea, just as not all utterances are about their experiences. To operationalize person- and idea-centeredness such that we could distinguish between them, we looked for evidence within the activities where Abby participated and discussed her personal experiences as a learner (person-centered) or the terms, concepts, or theories from the articles and chapters that she studied as part of the course (idea-centered). We drew on our prior multilevel analyses to focus in on the critical period in Abby's transformation during the semester, during weeks 7 and 8. During this period Abby showed heightened emotions, greater interpersonal engagement, and high levels of activity as evidenced in her personal reflective diary entries. Unsurprisingly, this period also marked a transformation for the learning community, which began to engage in a norm-negotiation process (Hod & Ben-Zvi, 2015), of which Abby was actively involved. After identifying several utterances that seemed to us meaningful, we engaged in a fine-grained micro-analysis of what Abby said or wrote within the context of a particularly potent activity. Our specific goal was to explore the way Abby changed from being a relatively peripheral participant in CATELT and the Edtech program to taking on more meaningful roles (Lave & Wenger, 1991) - through the lens of person- and idea-centeredness.

### **The Integration of Person- and Idea-Centeredness in an HLC**

Abby, a 52 year old project manager at an educational technology software company, was an assiduous worker with a background in chemistry and an epistemological viewpoint that favored "mathematical equations and objective reality". Seeking a change in her life, she joined the course on a voluntary basis, with permission of the lead moderator, to test her fit in the program and decide later if she wanted to continue. Calling CATELT a "180 degree switch" from her competitive work environment, Abby showed

a great deal of reluctance from the start of the semester. For example, she was skeptical about engaging in some of the interpersonal familiarization activities: “When we stood and held hands the first thing that came to my mind is if the staff from my job would see me, they would giggle with laughter” (during week 2 GRS). Likewise, she was critical of the entire learning community approach: “I am assuming that the University is full of researchers who learned in the paradigm of transmission of knowledge. We reached very nice and large achievements. You can’t completely cancel this” (during week 1 interactive presentation).

Fundamental to Abby’s change was a shift in her orientation from being product- to process-oriented. The product orientation was found in her professional life, where she was given tasks to complete individually, competed against others, and was measured based on her output. Thus, it was fitting that at the start of the semester Abby questioned why she should learn from others instead of listening to the expert (instructor) lecture and take notes. Consistent with Abby’s product-orientation, she experienced discomfort with the unending and expansive activities involved in collaborative wiki editing. In a GRS during week 6 of the course, she described how these activities related to her personal experiences:

6-01        *Abby:*        I always have the feeling that we are not going in depth into the issues... I feel a type of fluttering on all of the things. I don’t know, for me personally this is hard because I’m usually very fundamental. I like to go into something, to dive, to understand it until the end, and to feel at the end of the course that I really acquired knowledge... And I had this feeling after I saw everything that I needed to do, that I will simply lift up my hands and not do anything.

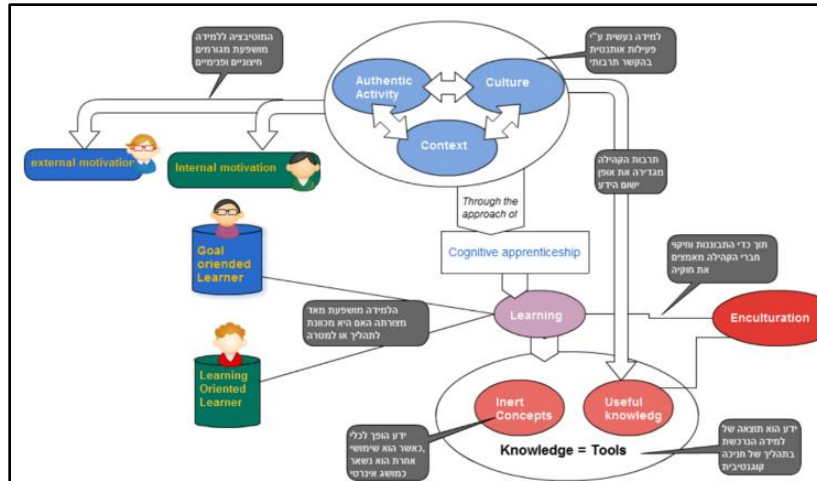
Given that the GRS was a person-centered activity, the moderator continued to inquire about Abby’s statement by connecting her here-and-now experiences to her life outside the learning community. The moderator used a metaphor that she had stated earlier, of knowledge as flowers in a field, to have Abby further elaborate:

6-02        *Mod:*        Do you know situations like this where you are in a field and you don’t have time to get to all the flowers? Does this resemble other situations in life?

- 6-03        *Abby:*     I am trying to think. Obviously I got stuck in situations where there are many things and I have to prioritize. But here I wanted to get to everything, and there weren't any things where I said, okay here I don't have an interest and I don't want them. Here I wanted to do all the things, but simply I couldn't do them all. This was a disappointment with myself, but no, I know that my time is [trails off].
- 6-04        *Class:*     [silence for 15 seconds]
- 6-05        *Abby:*     Maybe also losing control. Meaning, not losing control. I usually plan, and I do the things, and I do everything. And here I didn't get to everything.

The 15 second silence (6-04) signified that Abby was realizing something important about herself that she had difficulty articulating. In her work life, Abby knew that she had to prioritize her activities (6-03). Yet, in her role as a learner, she had trouble reconciling that she needed to be active in a process where there was no end (6-05). Thus, she used the word “fundamental” to describe herself as a learner, or stated that she could understand something “until the end” (6-01). Abby appeared to be at a meaningful juncture where she was understanding that learning was a process, but she was still unable to articulate these ideas in relation to her experience.

Following that 15 second meeting, students were asked to create concept maps using online collaborative diagramming software, called Cacao, based on an article they were assigned to read on situated learning (Brown, Collins, & DuGuid, 1989). Together with a partner, Abby created an elaborate concept map (Figure 2) that attempted to show the relation of many of the key ideas of situated learning, along with some other ideas from previous readings (e.g., motivation to learn and learning orientation: Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000, p. 61).



**Figure 2:** Concept map of situated cognition and culture of learning.

In Abby’s reflection upon the activity in her diary, she made a significant insight that continued on the theme of being product- or process-oriented from her previous discussion during the GRS:

- 7W-01 Abby: There is a process here [referring to what her concept map showed, Fig. 2]. Obviously! As someone who worked with chemistry and science, as someone who managed many projects – it is obvious that there is a process... we always start at a certain point, we go through a process, and we get to a new point that is a result of the process that we went through. There are always people that respond, and produce, and the products are dependent upon the direction and the conditions.
- 7W-02 Abby: When I read the summary of the article where it was written “that knowledge is the result of authentic activity that is done in a cultural context” immediately I saw across my eyes the appropriate concept map to describe the process: there is a result that is the product, and if there is a product, then there is a process and there is a start...

In this excerpt, we see how both the person- and idea-centers are informed by the other. At first, Abby pointed out there was a “process here” (7W-01), referring specifically to her concept map and the idea of situated learning, but also to her personal experiences of working with chemistry, science, and many projects. Her description of the process starting at a certain point and continuing to evolve was a further elaboration that integrated between the idea of process and her personal experiences. The use of the exclamation point with the word “obviously” signified that this was a large insight for her that applied broadly to her life. With this integration between the idea and her experiences made, Abby continued to

develop the idea (7W-02). Directly quoting the article, she described the process by which she understood its meaning (“immediately I saw across my eyes the appropriate concept map...”), again referring to her experiences as she described in 7W-01 where she discussed the start of a process.

In a post course interview eight weeks later, Abby was asked if she changed during the course, and if so, to elaborate on how. From her response, we see evidence of the integration of person- and idea-centeredness on the same theme of being product- or process-oriented. Her responses not only triangulate our previous findings, but provide evidence that she continued to extend this integration with both a broader range of personal experiences as well as ideas:

- Int-01 Abby: ...when I come [to this course], I talk, and I say what I feel, and I say what is on my heart, and this is the thing that is new for me.
- Int-02 Abby: Usually I come to a place of work, and I need to work [pounding fist of table], and nobody really cares what I really feel. What is going over me, if I changed or didn't change. What they want from me is usually a product. The process is less important, exactly the opposite from here...
- Int-03 Abby: I agree with it that knowledge is built collaboratively. I agree with it that what is important is the process and not the product itself. I agree that you need to strengthen everyone. That you need to pay attention to everyone...
- Int-04 Abby: To talk about myself, okay, to talk about feelings, to talk about thoughts, to talk about how I learn, how I work, all the metacognition, all of this analysis – these are things that I didn't have, this is one thing. The second thing that really [with emphasis] changed for me is to understand the contribution of the community in the shared learning. I didn't think this was important at all. And today I am found with a feeling that there is a lot to it.

In Int-01, Abby discussed her here-and-now experiences in the course, in relation to herself as a learner. She then connected this to her experiences outside the course (Int-02), drawing a comparison between the ideas of a product- and a process-orientation. In Int-03, Abby connected this to further ideas studied during the semester, such as knowledge and collaboration. Inserting her own beliefs (“I agree with”) and values (“you need to...”) showed that these were not just empty words, but had relevance to the way she lived. Finally, she integrated person- and idea-centeredness when discussing her transformation (Int-04: “things that I didn't have” / “thing that really changed in me” / “today I am found with a feeling”), by describing her current self as a learner using new ideas about learning (e.g., metacognition, community, shared learning).

By the end of the semester, Abby was deeply involved in participating in the learning community. She participated in a conference on collaboration following the conclusion of the course, and excitedly shared this news with the lead researcher (first author) in an unplanned meeting in a cafeteria soon after. Following the course, Abby enrolled formally in the MA program and completed her Master's thesis two years later. She has since enrolled in the Educational Technologies PhD program, examining embodiment and complex thinking as part of her research.

## **Discussion**

Our main goal in this article is to explore how the integration of person- and idea-centeredness plays a role in learners' transforming participation in learning communities. The claim that these two centers are integrated is not new. Sociocultural theory sees the person and activity as irreducible or inseparable, such that ideas are always situated and must be viewed holistically. This parallels a classic debate over 'feelings' and the 'intellect' that the humanistic tradition has long abandoned (Lyon, 1971). Our conceptualization moves the conversation forward by showing how person- and idea-centeredness, both vital aspects of transforming participation, are often driven by different goals and practices and are each linked to a different academic heritage. We have argued that learning community approaches in the learning sciences have often neglected the person-centered approaches, perhaps out of excitement for innovative conceptions that emphasize idea advancement (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 2006). Even those that have considered both, such as Scratch online communities, Herrenkohl's broad view of learning, and discursive views of identity have not attended fully to the encounter group as a paragon person-centered activity. Our research on transforming participation as it occurs in CATELT, which explicitly brings together these two centers, is therefore a valuable design experiment whereby we can examine the finer details of this claim.

### **Transforming participation as an integration of person- and idea-centeredness**

In the context of Abby's enrollment and increasing engagement in the educational technologies program, we have focused on a key part of her transformation. Namely, this is from considering her role as a learner

as one who completes assignments (products) to being engaged in an unending process of learning. This transformation, which we referred to as a shift from product- to process-orientations, was expressed well by Abby's metaphor of not being able to touch all the flowers (6-02).

We view the product- to process-oriented transformation as vital to a person's participation in any advancing organization, such as the educational technologies program, as it is part of a developing and prosperous academic department in a University setting. Therefore, becoming process-oriented can be seen as an aspect of Abby's enculturation, where she learned that she needed to become an active, contributing member of the community. It is quite fitting therefore that her transformation occurred simultaneous to the group taking collective responsibility over their norms, of which Abby took a leading role (see Hod & Ben-Zvi, 2015).

The integration of person- and idea-centeredness involved Abby considering the idea of learning as a process in relation to both her present experiences in the learning community (the here-and-now) and mainly in her professional life working in the high-tech sector, but also more distant past working with "chemistry and science" (7W-01). The prominence of person-centered activities as part of the course design cannot be understated here. From the first week of the course, Abby had both told and written about her outside life, continuing to refine her ideas about how they differed with the here-and-now. Thus, when she read the article on situated cognition, she missed the point about situativity. Her interpretation of the article was influenced by her activity in creating a concept map, which attempted to create a visualization of the situated learning process. The fact that she appropriated the idea of learning as a process (and not the other ideas) can be understood when considering her past and present experiences as a learner. On one hand, she could not escape the prism of her personal experiences in her consideration of the ideas. On the other hand, the new ideas (even if they were not the intention of the article's authors) helped her gain fresh insight into her experiences.

The way in which Abby's transformation occurred highlights the slow pace of learning. People taking a purely cognitive perspective, presumably an instructionist teacher, could easily become frustrated with the lack of a student's ability to grasp the depth of certain concepts even after several weeks of study.



But viewed from our perspective, where ideas and experiences are tightly interwoven, the slow pace of deepening understanding should be expected. We see further evidence of this in the post-course interview, where Abby continued to consider her experiences in relation to ideas studied much earlier in the semester, such as metacognition (Int-04). While it may sound strange to many that it should take an entire semester for a student to learn the difference between a product- and process-orientation, the fact that Abby lived this transformation gave new depth to an entire world of concepts that she could now make sense of in relation to her new experiences. We hypothesize, unsurely of course, that a common expression that we hear from students at the end of the semester, that they are “now starting to learn”, can be explained in this same way.

### **Practical implications of HLCs**

CATELT is hardly an ordinary classroom. In addition to being part of a long-term design experiment, there are two moderators, a researcher, a relatively small number of graduate students (14-20), and inconspicuous but visible cameras in a room. Like any such research setting, we therefore cannot separate the real effects of our design with the many confounding factors. Yet, after many years of seeing similar results and with a growing body of research, we can say with increasing confidence that the integration of person- and idea-centered activities are an important, if not the major part of the story here. Moreover, as part of an endeavor that seeks to design and research educational innovations, we hope this project can serve as a lighthouse for others as they engage in their own local contexts. We certainly do not suggest that others make literal copies of our design. If our research can tilt the balance in more ordinary classrooms to consider person-centeredness to a greater extent, than this research has achieved a worthwhile goal.

The key practical implication of this research is in the time and prominence given to encounter group types of activities within the course design, as shown in Figure 1. Even for innovative learning communities, this is a highly unusual approach. The purpose of giving so much time for the person-centeredness is based on our serious belief in the educational principles of Carl Rogers, where the person is accepted unconditionally and is given a fertile space to grow through their exploration of self through the

other. As is evident from the chronology and ratio of activities, person-centeredness is not just something that occurs towards the start of the semester, or at the end of a course meeting when there is time left to reflect on thinking. Person-centeredness is given prominence throughout the semester, with activities designed to both maintain and continue deepening students' relationships and trust, through the very end. It is in this person-centered way that we view the learning community, and why we feel it is necessary and appropriate to distinguish it from other learning communities with this label of HLC.

While designing and implementing an HLC is a highly attainable goal, this comes with risks and the need for highly skilled, professional moderation. Making time for person-centeredness means allowing for unanticipated issues that the students raise, such as resistances towards the moderator, dealing with interpersonal conflicts, and other issues long described in psychological literature (e.g., Bion, 1959). It is completely understandable why teachers prefer to put aside these social and emotional matters, or deal with them individually and not as a group level process which they nurture. Moderating encounter groups often requires licensing (Tudor, 2007), and the risks of running these groups can potentially disrupt students' lives if not treated with the professional sensitivities necessary. In general, we think that there are ethical considerations that must be taken into account for anyone leading an HLC. With that said, we do believe that there is no way to get around transformational change without opening up and considering the student as a whole.

### **Conclusion**

The motivation for this article comes from several sources. First, as a field, the learning sciences has yet to directly attend to Carl Rogers, and it is a worthwhile goal of any field to not forget the past. Researchers frequently cite Piaget, Dewey and Vygotsky, and Rogers certainly stands among these 20<sup>th</sup> century giants that impacted education. Second, we hope to contribute to what we view as a recent interest and resurgence in considering the role of emotions and personal experiences in learning, such as with the examples of Scratch, a broad view of learning, and ongoing identity research. Considering person- and idea-centeredness as two foci with different goals and activities adds new clarity to these issues, and shows the relation

between what may appear to be otherwise fragmented lines of research. Finally, we have been engaged in a long-term design experiment, and although we have published different aspects of it, this is our first offering of an overarching framework to explain a great deal of our efforts. Our research has now matured to the point where we want to share our own conceptualization and findings with the broader educational community. Mainly, we seek to show here that transformations of participation involve the integration of person- and idea-centeredness, and how this can inform the theory and practice of learning communities.

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