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# Editorial

With this issue the journal *Critical Social Studies-Outlines* has a slight change of name. The journal has now found its feet – critical social studies come in the foreground, though still with outlines of new theoretical approaches.

Taken together the papers published in this special issue on development provide a distinctly new perspective on child development. From social activism to relational psychology, and from cross-cultural perspectives to an expansion of activity theory, these papers move the unit of analysis from the individual to the social contexts that children experience and shape.

In Vygotsky (1998, Volume 5) critique of psychology, he suggested, that there had been only two important conceptions of child development. He argued that one perspective viewed development as ‘nothing other than realization, modification, and combination of deposits. Nothing new develops here – only a growth, branching, and regrouping of those factors that were already present at the very beginning’ The second perspective viewed development as a ‘continuous process of self-propulsion characterized primarily by the continuous appearance and formation of the new which did not exist at previous stages’ (Vygotsky, 1998: 190). The latter perspective has dominated psychology for the past century. Vygotsky argued that both perspectives highlight a linear path where deviating from ‘the normal path’ can be considered as “diseases” of development’ (1998, p. 191). A view of child development as an evolving natural process is embedded within the institutionalised thinking of many European heritage

countries where professionals look for and expect particular behaviours, when they are not forthcoming, concern is expressed about the individual.

In this issue of *Critical Social Studies-Outlines*, Michalis Kontopodis also argues against this evolutionary perspective on development. In drawing upon performativity theory and actor-network theory, Kontopodis suggests that development has been conceptualised as a ‘performative’ concept with little attempt to analyse the developmental discourses which shape and maintain specific forms of ‘development’. Kontopodis argues that traditional discourses seek to represent development and to understand the Other, by working towards the documentation of a ‘single truth’. It is argued that even cultural-historical theorists have not been mindful of the discourses they construct and maintain through the process of researching development. Kontopodis argues for a relational theory of child development, where mediation is foregrounded – that is the relations between discourse and materiality. A relational view of development would see multiple realities, creating new relations between subjectivities and objectivities. Relational psychology would generate difference and novelty rather than the maintenance of developmental performativity, thus debunking the institutionalised normative effect.

At the time, Vygotsky argued for a different perspective of child development. He put forward a dialectical process ‘in which a transition from one stage to another is accomplished not along an evolutionary, but along a revolutionary path’ (1998, p. 193). Vygotsky

argued that a dialectical approach to development, invites the pedagogue to be continually projecting learning beyond the child's current capacities, but will do so in ways which connect with child's growing sense of themselves within their communities/institutions. Having a revolutionary perspective, allows teachers to foreground the social situation of development.

The social situation of development represents the initial moment for all dynamic changes that occur in development during the given period. It determines wholly and completely the forms and the path along which the child will acquire ever newer personality characteristics, drawing them from the social reality as from the basic source of development, the path along which the social becomes the individual. This, the first question we must answer in studying the dynamics of any age is to explain the social situation of development (Vygotsky, 1998: 198).

The social situation of a child is determined by the society and cultural context in which the child is embedded. Development is a relationship between the child and society. Development is not something that exists within the child, but rather takes place as the child interacts with her/his cultural community. When development does not proceed as expected in a society, it is not the fault of the child, but rather the relationship between the child and society (Hedegaard, 2005).

Rather than problematising the community, Hedegaard has examined the nature of institutions, their relations with society, and together notes how they shape children's development:

Children develop through participating in everyday activities in societal institutions, but neither society nor its institution (i.e. families, kindergarten, school, youth clubs etc.) are static but change over time in dynamic interaction between persons' activity, institutional traditions for practice, societal discourse and material conditions. Children's life and development is influenced by several types of

institutional practice in a child's actual social situation. But at the same time children's development can be seen as socio-cultural tracks through different institutions. Children's development is marked by crises, which are created through change in the child's social situation (Hedegaard, 2005: p.3).

Eugene Matusov, John St. Julien, Pilar Lacasa, and Maria Albuquerque Candela (in this issue) like Hedegaard have examined the communal character of development and have argued that traditional perspectives on development have framed children as deficient. Matusov et al., argue that an individualistic view of development has become institutionalised in many European heritage communities, and that learning is viewed as occurring solely within the head of an individual person. They argue that educators are predisposed to focussing on making desired changes within individual students using a deficit-oriented pedagogical regime, where development is framed as academic success or academic failure along the success-failure continuum. Matusov et al., present evidence of how the institutions sanction and maintain these developmental trajectories to the detriment of children with disability and difference. This perspective also mirrors longstanding cross-cultural research (see Flear, 2006a;b for an elaboration).

Cross-cultural research has provided evidence of many other constructions of development. For instance, Woodhead, Faulkner and Littleton (1998: 2) argue that although all children develop emotional attachments, learn language and develop reasoning, 'they take place within culturally regulated social relationships, and are mediated by cultural practices'. Woodhead, Faulkner and Littleton (1998) argue that these 'practices are in turn shaped by knowledge and beliefs about what is normal and desirable'. Indeed 'comparative material can lead us to reinterpret behaviours as cultural that we have assumed to be natural' (Schieffelin and Ochs, 1998: 50).

For example, 'stranger anxiety' in Western Kenya has been shown to be related to social niche not developmental norms (Super and Harkness, 1998), language acquisition in some villages in Papua New Guinea is related to social embeddedness of infants, rather than disembedded practices where language lessons are introduced (Schieffelin and Ochs, 1998), and variations in sleeping patterns of infants (US – 8 hours longest period of sleep and Western Kenya, 4.5 hours longest period of sleep) is significantly different across cultures (Super and Harkness, 1998).

Although extensive evidence now exists to demonstrate the multiple forms of development, many European heritage schools continue to privilege one view of development. Matusov et al., (this issue) argue that schools should become learning communities of social activists where the pedagogical regime is problematised. They argue that individual teachers are colonized by the curriculum, and like Kontopodis (this issue) argues, performativity to institutionalized benchmarks represent only one developmental trajectory. This institutional approach positions children as failures or as being successful. Louise Ammentorp (this issue) also suggests that schools should become communities of social activists through the building of social consciousness. She argues that policy imperatives in the USA, such as No Child Left Behind Act, actively label children as failures. Ammentorp argues that due to pressures for maintaining school funding, schools have concentrated upon curriculum that is only cognitively oriented. As with Matusov et al. Ammentorp notes that teachers' minds have been colonised by curriculum and its measurement in terms of student performance. That is, performance which is measured against a traditional perspective on human development. In the US, this measurement is further refined in terms of what is valued (eg literacy and numeracy) and what holds less value (eg the Arts). Am-

mentorp argues that when youth growing up in poverty experience a more broadly defined and community based educational program then aspirational values are foregrounded and these values-oriented elements of societal and family contexts are not considered in evolutionary developmental frameworks currently sanctioned in the US

Social activism within the context of development has also been noted in research undertaken by Anne Edwards and Apostol Apostolov (this issue). Edwards and Apostolov discuss the concept of resilience within the context of a belief that resilience includes developing a capacity to act on and reshape the social conditions of one's development. In drawing upon Leont'ev's writing in relation to the object, and Vygotsky's concept of the social situation of development, Edwards and Apostolov argue for the importance of relational agency for intervention work. Here relational agency denotes the capacity for professionals to recognise, draw upon and contribute to preventing social exclusion. This distributed expertise includes aligning interpretations of the problem of practice across professional organisations. This perspective lies in strong contrast to that of traditional thinking about intervention services in the UK. Edwards and Apostolov argue that new thinking focuses on resilience, which is now recognised as a dynamic process of interaction between contexts and relationships rather than being viewed as individuals' personal attributes. Edwards and Apostolov state that a CHAT perspective pay attention to changing the conditions of children's development, rather than simply concentrating on changing children.

Like in the US, policy changes have been enacted in the UK for the social inclusion of disadvantaged children and youth. Unlike the US where curriculum narrowed (see Ammentorp, this issue), the UK professionals from all sectors of the community have had to re-think their views on children's development by

considering the totality of the child's life circumstances. Vygotsky and Luria (1994) have argued that 'from the very earliest stages of the child's development, the factor moving his activities from one level to another is neither repetition nor discovery. The source of development of these activities is to be found in the social environment of the child...' (p. 115).

In line with Edwards and Apostolov, a broader system view of development has also been examined. Louise Hardman (this issue) argues for the importance of situating general developmental principles within time and space and in drawing upon Engeström's and Bernstein's writings argues for a new methodological approach to the study of mediation in classrooms. She suggests that few activity theory researchers have focussed their attention on understanding the pedagogical activity in ways which provide a description of cognitive development that is both situated and historically embedded. She believes that activity theory bridges the gap between childhood studies and developmental theory.

Vygotsky used the term *perezhivanie* to articulate the dialectical relation between people and environment. As noted by Van der Veer, R., (2001) the concept of *perezhivanie* 'captures the idea of analysis in units rather than elements. Vygotsky emphasised that we cannot artificially separate subject and environment, but need to address both in their unity' (p.103). In this special issue of *Critical Social Studies-Outlines*, we note that each of the researchers have paid close attention to the dialectical relations between the environment and the children/youth, ensuring their unit of analysis goes beyond the individual. Through this expansive framing of their research, the social relations, institutional dimensions and community/cultural contexts have been captured and new perspectives on development have been outlined.

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