POLITICAL RISK-TAKING: A REQUIREMENT OF TODAY'S INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

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1. STUDENTS ASSESSMENT, WORK PLACE, ACTIVITY THEORY

To assess workplace practices (*practicum)* is part of our working duties in most of the Faculty teachers. I'm involved in the Social Education Studies, what allow me to know and work with a big range of different institutions, where the students do their workplace periods of practice (*practicum*).

One of the particularities in the Practicum action is that the students are crossing boundaries[1] between two systems, the university and the work institutions, with more or les collaboration/echange between them. The object/goal of the practicum could be seen from different perspectives:

- As an opportunity to "practice" or "put in practice" previous knowledge learned in the university context. In this perspective, knowledge (skills and concepts) can be "transferred" from one system to another, trough a process of modelling or adaptation to the new situations.

- As new learning situations (different from the university) where the students learn being part of and participating in a community of practice facing concrete and real situations. In this perspective knowledge can't be descontextualised from the situations where is been created and, consequently, can't be transferred.

Adopting the second perspective, learning (understood as transformation) occurs in multi-organisation fields and in different *activity systems*[2], the transformation occurs both, in the individual learner (student) and in the activity system (school, university, work-place...), usually rising from a contradiction between the elements in the system.

Elements in an Activity System

- *Subject : the individual or group whose point of view is taken in the analysis of the activity*
- *The object (or objective) : the target of the activity within the system*
- *Instruments : internal or external mediating artefacts that help to achieve the outcomes of the activity*
- *The community : comprised of one or more people who share the objective with the subject*
- *Rules : regulate actions and interactions within the activity system*
- *The division of labor : how tasks are divided horizontally between community members as well as referring to any vertical division of power and status*

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[1] Crossing boundaries: changing contexts, going from one activity system to another.
[2] Activity system is defined as a community engaged in a common goal (object of activity) using specific instruments, following rules.

Transfer is seen as transition trough collective activity systems involving changes in the individuals and in the institutions. Consequently university is one of the learning contexts, also itself involved in a learning process and with a role (responsibility) to prepare the youth for work demands.

The Practicum is an excellent social situation to construct learning. The students are confronted with authentic tasks and problems and they have direct concrete experiences with other colleges, participants and social phenomena (resources and constraints in the situations).

- But what kind of learning do they do?

- Can we use the traditional classification of *concepts, skills and attitudes* to identify them?

- How are the new learning related to the elements (*rules, instruments, division of labour...)* of the system they are involved in? Which situations are related to the new learning's?

- There is conflict in them?

And, in other hand, from my pedagogical concern and assuming that the University, as a system can learn.

- How can we, from the University, support work activity?

- How can we assess the practicum to create dialogical and reflective knowledge instruments?

My proposal for this year (2003-2004) was to create instruments for reflection/ thinking to develop learning abilities, starting to work out the use of some tools/ instruments to help the students reflection and tutor/student dialog about learning's taking place in the work place period.

I proposed them to use their *practicum diary* as a reflexive diary writing *their learning experiences* (2on column) and the learning situations on which they take place (3rd column). In the first column we write the date and the kind of learning, painted in 3 different colours. The students tried to classify their knowledge's in 3 different categories:

- concepts (objective knowledge)

- skills and process

- attitudes and identity changes

Day	New learnings	Learning situation
10.11.03	Some groups are more interested in some subjects and other groups in others. Example: the women group is interested in "the house" and "the family", while the men are for "work" and "directions".	Through their demands or noticing more or less interest they show.

My assessment work during the practicum focus on debates with the students to ensure that they where following the reflective process correctly and satisfactory.

A part of "checking the process" we where discussing the two main research interests:

❑ Learning's we can identify

   -    How can be classified

❑ In which situations they take place

Two students had followed all process satisfactory, placed in two completely different work-place situations, but we transcript only the first, placed in an Adult School doing a Plan to attend new immigrants in the community. The student, very well prepared, had been completely involved in the work place community.
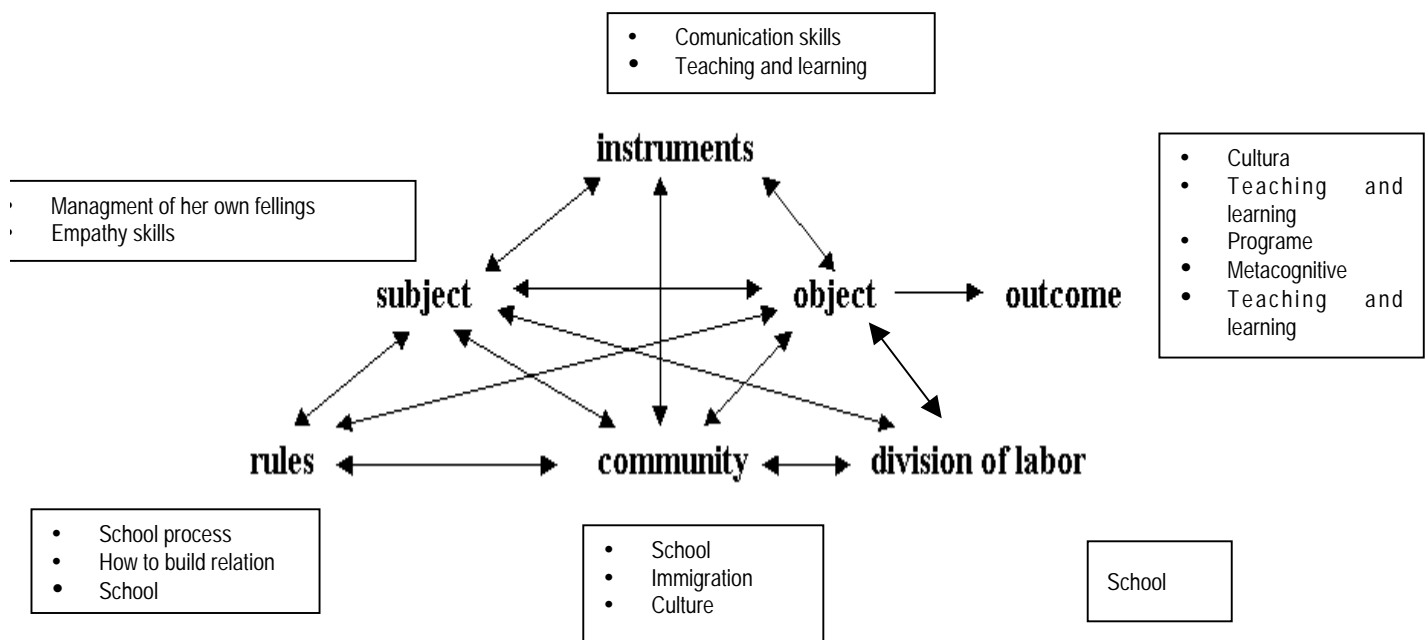
Using the sentences written in the diary and agreed categories (knowledge, skills, and attitudes) painted in different colours, we later did two analysis:

❑ First find sub-group categories.

❑ Second, linking this sub-group categories with the elements of Engestrom Y (1987) "Activity system" model:
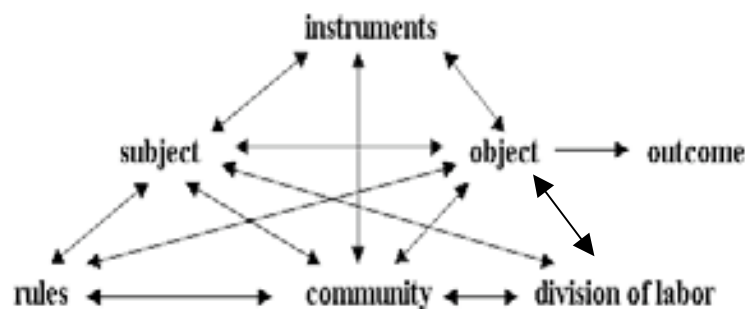
See the sub-group categories found and the relations with elements in the Activity Theory model:

- Knowledge subgroup categories:

  School

  Program

  Teaching and learning

  Immigration

  Community resourcers

  Culture

  Research

- Skills subgroup categories

  - School process

  - Communication skills

  - Empathy skills

  - Didactic strategies

  - Completing the practicum work

  - Attitudes and changes in identity subgroup categories:

    - Empathy skills

    - How to build relationships with the participants

- Management of her own feelings

- Comunication skills
- Teaching and learning

instruments

- Cultura
- Teaching and learning
- Programe
- Metacognitive
- Teaching and learning

- Managment of her own fellings
- Empathy skills

subject   **object**   **outcome**

rules   **community**   **division of labor**

- School process
- How to build relation
- School

- School
- Immigration
- Culture

School

The learning situations found are:

Learning situation for objective knowledge	Learning situation for skills and procedures	Learning situation for attitudes, skills:
Explication — Of the tutor / Of the teacher	Explication — Tutor	
Observing — The meetings / The tutor / The context / Participants / Different groups / A class	Observing — Tutor / Different groups	Observing — Participants / The tutor
Asking — The teacher / The tutor		
Using — Materials in class		Sharing
Listening — The participants / Tutor / The director		Talking
Asking — The participants / The tutor		
Talking		
Observing Different groups / The participants / A class		
Though — A problem / A situation	Through — A problem / A situation / Demands	Through — A problem / A situation / An experience
A discussion / The evaluation		
Thinking	Thinking — With tutor	Thinking
Practising in class	Practising — With different groups	
Doing changes and seeing the results	Doing it	
Reading — A document		

In blue we painted the ones that are related to some conflicts.

We see that, in that activity, the conflicts can be situated in the bottom left triangle:
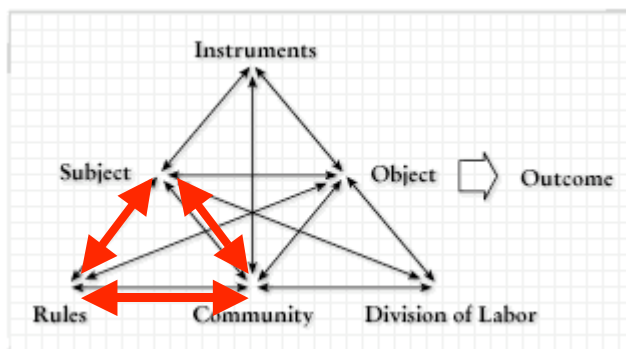
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