This book is the result of a long movement of ideas and practices between Brazil and Germany. It brings together different research methodologies (discourse analysis, case studies, cross-cultural comparison, and action and practice-research) and studies innovative theoretical approaches and childhood-related practices that question present power relations and open up new ways of dealing with emerging phenomena in the fields of school and educational policy as well as in home-rearing, therapeutic, and community practices. A series of critical case-studies and examples of radically innovative educational, media and therapeutic practices and community-based interventions are presented, all of which demonstrate the transformative powers of collective subjectivities in the making of the history of childhood and youth and of society in general. The studies presented in this volume also illustrate the role cultural-historical and qualitative childhood research may play in this “making of history”. With an introduction by M. Kontopodis and chapters by: I. Behnken, M. Benites, F. Camerini, M. Damiani, B. Fichtner, F. Liberali, A. Lopes, M. Mascia, I. S. Soares, H. Winkler, and W. Wörster.

Dr. Michalis Kontopodis has studied Psychology in Greece, France, Poland and Germany and is currently a research associate at the Institute of European Ethnology at the Humboldt University of Berlin. He is the Secretary of the International Society for Cultural and Activity Research (ISCAR). Kontopodis is engaged in both theoretical and empirical work on anthropological and cultural-psychological approaches to human cognition and development. He has also co-edited the Special Issue “Materializing Times: from Memory to Imagination” of Memory Studies (January 2009, Vol. 2, Number 1) and the book “Technologien des Selbst im Alltag” (with J. Niewöhner, in German 2009).
Michalis Kontopodis
( Editor )

Culture and Emerging Educational Challenges

A Dialogue with Brazil / Latin America

Berlin 2009
ICHs
International Cultural-historical Human Sciences
is a series committed to the tradition of the cultural historical theory, which was
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order to analyze man and his development within the context of culture and
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Dedicated to Bernd Fichtner

On the occasion of his retirement this edited volume celebrates the 15 years of his contribution to the dialogue between Brazil and Germany in the fields of cultural-historical theory and qualitative research.
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Opening
"I can’t begin anything with this"

I would like to begin this book with the words of a 17-year-old black male student of a Hauptschule\(^1\) in Germany. In the context of an interview held three years ago\(^2\), this student paused and asked me: “May I confide something to you?”. He then narrated for about half an hour, talking without making a single pause which would have allowed me to make any comments. The following extract is taken from this narration:

1. A: <Mir ist es, deswegen,> verstehst du, Michalis, deswegen meinte
   <for me it is, that’s why> do you understand, Michalis, that’s why

2. ich, mir (ist) es ^egal,
   I meant that it doesn’t ^matter to me,

3. I:
   Mm.

   where I do the job-training. (It) is the same everywhere.

5. I:
   Mm.

6. A: Wenn ich mache, weiß nicht, WH> (...) <CR äh, man muss realistisch
   If I, I dunno, WH> (...) <CR uh, one has to be realistic,

---

\(^1\) Hauptschule is the lowest type of secondary school in Germany. In most cases, students from marginalized social and cultural milieus are sent to this type of school and are thus separated from all other students, who by going to Realschule or Gymnasium/Gesamtschule will be entitled to enter higher education.

7. gucken, <wenn es, ich würde gerne, wo ich / gerne machen würde,> ist wegen <if it, I would gladly, what I would / gladly do, > it’s because of drawing

8. Mm.


10. Mm.

11. A: <WH Aber was soll ich da? Ich habe nicht die Noten dafür, ich habe, < WH but what am I supposed to do there? I don’t have the grades for it, I

12. <nicht das die,> nicht den Schulabschluss dafür. Verstehst du? (…) Um das don’t have <that, these,> don’t have the school certification for it. Do you

13. später als Beruf zu machen WH>. understand? (…) to later turn it into a profession WH>.

14. Mm. [Mm.]

15. A: [Ich mache] Praktikum da, [alles gut, aber trotzdem] [I do] (my) job-training there, [it’s all fine, but still ]

16. Mm. [Mm. Mm.] Mm

17. A: <P kann ich nicht, P> <P I can’t P>

18. Mm.

19. A: kann ich nichts damit anfangen. I can’t begin anything with this.

20. Mm. Das ist auch eine solche schwierige Frage (4 sec break). Mm. That is also a difficult question (4 sec break).

The black male student (A) begins in a whisper (<WH…WH>) but then speaks louder and louder (crescendo: <CR…CR>), emphasizing particular words (^) or phrases (/) and for a moment speaking very silently (piano: <P…P>). He tells me (I) that he would like to attend a school for graphic
design and later have a job in this field—but: *he cannot*; he cannot because he does not have the grades for it. This is why he is not interested in choosing any job-training among the ones offered at the school he attends now, because actually there is no choice. “It doesn’t “matter” choosing, it “is the same everywhere”, says the student. “I can’t begin anything with this’.

The context of this discourse is not very difficult to imagine: Even if this student is successful at the *Hauptschule*, his certificate will not allow him to enter any kind of university program later in his life. Even if Germany has one of the richest economies in the world, the student to whom we refer here, similarly to many other young people, will probably be a very low-paid precarious worker or even unemployed for the rest of his life—which in some cases might also lead to engaging in illegal activities, being homeless or suffering under psychiatric disorders. The situation of these young people reflects a broader educational and social crisis in Germany (Nolan, 2001) and the entire developed world, a crisis which is manifested by increased failure rates, low social mobility, the failed integration of generations of migrant populations and, last but not least, by school shootings (Pourkos, 2006). One could also recall the infamous case of the Rütli School in Berlin, Germany, where on February 28, 2006, teachers published a letter announcing that due to students’ violence they were unable to undertake any teaching activities3.

**In dialogue with the future**

At the same time such events are taking place, radically new forms of learning and teaching and of school organization are emerging in various local contexts, mainly non-western ones. The well-known “popular education” in Porto Alegre in Brazil can be seen as an example of such (Abers, 1997, Clovis de Azevedo, 2000, Hezberg, 2001), while a variety of other initiatives are also taking place on micro- and macro-levels in Brazil and other countries, usually associated with broader social movements such as the landless movement (Branford & Rocha, 2002, Ondetti, 2008) or the anti-globalization movement (Alvarez *et al.*, 1998). It is not an accident that in this frame the work of the Soviet revolutionary psychologist Lev Vygotsky (Vygotskij) as well as the so-called “Cultural-Historical Activity Theory” becomes more and more popular and a series of scholars in Brazil as well as all over the world seek to bridge

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3 http://www.ruetli-oberschule.de/dieschule/schuledokumente/index.php (date of access: 2008-04-
the gap between practice and theory by developing innovative theoretical, and methodological approaches and various interventions on all levels of societal organisation.

An important idea implied by cultural-historical approaches and reflected in concepts such “appropriation” (Stetsenko & Arievitch, in press), the “Zone of Proximal Development” (Benites & Fichtner, 1996, Chaiklin, 2003, Newman & Holzman, 1993), and “motive” (Hedegaard, 2001, Leont'ev, 1978), is *active subjectivity*, i.e. the idea that children and young people as well as scientists and teachers act according to their own intentions and motivations, actively participating in defining how signs and tools are used (Stetsenko, 2005, Stetsenko, 2008). Active subjectivity thus enters “in a dialogue with the future” – as Bernd Fichtner would put it⁴ – and can transform a given social situation so that new practices emerge. Very important here is also the contribution of Paulo Freire, according to whom *being in* the world also means *acting in* the world, thereby *transforming* it (Freire, 1986, Freire, 1993, Freire & Freire, 1994).

Inspired by these approaches, this edited volume is the result of long “movements” of ideas into practice and back as well as of a long “movements” of ideas and practices between Brazil and Germany and, as we will see, also beyond them – to countries like Argentina or to broader spaces such as Latin America or Europe. The volume explicitly seeks alternative solutions to current educational problems and challenges to which we briefly referred above – an endeavor which can be seen as ethic-political in the sense of Spinoza (Spinoza & Curley, 1994). The volume is dialogical in many regards (cf. Bakhtin, 1973) and experiments with different forms of academic writing (theoretical argumentations, empirical research papers, research reports, photo essays, etc.) while bringing together different research methodologies (discourse analysis, case studies, cross-cultural comparison, and action- or practice-research).

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⁴ In 2006, Bernd Fichtner organized the conference “Learning as a Dialogue with the Future” at the University of Siegen, which aimed not only at developing new ideas in educational research but especially at developing new practices that could deal with current educational problems and challenges. The work presented here has been much inspired by this focus on learning and development as a “dialogue with the future”. See also: Fichtner, B. (2000). Ensenyar i aprendre: un diàleg am el futur. *Collecció Temes d’ infància Vol. 36*. Barcelona: Associació de Mestres Rosa Sensat.
Book contents

The edited volume begins with a methodological reflection by I. Behnken, which can be read in combination to this prologue as an introduction to the book. It is followed by three interrelated sections, the first one focusing on school education, the second on family and community, and the third on new media projects. The edited volume closes with a theoretical chapter by B. Fichtner, which takes the place of an epilogue.

Based on the idea of the historicity of childhoods, the opening chapter “‘New’ Research on Childhood: Methodologies and Objectives” by I. Behnken analyzes different paradigms of childhood research in regard to their epistemological prerequisites and their political values. Behnken analyzes how qualitative research methodologies usually reconstruct childrens’ perspectives about themselves and their worlds, although they do not treat children as co-researchers even when they claim to do so. A different methodological direction in childhood research would be grounded in regular and long-term communication between children and adult researchers about the research process itself. Behnken analyzes a series of research examples based on this “new methodological direction” – mainly from the German-speaking academic space – and reveals the difficulties and challenges implied by such an approach. She also views a research project undertaken at the Siegener Centre of Childhood Research from a meta-perspective, examining how the use of diaries written by children may prove to be important to this kind of research methodology. The methodological principles outlined by Behnken are reflected in most of the research projects presented in this volume, especially those of Benites, Wörster and Lopes & Soares, as we will see below.

Part I: Inclusion, Exclusion and Collaborative Intervention at Brazilian Schools

The chapter “Inclusion or Exclusion? An Analysis of the Brazilian Curriculum Discourse of the 1980s and the 1990s” by M. A. Mascia could be seen as an introduction to the Brazilian projects presented in this volume. In this chapter, Mascia provides a brief overview of the Brazilian curricula reforms that took place in the decades of the 80s and the 90s, offering a critical analysis of the Brazilian educational discourse during this period. She explores curriculum as a discursive practice of social regulation and as an effect of power-knowledge relations that create the appropriate subjects for contemporary school systems.
in Brazil. The author’s critical analysis suggests that Brazilian educational reforms were constructed upon dichotomies which at the very same time naturalized exclusion and affirmed inclusion. By destabilizing the dominant reasoning in education, this chapter aims to open up the possibility of change, and it is exactly this possibility that the projects presented in the following chapters have worked on.

Following a different methodology, the next chapter, “Collaborative Culture and Success at a School in Pelotas” by M. Damiani, reports on a Brazilian school characterized by high rates of pupil success and a high degree of teacher satisfaction. This case-study examines data collected mainly through observations and interviews which document the 15-year process of creating a collaborative school culture. It mainly refers to a group of committed teachers who started to work together to improve a school in Pelotas, Brazil, which initially had a bad reputation due to its high failure rates, pupils’ disruptive behaviour, and run-down premises. Drawing on Engeström’s activity-theoretical approach, Damiani argues that the success of the process of school transformation has been the result of an intense and continuous group dialogue whose value is perceived by all of the school’s actors. She argues that in order to establish true collaboration, it is important for the group to have a common objective which is perceived as relevant by all of its members (such as changing the reputation of the school). In a further step, the cultural-historical analysis of Damiani reveals other aspects of the collaborative culture: the production of local knowledge, empowerment of the community, and active participation in the trade union in a plea for better salaries. The case Damiani refers to may be seen as an example of “best” educational practice, inspiring reflection about current educational problems and challenges.

Following a similar path but moving from teachers to researchers themselves, the chapter “Researchers Learning by Intervention Research: The “Acting-as-Citizens” Program as a Joint Production between Researchers and Deprived Communities in São Paulo” by F. Liberali discusses the learning process of the researchers involved in an extramural program for teacher development in the deprived communities of São Paulo, Brazil. Based on Vygotskian ideas, it considers method as simultaneously a pre-requisite and a product of study and emphasizes the key role of collaboration. The chapter draws on the analysis of recorded transcriptions of school meetings, workshops, and preparatory meetings over a three-year period (2005-2007) and explores how novice researchers moved from peripheral roles to central
ones as they learned ways of questioning the other researchers to prompt more elaborated replies and more critical ways of presenting opposing views. It also shows that when senior researchers provided the novice ones with more responsibilities, they all tended to move beyond their capacities to find ways of creatively participating in the joint construction of the program.

Part II: Making a Difference in Family and Community Constellations
The first chapter of the second part of this book “Supporting the Self-Efficacy of Parents and Children in Early Childhood Education: A case-study in Germany” by W. Wörster focuses on pathological child-rearing practices and examines the theoretical and practical significance of play in regard to children’s development in general and to early intervention in particular. Taking the example of the therapeutic treatment of the autistic child of an Iranian family that applied for asylum in Germany, Wörster analyzes the social and societal aspects of the child’s development, e.g. how the discontinuities and ruptures of the parents’ biographies were reflected in the way they related to their son. Wörster presents how the child’s situation changed when, by means of his therapeutic intervention, the relations between the parents and between the parents and the child were redefined. Wörster concludes by emphasizing the creative aspects of sociability, thus extending cultural-historical theory to the fields of family therapy and early intervention.

Moving from the level of family to that of a local community, M. F. Camerini reports in the essay “So that the Canoes Don’t Turn Over: An Experience of Inclusion with Community Groups through a Psychological Intervention in Rio de Janeiro” on an innovative intervention project that took place in the Vila Canoas, a small slum of approximately six thousand habitants, in the area known as São Conrado in the city of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Based on the active participation of the members of the community, the intervention consisted of a variety of activities for people of different ages and generations, such as English language courses, regular meetings of music, dance and theatre groups, and group discussions in cooperation with psychology students and other specialists. Camerini analyzes a series of practical aspects of the intervention, such as the free distribution of food, and employs a variety of theoretical concepts to explore how being in dialogue with the other in a non-hierarchical participatory context has been an important part of the process of subject constitution for the various participants of the
intervention project. The importance of early community intervention for child rearing is also discussed.

Following the different methodology of comparative case-study, the next article, “Infant Care in South America’s ‘Cono Sur’ and in Germany: Case Studies on Stern’s Concept of the Motherhood Constellation”, by H. Winkler presents a cross-cultural analysis of the relationship between mother and firstborn child during the first weeks or months of maternity. Winkler analyzes interviews with four women from different social (working class and middle class) and cultural backgrounds (urban areas in Germany, Uruguay, and Argentina) in order to examine their everyday baby-caring practices and their emotional reactions (fear that a behaviour is abnormal, tiredness, etc.). Winkler’s analysis draws on Daniel Stern’s theory of Motherhood Constellation and re-formulates it from a cultural-psychological point of view. Winkler argues that the second and third issues of this theory (primary relatedness, supporting matrix) are subject to variation due to differences caused by socio-economic, political, and societal reasons as well as by intergenerational conflicts. Cultural and ethnic differences, however, seem to be less important for motherhood constellations in the analyzed contexts. The article of Winkler is the only one that refers to other Latin American places than Brazil and points thus to directions the dialogue, which this book presents, could be further developed.

Part III: Working with New Media and Image Technologies
The third part of the edited volume turns to another major issue of recent educational research: the use of visual and interactive communication technologies in education. New media seem to promise radically new possibilities for children and youngsters in regard to their political participation (Buckingham, 2000, Buckingham, 2003), their educations and the transmission of different forms of knowledge (Gee, 2003, Jewitt, 2008, Jewitt & Kress, 2003, Kanselaar et al., 2000, Kress, 2003), and intercultural communication (de Block & Sefton-Green, 2004, Holzwarth & Maurer, 2003). Children and young people are supposed to increasingly express themselves by means of moving digital pictures, thereby sharing different forms of knowledge than those transmitted by oral or written speech. They have the possibility of playing and communicating with each other in public virtual spaces in ways that build communities, thus transcending institutional, geographical, and cultural boundaries.
This has been the case of the action-research project “Windows to the World” (www.janelasparaomundo.org), which M. Benites has coordinated since 2002 and which she studies in the chapter “Narratives in the Time of Internet”. With reference to Vygotsky, Peirce, Deleuze and others, Benites presents an account of the non-linear developments of this project over the years and the new questions which the practice itself led participants and researchers to deal with. By exploring a project which (a) is non-directive and originally participatory, (b) takes place in cities as different as those of Cuiabá, Barra do Bugres, Aracaju, Porto Alegre, Rocinha, Campinas, Jacareí, Santa Maria, Juiz de Fora, Natal, and Sao Paulo as well as in Germany and other places, (c) included at one time more than 85 groups of children, and (d) is still developing to new directions, Benites argues that the internet changes the configuration of time and space as well as the relations between movement and picture. The internet thus generates trans-cultural and transnational worlds that are beyond the imagination of school curricula, educational policies, and adult subjectivities.

The open-ended narration of Benites on the internet and communication is followed by the photo essay “Image Animation: a Study of the Creative Process and the Production of Narratives in the Context of Inclusive Education in Rio de Janeiro” by A. Lopes & I. Soares. The authors refer here to a project of social inclusion which they developed together with a group of students with special educational needs in a municipal school of the city of Rio de Janeiro. This study is characterized as an action-research in which authors participated both in their role as art-educators and as researchers of their own pedagogical practice. Based on the approaches of Benjamin, Vygotsky, and Machado, the photo essay investigates different ways of mediating the appropriation of animation techniques as well as the process of the creation and production of narratives by students with mental handicaps. It is argued that through the modelled shapes and the stories created, the students constructed a novel symbolic language in which they could express their views of themselves, of other members of the group, and of their broader living conditions in a playful and creative way. Of particular interest is that the images that were being produced by the students brought the group closer to themes and issues that were not always verbalized in their daily verbal interactions. By making use of photos in reporting about this project, the chapter itself also aims to bring the readers closer to themes and issues that are not always verbalized in academic writing.
Outlook: Children as “unstable signifiers”

By way of an epilogue, B. Fichtner treats children as “unstable signifiers”. In “a Dialogue with Agamben and Vygotsky”, Fichtner analyzes the shortcomings of various modern approaches to children and childhood and analyzes infancy as a philosophical category. Following Agamben, he claims that infancy is something in-between, where infancy is the origin of language and language is the origin of infancy, and attempts to explore this paradox with recourse to the childlike experience of the boundary between voice and language. According to Agamben, it is due to the distinction between the semiotic and the semantic, between language and voice, that there is history, that man is historical by nature. Childhood the setting in which the child transforms the semiotic into the semantic, pure language into speech and human discourse. On the grounds of this approach, Fichtner criticizes modern educational science and psychology and suggests a different epistemology of the study of children and childhood that “sees children and reality from the standpoint of the new”.

The edited volume is devoted to the study of innovative theoretical approaches and childhood-related practices that question present power relations and open up new ways of dealing with emerging phenomena in the fields of school and after-school education and educational policy as well as in home-rearing, therapeutic, and community practices. A series of critical case-studies and examples of radically innovative educational and therapeutic practices and community-based interventions are presented, all of which demonstrate the transformative powers of collective subjectivities in the making of the history of childhood and youth and of society in general – thus moving beyond the deadends of the current educational situation as depicted in the narrative of the student presented at the beginning of the introduction. The studies presented in this volume also illustrate the role cultural-historical and qualitative research may play in this “making of history”. Following Vygotsky, one could say that cultural-historical and qualitative research should not just lead to a better understanding of existing human practices, but also to the development of new ones (Vygotsky, 1927/1997, cf. Stetsenko, 2008).

Dedication to Bernd Fichtner and Acknowledgements

The year 2009 marks the 15-year anniversary of Prof. Bernd Fichtner’s cooperation with colleagues from universities all over Brazil as a guest scholar
and contributor to various research and social-pedagogical projects. 2009 is also the last year Bernd Fichtner will work as a full professor at the University of Siegen. On this special occasion, I feel honored to be the editor of this book, dedicating it to Bernd Fichtner on behalf of all the authors, colleagues, and friends who have worked with him these past years.

I will never forget how Prof. Bernd Fichtner opened the International Symposium “Place and Identity during Learning and Developmental Processes”, which was organized by the University of Siegen in cooperation with the Federal University of Juiz de For a, Brazil, in Siegen, Germany in November 2003. What was important for him as the director of the International Education Doctorate INEDD of the Department of Educational Science and Psychology at the University of Siegen was not to bring the long-established German educational scientific knowledge to Brazil but the other way round, to bring innovative knowledge about children-related practices from Brazil (back) to Germany. It is exactly in this sense that this book has been written and edited, and it is for his long and sensitive contribution to the dialogue between Brazil and Germany in the fields of cultural-historical theory and qualitative childhood and youth research that this book is warmly devoted to Bernd Fichtner. After two German anthologies edited by Fichtner and colleagues5 and a number of publications in Portuguese6, this edited volume is addressed to the English-speaking international audience and seeks to put forward what Bernd Fichtner has been working on for all these years: not only an international scientific exchange but “a dialogue with the future” (see above).

The work presented here has its origins at two international conferences funded by the German Research Foundation which I organized with Martin Hildebrand-Nilshon, Bernd Fichtner, and Maria Benites at the Free University

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5 Kinder und Jugendliche im Blick qualitati ver Forschung: Kulturhistorische Schule, Phänomenologie und Ethnografie in Brasilien und Deutschland (2003, coedited with Maria Freitas and Roberto Monteiro) and Vom Umgang mit Differenz: Globalisierung und Regionalisierung im interkulturellen Diskurs (2006, coedited with Maria Benites) – both books published in the Series Kulturen des Lernens with Athena (Oberhausen).


We would like to thank the German Research Foundation, the Department of Psychology at the Free University Berlin, the Department of Educational Science and Psychology at the University of Siegen, the Department of European Ethnology at the Humboldt University Berlin, and especially the International Education Doctorate INEDD at the University of Siegen for making this long international scientific exchange possible, as well as for funding the translation and proof-reading of the chapters of this book. Special thanks is due to Diana Aurisch, Thomas La Presti, Alice Delorme and especially to Kareeth Shaffer for their patience in dealing with all the challenges of translation and proof-reading, and for the excellence of their work. I am also very grateful to Nora Walther who undertook the difficult work of typesetting and formatting the manuscripts. Last but not least I would like to thank the ICHS Series’s editors, Georg Rückriem and Hartmut Giest, and Lehmanns Media for their kind cooperation in publishing this book.

Berlin - Germany, July 2009

References


“New” Research on Childhood: Methodologies and Objectives

Imbke Behnken

Three trends towards a paradigm shift: an introduction

For several decades now, the discourse on childhood and research on the topic have been undergoing intense transformations both in Germany and on an international scale. Since the 1970s, the following three trends have characterized developments in research on childhood:

First, the research community has become increasingly aware of a distinction between “children” and “childhood”. Research on “children” is concerned both with human subjects that can be empirically studied as individual persons and with social groups of children. Research on “childhood”, on the other hand, is related to childhood as a distinct social status (within a system of age groups and generations) and as a social construct. Whereas “children” has been an established field of scientific inquiry for psychology and education for more than 100 years, “childhood” has only more recently become a topic for academic study. Interest in this topic developed during the latter half of the 20th century, especially in the social sciences (sociology of childhood, politics of childhood, and history of childhood). With respect to both disciplinary concerns, that related to children as well as that related to childhood, research paradigms have considerably changed in recent years.

Second, children and groups of children are becoming increasingly understood as social agents, as actors or constructors of their own lives, their own worlds, and their own development. In this context, there are ongoing debates over new theoretical conceptualizations of the human subject, the formation of an appropriate methodology, and the development of research practices geared to the perspective of children.

Finally, a third trend has to do with historicizing childhood. In the aftermath of the influential initial study by Philippe Ariès (published in Germany in 1975, cf. Honig 1999, 16 sqq), a view of childhood as a historically variable societal construct became ever more widespread. Subsequently, a large number of individual historical studies were undertaken in attempts to prove or disprove the validity of this view. Here, childhood was seen to be a “social invention” of early European modern times, essentially
with its origin to be dated between the 16th and 18th centuries and conceived of in principle as some type of “pedagogical moratorium” (Zinnecker 2000a). Some critics of this view see this social project of the European Enlightenment becoming caught up in the whirlwind of a rapidly advancing (post-) modern era at the end of the 20th century. A debate over a possible historical end to childhood ensued in both journalist and academic circles (cf. e.g. Postman 1982; Hengst 1996; von Trotha 1999).

The discrete developments in research on children and in research on childhood had the immediate effect of temporarily leading to contradictory approaches. Whereas the former emphasized the status of children as human subjects and their own initiative, the latter implied the external nature of childhood as a social construct that was imposed on individual children and generations of children in the form of a life pattern. Only through the paradigm shift in historical research were children freed from their historical role as victims – a shift that is characterized as a turnabout from a socio-structural view of history (as represented by such scholars as Hans Ulrich Wehler or Michael Mitterauer) to a cultural micro-history that re-established the rights of everyday life and everyday social actors (cf. Daniel 1997). This was noticeable in research methodology in the importance now accorded to personal and biographical sources. Published autobiographies and oral histories of life stories now became a new qualitative standard for the historiography of childhood (cf. Rosenbaum 2001; Corsaro 1997 for Anglo-American historical research on childhood). The issue at hand here involved allowing children to again become perceptible as active co-designers of culturally preset patterns of childhood. In following I will examine closer the different trends and related methodologies.

I. Research on children and groups of children as actors and constructors

As mentioned above, from around the beginning of the 1980s there has been a considerable increase in debates within various disciplines and academic traditions on both a national and international scale concerned with a reconsideration and new formulation of children’s active roles as social agents. The fundamental issue has to do with the extent to which children actively develop themselves and their worlds or whether they are simply to be considered products of their surroundings. Seminal works in developmental
psychology (e.g., Montada 1982, 1987, 1998; Dollase 1985), in socialization research (e.g., Hurrelmann 1983, 1995), in childhood research oriented to the social sciences (du Bois-Reymond et al. 1994; Honig et al. 1996, Honig 1999a; Kirchhöfer 1998; Zeiher & Zeiher 1994; Zeiher 1996), or in history (cf. the pioneering work of Nitschke 1985) discuss the new theoretical principles and positions in their own discrete terminologies, but in similar ways. They point to predecessors within the history of their own disciplines and inquire into consequences for methodologies and research practices.

The reversal within interdisciplinary research on socialization can be dated to the period from the early to the mid-1980s. At this time, several relevant articles of a programmatic nature were published in the newly founded specialist journal *Zeitschrift für Sozialisationsforschung und Erziehungssoziologie* (ZSE – Journal of Socialization Research and Sociology of Education). In 1983, the managing editor, Klaus Hurrelmann, was able to propagate a model of a human subject productively coming to terms with reality, an image which during the subsequent years was to become a much-quoted motto for the turnabout in socialization research (Hurrelmann 1983). One chapter heading calls socialization the “productive assimilation of internal and external reality” (ibid., 62ff.). One of the fundamental assumptions here involves “the rejection of models of the linear, single-factor determination of personality development that are based on views of the individual being formed as a passive recipient” (ibid., 63).

The understanding of a human subject actively taking initiative is radicalized with the concept of self-socialization, a concept which was introduced into the debate from a constructivist perspective in sociological systems theory and is associated with the Niklas Luhmann school (cf. Gilgenmann 1986). In his overview on developments in the debate on self-socialization, Jürgen Zinnecker (2000b) notes that this concept signals a decisive attempt to move away from earlier empirical socialization research that was focused on an externally imposed socialization of youths especially within the context of pedagogical institutions (275 sqq). According to Zinnecker, this corresponds to a relative loss of significance of pedagogical surroundings and relationships for those who have become socialized. Furthermore, he emphasizes the ambiguity involved in this concept and indicates at least three distinct meanings which he perceives in current research on childhood:
1. Children as (co-)producers of their own development: *children socialize themselves* (27-28). Zinnecker states that such a meaning implies a perspective on the process of socialization from action theory. The corresponding research question, then, would be: “What do I actually do when I socialize myself?” “Self-socialization”, as Zinnecker maintains, “consists of three steps. First, children socialize themselves by attributing meaning to objects around them and to themselves; second, they attribute a certain logic to their own actions; and third, they formulate their own objectives for the actions they undertake. This self-directed activity of children results in a specific space for childhood, a specific children’s life-world, in contrast to the adult world.” (ibid., 279)

2. *Children develop a self-reflective “self”* and develop a conception of themselves as of an active human subject. Thus, self-socialization also means that a “self”, i.e., a central, substantive core of the child’s personality, is socialized (cf. the concept of *self-development* in Krewer & Eckensberger 1991, 573sqq).

3. *Children socialize each other* (cf. Krappmann & Oswald 1995; Corsaro 1997). In research on childhood self-socialization involves a third meaning: socialization within the peer group and without any involvement of adults. This relates to a further dimension of separating the concept of socialization from pedagogical institutions and relationships. Recent research on childhood is particularly interested in learning processes that take place among peers and without any assistance from adult educators. However interesting and innovative socialisation research on children and groups of children as actors and constructors has been and might be, a very different approach, that of research on *childhood* has recently attracted more and more attention and requires closer examination.

II. Research on childhood: *from the perspective of children?*

One could ask here the following question: Is there a particular catchword that is typical of the paradigm shift from externally directed to self-determined youths in debates related to new research on childhood? Here, it is especially a research approach “from the perspective of children” that pervades the entire discourse and has a unifying and organizing function in it. “In ways similar to “stage” and “development” in developmental psychology or “Bildung” in early childhood education, “perspective” can be conceived of as an idea organizing, even constituting the discourse of more recent research on childhood with a
As a research methodology corresponding to the paradigm shift, the “perspective of children” enjoys widespread acceptance, as does the demand to develop distinctive approaches if research on childhood is to perceive the children’s own voice in matters relevant to their concerns. Most recently, at the zenith of theoretical debates on such issues, there has been a noticeable increase in specialist discussions at both the national and international levels (Northern Europe, the U.S.). Such debates are well documented in recent anthologies on childhood research, e.g., in the book edited by Michael-Sebastian Honig, Andreas Lange, and Hans R. Leu (1999: Zur Methodologie der Kindheitsforschung – On the Methodology of Childhood Research), or in a later volume of the same series edited by Friederike Heinzel (2000: Methoden der Kindheitsforschung – Methods in Childhood Research). A parallel debate in recent childhood research in England is documented in the anthology edited by Pia Christensen and Allison James: Research with Children. Perspectives and Practices (2000). This reader compiles research strategies and experiences that have gained significance within the framework of the United Kingdom’s Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Children 5-16 Programme.

The editors and authors of the first German anthology indicate the ambiguity and need for interpretation involved in the concept of the “children’s perspective” (cf. esp. Honig 1999b). For example, the concept designates both a new topic of childhood research and a methodological or methodical research approach. The editors Honig, Lange, and Leu (1999) take recourse to this twofold aspect in their introduction to the anthology:

On the one hand, speaking of the perspective of children refers to the subject of childhood research and defines this as the reality experienced and produced by children. In this context, the “perspective of children” is a keyword of the socio-spatial, actor-centered, individual world of children.

Childhood researchers, then, view their approach as being situated within the tradition of a social ecology of childhood, as explicated by Martha and Hans H. Muchow in an early Hamburg study in 1935.

On the other hand, speaking of the “perspective of the child” refers to methods of compiling data, thus to methodological and practical problems of and limitations to research on and with children. […] There are ongoing debates about how the status
of social actors that is attributed to children is actually understood and put into operation in corresponding methodological procedures. (ibid., 10-11)

The German scholar Friederike Heinzel emphasized in an earlier article (1997) the distinct affinity between qualitative research and research on childhood:

Since the perspectives of children and adults differ and childlike ways of thinking and behavioral patterns are unfamiliar to adults, a decision in favor of qualitative methods in research with children suggests itself. Whenever, in particular, the subjective life experiences of children become a topic of research, the research process must be made receptive to children’s systems of rules and of assigning meaning, so that through interpretative means such systems can be made use of in “natural situations” (Heinzel 1997, 401).

Three years later, Heinzel published her own anthology on *Methods of Childhood Research* (2000), which provides an overview of the range of methods employed in childhood research and, with its examples from selected research experiences, allows for further-going insights into reflective research practices from the fields of sociology, education, psychology, and specialized teaching methodology. The spectrum extends from surveys and conversations (both standardized and semi-structured) through observation (e.g., participant observation and videotaping) to procedures that make use of children’s autobiographical materials (e.g., free texts or drawings). The editor of the anthology makes some interesting comments on “general problems” that obstruct realizing the new approach to childhood research in the social sciences. She explicitly refers to three critical points: 1) the power exercised by educational settings in children’s lives; 2) forms of expression typical of children; 3) the adult-centered approach of research and researchers (cf. ibid, 25 sqq).

In their book *Research with Children. Perspectives and Practices* (2000), editors Pia Christensen and Allison James provide an overview of current debates especially within Anglo-American research on childhood. Both methodological and practice-related research issues are presented and discussed. The editors and authors make explicit mention of their concern to treat children as human subjects, as “social actors” (Christensen & James, xi) and participants in the research process, and to put this postulate to concrete practice in their research. For a pragmatics of research, what does it mean to
put the “perspective of children” to practice, to gain access to the “voices of children”? Origins within the context of public policy on childhood and other connotations of the new directions in childhood research are highlighted in the final chapter of the book by Priscilla Alderson (2000), which has the programmatic title: Children as Researchers: the Effects of Participation Rights on Research Methodology.

What image of children as “social actors” is drawn or assumed when researchers with this new approach argue in favor of a research program “from the perspective of children”? It seems that these accounts engage in a form of simplification, for they do not at all do justice to all of the positions taken in childhood research. There appears to be a consensus that the demand to engage in research from the perspective of children is motivated in two ways. First, origins of such demands can be seen in political motives coming from the children’s rights movement. In this view, in the social world children have their own “standpoint”, which is related to specific interests and problems. In this context, then, doing research “from the perspective of children” means to do justice to the political interests and circumstances of the younger part of the population. For example, in this view social reporting may not simply confine itself to family situations, but must also single out the specific circumstances of children in families and make such conditions visible and subject to policy making processes. At any rate, since the United Nations’ Convention on the Rights of the Child was proclaimed in 1989, there has been an explicit concern for the rights of children to participate in the body politic. With consideration for the stage of their development, their views in reference to any issues that concern them are to be heard and they are to participate in the decision-making process. Through the amendment of the German law governing child and youth care in 1990 (Kinder- und Jugendhilferecht), the demand to pay special attention to children’s views and allow them participation rights has attained a distinctive legal status (cf. § 36).

The image of the child as social actor that predominates in politically motivated childhood research refers to the participating citizen. Children are seen as young citizens who – in ways appropriate to their development – should early be provided with opportunities to become informed about their situation and to participate in decision making. This refers to the immediate community surroundings in which children live and, of course, to educational institutions. School children are seen as young citizens of a particular municipal district, as “young school citizens”, for instance. One logical
consequence of such a view is that within the framework of parliamentary democracy children are accorded the right to vote at an early stage in their biographies. In general, such a program defines children as rational and reasonable human beings who in this respect are considered equal to adults. Moreover, children are acknowledged as “responsible” persons, which is not the case in conceptions of childhood as a moratorium, or, if so, only within the framework of educational activities (cf. Fuhs 2001). Much the same as with adults or elderly citizens, such assumptions may actually be contrary to fact, i.e., they may be found not to correspond to any empirically observable reality.

Second, the demand to engage in research from the perspective of children refers to the life-worlds of children. The major issue here is that children and childhood are understood from the subjective internal perspective of the actors themselves. At the same time, the assumption is made that in the past research on children was undertaken to a greater or lesser extent “from the perspective of adults”. It is also assumed that the interpretative schemes and active interests of adults, for example, of teachers or parents, were dominant and that children were seen from an external perspective and interpreted by means of theories that were developed for use by adult professionals. This critique was polemically condensed in the reproach condemning the “adultism” (or adult-centered perspective) of traditional psychological or educational empirical studies. In analogy to criminal law, such an “adultist” perspective immediately declares a fight among school children in the schoolyard to be “violence”. Models for explaining such events with a view to possible pedagogical interventions are then rather limited. On the other hand, any consideration of the inherent meaning or immanent rationality of such actions within the life-worlds of school children is neglected.

Research on children oriented to their life-worlds presumes that, as actors, children act in meaning-making ways, that is, not simply driven by physical urges, or acting irrationally or thoughtlessly. In accordance with this idealized fundamental assumption, children pursue a certain rationality in their actions that proceeds from their biography, from the history of their child culture, from the specific conditions of and resources for action within their “small-scale life-world”, and from their specific patterns for processing such a life situation. Precisely such incidents like fighting among school children, incidents that remain unintelligible and seem “meaningless” from the external perspective of the adult observer, challenge life-world research on children to decipher the “hidden meaning” of such actions.
At a very fundamental, philosophical level, we can maintain that epistemological assumptions on children as human subjects are at the basis of research from the perspective of children. Children are recognized as generally having the ability to understand and theoretically reflect on themselves and their own situation. Just like adult “everyday people”, children are also acknowledged to be understanding human subjects. This transformed view is to be found in various disciplines. The common thrust of this transformation consists in granting not only specialized and in this respect legitimized academic disciplines the right to form and implement “theories”, but instead to recognize this as a fundamental ability in all human beings. Various disciplines and research traditions use their own specific terminology to reflect this circumstance: one speaks of people’s “subjective theories”, “private theories”, or “everyday theories” on themselves and, in particular, on the institutions with which they live. With the new research on childhood, this insight has also been applied to children. Some experimental research on babies has become renowned that convincingly demonstrates the cognitive abilities of small children even before they learn language (cf. Dornes 1993). In various contexts, children’s expertise has been conclusively confirmed.

In the domain of cognitive psychology, there have been studies on children as “scientific experts” (cf. Schneider et al. 1998). Similar developments have occurred in research on representative surveys. These have shown that children are being asked about their opinions and attitudes toward political, societal, and private topics at increasingly earlier ages. Whereas in the middle of the 20th century surveys began only with 18 to 21-year-olds, because only from this age on were the interviewees considered to have their own awareness of public issues, the age groups now polled start with the 10 to 12-year-olds or even with younger children. Thus, even such surveys now assume that children are sufficiently knowledgeable subjects (cf. Zinnecker 1999, 69).

Looking at the modernization of childhood from the survey tradition of the life-world approach has certain methodological and content-related consequences. Methodologically, we are dependent on self-representations of witnesses of childhood. These could be linguistically evoked childhood worlds, pictorial representations in the form of subjective “maps” and “sketches” of the world at hand, or observable actions carried out by children who are present. [...] With reference to content, studying the life-world means choosing an internal perspective on the process of modernization. The focus is on ways of processing changing life
conditions in the everyday microcosm, not the transformed structures themselves (Behnken & Zinnecker 1992, 6).

A further way of putting the “perspective of children” into research practice that is particularly demanding and up to this point has only rarely been attempted, is to allow childhood witnesses to participate as researchers. If the main idea is to reconstruct children’s views of themselves and of the world, then various degrees of participation for the children in the research process are conceivable. Adult research experts could do the job for the children; they could tackle the reconstructive work together with the children as co-researchers; or the exploration of the children’s perspective could proceed from independent research on the part of the children (cf. Alderson 2000; Zinnecker 1999). Here, a comparison with ideas of children’s culture or children’s politics and participation rights suggests itself. In the corresponding communicative field, distinctions are made between culture or politics/political participation “for” children, “with” children, and “of” children. Upon closer examination, in research on childhood the “child’s perspective” is largely understood as “research for children”. “Research with children” is fairly rare, even though this label is often used by researchers to describe their own method. Yet, research with children means engaging in a long-term communicative exchange on the research process with the participating children.

III. Prospects stemming from current research at the Siegener Zentrum für Kindheits-, Jugend- und Biografieforschung (SiZe) – A report on work in progress

In briefly calling attention to ongoing research at our institute, I wish to present selected aspects and situations from a research project in which the researchers attempted to experience children’s perspectives. This involved devising a study in accordance with the paradigm of “research with children”.

Preliminary remarks on the context
Since its establishment in 1987, the Siegener Zentrum für Kindheits-, Jugend- und Biografieforschung has engaged in applied research on modernization under the management of Imbke Behnken and Jürgen Zinnecker. The institute focuses on the radical changes and transformation processes that have
characterized the maturation of the younger generation, the relationships between younger and older generations, and people’s biographies both at global and regional levels and within various national cultures in the 20th and 21st centuries. The research is based on a conception of the discipline of education as a social science and as a component of cultural studies. Modernization is understood as a complex social process involving risks and conflicts and whose consequences must largely be coped with by the cultures and groups concerned themselves, groups which need to assign significant meaning to this process. Hence, the research at the institute is focused on the perspective of such groups which need to come to terms with modernization. The issues examined include the strategies for assigning meaning and dealing with the problems encountered, the individual and collective (cultural) costs of such encounters, and the risks of failure in a biographically relevant sense.

Engaging in research with children: the Siegen research team which works on the modernization of childhood in comparisons between and within generations and examines case studies of children, parents, and grandparents with regard to specific familial and regional aspects was committed to devising a form of research that could be carried out with children.

The aim of this project is to contribute to both empirical findings and the theoretical debate on the transformation of childhood in the 20th century. The frame of reference for this research is provided by topical discourse in the media and in academia which is based on certain claims related to the modernization of childhood (e.g., individualization, the predominance of education, and the increased domestic orientation of children). Detailed and reliable studies of children’s life-worlds over the course of three generations are designed to provide insight into whether and to what extent a long-term, linear, but unplanned process of transformation has actually taken place. Within this context, the childhood of today is compared to that of the generations of parents and grandparents. This approach attempts to further socio-ecological research on socialization by adding a historical dimension oriented to modernization. Examining the life-world means selecting an internal perspective on the process of modernization. The research team focuses on ways of dealing with changing life circumstances within the everyday microcosm, not on the transformed structures themselves. With regard to social theory, the project is oriented to multi-level analyses of the civilization process in Western Europe and to paradigms within childhood and youth research related to reproduction and biographical issues.
Research with ten-year-olds
The following remarks are exclusively based on that part of the research that describes the work with ten-year-old children and particularly the case of Daniel (pseudonym) – one of the ten-year-old children. The project marked the beginning of a dissociation from the sceptical adult assessment of active child participation in research. This took place against the backdrop of a process that eventually led to a paradigm shift in the construction of childhood and children and that can briefly be described as an approach which conceives of children as social agents of their own development and environment. To a certain extent, contact was initially established through children. The research team informed fourth graders (most of these children are 10 years old) about the study and distributed leaflets describing the project and the researchers. Children were asked to inquire in their families about participating. When Daniel’s family announced that they were interested in participating, Daniel’s mother mentioned the following reason: “Daniel said that the project is about children. That’s important. We need to be a part of this.”

Empirical Research and Analysis of the Life-World
What provided the foundational basis of the project was the production of individual case studies, of monographs on childhood life-worlds. Monographs oriented to life-worlds are based on a long-term cooperation between interviewee and interviewer, a cooperation that, under the most favorable conditions, becomes a stable work alliance. Considering the modernization of childhood from the perspective of the survey tradition of the life-world approach involves certain methodological and content-related consequences. Methodologically, our sources are the self-representations of witnesses of childhood. Such sources materialize through linguistic evocations of the world of childhood, through pictorial representations in the form of subjective “maps” and “sketches” of the world at hand, or by means of ethnographic observation. The research design comprised a broad range of methodological approaches which the research team amassed or developed on their own initiative (cf. *Methodische Triangulation*, see Flick 2004).

The sequence of the planned meetings (which, however, was changed due to suggestions made by the ten-year-olds) initially called for a first meeting for the participants to become acquainted with each other, followed by a narrative interview. Subsequently, these stages were planned: a guided biographical
interview; an interview on significant biographical events, an interview on personal daily routines; a narrative, personal “map”; an inventory of the personal scope of action; a narrative, personal sketch of the home setting; an inventory of personal possessions; and photo interviews.

Fieldwork and Ethnography
Since the current childhood life settings were directly accessible to observation, elements of fieldwork were incorporated into the design of the study. Interviews were conducted in the home environment, often in the children’s own rooms. Interviewers were able to make direct observations and to protocol the children’s behavior within their own private sphere. At a specially arranged photo session aimed at documenting internal and external environments and personal possessions, the children presented their toys, cars, favorite clothes, and other personal items.

Excerpt from a protocol from July 20th:

Daniel wants to organize the series of photos of his room on his own. The plan is to document such things as the furniture, games, tools, and clothing. His mother and younger brother are told to leave the room. The younger brother refuses at first; he wants to remain. Daniel insists that both persons should leave. Eventually, Daniel’s mother is able to take his younger brother away with her. In the room, then, Daniel presents his toys, opens games, and talks about a number of things. He is not so careful with the clothing: he takes a pair of summer shorts and a colorful shirt from the closet and claims that nothing else matters. Daniel puts a question to his mother, who looks around the corner and, with a laugh, states that the shorts that Daniel just claimed to be his favorite clothing are hers (colorful cotton shorts).

Excerpt from a protocol from August 8th:

Daniel fetches his bicycle and races along the circular walks (open terrain near the home). Daniel seems to know every bump and bend here. He describes his route: a long, circular path for riding fast, a hill for an uphill climb, a rough stretch as a small test of his courage and to see if he can stay on the bike. Then we go to the rabbit pens behind the house. Finally, Daniel leads the interviewer to a nearby stream, where, together with his brother, he has made a dam of branches, stones, and sand.
Description of the situation
When he was asked about the interview process, Daniel’s reply indicated that he attempted to answer briefly and concisely, as he had learned to do at school. He was surprised to be asked to tell a few “stories” and responded, “That’s what you want to hear? Why is that so important?” Biographical events, children’s biographies in their temporal dimension – excerpt from a protocol from June 10th: subjective theories. Asked how old he was when his voice changed, Daniel refers to past segments in his biography. He marks the date of this event not only as a change that signaled his entrance into puberty, but also as a significant biographical event that accompanied his growing up. In his response, he refers to entering kindergarten, when his voice had not yet deepened, and to the first years at school, learning to read aloud. At some point, then, the change came. His voice became deeper, and now he feels that with a somewhat deeper voice he reads and speaks faster.

Memory-interviews of the youngest subjects, the ten-year-olds, were primarily oriented to their current situation. Probing their memories, as was done with the subjects in the older generations, only took place with reference to reconstructing their childhood biography up to the present moment (especially in the narrative interview). The ten-year-olds found individual ways of dealing with this situation. Some used institutionally structured biographical phases as guidelines: kindergarten (distinction between life as a small child and, then, as a somewhat older child) and school (distinction between the first grades and, then, the imminent transfer to a secondary school). Others chose a main topic that emphasized the development of physical prowess. Daniel’s first statement in the introductory narrative interview was as follows: “When I was three years old, I was able to ride my bicycle without training wheels.” In every case, the biographical interviews displayed main topics that constantly recurred within the narration.

Concluding remarks and future perspectives
The purpose of this paper was to provide an overview on the state of “new” research on childhood, as it has been conducted in research communities of Western Europe and the U.S. since the 1970s. Much of the pioneering work in this context was done within the social sciences. At the focus of both the theoretical debates and the research work are three trends concerned with the following domains: the distinction between child and childhood, children as
social actors, and childhood as a socio-historical construct. This paper attempted to give a brief account of these trends, presenting the views of major proponents. With a concluding view to present and future developments, the author provided insight into the work of a research team at the University of Siegen. This team is expressly committed to the trends mentioned above and is attentive to ensuring that its own research practices correspond to this “new” research on childhood. The analysis and interpretation of the data involved a long process from the many pages of transcriptions, the maps and pictures, the lists and protocols to the actual monograph of a particular childhood.

One difficult fundamental problem of any triangulation concerns how to credibly and still comprehensibly document the extensive procedures of the mutual comparison of the various individual instruments for the readership. In response to this situation, the researchers, along with other colleagues, developed and implemented a specific method in the course of the study: the process of triangulation was to result in a tentative writing that was called a “research-based source text” (cf. Friebertshäuser 1992, 101-106; Apel et al. 1995). This “research-based source text” was to be written in such a way that the valid material from the individual instruments involved in the triangulation were combined and consistently presented in a single text without making it necessary for the reader to take recourse to the raw material of the study, as this is fairly rare in research in any case. Aspects to be included in the “research-based source text” are selected according to the previously devised (relatively broad) analysis scheme. Interpretative conclusions are to be formulated in a separate text. In each case, the interconnection between the source text and the interpretative text should remain immediately comprehensible to the reader.

One direct consequence of this approach was an in-depth examination of the life-world of the child as documented by the survey material. This, then, allowed the researchers to grasp the important topics and specific peculiarities of the individual child’s life. In the research-based source text, only a small selection of original citations from the narratives can substantiate the relevant topics. Thus, the main task was to condense the abundant material, to select major topics, and to present these in such a way that an image of the individual child’s life emerged that was as comprehensive and multi-layered as possible. Hence, while on the one hand, the problem was a matter of condensation, on the other the entire material from interviews and conversations was to remain accessible to the researcher. On the basis of the text compiled in this way
(research-based source text), preliminary assessments of the children’s lives were made with reference to the following guiding questions: How is childhood to be appraised with reference to modernization? Which developments of modernization form the main topic of this specific childhood life-world? Which ways of coping with modernization can be observed in the child and in the family? (cf. Behnken & Zinnecker 1991, 20).

In every case, these steps involved in the analysis were a subject of discussion for the entire team or in a more extensive circle including other colleagues. Thus, how convincing at an inter-subjective level the processes of transforming and condensing the material and the strategies and interests of the interpretative approach were, was reviewed within a framework of “communicative validation” (Behnken & Zinnecker 1991, 21).

The childhood monographs now available are an attempt to analyze the comprehensive material with respect to developments in the transformation of childhood and to make the findings available to interested readers. As mentioned above, one of our main concerns is to provide a more exacting differentiation of the concept of modernization in contrast to popularized versions of the concept and to relate the various dimensions of the concept to the life-world of a specific child’s life – thus contributing to the debate about childhood, children and methodology to which the introduction of this paper referred to.

(Translation: Thomas La Presti)

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Part I
Inclusion, Exclusion and Collaborative Intervention at Brazilian Schools
Inclusion or Exclusion? An Analysis of the Brazilian Curriculum Discourse of the 1980s and the 1990s

Márcia Aparecida Amador Mascia

The signified concept is never present in itself, in an adequate presence that would refer only to itself. Every concept is necessarily and essentially inscribed in a chain or system, within which it refers to another and to other concepts, by the systematic play of differences. Such a play, then – différance – is no longer a concept, but the possibility of conceptuality, of the conceptual system and process in general (Derrida 1968, 140).

The aim of this article is to problematize the discourse of education from a post-modern perspective. My intention is to pursue the foundations of some of the naturalized concepts in Education, where I hypothesize that the discourse of progress is at the basis of our current educational policy and naturalizes the dichotomies of success/failure and inclusion/exclusion. I wish to demonstrate that these dichotomies should not be accepted as naturalized but should be considered a social construction and part of the effects of power in the education system of reasoning. In order to explore this point of view, some Brazilian schooling examples will be raised and analyzed.

This article is intended to be neither the origin nor the last word about the relations of progress and education, instead it should be viewed as a continuity and/or discontinuity in the discourse on education. The intention (or as far as I can intend) is to deconstruct some concepts often related to education: Liberalism, progress, power and truth.

The following questions will be addressed in this article:

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7 This article is based on my doctoral dissertation defended in Brazil, which aimed at describing functions of Brazilian political discourse by using curricula documents as data. This dissertation was transformed into the book: Mascia, M. A. A. (2003) Investigações Discursivas na Pós-Modernidade: uma análise das relações de poder-saber do discurso político-educacional. Campinas: Mercado de Letras/ Fapesp.

a) what are the rules upon which the discourse of progress in education is constructed?
b) what are the marks (traces) that make this discourse an exclusionary practice in a local example (Brazilian Curriculum Discourse)?

This investigation does not discuss what includes or excludes, but how the discourses create a system of reasoning of inclusion and exclusion in education.

My experience as a teacher in Brazil has been that there is a constant concern about the issues of exclusion and failure in schooling, in a sense of qualifying and disqualifying students, teachers, approaches and curricula proposals. For decades, we have watched movements of democratization and redemocratization of education, with countless curricula reforms. But we have noticed that there was something wrong: the reforms were implemented, but the school remained the same. “What could be the matter?” I asked. My discomfort as a teacher and researcher made me start thinking that we had probably been asking the wrong questions. Instead of pursuing what works or does not work in education, as a linguist and discourse analyst I realized that we should try to look at education discourses and examine the systems of reasons that enable us to think education in a dichotomous way, of inclusion and exclusion. The great argument of this article is that this system is a historically constructed discourse.

All research involves theoretical background that points not only to the analysis but also to the data. When we look for and at the data, we cross into theoretical considerations that head our process of selecting, viewing and interpreting.

As I have explained above, this article should be considered within post-modern social theory. The aim is to work with multiple disciplines and authors that reveal both my field and my intellectual background. If I were asked to label the theoretical field of this article, I would say that it is the Social Sciences, within post-modern theory, crossed by the disciplines of Linguistics, History and Philosophy, among others. The authors upon whom I base the arguments are: Foucault, Bakhtin, Bourdieu, Pêcheux, Haroche, Popkewitz, Kuhn, Derrida, Bauman, Hall, and many others. Even if I will not have the opportunity to quote some of them, they are part of my history: in the words and silences.
In the following, I am specifying the data, explaining the discursive methodology and studying the conditions of production of the discourse to be analyzed.

**Methodology and conditions of production**

The data of this research is constituted by curricula documents published between 1970 and 1990, in the state of São Paulo, Brazil. Discourse analysis methodology requires the examination of the social historical context within which the discourse is constructed followed by a micro-analysis of the texts. The description of the social-historical context, is also understood as “conditions of production”, aims putting the social representations of the curricular documents, in this case, into focus, as well as the place occupied by the subjects in this discourse. After contextualizing the production of a certain discourse, the analyst concentrates on the properties of the discourse. Discourse is characterized as possessing constitutive heterogeneity, which implies that doing discourse analysis is fundamentally trying to find the interdiscourses that are at the interior of a certain discourse. Any discourse is taken as an event inside some discursive formation, or in Pêcheux’s words:

(...) any given discourse is the potential sign of a movement within the social historical filiations of identification, inasmuch as it constitutes, at the same time, a result of these filiations and the work (...) of displacement within their space (Pêcheux 1988, 648).

The conditions of production of our corpus, the curricula documents, involve the social historical moment related to the 70s, 80s and 90s, both in the state of São Paulo and the world.

In Brazil, at the end of the 70s and beginning of the 80s we could see a process of political opening, with the fall of the military dictatorship leading to the proliferation of political parties, particularly the left-socialist party, PT (Partido dos Trabalhadores, Worker’s Party). At the same time, as soon as the civilians rose to power, new alliances were established in order to silence the dictatorship crimes. The crisis in education due to the social inequalities and poor distribution of income, installed during the dictatorship, would not be changed during the reigns of the so-called “new republican governors”, in spite of the process of the democratization of education promoted by Minister Jarbas Passarinho from 1969 to 1974. The state governors did start a process of
opening new schools, but soon as the quantity of education was increased, the quality decreased. New schools were built, but the formation of teachers was forgotten.

In global terms, during these decades there was a increasing scientific and technological (and even cultural) domination by the industrialized countries, mainly the United States. This domination led to the current process of globalization which resulted in a cultural and linguistic domination by the first world countries in relation to the third and second world ones, like Brazil. The “ghost” of an excluded country was installed that would affect everyone and everything, including education.

In the political sphere of the state of São Paulo, in 1982 the governor Franco Montoro, from the PMDB (Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro, Party of the Brazilian Democratic Movement) was elected. The workers in education expected democratic improvements from the new governor, taking into account his democratic political discourse. His motto was “Caminhando para o fim do quadro-negro,” that is, “Walking to the end of the blackboard”, or alternatively, “walking to the end of a bad situation”. It is important to call the reader’s attention to two possible meanings for “quadro-negro” in Portuguese. It is a compound word, and the first word “quadro”, can also be understood as “picture”, or in a metaphorical sense as “situation” or “context”. This way, “quadro negro” can both relate to the blackboard where teachers usually write during their classes, or to the terrible situation in which Montoro found education when elected, which he implies is “negro” (black). We can say that the interlocutor was using this double sense as a strategy of persuasion, in this case, of political change in education. This discursive strategy of using a word that belonged to both discursive formations, that of the school and that of the social situations, caught the readers’ attention, in this case the teachers, to point out the terrible conditions of the schools. Of course he, the governor, would come to the rescue.

It is within this feeling of change that the curricula documents appeared from which we chose excerpts to analyze. In the next sections, we pursue the main concepts in which we will inscribe our arguments.

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Liberalism and progress as discourses

One of the greatest challenges of the modern State is to develop strategies for social inclusion; yet as inclusion strategies are sought, patterns of exclusion remain prominent in social policy and education. These mechanisms of inclusion are embedded in the Liberal thought which underlies the Enlightenment claim of equality of men. Enlightenment believed that systematic knowledge was the motor by which “reason” could direct social action and guarantee a good future in society.

According to Mehta (1977), although Liberalism claims, from the theoretical point of view, a politics of inclusion, in practice, it has actually been exclusionary. This occurs because:

Liberal theoretical claims typically tend to be transhistorical, transcultural, and most certainly trransracial. [...] What is meant by this is that the universal claims can be made because they derive from certain characteristics that are common to all human beings (op. cit., 63).

But the exclusionary bases of liberalism, I believe, derive from its theoretical core. [...] It is not because the ideals are theoretically disingenuous or concretely impractical, but rather because behind the capacities ascribed to all human beings there exists a thicker set of social credentials that constitute the real bases of political inclusion (op. cit., 61).

In this sense, what Liberalism forgets is that men are social beings and that they are embodied in power relations.

Taking into account the notion of progress in Liberalism, it can be said that liberal theory assumes scientific knowledge and, in liberal thought, progress is obtained through managing social change. Popkewitz reinforces this idea, postulating for the American educational system that “in contemporary school reforms, these fundamental assumptions are deeply embedded as part of the doxa. Dominant and liberal educational reform discourses have tended to organize change as logical and sequential” (Popkewitz 1997a, 291).

According to Popkewitz, it is possible to postulate two different ideological forms in contemporary social and educational theory: the critical and the liberal traditions, both of which relate to the nineteenth century view of Enlightenment. In terms of Popkewitz (id., ibid.):
For critical and liberal theorists, change was premised on identifying the subjects who gave direction to change, either by locating the origins of repressive elements that prevented progress or the groups that would bring about a redemptive world.

If we think of Brazilian schooling models, we can say that critical and liberal traditions provide foundational assumptions of progress.

We will now pursue some fundamental concepts that will help understand history as a theoretical activity. In this work, when we talk about history, we are talking about discourses, as Foucault defined and was adopted by the French Discourse Analysis:

[… ] a body of anonymous, historical rules, always determined in the time and space that have defined a given period, and for a given social, economic, or linguistic area, the conditions of operation of the enunciative function. (Foucault 1972, 117)

Thus, discursive formations are constituted by discursive practices that determine the objects, the enunciative modalities of the subject, the concepts and the thematic choices. Discourses could be viewed as discontinuity practices that intersect with each other, juxtapose one another, but also sometimes ignore or exclude each other.

In light of the above, we inscribe the study of Liberalism in education in a study that should contemplate the discourses, that is, the historically constructed principles of classification and ordering of the world. Those who inscribe their researches in the post-modern studies broadly adopt this concept of history as discourses. For post-modern studies, the object does not pre-exist; it is actually constructed according to certain social and historical rules, the rules of discursive formations. These rules dictate what and/or how we are to interpret the world, transforming some things into data to the detriment of others.

But, apart from this interpretation of history as discursive practices adopted by post-modernity, there is another interpretation that we could label as traditional history upon which the Liberalism is based. Popkewitz (1997b, 136-139) focuses on these two systems and the differences between them. He makes a distinction between what he calls the historicism or philosophy of
consciousness and the “linguistic turn”\textsuperscript{10}. The former, which has dominated social studies, sees events as “real” and performed by “actors”; the latter, which was adopted by genealogical studies and social epistemology, focuses on language as a constitutive element in the construction of social life and “identity”. The difference between them most interesting here is their concepts of progress. For the historicist view, progress is an \textit{a priori} concept and is conceived as a movement from evil to good, applied to the social conditions of life. The task of social science in this perspective is to detect bad conditions, analyze them and propose ways of improvement. However, for the “linguistic turn”, which we are adopting in this work, “progress” is seen as change, and it is constitutive to social practices and does not pursue an ideal world. The “linguistic turn” focuses on the language, assuming that our relation with the world is crossed by language, that is, the rules that tell what, when and in which way we should say, act and see the world and ourselves.

The way we see change is as a social constructed image intermediated by language. The images of liberalist change in education through the improvement of curricula involve not only education, but also the politics of knowledge of the world, that is, our relation with language.

In the same line of thinking, Bakhtin (1973) works with the meaning of the sign crossed by the language:

\begin{quote}
Meaning is the expression of a semiotic relationship between a particular piece of reality and another kind of reality that it stands for, represents, or depicts. Meaning is a function of a sign and therefore inconceivable outside the sign as some particular, independently existing thing (op. cit., 28).
In short, anything and everything occurring within the organism can become the material of experience, since everything can acquire semiotic significance, can become expressive. But all the same, it is the word that constitutes the foundation, the skeleton of the meaning of every outside sign (op. cit., 29).
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{10} “Linguistic turn” refers to current methodologies in social studies that take the language as its center. For Popkewitz, “the linguistic turn centres on the opacity and figurative character of language, the manner in which subject positions as well as reality-effects are created within language” (2001, 50). The term “linguistic turn” was introduced by Rorty in the reader he edited in 1967, The Linguistic Turn, and this marked an ongoing break within analytic thought, moving from the object of language to language itself. For further details, see: Rorty 1967; Popkewitz 1997a, 1997b, among others.
Bakhtin distinguishes between two philosophies of language: “Abstract Objectivism” and “Individualist Subjectivism”. One of the fundamental positions of the former is that the linguistic system constitutes an external and objective fact beyond the individual consciousness and non-dependent on it. On the other hand, the individualist subjectivism, related to romanticism, places the origin of language in the consciousness of the individual. For Bakhtin, both positions are equivocal; the philosophy of language is the philosophy of ideological signs and vice-versa. In this sense, our consciousness of the world is intermediated by language which constitutes not only a link, but also works as a component in the construction of this consciousness.

To summarize: if we talk about progress in education, we talk about discourses, in other words, a dynamic bundle of power-knowledge interactions that take part in the understanding of the subject (the “self”) and of objects (things in the world).

**Subject and object: discursive construction**

Each discursive formation has some objects, which vary historically, that we understand as the ordering of the world, that is, the “data”. We define data as a collection of objects that have their place and their rule of creation inside each discursive formation. For Foucault:

> […] it is not enough for us to open our eyes, for new objects suddenly to light up and emerge out of the ground. […] the object does not await in limbo the order that will free it and enable it to become embodied in a visible and prolix objectivity, it does not pre-exist itself, held back by some obstacle at the first edges of light. It exists under the positive conditions of a complex group of relations. (Foucault 1972, 45)

These relations are not inside the objects, they do not pre-exist; they are, somehow, within the limits of discourse, which offers the objects that can be talked about. It is not possible, therefore, to talk about everything in a discursive formation, but only about those things that are allowed for by the rules of object formation. For example, the discourse of Liberalism embodied in every social change, as a pursuit of the objects of truth, talks about the principles of ordering of what is understood as problem and how we classify the society. When one discursive formation classifies some objects as
progressive and denies others, it is managing issues of power in order to classify the knowledge. Thus, objects related to the concept of progress should be understood within the rules of a discursive formation. What one discursive formation understands as progress is not the same for another. That is what Kuhn (1970) calls incommensurability among paradigms. He provides a view of progress that should be understood inside the same paradigm: what is progress for one paradigm is not for another. His work raises profound questions about the common image of progress, specially related to science as a process of cumulative evolution. For him, “we may, to be more precise, have to relinquish the notion, explicit or implicit, that changes of paradigm carry scientists and those who learn from them closer and closer to the truth” (Kuhn 1970, 170).

For Kuhn, we should understand progress in another way, by learning “to substitute evolution-from-what-we-do-know for evolution-toward-what-we-wish-to-know [this way], a number of vexing problems may vanish in the process” (ibid., 171). However, Kuhn does not go further, his conception of progress is positive and idealistic, he does not de-construct the subject and object, and still presupposes an agent.

The notion of agency is relevant to our work. The discourse of progress presupposes a subject of consciousness (an agent) who is the owner of his actions, capable of deliberately reaching his aims and transforming the world. On the other hand, as we question his intentionality, relating it to the historical context and, therefore, not to the origin of his actions, we are questioning and de-constructing this basis.

In brief, this paper argues that the subject is decentred, a conception that is stated by Pêcheux and Fuchs (1975) when they talk about the two illusions in which the subject and meaning are inscribed: the first is the illusion of the origin of discourse and the second is the illusion of only one meaning. We adopt a notion in which the subject is decentred, historical, and affected by ideology; incapable of “consciously” transforming the world, he can provoke changes, but does not have control over the meanings of these changes.

### A genealogical view on power

If we look at the issue of progress through Foucault’s lenses, we would challenge the social sciences, interrogating the conditions upon which modern society is constructed and constituted by power relations. For Foucault, power
is produced by and produces discursive practices. If we think about schooling as a discursive practice, we have to recognize the power embodied in its relations.

Foucault’s studies try to analyze the mechanics of power, how it works in daily struggles, or what he calls the “micro-physics” of power. Before Foucault, the studies about power were interested in detecting and denouncing the other, the opponent: capitalism or socialism, for example, but these studies did not analyze the functioning of power. On the other hand, from the post-modern point of view, power is not only concentrated in the upper classes, the dominant ones. It penetrates the whole society, constituting itself as a diffuse bundle of micro-powers in the discourses of daily life.

The author offers us three significant hypotheses about power: the first is that power does not exist as an \textit{a priori} element, it is only conceived in practices or relations; the second is that power does not only work repressively but is also productive, it produces knowledge which produces more power; and the third is that power does not apply only to macro-relations, but also (and mainly) to micro-relations. For the author, “there are no relations of power without resistances” (Foucault 1980, 142). In this sense, Foucault’s strategy for studying power does not relate to the subject but to its historicization. He describes this way of studying as genealogy:

\textit{[\ldots] a form of history which can account for the constitution of knowledges, discourses, domains of object, etc., without making reference to a subject which is either transcendental in relation to the field of events or runs its empty sameness throughout the course of history (op. cit., 117).}

This decentring of the subject enables us to problematize the reason upon which the notion of progress is constructed. From a genealogical point of view, we can see possibilities of change, which could be understood as “breaks”, or “movements” in the discursive field. Differently from the traditional history, which constructs progress as a linear movement toward the truth, we now have genealogy, which conceives changes as breaks within particular discourses and as power/knowledge struggles. If we transport this idea to schooling, we should study the social and conceptual conditions through which we have come to reason about schooling progress the way we do.

Most of the research that focus on the progress in educational curricula assume that progress is an \textit{a priori} notion and that students and teachers are
stable categories. Taking into account the picture above, critical studies detect a problem, which is avoiding to walk in the direction of an ideal school, analyze this problem within given categories and finally try to interfere suggesting a possible solution. But, on the contrary, we argue that the notion of progress and the categories of teacher and student are social constructs and they work as discursive practices in constructing the “self”.

After showing the paradigm into which we are inserted, and taking into account the French Discourse Analysis as an analytical tool as described in part 2, the following section is dedicated to the micro-analysis.

**Micro-analysis**

The micro-analysis consists of identifying the effects of meanings and pointing how they appear in the linguistic materiality. But the meanings depend on the conditions of production, that is, the social-historical moment in which they are constructed. In our case, as specified in part 2, the moment is of change, in politics and education.

The analysis of Brazilian Curriculum Discourse enables us to understand the reason upon which some images are constructed and naturalized. According to Chakrabarty, the first world, Europe, “works as a silent referent in historical knowledge” (1992, 337), and as great narratives are taken as models, when the third world histories are written, they are translated in terms of lack, incompleteness and absence.

The image of incompleteness has been a constant in Brazilian Educational Discourse, especially when applied to public schools, which are always conceived as needing reforms in order to reach the completeness. Curricula reforms are always designed to provide new ideas for teachers and schools that have consistently failed their students.

If we take, for example, the discourse of curricula reforms in Brazil, we will see that it is constructed upon dichotomies: the old and the new. The “old” is seen as the bad, the evil, the one that failed, and the “new” is associated with the modern, the complete, in short, “hope”. Reforms are always initiated by the government, they are top-down reforms and the discourse of reforms is embodied in the Political Discourse.

Political Discourse works in the way of political engagement: the speaker (X) intends to engage the listener (Y) in a political ideology (Z). For example, curricula reforms, in Brazil, frequently happen when the government changes, as a way of establishing a mark, a feature, a style of governance. Political
issues mean action and action in education means curricula change, among other changes.

One of the characteristics of the Political Discourse of reforms in Brazil is the use of metaphors. These metaphors are constructed upon dichotomies. Education as a “process” is one example of metaphor. Below, we present some parts of two introductory letters that appear in a Curriculum signed by two secretaries of Education of São Paulo state.

The curricula proposals that are being delivered now to the teams of public schools are the product of a long process of construction that has been forged into successive versions by the decisive collaboration of countless educators. By debating, disagreeing and sending suggestions, specialists from different regions of São Paulo state, in different moments, provided the technical team of the Coordenadoria de Estudos e Normas Pedagógicas – CENP – the backgrounds needed for the modification and improvement of this set of guiding teaching documents.

Therefore, it is a proposal that has been collectively built, but has not been finished (Modern Language Curricula Proposal, 1988).11 […]

The public school should distance itself from the current model […] It should transform itself into a living and active organism and part of the life of the society (Modern Language Curricula Proposal, 1992). 12

In these two examples, the metaphor of Education reforms as a “process” is constructed along two axes: a) a spatial and b) a temporal one. In space, Education is seen as a “building” and the reform is one step forward in its construction. We can visualize the spatial image of constructing the building step-by-step towards an ideal in the use of the words: construction, process,

11 My translation of part of a letter addressed to the teachers: As propostas curriculares que estão sendo entregues, neste momento, às equipes da rede estadual de ensino são produto de um longo processo de construção que foi se forjando, em sucessivas versões, através da colaboração decisiva de inúmeros educadores. Debatendo, discordando e encaminhando sugestões, professores especialistas, das mais diferentes regiões do Estado de São Paulo, em diferentes momentos, forneceram às equipes técnicas da Coordenadoria de Estudos e Normas Pedagógicas - CENP - os subsídios necessários à modificação e aprimoramento deste conjunto de documentos norteadores do trabalho docente. Trata-se, portanto, de uma proposta coletivamente construída, mas não acabada. (Carta do Secretário da Educação Chopin Tavares de Lima - P. C. 1º g., 1988)

forge, successive versions, collaboration and collectively built. It seems that everyone could go there and add a brick in order to raise that building. The other axis is the temporal one. We can see that there is a “before time” (the current model that should be changed) and an “after time” (alive and active organism) related to the curricula reform. The images associated to the previous time are always of incompleteness, as it is advised that the new model should distance itself from the current model, that is, the school is supposed to change, in time. On the other hand, the images related to the time that comes after the reform are visualized as a social progress: alive and active organism in the society.

Another characteristic is that the curricula reform is addressed to teachers and other people in education that are not supposed to be familiar with the new educational concepts. This kind of discourse aims to facilitate the philosophical trends of the reform to the addressee.

As part of this image of construction, another step is presented in the curriculum discourse: its dissemination to the teachers and their subsequent training. We can see here an ideological point of view: the teacher is seen as unprepared and unable to understand, so he/she is in need of training; the role of the government is to empower the teacher. This ideology is based on the illusion that both share the same ideas, and justifies, at the same time, the government power. Example:

Now begins a new step in the work: training the educators in the new curricula as part of the educational politics of the Education Secretary, with the aim of the re-qualification of Fundamental Public School (Modern Language Curricula Proposal, 1988).

One of the columns of this building is the rescue of quality in public school. Notable in this excerpt is the desire to “pursue the lost quality”, an argument that consists of not completely denying a certain quality in the

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13 “Current” understood as the old one, considered, in opposition to the new one, as “dead” (non-alive) and “stuck” (non-active).
14 My translation of part of a letter addressed to the teachers.
previous education system (this is supposed to be politically incorrect), and instead using the prefix –re added to the deverbal noun “qualification”, to simultaneously imply two different meanings: that it is necessary to change – by constructing some columns in this building – and that, even though in the past the quality was not desirable, it was not always bad. It is necessary to reinforce the foundations and give continuity to the process of construction.

The image of progress, as conceived through the metaphor of construction, is based on a linear and cumulative action towards an ideal of completeness. This concept of completeness can only be understood in opposition to incompleteness, in our context applied to the previous curricula documents. This is what Derrida calls “the play of differences” (1968, 140) in which our western rationality is inscribed. When exalting the new, this discourse shows traces of inadequacy and failure in relation to the old. The positive meaning regarding the curricula reforms is constructed with the voice of negative failure implied by the previous curricula, and in this discursive game, the two meanings end entwined: the new inscribes in the sphere of the old and one depends on the other to signify.

In the line stream of thinking, the excerpt below is based upon dichotomies. For example, in favor of a change in the linguistic approach, the curriculum proposal quotes the following extract from a book published in English by G. Brown:

Are all classes dead? No, not all. But too damned many are… What's the difference between a dead and a live classroom? In the dead classroom, learning is mechanistic, routine, over ritualized, dull and boring. The teacher is robotized and the children are conceived as containers or receptacles whose primary function is to receive and hold subject matter… The live classroom… is full of learning activities in which students are enthusiastically and authentically involved… Each student is genuinely respected and treated as a human being by his teacher… the learning involves living (Brown 1975, 1-2; cited in Pedagogical Practice 1993, 22).  

The explicit dichotomies upon which the argument is constructed are the images of death and life. The image of death is related to the previous (or old)

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approach and the image of life (alive) is associated to the new one. Reform means the passage from death to life. In order to create the illusion of death, the author uses the following adjectives and nouns: mechanistic, routine, ritualized, dull, boring, robotized, containers and receptacles. The image of life is created by the phrases: enthusiastically and authentically involved, genuinely respected, and treated as human being. This image of passage from death to life has its origin in the religious discourse, especially the one related to Catholicism, the most common religion in Brazil.

We could point to other images of incompleteness related to curricula reforms: the image of the teacher as a person not prepared to understand the curricula, or to work with the syllabus and to deal with the student. The image of the student as an empty individual who needs to be constructed, who has no past and no history. The notion of student is considered in a homogeneous way, because there is no space in the educational discourse for heterogeneity. The image of teaching is seen as an act of using strategies and the image of learning is to incorporate behaviors.

But what does this discourse of incompleteness imply? It implies that there is a silent referent of completeness, as it was said by Chakrabarty (1992, 337) when referring to the first world, upon which the discourse of incompleteness is constructed. This desire of completeness generates reforms in education based upon an a priori concept of progress towards an ideal school. The concept of Liberalism presupposes a centered subject that is able to transform this world consciously and reforms in education are seen as the march of progress.

**Final remarks**

We started this research with the hypothesis that the curricula reform discourse is constructed based on the ideal of completeness that characterizes the Liberalist philosophy in the search of progress, freedom, truth and social wealth. However, this same discourse excludes even as it includes.

Our point here was not to argue what does or doesn’t work in curricula reforms related to pedagogical practices. By using Foucault’s belief (1980) that knowledge is power, we wanted to show that power is embodied in the discourses we produce about ourselves, which intervene in social affairs. The curricula discourse, seen as discursive practices of schooling, does not only transmit ideas or produce instrumental pedagogy, it creates principles of reality by comparing, differentiating, hierarchizing and dividing the subjectivities of
the teachers and the students. Our approach was to examine how the discourse functions, especially the power-knowledge relations responsible for the reasoning of Brazilian schooling.

The main effect of meaning in the data analyzed was the conception of this document as a construction, that is, with many educational subjects (governors, teachers and others) democratically involved. This is also the main argument of the curricula reform discourse, based on the images of the Liberalist philosophy of our current time, as we have seen in the conditions of production of the discourse. However, the analysis examined the discourse in the light of the social historical context. Within this, the analysis tried to deconstruct some naturalized images and see the discourse as ideological construction, in this case related to education.

In relation to this, we quote Foucault’s ideas about the systems in which we are prisoners:

My problem is essentially the definition of the implicit systems in which we find ourselves prisoners; what I would like to grasp is the system of limits and exclusion which we practice without knowing it; I would like to make the cultural unconscious apparent. (Foucault, *Rituals of Exclusion*, cited in Butler 1997, 83)

Any progressivist point-of-view of Education is based on a liberalist concept of universal freedom in the world. But, behind this idea of universality, in its local application, as we have pointed in the examples above, Liberalism shows another face: it sustains politically exclusionary practices. These are the effects of Liberalism: inclusion in a universal view and exclusion in a local one (Mehta, 1997). This happens because the concept of Liberalism is taken as tranhistorical, transcultural and transracial, but in practice, relations among people are crossed by power.

In Foucault’s words, we would say that “schooling systems”, conceived from the principles of Liberalism, are systems of prison and exclusion. The above considerations bring us to consider the Brazilian Curricula Discourse as an example of local exclusion. We conclude that the discourse of incompleteness in the Brazilian example works against itself; when it affirms the other, it really denigrates itself, naturalizing the dichotomies upon which the discourse is constructed. It is what Bourdieu (1991, 146) calls “the return of the repressed”.

But what is the role of research in a discursive paradigm? Not to tell the readers what they have to do or how they have to see, but to raise new and unthinkable questions and make new ones come to the minds of readers. To understand without having to be told, to read between the lines. To look at the evidence, decentering, problematizing and questioning it. To look at what is familiar and make it strange. To disturb people’s mental habits. To reexamine rules and institutions. To see educational reforms as discourses constructed according to certain social historical and ideological rules. To destabilize the reasoning of education. By questioning, not by answering, as the positivist philosophy conceives, is the only way, in my point of view, to open up the possibility of different ways of thinking education and starting a movement of transformation.

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Collaborative Culture and Success in a School in Pelotas\textsuperscript{16}

Magda Floriana Damiani

Introduction

This chapter has the objective of presenting a case-study of a Brazilian \textit{Ensino Fundamental}\textsuperscript{17} school that has been successful in promoting academic success for its pupils and a significant degree of professional qualification and satisfaction for its staff. This school is characterized by a culture that I have identified as collaborative and the purposes of the study were: a) to describe the specific features that the collaborative culture assumed in this school; b) to understand how this culture has been originated and maintained over the years; and c) to discuss the benefits of collaborative culture under the light of cultural-historical psychology. In a country like Brazil, where school failure is a cause of great distress, the investigation of a school like the one under study in this chapter is mandatory.

Data from the Educational Evaluation System (\textit{Sistema de Avaliação do Ensino Básico} / SAEB, 2003), for instance, revealed percentages of age/grade distortion equal to 33.3\% & 40.6\%, respectively, for 4th & 8th grades of this level of schooling, indicating that children have been often repeating grades. According to the National Institute for Educational Studies and Research (\textit{Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais} / INEP 2006), there has been an increase of 25.7\% in the rate of age/grade distortion in \textit{Ensino Fundamental} between 2001 and 2005 within the municipal educational network of the city of Pelotas (southern Brazil), where the target case-study school is located.

Although currently presenting such a magnitude in Brazil, research on school failure has not been receiving much attention from our researchers. My guess is that they have lost their interest on such phenomena due to the significant tendency for permanence it has revealed to have. I agree with the idea that school failure is a complex phenomenon that has been very well described and explained worldwide. However, the changes expected to follow

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\textsuperscript{17} In the Brazilian system, \textit{Ensino Fundamental} is composed by grades 1 to 9, children starting at the age of 6 in grade 1.
the research that has been produced are scarce – mainly because failure, in Brazil, is mostly a consequence of the unfair distribution of wealth that characterizes the country – a difficult scenario to be changed.

In spite of this dramatic situation, I believe that researchers should continue to apply their efforts to try and fight school failure, as it will keep haunting our educational system. It is a well known fact that grade retention leads to school drop out (Patrinos & Psacharopoulos 1996) and, in the long run, children out of school become socially excluded (Eurydice 1994; OECD 1995). Retention causes overcrowding in schools, reduces the number of vacancies for new pupils, and is a source of economic waste. Grade retention is also a proxy for inadequate learning (Schiefelbein & Wolff 1992) and has negative effects on teaching. Therefore, my suggestion is to invest our efforts in the study of the instances where academic success has been produced, as a way to understand them and publicize their results in an attempt to show that fighting failure is possible.

Against this idea of studying successful institutions as the one focused in this work, it can be argued that schools in our society, as they are organized, are failing to provide children and youths (especially those from the economically underprivileged groups) access to the knowledge produced by mankind, and development of intellectual skills – which should be their main purposes. On the contrary, they have been denounced by researchers such as Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) and Althusser (1971), as institutions which serve the purpose of social reproduction rather than social emancipation of individuals. To this argument, I respond by saying that schools are very old institutions and seem to still have a long life ahead of them. Therefore, I still believe there is space for investigation that tries to contribute to create democratic and significant schooling to economically deprived children, who are the ones that benefit the least from their schooling. As Bernstein (1996) argues, schools are not all the same and research has shown that there can be schools that make a difference to working class children (if for nothing else, at least to provide them with official certification in order to compete with members of the dominant social groups).

Having justified my research intentions, I’ll move on to present some of the evidence provided in the literature that indicates specific types of school cultures (especially the collaborative) are capable of promoting academic success among their pupils. However, before that, I’ll discuss the definitions of culture and collaborative culture adopted in this case-study.
Definitions and literature review

School culture is here considered a network of shared unquestioned meanings, materialized in behavior, artifacts and rituals; an implicit, unfinished and metaphoric text which requires constant interpretation. It can be also understood, in simpler words, as the manner of perceiving things, reflecting on problems, and finding solutions that characterizes an academic institution (Pérez Gómez 2001; Libâneo 2001). Collaborative school culture, on its turn, is a culture characterized by “professional interactivism” (Fullan & Hargreaves 2000, xi), which includes, among other things, joint decision making, the sharing of resources and ideas and critical group reflection.

In a previous investigation (Damiani 1998, 1999), I have studied the differences between two schools, in the city of Pelotas - administered by the same educational authority, located in the same borough, with similar clientele - that presented contrasting rates of academic failure: 10% against 42%, for children attending Years 1 to 5 of Ensino Fundamental. The research findings suggested that this difference was mainly due to the culture that prevailed in each school: the school with low failure rate was characterized by an instructional culture (Bernstein 1996), i.e., it was mainly dedicated to educational matters, while the other was characterized by a regulative culture (Bernstein 1996), focused on socialization matters. These findings support the idea that different cultures can produce different effect on students and teachers – either harmful or beneficial (Ivic 1989) – and have motivated me to focus my attention such aspect of schools’ lives.

The relationship between collaborative cultures and school success is illustrated in the works of Fullan & Hargreaves (2000) and Thurler (2001), for example. These authors have carried out extensive literature reviews on this matter which allowed them to emphasize the value of such cultures both for pupils and teachers. Thurler (2001) argues that this type of culture is associated with the proliferation of new ideas, risk-taking, self-evaluation and self-criticism, and the quick mobilization of collective resources to implement perceived necessary changes in schools. It also relates to feelings of integration and solidarity on the part of school actors. These findings are confirmed by the work of Perrenoud (2002) who states that, apart from the capacity to promote innovation, collaborative cultures enhance collective reflexive postures which are internalized by school actors and later applied to different contexts, outside schools.
A large-scale investigation on English schools where collaborative cultures were prevalent, carried out by Creese, Norwich & Daniels (1998), informed that such schools were more able to deal with difficulties springing from pupil diversity and special needs than other schools where collaboration was not an important value. In an intervention study directed to the creation of collaborative teacher support groups in schools\textsuperscript{18}, these authors found that such groups lead teachers to be more tolerant to difficulties, actively and creatively engaging in the search for solutions for their problems. This kind of behavior resulted in a decrease in the number of pupil referrals to specialists outside the schools.

The work of Arnaiz, Herrero, Garrido & de Haro (1999), who have investigated a school in which a large number of special educational needs pupils were included, also suggest that collaborative work is beneficial for institutions. The fact that staff (teachers and specialists) met weekly, for two hours, to discuss their work, produced a wide scope of strategies to address their difficulties, helping to diminish teacher isolation, increase teacher motivation and feelings of worth and competency.

In Brazil, several studies concerning the benefits of collaborative cultures have also been implemented and have also produced similar results to those observed in the international literature (Passos 1999; Magalhães & Celani 2000; Nono & Mizukami 2001; Rausch & Schlindwein 2001; Detsch & Gonçalves 2002; Dickel, Colussi, Bragagnolo & Andreolla 2002; Lacerda 2002; Silva 2002). These studies point out that collaborative action (such as group discussions and studies) present the potential to produce mutual support among teachers, favoring reflection and professional growth. Teachers working together are able to produce knowledge about school life, through the theorizing of their practice in a process of continuous formation.

It is important to alert, nonetheless, that collaborative work also presents some limitations. In their literature review about what has been produced on it, Leonard & Leonard (2003, 1), for instance, state that this kind of work culture is widely considered “critical do the creation and maintenance of schools as professional learning communities”. They also claim that different federal and state education department directives and position papers, as well as funding allocation policies, reflect the importance of such culture for institutional

\textsuperscript{18} The same intervention was carried out in Spain, with similar results (Parrilla & Daniels, 1998).
success. On the other hand, the authors also call attention to evidence that indicate some of the difficulties related to establishing this kind of culture in schools – not a simple process. For collaboration to happen, teachers must share beliefs about the value of such an attitude as well as about educational practices. In order to collaborate, teachers must also develop collaborative skills and be able to handle conflict. Collaboration should furthermore receive incentives from the administrative authorities, in terms of time and organizational aspects, to take place in schools. Competitiveness should be also be discouraged.

Another important factor to be taken into account in this discussion is what Lavié (2006, 777) calls the trap of “he seductive logic of often ideologically tacit discourses, making collaboration an object of co-optation that can be put at the service of diverse interests of conservation or transformation”. The author presents a critical account of five different academic discourses on school-based teacher collaboration, analyzing them from this point of view. He alerts us to the fact that the concept of collaborative work may be linked to neo-liberal politics, based on work intensification and de-professionalization of teachers, and opposite to its use as a means for their empowerment. Thus, “teacher communities” can help to develop socially critical processes of change as well as perpetuate current power arrangements and the status quo. Lavié (2006) argues that, as collaborative cultures are linked to school improvement, it is important to define such improvement and examine whose interests it is serving to.

After presenting the benefits of collaborative cultures found in the literature, its time to report on the case-study investigation.

The investigation
The case-study target collaborative school, was chosen due to the combination of the following factors: a) their teachers, unlike teachers in the majority of schools in town19, have systematic weekly meetings to discuss administrative and academic issues, with occasional study sessions that take place during the 1.5 hour meetings20; b) its good reputation, in the city of Pelotas, originated from its lower than average grade repetition and dropout percentages

19 In most schools meetings are not considered important and take place solely to make announcements and discuss a few administrative matters that need collective decisions.
(compared to the rest of the schools administered by the city authority) and the constant participation of its teachers in seminars and other academic events, where they present the innovative work they carry out in their school.

The school is located near the city center and most of its pupils and students have a working class background. In 2005, when the fieldwork started, the school had classes ranging from pre-school to 6th grade and was on its way to become a complete Ensino Fundamental school. It offers day and evening classes (the latter for adults) and was, at the time of the fieldwork, attended by approximately 350 students. Twenty-three 23 teachers plus 10 other staff (cleaners, cooks, porters) worked in the school and it was mandatory for all teachers to attend the weekly meetings, held during the interval between the afternoon and the evening classes.

Data was collected through non-structured observations of the meetings and of different aspects of school life; semi-structured interviews with the head teacher, the deputy head and with a randomly chosen sample of teachers, families and children; and analyses of school and educational authority documents and of teachers’ academic productions. Data analyses started with the organization of a brief narrative of the school’s collaborative culture history. Later, the interview and observation data were organized according to empirical categories that tried to describe the specific features that the collaborative culture assumed in this school and which appear to be related to the fact that the school stands out among its peer institutions for its performance in terms of pupils’ attainment and teachers’ satisfaction.

History of collaboration
In 2005 the target school was 78 years old, but the collaborative culture, as it currently exists, was initiated only in the 1990s, as a result of the educational authority’s decision to put an end to the bad reputation the school had developed over the years. Its building was rundown, being victim of constant vandalism, the neighboring community avoided enrolling their children there because its students were considered to be badly behaved, bad influence.

20 A few other staff members participate in the meetings too.
To change this desolate picture, a so-called “interventionist”\textsuperscript{21} was placed at the head of the school and his first action was to recompose its staff. He stated his wish to promote a radical change in the school’s culture and advised people to stay in the institution only if they strongly wanted to be part of such a change. He composed a team of teachers that embraced his ideas and the group started to have meetings to plan its actions. Besides the usual school meetings, people would frequently meet on Saturdays (non-working days), around lunch, to decide what to do, to evaluate progress, to discuss any important matter, and to study, when they felt it was necessary.

The school was said to start changing almost immediately and the meetings, according to the teachers, proved to be vital to such a change. The “interventionist” was replaced by an elected head teacher, after two years, and this new head continued to carry on the same type of collaborative administration, investing in teaching quality and in a good relationship with the community. Since then, the school has had other three head teachers who have also cultivated the ongoing collaborative culture. Teachers have conquered the right to be paid for the extra-time they use for meetings – feature that, a few years ago, differentiated them from the other teachers working in municipal schools.

To be currently hired as a teacher in this school, one has to commit oneself to attend the weekly meetings, even if working in other institutions.

**Features of the collaborative culture**

Although the school building does not stand out as different from the others administered by the municipal authority, its conservation level, the organization of its space and decoration, and the lively and friendly atmosphere that prevails in it catch the immediate attention of the visitor. Although counting with similar amount of resources, as compared to its peer schools, its premises have recently been expanded with the help of an extra-budget that came directly from the city administration. The resources were obtained as a result of a community action, organized by the school\textsuperscript{22}.

\textsuperscript{21} This was the word used by many teachers to name the man the Educational Authority placed at the head of the school with the mission of improving it.

\textsuperscript{22} As part of the city budget can be used to fulfill priority needs expressed by people of different boroughs, institutions and groups can bid for funds which will be distributed according to the quality and strength of their pleas. The target school was successful on its plea at this occasion.
The sharing of decisions, actions, opinions and responsibilities are a constant practice in the school. As stated before, teachers, staff, students and community have a saying in administrative matters. The group of teachers and specialists\textsuperscript{23} – including the head and the deputy head – make a point on promoting the participation of other staff in the meetings, although such participation is somewhat shy. Actions and decisions are largely discussed and power is relatively distributed. Disagreements, although frequent, are dealt with through discussions and this could be observed during the meetings, where different opinions were constantly put forward. Evaluations seem to be of paramount importance and involve the whole community: besides the ongoing assessments that take place in the meetings, parents fill in a form with evaluation items at the beginning of each academic year; and participate in end-of-semester meetings, with students and families, for further evaluations\textsuperscript{24}. The school has a few special needs children among their pupils and it is interesting to note that some families travel from other boroughs to bring their children to this school, probably due to the good quality education it provides.

The group of teachers often organizes theoretical discussions, following some reading about topics that can help to understand their current difficulties. School has a collection of education books which can be borrowed by the teachers. Improving this collection seems to be an important investment for the group, who are constantly looking for and buying books of interest. During the meetings and interviews, praising and loyalty statements were often produced by the teachers in relation to their school. The teachers who also worked in other schools made constant comparisons between them and the target school, always in favor of the latter. They seemed to privilege the work in it, when there was an overlapping of activities (mostly related to extra-school activities in holidays or celebrations).

As mentioned earlier, teachers make a point on innovating: they have different projects, such as home visits to pre-school children’s families, incentive to the use of school’s library; foreign language teaching (Spanish, English and French), interdisciplinary classes, sports and dance clubs, traveling – all of them uncommon among city schools.

Teachers are very keen on publicizing their work, making presentations about it in teachers’ events. More recently, a number of them have gone back

\textsuperscript{23} Pedagogical and psychological supervisors.

\textsuperscript{24} Such a practice is not found in other schools.
to the university, for post-graduate courses, and a few dissertations and monographs have been produced as results of their research projects which are aimed at investigating their own institution.

Teachers are active in their trade union and political matters are also a theme during their meetings, indicating that, although achieving a degree of professional satisfaction through their work, teachers also participate in the struggle to improve their salaries – extremely meager, in Brazil.

Of course the target school is not perfect (far from it!) and it still struggles against grade repetition and teachers worry about pupils’ attainment. Nevertheless, it should be stressed once more, the school certainly shows striking differences in relation the other municipal schools in Pelotas. For this reason, it’s been acting as subject for research in different areas.

What is in collaborative work that is beneficial?

I believe that the most important factor associated with collaborative practices is the richness of learning it has the potential to produce. Such learning can be considered more complete than the kind achieved by any individual process. According to Wells (2001), the internalization of knowledge is only achieved after a discussion about it, based on information and experience, has taken place.

To understand the power of collaboration for learning one can turn to Vygotsky’s (1982, 1998) account of the human mind, considered to have a social-historical nature, its development being mediated by other individuals through the use of artifacts (especially language): on the one hand, other people provide referential models that can be used as basis for individual’s learning and actions. On the other hand, tools impart meanings and the accumulated historical experience of their society to the individuals. As Álvares & Del Rio (1996) explain, the learner borrows such models from the more knowledgeable people in his/her environment and elaborates on them, being able to surpass his/her own limits. In such respect, it is important to bring to this discussion the concept of imitation, considered by Vygotsky (1998) to be essential to the process of learning. He explained that imitation was an internal, active and creative reconstruction of external operations and argued that it was undeniable the fact that children develop a whole repertoire of abilities through imitation of adults, besides their instructions. Imitation is also related to the concept of Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky
1998), the space where new concepts and abilities are in the course of development and can be influenced by the help of other human beings.

The act of thinking is embedded in socially and historically organized activities, thus presenting an interactive, argumentative, dialogical character (Engeström 1994). In this respect, Lave & Wenger (1991), when describing the learning processes that occur in communities of practice in non-formal situations, state that it is through engaging in everyday group activities that people’s identities, knowledge and behavior are formed and transformed. Further developing this idea, Schaffer (2004) explains that by participating in communities of practice individuals internalize the norms, habits and meanings of such communities (like, for instance, professional communities) each with its own singular ways of knowing, deciding what is important to know, and understanding the world.

In their literature review about the mechanisms that promote learning in collaborative environments, Jeong & Chi (1997) report that research in the areas of Anthropology, Linguistics and Organizational Science suggest that people share memories, knowledge or mental models as a result of joint work. In consequence, they produce common understandings that are more complex and rich than individual understandings. Salomon & Perkins (1998), also discussing this topic, emphasize the possibility of “objectivation” (ibid., 4) of thoughts and ideas - during their process of elaboration – through discussions. As they are shared, thoughts and ideas can be analyzed and improved as external objects. Through dialogue, problems of common interest in a group can be challenged, and their solutions can be proposed, amplified, modified or counter posed in a process of knowledge production that Wells (2001) classifies as co-construction – considering it to be extremely important for learning (progressive dialogue). Through dialogue, thoughts can be made public, reasoning made explicit, points of view defended. When listening to someone else’s argument, an individual is lead to consider alternatives to such argument and challenge the person who has proposed it. This person, on its turn, is induced to re-examine his/her own argument and consequently develop it further.

Fullan & Hargreaves (2000) consider schools as institutions capable of a kind of learning that is not equivalent to the cumulative result of the learning that occurs in their individual actors. Engeström’s ideas on expansive learning – a type of “learning activity that produces culturally new patterns of activity” (Engeström 2001, 139) – seem to be helpful to understand this process of
collective learning. He considers that the concept of Zone of Proximal Development is not applicable to individuals, but can be useful to understand the learning that occur in institutions, thus being defined as “the distance between the present everyday actions of the individuals and the historically new form of the societal activity that can be collectively generated as a solution to the double bind potentially embedded in the everyday actions” (Engeström 1987, 174). It is by facing these conflicts collectively that knowledge may be produced and institutions have a possibility for growth and improvement.

**Concluding remarks**

This case-study has focused on a school that stands out among the others administered by the same educational authority in the city of Pelotas. Its pupils present better attainment than the average for the city and its staff is characterized by a higher degree of professional satisfaction than their peers. Data seem to indicate that these features are strongly associated to the target school’s collaborative culture. This culture was originated through the initial effort of a head teacher who was placed at the school in an attempt to change it when its performance was weak and its reputation bad. His initial act was to form a group of teachers who were highly committed to the cause of changing school’s status quo. So they engaged in different cycles of expansive learning although the knowledge or skills acquired during the process were not stable or reasonably well defined during the process (Engeström 2001). They were new elements, created by the group and not something had been taught to it. This process that brought about radical changes for the school produced knowledge through innovative and creative actions whose positive outcomes were feedback to the group producing a sense of worth and efficacy (besides producing new contradictions and problems) and, consequently, increasing the probability of further innovation. The richness of the process seems to be a result of an intense and continuous group dialogue and learning whose value is perceived by all the school’s actors. However, it is important to note here that this kind of dialogue can only be establish is a small group of people, like the one in the target school, who are able to maintain a contact with all its members at the same time. I believe that a progressive dialogue cannot be established in a large group of people.
Examining this process, it is also possible to hypothesize that to establish true collaboration it is important for the group to have a common objective, perceived as relevant for all its members (like changing the reputation of the school). Maybe initially this objective will be an ideal; but later it will need to prove possible and worth fight for due to the benefits the group perceives the fight has yielded.

If, motivated by the comments of Lavié (2006), one is to analyze the purpose of the collaboration culture established in the target school, one can perceive important clues indicating that the aims of transformation and emancipation are favored by the group, which is far from being conformist. Besides investing on the quality of schooling provided to their pupils – through planning it collectively, permanently evaluating it and trying to improve it by investing in teacher qualification – teachers actively participate in the political and academic instances which are committed to the emancipation equity ideals. Instead of being simply consumers of the knowledge produced by university researchers, teachers are involved in producing their own local knowledge about schooling for the less privileged. Instead of being accepting the status quo, the group is working towards the empowerment of the community there are involved with, giving it voice within the institution and helping it to fight for their rights and democratic participation. Instead of accepting the social condition they are submitted to through the salaries that are sufficient for them to lead a life with dignity, teachers are active participants in their trade union, in a plea for better salaries.

References


Researchers Learning by Intervention Research: The “Acting-as-Citizens” Program as a Joint Production Between Researchers and Deprived Communities in São Paulo\textsuperscript{25}

\textit{Fernanda Coelho Liberali}

Nobody teaches anybody, nobody teaches oneself, but all human beings teach each other, mediated by the world (Freire 1970)

\section*{Introduction}
This paper aims at examining the learning process of researchers involved in intervention research. The specific researchers this paper will focus on were involved with an Extramural Program entitled \textit{Acting as Citizens}\textsuperscript{26} during a three year time period, from 2005-2007. This is a program for community development in deprived communities of São Paulo, Brazil, which aims at creating opportunities for everyone to organize creative ways for transforming their social realities through education. The researchers, to whom this paper refers to, were engaged in developing a kind of research that focused on the reciprocal teaching-learning process between themselves as university researchers and their subjects, in this case teachers in deprived communities in São Paulo. The researchers looked to self and community development in an attempt to find a means of dealing with the unacceptable and unfair conditions of the society they live in. Their hope was to learn ways of improving their participation in activities for community growth, and they conducted their research with this goal in mind.

In order to develop this discussion, the following topics are addressed in this paper: the research group and the extramural Program where the intervention research was developed; the Socio-Historical-Cultural Activity perspective of Collaborative Intervention; the means of data collection, selection and analysis; and the discussion of the results of the two activities developed in the project.

\textsuperscript{25} I thank Sarah Weiller and Maria Cristina Damianovic for the review and comments on this text.
\textsuperscript{26} Programa Ação Cidadã.
The research group “Language in Activities in School Contexts”\textsuperscript{27} and its Extramural Program “Acting as Citizens”

The research group \textit{Language in Activities in School Contexts} was created as a part of the Post-Graduate Program for Applied Linguistics and Language Studies (LAEL\textsuperscript{28}) in response to encouragement from PUC-SP. The research group mainly focuses on how subject constitution, forms of participation, and the production of meaning are permeated by language. In 2002, the group decided to develop an extramural program for school and community transformation: \textit{Acting as Citizens}. This program would unite theoretical-methodological discussion with practical intervention in society.

The program was introduced in São Paulo, the largest city in Brazil, with a population of 11,150,249 people. São Paulo is the richest city in Brazil, with a high rate of development in terms of commerce, finance, the arts and entertainment. However, it is also a city of great social inequality. São Paulo’s major problems are: high crime rates, very poor living conditions of many of its inhabitants, a lack of urban planning, overcrowded public transportation, air pollution, and river pollution. In São Paulo, there are vast territories of social exclusion which do not share in the economic potential and suffer from highly vulnerable living conditions. These many problems make obvious the need for projects that can transform the condition of the population, especially in the case of kids and teenagers, who are often oppressed in the process of building their subjectivity. These kids and youngsters have no expectations, futures or dreams to live for (going to university, having a job, being part of a group, etc.).

Despite this situation, education is still based on memorization, individual work, fragmentation, linearization, alienation and excessive individualism. The teachers receive an inadequate pre-service teacher education and do not believe in the content of what they must teach. On top of this, they receive very low salaries and must work an excessive number of teaching hours, which deprives them from planning, exchanging ideas and studying\textsuperscript{29}. As for students, they have no voice in the decisions about the work developed in the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{27} Linguagem em Atividades do Contexto Escolar
\item \textsuperscript{28} Programa de Pós-Graduação em Lingüística Aplicada e Estudos da Linguagem.
\item \textsuperscript{29} As an example, a language teacher who has 33 different classes (around 1320 students) and works 40 hours per week earns R$ 1240,00 (about US$560,00).
\end{itemize}
class or school. They are rarely allowed to use their background, emotions, or physical energy in order to participate in school activities.

In this context, *Acting as Citizens* was developed in 2002 as an extramural project aimed at providing everyone involved in the community with tools to transform their reality. It was developed by PhDs, Doctoral students, Master students, undergraduates, participants, and other researchers from the Language in Activities in School Contexts research group. As pointed out by Liberali (2006a), the program aims at creating possibilities of playing with a world that has not been created yet. This leads to a concept of citizenship seen as the development of ethical attitudes and actions in Brazil’s very contrasting conditions (Lessa, Liberali & Fidalgo 2005).

In this sense, the *Acting as Citizens Program* focuses on the “development of citizenship as a condition of those who do not simply accept what is provided to them but who also want to produce their own rights and duties interdependently” (Lessa, Liberali & Fidalgo 2005, 15). As stated by Liberali, Fuga and Gonçalves (forthcoming):

> The Program is based on the concept of citizenship as the creation of contexts which stimulate discussion to make participants recognize their positioning as historical subjects which usually implies social exclusion. For the group of researchers, real citizenship should be relatively independent of legal questions about what constitutes a citizen (Torres 2003). It should be seen as a building process, which is organized by understanding that values and practices that constitute actions should be constantly re-evaluated. Moreover, it would be misleading to view citizenship as a status which embraces political rights and pre-given duties. This research group understands citizenship as a challenge of ethical nature, which establishes citizen praxis, aiming at diminishing the distance between the promise and the reality of a global democracy.

In order to do this, the program involves different projects:

a) Meetings with teachers, students, parents, principals, coordinators and researchers to discuss school needs and dreams;

b) The Reading in Different Areas Project

c) The Multiple Worlds Project

d) The Play–Learn Projects

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30 For more details about the topic, consult Fidalgo and Liberali (2006).

31 Leitura nas diferentes áreas
For the purpose of this paper, only two projects will be addressed: the Reading in Different Areas Project and the Play–Learn Projects.

**Reading in Different Areas**

*Reading in Different Areas* is a collaborative project called to life as the result of the poor performance of certain communities of Brazilian students in the national reading tests. Its main objective is to work with the reading capacities necessary for a critical understanding of the social genres (Bakhtin 1953) in which students scored the lowest in the official exams for all school levels. Specifically, it aims to develop and support Teacher Support Teams (Daniels & Parrila 2004) in all of the schools involved, teams that can independently contemplate the capacities necessary to reading in different subject areas.

The Teacher Support Teams were comprised of three or four teachers from each of the 24 schools that belonged to the program. The Teacher Support Teams were supported by the researchers and the supervisors from the State Secretary of Education. They discussed independently and with their school staff the capacities necessary to reading in different subject areas and ways of critically and transformatively acting in their communities. In order to do this, a network of activities was created as follows:

- **Preparatory Meetings** with researchers, to work out the theoretical and practical aspects of the workshops;
- **Workshops** with researchers, supervisors, and teachers, to further develop the Teacher Support Teams in their work with reading, in preparation for workshops in the HTPC meetings;
- **HTPC meetings**: Teacher Support Teams, teachers, supervisors, coordinators, principal, and researchers, meet to develop training procedures for educating teachers about: a) reading in different subject areas and b) critical participation in communities;
- **Classes of Different Subject Areas**: to develop critical reading in different subject areas and critical citizenship in the community;
- **Citizenship Acting Event**: actions in and with the community to develop critical attitudes towards their life histories.

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32 Aprender Brincando

33 The HTPC meetings are weekly meetings for further teacher education. The time is partially used to conduct the Reading in Different Areas and the Teacher Support Teams projects in regular schools, and are the school meetings referred to in this text. HTPC stands for horário de trabalho pedagógico coletivo i.e. joint pedagogical work time.
Play-Learn

Play-Learn was developed in the public nurseries and pre-schools of the deprived neighborhoods of São Paulo and aims to develop possibilities for principals, coordinators, teachers and students to work with language through play (Vygotsky 1930) as the locus for learning in different subject areas. The major topic discussed is how to create and plan tasks that will “educate” the whole community. Students, parents, caretakers, teachers, coordinators, principals, and researchers get involved in teaching-learning and performing in the world through citizenship actions. Play-Learn includes the following activities:

- **Principals’ and Coordinators’ Board Meetings** intended to develop the directing board (principal, deputies and coordinators) into teacher educators who will support teachers’ projects with students and the community.

- **Children Stories Workshops** aimed at developing teacher support teams that will work with their colleagues to develop ways of playing by using story telling as a means of student development.

- **Bilingual Education** offered in classes conducted by a teacher educator and student-teachers\(^{34}\) in order to:
  a) give deprived kids the opportunity to play in a foreign language as a means of developing multiple ways of organizing their cognitive processes and identities, and
  b) create a hands-on experience for student-teachers to learn how to teach different subjects/themes in a foreign language.

**Socio-historical-cultural activity perspectives on collaborative intervention**

According to Vygotsky (1930/1999, 65), research is “…one of the most important problems of the entire enterprise of understanding the uniquely human forms of psychological activity. In this case, the method is simultaneously prerequisite and product, the tool and the result of the study”.

This idea clearly reveals the essence of a research perspective that sees the position of the researcher as an apprentice throughout the research process. Along those lines, Magalhães (2006 a-c) emphasizes the role of collaboration as essential to the development of everyone involved in the process. However,

\(^{34}\) Students taking their undergraduate teaching degrees.
this is not a simple task. The organization and conduction of a research process which is simultaneously tool and result automatically implies that the researchers must learn how to conduct it as they do it, developing their expertise in collaboration with their partners.

This perspective overcomes the authoritarian and dogmatic perspectives of both common sense and scientific knowledge by constructing a new dialectical perspective of the object in focus. This dialectical construction involves the language that materializes new concepts at work in an activity as specific as critical collaborative intervention research. Language as a mediator in the construction of meaning in the interaction between researchers, practitioners and students is of utmost importance (Magalhães 2006).

Collaboration as the basis for intervention assumes that people construct “zones” – the space between who they are and who they are becoming – that allow them to become (Holzman 2002). In this view, the Zone of Proximal Development is the ever emergent and continuously changing “distance” between being and becoming. In constructing Zones of Proximal Development, we do things we don’t yet know how to do; we go beyond ourselves (Holzman 2002).

Collaboration could also be connected to the idea of communities of practice as stated by Lave & Wenger (1991). When discussing different apprenticeships (Yucatec midwives, Vai and Gola tailors, US Navy quartermasters, meat-cutters, and non-drinking alcoholics in Alcoholics Anonymous), the authors pointed out that novice members normally join the communities by learning at the periphery. As they become more familiar with the activities of that community, they move more to the “centre” of the particular community. In this perspective collaboration and participation are integrated and full participation occurs as a result of “legitimate peripheral participation” (Lave & Wenger 1991, 29). In more integrated collaborations, an emphasis on process, dialogue, and empowerment results in more flexible roles and divisions of labor (Mahn & John-Steiner 2002).

These views of collaboration combine with the Bakhtinian concept of answerability-responsibility. Bakhtin states that an utterance is produced by a dialogical relation with other utterances that are linked “in the chain of speech verbal communication” (Bakhtin 1992, 319). It “refutes, affirms, supplements,
and relies on the others, presupposes them to be known, and somehow takes them into account” (Bakhtin 1992, 341) in a sort of never-ending chain, called “addressivity”. In other words, the utterance is constructed while taking past utterances and possible responsive reactions into account. At the same time, according to Clark and Holquist (1984), Bakhtin discusses responsibility as the action of responding to the worlds’ needs that is accomplished by subjects becoming engaged in certain activities. Answerability-responsibility includes otherness as a fundamental category of value that makes all actions and creations possible.

In the Acting as Citizens Program, collaboration is a process of participation, shared evaluation, and reorganization of practices mediated by instruments for questioning senses and creating new meanings to (re)construct knowledge (Magalhães & Fidalgo 2007).

**Data Collection, Selection and Analysis**

This study first gathered the recorded and/or annotated data of 10 preparatory meetings and 25 workshops held in the three years (2005, 2006, 2007) of the research project. The data was then carefully sorted based on the emphasis of this paper and on the type of participation conducted by the researchers. The episodes chosen to be presented in the paper refer to the following activities:

- 5 preparatory meetings: 2 meetings from *Reading in Different Areas* 2005 (reports), 1 meeting from *Reading in Different Areas* in 2006 (reports and/or transcriptions), 2 meetings from *Reading in Different Areas* and one from Learn-Play in 2007 (reports and transcriptions)
- 5 workshops: 2 workshops from *Reading in Different Areas* 2005 (transcriptions), 1 workshop from *Reading in Different Areas* in 2006 (reports and transcriptions), 2 workshops from Learn-Play in 2007 (reports and transcriptions)

The analysis examines the positions occupied by the two senior PhDs, three junior PhDs, two PhD students, two Master students and two undergraduate students⁶ who conducted the *Acting as Citizens Program*:

- two senior PhDs (Senior Researchers), responsible for the coordination of the projects: Fernanda Liberali

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⁶ All the participants authorized the use of their names in this paper.
(general coordinator) and Maria Cecilia Magalhães (*Reading in Different Areas* coordinator);

- three junior PhDs (Junior Researcher), responsible for the coordination and/or supervision of the projects: Rosemary Schettini, Alzira Shimoura and Mona Hawi;
- two PhD students (Doctoral Student), responsible for the development of the projects: Valdite Fuga and Monica Guerra;
- two Master students (Mater Students), assistants in the direction of the projects: Sonia Fuji and Rosa Bronzon;
- two undergraduate students (Undergraduate Student), junior assistants in the direction of the projects: Silvana de Oliveira and Viviane Klen Alves.

The analyses were carried out through an investigation of voice and turn-taking distributions followed by an analysis of argument structures. Each text of the preparatory meetings and workshops was first analyzed by the lexical choices that defined the thematic content produced during the meeting. Then the voice distribution (Bakhtin) was analyzed in two ways: according to which people introduced topics in the meetings, and according to which people took turns to speak during meetings. After that, the number of turns taken in each of the transcribed meetings was analyzed and interpreted in the context of its production. Finally, selected parts of the meetings were studied for the traces of the researcher participation in the argumentative production of the meanings. Argumentative discursive characteristics (Toulmin 1958, Perelman & Olbrechts 1958, Dolz 1996) were studied based on: the presentation of points of view/theses, the arguments supporting these theses, the counterarguments, and the conclusion and/or compromise of the argument.

**Discussion of the results of the three project activities**

The following discussion of the data is based on the historical interpretations of researchers’ participation in two different activities, preparatory meetings and workshops.

Preparatory Meetings: moving to responsibility and addressivity

Preparatory meetings were planned as a space for researchers to study, plan and evaluate their actions in the projects. They took place once a month and had different types of organization depending on the aim, focus, or needs of the group.
In 2005, when the *Reading in Different Areas* project originated, not all the members of the group had had contact with reading as a theoretical object, let alone with reading in different areas. The preparatory meetings aimed at discussing the concepts of the critical reading of the world (Freire 1970), genre (Bakhtin & Volochínov 1929; Bakhtin 1953), language capacities (Schneuwly & Dolz 2004), and prototypical sequences (Bronckart 1997). It also involved the analysis and discussion of the impact of these concepts on the tasks prepared for the program. The senior researchers designed the preparatory meetings in order to discuss these topics while simultaneously starting to prepare the tasks and workshops that would be conducted with the Teacher Support Teams. The reports of these meetings describe how Liberali and Magalhães presented the topics and asked about the texts that were being read on the subjects we were studying.

In Preparatory Meeting 2, the group selected expository/informative texts from scientific magazines and then separated the narrative of these texts from more informative passages. The junior researchers, doctoral students, master students, and undergraduate students presented the text they had found and justified their choices with arguments from the theoretical text they had read. Whenever these participants presented the texts they had selected and their reasons for this selection, the senior researchers questioned their choices, and the whole group had the opportunity to present viewpoints to either support these positions or counter-argue them. Many doubts were discussed and, in the end, the texts that would be used in the workshop were selected. The discussions with the Teacher Support Teams in the workshops were the sole responsibility of the senior researchers, although they did present the material they would be using to the whole group, receiving only very few suggestions to change it.

In September 2005, the second semester of the project, the senior researchers traveled to a conference in San Diego. Because of this, the junior researchers conducted the workshops. Liberali prepared a plan for organizing these workshops, which would be held in the schools, and discussed with the whole group of researchers how to use it with the Teacher Support Team. The discussion was intense and the reports stated mainly what each item required from the researchers while they were conducting the workshops. The slides for these workshops were prepared by a junior researcher and sent, by email, to the whole group of junior researchers, who presented many suggestions.
In 2006 the group of researchers further distributed responsibility. Each member was made responsible for a group of schools and had to supervise them throughout the semester. In each preparatory meeting, the researchers reported back on their groups, speaking about tasks and plans they were developing. This led to a more distributed participation during the meetings.

In addition to this, the Teacher Support Teams had become increasingly involved with the process, having gained more expertise in the topics under discussion, and the dynamics of the workshops changed to include more mini-group discussions and concrete preparation of the workshops with other teachers. At that time, the Teacher Support Teams were more involved with their colleagues’ development and the center of the discussion was how to help them understand the concepts of reading and use them as tools to teach in their subject areas. The master students and undergraduate students planned some questions to guide their participation in the following workshops with the Teacher Support Teams.

During the preparatory meetings, based on suggestions made by the senior researchers, the master students and undergraduate students read both the tasks and their analyses done by the whole group and prepared questions to be used during the workshops with the Teacher Support Teams. Simultaneously, junior researchers and doctoral students planned their roles during such meetings. Their turns were frequently used to question theoretical points they thought relevant for the discussion to be carried out in the workshops.37

This movement towards more participation represents an important step in relation to responsibility and addressivity. Each researcher became more involved and learned more about his/her role, as well as the essential concepts and manners of conducting intervention.

In 2007 some of the junior researchers assumed the coordination of different activities of the project while the senior researchers coordinated the extramural program as a whole. This distribution of power involved more responsibility for everyone. For Liberali, it became essential continue to support each researcher in the direction of the specific projects/segments in which they were involved.

Senior Researcher Magalhães also assumed the coordination of the Reading in Different Areas Project and the organization of the participation of

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37 For reasons of clarification: preparatory meetings were used to plan the workshops. The workshops, among other things, were used to plan the HTPC meetings
researchers in all the schools. The junior researchers took responsibility for single projects, respectively: Shimoura – responsible for the *Play-Learn Project*, Schettini – responsible for *Children Stories Activities*, and Hawi – responsible for *Principals and Coordinators’ Board Activities*.

When she took over the coordination of the *Play-Learn Project*, Shimoura was already an expert in childhood education. However, she had to face enormous difficulties in moving from a participating position to the general coordination of a big project. In order to do so, she planned the preparatory meetings very carefully, which even resulted in pre-preparatory meetings with Liberali to discuss the issues she wanted to address with the other researchers.

Schettini had never studied childhood education, but had become an expert in training and supervising Teacher Support Teams. She therefore assumed the coordination of *Children Stories Activities* with the support and collaboration of Monica Guerra (doctoral student), Ivaneide (Master Researcher), and Cristina (Master Researcher) as her collaborators. They had plenty of experience with childhood education, although none with the development of Teacher Support Teams. Similarly, Hawi assumed the coordination of the work with principals and coordinators because she had been a teacher in the group’s extramural courses for coordinators for a long time and knew how to discuss issues in this area. She was supported by master students and undergraduate students, who also had some experience in these extramural courses.

This whole scenario of new responsibilities led to a lot of tension. Each person had to assume responsibilities which would depend on and determine other people’s actions. This movement led to disagreements in the preparatory meetings that can be explained in a Zone of Proximal Development perspective as a region of conflict, where differing concepts stress the importance of collaboration in the production of new possibilities for the whole.

In one of the selected preparatory meetings, the group had had an email quarrel about the visits to different schools and many were very annoyed with the attitudes of others. In this meeting, Liberali introduced the first topic of the meeting that had as its main theme the discussion of some theoretical concepts that were decisive for the development of the whole group and for the group’s reflection about the problems it was going through. Some of the topics discussed were: a) What is a social activity?; b) What is Acting as Citizens?; c) What are stories?; d) What are expectations?; and e) What is teacher
education?. Besides, the group would also discuss a conflict started through the internet discussion list, since one junior researcher, Schettini, believed that the ways a Master researcher, Monica L., reported her actions (1) was not appropriate and (2) did not represent what had actually occurred in the event reported. This led to a conflict and lack of action which, for part of the group, seemed to reflect lack of responsibility.

In order to introduce the issues in a more theoretical way and then move to the problems the group was facing, Liberali took a long turn to present some considerations that were already part of the discussions of the group but seemed to need some clarification. For instance:

Liberali: (...) So it actually is all about creating conditions in which people can have access. We need to remember our objective: we are involved in activities that deal with the issue discussed, the understanding (of this issue), the actual discussion (of it) and the action (as a result of the issue). So perhaps we have achieved a certain level as educators – that would be understanding – but we have not achieved an effective discussion or transformation, nor have we achieved effective action. (point of view presented)

Master student 1: So this is our objective then? (question for confirmation)

Liberali: As a group this is our objective. And it involves the whole group. We have to think about it all the time… We have to understand what is happening, we have to discuss what is happening, we have to suggest ways to change and we have to act so as to put these suggestions in practice. And why? Because we need to consider that we are not standing still. We change. We are correct at times, but we also make mistakes. (...) (presentation of supports with explanations)

(Preparatory Meeting 26/ 10/2007)

In the excerpt, Liberali is discussing the concept of acting as citizens and she says that they have probably managed to achieve understanding, though she doubts it. However, she states that they had not achieved real discussion and effective transformation of their practices. At that, a master student wants to confirm her point about the objective of the group. This was very relevant question because this master student was new in the group and was still unsure.

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38 The examples were translated from Portuguese into English by Claudia Winter, Ana Paula Cortez and Sueli Fidalgo. I thank them very much for this.

39 Italicized comments in parenthesis correspond to the analysis.
about the ideas shared by the group. It appears that these ideas had become static entities, that nobody discussed them anymore for they had it in their minds that they all shared the same understanding. The contradictions they faced proved them wrong. To clarify the idea for the researchers, Liberali gave examples and explanation of what the objective of the project was.

The whole discussion moved from the theories studied to the problems faced and the conflict became clear. Liberali then used a point made by one of the participants to set up the “hot” topic, and to introduce the topic of collaboration.

Liberali: Of course. So, collaborative action for knowledge construction. What is a collaborative action? (controversial question) Schettini started the meeting saying that she was uncomfortable. I agree with a lot of the things that she said, but I disagree in one fundamental aspect (presentation of point of view with opposition). I think that everyone has to tell each other what they do not agree with, what they think is inadequate because I may be in a place in which I do not receive criticism and may be doing a lot of things wrong (supports). And I don’t think this is what we want to keep (point of view restated). We need to be critical all the time, all around. Now, how is this criticism going to be spelled out? We need to learn how to do this so that nobody will feel bad about it. (support with explanation and suggestion) Because in all this mess [reported in the meeting] if I were Norma, I would feel really bad. I would be feeling guilty: “I am guilty because I did not give anyone else the information.” I think this is it. Collaborative action is not putting the other in the position of devil. All of us will always make mistakes. (support with example and explanation)

Palma: But I want to tell you something. Monica L. went ahead because she knows the situation a bit better. That’s ok. But I didn’t see that email as the type of criticism that was mentioned here by Schettini or by the rest of you. But this is me. What I saw in that email was a report of what people had said. That’s all that I saw. (presentation of point of view with support as an opposition to previous view)

Liberali: Then I will tackle the second point: I was negatively impressed by the type of descriptions made. (use of new topic posed to introduce another support to previous view) Think about it, everyone, I was not there and I don’t know what happened in any of the nursery centers. Actually, I don’t know anything. So I think that the problem is not that... I think that Monica L. did not want to be aggressive to Schettini or to Norma. (support with example about description not made)
Shimoura: It’s exactly what you are saying, that report does not bear any theoretical sustainability. If she is the person responsible for it, she should know. No, Schettini, we forgot, and the date is there. If the group does not know what is happening, then nothing will happen. It really did put Norma down on the sheet; she forgot. She had the obligation of knowing which day the citizen action [project] is. (...). (presentation of point opposing of view with support with examples)

(Preparatory Meeting 26/ 10/2007)

The flow of this conversation shows instances of argumentative language in a conflict situation. Participants had differing views and were competing in discourse in the attempts to both present their views and understand those of others. The junior researcher, Palma and Shimoura, tried to make their points with supports from impressions or examples. Shimoura tried to justify her view, which was contrary to what some other members of the group seemed to believe. As an answer, Liberati used the support given by the junior researcher to introduce another topic that was essential to the group: ways of making reports.

In the group, no one seemed to feel insecure about exchanging opinions, discussing ideas and presenting points of view. The feeling of belonging provided room for the participants to make their contributions, assuming positions and power in the relationship. However, the discussion presented also shows how assuming responsibility and answering to it may be very hard.

Workshops: a distribution of power built on democratic actions and ideas
The workshops with researchers, supervisors, and teachers were planned as places to work with reading and play while developing the Teacher Support Teams. They were also used to contribute to the preparation of the school meetings. In these workshops, the Teacher Support Teams gathered to discuss how a) to critically read different genres in their own subject areas (the Reading in Different Areas Project) and how to use children’s stories as a starting point to work with play in the classroom (Play-Learn); b) to discuss teaching-learning approaches to discursively engage in social practices through reading; and c) to develop tasks to work on in the communities with their students. A normal workshop had the following structure:
- an introduction of the researchers involved in the project to those teachers who were present on that specific day;
- a review of the topic discussed in previous meetings;
- discussions of the topic of the day in small groups;
- presentations the findings of these discussions to the whole group;
- closing remarks and preparations for the following workshops and other activities.

In the Reading in Different Areas Project 2005, these workshops were mainly conducted by Liberali, Magalhães & Cavenaghi\(^{40}\), senior researchers who were responsible for developing the whole group discussions as well as for guiding the small group discussions. While conducting the whole group discussions, the senior researcher introduced the objectives, posed controversial questions, and questioned the participants in order to lead them to support the ideas presented, as in the examples below.

Most of the time the junior researchers and doctoral students helped in the small group discussions by posing questions and/or simply following the discussion. Their task was mainly to detect problems and ask for help. The master students and undergraduate students participated just as the Teacher Support Teams did: they often had the same problems with the material as the TSTs, and sometimes even answered posed to the Teacher Support Team.

During the senior researchers’ trip to the conference, things changed and the junior researchers and doctoral students had assumed more responsibility for conducting the workshops. During these workshops, they created opportunities for the Teacher Support Team to question and expand on the tasks they had previously prepared to use with their colleagues in their schools.

In the following example, the Teacher Support Team were investigating the tasks they had planned and on different ways of conducting the school meetings. This Teacher Support Team was comprised of history teachers, but they were supposed to work with their colleagues from their whole school. This sounded very scary to the teachers, because they were not experts in every subject area and doubted if they could handle questions from their colleagues. Schettini posed a controversial question to raise the issue among the participants, and then conducted the discussion on ways of planning meetings with a more flexible perspective.

\(^{40}\) Angela Cavenaghi is a senior researcher who was involved only in the first year of the project.
Schettini: and if the guys of the math department ask for your help, what are you planning to do? controversial question, based on possible actions to occur during the school meeting)

Teacher 1: Oh, yes, we still have to take a look at that. (showing concern about the topic)

Schettini: Because in this group everyone teaches history, but you are thinking about making a presentation for everybody. Everybody is there, right? (supports her reason for questioning)

Teacher 1: Oh, yes, that’s why I’m asking you, we are worried about teaching a content which is not related to our area. (supports reason for doubting)

(Workshop 19/10/2005)

In 2006, the movement towards more active participation of the junior researchers and doctoral students was consolidated. They took responsibility for conducting parts of the meeting when they presented the themes and guided the tasks. The master students and undergraduate students also found a more effective role than that of simply recording/videotaping. They were responsible for working with the groups of Teacher Support Teams: they were supposed to ask questions to help the Teacher Support Teams remember essential issues to be addressed when planning a lesson based on a specific genre.

In the example that follows, Fuga, a doctoral student, questioned and guided the discussion in a small group. At this moment she assumed, together with Shimoura, the responsibility for the topic to be debated. The situation is similar to that experienced by Schettini in the previous example. Teachers are worried about how their colleagues would learn about reading in different areas. The Teacher Support Team member was worried about how to introduce so many theoretical concepts and how to deal with them in her school in a small amount of time. Fuga and Shimoura guided them to think of possibilities for their plans and presented new possibilities that they could not have devised.

Teacher 1: I will have to explain to them what a comic strip is, what the participant is, the objective, the place, the content, what textual organization means, what a narrative, a description is. Because I am going to have history, geography teachers… (teacher presents her opinion and justifies it)

Fuga: So you are actually talking about the theoretical background that lies behind the unit you prepared. (tries to direct position taken)

Teacher 1: Yes...
Fuga: So your question is how you are going to work with everything in these two hours (researcher reposes the controversial question)

Teacher 1: Yes.

Fuga: yes.

Teacher 1: that is what we are worried about. Because I have to work with this thing (pointing to part of the chart) and it is very complex. I felt this yesterday when we did a preview. (points to the chart) (point of view on the situation and reason)

Fuga: the lack of this theoretical support. (also points to the chart)

Teacher 1: This was lacking and I felt anxious because in actual fact, when I showed this to them, I felt: Wow, how can they understand this now? (support with example) (…)

Teacher 1: I had thought of a task for them to develop, but how could they if they had not seen [what we saw]. (support with explanation)(…)

Shimoura: Have you thought of any suggestions to solve the problem she is describing? (Addressing the other teachers) (controversial question)

Teacher 1: No, because it happened last night. (…) (justifying the answer)(…)

Shimoura: This is what I am thinking: How would I do this? It’s just like you said. You have a group who has seen it before and another one who has not. But those who have seen it before worked with a different genre, as you have just said. So you are going to work with something new, although some already worked with the project last year. Anyway, how can we work with this? (controversial question is restated) It isn’t easy. You have been working with this for a year and a half, haven’t you? How can they understand it (pointing to the chart) so quickly? If this is the only focus, they won’t understand a thing because they won’t be able to see it in practice. If they see the practice, they won’t understand what lies behind it. (describes situation stated to pose the problematic situation)

Teacher 2: what lies behind, yes. (agrees)

Shimoura: Why are we doing this? My idea is that the thing should be interwoven. Would be important to present the project, who the group is, what its aims are. Why are we here doing this? This is necessary, obviously, to contextualize. But I would do it this way: I would give them copies of the text, like you did (to a teacher) and as Fuga said, I would ask: What is a comic strip? Just like you did in the beginning of the unit. To explore the situation of action. If you did this, great, you take advantage of that. You can do it orally (…) (presents suggestion with examples and explanations)

(Workshop 11/08/06)
Similarly, Schettini and Fuji, a master student, discussed with teachers from different areas how to deal with reading cartoons. They tried to explain to the teachers that the teachers’ was appropriate because it related reading to the main topic of the day (saving energy). The teachers could see a connection between reading, the theme chosen for critical discussion and their own subject areas.

Schettini: so, ok, then, specify ... what citizenship action did you choose? (controversial question)(difficult to hear) (Teacher Support Team answers the question but it is inaudible for transcription)

Schettini: We are from the applied linguistic area so we always worry about language. (reading aloud the sheet with the tasks) we… create possibilities for… something… so creating possibilities for… or a space for discussion about the balanced use of water and electricity? (asks for clarification / restatement with reasons based on the group affiliation to linguistics)

Teacher 2: creating... a space.. (tries to clarify)

Fuji: about the rational use of water and electricity... (helps clarify)

Schettini: it’s all in the text... can you see? Can you see a link with...? (gives support)

Teacher 2: Ah! ok... this...( )

Teacher 1: the theme would be water... ((several voices))... It has to do with cubic meters… (gives support based on the specific topic under study)

Schettini: the HTPC needs to be useful for the school... (gives support based on the need of the school) ((several voices))

Fuji: Ah... is there any waste? (asks for clarification)

Teacher 3: because quite often there is also shortage ... (gives support/reason)

Teacher 4: water shortage... there have been... moments in which there was lack of water for a week... (expands support)

Fuji: Wow!...

Teacher 2: in the dry period, we had water rationing measures, there was water shortage... In São Paulo, there is no rationing measure for water supply, is there?... (expands support)

(Workshop 11/08/06)

The examples from 2006 demonstrate how junior researchers, doctoral students, and master students started to assume more turns and to question Teacher Support Teams by conducting the discussions in a more collaborative way. As discussed by Lave and Wenger (1991), novice members started to
learn at the periphery and began to move more to the centre. The discursive practices show that more flexible roles and division of labor were being constructed.

In 2007, the whole group had a more specific role in the workshops, taking turns and assuming larger parts of the tasks in the Learn-Play Project. The conductor of the meeting, who was responsible for triggering reflection among Teacher Support Teams, is exemplified by the way Schettini questioned the teachers about the reasons for them being chosen as members of the Teacher Support Team. Teachers had been presenting positive reasons for being chosen and accepting the role of a Teacher Support Team member. However, Schettini wanted to make them reflect and present opposing ideas which would help clarify their new status and possible problems they would face by assuming this new status. Her way of posing questions and insisting on asking participants to support their answers demanded more elaborate replies which were essential for the development of the whole group and for sharing ideas.

Schettini: Some speak differently; some say: I don’t know what I’m actually doing here. *(controversial question)*

Teacher 3: I asked my coordinator this question. Why me? *(reports on experience of reflecting on the theme)*

Schettini: Ok, so you have no idea, right? *(reposes the controversial question jokingly)*

Teacher 3: She said: Aren’t you always saying that you have high self-esteem? Well, this is the moment. *(gives support by reporting her coordinator’s answer)*

Teacher 4: I think that the support group is real support, isn’t it? The support group has to be well formed, very close together so as to have a certain sense of complicity! *(presents her view of what a Teacher Support Team is in order to support her choice)*

Schettini: What else? *(questions deepen the discussion)*

Teacher 4: Schettini, something like this, I don’t really know what we can do for each other. but *(expands with reference to material distributed)*

Teacher 5: I believe that what we are doing is supporting someone who needs support. So, let’s imagine that I’m going to give some suggestions of how to help someone who needs support and that I know how to help this person in their teacher education process. *(expands support with example)*

Teacher 6: I believe we are going to discover the unknown. *(expands support with expectation)*

*(Workshop 09/03/07)*
Besides posing the controversial question, Schettini asked other questions to make teachers present their ideas in a more elaborated way and also presented the views of the group concerning the importance of each person’s participation. The idea that there can be a movement from the periphery to the center is clear in the examples above. Similarly, the involution of turns by the senior researchers is important. While other participants assumed more important roles in the division of labor of the workshops, senior researchers moved to a more peripheral participation in these activities. They had a lot of work in discussing the workshops beforehand and reflecting on what happened later. However, in the meetings, they assumed the role of supporters and were asked to conduct the meetings only when a theoretical or a practical matter demanded. As a whole, they had a much less central participation in these activities. The discussions, the movement and the flexibility of researchers in the activity can be viewed as powerful instruments to conceive each action according to democratic ideals and distribution of power.

**Concluding remarks on the production of shared meanings**

The results of the study indicate that novice researchers moved from a peripheral to a central participation position, taking a greater number of turns to provide more significant inputs to the discussions. All the researchers seemed to have learned ways of questioning the others to prompt more elaborate replies and forms of presenting opposing views in more critical ways. The study also showed that when senior researchers provided the novice researchers with more responsibility, they all tended to move beyond their possibilities to find ways of creatively participating in the joint construction of the program. As pointed out elsewhere (Liberali 2009), there is a real possibility that when subjects express their own voices (rights, duties, knowledge), they create a polyphonic orchestra. Each one makes a different synthesis, but all voices may be heard. All researchers learned to be flexible about moving from periphery to center and vice-versa in the different activities of the Extramural Program.

This group of researchers believes that becoming an intervention researcher who works for the conscious development of the individual’s responsibility of being and acting in the world involves reciprocal transformation. This implies that the answerable-responsible being (Bakhtin 1992) is not only responsible for his/her own actions but also for others. In this sense, s/he both becomes responsible and assumes a position in relation to whatever is occurring in the
Program. Otherness turns into a fundamental issue not only in the work planned with community education but also in the relationship developed among researchers.

Therefore, learning to become an intervention researcher is not seen as an easy task. In the process of participating in intervention research projects, learning is connected to increasing responsible-responsive participation in activities of the group which “concerns the whole person acting in the world” (Lave & Wenger 1991, 49). This whole discussion leads to Freire’s assertion (1970, 78) in the epigraph of this paper: “nobody teaches anybody, nobody teaches oneself, but all human beings teach each other, mediated by the world”.

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Part II
Making a Difference in Family and Community Constellations
Supporting the Self-efficacy of Parents and Children in Early Childhood Education: A case-study in Germany

Wolfgang Wörster

The fragile status of childhood and the current social situation in Germany

When a society itself has developed deep rifts, then we cannot be surprised that this has an effect on one of its most sensitive systems, on children. When adults can no longer build their lives on the stable ground of the familiar, then we certainly can't expect security for children and their development. What does this mean for early interventions which are intended to be supportive of the family as a system? What does this mean, especially in the analyzed example, where a heavily-burdened family of refugees is threatened with deportation (among other existentially threatening problems) and the child has been diagnosed with suspected Asperger syndrome? If there is no longer a certain familiarity on which adults can base their lives, there can be no simple assumption of a safe environment for children and their development. Cases of neglect and abuse resulting in death that have recently become well known mark a culmination point in these societal developments. It can now be considered a commonplace that childhood in this country is a perilous situation. How significant are these developments for early childhood education, a supportive context oriented to the family as a social system?

In the course of our work in early childhood education during the last few years, we have observed an increasing number of children whose problems can be characterized in terms of the so-called “new morbidity” (Schlack 2004). The health of these children has now reached a critical stage which, in qualitative terms, can only be described as a problem related to society in its entirety. Processes of impoverishment are constitutive of the current problematic situation of children (Kalinowski 2007). The relationships between parents and children are also often problematic. How do children become disturbed or ill, and which supportive measures of early childhood education are adequate and helpful for families (Laucht & Schmidt 2005; Paulsen 2007)? Preventive and resource-oriented intervention strategies can be effective if certain basic prerequisites are met (Holodinski et al. 2007). At the same time, in view of the present societal situation, such effectiveness should not be overestimated.
In the following sections, major issues and experiences related to our approach, which is based on supporting parental sensitivity, will be discussed.

**Disruptions in parents’ biographies**

The changes in the living conditions of children mentioned above correspond to disruptions in the adult world. These are characterized by unemployment, the experience of alienation in professional life, and a closely related increase in mental stress and vulnerability.\(^{41}\)

Today, adults are forced to develop a maximum of flexibility, not only in relation to work-related perspectives. Even traditional domains of retreat from such demands, e.g. partnership or family, are no longer excluded from them. The social character of the adults that corresponds to the modified living conditions involves change, mobility, and open-mindedness. The complementary disruptions in adult biographies are closely related to the developmental conditions for children. The disruptions in the biographies of adults are marked by: alienation to current work; fear for one’s livelihood; unemployment; separations and conflicts resulting from these separations; mental instability and mental illness.

**Loss of self-efficacy in adults**

Life stories and workplace biographies (Grimm 2007) in the post-Fordist era have become extremely varied and, above all, unforeseeable. Adults are constantly confronted with such questions as: “How can I predict the unpredictable? How can I plan something that cannot actually be planned? Everything is full of risks and hazardous options” (Beck 2007, 579). The lives of parents are, for example, dependent on the location strategies of their employers, on the prices for fuel and other energy sources, on child placements in day-care centers and their costs. Beck aptly sums up this idea, which only appears banal at first glance. “Sometimes the only thing that needs to happen is that Grandma cannot babysit the kids, and the tenuous and fragile constructions of individualized life break down.” (ibid.) The feeling of no longer being able to control one’s own life has the immediate effect of corroding one’s self-image. This feeling, then, is reflected in the emergence of a deep-seated alienation towards both oneself and others.

\(^{41}\) The consequences of unemployment in families were described as early as 1933 in the so-called “Marienthal study” (Jahoda et al. 1975).
The terms “double bind” (Bateson 2001; Elias 1983) and “alienation” (Haug 1976, 115-120) seem appropriate for explaining these increasingly critical phenomena. “Double-bind” situations, the most extreme form of futility, have two characteristic features. They exacerbate the circumstances and have destructive effects. Both of these features seem to have a fate-like quality. From this perspective, constructive solutions appear to be impossible (Seeger 1986, 3). There is good reason to believe that “alienation” plays a decisive role in the emergence of seemingly hopeless, increasingly critical circumstances. Alienation, as a constant process of the mutually increasing corrosion of subjectivity and sociality, is expressed in the individual human subject in a strong feeling of separation from both other people and oneself. “An alienated world presents itself to the individual as pointless and meaningless, as deadened or impoverished, as a world that is not his own.” (Jaeggi 2004, III)

Both dimensions, the social one and the individual one, are inextricably interconnected and lead to their own mutual disintegration. If the basic form of development is “internalization”, that multidimensional and multifaceted process of meaning making, then the downside to internalization is alienation. Alienation is manifest in types of behavior and adaptation on the part of the human subject that appear incomprehensible and “strange” to us.

This can mean that even the most basic signals a child transmits, such as being hungry, crying, or feeling sick, appear to the parents as something completely incomprehensible, much like their own feelings and reactions in response. Needs for safety and togetherness are then often satisfied by taking recourse to products of the “leisure industry” such as amusement parks and fast-food restaurants. In this way, these needs are satisfied with “surrogate goods'. The individuality of relationships disappears behind sale-optimized goods and service clichés. The extra meatball then becomes a substitute for parental care. Since children need much care, they receive the corresponding

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42 In my view, “corrosion”, as in American sociologist Richard Sennet’s The Corrosion of Character (2000), is an appropriate phrase for describing this process of the destruction of subjectivity.

43 Internalization is the basic principle of human development for cultural-historical psychology. Thus, there is a fundamental difference in the understanding and use of the term in that school of thought in comparison to other theoretical contexts in which internalization or appropriation is an issue (e.g. Koffka 1925; Bühler 1924; Stern 1927).
amount of such goods. Is obesity now a manifestation of reciprocated feelings expressed in surrogates?

In view of current reports on health issues, it appears that the situation for children and their future is very uncertain, even alarming. To avoid the temptation of taking on a position of cultural pessimism, it seems appropriate to initiate a change of perspective, i.e., to shift to a culture in which the social situation is much more acute.

**Detachment from one’s own practices**

Detaching oneself from one’s own social practices can be helpful when it comes to examining issues from a different perspective. I was given the opportunity to do this in a new cultural context, in which the social and economic conditions are more severe than in the Federal Republic of Germany. In Cuiabá, the capital of the Brazilian state Mato-Grosso, I was able to conduct a workshop⁴⁴ with colleagues and parents from various institutions concerned with special education support. The subject of the workshop was the development and rediscovery of indigenous playthings and games for practical work within the institutions. The first phase of group work consisted of forming impressions of the assigned task, the children, teachers, and of the supportive materials available within a period of one week. During the second week we were concerned with devising and producing game materials and toys. These toys were supposed to be based on participants’ memories of their own childhood and on a concrete desire to devise a game for one of the children in the institutions and centers to play.

The approach required every single one of the participants to become involved in play. All of the teachers, therapists, and parents played like children. Spontaneously, games were developed, either in group work or in individual work. Again and again, they played, sang, danced, painted and competed against each other. Games from their childhood were rediscovered and played, and new ideas were put into effect with impressive improvisation skills. Within a few days, some fascinating toys were developed. These toys were then presented to the other colleagues during the course of summer school. How did the colleagues and parents manage to transform the workshop into a game? How did they manage to free themselves from the complex

constraints of creating immediately useful supportive materials, which were the main reasons for the workshop?

Following a line of thought put forth by Norbert Elias, Falk Seeger makes use of the parable “maelstrom” (Seeger 1986, 3), in which a hopeless, fateful and extreme situation is depicted. In my opinion, this parable, which, according to Seeger, can be compared to the situation of a teacher during a lesson, is certainly useful for a general understanding both of the development of children and of the adults involved in that development. Moreover, the development of the children and that of the participating institutions seems hopeless, as well. The parable, however, provides a loophole. In order to find it, the protagonist adopts the perspective of his own future. In other words, he sees the hopeless and extremely life-threatening situation through the eyes of an external observer. The protagonist survives because he is able to identify the principle of the “maelstrom” and adapt it to his goal of survival.

The Brazilian colleagues and parents helped me to understand a crucial point: It is the child’s attitude towards his or her own development which the adult has to actively understand in order to become an adequate, cooperative partner to the child. This process is not a methodological trick or a strategy. It is related to deep-felt emotions that express and realize the potential of an accompanying and sensitive form of empathy.

The Brazilian adults were able to create such an environment, much like playing children are capable of doing. The adults played games in order to attain the children’s perspective. The breakaway from the constraints of utilitarianism is based on a specific practice that can tentatively be described as follows.

Work with parents and children is described as accompanying people along a stage down the path of life. This results in an interconnection of the biographies involved. The children and their families become a part of the educator’s life story. Emotions play an important role in regulating and democratizing the interaction. The disintegration of the balances of power between parents and children leads to an essential change of perspective. This change of perspective is a radical breakaway from pedagogical and therapeutical traditions. The new perspective can be seen as a challenge: Who are we?
A new perspective: developing parental self-efficacy

An adult’s habitus is, on the one hand, a referential system that is gained through social exchange and assigns meaning to a person’s social practices. But, on the other hand, in connection with this system of preferences, habitus is also a creative principle that provides considerable room for improvisation. This is an aspect that points to the fundamentally open-ended nature of change. A further aspect is that experiencing crises and resistance can literally boost development. In this sense, then, not the problems are decisive, but enhancing the variety of forms and types of solutions. The goal is to open a fully new horizon for potential solutions.

The salutogenic perspective seems especially useful for our work. With his approach, salutogenesis, Antonovsky (1993) does not ask why someone becomes ill, but, rather, how a person can remain healthy. A central category of this approach is the sense of coherence. The SOC is a basic feeling that we can cope with life even in the face of difficulties. Antonovsky’s approach indicates a significant perspective. The approach is oriented to resources, but does not trivialize existing problems. This orientation to resources seems to be an essential and promising approach for work with families. This orientation provides families with the respect and dignity they need to be self-effective, instead of having them remain under the care and influence of others. In this way, a change in perspective, from external control to self-determination, can succeed.

Acquiring the child’s perspective through play

If parents engage in play with their children and look at the world from their perspective, they can have valuable experiences with them. A precondition for this is that they adopt the child’s perspective and put themselves in the child’s place. It is essential to assume the role of the child in order to also understand the child’s emotional reactions.

Playing with their children, parents gain access to their children’s internal world of experience and imagination and are able to take part in their experiences, their excitement, their serious moods, and their joys. Through playing, parents and their children establish a common basis of experience in which they can share attention, feelings, sentiments and attitudes and can also relate to their surroundings and communicate in a common language. A child only engages in play if he or she feels safe and secure. Taking care of the
physical and mental well-being of a child and creating an environment that satisfies the child’s need to play is one of the most important responsibilities of parents. For the shaping of such an environment it is not only important to choose age-appropriate toys and to allow for time and space for playing with the child, but it is equally important to shape the emotional environment in which interactive play can develop. Play provides a particularly important context for early parent-child communication.

In sum, the quality of the interaction between parents and children during playtime is especially significant for maintaining the child's motivation in play and for developing play-related skills, the cognitive abilities relevant to play, and social behavior patterns.

**Where change begins: active parental participation**

Parents can only effectively support the development of their children if they are able to adopt and consistently maintain appropriate attitudes and behavioral patterns towards them. Yet, precisely in this respect, questions arise as to why there seem to be extensive problems here and what these pressing matters actually stand for. We need to discover ways to support families and children.

Education is, first of all, based on a complex pattern of interaction. Parents can only be supported within this context if important know-how and characteristic experiences are made accessible to them. In this process, insight into the emotional world of the children seems to be the decisive key for a range of abilities that can be described as parental sensitivity. Parental sensitivity is a precondition for and a result of specific processes of organization and perception. These relate to the entirety of the psychosocial processes in the interaction between parents and children. The remarks above should have made clear that an unfavorable change or a disturbance of the mutual perception of parents and children is followed by a loss of sense and meaning at the level of their relationship. With reference to the entirety of the child’s life circumstances, the increased sensitivity and perception mentioned above is not at all a singular response, but an overall approach which is decisively supported and guided by emotions. Thus, with respect to the necessary actions, the heart of early childhood education can be considered to be a form of support for perception and sensitivity. Experiences are facilitated which provide better orientation by structuring the parent-child relationship. Moreover, it is crucial that the activities are gratifying, motivating and challenging. Since such activities realized through play facilitate and thus
support emotionally charged participation, these forms of shared activity can improve the relationship between parents and children as well as that between the adults involved. Their feelings become more sensitive and more differentiated. A better form of togetherness is achieved through successful, shared actions.

If we assume that the decision to participate in our program is voluntary, this decision is the first step towards the creation of a new range of possibilities for parents and their children. The elements of this spectrum are made available, established, and interconnected to one another through signs and symbols and maintained by emotions. As mentioned above, such emotions are the decisive key to creating new potentials for parenthood and childhood. For this reason, it is important to help parents gain access to the “magic moments” they have shared with their children. These magic moments have to be made accessible at every level of the process.

**Putting theory into practice**
The case of one family can illustrate the perspective involved in regaining self-efficacy. This case unequivocally fulfils all the criteria necessary for classification as a multi-problem family. Since the family’s two-year-old son seemed not to have developed adequately, the family sought advice at our counseling center. Both parents were desperate; especially the mother was worried about failing in her role as a mother.

**Family background**
Due to political persecution, the family had had to leave Iran. The father was the first to arrive in Germany; the mother, well advanced in pregnancy, followed. At this point, several friends with similar political views and relatives of the father lost their lives. Both parents had completed an academic education in their homeland, with the husband being an architect and the wife a teacher of physical education. Yet, neither degree was accepted in Germany. Due to problems with obtaining a residence permit, the family did not receive an employment permit. Furthermore, their application for political asylum was rejected, and deportation to their homeland was impending, which would have had drastic consequences.

Their son was born in 2001. At first, he did not show any behavioral disorders in his development. Then, he interacted less and less with his parents
and did not develop good language skills. Instead, he screamed very often and was generally dissatisfied. At the time of contacting our center, both parents felt helpless and powerless. In one-on-one interviews, they described themselves as being weak and in a state of melancholy.

In the summer of 2005 a medical examination resulted in the diagnosis of early childhood autism and in a possible diagnosis of a fragile x syndrome. Without explaining their decision, the parents discontinued their son’s stay in a hospital. The hospital staff complained about “unreliable” parental behavior.

In the meantime, the parents had consulted a different lawyer, since the previous one had not taken any legal action, although he did charge them fees. All of the father’s efforts to receive help from political or human rights organizations were in vain. The father repeatedly stated that only his family prevented him from committing suicide.

Even the child’s acceptance into a kindergarten group focused on integration, which was achieved with considerable effort, did not result in the progress they had hoped for in the boy’s development. He still exhibited behavioral disorders and dictated the family’s daily routine.

During one counseling interview in the family’s apartment, the father was unexpectedly absent. The mother reported serious tensions in their relationship. At that time, she was considering a separation from her husband. She said that her husband had changed significantly and that she now only wanted to take care of her son. The mother also stated that she no longer had any hopes that her son would develop in a positive way.

The boy did not obtain any special support at the integrative kindergarten, although no reasons for this were specified. It appears he was merely kept there and not treated properly. The parents withdrew their child from the kindergarten in the summer of 2006. The nursery school teachers did not notice this until September, even though the boy had not attended kindergarten since July. Moreover, the parents’ apartment is located only about 500 meters away from the kindergarten.

Increased self-efficacy
The parents had thought about withdrawing their son from the kindergarten because they felt more capable of caring for him than the kindergarten teachers. They asked if I could offer regular appointments again. In the meantime, the social welfare office placed the mother as a physical education
teacher in a municipal primary school. The father was able to obtain a part-time job as a service employee in a restaurant.

Since then, one parent has regularly actively participated in the sessions at the counseling center. Now, both of the parents include their son in the activities of their day-to-day routine. The boy speaks words and short sentences both in German and in Persian and he often has physical contact with his parents. The parents have developed a keen sensitivity to their child’s needs. Now they pay attention to small details, make use of their observations, and provide their child with a loving and stable orientation. The boy has now mastered many important everyday activities. He helps to set the table, and the family always has their meals together. The parents are very proud of their son.

During the sessions, father and son enjoy playing together with the wooden toy train and the marble run, while the mother prefers the trampoline and the skateboards. Furthermore, the father has taught his son how to play catch and how to vary this game, which they call “I am the lion and am going to eat you”. The boy takes much pleasure in this game and immediately runs to his mother or me to hide. In short, the former noticeably autistic boy has become a more out-going and happy person, who now has a better relationship with his parents. I repeatedly tell them that they are the reason for the positive progress the boy is making. I also asked the parents to write down their experiences, and they offered to share their personal experiences with other families as well. In the middle of the sessions, the father or the mother sometimes asks me if I can still remember the times when their son was a completely different person.

Developing new aspects in parent-child relationships

Culture and cultural practices indicate that the diverse forms of human behavior and awareness are always facilitated, established, and interconnected to one another through signs and symbols in a shared environment and are then maintained by emotions. This environment is characterized by a certain culture. The family I have described above created such an environment, which both initiates and requires the development of the complex nature of personal ties to everyday life.

In this sense, social and individual aspects are not contradictory, but, instead, form a dynamic unit. The development of something new does not directly depend on prior conditions, but on the dynamic movement away from them (Engeström 1997, 180). From this perspective, life is not an isolated phenomenon that can be individualized. Life and its development is a unique,
individual and at the same time social story. This story continuously originates in the person himself or herself, both consciously and unconsciously, as a complex precondition for and as a result of feelings, motions, sensations, actions, etc. This individual story, whichever form it takes, can only develop within a context of social interaction.

Our “playful” way of dealing with relationships, which is oriented to the available resources, is primarily intended to foster and support the pleasure of organizing everyday life with children. Life’s rhythm and the tune of the parent-child relationship are to be perceived in all of their vividness, sensitivity to appropriate forms to be vitalized. Stimuli are to be provided, so that parents can interact and cooperate with their children and give them advice and make suggestions. It should be evident that this is not a methodological procedure. The task for the adults is to develop an attitude towards their child. This should come from a need on the part of the parents that is supported by a strong emotional bond, which itself is necessary for becoming involved in the child's predominant forms of action.

The medium “play” is, in its diversity, the driving force of child development until the first day of school. Play is both the context of development and an expression of personality development. Furthermore, play is a very distinct “Zone of Proximal Development”. It is both a form of activity and a means of development; it establishes interconnections between activities and is itself an interconnection of activities. Play itself is both a prerequisite for and the result of a highly complex systemic organisation involving all of the senses and supporting their integration. Children develop their own sense of the world and its objects through play. As a form of social interaction with widely diverse possibilities, play needs to be explored and developed.

Supporting parental sensitivity, then, means playing together with parents and children in order to develop play as a platform of exchange. This aim was able to be achieved by the simple games which are the basis and result of the earliest parent-child interaction and involve all of the senses. In such games adults and children shared the experience of suspense, excitement, and pleasure. The child experiences sequences of events that can be attentively observed and perceived in light of their rules. Even simple games demonstrate that play involves a complex interconnection of social, emotional, linguistic, and intellectual practices and is, at the same time, a precondition for this interconnection. Play and its multi-faceted and individual internalization are the basis for and the goal of the child’s dialogue with his or her own future and
with the future in general. Development is a process of dialogue in which both parent and child participate to the same extent.

Development which is impeded through complications actually stimulates a creative process between the partners in the dialogue. Thus, a child can deal with problems using an almost limitless supply of new and infinitely varied forms of development if we provide support for this process. For parents with whom we have worked, some factors relate to their own childhood. This is especially the case if all the people to be seen are engaging in play. We have also tried to provide emotional access to childhood memories for the parents through suggestions such as these:

- What do you remember when you think of your childhood?
- Do you remember certain events, sounds, or smells?
- Did you also wish you were able to fly?
- Did you share Tom Sawyer’s excitement and did you disappear with him on the island in the middle of the Mississippi?
- Which marbles were your most valuable ones?
- Did you fly a home-made kite in the autumn wind?
- Do you remember the feeling of walking barefoot across a freshly-mowed meadow or field?

From the perspective of activity theory, everyone develops a social relationship with themselves and with the various spheres of reality starting from the first moment of their life. This relationship is effected as an interconnection between internalized and externalized activity with reciprocal transitions. It is a necessarily practical and sensual process without which our world could not become one’s own reality, not even for a child. “Every function in the child’s cultural development”, according to Vygotsky, “appears twice: first, on the social level, and later on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological), and then inside the child (intrapsychological) […] All the higher functions originate as actual relations between human individuals” (Vygotsky 1978, 57).

The idea that not everything, but still a considerable amount, is up to us to change was conveyed to us by parents whose actions demonstrated this fundamental principle in impressive ways.
References
So that the Canoes Don’t Turn Over: An Experience of Inclusion with Community Groups through a Psychological Intervention in Rio de Janeiro

Maria Florentina A. Camerini

Introduction: When a local community expressed its desire for a psychological intervention

I would like to begin this chapter with a quote from an old woman, who put into words a specific community’s demand for a citizenship-building intervention in May 2006:

For God’s sake, doctor. Set up some sort of psychological intervention with the children and young people of Vila Canoas, like you do here with the church and with the elderly ladies. My grandson was killed by the drug dealer of Rocinha because he bought drugs to resell in Vila Canoas and never paid the dealer what he owed. Please, do it, Doctor. For God’s sake! (noted and translated in English by the author)

As one can see, the existing practice of intervention, which had been going on for more than two decades, was already part of the context of the people of this community, and they continued to hope for transformation through the help of psychological services. After a few days (a week, maybe), this lady returned, again looking for the psychologist. She made the same request, adding that she would be leaving Vila Canoas for good because she could not stand the painful memories of her grandson. She implored the psychologist to begin working with the children and young people in Vila Canoas. The lady who made this

45 The title of this article is inspired by a traditional Brazilian song entitled “If the Canoe Doesn’t Turn Over,” a favorite among the program’s music group in the community of Vila Canoas (Canoe Town). The lyrics, translated roughly are: “If the canoe doesn’t capsize, olê, olê, olá / I’ll get there Row, row, row rower / I want to get back quickly to my beloved. If I arrive after sunrise / She will replace me with another”. While the song was chosen by the music group for its resemblance to the name of the community, it also suggests the nature of the work described in this paper. The work aimed to instill and develop capabilities and collective spirit that would keep participants and the community “afloat”. Special emphasis was placed on starting early, with youth and families of young children, so as not to let the canoe “capsize”.

46 Vila Canoas is a small slum with approximately six thousand habitants, in the area known as São Conrado in the city of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. It lies within three kilometers of the Rocinha, a slum
request had taken part in a group psychology experience held on the grounds of the São Conrado Catholic Church in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

As a central part of an intervention organized by myself together with colleagues, one hundred families (mothers, fathers, grandparents) with newborns were prepared for the care of children through the exchange of psychological and psychoanalytical knowledge. The basis for these activities was found in psychoanalytical theory, such as Freud’s text “Lines of Advance in Psychoanalytic Therapy”:

We shall then be faced with the task of adapting our technique to the new conditions. I have no doubt that the validity of our psychological assumptions will make its impressions on the uneducated too, but we shall need to look for the simplest and most intelligible ways of expressing our theoretical doctrines (Freud 1918, 167-168).

The woman’s wish that the psychology experience at the church be replicated with the community in Vila Canoas can be associated with Winnicott’s concept of the “good enough mother” (1988). For Winnicott (1962,1990), the emotional need of the infant demands sensitive, constant, predictable care from the mother-environment, in other words, demands a stable object with little variation. The woman’s request was constructed from a point of reference that we could call “primordial” as the project had, after all, continued uninterrupted for many years and had so become a reference, both concrete and subjective. Having spanned two decades, the program had been an integral part of the community involvement of this church. Its positive consequences echoed throughout the community.

The program also considered the ideas of Baremblitt (1997, 7) according to whom “the clinic can constitute a practice, leading more and more to a political and ethical attitude towards life, in the large sense of the term.” On this same page, the author states that:

that is considered the largest slum in Rio de Janeiro, with about three hundred and fifty thousand inhabitants.

47 Because of the large amount of participants in this project, an index with information pertaining to the psychoanalytical studies made by the author has been made available in this article. See attached index.
The statute of the clinic cannot be reduced to the control of a method or a specific skill, and even less the regulation of the exercise of a profession. The clinic takes place in a “sui generis' space, therefore without an instituted place. Once there is “Will to help” that localizes and tries to deconstruct what hinders the productive process, something can happen that can be recognized as “clinic”.  

Considering the above, we understand that the work done in this intervention was mainly clinical, since it promoted significant transformations in the social relationships of the people of this community, transformations that extended to other communities as well. Thus my belief that our project reverberated into significant changes for the subject, both in how he or she lived and how he or she was connected with others within the community.

Having considered the woman’s plea, we decided to establish a field of intervention directed towards contemporary questions that demanded a reflective effort in the face of current tensions which exceeded the forms of traditionally-instituted intervention. Aside from promoting a means of alleviating suffering, we also intended to produce creative ways of minimizing the oppressive obstacles that paralyzed subjects in their life course. Although the community project began work with the adults responsible for the children, it later developed to include another age range: children and adolescents who often grew up without a family life or in independence on the streets or in big city gangs. A team of professionals was set up to work with children and young people, using psychological technical and theoretical fundamentals. This field of knowledge uses language as an instrument through which the subject manifests his desire: not only in the sense of understanding the world, but creating it as well, thereby constituting his humanity.

The meetings were held once a week. The time, day and length of the meetings, as well as the amount of time to be spent there by each participant and the guidelines for lateness and absences were established by the group.

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48 The idea of the „will to help“ could be seen as a re-definition of an idea borrowed from Nietzsche. This quote above is a rough translation into English of the original text in Portuguese: „O estatuto da clínica não se reduz ao domínio de um método ou de uma técnica específica, muito menos aos regulamentos do exercício de uma profissão. A clínica se processa num espaço „sui generis“, portanto sem um lugar instituído. Desde que haja „Vontades de ajuda“ (see Index 4), que se localizem e procurem desconstruir o que impede o processo produtivo, pode se dar algo da ordem da clínica“. (Baremblitt 1997, 7).
This fact makes a lot of sense for the purposes of this paper, because the demand for rules came from within the group itself. Related to this question, Guattari uses the expression “group device” to make clear that it is through the tensions generated in the group itself that the solutions must be sought, or in his words, its “lines of escape” (see Barros 1996).

Taking a deeper look at this project, which began with an impassioned plea, one immediately sees ways of answering the question of how to look at “the Other”. The concept of “alterity” (Bakhtin 2000) instantly comes to mind. Bakhtin explains that there is a way of looking with both an ethical and aesthetic dimension in the relationship to the Other:

When I identify myself with the Other, I feel the Other’s pain precisely in the relationship with the Other, and the reaction that it incites in me is not a cry of pain, but a word of comfort or an act of assistance. To relate what one lived to the Other is the necessary condition for identification and a productive knowledge, both ethical and aesthetical.49 (Bakhtin 2000, 46)

For Bakhtin, the being is only found through the Other. There is no way of existing as a subject confined in oneself. The plurality of the human is based in the complement each one represents for the Other. As Bakhtin writes (1992, 52), “it is beginning with the Other that we try to give ourselves life and form.” Bakhtin (1992, 55) also claims that what is important in human life is the continuous dialogue between I and the Other, for the I only constitutes itself as such through the alteration that the Other promotes in one’s life and in one’s way of looking at it: “our individuality would have no existence if the Other didn’t create it.” To recognize difference through the Other is to recover human dignity, as well as its incompleteness. It is to recognize how much the human existence constitutes itself in an alteritarian condition, in other words, in its relationship with the Other.

One could also mention Vygotsky (1987), who developed a theory basically aimed at the process of the subject’s constitution anchored in history and culture. He attributes to language a unique place of importance. It is in language that the subject, through social interchange with his peers, plans his actions, reflects, represents and signifies reality. Given the role of language and social-cultural practice embedded in the dynamics of social life, one has to

49 This is a free translation into English by the author, from Bakhtin (2000, 46).
point out the role of social interaction in which the living flow of intersubjectivity manifests itself in various interpenetrating voices, cultures and thoughts.

**Sharing material and subjective goods**

During the weekly project meetings, one can of powdered milk was distributed to each family registered. Each participant stayed in the group for two years. The distribution of milk functioned as a means of motivation to support the work of the group encounter. The type of work our project represented is focused on the dynamics of the subjective life, starting from a concrete demand: food. Freudian theory refers to the fundamentals of the desire theory in terms of “satisfaction experience”. For Freud, this is the experience that founds the human psyche. In his text “Project for a Scientific Psychology”, Freud narrates the moment in which the newborn establishes the first and elementary social bond with the Other who, by giving meaning to his cry, satisfies his thirst, cold and hunger. In Freud’s own words:

> At first, the human organism is incapable of bringing about the specific action. It takes place by extraneous help, when the attention of an experienced person is drawn to the child’s state by discharge along the path of internal change. In this way this path of discharge acquires a secondary function of the highest importance, that of communication, and the initial helplessness of human beings is the primal source of all moral motives. (Freud 1895, 318)
The milk donation thus became the object of significant transformation: in group interaction, the participants, besides receiving the milk, were given the opportunity to subjectively produce knowledge about their various lives with the help of developmental psychologists. As an expansion of the milk distribution and knowledge construction, an intervention was then started with the children and young people of Vila Canoas which also took the form of weekly meetings. It also reached adults and elderly people in this same community who got together for the gymnastics classes.\textsuperscript{50}

It is important to emphasize that this work with the community attached the donation of a material good to the condition of the construction of a subjective good. At the church, the milk was the material good, at Vila Canoas it was the various activities (classes). Due to the precarious conditions that life imposed on these people, it was thought that it would be hard for them to find enough motivation to hold a space of reflection without these motivating factors. In the face of the immediate necessity of surviving, it was nearly impossible for the subject to be motivated to construct a long-term project. Again one could go back to Freudian thought to better understand the process of clinical intervention in this community:

\begin{quote}
We shall probably discover that the poor are even less ready to part with their neurosis than the rich, because the hard life that awaits them if they recover, offers them no attraction, and illness gives them one more claim to social help. Often, perhaps, we may only be able to achieve anything by combining mental assistance with some material support. (Freud 1918, 167)
\end{quote}

It was in this sense that the distribution of a good represented a vital necessity. The food worked as a motivating device, with functions that went beyond the simple act of feeding: it allowed people to position themselves as subjects of language and desire in the process of the construction of citizenship.

\textsuperscript{50} This group was created in October 2005, after the request of a group of elderly ladies who had already frequented the psychology work of the Pastoral. Due to the closure of a Vila Canoas’s social assistance center located in the Town Hall, the gymnastics group was located in the space of the Chapel of Vila Canoas. The group functioned similarly to the Pastoral group, with the motivating factor being their wish to do gymnastics but not being able to afford it.
Collective activities and self-organization

The main activities that took place were of three kinds:

a) Discussion and reflection groups: Here the intervention was set up as an operative dynamic in which the group work happened after the group had articulated a difficulty or a question. Thus the group encounter, mediated by words, provided a level of clarification reflected by the subject’s taking responsibility for his subjective expression. This expression was reiterated in the historical construction of the community and the world.

b) Image-mediated groups: In this portion of the intervention, the group experience was video-recorded in order to allow the group to observe the behavior of each participant, individually and in the group. When dealing with the use of image, one has to consider the production of subjective arrangements and consequently the transformation of the subjects. The image is powerful in that it enhances narcissism in its subjects, elevating self-confidence and encouraging the subject to engage in action. In this way, the image is an element of intervention because it makes it possible for the individual to observe and think about his own speech and attitude as well as his relationship with the other members of the group. The idea of having the subject produce knowledge by looking at his image recorded on video is based on the concept of “exotopy” (Bakhtin 2000), that is to say that one is constituted by the look and word of the Other. It is the Other who can give finishing to another, say how this Other is, what he looks like. Depending on their spatial position in the world, the participants capture themselves at angles inaccessible to themselves. They depend on the Other to have a complete idea about themselves (see also Camerini 2003).

c) Monitoring group: This aspect of the intervention consisted of monitoring the construction of action strategies and activities being developed in and with the community, facilitating the search for ways of overcoming obstacles that emerged.

51 In the period of 2006/2007, a series of other groups were also organized in the community of Vila Canoas: stretching for the elderly group, gymnastics for the adults, the Windows to the World group (children that communicated via internet with children from another state, see Benites, in this volume), an English language group for children, an English language group for youth and adults, a ballet group for children, a theater group for children, youth and adults, music groups for children, youth and adults under the direction of the Brazilian musician and Maestro Paulo Moura, and a group for the construction of mosaics and paintings on the façades of houses.
In the abovementioned activities, all interventions by the psychology trainees were directed by the code of ethics of the psychologist and were related to a training which was meant to be part of an initial professional experience that placed the trainee in the field of psychological practice. The theorized social practice was to be seen as allowing the participants to widen their horizons through the access to knowledge, facilitating their familiarization with solutions to the obstacles that they faced in everyday life. The community was to be considered as a totality, and the intervention groups were cells that represented the community. Once transformed, these members would act as operators or multipliers in the whole community. The process of intervention was discussed with the participants, thus allowing a continuous assessment of the transformation occurring. The trainees were supervised weekly and also held a weekly study group where they read a specific bibliography about group work, children, young people, elderly people and community.

The meetings also involved specialists that the community wanted to have, such as a famous hairdresser who was invited for a hair cutting workshop, or a dental pediatrician who gave demonstrations on the proper brushing of teeth and cavity prevention, as well as applying fluoride to the teeth of children from the Tia Maura nursery-school (Vila Canoas).

The premise driving these activities was the idea that collective actions produce results which return to the subject: they cause him to reevaluate and reposition his subjective condition, as well as reflect on what is within his reach in terms of engagement in a historical process of production by means of collectively reached agreements. The most important aspect of this process of intervention is to surprise the collective by not only answering their questions, but asking them again, summoning the collective to take responsibility in the production of a viable means to solve them.

In leading the activities, the presupposition was that action is provoked by knowledge constructed from within the community. This allows for transforming conditions of the subjective kind to be enhanced. The voices of the participants of the groups were manifold: in the case of the gymnastics group, the participants brought forth their wishes for activities that they thought would be important for the community to have in order to attract children and young people. These wishes were directed to people interested in the project in order to find teachers for the requested activities. Internships were announced at the universities through announcements in seminars and posters. The
community was heard in weekly meetings and different groups were put together. In the meantime, the director of the Psychology Department of PUC/Rio accepted the proposal to offer official internships with the project to students about to graduate from the psychology program.

The work with psychology students was organized as a group activity involving two coordinators, who worked with the concepts of self-organization and group-analysis (Baremblitt 1988). In other words, the issues discussed within the group were always understood as a group happening, thus promoting permanent responsibility for the subjective manifestation of the subjects in question. The coordinators were also supposed to participate in producing group knowledge. It was expected that all the participants of the project (technical team, trainees and group members), would take responsibility for its construction, its achievements, and the evaluation of its goals. Everyone was aware that the results were consequences of a collective action that sought a common welfare.

Discussion

During the meetings with the psychology groups that followed the workshops, the following statements were heard that reveal the transformation experienced by participants and indicate positive results produced by the intervention in the community:

“I like the psychology groups because here I can say and talk about things that I can’t say and talk about at home”. (Joana 9 years old)
“On the street where I live, there is a girl who doesn’t talk to anyone. Her mother doesn’t let her go out because she fights with everybody. I think if she belonged here she wouldn’t fight” (Paula, 10 years old)
"I like it here because we learn how to trust people"(Bianca, 8 years old)
"I like it here because every day we do something different. We draw, we talk, we play, we paint, everyday there’s something new."(Laura, 8 years old)
“I like it here because the mothers come to pick us up and they also have a meeting" (Luisa 6 years old)

Just as Rabello de Castro (2001) points out in her studies, due to the social diversity present in large cities clear boundaries are established between those who belong to a concrete social group and those who are excluded. This was also obvious during this period of intervention with the Community of Vila Canoas, in Rio de Janeiro. It is very common, especially among the poor in
Brazil, to see people who find identification when cheering for the same soccer team or samba school – but the interaction does not go beyond these leisure activities. To this day, children are considered incomplete subjects, thus restricted in their freedom of expression and in their mobility. They often lack the chance to learn about rights and responsibilities, except in imaginary situations that add nothing to their understanding of the concept of citizenship. Through increased participation of the people in the construction of their city, state or nation, it is possible to construct the practice of citizenship, identification and belonging.

In the workshops which we held with the children, youth and adults of Vila Canoas, the free distribution of food initially worked as a motivating device with functions that went beyond the simple act of feeding: it allowed people to position themselves as subjects of language and desire in the process of the construction of citizenship. In turn, community members had the opportunity to experience their productive capacity while developing an ability (such as ballet, theater, arts and crafts, mosaic, etc) and presenting them in events inside and outside their community. This helped to build a sense of worth among community members, as well increase their self-esteem and the desire to develop and perfect themselves. Allowing the participants to interact produced visible effects of differentiation that tended to multiply throughout the community. One could call this type of intervention clinical-political (Baremblitt 1997), since what was at stake was a transformation, however minimal, of aspects of their reality. This transformation came about through the possibilities of subjective transformation, which gave rise to a significant alteration in social contexts. The meetings raised consciousness about the encounter with the “Other”, the “different”; they also encouraged the children and young people to explore their own and the Other’s condition and social, physical and intellectual capabilities.

One can conclude that these experiences helped participants to develop productive capabilities, abilities (in dance, music, etc.), self-esteem and self-confidence. It also increased the trust among the members of the community and stimulated participants’ desires to create further group activities. Returning to the song, “If the Canoe Doesn’t Turn Over,” the singer says that if he doesn’t arrive early, his beloved will replace him. In the same way, the sense of worth and collective action must be awakened early with children. Just as the singer relies on the other rowers, people must trust one another and act together.
Appendix: Index of Lectures

1- Determinant situations in human psyche: mythical hystory (situations prior to conception and birth of a child), projection of the future of a child.
2- First year of life, psychological factors: childbirth, nursing, weaning, teething, speech, walk, etc. Sexuality in oral phase.
4- Third year of life: the Discovery of sexual difference and heterosessuality. The school, its psychological significance at this time. Sexuality in the phallic phase. The experiences of the Oedipal Complex: the feeling of possession, rivalry, etc.
5- Discrimination of places (of the father, the mother, the son) in the triangular relationship. Problems and substitution of the parents in the triangular situation.
6- The resolution of the Oedipal Complex: heterosexuality as a base for possibilities of relationship with the different, the new, the rules, the order, etc.
7- The latency phase: the practice of law as regulator and facilitator of the production and creativity.
8- The phase of puberty: beginning of body changes, the need of confirmation and clarification of questions related to sexuality.

References

Infant Care in South America’s “Cono Sur” and in Germany: Case Studies on Stern’s Concept of the Motherhood Constellation

Haydée Winkler

Introduction

Are cultural differences expressed in the ways mothers care for their babies and in how they reflect on their own behavior in this context? On the basis of four case studies, the findings to be discussed here may provide some answers to this question. The starting point for the research project presented in this paper was Daniel Stern’s psychological theory of the “motherhood constellation” (1995). This theory’s validity was examined in reference to urban regions in South America’s Cono Sur (Argentina and Uruguay) and in Germany, with particular attention to middle-class and working-class conditions. At the same time, this research was also able to test how useful Stern’s theory is as a parameter of cross-cultural comparisons.

Certain advantages for such comparisons were provided by Stern’s qualifications of the validity of his own assertions, as he limited it to statements about western, developed, postindustrial societies. According to Barbara Rogoff (2003), taking the cultural limitations of a theory into consideration represents a significant advance in the social sciences, where generalization of theories to all cultures is common. From her point of view, social phenomena should be described within the conditions of the community the data were taken from. To transfer them to other contexts, cross-cultural comparisons are necessary, and this is exactly the purpose of this paper. The study presented here applies categories such as social class and cultural community (country or region in which the mother lives) taken from Rogoff (2003) and thus complements the categories Stern (1995) uses (developmental status of the region, cultural area, economic conditions). Since the four settings selected differ in relation to Stern’s categories only with regard to the

52 This paper presents part of a cross-cultural comparison undertaken in the field of cultural psychology with my thesis at the Freie Universitat Berlin (“The ‘Motherhood Constellation’ in First-Time Mothers. A Cross-Cultural Comparison”, completed July 2007, academic advisor: Prof. Martin Hildebrand-Nilshon).

53 In this study, the concepts “regional” or “geographical” were used to avoid the limitations involved in concepts such as country-specific or ethnological.
developmental status of the country or region in which the mother lives, it was possible to examine the categories of social class, region, and developmental status of the country more closely. A further similarity materialized with the largely European heritage of the Cono Sur’s middle class, which allows the category of social stratum to become more prominent.

From a psychoanalytic point of view, Stern (1995) argues that motherhood itself represents a totally new organization in the psyche of a woman that will, for a time, have a dominant role. Now, four topics will take first place in a mother’s psyche: the child’s life and growth, the relationship between the mother and her child, the organization of a supporting environment for the mother, and the reorganization of her identity around motherhood. This article will deal with only two aspects of the cross-cultural research undertaken in reference to Stern’s theory (1995): the child-caring methods of the mothers (the mother-child relationship) and the child-caring assistance gained by the mothers from their childrearing support system (the supporting matrix).

As Stern (1995) sees it, the mother’s concerns with regard to caring for the infant have been accurately described with Winnicott’s concept of “primary maternal preoccupation” (1956, cf. Stern 1995). This situation makes several demands on the mother: high sensitivity to the child’s needs, intense identification with the infant, and the regulation of the infant’s rhythms. The analysis of the interviews in the study presented here demonstrates various variations of the “primary maternal preoccupation” in the mothers of the four settings. In this respect, the supporting matrix repeatedly proves to be of considerable importance. Possible reasons for this were seen in the class origins of the mothers, in the developmental status of the country, the varying political and historical traditions of the respective countries and in milieu-specific distinctions. The two aspects mentioned first are to be examined in more detail in this article. “Primary maternal preoccupation” seems to be less profound in mothers with a lower level of education than in those who have experienced a higher degree of formal schooling. These distinctions seemed to stem from both the amount of leisure time available and the mothers’ varied levels of education. The level of education often determines the childcare assistance sought from the supporting matrix. Especially for socially underprivileged groups, the developmental status of their country and resulting everyday concerns can also restrict mothers’ abilities to adapt to the child’s needs.
The findings demonstrate that, on the whole, it is possible to undertake cross-cultural comparisons using Stern’s theory (1995). Moreover, for the settings examined, which went beyond Stern’s qualifications for his own assertions, a significant correspondence to Stern’s account of motherhood was able to be ascertained. Yet, there are also indications that both within and without the contexts he describes other qualifications may be necessary. Further research is required to confirm the findings of this qualitative study.

From Stern’s (1995) point of view, the change in a woman’s psyche is so drastic when she enters motherhood that we need to speak of a new psychic organization, with its own tendencies, sensitivities, fantasies, fears, and wishes. These elements are then considered to be central to her psyche and to normally bring about a permanent change. With his theory of the “motherhood constellation”, Stern (1995) argues that there are four central subjects, questions and groups of concerns in a mother’s mind that will reorganize her psychological structure and replace the Oedipal aspects central to a woman’s psyche before motherhood. The four constituent themes of the “motherhood constellation” are as follows:

I) **Life-growth theme**: keeping the child alive and safe.
II) **Primary relatedness theme**: establishing and developing the relationship between herself and the child. One element of this theme is the “primary maternal preoccupation”, which is to be discussed in more detail below.
III) **Supporting matrix theme**: establishing an environment which supports the mother. One part of this matrix, the educative matrix, is to be examined more closely here.
IV) **Identity reorganization theme**: taking on a new role as a woman. This concerns the development from wife to parent, from employed person to housewife, from daughter to mother.

The two themes that are the larger focus of this article (primary maternal preoccupation and the educative matrix) will be discussed more thoroughly below, under the title “The two major themes” before the findings are then presented.

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54 The stimulus that led Stern to elaborate his theory of the “motherhood constellation” (1995) was his search for a scientific foundation for the experiences he had had in his therapeutic work with mothers.
As Stern (1995) provides a stimulating description of the psychological themes that constitute motherhood, it seemed interesting to test the applicability of his theory to other cultural settings. The fact that Stern (1995) refrains from considering these themes as valid for every culture demonstrates his awareness of the importance of cultural influences on motherhood. As mentioned above, he limits the validity of his theory to western, developed, postindustrial societies. Barbara Rogoff (2003) has pointed out that “the study of human development has been based largely on research and theory coming from middle-class communities of Europe and North America that often have been assumed to generalize to all people.” Taking into account how environmental factors influence childrearing practices around the world, Rogoff stresses the fundamental importance of drawing distinctions with regard to the choice of informants. She differentiates ethnicity, social class, historical and political context (e.g., the extent of industrialization and the influence of birth-control laws), and social structure (e.g., extended or nuclear family). To take such factors into account, she demands with Vygotsky (1987) an interdisciplinary approach to sociocultural-historical investigations. With his qualifications of the validity of his theory, Stern (1995) refers to economical, historical and political categories. In doing so, he can meet some of Rogoff’s (2003) demands. The application of Stern’s (1995) theory to case studies in South America’s Cono Sur and in Germany undertaken here takes the additional categories of social stratum and regional peculiarities into consideration.

Research design
For the intercultural comparison, urban regions from Germany and from South America’s Cono Sur were selected in terms of two settings with substantial similarities. The largely European origin of the population in the Cono Sur can be judged to be a possible constant that facilitates the comparison of Stern’s (1995) categories of culture, a country’s developmental status, and economic conditions. Nevertheless, the differences related to the country’s developmental status in the particular settings will be pointed out with reference to the specific concrete cases.

55 One reason for the selection of the countries was the bi-national origin (from Argentina and Germany) of the researcher.
In accordance with Rogoff’s (2003) suggestions, both the social stratum and the specific cultural community were taken into account. In this context, social class is defined along the lines of the mother’s level of schooling and not in terms of her financial circumstances. Mothers with little formal education or no vocational training were assigned to one stratum, while the other was composed of mothers with an academic degree. Within this text, the two social groups are sometimes designated by the older labels of working class and middle class or socially underprivileged and affluent groups. The preliminary reflections alluded to above led to the following four contexts to be explored in the study: a) middle class of Germany, b) working class of Germany, c) middle class of the Cono Sur, d) working class of the Cono Sur.

Data was collected in problem-centered interviews carried out in accordance with Witzel’s (1982) guidelines. Only one informant was interviewed for each of the four settings, as the research was conducted within the framework of a final thesis and was thus limited in reference to time period and available personnel. Still, a total of 24 interviews were completed and their general characteristics were considered for the discussion. Possible explanations for the similarities and distinctions that became manifest between the four settings were then developed with recourse to the literature relevant to each of the specific settings.

To focus on an exploration of women’s first experiences with motherhood, only mothers who were raising their first child at the time the study was conducted were selected as informants. Moreover, due to the significance accorded by Stern to the first year for the theme of primary relatedness (establishment of a nonverbal relationship), the child was to be approximately one year old. In addition, the time period of a single year ensures that the four women could relate as immediately as possible to their very first experiences as mothers. The interview partners were recruited from breastfeeding groups, from healthcare and counseling centers, and from social aid organizations. Finding interview partners of the stratum with a lower level of schooling in Germany proved to be especially difficult since such persons were rare in counseling groups or breastfeeding groups, and healthcare institutions are not allowed to disclose information about their patients. The fact that the interview partner from this setting (stratum with lower level of formal schooling in Germany) is a member of a specific occupational group (the police) is to be attributed to these difficulties in recruiting informants and is an impediment to the comparison. At the outset, this informant was the only person in this setting
who could be interviewed. The need to account for differing situations in East and West Germany is also due to this circumstance.

The content of the interviews was summarized in accordance with Mayring’s (2002) approach to qualitative content analysis. The first step in the interpretation of the data aimed at understanding each mother in her own terms and within her own discourse. For the second step, relevant literature was consulted that helped explain the mothers’ behavior within historical or geographical frameworks, with reference to specific social stratum, and to further possible influences, in compliance with Rogoff’s (2003) requirements for cross-cultural studies. To help make this historical-cultural dimension in the biographies of the four women and in their specific differences comprehensible, the literature consulted consisted of works from the fields of sociology, pedagogy, history, and cultural psychology. In no way do the findings claim to make general statements on the mothers of the respective country, region, or on the social stratum, as this is not the aim of qualitative research. Nor would this be possible on the basis of four informants who, with their varying circumstances, are to be regarded as individual cases. Thus, at best, these very specific cases can only indicate the direction for a variation of Stern’s motherhood constellation under altered circumstances that remains to be described and tested.

What follows is a brief description of the interview partners and their life world, their job situation, and their supporting matrix.

1) The woman who served as an informant from the German working class is Nina. She is a 23-year-old policewoman who lives in a city in former East Germany. Her educative supporting matrix consisted almost exclusively of her midwife. She was planning to return to work when her child reached the age of one. In the meantime, she was receiving a maternity grant. She had started a relationship with a new boyfriend after the child’s father left her.

2) From the German middle class, I selected Dorothea, a 38-year-old physicist living with her husband in a city in former West Germany. Her educative supporting matrix was constituted by a number of books for young parents, her breastfeeding group, and her midwife. She stopped working for a full year, even though she would have liked to remain at home with her baby for a longer period of time.

3) The working class informant from the Cono Sur was 24-year-old María Azul. She lives in a very poor barrio on the outskirts of a large city together with her daughter and partner. The few instructions and little advice on childrearing that she
received from her supporting matrix during her pregnancy and early motherhood were given by her mother. Also, a few days after she gave birth, further advice was given by the personnel of the hospital, which was located one hour by bus from her home. When I interviewed her, she was unemployed. Her extended family and public aid were providing economic support.

4) The middle class woman interviewed who was also from southern South America was Yolanda, a 28-year-old teacher of physical education who lives near a city center. She was a single mother living in a flat together with other young people. Her supporting matrix was constituted by friends who had children, physicians, and a few books for young parents. Interested in alternatives to hospital treatment, she gave birth at home. After 4 months, she returned to work.

The following classification of the interview partners lists both Stern’s (1995) categories and the additionally applied categories of social class and native country from Rogoff (2003). In reality, all of the data are taken from urban regions and, for the most part, refer to metropolitan areas. National political influences on the mothers and on the supporting matrix were taken into account by means of the random selection of interview partners.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country/Region</th>
<th>Nina</th>
<th>Dorothea</th>
<th>Maria Azul</th>
<th>Yolanda</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Argentina (Cono Sur)</td>
<td>Uruguay (Cono Sur)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social stratum</td>
<td>working class with vocational training</td>
<td>upper middle class with academic background</td>
<td>working class of a poor district, unemployed</td>
<td>lower middle class with academic background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National political influence on mother and support matrix</td>
<td>socialist</td>
<td>Capitalist</td>
<td>capitalist</td>
<td>capitalist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developmental status of the country</td>
<td>industrial nation</td>
<td>Industrial nation</td>
<td>fast-developing nation</td>
<td>fast-developing nation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The two major themes
The two themes to be discussed in this article will now be presented in detail:

• Primary maternal preoccupation (theme II)
The second constituent theme of the “motherhood constellation”, the “primary relatedness” theme about the emotional involvement between mother and child, focuses on questions such as: “Am I able to love my child?” or “Does my child love me?” The findings to be elaborated on here deal with childcare,
described by Stern as the “primary maternal preoccupation”, a term coined by Winnicott (1956, cf. Stern 1995).

Following Winnicott, the term “primary maternal preoccupation” is used here to describe the development of a woman’s extreme sensitivity during the first weeks or months of maternity, a process that permits her to “read” the baby, and to react to his or her needs in an optimum way. This higher state of awareness also influences how recurring everyday activities (such as breastfeeding) are regulated. To succeed here, the mother needs to strongly identify with her child. For this reason, concerns about possible failure are common. Stern points out that these phenomena, in this way similar to all other issues of “primary relatedness”, are defined by the cultural given, which probably does not coincide with the woman’s own inclinations. Her fears revolve around being “unnatural” and around the child’s psychological well-being. The issues raised in the interviews centered on feeding practices, setting nursing time intervals, and responding to the baby’s crying. Thus, an implicit issue was how the baby should be treated and how to react to the baby’s needs.

- Psychological and educative aspects of the supporting matrix (theme III)

Stern argues that a mother invests a great deal of energy in establishing and regulating a network to support her in the context of dealing with the life-growth theme and the primary-relatedness theme. Her supporting network needs to exhibit the following two characteristics:

a) on the one hand, it should provide for the subsistence of mother and child and protect both physically
b) and on the other hand, it should support the mother with psychological and childrearing advice. The influence of the psychological and educative supporting matrix on the primary relatedness and on the primary maternal preoccupation will be discussed below in more detail.

The task assigned to the psychological and educative matrix is to help the mother and to instruct her in nursing and other childcare issues, and to provide her with recognition for her mothering, to offer her support and love. This function has traditionally been fulfilled by the female members of the extended family, by midwives and nurses. Stern (1995) argues that, today, the husband takes on an important part of this function. From Stern's point of view, the
health system does not have the capacity to replace the extended family’s support.

**“Primary maternal preoccupation” in the four interviews**

The variations in how the mothers interviewed deal with these issues can be used to analyze the influence of the selected categories and to determine further salient categories. Here, the focus is on the influence of social status and of the country’s status of development. The influences of possible regional differences or political influences on the matrix are to be only briefly outlined to promote a more thorough understanding.

Nina (working class of former East Germany)

For Nina, the issue of primary maternal preoccupation is especially relevant in the context of nursing. She first tried to feed her baby in accordance with the baby’s own needs, but when this did not work as expected, she stopped doing so. Her midwife showed her how to use a structured nursing method following a fixed rhythm of four hours. Nina was able to adopt this method very well and claimed that this was the same method and rhythm her own mother had used as a young mother.

Nina coordinates all of the other activities related to the child with her own activities, which is why she describes the organization of her childcare routine as “reciprocal learning”. From this perspective, both mother and daughter must learn to adapt to the times and needs of the respective other and to abstain from having their own way. To facilitate easy coordination between both, the day is organized around fixed rhythmic intervals. One reason Nina mentions for this strong structuring of her childcare routine is that she would not like to be constantly interrupted by her child in the midst of her own activities, for these activities are important to her.

María Azul (Cono Sur with a lower level of formal schooling)

María Azul mentions few difficulties encountered in “reading” her child. Yet, she despairs if such difficulties do arise, for example, if the child cries inconsolably. At the hospital, she was taught to set up three-hour intervals for breastfeeding. Yet, María Azul did not adhere to the rhythm because the child started to cry before the three hours had passed – at which time she breastfed the baby. When during a phase of reversed waking and sleeping hours this
became too strenuous for María Azul, instead of breastfeeding she began to bottle-feed her baby because she could then sleep better. Her mother then urged her to return to breastfeeding for the infant’s better well-being. By this time, however, María Azul could no longer provide the milk for breastfeeding and reproached herself for her neglect.

She describes the birth of her child as “the happiest moment” in her life (Winkler 2007, line 323). Her daughter allows her to overcome feelings of sadness and strengthens her identity by calling her “Mama” (line 327). On the whole, María Azul’s statements on the emotional attachment she experiences from her daughter seem to be the focus of the relationship: the child was to comfort her because of a previous late miscarriage. During the interview, the mother is more strongly concerned about the drinking problems her partner has than about her daughter’s development. The mother hopes that her child will be happy and will be able to grow up with both parents. She does her very best to ensure that the latter remains a concrete opportunity for her daughter.

Yolanda (Cono Sur with a higher level of former schooling)
During her pregnancy, Yolanda mentions her fears of not providing appropriate childcare in the context of her psychotherapy. She attaches quite a bit of importance to her own intuition, which she learns to become aware of and appreciate in the therapy sessions. She is interested in learning to trust her own judgment. To be better able to “read” her child and to promote their mutual communication, she prolonged her legal maternity leave from 2 to 4½ months. But she was not really worried that she would have difficulty “reading” her child. She thinks that it is particularly important to be in constant contact with her child, for example, to sleep in the same bed with the baby. Yolanda does not consider it a burden to be the person on the giving side of the childcare relationship. Instead, she is very grateful because she feels that she also receives very much from her child. In this sense, she is pleased to see her child grow and it is a pleasure for her to offer her love to her child. To promote her child’s emotional development, it is important to her that from the outset the child can establish and cultivate contact to the father.

Dorothea (middle class of former West Germany)
Dorothea reads many books and engages in discussions with others in her breastfeeding group to understand what her child is going through in each
phase of development. She only makes decisions after consulting the books and tries to respect the individuality of her baby. But when child-related tasks become overly arduous, she does not change her childcare methods. So she needs help to become aware of the fact that she is making excessive demands on herself. She also applies a fixed nursing rhythm, but with a frequency of 2 hours.

**Differences of social status**

If the four mothers are compared with reference to their willingness and their interest to become involved in the “primary maternal preoccupation”, i.e., to “read” the child and to identify with him or her, then a somewhat stronger willingness is noticeable in the stratum with a higher level of schooling, although the ability to actually engage in this, is, in part, still being learned. (The varying degrees of ability will be discussed in somewhat more detail below.) The mothers with a higher level of schooling focus their attention and their interests exclusively on the child and, as they identify very strongly with the child, would like to do everything possible to please him or her. By contrast, the mothers with less formal schooling also take their own needs into account or, since they have pressing responsibilities in other areas of everyday life, must also focus on these. A characteristic common to all of the mothers is that at the beginning of motherhood they rely on support from their environment to come to terms with childcare. The fears that they had at this time were expressed in remarks such as: “I was shaking like a leaf” (Nina) or “She was so small that I was afraid I would hurt her. My mother helped me to change her diapers” (María Azul).

For example, María Azul of the Cono Sur’s social class with little formal schooling stopped breastfeeding her baby because breastfeeding during the night was too taxing for her. The fact that during the interview a great deal of her attention was focused on the child’s father’s absence resulting from his alcohol addiction also shows that because of such problems she cannot exclusively concentrate on the child. Nevertheless, she did change the prescribed three-hour rhythm of breastfeeding to better suit the child’s needs. Whether this was motivated by intensive feelings for the child must remain unresolved at the moment, but will be taken up again and explored as the ability to “read” the child below. In any case, it is not María Azul’s express aim to do everything to please the child, although she does want her child to be happy.
In contrast, Nina, who is from former East Germany’s social class with little formal schooling, demonstrates unambiguously in both her actions and intentions that mother and child must both show consideration for each other and that she is not willing to completely disregard her own needs for the sake of the child. To her, a daily routine which organizes the care of the child is the precondition for her to also take care of all of her other responsibilities. Below, other important factors influencing Nina’s style of childcare will be mentioned.

The focus of motherhood for Yolanda, who is from the Cono Sur’s social class with a higher level of schooling, is her interest in getting to know the baby’s needs and in acting accordingly as much as possible. Giving birth at home, extending the legally authorized period of maternity leave (even if only for a few months), discussing her ability to “read” her child in therapy sessions, promoting contact between father and child – all of this was undertaken to explicitly further the child’s well-being.

Dorothea, who is from former West Germany’s social class with a higher level of formal schooling, would like to understand her child’s every movement and motion and to orient her childcare as much as possible to her baby’s needs. She would like to learn to understand the unique characteristics of her child. To this end, a book on childcare and her breastfeeding group provide support. Yet, her interest is so strong that she demands too much of herself.

Time available to the mothers
For the analysis of social-stratum specific differences in childcare performance, Badinter’s work was consulted, as this scholar has not only put forth the much-debated idea of the cultural genesis of motherly love, but also expounds upon the route this myth takes through the various social strata. In this view, the value of motherly love\textsuperscript{56}, sometimes described as a myth, was, in the main, after its emergence at the end of the 18\textsuperscript{th} century able to gain a foothold among the bourgeoisie in France. The mothers in this social class had the time needed to be concerned with childcare. The mother instinct, ascribed

\footnote{\textsuperscript{56}“At the end of the 18\textsuperscript{th} century, the ruling powers in France were interested in increasing the number of citizens in order to produce economic wealth. This was to be done by fostering mothers’ positive feelings for their children so that more children would longer survive. With “Emil”, Rousseau introduced the mother instinct into academic discourse” (Badinter 1982, cited in Dazcal de Lauzán 1984).}
to mothers as a natural ability, expressed itself in spontaneous love, strong dedication, tolerance, tenderness, understanding and passiveness. By contrast, female laborers were not able to bestow such care on their children, as they had to work for a living.

According to Textor (2006), the middle-class mother of today’s Germany bases her actions on several models, ranging from the overworked supermother who can combine work, partnership, and intense, child-oriented motherhood to the successful working person who gives up her profession for the values of a motherhood characterized by loving care. Nonetheless, common to all of the middle-class models is still the ideal of a motherhood characterized by selflessness, attachment, and loving care. Dazcal de Lauzán (1984) also describes such values as applicable to the Argentinean middle class. Such ideas often exercise a great deal of pressure on mothers. As Textor (2006) notes, German middle-class mothers can only manage this kind of care with support from child minders, nannies, and charwomen.

Since research in the social sciences, particularly that in psychology and in education, primarily relates to the white middle class (Rogoff 2003, Herwarz-Emden 1995), it is difficult to draw conclusions on the childrearing values of today’s social class with a lower level of formal schooling. Textor (2006) cites some of the few studies on this topic for Germany. In much the same way as Badinter (1982), he relates the differences in childcare methods between the middle class and the socially underprivileged stratum to the time available to the mothers in light of their professional obligations. According to Textor (2006), despite emancipatory processes socially underprivileged women are under greater material and labor market pressure, which does not permit them to interrupt their work completely or partially and go on maternity leave. On the labor market, mothers from the social stratum with lower formal schooling are under greater pressure than middle-class mothers due to their lower qualifications and their employers’ attitudes towards motherhood. Furthermore, Textor notes, working class mothers are not accorded the luxury of having staff help and, for this reason, cannot afford such time-consuming childcare and childrearing practices like those of the middle-class mothers. In Germany, the current debate on day nursery placements indicates that the infrastructure provided by public childcare facilities is insufficient to meet the needs of working mothers (Hank 2007). It is not difficult to imagine how demanding organizing childcare can be with the longer working hours that are
more usual for the working class, or with shift work and night work. Such a situation becomes even more complicated if the mother is also a single parent.

The issue of providing childcare during the mother’s working hours will be similarly significant in South America’s Cono Sur. According to Aguirre’s report (2004) for the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC/CEPAL), the number of women professionally employed has continuously increased there over the past decades. For socially underprivileged groups, the chances of finding work are better for women than for men despite the high rate of unemployment – a factor that increases the pressure on women to seek gainful employment. The number of mothers who are single parents is also largest in this group: it is as high as 60% in the suburbs of Buenos Aires (Aguirre 2004; Mazzotti, Pujol and Terra, 1994). The extended family in the Cono Sur area takes over part of the childcare functions. But this tendency is greater in more deprived groups than in the middle class, although in both sections of the population worldwide trends towards individualization that are on the increase are, of course, noticeable (Aguirre 2004; Mazzotti et al., 1994).

Whether the time pressure which arises from gainful employment is the only reason for a possible difference in childrearing approaches of the working and middle classes cannot be definitively stated. At any rate, this correspondence seems to be an indication of the continuity of material and thus also of temporal circumstances which have been influential factors in childrearing approaches since the 19th century.

The psychological and educative supporting matrix
Yet, for the study under discussion here a further explanation for possible differences in approaches to childcare in the two social strata could be the influence of the mothers’ educative supporting matrix. This support system proves to be very different for the two social classes. Possible influential factors in this context include the mother’s education, material reasons, and class-specific needs and priorities.

Among the middle-class mothers the preferred support system consists of an intense consultation of books, breastfeeding groups, therapists, and friends. These recommend childcare methods strongly oriented towards the child. To a certain extent, the mothers relate their own dedicated attitudes to these recommendations and consultations. Dorothea, who was from Germany’s social stratum with a higher level of formal schooling, had been reading, for
example, guidebooks on parenting since her pregnancy. During the infant care period, she consulted a book by a pediatrician for every question that arose. This book explained what her child was going through in each phase and provided suggestions on practical childcare. This was a great help to her because she wanted to make things as pleasing as possible for her child. As she did not approve of her mother’s attitudes towards childcare, she did not ask her for advice. But she did seek help in her breastfeeding group and put many of those suggestions into practice. A therapy group taught Yolanda, who is from the Cono Sur’s social stratum with a higher level of education, to trust her own feelings with respect to childcare issues. She also asked friends for advice and occasionally consulted a book.

According to Dazcal de Lauzán (1984), Oubaid (1987) and Rerrich and Urdze (1981), one reason for the emphasis on emotional aspects and devotedness in the information used by the middle class of both continents is the influence of the social sciences and of psychology. In particular, psychology draws attention to the risks of undesirable developments at an early age. Since such information is widely distributed through, e.g., books, breastfeeding advisers, and psychologists it is primarily the middle class (which makes use of such assistance) that is guided by these values in the search for support. However, for Germany Quaiser-Pohl (2001) has found that through these values a tendency among mothers to demand too much of themselves has emerged.

In contrast, in the study under discussion here the working-class mothers gathered their advice, as much as necessary, from midwives, nurses, doctors, pharmaceutical magazines, or family members. For the most part, the advice tended to be about the practical implementation of childcare. How different the advice that is being contrasted here can be is noticeable in that Nina, from the German working class, upon a visit to a breastfeeding group frequented exclusively by middle-class mothers, left the group shocked. She thought that she would be on the edge of total exhaustion if she were to breastfeed her child in accordance with the 2-hour intervals that were recommended in the group. As mentioned above, she breastfed her baby in 4-hour intervals, as was recommended to her by her midwife and had been demonstrated by her own mother’s childcare methods. On the other hand, the advice from María Azul’s mother (Argentinean working class) referred, as María herself put it, to advantages of a medical nature, emphasizing, for example, the advantages of breastfeeding in comparison to bottle-feeding. Emotional support from the
young mother’s own mother is only provided in connection with the problems in the parents’ relationship to one another, from the doctors in the form of attempts to calm the mother during delivery.

The country’s status of development influenced the supporting matrix of the working-class mother in Cono Sur to the extent that she received no regular assistance from a midwife, but, instead, was advised only once in the hospital immediately after having given birth. Thus, she was dependent on her mother’s advice. Apparently, she valued that advice, as she reproached herself for having stopped breastfeeding when she learned how important breast milk could be, even though at that point she was no longer able to breastfeed her baby.

Developmental status of the country
However, María Azul also serves as an example to show how the social problems of a developing country can allow the psychological and educative supporting matrix to become precarious and how the resulting gaps in the support system make a focus of orientation to the child more difficult. In this sense, then, María Azul’s partner’s loss of work is probably partially responsible for his drinking problem. The resulting financial problems and his frequent absence have motivated María Azul to engage in a struggle over his role as the child’s father and as her partner – for instance, to accompany her when she takes the child to the hospital or when the child cries and wants to be comforted by him. María Azul, then, spent a large part of the interview dealing with these topics. In comparison to interviews with German mothers of the same social stratum, these and similar problems appeared more frequently and with a greater intensity in the interviews with mothers from the Cono Sur. Such problems include a teenaged, single mother’s search for a new partner who could offer her protection, or the worries of another about her partner, who had been taken into custody for minor crimes. In this social context, the child is often described as a “companion” or “friend”, which emphasizes the emotional benefits of the relationship for the mother more than those for the child.

It is interesting to note that much of the literature on the motherhood of first mothers in socially underprivileged groups of the Cono Sur applies to teenage mothers. In some of the hospitals in Uruguay, a fourth of the mothers gave birth before the age of 18. Among these mothers, an age-related, rather egocentric attitude results in not putting the child at the center of attention. The
necessity of institutions which take over these tasks of the supporting matrix is evident in that these mothers seek advice, support, and social contacts. They want to be good mothers, but simply don’t know how. At first, they always start breastfeeding whenever the baby cries, regardless of whether the real reason is that the baby has been waiting to have a diaper changed. They mistake their own desires for those of the child when, for instance, they feed the baby solid food at a much too early date. Many mothers choose motherhood as an alternative to a situation on the labor market that offers them no opportunities. Then, they feel they have discovered a goal in life. Like other facilities, the Casa Luna in Montevideo takes care of such mothers by offering them training programs and educational opportunities as an alternative to the mother’s identity they have simply chosen out of despair.

Further possible factors
At this point, a few of the study’s findings that go beyond considerations of social stratum and of the developmental status of the country are to be briefly mentioned, as these can promote a better understanding for the interview partners. The first remarks in this context refer to Nina and Dorothea, the mother from former East Germany’s social stratum with a lower level of formal schooling and the one from former West Germany’s social stratum with a higher level of education, respectively. At the outset, it seems not unreasonable to suspect certain influences in the supporting matrix of both mothers from the specific, earlier political systems. Nina accounts for the strict organization of her daily childcare routine by explaining that she would not like to constantly be distracted from her own activities. In contrast, Dorothea often demands too much of herself with her needs to understand, to “read” her child as well as possible and to make everything as pleasant for the child as possible, taking her offspring’s unique personality into account. In comparisons between mothers of the two former German states, Meise (1995) notes that in the GDR motherhood was characterized by an interest in re-integrating the mother into the labor market. Thus, the child had to adapt to the mother’s activities. In contrast, the childcare and childrearing methods of West German

mothers were, according to Meise, characterized by a constant readiness to attend to the child. Rerrich and Urdze (1981) see the reasons for this in the increased demands made on mothers in West Germany since the 1980s, demands which were rationalized with the psychological insights referred to above. Yet, Oubaid (1987) claims that such insights were implemented by supporters of increasingly conservative trends, who, to further their own political aims, were interested in keeping women away from the labor market.

A further reason for Nina’s especially disciplined way of carrying out childcare might have to do with her profession as a police officer, the same profession as her father. Along similar lines, Nina justified her plans to have her child start taking part in sports as early as at the age of one – she says that her parents supported her this way, too. Nina thinks that this is important so that the child can learn to persevere in the face of difficulties. In this context, then, we can speak of a milieu-related or family influence.

Childcare methods with less emotional involvement and which emphasized letting the child cry and not picking up the child much so that he or she did not become spoiled and with fixed feeding times of 3 to 4-hour intervals, were mentioned very often in interviews on motherhood from the middle of the previous century. This may have to do with medical findings of the 1950s (Rogoff 2003). But it is also conceivable that factors pertaining to certain political and economic systems (whether authoritarian, socialist, or capitalist systems) also play a role here. For such systems may be interested in child-rearing practices which produce a population that is easy to control and exploit. The amount of research required to ascertain such influences could not be undertaken within the framework of the project under discussion here. Nevertheless, for childrearing books of the Nazi era such practices have been noted by Chamberlain (1979). But authoritarian values expressed in child-rearing and considered to be Prussian virtues can be traced back as far as the 18th century. This historical background might be a major reason why mothers in today's Germany dissociate themselves from such practices. Perhaps with reference to this point, then, the two German mothers are simply at opposite ends of the spectrum.

Finally, a certain similarity noticeable in the two South American mothers should be mentioned here. Both of them breastfeed on a schedule designed to meet the child’s needs. In contrast to the German mother from the same social stratum, the middle-class mother demonstrates no excessive demands made on herself with reference to childcare. At the beginning of the analysis, this type
of childcare was called the “ability” to become involved in the “primary maternal preoccupation”. This similarity between the two mothers might simply be a coincidence, since individual mothers from other settings also reported on spontaneous breastfeeding adjusted to the child’s needs and on their problems with forcing the baby to adhere to a set rhythm. But a further possible reason might be the common history of both German mothers, which distinguishes them from the mothers in the Cono Sur and would support the assumption of a regional difference. Yet, as mentioned above, the fact that regional differences proved to be relatively insignificant in this research may have to do with the common European heritage of the middle-class mothers. The child-rearing values of the mothers, held either individually or originating in a context that must still be defined, should be mentioned here as a further hypothesis. Their relations to care practices would be interesting to explore.

**Discussion**

To compare the categories analyzed in the study with those applied in Stern’s “motherhood constellation” (1995), the latter are to be listed here once more: Stern limits his theory to developed, Western, post-industrial societies. It is noticeable that Stern attaches more significance to transnational processes than to regional ones. This approach corresponds to the findings of the part of the study presented here and to the regions selected: similarities in childcare practices are greater for mothers of the same social stratum than for those within the same national boundaries. In addition, the developmental status of the country seems to influence the mothers’ childcare practices.

Stern does not differentiate between social classes. However, my results demonstrate that, in the chosen contexts, temporal, material and educational factors determine the formation of care practices. Further research is necessary to determine which influences child-oriented childcare approaches depend upon. For the settings examined here, meeting the child’s needs in terms of the “primary maternal preoccupation” as described by Stern (1995) and Winnicott (1956, cf. Busch 1992) seems to be a phenomenon that can primarily be attributed to the middle class. Beside this the necessary abilities for such childcare are acquired in certain social and ethnic groups with their own traditions and history, through a learning process, also in the middle class. Yet, they must also correspond to the intentions of the mother. If a learning process is intended, then the necessary supporting environment must be available. In the final analysis, the mother’s career and private-life circumstances must
allow for the time and flexibility required by a child-oriented approach to childcare. The abilities mentioned necessitate a mother’s psychological energy and readiness to be able to “read” her child.

For cultural psychology, the major benefit to be gained from Stern’s work (1995) seems to consist in his description of motherhood and especially in the significance he assigns to the mother’s supporting matrix. In this sense, Stern emphasizes the supporting matrix’s role in the learning processes necessary for the mother, in providing her with psychological support. The theory of Stern refers to the also economic conditions of the matrix (material support). But he does not reflect on cultural influences of the social class on the pedagogical and psychological matrix, e.g. the specific choice of pedagogical and psychological aid. As the study discussed here demonstrates, the composition of the matrix, just as much as its presence or absence, is closely connected to the cultural context, to the mother’s socio-economic conditions, to political, regional, and historical influences on motherhood, and to traditional family value systems. At present, the childrearing values expressed in the “primary maternal preoccupation” correspond, above all, to the support matrix of the middle class in both of the settings examined here. The implementation of such values is facilitated by the economic conditions of this social group, although some of these mothers make excessive demands on themselves with respect to the requirements of a child-oriented approach to childcare. It should be noted that Stern (1995) underemphasizes the significance of professional staff, whose influence on childrearing values has been shown by the research findings discussed here to be substantial. Instead, Stern emphasizes the husband’s role and in doing so neglects the specific situation of the large number of single mothers.

The substance of the findings presented here can be seen in having demonstrated that professional aid to mothers should take both their interests and their resources into consideration. This is necessary for establishing meaningful contact at all, for attempting to do justice to their value systems, and for not making excessive demands on them. Under certain circumstances, the aid may need to begin with the external conditions of the supporting matrix, as can be illustrated by the work with teenage mothers in South America – provided that this is in the mothers’ interests. An offer of assistance that ignores the mother’s values can lead to her withdrawal, as it did in the case of the mother from the German social stratum with a lower level of formal schooling. This helps neither the mother nor the child. Considering that
the abilities of childcare have to be acquired through a learning process, perhaps it would be important to support the necessity of the time working mothers need for it. In this context, the obligation of cross-cultural studies would be to support reflection on the cultural background among those offering professional aid and to facilitate their recognition of possible cultural conflicts in mothers who seek help.

The main emphasis of the analysis under discussion here was, as mentioned above, on identifying differences between the cases examined and on the possible interpretation of such differences. Further interpretation of the findings in comparison to other cases and a quantification of the same is a major priority. Further research might be encouraged by the following suggestions and impulses:

a) including the interview partners in the analysis and/or more intense work on a single case to delimit the variety of perspectives which the cultural view of their statements allows;

b) analysis of the cultural significance of childcare practices: might, for example, the effort to ensure the father’s presence in working class be interpreted as a cultural expression of the “primary maternal pre-occupation”?

c) further culture-specific qualifications of the researcher’s interpretations.

(Translation: Thomas La Presti)

References


Part III
Working with New Media and Image Technologies
Narratives in the Time of Internet

Maria Benites

The main defect of all hitherto-existing materialism (…) is that the object, actuality, sensuousness, are conceived only in the form of the object, or of contemplation, but not as human sensuous activity, practice [Praxis], not subjectively.

The materialist doctrine that men are products of circumstances and upbringing, and that, therefore, changed men are products of changed circumstances and changed upbringing, forgets that it is men who change circumstances and that the educator must himself be educated.

(K. Marx: 1st and 3rd thesis on Feuerbach)

Philosophical and theoretical considerations on Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)

The huge increase in the availability of the internet during the past 6 years is becoming more and more apparent. According to Internet World Statistics\(^58\), inequality in the use of internet still remains. However, it seems to be diminishing every year. From 2000 to 2008, the worldwide use of the internet increased by 290% – in Latin America and the Caribbean, it exploded by 659.90%. In spite of this massive increase, only 23% of the population in these regions have access to the internet, and only 137 million of almost 600 million inhabitants use a computer. The figures are different in Europe, especially in Germany, where 53 out of 82 inhabitants have internet access – more than 64% of the population. In Spain, the figures are quite similar: out of 40 million inhabitants, more than 22 million use the internet, which represents more than 56% of the population.

The democratization of the internet, a cutting-edge technology, is a unique phenomenon: the proliferation of cyber cafés clearly shows its societal distribution: everyone able to operate a computer can access the biggest information network in the world, take pictures, make movies, create an internet radio station, publish their own webblog, browse through major institutions, communicate with newspapers and magazines, influence the

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course of elections, and organize international meetings. In the current pedagogical discussion, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are being simultaneously both overestimated and underestimated.

ICTs are being underestimated to the extent that their current functions as processors of a complex transformation of knowledge and its social function are being overlooked. On the other hand, the overestimation of ICTs either emphasizes the positive or the negative potential of ICTs: the hypothesis goes that ICTs will have an immediate effect on education and learning. Critical voices tend to consider ICTs an “extreme realization of our culture” Basically, this line of thought contends that they will destroy all of the achievements elaborated by modern pedagogy since the beginning of the twentieth century that favour children and society. In contrast, enthusiastic voices tend to acknowledge the potential of the new technologies in creating new forms of learning and in causing a dramatic transformation of schools, teaching, and education. Both of these positions, the pessimistic as well as the optimistic one, attribute effects to ICTs that are already either positive or negative. However, the societal and the social forms of their use are being systemically ignored.

We believe, that ICTs will fundamentally transform learning, appropriation, and the development of subjectivity in curricular and extracurricular contexts in the “long term” (Geraldi, Fichtner & Benites 2007, 117-134). The project “Windows to the World” shows that neither of these two points of view belong to the world of children and teenagers – ICTs are constructs created by adults, produced by an uncertainty towards the future and realities that neither children nor young people actually experience. In our project “Windows to the World”, the real practices of children and youngsters, their own activities and forms of dealing with these new technologies in a “non-pedagogical context”, are the central focus.

We consider these practices a form of societal appropriation of the ICTs. What do I mean by societal appropriation? By this term I do not simply describe the organized development of individual abilities that can deal with the possibilities of a device in a technically adequate way. Nor does societal appropriation signify dealing with the multi-facetted, media-related didactic problems which can arise during this process: at school, in the course of instruction, or under other circumstances. Societal appropriation of the ICTs as “universal machines” means the development of social patterns befitting the potential of these machines. It means the development of habitualizations and
standardizations, as well as their preservation, reproduction, and transmission. Societal appropriation means a process by which we learn to consider the new technology as an essential part of ourselves, to integrate it consciously into our daily lives as our culture, and to develop and make use of it as a means of social self-direction.

Important to this definition were Karl Marx’ theses on Feuerbach, a line of thought which he later formulates more concretely in his *Grundrisse* (Marx 1953). As Marx states here, change in social relations is always accompanied at first by a consciousness of dissolution and decline, of pessimism and an apocalyptic mood. According to Marx, this stems from the circumstance that the strangeness and independence of the inception of something new still exists in opposition to the individuals, even though they have actually created that which is new themselves:

> It is equally certain that the individuals cannot subordinate themselves to their own social relations before they have created them. But it is absurd to consider that material relation as indigenous, as inseparable from and immanent to the nature of individuality (as opposed to reflected knowledge and will). It is their product, an historical product. It forms a part of a particular phase of their development. The strangeness and independence by which it seems to exist in opposition to them is only proof of the fact that they are still engaged in the creation of the conditions of their social life instead of having begun this life, using these conditions as a starting point. (Marx 1953, 79 translated from German by MB)

From this perspective, one could say that, at present, the process of appropriation of the computer as a universal device is geared toward a simple, naively technical use of the device and toward its often brutal implementation in daily life without any reflection upon its consequences and effects. This implementation is often accompanied by individual anxieties about the dissolution of traditional ways of life and the identity they guarantee. It is often accompanied by a fear of the destruction of highly regarded elements of traditional culture and of the values associated with them. Former ways of life become fragile, contexts are changed, habits dissolved – all of this is experienced as a crisis and is reflected upon as a crisis.

The results of current research on the structural transformation of childhood, youth, and schooling in Germany and other countries seem to indicate a fundamental change in the way internal and external coherence within our society is produced in the first place. On the whole, an image of
multi-facetted, differentiated, and somewhat diffuse actions is depicted, and in
the process contradictions become evident:

1. Parents, educators, and nursery school teachers work intensively to
develop a conscious self-concept in children and youngsters, which has as its
chief aim the autonomization of the individual. However, a contradiction arises
between this autonomization and certain pedagogic intentions which have led
to the increasing structuring and control of youth’s daily lives.

2. At the same time, the autonomization demonstrates the other side of the
coin with its privatization and therapeutization in the sense of a concealment of
systematic factors such as politics, society, and the external world.

3. These processes are accompanied by new dependencies such as
alienation, mediatization and reification of human and social relationships.
This is all contained within a social context that is characterized by sharp
contradictions between the individualization of life-styles and a social
normalization, standardization, and conformism of behavior never before
observed.

We consider these contradictions to be an indication of insecure, groping,
searching actions in the course of everyday life on the part of individuals and
social groups, actions directed toward aligning oneself with some sort of
“compulsory modernization”. At the same time, it seems to me that exactly
these contradictions indicate the creation of something new and the suspicion
with which the new is always met (see above, Marx).

If the assumption is correct that something new never originates
organically or as a prolongation of something old, that something new can only
be the result of a dynamic, always contradictory movement leading away from
that which is already existent, then one could investigate the current processes
in a totally different manner: are they related to the social acquisition of new
activities? Does this acquisition have a particular direction or perspective? In
the course of this process, how do the individuals express themselves as
subjects who – to connect the inquiry with Marx’ perspective - are engaged in
becoming the proprietors of their social relations?

The project “Windows to the World” faces this very question in a distinct
way: how do marginalized children and youths appropriate the new ICTs by
becoming the proprietors of their own social relationship? Implicitly, our thesis
is that the “new” emerges from the margins of society.
New ways of dealing with ICTs by marginalized children: “Windows to World”

In April 2002, when the project “Windows to the World” was launched, the internet was only accessible to a few privileged individuals. This project aimed at investigating how internet technology could be appropriated by groups of children and teenagers living in the poorest areas of various cities and countries (Brazil, Germany, and Spain), as well as how webcam communication functioned between groups located in different places across the globe. The project was carried out over a period of six years, involving more than 85 groups in three different countries. All the groups that were set up during these six years obtained free access to the internet. From 2006 onwards, it became less interesting to implement more groups in Europe, since the internet had been expanding rashly there within the past few years. Therefore, during this late phase of the project, we focussed more on the Brazilian periphery.

In Brazil, it was in general barely possible to gather the necessary equipment to set up an internet connection. Only a huge personal and financial effort made this possible (especially thanks to the sponsors from Petrobrás, Brazil’s only national and international oil company). In the cities of Cuiabá, Barra do Bugres (Federal State of Mato Grosso), Aracajú (Federal State of Sergipe), Porto Alegre, Santa Maria (Federal State of Rio Grande do Sul), Rocinha – Favela in Rio de Janeiro (Federal State of Rio de Janeiro), Campinas, Jacareí, São Paulo (Federal State of São Paulo), Juiz de Fora (Federal State of Minas Gerais), and Natal (Federal State of Ceará ), the team was first confronted with the lack of broadband, power connections, premises and security. Thanks to the efforts of the communities who were involved in the continuity of the project, over the years these problems were solved. The involvement of these communities in the maintenance of the project in their respective living areas was driven by the common desire to access a technology permitting them a greater integration in today's world, as well as by the urgent need to keep children and teenagers busy and beyond the streets and the reach of and drug traffic.

The different groups usually met on a weekly basis for one hour, always outside of class. The only objective was to stimulate the children and teenagers to handle the computer in a way that allowed for freedom and curiosity. There was no pedagogical concept, nor a schedule of the activities to be carried out
during the meetings. The main goals were to explore, first of all, how the technology was being appropriated by the children in a process of application, use and knowledge-acquisition, and, secondly, if such processes implied a change for the children.

We intended to observe and analyze the appropriation process of an advanced technology emerging from the interest and the initiative of its users – children and youngsters between 8 and 16 years. We wanted to find out whether they could learn how to use different software applications by themselves, with only the support of the facilitator\(^59\). We also wondered how, under these conditions, internet communication with the other groups would occur (www.janelasparaomundo.org).

The children and teenagers showed no uncertainty and no fear regarding the use of the internet. They quickly appropriated the technology using the logic of trial and error – they tried without success and then tried again another way. The appropriation was a collective process. Learning was a way of moving forward as a group, starting with the individual wishes to send messages, photos, or drawings and to play with the various communication applications (Yahoo Messenger, MSN Messenger, and Skype).

The laboratory of the University of Campinas (UNICAMP) observed this process between May and July 2005. The researchers of the project looked at the relations between curiosity, desire, and exploration within the framework of the relationship that the society of these participants created through the use of computers. In spite of all the progress made by the groups, a recurring fact attracted the attention of the researchers: in all the groups constituted of children and youths between 8 and 16 years, the use of the internet was mostly restricted to computer games. Only few groups spontaneously used the potential of the computer in such different areas as photography, video, or to improve their general knowledge. The programs used the most – beside the games – were the communication applications MSN Messenger and Yahoo Messenger as well as the internet community Orkut. However, their use started not during the actual meetings but after the group meetings, when individual children had free access to the computers. The participants also used applications like Word, Excel, Photoshop, Adobe Acrobat and Power Point, although only after stimulation by the experts accompanying the project.

\(^{59}\) The function of a facilitator in our project was to provide support with technical problems and translations in the communication with foreign groups.
The core structure within the first five years was the completely free use of computers without any educational intention. This was very difficult to maintain, since children and teenagers facing a new kind of knowledge or technology generally tried to establish a relationship between teaching and learning, the norm that they were used to. During this period of five years, we observed that different relationships of collective learning and solidarity in facing technical problems and open questions were established within the group. The groups generally lasted six months to one year. They were constituted of up to five children who communicated as a group with another group of the same size in other cities or countries.

The material accumulated in more than 85 groups revealed data which have been analyzed and presented in the book *Janelas para o Mundo* (Benites 2006 a; 2006 b), published in Portuguese. Each phase of the project revealed new research issues and methodological questions. It is, indeed, paradoxical to analyze new contents with traditional tools – it is even impossible to teach to someone how to appropriate a new technology with old teaching methods! How can we escape such paradoxes? Is there any possibility of a new paradigm? The artistic domain, especially in literature, might give interesting clues to these questions. The novel *The Last Reader* by Piglia (2005) comes to mind, particularly regarding his presentation of the various perspectives of the reader. Reading is presented here on the one hand as a complexity of different forms and different levels of investigating a social phenomenon and, on the other, as a “construction of subjectivity” of the reader – only in our case it was the researcher.

In the following, I list some of the main findings:

1. In the project, communication transcended the face-to-face situation. The children and youngsters saw the faces of the others and at the same their own faces. We are dealing here with a completely new type of communication, whose particularity has not been studied as yet.

2. The gaze of the Other on oneself constructs me, according to Bakhtin. The technology of the webcam enables one to see oneself at the same time as one sees the Other. The Bakhtinian concept of alterity could have to be fundamentally reformulated on the basis of our data.

3. The concept of the “Zone of Proximal Development” by Lev S. Vygotsky maintains that the assessment of children’s intellectual abilities should rely on a more dynamic conception of intellectual potential than what is expected for their age. Vygotsky defines the Zone of Proximal Development as
“the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky 1978, 86). What emerged in our project was that the adults were learning both with and from the children and youngsters as to how to use the new technologies. This can be seen as a new pattern for the appropriation of knowledge and also as a new dimension of Vygotsky’s concept of the Zone of Proximal Development.

4. Our particular scientific research project was also influenced by a proposal made by C. T. Peirce regarding the abductive formulation of hypotheses using intuition. According to him, this provides a greater freedom of understanding and more possibilities to receive and accept the new. The reference to C. S. Peirce confirmed our perspective: we place the concept of coincidence at the centre because the concrete phenomenon is based on a concurrence of the interest, the motivation and the qualification of the researcher who puts this concrete phenomenon on the level of generalization. In the perspective of Peirce, we are not able to scientifically understand any concrete object or phenomenon. We only achieve a scientific understanding of the general, constructed by our own methodology and methods. In the perspective of Pierce the coincidence is the mediator between the concrete and the general as elaborated by Otte (1994, 79-105).

I would like to finish this section by putting a concrete experience in a theoretical perspective, which will also serve as a general synthesis of the first stage of our project. The following extract of a chat session took place between the coordinator of the project and one of the participants, who was ten years old when he joined the project and fifteen years old by the time of this chat, which took place in 2007 and lasted about three hours.60

Maria: Was the project “Windows to the World” important to you? Or was it rather just another extracurricular activity?

Francisco: Yes, it was, because thanks to it I got to know German culture. I was a child and it made me grow a little in my mind.

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60 The participant took part in the pilot project of “Windows to the World”, which consisted in webcam chatting between an indigenous village, a school in the periphery of Cuiabá (capital of the Federal State of Mato Grosso/Brazil) – both groups in Brazil – and a third group in Siegen, Germany. The groups met on a weekly basis for one year (the name Francisco is fictive).
Maria: Could you explain a little more, what you mean by “growing in your mind”?

Francisco: It made me understand that each person has its own culture. I used to think that people in other countries had a crazy culture. But then I understood that every nation has its own culture. In fact, if they were all the same, they wouldn’t be cultures.

Maria: For instance, what did you see in German culture and in your own culture?

Francisco: It would be very bad if the world were all the same.

Maria: It is very, very important to me that you tell me with your own words how this change happened in your head.

Francisco: Ah, I realized that Germany has a very rich culture full of traditions which Brazil doesn’t have. That’s how changed my way of seeing other countries, I grew as a person.

Maria: How did you think it was before?

Francisco: Ah, I used to think it was a crazy culture – pardon the use of this expression – I used to find them very weird.

Maria: They were crazy?

Francisco: No, I was. And then I realized that each one has their own culture. Now I’m dreaming of going there to get to know this culture.

Maria: What is culture for you?

Francisco: For me, culture is the tradition of a people.

Maria: And how was the communication with other groups in Brazil?

Francisco: Our communication was good because we became friends and for them (the Germans) it was good, too, because they also got to know new people.

Maria: Yes, but I am asking if you communicated with other groups in Brazil, apart from the Germans.

Francisco: Ah yes, I chatted with indigenes from Umutina village. It was good too, it made me get to know the indigenes a little better than what I usually saw of them on TV and in the cinema. I used to have a completely different image of them.

Maria: What do you mean by that?

Francisco: Well, I used to think that they couldn’t speak Portuguese, just their own language, but I was wrong. I used to think that they couldn’t handle the internet but I was also wrong in that regard.

Maria: And how crazy did you use to think people in other countries were?

Francisco: Pretty crazy.

Maria: But tell me what you were thinking, how and what they were in your head.
Francisco: I used to think that they were completely different... I used to think that they were stupid, like Martians, but then I realized that they were just like us, that the only difference is the culture. […]

Maria: Tell me a little about your family, do you have any brothers or sisters?

Francisco: I was born in Rio de Janeiro; I came to Cuiabá when I was six years old. We were very poor there but here [in Cuiabá] my father set things right and now we’re better off. I have an older brother. He’s 17.

Maria: What does your father do? And your mother, does she work?

Francisco: My mother has a small shop and my father is a locksmith.

Maria: And you help your father?

Francisco: Unfortunately not because I have to learn for school, but he has an employee.

Maria: And you don’t help your mother either?

Francisco: Actually I do help my mother; I’m always in the shop when she can’t be there.

Maria: I would like to know a little more about your school, Rita Caldas. Next, I’ll ask you about the technical school. When did you leave Rita Caldas?

Francisco: I left last year and I started to study at CEFET61 this year.

Maria: And how come you took the entrance test of the CEFET, where did you hear about this opportunity?

Francisco: Here everybody knows about CEFET, everybody dreams of going there. […]

Maria: You participated in this project. Do you think – now, after 5 years – that the exchange helped you in your education?

Francisco: Yes, a lot.

Maria: Really? Or just because I asked?

Francisco: Really. (…) […]

Maria: And how did you find me again with MSN Messenger? And why?

Francisco: Because I wanted to talk with you, I don’t know... Because I remembered you, so I asked how you were. Then Lurdi62 gave me your MSN user name.

Maria: Do you plan to study at the university?

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61 Cefet Centro Federal de Educacao Tecnologica – Federal Centre for technological education
http://www.cefet-cuiaba.edu.br/index.html

62 Lurdi: Headmistress of the Rita Caldas School. She also coordinated the project in the city of Cuiabá.
Francisco: I don’t attend university; I study at the technical school. When I graduate, I want to study at the university.

Maria: Yes, that’s what I meant: do you want to study?

Francisco: Of course, I want to be very successful.

Maria: Do you already have an idea of the faculty that you want?

Francisco: Yes, I want to study advertising.

Maria: Hey! And I thought you wanted to study some kind of engineering!

Francisco: No, I want to be an advertiser, I love advertising. […]

This is a concrete example of a change in an individual’s perception of himself and, at the same time, his vision of the world, initiated by his participation in the project “Windows to the World”.

According to Vygotsky, societal instruments are mediators in social interactions and contribute to new mental functions in individuals and, thereby, to their development. Drawing on the concept of the “Zone of Proximal Development”, we see that, in this case, computer and internet represent a gate for Francisco which allowed him to locate and attain his personal goal, to study cinema and advertising. The distance between this professional area and the social reality of a child whose father owns a small shop in a Brazilian favela is more than astonishing. However, through the use of internet, any kind of world became imaginable.

**Narratives as mediators between two worlds – subjective and virtual realities in the second phase of “Windows to World”**

During the years 2007 and 2008, we have analyzed the data collected by the 85 groups that participated in the first phase of the project “Windows to the World”. This analysis also initiated the second phase of this project. One of the main problems, which appeared in almost all of these groups, was the children’s and youngsters’ difficulties with speaking about their life experiences. From our perspective as researchers, these narratives belonged to a past that was constructed within a social context. We tried several times to record some of these narratives through interviews with the children and youngsters participating in the project. The difficulty that they showed in narrating their experiences greatly surprised us. We wanted to use Pierce’s concept of *coincidence* once again in order to describe and understand the significance of the project for the lives of the participants. This is how we
initiated the second phase of the project, in November 2007: “Narratives in the Time of Internet”.

The construction of a “narrative of interaction” – this was our hypothesis – could be set in motion if different groups participated in certain contents of the other groups, using the camera as a means of observation. In this way, a repertoire of contents could be created, which would then open completely new perspectives in the internet meetings. The creative appropriation of the potential of the ICTs would then have a center that could be focused on in the meetings. The “other” group would automatically be more than an exotic screen for self-reflection. In our next moves, we attempted to make this theoretical aspect on the nature of the narrative concrete.

Our aim was to investigate how oral narratives (such as the description of a photograph) are related to visual, more concrete narratives (such as the making of a movie based on a narrative). We decided to delineate the second phase of the project into the following steps:

1. We would build groups of five children or youngsters (the groups are organized by age: 10 to 12 years, 12 to 14 years, 14 to 16 years). Each group has a partner group of same age, located in another city or another federal state, with which they can communicate once a week for one hour (or more if both groups wish to) through webcam and messaging applications like MSN Messenger, Skype or Yahoo Messenger. The groups can decide which one of the applications they do prefer.
2. Before the project starts, each member of the group would have an interview with a facilitator in the form of a dialogue. In this way, their narrative capacity and style would be recorded before they enter the project.
3. Within the project, each member of the group would make a detailed description of a photograph he would like to take – this picture has to be realizable in the child’s social context. The description is to be written down.
4. The picture descriptions would be sent to the partner group. Then the partner group takes the actual pictures according to the description and sends them back to the other group and vice versa. When the groups receive their pictures, they do compare them to their own descriptions and point out the differences.
5. A virtual exhibition would show the pictures of both groups.
6. This exhibition would form the basis on which each group could then make up a story about their partner group – or of other groups in the project. The only restriction would be that they cannot write a story about the pictures that they took themselves. They can make up the stories with the help of “guests” as protagonists, who can be their parents and relatives, friends, neighbours etc.
7. A storyboard would be drafted out of the stories, keeping in mind a time span of twenty minutes for the final film. Here, the participants choose actors and scenarios.  
8. The videos would be shot and uploaded on the internet.

The idea was to investigate how narratives (initial descriptions), pictures (photo-graphs), and narrated moving pictures (narratives based on photographs and aiming at the realization of a film) are related to each other.

Based on the research of Gilles Deleuze on cinema (Deleuze 1995-96; 2005), we intended to take a closer look at the relationship between body and image from a new perspective, enabled by today’s digital technology. Bodies and objects would be photographed and narrated in the storyboards of the films. These films, again, would be realized through the bodies and the actions of the children and youths. The fascination for moving pictures that has existed since the early beginnings of cinematography has radically changed the concept of narrative. It is nowadays possible to sum up a narrative that includes years or even centuries within an hour and a half. This means that time is different in images; moving pictures give a new value to both space and time. The internet has changed both realms even more, but has also changed pictures and movements, as well as the relationships between them. With the internet, the picture, the word, the news and the narrative travel instantaneously around the world, crossing time zones, thousands of kilometres and multitudinous cultures. Space is no longer fixed and closed; it can now be crossed, invaded, modified, and turned into a new dimension we cannot yet name.

The aim of the research was to show the picture constructed by a subject based on his desire to eternalize an image. There was no specific goal beside the realization of the project, no fixed sequence was prescribed. Nobody received suggestions on what he was supposed to do: all that was fixed was for the idea that the shooting of the photograph would allow the child or teenager to make concrete an abstract construction, desire, or intention through the medium of a digital picture. The picture that they could propose might have resulted from various subjective perspectives: their real world, their imagination, and their desires. In that way, we would obtain first hand a “memory-picture” of a world that only the author of the picture knew.

We started the research with six groups, which means that three groups chatted with three other groups. All six groups were located in extremely poor areas of different federal states in Brazil: one in the city of Aracaju (Sergipe),
one in the city of São Paulo, one in the city of Campinas (São Paulo), two in
the city of Rio de Janeiro, and one in the state of Mato Grosso. The first step
was to explain the meaning of the narrative:

Facilitator: So, today, in the interview that we’re going to make, each one of
you will narrate something interesting.

Child 1: Narrate? What is narrating?
F.: Telling.
C1: Telling?
F.: Yes, telling.
C1: But we can’t tell.
F.: Why?
C1: Because secrets can’t be told.
F.: If you can’t tell secrets, then what can you tell?
Child 2: Numbers. 63 (laughs.)
F.: But doesn’t counting (telling) numbers make you feel sleepy?
C1 and 2: Yes, it does!
Child 3: Gossip.
F.: But we’re not going to tell gossip, are we?
C1, 2 and 3: laugh.
Child 4.: Sitcoms.
F.: What sitcoms?
C4: From TV.
F.: Then we’re going to tell everything that can be told.
C1: News.
C2: Lies.
C3: Nonsense.
C4: Secrets.
C5: Tales.
F to child 5: Exactly, tales too.

After this exchange, we felt that we needed to explain what a narrative was
to the children and youngsters and to define what type of narrative should be
investigated. The initial structure of the project as demonstrated in this first
interview clearly showed that our vision did not match the project’s reality.

63 In this dialogue, we see that the word “tell” has a different meaning for Child 1. In Portuguese,
“tell” (in the sense of telling a story) means “constrá”, which also means count. Child 2 takes the
second meaning of the word and says that they can “count” numbers.
Heisenberg and Bohr showed that it is not possible to observe and measure an object without altering it. The object after the measurement is different from the object before the measurement, and this was a major problem of the first phase (2002 to 2006): we could neither quantify nor qualify what was happening during the process of appropriation of technology. The personalities and the wishes of the children and youths were changing; everything was in permanent, non-linear transformation.

In the first phase (2002 to 2006), we knew that there had been some significant changes for the children and youths, although nothing seemed to change on the surface. All of them, of course, learned how to use the internet and improved their reading and writing skills – according to their teachers. However, we would never have been able to catch a glimpse of the impact of the project on the children’s lives without the interviews that we made five years later, when the children were youngsters and had left primary school and the project far behind them.

Because of the great amount of collected data, we thought that it was hardly possible to focus on the observation of the learning process. Indeed, the concept of rhizome, developed by Deleuze (Deleuze 1996, Vol. 1, 15), had significantly helped us to deal with this problem. In this second phase, we intended to specifically test the realization of a concrete project, and this with only a few groups, without extending the project to an undefined size as in the first phase. We set clear limits to the research field for a more accurate observation. In contrast, in the first phase, we primarily wanted to see how rhizomes come into being, as something that expands without any method, limits, frontiers or specific goals.

Still, and this was the first challenge of the second phase, we considered research a dynamic system where structure and process interact in a constant relationship. We created a system based on this: the structure, consisted of what we planned to investigate, which tools and instruments we wanted to use, and who was going to investigate whom. It was clear, precise and concrete. We then wrote a manual describing precisely every step of the project, which would allow us to control and monitor all the numerous variables of the process.

World orders (old and new) are, according to Chomsky, dictated by the mass media: radio, cinema, and television. All over the world, they diffuse the same headlines, the same films, the same songs, the same fashions, and the same myths. These orders determine the present of the society (Chomsky
However, the future depends how coming generations will use the instruments that now uphold the current order.

The use of the internet is developing faster and faster, which could imply that its discourse is homogenizing – it already requires a high level of standardization to achieve an international form of communication. However, this is not actually happening. The internet transforms itself every month, and every year new forms of its use break through. In fact, there is a wide variety of independent, peripheral, and alternative discourses expanding and multiplying at an impressive pace. More “traditional” media like radio, cinema, and television are determined by the specificities of their use – their impact range is clearly and rigidly defined. These communication media belonged and still belong to small groups. Cinema has always been strongly controlled – mainly because of the high production costs – with only a few notable exceptions. Maybe now, with digital TV and cinema on the rise, changes will be made in cinema that the internet already demonstrated – especially the democratization of the use of the latest technology.

In our project, this phenomenon led us to offer children and teenagers the possibility of using digital cameras to produce individual narratives – based on their imagination. We found out that the production of visual material was extremely difficult for the children, and we also encountered an enormous difficulty in releasing spontaneous suggestions. Both youngsters and children thought of pictures which required the opposite of spontaneity. The time required to obtain the material was much longer than previously assumed. Currently we are searching for a way to initiate, without compromising the research, a free flow of the imaginary repertoire\textsuperscript{64} of the children and teenagers, either as visual narratives of the participants’ environment, or as narratives which, afterwards, could be created visually. Trying to see what is behind the difficulty of the children with producing their own images has become the main research question in the current phase of the project, and we hope to answer this in the near future.

\textsuperscript{64} “Imaginary repertoire” refers to the theoretical concept “maginário” – a term that describes the world of images that is internally (psychologically) as well as externally (in manifold forms of cultural practice) present and has a systematic character (Moscovici 1988).
Instead of an epilogue: Research as a process

In the last decades, communication through computers (internet) has transformed centuries-old communication patterns. When we stopped for a while to consider this phenomenon, however, we felt perplexed and surprised. No theories would help to gain us the necessary distance to answer today’s most simple questions: what is communication today? What phenomena are meant when we say “global communication”? Internet? Virtuality? Hypertext? Today, communication is a link, a connection that produces new patterns in almost all forms of social relations, but which also provokes new norms of conduct, new paradigms, and new forms of social organization. The internet leads to standardization, but simultaneously it grants a complete freedom of action to its users. It puts an end to the receptor’s passivity. Other media – radio, cinema, television etc. – gave their receptors the role of an audience. They can watch, and maybe sometimes even participate in a show, but this participation takes place under the absolute control of the stations. This does not happen on the internet. Not only can everyone create his own website, community, or weblog, but they can also connect and interact with other users at an international level. Control only results from technical restrictions, and even these are constantly changing as users look for new forms of overcoming such limitations.

During the implementation of the research structure, we realized that the structure had to be changed constantly. In spite of a very careful planning, we could not meet the deadlines nor achieve the goals of the interviews, because it was particularly difficult to create a rapport with the children and teenagers: that could only emerge when the research was already running. This is how the process was destroying the structure. With every step, we had to think the whole structure over. Everything that used to seem so easy and reliable within the solitude of a workroom now manifested itself as impossible in practice. Regarding the appropriation process, the children and teenagers demonstrated a new form of learning that we could not find in the theoretical models on learning and development. In the work of Pierce, however, we did find a method that allowed us to analyze the data as hypotheses that emerge every day. According to Peirce:

The abductive intuition takes place within us like a flash. It is an act of insight, although this insight is extremely fallible ... It is true that the different elements of the hypothesis were in our minds before; but it is the idea of associating what we
had never before thought of associating which makes our abductive intuition flash up. (Peirce Vol V. 7.7.)

According to physiologists, the development of an individual is realized by so-called homeostatic processes: difference provokes the necessity of interacting with the environment. We can apply the analogy of this homeostatic process to the relationship of a human being with his culture and society. In other words, the movement of interaction that results from the human’s necessities, environments and specificities will produce specific manifestations that represent his development in the course of his history (Bateson & Donaldson 1991). Every day, the researchers try to gain access to the necessities of the children and youngsters related to culture and imaginary repertoire. However, at the same time that the researchers are changing, they are changing the culture and the imagination of the children and youths. In the context of such lively exchanges, it is impossible to focus on the process without being led by one’s own culture.

We believe with Eagleton (2000) that “human beings are not mere products of their environments, but neither are those environments sheer clay for their arbitrary self-fashioning” (ibid). If “culture transfigures” (ibid) our interpretation of this process consists in a relocation of cutting edge technologies into the periphery, in order for children and youngsters to create their very own imaginary repertoire.

References


Image Animation: Studying the Creative Process and the Production of Narratives in the Context of Inclusive Education in Rio de Janeiro

Ana Elisabete Lopes & Ivana de Souza Soares

Introduction

This is a photo essay about the appropriation of the language of animation as a means and mediation of artistic expression, of production of narratives and of social inclusion, as developed together with a group of students with special educational needs in the municipal schools of the city of Rio de Janeiro. This study is characterized as being an action-research, where authors participated both in their role as art-educators and as researchers of their own pedagogical practice. The study took place during the 2007 and 2008 school years, within the context of the animation workshop organized by the Instituto Municipal Helena Antipoff. This institute is the Reference Center for Special Education in the municipality of Rio de Janeiro, in partnership with the Center for Digital Art and Animation of the Department of Art and Design at the Pontificia Universidade Católica in Rio de Janeiro/PUC-Rio (www.dad.puc-rio.br). The aim of the study was to investigate different ways of mediating the appropriation of the animation technique as well as the process of creation and production of narratives by students with mental handicaps. The challenge was to learn how to handle the basics of image animation and produce different narratives in order to explore the expressive resources of images in movement and analyze the contribution of the language of animation in the construction of an inclusive education. We highlight the thoughts of Walter Benjamin, Vygotsky, and Arlindo Machado, as guidelines in this theoretical-methodological research.

The question of the appropriation of the means needed for the animation of images, such as photography, video, computers, was explored in the light of art languages in an educational context. In dealing with the diversity of the means and mediations related to image animation, we explored the opportunity that the language of image animation provided the teachers and the students with, in reflecting on the challenges and possibilities of expressions that characterize the field of “Artmedia”. The production of art that incorporates technological resources gives rise to a new artistic experience. Using these different means together with various techniques, materials and props resulted in a multiplicity
of forms of mediation of the artistic production and of the process of appreciation, as well as in the expansion of the possible pathways of propagating the art pieces produced.

Why animation? We would like to explain our choice with a quote from Arlindo Machado (2007, 10), who stated that: “if all art is produced with the means of the time, then the art media represents the most advanced expression of present artistic creation, and it is the one that best expresses the sensitivity and the know-how of man in the third millennium”. As art-educators, we are aware of the need to incorporate new media in pedagogical practices, not only as a pedagogical resource, but also as new languages of expression and communication used by mankind in the contemporary world.

This is how we came to familiarize ourselves with the language of animation, appropriating the basic techniques, in order to carry out favorable interventions in the processes of creation, expression and communication in a group of female students with mental handicaps. We aimed to find out how to democratize the access to the language of animation, and for this we created an integrated group, composed of eight female students in the public municipal school, ages 11 to 20 (seven of whom are mentally handicapped), working together with four graduate students of the Department of Art and Design at PUC-Rio, who are part of the Center for Digital Art and Animation (NADA), and with the teacher-coordinator of the Animation Center – Ms. Claudia Bolshaw, as well as with four teachers from the Municipal Institute Helena Antipoff – Ana Beatriz do Lago, in charge of the Dance Workshop; Michéli Aciolli, in charge of the IT Workshop, and ourselves—Ana Elisabete Lopes and Ivana de Souza Soares, in charge of the Visual Arts Workshop.

Vygotsky’s reflections (2000) on the role of social interactions in the learning process have guided our research and influenced the working methodology of the animation workshop. In our group, which was inclusive of students with mental disabilities, we believe that the interactions among the subjects, the group and the context demonstrate the valorization of diversity and respect for differences. In the inclusive process of teaching-learning, students and teachers created new mediations that helped the group to overcome difficulties and access to knowledge, resources and animation techniques.

This chapter focuses on two areas of research. The first one is the observation of the process of teaching-learning of the animation language and its appropriation by the group. The second focus is the analysis of the image
narratives produced by the group with the animation technique. In this way, the investigation focuses both on observing the creative process of the group using the animation language, and on the pieces that were produced collectively at the end of the project – four animations, entitled: “The Dalmatians’ Wedding” (2007), “Funk Ball” (2007), “Saving the Colored Day” (2007), and “Love is in the Air” (2008).

The workshop format used in the action-research enabled the teachers/researchers to have an investigative insight into their own pedagogical practice, as well as increase their understanding that the field of research is also the field of learning. This is why, for example, the initial proposal was revised in light of issues that ensued from the workshops and from group dynamics. The practice of action-research enabled us to modify the field of learning, i.e., the Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky 2000). At different stages the students interfered in the workshop’s dynamics, and even in the research process they provoked and challenged the teachers/researchers to find new pathways to achieve the objectives that had been determined, and, in this way, the responsibility for the organization of the process was shared with the group. By considering the following thoughts from Dietrich (2001), we deliberated on the possible manners of interaction between researcher and object of research within the perspective of an action-research:

The ZDP space is multidimensional, changing the concept and the role of the expert, who ceases to be the sole person responsible for the organization of the process. That is where the teacher and the student meet, together in an interaction, and the difficulty to determine the places, the positions, is not only regarding the student, but also the teacher. The implication of this, is that in the learning processes, even though they may be institutionally formalized and organized, the roles of the participants are not necessarily distributed once and forever, at the beginning of the process. They may change, and every one can be an expert at one point, an apprentice at another, a teacher or a student, depending on what is happening along the concrete pedagogical process. (Dietrich 2001, 17)

Vygotsky’s thoughts on art (Vygotsky 1982; 1987; 1998) led to the construction of the theoretical-methodological research developed during the workshop. Vygostsky highlights the importance of the perceptive processes for the creative experience. According to him, both external and internal experiences are the beginning of a process that is the basis for our creative
experience. Creation does not ensue from divine inspiration, nor is it limited to the pure discharge of emotions. It is the fruit of human labor.

**Working with images**
Within this perspective, the work that was built within the group was one of experimentation and knowledge of some of the principles involved in image animation. We started the study by investigating the relationship of the group with the animated cartoons shown on public television networks and cable TV. We surveyed the image repertoire of the group, and the observations that students made about animation were used as a starting point for the project. They also influenced the proposals that were developed during the meetings. We worked with optical toys that explore the possibilities of simulating images in movement, provoking the eye to perceive the effect. In addition to this, the group also became acquainted with some animations created by special education students of municipal schools in Rio de Janeiro, as well as from the graduation course of the Department of Art and Design at PUC-Rio.

![Group of students working in an animation workshop](image)

Reading images produced by different artists was also encouraged. This led to group reflections on the issues proposed by the artists through their art pieces. The group pointed out that some art pieces expressed social critique, and, based on their readings, each student was able to reflect about her relationship with her own reality and her everyday life. In this interaction, the group shared experiences, and was able to collectively elaborate new senses
and meanings for the images that were being observed and re-interpreted. In this exercise of seeing, observing details, perceiving forms, reading the portrayed context, the group was encouraged to imagine and create narratives, and to tell and listen to stories.

As the work progressed, we discussed the animation process with the group and talked about how an image gains movement. We used comic strips to illustrate this idea, examining the step-by-step actions of the characters, and we also observed some art pieces from artists that use visual media to simulate movement. Besides this, the students also came into contact with a variety of art pieces, produced in different contexts and times, which investigated various ways of representing movement. According to Lucena Júnior (2002), the simulation of movement has been used during the entire history of art: “we find, along the whole of the history of art, the atavistic desire of mankind for animating its creatures – initially as a magic intention (Pre-history), later as a social code (Ancient Egypt), passing by the reinforcement of narrative (Ancient Middle East and onward), until we reach the pure formal desire with modern art” (Júnior 2002, 29). The various images that were observed allowed the group to perceive the transformations that took place in the representations of movement. One example of an activity carried out by the group was when they were asked to create a drawing based on an image of a dog cut from a Giacomo Balla piece. The suggestion was that each one should create a scene in which its elements would also suggest a sense of movement.

*Teacher (Ivana Soares) presenting the work of the artist to the group*
In the following stage, the group began working with stories and fairy tales, which they had already started to do in their IT Workshop. New characters were created, and they entered in dialogue with as well as counteracted to traditional characters from fairy tales and from animated Disney drawings. The new characters would interact in different situations and with new scenarios created by the students. The proposal was to imagine scenarios and actions that would unfold into new and multiple events. Thus, the group began to create oral, visual and written narratives, exploring the visual and expressive resources of drawing. The group faced certain difficulties in memorizing the narratives that had been created orally: it was difficult to maintain a logical thread in the stories that were being told and a beginning, middle and end of the action that was being narrated.

Students drawing the characters during the animation workshop

The more specific task of producing an animation script used stories collectively created by the students. The story that was animated at a later stage incorporated all the characters and drawings that had been created by the individual students, with the features of each character being maintained. In order to bring these scripts to life, the group had to become acquainted with the technical processes of animation. At this point, the challenge was to participate in each of these processes with the assistance of university students from the NADA group who already mastered the whole process.

The animations – “The Dalmatians’ Wedding” (2007), “Funk Ball” (2007), and “Love is in the air” (2008) – were made by cutting out the drawings
created by the students. This simple technique allowed the students to manipulate the characters that had been drawn, insert them into the scenes, and follow the script of the story the group had created. The students understood how the movement took place with the help of a digital photo camera and a video camera. They experimented with the whole animation process, taking pictures of the movement of the characters, frame by frame, with the digital camera, and then transporting these images to the computer. The images in the computer were manipulated using animation programs – MUAN (www.muan.org.br) and Movie Maker – which were also used to create movement and sound effects. During the whole period of the development of the project, the university students worked together with the workshop students and teachers, investigating how the techniques could be adapted so that everyone could understand the stages of animation production.

The animation “Saving the Colored Day” was made by modeling the characters in modeling clay. This experience allowed the students to have contact with the traditional modeling technique. They then captured the images through a video connected to a computer and the MUAN animation program. Some ideas on the modeling technique were implemented by the group, aiming at creating the basic conditions for making their ideas and imagined shapes concrete in the modeled characters. At this stage, the mediation of the teachers and the university students was very important. They conveyed ideas about the materials the students were using and so facilitated the creative process. A
non-directive mediation, yet a provocative one, may stimulate and expand every student’s possibilities of realization, as well as their knowledge about the characteristics of the material.

Projection of the final result of the animation at the university (PUC-Rio)

In the modeling process, the students worked the clay, defining shapes, selecting colors, creating textures, and, at the end of this process, they produced different dolls. At this point, the dolls had already become characters with individual features, with their own physical appearance and identity. In

Students moving the toys with the help of a university student of the group NADA
this process, the relationship between each one of the dolls/characters and the other dolls/characters also gained its own dynamics, mobilizing the construction of a collective narrative.

We noticed that each one of the characters was incorporated in the collective story, the manipulation movements of the characters were defined in the group. The scenery and the interactions of the characters with the scenic elements were also group-defined.

**Final considerations**
Throughout the process of creating the animations, we noticed that the group attempted to incorporate facts based on their real experience, their personal behavioral features, and the physical appearance of the people who belonged to their daily life contexts. Through the modeled shapes and the stories created, the students constructed a symbolic language, a language that talked about themselves, about other members of the group, and about the wider context in which the student belonged in the flow of her daily life. In this dramatic game, the characters that were created gained life, and the animation can be understood as a language that stimulates imagination and fantasy. This is how one can come closer to reality and its re-interpretation through games, imagination and symbolism.

According to Walter Benjamin (1984), the fields of games and playing are the foundations of human experience, and should be explored as a pathway for the expression and constitution of personality. The author reclaims the important role of playing, both for the experience of the child and of the adult: “Surrounded by a world of giants, by playing, children create their own small world for themselves; yet the adult, facing a threatening reality, without any perspective for a solution, (playing) allows him to liberate himself from the horrors of the world” (Benjamin 1984, 64). Benjamin states the importance of playing as the origin of narrative experiences and of creativity. Exercising its playing potential and its imagination are a means for the child to fully experience its infancy.

In this action-research, the investigation on the language of animation brought the group of students and teachers closer to other means and mediations that favor expression and communication in a playful and creative way. The dynamics of the production of animations demanded cooperation at a number of work stages: in the collective creation of the story, the production of the script, the construction of characters and scenarios, in capturing images frame by frame and the sequence of the scenes that build up the story, in the analysis of the result that was obtained and selection of the material to use in the graphic computation, in the image animation on the computer, and in the sonorization of the animation. In all of these stages, each one of the members of the group found space for her participation in the work process according to her capacities and interests. The movement of the group was based on respect and value of individual differences that could be manifested and incorporated as positive qualities in the development of the work and research project.

In the various activities in which we explored the artistic language and the production of narratives with animation language, we realized that the images that were being produced by the students brought the group closer to themes and issues that were not always verbalized in their daily verbal interactions. Through the mediation of art, games, playing, fantasy and imagination, it was easier to express and explain their thoughts, and the students entered into a dialogue with the group, taking up issues that were enlivened by the production and mediation of symbolic shapes. In the dialogue produced during the elaboration of these symbolic shapes, other access pathways for the expression of their emotions, feelings and conflicts were created. In other words, we built other forms of dialogue between the I and the Other, mediated
by artistic languages, which value diversity and differences as guiding principles of the creative process and the artistic production.

References
Instead of an Epilogue
Children as “Unstable Signifiers” and as Language Learners: A Dialogue with Giorgio Agamben and Lev S. Vygotsky

Bernd Fichtner

We are familiar with children and childhood; as adults, we constantly encounter them in everyday contexts related to the family, school, leisure time, and other areas of life. We remember our own childhood and what it was like to be a child, but in a strangely ambivalent way. We know so little about the child inside us. It seems likely enough that this child within us is more than just a segment or an episode in our life story. There seem to be peculiar obstacles that block our ability to relate to this child. At the same time, the children outside us often seem to be extraterrestrial beings, “aliens”. Relating to the child within us is mysteriously difficult; the children around us are puzzling strangers. If this is true, then the question arises why in our culture relating both to the child within us and to the children around us is so difficult.

To adults, children and childhood seem to be something radically different. They display a confusing strangeness and heterogeneity, an absolute difference in relationship to us and to our world. The mysterious presence of childhood and children is the presence of something that is radically and irreducibly Other.

This chain of thought raises the following issues: To what extent does this Other remain elusive? To what extent does it make what we know – despite all of our disciplinary and interdisciplinary research on childhood – uncertain? To what extent does this Other call to question the places and spaces that we adults organize for children and childhood? To what extent does this complete Otherness of children and childhood lead to areas where the standards of our knowledge and of our power do not apply? A historical perspective allows for more incisive questions: When and why did the presence of children and childhood become so radically Other? Is there a connection here to European modernity, which was compelled to make children and childhood into something radically and irreducibly Other? In majority world cultures, why do we not encounter this radical strangeness and otherness of children in comparison to the world of the adults? Is this related to the fact that here we encounter a conception of time that is fundamentally different from that of modernity?
Within the last three decades, extensive research on children and childhood has increased dramatically within individual academic disciplines at both national and international levels. Limited space does not permit me to present all of the individual stages of this development in detail here. Instead, with reference to the work of Imbke Behnken and Jürgen Zinnecker (2002, see also Behnken, second chapter of this volume), I would like to briefly outline the following three developmental trends:

1. Both disciplinary and interdisciplinary studies are concerned with an increasingly conscious distinction between “child” and “childhood”. “Children” has been well established as a topic of research within the fields of psychology and education for the last one hundred years. “Childhood” has become a research topic primarily in the social sciences (the history, sociology, and politics of childhood) within the last fifty years.

2. To an ever greater extent, children are being considered as “social actors”, as designers of their own lives, of their own development. Within the scope of this research, viewing things from the “perspective of children” has advanced to a major methodological guideline.

3. Childhood as a “social construct” characterizes the third developmental trend. Especially noteworthy here is the paradigm shift from a conception of history focused on social structures to one centered on cultural micro-history and emphasizing everyday life and the social actors involved. It is apparent that this shift coincides with a relative devaluation of the significance of educational environments and relationships.

For all three of these trends, the Other, the difference between children and adults, has certainly become a central theme. Researchers are expected to explore the contexts of children and childhood and, thus, the contextual constraints of their own research, in methodologically appropriate ways. The otherness of children’s life-world and the patterns of sense-making employed by children are, indeed, seen as problems of understanding a different culture and as problems of “expropriation” by means of research practices. Possible solutions to such problems seem to involve increased orientation to reflection and self-reflection on methodology and methods.

In my view, these solutions, in turn, are not without problems. In a fundamental way, they remain biased and, at times, constricted by the prevailing logic of disciplinary and interdisciplinary research.
What does this mean? Science, as a form of knowledge and a process, attempts more or less successfully to arrive at ever more precise approximations of reality. In doing so, it must presume that the essence of reality has already been determined. In principle, developmental psychology knows what a “child” or “adolescent” is. In principle, pedagogy knows what kind of institution and organization a “school” is. An example: What is a kindergarten?

This designation is regarded as a collective term applying to all kinds of child day-care facilities. The kindergarten, the rudimentary sphere of the educational system, has a mission to fulfill with respect to education, personal development, and personal care. Friedrich Wilhelm August Fröbel founded the first kindergarten in 1840. He selected the name because he thought that a child should be cared for and should develop in analogy to the care and development of a plant. In the aftermath of the unsuccessful revolution of 1848, from 1851 to 1860, the institution was banned and then abolished in Prussia. During the Nazi era, the number of placements in kindergartens doubled; in 1941, 31% of all children attended kindergarten. Since 1996, German children have had a legal right to a kindergarten placement for the period from the age of 3 until they enrol in elementary school.

Lia Menna Barreto (Porto Alegre): “Jardim de infância”
In Germany, professional journals, one academic online handbook, numerous academic publications, and historical and systematically oriented research projects deal with kindergarten pedagogy as their central theme. Following the logic of disciplinary and interdisciplinary research work, then, individual aspects not yet fully understood, specific issues, or newly emerging phenomena associated with the “kindergarten” become topics of research in accordance with the logic of that ever more precise, yet in principle never-ending approximation of reality. In this process, methods gain more and more significance.

To return to our question: What is a kindergarten? That form of knowledge we call art responds to this question in a distinctive way. Brazilian artist Lia Menna Barreto from Porto Alegre/Brasil provides the following response with her installation art (see picture above).

It is not my intention here to provide some sort of aesthetic or historical interpretation of this work. Nor am I interested in assessing the significance of this installation for Barreto’s career as an artist. What Barreto presents here is a kindergarten circle time activity, a practice that is taken for granted in virtually every kindergarten. This naturalness and familiarity is literally disrupted and destroyed. The individual children’s chairs have been mutilated, burned, or vandalized in various ways. Yet, the circle order is maintained – a system of order that has been imposed and structured “from above”, from the pedagogical sphere.

In this installation there is no fixed content, no pedagogical idea that is presented and explained. In this context, viewing “kindergarten” from a novel perspective entails the individual artistic forms becoming the means through which the observers make and construct meanings. Here, “kindergarten” as a reality is one that is already determined, defined, and understood. Something is represented “as something”. In this metaphorical perspective (“this” is “that”), the “that” is not predetermined and definite in the sense of some finalized message communicated by the artist. Yet, through forms that are, indeed, very precise and specifically defined, a relationship to an indeterminate reality is established.

As a form of knowledge, art cannot be confined to the domain of the fine arts or of literature or music. As a form of knowledge, art is neither didactic nor pedagogical; nor is it technical. Works of art are not tools for solving practical problems. Art mediates a relationship by providing space for the
development of thinking and feeling. Art offers possible answers to questions that have not yet been posed. If we allow ourselves to become involved with a work of art, we learn something about the world we live in and, at the same time, about ourselves.

The forms of knowledge we call philosophy and/or art demonstrate clearly that the increasingly better approximation of reality is an illusion. They show that science never proves anything. It puts forward hypotheses, checks these, improves or rejects them, or proposes new ones. Art and philosophy, as forms of knowledge, do not relate to an approximation of a predefined reality that basically has already been understood. Instead, they refer to an ideal and objectively indeterminable reality. Works of art and philosophical theories are fundamentally different from the reality to which they refer and, at the same time, they are thoroughly effective ways of perceiving reality.

As specific forms of knowledge and cognition, they thematize and realize a certain relationship to reality. They are unconditional; i.e. they disregard every power external to themselves. They recognize no authority over and above themselves. Works of art and philosophical theories refer to reality in a formal way. In an absolute and precise manner, they relate to an ideal reality - here, “ideal reality” is based on Ilyenkov’s (Il’enkov’s) concept of the ideal (Ilyenkov 1994). This becomes especially apparent in the relevance of the formal aspects of artworks, whose precision and absoluteness determine the works’ overall quality.

**Art and philosophy – their potential to perceive reality from a fully novel perspective**

I would now like to quote the following passage by Fernando Pessoa in full, a passage from *The Book of Disquiet by Bernardo Soares, assistant bookkeeper in the city of Lisbon*:

Most people are afflicted by an inability to say what they see or think. They say there’s nothing more difficult than to define a spiral in words; they claim it’s necessary to use the unliterary hand, twirling it in a steadily upward direction, so that human eyes will perceive the abstract figure immanent in a wire spring and a certain type of staircase. But if we remember that to say is to renew, we will have

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65 This view has developed from my collaboration with Maria Benites, who founded the Mercosur ‘Biennial of Modern Art’ in Latin America.
no trouble defining a spiral: it's a circle that rises without ever closing. I realize that most people would never dare define it this way, for they suppose that defining is to say what others want us to say rather than what's required for the definition. I'll say it more accurately: a spiral is a potential circle that winds round as it rises, without ever completing itself. But no, the definition is still abstract. I'll resort to the concrete, and all will become clear: a spiral is a snake without a snake, vertically wound around nothing.

All literature is an attempt to make life real. As all of us know, even when we don't act on what we know, life is absolutely unreal in its directly real form; the country, the city and our ideas are all absolutely fictitious things, the offspring of our complex sensation of our own selves. Impressions are incommunicable unless we make them literary. Children are particularly literary, for they say what they feel and not what someone has taught them to feel. Once I heard a child, who wished to say that he was on the verge of tears, say not "I feel like crying", which is what an adult, i.e. an idiot, would say, but rather "I feel like tears." And this phrase – so literary it would seem affected in a well-known poet, if he could ever invent it – decisively refers to the warm presence of tears about to burst from eyelids that feel the liquid bitterness. "I feel like tears"! That small child aptly defined his spiral. (Pessoa 2001, No. 117, 107-108).

With reference to two differing “philosophical” positions on childhood and children and to a possible dialog between these positions, I would like to put Pessoa’s (or Soares’) point of view into concrete terms, thus opening it to discussion and criticism. The two philosophical positions are Giorgio Agamben’s conception of childhood (in-fantia); and Lev S. Vygotsky’s conception of child development and language. In this way, I wish to demonstrate that the level of philosophy and art – I can only touch on art – does not conflict with the level of disciplinary research, but that, instead, the latter, for its empirical, qualitative and quantitative research, requires the former if it is not to be dominated by a purely methodical and technical orientation.

Giorgio Agamben: Children as “unstable signifiers”
A short biographical note: Born in Rome in 1942, Giorgio Agamben studied law, literature, and philosophy. Important influences on Agamben’s theoretical framework include Martin Heidegger, Michel Foucault, Hannah Arendt, and Walter Benjamin. He edited the Italian edition of Benjamin’s collected works. Since the end of the 1980s, Agamben has been primarily concerned with political philosophy (cf. his project in *Homo Sacer*).
Currently, he teaches aesthetics and philosophy at the universities of Verona and Marcerata. He has held visiting appointments at various universities, including institutions in Paris, Berkeley, Los Angeles, Irvine, and in Germany.

Agamben cannot be classified as belonging to a philosophical school, nor as an adherent of a specific methodological approach. My remarks on his work here refer to “Infancy and History” (published in Italian in 1978, English ed. 1993, German ed.: Kindheit und Geschichte 2004). Many of the ideas expounded upon in this volume are provocative. Historical, political and disciplinary distinctions are often treated in a very playful, perhaps too playful way. Moreover, some of the hypotheses are probably untenable, especially if one confronts them with specific disciplinary research on childhood, history and, most particularly, on the phylogeny and ontogeny of language.

What infancy is not: In Agamben, infancy is not a “paradise lost” that is characterized by immediacy and authenticity. Infancy is neither a chronologically distinct condition such as that of a specific age group nor a psychosomatic condition which could emerge as a construct of developmental psychology, psycholinguistics or paleoanthropology in the sense of a human condition independent of language. Nor is infancy a psychological state that precedes subjectivity and is then repressed or relegated to the id. Nor is infancy a condition of the human subject prior to language acquisition, a condition that predates language and after a certain point no longer maintains, as it then finally leads to speaking and speech. Nor is infancy the raw material (materia prima) of the political and pedagogical utopias and projections of adult society.

For Agamben, infancy is a philosophical category. To determine the logical status of infancy, it is necessary to find a philosophical (transcendental) answer to the following questions: “Is there such a thing as human in-fancy? How can in-fancy be humanly possible? And if it is possible, where is it sited?” (Agamben 1993, 54). With respect to these questions, Agamben takes infancy literally. In the original Italian, the term in-fanzia makes constant reference to Latin in-fans, someone who is speechless. This does not refer to experiencing something thought to be unspeakable. Instead, infancy is the designation for experiencing that empty space of language which makes meaning possible in the first place. In-fancy is a paradox, a circular
phenomenon, something in-between, where infancy is the origin of language and language is the origin of infancy.

Agamben attempts to explore this paradox with recourse to the childlike experience of the boundary between voice and language (1993, 50-70). Man is precisely not the “animal” whose distinctive characteristic is that of “having language”, but rather the animal that has no language and for this reason must acquire it from the exterior. Animals do not become engaged in language; they are always already involved in it. If we had language from the beginning, it would have the same function as the sense of smell in animals. It would be a sensory organ providing orientation in an environment in which we would be immersed like in an amniotic sac – with no chance of breaking out of there or of changing our condition. To go through childhood and experience language acquisition entails a permanent disruption between human beings and any kind of environment. It is due to this transition from the speechlessness of sensuous life to articulated speech that we have no environment, but, rather, a world that we are a part of and that involves lasting, manifold forms of resistance resulting from mutual permeation. **Childhood seize man from his environment and allows history to become possible.**

Agamben attempts to put this major hypothesis into concrete terms in two steps:

1) The personal pronoun “I” does not signify a lexical unit in the same way as the noun “tree”, from which all individual instances of “tree” can be derived. The personal pronoun refers to something which is very distinctive and exclusively lingual in nature. It refers to the process of individual speech and to the speaker. The subject is simply the speaker. In this view, only in and through language does man constitute himself as a subject. In order to speak, he must say “I”; he must constitute himself as the subject of language.

2) Since man goes through childhood and is not a speaker from the outset, he splits the unity of language and speech. There is an irreconcilable hiatus between language and speech/voice. Here, the distinction between the *semiotic* and the *semantic* (Beneviste), which is more precise than Saussure’s distinction between language (langue) as a synchronous language system and speech as an individual realization of language (parole), gains acertain significance. The *semiotic* designates the way a linguistic sign constructs meaning (signification), *which it constitutes as a unit*. It designates pure identity with itself and pure otherness from an opposing sign (chansan – vanson, laver – laner, sur – tur). The *semantic* designates the specific manner
of constructing meaning that is produced by discourse. The semiotic must be recognized; the semantic must be understood. The semiotic is a quality of language; the “semantic” results from the activity of a speaker who puts language to use.

Since man goes through childhood and thus is not a speaker from the outset, he cannot engage in the semiotic system of language without radically transforming it through his discourse, in speech. Childhood is the setting of the scene in which the child transforms the semiotic into the semantic, pure language into speech, into human discourse.

From this line of thought, Agamben draws the following bold conclusion: It is due to the distinction between the semiotic and the semantic, between language and speech, that there is history, that man is historical by nature. His characterization of children as “unstable signifiers” exemplifies this conclusion.

The foundation of this position is provided by the work of Lévi-Strauss and other cultural anthropologists on ritual and play. Rituals do the work of connecting the present with a mythical past. The gulf separating them is eliminated, and events are united to form a synchronous structure. Play tends to sever the connection between past and present and to dissolve a synchronous structure into individual events. One consequence of this is that the subject of the discipline of history is not the diachronic as such, as if this were some material, objective reality. The subject of history is the opposition between the diachronic and the synchronous which characterizes any society.

Funerary rites, which we find in all societies, have the function of turning deceased persons into ancestors. Deceased persons who have not been buried are thought of as “homeless”, as “phantoms” that “wander around”. They are “unstable signifiers”. Funerary rites are concerned with transforming “unstable signifiers” into stable ones. The deceased leaves the sphere of the living and enters into that of the dead, in which there is only the synchronic.

With reference to their logical structure, initiation rites correspond to funerary rites. Just as death does not produce “immediate ancestors”, birth does not produce “immediate” human beings, but, instead, children who take on a specific distinctive role in any society. As “unstable signifiers”, children represent the discontinuity and difference between the world of the synchronic and that of the diachronic. The necessity of maintaining an open and animated opposition between the diachronic and the synchronous and, thus, of making history possible is apparent in every society in children and childhood.
Children and language in the perspective of L.S. Vygotsky

In Vygotsky, the transcendental, philosophical conception of history as a system of diachronic and synchronic relationships with reference to children and childhood is dealt with in a way radically different from its treatment in Agamben. The differences and stark contrasts between the two positions, but also the elements they have in common allow for engaging in a dialog.

Vygotsky did not conceive of himself as a linguist or even as a psycholinguist. In contrast to current positivistic interpretations of his work (e.g. Wertsch 1996), it should be remembered that his paradigm ultimately consists in an attempt to establish a new discipline focused on the human subject (Fichtner 1992). His work does not identify the constitutive role of language with language as an independent system comprising autonomous fields such as semantics, syntax, and phonology. Like Agamben, Vygotsky situates the reality of language within the speech of the individual.

One key issue that Vygotsky and Agamben deal with in radically different ways is how language determines the substance of human consciousness without representing it. For Vygotsky, the relationship between linguistic sign and meaning is not based on association, but, instead, is to be described as a developmental relationship. Meaning is not to be explained in terms of reference semantics. Only through the production of meaning on the part of the individual does the developmental relationship between linguistic sign and meaning come about.

To put this developmental relationship into more concrete terms, I will briefly exemplify this with reference to grammaticalization to make the difference to Agamben’s view clear. I will attempt to describe grammaticalization as a process of cultural appropriation and, in doing so, I will employ Vygotsky’s conception of age levels.

66The concept of “grammaticalization” is used in various ways. It designates not only the “diachronic process of de-semanticizing, formalizing, and schematizing semantic options,” but also the “subprogram of speech that aligns a message with the language rules pertaining to grammatical forms and syntax,” and, finally, a child’s learning progress in language acquisition in the development from pre-grammatical single-word utterances to the production of verbalizations that conform to dominant grammatical conventions (Knobloch 1994, 77). Evidently, this process is not terminated with the child’s mastery of the language. It receives an essential impetus through the acquisition of written language and perhaps through the appropriation of other systems of notation.
For Vygotsky, to theoretically grasp a particular age level involves discovering the transformations in a child’s entire personality, venturing into a special kind of drama with its major and minor roles, central and peripheral lines of development, evolutionary and involutionary elements. The specific social situation of development is to be understood in a concrete and detailed way as a dynamic system, as a context in which a child effects his or her own development by engaging in a dialog with his or her environment (1987a). Vygotsky is especially interested in critical age levels “in which the dialectical laws of development are manifest” (1987c, 197).

The “crisis of the first year” usually begins towards the end of the first year in the child’s life and terminates at the end of the second year. It consists of three elements that can be characterized in a “highly dialectical formula” as “the unity of being and nonbeing” (1998, 243). The three elements are: learning to walk, the focus of this stage; children’s autonomous speech; and the non-differentiation between will and affect, the so-called hypobulic reactions. But this only identifies the main aspects of the social situation of development. How learning to walk is related to the hypobulic reactions, how such reactions can be attributed to a social structure expressed in the mutual communicative problems between child and adults – all of this would need to be described as a systemic structure with its particular social qualities.

For Vygotsky, the neoformation in the development of the child’s psyche in this period is children’s autonomous speech, which he describes in detail as a typical transitional phenomenon in contrast to standardized language. Vygotsky notes differences with respect to structural rules, the phonetic systems, and connections between words. In this view, the two types of language generate two different forms of communication (1987c, 181). The phonetic structure of children’s speech differs considerably from that of standard language; the connections between individual words are non-grammatical; that is, there are no clear syntactical relationships. The words have indicative and nominative functions, but no signifying function.

But the crucial issue is the child’s relationship to the social environment that is established with this neoformation: to what extent it involves the child’s entire life, which significance it has for the child’s thinking, perception, and emotions, which new ways of perceiving external reality and of becoming active within that reality and which forms of internal activity it facilitates (1987c, 189-91). As a neoformation of the child’s psyche, autonomous speech is not yet independent of perception and the concrete situation. It corresponds
more closely to outbursts that express both an emotional reaction and a willful tendency. A vital force characterizing autonomous speech is a contradiction that will destroy the social situation of development for this critical age level – the child has only its own speech at its disposal, but at the same time, is also able to understand our speech.

One might now assume that in the subsequent stable age level, that of early childhood, speaking for the first time within the context of standardized language would become the central neoformation of the child’s psyche. Yet, this is not Vygotsky’s view. For him, this is simply the main line of development:

[...] the very fact of acquiring speech is in sharp contradiction to everything of which I spoke thus far that characterizes early childhood. In other words, speech instantly starts to shatter sensori-motor unity and to break up the situational connectedness of the child. (Vygotsky 1998, 268)

The fundamental psychological neoformation of the child must be connected to speech, but cannot be identical with it. Along with the development of speech, consciousness attains for the first time a new quality which Vygotsky characterizes as the interrelation of meaning and the systemic structure of consciousness, and it is this which he considers to be the neoformation of the child’s psyche at this age level.

Vygotsky elaborates on this interrelation of meaning and the systemic structure of consciousness by claiming that now generalization is the prism through which all functions of consciousness are refracted. Further, if generalization is understood in the context of communication, then it becomes apparent that generalization as a whole is a function of consciousness and not solely one of thinking. In this view, all acts of consciousness are generalizations (cf. 1998, 280).

Perception, the main function of this age, differentiates itself from internal experience and develops into the beginning perception of meaning. To the child, the world starts to become a world of things that have meaning. Concealed behind the meaning of a word is now a generalized perception.

Through speaking, the child is no longer under the power of the merely visible, concrete situation. It now becomes possible to see things not only in their situational relationships to one another, but also in a generalization that is behind the word. But this all depends on the specific level of generalization
that the child is capable of. For the child, “the word itself is a transparent glass through which he looks at what is hidden behind this glass, but does not see the glass itself” (Vygotsky 1998, 279). The child speaks without being aware of speaking.

What Vygotsky means by speaking of the systemic structure of consciousness is that the meaning of words begins to mediate all psychological processes with a new quality. On the whole, perception involves changes of the most significant order. Memory is realized in active perception as recognition. Attention is also refracted by the prism of perception. Thinking is a vivid and practical restructuring of the situation, of the perceived field. At the end of the child’s third year, a new social situation of development arises with the crisis at age three.

Linguistics and psycholinguistics see grammaticalization as an irreversible, diachronic process of de-semanticizing, formalizing, and schematizing semantic and lexical operations. On the basis of a broad consensus, the phenography of grammar acquisition describes the individual stages of this acquisition as a progressive line. Vygotsky’s conception of age levels raises the question of which function this line and its individual sections have in the child’s development, which function the child himself or herself actively carries out in the process of cultural appropriation or in the development of personality.

Children can manage quite well and for a long time without taking recourse to systemically organized morpho-syntax in their speech. They solve problems related to the ordered relations between words on the basis of a proto-syntax (Knobloch 1994, 77). With this proto-syntax, children put into effect a relationship to their environment that Vygotsky, with recourse to Eliasberg, terms children’s autonomous speech and Knobloch calls syn-semantics. But what is the precise nature of this relationship? When do children no longer manage to get by with this relationship and, above all, why does this happen? Why do they destroy the context of the social application from which this resource has arisen by making socio-communicative use of this psychological neoformation? Is there such a thing as a “Zone of Proximal Development” in the process by which grammar becomes autonomous?

Apparently, only in the level that follows the crisis of the first year does the child work out the first structures of the system that we call grammar. In this new social situation of development that characterizes early childhood, the child constructs the interrelation of meaning and the systematic structure of
consciousness as a neoformation of his or her psyche. The first grammatical structures could be taken to be the basis of this neoformation. Linguistic signs now no longer immediately refer to the present situation and its components; they detach themselves from affective and volitional elements and, only mediated through the relationship of several linguistic signs to one another, do they now refer to the situation. The original indicative, referential, and action-related potentials of language signs now become decontextualized, as at the level of linguistic units they become schematized, operationalized, and fixed. This is a dramatic break from the child’s primary experiences. The question to be posed from Vygotsky’s perspective is to which extent these processes of grammaticalization are supported, determined, or even motivated by the reciprocal effects between communication and generalization in the context of this social situation of development.

What the child develops here as the core of grammar, viz. syntax, apparently only exists in the form of a process that works in a specific way when the child speaks. At this point, space prevents me from going into detail on the controversial discourse on syntax in psycholinguistics. But I do find the metaphor Clemens Knobloch uses to describe the work process of syntax as that of a syncretical machine very thought-provoking: “This machine works its way from word form to word form and under constantly changing direction (but with the long-term aim of providing a stable representation of discourse) taps into the structural levels that are momentarily required for making references.” (Knobloch 1994, 89)

This metaphor reminds one of Lady Ada Lovelace’s famous commentary in which she compared Jaquard’s loom to Charles Babbage’s Analytical Engine in the first half of the nineteenth century:

The distinctive characteristic of the Analytical Engine, and that which has rendered it possible to endow mechanism with such extensive faculties as bid fair to make this engine the executive right-hand of abstract algebra, is the introduction into it of the principle which Jacquard devised for regulating, by means of punched cards, the most complicated patterns in the fabrication of brocaded stuffs. […] [T]he Analytical Engine weaves algebraical patterns just as the Jacquard-loom weaves flowers and leaves. Here, it seems to us, resides much more of originality than the Difference Engine can be fairly entitled to claim. We do not wish to deny to this latter all such claims. We believe that it is the only proposal or attempt ever made to construct a calculating machine founded on the principle of successive orders of differences, and capable of printing off its own results; and that this engine
surpasses its predecessors, both in the extent of the calculations which it can perform, in the facility, certainty and accuracy with which it can effect them, and in the absence of all necessity for the intervention of human intelligence *during the performance of its calculations* (Lovelace 1996, 118-19).

What kind of a learning process is this, in which a child constructs such a process-oriented machine that mediates structure and process and, in doing so, corresponds to the unity of communication and generalization? According to Vygotsky, the *significance* of this unity for all issues related to human consciousness cannot be overestimated – a point he repeatedly stresses (Vygotsky 2002, 52). Here, I cannot presume to present even an attempt at an answer to this problem. But I would like to hint at the direction pedagogical research could take.

Describing such learning as cultural appropriation seems to lead to a contradiction stemming from the object and the subject involved in the process: the object, language, is the pre-existing result of socio-historical developments, whereas the subject actively constructs such a syncretical machine in a fascinating display of independence. Pedagogy usually sees independence and self-directed activity as learning without guidance. Self-direction is the opposite pole of external pedagogical control. With numerous images, pedagogy has repeatedly drafted the idea of a human subject that directs himself or herself from an organizing inner core of personal needs. This form of pedagogy has always stressed that outside influences unfortunately cannot be eliminated, but should, at least, be minimized. This view is based on a complete lack of understanding of the social character of human learning. Every process of cultural appropriation is a developmental process of “knowledge”. The motor behind this development is the relationship between individual and social elements of learning in the specific social situation of development.

What kind of independence is expressed in the processes of grammaticalization that take place in language acquisition? The child speaks, but does not become aware that he or she is speaking. The child constructs his or her “syncretical machine” and uses it with superior ease, but in a way that is totally unconscious. At the basis of cultural appropriation is a specific relationship between teaching and learning on the one hand and psychological development on the other. In grammaticalization, linguistic signs are, step by step, withdrawn from consciousness, automated, and mechanized. Yet, this is
exactly the precondition for the child to discover new communicative forms of language.

No concluding summary can now decide the issue of which approach, Agamben’s or Vygotsky’s, is more productive or more tenable. These two approaches are, on the one hand, not really comparable; yet, on the other hand, they do have something in common: a pronounced affinity to the meta-level of philosophy or of art. For Vygotsky, grammaticalization would be a developmental process in which speaking discovers language as its own context and can now put it to use. This can be considered an example for processes of grammaticalization being generalizations of generalization from the perspective of Vygotsky. From Agamben’s perspective, only through such processes do children make history possible in the first place.

(Translation: Thomas La Presti)

References


Appendix
Biographical Notes & Contact Details

I. Behnken


Contact Information: Dr. Imbke Behnken, SiZe, Department of Educational Science, University of Siegen, FB 2, Adolf-Reichwein-Str. 2, 57076 Siegen, Germany, Email: IB@size-siegen.de, Tel. +49 2717402204, Fax: +49 2717402139.

M. Benites

Maria Benites is the founder and director of the Vygotsky Institute in Sao Paulo, Brazil (since 2001) as well as general coordinator of the International Education Doctorate program at the University of Siegen (since 2002). After graduating in programming and system analysis at the IBM school in 1971, she studied psychology at the University of Buenos Aires, where she received her degree in social psychology at the Pichon Riviere school in 1981. She was furthermore the chief initiator of the Mercosul Visual Arts Bienal Foundation in Porto Alegre, Brazil (1995 – 1997), and since 2003 has been a founding member in the executive committee of the World Education Forum. Her publications reflect her research interests in the field of contemporary art and the relation between art and learning: *Vom Umgang mit Differenz: Globalisierung und Regionalisierung im interkulturellen Diskurs* [On Dealing with Difference: Globalization and Regionalization in Intercultural Discourse] (2006, coedited with Bernd Fichtner, ATHENA-Verlag), *Janelas par o mundo: um projeto de pesquisa e ação* [Windows to the World: a Research and Action Project] (2006, Livraria do Arquiteto), or *Dialogo com outras vozes* [Dialogue with Other Voices] (2006, Livraria do Arquiteto).

Contact Information: Maria Benites, University of Siegen, FB 2/ INEDD, Walter-Flex-Str. 3, 57076 Siegen, Email: benites@inedd.uni-siegen.de, Tel.: +49 2717402917, Fax: +49 2717402917.
M.F. Camerini
Maria Florentina Camerini (PhD) teaches psychology at the Pontifícia Universidade Católica de Rio de Janeiro in Brazil and is the director of the Vygotsky Institute there. She has also been a psychoanalyst for nearly 33 years, during which time she has had extensive experience with psychological community outreach programmes as a supervisor of the NGO “Roda Viva” and coordinator of the Vygotsky Institute’s “Windows to the World” project. She has published numerous articles, mainly in Portuguese, such as Olhar através das janelas [Looking through the windows] (2006, in: Janelas para o Mundo: um projeto de pesquisa e ação. Diálogos com outras vozes, Livraria do Arquiteto), Subjetividade em imagens: novos usos para o vídeo [Subjectivity in images: new uses for videos] (2000, in: Mosaico–imagens do conhecimento, Rios Ambicioso, Rj), A Imagem técnica e a leitura do mundo: desafios contemporâneos [The Technical Image and the Reading of the World: Contemporary Challenges] (2002, co-authored, in: Leitura e escrita na formação de professores, Juiz de Fora: UFJF) or Interatividade audio-visual e produção da subjetividade [Audio-visual interactivity and the production of subjectivity] (2002, in: Identidades: Recortes Multi e Interdisciplinares, Campinas, SP: Mercado de Letras).

Contact Information: Dr. Maria Florentina Cemerini, Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro, Rua Sta Glátila, n° 90, 22-610.300 São Conrado, Rio de Janeiro, Brasil, Email: Flo.camerini@gmail.com, Tel.: +55 02122877092, Fax: +55 21 2259.

M. Damiani
Having graduated in Psychology at the Universidade Católica de Pelotas (1979), Magda Floriana Damiani (PhD) received both her Masters in Educational Psychology and her doctorate in Education (1998) from the University of London. She is currently an associate professor with the Universidade Federal de Pelotas in Brazil. She has published on cultural-historical aspects of learning and education, mainly in Portuguese. In 2008 she was also a guest scholar at the University of Siegen in Germany.

Contact Information: Dr. Magda Floriana Damiani, Federal University of Pelotas, Av. Domingos de Almeida, 1086, ap. 30, Pelotas/ RS 96.085-470, Brazil, Email: magda@ufpel.tche.br, Tel.: +55 32786653/6908, Fax: +55 32786653/6908.

B. Fichtner
Bernd Fichtner (PhD) is professor of educational science at the University of Siegen, Germany. He is also the director of the International Education Doctorate Program and the co-founder of the International Society for Cultural Research and Activity Theory (nowadays ISCAR). In the last 15 years he has cooperated extensively with federal universities in Brazil on various research projects. Selected book publications include Lernen und Lerntätigkeit [Studying and the Learning Activity] (1996, Lehmanns),

Contact Information: Prof. Dr. Bernd Fichtner, University of Siegen, FB, Adolf-Reichwein-Str. 2, 57076 Siegen, Germany, Email: fichtner@paedagogik.uni-siegen.de, Tel.: +49 2717404532, Fax: +49 2717402933.

M. Kontopodis
Michalis Kontopodis (PhD) has studied Psychology in Greece, France, Poland and Germany. He is currently a research associate at the Institute of European Ethnology at the Humboldt University of Berlin. He is the Secretary of the International Society for Cultural and Activity Research (ISCAR) as well as the editor of the ISCAR Newsletter. Kontopodis is engaged in both theoretical and empirical work on anthropological and cultural-psychological approaches to human cognition and development. He has published in Forum Qualitative Social Research, Psychology, Critical Social Studies and other academic journals and edited books. He has co-edited the Special Issue “Materializing Times: from Memory to Imagination” of Memory Studies (January 2009, Vol. 2, Number 1). He is also the co-editor of the books Technologies of the Self in the Everyday (with J. Niewöhner, forthcoming in German in 2009, transkript) and Performing Pasts and Futures: Memory, Otherness & Imagination (with V. Matera, forthcoming in 2010).

Contact Information: Dr. Michalis Kontopodis, Institute for European Ethnology, Humboldt University of Berlin, Mohrenstraße 41, 10117 Berlin, Germany, Email: michalis.kontopodis@staff.hu-berlin.de, Tel.: +49 3020933716, Fax: +49 3020933739

M. A. A. Mascia
Márcia Aparecida Amador Mascia (PhD) is a professor of the Post-Graduation Program in Education at the “Universidade São Francisco” in the state of São Paulo, Brazil. She has a Ph.D. in Applied Linguistics at UNICAMP - Brazil, but developed part of her research at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction. She works in the area of “Language, Discourse and Educative Practices”. She develops her researches at the intersection of French Discourse Analysis, deconstruction and psychoanalysis within post-modern social theory. Her interests are the discourses in Education, especially the Political Educational discourses and the discourses of teaching-learning of languages.
Contact Information: Márcia Aparecida Amador Mascia, Universidade São Francisco, Rua Ernani Paulino, 65, Cidade Universitária II, CEP (ZIP CODE): 13086-070, City: Campinas, São Paulo, Brazil, Email: marciaaam@uol.com.br, Tel.: +55-19-32878242 / 55-19-92581681.

F. C. Liberali
Fernanda Coelho Liberali has a PhD in Applied Linguistics from the Post-graduate Program of Applied Linguistics, PUC/SP (the Pontific Catholic University of São Paulo), where she has worked as professor and researcher since 2000. She is the Brazilian representative for the International Society for Cultural and Activity Research (ISCAR) and director of the Instituto Ação Cidadã. In a socio-historical-cultural perspective, her extramural and research interests are related to teachers’ and teacher educators’ development, teaching-learning issues, citizenship education and argumentation. She has published numerous articles, chapters and books in Portuguese, English and German, which include Formação Crítica de Educadores: Questões Fundamentais [Critical Formation of Educators: Essential Issues] (2008, SP: Cabral Editora e Livraria Universitária), School Teachers in Favela Contexts: Metaphors and Metonymies they live by. (2008, In: Mara Sofia Zanotto; Lynne Cameron; Marilda C. Cavalcanti. (Org.). Confronting Metaphor in Use. An applied linguistic approach. Amsterdam / Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company); For more details on her work, please see: <http://www.buscatextual.cnpq.br/buscatextual/visualizacv.jsp?id=K4791915T8>

Contact Information: Dr. Fernanda Coelho Liberali, LAEL - Applied Linguistics, Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo, 05009-060 São Paulo, SP Brazil, Email: liberali@uol.com.br; Fax: +55 11 3676 1537, Tel: +55 11 3676 1537.

A. E. Lopes
Ana Elisabete Lopes (PhD) teaches Art Education and Special Education at the Pedagogy course of the Universidade Estácio de Sá, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. She is a Visual Arts teacher at the Instituto Municipal Helena Antipoff, which is the Reference Center for Special Education of the Municipal Secretary of Education in Rio de Janeiro. She has had a number of articles published about her research on the contributions of Art Education to the process of teaching-learning, as well as on the social inclusion of students with physical, mental and sensorial handicaps eg. Interdisciplinary project of the dance and visual arts workshops of IHA (2008, co-author in: Diversity in art: views of a practice, Instituto Municipal Helena Antipoff, RJ). Fotografie und digitale Medien - Neue Interfàaces des Erzàh lens (2007, in: Vom Umgang mit Differenz: Globalisierung und Regionalisierung im interkulturellen Diskurs.Oberhausen: Athena).

Contact Information: Ana Elisabete Lopes/ Instituto Municipal Helena Antipoff – Secretaria Municipal de Educação do Rio de Janeiro, Rua Mata Machado 15 –
I. S. Soares
Ivana Souza Soares is a visual artist as well as a visual arts teacher, and a specialist in Art History. She teaches Visual Arts at the Instituto Helena Antipoff, which is the Reference Center for Special Education of the Municipal Secretary of Education in Rio de Janeiro, and at Mestre Candeia Integrated Center for Attention to Handicapped People – CIAD, in cooperation with the Secretary of Education in Rio de Janeiro. She has published articles about the projects developed at the art workshops of CIAD and IHA, respectively and is co-author of: Diversity in art: views of a practice, Instituto Helena Antipoff, RJ, 2008).

Contact Information: Ivana de Souza Soares, Instituto Municipal Helena Antipoff, Secretaria Municipal de Educação do Rio de Janeiro, Rua Mata Machado 15, Maracanã, Rio de Janeiro/RJ, Email: ivanass@ig.com.br 20271-260, Tel: +55 21 25696806, Fax: +55 21 25690378.

H. Winkler
Haydée Winkler studied educational science in Buenos Aires, Argentina, as well as Montessori pedagogy in München, Germany, and South American anthropology and psychology in Berlin. She worked for 6 years in after-school educational programs for children from poor neighbourhoods in Argentina, absolved observations on primary schools based on the principles of Freire Peragogy in 1985 in the North-East of Brazil and and since 1998 has worked as a therapist for arithmasthenia in Germany. In the last few years she has also engaged in cultural-psychological research in Latin America and Germany.

Contact Information: Haydée Winkler, Unionstr. 7, 10551 Berlin, Germany, Email: haydee_winkler@yahoo.de, Tel.: +49 3039408587.

W. Wörster
After his schooling as a pre-school teacher, from 1978 to 1985 Wolfgang Wörster studied Social Pedagogy and Educational Science at universities in Marburg and Siegen. He achieved his doctorate on the development of tutorage at the University of Siegen in 1989 while also directing a work education project for disadvantaged youth. Wörster has been the founder and director of the interdisciplinary early intervention and family aid centre, “Haus früher Hilfen” since its opening in 1990 in Wiehl, Germany. His team examines problems of development in children ages 0-6, particularly the relationship of the child to their primary caregives. Most of his publications focus on aspects of development in early childhood, especially the attitudes of the child towards its own development in the context of a specific cultural historical paradigm. He also works on conceptual questions such as the conditions for and the effects of
estrangement on the development of attachment, self-efficacy and new forms of professional cooperation.

Contact Information: Dr. Wolfgang Wörster, „Haus früher Hilfen“, Interdisziplinäre Frühförderung & Integrierte Familienberatung, Wellersiefen 6, 51674 Wiehl, Germany, Email: Wo.Woerster@t-online.de, Tel.: +49 2262699212, Fax: +49 02262 699240.
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