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1. Second Workshop on Activity Theory and the Cultural-Historical School, 8-10 July, 2005, Haus Ohrbeck, Germany

Zweiter Workshop zu „Tätigkeitstheorie und kulturhistorische Schule“

Auf dem letzten Workshop in Bergneustadt war verabredet worden, im Jahr 2005 ein weiteres Treffen zu organisieren. Es wurde ein wunderschöner Tagungsort in Mitten des Nördlichen Teutoburger Waldes bei Osnabrück gefunden; Haus Ohrbeck. Hier fand vom 8. bis 10. Juli 2005 der zweite Workshop statt.

An diesem Workshop nahmen 25 Wissenschaftler aus Philosophie, Computerwissenschaft, Sozialpädagogik, Psychologie, Sportwissenschaft, Soziologie, Erziehungswissenschaft, Betriebswirtschaft und Psycholinguistik teil.

Der erste Abend des Workshops war der Frage gewidmet, ob die Emotionen in der Tätigkeitstheorie angemessen behandelt werden – es war die Frage, ob die Tätigkeitstheorie hier nicht einen „blinden Fleck“ hat (Manfred Holidynski und Martin Hildebrand-Nilshon als Diskutant). Naturgemäß wurde diese Frage kontrovers diskutiert – zumal das generelle Thema aufgeworfen wurde wie sich die Tätigkeitstheorie gegenüber neuen empirischen Forschungsergebnisse der Psychologie verhält.

Der nächste Tag begann mit einer Auseinandersetzung mit der Kritik A. N. Leont’evs and Vygotskij, über die Peter Keiler im Hinblick auf neue Dokumente vortrug. Einen beachtlichen Raum in den Vorträgen und Diskussionen nahm die Frage, wie sich tätigkeitstheoretische Begriffe und Methoden in der praktischen Arbeit anwenden lassen, wie sie diese Praxis anleiten und zugleich von ihr erweitert werden können. Einen beeindruckenden Einblick in die Arbeit mit behinderten Kindern (Trisomie 21) gab Christel Manske. Über den Bereich der Interventionen in Arbeit und Organisation berichtete Zlatko Bodrozik und über ein empirisches Pro-

jekt über die narrativ-biographische Konstruktion sozialer Geschlechtsidentität Michael Herschelmann. Eine Reihe von Vorträgen beschäftigten sich mit der Notwendigkeit, das begriffliche Inventar der Tätigkeitstheorie und kulturhistorischen Schule zu verändern und zu ergänzen – es wurde angesprochen das Verhältnis von allgemeiner und spezieller Tätigkeitstheorie (Georg Litsche), das Verhältnis von Prozeß und Tätigkeit und die Spezifik der Tätigkeitstheorie (Volker Schürmann) sowie die Frage nach der Möglichkeit der Objektivierung der Tätigkeitstheorie (Christian Dahme) und der speziellen Dialektik der Altersstufen in der Tätigkeitstheorie (Manfred Jödecke). In einer Abendveranstaltung erinnerte Georg Rückriem an das Lebenswerk des zu Beginn des Jahres verstorbenen Joachim Lompscher.

In der Auswertung der Diskussionen und der Tagung wurde beschlossen, den Workshop künftig jährlich durchzuführen und dazu als Tagungsort Haus Ohrbeck beizubehalten. Für die Organisation des nächsten Workshops im Sommer 2006 haben sich Bernd Fichtner und Mitarbeiter von der Universität Siegen bereit erklärt. Nachfragen sind an die folgende email Adresse zu richten:
fichtner@paedagogik.uni-siegen.de

Second workshop on ‘Activity theory and cultural-historical school’, Haus Ohrbeck, Germany

It was decided at the first workshop in 2003 that the next one should be held in 2005. A nice place was found close to Osnabrück, Lower Saxony, and the 2nd workshop was held there from the 8th to the 10th of July, 2005.

25 researchers participated, coming from diverse disciplines including philosophy, compu-

ter science, social work, psychology, sociology, sport sciences, education, management science and psycholinguistics.

The first evening of the workshop was devoted to the question whether emotions are the 'blind spot' of activity theory (Manfred Holodynski with Martin Hildebrand-Nilshon as discussant). It was clear that this question was discussed in controversial terms — especially so because it was followed by the more general question of how activity theory addresses and digests new research results in related scientific disciplines.

The next day began with a presentation on A. N. Leont'ev's critique of Vygotskij (Peter Keiler). Much attention was given in the following presentations and discussion about the question of what methods and concepts of activity theory might be specifically helpful and applicable in societal praxis. An impressive account on her work with handicapped children (Trisomy 21) was given by Christel Manske. Zlatko Bodrozik presented on interventions in work and organization, and Michael Herschelmann about an empirical study on the narrative-biographical construction of gender identity.

A couple of presentations were addressing the issue of changing and extending the conceptual inventory of activity theory — the relation of general and specific activity theory (Georg Litsche), and the question of how activity theoretical concepts might be objectified (Christian Dahme), the relation of process and activity (Volker Schürmann) and the dialectic specific for different age groups (Manfred Jödecke). In an evening session Georg Rückriem talked about the life and work of the late Joachim Lompscher.

In evaluating the workshop it was decided that it should be held more regularly, on a yearly basis. It was also decided that for now Haus Ohrbeck should be the meeting place. The organization of the next workshop, to take place in the summer of 2006, is in the hands of Bernd Fichtner and co-workers from the University of Siegen. Questions about that should be addressed to:

fichtner@paedagogik.uni-siegen.de

(Falk Seeger, falk.seeger@uni-bielefeld.de)

2. Memorial symposium for Joachim Lompscher, Berlin, 31 August 2005

A symposium entitled "Erinnerung für die Zukunft — Pädagogische Psychologie in der DDR" ("Memory for the Future — Pedagogical Psychology in GDR") was held in Berlin on 31 August 2005 in memory of Joachim Lompscher, who died this year (05.02.2005).

The main purpose of the symposium was to remember Joachim Lompscher and his scientific work, which had both national and international importance, and made a tremendous contribution to establishing pedagogical psychology in the German Democratic Republic (GDR). A second purpose of the symposium was to preserve the results of pedagogical psychology from the GDR in general and especially the research that has contributed to the develop-

ment of modern cultural-historical theory and activity theory in psychology.

Seventy-five participants discussed issues from seven presentations, which were grouped in three thematic blocks. The first thematic block addressed the development of GDR pedagogical psychology until the end of the 1980s. Here it was asked what contribution to the development of the scientific discipline of pedagogical psychology came from the GDR, and what findings and theoretical approaches from this contribution are still relevant today to psychological discourses and to solving current problems in education. It could be shown that there are some (ideological) limits in principle, but also some good promises of pedagogical

psychology from GDR, which should be remembered for its contributions to solving present educational problems (e.g., in preschool education).

The second thematic block was the outside perspective (the perception of pedagogical psychology outside the GDR). The presentations and the discussion showed some problems of cultural-historical theory and of activity theory in principle. Here the participants pointed to a still existing gap between theoretical and empirical research, a missing unity between theory and its empirical foundation.

The third thematic block showed future perspectives (the development after the political change — from the 1990s until present). This block was dedicated to works that were inspired by the work of Joachim Lompscher. The present-

ed research projects pointed at the issue that a consistent subject orientation in pedagogical psychological approaches based on cultural-historical theory and activity theory are able to show new perspectives for education in the classroom. These new perspectives are tied closely to the creation of a new learning culture (e.g., action-oriented, self-directed, conscious learning - learning activity). The creation of this learning culture is a main challenge for and an urgent problem to be solved in modern society, education and classroom. This problem is not new at all; it was addressed in the 19th century by Humboldt and Diesterweg, but still remains unsolved in school practice today.

(Prof. Hartmut Giest, giest@rz.uni-potsdam.de)

3. 16th Activity Theory Conference, 18-20 November, 2005, Nyborg, Denmark

The 16th conference on activity theory was held from 18-20 November in Nyborg, Denmark, with about 55 participants, a mixture of doctoral students, university-based researchers, and persons working in public institutions, and coming from several different professions and disciplines including psychology, occupational therapy, computer systems, philosophy, sociology, criminology, and pedagogy.

The theme of the conference was *New demands to theory, method and practice*. As noted before in this newsletter, the name of the conference has been retained from its historical origin, but today, the participants come from a variety of different theoretical traditions that could be described as cultural-historical, activity-theoretical, and critical psychology.

Friday evening started with a short account of recent international developments in relation to ISCAR and persons who are participating in ISCAR (Seth Chaiklin). This was followed by several short (10-minute) presentations about current research projects including development of meaning among drug users (Anna Juberg), men

who sell sex over the internet (Hans Knutagård), special education (John Bertelsen), self-understanding among teachers (Jan Selmer Methi), relations between ecological psychology and cultural-historical psychology (Jytte Bang), and studies of prisoners (Charlotte Mattiassen).

The final two days were organized in three thematic blocks. The first block focused on the relation between theory and practice with a starting point in concrete research projects aimed at intervention. Presentations were made about projects that were aimed at developing categories in practice for how to think about school children in difficulty (Ole V. Rasmussen), a model for developing solutions in practice for cultural minority youth (Lene Lerche Mørck) and changing practices in treating drug abusers (Morten Nissen). This was followed by a general discussion of the problems of developing interventive research practices.

The second block was focused on the question of evidence-based research, which was a continuation of a theme raised at the previous conference. One presentation gave a historical

account of the development of evidence-based research (Uffe Juul Jensen), another presented an account of how evidence-based demands are appearing today in the Danish health system (Tove Borg), and a third presented a project that gave a critical analysis of the process by which evaluation was implemented in some residential treatment centers for children (Irene Højlund). This was followed by a lively and active discussion about how to understand the phenomenon of evidence-based research, as well as strategies for how to respond to it.

The third block was devoted to general psychological issues, again reflecting a desire from the previous year's conference to have more exchange around these questions. There was a presentation by a neuropsychologist about what neuroscience could (or could not) contrib-

ute to the understanding of cognition (Hysse Forchammer), a presentation of a recently completed masters thesis on the historical development of writing and its relation to the development of psychological functions (Jacob Klitmøller) and a project about children med spastic paralysis (Louise Bøttchner).

It was generally agreed that it was useful and exciting to have a program that mixed theoretical and empirical work together, and to include both questions of practical intervention and investigations of general psychological concepts.

A committee was formed to plan for the 17th conference, which will be held next November. An almost accurate version of the program for the 16th conference can be found (in Danish) at: <http://www.iscar.org/dk/iscardk/16konf.htm>

Announcements

4. Call for Papers: *Language in Action — Vygotsky and Leontievian Legacy Today*, 8–10 June 2006, University of Jyväskylä, Finland

Deadline: 31 January 2006

The conference offers a forum for scholarly discussions concerning language and action/activity, while at the same time celebrating the life and work of Alexei Alexeevitch Leontiev. Key-note speakers will be: Tatyana Akhutina, Yrjö Engeström, Dmitry Leontiev, Aida Markosyan, Dorothy Robbins, and Anna Stetsenko.

The Centre for Applied Language Studies and the Department of Languages at the University

of Jyväskylä, Finland will host the conference. It will take place in connection with the Summer School of Applied Linguistics (5–7 June 2006), focusing on sociocultural approaches to language learning and language education.

For more information about the conference and for instructions on how to submit 500-word abstracts:

<http://www.solki.jyu.fi/english/conference2006/>

5. Ph.D. Stipendium, Language – Culture – Media – Identities research unit, University of Luxembourg

The Faculty for Language and Literature, Humanities, Arts and Education at the University of Luxembourg invites applications for a Research Assistant (PhD student) on the basis of a part-time position (50%) for the time period 1.4.2006 – 31.03.2008. This contract is likely to be extended for a second period until 2010.

It will be an advantage to have knowledge

and experience with sociocultural theory and/or cultural-historical activity theory.

Applications should arrive by January 20, 2006. For further information or questions, please contact assistant-professor Charles Max <charles.max@uni.lu> or go to <http://www.lcmi.lu/> and click on Latest News.

Publications

6. Discounts on Journal Subscriptions for ISCAR members

20% discount on the journal *Mind, Culture, and Activity*

A 20% discount is offered to ISCAR members for new and renewed subscriptions to the quarterly journal *Mind, Culture, and Activity*, published by Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

(This offer does NOT apply to persons who have already paid for a 2006 subscription.)

Rates for year 2006:

USA and Canada: 36 USD (normally: 45 USD)

Elsewhere: 60 USD (normally: 75 USD)

Please note that all subscribers to the journal are also able to receive an electronic version of the journal by registering on the Erlbaum webpage.

You may order by Erlbaum's website, telephone, fax, or post. To receive detailed instructions about how to get the discount, send an empty email to: mca-request@iscar.org
Instructions will be sent immediately.

30% discount on the journal *Culture & Psychology*

A 30% discount is offered to ISCAR members for new and renewed subscriptions to the journal *Culture & Psychology* published quarterly

by Sage Publications. (This offer does NOT apply to persons who have already paid for a 2006 subscription.)

Rates for year 2006: 58 USD (normal rate: 84 USD)

You may order by telephone, fax, or post. To receive detailed instructions about how to get the discount, send an empty email to:

cp-request@iscar.org

Instructions will be sent immediately.

25% discount on the journals *Outlines and Nordisk Udkast*

Outlines and *Nordisk Udkast* are published twice a year, the first in English, the second in Scandinavian languages. The content is critical social studies, combining critique of science, professional practice, and social issues in an attempt to intervene in public discourses and establish counter-discourses in various social fields. For more information about costs and ordering:

<http://www.iscar.org/benefits.html#outlines>

7. New Books by ISCAR Members

Cultural Psychology: A Perspective on Psychological Functioning and Social Reform.
Carl Ratner. Erlbaum, 2006.

<https://www.erlbaum.com/shop/tek9.asp?pg=products&specific=0-8058-5478-9>

This book deepens our understanding of cultural aspects of human psychology. It emphasizes the central role that macro cultural factors, such as social institutions, artifacts, and cultural concepts, play in stimulating and structuring emotions, personality, perception, cognition, memory, sexuality, and mental illness. The book articulates a theory of culture, a theory of psychology ("macro cultural psychology"), a theory of subjectivity/agency, and a qualitative methodology for investigating the cultural origins, characteristics, and functions of psychological phenomena. A number of social science theories and philosophies of science are integrated to form the conceptual underpinning of macro cultural psychol-

ogy. These include dialectics, functionalism, critical realism.

The book explains how a cultural perspective on psychology can be used to enhance psychological growth on an individual level (therapy, education). It also explains how this perspective encourages social reform in order to enhance psychological functioning. The macro cultural perspective on psychology additionally provides distinctive insights into the direction that social reform can take, as well as the direction that psychological change should take in order to facilitate social reform.

The book critically examines shortcomings of several prominent social theories that seek to explain psychology. These include evolutionary psychology, social constructionism, cross-cultural psychology, mainstream psychology.

Table of contents and preface available at: <http://www.humboldt1.com/~cr2/Erlbaum.htm>

8. Ph.D. Dissertation Abstracts

Activity, contradictions and expansive learning circle in online students' engagement

Angelita Gouveia Quevedo
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This research investigated how 19 in-service public school English teachers, from the State of São Paulo, Brazil have undertaken the activity of engaging in the course of English Listening Comprehension via Internet I and II. The objective was to understand how the activity happened from the student's perspective, how the mediational tools helped understanding the relationship between the student and his objective(s), which contradictions emerged in the activity, which solutions were found, and which student actions helped perceiving his engagement in the several production areas of the course.

The analysis was based on the activity theory (Leontiev, 1978; Engeström, 1987, 1997; Cole, 1997; Davydov, 1999; Kaptelinin, 1996, 1997) that considers people are not only surrounded by the context of their activities; they interact with the context and change it. The activity theory was used to describe the factors that affected or mediated the subject(s) and object in the specific context and explained how the subject(s) interacted with the other elements of the activity system.

The analysis of students' development and engagement was based on the expansive learning cycle conception (Engeström, 1987) that states that developing means solving or transforming the existing contradictions, and consequently it results in changes of the activity system: the building of a new object and new motive(s).

Publications

Data were collected during the whole period of the online course, from March to July, 2003. These included: (a) the courseware used (TelEduc), (b) questionnaires, (c) the students' written production registered in TelEduc, and (d) the electronic communication (e-mail) from teacher/students and students/teacher.

Initially, descriptions were made of the investigation context, the English Listening Comprehension Course via Internet I and II and the participant's characteristics. The contradictions, source of transformations and development were listed and analyzed, based on the students' written production and observation notes. The analysis of the contradictions was useful to locate the areas that need to be reviewed, to identify the opportunities for changing, developing and evolution. Finally, analysis was made of the students' development and engagement based on what Engeström (1999) calls miniature/intermediate cycles of learning. Observations of the students' written production were used to identify, discuss and show how learning emerged from the sociocultural context of the activity in study. It was concluded that when analyzing stu-

dents' performance in the activity of engaging in an online course, then one has to consider the environment in which they are working. Subject, object and tools are interrelated and they reciprocally and mutually instigate the process of knowledge building (Cole, 1996). Therefore, the mediated action is a transformation process not only to the student but also to the object and tools. When the student finds difficult situations (contradictions), and if he decides it is important to persist, he has the choice of looking for help. In virtual learning environments, computers may behave in an unexpected way provoking changes in focus and the student, instead of concentrating on the object of the activity, may focus his attention on the operational tool mechanisms. Activity theory recognizes the importance and influence of the context, of the different perceptions, the understandings and expectations of the participants of an activity system, which helped to understand the design and the process of its use made by the students and teacher.

The dissertation was presented on 7 October 2005.



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ISCAR is an association, whose purpose is the promotion and development of multidisciplinary theoretical and empirical research on societal, cultural and historical dimensions of human practices.

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