Ellis, Viv; Edwards, Anne & Smagorinsky, Peter (Eds.) (2010)
Cultural-Historical Perspectives on Teacher Education and Development.
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This book presents a collection of research articles brought together by the editors to illustrate how cultural-historical perspectives on learning and development can be used to analyze current problems with pre-service teacher education: incongruities between the university setting and school contexts, privileging of certain forms of learning over others in different sites (i.e., traditional pedagogy, liberal pedagogy), and determining how knowledge is gained across a variety of settings and pedagogical beliefs. Furthermore, the editors suggest that cultural-historical perspectives offer a helpful way to conceptualize teacher growth and change over time and across settings, and point to possible designs for a different future.

In a brief introductory chapter in the book, the editors describe the family of cultural-historical perspectives on learning and development (e.g., sociocultural, cultural-historical, cultural-historical activity theory), providing a list of key cultural-historical ideas relevant to understanding teacher growth. While they acknowledge their oversimplification of these complex, dynamic theories, they briefly mention several concepts that can be problematic for the reader unschooled in cultural-historical perspectives (e.g., mediation, appropriation, abstract to concrete). I found myself asking: Will these concepts be clarified throughout the book, or is familiarity with cultural-historical perspectives necessary to understand the chapters include in this collection? As I moved through the collection of chapters, my concerns diminished. This collection serves to lay the foundational underpinnings of cultural-historical perspectives for those not familiar, and fills in gaps in understanding for those who consider themselves versed in cultural-historical perspectives.

As editors, Ellis, Edwards, and Smagorinsky organized thirteen chapters into three sections. Part one consists of five chapters, all pertaining to the social situation of teacher education. The four chapters in part two use cultural-historical perspectives as research methodology. And, part three includes four chapters describing potential sites of change in teacher education. Within each chapter, the author(s) start by clearly describing their theoretical perspectives, often deeply engaging the reader in one or two key concepts of cultural-historical theory. Next, the theoretical concept is brought to life through rich examples from their own research on teacher education. As the reader moves through each section, theoretical concepts from previous chapters resurface, reinforcing the readers understanding of both cultural-historical perspectives and issues in need of change in teacher education.

In this review, I will describe each of the three sections mentioned above, explaining strengths and weaknesses within the section and also pointing to contributions to the field. I will talk in more detail about some chapters, as I feel they are compelling, "must reads" for those engaged in

teacher education. For other chapters, I will briefly mention their content or purpose, although it must be duly noted that I found each chapter engaging and informative. Finally, I will provide some concluding remarks about this compilation of studies targeting the improvement of teacher education.

Part 1: The Social Situation of Teacher Development

The purpose of part one is to highlight the social situations in which teachers learn to become teachers. Most researchers are familiar with a socio-cultural perspective: learning does not occur in isolation within an individual, but socially as the learner engages with others (Rogoff, 2003). What is most poignant about the collection of five chapters in part one is how the author(s) move the reader from thinking about the individual learner as the unit of analysis, a typical Vygotskian perspective, to thinking about how the *activity* of the *collective* shapes learning and development, congruent with more recent generations of cultural-historical activity theory (e.g., Leont'ev, Engestrom). These chapters explicitly guide the reader through key tenets of socio-cultural learning through participation in on-going activity. A second strength of this section of the book is how the authors in each chapter immerse the readers in the historical context of the social situations for learning, emphasizing the importance of *history* in the theory. I find this particularly relevant as many researchers drawing on cultural-historical theories focus most of their attention on the *cultural* domain, neglecting to consider how meditational, learning tools have been developed historically. Without analyzing the historical implications of the different social situations of teacher education, it is difficult to envision potential changes in the activity of learning to teach. It is history that makes the activity system dynamic and able to sustain growth, a very promising idea for those engaged in teacher education.

Smagorinsky launches part one with a chapter highlighting the difference between Vygotsky's first generation cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) perspective on learning and development within the individual and Leont'ev's

second generation CHAT perspective on how the collective of individuals engaged in activity shapes learning. He applies it to a case study in which his participant honed her craft of teaching writing based on her own experiences of learning to write but also situated within the context of her school environment. Taking either approach shifts the unit of analysis from the individual to the collective, thus responding to different research questions. This chapter outlines the historical context in which Vygotsky and Leont'ev worked, helping the reader understand their shifts in thinking from individual to collective. Douglas moves into a focus on how the collective shapes teacher learning, examining how two different secondary school departments constructed different learning opportunities and outcomes for novice teachers. Making use of Leont'ev's activity triangle, Douglas focuses on the *object* of the activity system and how the tools used in each department (e.g., observations, handouts) shaped the purposes for teaching for the novices in the program, thus providing different learning trajectories for the participants. This chapter provides a rich description of the object, or purpose, of the activity system, revealing for the reader how different objects necessitate the use of very different tools for learning and lead to potentially different outcomes for the participants in the activity system. Edwards' chapter moves into the most recent generation of CHAT, expanded learning (Engestrom, 1987), with the purpose of expanding the object of teacher education. It is within this chapter that the reader is introduced to Engestrom's emphasis on using tools to ask "why" and "where" instead of asking "what" and "when" when considering new practices in teacher learning. Here the reader is provided a glimpse into how cultural-historical perspectives can be used to rethink the object of teacher education, and possibly expand it to design new approaches. The final two chapters in this section introduce the idea of how learning can be situated within discourses when teachers talk about children (Hjörne, Larsson, & Säljö) or about the curriculum (McNicholl & Childs). The social situation of learning to become a teacher occurs as a consequence of the history of the individual and of the collective, as the individual negotiates and participates across a variety of activity systems, and as the individual

engages in discourse and dialogue about students and curriculum.

Part 2: A Cultural-Historical Methodological Perspective

The second section of the book draws attention to how cultural-historical theories can also be used as research methodologies. While the authors in this section select and engage with some of the more obscure concepts in cultural-historical theories, they engage the reader with clear descriptions and relevant examples. My first impression of this section was that it seemed a rather haphazard collection of studies combining cultural-historical theory with a variety of other methodological approaches (e.g., conversation analysis, interaction analysis). Yet as I completed the section, I realized how well these chapters fit into previous ones devoted to understanding the object of the activity. Using cultural-historical perspectives as both theory and method helps make visible how the object of the activity in which teachers are engaged shapes their learning trajectories, which in turn shapes their future outcomes as teachers. This section also helps the reader begin to think about how using cultural-historical perspectives as a research tool can transform or expand the purpose of teacher education.

In the first chapter in this section, Ellis features the use of Vygotsky's double stimulation strategy (Vygotsky, 1978) as a research tool to determine how subjects pick up and use new tools, make sense of them, shape their activity with them, and possibly re-shape the meaning of their tools. Ellis reports on two studies using this methodology: one that introduced a drawing task as a second stimulus to elicit changes in thinking about teaching English and the other that used developmental work research (DWR) as an English department took on the task of generating change through the introduction of new conceptual tools. Here the unit of analysis is the process of engaging in a task rather than the outcome or product. Boag-Munroe's chapter explores how language mediates thinking in teacher/mentor interactions. Using both Conversation Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis allowed the author to examine different ways that

language was used to develop knowledge and build identities of teachers in the study. Boag-Munroe argues that to understand learning, one must understand how talk shapes learning.

Jahreie and Ottesen present their findings from a study looking at how teachers' learning trajectories were shaped as they moved across "learning spheres". In this study, teachers picked up and used different tools and resources as they negotiated a variety of historical scripts and systemic constraints across different activity systems. The authors conclude that it is important to understand and analyze how the meanings of object and the tools in the activity system or "learning sphere" are negotiated by teachers in the formation of knowledge. Finally, Sannino provides a compelling finish for this section with a chapter devoted to combining Davydov's theory of "rising from the abstract to the concrete" (Engestrom, 1999) with Leont'ev's object of the activity. Using data from a 5th Dimension school in Italy, Sannino demonstrates how teachers needed to make concrete their understanding of students by actually interacting with them instead of just reading about them in their university classes. The concept of rising to the concrete is a difficult one to understand, but Sannino provides rich examples and relevant data guiding the reader's understanding. As demonstrated in this section, certain concepts in cultural-historical perspectives serve the researcher as both guiding theory and as research methodology in understanding teacher education, and ways to elicit change.

Part 3: Cultural-Historical Designs for Teacher Education

The final section of the book features four chapters compiled by the editors to demonstrate transformed, innovative approaches to teacher education that are derived from using a cultural-historical theoretical perspective on teacher learning. All four of these chapters engage the reader in thinking about contradictions within and across activity systems as potential sites for change, a key tenet of Engestrom's third generation of CHAT. While this line of

research is potentially quite powerful for teacher education, the studies featured here report minimal success in actually producing positive change in the activity of teacher education. Instead, the strength of the chapters in this section is how they make visible the *potential* for change found within zones of contradiction within and across activity systems. This clearly lays the theoretical and methodological groundwork for future study in teacher education. Because the use of more recent generations of cultural-historical perspectives is relatively new in teacher education research, it is likely that the reader will indeed see such work in the near future. In the meantime, these four chapters provide insight into ways researchers and teacher educators can seek out and enrich zones of contradiction in order to provide space for expanding the object of teacher learning.

In the first chapter in this section, Jóhannsdóttir draws on Engestrom's expansive learning theory, using contradiction analysis to explore how teachers experience contradictions as they cross activity systems (e.g., university, school sites). The author clearly explains Engestrom's four levels of contradictions, both across and within activity systems, the individual, and the collective, and concludes that contradictions are potential sites for growth and development within the teacher education system. Liu and Fisher introduce incongruities between traditional and liberal pedagogy in China, suggesting the potential for conceptual change as individuals "boundary cross" across systems. The authors highlight the research on "cultural learning" and how learning occurs more readily when it aligns with one's situated beliefs and values. While this study does not feature ways to engage participants within the boundaries of different activity systems, its strength is in helping the reader recognize the potential for conceptual growth within the boundary zone. Norton-Meier and Drake use Gutierrez' idea of a 'third space' (Gutierrez, Baquedano-Lopez, & Tejada, 1991) and Moll's funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992) to explore the space created when the official activity system of the school meets the unofficial activity of the surrounding culture. In this study, three overlapping spaces (e.g., university, school, and community)

provide potential sites for third spaces to be created. Findings indicate that if resources are not exchanged between sites, a third space of learning and development will not occur. Finally, Max builds on the previous chapters by noting that the boundary zones may not always be conducive to expanded learning, but this can be enhanced if there is a boundary object in which participants feel compelled to engage. To expand the object of teacher education, researchers and teacher educators must seek out the contradictions within and across activity systems and find ways to use these contradiction zones to design new approaches to teacher learning.

Conclusion

One of the unstated messages this book relays to the reader is how the different strands of thought within cultural-historical perspectives influence each other dialectically (i.e., between the individual and the collective, between constraints and affordances within and across systems), empowering us to analyze teacher education from a variety of positions. It is evident that there are contradictions within and across activity systems designed to prepare novice teachers to teach. But what is left unclear in this book is what the purpose of teacher education *should* be. As Wardekker notes in the afterword of the book, learning is a normative concept and one which must be considered critically. For the editors and authors of this book, teacher learning "has an important part to play in shaping the social situation of development of students in schools and, in particular, how what matters in society is mediated by teachers" (p. 9). However, the use of cultural-historical perspectives toward changing teacher education presents its own contradiction. Engaging socially in activity certainly opens up the possibility for change as individuals pick up the resources and tools of the activity system, use them and potentially transform the tools to reflect shifts in the object of the activity. But, to what ends? Cultural -historical perspectives open up learning and development to unknown, uncertain outcomes. This seemingly weak link in cultural-historical perspectives can indeed be the catalyst for transforming the ways novice teachers approach teaching.

But, this can only happen when we make visible the contradictions in the current conceptualization of teacher learning. This book has done a good job of bringing these contradictions to light. It is my hope, and my belief, that future work in the field of teacher education can use cultural-historical perspectives to shape activity systems were the *object* of teacher learning becomes the "education for a citizenship that is engaged as well as critical" (p. 245).

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