Activity Theory:
a framework for qualitative analysis

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Sharing objectives

1. What is Activity Theory (AT)?

2. AT as analytical tool

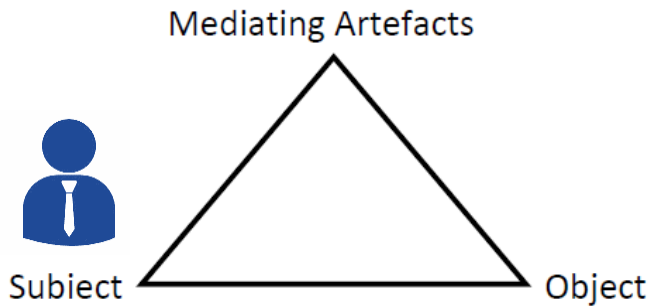3. AT and contradictions

What is Activity Theory (AT)?

- Activity theory, alternatively known as Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT)

- Vygotsky(1978), further developed by Leont'ev (1978; 1981) and Engeström (1993).

Activity theory can be utilised as:

- **an analytical tool** (Scanlon and Issroff, 2005)
- **an approach** (Nardi, 1996),
- **a conceptual theory** (Cole, 1999; Nardi, 1996; Russell and Schneiderheinze, 2005).
- **a philosophical framework** (Kuutti, 1996).

What is Activity Theory (AT)?

1ˢᵗ generation

Mediating Artefacts

Subject — Object

Vygotsky, 1924 -> (Leontév, 1978)

- analysis tools for understanding **human activities.**
- Understanding of the **relationship between people and their environments**.
- Why do they behave/react/interact the way they do?
- E.g., what is their motive to learn/ to collaborate?

- helps you to reflect on current practice and see the gap/ the issue
- helps you to strategize/ restructure
- helps you to make better decision
- helps you to understand the best way to help others

What is Activity Theory (AT)?

Subject

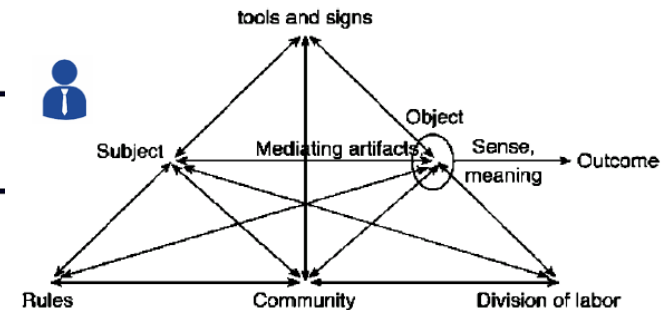**Externalization**

Internalization

Language is a special kind of artefact/ tool

- A person's actions are influenced by internal and external factors
- AT provide focus for us to analyse these factors: **tool**, object, rules, community, and division of labour.

What is Activity Theory (AT)?

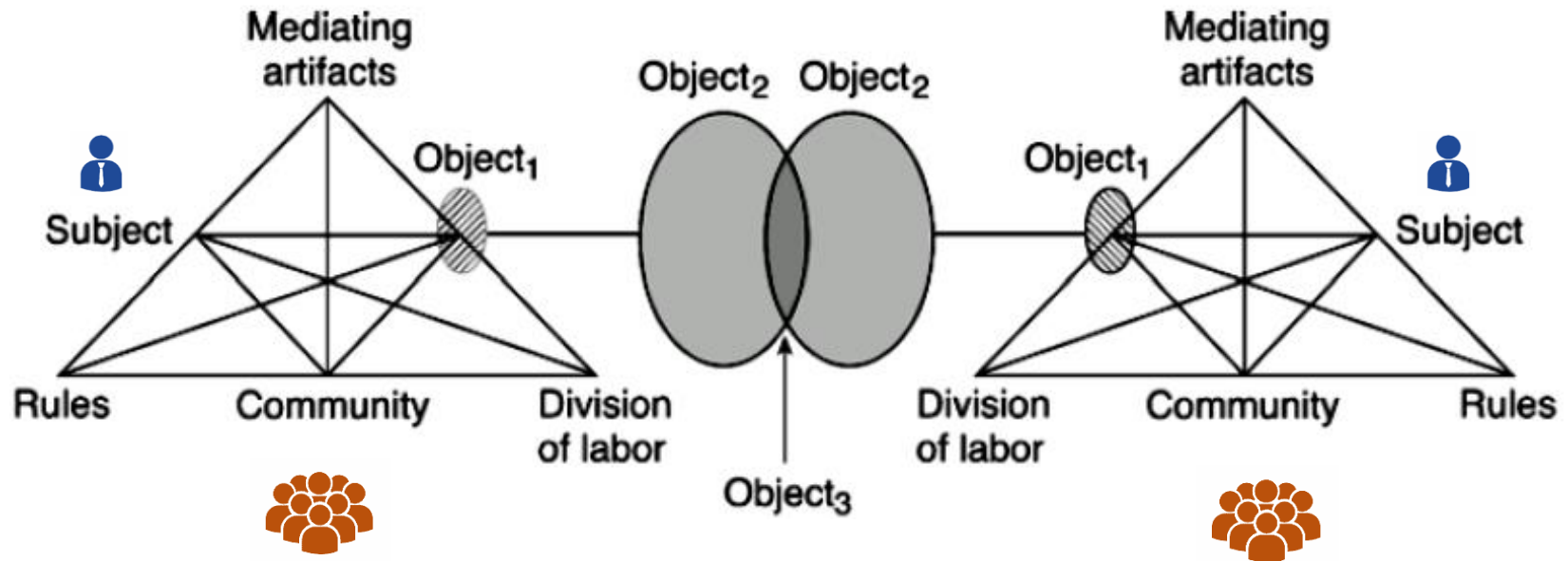| Step	Identify the:	Question to ask:
1	Activity of interest	What sort of activity am I interested in?
2	Objective	Why is the activity taking place?
3	Subjects	Who is involved in carrying out the activity?
4	Tools	By what means are the subjects performing this activity?
5	Rules and regulations	Are there any cultural norms, rules or regulations governing the performance of the activity?
6	Division of labour	Who is responsible for what, when carrying out activity and how are those roles organised?
7	Community	What is the environment in which this activity is carried out?
8	Outcomes	What is the desired outcome from carrying out this activity?

2nd generation

(Engestrom, 1987)

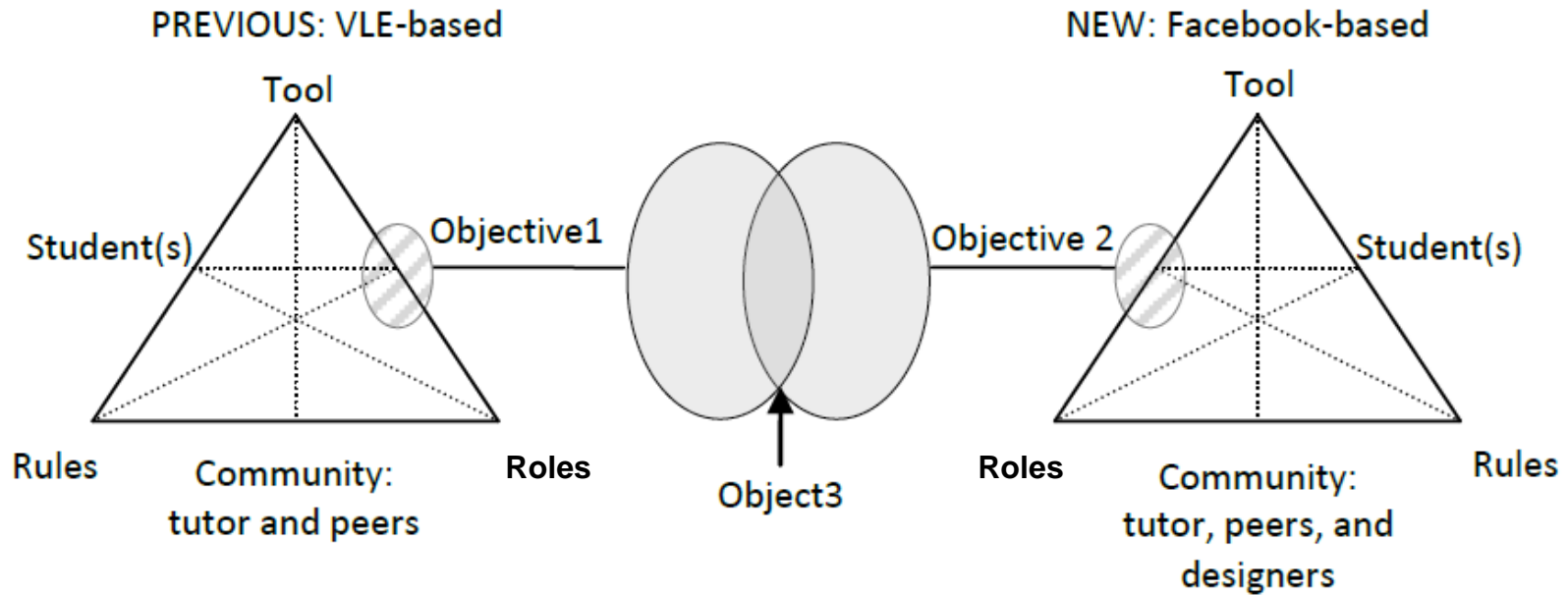The eight step model (Source: Mwanza and Engestrom, 2005, p.459)

3rd generation

Identifying contradictions that bring changes

(Engestrom, 1999)
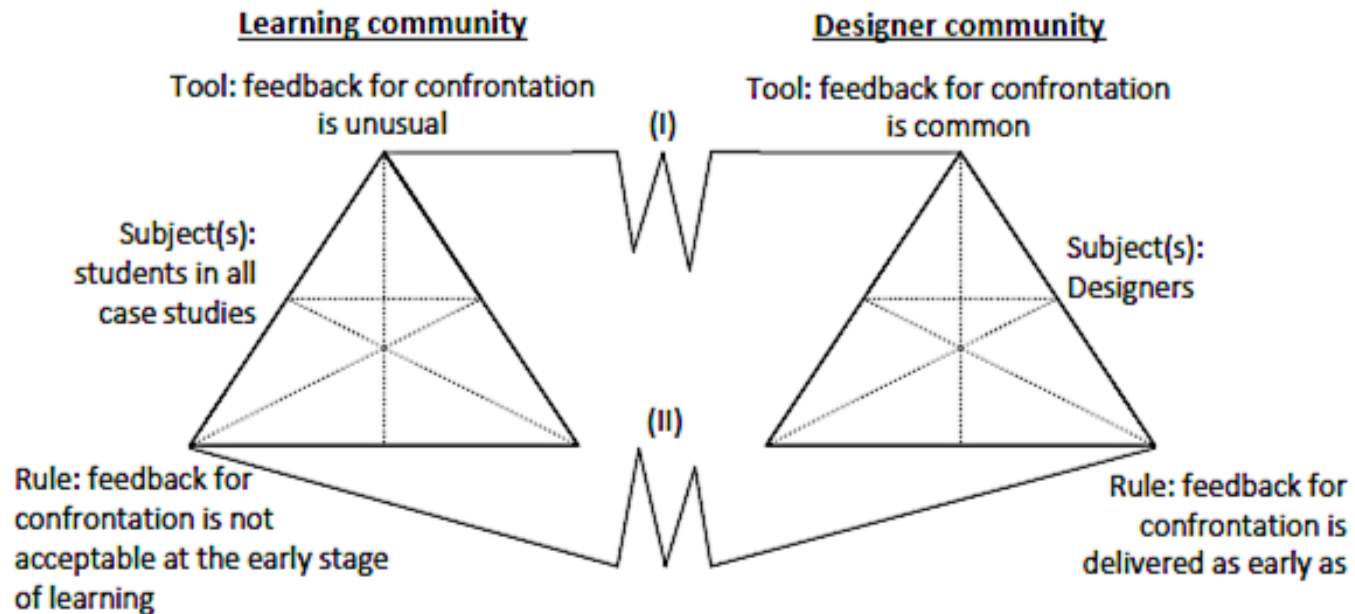
Interpretations of **contradiction**:

- conflict (Dippe, 2006),

- tension (Basharina, 2007),

- problems, ruptures, breakdowns and clashes (Kuutti, 1996),

- accumulating tensions (Engeström, 2001)

AT and contradictions

PREVIOUS: VLE-based

Tool

Student(s)

Objective1

Roles

Rules

Community:
tutor and peers

Object3

NEW: Facebook-based

Tool

Objective 2

Student(s)

Roles

Community:
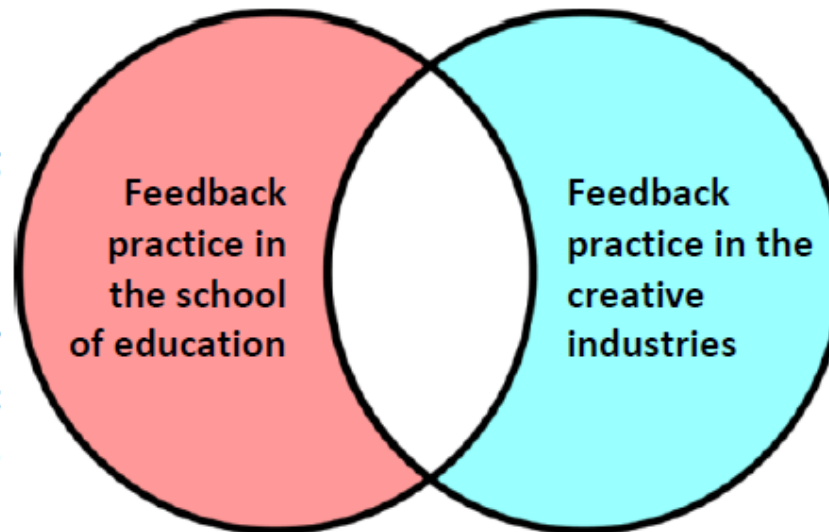tutor, peers, and
designers

Rules

- AT sees contradictions as sources of learning and development (Engeström, 1987)
- e.g, AT facilitated the understanding of how students were affected by the contradictions and how they reconciled them.
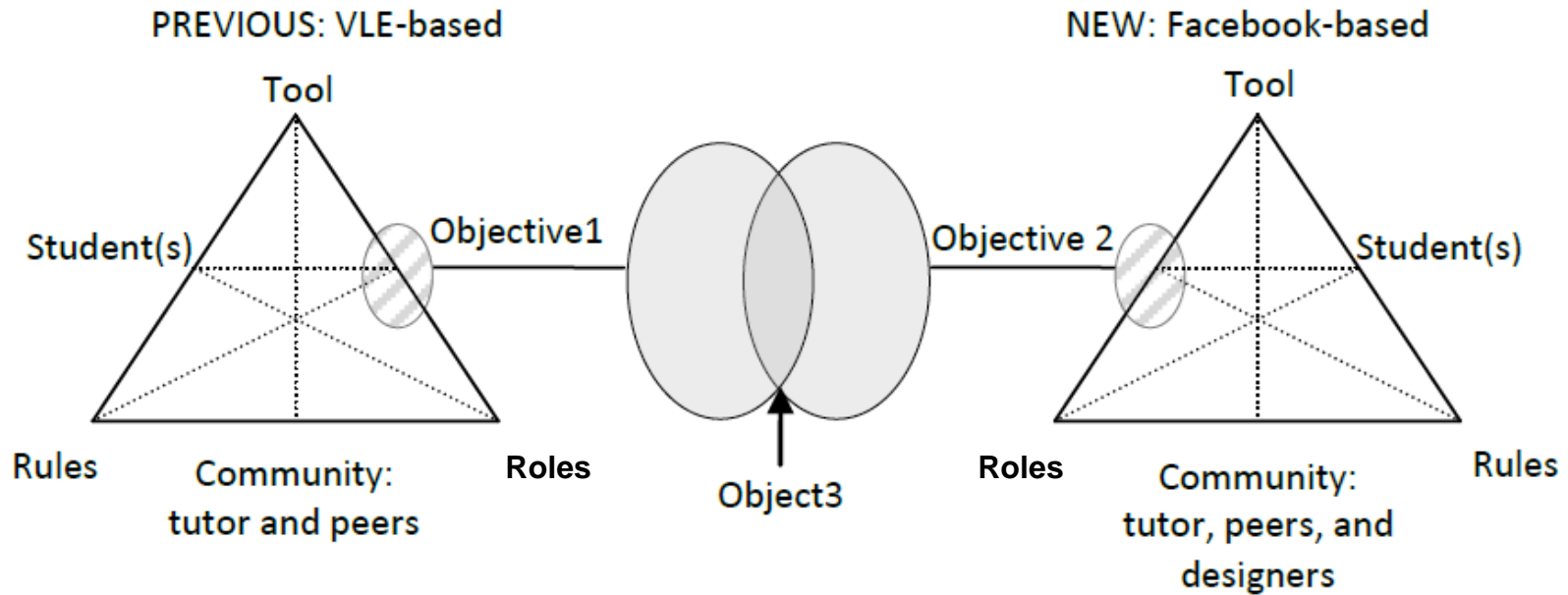- The contradictions brought about some benefits and also drawbacks

- What were the contradictions that emerged in the project under study?'

- 'What were the underlying reasons for those contradictions?

- Feedback: constructive, kind and helpful
- Problem-based learning approach
  - Task completion
    - Feedback for confrontation at summative phase (delayed)

Feedback practice in the school of education

Feedback practice in the creative industries

- Feedback: Critiques/ complaints
- Studio-based learning approach
- Clients' recognition
- Feedback for confrontation at formative phase (immediate)

AT and contradictions

PREVIOUS: VLE-based

Tool

Student(s)

Objective1

Rules

Community: tutor and peers

Roles

Object3

Roles

NEW: Facebook-based

Tool

Objective 2

Student(s)

Rules

Community: tutor, peers, and designers

- Student's objective changed – from producing a design with high marks (Objective 1), and producing a design to get accepted by the designers and lecturers (Objective 2) to producing a design that is appropriate for the target audience (Objective 3).
- What caused the change? The different culture/styles in feedback delivery.
- Therefore, attention on feedback delivery is crucial if you wish to have such learning collaboration.

Reading list

Available online at www.sciencedirect.com

ScienceDirect

ELSEVIER

Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences 131 (2014) 70 – 84

Procedia
Social and Behavioral Sciences

Abdullah, Zaleha (2011) Collision of two communities: Developing higher education student teachers' creativity in design through a social networking collaboration with professional designers. PhD thesis, University of Nottingham.

Activity Theory As Analytical Tool: A Case Study Of Developing Student Teachers' Creativity In Design

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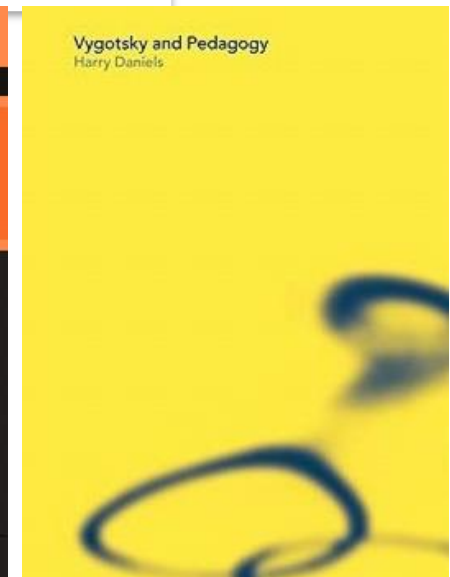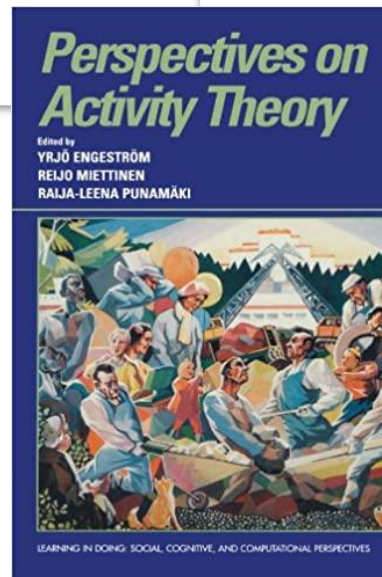81310, Skudai, Johor, Malaysia*

Abstract

Activity Theory has been found useful in providing insights into all aspects of interactions and contradictions. This is relevant to this study in comprehending the learning experiences of student teachers. A qualitative approach was utilized in addressing the question 'Does Activity Theory assist in highlighting challenges faced by the student teachers in developing design creativity and assist in representing what student teachers require from collaborating with professional designers?' I established the usefulness of Activity Theory in three areas: the need for managing students' cognitive and emotional aspects, viewing confrontation as valuable in stimulating design creativity, recognize the affective and confrontational roles played by the tutor and the designers in encouraging design improvement. I conclude that Activity Theory enables a more holistic approach to be taken in developing design creativity.

Keywords: Activity Theory, interface design, community of practitioners, contradiction

Perspectives on Activity Theory — Edited by YRJÖ ENGESTRÖM, REIJO MIETTINEN, RAIJA-LEENA PUNAMÄKI — LEARNING IN DOING: SOCIAL, COGNITIVE, AND COMPUTATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

Victor Kaptelinin and Bonnie A. Nardi — ACTING WITH TECHNOLOGY — Activity Theory and Interaction Design

Vygotsky and Pedagogy — Harry Daniels
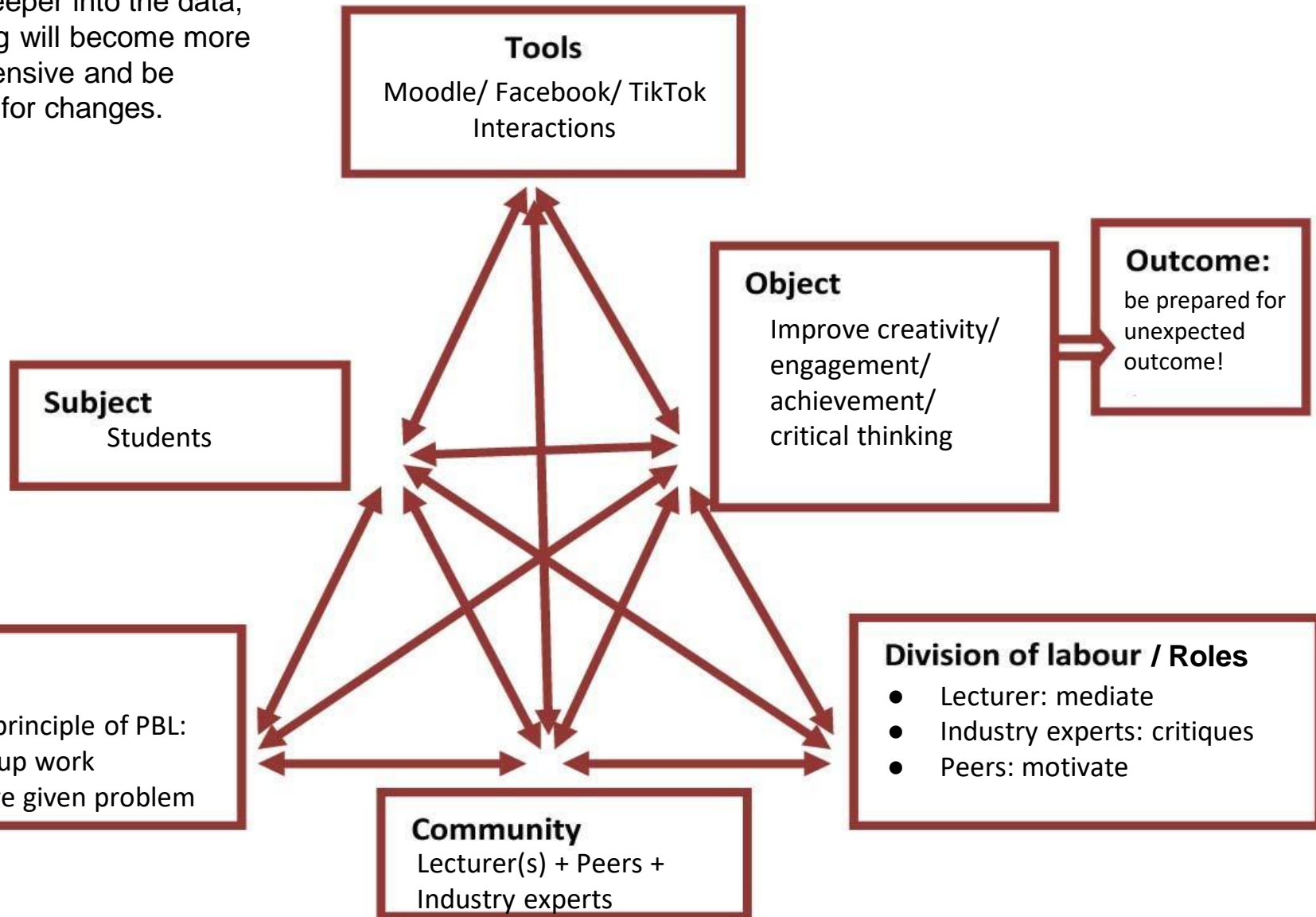
Where to start?
Exercise

REMINDER:
You can start with this, but as you go deeper into the data, everything will become more comprehensive and be prepared for changes.

Tools
Moodle/ Facebook/ TikTok Interactions

Object
Improve creativity/ engagement/ achievement/ critical thinking

Outcome:
be prepared for unexpected outcome!

Subject
Students

Rules

Based on principle of PBL:
- Group work
- Solve given problem

Community
Lecturer(s) + Peers + Industry experts

Division of labour / Roles
- Lecturer: mediate
- Industry experts: critiques
- Peers: motivate