**Call for Papers**

**On the Definition on Learning**

Over a number of years learning theory has developed rapidly; old theories are continuously modified and refined, and new theories are developed. The field of learning theory has become massively complex with different foci, founders and proponents, schools, and disciplinary approaches (see Qvortrup & Wiberg, 2013). On the one hand, some proponents of theories of learning tend to advocate their own viewpoint and see the perspectives as mutually exclusive, conflicting, and therefore incompatible. On the other hand, some researchers try to unify the field into a comprehensive theory of learning (Illeris, 2006; Jarvis, 2006). The consequence is that definitions of learning are either narrow or broad.

This tendency within the field of learning theory should be seen in connection with the societal and global focus on learning in all aspects of human life. Looking at the concept of learning as a societal phenomenon, we see how the concept of lifelong learning, i.e. learning at any time, on time, everywhere, and for everyone in a group of learners of diverse ages and from diverse cultures, has widened and changed our understanding of what learning is and how learning takes place.

It is a prevailing consensus in the literature on learning that learning is not about the mechanical transmission of information from one subject to another, for example teacher to student (see Qvortrup and Wiberg, 2013). Furthermore, the idea of a possibility of formulating general laws of learning has dropped to zero (see Shuell, 1996; Weinert, 1996a,b; Reinmann-Rothmeier and Mandl, 1998; Terhart, 2003; Qvortrup & Wiberg, 2013a), and various ways of coping with different perspectives have been suggested (Cobb, 2007; Sfard, 1998; Qvortrup & Wiberg, 2013a). If we look at theories of learning over a broad spectrum, learning is defined by various concepts and metaphors which describe an interplay between different aspects or distinctions, for example between subject and object, individuality and context, inside and outside, thinking and action, cognition and body etc.

The reason why it is difficult to identify learning might be the lack of a clear disciplinary affiliation. Before the focus on learning increased in the early nineties, the phenomenon of learning was mainly a part of psychological research. Afterwards, other disciplines such as philosophy (Winch 1998), sociology, and anthropology have tried to find their footing in the theoretical field and currently learning has become an object of research for many other disciplines. This tendency should be seen in connection with the societal and global focus on learning in all aspects of human life.

The recent development calls for a modernised and refined conception of the field of learning theory, in particular the role of learning theory in pedagogical and educational research and practice. There are at least three areas in need of development in the field of learning theory:

The first area in need of development is theory building within the *field*. There is a need for mapping and categorising all the different areas where theory of learning and empirical research concerning learning have evolved since the concept of learning spread from the area of education to many other fields. Is there a need for demarcation of the field of learning, or is the concept of learning to be understood in terms of lifelong learning, as a phenomenon which is relevant to study in all contexts and as something that spans an entire lifetime? Furthermore, there is a need to focus on how various theories of learning provide us with various ways of identifying learning. The question then revolves around whether and how it is possible to move from single theories to learning theory as a field and reflections on learning theory as a discipline. This requires knowledge of the structure and characteristics of the field of learning theory and of the epistemological and ontological frameworks of specific theories. Such knowledge will be helpful in identification, analysis, and interpretation of learning and learning situations. The theory building should allow for a synthesis that would move away from individual ‘pure’ theories of learning towards learning theories as a field of knowledge, and theoretical reflections on learning as a central discipline in educational and pedagogical research and practice.

The second area in need of development is the study of the relation between learning theory and empirical research concerning learning and human change. Knowledge about learning theory must prove itself useful in regard to certain contexts, interests, problems, and situations – i.e. ‘viable’ (von Glasersfeld, 1996) or ‘operationally useful’ (von Foerster, 1984), or in the form of ‘ideas as plans of operations to be performed’ (Dewey, 1990). In this respect, knowledge in terms of concepts, ideas, and theories might be seen as an instrument of finding one’s way around (Terhart, 2003).

The third area in need of development is theory building within the *field of teaching theory*. Empirical research suggests that a theory of teaching includes both a theory of student learning and a theory of teacher behaviour (Hattie, 2010; Terhart, 2011). Repeated attempts have been made to derive instructional prescriptions directly from theoretical perspectives. However, when moving from the level of theory to the level of practice ( operationalisation), there is a need for a considered and practicebased approach to development of teaching theory on the basis of research knowledge in the field of learning theory (Richardson, 2003; Sfard, 1998, Cobb, 2007; Qvortrup & Wiberg, 2013).

**How to contribute:** Authors are invited to submit papers discussing various issues related to the three areas described. Below is a non-exhaustive list of possible topics:

* What characterises a theory of learning? What makes it a learning theory?
* How is learning to be defined? What is learning? And what is not learning?
* How can theoretical reflections on learning be described as an independent discipline?
* Landscapes of theories of learning – how do they make sense?
* Categorising the field of learning: Is it possible to unify the field or to compile a list of characteristics, themes, metaphors, or something else which can be said to create a framework for the field?
* Application of theories of learning in empirical research; what are the potentials of learning theory in this kind of work? And what potential risks can be identified?
* Theories of learning in the field of education; what are the potentials of learning theory in this kind of work? And what potential risks can be identified?
* Teachers’ use of theories of learning; what are the potentials of learning theory in this kind of work? And what potential risks can be identified?
* Learning to learn – what does it mean?
* Delimitation of the field of learning theories.
* Etc.

**How to submit a paper:**

Papers should be written in English. Abstracts will undergo a double-blind review.

Length of abstract (excluding references): max 500 words

Length of paper (excluding references): max 7500 words

Deadline for submission of abstract: 1 June, 2014

Acceptance/ declination notification for abstract: 4 July, 2014

Deadline for submission of full paper: 15 August, 2014

We are planning a published copy of the conference proceedings. Information concerning how to submit material will follow on the conference website.

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