

# Editorial

The first Nordic-Baltic conference on Activity Theory was held in Helsinki, 1997. In the book of abstracts the conference was presented by Yrjö Engeström as a preparation for the ISCRAT world congress in Aarhus 1998. He also expressed expectations that the conference would be the starting point for recurrent Nordic-Baltic conferences. The second Nordic-Baltic conference on Activity Theory and Sociocultural Research was held in Ronneby, 2001. This year, 2004, the third conference, now called NordicIscar, will take place in Copenhagen (see <http://www.iscar.org/dk/3NC/>). Thus, it seems like the expectations are met and that we hope we can look forward to many more Nordic conferences in the future.

After the second conference in Ronneby we were a number of participants who had a strong notion that CHAT research had taken a step further in our countries since the first conference. At this second conference the number of presentations had almost doubled compared to the first one. There was a lot more empirical research presented and we thought that it would be interesting to publish a representative selection of the presentations. Our first aim was to produce a conference book that would reflect important questions and developments of CHAT research in our region. We started out with a call for papers among the participants and at that instant our long editorial journey began. During this journey we found that some of the participants had published elsewhere (some in earlier issues of Outlines), some did not have time to work their papers over, and

some, probably, just got tired of waiting for the reviewers' and the editors' comments. Finally we ended up with a selection of five articles to present in this special issue of Outlines.

The first two articles concern the interrelation between psychological development and social and cultural environment based on the Vygotskian view of human development. Both articles deal with the learning potentials in the change process of tools and objects in child development. In the first article, "*Narrative Learning in the Fifth Dimension*", Pentti Hakkarainen addresses the potential of narratives in learning and in the international development community called the Fifth Dimension. He discusses the problem of explaining the origin of play in general terms and emphasizes the importance of empirical examinations of developmental transitions from play to learning activities. Hakkarainen proposes narrative learning as a concept for transitory activity. The Fifth Dimension offers a space for narrative learning which is neither pure play nor systematic school learning; it is a transitional activity system between play and learning. In his article, Hakkarainen exemplifies how narratives work for children in different ages, in two 5D sites, situated in Kajaani, Finland and in Petrozavodsk, Russia. The second article, "*A Cultural-Historical Approach to Learning in Classrooms*" is written by Mariane Hedegaard who uses an extended model of Vygotsky's original model of mediation to conceptualise learning as a change in a person's tool use and in the relation to his

or her social and material world. Hedegaard emphasizes the role of institutional practices for understanding tool use and the importance of differentiating between learning in different institutions. Furthermore, Hedegaard argues that it is important to understand the cultural traditions that the institutional practices depend on. In this article Hedegaard focuses on learning in school settings and she shows how the same activity (a teaching experiment) can relate to a different motive development for different pupils. Hedegaard concludes that cultural traditions outside the classroom play an important role and must be integrated into the research approach.

The next two articles concern health care work and workplace interventions. The two articles touch upon similar problems in Health Care organizations that are under considerable strain.

Hannele Kerosuo's article, "*Examining Boundaries in Health Care – Outline of a Method for Studying Organizational Boundaries in Interaction*", examines activity system boundaries in Health Care in interactions between patients and multiple care providers. Kerosuo uses several types of data sources as well as a kind of research interventions called Change or Implementation Laboratories to show how boundaries are expressed and how they can be challenged, crossed and reconstructed. She finds that the laboratory sessions offer a unique opportunity to study the interactions in Health Care practice and to develop new tools, for the present and for the future. However, she concludes that differences in professional power and power structures need more attention in studies to come. Kristina Westerberg's article "*Workplace Development and Learning in Elder Care – the Importance of a Fertile Soil and the Trouble of Project Implementation*", touches upon similar issues in the collaboration and coordination of care. Westerberg describes a research and develop-

ment project in Elder Care with the overall aim to improve learning and knowledge acquisition. The impact of the project intervention was examined a year after the intervention. However, the outcome of the intervention was not easy to trace in the follow-up although some of the identified weak points that prevented a good soil for learning and development in the participant workplaces had been improved and the participants had continued with new projects that concerned learning and knowledge development. Westerberg discusses whether a workplace intervention is enough to face the problems that the changing institutions of Elder Care has to deal with and suggests that work development requires changes of an activity level which includes the division of labour and the organization of work, not only within the organization of today, but with other networks and institutions.

The final article, "*Wild Objectification: Social Work as Object*" is written by Morten Nissen on the background of his long-standing cooperation with experimental social workers in Copenhagen. The currently problematic issue of objectivity in social work is approached in the light of basic activity theory assumptions about objectification, revealing ideological workings as well as prototypical functions of artefacts like internet essays.

The articles presented are all, more or less, concerned with boundaries in different practices. Since they all are, more or less, relating to the public sector of schools, hospitals and social work, issues of boundaries seem to be highly relevant for these very practices. These practices and their institutional forms in the context of the Nordic welfare states are under rapid change. In his article, Morten Nissen writes about the gradual retreat of the Nordic welfare state and Hannele Kerosuo and Kristina Westerberg, in their articles, point to the problems with organizing the Health

Care systems in an effective manner in Finland and Sweden. And, as Mariane Hedegaard and Pentti Hakkarainen show, the context and cultural forms are interrelated to human lives and development. In addition, there is also a theoretical issue underneath the concern with boundaries that has to do with the unit of analysis in CHAT research; where are the limits of the activity studied? How extended must and can the analysis become for a relevant and useful result? Clearly, the analysis can be conducted on various levels as shown in the

articles presented above but there is always a choice were to set the limits of data. CHAT as a theoretical foundation offers a lot and not least the opportunity to see how social and cultural changes are expressed in individual lives and human activity. Can it be too generous? We will have the opportunity to continue to discuss and explore these questions, among many others, at the third Nordic conference; a conference that is now an event of its own and not only a preparation for the ISCAR world congress in Sevilla 2005 (<http://www.us.es/qlabahum/ISCAR2005>).

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