

RETHINKING EXPANSIVE LEARNING: EXPERIENCE FROM AN EDUCATIONAL DESIGN SUPPORTING AUTHORS IN PRACTICE

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Abstract: This paper analyses an online community of master's students taking a course in ICT and organisational learning. The students initiated and facilitated an educational design for organisational learning called Proactive Review in the organisation where they are employed. By using an online discussion forum on Google groups, they created new ways of reflecting and learning. We used netnography to select qualitative postings from the online community and expansive learning concepts for data analysis. The findings show how students changed practices of organisational learning in their professional organisation and how they developed their identity to become more skilled practitioners. We discuss the effects of the written discussions and reflections on the students' endeavour to become authors in practice. Our contribution to the research consists of considerations of changing the spoken word to the written word, which lacks spontaneity but supports equality among students.

Keywords: Educational design, organisational learning, expansive learning, online community, authors in practice.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Collaboration forms and learning conceptualizations between educational institutions and organisational workplaces has for long been the focus of educational design and organisational learning researchers. Two overarching questions direct us towards this field of research, where learning in the context of work and learning in the context of education form a common basis for integrative approaches. The general questions are as follows: i) How do students experience their formal studies in preparation for professional work? ii) How do professionals reflect on their practice in order to enhance their professional skills? In this paper, we refer to the practice of integrating an educational design of formal learning with student interventions in real work situations occurring in professional organisations. Our focus is directed towards an individual level of learning where professionals—as students of master's courses—identify new ways of learning, where they were encouraged to learn from experiences in realistic work practice. In the analysis, we reconsider Engeström's model of expansive learning and outline new implications for further expansion of the elements in said model.

The aim of this study is to learn from new alternative possibilities of knowledge sharing that lead to new ways of thinking and learning for professionals from different workplaces and influence their practices. The aim is twofold. Firstly, we analyse the realization of an educational design of how students act as authors in a community by creating new and common meanings of their experiences with an educational design for learning in the context of work in their organisation of employment. Secondly, we look into the development of students' identities as facilitators, which is a new role for them, and into the enhancement of their professional practice skills.

Our research question is:

How do master's students create new ways of thinking and agency, change and practical impact in their organisation of employment using an educational design for learning in the context of work?

2 LEARNING IN CONTEXT OF WORK - AND IN CONTEXT OF MASTER'S STUDIES

We base our study on Yrjö Engeström's theoretical concept of expansive learning that supports the understanding of things to aware of when studying learning in the context of work.

The theory of expansive learning describes learning in the context of work (Engeström 1996), including the different elements to be aware of when studying learning in this context. The subjects of learning in the activity system are individual employees (Engeström 2001, p.136).

An organisation may be perceived as an activity system and framed as a subject that strives for achieving an object (Cole & Engeström 1993, Engeström 2001). This process is influenced by rules and regulations from inside and outside the organisation (the activity system) and the community to which it belongs. Additionally, the move is influenced by the division of labour in the specific context and the tools (mediating artefacts) available for achieving the object (Engeström 2001, p.136). See Figure 1.

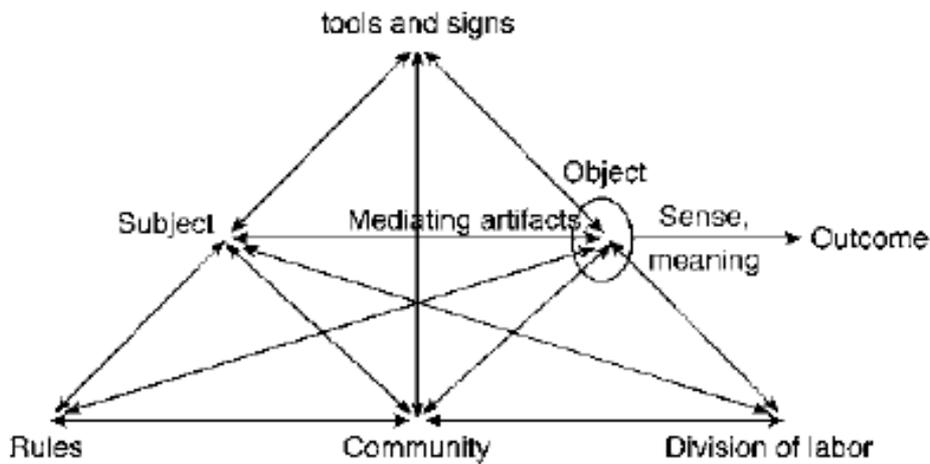


Figure 1. Structure of human activity system (Engeström 2001, p. 136)

An activity system may refer to a group of employees working together to solve a task (Engeström 2001). This task may be formulated explicitly or involve implicit contradictions between new objects and available tools or rules. Tensions may occur over time when new ideas or requirements clash with employees' current methods of working. Such tensions may lead to contradictions between the old and the new. Engeström claims that such contradictions should be welcomed because even though they often imply disturbances and conflicts, they are the starting points of new inventions and changes.

The employees invest effort towards learning to participate in “culturally valued collaborative practices in which something useful is produced” (Engeström 2001, p. 141). They solve work-related problems, and in doing so, they learn. According to Engeström (2001), the key actions for learning in the context of work include questioning, analysing, reflecting on, and evaluating the process of learning.

We apply Engeström's model in an educational setting where ‘learning at work’ is added with ‘learning in education’ and argue that the activity system of an educational setting could be seen as the activity system of students' work practice.

Our aim is to enable master's students to learn from experience, both individual experience and the experiences of their peers. As Engeström does not specifically go into the term ‘experience’, we draw upon John Dewey in this regard. Both Engeström and Dewey perceive learning to be context based. Engeström describes six elements of this context, whereas Dewey describes learning as a function of experimenting with the world. ‘The world’ will most likely include the context in which learning takes place.

To ‘learn from experience’ is to make a backward and a forward connection between what we do to things and what we enjoy or suffer from in consequence. Under such conditions, doing becomes a trying, an experiment with the world to find out what it is like; the undergoing becomes instruction—the discovery of the connections between things (Dewey & Boydston, 1976, p. 147).

According to Dewey, experience is obtained through our actions and interactions with the world, provided that we reflect upon what we try to do and what happens as a consequence (Dewey & Boydston, 1976, p. 151). He stresses that knowledge and action

are intertwined and that knowledge influences future experience because knowledge and experience are closely linked (Elkjaer & Simpson, 2011).

According to Dewey, experience is gained through activities ('what we do to things'), and such experience involves emotions ('what we enjoy or suffer from'). In his book *Middle works* (volume 9) from 1976 (Dewey & Boydston, 1976), Dewey refers to 'we' as learners in the sense that all humans experience. Experience stems from experimenting with things. The starting point is a sense that something is wrong, which is an emotion followed by an urge to solve the problem. We 'experiment with the world' to find out what it takes to solve a problem; consequently, learning from experience involves an individual and the world. To clarify the problem, we explore and analyse it, which leads to elaboration of tentative suggestions for solutions. These must be evaluated in practice and refined. This flow of activities leads to the development of experience. Experience is created by the interaction between thinking and doing. Experience occurs when we connect our ways of acting with the consequences of these actions (Ibid, p. 152), and experience gives us an advantage when we solve problems (Ibid, p. 350).

According to Elkjaer "*Experience is a transaction between individuals and environment in which both individual and the environment develop over time*" (2003, p. 488).

Therefore, experience is constantly under construction as the environment changes over time, and individuals adapt previous experiences into new ones. Experiences are based on the past, utilized in the present, and retained for use in the future (Dewey & Boydston, 1976). Learning from experience involves experimenting with the world and reflecting on such experimentation.

Engeström's (2001) 'Human activity system' describes important elements of learning in the context of work, whereas Dewey (Dewey & Boydston, 1976) adds dimensions of learning from experience. Engeström claims that employees undertake efforts to learn in order to participate in culturally valued practices; Dewey claims that we learn from inquiry and reflections, which leads to us to solving problems and controlling actions. It seems like learning leads to practices. Given that the purpose of this study is to learn about authors in practice, we will describe briefly our understanding of this term.

In alignment with Gherardi & Strati (2013), we interpret *authors in practice* as a practice-based activity taking place in a social context. We consider professional individuals as students participating in a specific social context that integrates their professional work practice with the educational practice of their master's studies. As members of an online community in this learning context, we regard them as authors in practice, creating and discussing essential knowledge via written comments and reflections in an online community forum. They comment and reflect on each others' experiences of testing a learning object in a real work environment. By doing so, they are able to formulate and legitimize new forms of thinking and acting for improving their practice in their respective professional organisations.

3 RESEARCH SETTING

We look into students attending the 'Master's in Information Technology and Learning' (MIL) course in Denmark. Admission requirements for MIL are divided in two parts.

Firstly, the applicant must hold a bachelor degree or a professional BA, a nurse or a teacher for example. Secondly, the applicant must have at least two years of work experience based on the bachelor degree, including technical skills in IT (<http://www.evu.aau.dk/master/mil/>).

MIL course called Proactive Review

This study inquires a 'module' of five ECTS included in MIL education. The students are in their first or second year of their master's study in ICT and Learning (MIL). The *object* is for the student to gain insights into organisational learning from the theoretical and practice perspectives, and the students are to create experience in this regard during the module. They create experience by initiating and facilitating PR, an educational design for organisational learning, in their own or in a fellow student's organisation.

The *tools* and mediating artefacts consist of an educational design for organisational learning called PR, which may be seen as an instrument used to probe learning in the home organisation of the professional/practitioner. This article focuses on the learning of students and not on the design of PR, which is described in detail elsewhere (Kolbaek, 2014a, 2014b). However, PR consists of seven open questions asked in a specific sequence to lead to two tangible results, namely an action and communication plan that solves the problem handled in the PR, and a management challenge that involves the top-management in solutions that need their attention.

The tools for learning and collaboration within the student groups are a face-to-face seminar of four hours followed up by written, dialogical collaboration in a Google group for 11 days.

To pass the course (the *rules*), the students are required to participate in the face-to-face seminar, conduct a PR in their organisation of employment, and discuss their experience online in a Google group. The themes of discussion in the online forum were as follows: 1) Preconditions of participants in the PR, 2) preparation as a facilitator of the PR, and 3) dynamics of power distance within the PR. These themes are important for understanding the implications of the PR process. Even though the themes are well described in a book, the students were not advised to read about the themes beforehand because the teacher/researcher wanted the students to learn inductively rather than deductively.

The *community* in the Google group included 10 students and two teachers. The students became **authors in practice** when using written communication in their reflection (and learning) upon the intervention. The online community embraced 10 other communities, namely the organisations in which the students were employed, which gave insight in how PRs were perceived in different settings. The students became **agents** when bringing in PR as an intervention in their respective professional organisations.

The *division of labour* in the Google group community consisted of the tasks of the teachers and those of the students. The students were required to provide a minimum of three comments in the Google group, and the teachers were to ask for more details, conclude on the inputs, and contact students who did not attend properly (to help them pass).

3.1 On-line studies inspired by ethnography i.e., netnography

We conducted a study using an online forum by following an ethnography-oriented, observational, and active approach, inspired by the methods discussed by Kozinets (2010). According to Kozinets (2002), netnography is

“a new qualitative research methodology that adapts ethnographic research techniques to study cultures and communities that are emerging through computer-mediated communications” (Kozinets, 2002, p. 62).

Furthermore, Kozinets notes that netnography is *“based primarily on the observation of textual discourse”* (Kozinets, 2002, p. 64) and states that content analysis is used to expedite data coding and analysis.

We used netnography because the nature of interaction among the researched people could not be face-to-face but online conversation-based. The use of netnography gave us easy access to online conversations among participants and created the possibility of achieving all minutiae of the utterances online (Kozinets 2010).

We applied the netnographic approach because it can be used to analyse communities where access based on conventional methods is difficult. Without denying its ethnographic relevance, it appears even more legitimate to classify or position content analysis of online communication in between discourse analysis, content analysis, and ethnography. By applying this approach, we were able to select data for qualitative aspects, such as the methods of expression in a text, different perspectives taken in an on-line written conversation, and various aspects of reflective discussions.

3.2 Data material and analysis

The data used in this particular research consists of the community and its members' posts, interactions, and their meanings. Based on this content, we analysed and interpreted the data using concepts inspired by Engeström and Dewey, such as semiotic terms, and practice theory of learning and reflection. Moreover, our study is action-oriented because the researcher seeks and incorporates feedback from members of the online community being researched. One of the researchers was an MIL course instructor, and she introduced and concluded the dialogue among the students. When appropriate, the researcher asked a question or clarified a term to support students' reflections.

The data material was selected and analysed qualitatively based on the specific aspects relevant to our aims. Our first aim was to determine how students act as authors in the community by creating new and common meanings of their experiences with PR in their organisations of employment. This common understanding was based on reflections on the context and the profile of the participants in the PR. Our second aim was the development of a new identity for students of being facilitators who influenced learning practices in their respective organisations and by doing so, students' practitioner skills were enhanced.

3.3 Methodological considerations

Kozinets (2002) further recommended distinguishing among tourists, minglers, devotees, and insiders when analysing messages from online community members. Ten MIL students and two MIL teachers were members of the online community created for this study. We considered our community members as insiders, who have the strongest social ties to the group and maintain a strong interest in the central consumption activity. They are the most enthusiastic, actively involved, and sophisticated users—and thus, the most important data sources.

The netnography methodology was originally developed to study consumers for specific marketing purposes (Kozinets 2002), whereas we use parts of this methodology for studying learning and personal development of a new identity as a facilitator. Even though we use netnography in a different context, we argue that the netnographical approach fits into this study because we look for students' interactions and meaning as they thrive in written online discussion. Moreover, we analyse the utterances from the perspectives of the expressions of authoring and learning as communicative acts. Furthermore, the backbone of the written online conversation in this study was feedback from the students to the teacher/researcher, feedback that enlightened new perspectives on PR as an educational design for organisational learning.

As recommended, we contacted the community members to obtain their permission (informed consent) to quote directly their specific forum posts in the research (Kozinets, 2002, p. 65).

The data was generated from three discussions in a Google group that could be accessed only by the students, teachers, and researchers. These discussions lasted for 11 days, and 75 comments were shared in them. The comments were made Danish and Norwegian, and they have been translated into English for this paper.

4 RESULTS

In Table 1, we present the activities of the students and the teachers/researchers as they appeared in the Google group. We have not named the participants, but it may be relevant to know that T denotes teacher/researcher.

Discussions running 7–16 Jan 2014	# Active students	# Comments	# Students' comments	Average comment length	Answers/responses	Degree of participation
Discussion 1 Precondition of participants	8	20	16	11,3 lines	9	C, 2E 2G, 3H 2L, 3P,2S 4T,W
Discussion 2 Preparation	9	29	21	12,0 lines	14	4B, 3C, 3G,L, 7M, 2P,S,8T,W
Discussion 3 Power distance	10	26	17	13,5 lines	17	2B, C, 3E G, H, 2L, 2M,3P, 2S,9T,W.

Table 1. Discussion themes in online Google group.

In the discussion about *participant preconditions* in PR, eight students and a teacher/researcher made 20 comments, of which four were made by the teacher. On average, the 20 comments were 11.3 lines in length. Two students contributed with only one comment each, whereas the other six students commented two to three times. Nine of the contributions represented comments or questions to inputs from other students. In the discussion about the *preparation for PR*, the nine students and the teacher/researcher made 29 comments with an average comment length of 12.0 lines. Thirteen comments exceeded the average, eight comments were written by the teacher/researcher, and 21

comments were made by the students. Four students contributed with three comments or more. Fourteen utterances were comments to contributions from other students or the researcher/teacher; six of those were very short statements of agreement by fellow students. We see that there is a high level of reflection, very often ‘provoked’ by fellow students than by the teacher. In the discussion about *power distance*, the ten students and the teacher/researcher made 26 comments with an average comment length of 13.5 lines. Thirteen comments exceeded the average comment length of this discussion, and 16 comments exceeded the average of 12 lines in the former discussion and the average of 11.3 lines in the first discussion. The teacher/researcher made nine contributions. Only two students contributed three times, whereas the other students contributed one or two times. Fourteen contributions were answers or comments to inputs from other participants, which implies that the students actually involved themselves in the written discussion as opposed to simply delivering their personal statements without reflecting on the thoughts expressed by fellow students.

When looking into the students’ activity, the data show that M delivered nine comments shared between the two themes, with seven comments in one theme and two comments in the other. W delivered only three comments, one in each theme. Most students delivered five to six comments. Half of the students contributed to all three themes, whereas the other half contributed to only two of the themes. Considering that the discussion lasted for only 11 days including a weekend, on average, the students commented every second day. The data show that not all students participated to the exact same extent, but the differences were small. Compared to an oral discussion, it seems that ‘outspoken’ students take less space in written communication, whereas ‘silent’ students are less silent in the written format. The data suggest that the written format enables greater equality in regard to ‘being heard’.

The development of the comment length and the development in the responses to inputs from fellow students indicate that the students became more familiar with the written discussion format and that they developed their skills as authors in practice.

5 ANALYSIS – LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCES

In the following analysis, we will focus only on the context of the online discussion in this MIL course (e.g. PR). We are not directly interested in how PR (PR) actually worked out in the professional organisations per se, but in how the students used PR as a learning object to be tested and reflected upon in context different from an educational setup, i.e., in a context of their home professional work. More importantly, the manner in which this reflection and learning is represented and played out in the online learning community (Google group) is of interest to us.

Consequently, from the results, we derived certain analytical themes as a basis for the understanding of students’ activities as authors in practice. The themes we looked for and their representations in the material are summarized in Table 2.

Learning from experience			
What	How	Observation and quotes	Emotions and Semiotic terms
Doubt or uncertainty		X	x
Tentative suggestions and solutions		X	
Developing an identity of being a facilitator <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Experimentation with the world and reflections on their 		x	

professional organisation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating experiences based on the past, using them in the present, and retaining them for the future 	x	
Becoming authors in practice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of common understanding • Creation of new meaning 		x x

Table 2. Analytical themes in Google group discussion

5.1 Looking for emotions

Out of the three discussions including the themes a) *participant preconditions*, b) *PR preparation* and c) *power distance*, only one comment expressed frustration. One student wrote:

“Only 6 out of 10 arrived prepared for the meeting. What in the earth do you do as facilitator?” (our translation)

This utterance is formulated very much like it was spoken out orally. It represents frustration as a direct reaction to a critical situation. All other comments are less spontaneous, expressing reflection rather than reaction. It seems like there is a lack of spontaneity in the written conversations.

5.2 Doubts and uncertainties

According to Engeström (2001) and Dewey (Dewey & Boydston, 1976), the learning process takes its departure in **doubts or uncertainties**. Consequently, we looked for utterances in which the students expressed doubts or uncertainties as the starting point of their learning process. The students shared doubt and uncertainty in their online discussion, for example by asking

“Only 6 out of 10 participants did prepare before attending the meeting. What do you do as facilitator, when six out of ten delegates arrive unprepared?” (our translation)

This question initiated five more inputs including suggestions for tentative solutions to the problem, for example, the following comment:

“I agree it is a precondition for a success PR that the participants are well prepared...an icebreaker may be used for getting them to know each other’s roles....it is a good idea to use an online forum for the participants to getting to know each other, but then again, they actually have to read everything” (our translation).

These follow up inputs served the collaborative process of analysing and elaborating tentative suggestions from the others’ perspectives as well. This, in turn, led to a collaborative and reflective dialogue among the students.

The students discussed the importance of trust and the difficulties involved in establishing trust in their professional organisations.

“...you spend time on building up trust which is an important foundation in online communication” (our translation).

This shows that this student connected the new insights to existing insights discussed in other themes of the MIL coursework.

Other students were uncertain about the feasibility of PR in their professional environment. A student shared her uncertainty as follows:

“PR will have hard times at my workplace, if used as a knowledge sharing strategy... to spend 3 hours on a single meeting will not be easy to juggle at my workplace” (our translation).

We see that the students experimented with the world and reflected on their actions (Dewey & Boydston, 1976), leading to development of both the individuals and their environments (Elkjaer 2003). This discussion indicates that the students created and discussed essential knowing by formulating doubts and uncertainties, which implies that their contributions to the collaborative reflection developed them as authors in practice.

5.3 Tentative suggestions and solutions

Because an important part of the learning process is coming up with **tentative suggestions and solutions** (Engeström 2001, Dewey & Boydston, 1976), we find it interesting to determine whether the students elaborate on their experience to solve the doubts and uncertainties shared by them.

The students faced various difficulties in preparing (described above) to be facilitators, as well as the very start of the PR. A student considered the requirements for running a worthy PR and suggested

“It is important that the sponsor and the facilitator thoroughly consider whom to participate” (in the PR, editor) (our translation).

This comment indicates that the student considers the basis of the educational design of PR. Moreover, this student suggests that the participants should not be picked randomly, but that they should be chosen for good reasons.

During the discussion on creating trust in professional organisations, a student referred to literature on this term:

“H: Mads Schramm describes in the book: Virtuel ledelse, (Dansk Psykologisk Forlag, 2012)” (our translation).

This may be seen as an attempt to create a tentative solution by suggesting relevant literature, even though none of the students attempted to facilitate online PRs.

More students shared their difficulties of initiating the PR process, and other students replied with suggestions for solutions such as ‘*initiate a prepared self-presentation*’ or ‘*start with an ice-breaker*’. A student pointed out the importance of the timeframe and the agenda, and suggested offering refreshments to the PR participants.

“Furthermore, I was surprised at my PR, how effective it seemed that refreshments were prepared, a clear timeframe and a clear agenda” (our translation).

The students explained uncertainties, and the online discussion enabled them to come up with tentative suggestions and solutions that fit not only their respective professional organisations but also professional organisations in general. We cannot know the extents to which these suggestions and solutions will be implemented in the students’ professional organisations, but we can see that the students commented on the suggestions and that they found them useful. This indicates that the discussion and the suggestions made therein developed the students’ identities as facilitators.

5.4 More skilled professional and new identity as facilitator

The students discussed their new practices of initiating and/or facilitating PRs in their everyday job within their professional organisations. First, they experimented with PR in their professional organisations; then, they reflected on their role of **being a facilitator**. One student realized that he did not prepare adequately with the sponsor, so the sponsor was in doubt about his introduction to the PR.

“I am afraid I did not explain clearly the sponsor’s introduction for the sponsor” (our translation).

After some discussion with other students, he concluded:

“So after a Proactive Review my experience is that you, as the facilitator, must be very careful with the preparation and dialogue with the sponsor” (our translation).

Therefore, the students discussed the importance of good preparation not only for the facilitator but also for the participants and the sponsor. More students agreed on the statement:

“If the structure of the meeting is not properly prepared, there is a risk... that the result of the PR is no useful—and then, it is unlikely that people will contribute again” (our translation.)

Another student pointed out that the participants, who were her peers in school, did not agree on ‘proper knowledge’. This disagreement made it more difficult to motivate the colleagues to participate in PRs. The student claimed

“This disagreement upon what is necessary/proper knowledge is a cultural ‘pain’ among high school teachers” (our translation).

This reflective quote represents a vital question for knowledge creation and learning to take place, namely questioning and negotiating upon the knowledge we regard as essential and legitimized. The student indicates that there is an ongoing debate of this nature in her place of employment.

A third student realized that it would have been an advantage for the pupils and the process if they (the facilitators) had prepared more specifically. He said:

“It was pleasantly surprising to the participants (in the PR, editor) that each of them influenced the focus of the meeting. If we (the facilitators, editor) had presented the shape more clearly in the call, maybe more pupils would have participated” (our translation).

During the experimentation with PR in their respective professional organisations, the study participants reflected on issues regarding power distance among themselves. A student raised concerns about a manager being present in the PR, as follows:

“We (the two facilitators, editor) saw in our PR that in the previous Nonaka-inspired process that ‘challenged’ areas, which had previously been discussed merrily, were out of focus in the management’s presence at the table” (our translation).

Another student reflected on this issue and added his experience:

“At least it is my experience with power distance that that a skewed balance of power during a meeting/workshop where the strong party exploits the situation may destroy all discussion and creativity” (our translation).

As recommended by John Dewey, the MIL students experimented with the world as they attempted PR in their respective professional organisations. Thereafter, they reflected collaboratively in the Google discussion forum with fellow MIL students and the teacher/researcher. They discussed initial requirements such as ‘preparation and planning with the sponsor’, as well as the possible negative influence of ‘powerful people’ on the PR. The online discussion enabled the students to reflect on their new roles as facilitators, and they pinpointed things that a facilitator should be aware of, specifically the importance of preparation with the sponsor and handling power distance within the group of PR participants. This way, they obtained insights in their respective professional organisations (‘a cultural pain amongst high school teachers’) and identified requirements for being a facilitator.

The discussions indicate that the students gained new insights into their respective professional organisations (‘a cultural pain amongst high school teachers’) and by doing so, they became more skilled as professionals. Additionally, the students identified and discussed the requirements for being a facilitator, which supported the development of their new identities as facilitators. Their experimentation in their respective professional organisations (the world) and the written reflections on these experiences enabled the students to become authors in practice.

The discussions, suggestions, and tentative solutions indicate that the experimentation and reflection developed the students’ identity as facilitators, leading them to become more skilled professionals who participate in “*culturally valued collaborative practices in which something useful is produced*” (Engeström, 2001 p 141).

6 DISCUSSING HOW TO BECOME AUTHORS IN PRACTICE

Online collaboration via a Google group was an alternative possibility for knowledge sharing among geographically dispersed students who maintained full time jobs alongside their master’s studies.

Because we are interested in exploring how the students became authors in practice, we investigated how they created common and new meanings on the PRs they attempted in their respective professional organisations, and how they developed meanings in progress, in the making, and became more knowledgeable of both their role as facilitators and their professional roles in their organisations. Thus, the students created new meanings of what it takes to initiate and maintain learning in their professional communities—even though these communities are different.

The students tried out PR in their professional organisation, and they reflected on their experiences in the online discussion, which was part of their MIL study. The students shared doubts and uncertainties, and individual concerns were picked up by fellow students. Thus, the students created a common understanding of important challenges in developing a new identity as a facilitator and additional potential risks in the development of their role in their respective professional organisations. The discussions indicate that the students collaboratively created new forms of thinking and acting with regard to organisational learning in their professional organisations.

The written reflections and interactions among the students increased during the period of 11 days. The first discussion included 16 comments from the students with an average comment length of 11.3 lines, second discussion elicited 21 comments from the students with an average comment length of 12.0 lines, and third discussion generated

only 14 comments from the students, but the average contribution length had grown to 13.5 lines. This development indicates that the students became increasingly familiar with collaborative reflections in the written format. In the discussion about preparation, the students often stated their own experience, and only a few students responded to other students' utterances. However, in the discussion about power-distance, only a few students stated their individual experience, but most comments reflected the few initial inputs. Maybe the students became less reflective of their own experience or maybe they became more interested in other students' inputs. If the latter is the case, it indicates that the students became more collaborative and interactive.

The discussion shows that the students were eager to elaborate on 'how' than 'what' to learn in the role of a facilitator, participated actively as the learning process progressed, and enhanced their collaborative reflections over the course of the workshop.

Only one student expressed emotions, and emotions were only expressed this one time, even though other comments included doubts and uncertainties. The 75 comments and the eagerness to reply (especially in the discussion about power distance) indicated that the students involved themselves in reflection. Therefore, the lack of emotional comments is interesting. An explanation may be that the students do not want to appear 'emotional'; another explanation could be that the written format slows down spontaneity, and in this process, emotions are developed more consciously, which allows them to be expressed as well-formulated reflections.

The online dialogue shows that the students influenced their practice and developed new ways of thinking about learning in the context of work. Analysis of the utterances indicates that the students became authors in practice in this online community, and they enhanced their practice skills in terms of being able to facilitate PRs. Thus, acting in two different activity systems in such a way served two main supportive elements.

Firstly, they became authors in practice as students supported by communities of student peers and threads of ongoing interaction and reflection. They realised the importance of articulating and reflecting on their own actions in an ongoing and 'on-the-fly' manner. The students acting as authors in practice were in an 'in-progress state', where reactions were not so common but reflections were more common. The students' participation in the online community led to reflective post writing, where the students became authors in practice, legitimising the common understanding of the experiences gained in their respective work practices.

Secondly, they became facilitators of actual PR tests in professional organisations, supported by organisational sponsors, rules, and professional communities. By having a new context in which to test PR (the learning object) in a 'real' setting, the students were pushed to consider their roles (as facilitators) more seriously. They needed to account for the participants' backgrounds and the preconditions prevailing in their respective contexts. We found that the students expanded their perspectives on organisational learning by utilizing Proactive Review as an intervention in the context of the organisation in which they were employed. Preparing an intervention in their own practices challenged the students to 'pedagogically launch' or trigger new ways of creating knowledge in their respective professional organisations. The students went from 'not knowing' to being facilitators and having experienced the impact of PR in real settings, namely their respective workplaces.

7 CONCLUSION

The students formulated doubts and uncertainties, which they discussed collaboratively. These discussions led to the creation of common meanings, as well as suggestions for tentative solutions. The students formulated and legitimated new forms of thinking and acting to improve their practice in their respective professional organisations. Furthermore, they shared and created new knowledge about the implications of PR both in regards to the preconditions for PR participants and the roles of the facilitator and sponsor. The students created new ways of thinking and agency for improving their practices of organisational learning in their respective professional organisations, which make us regard the students as authors in practice.

Through discussions, organisational visits, and written communication, students reported various examples of learning during the MIL course. They described how they gained knowledge about organisational learning in general but also how they developed profession-specific knowledge when interacting with the PR process and involved people in their respective professional organisations.

Furthermore, they specified how the discussion with student peers as PR facilitators was an important part of their learning process. When meeting ‘the others’, they learned about differences and similarities between the actor systems. They were familiarised with general professional conditions and how these conditions vary across organisations. Thus, their own situations were clearer relative to others’ situations. They faced different circumstances, conditions, and approaches—various contexts in which the learning object was tested.

In their reflection comments, the students wrote how they became more confident with the knowledge of organisational learning in general and PR in particular. During the process, they became active authors in practice because they described how they solved problems on the fly and created meanings in-progress.

The students developed themselves in more directions during this course. Firstly, they experimented with the world and reflected on their experiences, which enabled them to develop the identity of being a facilitator. Secondly, this experimentation made them approach their respective professional organisations in a new position (as a facilitator), thus forcing them to solve problems on the fly and creating meanings in-progress in their professions. They changed the practices of organisational learning in their professional organisations, which had practical impacts. In other words, they became more skilled professionals. Thirdly, reflections in the written format enabled the students to become authors in practice, and the developments in the comments indicate that the students progressively became more knowledgeable and capable in this regard.

Our contribution to research consists of considerations of changing the spoken word to the written word, which is characterised by the lack of spontaneity, equality between outspoken and silent students in regards to contributions, and seemingly high levels of reflection, very often ‘provoked’ by fellow students rather than by the teachers.

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