“Figured worlds as mediators in personal trajectories of learning”

Line Wittek
Buskerud and Vestfold University College
The purpose of this presentation

Suggesting a tentative analytical framework highlighting figured worlds as mediators in personal trajectories of learning

Core concepts:

- **PERSONAL TRAJECTORIES OF LEARNING** (Dreier 1999, 2008)
  Learning trajectories are formed by how persons interpret and make meaning from their experiences. A more dynamic and fluid approach to learning than the more static notions like competence or expertise.

- **MEDIATION** *Instead of acting in a direct, unmediated way in the social and physical world, our contact with the world is indirect or mediated by signs.* (Wertsch, 1991;178)

- Figured worlds as mediational tools.
  Empirical example: writing as a tool for learning.
Writing and Learning

• Activities of writing foster learning, a robust conclusion from many years of research (e.g. Emig, 1977; Flower and Hayes, 1981 and 1981; Dysthe 2002; Barton, Hamilton, & Ivaniç, 2000,, Wittek and Habib 2013; Barton, 2007; Thompson 2013)

• What is it about writing?
• What does it do and how does it do it?
• How can the individual layers of sociocultural learning from writing be conceptualised?
Context of the study (empirical example)

Norwegian university college – the initial teacher program authorizes students for teaching at lower secondary school.

4 years. Pedagogy, mathematics or Norwegian and 3 other additional subjects.
Methods

Data material: texts written by students during their 3rd and 4th years, interviews and program related documents.

Informants:

6 lecturers (one in each of the subjects: religion, science, social studies, mathematics and 2 in pedagogy)

18 students enrolled in their third year

All interviews were read and analysed by all of the three researchers for the purpose of identifying core stances expressed by students and by teachers on writing as a tool for learning
Analysis

“What advices would you give to new students regarding writing of assignments?”

“They should share with each other, arrange peer response, read a lot, be active in plenary discussions and work hard”.

A striking agreement among the 18 student informants

What activities are students referring to in particular?

How do students explain how these activities help them learn?
Two specific courses is being highlighted by the students as significant for their learning in general

- 1. pedagogy
- 2. maths

- Both are extensive courses at the beginning of teacher education.
- The responsible teachers in both courses arrange for feedback from teachers and peers to enhance learning. They both engage heavily in teaching and supervising, they give assignments where the students have to relate, compare and contrast between different experiences from internship and discuss them in light of theoretical concepts. They set high expectations to the students.
Symbolic spaces that are socially produced and culturally constructed, but they appear as spheres of interpretation of social experiences at a personal level.

Important in human thinking and learning as they structure our ways of thinking and acting, and make us value certain ways of reasoning and acting over others.

Equip us with a lens from which we observe ourselves and form ideas about who we are and who we want to be in certain activities.
FIGURED WOLDS as mediators (Holland 2010) 1/2

- People have the inclination to be drawn into, and formed within, symbolic worlds and to become active in, and passionate about them.
- Made meaningful by cultural narratives and imaginaries of actors, events and activities
- Spheres where persons can perform as participants in their inner speech; they can bring different voices from different contexts together, reflect upon them compare and contrast on them.
- Spheres where participants are socially positioned
- “One important aspect of participating in culture(s), is the self-identification and eventual self-investment as a particular sort of actor in one or more figured worlds and learn to be, in the eyes of the self and others, a particular sort of actor in that world” (Holland 2010, p. 272).
To enhance learning, writing assignments should centre around scientific concepts, and they should be designed for the purposes of:

• Giving students the opportunity to apply and make use of core concepts as “novices”. Even before they fully understand the concepts, they form an important “ticket of entrance” into professional activities.

• Make students interrelate experiences from different contexts and spontaneous and scientific concepts.

• Make students perform thorough investigations of core themes and concepts within the discipline or profession.

• Exploration, interaction and play should be part of the writing activities
FIGURED WOLDS as spheres where students can

- Be drawn into active participation and even passionate engagement
- Apply and make use of concepts and interpretations, narratives and imaginaries of actors, events and activities
- Explore, interact and play with ideas and self-conceptions

“There was an extensive focus towards the importance of a culture of sharing from day one, because we learn more. It is not about copying or stealing .... We just learn more that way”.

““The pedagogy teacher followed us carefully to make sure that we did a good job. That made me a bit anxious. I think a lot of the other students felt the same way. Our class where reduced to the half during the first months, and that might be because of the high demands. But it was good.... I needed it ... to understand that I had to read. The results does not come out of nothing, you have to work”.

Figured worlds as mediators 1/3
Figured worlds as mediators 2/3

FIGURED WOLDS as spheres where students can

• interrelate experiences from different contexts and spontaneous and scientific concepts, bringing different voices from different contexts together, reflect upon them, compare and contrast them

• investigate core themes and concepts within the discipline or profession

“I did not look forward to mathematics, but with this teacher nothing was difficult. She gave very specific instructions and it was clear to us what she expected. And her comments were so specific and good – they were of good help in pushing you forward, I believe that all the students in this class agree with me on this; she was fantastic!”.
Figured worlds as mediators

FIGURED WOLDS as spheres where students can

• Position themselves
• Appropriate tools for continuously reflection on who we are and who we want to be in specific (professional) activities
• Play around with ideas and create situations and represent it all by themselves without the situational and expressive form of support, but achieved only through signs and words and their combinations

Assignments in pedagogy is more about me generally as a teacher, The profession of teaching in all its complexity, but the disciplines is more on the disciplines ... and issues on didactics to a certain degree”
Figured worlds are powerful mediational tools for learning

Activities of writing can form a proper structure for creating spheres where students can:

- Be drawn into active participation
- Apply and make use of different types of resources
- Explore, interact and play with ideas and self-conceptions
- Interrelate between different experiences and also between practice and theory
- Investigate relationships between spontaneous and scientific concepts
- Position themselves
- Appropriate tools for continuously reflection
- Play around with ideas and create imaginative situations

“They should share assignment drafts with each other, arrange peer response, read a lot, be active in plenary discussions and work hard”.
References


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