Children, Development and Education
International Perspectives on Early Childhood Education and Development

Volume 3

Series Editors

Professor Marilyn Fleer, Monash University, Australia
Professor Ingrid Pramling-Samuelsson, Gothenburg University, Sweden

Editorial Board

Professor Joy Cullen, Massey University, New Zealand
Professor Yukiko Mastsukawa, Rak-Rak University, Japan
Professor Rebeca Mejía Arauz, ITESO, Mexico
Professor Nirmala Rao, University of Hong Kong, China
Professor Anne B. Smith, Formally from the Children’s Issues Centre, University of Otago, New Zealand
Professor Collette Tayler, Queensland University of Technology, Australia
Associate Professor Eva Johansson, Gothenburg University, Sweden
Professor Lilian G. Katz, Ph.D. Professor Emerita of Early Childhood Education, University of Illinois, USA

Early childhood education in many countries has been built upon a strong tradition of a materially rich and active play-based pedagogy and environment. Yet what has become visible within the profession, is essentially a Western view of childhood preschool education and school education. It is timely that a series of books be published which present a broader view of early childhood education. This series, seeks to provide an international perspective on early childhood education. In particular, the books published in this series will:

- Examine how learning is organized across a range of cultures, particularly Indigenous communities
- Make visible a range of ways in which early childhood pedagogy is framed and enacted across countries, including the majority poor countries
- Critique how particular forms of knowledge are constructed in curriculum within and across countries
- Explore policy imperatives which shape and have shaped how early childhood education is enacted across countries
- Examine how early childhood education is researched locally and globally
- Examine the theoretical informants driving pedagogy and practice, and seek to find alternative perspectives from those that dominate many Western heritage countries
- Critique assessment practices and consider a broader set of ways of measuring children’s learning
- Examine concept formation from within the context of country-specific pedagogy and learning outcomes

The series will cover theoretical works, evidence-based pedagogical research, and international research studies. The series will also cover a broad range of countries, including poor majority countries. Classical areas of interest, such as play, the images of childhood, and family studies will also be examined. However the focus will be critical and international (not Western-centric).
## Contents

1 Introduction: Children, Development and Education – A Dialogue Between Cultural Psychology and Historical Anthropology ............................. 1
   Michalis Kontopodis, Christoph Wulf, and Bernd Fichtner

Part I Culture, History and Child Development

2 Darwin and Vygotsky on Development: An Exegesis on Human Nature ................... 25
   Anna Stetsenko

3 Two Lines of Development: Reconsidering and Updating Vygotsky’s Argument ...................... 41
   Falk Seeger and Martin Hildebrand-Nilshon

4 Material Culture, Semiotics and Early Childhood Development .......................... 57
   Christiane Moro

5 Touching Each Other: Video Analysis of Mother–Infant Interaction After the Birth .................. 71
   Sigrid Klasen

6 Mimesis in Early Childhood: Enculturation, Practical Knowledge and Performativity ..................... 89
   Christoph Wulf

Part II Gender, Performativity and Educational Practice

7 Speculative Fantasies: Infancy in the Educational Discourse of Early Modern Germany .......... 103
   Birgit Althans

8 A Cultural-Historical Approach to Children’s Development of Multiple Cultural Identities .............. 117
   Mariane Hedegaard
## Contents

9 Under the Sign of the Coffee Pot: Mealtime Rituals as Performative Practices ................................. 137
Katrin Audehm

10 School Curriculum as Developmental Resource: Gender and Knowledge ........................................ 151
Gabrielle Ivinson

11 Configuration of Ontologies: An Inquiry into Learning Designs ...................................................... 165
Estrid Sørensen

12 Enacting Human Developments: From Representation to Virtuality .............................................. 185
Michalis Kontopodis

13 “Troubling” Essentialist Identities: Performative Mathematics and the Politics of Possibility .............. 207
Anna Chronaki

Instead of an Epilogue

14 The Role of Practice in Cultural-Historical Science ......................... 227
Seth Chaiklin

Biographical Notes .................................................. 247

Name Index ......................................................... 253

Subject Index ....................................................... 259
Contributors

Birgit Althans  Universität Trier, Trier, Germany, althans@uni-trier.de
Katrin Audehm  Free University Berlin, Berlin, Germany, kathrin_audehm@web.de
Seth Chaiklin  University of Bath, Bath, UK, s.chaiklin@bath.ac.uk
Anna Chronaki  University of Thessaly, Volos, Greece, chronaki@uth.gr
Bernd Fichtner  University of Siegen, Siegen, Germany, fichtner@paedagogik.uni-siegen.de
Gabrielle Ivinson  Cardiff School of Social Sciences, Wales, UK, ivinsong@Cardiff.ac.uk
Mariane Hedegaard  University of Copenhagen, Copenhagen, Denmark, Mariane.Hedegaard@psy.ku.dk
Martin Hildebrand-Nilshon  Free University Berlin, Berlin, Germany, hildenil@zedat.fu-berlin.de
Sigrid Klasen  Free University Berlin, Berlin, Germany, sigiclasen@yahoo.de
Michalis Kontopodis  Humboldt University Berlin, Berlin, Germany, michaliskonto@googlemail.com
Christiane Moro  Université de Lausanne, Lausanne, Switzerland, Christiane.Moro@unil.ch
Falk Seeger  University of Bielefeld, Bielefeld, Germany, falk.seeger@uni-bielefeld.de
Estrid Sørensen  Ruhr-Universität Bochum, Bochum, Germany, estrid.sorensen@rub.de
Anna Stetsenko  The Graduate Center, The City University of New York, New York, NY, USA, astetsenko@gc.cuny.edu
Christoph Wulf  Free University Berlin, Berlin, Germany, chrwulf@zedat.fu-berlin.de
Chapter 1
Introduction: Children, Development and Education – A Dialogue Between Cultural Psychology and Historical Anthropology

Michalis Kontopodis, Christoph Wulf, and Bernd Fichtner

Introduction

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. (Pessoa, 2001, p. 108)

Reading this passage by Fernando Pessoa, a passage from The Book of Disquiet by Bernardo Soares, Assistant Bookkeeper in the City of Lisbon, we are surprised by the way Pessoa (or Soares) manages in a few lines to manifest everything our book is about. Pessoa refers in a poetic way to children and adults as speaking subjects, to the differences in the way they use language and to the importance of the senses in child experience. This quote is situated in the context of a longer work that reflects on power relations and implies an understanding of human history as not yet ended – which, as we will see, are also important arguments presented in our edited volume.

In the above-presented quote, Pessoa refers to the fact that children and adults are speaking subjects. An important argument presented in this book is that children and adults become subjects and experience the world through speaking. Speaking involves mimetic and metaphoric processes as well as the creative appropriation of utterances already used by others (cf. Bakhtin, 1973). As Gebauer and Wulf write:

Only in interaction with the outer world does the individual come to acquire his or her subjectivity (...). The development of the human individual’s complex of impulses takes place in language, which is also responsible for conducting interaction with the world. Thus does there arise within a single system both the formation of the self and discrepancies between the self and the outer world. (Gebauer & Wulf, 1995, p. 275)

Gebauer and Wulf outline here an important thesis of the school of “historical anthropology,” a school of thought developed at the Free University Berlin in...
Germany over the course of the last 30 years. This school of thought can be seen as a revision of the German philosophical anthropology under the influences of the French historical school of Annales and the Anglo-Saxon cultural anthropology. Historical anthropology examines the historical and cultural situation of humankind today as connected with the significance of signs (gestures, oral and written language and pictures) in social evolution, especially in western civilizations (Dux, 2000; Gebauer & Kamper, 1989; Gebauer & Wulf, 1995; Wulf, 1997, 2009; Wulf & Kamper, 2002). In this context, the relations between child development and culture have become a particular focus for a great deal of historical anthropological theory and research (Wulf, 2004, 2007, 2010; Wulf, Göhlich, & Zirfas, 2001).

The primacy of language and signs for the constitution of human subjectivity was also the main research subject of another school of thought that emerged in the context of the Soviet revolution and deeply affected the discipline of psychology in the twentieth century. The experienced reader will understand that we refer here to the approach of Vygotsky and his colleagues and students, as well as to what has later been called the “cultural-historical school,” “cultural-historical activity theory,” “post-Vygotskian research,” or simply “non-classical psychology” (Chaiklin, 2001; Daniels, 2008; Daniels, Cole, & Wertsch, 2007; Fichtner, 1996; Fleer, Hedegaard, & Tudge, 2009; Lompscher, 1989; Robbins & Stetsenko, 2002; Stetsenko & Arievitch, in press; van Oers, Elbers, Wardekker, & van der Veer, 2008).

According to Vygotsky, development occurs in the relationship between the child and its environment (Vygotsky, 1931/1997, 1934/1987). Post-Vygotskian approaches to teaching, learning, and development have thoroughly studied how signs and tools mediate the communication between teachers and students, adults and children, as well as between one’s ‘inner speech’ and oneself, shaping one’s thinking and imagination. According to this approach, the very ‘nature’ of subjectivity, i.e. psychological processes such as thinking, imagination, or motivation, is constituted through the use of the signs and tools available in a civilization at a particular historical moment (Hildebrand-Nilshon, 1980; Hildebrand-Nilshon, Kim, & Papadopoulos, 2002; Seeger, Voigt, & Waschescio, 1998; van Oers et al., 2008; see also Chapter 4, this book). Concepts such as appropriation, agency, activity, and semiotic mediation have been central to this kind of theory and research.

The edited volume Children, Development and Education: Cultural, Historical, Anthropological Perspectives brings together these two approaches to children and child development so similar to each other: historical anthropology and cultural-historical psychology. The history of the ideas of both approaches can be traced back to the German classical philosophy of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. W. Benjamin’s works are of particular importance for historical anthropology, while the works of L.S. Vygotsky and activity theory are central for the cultural-historical approaches to child development. At the same time each approach has specific strengths — theoretical, methodological or empirical — that, when combined, can prove of particular importance for the further development of childhood research and educational practice.

Cultural-historical psychology has developed theoretical tools with which to study subjective phenomena such as the development of abstract thinking or of
imagination. It has also studied collective subjectivity (or subjectivities) and its (i.e. their) active contribution to societal change and the making of history. These theoretical and methodological accomplishments advance the understanding of current society and minimize the “great divide” between theory and practice, thus suggesting novel forms of social organization.

Anthropology, on the other hand, has developed a theoretical and methodological sensitivity to children’s alterity. It has also developed a great sensitivity towards alterity in general, which depending on the particular context of investigation can be alterity of gender, class, (sub-)culture, race, color, or age. It is obvious, even in an era of globalization deeply marked in its content and form by Western culture, that different forms of human life exist today, influenced by various local, regional, and national cultures. Within this framework, the focus of anthropological research lies on the social and cultural diversity of human life. Quite apart from creating sensitivity for the strange and foreign character of other cultures, anthropological work also creates sensitivity for that which is strange and foreign in one’s own culture. The (self-)reflexive point of view adopted by cultural and historical anthropology towards European cultures has contributed to the considerable evolution and advancement of anthropological knowledge (cf. Evans-Pritchard, 1965; Harris, 2001; Lévi-Strauss, 1992; Malinowski, 1922; Mead, 1950; Sahlins, 1976).

This sensitivity has not been adequately elaborated in cultural-historical psychology. Cultural-historical psychology “grew up” in a “modern” context, never questioning objectivity in general and the scientific representation of childhood, gender, race, or class in the radical way anthropology has (Marcus, 1986; Wulf, 2002; Wulf et al., 2001). Furthermore, cultural-historical psychology has not widely studied the senses and embodiment to which Pessoa so poetically refers in the introductory quote and which play an important role in everyday rituals and ritualizations and have thus always been a major object of study for anthropology (Wulf, 1997, 2001; Wulf & Kamper, 2002).

Despite the aforementioned minor differences or specific strengths of these approaches, it is quite obvious that cultural-historical psychology and historical anthropology are grounded on similar theoretical prerequisites, share a similar interest for children and education, and, as we will see, involve similar methodologies. However, until now they have never been in dialogue. While literally working next to each other at the Free University of Berlin, the editors and authors of this volume soon realized that cultural-historical psychology and historical anthropology could be complementary to each other. This edited book is the result of this local interdisciplinary research cooperation between German anthropologists, educational scientists, and cultural psychologists. This research cooperation has slowly grown into an international endeavor and dealt with theoretical and empirical issues related to early child development, the history of childhood, everyday child-related practices, and emerging educational challenges (2004 until today)\(^1\). In the following we will refer more analytically to the main ideas of this interdisciplinary work: subjectivity, performativity, infans absconditus, and historicity.

\(^1\)See acknowledgements for details.
First Motion: Subjectivity

In the above-presented quote, Pessoa echoes Walter Benjamin in his *Berlin Childhood around 1900* (Benjamin, 2006). Benjamin shows in this autobiography how children appropriate the world mimetically: like a poet they establish similarities between themselves and the outer world; mimetically they discover streets, squares, and the various rooms of their home. Children’s poetic and metaphoric interpretation of the world, which views the world of objects as something that is animated and responsive to themselves, is established by making themselves similar to the objects. In this process, children extend themselves into the world, accord it a place in their own internal imaginary worlds, and educate themselves. As this world is always historically and culturally determined and its objects endowed with meaning therefore symbolically encoded, these mimetic processes also lead to the enculturation of children. With the help of their mimetic abilities, children acquire the meaning of objects and forms of representation and action. A mimetic movement thus serves as a bridge between a child and the outer world (see also Chapter 5 by Wulf, this book).

For Vygotsky, theoretically grasping a particular developmental level involves discovering the transformations in a child’s entire personality. It means understanding 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 as a dynamic system, as a context in which a child effects his or her own development by engaging in a dialogue with his or her environment (van Oers, 1998; Vygotsky, 1934/1987; Wygotski, 1987a). Placed in the broader context of spinozic monism (Spinoza & Curley, 1994), development for Vygotsky is not about the development of cognitive or professional skills, but about the development of a child or an adolescent as a whole person in relation to other persons and to the society as a whole (Kotik-Friedgut & Friedgut, 2008; Robbins, 2001, 2003; Vygotsky, 1933/2002). Vygotsky is especially interested in “critical age levels” in which the “dialectical laws of development” are manifest (Wygotski, 1987b).

A much-disputed concept that belongs in this framework and carries revolutionary implications for developmental theory and educational practice (cf. Newman & Holzman, 1993) is the Vygotskian notion of the “zone of proximal development” (Vygotsky, 1929/2005, 1930–1934/1998, 1934/1987, 1934/1999). Chaiklin has reviewed all of Vygotsky’s texts in which this term appears and questions the definition of the term, since Vygotsky himself does not provide it and there is no outline of the theory of the “zone of proximal development” (Chaiklin, 2003). Chaiklin argues against the various “common sense” interpretations of the “zone of proximal development” and their implications for educational practice. The main features of the “zone of proximal development” as summarized by Chaiklin are the following: (a) it involves the whole child, (b) development is concerned with the relations between psychological functions and not the psychological functions as such, (c) development takes place as a qualitative change in these relationships, (d)
change is brought about by the child’s actions in the social situation of development, and (e) each age period is characterized by a leading activity/contradiction that organizes the child’s actions through which new functions develop (Chaiklin, 2003, p. 50).

In the psychology of Vygotsky, development is not considered to be an inner progression of states that follow one another; Vygotsky’s psychology is processual and relational. We would like to emphasize here that seen from our perspective, the notion of proximity in development indicates not a following temporal phase but the space of social relations that can be further developed. Proximity understood in this sense is proximity to the unknown – and not to the known. The “zone of proximal development” is thus defined as the distance between the known and the unknown. The dialogue and tension between the given and the forthcoming, the past and the future fascinates Benjamin in the analysis of his own childhood under the threat of fascism (Adorno & Benjamin, 2005; Benjamin, 2006). It also fascinates Vygotsky in his analysis of the tragedy of Hamlet (Vygotsky, 1925/1971) and of the crises of development (Vygotsky, 1932–1934/1998). These dynamic and conflicting aspects of child development and everyday action in educational institutions are given particular emphasis in the second part of this book.

An important idea implied in concepts such as “mimesis,” “zone of proximal development” (see above), “appropriation” (Stetsenko & Arievitch, 2010), or “motive” (Hedegaard, 2001; Leont’ev, 1978), is active subjectivity, i.e. the idea that children and youngsters as well as scientists or teachers act according to their own intentions and motivations, actively participating in defining how signs and tools are used (Stetsenko, 2005). Active subjectivity can thus transform a given social situation so that new practices emerge. Being in the world is transforming the world, not adapting to it (Freire, 1973, 1986; Kontopodis, 2009a). Human development is the process of the purposeful transformation of the world, a process which is collaborative per definitionem (Liberali & Rahmilevitz, 2007; Stetsenko, 2008; Vianna & Stetsenko, 2006). Desires, affects, and emotions play here a very important role. In this regard, one could argue that Vygotsky’s approach shares a great proximity with Benjamin’s approach, whose work is one of the cornerstones of historical anthropology, as we mentioned above. Emotions and affects are what bring different people to act together, thus transforming themselves as well as social and societal relations (cf. Chapter 12 by Kontopodis, this book).

It is quite well known that Vygotsky tries to conceptualize child development in terms of drama – a drama in terms of theatre and performativity during which different tensions collide and novelty is generated. Very recently Veresov (2004) has pointed out an aspect of the “zone of proximal development” which has hitherto been overlooked: emphasizing the influence of art on Vygotsky, Veresov interprets
Vygotsky’s work as a psychology in terms of “drama.” He uses the term “emotionally colored experience” (perezhivanie) to refer to development according to Vygotsky as a process that is dynamic and lived-through. In the zone of proximal development, as Veresov argues, “dramatic events” occur and contradictory aspects collide – crisis and conflict arise and thus development emerges. There is no way of predicting or foreseeing the outcome of these dramatic events. After a dramatic event, nothing is as it was. In this context, Vygotsky attributes particular attention in his developmental theory to emotions, intensity, and desire (Delari, 2009; Puzyrei, 2007; Veresov, 2004; Vygotsky, 1929/2005). He considers play the cornerstone of development:

“An idea that has become an affect, a concept that has turned into a passion” – this ideal of Spinoza’s finds its prototype in play, which is the realm of spontaneity and freedom. (…) In short, play gives the child a new form of desires, i.e., teaches him to desire by relating his desires to a fictitious “I” – to his role in the game and its rules. Therefore, a child’s greatest achievements are possible in play – achievements that tomorrow will become his average level of real action and his morality (Vygotsky, 1933/2002, online).

Seen from this perspective, child development is studied and conceptualized not only in terms of plurality but also in terms of intensity, conflict, and controversy between different value positions, the outcome of which nobody can predict (Dafermos, 2002; Gebauer & Wulf, 1995; Vygotsky, 1929/2005). As becomes evident in most chapters of this book, the process of merging the subjective and the cultural-historical includes biographical ruptures; it embodies social controversies and reflects power relations.

Second Motion: Performativity

However important signs, metaphors and language might be, the senses and the body – in the quote by Pessoa the tears and their liquid bitterness – are central to mimetic processes and to ritualized situations that involve particular emotions and feelings. Historical anthropology does not employ the notion of drama – however, it has developed a methodology for the study of everyday rituals, which are hardly different from dramas. Rituals and ritualizations have a beginning and an end. They are characterized by their dynamics, which cause adaptations and changes in child behavior. Their corporeal practices create forms of action, images, and schemata, which children identify with, which they remember, and the performance and enactment of which bring forth new forms of actions. During the performance of rituals and ritual practices, the participants relate immediately and directly to the actions of other participants. This takes place in a largely mimetic manner, using the senses, the movements of the body and the common understanding of words, sounds, tastes, smells, language, and music. Rituals can be conceived as small, everyday performances that include conflict potential, express power relations and at the same time accept and question a given social order (Wulf, 2004, 2010; Wulf & Zirfas, 2004; Wulf et al., 2001).
Geertz regarded culture as an “assembly of texts” and saw a necessity for a “thick description” (Geertz, 1975, 1995). On the basis of a similar background, classic hermeneutics assumed the existence of a deeper structure of meaning that was contained in (educational) reality and has to be brought to light by the researcher. However, extensive discussions about the “crisis of representation” (Berg & Fuchs, 1993) and the so-called “performative turn” moved the focus of attention from meanings and representations themselves to the ways in which they are performed, employed, and enacted to constitute realities. In this context, historical anthropology shifted its attention from the hermeneutics of pedagogic and educational reality to the performativity of pedagogic and educational practice (Wulf, 2003; Wulf & Zirfas, 2007).

Departing from a performative understanding of culture historical anthropological research has recently looked into how children learn, how they perform their learning, and how this manifests itself in their interactions with other children. It is only in interaction with other children that children pursue their own learning program. Historical anthropological research here begins to resemble Vygotskyan and post-Vygotskian research. However, it sheds another light on development by focusing on the performativity of difference in everyday interactions. For example, the question of how boys distance themselves from girls and how girls distance themselves from boys during class activities has been crucial in a series of recent studies (Tervooren, 2006; Wagner-Willi, 2005; Wulf, 2010).

Rituals in education always relate to other rituals that have already taken place – either rituals in which one has participated or rituals of which one has heard an account. This makes the historical dimension a basic condition of rituals. Ritual actions involve mimetic references to earlier rituals. As these references are made mimetically, they create an “impression” of earlier performances of the ritual that is then adapted to suit the current context. Creating a mimetic link between the current and previous world ensures historical continuity in education thus legitimizing the current ritual activity, even if it differs from its predecessor. Mimetic referencing is “taking on similarities,” i.e. the repetition of a similar action that would not be possible if the previous ritual activity had not taken place. Mimetic reference does not mean that the ritual is recreated in exactly the same way every time.

In some cases the result of this mimetic referencing also leads to critical distancing from the reference point of the ritual, without this point of reference becoming superfluous. Mimetic referencing enables the current figurations and arrangements of ritual practices in education to be updated and modified to suit the context of the current instance. Mimetic constellations, staging styles and types of movement are adapted and changed according to necessity or taste. The “repetition” of earlier rituals does not result in a copy of this ritual in the sense of a copy as made by a photocopier. Rather, this repetition, which makes use of mimetically transferred and assimilated elements, creates something new for all participants although the predecessor is dialectically upheld. The ritual that has been updated by this mimetic process integrates the old ritual with a new purpose and a new appearance (Wulf, 2005; Wulf et al., 2001). The staging of rituals in education is always conducted in the context of previous ritual performances. However, these can differ enormously.
In some cases the relationship between old and new ritual performances is very close, and in other cases very loose. Rituals do not only guard societal and cultural continuity, they also cause change. The practical knowledge required for their performance, which is acquired in mimetic processes, means that they are social dramas, and the performative character of these dramas changes social orders. Without rituals, social relations and communities would be unthinkable. Educational and social communities are formed in ritualized practices. Communities are the cause, the action, and the effect of rituals. These practices are creating an order, for the emergence of which power relations play an important role. Through regularity and repetition, the relationships between children and between children and adults are confirmed as well as modified.

Power issues between the genders and generations are also dealt with in everyday rituals such as at the family breakfast table (see Chapter 9 by Audehm, this book); this occurs in a seemingly casual manner that is all the more effective for its relaxed appearance. Ritual staging and performance allow several matters to be handled simultaneously in education. For example, children may demonstrate that they are no longer children and are on their way to the next stage of psychological development. They enact this passage through rituals, playfully making it public for their relatives and for their school community (Wulf, 2001).

To sum up, during the performative arrangement of rituals, a new social and educational reality is created. This reality is not completely new – previous models of it have existed before. However, it has not been present in this particular form at this particular location before this particular time. Taking earlier rituals as a basis, every performative arrangement in education creates a new ritual reality and a new ritual community. This ritual community can develop for the first time among the children or people who carry out the ritual practices, but it can also be a repetition of itself, whereby the community confirms its status as such.

The performative turn does not only draw our attention to rituals but in general to the question how semiotic, material and corporeal relations are performed in the classroom, at school or in other educational settings as well as to the question how can qualitatively new relations emerge. This has recently also been the focus of science and technology studies (Bowker & Star, 1999; Kontopodis & Niewöhner, 2011; Latour, 1994; Law, 2004), of post-feminist theory (Haraway, 1997; Wolfe, 2010), of performativity theory (Barad, 2003; Butler, 1997; Conquergood, 2002) and can be seen as a research direction that can prove very fruitful and significant in educational and psychological research (cf. Chapter 13 by Chronaki, this book; Chapter 8 by Ivinson, this book; Chapter 12 by Kontopodis, this book).

**Third Motion: Infans Absconditus**

Pessoa’s quote at the very beginning of this introduction brings our attention to a further aspect of childhood: *infans absconditus*. Since children and adults live in modern societies and use language in different ways, children and adults have become radically different from each other. To adults, children and childhood
display a confusing strangeness and heterogeneity, an absolute difference in relationship to them and their world. The mysterious presence of childhood and children is the presence of something that is radically and irreducibly Other. In communities, however, that have been less affected by European modernity, we do not encounter this radical strangeness and otherness of children in comparison to adults.

Researchers and educational practitioners participate in defining, generating or limiting otherness by means of scientific knowledge, methodology, and educational approach. Modern science, as a form of knowledge and a process, attempts to arrive at ever more precise approximations of reality. In doing so, it must presume that the essence of reality has already been determined, thus separating reality from its intrinsic becoming different-to-itself. This means that developmental psychology must already know what a “child” or “adolescent” is. Pedagogy assumes that it is known what kind of institution and organization a “school” is. The emergence of educational science and developmental psychology has long been associated with the establishment of public education in the eighteenth century as well as with European modernity in general. In this context, mainstream childhood research has thus been based on the western idea of the “general child” that finds itself in the process of developing into an adult. Educational and psychological research has thus often been criticized for relying on the normative conception of a universal, ahistorical, rational human being, thereby reproducing power relations, defining and at the same time excluding otherness (Morss, 1990; Walkerdine, 1993; Wulf, 2002).

Neither the concept of mimesis, so crucial in Benjamin’s work and further developed by Christoph Wulf and his colleagues (Gebauer & Wulf, 1995; Wulf, 2005), nor the concept of the “zone of proximal development” of Vygotsky (cf. Chaiklin, 2003) reduce children to predictable objects of knowledge or offer a way to exactly predict how a child is going to appropriate a given sign. Not only is childhood and child development a cultural-historical phenomenon (as claimed by post-Vygotskian and historical anthropological research); the methodologies and models employed for the study of children and childhood have also been culturally and historically developed and are also culturally and historically situated. There is thus a dialectical relation between the cultural-historical aspects of the phenomena studied and the cultural-historical specificity of the knowledge produced about it. We define this relation as “double culturality and historicity” (Wulf, 2009, p. 129). The epistemological position of double culturality and historicity enables cultural-historical scholars to reflect on both the cultural-historical character of childhood, education, and child development, and the cultural-historical specificity of their own discourses and methodologies.

This modest and reflective approach is very different from dominant modern childhood research; it cannot avoid making its own values explicit and becoming political. An emphasis is thus given to qualitative and interpretative methodologies that examine the different value positions of research subjectivities with sensitivity and reflectivity, such as qualitative or quasi-experiment, case-study analysis, ethnographic fieldwork, interpretative video-supported observation, and the analysis of photographs, interviews and group discussions. These methods should be combined wherever possible and are indispensable for obtaining complex and
methodologically transparent research results. The methodologies followed by the authors in this volume provide an overview of the different methodological possibilities provided in cultural-historical and historical-anthropological research and reveal different aspects of the ways in which culture affects children’s and young people’s everyday lives and development.

**Fourth Motion: Historicity**

In his psychology, Vygotsky employs a concept of history stemming from Hegelian philosophy that Dafermos has examined in great detail (Dafermos, 2002, pp. 35–38). Also influenced by Marx’s political economy as well as by the theory of evolution, Vygotsky introduced the “genetic historical approach” to developmental psychology. In Vygotsky’s words:

*To study something historically means to study it in the process of change; that is the dialectical method’s basic demand. To encompass in research the process of a given thing’s development in all its phases and changes – from birth to death – fundamentally means to discover its nature, its essence, for it is only in movement that a body shows what it is. Thus, the historical study of behaviour is not an auxiliary aspect of theoretical study, but rather forms its very base (Vygotsky, 1930/1978, pp. 64–65).*

Not only does Vygotsky conceive child development and schooling as cultural-historical phenomena, he also poses the question as to how human history can lead to a new type of society and a new type of human being (Vygotsky, 1934/1994).

Critical educational (Davydov, 2008; Fichtner, 1996) and critical psychological research (Holzkamp, 1993) have been much inspired by Vygotsky as well as by the entire Soviet school of psychology (Davydov, 2008; Leont’ev, 1978; Lompscher & Galperin, 1972).

A quick review of cultural-historical psychological literature reveals, however, that the understanding of history of most cultural-historically oriented studies is very abstract and is not translated into a concrete methodology for the analysis of historical data. Such an approach would investigate the history of childhood, disability, schooling and other related phenomena in combination with the history of the discipline and the history of local practices and traditions. It would have to be able to face the challenges and dilemmas such an investigation would pose.

Anthropology quite recently underwent a significant historical turn, as is apparent in the historical treatments of anthropological topics by the *Annales School* and the history of mentalities that flowed from it (Ariès & Duby, 1985; Burke, 1991). Fernand Braudel’s study of the Mediterranean (Braudel, 1949), Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie’s of the village of Montaillou (Ladurie, 1979), Carlo Ginzburg’s of the world of millers around 1600 (Ginzburg, 1980) may be cited as successful examples of this kind of approach. Under this influence, historical anthropology nowadays

---

3 As an exception to this one might regard the work of Valsiner (1998) which offers a general methodological frame for the study of historical processes as well as enters into dialogue with anthropological approaches.
attempts, to bring into accord the historical and cultural determination of its perspectives and methods with the historical and cultural determination of its object of study. As a consequence, historical anthropology can harness insights gleaned in the humanities with those yielded by a critique of anthropology based on the history of philosophy. It can combine them to create new perspectives and lines of inquiry out of a new consciousness for methodological problems. Historical anthropology is limited neither to certain spatial frames nor to particular epochs. Reflecting on its own historicity and its own cultural condition, it succeeds both in leaving behind the eurocentrism of the humanities and an antiquated view of history, and focuses on examining and discussing current and future problems (Wulf, 1997, 2009; Wulf & Kamper, 2002).

The critique of anthropology is itself a constituent part of historical anthropology, which leads to an epistemological uncertainty. At the same time, it is important – especially in the context of the present economic crisis – to emphasize, as Vygotsky did, that history has not yet come to an end, that human development is a process of purposeful collaborative transformation (Stetsenko, 2008) and we (can) actively contribute to the making of history and human development (see also: Kontopodis, 2009b).

Such an understanding of historicity goes together with the notions of “active subjectivity” and “drama” briefly introduced above. Furthermore, the notion of practice, not as opposed to theory but as dialectically related to it (Chaiklin & Lave, 1993), is very important here. From a Marxian/Hegelian point of view, theory is only meaningful to the extent in which it advances practice in the creation of a more equal society (Chapter 14 by Chaiklin, this book). Theoretical concepts such as those of situated cognition, of peripheral participation, or of communities of practice have long been employed in psychology as well as in anthropology in order to develop an understanding as to how people participate in practices that are culturally-historically rooted and at the same time transform these practices in emancipatory ways (Dreier, 2008; Hedegaard & Chaiklin, 2005; Lave & Wenger, 1991; van Oers, 2009).

Taking these terms seriously one could speak of a “cultural-historical science” as Seth Chaiklin does in the “instead of an epilogue” part of this book. On the basis of the ideas presented so far a cultural-historical science would try not only to analyze human practices but also to develop them thus participating in satisfying societally meaningful needs. In this regard, the book Children, Development and Education: Cultural, Historical, Anthropological Perspectives advances current scholarship and criticizes mainstream western developmental theories and educational practices by bringing into dialogue cultural-historical psychology and historical anthropology. By emphasizing communication, semiotic processes, and the use of artifacts, pictures, and technologies the edited volume places special focus on performativity, everyday action, school, family and community practices, and changing educational institutions. Divided into two main parts, “Culture, History and Child

---

4The study of Althans presented in Chapter 7 (this book) provides an example of this approach by exploring the double historicity and culturality of western childhood.
Development,” “Gender, Performativity and Educational Practice” the book may be seen as an important contribution to the fields of cultural-historical research, educational science, developmental psychology, and childhood studies.

The Contents of This Volume

Part I: Culture, History and Child Development

The first part “Culture, History and Child Development” presents a compination of theoretical and empirical theoretical works that examine childhood and child development as products of the transformative powers of history, culture and society over nature. It enacts a dialogue between classical texts of Vygotsky and/or Benjamin and current research from disciplines as diverse as developmental psychology, the anthropology of childhood, and evolutionary anthropology. Human development is thus explored and conceptualized in regard to its interrelated semiotic, material/embodied, mimetic and performative aspects.

In her opening paper “Darwin and Vygotsky on Development: An Exegesis on Human Nature” Anna Stetsenko suggests an alternative to the evolutionary and neurological reductionisms that are currently becoming dominant in psychology. She charts an approach to the human mind and to development in which people are revealed as being shaped by history, culture, and society at the same time as they themselves create and continue these processes in the ever-expanding fabric of their communal life.

In the framework provided by Stetsenko, Falk Seeger & Martin Hildebrand-Nilshon examine in their paper “Two Lines of Development: Reconsidering and Updating Vygotsky’s Argument” how Vygotsky’s example of the development of the pointing gesture is situated within more recent developments in developmental psychology, comparative psychology, and the analytical philosophy of language. Drawing on these approaches and findings, Seeger and Hildebrand-Nilshon develop the Vygotskian argument of two lines of development (natural and social/cultural) and claim that from the moment of birth – and possibly even before – human infants turn out to be super-social attractors. Being born into an environment so deeply saturated with signs and meaning requires intentional understanding as basic to all other human activity.

Seeger & Martin Hildebrand-Nilshon’s analysis is continued in the chapter Material Culture, Semiotics and Early Childhood Development by Christiane Moro. Moro focuses on the materiality, variety, and complexity of semiotic systems and their interactions as source and resource for psychological development in early infancy. She explores human thoughts and matter as mutually constitutive. She analyses a series of everyday observations of children dealing with material objects such as telephone devices under the guidance of adults in quasi-experimental settings and contributes to theory building about the material aspects of mediation thus criticizing speech-centric developmental psychological and educational approaches.
Within a similar perspective, the next chapter by Sigrid Klasen analyzes the early communication between mother and child while employing micro-sequential video analysis. In her study “Touching Each Other: Video analysis of Mother–Infant Interaction after the Birth,” Klasen examines the mimetical, performative, and embodied aspects of early mother–child communication and how these contribute to the establishment of community relations between the mother and the newborn.

Concluding those critical to speech-centric approaches studies Christoph Wulf in his paper “Mimesis in Early Childhood: Enculturation, Practical Knowledge and Performativity” elaborates on the notion of “mimesis.” On the basis of a historical analysis of the term in western philosophy (Aristotle, Plato, Benjamin) and by taking a critical look at recent findings of evolutionary anthropology, Wulf argues the importance of mimesis for human evolution and development. Wulf’s analysis leads to similar conclusions as those of Stetsenko and Hildebrand and Seeger: it foregrounds the social character of developmental processes. At the same time, Wulf also examines the corporeal aspects and the creative potential of mimesis. The chapter by Wulf can thus be read as a “conclusion” or an “outlook” to the first part of this book.

**Part II: Performativity and Educational Practice**

As a transition from the first to the second part, the next paper “Speculative Imaginations: Infancy in Educational Discourse of Early Modern Germany,” by Birgit Althans examines how scientific and pictorial representations simultaneously express and form understandings of childhood and shape associated cultural practices. Althans’ study illuminates the interrelation between scientific and artistic _images_ of childhood and scientific and artistic _imagination_ and enables a critical analysis of current western childhood-related practices (medicalization, scientification, objectification).

The chapter by Althans adds a historical or – better say – genealogical dimension to the account developed in the first part of this book. It opens the second part “Gender, Performativity and Educational Practice” which reveals multiple aspects of the ways in which children’s and young people’s everyday lives and development are shaped in-between and through various institutional practices. While the first part of this volume focuses more on infancy and early childhood development (as also does the transitory chapter by Althans), the second part focuses more on qualitative studies of school-aged children and young people. While the possibilities to escape given power relations are investigated and/or discussed, a specific focus is given here on multiple identities, difference, materiality and performativity.\footnote{Although many types or modes of “difference” are investigated, we decided to use the word “gender” in the title of this part in order to make clear the connection to feminist scholarship and especially the so-called “third wave” of feminism.}
In her study “A Cultural-historical Approach to Children’s Development of Multiple Cultural Identities,” Mariane Hedegaard analyzes interviews with children from Turkish cultural minority families who have just completed 9 years in a Danish school. Hedegaard explores conflicting situations in which the institutional demands of a concrete school practice are in conflict with the student’s own motives. Instead of defining this conflict as “cultural”, she suggests a cultural-historical activity approach that moves beyond the given anthropological and psychological understandings of identity. In this frame, Hedegaard suggests that the conflict is about how participants in school practice (Danish teachers and students from immigrant families) should develop a shared practice.

The next chapter of the book moves from the study of cultural differences to the study of age-related differences, and focuses on family settings. Kathrin Audehm analyzes the ritualized performance of children and their parents during eating. In her paper “Under The Sign of the Coffee Pot: Mealtime Rituals as Performative Practices,” Audehm interprets ethnographic material of a German middle-class family’s breakfast. By making use of Bourdieu’s concept of social magic, she analyzes the performative effects of rituals of the table and argues that what is going on during rituals of the table is education.

Maintaining the focus upon difference, the study by Gabrielle Ivinson brings together cultural-historical theory and feminist approaches in order to examine how gender emerges in classroom practices and how boys and girls recognize and access different kinds of semiotic assemblages during different curriculum activities. Under the title “School Curriculum as Developmental Resource: Gender and Knowledge,” Ivinson draws on ethnographic work in year 8 (students aged 12/13) single-sex drama classes at a British comprehensive secondary school. She investigates the classrooms as semiotic fields with a range of linguistic and non-linguistic signifiers and demonstrates how historical legacies that intermesh gender with knowledge are embodied and performed in curricular subjects.

Both historical anthropology and cultural-historical psychology emphasize that neither subjectivities nor objectivities (signs, tools etc.) exist outside of practice (Chapter 14 by Chaiklin, this book, Papadopoulos, 1999; Wulf & Zirfas, 2004). Children and youngsters as well as scientists and teachers not only actively participate in defining how signs and tools are used in everyday practices, but are also shaped through these practices. This twofold character of practice, which includes uncertainty, has been thoroughly examined not only by cultural-historical approaches but also by Foucault, Martin, Gutman, and Hutton (1988) and Foucault, Gros, Ewald, and Fontana (2005) and by process philosophy (Badiou, 2005; Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987). It has recently been the focus of science and technology studies (Bowker & Star, 1999; Kontopodis & Niewöhner, 2011; Latour, 1999; Law & Mol, 2002; Mol, 2002), of feminist theory (Blackman & Walkerdine, 2001; Haraway, 1997; Walkerdine, 1998), of performativity theory (Barad, 2003; Butler, 1997; Conquergood, 2002), and of critical psychology (Dreier, 2008; Stephenson & Papadopoulos, 2006).

In this broader frame Estrid Sørensen’s paper “Configuration of Ontologies: an Inquiry into Learning Designs,” takes as its point of departure the well-known 5th
Dimension learning design (Cole, 1996), which is founded on cultural-historical activity theory but applies an actor-network theory approach in analyzing the ordering of the 5th Dimension game as well as another internet-based project, Femtedit, which shares a lot of 5th Dimension’s features but provides a much more flexible virtual environment. Sørensen analyzes the ways in which the different environments lead to different kinds of activities, and suggests that children and materials, humans and artifacts are co-constituted so that different human–artifact configurations lead to different distributions of agency.

As a further contribution to the discussion about educational practice, Michalis Kontopodis, in his paper “Enacting Human Developments: from Representation to Virtuality,” brings together materials from two different research projects: ethnographic research that took place at an experimental vocational school in Germany from 2004 till 2005, and a literature-based analysis of a similar school project that took place in the Woodrow Wilson School in Long Beach California, USA from 1994 till 1998. The analysis of the presented material points out that “development” is not something happening “out-there,” in the school or in everyday life; nor is it just a discursive category specialists use “in-here” to describe what is happening “out-there.” Development is instead the product, the enactment, or the relation between the “in-here” and the “out-there.” This relation is mediated through documents, diaries, photos, CVs, and other tools.

The attempt to bring together cultural-historical thinking with actor-network theory and performativity theory continues in the next chapter of the book, “Troubling’ Essentialist Identities: Performative Mathematics and the Politics of Possibility.” Anna Chronaki analyzes three cases of Tsiggano children who deal with school mathematics in distinct ways. Chronaki examines how participating in school arithmetic rituals involves performing certain learning identities and in some situations disrupts norms, and “troubles” - in Butler’s (1990) words - hegemonic discourses about who is able, and who is not, to do well in school mathematics.

Instead of an Epilogue

Our edited volume concludes with the chapter “The Role of ‘Practice’ in Cultural-historical Science,” by Seth Chaiklin. This chapter can be read as an epilogue to the whole book and claims that it is possible to conceive of “cultural-historical science” as a science directed at the study of human practices. Chaiklin elaborates on the epistemological and methodological implications of this theoretical position, and formulates some general principles of investigation in cultural-historical science. He claims that research in cultural-historical science should not just lead to a better understanding of existing human practices, but also to the development of new ones.

One could thus say that with a special focus on late-modern European societies with their multiplicity of inner societal groups and communities, the book Children, Development and Education: Cultural, Historical, Anthropological Perspectives does not only present reports from the cutting edge of developmental and
educational psychological and anthropological research but constitutes a whole that is more than its parts. The edited volume highlights differences in ethos that depend on where, how, and with whom someone lives. Such an approach sets cultural-historical practice at the center and employs it as an organizing principle for conducting research. It also makes clear that practice is always to be thought of in terms of diversity and heterogeneity. Distinguished contributors highlight the dynamic and creative aspects of everyday action and the dramatic aspects of child development and search for innovative ways to translate cultural-historical and historical anthropological theory and research findings into a thorough understanding of emerging phenomena in the fields of childhood and youth education and development.

**Acknowledgements** The work presented here is the result of long interdisciplinary research cooperation between anthropologists, educational scientists, and psychologists and has its origins at two international conferences funded by the German Research Foundation and co-organized by Michalis Kontopodis, Christoph Wulf, Bernd Fichtner, Martin Hildebrand-Nilshon, and María Benites at the Free University Berlin (2006) and at the University of Siegen (2007) as well as at further meetings held in the context of International Conferences in Toronto (ISTP, 2007) and San Diego (ISCAR, 2008). We would like to thank the German Research Foundation, the Faculty of Education and Psychology at the Free University Berlin, the Department of Educational Science at the University of Siegen and the Department of European Ethnology at the Humboldt University Berlin 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 are due to Kareth Schaffer, Diana Aurisch, and Thomas La Presti for their patience in dealing with all the challenges of translation and proof-reading, and for the excellence of their work. Last but not least we would like to thank the Springer Series’ “International Perspectives on Early Childhood Education and Development” editors, Marilyn Fleer and Ingrid Pramling, for their kind cooperation in publishing this book.

**References**


