

CULTURAL-HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES ON TEACHER EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT

LEARNING TEACHING



EDITED BY
VIV ELLIS, ANNE EDWARDS
AND PETER SMAGORINSKY



Cultural-Historical Perspectives on Teacher Education and Development

Teachers, both in and beyond teacher education programmes, are continual learners. As society itself evolves, new settings and the challenges they provide require new learning. Teachers must continually adapt to new developments that affect their work, including alterations to qualification systems, new relationships with welfare professionals, and new technologies that are reconfiguring relationships with pupils.

Cultural-Historical Perspectives on Teacher Education and Development is an international volume that clarifies the purpose of initial (pre-service) teacher education and continuing professional development, and the role of universities and higher education personnel in these processes. An edited collection of chapters by leading researchers from the UK, the US and Europe, it gains coherence from its theoretical orientation and substantive focus on teacher learning. This book:

- demonstrates the contribution of sociocultural and cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) towards our understandings of teacher learning;
- offers a strong exemplification of a research focus on teachers as learners in specific sociocultural settings;
- shows what teachers learn, how they learn and where they learn, using specific research examples, in the context of broader interests in the development of professional practice and professional education.

As the only volume now available that applies CHAT principles to teacher education and learning, *Cultural-Historical Perspectives on Teacher Education and Development* will be highly useful for teachers and teacher educators undertaking postgraduate and doctoral studies, particularly in the area of professional learning and development. It will also be of relevance to the continuing development of teachers and other school-based professionals.

Viv Ellis is University Lecturer in Educational Studies at the University of Oxford, UK. **Anne Edwards** is Professor of Education in the Department of Education at the University of Oxford, UK, and a Visiting Professor at the University of Oslo, Norway. **Peter Smagorinsky** is Professor of English Education at the University of Georgia, USA.

Cultural-Historical Perspectives on Teacher Education and Development

Learning teaching

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Contributors

Viv Ellis is University Lecturer and Tutor for English Education at the University of Oxford. He is co-convenor of the Oxford Centre for Sociocultural and Activity Theory Research (OSAT) and chaired the 2008 international conference, ‘Sociocultural Perspectives on Teacher Education and Development’. He completed his PhD at the London Institute of Education and worked as an English teacher in secondary schools before moving into higher education. In his research, he maintains a focus on learning, subject English and the education of teachers from a CHAT perspective. With Brian Street and Carol Fox, he edited *Rethinking English in Schools* (Continuum 2008).

Anne Edwards is Professor and Director of the Department of Education at the University of Oxford, where she is also co-convenor of the Oxford Centre for Sociocultural and Activity Theory Research. She has written extensively on teacher education, professional learning and cultural-historical analyses of practices and learning. Her current research focuses on developing understandings of the relational aspects of expertise.

Peter Smagorinsky has taught in the English Education programmes at the University of Oklahoma (1990–1998) and University of Georgia (1998–present) since receiving his doctorate from the University of Chicago in 1989, following a career as a high school English teacher in the Chicago area. He has written on a variety of topics, including literacy across the high school curriculum, the teaching and learning of the English curriculum, the dynamics of small group and whole class discussions of literature, the composition of non-verbal texts across the high school curriculum, the discourse of character education, and related topics.

Gill Boag-Munroe undertook her PhD at the University of Birmingham, investigating how teacher-mentors constructed identities to assist their work in Initial Teacher Education. The research additionally aimed to

find ways to unpick the relationship between language and concepts that would assist sociocultural understandings of activity. Recent work, undertaken in partnership with Jan Georgeson (University of Chichester), has included developing a way to 'read' the buildings and spaces used in Early Years settings to understand how they construct identities for those using and working in them.

Ann Childs is University Lecturer in Science Education at the University of Oxford whose principal teaching responsibilities are in the initial teacher education and in the supervision of master's and doctoral students. Her main research interests are science teachers' professional knowledge and the ways in which this is developed in and by different contexts, and how technology, specifically the Internet, can be used to enhance teaching and learning in secondary science classrooms. Her research draws largely upon sociocultural theoretical perspectives.

Alaster Douglas has worked as a teacher and senior manager in four secondary schools in the UK, becoming a deputy head teacher in London. This position, being responsible for staff development, led him to be particularly interested in the role schools play in developing student teachers. He completed an MA in Education (Publishing) and an MSc in Educational Research Methodology before undertaking doctoral research at the University of Oxford. In September 2009, he took up the position of Senior Lecturer in Education and Professional Practice at Roehampton University.

Corey Drake is Associate Professor of Mathematics Education at Iowa State University. As a researcher and a teacher educator, her primary interest is in supporting teachers in learning to incorporate new resources into their teaching. These resources include family and community funds of knowledge, as well as new curriculum materials, policies and teaching practices. Recent publications span the areas of mathematics education, curriculum studies and teacher education.

Linda Fisher is Lecturer in Education at the Faculty of Education at the University of Cambridge. She co-ordinates the initial teacher training programme for Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) and is involved in extensive work with secondary school teachers of MFL. She jointly plans and delivers faculty-wide mentor training, and teaches and supervises on the MEd, MPhil and PhD programmes. Research interests are primarily in language learner motivation and teacher education. She has experience of qualitative and quantitative research projects and is co-director of the DCSF-sponsored research project 'Language learning at Key Stage 3: the impact of the Key Stage 3 Modern Foreign Languages Framework and changes to the curriculum on provision and practice'.

Eva Hjörne is Associate Professor in Education at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden. Her main interests are in the analysis of learning and social interaction, processes of marginalisation and mediated action with special focus on categorising and identity formation of pupils in school. Her current research project includes meetings between experts in school (so-called ‘pupil health team’ meetings) when negotiating and identifying who is in need of special services and what pedagogical implications this will have when pupils, for instance, are placed into special teaching groups.

Cecilie Flo Jahreie is completing her PhD at InterMedia, University of Oslo, Norway. Before starting her doctoral studies, she worked as a researcher at InterMedia and Network for IT-Research and Competence in Education (ITU), University of Oslo. Currently, her research focus is on student teachers’ learning trajectories between university and schools from an activity theoretical perspective. Her interest is in studying how individuals work discursively, and how talk is regulated in terms of social, cultural and historical relations.

Thurídur Jóhannsdóttir is Lecturer in Educational Studies in the School of Education at the University of Iceland. Her research focus is on information and communication technology and distance education. In 2002–2005 she was project coordinator of the research project LearnICT – using ICT in learning and teaching in Icelandic schools, funded by the Research Council of Iceland under the Information Technology research programme. She is currently finishing her PhD thesis on teacher education through distance learning. She has a background in language and literature and was Iceland’s representative in BIN, Nordic Child Cultural Research Network from 2001–2004.

Pernilla Larsson is a teacher and post-graduate student at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden. Her studies include analysis of teaching and learning practices within special classes organised for children diagnosed with ADHD or Aspergers.

Yongcan Liu is Lecturer in Language Education at the School of Education and Lifelong Learning at the University of Exeter. He was trained as a linguist in China and received his PhD in education from the University of Cambridge. His doctoral research is an ethnographic study of teacher learning in the workplace in a university department. His recent research focuses on sociocultural theories of learning and narrative inquiry of intercultural communication. He is particularly interested in using community of practice and activity theories to look at issues related to educational change, teacher development and multi-agency workplace learning.

Jane McNicholl is Lecturer in Science Education at the University of Oxford; her principal teaching responsibilities are in initial teacher education. Her main research interest involves science teachers' professional knowledge and the ways in which this is developed in and by different contexts. Her research draws largely upon sociocultural theoretical perspectives.

Charles Max is Professor of Learning with Educational Media at the University of Luxembourg. His research interest is concerned with learning and development from sociocultural and cultural-historical perspectives, both at the organisational and individual levels. He leads the DICA media research group, which is focusing on digital media technologies, their design and the impact they have on learning, interaction and community building. He is also the scientific director of the innovative initial teacher education programme, Bachelor in Educational Sciences.

Lori A. Norton-Meier is Associate Professor in Literacy Education at the University of Louisville. As a classroom teacher, Lori taught for seven years in an urban environment, where many of her students lived in poverty and for whom English was a second language. This experience generated many questions and she has spent recent years studying students' literate lives in and out of school contexts. Her interests include early childhood literacy, family literacy and media literacy, particularly related to gender. She has multiple publications in literacy studies including a forthcoming book on ethnographic studies of family literacy in and out of school contexts.

Eli Ottesen is Associate Professor in the Department of Teacher Education and School development at the University of Oslo, Norway. Her doctoral dissertation (2006) was a study of student teachers' learning during internship periods in schools. Student teachers' and mentors' discourses were analysed in a sociocultural perspective. Her research interests are in the areas of workplace learning in schools, educational administration and leadership, and supervision.

Roger Säljö is Professor of Education and Educational Psychology at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden. His research interests include learning and interaction in a sociocultural perspective. During recent years he has worked with issues of integration and marginalisation in Swedish schools, in particular with reference to how teachers and other school staff interpret and attempt to remedy school difficulties. He is also director of a Linnaeus centre of excellence for research on learning and media.

Annalisa Sannino is Lecturer in the Center for Research on Activity, Development and Learning (CRADLE) at the University of Helsinki, Finland. She completed her PhD at the University of Nancy, France, and worked as a researcher at the University of Salerno, Italy. Her research is focused on discourse, experiencing, and learning in formative interventions in educational institutions and work organisations. She has published research articles in English, French and Italian. She is the leading editor of a special issue of the *Journal of Educational Change* (2008) on ‘activity theory and school innovation’ and the book *Learning and Expanding with Activity Theory* (Cambridge University Press 2009).

Willem Wardekker worked until recently as Professor of Education at the Department of Theory and Research in Education at VU University, Amsterdam, and at Windesheim University of Professional Studies, Zwolle, the Netherlands. For most of his professional life, he has carried out research in education from a cultural-historical point of view, specialising in the possible contribution of schools to identity formation, citizenship and moral education. Together with a number of Dutch teacher educators, he has recently co-published a book (in Dutch) on the education of teachers for Vygotsky-inspired primary schools. He is also a board member of the association of teachers in such schools.

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Introduction

Viv Ellis, Anne Edwards and Peter Smagorinsky

Teacher education has been constructed as a problem for almost as long as it has formally existed (Cochran-Smith and Fries 2005; Labaree 2004). The American Educational Research Association (AERA) Panel on Research and Teacher Education noted that, as a mode of professional formation and as a set of institutional practices, teacher education has been shaped in response to fundamental societal questions such as the nature of childhood and adolescence, the challenges of globalization, the rise of a professional class and the role of the state, as well as specifically educational concerns such as school effectiveness and teachers' impact on educational attainment (Cochran-Smith and Zeichner 2005; see also, for example, Furlong *et al.* 2000; Zeichner 2009).

The 'peculiar problem of preparing teachers' (Labaree 2004: 39) has played out rather differently around the world, but it is possible to discern a constellation of concerns that have achieved greater relative importance at different times and places. One of these might be posed as the question of the 'contribution' of higher education to the initial (pre-service) education of teachers. This concern speaks to the status of both teachers and teacher educators as professionals or academics as well as the kind of learning that is privileged. A related concern has been the nature of the association between the universities and the schools in teachers' learning processes. From this concern arise questions of 'partnership' and 'internship' or 'learning on the job'. Another has been an interest in teachers' uniquely 'professional' knowledge and, following on from this, questions about what, where and how teachers learn – and how their expertise and the development of their expertise might be conceptualized. Often, it seems, the capacity of individual teachers for reflection has been pre-eminent in answers to these questions.

Until relatively recently, much of the thinking about teacher education and development has been informed by dualistic understandings of the relationship between thought and action which seeks proof of the transfer of learning through the evident application of knowledge. From this perspective, teachers' minds become storage devices; university curricula and

mentor (supervisory) teacher feedback are inputs; classroom teaching and learning is the output. Highly valued outputs can then become codified into competence statements or professional ‘Standards’ either imposed by the state or developed from inside the profession by researchers. ‘Standards’ can then be employed to measure both teachers’ effectiveness and the quality of the teacher-education programmes they have followed.

We are less confident about the coherence and integrity of this way of thinking about teacher education than many policy-makers, and want to suggest a shift in perspective. The argument of this book is that a cultural-historical perspective on teacher education and development offers a powerful theoretical and methodological lens through which both to analyse the problem of teacher education and to design new curricula and programmes. The chapters come from a range of international authors who have been using cultural-historical theories to understand teacher learning and professional development, analyse relationships between universities and schools, interrogate the nature of teacher knowledge and expertise and seek to understand the potential of formative interventions into teacher education in developing a theory of practice. They do so across a range of different national contexts in Europe, the United States and China. Our book doesn’t claim to offer representative coverage of education systems worldwide; rather, the chapters raise interesting questions about teacher education and teacher learning, show how these questions play out in local settings and why a cultural-historical perspective helped each contributor to analyse the issues and act on them.

We next define what we mean by a cultural-historical perspective, outline how this perspective differs from vaguely ‘social’ theories of learning and suggest what some of the possible distinctions within the perspective might be.

A shift in perspective: Vygotsky and the cultural-historical line

Cultural-historical theory and cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) provide the perspectives on teacher education and development that inform each of the chapters in this volume. Sometimes, the authors use the term ‘sociocultural’ and it might be helpful to distinguish between uses at this point. Sociocultural, cultural-historical and CHAT all arise from the work of Vygotsky and his methodological interest in the mediation of human activity by physical or psychological tools. A sociocultural line has been taken up by educationalists, anthropologists, sociolinguists and others, and one of its distinguishing characteristics is the insight that social practices are situated and that people learn by engaging in these practices, working with the resources that are ‘stretched over’ (Lave 1988) specific settings for practice, settings that are in a dialectical relationship

with the cultural arena within which certain forms of identity are motivating.

Cultural-historical theory draws on key Vygotskian ideas about cultural development by placing a slightly different emphasis on mediation. Under a cultural-historical analysis there is an interest in the relationship between human consciousness and practical activity, an explicitly Marxist tenet: 'Consciousness does not determine life: life determines consciousness' (Marx and Engels 1845–6/1964: 37). Cultural-historical theory proposes that physical and psychological mediational tools are used to build cultures. Tool-use has a strongly historical dimension in that the tools have been imbued with meaning by past use and because new meanings can be embedded in them through present activity under evolving cultural conditions. Cultural tools therefore have a shaping function in terms of human activity but also can be re-shaped and cultures re-tooled. The historical development of human consciousness can therefore be traced through an analysis of cultural tools and the ways in which they function in a mediating capacity. This focus may concern both cultures and the settings that they provide for human action and individuals as they appropriate cultural tools through which to navigate their environments.

CHAT, like the cultural-historical line, takes on Vygotsky's interest in social and semiotic mediation but shifts the emphasis from individual to collective subjects. This shift is informed by the work of one of Vygotsky's students, A.N. Leont'ev, and his development of activity theory. Leont'ev distinguished between the individual subject's operations, the individual or group's goal-oriented actions and the level of collective activity given meaning by a shared object-motive.¹ CHAT might be distinguished from the broader cultural-historical line by both its collectivist perspective and its 'emphasis on action or intervention in order to develop practice and the sites of practice' (Edwards and Daniels 2004: 108). A major contribution to CHAT has been made by Yrjö Engeström, and it is Engeström's triangular representation of the activity system associated with his 'third generation' of activity theory that has often become associated with a CHAT perspective. However, key CHAT concepts can still be traced to Vygotsky's Marxist, developmental project, to Vygotsky's students and to Soviet philosophers such as Il'enkov (1977), who proposed that internal contradictions within activity systems might act as generators of change and the evolution of the system.

Presenting such 'potted' distinctions between members of the same family is risky in at least two respects: first, gross over-simplification; second, reifying the distinctions in unhelpful ways, especially when our concern in this book is with how a theoretical line that can be traced to Vygotsky is useful in thinking about the education, training and development of teachers. Rather, we see the differences as offering a rich 'conceptual tool box' (Edwards and Daniels 2004: 108) with which to answer some

of the vexing questions about how teachers learn and how they might learn better. For consistency's sake, we have adopted 'cultural-historical' as the framework that best reflects the perspectives of the book as a whole and hence its place in our title. Across the various chapters, however, the different emphases are apparent; a few chapters are more sociocultural and others are written from a much more explicitly CHAT perspective. Regardless of which aspect of a Vygotskian approach they foreground, each author bases her or his research on the notion that human development relies on the appropriation of pre-existing cultural tools, that this appropriation occurs through social interchange, and that as a consequence of these dynamics, people grow into the frameworks for thinking afforded by the cultural practices and tools made available to them in the social settings of their development.

Key ideas in the cultural-historical line and their relevance to studying teacher education and development

The authors in this collection argue that the cultural-historical line provides the intellectual resources to develop a coherent view of how teachers at different stages in the professional life-course conceptualize their praxis. Some of these key ideas are:

- an understanding of historical processes as dialectical relationships between continuity and change and the reproduction and transformation of social structures and relationships, underpinned by a complex chronology of development;
- a recognition that expertise is distributed across systems and that learning involves being able to perceive, access and contribute to that expertise;
- a conceptualization of learning to teach as a continual, mutually mediating process of appropriation and social action, where practitioners take on the cultural practices that are valued in the social situations of their development – whether these settings are schools or universities – and employ them in turn to shape that social situation;
- an analytic interest in cultural and historical practices and mediational tools, and the values that underlie them, and how they inform particular notions of practice in each of the settings of learning to teach;
- a recognition of transitions between settings in teachers' learning as important foci of analysis;
- an understanding of the relationship between theory and method when taking a cultural-historical approach to studying learning and how this can help us formulate key questions about fundamental prob-

lems of design in teacher education programmes as currently conceptualized.

We hope that, in exemplifying and interrogating these key ideas in the chapters that follow, the book both complements and extends the work of other researchers who study teacher education and development using an approach emerging from the insights of Vygotsky (e.g. Johnson 2009; Tsui and Law 2006; van Huizen *et al.* 2005; Putnam and Borko 2000; Grossman *et al.* 1999).

The organization of the book

The book is organized thematically into sections that represent core concerns for researchers taking a cultural-historical perspective. Each chapter arises from the author's research in a culturally and historically distinctive setting. In part, the chapters' exemplifications of the key ideas we have elaborated above emerge from their analysis of the distinctively different material conditions of teacher education work around the world, whether in a relatively small, sparsely populated country like Iceland, a multilingual, politically complex city state like Luxembourg, a tightly prescribed, centralized bureaucracy such as the education system in England or locally controlled, conceptually ambiguous settings in the United States.

Part I: The social situation of teacher development (Chapters 2–6)

The social situation of development is, in Vygotskian terms, a learner's experience of the opportunities for action in an activity in a specific setting. The social situations of development in initial teacher education may be complex sites where the practices of school and the university intersect, or they may be discrete settings which reflect only the practices in which they are currently situated. However, they will certainly be experienced differently by each participant in them.

The chapters in this section examine the social situation of teachers' development from three starting points: teachers as learners (Douglas, Edwards, Smagorinsky); the school as an activity setting or arena which offers different learning opportunities through mentoring (Douglas) and through the pedagogical discourses available when the curriculum or children are discussed (McNicholl and Childs; and Hjørne, Larsson and Säljö); and teacher education as a product of societal expectations which have shaped educational practices (Edwards, Smagorinsky).

In the opening chapter Smagorinsky reminds readers of the distinctions to be made between the individual orientation of Vygotsky and the collective focuses of Leont'ev and Engeström. He turns to Lave's 1988 analyses of

learning, and in particular her constructs of *arena* and *setting* where a setting is interpreted by the individuals who experience it, in ways that echo the description of the social situation of development just outlined. Douglas, in the next chapter, draws on his study of school-based mentoring to reveal how the social situation of development for student teachers is also shaped by how the practices in which the activity of mentoring are understood by the mentors. His analysis of how mentors used tools such as a course handbook combine a Vygotskian attention to tool use with an Engeströmian focus on the settings in which mentoring occurred. McNicholl and Childs continue the theme of subject departments as sites for teachers' learning by describing how science departments can operate as systems of distributed expertise which support the practices of student teachers and more experienced practitioners. Their cultural-historical analyses also lead them towards a critique of science teachers' dependence on 'pedagogic content knowledge' (Shulman 1986). In the next chapter Edwards looks more broadly at what the Vygotskian toolbox can offer those who design teacher-education programmes and calls for attention to the dialectical possibilities they afford, as teachers' responsibilities change in response to changes in national policies. In the final chapter in this section Hjörne, Larsson and Säljö continue the theme of teachers' changing responsibilities by examining conversations in one arena, where practitioners from different backgrounds discuss children as part of the development of a pupil health system. This chapter, with its analysis of the 'accounting for' pattern of individualizing children's problems in talk about children, makes a methodological bridge to the section that follows and concludes that these arenas and their potential for shaping new practices need to be understood better so that they can inform the development of more responsive pedagogies in schools.

Part II: A cultural-historical methodological perspective (Chapters 7–10)

Vygotsky's project was in large part a methodological contribution, a response to behaviourist psychology and a radical proposal for studying human activity holistically and paying attention to the processes of mediation. In one way, these interests are reflected in his emphasis on word meaning and the role of language in thinking and concept formation (Vygotsky 1986); in another, the 'zone of proximal development' (Vygotsky 1978) reflects a different emphasis on social mediation and the potential to study change by provoking it in a developmental space (cf. Moll 1990). The chapters in this section all address questions of method and show how a cultural-historical methodological perspective can be especially productive in understanding teacher learning and revealing the complexities of development. Key concepts in this section are analytic

attention to the whole activity, the processes of mediation and the vital dimension of language.

In his chapter, Ellis explores the central importance of the ‘double stimulation strategy’ (Vygotsky 1978) as a methodological concept in the cultural-historical line. ‘Double stimulation’ describes the researcher’s introduction of new tools as a way of stimulating work on the research problem. Rather than focusing simply on the outcome of the task, the researcher studies the complex semiotic activity that arises from what Vygotsky referred to as a ‘second series of stimuli’ (ibid). Boag-Munroe follows on from Ellis in focusing on the analysis of language-use in cultural-historical research designs. The relative merits of Conversation Analysis and Discourse Analysis as methods for analysing language are discussed in the context of Boag-Munroe’s research into the construction of mentor–teacher identities in England. The chapter exemplifies important cultural-historical ideas about language and perception and the role of language in identity formation.

Jahreie and Ottesen’s chapter takes a CHAT perspective on teachers’ learning across the sometimes over-lapping but nonetheless distinct activity systems of schools and university departments of education. They refer to the spaces where the boundary-crossing work of teacher education takes place as ‘learning spheres’ and, drawing on their research in Norway, show that an analysis of participants’ interactions and tool-use reveals how the construction of knowledge is affected by historically-developed rules and division of labour. In the final chapter in this section, Sannino analyses how Italian student teachers developed specific understandings of the materiality of their individual students through a formative intervention known as the 5-D. Sannino methodologically expands on Leont’ev’s notion of object and Davydov’s ideas of abstraction and offers a form of analysis that allows her to conceptualize the learning of the student teachers as a movement from the abstract to the concrete. This chapter, like Ellis’s, also underscores the transformatory potential of participatory, interventionist methodologies in the cultural-historical line.

Part III: Cultural-historical designs for teacher education (Chapters 11–14)

The third section features scholars who present studies of innovative, CHAT-informed teacher-education programmes in such contrasting locations as Iceland, China, Luxembourg and the USA. To begin, Jóhannsdóttir reports on an Initial Teacher Education distance-education programme in Iceland, focusing on the ways in which student teachers cross boundaries between their schools and the university. She finds that disturbances in both the schools and the distance education programme that follow from contradictions experienced during student teaching can serve as

catalysts for change in each of these distinct activity systems. She considers how schools and teacher-education programmes can exploit these disturbances by capitalizing on shared motives for their work, even amidst the contradictory goals of the different settings of learning to teach.

Liu and Fisher then analyse the cultural factors involved during a shift in pedagogical policy in China. They examine the responses of teachers to traditional (based on the Confucian principles of deferring to the authority of elders) and liberal (based on Western principles of student agency and empowerment) teaching practices in English as a Foreign Language instruction. They find evidence of a 'boundary zone' for the members of the community to reflect, compare and voice opinions regarding the relationship between a national culture and how people most effectively teach and learn within that society. They conclude that this boundary-crossing opens up opportunities for intercultural learning as a central aspect of teachers' developmental trajectories.

Norton-Meier and Drake continue this attention to boundaries between settings for learning and interrogate the construct of the 'third space', an area in which 'official' school spaces intersect with students' own cultural routines to produce a medium that creates new opportunities for discourse and learning. They focus on pre-service teachers' incorporation of family and community resources into elementary mathematics and literacy instruction, and their integration of knowledge from these sources into formal and practical knowledge gained through their experiences in university and elementary school classrooms. Pedagogical learning, they find, is achieved through teachers' production of personal narratives of self as learner and teacher, their development of professional identities and practices as elementary school teachers, and their understandings of the mathematics and literacy practices and resources of children, families and communities.

Finally, Max outlines the Initial Teacher Education programme at the University of Luxembourg. This programme views student teachers' learning as a growing capacity to recognize the complexity of supporting children's learning and strives to interrelate academic concerns with school activities. This expansion takes place across various boundaries, including educational contexts, disciplinary communities and semiotic systems. Max draws on evidence of work in these learning spaces to analyse tensions emerging when those who are engaged in a joint learning-for-teaching activity move across institutional boundaries, and when learning in a boundary space is mediated through a collaborative inquiry task. He considers the innovative potential of such learning spaces at the boundaries of schools and universities for student teachers' learning and for generating change and development among the collaborating partners.

In an Afterword that concludes the book, Wardekker comments on the different lines of thinking that have emerged from Vygotsky's work in relation to the research reported in each chapter. For Wardekker, it is the very

diversity of perspectives in the cultural-historical line that makes it such a powerful lens for understanding the problem of teacher education.

Concluding points

The contributors to this collection have all taken as given that teacher education 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. While recognising that teachers are not always and easily positioned as agentic professionals within national systems of education, between them they point to how the conceptual resources of cultural-historical theory, which owes so much to the legacy of Vygotsky, offer tools for shaping teacher education, from the micro levels of mentoring conversation through to the more macro ambitions of restructuring national teacher-education programmes.

Note

- 1 The concept of ‘object-motive’ was developed by Leont’ev, a colleague of Vygotsky and a major contributor to activity theory. He explained it as follows:

The main thing which distinguishes one activity from another, however, is the difference of their objects. It is exactly the object of an activity that gives it a determined direction. According to the terminology I have proposed, the object of the activity is its true motive.

(Leont’ev 1978: 62)

The object motive, how the object of activity is interpreted by participants in the activity, directs activities. For example, a student teacher who sees teaching as a matter of maintaining control will operate differently in the activity of teaching a lesson from another student teacher who sees it as enthusing children as learners.

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Part I

The social situation of teacher development
