

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-43127-9 - Perspectives on Activity Theory

Edited by Yrjö Engeström, Reijo Miettinen and Raija-leena Punamäki

Frontmatter

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Perspectives on activity theory

Activity theory is an interdisciplinary approach to human sciences that originates in the cultural-historical psychology initiated by Vygotsky, Leont'ev, and Luria. It takes the object-oriented, artifact-mediated collective activity system as its unit of analysis, thus bridging the gulf between the individual subject and the societal structure. This volume is the first comprehensive presentation of contemporary work in activity theory, with 26 original chapters by authors from 10 countries.

In Part I of the book, central theoretical issues are discussed from different points of view. Some topics addressed in this part are epistemology, methodology, and the relationship between biological and cultural factors. Part II is devoted to the acquisition and development of language – a theme that played a central role in the work of Vygotsky and Luria. This part includes a chapter that analyzes writing activity in Japanese classrooms and an original case study of literacy skills in a man with cerebral palsy.

Part III contains chapters on play, learning, and education, and Part IV addresses the meaning of new technology and the development of work activities. The final part covers issues of therapy and addiction.

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Frontmatter

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Contents

<i>List of contributors</i>	<i>page</i> x
<i>Series foreword</i>	xiii
Introduction	1
<i>Yrjö Engeström and Reijo Miettinen</i>	
Part I Theoretical issues	
1 Activity theory and individual and social transformation	19
<i>Yrjö Engeström</i>	
2 The content and unsolved problems of activity theory	39
<i>Vassily V. Davydov</i>	
3 Knowledge as shared procedures	53
<i>Stephen Toulmin</i>	
4 Activity theory in a new era	65
<i>Vladimir A. Lektorsky</i>	
5 Society versus context in individual development: Does theory make a difference?	70
<i>Charles W. Tolman</i>	
6 Cultural psychology: Some general principles and a concrete example	87
<i>Michael Cole</i>	
7 Laws, logics, and human activity	107
<i>Antti Eskola</i>	
8 Collapse, creation, and continuity in Europe: How do people change?	115
<i>Yrjö-Paavo Häyrynen</i>	
9 Activity theory and the concept of integrative levels	133
<i>Ethel Tobach</i>	
vii	

Cambridge University Press

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

viii	<i>Contents</i>	
10	The relevance to psychology of Antonio Gramsci's ideas on activity and common sense <i>Francesco Paolo Colucci</i>	147
	Part II Language and its acquisition	
11	The expanded dialogic sphere: Writing activity and authoring of self in Japanese classrooms <i>Yuji Moro</i>	165
12	Improvement of schoolchildren's reading and writing ability through the formation of linguistic awareness <i>Kyoshi Amano</i>	183
13	Psychomotor and socioemotional processes in literacy acquisition: Results of an ongoing case study involving a nonvocal cerebral palsic young man <i>Matthias Bujarski, Martin Hildebrand-Nilshon, and Jan Kordt</i>	206
	Part III Play, learning, and instruction	
14	Play and motivation <i>Pentti Hakkarainen</i>	231
15	Drama games with 6-year-old children: Possibilities and limitations <i>Stig Broström</i>	250
16	Activity formation as an alternative strategy of instruction <i>Joachim Lompscher</i>	264
17	Activity theory and history teaching <i>Mariane Hedegaard</i>	282
18	Didactic models and the problem of intertextuality and polyphony <i>Jacques Carpay and Bert Van Oers</i>	298
19	Metaphor and learning activity <i>Bernd Fichtner</i>	314
20	Transcending traditional school learning: Teachers' work and networks of learning <i>Reijo Miettinen</i>	325

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978-0-521-43127-9 - Perspectives on Activity Theory

Edited by Yrjö Engeström, Reijo Miettinen and Raija-leena Punamäki

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

<i>Contents</i>	ix
Part IV Technology and work	
21 The theory of activity changed by information technology <i>Oleg K. Tikhomirov</i>	347
22 Activity theory, transformation of work, and information systems design <i>Kari Kuutti</i>	360
23 Innovative learning in work teams: Analyzing cycles of knowledge creation in practice <i>Yrjö Engeström</i>	377
Part V Therapy and addiction	
24 Object relations theory and activity theory: A proposed link by way of the procedural sequence model <i>Anthony Ryle</i>	407
25 The concept of sign in the work of Vygotsky, Winnicott, and Bakhtin: Further integration of object relations theory and activity theory <i>Mikael Leiman</i>	419
26 From addiction to self-governance <i>Anja Koski-Jännes</i>	435
<i>Author index</i>	445
<i>Subject index</i>	452

Cambridge University Press

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Contributors

xi

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Series foreword

This series for Cambridge University Press is becoming widely known as an international forum for studies of situated learning and cognition.

Innovative contributions are being made in anthropology; in cognitive, developmental, and cultural psychology; in computer science; in education; and in social theory. These contributions are providing the basis for new ways of understanding the social, historical, and contextual nature of the learning, thinking, and practice emerging from human activity. The empirical settings of these research inquiries range from the classroom, to the workplace, to the high-technology office, to learning in the streets and in other communities of practice.

The situated nature of learning and remembering through activity is a central fact. It may appear obvious that human minds develop in social situations and extend their sphere of activity and communicative competencies. But cognitive theories of knowledge representation and learning alone have not provided sufficient insight into these relationships.

This series was born of the conviction that new and exciting interdisciplinary syntheses are under way, as scholars and practitioners from diverse fields seek to develop theories and empirical investigations adequate for characterizing the complex relations of social and mental life, and for understanding successful learning wherever it occurs. The series invites contributions that advance our understanding of these seminal issues.

Roy Pea
John Seely Brown
Jan Hawkins