

## CONCEPT FORMATION IN THE WILD

Concept formation is predominantly analyzed in classrooms and laboratory experiments, meaning that the collective formation of culturally novel concepts in practical activities “in the wild” has largely been neglected. However, understanding and influencing the complexity and contradictions of the present world demands powerful concepts that can make a difference in practice. Going beyond the understanding of concepts as individually acquired static labels, this book develops a dialectical theory of collective formation of novel concepts in the wild, in everyday activities. Drawing on cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT), concepts are seen as contested and future-oriented means for guiding activities and their transformations. Detailed real-life examples of germ cell concepts show how they can radically influence the course of development in different activities. Helping to identify and foster the formation of potentially powerful concepts in fields of practice, this book is essential reading for researchers, advanced students, and practitioners across human and social sciences.

YRJÖ ENGSTRÖM is Professor Emeritus of Education at the University of Helsinki and Professor Emeritus of Communication at the University of California San Diego. He is Director of the Center for Research on Activity, Development and Learning (CRADLE) at University of Helsinki and a visiting professor at Rhodes University, South Africa, and University West, Sweden. Engeström applies and develops CHAT and the theory of expansive learning in studies of transformations in education, work, and communities. He is known for the methodology of formative interventions and the Change Laboratory. His recent books include *Learning by Expanding* (2nd ed., 2015), *Studies in Expansive Learning* (2016), and *Expertise in Transition* (2018), all published by Cambridge University Press. Engeström received an honorary doctorate from the University of Oslo in 2005 and from the University of Ioannina, Greece in 2018. In 2021 he received a lifetime achievement award from the Cultural-Historical Research Special Interest Group of the American Educational Research Association.



# CONCEPT FORMATION IN THE WILD

YRJÖ ENGSTRÖM

*University of Helsinki*



**CAMBRIDGE**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS



CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom  
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA  
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia  
314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi – 110025, India  
103 Penang Road, #05–06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of Cambridge University Press & Assessment,  
a department of the University of Cambridge.

We share the University's mission to contribute to society through the pursuit of  
education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781316516706](http://www.cambridge.org/9781316516706)

DOI: [10.1017/9781009030021](https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009030021)

© Yrjö Engeström 2024

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions  
of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take  
place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press & Assessment.

When citing this work, please include a reference to the DOI [10.1017/9781009030021](https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009030021)

First published 2024

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.*

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

NAMES: Engeström, Yrjö, 1948– author.

TITLE: Concept formation in the wild / Yrjö Engeström, University of Helsinki.

DESCRIPTION: Cambridge, United Kingdom ; New York, NY : Cambridge University Press, 2024. |

Includes bibliographical references and index.

IDENTIFIERS: LCCN 2023058120 (print) | LCCN 2023058121 (ebook) | ISBN 9781316516706  
(hardback) | ISBN 9781009015998 (paperback) | ISBN 9781009030021 (epub)

SUBJECTS: LCSH: Concepts. | Knowledge, Theory of. | Learning, Psychology of.

CLASSIFICATION: LCC BF443 .E54 2024 (print) | LCC BF443 (ebook) |  
DDC 153.2/3–dc23/eng/20240119

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2023058120>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2023058121>

ISBN 978-1-316-51670-6 Hardback

Cambridge University Press & Assessment has no responsibility for the persistence  
or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this  
publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will  
remain, accurate or appropriate.