SYMPOSIUM AT THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR CULTURAL AND ACTIVITY RESEARCH (ISCAR) 2011

YOUNG PEOPLE'S EXPANSIVE LEARNING FROM THE MARGINS OF EDUCATION
Symposium at The International Society for Cultural and Activity Research (ISCAR) 2011 by chair Line Lerche Mørck, discussant Kevin O’connor

Young peoples expansive learning from the margins of education

The aim of symposium is to discuss the relationship between learning and marginalization in education as well as change of educational practice for young people.

In many respects, the social practice of schooling has been the center of our thinking about education, learning and social change. Jean Lave’s work about situated learning offers an invitation to rethink our comprehensions about what counts as central and what counts as marginal when we address issues of learning. In the centre of dominating politic’s and theories of learning stand notions of individuality, cognition, symbolic and theoretical manipulations, curriculums, and education. In the margins stand the body, everyday life, collective dimensions of learning and change, conflicts and contradictions in social practice and questions of marginalization.

All three papers conduct empirical analysis of learning from the margins of educational practice in the Nordic countries, and we explore how we might develop educational practice in a direction of being more meaningful and paving the way beyond marginalisation and ethnic othering.

We discuss divisions between what we think is marginal and what is at the center of learning theories, and we apply new social practice understandings of marginalizing learning and expansive learning to the analysis of yong peoples learning from the societal margins in and out of education.

This includes analysis of dilemmas, struggles, doublebinds from the perspectives of yong people and their teachers. How do we expand meaning in learning? How may we as practice
researchers help about the production of inclusive communities, intercultural understanding and mutual respect? What kind of dilemmas, binaries do we meet when this struggles are done as part of educational practice?

**Keywords:** expansive learning, marginalized youth, intercultural processes of mutual production of respect, expanding meaning in education.
Expanding meaning in learning
By Eli Marie Killi

Generally notions of meaning have primarily been approached as an intrapsychological process, excluding notions of the social world (Nielsen 2008). Rather my approach is that the context is the dynamic presupposition for learning something, or in other words; learning becomes meaningful as part of one’s activities in the world. But how does learning become meaningful when you have got your cerebral premises changed after a brain injury? Acquired brain injury (ABI) in childhood has a major negative effect on children’s academic and social life, as brain injury during development not only disrupts established functions but also affect functions that are still to emerge (Prigatano and Gupta 2006, Yeats et al. 2002, Ponsford 1995). Studies show that children and young people with ABI identify social inclusion as what matters most after the injury (Bohnert, Parker and Warschauisky 1997, Prigatano and Gupta 2006). They lose friends (Ylvisaker et al. 2005), and they experience it more burdensome to live with social difficulties than academic difficulties (Rødseth 2008).

In my project I will try to pursue an understanding of what is meaningful learning for students with ABI through a combination of theoretical perspectives from critical psychology/social practice theory and neurobiology/psychology. This means that I pursue an understanding of students with ABI which acknowledge the biological realities of the brain injury and the necessity of including social and cultural practices in understanding what yields meaningful learning. The brain injury/cerebral dysfunction are not considered to have one objective meaning, within a CHAT tradition the brain injury will be understood in relation to the adolescent’s participation, that is, as a subject. The brain injury will therefore manifest itself in different ways dependent on the context and community. To catch both the biological level and the psychological as well as the social practice level Bøttcher (2010) invent the concept “neurological constraint” with reference to Jaan Valsiner. This concept Bøttcher says changes the focus to conflicts between biological defects, cognitive difficulties and learning demands at the social practice level and instead highlights that neurobiological constraints such as learning impairments are movable in and through activity in the social practice (p. 17)

In Norway approximately 1600 at the age of 0 - 19 suffer a brain injury every year and many of them experience learning difficulties of some sort for a shorter or longer period. Nearly all these students belong to their home-school regardless of their functional ability. My paper draws on observations, interviews of the students with ABI, their parents and their significant professionals in school together with documents from neuropsychological and pedagogical assessments. There are few studies published to date dealing with the learning of students with ABI in mainstream classroom conditions (Rees and Skidmore 2008).

This paper will bring into question how to expand meaning in learning where meaning is considered as depending on a dialectical relation between the adolescents’ personal abilities after ABI and social practice. Meaning as referred to in this paper, points to Leontiev’s (in Nissen 2010 in prepp) distinction between meaning and sense. Leontiev speaks about sense as
personal and subjective, while meaning is socio-cultural and objective. Leontiev’s individualizing of sense is anchored in motive and need (Nissen 2010 in prepp). He argues that to understand why separate actions are meaningful one needs to understand the motive behind the whole activity, because activity is guided by a motive (in Daniels, 2004). And this motive depends on possibilities of action, based on the adolescent’s everyday life.

Regarding ABI we know that these areas; emotional and cognitive understanding and social competence are very vulnerable. For example the brain injury may influence upon the adolescent understanding of his/her situation, it can bring about a behaviour where the young person acts opposite to what he/she considers as the most appropriate action, or it may result in reduced ability to “read” situations and decide what is best to do for him-/herself and others, and thereby reduce his/her own possibilities of action and repel other people. This challenge the concept og personal ability and the rationale that people know their own best and therfore will take advantage of possibilities in context.

The school’s arrangements for certain practices makes particular possibilities, activities, purposes, and concerns significant, while other activities, purpose, and concerns are left out or made difficult to pursue (Dreier 2008). This selection process will have various implications for the activities of the students with ABI when the variety of possibilities available only become personal possibilities, that is conditions a person is able to use, as personal abilities are developed (Dreier 2008). How the schools’ arrangements affect their possibilities in and across contexts and communities and thereby either support or prevent meaningful learning, is therefore of a certain interest.

Schools make trajectories of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991) and students with ABI move through these institutional trajectories of change and each and one of them lives it differently. Questions to ask, to enhance our understanding of what is meaningful to them are among others; How do they take part in institutional trajectories as in school? What do they engage in? How do they deal with it? One inference could be, that what they experience as meaningful is a contributory factor to form their personal trajectories in school.

The possibilities available in the world are contextually distributed and arranged; personal abilities cannot be defined as free-floating entities, nor can cognitive deficits. What counts as personal abilities presupposes a particular kind of context in relation to which they make up necessary and sufficient personal preconditions of participation. This will be a crucial point in my discussion about how to expand meaning in learning for student with ABI. Breckenridge and Vogler (in Dreier 2008) claim that “Arrangements and forms of practice define abilities as well as disabilities, such as what it means to be able-bodied” (p. 33). By inference this means that both “ability” and “dis-ability” are a question about social practice, also with regard to practice in school.

Expanding meaning in learning for students with ABI thus implies expanding their personal ability. So the main questions to discuss in this paper are: How do possibilities in context
become personal possibilities that the young students can make use of at the same time as their personal abilities develop? How do their neurobiological constraints influence on their ability to make use of the possibilities in context? And how do we support them to make use of these possibilities to expand meaning in learning?

**Keywords:** Aquired brain injury, expanding meaning in learning, learning impairments, personal ability, students with ABI,

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A study of young ethnic minorities' incidental learning in Danish and Swedish education

By Laila Colding Lagermann

Apparently Denmark is facing a number of difficulties integrating ethnic minority pupils into the Danish educational system, and according to OECD reports (2004) Denmark is facing more obstacles than other countries in the OECD, for instance Sweden. This difference is underpinned by Danish professor Niels Egelund (2003) who, among other things, points to a Swedish tradition for greater acceptance of diversity that proves important in relation to integration, as well as as crucial differences between Swedish and Danish kindergarten-and teachers educations. Based on these, and other results pointing in the same direction, I focus on young 9. graders from two schools; one in Denmark and one in Sweden. The main focus of the analysis in my project is on societal and local conditions as well as the meaning making of these conditions amongst the youngsters, with a special focus on the concept of incidental learning.

Incidental learning from marginal positions may include both marginalizing learning, that is, being caught up in crises and/or dilemmas, as well as expansive learning, that is, collective struggles with these dilemmas and movement beyond them (Mørck, 2010). This so-called double perspective stresses the importance for research to focus on both marginalizing and expanding aspects of learning, because both of these occasion new action possibilities relevant for practice (Ibid.; Lagermann 2008). Theoretically I will discuss how the concepts of marginalized learning - as well as transgression, transcending marginalisation – as part of expansive learning. How do these concepts differ from each other and how they are used according to my study?

The concept of transgression lies as an overall ambition of my project, and is in my analysis strongly related to poststructuralist concepts of destabilization and deconstruction. Binary logic tends to assume its poles to be truly separate, and by doing so, it produces a rhetoric justifying marginalization or stigmatizing of the socially problematic low, rather than critique and change in the politically repressive high (Stallybrass & White in Lave 2008: 128). My ambition to transgress binary ways of thinking is related to the very purpose of deconstruction; thus to examine excluding- and othering processes (Søndergaard 2001) (e.g. in my study: “us” vs. “them”). These examinations are made in order to interrupt the binary logic and thereby its hierarchical, contrast-establishing force (Davies & Hunt in Davies 1990). A challenge to the hierarchy of sites discourse, carries the promise of politically transformative power (Stallybrass & White in Lave 2008: 128, Davies in Søndergaard 2001: 71-72).

In my study, the concept of expansive learning is understood as a dialectic of collective and individual learning: “Marginalization is seen as a complex, multilayered process that has restrictive implications for a person’s societal position across various action contexts in his or her everyday life. Expansive learning, then, is a kind of learning that partly transcends
marginalization through changed participation and recognition by other participants in their changed communities” (Mørck, 2010).

Based on the above, the main issue of the paper is, how to understand young people's opportunities and limitations for transcending/expansive learning (Mørck 2006), from primarily the young peoples perspective, supplied with a perspective from other parties whom to the youngsters represent significant others (e.g. parents, teachers and and other to the youngsters significant adults). I hereby, like Engeström (1987) and Mørck (2010) focus on the conflictual and collective nature of expansive learning.

Theoretically I mainly draw on social practice theory in which the theory of situated learning is integrated in Danish-German critical psychological practice research (Mørck 2006: 13), combined with poststructuralist theories of discourse and ethnic othering. I discuss whether and how differences in institutional trajectories in some ways influence the dilemmas and doublebinds of the young ethnic minorities in Sweden and Denmark, and the possibilities for expansive learning. What kind of binary thinking is at stake in the educational structure and learning of the youngsters? In what ways do the youngsters and their significant others make it possible to challenge and transgress problematic binaries?

I discuss possibilities and dilemmas of this combination of approaches when studying incidental learning practice of young people with ethnic minority background across different historically and discursively constituted educational practices. How do they help us produce expansive learning for the involved parties?

**Keywords:** Expansive learning, transgression, incidental learning, marginalization, young ethnic minorities in education.

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Production of respect and intercultural understanding

By Line Lerche Mørck

The idea of “respect production” came up when we (a production school headmistress and me) were planning a community based production school project named “Culture coach” that should attract young men with ethnic minority background, an educational practice that should be able to pave the way to a better position, a better life, moving the young men the first steps beyond marginalization and ethnic othering (Khawaja & Mørck, 2009). Denmark has about 72 production schools for marginalized young people age 16-24, who has dropped out of school and are not ready to start in ordinary youth education. The young people attend different workshops at a production school for about a year, and they may also try out different apprenticeship positions. The goal of the productions schools is to help them find a meaningful and productive place in society and within the ordinary educational system. A challenge within Danish society is that 66 % of young males with ethnic minority background drop out of vocational education, and at the same time most of the Danish production schools have given up or ignore the ethnic minority group of young men, leaving them to street communities with the risk of getting involved in criminality or gang conflicts.

Culture coach opened in 2009 a cooking project, run by an chef with Iranian background. As a production school teacher, he manage 10 young men mostly, but not only, with Muslim and/or ethnic minority background. Culture coach is placed outside the productions school as part of a Ressource Center, an allready very intercultural community, producing voluntary work for and by local young people with diverse ethnic minority backgrounds. We are exploring the intercultural “production of respect”. We work with an empowerment goal; partly, step by step, to move productions school practice beyond the marginalization of these young men. In our understanding empowerment (Mørck, 2011) is about mutual exchange and expanding the understanding of conflicts, dilemmas and action possibilities. Steps to this end include change of the production schools and the broader Danish welfare society. This change become possible by recognizing the various positions and perspectives of disparate groups, expanding the critical consciousness of all involved parties, this by producing presentations and articles, which are mediated to other productions schools as well as the Danish Ministry of Integration and education (which has funded the project). This process also includes a change in practice ideologies of the involved groups; such as the young marginalized men, their (Muslim) families and production school teachers. Analysis of practice ideologies (Mørck 2006) includes analysis of what are seen as legitimate versus illegitimate actions within involved communities.

Practice ideologies are linked to communities of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998) and sometimes practice ideologies differ from actual actions of the members of a community. This difference is visible when analyzing dilemmas, contradictions, double binds of involved parties as part of the process of change.

In this paper I reflect upon practical dilemmas, such as: How to deal with Ramadan without reproducing contradictions to the young Muslims individualized problem (within the Culture
coach project which produces the daily lunches at the Resource Center)? How do you as a production school deal with young people who lie to their parents, because of contra dictionary practice ideologies in their various life contexts and communities?

Theoretically the focus on ‘production of respect’ stresses the active subjectivity of all the various parties involved in ‘common third processes’; questioning what and how they do things together. Theoretically I also relate my discussion to the themes of the other papers in the symposium, such as expanding meaning in learning and expansive learning. Meaningful learning, intercultural understanding and production of respect are all important aspects of expansive learning, when collaborating with the marginalized youth. But what is respect production, and in what ways are we at Culture coach actually producing respect? How do we as educational organizers, teachers and practice researchers use this kind of practice based knowledge to influence institutional and personal trajectories that expand the possibilities for meaningful learning and transcending marginalization in broader educational practice?

**Keywords:** Expansive learning, Production school, intercultural understanding, young men with ethnic minority background, young Muslims

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