

Learning beyond Cognition

Niels Kryger and Birte Ravn (Eds.)

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Danish University of Education Press

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Foreword

This book builds on the conference *Learning beyond Cognition*, which took place in Copenhagen in the summer of 2005. The intentions of the conference were a) critically to scrutinize efforts to develop that part of the learning process dealing with dimensions beyond cognition, b) to explore the present rhetoric of learning as distinct from earlier concepts of education, teaching/learning with respect to learning beyond cognition.

The conference was initiated by the Danish members of the *European Affective Education Network* (EAEN), which has an interdisciplinary membership of scholars, researchers, and practitioners interested in the affective dimension of the education process.¹ This dimension has as its focus the personal, social, moral, cultural and spiritual development of primarily students, and is concerned with feelings, beliefs, attitudes, interpersonal relationships and personal well-being.

This publication can be seen as part of a number of books published by the network even though participants who have not previously been part of the network have been invited to contribute to this book.

Copenhagen February 2007

Niels Kryger and Birte Ravn

1. Homepage: (<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/wie/NEOTHEMI/sneill/eaen/>).

Publications from the Network

Lang, P., Katz, Y. and Menezes, I. (Eds.) (1998) *Affective Education: a Comparative View*. London: Cassell.

Karppinen, S., Katz, Y.J., Neill, S. (Eds.) (2005) *Theory and practice in affective education*. Helsinki: University of Helsinki.

Menezes, I., Coimbra J. L. & Campos, B. P. (Eds.) (2005) *The affective dimension of education – European perspective*. Porto, Portugal University of Porto.

Introduction

Niels Kryger and Birte Ravn

The aim of this book is to theorise and analyse dimensions of learning that transcend—or go beyond—an intra-psychological and cognitive view of learning. We use the concept, ‘learning beyond cognition,’ to refer to these dimensions. This approach to learning emphasizes that *learning is always situated* in specific cultural and social contexts. In this view, it is axiomatic that specific contexts shape the conditions for the kinds of learning that can take place. Jerome Bruner’s cultural-psychological approach to education has inspired our thinking (Bruner, 1996). Bruner stresses that learning is a “complex pursuit of fitting a culture to the needs of its members and of fitting its members and their ways of knowing to the needs of the culture” (p. 43). Therefore learning is “not an island, but part of the continent of culture,” (p. 12). This view cautions that learning must never be isolated to ‘something’ taking place only ‘inside’ an individual because learning is always inherent in ongoing interaction with a social, cultural and physical environment. Hence, the study of ‘learning beyond cognition’ involves opening up for the cultural and social situatedness of learning, as well as for what are traditionally considered emotional and affective dimensions of learning. As stressed by Lave and Wenger in their theory of ‘situated learning,’ learning must not be seen simply as the acquisition of knowledge by individuals but as a process of social participation in a community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991). The ‘community of practice’ we will extend to cover also nation states as

communities of practice². Comparative studies can illustrate how nation states constitute “communities of practice” such as the Encompass study, *A World of Difference? Comparing Learners across Europe* (Osborn, M. et al., 2003). This study has compared the educational cultures of England, France and Denmark and the pupils (12-14 years) that inhabit these. This study traces how different national traditions within education policies are reflected in the organization, learning concepts, and practices of schooling in these three countries.

Our intention with this book is to develop approaches to learning that are sensitive to theorising and analysing the contexts in which learning is produced, i.e. to the situatedness of learning. Using this framework, the book’s chapters focus on contemporary educational practices in Europe and other Western countries. Dominating discourses, rhetoric and practices of learning will be analyzed to identify their social and cultural underpinnings in modern Western societies. Here, the concept of ‘learning beyond cognition’ helps us explore situated dimensions of learning in Western societies, which, at this particular historical moment, are being re-situated in discourses specifically focused on the emotional and affective dimensions of learning. We will also discuss educational and pedagogical approaches that we view as adequate responses to current challenges in European and other Western countries in which both the creation of efficiency in working processes at the labour market and issues concerning the shaping of the personal identity more and more call for learning processes that go beyond cognition.

Our aim is not to establish a simple dichotomy between cognitive and affective, emotional dimensions of learning and thinking. Emotions and feelings play an important role in cognitive processes, such as meaning making and the construction of reality. Indeed, many newer theories of learning view cognition in this broader perspective, linking social and cultural situatedness and emotional dimensions inextricably to reasoning and problem solving and recognising (cf. Gardner, 1983 & 99; Bruner, 1996, Goleman, 1996 and Borofsky, 1994, Ziehe 2003). Thus, in focusing on ‘learning beyond cognition’, it is not our

2. Labelling a nation state a ‘community of practice’ is broader use than Lave and Wenger’s. As mentioned by Benedict Andersen (Andersen 1983) nation states constitute in many ways ‘imagined communities’ in which the members don’t know each other. However, it can also be considered a ‘community of practice’ since same type of practices are carried out in for example schools based on traditions, legislations, formal, informal exchange of viewpoints etc.

intention to exclude those processes traditionally conceptualised as ‘cognition.’ Instead, we propose to highlight aspects of learning that go beyond influential understandings of learning based in traditional cognitive psychology that have often neglected or even ignored the role of emotions and feelings in the life of mind (Bruner 1996, p. 12).

In our approach, *learning beyond cognition* covers affective and emotional aspects of learning, and the ideological and mental forming of the individual as well as the individual’s own shaping of an identity, for example as conceptualised and discussed within the tradition of ‘Bildung’ and in current discussions on citizenship education. Moreover, our ambition is to develop theoretical, analytical and practical tools to understand and work with learning as situated in the changing practices, policies, and discourses of Western societies.

Process of modernisation – and new challenges to learning

Generally, over the last one or two decades new ways of verbalizing, organising and practising education (as teaching and learning) have come to existence. There has been an increased focus on the student’s personal construction of his/her learning, and portfolio, diaries and individual social contracts between the student and his/her teacher have been one of the means to facilitate this process.

We see this renewed interest in affective and mental processes within education in the light of the ongoing modernisation process in Western countries. The chapters in this book not only reflect on how these societal changes influence non-cognitive aspects of learning but also how the changes themselves can be understood and conceptualised at a macro level.

An approach can be taken by describing the overall societal changes in terms of a change from ‘industrial society’ to ‘knowledge society’ which in Western societies has taken place over the last 4-5 decades. Even though this commonly used ‘narrative’ of societal changes seems a little schematic we consider it a suitable basis for discussing and theoretically grasping changed functions of education including a renewed interest in aspects of learning that go beyond cognition. In this book the change and its possible implications for learning processes are reflected in different ways. In his chapter **Sean Neill** (I.6) highlights recent changes in the conditions in which children grow up that have the

potential of making them less responsive to efforts to educate them as cooperative and responsible citizens. He emphasizes as a problem for educators of learning beyond cognition, that systems of informal social control today are undermined by the diversity of reference groups in modern societies, the rapidity of cultural change, and pressures on parents which reduce their ability to raise pro-social children. **Birte Ravn** in her chapter (I.7) further highlights how different rationales observed among educational policy making in Europe to various extent and often unconsciously compete on influencing the understanding of learning and parents' role in education. One of these rationales primarily focus on subject knowledge, another on democracy and citizenship education, and a third on competitiveness, school efficiency and individual success. This is in line with the EU intentions, where focus lies on three main themes *competition, quality and citizenship* which are assumed to be interwoven into a 'modernist but social welfare conscious fabric' (Novoa, 2000). **Palle Rasmussen** (I. 3) discusses the conditions for the growing adult-education in modern societies. He argues that in modern adult life individual biographical reflection plays an increasing role, not only for educational and occupational choice but also in the process of identity formation and emotional investment. **John Krejsler** (I.2) attempts to shake up our usual conceptualisation of societal change as a transition from 'industrial' to 'knowledge' society. Inspired by Deleuze & Guattari (Deleuze & Guattari 2002) he re-describes this change as a transition from 'signifying' to 'post-signifying' regimes and he discusses the condition for being a professional teacher in this situation. According Krejsler post-signifying regimes seek to influence the individual's quest for self-realisation and stimulate individuals' desires by motivating them to implant particular passions in their minds as if they were their own, also as professional teacher. Evidently this implies matters that go 'beyond cognition'.

New ideas of efficiency in learning in knowledge society

In particular, the phrase 'learning beyond cognition' comes into play in new ways of thinking efficiency in the process of learning required for the labour-market. A background for this is the fact that over the last 4-5 decades in Western countries classic industrial work has diminished, some of it has been automated and some has been outsourced to so-called developing countries. Parallel to this change it can be recognised that the dominating discourse in education is no

longer based on the idea of Taylorism and Fordism, according to which teaching-learning is seen as a preparation for operating in a society based on more and more differentiated expert systems (Kryger 2005). Within this Taylorist thinking, the 'schooled' person is an effective expert who manages to eliminate – or at least to control – (irrational) emotions. In this way of thinking learning is focused on cognitive linear processes to facilitate efficiency.

Today knowledge has obtained a status of something more fluent since the production and exchange of 'knowledge' in itself sets the agenda for modernisation. Official policy documents in Western countries focus on 'knowledge' in this sense (For discussion of the use of the word 'knowledge' in EU documents, see **Stoer & Magalhães** in this book I.1). The new mantra is that the citizen in modern society should be flexible, creative and prepared for change. Education is expected to facilitate this process so individuals can develop competences to match these new demands. These competences are often named 'soft competences' and are generated from a great interest in newer market oriented philosophies in order to adjust to the societal modernisation process in the Western countries characterized by a rapid development of information technology and changed social relations. In his chapter **Per Fibæk Laursen (III.4)** reflects how the demand for these new competences can be met in what he labels flexible schools. Based on an empirical study in Denmark, he argues that the non-cognitive learning in flexible schools is not only more functional in post-industrial society but also of a higher quality than the learning in traditional school, which he labels the 'industrial school'. In these new flexible schools the old teacher-centred interaction in the classroom has been replaced by a much more child-centred approach where teachers create learning abilities for students with different learning styles and intelligence profiles. **Kamuran Tarım, Ayten İflazoğlu and Sencer Bulut (III. 1)** also focus on learning styles in their chapter. Within the context of an empirical study of maths education in Turkey they aimed to investigate if a multiple intelligence (MI) based maths learning environment had an influence on math anxiety and students' views about their achievement. The central theory for these aspects of learning beyond cognition is the multiple intelligence theory by Howard Gardner (Gardner 1983 and 1999). **Jepppe Bundsgaard** (chapter II.3) discusses the importance of considering motivational and not only cognitive factors when organizing collaborative learning via the Internet. He argues that it demands more effort to collaborate on the Internet than is usually anticipated because of the characteristics of the modality of writing and forum technology. To promote

learning is not just a question of preparing the cognitive subject matter, Bundsgaard argues, but also of organizing a motivating learning environment that incorporate and appreciate social relations so that the students experience benefits that counterbalance the greater effort of writing and relating in virtual forums.

The construction of a personal and community-based identity in modern society

It has often been argued that modern societies are characterized by an increased individualisation (Beck 1992 and 2000). However, this tendency to individualisation lives side by side with policies and efforts that at different levels appeal to the idea of belonging to a community. Over the last few years many of these efforts have been formulated in terms of programmes to promote *citizenship* which has been a key concept in national – as well in transnational – policies to maintain and develop ideas of societal communities. The modern citizens' participation in civic society is considered essential in official policies not only for maintaining the Western idea of democracy, but also for maintaining modern societies themselves. So, in recent years many nation states have designed programmes to promote citizenship, and not least education, formulated as citizenship education, has been seen as a means in this promotion. These programmes have not only been formulated within national contexts, but also in 'supra-national' contexts, of which the EU in a European context must be seen as an important co-actor to national programmes in the Union's efforts to promote the idea of the 'EU citizen'. The official text in these programmes often focuses on participation at local, national and/or global level.

Therefore citizenship education, which is growing all over Europe, is in many ways a meeting place – and a battle field – for these diverse idea. (Kryger and Ravn 2007). One key issue is what kind of community this education aims at: is it a national, a European (European Union) or world wide community. Another key issue is how the relation between the individual and the community should be e.g. what are the rights and the obligations for the citizens in relation to the state. To the extent that these issues become part of the educational process they appeal to aspects of the learning process that go beyond cognition: shaping of identity, solidarity, forming cultural and social membership of communities and so on.

In this book several chapters reflect on these issues. **Stoer and Magalhães**³ in chapter I.1 argue on the base of their observations of ‘Europe of Knowledge’ that citizenship above all rests on the agency of individuals and groups on the base on their identity choices. However these choices must be seen in the context of the EU-project of ‘fabricating Europe’ and are closely linked to knowledge and education as formation of individuals and citizens. The expression ‘fabricating Europe’ was inspired by the title of a book by António Nóvoa and Martin Lawn (*Fabricating Europe*). In the chapter they have paraphrased this expression with an intention of inter-textuality.

In chapter I.5 **Azevedo and Menezes** discuss how citizenship education can help to overcome young peoples’ distrust in political issues in Portugal. The growing privatisation of life – with increasing individualism and alienation, a strong distrust in political issues and low political efficacy – seems, according to the authors, to disconnect youth from political and communitarian life. They describe a study in which they identify contextual factors that sustain civic participation and analyze the influence of youth’s experiences of dimensions of political development. In chapter II.1 **Adams and Calvert** also explore the area of citizenship and examine the tension between citizenship education as an area of curriculum: a subject or discrete area (a vertical conception using Bernstein’s nomenclature) and citizenship as ‘more than a subject’ permeating all areas of school life (a horizontal conception). The authors argue that the holistic nature and complexity of citizenship as a key element of education sits uneasily with the nature of ‘subject’ which speaks of boundaries, defined content which can derive status and legitimacy via a testing and inspection regime.

Citizenship education appears on the one hand as efforts to establish new ideas of how participation, community and belonging shall be considered and on the other hand as a reappearance of an (old) thinking about the educational system as a means for nation-building celebrating the national cultural heritage. Both aspects involve themes in learning that go beyond cognition by this, since it involves learning about the cultural, social and personal identity. **Yaacov Katz** (III.5) focuses on values education in Israel. He states that modern democratic society should ensure equal access to participation in social and political life as

3. With great sorrow we learned a few months after the conference that Steve Stoer had passed away after a serious illness. We are very gratefull for his engagement and inspiration and we are not least grateful to António Magalhães who had worked together with Steve on their chapter in the book and which he afterwards finished.

well as participation in a community of shared discourse. He describes values education as the concretization of a system of values unique to a particular culture, tradition, background and ideological standpoint. **Niels Kryger** (chapter I.4) highlights two seemingly contradictory rhetorics of learning in modern society, that of flexible learning and that of canonized national learning rhetoric. Using the example of Danish cultural policy making he illustrates how many modern states – not least the European – try to use education to maintain their national identity when meeting ‘global challenges’. The idea of using education as a means of nation-building has had a revival in Danish education policy.

Addressed more direct to a concrete problem of young people’s ‘self-harm’ in modern societies, **Ron Best** (II.4) in his chapter asks if this issue should be a topic in citizenship education in England. The background is that deliberate self harm is widespread (25000 yearly in England) and that this self damage not only can be seen as a response to societal conditions, but also to some extent seems to be culturally accepted. Best discusses how teachers as professionals can meet these problems, which evidently implies aspects in learning and teaching that go beyond cognition.

Learning beyond the social processes in schools

A number of chapters highlight general aspects of learning beyond cognition based on concrete studies of social processes in schools. **Tom Ritchie** (II.3) discusses the contribution which recognition might give to the development of educational practice in schools and pre-school institutions. He argues that recognition provides us with a normative and theoretical framework, which may compensate for the heavy emphasis on cognitive development in schools today and encourages learning beyond cognition. These issues are discussed partly on the basis of a philosophical approach (inspired of Hegel) and partly on the basis of concrete experiences primarily from a Nordic context. **Margaret Zeegers** highlights how teachers’ sensitivity can be developed with regard to cultural and social processes that ‘go beyond cognition’ in specific school environments in Australia. She describes a project in which she has taken a group of pre-service teachers (PST) into activities designed to promote understanding a culture in ethnographic ways. **Sue Waite and Bernie Davis** (III.3) discuss the contribution of free play and structured activities in a Forest School programme in the UK and their possible influence in supporting ‘learning beyond cognition’.