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EDITORIAL

Addressing persistent inequities in education: A Cultural Historical lens

Monica Lemos

Colégio Rio Branco, São Paulo, Brasil

Patricia Martínez-Álvarez

Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, USA

It is with great enthusiasm that we, as guest editors, introduce this special issue on Cultural Historical Research. This issue draws from an effort to unite scholars from different career stages and expertise to collaborate by capturing existing knowledge and producing new ideas that can meaningfully contribute to today's education landscape.

Focused on exploring how Cultural Historical theories can address historical inequities in education, this special issue includes articles that derived from the mentor and mentee working group experience, which we organized as Co-Chairs of the Cultural Historical Research SIG during the AERA 2023 pre-conference annual meeting. The articles published here all have Cultural Historical Research as their backbone and are interdisciplinary in nature. While the idea for this special issue was born during the AERA 2023 pre-conference mentoring experience with the SIG, prior to publication, the studies were presented and discussed with Dr. Aydin Bal, professor of special education at the University of Wisconsin—Madison, during a paper session at the AERA 2024 conference in Philadelphia (Martínez-Álvarez & Lemos, 2024).

The groups of scholars that were involved in this effort worked together, mentoring and intellectually challenging each other, and contributing to imagining new possibilities to grow each other's fields and understandings while using a Cultural Historical lens. The different contributions we now introduce either zoom out to capture the larger scope of the theory taking on a macro perspective or zooming in to center

classroom or school situations, at a micro level.

While referring to formative interventions, Engeström (2008) and Vilela et al. (2020) state that the local bottom up or top-down changing efforts may result in solutions that conflict with practices, priorities or power constellations in the organizational contexts, leading to stagnated implementation and faded away solutions. It is also important to consider other Cultural Historical Research in the dynamics of macro and micro perspectives. Concerning such dynamics, Merçon (2023) points out that by juxtaposing layers of identity, a micro level challenges universal notions and depicts complex hybridization processes as well as individualization flows. The author insists that the macro without the micro can be superficial and even infertile because it does not recognize the power of the grassroots, where transformation can emerge. Inversely, the micro without the macro is naïve because it ignores the cultural historical and social context, the political-economic and cultural aspects that provide critical sense and its transformational power.

With that in mind, and as we collectively aimed at elucidating how Cultural Historical Research promotes equity and how it addresses the persistent injustices present in educational systems all over the globe, the special issue incorporates work representing various disciplines and includes the participation of scholars at various stages in their career. The authors of the five paper contributions collaborated to take into consideration the usefulness of using theories rooted primarily in the legacy of Vygotsky and Leontiev alongside other Cultural Historical scholars from more recent generations. This compilation of scholarly contributions holds the potential to create new theoretical understandings and conceptualizations to identify areas of need and move equity work in education that is based on Cultural Historical research forward.

This special issue is hence an invitation to examine and reflect upon the role of Cultural Historical Research in addressing persistent quality in education from a macro and a micro level. The studies on which the different contributions report, shed light on how Cultural Historical Research supports the surfacing of, and the engagement with, the inequities we increasingly and persistently see in educational systems. Such work holds potential to reshape how Cultural Historical Research tools are employed in education, promoting equitable learning opportunities for minoritized learners and their communities and their future teachers.

Therefore, the first article titled, “Special education services for students with disabilities experiencing houselessness: A systematic review” by Yehyang Lee (with the support and mentoring of Tamara Handy), provided a comprehensive picture of the research documenting the experiences of school-aged students with disabilities who are houseless in the USA public education system. Of particular interest was to use CHAT identifying contradictions/tensions within and between activity systems (i.e., schools, shelters, families, etc.), committed to supporting students at the intersection of houselessness and disabilities. This synthesis has implications for how schools and educators serve students at the intersections of disability and houselessness. The findings shed light on the critical role of schooling for students without house security who have disabilities.

The next article, by Inna Stepaniuk and mentor Beth Ferholt, showcases the potential of dialogue within Cultural Historical Research to enhance the understanding of and advocacy for inclusivity in schools in the article “Cultural historical research in support of inclusive classrooms: Two approaches in dialogue”. The authors engage in what they name “inclusive coauthoring,” approaching each other’s methodologies with an

asset-based, solidarity-seeking stance. The first author utilizes excerpts from an ethnographic study in an elementary classroom to demonstrate how Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) can elucidate the intricate dynamics of diverse classrooms, shedding light on mechanisms of inclusion/exclusion and identifying potential barriers (opportunities) to inclusive practices. The second author illustrates how a romantic science perspective can empower educators to cultivate inclusivity in ways unexplored before their deep engagement with the study. As these authors advocate for addressing inequities through CH Research, they defend creating solidarity across differences in the academy as well as outside it.

With the focus on learning identity, Socorro Orozco and mentor Aria Razfar propose to further investigate the cultural contexts under which math achievement gaps continue to persist in the U.S. The authors analyzed pre-service teachers' narratives that included a description of their math abilities, their perceptions of what it means to be a good mathematics student and the impact of parental/caregiver and teacher relationships on the development in mathematics identity. The analysis revealed three types of mathematics identities: positive, negative, and neutral and/or ambivalent. It also revealed two dimensions of mathematics identity development, the social and the ideal. The analysis pointed out that some classroom structures compel students to behave in ways that are supposed to demonstrate good mathematics learning practices; however, they often have the exact opposite to what they need. As educational policy moves towards more equitable mathematics instruction, it is imperative to analyze educational experiences and processes that provide a clearer view of culturally relevant and meaningful experiences for learning and teaching mathematics beyond identifying best practices.

In the article entitled “Augmenting bilingual preservice teachers’ articulation of teaching in a Change Lab: An art-mediated instrumental approach” Sharon Chang, Monica Lemos and mentor Artin Göncü investigated and integrated the overlooked knowledge and epistemologies of bilingual preservice teachers (BPSTs) into teacher preparation. To do so, they conducted a secondary analysis of pictures of participants’-generated Play-Doh structures and the written narratives the BPSTs created from a multi-year change laboratory (CL) intervention, which took place in one U.S. graduate-level practicum seminar, enabling the participants to tell their stories and express their voices in multimodal ways. By applying Rabardel’s (2001) notion of instrumentality to BPSTs’ imaginative work with Play-Doh, the study describes how the art-mediated instrumental approach supported the BPSTs to co-reflect on their articulation of teaching. The authors concluded that art-mediated expressions are instrumental in facilitating co-reflective thinking that gives teaching philosophy an articulatory form first in narrative and visual forms and then in future-oriented action. Thus, authors argue that cultural expressions can be mediated by art to shape and reshape BPSTs’ articulation of teaching and inform teaching philosophy.

The special issue closes with the article “Revitalizing Vygotskian radical legacy in Cultural Historical Research for addressing racial injustice in education” by Rebekah Pollock and mentor Dosun Ko, which aims to respond to recent calls for the revitalization of the Vygotskian radical legacy and the reclamation of critical uses of Cultural Historical Research through a retrospective analysis of two case studies. The first case study describes the development and application of a discourse-based formative intervention framework to reveal psychological processes associated with reimagining and enacting possible futures among early adolescent Black girls. The second presents the Future-

Making Learning Lab's efforts to address racial injustice in school discipline and empower parents and school personnel to collectively envision a culturally responsive, inclusive school system. Importantly, these case studies represented epistemological, methodological, and axiological expansions of formative intervention methodology through efforts to amplify the voices of participants and leverage their experiential knowledge through interactive participation structures and researchers' integration of critical theoretical lenses to devise and employ mediating artifacts. These, in turn, support participants' transformative agency to criticize current practices, ideologies, and structures, and imagine possible and more equitable futures.

Concluding Remarks

While much more needs to be done and said, these five contributions clearly challenge us to explore new arenas in education where there is need for change and how Cultural Historical Research can help us in doing this work. This special issue opens up an invitation for all CH researchers to continue to center equity in their work and to attend to Merçon's (2023) micro and macro levels to challenge universal notions to, instead, engage in hybrid processes. We encourage scholars to continue to explore how Cultural Historical tools can situate theory in praxis to consistently support our efforts to transform educational experiences for more just opportunities for minoritized learners and communities and their future teachers.

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About the Authors

Monica Lemos is a Pedagogical Coordinator at Colégio Rio Branco and an external researcher at University of Girona. She also contributes as a researcher for the Language and Activity in Educational Context, Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo, and Workers' health, University of São Paulo, research groups. Her scholarly interests are Cultural-Historical Activity Theory, Formative Interventions and Teachers' education. Corresponding author email: monica.lemos@gmail.com

Patricia Martínez-Álvarez is an Associate Professor of Bilingual/Bicultural Education at Teachers College, Columbia University. Her research examines the intersection of bilingualism/biculturalism and disability through cultural historical lenses. Dr. Martínez-Álvarez's research exposes the educational inequities that bilingual children with disabilities experience and advances the preparation of teachers for inclusive bilingual education.