

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

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Experiencing conversations: Bridging the gap between discourse and activity

The keynote introduces the Vygotskian tradition in the realist theoretical discussion of the structure-agency problem. Archer's concept of internal conversation is discussed in terms of internalization and externalization of conversational dynamics. The keynote addresses in particular the methodological issue of observing how external events trigger internal use of language, and how these internal dynamics are externalized. The experience of talk is proposed as a conceptual key to the understanding of internal conversations and of the relation between structured activity and agency. The experience of talk is defined with the help of the notions of emotional experience, personal sense and inner speech, as they are conceptualized in activity theory and in particular in the works of L. S. Vygotsky and A. N. Leont'ev. Students' experiences of critical conversational events with teachers are analyzed on the basis of written autobiographical accounts. The experience of talk emerges from the analysis as a form of emotional experience in which the horizon of the individual's subjective view relates to specific circumstances external to the individual. Autobiographical accounts of critical conversations are suggested as a type of data which allows access to the experience of talk.