OUTLINES - CRITICAL PRACTICE STUDIES

• Vol. 14, No. 2 • 2013 • (106-129) •
http://www.outlines.dk

A Gramscian perspective on developmental work research: Contradictions, power and the role of researchers reconsidered

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Abstract

The article presents a Gramscian reading of organisational interventions within the framework of developmental work research. Developmental work research is based on Engeström's concepts of activity system and expansive learning cycle. It utilizes the theoretical vocabulary provided by Marx and Ilyenkov and is situated in the traditions of cultural-historical and critical research. In recent years, critical commentaries have pointed to a need to reconsider questions related to transformation, contradictions and power within the approach. The Gramscian reading here suggests that the concepts of transformism, hegemony and dialectic pedagogy could open potential ways to reformulate certain elements of both the practice of organisational intervention and the theoretical principles of developmental work research.

Keywords: developmental work research, expansive learning, hegemony, dialectical pedagogy, Engeström, Gramsci

Introduction

Organisational change triggered by designed interventions is at the core of developmental work research situated in the tradition of cultural-historical research (Engeström 2001; 2005b; Virkkunen & Schaupp 2011). Developmental work research and its further applications, such as Change Laboratories, apply interventionist methodology to organisations conceptualised as activity systems, or, networks of activity systems. The theoretical groundwork of developmental work research (Engeström 1987) innovatively combines psychological accounts of human learning drawing on Vygotsky, Leontjev and Bateson together with the overall Marxian philosophy of praxis and the analysis of contradictions as phenomena related to the economic constellation of capitalism. The fundamental notions of developmental work research are *activity system* and the cycle of

expansive transition (Engeström 1987, 78, 322), further referred to as expansive learning. Practical organisational interventions follow the stages of the cycle of expansive learning: historical analysis, actual-empirical analysis, modelling, examining and implementing new models, reflecting on the process and consolidating the new practice. (Engeström 2001;Virkkunen 2004). In this article, I use developmental work research[1] in reference to organisational intervention, which is a researcher-designed process in activity systems proceeding in accordance with the stages of expansive learning.

On the basis of references made to Marx's *Feuerbach theses*[2] (Marx 1998 [1945], 574) in support of the need to not understand but instead change the world, developmental work research can be located in the tradition of transformative and critical research. For example, Sawchuk et al. (2006, 5) define the meaning of 'critical perspective' as "approaches that ultimately have an interest in describing, analysing, and contributing to a process of historical change and human betterment along the lines of Marx's Eleventh *Thesis on Feuerbach*, that is an emphasis on change with a clear-eyed understanding of the social, political, economic, and historical base of material reality". The research that produces socio-critical knowledge can be conceptualised as revolutionary practice which entails the idea of a dialectic relationship between changing circumstances and changing activity. Jean Lave (2012) urges cultural-historical research to become such a revolutionary practice. In her search for new, revolutionary research agendas, she advocates the ideas of Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), particularly as a basis for a theory of learning and education. Gramscian notions such as transformation of societal relations, engagement in a critical analysis of power as hegemony, and understanding the political aspects of any activity are relevant to cultural-historical research in the contemporary world.

In this article I discuss Lave's proposition within the specific context of developmental work research. I draw on recent research literature which critically discusses the theoretical principles and practical implementation of developmental work research. These reflections have pointed to the use of the concept of contradiction (Langemeyer 2006), the insufficient analysis of power relations (Blackler 2009; Kontinen 2004; Silvonen 2005), the undialectical misconceptions of societal practice in terms of local activity systems and missing the complexity of human practice (Langemeyer and Roth 2006), as well as the overall observation of developmental work research being a managerial technique of improving work processes to best serve the interests of capital, rather than a transformative practice (Avis 2009; Daniels and Warmington 2007). Moreover, losing the link between Marx's *Capital* and the analysis of concrete work activities is said to bring "bourgeois sociology to Marx" (Jones 2009, 50).

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[1] In a number of texts the notions of "activity theory", "expansive learning" and "developmental work research" are used together and in an interconnected way (e.g. Engeström 2001; 2005b). For the sake of clarity and consistence I will use the term "developmental work research" in reference to the approach to organisational intervention based on the Engeströmian theory of activity and learning by expanding (Engeström 1987). Developmental work research, in its wider meaning, entails its further applications such as Change laboratories, Boundary Crossing Laboratories and the like.

[2]For example, the theoretical contextualization of development work research in activity theory provided on the webpage of CRADLE, University of Helsinki, begins with quotes from the *Feuerbach Thesis*. (http://www.helsinki.fi/cradle/chat.htm)

All in all, the overall tone of the critique has been that developmental work research has distanced itself from its Marxists philosophical roots and the idea of transformation, and has been domesticated into an approach interested in technically improving work practices within the prevailing capitalist economic system. However, the main theoretical principles of developmental work research and expansive learning have remained unchanged, and any explicit reconsideration of Marxism, for example, has not been called for. In addition, notwithstanding the number of applications of the theory in different areas of activity, and the introduction of new notions such as "knotworking" (Engeström, Engeström and Vähäaho 1999) and "runaway objects" (Engeström 2011), the underlying concepts of activity systems, expansive learning and contradiction have not been significantly reformulated. In what follows, inspired by Lave's (2012) suggestions, I will propose a Gramscian direction for revisiting some theoretical notions in developmental work research. It goes without saying that Gramsci's concepts are subject to continuous contestation and specialized scholarship[3], and it is far beyond the scope of this article to delve into these nuanced debates. Here, for Gramsci's contributions I have mainly used the *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (Gramsci 1971) edited by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, supported by the *Prison Notebooks* (Gramsci 2011), edited and introduced by Jospeh A. Buttigieg and the recent contribution *The Gramscian Moment. Philosophy, Hegemony and Marxism* by Peter D. Thomas (2009). In line with Stuart Hall's observation (1996b, 411-412) of Gramsci being "not Marxist in a religious sense" but being one who "understood that the theoretical framework should be constantly theoretically developed and applied to new historical conditions", I aim to identify and discuss a few Gramscian ideas as being potentially relevant to specific contexts of organisational intervention in contemporary working life.

I will discuss a number of themes in regard to transformative practice in developmental work research and revisit some selected principles of the approach along with their critical commentaries. I focus on the notions of transformation, contradictions, power and the role of researchers in organisational learning in developmental work research. While agreeing with the critics, my interest is to pave the way to a Gramscian reading of developmental work research (see also Holma & Kontinen 2012). Thus, as regards each theme discussed, I will propose selected Gramscian notions which, in my mind, inspire a reconceptualization of developmental work research. These include notions such as transformism, hegemony and dialectical pedagogy. I conclude by discussing how these notions would relate to the stages of organisational intervention in developmental work research.

Transformation as a goal of organisational intervention

Developmental work research often utilizes the term *transformation* in regard to the qualitative change in certain aspects of activity systems, such as a new object, new tool or

[3] The contestation of Gramsci's concepts is related to the nature of his written legacy which consists mainly of journalistic articles, letters, and most importantly, the 36 notebooks written during his imprisonment. However, Gramsci is widely acknowledged as an important thinker who contributed to the development of Marxism. Thomas (2009) discusses at length the contributions of Althusser (1969) and Andersson (1976) . In addition to political science, Gramsci has inspired development of a number of research areas including cultural studies (Hall 1996) and education (Mayo 1999; 2003; Coben 1998), to mention a few.

the division of labour. Engeström (2005b, 35-36) connects the notion of transformation with the cycle of expansive learning, in which transformation refers to the "construction of new models of activity jointly with the local participants, on the basis of careful historical and empirical analysis of the activity in question". In this formulation the transformation remains within the local activity at hand. In contrast, and as pointed out by Peter Jones (2009, 56) among others, social transformation rarely occurs as a goal of developmental work research. Moreover, it has been argued that the notions of transformation and transformative practice have experienced a "domestication" which has distanced them from the original idea of revolutionary activity being translated into wider societal interventions (Avis 2009, 161, 163; Sawchuk 2006, 251). It has been claimed (Avis 2007, 161) that with restrictions to the notion of "transformation" in developmental work research, the radicalism has been technicized with research practice becoming more conservative.

In accordance with the criticism of a lack of societal transformation and social mobilization aspects, Engeström and Sannino (2010, 19) maintain that the studies on expansive learning at work aim to analyse and generate "transformations within and between activity systems", and therefore do not usually "engage in large-scale political confrontation". They do not propose (ibid.) to change the theoretical and methodological focus of expansive learning and developmental work research in order to incorporate the societal aspects and move in a transformative direction, but instead suggest engaging in an analysis of existing antagonist activities such as social movements. Such a response possibly reflects the methodological principle of focusing on the object of an activity. The object "embodies the meaning, the motive and the purpose of the collective activity system" (Engeström and Kerosuo 2007, 337) and is shown in the conceptualization of organisations as social entities that exist in order to "produce goods, services and other outcomes" (Engeström 1999b, 170). It is mainly the analysis of an object rather than the social relations through which the contradictions and historical situation of activities are approached (Engeström and Kerosuo 2007, 338). Accordingly, the notion of transformation has referred primarily to the changes in an object rather than changes in the socio-economic and societal relations.

Transformation, transformism and the depolitisation of interventions

In his critique of Engeströmian activity theory Avis (2007; 2009) uses a Gramscian distinction between transformation and transformism. He (2007, 163) argues that developmental work research is merely a form of transformism in which the change occurring in the interventions secures the interests of capital rather than supports an emancipatory project. Gramsci (1971, 58-59) connected the terms of 'transformation' and 'transformism' was with the Italian history after the Risorgimento[4]. The distinction depicted the relationship between two political parties, the *Moderates* and the *Action*

[4] The Risorgimento, or the Resurgence, refers to three wars leading to the unification of Italy which until 1861 was a constellation of different provinces. This unification was realized through collaboration between two parties, the Moderates led by Camillo Cavour and the Action party led by Guiseppe Manzini and Giuseppe Garibaldi. After the declaration of Italy and the establishment of Italian democracy the programmes of the right-wing Moderates and leftist Action party were almost identical, and a period called Transformismo, where hitherto party were turned into conflicts into a general consensus, followed. (Jones 2006, 14-15).

Party, the former being conservative and the latter representing leftist antagonism. Transformism as a term was used to depict formation at that time of the ruling class by gradually absorbing of antagonist individuals, groups and classes into the agenda of the Moderates. Transformism, in the sense of a merging of left and right, was a "parliamentary expression of intellectual, moral and political hegemony" (Gramsci 1971, 58). For the Moderates to be successful in establishing such a hegemony through transformism, it was essential for the party to be actually organic to the economic upper class they represented. In contrast, Gramsci (1971, 59-60) claims the Action party was not a clear expression of a particular class at that time and therefore failed to gain a hegemonic position.

If transformation refers to being faithful to the agenda of the subaltern class and striving for real political and economic change, transformism can therefore be seen as an effort to preserve the established power of the bourgeoisie. This effort included, for example, recruiting the leaders of the critical social movements to support the agenda of the state apparatus. Further, transformism for Gramsci (1978, 58) was a form of *passive revolution*, of non-confrontational politics within the existing economic and political constellation. Thomas (2009, 146) explains that 'passive revolution' was a term Gramsci appropriated from Vinzenzo Cuoco who used it to describe the Neapolitan revolution in 1799. In Gramsci's use, the term was applied to the analysis of the Risorgimento, and later was used in a more general sense to depict the incorporative force exercised by bourgeois. The passive revolution denoted the "bourgeois hegemonic project for an entire historical period" (Thomas 2009, 147, 151), which included molecular transformation, incorporation and preventing the emergence of competing perspectives. Gramsci (1971, 106) argues that passive revolution occurred in periods where there was room for development in the existing productive forces; in such situations no fundamental change in the social order would take place. In the process of transformism, one technique was the so-called depoliticisation of politics, which refers to the presentation of hitherto political issues as purely technical (Thomas 2009, 151). This facilitated the improvement of issues within the hegemonic constellations, but did not challenge the constellations themselves.

At the first glance, drawing a connection between the politics of post-Risorgimento Italy and contemporary work life seems far-fetched. However, the analytical potential of the above-mentioned concepts should not be hastily overlooked. Concerning organisational intervention, it is worth reflecting on the transformism-transformation distinction in at least two ways. First, the distinction would guide one towards paying attention to how the need for an organisational intervention was formulated in the first place. One can examine whether the need identified exemplifies depoliticized improvements within given circumstances, or whether the participants have room to identify and challenge the existing constellations. Second, in analysing the process of organisational intervention where the shared view of the potential direction of change is negotiated, the notion of passive revolution encourages to identify the process of integrating and incorporating certain voices and silencing and marginalizing of others in the context of a specific organisational process. In tackling these questions, the notions of contradiction and power discussed in what follows gain relevance.

The concept of contradiction in organisational intervention

In developmental work research the concept of contradiction is said to provide a basis for the logic of organisational change, and further, expansive learning. Contradictions are "historically accumulating structural tensions within and between activity systems" (Engeström 2001, 133). Further, Engeström (2001; Engeström & Sannino 2011) argues that in developmental work research the concept of contradiction is connected with the "dialectical logic" of change in activity systems. In his original formulation, Engeström (1987) distinguishes between primary, secondary and tertiary[5] contradictions. According to him, a primary contradiction refers to a contradiction between the use value and exchange value typical of every commodity in capitalism. However, in the context of organisational interventions, the analysis often focuses on the secondary contradictions. These, in turn, are defined vis-á-vis the concept of activity system, and refer to contradictions between its elements, for example between the object and the tools, or division of labour and tools.

The concept of contradiction is discussed on a couple of pages of *Learning by expanding* (Engeström 1987, 82-88) which consists mostly of direct citations from Marx and Leontyev. The grounding of the notion of contradiction proceeds in the following way. First, citing Marx (1909), Engeström (ibid. 83) contends that in the "pre-capitalist socio-economic formations, the basic contradiction, the subordination of individual producers to the total system of production, took the form of immediately visible personal suppression by force, be it exercised by slave-owners or feudal lords". Then he (ibid. 84) proceeds to capitalism, in which "all things, activities and relations become saturated by the dual nature of commodity - they become commodified". Further, he (ibid. 85) continues, "the essential contradiction is the mutual exclusion and simultaneous mutual dependency of use value and exchange value in each commodity. This double nature and inner unrest is characteristic to all the corners of the triangular structure of activity. It penetrates the subject and community corners because the labour force itself is a special kind of commodity." The he (ibid. 87) states: "The primary contradiction of activities in capitalist socio-economic formations lives as the inner conflict between exchange value and use value within each corner of the triangle of activity".

This formulation is repeated in Engeström's later works without presenting much further theoretical elaboration vis-á-vis the Marxist debates of the time. For example, Engeström

5 Engeström (1987, 87-88) defines the different tertiary and quaternary levels of contradictions as follows: "The tertiary contradiction appears when representatives of culture (e.g., teachers) introduce the object and motive of a culturally more advanced form of the central activity into the dominant form of the central activity. For example, the primary school pupil goes to school in order to play with his mates (the dominant motive), but the parents and the teacher try to make him study seriously (the culturally more advanced motive). The culturally more advanced object and motive may also be actively sought by the subjects of the central activity themselves". Moreover, quaternary contradictions require that we take into consideration the essential 'neighbour activities' linked with the central activity which is the original object of our study.

(2001, 137) states that "the primary contradictions of activities in capitalism is that between the use value and exchange value of commodities", not citing Marx in connection with the concept of contradiction, or on any other occasion in the article. Contradiction is a more or less taken-for-granted starting point with explicated in statements such as: "this primary contradiction [between use and exchange value] pervades all elements of our activity system" (Engeström 2001, 133). The concept is explicitly attributed to Ilyenkov (1977) in regard to the contradictions being a driving force for change (Engeström ibid. 135). In the same vein, connecting the definition of the concept of contradiction to Ilyenkov is made in the article reviewing the history of the developmental work research (Engeström & Sannino 2009) which states that "following Ilyenkov (1977), the theory of expansive learning sees contradictions as historically evolving tensions that can be detected and dealt with in real activity systems". This idea is immediately continued in the following statement: "in capitalism, the pervasive primary contradiction between use value and exchange value is inherent to every commodity, and all spheres of life are subject to commoditization".

A close reading of the accounts of developmental work research suggests that the concept of contradiction is simultaneously a theoretical concept describing the nature of commodities in the social-economic constellation of capitalism, a concept which depicts the claimed dialectical logic of the historical development of any activity, and a tool used in organisational intervention for understanding the current state of affairs and the potential ways the activities at hand can be changed. As Miettinen (2009, 160) observed, in *Learning by Expanding* (Engeström 1987) the concept of contradiction was developed from two different directions. First, it was attributed to the commodity form and the contradiction between use value and exchange value typical of capitalism. Secondly, the concept of contradiction, on its different levels, was operationalized to be used in interventionist research methodology in support of expansive learning (Miettinen, ibid.). In the methodology of organisational intervention, different types of contradictions are connected with the stages of the expansive learning cycle (Figure 1).

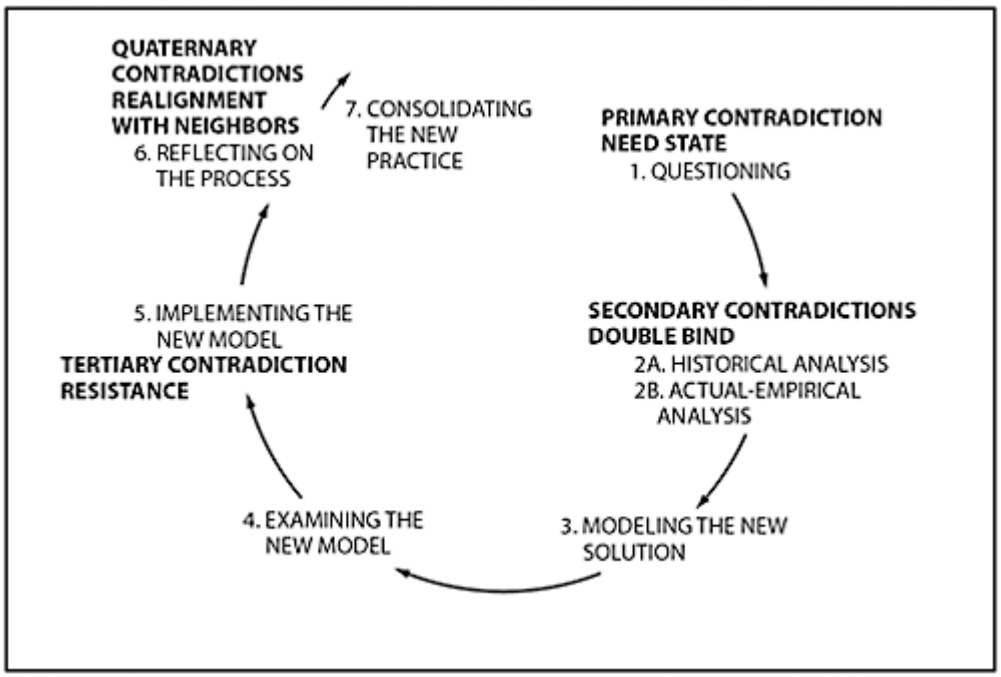

Figure 1. The strategic learning actions and corresponding contradictions in the cycle of expansive learning. Source: Engeström (2001, 152); figure downloaded from http://pagi.wikidot.com/engestrom-expansive-learning [accessed 2.6.2013]

In the learning cycle, the concept of primary contradiction is attributed to the first stage – the need stage whilst the secondary and tertiary contradictions emerge more importantly in the second and third stages, the stages of analysis and the design of the new. Moreover, the secondary contradiction in the second stage go hand in hand with the "double bind", which does not primarily stem from the Marxist analysis but originates from Bateson's (1972) distinction between levels of learning (Engeström 1987, 175). All in all, the notion of contradiction has a variety of theoretical sources in developmental work research. Moreover, the continuous statements of the primacy of the contradiction between use value and exchange value does not always seem to resonate with the actual use of the notion in the analysis of activity systems. In his exemplary analysis of contradictions combined with the cycle of learning, Engeström (1987, 175-193) uses examples from literature. For example, analysing the novel *Huckleberry Finn* he defines the primary contradiction characteristic of the need state in learning in the context of social vagabondism: "individual private freedom vs. the cultural norm of public unfreedom" (ibid. 193). When analysing an excerpt from the Finnish classic *Seven Brothers* (ibid. 194-208), the primary contradiction refers to one related to hunting life in the wood: "freedom in nature vs. social interaction with people" (ibid. 208). These examples seem to exemplify not primarily commodity forms generally but rather different forms of social being in the world. Such classical examples open up an interpretation in which the contradiction between use and exchange values is not always primarily relevant in every activity. Therefore it could be inferred that contradiction as a principle of the development of any activity is not necessarily primarily economic.

Moreover, at least three further aspects of using the notion of contradiction in developmental work research can be observed: they are localized, they represent

opportunity, and they are considered from a non-normative point of view. Developmental work research subscribes to the principle of "radical localism" (Engeström 2005b, 36), of which the underlying idea is that the contradictions in any given socio-economic formation are manifested in local activities and networks of activities. Thus the analysis begins with local activities rather than a structural analysis. As Engeström (2005a, 13) explicates, a central question in developmental work research is the following: What are the inner contradictions of *our activity*? The identification of the vision, and of what *can* and *will* be done is made by working with those engaged in the activity to actually redesign the practice (Engeström 2005a, 13).

Therefore in the analysis of an activity, contradictions represent a positive opportunity for change, learning and development (Engeström 1999b, 178). Contradictions are seen as generating conflicts and disturbances, but these are considered to be real opportunities for overcoming contradictions and making way for innovative attempts to change the activity (Engeström 2001, 133). Moreover, when carrying out interventions the contradictions are made visible by means of analysis and experimentation with new patterns, and this may open "a horizon of possibilities beyond the contradictions" (Engeström 1999b, 181). Additionally, focusing on inner contradictions in activity systems is seen as a non-normative and neutral practice of organisational intervention. The analysis of contradictions as systemic features offers a ways to avoid value judgments about the desirable direction of change, or, evaluating different voices in terms of "right" or "wrong". Systemic contradictions define possible directions, "what can be done" instead of "what should be done" (Engeström 2005a, 12-13).

The use of the concept of contradiction in developmental work research has been criticized and challenged from different points of view. First, questions have been asked about whether the idea of primary contradiction holds in contemporary working life featuring new forms of products, work organisation, and for that matter, capitalism. For example, Miettinen (2009, 175) has argued that new societal forms such as the network or knowledge society can potentially introduce "robust alternative forms of production within capitalism". Further, Rückriem (2009) points out that the Engeströmian reliance on "old theories" is not necessarily able to capture today's problems.

Second, a number of critiques have related to the lack of a societal dimension in the analysis of contradiction in developmental work research. The principle of localism, in which the contradictions are produced from the analysis of the data on work within the activities at hand, has led to observations that on some occasions the concept of contradiction seems merely to refer to "individual consciousness" rather than an expression of societal contradictions (Langemeyer & Roth 2006, 38). Such observations are connected with the critical argument that developmental work research has actually distanced itself from its Marxists roots (Langemeyer & Roth 2006; Warmington 2008, Avis 2009). As developmental work research mentions capitalism as merely a taken-for-granted context manifested in the primary contradiction in the elements of local activity system, critics have pointed out that a Marxist ethical critique of capitalism is missing (e.g. Warmington 2008, 9).

Third, the positive image of contradiction in work activities has also encountered criticism. Seeing contradictions in organisational interventions as resolvable in order to achieve expansive learning has been challenged. Such an enabling view of contradictions

has been criticized for being "positivist" (Peim 2009, 174-176), leading to improving efficiency within capitalist constellations rather than being critical of the system. Therefore, the argument goes, while resolving local contradictions, developmental work research is not actually a radicalized, transformative, progressive or emancipatory practice. Such practice should, by definition, engage with the social formation and societal context as a whole (Avis 2009, 157; Langemeyer & Roth 2006, 39; Warmington 2008, 10).

Fourth, in close connection with the previous critique, the concept of contradiction in developmental work research has been said to specifically ignore the class relations and the dynamics of labour-power production within the context of capitalism (Warmington 2008, 10). In developmental work research the primary contradiction inherent in the commodification process in capitalism is between the use value and exchange value. However, the idea of labour power as a form of commodity, itself contradictory as evident in the antagonized relationship between capital's and labour's interests (Daniels and Warmington 2007; Warmington 2008) is not addressed. For developmental work research to support human development, it should address the dual nature of workplace activities as sites for the social production of the unfinished commodity of labour power, in addition to addressing the concrete labour that produces general commodities (Daniels and Warmington 2007, 381).

Towards a more open definition of contradiction

All in all, the challenges posed to developmental work research have been, first, how to explicitly engage with the societal and economic constellations beyond localized activity systems, and second, how to consider the notion of primary contradiction based on economic relations when analysing particular activities. Gramscian ideas could offer potential means for reflecting on these challenges. For example, the current definition of primary contradiction reflects the Marxian idea of economic relations being the base which determines other societal relations. In a Gramscian perspective, this is further discussed in regard to the base and superstructure[6]. Whilst some argue (e.g. Bobbio 1987) that Gramsci turned Marx's account of base and superstructure upside down by pointing to the primacy of the cultural, others (Thomas 2009) maintain that this was not exactly the case.

However, Gramsci challenged the relation of determinations between economic base and institutional superstructure, and expanded the discussion towards superstructure*s*, in plural. Superstructures, according to Gramsci, were not only expressions of economic aim but intellectual and moral entities as well (Gramsci 1971, 181). Stuart Hall (1996b, 417) pointed out that Gramsci distanced himself from "reductionism and economism within classical Marxism" and suggested a more complex analysis of particular historical situations combining economic, political and ideological relationships. In his reflection on the failure of the proletarian revolution in the West, Gramsci (1971, 235) stresses the potential of superstructures in civil society to resist the economic forces. Moreover, Gramsci did not consider the relationship between the base and superstructure to be a one-way-determination (Thomas 2009, 95-101). Rather, the connection between the economic

[6] The concepts of base and superstructure, to my knowledge, are not explicitly dealt with in the texts articulating the theoretical basis for developmental work research.

relations of production and the cultural and moral aspects of society were seen to have a reciprocal and dialectic relationship (Gramsci 1971, 365-366).

Within the context of organisational interventions in contemporary working life, the idea of dealing with superstructures, "the terrains on which members of the social group come to know in a particular practical way the determining conditions of their lives within a particular historical situation" (Thomas 2009, 100-101), might open up new avenues. Whilst the economic contradictions are there, the superstructures present different ways of comprehending and trying to solve the economic contradictions in a variety of ways (Thomas 2009, 172). The idea of conducting organisational interventions in which the analysis would focus on the sphere of superstructures rather than directly starting with the contradiction between use and exchange values characteristic to the economic base, would be worth further conceptualisation. Moreover, as Gramsci (1971, 452) suggests, every new type of society is likely to create new superstructures. It would be relevant to investigate the superstructures, the institutional, ideological, moral and ethical aspects in today's working life. The constellations of civil society and the economic processes have changed since the beginning of the 20th century. Consequently, the challenge for developmental work research is to identify the contradictions typical of contemporary situations.

Analysing power in organisational intervention

In organisational interventions based on developmental work research the issue of power has not been the focus of the analysis. However, the question of power explicitly emerges in at least three ways (Kontinen 2007, 139-142). First, power has been mentioned as a feature of the historically formed division of labour (Engeström 1993, 67; 2001, 132). In these accounts, power refers to the hierarchies in workplaces, for example between shop-floor workers and management within an activity system. Second, power is mentioned in relation to the notion of contradiction where "power and domination are at work in contradictions" (Engeström 1999c, 178) but is distanced from asymmetrical relationships. Third, power has been seen as materialized in the instruments used in activities (Engeström 2005a, 12). In this view, power is perceived as power to do something, the capability to produce and work on the objects. Commenting on the Foucauldian notion of governmentality, Engeström (ibid.) maintains that "productivity is power" and that in the analysis of power we should ask the following questions: What are the tools and signs available for different participants, and how are they used to construct the object of the activity? Moreover, Engeström (2005a, 12) suggests that the analysis of power, if put into focus, does not necessary mean any normative stand towards the interests of different participants, for example shop-floor workers. The different perspectives are treated as equal voices, and both the ideas of management and the everyday experiences of ordinary workers are made visible in the intervention. The question of whether a normative stand can be taken towards the capitalist relations is not elaborated on.

The accounts that are critical to activity theory within organisational studies have pointed to the starting point of developmental work research, namely the object of the activity. The focus on object, it is claimed, leads to a tendency to ignore both the "hierarchy and disadvantage" that occurs in the reality of organisational life (Blackler 2009, 39) and the tendency for the conflicts to be domesticated (Avis 2009, 159). In the same vein, Warmington (2008, 12) addresses the tendency of developmental work research to focus

on a horizontal division of labour. Thus, the contradiction between labour and management who, according to him, are the representatives of capital, is left untouched. Avis (2009, 159) argues that changes in activity resulting from interventions are treated as a process which serves the interests of all participants as if there would not be some interests served better than others in the new models of the activity.

The principle of multivoicedness and assumed dialogue between historically formulated voices is central in developmental work research. However, one finds little analysis of the actual dialogue from the point of view of the inclusion and exclusion of certain voices, and the historically formulated relationship between the voices (see Blackler 2011; Kontinen 2004; 2007, 222). Whilst the conflicts and tensions are acknowledged as important points in learning, the analysis of conflictual interests[7] and their manifestation in negotiations is rare. In organisational interventions, the notions of "dialogue between voices" and the design of the zone of proximal development tend to be somewhat neutral processes oriented towards the object. However, in an organisational intervention, the qualitative change might be located in the zone shaped by those who have the power to determine the change agenda (Langemeyer and Roth 2006). Negotiations over the shared and potentially expanded object, however neutral they might be at a first glance, are also sites of struggle with others. In such struggles, some voices are marginalized and excluded from the construction of a shared object, and further, from mapping the potential path in the zone of proximal development (Kontinen 2007, 141).

Power as hegemony in organisational interventions

The application of an organisational approach taking into account the hierarchies within organisations (Blackler, 2009), the labour theory (P. Jones 2009) and Foucauldian governmentality (Peim 2009) has been proposed to tackle the issue of power in developmental work research. On the basis of my reading of Gramsci, I suggest investigating power as hegemony in the context of organisational interventions.

The concept of hegemony is discussed in a number of sections in *the Prison Notebooks* where Gramsci (1971) discusses the notion of hegemony both in relation to the notions of state and civil society and in regard to the class struggle. The state was attributed to domination, the civil society to hegemony. However, there is no specific definition of the concept, but rather a variety of observations related to other themes. In his critical reading, Thomas (2009, 160) presents four features usually seen as characteristic of the concept of hegemony. First, hegemony "denotes a strategy aiming at the production of consent rather than coercion". Second, "the terrain of its efficacy is civil society rather than the state". Third, hegemony's "field of operation in the 'West', the proper terrain for the war of position, in its distinction from the "East" suited to war of movement". Fourth, hegemony can be applied equally to bourgeois and proletarian leadership strategies because it is a generic and formal theory of social power. Thomas (ibid. 160-241) analyses the concepts in depth, and shows how the distinctions articulated in these characteristics are analytical and should be understood as dialectical phenomena within the context of an integral state. He (ibid. 195) concludes that hegemony is a "process by means of which social forces are integrated into the political power of an existing state –

[7] The concept of interests is seldom used in developmental work research probably because the concept is usually attributed to *actors* rather than objects of activity.

and as the path along which the subaltern classes must learn to travel in a very different way in order to found their own non-state state". However, he (ibid. 160) writes that "in actual reality civil society and the State are one and the same", but can be methodologically distinguished. It is within the civil society, within the spheres of institutions, education, media and associations, where the "hegemonic apparatus" is put to work. All in all, the notion of hegemony combines economic, ethical and political elements.

The notion of *consent* is at the heart of hegemony. Hegemonic power and leadership is achieved by gaining consent in an ongoing process. This process includes the gradual integration of potential antagonists, and the legitimation of the power of the ruling class (Thomas 2009, 225). The concept of hegemony was used both for analysing existing power and for designing a strategy of gaining power and mobilizing for societal change. Consequently, the concept of hegemony was used both in analysing the achieved bourgeois hegemony and, as a basis of proposals for the construction of its proletarian hegemony in the working-class movement (Thomas 2009, 223). With respect to hegemony as strategy, in *Some aspects of the Southern Question*, written in 1920 Gramsci (1978, 441-462) discusses the question of a possible alliance between the northern proletariat and southern peasants in Italy in the struggle for transformative social change. He argued that in the process of gaining hegemony, the northern proletariat would emancipate the southern peasant masses as well. This, however, required winning the solidarity of the peasants for proletarian interests. In the effort to do so, it was essential for proletarian the leaders to understand what was culturally important to the peasants and be able to transfer this to the proletarian cause. (Gramsci 1978, 441-442).

For Gramsci, however, hegemony represented an analytical concept which could be deployed in concrete studies in particular historical situations (Thomas 2009, 222). In cultural studies, the concept of hegemony has been used in researching ideology that facilitates the maintenance of hegemony through the use of concepts and language. (Hall,1996a, 27). In this respect, it has been argued (Hall 1996a, 44) that whilst the economic aspects of capitalist production limit the categories in which the circuits of production are considered, they cannot provide the contents for contemplating particular social classes or groups at any specific time. Therefore the hegemonic processes and power struggles can be examined in the use of language, terminology and concepts hand in hand with the economic asymmetries.

I consequently argue that the concept of hegemony is relevant to the contemporary developmental work research as well. First, it suggests paying attention not to economic relations but to political, institutional, ideological and cultural forms of power. The relation between language and concepts in terms of which the need for organisational intervention is identified and problems are constructed, and also in terms of the general situation in society, would enable reflecting on the relationship between particular processes vis-á-vis overall historical situations and their hegemonic trends. Moreover, the analysis of power in organisations would become more nuanced in a detailed analysis of the organisational processes in which the dialogue of voices reaches a certain kind of consent with respect to the current state of the activity and potential new forms of it. In this dialogue, examining the absorption and integration of certain voices and the legitimation of others would provide insights into being more sensitive to the hegemonic processes within the course of the intervention.

The role of researchers in organisational intervention

In developmental work research the interventions to facilitate change and learning in organisations are designed on the basis of the stages of the expansive learning cycle (Engeström 1987; 2001; Engeström & Kerosuo 2007, 337). The concept of 'expansive learning' is an innovative combination of, at least, the categories of learning provided by Bateson (1972), the concept of zone of proximal development taken from Vygotsky (1978) and reformulated for a context of activity, and the principle of dialectical logic in reference to Iliyenkov (1977). Moreover, the organisational interventions are designed on the basis of the methodological idea of double stimulation (Vygotsky 1978; Virkkunen & Schaupp 2011). In developmental work research the first stimulus refers to the data and material collected from the everyday work, and the second stimulus is the conceptual tools of an activity system and cycle of expansive learning. In organisational intervention workshops the researchers provide selected pieces of interviews and video recordings to be co-analysed with the participants on the basis of the theoretical resources provided. Engeström (2001, 149) cross-tabulates four general questions related to any learning theory with five principles of activity theory and the theory of expansive learning. In this elaboration the dynamics of learning, the "*how*" aspect, is depicted as a dialogue between different voices on the object and, the process of discussing contradictions ranging from the need state and double bind, to resistance and realignment. Researchers are part of the process and represent their own voices. It is therefore relevant to ask what role do the researchers actually play in organisational intervention and how are the relationships constituted.

The role of researchers and theory in organisational intervention

The desired learning outcomes of expansive learning in the context of organisational interventions are new patterns of activity (Engeström 2001), expanded objects, and new collective work practices, including the practices of thinking and discourse (Engeström & Kerosuo 2007, 339). The learning is often materialized in different tools, i.e. conceptual or material instruments that allow for new patterns of activity, or, a new division of labour when implementing the activity. The concept of learning is closely connected with the object of the activity; the tools, division of labour and rules, for example, are analysed with reference to the object, and learning might lead to an expansion of the conceptualization of the object. The organisational intervention is guided by the activity system model, and the elements of the activity system therefore define the scope of the dialogue, joint analysis, and potential direction of learning in the intervention. The model simultaneously facilitates dialogue and potentially silences certain aspects. For example, as the activity system model and cycle of expansive learning are weak in the vocabulary of power and more focused on the localized object, the issues of societal relationships and "meta-objects" related to the production of labour (Warmington 2008, 14-17) do not easily enter the agenda.

The principle of non-normativity and lack of wider societal vision in developmental work is related to the role of the researchers and academic research in general. While reflecting on the nature of the partnership between researchers and organisations, Engeström (2005a, 15) depicts this relation in developmental work research as follows: researchers obtain data and findings and organisations obtain new tools and critical impulses to examine their work. The assumed vision of the researchers is to acquire data and perform analysis

relevant to academic publications whilst the employees are most likely to desire concrete changes in their work and solutions to their problems. The researchers have neither a specific societal vision nor transformative or emancipatory objectives, as is typical in the case of transformative education (Mayo 2003, 43). For the Gramscian conception of social transformation, as elaborated in an educational context by Mayo (2003), it is essential to challenge the dominant thinking and practices. Whilst for Gramsci civil society was an arena in which such ideas were consolidated, it also provided for "pockets" within institutions where the arrangements were constantly negotiated (Mayo 2003, 43). In my view, as a microcosm of change, organisational interventions could function as such pockets for a joint analysis of the renegotiation of the object as well as the social relationships.

Whereas organisational interventions are typically conducted within the existing system, there is also room for critical considerations. The dilemma for a critical organisational interventionist is that engaging with the system to a certain extent is required for survival (Mayo 2003, 43). The collapse of the organisation as a result of "local revolution" cannot be a goal of critical interventions conducted in an ethical way. Moreover, workers in the organisations face the risk of surviving. Taking this into account, the critical vision of interventionists should not lead to a situation of unemployment, unresolved conflicts or other negative, unintended consequences. As Mayo (2003, 43) explicates, "living critically entails readiness to experience tensions involved in trying to move toward the transformative end of the continuum while being pushed toward the other end by the material forces with which we contend daily". In organisational intervention, there is a need to experience and deal with such tensions.

Organic intellectuals, common sense, and dialectic pedagogy as ways to understand organisational intervention

The role of education was at the centre of Gramsci's idea of transformative change. Moreover, education was part of Gramsci's own political activity. He was intrigued by the need to educate people for political change in non-institutional educational settings such as workplaces (Coben 1998, 31), and within contexts such as factory councils (Gramsci 1971). In these contexts, learning included the emergence of educational leadership by 'organic intellectuals' and bringing coherence to common sense. Next I will consider these concepts within the more limited context of organisational intervention.

Researchers conducting an intervention in order to support change and learning can be conceptualised as intellectuals who strive for pedagogic leadership. Gramsci distinguishes between so-called traditional and organic intellectuals (Coben 1998, 19). For Gramsci (1971, 5-23), the distinction between these different types of intellectuals is explicated in his discussion considering urban and rural intellectuals as well as intellectuals of the peasantry and proletariat. To be able to educate for social transformation, intellectuals should be *organic* and born within a particular economic group, and then develop into political leaders and organizers from within that group (Gramsci (1971, 14-16). When asserting this, Gramsci argued against educational leadership by the academic elite, the so-called 'traditional intellectuals' who have no direct experience of the daily lives of proletarians or peasants. In contrast, organic intellectuals have actively participated in the practical life of subaltern groups, and are able to articulate their struggle in the political arena (Gramsci 1971, 16; Coben 1998, 20). When the intellectuals are not organic, as in

Gramsci's example of the Action Party, the pedagogical project to formulate a hegemonic process is subject to failure (Gramsci 1971, 60-61), and more dialectical pedagogy is needed in the struggle.

The notion of dialectical pedagogy entails the idea of the dynamics of knowledge production. One way to enable transformative change was to support the pathway of bringing coherence to so-called *common sense*. For Gramsci (1971, 330), people's common sense refers to the "diffuse, uncoordinated feature of the generic form of thought common to a particular period and a particular popular environment". According to Gramsci, the conceptions of marginalized groups are usually fragmentary and incoherent regarding the context. In Gramscian terms (1991, 198-199), such knowledge - common sense - being practical, spontaneous and based on direct experience, is not powerful in hegemonic struggles. For the subaltern classes to engage in the struggle for political hegemony their voices should be based on a critical and coherent conception of the world. Achieving such a critical conception requires realizing and reflecting on one's historical situation and the hindrances set by the language used, since the commonly used conceptions are often mechanically imposed by the social environment and the ideology of the ruling group (Gramsci 1971, 324-325). Creating one's own critical and coherent own conception of the world requires analysis, self-awareness and acknowledging of that one's historical position (Thomas 2009, 373-374).

The process of coherence-building is at the core of Gramci's philosophy of praxis (Gramsci 1971, 330-335), which calls for a dialectical process of critical engagement with both the common sense of the masses, and a critique of the philosophy of traditional intellectuals. In such a way it would be possible to produce knowledge "superior to common sense" (ibid., 330), but also to ensure that this knowledge would be in touch with practical activity, and organic to the experience of the masses. In addition to the principle of engaging with everyday life, dialectical pedagogy emphasizes a reciprocal relationship between practice and philosophy. In the process of building coherence beginning with the fragmentary common knowledge, the philosophy is transformed as well (Thomas 2009, 379; Coben 1998, 21). Consequently, this reciprocity also applies to the teacher-student relationship and is exactly what Thomas (2009, 124) sees as Gramsci's dialectical pedagogy and the principle of "education of the educator", originally formulated in Marx's III Feuerbach Thesis as follows: "The materialist doctrine concerning the changing of circumstances and upbringing forgets that circumstances are changed by men and that it is essential to educate the educator himself". Gramsci (1971, 350) points to how the cultural environment becomes the teacher of the philosopher by reacting to the philosopher and "imposes on him a continual process of self-criticism".

The implications of the above-mentioned theoretical ideas for organisational intervention in developmental work research might be considered from three points of view. First, the process of organisational intervention and learning could be analysed as a process of bringing coherence to common sense. Second, the role of researchers and employees could be discussed in regard to the concepts about intellectuals. Third, the dialectical relationship between intervention practice and theoretical principles in developmental work research could be considered from the framework of dialectical pedagogy. The expansive learning cycle begins with a need state characterized by vague feelings of rupture and tension as well as differing views about what does not work and practical experiences of it, and proceeds to analyse this in terms of the concepts of contradiction,

activity system and expansive learning. In this process, a certain coherence is produced, and the uncoordinated experience, that is common sense of the workers are explicated and clarified by the concepts provided by the researchers. This articulation enables the design of and experimentation with the new forms of practices. In the course of the intervention, the researchers typically represent the academic community - traditional intellectuals - and are experts in theories and research methodology. The researchers have an intellectual knowledge of concepts of activity system and expansive learning utilized in the process of turning the practitioners' fragmented knowledge into systematized analysis. As neither the activity system model nor the stages of the expansive learning cycle are usually part of the normal vocabulary of any workplace, these tools are not organic to the activities. However, the specific contents of the elements of activity systems, for example, are produced from below, from the experiences of the participants, in a dialogical relationship. Further, in dialectical pedagogy, the dialogical relationship between theory and practice represents a potential for change in the theory and concepts, possible new elements in activities or novel stages in expansive learning cycle emerging on the basis of empirical investigations.

Conclusions

Conclusions can be drawn in two respects. First, the Gramscian reading of developmental work research has implications concerning the practical execution of organisational intervention. Second, the Gramscian notions discussed in this article can potentially contribute to the theoretical principles explicated in the developmental work research. I will begin by elaborating on the implications of my Gramscian reading for practical intervention in developmental work research with respect to the stages of the intervention cycle (Engeström 2001, 152).

In practice, before the first stage, the "*conflictual questioning of standard practice*", there is the stage of making a contract between the researchers and the management of the organisation at hand. This contract often stipulates financial contribution from the organisation for a purpose of improving work practices. Therefore, the initial need state is often identified by the management which, naturally, is primarily concerned with improving the efficiency. In addition, the stage of identifying the need is often inspired by trends circulating in the field of organisational development. Thus, a need might be defined, for example, as a need to develop a team organisation, network-type of organisation, results-based management system and the like. In Gramscian terms, the first step in investigating the "need state" would be to pay attention to the cultural terminology within the framework in which the need state is discussed and defined.

The second stage, "*historical analysis and actual-empirical analysis",* resonates with Gramsci's methodological idea of analysing historical "situations". In developmental work research, historical analysis refers to both the historical analysis of the particular activity system at hand and the societal activity in which the particular system is embedded (for health care, see Kerosuo 2006). In this phase, the historical changes and emerging tensions in the conception of an object become central. Consequently, analysing a current situation embarks with the methodological principle of "follow the object". For example, the everyday work of technicians in a telephone company is observed and 'shadowed' (Ahonen 2008) from the point of view of the technical operations conducted, or in the case of hospital work, the trajectories of patients in different health care

locations and specialized hospitals (Kerosuo, ibid.). Joint analysis of the current situation and subsequent tensions is conducted on the basis of this data and the theoretical resources provided.

Inspired by Gramscian ideas, the aspect of historically formulated relationships and the current hegemonic struggles over interpretations could be an additional angle in the analysis. The joint discussion on activity's history and current situation – and the new models, for that matter – could be conceptualised as a process of producing coherence in the course of moving from the common sense of the unsystematic need state towards a systemic analysis of the situation facilitated by the data and the theoretical resources. Consequently, in this process, analysing the role researchers is worthwhile. After the research data is collected from the everyday situations, the researchers examine it and select excerpts to be discussed in the developmental work research workshops in terms of the activity system model. In Gramscian terms, there is a tension between the will to identify the organic tensions within a particular organisation by involving the workers in the analysis, and the theoretical tools provided by the researchers, the traditional intellectuals.

In the subsequent stages of "*modelling the new solution*" and "*implementing the new model*", the similar analytical observations apply. Moreover, in the developmental work research workshops different suggestions are made, discussed, and gradually a consensus on the new solution is reached. Modelling a new solution necessarily means dropping and excluding some suggestions. Paying attention to the strategic processes through which certain views might accommodate the new challenging ones in building a coherent joint voice would potentially open up new avenues for understanding the dynamics of a particular organisation and vis-á-vis the societal situation at large.

Concerning Gramsci's theoretical inspiration, I suggest a further elaboration of the notions of contradiction, hegemony and dialectic pedagogy within the framework of developmental work research. First, the primary contradiction defined as that between use value and exchange value and thus grounded in the commodity form of labour, is currently stated to be closely related to the need state. However, in practical interventions, an uncomfortable need state characterized by tensions a sense that "this does not work", are not straightforwardly attributed to the commodity form but rather a variety of tensions and contradictions are identified. Moreover, as the notion of contradiction in developmental work research is motivated by a diversity of theoretical sources, its further discussion and theoretical reformulation might be worthwhile in the contexts of contemporary working life. The Gramsci-inspired proposition of focusing on the dynamics of the superstructure, or further, superstructures, provides a promising means of paying attention to a variety of economic, political, cultural and ethical contradictions in society.

Second, strengthening the transformative potential in developmental work research would require a further elaboration of the concept of power relations and the practical manifestations of them during the course of organisational interventions. Power relations should not only be perceived as hierarchical organisational positions, or as a productive capability to work on object, but rather along the Gramscian lines could also include reflecting on hegemonic processes both leading to the need for intervention in the first place, and within the process of organisational change. For example, the hegemony of results-based management in contemporary working life surely sets institutional limits on

the zones of proximal development identified in the course of the interventions. The principle of multi-voicedness should lend itself to analysing how certain voices gain consent from others and become hegemonic in mapping the zone of proximal development. Since no knowledge can be considered entirely neutral, in interventions it would be beneficial to be sensitive to hegemonic struggles, and to be conscious of the voices and directions we support with our interventions.

Third, since the organisational interventions are conducted with researchers and organisation's members working closely together, the process could be investigated in regard to the notion of dialectic pedagogy. The analysis conducted during the dialogue between the researchers and practitioners reflects the principle of embedding the change in the everyday life of organisations. In Gramsci's vocabulary, the process enables workers to become organic intellectuals striving for change. However, the idea of reciprocity of the relationship, as "educating the educationist" is not explicit in the accounts of developmental work research. Whilst the research reports on developmental work research give detailed descriptions of change in the organisations at hand, there is little detailed analysis of the role of the researchers and their learning, as well as the implications of particular empirical processes for changes in the theoretical framework.

In conclusion, I suggest that the theoretical ideas and practices of developmental work research involve elements of both transformism and transformation understood as the legacy of the 11th Feuerbach Thesis. The detailed analysis of the activities at hand, the in-depth engagement with historical evolvement and everyday work, and the identification of tensions and different voices are principles that clearly distinguish developmental work research from consultative approaches interested merely in facilitating a predefined technical improvement in an organisational setting. However, as proposed by the critics reviewed in this article, the further elaboration and reconsideration of societal complexities in relation to the particular activities under intervention, and the location of particular interventions in the relevant historical situation with its economic, political and ethical elements, would take developmental work research in a more transformative direction. Gramsci's concepts offer a promising way for such a development to be continued through empirical examination and further theoretical consideration.

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Acknowledgements

This article is based on the paper presented in symposium of "Transformative social practice" at ISCAR 2011 in Rome. I thank the coordinators and participants of the symposium for inspiring discussion and comments. I also would like to thank all my former colleagues, my former supervisor Prof. Reijo Miettinen and head of the my research group Prof. Yrjö Engeström at the Center for Activity Theory and Work Research at the University of Helsinki for the critical discussions on the issues explicated in this article during my graduate school period in 1999-2004.

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