



SUB-THEME 1: ACTIVITY THEORY: CREATIVE AND SUSTAINABLE ORGANIZATIONAL APPROACHES TO LEARNING DEVELOPMENT

conveners:

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objective:

To identify new sustainable and creative ways of dealing with present forms of critical social conditions relying on the multidimensional and holistic developmental approach proposed by Activity Theory.

description:

Activity theory is derived from the Marxist school of thought and set out to theorize human learning and development. In activity theory, human actions are studied in historically evolving collective activities, the essence of which reflects the relation “between the human subject, as a social being, and external reality, a relation that is mediated by the process of that reality’s transformation and change” (Davydov, 2008, p.14). It subsequently relies on the perception of history and development as evolving vertically and following predetermined stages.

Engeström (1987/2015) opposed such thoughts maintaining that rather than verticality, historicity should be understood as being multi-dimensional and uncertain (Engeström, 1991a). The implication is, that instead of perceiving the “world as needing to be

controlled, we should accept that all our designs have unintended consequences and drift in unexpected ways” (Engeström, 2013, p. xv).

Activity theory, in comparison to action research, conceptualizes “actions in the broader perspective of their systemic and motivational context and, thus, aims at going beyond a given situation” (Sannino, Daniels, and Guriérrez, 2009, p. 3) through investigation of the practical everyday reality of human beings and their future perspectives. It is a practice-based and future- oriented theory.

Furthermore, Engeström (1987/2015) highlights that an activity contains the ability to stabilize and expand. Creativity is the key to an expansive collective future oriented activity and sustainability is present in all its evolving states due to its capacity to both transcend and retain previous layers of the organism.

The use of activity theory as a tool to investigate and facilitate human learning and development has vastly transformed from the early works of Vygotsky, Lurii, Leont’ev, Galperin, Zaporozhets and Davydov. Scholars have since extended their investigations and formative transformations (Engeström, 2013) to areas such as NGO’s (Kontinen, 2002); AIDS pandemics (Carm, 2012); Navy ships (Hutchins, 1995); Agriculture (Pereira-Querol, 2011); Organizations and Knowledge management (Newnham, 2016); Interorganizational collaboration (Edwards, 2009); Refugees and Organizations (Newnham, forthcoming) and many more. Such shifts of interests are due to new dynamics within our contemporary society where ways of “learning, accumulating knowledge and passing it on, interacting with changing ways of organizing production and regulating economic activities and social behaviour” (Virkkunen & Newnham, 2013, p. 1) are driven by new motivations, have taken on new meaning, and produce different experiences (Vasilyuk, 1992) and behaviour.

In this sub-theme we identify a range of themes concerning activity theory, education, learning and development. We welcome papers; posters and academic debates on themes such as:

Expansive forms of learning and development in formal education

- Activity theory as a developmental tool in the informal sector
- Creativity and Sustainability in Organizational learning and development
- Critical reflections on activity theory and learning
- Activity theory and knowledge management
- Organizations and development with activity theory
- Individual agents and collective agency

keywords:

Activity theory, Learning, development, creativity, sustainability, organizations

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