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Interventionist and developmental research methodologies

Expansive learning actions and expressions of transformative agency: a change laboratory in the academic library

The paper presents an analysis of learning in an intervention in which the workers of an academic library, together with their clients, redefined the services the library offers to research groups. A specific intervention method, the Change Laboratory, was used to facilitate the generation of new ideas and procedures. This study is part of a research and development project taking place in the Helsinki University Library in 2009–2011.

This developmental process is examined by using the theory of expansive learning by identifying expansive learning actions from the data. The learning actions of an expansive cycle are (1) questioning, (2) analysis, (3) modeling a new solution, (4) examining the new model, (5) implementing the new model, (6) reflecting on the process, and (7) consolidating the new practice. Added to this, participants' active involvement in the Change Laboratory process is analyzed by using the category of six expressions of transformative agency (Engeström 2011). The expressions of transformative agency are (1) Resisting change, new suggestions or initiatives, (2) Criticizing the current activity and highlighting the need for a change in the activity, (3) Explicating new possibilities or potentials in the activity, (4) Envisioning new patterns or models of the activity, (5) Committing to concrete actions aimed at changing the activity, and (6) Taking consequential actions to change the activity. In the end, the relationship between learning actions and expressions of transformative agency is considered.

In the analysis six of the seven expansive learning actions were identified in the transcripts of the sessions. A preliminary analysis indicates that examples of most of the expressions of transformative agency are possible to identify in the data. As a result of the ongoing analysis our intention is to found out how particular expansive learning actions are related to different expressions of transformative agency. One objective of this study is to develop a new methodology for analyzing learning during formative interventions.