The main idea of the book is to contribute to a broader understanding of learning, identity and diversity by presenting actual research findings that were retrieved from classroom settings and related social practices. Learning is to a large extent an ongoing social process as both students and their teachers learn by being part of shared social practices through social interactions that facilitate learning gains. Sociocultural research shows that the organization of schooling promotes or restricts learning, and is a crucial factor to understand how children from a diversity of backgrounds profit from instruction. This is a first urgent issue to be considered by teachers and teacher education in our socio and culturally diverse society. A second issue is the ongoing debate about learning as a process that involves the construction of identities in schools and classrooms, and in the transitions between school and home practices. Last but not least, since school practices can be addressed from the perspective of diversity and special educational needs an ongoing discussion about optimizing pedagogical approaches is of main importance to allow maximum educational effectiveness.

Our potential audience for this book are researchers, post-graduate students in education and psychology, teachers, teacher education, other academics and policy makers.
Learning, Social Interaction and Diversity – Exploring Identities in School Practices

Edited by

Eva Hjörne
University of Gothenburg, Sweden

Geerdina van der Aalsvoort
University of Applied Sciences Saxion, The Netherlands

and

Guida de Abreu
Oxford Brookes University, UK
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CONTRIBUTORS

Sangeeta Bagga-Gupta is Professor Chair at Örebro University, and CRR, University Hospital, Örebro in Sweden. She has a multidisciplinary background and has conducted/lead large scale ethnographical research in settings where a range of languages including Swedish, English, Swedish Sign Language, Finnish, Italian Hindi and minority/immigrant languages are used. Her current research interests lie at the intersections of the fields of (i) languages (including literacies, multilingualism), (ii) diversity (including ethnicity, gender and functional disabilities), (iii) culture and (iv) learning. She currently leads the national research school LIMCUL, Literacies, Multilingualism and Cultural Practices in present day societies.

Tony Cline is Co-Director of the part-time professional doctorate programme for experienced educational psychologists at University College London and Visiting Professor of Educational Psychology at the University of Bedfordshire. Tony initially worked in inner city and suburban areas around London as a teacher in primary and secondary schools and as an educational psychologist. His current interests include learning difficulties of bilingual pupils, selective mutism in childhood, young people’s representations of child development and the analysis of the concept of school ethos.

Marcela Costanzi is Professor of Didactic of mathematics at the Universitat Ramón Llull in Barcelona, Spain. She is interested in teachers social representations’ particularly linked to the teaching of mathematics to immigrant students.

Sarah Crafter, Senior Lecturer in Psychology and Research Fellow with the Centre for Children and Youth at the University of Northampton, UK. Sarah’s main interests include home and school mathematics learning in culturally diverse settings, cultural identities of learners, child workers, young carers and language brokering.

Guida de Abreu is a Professor in Cultural Psychology at Oxford Brookes University, UK. Her main interests focus on theoretical and empirical work in cultural-developmental psychology. Using qualitative methodologies she investigates learning and identity development in culturally diverse settings, including the perspectives of children, young people, parents and teachers.

Annelieke Ensing, PhD in Developmental Psychology at the Rijksuniversiteit of Groningen, the Netherlands. Her main interest lies in the patterns of interaction as they arise between five year olds and their teacher during instruction on curriculum
related tasks, and how these patterns are fundamental to the learning potential the child expresses during the interaction.

**Ann-Carita Evaldsson** is Professor at the Department of Education, Uppsala University, Sweden. Her research combines ethnography with conversation analysis and membership categorization analysis. Her work has mainly focused on preadolescent children’s peer language practices, addressing topics such as play and games, moral ordering, identity-work (gender, class and ethnicity) and multilingualism.

**Rinat Fellah**, MA Student at Bar-Ilan University, Israel.

**Núria Gorgorió** is Full Professor in Mathematics Education at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Spain. She is interested in the processes of learning of mathematics of immigrant students, and how this processes are influenced by social representations hold by their teachers.

**Michèle Grossen**, Professor of Social Psychology at the University of Lausanne, Switzerland. Drawing on socio-historical psychology and a dialogical approach to language and cognition, her research interests include the study of social interactions and communication in learning situations as well as in therapeutic interviews.

**Eva Hjörne**, Associate Professor in Education at University of Gothenburg, Sweden. Her main interests are in the analysis of learning and social interaction, processes of marginalization and mediated action with special focus on categorizing and identity formation of pupils in school.

**Gabrielle Ivinson** is a Senior Lecturer at Cardiff School of Social Science, Cardiff University, Wales, UK. Her main research interests are curriculum and pedagogy, gender and schooling, young people, affect and poverty which she studies using Vygotskian sociocultural theory and Basil Bernstein’s sociology of pedagogy.

**Wen-Chuan Lin** is an Assistant Professor in English Department, Wenzao Ursuline College of Languages, Taiwan. His main research interests are TESOL, EFL-related issues and computer mediated English writing instruction with the perspectives of Vygotskian Sociocultural Theory.

**Yvonne Karlsson**, PhD and a Senior Lecturer in Education at University of Gothenburg, Sweden. Her main interests are in the analysis of children’s participation, agency space and identity work in school, and processes of marginalization and categorizations in school activities.
CONTRIBUTORS

**Kristiina Kumpulainen**, PhD and the Director of the Information and Evaluation Services at the Finnish National Board of Education. She also holds adjunct professorships at the University of Helsinki and at the University of Turku. Dr. Kumpulainen specializes in sociocultural research on learning and education, learning environments, innovative pedagogies, and teacher professional development. In her publications, she has taken a particular interest in the methodological questions surrounding research on social interactions and learning processes.

**Pernilla Larsson** is a MA Student at University of Gothenburg, Sweden.

**Montserrat Prat** is a Post-doctoral Research Fellow at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Spain. She is interested in the processes of mathematics learning of immigrant students as transition processes where they reconstruct their identities and develop ways of understanding their own learning processes.

**Evangelia Prokopiou**, PhD and a Cultural Psychologist and she works as a social researcher, community worker and associate lecturer. She was trained in family and groups dynamics at the Athenian Institute of Anthropos (AIA), Greece. Her PhD thesis investigated the development of cultural identities of ethnic minority adolescents attending community schools in the UK. Her research interests focused on exploring changing sociocultural contexts and the development of identities of young people and their families in the islands of Cyclades, of unaccompanied asylum seekers in a reception centre in the island of Lesvos and of Children and Adolescents Mental Health Service’s patients in the UK.

**Jenny Ros** is a PhD Student and Research Assistant at the Department of Psychology, University of Lausanne, Switzerland. Her doctoral dissertation concerns multidisciplinary team collaboration in psychiatry.

**Merja Saalasti** (M.Ed) is an English Teacher in a comprehensive school and a researcher in the Centre for Sociocultural Studies of Learning and Instruction, the University of Oulu. Her special interest is the role of digital video case material and social reflection. In current projects, Merja Saalasti’s work focuses on understanding the social nature of pre service teachers’ learning, and developing the methods enhancing dialogical culture in teachers’ working communities.

**Adina Shamir**, PhD and a Senior Lecturer and Head of the Special Education Track at the School of Education, Bar-Ilan University, Israel. She has been serving as the coordinator of the SIG on Children with Special Needs of the European Association for Learning and Instruction (EARLI) since 2007. Her scientific research and publications lie in the area of cognitive and metacognitive development, involving research in Computer-Assisted Learning, Cognitive Modifiability and Learning Skills of students with Special Needs.
CONTRIBUTORS

Roger Säljö, Professor of Education and Educational Psychology at the Department of Education, Communication and Learning at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden. His main research interests are within the areas of learning, development and communication in a sociocultural perspective. Prominent topics of interest concern the development and circulation of knowledge in society including how our modes of learning and appropriation of collective experiences of our society are shaped by sociocultural conditions, which include material and intellectual technologies linked to literacy, numeracy and other generic human skills.

Auli Toom, PhD, Adjunct Professor, and a senior lecturer in higher education at Faculty of Behavioural Sciences, University of Helsinki, Finland. Her major research interests are teacher’s tacit pedagogical knowing, teacher knowledge, teacher reflection and teacher education. Recently her research work has focused on the learning processes during doctoral education and PhD research process as well as the development of expertise during university studies. Auli Toom has also strong theoretical and practical expertise on the video observation methodology.

Geerdina van der Aalsvoort is a Professor at Saxion University of Applied Sciences Deventer, The Netherlands. Based upon a transactional model of development she studies social interaction processes in relationship to learning potential assessment, play and school readiness. She applies both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to investigate how patterns in interaction patterns between teachers and students allow developmental progress with young children growing up at risk.

Paul van Geert, Professor of Developmental Psychology at University of Groningen, The Netherlands.

Eveline Wuttke, Professor in Business Education at Goethe University in Frankfurt, Germany. Her main research interests are the analysis of classroom talk, learning from errors and professional error competence of teachers, and economic literacy of young adults.

Tania Zittoun, Professor at the Institute of Psychology and Education of the University of Neuchâtel, Switzerland. She is interested in the relationships between informal and formal learning. Her work focuses on transitions in learning and developmental trajectories, and on the specific role of fiction and other symbolic resources in thinking.
Learning is to a large extent an ongoing social process as both students and their teachers learn by being part of shared social practices through social interactions that facilitate learning gains. Learning gains are facilitated by different factors. Sociocultural research shows that the organization of schooling promotes or restricts learning, and is a crucial factor to understand how children from a diversity of backgrounds profit from instruction. This is a first urgent issue to be considered by teachers and teacher education in our socio and culturally diverse society. A second issue is the on-going debate about learning as a process that involves the construction of identities in schools and classrooms, and in the transitions between school and home practices. Last but not least, since school practices can be addressed from the perspective of diversity and special educational needs an on-going discussion about optimizing pedagogical approaches is of main importance to allow maximum educational effectiveness. Roger Säljö is in the introductory chapter elaborating more on these issues including a brief historical view of learning and schooling.

The book presents results of empirical research examining school practices as part of educational systems. The main theoretical framework is sociocultural theory. Therefore, the connection to social and cultural elements that shape school and classroom practices is described and discussed in every contribution of the book to offer increased knowledge within the field of instruction and learning. The book includes findings from classrooms based upon teachers’ approaches and students’ viewpoints within classrooms as well as the role of parents in education, and the role of school as an institution in society. Three types of identities that are constructed through participation in school practices are examined: cultural identities, student identities and teacher identities. Thus the book aims at contributing to a broader understanding of practices in school by presenting research findings that were retrieved from classroom settings and related social practices, such as the transitions between home and school practices.
The book is a result of research presented during the EARLI in-between meeting in Gothenburg, May 2008, organised by three SIGs: Social Interaction in Learning and Instruction, Learning and Teaching in Culturally Diverse Settings, and Special Educational Needs. The small scale conference allowed the SIG members to exchange and discuss research activities related to their special interest groups. The book is a result of this meeting since several papers presented at the meeting are included in this publication. This is not the first book that came out after a SIG meeting. Looking back on former publications the book ‘Social Interaction in Learning and Instruction. The Meaning of Discourse for the Construction of Knowledge’ edited by Helen Cowie and Geerdina van der Aalsvoort was published in 2000. The book contained the papers that had been presented at the meeting in Leiden 1998 of SIG Social Interaction in Learning and Instruction. In 2009 two publications came out. Both books resulted from meetings of SIG members especially the one in Lisbon in 2004 that gathered members of SIG Social Interaction in Learning and Instruction, and SIG Special Educational needs. ‘Investigating classroom interaction. Methodologies in action’ was edited by Kristiina Kumpulainen, Cindy Hmelo-Silver and Margarida Cesar. In this book diverse approaches to investigate classroom practice are discussed. Main themes are encompassing different timescales and emphasis on learning as a process that develops over time. The second book edited by Margarida Cesar and Kristiina Kumpulainen called ‘Social Interactions in Multicultural Settings’ offers the results of studies that embrace the fact that most of the classrooms are multilingual and multicultural.

Motivated by the challenges the former book editors encountered we stress that the theme of social interaction in learning and instruction from a multicultural perspective including special educational needs deserves another book that represents the contributions of active, devoted and highly skilled EARLI members.

EXPLORING PRACTICES AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITIES IN SCHOOL IN THREE THEMES

One common theme that emerges in the empirical analysis of the various chapters is the link between school practices and the development of identities. Various facets of the way in which learners’ identities are constructed in their participation in school learning practices are examined. Three particular identities are stressed in the studies presented: cultural identities, student identities and teacher identities. The studies illustrate complex relationships between identities as constructed at a social level, such as “student identities” as embedded in the practices of schools as institutions, and in the practices of key relevant others such as parents and teachers, and identities as constructed by learners (by the person as a participant in the social practice of schooling).
Part 1: Constructing cultural identities

Michele Grossen, Tania Zittoun and Jenny Ros examine how secondary school students make sense of cultural elements taught in three different disciplines: philosophy, literature and general knowledge. Drawing upon socio-cultural and dialogical approaches the chapter addresses two complementary questions: Do students make sense of a cultural element taught in class by referring to cultural elements they know from other contexts? Conversely, do they make sense of personal or social phenomena occurring outside the school by referring to cultural elements taught at school? Starting with the assumption that cultural elements at school have some connection with cultural elements in other contexts the chapter presents a theoretical and empirical analysis of “boundary crossing events”. These are events where either the teacher or a student attempts to make connections between a cultural element that is part of the lesson, and other elements that belong to the outside world. The analysis illustrates how the teacher and the students manage the tensions between activities, identities and bodies of knowledge linked to school practices, and those that are connected with outside school. The chapter offers a unique contribution suggesting that identity connections can sometimes facilitate the opening of potential appropriation space for school learning, and at other times prevent the creation of such a space.

Evangelia Prokopiou, Tony Cline and Guida de Abreu illustrate the complexity of the socio-cultural macrosystem in pluralistic societies and its impact on the development of identities of young people from minority ethnic backgrounds. They theorise the influence of multiple heterogeneous contexts by revisiting and elaborating on Bonenbrenner’s model, dialogical self theory and cultural developmental theory to understand the cultural and dialogical nature of the processes through which ethnic minority young people develop their identities in community schools. In their contribution they explore how second and third generation British-born young people of Pakistani and Greek-Cypriot origin perceive themselves as ethnic minority pupils in both community and mainstream education as well as in their role as members of the wider society. They illustrate how dialogical negotiation of aspects of differences/similarities resulted in multivoiced cultural identities which emerged through a constant positioning and re-positioning within communities and school contexts.

Sarah Crafter elaborates the role of parents in supporting their children’s school learning. Drawing on the notions of cultural models and cultural settings her chapter examines the kinds of resources parents use to make sense of their child’s mathematics homework. Two parental resources for making sense of mathematics homework are scrutinized: (a) the child, and (b) cultural models of child development. The way the parents make sense of their experiences of supporting their children’s school mathematical learning at home both draws on their own cultural identities and on the cultural identities underlying school practices. This is examined in terms of the cultural models about child development held by the parents often at odds with those held by the school institution. These different models between home and school are deeply rooted on cultural representations of
what is optimal child development, and what practices contribute to its achievement.

Wen Chuan Lin and Gabriella Ivinson examine the impact of ethnic cultural legacies in learning English as a foreign language. Taking a socio-cultural perspective they intend to broaden theories of learning a second language by recognizing that students’ learning has to be situated within broader frames of analysis including the political, institutional, local and ethnic cultural contexts in which individuals encounter English. Their analysis draws on empirical research conducted in Taiwan. Two substantive issues are explored in their research; (1) differences between ethnic groups’ situated experiences of, and access to, English, (2) the relationship between ethnic group cultures in four groups (Hokkien, Chinese Mainlander, Hakka and indigenous people) and experiences of American and Anglo culture. Their findings illustrate a complex intersection of ethnic cultural identities and the way students from each group learn English. Historical cultural legacies interacted with what kinds of resources became locally available in relation to English learning, and students from some groups come to school already better equipped to access Anglo-American English than other groups. Similarly to what has been highlighted by Crafter to understand how students access school learning resources it is necessary to search beyond academic cultures. In particular both studies show that the students’ home cultures intersect in complex ways with their school cultures shaping trajectories of learning.

Sangeeta Bagga-Gupta offers critical reflections on the meanings of cultural diversity and human identities in complex Northern European settings through the socio-historical analysis of demographic data and national educational policies and through the analysis of mundane interactions in different types of language profile schools in present day Sweden. Current discourses of multilingualism and multiculturalism in Sweden are problematic in that they appear to be based upon a-historical assumptions about migration and diversity and upon monolingual perspectives that “normalize” a particular view of human communication. Issues related to language-contact, language-switching and language-chaining are exemplified as well as issues related to the situated nature of human identity in classroom interaction. Bagga-Gupta calls attention for the intersections between languages, human identity and cultural identities, arguing that “it is not human characteristics like ethnicity or deafness or age that are significant, but rather issues of human difference in relation to languages and literacies in use that are significant”.

Part 2: Constructing student identities

Eveline Wuttke states that classrooms are environments that are highly dependent on communication. By talking with each other teachers and students give, accept, and exchange information. Mostly this is done with the intention to help students to acquire knowledge. Other important functions of communication are the circulation of interaction rules and the organization of social relationships. Mostly, communication follows quite standardized patterns and is structured by socially
EXPLORING PRACTICES AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITIES IN SCHOOL

accepted ways in which knowledge is presented. She looks closely at patterns of classroom talk to answer three research questions: In case students are given the chance to actively participate in classroom talk: To what extent do they seize their chance? Of which quality is their talk? What are the effects of students talk?

Ann-Carita Evaldsson and Yvonne Karlsson present their findings about how a group of preadolescent boys are ascribed a more permanent (and deviant) identity as 'boys with externalizing behaviours' in talk-in-interaction within a routinely organized remedial activity in a special educational needs unit. In such activity, the boys’ emotional, social and behavioural deficiencies are made a daily topic of inquiry and talked into being in order to remedy the referred to problem behaviours.

Eva Hjörne and Pernilla Larsson focus on different strategies for disciplining boys in the remedial class during the 1960s. In which ways are boys made accountable for disruptive school behaviour during regular learning- and teaching practices? What strategies are used by the teachers and why? The research is based on a historical material of video-recorded classroom interaction from 1968. The issues explored in their study concern the activity of regulating or disciplining boys during a specific lesson called “ABC in conduct”, and how different strategies and accounts or categories invoked by teachers, determine the nature of the daily schooling experiences and, in a long-term perspective, the educational career and identities of the children.

Adina Shamir and Rinat Fellah describe the findings when using electronic books with children to enhance their emergent literacy. The large population of children with learning disabilities (LD) in Israeli schools and worldwide has increased the priority of finding new interventions and learning tools for these children very early in their schooling. One dominant difficulty faced by this community is the acquisition of reading and writing skills, for which the foundations are laid in preschool. However, the growing entry of computer programs such as electronic books (e-books) into the learning environment of kindergartens and schools now provides ample opportunities for computer use in the support of children’s language and literacy development. In their study they investigated the effects of activity with an educational e-book developed by the authors on the emergent literacy of 5- to 7-year-old kindergarteners who had been diagnosed at risk of learning disabilities.

Part 3: Constructing teacher identities

Kristiina Kumpulainen, Auli Toom and Merja Saalasti explore the ways in which the collaborative investigation of video cases of authentic classroom teaching and learning situations can afford opportunities for student teachers’ agency work and support their professional identity formation in teacher education. In particular, the potential of digital video telling cases has been recognized in their power to create social and discursive spaces for pre-service and in-service teachers to investigate and reflect upon teaching and learning practices in local and distant classrooms. The study aims to gain an understanding of students teachers’ identity building
processes by examining: What kinds of discursive identities and positions do student teachers construct into being in their written essays over their pedagogy course focusing on teaching and learning of mathematics? And Which topics and issues dominate students’ reflection processes as they describe their professional learning processes over the course?

Annemieke Ensing, Geerdina van der Aalsvoort and Paul van Geert bring to attention how for a long time the potential to learn was related to specific ways to assess children by ways of dynamic assessment (DA). DA is a generic term for procedures that embed intervention within the ongoing assessment, and that usually include a pretest-training posttest format that directly links assessment to intervention. As the child engages in the assessment task, the assessor can observe the child’s strengths and weaknesses. By looking at the learning processes during the course of problem-solving, the examiner can discover how the child learns and how the child can best be instructed. The authors present learning potential as a dynamic system that allows insight in the actual emergence of learning processes. The processes that are responsible for learning potential to be revealed are still unclear. The study aims at answering the questions: What patterns during the instruction elicits response to instruction emerge? Is it verbal instruction that evokes a child’s response or are non-verbal behaviors responsible for it?

Marcela Constanzi, Nuria Gorgorió and Montserrat Prat draw to attention that a mathematics classroom attended by immigrant students may be considered a culturally diverse setting because, most probably, the students and teacher that are interacting in it have been socialized within communities having different cultural frames of reference. The different understandings of the processes and facts related to the teaching and learning of mathematics, of the ways of teaching and learning, or the different values attached to mathematical knowledge, are linked to cultural understandings, and shape the way people act and interact within the mathematics classroom. Details are presented of ongoing research on student teachers’ representations on the learning of mathematics of their immigrant students. Their analysis illustrates how teachers’ social representations mediate practices in the mathematics classroom, conditioning the possibilities of student participation, legitimating certain ways of learning, and favouring the development of certain mathematical identities.

REFERENCES


Eva Hjörne
Department of Education and Special Education
University of Gothenburg
EXPLORING PRACTICES AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITIES IN SCHOOL

Geerdina van der Aalsvoort
School of Education
Saxion University of Applied Science Deventer

Guida de Abreu
Psychology Department
Oxford Brookes University
All over the world education is expanding as a social activity. In what is commonly referred to as the information or knowledge society, politicians, business leaders, scholars, high-profile representatives of international organizations and large proportions of the public seem to agree that learning is a key to success and to survival for societies in a time characterized by global competition. According to this dogma, the so-called knowledge economy, fuelled by digital technologies and new forms of global collaboration (Castells, 1996), requires citizens with advanced information skills keen to engage in life-long learning starting already in preschool and continuing throughout working life.

This identification of knowledge as a key element in social development and competition has resulted in an increased political emphasis on monitoring the performance of educational systems. High-stakes international tests, such as PISA, TIMSS and others, are used as benchmarking systems and the hope is that they will provide insights into the relationships between investments and outcomes in education. The ambition is that eventually politicians will be able to act on such performance indicators by making educational systems more efficient and competitive.

While comparing achievements, and learning from other countries, is commendable, the problems of such comparisons are not that they are carried out, but, rather, that they rely on traditional and narrow perspectives of what going to school and learning are all about. The tests are all paper-and-pencil exercises where students sit alone and answer questions during an hour or two, and they do this without access to technologies they rely on in their everyday lives, generally without collaborating with peers and their activities are not embedded in any other activity than taking a test for its own sake. Thus, competences aimed for a digital and globalized society are assessed on the basis of indicators that precede the

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1 Programme for International Student Assessment.
2 Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study.
digital revolution, and which reflect a narrow, product-oriented view of what it means to know something.

Such views on the role of education and educational effectiveness are consequential. The abstract nature of the public debate that follows from heavy reliance on these kinds of accountability systems tends to view schooling mainly as a means-to-an-end activity. Schooling and learning are meaningful to the extent that they provide skills for a distant future, for adulthood and for the labour market of the future (about which we know very little). The perspective on education, teaching and learning that many of the modern accountability systems imply is antithetical to the view that John Dewey tried to communicate, when he argued that education “is a process of living and not a preparation for future living” (1897, p. 78).

If we follow this Deweyan principle of attending to schooling as “a process of living”, the explorations take us into the daily lives of teachers, students and others as they engage in joint activities, and it opens up for a more differentiated view of what education contributes, for society as well as for the individual. As the chapters in this book illustrate, schooling in contemporary society is a complex and diverse phenomenon. Increasing social complexity, demographic changes, continuous development of new technologies and new production systems, rising expectations of literacy and other skills in the population are examples of factors that change the conditions of life in classrooms, and large-scale benchmarking systems give little, if any, guidance about how to adapt to such new circumstances.

TEACHING AND LEARNING AS INTERACTIONAL PRACTICES IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

The assumption that education can be considered mainly as a means-to-an-end practice, which is legitimate to the extent that it cultivates the human capital in line with market expectations, threatens the integrity of teaching and learning as human activities, as significant elements of people’s lives and as objects of inquiry for research. As an antidote to such trends, it is important to analyse what educational practices are all about in contemporary society, and what challenges and options students and teachers face. This is in large part an empirical problem of having access to in-depth and situated descriptions and analyses of how such practices unfold, of understanding the logic of the contributions that the parties make, and of scrutinizing the role that the activities have for the development of learners.

In order to succeed with such analytical enterprises of showing the significance of education in the lives of people, there is an obvious need for broadening the conceptual lenses through which schooling and learning are studied. We need to include, and consider seriously, issues of how children’s opportunities for participating and contributing to activities are organized, and what the implications of their involvement are in terms of their future life. What arenas for learning and engagement are created in schools and classrooms, what is the continuity (Dewey, 1963) between in-school and out-of-school experiences, and how are children’s identities shaped during their course of participation in institutional practices?
These are some of the issues that deserve attention and that should be brought to public attention as backgrounds for discussing and evaluating education.

Our concept of schooling – one classroom, one teacher, one class and one subject at a time – has a long history. In fact, it goes back to the first schools established in Mesopotamia over five thousand years ago (Kramer, 1981). In the so-called edduba, the tablet house, boys from the elite of society learned to read and write in order to prepare for their future careers as scribes (Burns, 1989). In these schools, the mysteries of cuneiform reading and writing were taught under what seems to have been a hard regime with frequent use of corporeal punishment as a method of making students comply with whatever rules the authority deemed relevant (Falkenstein, 1948). Also, the idea of conceiving of learning as essentially reproducing what the teacher presented was born in these particular circumstances, where students were trained to copy signs and texts produced by others; the closer to the original the copy made by the student was, the better the result.

When schools were opened up for the children of all social backgrounds, which in European countries did not happen until the 19th century in the wake of industrialization (Sandin, 1986), the institutional practices were largely modeled on established traditions: teachers taught and students reproduced, and the asymmetrical communication patterns of the classroom survived. Religious indoctrination and moral disciplining were often important goals, and there were generally quite low expectations that what you learned in school would be important in other spheres of life, except, possibly, for mastering basic reading and writing. But by opening up schools to children with all backgrounds, we see how diversity challenges institutional practices, and since then the problem of how to productively deal with individual differences and issues of diversity has been part of the public debate.

For a long time many of the problems of adaptation to schooling experienced by marginal groups (children from lower social classes, from minority groups, children with disabilities and so on) were solved through the classical method in education: they simply dropped out of the system at the earliest possible opportunity. Low-paying jobs appeared for many as a more attractive alternative. In the American context, for instance, leaving school was not considered a social problem until relatively recently, and as late as in the 1940s “less than half of individuals age 25-29 completed high school” (Shannon & Bylsma, 2003, p. 2). By marginalizing children who did not fit in, the traditional format of schooling, by and large, could be maintained even as the social circumstances were changing.

The explanations offered for school disengagement are interesting, and they tell us a lot about the wider social and political climate under which schools have operated during the past 150 years or so (Deschene, Cuban, & Tyack, 2001; Hjörne & Säljö, 2004, 2008). An initial focus on the inferior moral fiber of the lower classes as the preferred explanation of school failure was later replaced by the intellectual deficit paradigm, which has continued to serve as a strong explanatory framework well into our time. In the postwar period, we have seen other types of explanations emerge such as poor family conditions, ethnic
background, and in recent years we have seen a proliferation of learning disabilities all the way from MBD (Minimal Brain Damage/Dysfunction) via dyslexia (which has a longer history, cf. Zetterqvist Nelson & Sandin, 2005) to ADHD and a range of similar neuropsychological diagnoses. To match these categorization practices, the political debate about how to solve the problems has swayed back and forth between strategies of integration and mainstreaming of pupils with special needs to inventing dedicated pedagogical practices for various categories of learning disabled.

Today, however, the dropout option is not so attractive or politically viable. Even if it would make the lives of teachers and school administrators simpler, the demands of modern society are such that politicians, parents and many other stakeholders worry about early school leavers, and they worry a lot. Current EU ambitions, for instance, are to reduce the proportion of early school leavers (defined as students who only finish lower secondary education) from the present 14.4 per cent to under 10 per cent by 2020 (European Union, 2011). High unemployment rates and other social problems throughout the life-span are overrepresented in these groups, and the ambition is therefore to keep students in school as long as possible. Over the years, a range of politically motivated counter strategies have been launched: early intervention programs, supplemental programs, individualized education, alternative schools and alternative pedagogies are among the initiatives tested (Shannon & Bylsma, 2003, p. 59ff).

Research has an important role to play when it comes to providing tools and analyses for understanding the dynamics of education in complex societies. One such strategic function is to give access to the daily practices of schooling as they unfold in situ. Any productive discussion about schooling, and about the possibilities for developing teaching and learning practices, must be grounded in concrete analyses of the nature of the varied and diverse activities that go on in classrooms and other educational settings. Classroom activities should not be black-boxed but rather unpacked in their details and functional patterns. Important tasks to attend to include understanding the trajectories of participation and learning, and how children (or adults, for that matter) stay involved or risk becoming disengaged by specific educational practices.

In such analyses, understanding the identity development of children throughout schooling is one important task, and this includes attending to what happens to their institutional identities as well (Gee, 2000). How are the difficulties learners encounter interpreted by institutional representatives, and how can pedagogical practices be organized in manners that allow for children to continue seeing themselves as committed learners within the frames offered by schooling? From the research point of view this implies aiming for “thick descriptions” (Geertz, 1973) and accounts of learning that focus on issues of participation and involvement as an alternative to resting content with thin descriptions in terms of abstract outcome measures of products of learning.

Analysing the agency of children and adults as learners in educational settings implies paying attention to how their ambitions, as expressed by their trajectories of participation, may stay aligned with the normative expectations of educational...
institutions (Edwards & Mackenzie, 2005). Showing the contingencies between instructional practices and student engagement both generally, and with respect to particular kinds of activities, may help increasing institutional and political sensitivity in response to current transformations of social life, where diversity is an important issue. The chapters in this volume thematize some of the dimensions of this diversity which emanates from so many sources. The authors scrutinize features of schooling such as classroom practices and their connectedness to children’s cultural experiences in various areas, the assumptions underlying remedial teaching, changes in literacy practices and expectations related to the digital technology and other significant issues. In a concrete sense, they illustrate some of the challenges the institution, and all its participants and stake-holders, currently face. An important tension emerges from these analyses: what should schooling and instruction be like in contemporary society, and what are the relevant criteria for judging success, not only of children but also of the manners in which educational practices manage to adapt to diversity.

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Roger Säljö
Department of Education, Communication and Learning
University of Gothenburg &
Centre for Learning Research
University of Turku