

Chapter 1

Introduction: Exploring Activity across Education, Work and Everyday Life

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Introduction

Clearly, there has been an international explosion of interest in theories of mind, culture and activity over the last two decades. This interest is well founded. The traditions involved in this explosion speak to some of the most pressing and obvious challenges facing the social sciences. These include the increasingly inter-disciplinary nature of problem solving; the complexity of social systems; the role of technologies, tools, culture, divisions of labour, and other mediating factors; the role of cognition, social interaction and learning; and, perhaps most importantly of all, how and why such systems--from classrooms, to schools, to organizations and beyond--undergo change. There are very few analytic traditions that offer so much to students, scholars and, perhaps even, policy-makers. In this collection, theories of mind, culture and activity are also rooted in a long and rich tradition of social criticism as well. These traditions have been recovered, developed and expanded.

Today, there are flourishing journals, scholarly associations, conferences and powerful research programs widely available. Reports, monographs, articles, books and collections such as this one are circulating across international and linguistic boundaries more than ever before. However, despite this, and in particular despite the existence of several high-quality collections devoted to representing this explosion, there remains several important gaps that must be addressed. This collection seeks to respond to these gaps by posing, illuminating and answering important questions that define these gaps in two principal ways.

First, each of the chapters in this collection represents an original and cutting-edge analysis in its own right. Many provide the grist for important new lines of research to be taken up and expanded. All authors orient to the concept of social cultural participation in relation to the concept of 'activity'. Activity in this tradition is not used in the everyday, common sense way however. Rather, it is a specialized and, in fact, highly contested concept. To begin with, it is defined as the minimal unit of analysis for the understanding of cognitive development, human participation and change. It inherently contextualizes practice in cultural and historical terms. It is, in our view, the most comprehensive analytic framework for changing human practice, and learning, currently available. At its heart, is the recognition that all human practice is mediated by symbolic, cultural, communal as well as material resources or tools; though these forms of mediation that human practice is understood as both dynamic and historical. This conceptual approach allows important, integrated forms of analysis. In this collection, for example, some authors explore activity

vis-à-vis education and economy, and its relationship to the reproduction of inequities and contradiction. Others examine activity in relation to the nature of work and learning processes, job design and the institution of schooling as a workplace. And, still others develop new understandings of activity in the context of everyday life. Importantly, one of the original contributions this collection makes to the corpus is that these varied topics have been carefully selected to generate additional ‘meta-level’ observations. In other words, our chapters do not simply represent reports on discrete phenomena. Rather, they offer a profile of, and insight into, an important ‘complex’ of overlapping practices and institutions in contemporary society: activity at school, at work and in everyday life are connected as a mutually dependent set of activity systems. We return to the inter-connectedness of these foci at the close of this chapter, but suffice it to say here that, in this way, the collection seeks to penetrate and inform a broader societal debate over the nature of ‘knowledge economies’ and, by now one of the most frequently discussed policy issues of all, ‘lifelong learning’.

The second gap to which this collection seeks to respond relates to the fact that, while application and development of the concept of ‘activity’ have seen remarkable growth; and, while many of the leading writers in the broad area of Cambridge’s ‘Learning in Doing’ series have (albeit sporadically) noted the importance of recovering and evaluating the larger influence of the writings of Karl Marx on current and future research directions, as yet there exists no collection devoted to critical dialogues of this kind specifically. We seek to reflect seriously upon the importance and theoretical influences of what we refer to in the title of the book as a ‘critical perspective’. It builds more or less explicitly on the writings of Marx. Marx’s work was, of course, central to the genesis of theories of activity beginning with the work of Vygotsky, Leont’ev, Luria and others in what has become known as the Cultural Historical School. Across our collection, contributors engage in critical exploration of Marx’s writing and concepts. Some authors examine the issues of Marx as a ‘founding influence’. Others explore specific concepts including ‘estranged labour’, ‘alienation’, ‘relations of production’, ‘class consciousness’, ‘class struggle’, ‘ideology’, ‘labour process’, and theories of ‘value’--all original preoccupations of Marx and Marxist analysts since him.

The research observations and theoretical debates are collected and initiated in this collection offer specific directions for research on mind, culture and activity with empirically grounded arguments. But it is also our hope that the collection will ultimately benefit the development of the tradition as a whole whether people choose to pursue the directions mapped out or not. An important element of making a contribution to broader debates, as we’ve said, is inter-disciplinarity, and this collection is remarkably diverse. Inter-disciplinary dialogue is vital to anyone facing real, concrete challenges. To us it seems clear enough that one doesn’t solve complex problems in the real world by strict reference to any single academic discipline. Interestingly enough, in the first decades of the 20th century a significant feature of Marxism’s broader concern in the academy, political spheres as well as political parties, labour unions and assorted working-class movements was its multi-disciplinarity. At that time, in academia scholars contributing to this research tradition working from the fields of economics, anthropology, history and jurisprudence as well as philosophy and

sociology were evident. In his work Essays on the Materialistic Conception of History (1908) Antonio Labriola commented,

[t]he various analytic disciplines which illustrate historical facts have ended by bringing forth the need for a general social science, which will unify the different historical processes. The materialist theory is the culminating point of this unification (p.149)

This ‘inter-disciplinary impulse’ is an important point of similarity between Marxist scholarship historically and the Cultural Historical school today that we wish to develop further. We’ll return to the importance of this multi-disciplinarity in relation to a critical, dialectical analysis in a moment, but in the case of this volume we note that its genesis lay in dialogue between an educational scholar, a psychologist and a sociologist. In turn, we each recognized the need to extend this impulse further as we included leading international scholars working from the fields of education, anthropology, communications, industrial relations and business studies as well.

A Critical Perspective?

Within the field of mind, culture and activity as a whole there are important, recent predecessors to this book (e.g. Chaiklin, Hedegaard and Jensen 1999; Chaiklin 2001; Robbins and Stetsenko 2002). Each is an important volume that has informed thinking for us and many others. For our purposes, an exemplar in this regard is Engeström and Miettinen and Punamaki’s Perspectives on Activity Theory (1999). That volume had as one of its explicit goals to collect diverse sets of scholarship that were often ‘hybrid’ in nature. Contributors frequently combined a range of theoretical traditions in dialogical relationship with Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT). Topics addressed there were wide-ranging and included sections devoted to play, learning and instruction as well as technology and work. As a whole that collection offered a concentrated primer in historical roots and current trends. Our volume can be thought of as a complement to that collection. As our title indicates, however, our unique contribution lies in its interest to express a type of ‘critical’ perspective on activity; to recover, express and press forward many of the original Marxist elements of the Cultural Historical tradition.

So, it is appropriate that we turn to the question of what exactly is meant by this notion of a critical perspective. In return, and by way of an answer, we pose what we see as an important question. Although much is said in the Cultural Historical tradition about context and history, why is that the concept of capitalism, the contradictions inherent in the commodity form, conflictual social relations and class struggle remain latent or, worse, ignored by so many scholars? Indeed, many of the most powerful and insightful contemporary writers in this tradition seem to prefer to speak of general principles that run across historical periods such as mediation, co-construction and so forth. For us, while provocative, these are particularly abstract abstractions in the sense that, by omission, they deny a coherent statement about the particular kind of social, political and economic--let alone historical--world in which we are, in fact, engaged.

Of course, we wish to be careful to avoid the impression of dogmatism. Indeed, it will become obvious that our collection does not programmatically eschew the contributions of non-Marxist traditions. Nevertheless, throughout we are persistent in claiming the importance of recovering Marxist and related critical elements; and more than that, pressing these elements into service for further development of future, international and multi-disciplinary conversations. In this sense, we hope that our collection becomes an important resource for those wishing to engage with such perspectives whether, in the end, they apply them directly themselves or not. We begin, however, with a *prima facie* observation that Marx forms the central philosophical and social analytic root of the Cultural Historical tradition. We emphasize the need to go further than the otherwise correct observation that “a careful and critical study of Marx’s work” is necessary (Engeström et al. 1999, p.5). Indeed, for us, what is most remarkable about Marx’s work is not simply its role in the genesis of this tradition, but that it maintains an extraordinary power for understanding its future.

At the same time, frequently noted in activity-based scholarship is the overlap of CHAT with questions emerging from sometimes vastly different traditions. The debate over the meaning of activity is central to our book. So, while many authors have been both quick and insightful in noting and exploring the overlaps of CHAT with other intellectual traditions we nevertheless suggest there needs to be some clarification. Our claim is that the ultimate value of such overlaps, if it is to be something more than merely intellectually fascinating, is to be found in integration within the rubric of a critical approach to activity rather than the other way around. At the very least, the re-assertion of original elements of activity in relation to a critical and/or Marxist perspective should be actively debated. Thus, in defining what we mean by the term critical in relation to the original germ cell of ‘activity’ we propose a re-vitalization of Marxist analysis.

Given the preceding explanation, we can now more meaningfully state that by ‘critical’ we mean approaches that ultimately have an interest in describing, analyzing 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 bases of material reality. Building on this basic idea, though we recognize some differences amongst authors in the collection, we note their shared beginnings in this impulse as well as the recognition in the idea that there are dialectical contradictions at play in the various phenomena of interest. These contradictions are, of course, far from apolitical and far from irrelevant to the larger questions we face as a society. Thus, critical perspectives on activity understand that ‘revolutionary practice’ is not limited in the least to overt political activity: it is activity that is historical, incorporating elements of fundamental individual and, necessarily, social change. Perhaps most apposite to our claim, is the observation that the fundamental nature of this change, in the Marxist sense, is understood as the resolution of contradictions. As a form of politics, then, all activity is at its heart contested or conflictual; it is, in a phrase, deeply shaped by social as well as individual struggle. Struggle, in our definition of ‘critical’ is crucial. In this collection we see the notion of struggle expressed in a variety of ways: as politicized, theoretical struggle to retain a means of

understanding individuals, societies and change processes; as struggle to argue for the relevance of Marx's concern with the labour process (in school, higher education as well as other workplaces); as a struggle to break down ideological boundaries between work and education, learning and everyday life, different forms of social consciousness and forms of value creation; and most centrally, as struggle against inequities rooted in the diversity of class experiences and class-based organizations and social systems.

The question of defining a 'critical perspective', then, is rooted in dialectical thought. Dialectical thought, in the Marxist tradition, is defined by the union of 'materialist' thought associated with the scientific revolution and the Enlightenment and Hegel's idealist dialectics, itself rooted in even older philosophical traditions. It seeks to break the boundaries between thought and idealism on the one hand, and concrete, material reality on the other by demonstrating their co-constitution. As an analytic method, Marxist dialectics seems remarkably well suited to the contemporary, globalized context more often treating change as a given fact while dealing with apparent stability as something to be explained.

While we cannot provide an extensive introduction to Marxist dialectics here, nonetheless, as a starting point for understanding our use of the term 'critical' we must, at the very least, speak to some of its important general principles. To do this, we start by recognizing the significant challenges that ideological barriers create in any attempt to analyze and understand culture, institutional forms and human development as a process of historical change. This is, after all, perhaps the first achievement of the concept of activity as it inherently challenges and in turn helps us transcend powerful ideological individualizing boundaries reflected in dominant understandings of human development and learning. Marxist dialectics, as a central element of this original thinking, is seen as a critical approach which allows us to question the ideological distortions embedded in dominant, taken-for-granted definitions. Does this mean we dismiss, for example, the notion of 'institutions' as a mere ideological distortion? Hardly. Such categories or boundaries can be used critically when they are historicized and contextualized through the specific techniques of dialectical abstraction (e.g. Ollman 1993): a process ably demonstrated in the chapters of this volume. It is, after all, only through such forms of analysis that we can begin to assemble a sense of the overall societal, or rather societal-historical picture, what is called in the language of this method, 'totality'. Moving in the opposite direction of the well known post-modernist refusal to acknowledge notions of totality, this collection adopts the assumption that a critical approach to human activity is impossible without a critical theory on capitalism as a 'totality of many determinations and relations' (Marx). Capitalist relations are not confined to economical fields of social practice. We all live and act as part of a totality named capitalism necessarily making us all are part of the dialectical struggle between humanization (or emancipation) and alienation.

An expression of this impulse in third generation CHAT scholarship when, for example, we extend our exploration of local systems of activity (e.g. a classroom, a department in an organization, etc.) to the notion of systems of activity systems each with dynamics of change and historical trajectories. Dialectics, as the likes of Marx, Ilyenkov, Ollman and others have so

consistently demonstrated, brings 'ideas' under the yoke of analysis rather than the other way around. It is, in fact, a dialectical observation to say that ideas should be treated as artifacts: tools that mediate activity but which can also be re-made by people to allow us to change ourselves and our world.

Before concluding this section, it makes sense to briefly reference one final distinction of Marxist dialectics: the basic difference between philosophies of 'external' and 'internal' relations. To begin, first we acknowledge that an awareness of both internal and external relations is necessary. In the same way that Marx originally sought to conjoin idealist philosophy with concrete, material analysis, likewise a critical approach as we understand it seeks to combine analyses of both internal and external relations, a form of anti-essentialism developed long before the ground was claimed by what is now known as post-modern social theory. Specifically, a strict philosophy of external relations focuses analysis on the interaction between two seemingly self-contained spheres, institutions or fields of practice which may, in turn, interact to produce a third separate effect while the original two spheres remain largely unchanged. A philosophy of internal relations, on the other hand, allows an analytic focus on the nature of a particular part of a system as an element in relation to the whole, necessarily reflecting in it the central defining relations of the total socio-historic system, or totality. A philosophy of internal relations explores the nature of any single part deeply. It abstracts elements inherent in one analytic object through time, through the dialectical techniques of generalization, extension, contradiction and the recognition of alternate standpoints (see Chapters 1 and 2 of Ilyenkov 1982; Part II of Ollman 1993).

To ground this explanation, a brief example suitable to the topic of the volume may be in order. For this we can look toward schooling. A philosophy of internal relation allows us to understand how schooling--in itself through individual testing, competition, differential reward systems and so on--produces learning as a 'credential' that is, at the same time, recognizable as a form of commodity. Students obtain credentials which have as one of their organizing features an exchange-value. In this way, claims about the nature of credentialism can be made on the basis of internal relations within the educational process which also express a key relation defining the broader socio-economic system of capitalism. A key contradiction then becomes apparent. The credential granting process is subject to the contradictions between use-value and exchange-value inherent in the commodity form. Use-value in the context of this example is what most students, parents, teachers and administrators might understand as 'education as valuable in itself'. This relation thus represents the classic 'unity of opposites'. As most educators would agree--and at least two of the chapters in this volume directly demonstrate--credential production as an 'exchange-value' has increasingly come to govern its internally related opposite, educational 'use-value' to produce a specific form of development on the basis of internal relations. The contradiction within this unity tells us a great deal about the struggle that goes in within the walls of every school under capitalism. At the same time, we cannot ignore external relations. In our example, schools as institutions have an important relationship to the separate institutions of paid work and, more directly, labour markets. Tracing interactions between these separate spheres is an important element of understanding how the contradiction above plays itself out in the concrete.

It is the purpose of this volume to collect applications of this type of critical perspectives on activity across a number of social spheres. As Marx did, through his now famous immersion in the governmental Blue Books of the British Museum and the social, political and economic questions of the day, our collection seeks to understand, with help of empirical resources, the real contradictions of the day leading to change. Marxist dialectics is not a generic theory of change. It is a theory of change that is rooted in actualities of particular historical epochs. In our current historical context it is a theory of change within and beyond capitalism specifically.

Major Themes Across the Collection

Following this introduction, Mohamed Elhammoumi's Chapter 2 *Is There a Marxist Psychology* provides a fascinating account of the mind in action; an essay on the thinking through of key questions of Marxist psychology as well as Marxism as a whole; its past, present and possible futures. It is highly personal, shedding many of the clothes of confident appraisals, preferring good questions to partial answers, and thus serves as our initial presentation well. Elhammoumi begins noting the parallel between the methods of Vygotsky in arriving at his theory of higher mental functioning to Marx's own method in the study of the development of human history. Returning to a historical roots of radical psychologists in discussions of the Austro-Marxist School, German critical theory, Freudo-Marxism, Pavlov's Materialism, Soviet Psychology, Frankfurt School, Berlin Critical Psychology, Western Marxist Psychology, and other forms of Materialist Psychology, Elhammoumi response to a provocative question: was Vygotsky the Feuerbach of psychology or its Marx? Along the way, he emphasizes how Vygotsky's thinking obviously responded positively to the role of various social relations (social relations of production, social interaction, cooperation, collaboration, etc.) in individual development. Exploring the explicit Marxist questions Vygotsky entertained and the variegated tradition of Marxism more broadly, the author arrives at a focus which he argues may be crucial to the future of both. This focus is spatio-temporality; an issue which the author claims set the limitations of Marx's own theoretical development. What are the inconsistencies in treatments of abstract and concrete labor, in treatments of 'leisure time', in the dialectic of use-value and exchange-value, and so on? Theories of activity, in particular, are said to require an assessment of the forces of spatio-temporality if they are to become truly formative conceptions. Springing from such issues, among other important insights, is a radical re-engagement with notions of individuality, that is the social production of the individual, understood by Elhammoumi as the 'individual form'.

Joachim Lompscher's Chapter 3 entitled *The Cultural-Historical Activity Theory: Some Aspects of Development* is the second chapter of our subsection on 'Theoretical Foundations'. It presents an original, critical profile of the developmental history of CHAT with the hope of stimulating a further elaboration and debate. He begins with a grounded description of Vygotsky and collaborators, taking careful steps to show key theoretical origins and foci of work including its divergent patterns of development amongst Vygotsky and Leont'ev specifically. Throughout the author shows the key theoretical elements as they underwent development. He directly addresses the question of whether

or not the work of Vygotsky and Leont'ev represent two different stages in CHAT development; an issue that contributes to understanding of the overall relation of critical theories of activity to current scholarship. As Lompscher discusses, it is now known that Leont'ev did in fact write a private letter to Vygotsky which openly argued for a return to earlier preoccupations which included the notion of collective human activity. Nevertheless, Lompscher concludes their work remain deeply intertwined with later work building on the earlier elements. Following this, Lompscher delineates schools and sub-schools of Russian and non-Russian CHAT research approaches providing detailed account of several works, some not widely available in the English translation, across a range of key concepts. Covering the research of the three generations of Leont'ev scholarship, the work of Asmolov, Davydov and others. By the end of the chapter, the author offers constructive directions forward for analyses in the CHAT tradition, highlighting the lack of careful consideration of the socio-technical and economic role of the forces of production, namely computer technology and the Internet, as an underdeveloped area of research.

A key element of our opening discussions of CHAT theory is the concluding chapter of this section. Maria Célia Marcondes de Moraes' Chapter 4 *Epistemological Scepticism, Complacent Irony: Investigations concerning the Neopragmatism of Richard Rorty* offers a useful anti-dote to the free flowing search amongst many CHAT researchers to find other traditions that offer more suitable paths of development than those already offered. The author takes on one that is, perhaps, most central to current discussions: neo-pragmatism. Moraes methodically affirms the importance of a dialectical, historical materialist reality in understanding activity which is, she argues, incompatible with the path that neo-pragmatism, as embodied in the work of Rorty, suggests. Moraes provides a searing assessment of Rorty's claims about knowledge and truth in the context of 'hypercontextualism'. Hyper-contextualism in this context is said to reduce every knowledge and every ethical value strictly to conventions shared by people in a specific cultural set. In this sense the knowledge is neither true nor false; it is only good or not good depending on its instrumental function; the truth is just something taken as true by people in a particular social practice. Importantly, this cultural relativism is considered by many to be the same as the Vygotskian conception of human being as cultural and historical beings. But the real question is, can a Marxist theory such as Vygotsky's be connected with the pragmatic philosophical tradition? Moraes' critical analysis of Richard Rorty's philosophy is a contribution toward the negative. Moraes' contribution is a strong and persistent argument against the post-modernist appropriation of Vygotskian theory, addressing epistemological questions as well as the educational, ethical and political consequences of Rorty's neo-pragmatism. It should give pause to those assessing theories of activity generally and especially those enthusiastically taking up the pragmatist tradition including the writings of Dewey, Mead and others.

Following our more general assessments of theories of activity we move to our second sub-section on 'Education'. First in this section is Alessandra Arce's Chapter 5 *The Importance of Play to Pre-School Education: Naturalization versus a Marxist Analysis*. Here we see a critical comparative perspective on play, pre-schooling and child development in which she takes up the perspectives developed by Elkonin and Leont'ev from the CHAT tradition

against the perspectives of Froebel. Her critique of Froebel demonstrates the problems associated with ahistorical and universalistic modes of analysis with a focus on naturalism or rather 'primordialism'. The significance of the comparison comes, first, in its careful analysis but also, perhaps in particular, when we note the 'genetic role' that early theories of education and pedagogy had, and thus still have, within dominant conceptions of education. In other words, the history of education, specifically in the west, carries with it a lasting influence of such philosophies. Arce begins by agreeing that Froebel's emphasis on play was important to understanding the modern educational enterprise. Like Moraes' paper which is a contribution to a criticism of the linkage between CHAT and Pragmatism/Neo-pragmatism, Arce's paper shows the problematic nature of the association between CHAT and the so-named 'Active Education' or 'Active School' in Europe and 'Progressive Education' approach of North America. Arce's comparative analyses of the idealistic conception of Froebel on play in childhood and the historical-materialistic approach of Leontyev and Elkonin is particularly enlightening in terms of the critical perspective on activity adopted in this volume generally. This chapter can be taken as an example of how much the dialectical conception of totality is important to the analysis of specific kinds of human activity.

In Chapter 6 *Estranged ~~Labor~~ Learning*, Jean Lave and Ray McDermott begin with key statements on the subject of capitalism vis-à-vis Marx's well-known essay 'Estranged Labor' (from The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844). The authors carefully situate the basic axioms of one of capitalism's hidden secrets, and then do what dialectics demands, they apply it to see if indeed the hidden secrets of capitalism's commodity form, its alienation and so on can be understood as an inherent part of the concrete educational process. Of course, it can. This chapter's analysis of social practice and activity goes back to several first principles of Marxist analysis through careful, line-by-line analysis of Marx's own writing, and transposes them directly to an inventive overall critique of contemporary schooling under capitalism. As they remark, "in critiquing the theories of political economy available in 1844, young Marx unwittingly wrote a quite devastating critique of the theories of learning available in 2004". And through this type of reading the authors emphasize the political economic turn in analyses of learning and activity to which this collection hopes to contribute. Herein are covered concepts central to Marxist educational theory, but given fresh life. As editors to this collection, we note with satisfaction that the authors invite the reader into the process of production itself--an act of de-fetishization--rather than to simply view the final scholarly product (a commodity). It is a practice to be emulated. Indeed, the spirit of critical dialogue which inspires the collection as a whole is represented here in the subtle and not-so-subtle divergences between ideas. This critical dialogue is an intentional characteristic of this collection, and we invite the readers to elaborate their own positions inside the inherent debates.

Helena Worthen and Joe Berry's Chapter 7 *Bargaining for 'Quality' in Higher Education: A Case Study from the City Colleges of Chicago* begins with the quoted statement: "Our working conditions are our students' learning conditions." What is the significance of this, as well as the details of the struggle to which it refers, in the broader context of the collection? Can a critical

perspective on activity open new questions that are not yet widely posed for this international phenomenon at the intersection of education and work? Worthen and Berry think so. They offer a dialectical analysis of schooling *as* work and work *as* schooling emphasizing the political economic dimensions of the teaching/learning conditions amongst contingent faculty in American higher education. The authors ask: what is meant by the ‘good teacher’? This is a matter of dialectical contradiction within a system of activities that are through and through formed by the confluence of educational as well as economic elements of a “higher education industry”. What standpoints are relevant to understand or map what’s going on? To begin with, the standpoints of the worker-teacher (in particular, the contingently employed worker-teacher) and that of educational management, but in addition there is the parallel system that accounts for the practices of tenure track teachers as well.

In Chapter 8 *Contradictory Class Relations in Work and Learning: Some Resources for Hope*, D.W. Livingstone begins from an analysis of contradictory (and, ultimately, polarizing) class relations and its effects on work and learning. It is the first of three chapters that form the sub-section entitled ‘Work’. Covered in Livingstone’s contribution are discussions of unemployment, underemployment and theories of work-education relations. Above all, there is evident need, according to the author, for critical theories of learning to pay more concerted attention to contradictory class relations. An important discussion that spring-boards analysis is the expansion of the narrow conceptual boundaries of both work and learning. CHAT is used to interrogate various alternative conceptions of learning (tacit, informal, non-formal and formalized learning); while work, it is argued, must be viewed in both paid and un-paid forms if class relations are to be brought fully into view. In some ways similar to the chapter which follows, the socialization of labour is central. In Livingstone’s case he is concerned with the forces of knowledge production; that is, the central contradiction between the “socialized forces and privatized relations of knowledge production.” The sites of development of the socialized forces of knowledge production are, according to Livingstone, both the sites most often ignored by educational scholars and the sites that form the starting point of revolutionary change.

Following, in Chapter 9 *From Labor Process to Activity Theory* Paul Adler takes as a starting point Marxist Labor Process Theory (LPT) as understood in the tradition of inspired by Harry Braverman. He outlines how a return to Marx’s original discussions of the fundamental contradiction between the socialization of the labor process on the one hand and the persistence of the constraints of capitalist profitability on the other provides a constructive way of invigorating labor process analysis. How can contemporary LPT address the problem of de-skilling; that is, what is the nature of the ‘de/en-skilling’ debate? A critical perspective on activity as well as close--“paleo-Marxist”--re-reading of Marx’s work itself, according to the author, allow us to see and partially resolve the problems within LPT. To ground discussion, Adler draws on a case study on the rationalization of work in the software development sector in the United States. The analysis of the socialization of labor processes provides a fascinating argument that reaches back to Marx’s critical commentary on what he called ‘craft idiocy’. As these craft boundaries break down a greater number of participants find the complexity of their work increased. Could it be that en-

skilling occurs at a societal level as the socialization of, in Adler's case software design processes, becomes more standardized allowing greater international exchange? His analysis leads directly to issues of the development of a lived experience of the 'collective worker' as well. Implications of social versus technical division of labour abound. At the same time, the author juxtaposes the contradictory internal unity of this socialization effect with the valorization effect through which the familiar disabling forces of capitalism on cooperation, free-exchange of ideas, the production of higher quality use-values is seriously threatened by, inter-capitalist competition, heightened managerial control and, in general terms, commodification/profit requirements.

In Chapter 10 *Values, Rubbish and Workplace Learning*, Yrjö Engeström takes a critical approach to the issue of value. As the author indicates, 'Values at Work' is frequently the subject of scholarly and popular concern. Citing the common-sense perspectives, widely reproduced in psychology, education as well as other disciplines that suggest the notion of 'values' as a largely mentalistic and discursive phenomena, the author argues for the importance of seeing values as a structurally embedded as contradictory objects/motives of activity: "The articulation, questioning and expansive transformation of values can eventually only succeed at the level of collective activity systems. Problem solving and reflection-in-action at individual or dyadic levels will not suffice." He takes as the central problematic the many transformative cycles of objects, in provocative fashion, drawing and significantly expanding upon the fascinating work of Michael Thompson's 1979 book *Rubbish Theory*. How are values, in this context, shaped? Here the value of objects of activity is in constant flux but with discernable and distinct patterns: a car of considerable exchange-value is purchased, its value plummets, possibly through multiple instance of re-sale, to the point of worthlessness or rubbish, but, in some cases, re-emerges again as a 'durable', a collector's find that then may increase in value over time. From these rudiments, an elaborate set of alternative pathways of objects and values are traced illuminating the roles of production and consumption in addition to exchange. Drawing on concrete examples in health care service work, it is in these phases, largely ignored in Thompson's work, that Engeström finds 'invisible resistance and emergence'. Here we trace the career, as it were, of 'difficult', 'demanding', 'complex' patients and ultimately the so-called lost causes or 'rubbish cases', their lives translated into a rubric of 'commoditization', price and (exchange) value that define the central contradiction of health systems around the world. Building into the model instances of self-care, re-using of equipment, re-diagnoses and self-medication (as well as poverty and self-abuse), Engeström embraces the central tenet of a critical approach in asking: How do these patient cases become rubbish? And how might they become durables? Three trajectories, perhaps, hold the key for moving forward: playful conversion, caring revitalization and engrossed appropriation. Implications for health care work and other contexts abound.

The final sub-section of the collection is 'Everyday Life'. It begins with Newton Duarte's Chapter 11 *Education as Mediation between the Individual's Everyday Life and the Historical Construction of Society and Culture*. Here Duarte present observations on the studies he's carried out over the last decade and a half. The focus of this chapter is on the relations between three theoretical

approaches. The first one is the historical and philosophical anthropology in the Marxist tradition. In this chapter deals with two key dialectical relationships: the relationship between humanisation and alienation on the one hand, and the relationship between objectification and appropriation on the other. The second theoretical approach, represented in Leont'ev's collective works, concerns theories of activity which incorporates Marx's anthropology and develops the analysis of the relationships between the structure of activity and the structure of consciousness. Two important topics of Leont'ev's theory of activity are specifically noted: the role in the formation of the individual of the appropriation of the socio-historical experience objectivated in the material and non-material culture; and, the alienation produced by the capitalist society. Duarte demonstrates how alienation is analysed by Leont'ev taking into consideration not only the barriers that drastically limit the possibility of appropriation of culture by the individual, but also the rupture between meaning and sense of most of the actions taken by human beings. Finally, the third theoretical approach is the Theory of "Species-Essential Objectivations" proposed by Agnes Heller in her book *Everyday Life*, written between 1967-68. The conceptual tools the author draws from Heller allow an exploration of a number of key topics. These topics include the differences and relationships between "species-essential objectivations in itself" (everyday life) and "species-essential objectivations for itself" (what does not pertain to everyday life), the main characteristics of the everyday activities and the forms of thought and knowledge of everyday life; and finally, the concept of person and the distinction between "particularity" and "individuality". The chapter concludes with a defense of the relevance of these three theoretical approaches for contemporary studies across philosophy, psychology, education and sociology.

Finally, in Chapter 12, Peter Sawchuk's *Activity & Power: Everyday Life and Development of Working-Class Groups* undertakes an assessment of contemporary Cultural Historical theories of activity for their ability to explain and analyze specific patterns of change in political consciousness. He links his discussion with broader social trends related to the so-called new, knowledge society and economy directly. An important matter for Sawchuk's argument is the notion of 'class struggle' which must be analyzed in relation to changes in consciousness vis-à-vis structural shifts in the workings of specific activity systems. Key contributions to the CHAT rubric can made, according to the author, from other conceptual resources such as Michel de Certeau's notion of the tactical and the strategic, Henri Lefebvre's understandings of resistance and *le détournement*, and especially Pierre Bourdieu's concept of 'class habitus'. Sawchuk presents a three type model of changes in political consciousness in the form of complex everyday learning activity systems undergoing forms of contracted and expansive development. Forces of fragmentation and, what Sawchuk calls, interstitiality (everyday resistance) shape and ultimately provide an account for changes in class consciousness. The class habitus is said to be the key mediating cultural artifact. Tracing changes in its content as well as structural position within activity, it is proposed as a master artifact in many ways primary to language.

Activity Across Education, Work & Everyday Life: Visions of Lifelong Learning

According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), 'lifelong for all' is now a major policy perspective amongst Education Ministers around the world. Built on the concept of lifelong learning originally developed over three decades ago by the OECD, UNESCO and the Council of Europe, comparative international statistics on performance now increasingly orient policy affecting the majority of countries in the world. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, likewise, now orient to, amongst other matters, this issue as well. Importantly for this volume, 'learning' in this rubric encompasses practices of early-childhood, through compulsory and post-compulsory education and training and throughout everyday life: 'from cradle to grave' as the OECD puts it. Four features mark the edges of the policy implications of such views according to the OECD (2004, p.2): learning objectives; structure of provision; content; resource provision/management. One of the main goals of this collection is to contribute to a critical conception of the fact that in the contemporary capitalist society people are expending more and more time in their lives in learning activities or learning processes. Critical analyses of what this social and historical fact really means is necessary in order to move the policy beyond the mere rhetoric of 'lifelong learning society', 'knowledge society' or 'educative society' adopted by the leading international institutions.

While policy discussion is not the focus of this collection, nor in the broader sense of the work should it be ignored. In the case of our volume, it is not hard to see that this collection poses useful, powerful and perhaps even vexing questions for such discussions. The contents do, afterall, provide a potent mix of empirical specificity and theoretical depth in its assessment of learning/practice that is international and which encompasses the life course. What vision of lifelong learning does this collection, exactly, afford?

Reading across our first sub-section on theory we can begin to piece together interesting points of tension that national and international policy-makers rarely have the time, resources or expertise to entertain. First we note that it is important to remember that theory does matter. Frames of reference and relevance that we apply to analyses shape what one attends to, denies and ignores. How we understand the very concept of 'learning' (a concept chronically presumed rather than defined in policy documents) has radical implications for how something like a 'knowledge economy' or 'lifelong learning society' might be organized. Taken as a whole, the writing of Lompscher, Elhammoumi and Moraes present important clues about key fallacies, theoretical dead-ends and mistaken directions to be avoided in understandings of learning itself. The lesson to be taken from this opening section is that, while not discounting a range of important differences, a cultural historical view of learning as mediated human activity provides a broad, systematic and inter-disciplinary basis for defining, tracing and in turn understanding the phenomenon. Our understanding of idea of a 'critical approach' is oriented by an assessment of major contradictions that define societal history; this view is largely conflictual; it is rooted in actual material practices; it refuses to paper over real inequities, including their systemic and historical roots. At the very least, it is clear that policy discussions that refuse to

acknowledge the highly uneven and hotly debated theoretical roots of the concepts of learning and knowledge production can scarcely recommend new forms of practice with confidence.

The discussion within our 'Education' section provides policy-makers with further pause for thought. Is it simply an abstract observation to note that our society's future rests on very first imposed visions of what childhood means, what it means to learn and, in particular, play? We think not. The daughter is the mother of the woman; that is, a life-course perspective must acknowledge that there can be no adequate understanding of learning in society without a critical assessment of the experience of childhood. Arce's chapter is clear that how pedagogy frames these experiences and shapes them incurs important choices: some of which connect with actual cultural historical practice and modes of knowledge acquisition better than others. We might juxtapose this argument, once again, with Worthen and Berry's observation (quoting college teachers): "Our working conditions are our students' learning conditions." The dynamic analyzed by Worthen and Berry can easily inspire reflection on teaching as a whole; the hidden economic constraints on pedagogy, whether it is early-childhood or post-compulsory, cannot be left to one side as we discuss lifelong learning. Similarly, Lave and McDermott's political economic framing of the credentializing and theorizing practices of the educational realm bring into question the true function of schooling in our society. Can lifelong learning policy continue to ignore these central contradictions?

The discussion in our section on 'Work' shows the real constraints on skill and learning development in the work process (seen as both paid and unpaid). Policy discussions are rife with presumptions of what 'knowledge work' is, typically viewing it as largely consensual and unproblematic. Livingstone and Adler each show that there are important contradictory forces at play that would easily undermine any simplistic policy initiative. The socialization of labor processes and forces of knowledge production are both constrained and partially constituted by a powerful opposing force that few policy analysts openly acknowledge. It may be absurd to proclaim any lifelong learning policy involving, for example, greater support for workplace training without first understanding the system, as outlined by these contributors, in which these practices are enmeshed. Engeström's grounded analysis of alternative forms and pathways of 'valuing', equally, suggests that understanding the complex workings of work must be taken into account in proclamations of its future.

Finally, in our fourth section 'Everyday Life' we begin to open up critical dialogue about the link in the trajectory of lifelong learning policy that is perhaps the most inadequately addressed of all. To date, lifelong learning policy rests on tallies of how many attended school, took training courses, apprenticeship programs and so on. With notable exceptions, across the globe the learning that goes on outside organized courses remains difficult to assess and challenging to fit into conventional policy frameworks. More often than not, policy initiatives rest on simplistic survey constructs and correlations. In contrast, Duarte offers a powerful philosophical starting point for beginning to understand the nature of everyday life and through it learning in its broadest forms. Objectively, different relations between human beings and their modes of objectification/appropriation provide a means of sorting out what most theory

fumbles around as it attempts assessments of the vast flow of human experience that is 'lifelong learning'. Sawchuk, likewise, attempts to bring a sense of shape to what might appear to be a complex and arbitrarily set of different trajectories of development in the context of everyday learning. Why and how is it that there are such differences in experiences, outcomes and development in the realm of everyday life? Learner motivation, generalized correlations between prior school experience and socio-economic situation are the state of the art of lifelong learning analysis, and as such leave much to be desired. Both Duarte and Sawchuk show conceptual means of sorting out who, how and why in the development of everyday learning so essential for a comprehensive lifelong learning strategy.

Concluding Remarks

Our approach to activity has a great deal to offer those wishing to embrace the complexity of learning through the life-course in changing times. Inter-disciplinary dialogue is as essential as a recovery of a critical perspective. The concept of 'activity', however, remains broad. The usage throughout the collection recognizes this and presents analyses of activity as a process of change. Learning is at the center of our analysis because it evokes an image, along the lines of Marx's original compliments of Hegel's work, "[h]e grasps the self-creation of man [*sic*] as a process... that he therefore grasps the nature of labour" (from Bottomore 1963, p.202). Labour produces and shapes human individuals. Just as the concept of labour allowed Marx to overcome Cartesian dualism, the concept of activity does the same for the social sciences with regards to learning. The concept of activity unites the subject and object, overcomes the dualism of lower versus higher mental functions, inner world of meanings and the outer world of determinations. Through labour or productive activity, human individuals objectify themselves, their potentialities, as well as their thoughts and capacities. Learning is, in this sense, the labour people do on themselves. Labour might be used inter-changeably with activity; and labour/activity becomes, for us, the cardinal representation of social relations, social organization, and culture. According to Leont'ev (1974), these forms of relations are nothing other than the total logic of human life processes inclusive of the division of labour.

In many ways, we might say that our collection tries to reconcile the theories of activity with Marx's concept of labour. Authors review several key areas of research with a view of assessing and evaluating the premises, categories and concepts as well as epistemological, methodological and philosophical foundations. We should conclude, however, that while the research program of the Cultural Historical School formulated by Vygotsky, Luria and Leont'ev has been very fruitful and promising, its overall ambition to provide a properly elaborated theory of human higher mental functions remains, to date, unfulfilled.

Finally, we note that the theoretical and political importance of this dialogue on 'work, education and everyday life' lies in the attempt to trace the contours of life under capitalism starting from the key loci that seem to uniquely define the period. Each section lays out key questions on the meaning and potentials for a vision of lifelong learning society or knowledge economy. At the same time, answers given in the text can only be partial. Science is a collective

endeavor, each of us standing on the shoulders of others, forming the platform for still others who follow. Moreover, for in-depth analyses there is always a sacrifice of breadth. In the case of our collection, authors address either local, national, or a narrow range of international contexts; specific conceptual matters, populations and institutions. What should be clear, however, is that studies of mind, culture and activity such as these offer a powerful means of moving forward on central questions of our time. At the broadest level it can be said that policies of lifelong learning and most articulated visions of a knowledge economy are, at this stage, perfunctory: a richly fragranced stew with little meat. Beyond the intellectual nourishment this text may offer, studies herein, and those like them, promise to add sustenance to the overall societal debate.