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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Perspectives on activity theory

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Contents

List of contributors .......................... x
Series foreword ............................. xiii

Introduction
Yrjö Engeström and Reijo Miettinen .......................... 1

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

vii
Contents

10 The relevance to psychology of Antonio Gramsci’s ideas on activity and common sense
Francesco Paolo Colucci

11 The expanded dialogic sphere: Writing activity and authoring of self in Japanese classrooms
Yuji Moro

12 Improvement of schoolchildren’s reading and writing ability through the formation of linguistic awareness
Kyoshi Amano

13 Psychomotor and socioemotional processes in literacy acquisition: Results of an ongoing case study involving a nonvocal cerebral palsy young man
Matthias Bujarski, Martin Hildebrand-Nilshon, and Jan Kordt

Part II Language and its acquisition

14 Play and motivation
Pentti Hakkarainen

15 Drama games with 6-year-old children: Possibilities and limitations
Stig Broström

16 Activity formation as an alternative strategy of instruction
Joachim Lompscher

17 Activity theory and history teaching
Mariane Hedegaard

18 Didactic models and the problem of intertextuality and polyphony
Jacques Carpay and Bert Van Oers

19 Metaphor and learning activity
Bernd Fichtner

20 Transcending traditional school learning: Teachers’ work and networks of learning
Reijo Miettinen
Contents

Part IV Technology and work
21 The theory of activity changed by information technology 347
Oleg K. Tikhomirov

22 Activity theory, transformation of work, and information systems design 360
Kari Kuutti

23 Innovative learning in work teams: Analyzing cycles of knowledge creation in practice 377
Yrjö Engeström

Part V Therapy and addiction
24 Object relations theory and activity theory: A proposed link by way of the procedural sequence model 407
Anthony Ryle

25 The concept of sign in the work of Vygotsky, Winnicott, and Bakhtin: Further integration of object relations theory and activity theory 419
Mikael Leiman

26 From addiction to self-governance 435
Anja Koski-Jännes

Author index 445
Subject index 452
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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.

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