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Title: Practices and habits of citizenship and learning

Year: 2020

Version: Published version

Please cite the original version:

Holma, K., & Kontinen, T. (2020). Practices and habits of citizenship and learning. In K. Holma, &
T. Kontinen (Eds.), Practices of Citizenship in East Africa : Perspectives from Philosophical
Pragmatism (pp. 15-28). Routledge. Routledge Explorations in Development Studies.
https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429279171-2

2 Practices and habits of citizenship and learning

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Introduction

This chapter discusses the volume's theoretical underpinnings, which are derived from philosophical pragmatism. One of the key ideas of this research project has been to bring philosophical and empirical research into dialogue by following the principles of pragmatism. Pragmatism sees the relationship between theory and practice as bidirectional: all theories must be subjected to revision in light of practice but, at the same time, a crucial role of theories is to critique current practices. At the level of methodology this implies that theorizing must be tied to what people do. The second central feature of pragmatism is that human experience is a crucial starting point of inquiry; pragmatism is suspicious about universal solutions: theorizing should start from real-life contexts, which vary for cultural, historical and geographical reasons.

Our research began, on the one hand, with existing theorizations of citizenship and learning inspired by philosophical pragmatism and, on the other, the lived experiences of citizenship and learning in the various research contexts in Tanzania and Uganda. In addition to the broad conceptualization of citizenship as a legal status, participation and identity – widely discussed in both philosophy and development research – we particularly considered citizenship from the viewpoint of *practices* and learning from the viewpoint of reformulation of *habits*. The idea of citizenship as constructed in practices presented here is grounded in John Dewey's (1859–1952) concepts of the public, community and his theory of social nature of knowledge and action. It directs the focus to what people do in shared activities that relate to citizenship, as well as the ways and the arenas in which they interact with each other and with their environments. The concept of habit, in turn, refers to the "acquired predisposition to ways or modes of response" (Dewey 1922, 32). Habits are formed in experience, which the pragmatists understand as the interaction between the self and the environment (Hildreth 2012, 922–923). Habits and environments can change, and the conditions of such change are central in conceptualizing learning as the reformulation of habits.

In what follows, we first provide a brief overview of the process that led to our definitions of the concepts of practice and habit. Initially, we had the idea of conducting research based on the concept of *growth into citizenship*, which we had developed by drawing on Dewey's theory of growth. As it turned out, this conceptualization had both benefits and limitations which related to the particular contexts and research phenomena under analysis. Second, based on the identified benefits and limitations, we describe the further developments of our framework by elaborating on our conceptualization of citizenship as constructed in practices, and learning as the reformulation of habits. We then reflect on the notion of circumstances in relation to citizenship habits and practices in the context of sub-Saharan Africa. In conclusion, we provide a summary of the definition of citizenship used throughout this volume.

Growth into citizenship – advantages and limitations

Our initial, broad aim was to provide a theoretical account of how one *learns* to be a citizen in various contexts in Tanzania and Uganda. We started the project by drawing theoretical notions from Dewey's work, suggesting the notion of *growth into citizenship* as a new theoretical approach to these contexts (Holma, Kontinen & Blanken-Webb 2018). We explicated that Dewey's concept of growth is founded in the dynamics between three central elements: "habit", "disruption" and "aesthetic response", demonstrating that, according to this theory, habits channel daily practices and thoughts, and allow human beings to think and act efficiently and productively. People are not usually conscious of their habits in their everyday lives, but realize them when their ways of acting and thinking face a disruption. A disruption presented, for example, by a new situation, disorganizes existing habits, to which an individual can respond in many ways. The response, for its part, is aesthetic when it leads to the reformulation of habits in a way that enables further growth (ibid., 222–225).

Dewey's view combines his theory of the interplay between habits, disruptions and aesthetic responses with what could be called an anti-foundational but normative view of growth (Hildreth 2009, 796), which distinguishes growth from other versions of learning. Growth is anti-foundational in the sense it is not tied to any predefined ends; on the contrary, ends are always ends-in-view that depend on the context (Hildreth 2009, 795–796; Holma, Kontinen & Blanken-Webb 2018, 226). Dewey argues that predefined ends are actually fundamental obstacles to growth (ibid., 226; Dewey 1916, 107–108). This distinguishes growth from learning ideals which include a specific target: for example, views in citizenship education which entail predefined definitions, such as formulating the "active citizen" as a person who is motivated and capable of pursuing the aims of deliberative democracy or making explicit claims towards the power-holders. Nevertheless, the definition of growth is itself also normative in the sense that learning can only be defined as growth when it enables further growth and increases the ability to make change in one's environments (Nelsen 2016, 239; Holma, Kontinen & Blanken-Webb 2018, 226).

During the process of developing the conceptualization of growth into citizenship, in dialogue with real-life contexts of our research, we identified some benefits and some problems. The idea of not grounding normativity of growth in predefined ends but in context-dependent "ends-in-view" defined in joint negotiations, resonated with our idea that ideals of citizenship are something continuously defined and negotiated in contextual practices. However, we realized that the Deweyan normative stance of growth as a particular kind of learning confronted philosophical difficulties when brought into Tanzanian and Ugandan contexts. Whether a process of learning really amounts to growth, especially when it involves an increase in the ability to make change in one's environment, is so deeply dependent on circumstances that it seemed problematic to define something as growth or not growth based on Dewey's normative criteria. Consequently, we realized that the proposed framework needed serious sensitivity to larger societal dimensions. Although Dewey (1922, 76–78) discusses, at a general level, the difficulty of rapid social change in the context of institutions that embody habits, in our view his theory does not pay sufficient attention to the contextual content of the circumstances of practices where the citizenship is constructed.

Furthermore, at the level of conducting empirical research it proved difficult (or even impossible) to track processes of growth, whether from the narratives of people, by conducting surveys or through observation. Such processes are hard to observe in everyday life within the limited time allocated for fieldwork. Moreover, in regard to interviews, rare is the occasion when someone is both aware of, and able to articulate, the process whereby existing habits had faced disruption, and then been reformulated to expand the possibilities of action and enable further growth.

Based on these observations, we shifted the focus of our experiment away from growth as we became increasingly aware of the importance of understanding the nature of habits and the process of their acquisition in the course of everyday practices. Moreover, we decided to pay more attention to the circumstances of the practices. Ultimately, our attempt to bring into dialogue the conceptualization of growth into citizenship and the real-life situations of our research contexts led us to focus more on what we now term practices, habits and circumstances.

Citizenship as constructed in practices

In developing our approach to citizenship as constructed in practices, our starting point was the Deweyan idea of citizenship as manifesting in different kinds of communities where people participate in their everyday lives (Dewey 1927, 238–366). The proposed notion of citizenship as constructed in practices differs from the common term of "citizenship practices" (Wiesner et al. 2018) used in reference to activities such as voting or deliberating on public decision making, which are closely connected either to ideas of citizenship as a status or active participation in public affairs. The notion suggested here

rather refers to any kind of practice where people participate in their everyday lives and which constitute their lived experiences of citizenship. Ideas related to citizenship as lived experience are, nevertheless, not new either to recent citizenship studies or development research. Therefore, in this section, we elaborate on our conceptualization vis-á-vis some current theoretical tendencies in these fields.

In her entry, "Citizenship", in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Dominique Leydet (2017) divides the contemporary discussion of the notion of citizenship into three dimensions: 1) "legal status, defined by civil, political and social rights"; 2) political agency, that is, citizens actively participating in a society's political institutions; and 3) membership in a community that "furnishes a distinct source of identity". These three dimensions relate to the traditional distinction between theoretical approaches to citizenship in the political sciences: liberalism, republicanism and communitarianism, with liberalism focusing on rights, republicanism stressing active participation, and communitarianism paying attention to aspects of belonging and identity (Björk et al. 2018, 17; Gaventa 2004). Recent debates in citizenship studies, however, have argued for an "expansion of the concept of citizenship" (Isin & Nielsen 2008, 1; Isin & Nyers 2014, 8). This refers, first, to distancing the concept of citizenship from the traditional notion based on the civil, political and social rights of an individual vis-á-vis the state (e.g. Marshall 1950), and the inclusion of sexual, cultural and environmental rights; and second, redefinition of the political communities from whom these rights are claimed and exercised to include more local communities on the one hand, and regional (e.g. European Union) and global entities, on the other. Therefore, a "recentering" and "thick contextualization" of the concept has been suggested on the grounds that contemporary citizenship is always related to specific "political projects, particular social contexts, and distinctive cultural configurations" (Clarke et al. 2014, 9).

In the field of development research, the rights-based view resonating with the liberal perspective has been prevalent, accompanied by republican ideas of participation and engagement, as well as more radical views on transformative citizenship (Hickey & Mohan 2004). However, there have also been calls for more nuanced conceptualizations of citizenship, starting from the experiences and perspectives of the people concerned rather than from theoretical frameworks, especially but not exclusively with regard to citizenship as membership and identity.[1] For example, Kabeer (2005, 3) emphasizes the importance of investigating how "people define themselves in different contexts, how they see themselves in relation to others, and what this implies for their understanding of citizenship *in the world as they know it*" (emphasis added). Here, the focus should be on the *meanings* and *experiences* of citizenship in "different parts of the world". In a similar vein, the anthropology of citizenship (Lazar 2012; 2013; Lazar & Nuijten 2013) has argued for focusing on experienced citizenship rather than ideal theoretical models of it.

Thus, our pragmatist starting point was to explore what we call the "lived experiences of citizenship", is in line with recent debates in citizenship studies, development research and the anthropology of citizenship. Following Clarke et al. (2014, 141), who suggest a focus on "communities of citizenship", we examined citizenship in social contexts, starting with significant and meaningful arenas. These were identified based on interviews wherein participants were first asked to identify groups and communities in which they participate, and then to describe their perceived significance and the actual ways they took part. The groups comprised, for instance, local communities through residence, religious communities, self-help groups, economic associations and ethnic cultural groups (Nguyahambi et al. 2017). Moreover, in line with the arguments presented in development studies, pragmatist notions lead us to attend to people's own experiences and definitions of citizenship. These largely revolved around the idea of citizenship as membership and identity in the cases analyzed, whereas citizenship as a legal status was discussed mainly in relation to a voter's identification card. It also became apparent that participation was mostly geared towards the meaningful communities mentioned above; participation in what is traditionally referred as the public sphere – that is, being active in local politics, or engaging in political claim making (Gaventa 2004) – was not so prevalent within the contextualized experiences among our research participants.

Against this backdrop, we argue that Deweyan pragmatism enables an expanded and contextualized conceptualization of citizenship. In order to explore more deeply what this theory implies, Dewey's notions of *the public* and *community,* as well as his theory of the *social nature of human knowledge and activities* are central. In his use of *public,* Dewey refers to people jointly taking part in activities of different kinds with the aim of taking care of shared issues; public thus refers to the sphere of activity wherein various communities go about their business of taking care of shared issues. A *community,* on the other hand, refers to the group of people participating in this kind of joint activity (Dewey 1927, 278). In one larger society, there are many different kinds of communities related to different kind of shared issues and joint activities, which can also be related to each other; concomitantly, one person can be a member of many communities. As Melissa Williams writes:

> [W]e find ourselves in webs of relationships with other human beings that profoundly shape our lives, whether or not we consciously choose or voluntarily assent to be enmeshed in these webs. What connects us in a community of shared fate is that our actions have an impact on other identifiable human beings, and other human beings' actions have impact on us.
>
> (Williams 2003, 229)

Dewey's framing of the public does not involve a public / private dichotomy; his philosophy rejects the idea that only public sphere activities can be

considered citizenship-related, and stresses the intertwined nature of the two spheres when participating in different kinds of communities taking care of shared concerns (Dewey 1927, 235–253). This view has proved useful in analyzing the empirical contexts of our research, as these dimensions are often intertwined in peoples' everyday lives; one also acquires important citizenship habits in the sphere that some other theories consider private. Dewey's formula does not include this dichotomy because his theorizations of citizenship do not set out from state-level democratic arrangements but, rather, begin with the notion of community. From this starting point, citizenship is also seen as participation in what are sometimes considered private sphere activities (like family life), daily work and duties, and other activities related to the arts, science and so on (ibid., 253).

This approach, that of citizenship constructed in practices, is further enriched by Dewey's suggestion that human knowledge and action are fundamentally social (Dewey 1916, 304; 1934, 251; 1938a, 482; 1938b, 22; Kauppi, Holma & Kontinen, this volume). Thus, rather than thinking about citizenship in relation to individual identity, action or choice, it should be envisaged along the lines of joint and shared activities. Dewey's thinking is especially compatible with the overall idea of the primacy of the community over the "individual" when it comes to citizenship in Africa. As, for instance, Englund (2004, 3) argues, in the historically specific modes of belonging in Africa, individual citizenship is "merely one instance among many of claiming recognition" and, therefore, any theoretical framework guiding empirical investigation should not start only with the idea of the individual citizen.

Another important difference from other prevalent citizenship theories is that our notion does not draw a sharp distinction between political and social activities. For example, Isin and Nielsen (2008, 2) distinguish between social practices and *citizenship* acts, with the latter referring to collective or individual deeds that in some way "instantiate ways of being that are political". In contrast, we, like Dewey, think that the political is so deeply rooted in the social that a strong distinction appears artificial. Dewey's views resonate with the distinction made between "broad" and "narrow" conceptions of the "political", something also stressed by feminist scholars of citizenship (Lister 1997, 25). The narrow conception refers to traditional participation in political institutions, while the broad regards the public, private and even intimate spheres as political. In the broad view, "public sphere" does not only refer to political institutions, but encompasses "the myriad of voluntary associations of civil society, most particularly the kinds of campaigning and community groups" (ibid., 29).

The broad conception of "political" has especially made women's invisible citizenship actions visible, but it can be also understood as more general basis for broad notion of citizenship. Communitarian frameworks argue that "citizenship activities" are those that maintain the community and its "shared beliefs and values" (Voet 1998, 10), rather than only consisting of overtly political activities of claim making. In a similar vein, Clarke et al. (2014, 132)

point out that citizenship occurs "in the variety of daily, routine or more exceptional practices of citizenship across a diversity of levels, sites and places that are differently connected". Therefore, Dewey's criticism of the private /public distinction and his wide conceptualization of public affairs together offer a contribution to these debates by highlighting that not all practices where citizenship is constructed, are political in the narrow sense. Therefore, in addition to enhancing the view of citizenship as membership, the Deweyan perspective expands the understanding of citizenship as participation in any public affairs, which enables the examination of citizenship in a context relevant to people's experiences. The downside of this, however, is that considering participation in any public affairs or in solving social problems as the practice of citizenship can all together mask the political dimension related to state-citizen power relations, or the struggle over hegemony of different interests in the course of negotiation (Holma & Kontinen 2015).

Habits and learning

One of our aims in the research process was to gain a new understanding of how citizenship is learned. In the beginning, we identified two challenges in contemporary conceptualizations of learning in regard to educational interventions geared to fostering "active citizenship" in international development (Holma, Kontinen & Blanken-Webb 2018). First, while a wealth of learning approaches focus on transformative learning (Skinner et al. 2016), there is a need for a conceptualization of learning that is sensitive to gradual changes, incremental learning and obstacles to learning (Holma, Kontinen & Blanken-Webb 2018, 219–220). Second, in contrast to one-off training approaches, there is a need for both theoretical and practical approaches to understanding learning as embedded in everyday practices (ibid., 220–222). In order to address these challenges, we based our exploration of learning on the pragmatist concept of habit.

In general, all action and thinking is channelled through habits, which are not necessarily observable acts; rather, they are "predispositions to act" in a certain way in certain situations (Dewey 1922, 32). Habits are formed in a particular cultural and social context (Dewey 1927, 334–335) and are ways of thinking and acting that one has consciously or unconsciously learned in existing material and social circumstances. They are not something of which one is usually consciously aware; quite the contrary, in everyday life, habits are mostly unquestioned. Habits are both things that cannot be escaped, yet, at the same time, can be changed under suitable conditions. In Dewey's words: "The organic structure of man entails the formation of habit, for, whether we wish it or not, whether we are aware of it or not, every act effects a modification of attitude and set which directs future behavior" (Dewey 1927, 334–335).

The Deweyan notion of experience may be useful in understanding the nature of habits as well as the process of their formulation. Human experience

can be described as an interaction between the environment and the self. The environment involves both material and social reality, including human activities, and it is in this interaction that habits are formed; however, it is possible to change both the self and environments (Hildreth 2012, 922–923), with changes in one resulting in changes in the other, while both existing habits and the environments can expand or narrow the possibilities of change. The self, in this view, does not refer to an isolated individual, but is, as Hildreth (2012, 922) puts it, "habitual and social".

The concept of habit is central to conceptualizing learning at many different levels; almost all human activity has to be learned, individuals learn new habits both consciously and unconsciously, and habits may change quite radically, on reflection, when they confront a disruption. However, habits do not change easily. The concept of habit provides a way to theorize around two crucial questions in development research: why changing citizenship practices through interventions is so difficult (Pettit 2016), and how a change of habits might be triggered by presenting adequate disruptions to current ways of thinking and acting. The following quotation describes one reason why "citizenship habits", embedded in politically, morally and culturally formed opinions, may be especially difficult to change:

> Habits of opinion are the toughest of all habits; when they have become second nature, and are supposedly thrown out of the door, they creep in again as stealthily and surely as does first nature. And as they are modified, the alteration first shows itself negatively, in the disintegration of old beliefs, to be replaced by floating, volatile and accidentally snatched up opinions. [. . .] In social and human matters, especially, the development of a critical sense and methods of discriminating judgment has not kept pace with the growth of careless reports and of motives for positive misrepresentation.
>
> (Dewey 1927, 336–337)

From the pragmatist point of view, learning as a reformulation of habits is not primarily an individual but a social phenomenon. In reference to our discussion of the social nature of intelligence in pragmatism (Kauppi, Holma & Kontinen, this volume), learning as both the acquisition and reformulation of habits takes place in interaction with others and, moreover, in an active relationship with both the social and the material environment (Miettinen 2006). In the context of learning citizenship, the environments that have constituted political circumstances are also relevant, in addition to local practices. Even if considerable learning of citizenship habits takes place in the course of local practices that revolve around public affairs and social problems, these practices interact with historically formed state-citizenship constellations and institutionalized habits that can both expand or narrow the directions of learning.

Circumstances of practices and habits of citizenship in sub-Saharan Africa

Pragmatism stresses the need for theorization to start from practice, from what people do. There are different interpretations in pragmatism about the role and nature of practices in theorizing but the main idea is that theory and practice are "responsive to each other in an ongoing interaction" (e.g. Talisse 2005, 98). This springs from one of the most essential ideas of pragmatism, *fallibilism* (Peirce 1934, 135–189), meaning that all our beliefs, perceptions and theories are liable to error, and implying that all theories must be submitted to critique and revision; one important source of the former is practice. The other side of the coin, however, is that one role of theorizing is to critique current practices.

As a methodological starting point, we found this pragmatist idea relevant in terms of the concept of citizenship, especially as citizenship (almost always) has a normative element; its definitions involve a normative dimension of what citizenship should ideally be. Philosophical accounts of citizenship may be idealistic in the sense that they are constructed by philosophers with little connection to the everyday life about which they are theorizing, and therefore, have insufficient reflection on the realizability of ideals. Yet, although the very point of an ideal is that it will not be fully realized, it must nevertheless be something which can guide thought, feeling and action (Huhtala & Holma 2019, 175; Jaggar 2014, 35). In some cases an ideal can be suited to one context, but faces the problem of being too distant from real-life practices in another. In order to take a critical stance on either kind of ideal, we focused on actual citizenship practices and the habits acquired and reformulated in these particular practices, from a non-normative position. From there we followed Talisse's (2005, 98) statement that "responsible theorizing, especially about political matters, must remain closely tied with what we do".

Practices are located and habits developed within particular circumstances, and a change of habits goes hand in hand with the change in circumstances. In Dewey's words, they depend "upon the environment inherited from our forerunners" and "incorporate objective conditions in themselves" (Dewey 1922, 19). During our research project it became evident that the historically evolved characteristics of sub-Saharan African experiences of citizenship differ so crucially from, for instance, those of the United States and Europe, that these characteristics deserve closer attention in theory building. For example, in contemporary theoretical debates, the need to expand the concept of citizenship has often been related to the changing "realities of the modern pluralistic society" (Kymlicka & Norman 2000, 8). The argument is that the goals of citizenship and the means of promoting it should increasingly take into account ethnic and religious diversity, including new minorities resulting from immigration. In contrast, for many of the sub-Saharan countries, this has been a normal situation for centuries. Different ethnic groups, languages

and religions co-existed long before the establishment of nation states and continue to play an important role in people's experiences of identity and belonging; indeed, our own empirical investigations demonstrated that ethnic, linguistic and religious plurality was part of the everyday life of citizens, and constituted the main arenas of participation and identity.

African studies literature tends to suggest that African politics "poses formidable barriers to active citizenship" (Bratton 2013, 3). Taking into account the role played by the colonial and post-colonial history of state formation in the constitution of citizenship, Chabal (2009, 47) argues that Africans are simultaneously treated by the state as subjects with minimal power, clients constantly establishing reciprocal relationships with "Big Men" and citizens (at least when it comes to the act of voting). Moreover, as long as the state does not provide space for participation or sufficient social protection (Green 2012) there is a need to seek them from, and therefore identify with, spheres of clientelism, ethnicity and religion. Chabal (2009, 12) goes so far as to claim that the African state – and thus citizenship – necessarily reflects the patrimonial nature of local politics, wherein the state is not institutionally functional. Instead of the state, the politics of belonging are geared toward kin, ethnic groups and reciprocal neo-patrimonial networks, which all revolve around a notion of *obligation* rather than rights, power hierarchy rather than equality (ibid., 2009). Moreover, some African studies scholars (Bøås & Dunn 2013; Geshiere 2009) emphasize autochthony (being born from the soil), the idea that one is entitled to belong because of ancestral rights to land gained by "being there first" – the claim being "this in ours because we were here first" – linking people's identity to space and location. This became evident in our empirical exploration, as people in rural areas quite routinely spoke of "citizenship" in terms of residence in a certain location (Ahimbisibwe et al., this volume). Taken together, insights drawn both from the African studies literature and our own empirical work emphasize the importance of paying rigorous attention to environments and circumstances when using a pragmatist approach to citizenship.

Conclusions

In this chapter, we have provided a background for the methodological principles we have followed, and a conceptual contextualization of the notion of citizenship and learning as defined in this volume. We started with the idea of taking seriously two key ideas of pragmatism: valuing human experience as an important source of knowledge, and beginning our theorizing about social matters with what people actually do.

Based on philosophical pragmatism, we also elaborated on the notion of citizenship as constructed in practices. Our interpretation is based on Dewey's concepts of public and community, where *public* is the sphere where people attend to shared issues by participating in various *communities*. We suggested that the viewpoint of practices to citizenship enables the analysis of

citizenship in all its three dimensions – legal status, participation and membership – especially helping to achieve a broader understanding of participatory and membership dimensions. This is mainly because citizenship as interpreted in this chapter do not necessary revolve around politics and claim making, but include different kinds of joint activities through which people address shared issues.

Our approach to learning is based on a pragmatist interpretation of the concept of *habit*. Broadly speaking, habits are people's consciously or unconsciously accepted dispositions to act and think. The acquisition and reformulation of habits can be conceived of as learning, which may happen either unconsciously or as a reflective response to disruption. By participating in the public in various communities, people acquire habits which can be utilized in other practices, including the arenas of citizens' engagement and citizenship acts of rights claiming. We also pointed out that citizenship habits and practices are formed in interaction with environments and circumstances, and, therefore, reflect the particular context of sub-Saharan Africa.

In conclusion, the definition we provided, based on pragmatism, understands citizenship as constructed in practices taking place in communities involved in a public, thus, in joint activities with an aim of taking care of shared issues. In these practices, citizenship habits are both acquired and reformulated, thus, learned. Circumstances, referring to the institutionalized habits of state-citizen relationships and habits of people's organizing, connect local and everyday experiences to the historical continuum, affecting which practices become relevant and what kinds of habits are the most likely to be learned. This conceptualization will guide the analysis in the empirical chapters of this volume engaging with different practices and citizenship habits learned in a variety of local contexts.

Note

1 For example, the extensive research conducted in the Center on Citizenship, Participation and Accountability in the Institute of Development Studies, Sussex, in 2000–2010, elaborated on a range of understandings of citizenship in the development context. The resulting book series, *Claiming Citizenship* (Zed Books), aims to challenge liberal understandings and "give a more robust understanding of citizenship as a multidimensional concept, which includes the agency, identities and actions of the people themselves" (Gaventa 2005, xii).

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