

Learning08: Methodologies and Practices for Approaching Learning as a Social Phenomenon Inside and Outside of School

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Learning and teaching as longitudinally constituted activities in children's lives in- and outside school

Within recent understandings of learning and development, interaction is considered constitutive of learning. Hence, taking part in interaction is understood as taking part in learning situations. This 'participationist' stance has far-reaching consequences in many respects. One issue highlighted by shifting the focus from a mentally constituted individual to socially constituted participation concerns the development of ways of systematically studying interaction as a longitudinally evolving process. This paper addresses this question, on the basis of longitudinal video recordings of the everyday lives of six- and seven-year olds, inside and outside classrooms, and inside and outside schools.

Conversation Analysis (CA) has during the last forty years established itself as a highly productive way for a social understanding the organization of human interaction, providing a thoroughly empirical understanding of social practices. Until recently however, less attention has been given to issues of how learning and change takes place. Addressing learning and change within CA requires a capacity to argue for the situated and oriented-to relevance of prior interaction to situations, and a capacity to demonstrate the similarly situated and oriented-to possible projectability for future situations. This analysis has, as any CA work, to remain firmly anchored in socially established participant orientations. This field is currently in rapid development, and researchers at different locations are addressing the challenges involved in taking CA understandings beyond the limits of single situations.

Prior work within CA on longitudinal change has used repeated occurrences of practices over time, such as repair and corrections, in some occasions further constrained by topical orientation, to set up analytic collections within which the study of development and change is possible. The results from this growing body of work are impressive. However, one cannot, in our opinion, presume that the presence of a particular practice or content is enough for warranting a participant orientation to the relevance of prior situations for the present. One can also expect that there are differences in the level of relevance, where mentions of the same lexical item, or the doing of the same action, at times can index a strong relevance, and at other times a weak such.

To pursue these (and other) issues, we have followed a number of children throughout their entire days for a week, recording as much as possible of their everyday lives. Within this body of data, we have begun to find and investigate trajectories of action. In this paper, work on what by bi-lingual children is called "learning English", and work on the use of the concept "star" ('tähti' in Finnish), is used for studying how the children establish the relevance of prior situations to the current, and how they project future orientation to the same action. Within data from six days, we have, for this paper, identified four sets of topically related trajectories, consisting of five and ten instances each, where the children are demonstrably oriented to the relevance of prior action. This is established relying on a variety of resources: explicit mentions, written artefacts,

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epistemic positioning, and activity context. The occurrences of the focused action are found in diverse contexts, such as in the lunch hall, in the recess yard, at dinner in the family. The results are valuable for continuing the development of the study of learning and change within CA. Further; the results indicate an interesting aspect of teaching (here, mostly peer teaching) with respect to the situated establishment of longitudinal relevance. In the data, the studied children repeatedly, explicitly, as part and parcel of the studied action, situate their current ways of knowing what is taught in relation to what is already known. Further, this knowing is argued as situated doings. Or, as indeed stated by current theorizing on learning, as changing participation, but not only as an analyst understanding, but as an every-day life oriented-to understanding, about doing, and about change. Thus, if this proves to be correct in future work, it seems as if learning and teaching can be argued to be oriented to as inherently longitudinal. Which, if the argument holds, considerably would benefit CA studies of learning and change, as some of the issues of how to argue for cross-situational relevance would be solved by the ones we are primarily interested in understanding, namely the participants.