Activity Theory

A critical overview
By Andy Blunden

Contents

Preface
Acknowledgements
List of Figures and Tables

PART 1
Basic Principles of Activity Theory

1 Introduction
1. Behaviour, Consciousness and Activity
2. Substance, Monism and Dualism
3. Continuity and Discontinuity
4. Actions, Goals and Motives
   4.1 Operations
5. Artefacts
   5.1 Words, Tools and Signs
6. Activities
   6.1 What is an Activity?
   6.2 Activities which fall short of Leontyev’s ideal-typical activity
7. Motivation
   7.1 The “Unconscious”?!
8. The Genealogy of Activity Theory
9. Activity Theory and Vygotsky’s Socio-Cultural Theory
10. Germ Cell and Unit of Analysis
11. Activities and Concepts
12. Abstract and Concrete
13. Analysis by Units and Analysis by Elements
   13.1 Monism again
14. Subject, Object and Participant Research
15. Activities have a Life Cycle
16. The Context of Activities
   16.1 The Immediate and Societal Contexts of Activities
   16.2 The Historical Context of Activities
17. Perezhivanie
18. The Development of the Personality
19. Narrative Analysis
20. Summary: motivation

PART 2:
Diverse Research in Activity Theory
Introduction to Part 2

2 Building institutions
1. A child learning to read.
   1.1 Question Asking Reading (King, Griffin, et al.)
   1.2 Putting academic knowledge to work
2. Vasilyuk's work on resolving “impossible situations”
   2.1 Types of “life-world”
   2.2 Types of Perezhivanie
3. A wage worker employed in a capitalist firm

3 Activities characterised by a Narrative
1. The life course of an individual person
   1.1 Luria's Romantic Science
2. The narrative of a patient visiting a hospital and receiving treatment
   1.1 The story of a female trainee surgeon who chooses to leave training
   1.2 A medical student in their first months as a hospital doctor
3. The history of a practice, such as a science or profession

4 Transformative Projects
1. The activist stance
   1.1 Agency
      1.1.1 Vygotsky on Self-Control
      1.1.2 Sannino on Collective Decisions
      1.1.3 Gutiérrez on Transgression
      1.1.4 Stetsenko on Agency
      1.1.5 Holland and Edwards on Relational Agency
      1.1.6 Horton on Freedom
      1.1.7 Discussion
   2. The germ cell of a new practice
      2.1 Marx's use of the idea of a germ cell or unit in Capital
         2.1.1 The introduction of trade into a traditional society
      2.2 Vygotsky made word meaning a unit of analysis
         2.2.1 Concepts and Activities
         2.3 Vasily Davydov's mathematics curriculum

5 Intervening with Activity Theory
1. Transforming activities with a germ cell
   1.1 The sit-to-stand exercise
   1.2 Junior doctors using purple pen for prescribing
   1.3 Collaborative Learning Spaces
   1.4 The “root model” for teaching topics in school

6. Political Life
1. A trade union organising workers in an enterprise
2. Rival political parties competing for government of the country
   2.1 Elections
2.2 The formation of public opinion

7. Social Movements
   1. The women’s liberation movement
      1.1 The life cycle of the WLM
      1.2 The WLM as a learning process
      1.3 Decision making within projects
      1.4 Transforming the object-concept
      1.5 Relations between projects
      1.6 The Urpraxis of a movement

8 Incoherent Activities
   1. Activities characterised by a shared motif
      1.1 The Solar Punk youth movement
      1.2 The anti-vax campaign against public health measures

9 Formative Interventions
   1. Construction of utopian forms of activity as educational artefacts
      1.1 Mike Cole et al.’s 5th Dimension
      1.2 Aydin Bal’s Learning Lab
      1.3 Fernanda Liberali’s LACE
   2 Postcolonial projects

10 Ethics
   1. The Ethics of Collaboration
      1.1 Social Science and Ethics
      1.2 Modern Ethics
         1.2.1 Religion and Ethics
         1.2.2 John Rawls’ Political Liberalism
         1.2.3 Habermas’s Communicative Ethics
         1.2.4 Seyla Benhabib
         1.2.5 Amartya Sen
         1.2.6 Agnes Heller
         1.2.7 Alasdair MacIntyre
         1.2.8 Thick and Thin Ethos
      1.3 Collaborative Ethics
      1.4 Participant researchers
   2 Social class
   3 The Urpraxis of Socialism
      3.1 The worldwide anti-capitalist struggle

Conclusion

References

Index