

Expansive learning

A central concern of our work is the conceptualisation of *expansive learning* (Leont'ev, 1978; Engeström, 1987). In this we have drawn primarily from the version of activity theory developed by Engeström (1987, 1989, 1991, 2001), which is detailed in Leadbetter (2006) and Daniels and Warmington (2007). By expansive learning we mean the capacity of participants in an activity to interpret and expand the definition of the object of activity and respond to it in increasingly enriched ways. For practitioners in our research sites such learning is evidenced in enhanced analyses of the potential of the education and/or care trajectory of the young person, and of their own capacities for professional action. It is also evidenced in their dispositions to recognise and engage with distributed expertise in complex work places. Objects, such as these trajectories, should not be confused with goals. Goals are primarily conscious, relatively short-lived and finite aims of individual actions. The object is the constantly reproduced purpose of a collective activity system that motivates and defines the horizon of possible goals and actions (Leont'ev, 1978; Engeström *et al*, 1995). Hence by studying the formation of objects, we are studying the learning that takes place in and across complex and rapidly changing activity systems.

Expansive learning involves the creation of new knowledge and new practices for a newly emerging activity: that is, learning embedded in and constitutive of qualitative transformation of the entire activity system. Such a transformation may be triggered by the introduction of a new technology or set of regulations but it is not reducible to it. This type of learning may be seen as distinct from that which takes place when existing knowledge and skills embedded in an established activity are gradually acquired and internalised, as in apprenticeship models, or when existing knowledge is deployed in new activity settings or even when the new knowledge is constructed through experimentation within an established activity. All three types of learning may take place within expansive learning but these gain a different meaning, motive and perspective as parts of the expansive process.

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