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My work engages cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) by studying processes of expansive learning within institutions of higher education undergoing organizational change efforts. In this profile, I will highlight two main contributions to the CHAT literature: 1) illuminating the role of relational ***bridging practices*** that facilitate expansive learning, and 2) describing leadership practices that support the development of **transformative agency** during processes of expansive learning.

The Role of Relational *Bridging Practices* in Expansive Learning

I employed expansive learning to examine how three "high data use" teacher education programs (TEPs) located in diverse institutional and regional settings in the United States developed new work practices to both comply with external policies and serve locally constructed goals (Davis, 2021, 2023; Davis & Peck, 2020). Though change leaders shifted policies, structures, and division of labor, these structural changes to the activity system were not sufficient in motivating and supporting collaborative engagement in the kind of new workplace practices necessary to expand the object of activity. This study highlights the importance of relational ***bridging practices*** that facilitated expansive learning despite tensions, setbacks, and disturbances created as new work practices emerged in response to shifting internal and external conditions (Davis, 2021, 2023).

In these programs, shifting the allocation of structural resources and program policies was helpful but insufficient in motivating and sustaining engagement in data use. Relational bridging practices that linked and supported ***individual and collective motives, agency, knowledge, expertise,*** and ***responsibility*** encouraged and sustained program members' engagement in data use work that furthered the object of change and both individual and collective learning and development (Davis, 2021, 2023).

This work builds on Engeström and colleagues' (2007) identification of bridging actions as attempts to resolve contradictions in ways that continue rather than abandon expansive learning processes when there is a threat to their persistence. These authors primarily identified bridges as systems-level decisions and actions (e.g., adopt a new training system). My analysis of expansive learning processes in these three TEPs suggests that relational bridging practices played a key role in addressing tensions and conflicts that came up during the process of expansive learning.

Findings from this study suggest that the process of expansive learning requires simultaneous attention to interpersonal, organizational, and cultural dimensions of the change process. Through the use of relational bridging practices, these three programs developed ***co-constructed collective motives*** related to data use, ***common knowledge, distributed expertise***, and a sense of ***collective agency*** and ***shared responsibility***. These became cultural resources that further supported expansive learning efforts.

Leadership Practices that Facilitate the Development of Transformative Agency

Another project examines how faculty involved in a comprehensive, "revolutionary" organizational change project situated in a multidisciplinary engineering department in a large, public, Hispanic-Serving Institution in the United States expressed and fostered transformative agency during expansive learning processes, and how the development of transformative agency is shaped by structural, cultural, and interpersonal power relations (Davis & Svihla, 2024; Davis et al., 2023).

Our analyses utilize a large corpus of qualitative data collected over six years, including more than 80 hours of transcribed audio recordings of interviews and observations of faculty meetings and workshops. We focused primarily on interactional data (e.g., faculty meetings and workshops) to characterize transformative agency in dialogue. Early analyses identified key elements of supporting transformative agency: meeting stakeholders where they are, sharing agency with them, using potential control verbs (can, could, might, etc.), acknowledging and legitimizing their concerns, and inviting them in the effort in ways that suggest ownership (Davis et al., 2023).

An ongoing analysis (Davis & Svihla, 2024) is examining the development of transformative agency across this 6-year change process. We draw on Haapasaari et al.'s (2016) work to identify expressions of transformative agency (resisting, criticizing, explicating, envisioning, committing, and taking concrete actions), and have expanded this framework to identify relational and leadership practices that supported the *development* of transformative agency among stakeholders over time.

An important aspect of that relational work was responding to ***misalignment*** (e.g., stakeholders with views or practices misaligned with the object of expansive learning) in ways that allowed the work to move forward while still engaging change-hesitant stakeholders. Even misaligned faculty were continuously framed as part of the change effort. Leaders often ***invited*** others to co-construct aspects of the change project in ways that suggested ownership. This often took the form of asking open-ended questions to engage stakeholders and understand where they are coming from. They also demonstrated ***shared agency*** through discourse, often using "we" narratives or "you" to include others as active change agents and part of this collective project. Change agents also engaged in ***aligning***—aligning their responses to others' interpretations or ideas, sometimes even if they were misaligned. Aligning practices positioned faculty to co-construct shared values and goals in a collaborative way, so that faculty had a voice in shaping the change process.

We're working towards providing a toolkit for researchers and practitioners interested in examining and fostering transformative agency in expansive learning processes and understanding how leaders can foster transformative agency during all phases of organizational change.

References

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