

Teacher learning through the lens of activity theory education essay

[Education](#), [Learning](#)



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During recent old ages, teacherlarning has gained much attending of principals and school leaders. In many instances schools leaders ' effort has been to supply anenvironmentin which the instructors feel supported and accordingly learn efficaciously in their categories. Fuller and Unwin (2006) have categorized schools ' acquisition environments, as either restrictive or expansive inrespectto their nature of societal interactions. Concentrating on the impressions introduced by Fuller and Unwin (2006) , in this paper I analyze these two acquisition environments in an Persian bilingual school, in which Persian and English are the media of direction, through the lens of activity theory. Kutti (1996) defines activity theory as `` a philosophical and cross-disciplinary model for analyzing different signifiers of human patterns as development procedures, both single and societal degrees interlinked at the same clip " (p. 23) . Sing this definition, utilizing activity theory in analysing the Persian school environment, I show how this model and its rule of contradictions can be relied on to steer research in larning environment and educational engineering. Furthermore, this survey provides an

penetration into alterations in the instructors ' acquisition at workplace when a new technological tool becomes portion of schools ' activities and communicating.

Keywords: expansive acquisition environment, restrictive acquisition environment, formal acquisition, informal acquisition, activity theory, teacher learning, e-learning

1. Introduction

1. 1 Introduce the Problem

Schools are non merely places where pupils learn but besides are they topographic points for instructors ' acquisition. Nowadays, school leaders around the universe are seeking to determine a civilization in which acquisition for both pupils and instructors happens in the most effectual manner. Since school principals have realized that instructors ' cognition and emotional provinces may impact pupils learning, which is the ultimate end of schools, they try to supply an environment in which instructors upgrade their accomplishments and decide their emotional battles related to their workplace. However, it is of import to detect what `` counts " as workplace learning for instructors. Marsick and Watkins (1990) defined this as chances for acquisition, both those that are more formalistic and knowing and those characterized as minor expense. The focal point of this survey is on instructors ' acquisition and learning environment characterized as restrictive or expansive. Furthermore, analysing a instance through the lens of activity theory by concentrating on contradictions inside the activity systems

provides an reliable illustration of both restrictive and expansive acquisition environments. The chief intent of this survey, nevertheless, is to demo how the activity theory can be utile in analysing instructors ' acquisition in different acquisition environments. This survey is organized in four subdivisions. The following subdivision provides an overview on the constructs related to instructors ' workplace acquisition and the activity theory model, by reexamining some cardinal literatures. The method subdivision describes the types and design of this survey. The consequence subdivision looks at two different larning environments in an Persian school and an e-learning plan through the lens of the activity theory and the last subdivision, which is treatment and decision portion, wraps up the treatment with deductions and suggestions.

1. 2 Describe RelevantScholarship

In this subdivision some surveies are reviewed in order to lucubrate some of the cardinal constructs in the survey such as, `` restrictive " and `` expansive " larning environment, `` formal " and `` informal " acquisition, and the activity theory.

1. 2. 1 Restrictive and Expansive Learning Environments

While this survey is grounded in the context of an Persian school in which two different larning environments were experienced, I believethere is a demand to acknowledge the features of each environment. The thought of restrictive and expansive acquisition environment comes from the surveies of Fuller and Unwin (2006) on learner acquisition in four different

companies. During their surveys Fuller and Unwin developed a conceptual model within which to do sense of chances and barriers in learner acquisition. Pulling on the thoughts of Lave and Wenger's community of pattern theoretical account and Engeström they classified learning environments as either expansive or restrictive. The following tabular array shows an altered model for instructor acquisition environment.

Table 1. Expansive and restrictive acquisition environments for instructors.

Beginning: Evans, Hodgkinson, Rainbird, & A ; Unwin, (2006, p. 53, Figure 3. 1)

Expansive acquisition environment

Restrictive acquisition environment

Near collaborative working with co-workers

Out-of-school educational chances, including chances to reflect and believe otherwise

Explicit focal point on instructor acquisition as a dimension of normal on the job pattern

Supported chances for personal development traveling beyond school or authorities precedences

Colleagues are reciprocally supportive in heightening instructor acquisition

Opportunities to prosecute with working groups inside and outside of school

Opportunities to widen professional individuality through boundry-crossing into other sections, school activities, and schools

Support for fluctuations in ways of working and acquisition, for different instructors and sections

Teachers use a broad scope of larning attacks

Isolated, single working

No out-of-school clip to stand back. Merely narrow, short preparation programmes

No expressed focal point on instructor larning except to run into crises or imposed enterprises

Teacher acquisition dominated by authorities and school dockets

Colleagues obstruct or do non back up each others 's acquisition

Work restricted to home departmental squads within school

The lone chance to boundry cross associated with major alteration of occupation

Standarised attacks to learning and teacher larning are prescribed and imposed

Teachers use a narrow scope of larning attacks

1. 2. 2 Formal and Informal Learning

Since one of the differentiation points between two different learning environments, viz. , expansive and restrictive, is on supplying support for fluctuations on acquisition, it is of import to acquire to cognize different types of acquisition. Marsick and Watkins (2001) qualify formal acquisition in contrast with informal acquisition as `` institutionally sponsored, classroom-based, and extremely structured " (p. 25) . For them informal acquisition is `` incidental " and non classroom-based and extremely structured, and the control of acquisition is `` chiefly in the custodies of the scholar " (p. 25) . To clear up the impression they defined incidental as `` a by-product of some other activity, such as undertaking achievement, interpersonal interaction, feeling the organisational civilization, trial-and-error experimentation, or even formal acquisition " (p. 25) . As said by Eraut (2004) informal learning suggests more flexibleness or freedom for scholars. He believed that informal learning takes topographic point in a broader scope of scenes than formal instruction. This informal acquisition can take the signifiers of `` conversations in the corridors or when sharing lifts with co-workers to the workplace ; detecting instructors ordaining their functions around a school ; and co-participating in normative patterns " (Fox, Deane, and Wilson, 2009, p. 219) . Eraut (2004) believed that nevertheless in informal acquisition, learning from other people is recognized as socially of import, but single bureau is more considerable than socialisation. He declared that informal acquisition plays a important function in professional development. Eraut declared that that in many scenes scholars experience both formal and non-formal acquisition. Although some bookmans acknowledge the significance of informal acquisition in

professional development (e. g. Eraut, 2004 ; Marsick, 2009) , Fuller and Unwin (2006) pointed to Solomon 's concern about the recent accent on informal learning to state that this accent has `` a negative side in that it may be sabotaging the demand to supply employees with chances to prosecute in off-the-job proviso as well " (p. 29) . Fuller and Unwin added that harmonizing to Solomon 's position `` supplying fewer off-the-job chances gives employees less opportunity to stand back and reflect critically on their pattern " (p. 29) .

1. 2. 3 Activity Theory as a Theoretical Model

As I mentioned before the instance of the Persian school under the focal point of this survey will be analyzed through the lens of activity theory. Indeed both learning environments, experienced at the school, will be scrutinized utilizing activity theory, in order to demo how each environment works for instructors in footings of acquisition and effectivity.

Activity theory has had an germinating alteration from its development by Lev Vygotsky in 1920s. The first coevals of this theory, centered on Vygotsky 's suggestion, introduced the thought of mediation (Engestrom, 2001) . Vygotsky 's thought of cultural mediation of actions is expressed `` as the three of topic, object, and interceding artifact " (Engestrom, 2001. P. 134) . This coevals of Activity Theory, nevertheless, is located on the degree of the person 's actions and does non exemplify `` how cognitive alteration happens within a corporate context " (Hardman, 2005, p. 2) .

Vygotsky 's co-worker Alexei Leont'ev in 1981 clarified the differentiation between single action and corporate activity (Engestrom, 2001) . The 2nd coevals of activity theory arose so out of Leont'ev 's three-level theoretical account of activity with its footing in the differentiation between action, operation and activity (Engestrom, 1987) . However, `` this theoretical account failed to develop Vygotsky 's theoretical account into one of corporate activity " (Hardman, 2005. p. 3) . Engestrom in 1987 developed Vygtsky 's thoughts and introduced the 3rd coevals of activity theory (Figure 1) :

Figure 1. Components of the activity system (Engestrom, 1987)

Engestrom (2001) asserted `` the 3rd coevals of activity theory needs to develop conceptual tools to understand duologue, multiple positions, and webs of interacting activity systems " (p. 135) .

Kutti (1996) defines activity theory as `` a philosophical and cross-disciplinary model for analyzing different signifiers of human patterns as development procedures, both single and societal degrees interlinked at the same clip " (p. 23) . As you see in the figure 2, activity theory is consisted of seven elements:

Subject: the histrions engaged in the activity

Object: natural stuff or job infinite at which the activity is focused
(Engestrom, 1993) .

Tools: instruments facilitate the object of activity

Community: the topics of an activity system with a common object

Division of labor: horizontal and perpendicular division of undertakings and functions, power and position among members of the community

Rules: explicit and inexplicit norms that control actions and interactions within the system (Engestrom, 1993)

Result: transmutation of the objects ; the overall mark of the activity system (Jonassen, 2002)

Engestrom (2001) uttered five rules that summarise his attack to the modern-day activity theory. In the first rule, he identified the activity system as the chief unit of analysis. In the 2nd rule he emphasized multi-voicedness of activity systems ; he argued that activity systems are communities of multiple points of position, traditions and involvements. In the 3rd rule Engestrom (2001) pointed to historicity of systems by stating that `` activity systems take form and acquire transformed over drawn-out periods of clip " (p. 136) . In the 4th rule he tried to demo the significance of contradictions by presenting them as beginnings of alterations and development. For him contradictions can ensue in tensenesss but besides transmutation in activity systems. In specifying contradiction Kuutti (1996) stated `` contradiction is a misfit within elements, between them, between different activities, or between different developmental stages of a individual activity " (p. 34) . In the last rule he talked about expansive rhythm by adverting that `` activity systems move through comparatively long rhythms of qualitative transmutations " (p. 137) .

2. Method

Because this survey seeks to understand how activity theory can be a utile model for analysing learning environments, it adopts an explanatory instance survey design. This is a survey on an Persian bilingual school in which both restrictive and expansive acquisition environments were experienced. In order to supply a better apprehension of the context, the research worker uses her observations and perceptual experiences as one of the instructors in the school upon which the survey is built. In each acquisition environment, either restrictive or expansive, by concentrating on contradictions as dynamic forces of alteration, we can show how we can track transmutation and better understand these transmutations within an activity system. In fact, contradictions can either authorise learning to come on, or they can curtail it, depending on whether or non they are acknowledged and fixed (Nelson, 2002) .

3. Consequences

3. 1 Restrictive Learning Environment

From its constitution in 2002 up to its work on 2006, the school had a restrictive acquisition environment in which instructors did non back up each others ' acquisition. There were some Teacher Training Courses (TTC) for the instructors, every one time in a piece, to order and order some instruction schemes and criterions ; later the instructors had to learn precisely harmonizing to what they had been told. Teachers had to work separately and there was no civilization of collaborative acquisition. However some informal acquisition happened inside the schoolroom for the

instructors, they did not hold the opportunity of speaking to the other instructors in order to hold more informal acquisition. Despite some efforts of the supervisors on the manner of supplying chances for instructor acquisition such as category observation and supplying feedback to the instructors, teacher preparation classes, and supplying some text books for the instructors, teacher learning was not admitted explicitly as a critical issue of the school. In such an environment emerging contradictions seemed inevitable. Figure 2 shows the activity system representation of such a restrictive acquisition environment by presenting elements of the system.

Figure 2. An activity system representation of restrictive school environment

3. 1. 1 Contradictions in Restrictive School Environment

School leaders' belief was grounded on the thought that individualist acquisition is more effectual for instructors, so the instructors were encouraged to analyze separately. This thought nevertheless, was not in line with the human nature which has disposition toward communicating with others. The instructors were restricted to pass on with each other and this was in contradiction with their established patterns in the society. In the communities out of this school all of the instructors had chances to speak with other people and to learn from them ; so outgrowth of a contradiction between the topics particularly the instructors with the object was obvious (subject/object contradiction) . On the other hand the regulations of the school were in a manner that made the instructors stay off from each other. Harmonizing to the regulations, the instructors had to pass their java

interruption clip in their categories and there was no chance provided for them to pass on with each other (subject/rule contradiction) . The school supervisors were supposed to supply such a acquisition environment in which the instructors ' acquisition happened in the most effectual manner ; in this manner, nevertheless, they were non supportive plenty. For illustration, one of the undertakings of the supervisors in each school is detecting the instructors ' categories and supplying feedbacks to them. In this school nevertheless, the supervisors observed each category merely one time in a twelvemonth, and this did non hold any added value for the instructors ' acquisition. In this manner the instructors had to oversee their ain actions and to go supervisors of themselves (division of labour contradiction) .

Harmonizing to the 5th rule of the activity theory `` as the contradictions of an activity system are aggravated, some single participants begin to inquiry and pervert from its established norms. In some instances, this escalates into collaborative picturing and a calculated corporate alteration attempt " (Engestrom, 2001, p. 137) . The contradictions inside this activity system were assumed as barriers in making the school effectiveness so as a consequence of facing these contradictions, the school initiated alterations in the system in order to decide the contradictions for the interest of better results. In this respect, a sort of expansive transmutation happened in the system. As Engestrom (2001) said `` an expansive transmutation is accomplished when the object and motivation of the activity are reconceptualized to encompass a radically wider skyline of possibilities than

in the old manner of the activity " (p. 137) . In this sense, the object of the system changed to expansive acquisition undertakings and consequently the tools changed in order to advance the object to run into the result of the system.

3. 2 Expansive Learning Environment

Harmonizing to Engestrom (2001) activity systems take signifier and acquire changed over long periods of clip. He adds that jobs and potencies of an activity system can merely be understood against it ain history. In this instance, the school environment as an activity system changed from being restrictive to being expansive in order to be more effectual in making the end of the system. This means that the instructors were encouraged to hold a close collaborative working relationship with the other instructors.

Anchoring on this thought a new e-learning plan was introduced to the instructors as a manner of communicating with the other instructors of their ain school and the instructors of another school in Malaysia. The chief end of this plan was assisting instructors to pass on their jobs with each other and with their supervisors and to upgrade their cognition. In contrast with the old manner of the system, instructors ' acquisition was accepted explicitly as a cardinal construct in the school and it was considered as a chief factor in the school effectivity.

The e-learning plan was an on-line plan in which the instructors could entree online classs held by teachers from Malaysia. In add-on to this formal larning some informal acquisition chances were besides provided: the instructors

could be involved in voice and picture confabs online with each other and with the other instructors from the Malayan school. They could besides inquire inquiries and discourse around a subject in a treatment forum. Figure 3 shows the activity system representation of such an expansive acquisition environment.

Barb, Evans, and Baek (2004) believe that as one moves toward seeking to plan community, particularly one in which the members are expected to prosecute in new patterns that challenge their current civilization, many contradictions emerge. In this activity system presenting a new engineering and new patterns caused some contradictions in the activity system.

Figure 3. An activity system representation of expansive school environment

3. 2. 1 Contradictions in Expansive School Environment

Harmonizing to Engestrom (2001) one of the rules of activity theory is the `` multi-voicedness of activity systems " (p. 136) . This means that an activity system is a community of different points of position, histories, and involvements. This multi-voicedness as said by Engestrom may do some problems and contradictions. In our instance, after presenting e-program as a manner of communicating and coaction some of the instructors resisted engagement in the plan and some other were actively involved in the plan. This was largely because of their involvements and backgrounds. Some of the instructors were old instructors who had got used to individualist acquisition and treated such plans as a manner of `` wasting clip " . Some others nevertheless, had found it a good manner of join forcesing with the

others and work out their own jobs and the jobs of the other instructors. While in an expansive environment instructors are supposed to be reciprocally supportive in heightening their acquisition (Evans et al, 2006) , in this instance the older instructors were non supportive plenty because of their background and involvements and this caused a contradiction between the divisions of labor of the system. On the other hand, as all of the instructors were non active scholars and some of them were inactive scholars a contradiction emerged between the topics (topics contradiction) . Furthermore, as mentioned before, in the instance that some of the older instructors preferred individualist acquisition and resisted affecting in expansive patterns we see a contradiction between topics and object which was `` expansive acquisition undertakings and patterns " (subject/object contradiction) .

One of the grounds for the instructors who resist engagement in the new undertakings was their deficiency of cognition in utilizing technological device such as computing machines or cyberspace (subject/tool contradiction) . In such a system a contradiction besides emerged between tool and division of labor. The debut of the e-learning plan and computer/internet as a tool required a new division of labor due in portion to the freshness of the tool but besides due to the fact that the supervisors were non able to help all instructors with the computer/internet undertakings. Consequently some instructors who had a better technological cognition became supervisors of the other instructors with the deficiency of cognition in utilizing new devices.

One of the patterns in which the instructors were involved was going online classes held by Malayan teachers. Since the Persian school was a bilingual school, the teachers had some suggestions for pupils' linguistic communication acquisition betterment. For illustration, they suggested that doing learning groups from the pupils and inquiring them to be involved in some reliable role-playing could better their linguistic communication proficiency. But they emphasized the thought that in each group both genders should be involved. This suggestion nevertheless seemed to be effectual, but was non applicable for an Persian school, because Persian schools are non co-education systems and male and female pupils, because of the Islamic regulations, can non be in a same system. There were besides some other suggestions which were incompatible with the school regulations (tool/rule contradiction). This mutual exclusiveness of the instructions with school regulations made the instructors uninterested in the instructions because they thought that those instructions were non utile in their instruction systems (subject/tool contradiction). There were some besides some other issues in the system which caused emerging some contradictions between the elements. One of these issues was low cyberspace velocity in Iran which de-motivated the instructors from utilizing e-program as a manner of communicating (subject/tool contradiction).

Harmonizing to Nelson (2002) contradictions can either ease acquisition to come on, or they can impede it, depending on whether or non they are acknowledged and resolved. Introducing a new plan to the instructors, as we saw, caused some contradictions. When the school system had a restrictive

environment, the school leaders tried to decide the emergent contradictions due to the deficiency of communicating. When they decided to present the e-learning plan they believed that this plan could hold been a good manner for the instructors to pass on with the other instructors inside the school and outside of it. By presenting a new engineering, nevertheless, some other contradictions emerged that the school leaders had non anticipated. So alternatively of deciding the new contradictions they decided to eliminate the beginning of them which was the e-learning plan. Despite the huge sum of budget and clip devoted to presenting the new plan, the school leaders stopped the plan because they believed that the plan did non hold much added value to the instructors ' acquisition.

4. Decision

This article began with the purpose of look intoing contradictions in different acquisition environments through the lens of activity theory. In order to show contradictions happening in different acquisition environments the article introduced a instance survey in an Persian school. However, as said by Hardman (2005) although `` a instance survey does non allow one to do general statements about how something might be used in different state of affairss " , it does supply a deep description of the procedures underlying the object of the survey.

Analyzing restrictive acquisition environment at the school under probe showed that most of the instructors were inclined to pass on with the other instructors for the interest of more acquisition. As one of the elements of expansive larning environment as said by Evans et Al (2006, is `` chances to

prosecute with working groups inside or outside of school " (p. 53) , the e-learning plan could hold provided such an chance for the instructors. When the object and consequently the tools of the system changed and a new engineering was introduced to the instructors, some contradictions emerged.

The lens of activity theory, as we saw, could supply insight into alterations in the instructors ' acquisition at workplace when a new technological tool became portion of their activities and communicating. In this instance some of the older instructors had some jobs with the new engineering or even with the new object (expansive acquisition patterns such as communicating with the other instructors) . If the school leaders and instructors tried to happen the contradictions and to decide them, the activity system could hold gone one measure in front to its end. For illustration, if merely a few Sessionss were devoted to learn computing machine and cyberspace accomplishments to the instructors, some of the contradictions could hold been resolved ; but when confronting with jobs caused by contradictions the school leaders eliminated the beginning of contradictions (e-learning plan) alternatively of look intoing the beginning of the jobs (contradictions) and deciding them. As a affair of fact, presenting a new plan or engineering to any puting shifts participants ' established patterns to the new patterns, which causes some contradictions. It is of import that school leaders can place contradictions in their scenes and see how these influence school civilization and how to equilibrate them.

Recognitions

I would wish to thank Dr. Alison Taylor, the teacher of my `` Workplace and Learning " class at University of Alberta, who guided me through this survey.