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Editorial

Pernille Hviid

Department of Psychology, University of Copenhagen
Copenhagen, Denmark

I am very pleased to introduce this new issue of *Outlines – Critical Practice Studies*. The volume is composed of five papers combined with a reply to a book review, presented in Vol. 16 (1). I hope you will enjoy and get inspiration from these writings, which are presented here without further introduction. As is the practice of *Outlines*, the editorial points back to the papers published in the most recent (ordinary) issue, to remind you of the latest, excellent publications. Beside a number of reviews, Vol. 16 (1) included papers by Noomi Christina Linde Matthiesen, Wolff-Michael Roth and Stephanie Freeman.

Stephanie Freeman investigates how human beings make sense of a life engaged in DIY (“Do-It-Yourself”) practices, Noomi Christina Linde Matthiesen examines how two groups of people make sense of each other’s actions, and likewise Wolff-Michael Roth examines in what way researchers and educators make sense of the concepts of “meaning” and “understanding” and argues that using these concepts do not make much sense in cultural-historical or Wittgensteinian perspectives.

In Matthiesen’s paper “*A Struggle for Equitable Partnerships: Somali Diaspora Mothers’ Acts of Positioning in the Practice of Home-school Partnerships in Danish Public Schools*” (Matthiesen, 2015), the theoretical framework is composed productively by positioning theory and social practice theory. The phenomenon being scrutinized is a tensioned and difficult co-existence/collaboration between the Danish-Somali diaspora and the Danish society in general as well as the Danish educational system in particular. Apparently, Danish-Somali citizens are, seen as a group, very vulnerable. In general they have problems finding jobs, and furthermore, their children are not doing well in school. Parents have acquired a tarnished reputation, as either incapable or unwilling to support their children as pupils. Through a number of interviews with Danish-Somalian mothers, Matthiesen shows how these mothers struggle to comply with the Danish educational system while at the same time trying to protect their children from experiencing unjust pestering by staff. An excellent point of departure for renegotiating the everyday collaboration between children, parents and schools.

Wolff-Michael Roth's paper "*Heeding Wittgenstein on "Understanding" and "Meaning": A Pragmatist and Concrete Human Psychological Approach in/for Education*" (Roth, 2015), is theoretically thought-provoking. Drawing mainly on Wittgenstein, but also on cultural historical psychology (Leontjev and Vygotsky), Roth problematizes the use of the concepts of "meaning" and "understanding". The empirical phenomenon analysed is educational discourse, illustrated in the use of these concepts in reports on educational research, but he intends to take a much more generalized standing point, proposing to "get rid of those terms" altogether. So what is wrong with "those terms"?

Taking a strict pragmatist point of view, Roth argues that their use is superfluous and even harmful. They refer to unobservable entities located in individuals, while every "language game" in the Wittgenstein-sense is perfectly understandable at the level of observable interactions: Understanding is what shows in what one does and says in a concrete context. The concepts seduce us to adopt an individualistic view of mind, where 'meaning' and 'understanding' are stored independently from concrete practice contexts and seem to be individual rather than social products. That is, of course, a serious problem to any cultural psychology, but is such classical mainstream use enough to advocate the deletion of the terms?

Roth explicitly states that he wants to "stimulate discussions" on this issue and he does so in a very welcoming manner. Beginning the discussion, my own starting point (from cultural historical psychology) is an agreement with the diagnosis but a concern with the radical "cure". If we abandon these concepts, what happens for instance to a long-term genetic perspective? How will we be able to describe the (collective) historical culture and the local common sense and then, following that, the dynamic genesis of the subject? How should we re-interpret Leontjev's (1967, 2009) distinction between meaning (collective understanding) and sense (personal understanding based on one's unique, albeit social, history)? He, as well as Vygotsky (who inspired him in this direction), saw a need to distinguish between the two levels and their genesis. But the idea in "distinguishing" between these two dimensions of the symbolic world was not to separate them, but to investigate how these relate to one another in a co-genetic course of existence. Where the collective meanings would indicate a presence of shared understandings, "sense" points to engagements and concerns and thus entails directionality into the future of the human being. In its uniqueness, it is also a source of informed creativity and innovation, for instance by re-contextualizing experiences in a different 'language game'. How could we understand such processes in Roth's terms, and would such an understanding open new perspectives? And finally, how harmful is it really to go on speaking in terms of meaning and understanding in educational discourse, just like we continue to speak of the "sun setting"?

The last paper in the volume by Stephanie Freeman "*Immersed In Pellet Technology: Motivation Paths of Innovative DIY'ers*" (Freeman, 2015), opens up a new world of internet-enabled practices; slippery and difficult to categorize; as leisure or work? As a hobby or a need? As amateur or professional practice? As profit or non-profit? Or as self-presentation, collaboration or help-seeking? In the CHAT-framed analysis, Freeman shows that the boundaries between these categories, offering a neat order of our societies, are very blurry here, and probably also so, in the life outside the internet-enabled communities, should we take a fresh look. Freemans phenomenon is Innovative Do-It-Yourselfers in the area of pellet technology (heating arrangements by wood-pellets), and her object of research is which paths, motivation of human beings take over time. Partly

through a range of interviews with internet users and partly by analyzing the texted exchanges on the website, Freeman studies this “recycled labour” and argues for a conceptualization of motivation as a temporal path, persisting yet evolving over time as a dilemmatic motive landscape, personally and existentially guided, yet co-orchestrated in the community. Interesting!

The volume might at the surface leave an impression of a collection of fragmented themes - I would, however, argue that such fragmentation is only superficial. It underscores that psychology is still in need of a methodological frame that could merge the parts into a whole. In that sense each paper contributes with particular aspects of human living and implicitly – or as in the case of Roth’s paper explicitly - addresses the issue of how psychology conceptually integrates its “findings” in a theoretical frame, that makes it possible to understand, guide and support human life – the object of our practice.

Go back, and read vol. 16 (1), if you missed it!

Pernille Hviid, Editor

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