

## Learning as movements in interspace

*My research issues concern how learning takes place in drama education in compulsory school<sup>1</sup>. One part is to explore and problematize approaches to learning (in and through drama). In this paper is focus on the concept learning which will be discussed using a thought derived from Deleuze and Guattari's nomad philosophy. They describe learning as a movement in the interspace. Focus is on process and inquiry, not on achievement of predetermined skills and competences.*

Learning is a wide and complex concept. It can be given different meanings depending on the context and what is referred. It may be associated with specific experiences and charged with certain meaning. Regardless what meaning the concept is given so is included that someone learns, something is learned and this learning takes place as an activity. The concept learning consists of three parts; what is happening with the learner, the activity (process, interaction) and the content being learned (Carlgren, 2010). All these parts have to be taken into consideration. In this paper is focus on learning as activity since this part have been put in the background in current debates about education. Aim is to investigate some thoughts about learning derived from Deleuze and Guattari's *nomad philosophy*, or as they (1994) describe it, to use thinking as experimentation. Such experimentation is not based on an (in forehand) expected result. After a brief background will some concepts described by Dewey and Løvlie be taken as a starting point for my thoughts.

In school policy and in the public debate about school today, is there unilateral focus on what is learned and on achieved results. This is the case in Sweden and is seems also to be the case in other countries. Learning becomes a matter of achieving certain predetermined results. And as a consequence so does this imply a simultaneous learning that the pupil as individual shall strive to achieve expected and measurable goals. Thus education becomes a thing to be "supplied by the teacher [... and...] consumed by the learner", as Biesta (2006, p. 28) describes it. Such definition of learning implies a focus on individuals as entity and/or to focus on results. Learning is delimited to be about *who* is learning signifying separate individuals and about *what* is learned. But *how* and *where* learning takes place is not given importance. Consequently is not considered the relation between the different parts.

How we learn and what we learn is interconnected. Learning about something always takes place in a context. Learning as activity is relational and situated. This implies that it is both an individual, internal process and a socially situated, interactive process. This cannot be separated from learning's *where*. Learning processes always takes place somewhere, in a place. Place is here defined as *both* physical space and as "actions and persons in their actualisations" (Løvlie, 2009, p. 34). The latter is Løvlie's definition of place. He is not including physical environmental aspects in his definition even if he is discussing experiences as something taking place in the material world. Despite this, his thoughts are of interest here

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<sup>1</sup> I am here referring to my research project for PhD-degree, named *Drama in School*.

since he highlights the importance of place in education and includes the dimensions *situation*, *materiality* and *attunement*. In the following I will use the concepts *situation* and *materiality* in discussion about learning. It is not because the concept *attunement* is not of interest. It is. Purpose here is to give space for some aspect in order to enable inclusion of different kind of aspects as a following step.

### **Learning as situation**

A point of departure is that learning take place as activities in specific places in the material world. A situation and a place is not the same thing. We can leave the place but bring experiences from situations with us as memories. The concept *situation* is defined by Dewey (1938/1991) as a “contextual whole” (p. 72) consisting of a phase of events and of relations. Situation is inseparable from interaction. Interaction<sup>2</sup> is going on between individuals and between individuals and objects. Dewey (1938/1997) argues that individuals “live in a series of situations” (p. 44) and that this living *in* imply that there is an ongoing interaction. Situations follow after each other. Experiences and learning in one situation becomes tools for understanding in new situations. This implies a continuity and Dewey refer to it as “the experiential continuum” (Ibid. p. 33). Described processes are characterized by ongoing movements forward, to what comes after ‘here-and-now’, according to my interpretation. Of course there is constant movement, as Dewey write so was that which is now past “once a living present, just as the now living present is already in course of becoming the past of another present” (Dewey, 1938/1991). But this does not necessarily imply that processes are like pearls in line on a necklace, which is how it is described by Dewey, according to my interpretation.

These thoughts about situation have been useful as a springboard into an investigation of learning as movements in interspace. But before I go into that, I will highlight the concept *materiality*.

### **Materiality**

Dewey focuses on social interaction and on social environment. This IS useful for understanding learning processes in and through drama, but will not be discussed in this text for the same reasons that the concept *attunement* is not. Instead will focus be on physical environment and materiality. The latter concept is not used by Dewey, but he writes about physical environment and objects. Physical environment is given importance as a tool for human interaction (Dewey, 1916/2004). He questions the dichotomy between the human body and the soul within Western thinking and argues that body and mind constitutes an integral unity. We experience the world with the body and mind. Nor can organic life and mind be separated from nature. “We cannot separate organic life and mind from physical nature without also separating nature from life and mind” (Dewey, 1929/1958, p. 296). But it seems that physical nature only is given significance as something related to humans. Løvlie (2009) has a similar focus when he writes about materiality. He describes places as material.

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<sup>2</sup> The prefix *inter* is defined as *in between*. (Dewey, J. & Bentley, A. F. (1949). *Knowing and the known*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Experiences are embodied experiences in the world. Both Dewey and Løvlie place human being in the center of description.

The concept materiality opens up for a change of perspective since it also is used by post humanistic theories. These are diverging micro-theories that have evolved within feminist and postcolonial theories and within technology science (Åsberg, (2012). They can be seen as further developments of postmodern theory and are not a uniform field. They are theoretical approaches that complement existing ones, but shall not be used instead of humanistic perspectives. They have in common that the human being is decentered, not viewed as the center. This 'material turn' highlights the intertwined existence and mutual influence between man, nature and animals, things and environments. Materiality also refers to aspects of ourselves (for example physiology and neurology). Materialities cannot be reduced to something passive and unchangeable, they are active agents. All active agents involved in a relationship co-constitute one another. Both humans and materialities are seen as agents. Co-constitution implies that they change each other. Barad uses the term intra-action instead of 'interaction' since she means that the latter "presumes the prior existence of independent entities" (Barad, 2003, p. 815). This is interesting of various reasons; it stands for a way of thinking beyond either/or, it can be used to describe interplay between participants, space and objects (for example within a drama situation) and it highlights the interrelation between human beings and environment, that "we are parts of the world" (Barad, 2003., p. 828). It is also a basis for understanding Deleuze and Guattari's reasoning about *abstract machine*.

### **Movements in interspace**

An abstract machine is a movement force where intra-actions between different materialities and where phenomenon appear and become visible. In this are not only materialities included (for example objects and bodies) but also conceptions, thoughts, discourses etc.<sup>3</sup> In a drama situation can, for example, plot and symbolic use of theatrical tools, be included. This force produces connections between included agents (materialities, humans etc.) as a temporary space, which generate an ongoing becoming. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) use the concept *deterritorialization* when they describe becoming. This illustrates that it is a process of constant ongoing. Deterritorialization implies transformation of all included agents.

Learning has been described as a changed relation between the learner and what is learned (Carlgren, 2011). Applied to Deleuze and Guattari's theory, can learning processes be described as *deterritorialization*. Thus, transformation does not take place as transition from one point to another, but as ongoing displacement. When we realize that we understand in a new or other way, has this learning process already taken place. Movement in interspace is not about connecting certain points. New points are located but they are temporary. The nomad occupies spaces in-between but without doing demarcations. Such approach implies that learning is movements in interspace and that these processes are intra-actions of involved active agents.

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<sup>3</sup> Thus, it may seem contradictory to only highlight some kinds of aspects here. As mentioned earlier so is purpose to give these a space for future inclusion.

Deleuze (1990/2001) uses the concept *event* as a description of a meeting of involved active agents. This does not signify a passage between a 'before' and a 'after', a delimited situation. Events are in movement. Or, it is in movements since it is about different but simultaneous processes. Here I will use Lenz Taguchi's (2010) descriptions of movements, since this is a simplification of Deleuze's abstract and complicated theory. Lenz Taguchi describes two different movements that are "intertwined and dependent of each other" (p. ), the circular and the horizontal movement.<sup>4</sup> The circular movement implies to slow down and re-enact something. This movement is a delay and distance that allows questioning of assumptions taken for granted and a new understanding. It also implies a counter-actualization which opens up for new ways of understanding. This implies a repetition which does not cause a change in the thing but imply a change in mind. "... a change is produced in the mind which contemplates: a difference, something new *in* the mind" (Deleuze, 1968/1994, p. 90). A horizontal movement occurs when events suddenly take a leap. "It becomes the event of unthought possibilities that leaps away from immobile over-coded striated spaces (Lenz Taguchi, p. 99). It implies new and unexpected events or patterns of thoughts.

According to such approach is it not possible to completely predict results of learning. It opens up for various opportunities and for the unpredictable. It opens up for an education which includes embodied and environmental aspects (both social and physical). An openness including inquiry and questioning. And thereby also a critical approach?!<sup>5</sup>

## Concluding reflections

Aim of this paper has been to investigate some thoughts about learning derived from Deleuze and Guattari's *nomad philosophy*. As a starting point, was used some concepts from Dewey and Løvlie; situation and place. This was a help to shed light on learning's *where*. The concept materiality opened up for a change of perspective to post humanistic theories and especially to Deleuze and Guattari's thoughts. Learning can be understood as movements in interspace and these processes are intra-actions of involved active agents.

Deleuze and Guattari's theory is abstract and difficult to access. Here I have only scratched the surface and been mentioning some of their central concepts. But it opens up for new thoughts. It might be a tool to catch sight of processes in the interspace and to describe intra-actions of different active agents in a process of learning. It might also be a tool to describe interconnections between physical and social environment, which might support a holistic approach to what learning, and education, is for and why.

In the introduction is 'in and through drama' put in parentheses. A next step is to remove the parenthesis in order to do concretization and deepening of thoughts mentioned here. What can this imply when adapted to drama education?

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<sup>4</sup> Deleuze do not describe them as movements but as *repetition* and *line of flight*. Lenz Tacuchi's connection of these concept using the word movements also implies an interpretation which can be useful for further development of thoughts presented in this text.

<sup>5</sup> This might be understood as *sustainable learning* in a wide sense. However, explanation of what the concept *sustainable* means is not included in this paper.

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