Psychotherapy in Everyday Life

Psychotherapy in Everyday Life details how clients make therapy work in their everyday lives by using what they learned in private sessions. Therapy cannot fulfill its purpose until clients can make it work outside the therapy room in relation to the concerns, people, and places of their everyday lives. Research on therapy has largely ignored these efforts. Based on session transcripts and interviews with a family of four about their everyday lives, this book shows the extensive and varied work that clients do to make their therapy work across places. Processes of change and learning are seen in a new perspective, and it is shown that expert practices depend on how persons conduct their everyday lives. To grasp this, Ole Dreier developed a theory of persons that is based on how people conduct their lives in social practice. This theory is grounded in critical psychology and social practice theory and is also relevant for understanding other expert practices such as education.

Ole Dreier is a professor in the department of psychology at the University of Copenhagen, where he received both his M.A. and Ph.D. He is a leading scholar in activity theory and critical psychology in Europe and combines work on the development of theory with research directed at developing practices in the fields of psychotherapy, health care, and education. He is a member of the Danish interdisciplinary Center for Health, Humanity, and Culture and an approved specialist in psychotherapy and supervision. Dreier has held the Wilhelm-Wundt chair in Leipzig, and he has been affiliated with universities in Mexico, Germany, and the United States. He is a member of the International Society for Theoretical Psychology and the International Society for Cultural and Activity Research.
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Psychotherapy in Everyday Life

OLE DREIER

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Series Foreword

This series for Cambridge University Press is widely known as an international forum for studies of situated learning and cognition. Innovative contributions are being made by anthropology; by cognitive, developmental, and cultural psychology; by computer science; by education; and by social theory. These contributions are providing the basis for new ways of understanding the social, historical, and contextual nature of learning, thinking, and practice that emerges from human activity. The empirical settings of these research inquiries range from the classroom to the workplace, to the high-technology office, and 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 underway as scholars and practitioners from diverse fields seek to develop theory 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
Christian Heath
Lucy Suchman
Preface

The project I present in this book grew out of a series of “Theory–Practice–Conferences” in which researchers and practitioners, coming from the tradition of critical psychology, met twice a year, mostly in Berlin, for a period of more than ten years to study psychological practices. These conferences pursued two related goals. The first objective was to study the conduct of psychological practice, broadly taken, in order to become able to describe and understand it better and thereby find better ways to conduct it. As a means to that end, we developed a guideline, the so-called practice-portrait (Markard and Holzkamp 1989), for the analysis of professional psychological practices. The second aim was to work out a better understanding of how to base the conduct of psychological practice on a theoretical conception, that is, of how to use concepts as a basis for analysis and conduct and, at the same time, to utilize the analyses of issues in practice to foster the development of concepts and theories. My project was presented and discussed several times at these conferences.

It was also inspired by my involvement for many years in collaborations between university-based researchers and psychology practitioners in Denmark, many of whom had a strong interest in critical psychology. Thus, I had collaborated for some time with members of the staff at the outpatient unit of child psychiatry where this project took place. It also grew out of my activities as a therapist, supervisor, trainer, and teacher. For thirty years I have used these activities as vehicles for research in my position as a faculty member at a university department. Much of this research has been aimed at developing a critique of problematic aspects of current psychological practice and current understandings of it. This critique was not an end in itself but a means to reach better understandings and identify possibilities for improving practice. Still, critique is necessary because particular assumptions stand in the way of changing our approach to and conduct of practice.

Many colleagues and institutions have contributed to the development of my project. The key figure in critical psychology, Klaus Holzkamp, has been the major theoretical and personal inspiration for my work, and he contributed many important ideas to this project – in the Theory–Practice–Conferences and on many other occasions. I discussed the project with colleagues during my stay as Wundt professor in Leipzig, as well as with fellow members of
the Center for Health, Humanity, and Culture in Denmark, headed by Uffe Juul Jensen. Jean Lave has been a source of profound inspiration and strong support throughout, and during my stays at UC Berkeley and hers in Copenhagen. The University of California Humanities Center provided a chance for presentation and discussion during my stay there in 2001, as did the Danish research network on nonscholastic learning, which I co-led with Steinar Kvale and Steen Wackerhausen. Responses from colleagues at other conferences and from my students in Copenhagen spurred the project along. Initially, the Danish Research Council for the Humanities provided funding for a research assistant to do the interviews and part of my later work through its support of the first four years of my work in the Center for Health, Humanity, and Culture. Finally, the Spencer Foundation provided support through a collaborative Small Grant 2000000053 obtained by Jean Lave. My research assistant, Lisbeth Moltzen, and I developed and updated the interview guide together, and Lisbeth played a very constructive role in conducting and developing the interviews. My cotherapist in the chosen case, Ingrid Gehl, graciously contributed her time and expertise in the field to the project. And over the years my wife, Dorte Bukh, lent her ears and important advice, as a practitioner in the field, to my musings and questions.