



The Challenges of the Schooling from Cultural Psychology of Education

Giuseppina Marsico^{1,2,3,4} 

Published online: 10 August 2018

© Springer Science+Business Media, LLC, part of Springer Nature 2018

Abstract

Education is in the core of societal change in all its different forms—from kindergartens to vocational schools and lifelong learning. Education—understood as goal-oriented personal movement—re-structures personal lives both inside school and outside the school. This special issue stems from the Cultural Psychology of Education (Marsico *Culture & Psychology*, 21(4), 445–454, 2015a, b, *Journal for the Study of Education and Development*, 40(4), 754–781, 2017)—a new approach to the field of education that examines how educational experience is culturally organized. This special issue is focused on the work of schooling as a crucial scientific arena to investigate. It is the follow up of an international workshop host by the Centre for Cultural Psychology (at Aalborg University, Denmark) that was very thought provoking and from where several outcomes came out. Some of them are the papers here presented that tried to illuminate the different dimensions of the educational context in the East and West society with specific attention to the Chinese and Scandinavian educational practices. The dialogue between Chinese, European and North American scholars offered a complex view of the current educational challenges in the age of globalization. In this paper I try to focus on some of the most debated and challenging aspects in educational psychology worldwide: diversity, values and practical usability of psychology at school. I re-read these “hot topics” with the help of the themes developed by the authors of this special issue and in light of Cultural Psychology of Education. Then, I conclude by proposing a new agenda for the education of the future.

Keywords Educational Psychology · Cultural psychology · Schooling · Diversity · Values

✉ Giuseppina Marsico
pina.marsico@gmail.com; gmarsico@unisa.it

Extended author information available on the last page of the article

In our contemporary globalized world, education and schooling become one of the cruelest frontline where all sort of societal changes, different expectation and social demands reverberate.

This Special Issue aimed at discussing the articulation of theoretical knowledge, methodological instances and culturally situated meaningful interventions in specific educational contexts for promoting a cultural approach to the work of schooling and to the Educational Psychology at large.

Education is in the core of societal change in all its different forms—from kindergartens to vocational schools and lifelong learning. Education—understood as goal-oriented personal movement—re-structures personal lives both inside school and outside the school. This special issue stems from the Cultural Psychology of Education (Marsico 2015a, b, 2017)—a new approach to the field of education that examines how educational experience is culturally organized. Cultural Psychology of Education emerges in the realm of Cultural Psychology at the intersection of developmental and social psychologies, anthropology and sociology and history to understand the relationships between the developing person and the educational contexts and to provide new theories and qualitative methods. This fits the global processes of most countries becoming multi-cultural in their social orders and in their educational purposes.

This special issue is focused on the work of schooling as a crucial scientific arena to investigate. It is the follow up of an international workshop host by the Centre for Cultural Psychology (at Aalborg University, Demark) that was very thought provoking and from where several outcomes came out. Some of them are the papers here presented that tried to illuminate the different dimensions of the educational context in the East and West society with specific attention to the Chinese and Scandinavian educational practices. The dialogue between Chinese, European and North American scholars offered a complex view of the current educational challenges in the age of globalization.

I do not want here echoing back what the authors of this special issue have already discussed, rather I would like just to cross and elaborate some of their theoretical and methodological preoccupations and I will recall their voices in the flux of my augmentations. Thus, in the next pages, I will try to focus on some of the most debated and challenging aspects in educational psychology worldwide: diversity, values and practical usability of psychology at school. I will re-read these “hot topics” with the help of the themes developed by the authors of this special issue and in light of Cultural Psychology of Education. Then, I will conclude by proposing a new agenda for the education of the future.

What Cultural Psychology of Education Is about

In my proposal of Cultural Psychology of Education, I start from the axiomatic point that human experience is culturally organized, through semiotic mediation, symbolic action, accumulation and exchange of inter-subjectively shared representations of the life-space. By taking this approach, I want to challenge the “ontological” conceptualization of education by promoting an idea of education as localized on liminality (Marsico 2017). In my view, education has been understood as goal-oriented personal movement that is at the core of societal change in all its different forms—from

kindergarten to vocational school and lifelong learning. It restructures personal lives both inside school and outside the school. The cultural psychology approach to education reflects the interdisciplinary nature of educational psychology, and informs the applications of educational psychology in a vast variety of cultural contexts.

Psychology of Education seems nowadays to have put into the background the theoretical investigation to privilege more empirical and applicative concerns. This trend is only partly justified by the challenges that the educational systems are facing worldwide, such as the multiculturalization of the classrooms and the increasing rhythm of innovation. The answer of the discipline has been focused on the small-theorizing and the medicalization of the object of study. By “medicalization”, I mean the focus on the performance, the disempairments and the pathologies of learning, the obsession with quantitative assessment, the comparative and cross-cultural aspects of education processes as a way to introduce a benchmarking approach to school. All these concerns can be perfectly legitimate, but focusing on the outcomes and performances of education has led psychology of education, the discipline that should study the processes of learning and teaching which are the most typical developmental phenomena in psychology, to approach its object as if it were a non-developmental one. On the other hand, we seem to have forgotten that some minor characters of psychology, like Vygotsky, Lewin, Piaget and Bruner, to mention but few, understood that the psychology of education is a privileged field of study and development of grand-theories about human psyche. Those scholars intuited the relevance of educational processes to the development of the person, but also that the theories, methodologies and questions that were raised in the study of education could provide a fundamental knowledge to psychology at large. We desperately need a renovated theorization in psychology of education. Yet, education is not a major concern of theoretical psychology today. Therefore, on the one hand we have a psychology of education which is producing few theory to understand a stockpile of empirical data. On the other hand, we have theoretical psychology which is not fully involved in providing a long-range theorization in education.

Cultural Psychology of Education is aimed at providing both an overview to the current trends in the field, especially outside the Anglo-American context, and a constant introduction of innovative and edge theoretical concepts. The focus is on the liminal phenomena in education (e.g relationships, transitions and negotiations occurring between different contexts, such as school, family, formal and informal education, school and work, etc.) (Marsico 2018a). The emphasis on developmental processes, contexts, sense making, theorizing and borders places this scientific programme outside the current horizon of educational psychology.

First Challenge: Diversity in Focus

In many parts of the world we are facing a large-scale migration (from East to West and from South to North of the planet), as well as the internal migration within geo-political regions is rapidly increasing (i.e. within European countries, from rural to urban areas in China etc.). Consequently, immigrant children are now experiencing new countries, new environments and school context (Fanøe and Marsico 2018).

According to Suárez-Orozco et al. (2010), the national and ethnic identity have a great impact on the well-being of immigrant students.

The complex interplay between support for ethnic maintenance and the responses from the receiving society in terms of pressing for assimilation, will determine the strength of identity. A strong ethnic and national identity seems positively correlate with the adaptation to new cultural environment and then being acquainted of ethnicity and cultural origin of ourselves and of the others seems to be a valuable outcome on both the emotional and cognitive engagement of immigrant students (Chiu et al. 2012).

In other words, diversity matters!

After all, intercultural communication, multilingualism and diversity are the reality in many countries all over the world.

The special case of Luxembourg represents the quintessence of this phenomenon where multilingualism and multiculturalism are the pillars of the national identity.

Luxembourg is located in the center of Europe, borderer by Belgium, Germany and France. It is a migrating society since most workers commute from France and Germany daily while others live there over generations (mainly Italian and Portuguese immigrants). Moreover, Luxembourg occupies a crucial place in the European political agenda (this is the place where the Schengen treated has been signed in 1985) and then it welcomes a large international community. Thus, the population has a variety of cultural, religious and social backgrounds. Deep multilingualism is the rule there: the Luxembourgish is first promoted in schools, later shift to French language and German.

Luxembourg is a clear example of what I call *Cultural Border Zone* where the notion of liminality in education plays a crucial role (Marsico 2016, 2018a). In the educational settings, in fact, diversity undoubtedly represents an opportunity, but it constitutes one of the major challenges in contemporary society. The problem of norms, equity and fairness comes into place. How and what do we teach at school is one of the most urgent problems especially if the students have linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds. Early Childhood Education has been recognized as the best educational sector for helping children to develop their fully potential from cognitive social and emotional point of view (Li and Xu 2018; He 2018). This acquires a terrific relevance especially in a multicultural settings. One of the most critical issue in the current debate in the field of Early Childhood Education (Fleer and van Oers 2018) is about how to develop methodology and tools to help children in succeeding independently of their socio-cultural background. The focus on the early intervention in the first years of the educational trajectory for vulnerable target population is not new in the history of the contemporary psychology.

In the early 60s Jerome Bruner served as a member of the President's Science Advisory Committee during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations and he hardly worked in designing and starting up the educational reform whose guideline are already traceable in the book *The Process of Education* (1960). Since then Bruner was involved in several educational initiatives, including the founding of the *US Head Start* programme.

In the 70s (from 1972 to 1979) Bruner headed the Oxford Pre-School Research Group at Oxford University (UK) with the purpose of promoting preschool education in Britain (see also Marsico 2015a, b, 2017).

This is how Bruner described that period:

“I was engaged not only in scholarly pursuits, but (inevitably, I suppose!) in the politics of education. For back in those days, in the 1970s, we had just discovered the importance of early childhood as the crucial period for developing the cognitive skills needed for young children later to benefit from regular schooling. We even had a lively Oxford Preschool Research Group working flat-out on that subject. A word more about those dawning days. We were becoming convinced that inequalities in education provided a powerful if often inadvertent means for preserving a class system. "Educational deprivation," as we called it back then, kept the children of the poor from developing the aspirations and the intellectual skills needed for a better life. On the other hand, research all over the place was showing that if you gave the young children of the less well-off an enabling headstart, even in the years before they started school, they stood a better chance of developing the powers of mind and heart needed for later schooling and for a better life afterwards. Those early pre-school years were crucial” (Bruner 2007, p.1).

The notion of Educational deprivation, as he said later on in the book *The Culture of Education* (1996), was defined in relation to a specific cultural milieu that of the American middle-class society. In other words, the notion of deprivation was (and still is) a confrontational outcomes against the standard of culture as implicitly derived from the idealized white middle class American lifestyle. In this view, the education consists in an harmonious interaction of a mother (full time housewife) with her well feed child who has several opportunities of exerting autonomy and independency. Who do not meet this standard was considered cultural deprived (usually black, working class family) at the point that several socio-pedagogical actions were taken with the aim of teaching the mothers to talk more and play with their children, to provide them opportunities for becoming assertive and autonomous. In sum, the purpose was the adaptation to the socially accepted cultural standard.

The American social interventions in the early 60s (before the HeadStart programme) were de facto inspired by the idea of providing some educational tools to vulnerable families (mainly immigrant people) irrespective of the recipient’s cultural background.

This seems to me almost the same of the Early Childhood Education in multicultural settings discussed above where, behind the benevolent equalitarian façade of offering the same education programme to all, there is the denial of the differences.

While dealing with diversity, the very educational power of diversity is killed.

In the school, all are migrants, even the native child who lives 50 m far from the school. He is migrant because he brings his own view to the school setting which is never the same of another one in his classroom. Sameness doesn’t exist at school (Sovran 1992). This is why school system should first put under scrutiny words like “integration”, “minority background” or “educational deprivation” as they are value laden and historically and culturally rooted in a specific ethnocentric perspective (Guimarães 2017).

Secondly, if the school wants to have any remote possibility to be a real factor of positive societal change and not just a place of reproduction of inequalities, it must refocus, at least, on the following three aspects:

- 1) the notion of *Agency*. Human beings are goal oriented agents who “*posit the future state of possible affairs and then proceed to construct it*” (Valsiner 2015, p.80). In the context of multiculturalism and multilingualism, it becomes relevant to investigate how do individuals deal with their diversity in the host society and, more specifically, within the school context. The uniqueness of human subjective experience is the core issue here. The personal synthesis of the student of his/her own experience plays a crucial role in how he/she makes sense of his/her cultural and national identities. Vygotsky’s notion of “*perezhivanie*” points out exactly to the different contextual conditions form a unique state of “*living-through*” in the domain of personal experience (Vygotsky 1933/1984);
- 2) *the history of migrating people* especially the migrant families in their intergenerational relationships (Albert and Ferring 2013). According to Albert and Barros Coimbra (2017):

“Life course view is needed when studying intergenerational relations in the context of migration, which should take into account the specific needs, goals and resources of individual family members depending on their position in the life span, their position in the family system and related roles within the family, as well as taking into account the relationship history, critical family life events and the socio-historical context” (p.208).

After all, the education of the new generations is a family project (de Sousa Bastos and Barros Filho 2015) that acquires a special meaning for migrant people in the host society. The case of the Chinese migrant school in the District of Shanghai is a clear example of all the effort made by a family to move from the interior of China to reach the urban context in order to allow their children to get a better education.

- 3) *the specificity of the host cultural context* from geographical, socio-economic, political perspective as well as from psycho-social point of view. How does the host society cope with cultural diversity? How can a sustainable development of the population be assured? These are relevant issue to investigate.

What are the educational implications of all these? They are substantial.

If we seriously assume the Cultural Psychology as the general science of specifically human ways of existence (Marsico and Valsiner 2018), we should re-think the classical categories we use in labelling the others (as immigrants, refugee, Italian, Portuguese etc.) and look, instead, at the new hybrid identities (“*neo-formation*”). What does it means, for instance, being a second generation immigrant in Luxembourg and grow up in the midst of a multicultural society? Is it the same of being a migrant child from the interior of China, leaving with all the family the far away village to attend the school in the more advanced district of Shanghai? What are the process of meaning making that undergoes in these different school migration experience?

The question of the psychological synthesis of the real person, that was Vygotsky’s main commitment, should become the urgent matter for each and every teacher and researcher in the field of education. The Neoliberalism dramatically fails in providing

tools for understanding the real life in the school context (Szulewicz 2018; Boll 2018). After all, it is interested in what is homogenous, normative and standardizable. In other words, Neoliberalism promotes the illusion of the sameness (Szulewicz et al. 2016) in detriment of the human variability, subjectivity and well-being at school (Matthiesen 2018).

Borders in Education. School as a Social Membrane

Now is time for something different. Cultural Psychology of Education wants to investigate the general principles that regulate the multicultural educational setting characterized by a high level of diversity among students.

Education is a liminal process since it happens on the border between what is already present and what is going to come (Marsico 2018a). The articulation of theoretical knowledge, methodological instances and culturally situated meaningful interventions for promoting a cultural approach to the border in Education is needed. The conceptual difficulties of making sense of a Border Zone are particularly evident in the case of specific social institutions (i.e. kindergartens, schools, churches, workplaces, family) that are set up for guiding human developments in some specific social directions. While the general directionality of such frames are relatively easily specifiable, the concrete *mechanisms* through which such guidance operates still need to be clarified. In the recent years a new efforts for understanding the processes of schooling (Marsico 2017, 2018; Marsico and Tateo 2018; Meijers and Hermans 2017; Valsiner et al. 2018) have provided examples of where the search for those mechanism and meaning-making processes could be productive. The innovative idea of *School as a Social Membrane* I propose here for the first time seems a promising construct to overcome the current incapability of the schools to deal with diversity.

Both biological and social sciences operate on phenomena that are characterized by *variability amplification*— as pointed out by Magoroh Maruyama in his crucial introduction of the notion of “second cybernetics” over half-century ago (Maruyama 1963). Biological and social systems, open in their relationships with the environment, constantly produce innovation that exactly emerge on the border between the organism and the surroundings. New forms come into being, are being transformed into still newer forms while maintaining *generative continuity* with the past. This process should be the general frame of reference also for the school, who deal with process “in between” (different social settings and cultural background) and “in becoming” (the edge of what is and what is not-yet). This leads to a number of deep changes in the ways in which we need to think about the development and educational process of a liminal nature.

Borders: from Theoretical to Empirical Elaboration

The work of schooling acts on the edge between the entire set of established and socially valued knowledge and rules and the individual process of “becoming” and getting educated (through the school system) that is a unique synthesis of a person on the basis of her history and socio-cultural background.



Fig. 1 Minimum structure of a borders space (from one to 4 borders)

Yet, the border between what is inside the school system and what is outside should not be conceptualized as a line who demarcates two distinct territories (Marsico et al. 2015), but as a Border Zone with a set of barriers to be crossed (Marsico 2016).

The following is an abstract model that shows the theoretical elaboration of the border phenomenon from one up to four borderlines that creates the minimum structure of a borders space (Fig. 1).

So far, we have moved from a Border to a Border Zone, but it would be quite hard for any entity/organism/subject to cross these borders which seem very rigid (Fig. 2).

The crossing phenomena would happened only if the borders are not rigid but permeable. Yet, the subject must find her own way to navigate in the Border Zone depending on the constrains and the point of access in place (Fig. 3).

The theoretical problem become then, under what conditions this crossing border phenomenon become possible? What are the circumstances for this to occur?

As mentioned above, one of the condition is the permeability of the borders. Nevertheless, this would be enough for a basic understanding of the Border Zone as a space of transit. My proposal instead, is an advanced conceptualization of the Border Zone as a *Membrane* (in analogy with biology) where novelty emerge and new “formations” can be built. Here the notion of *temporary building channel process*

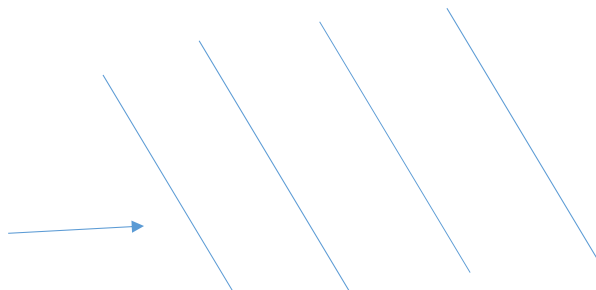


Fig. 2 Rigidity of the borders

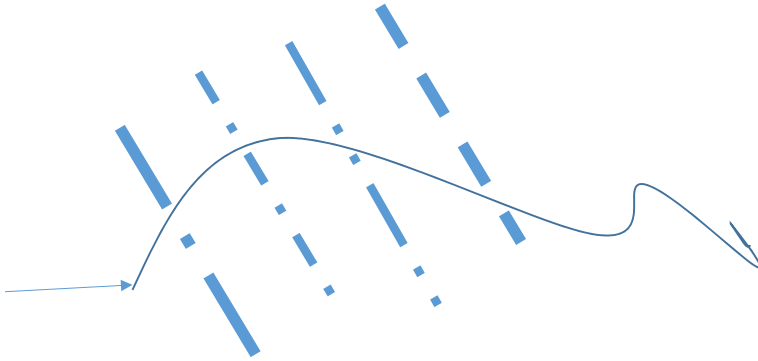


Fig. 3 Permeability of the borders

(Fig. 4) come into place and become the crucial mechanism through which people make meaning to the surrounding.

These channels are the locations for temporary solutions to a wide range of challenges that human being has to deal with or they can be more durable and serve a larger horizon of purposeful oriented actions. In any case they are dynamic semiotic tools that can bloom, be used and then dismissed (and eventually replaced in different forms) in our social and psychological life (Marsico 2018b; De Luca Picione and Valsiner 2017).

The school system (especially in case of a multicultural social setting) is the perfect example of this multiple borders at work where the progressive crossing process is in place. School, in fact, is a social membrane characterized by a semi-permeability and by a set of psychical (the entrance, the corridors, forbidden spaces, space with limited accessibility etc.) and symbolic borders (i.e. the official language, the rules, the social expectation, the regulations, the exams etc.). In this membrane-like situation, every student needs to find a way to cross the borders and it implies at least three passages: a) approaching them; b) finding the point of access; c) building temporary channel to

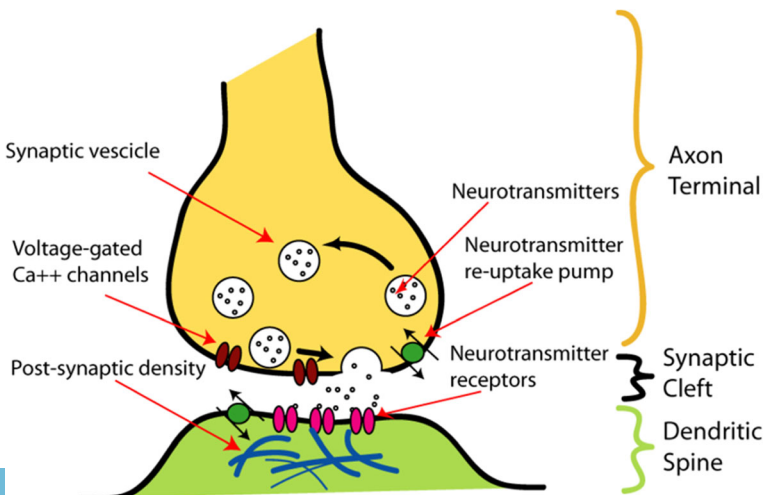


Fig. 4 The membrane-synaptic cleft

move on that can be eventually destroyed and rebuilt in a different form along the path. All of these passages are semiotic in their nature since they requires a meaning-making process and they are intentional and relating with the anticipated futures (Marsico and Valsiner 2018). The *variability amplification*, in Maruyama words (1963) is here in place: each student creates her personal crossing borders path by bulding temporary channel on the basis of her socio-cultural background and imagined future. This accounts for the extraordinary human diversity in the same social setting which is usually denied or intentionally discharged in the current educational scenario (Dorsch 2018). A microgenetic analysis of temporary building channel process by migrant students or students with different background could illuminate the variety of personal solutions and the syncretic knowledge (Tateo and Marsico 2018) produced by actors in a multicultural and highly diverse setting. Rethinking the school as a social membrane would offer new insights to conceptualize the notion of integration in a way that contemplate distinctions and relations as complementary assets of the same complex system.

The Second Challenge: Values and Schooling

Schooling is not value free. Never!

Educational system are purposefully oriented towards the instantiation of the values of a specific cultural context by crafting an institutionalized setting that strictly guides the way in which people become members of that environment (Tateo 2015).

As some of the contributors of this special issue (Birkeland and Ødemotland 2018; Tateo 2018) have pointed out, values in education should be investigated as dilemmatic fields and products of collective activity, rather than emanating from abstract universals.

While the scholars in developmental and educational psychology generally agree upon the relevance of the values in the ontogenesis of the human species, this topic is often disregarded in the current academic debate or, if considered, it has been treated from a cross-cultural perspective that overlooks the endogenous process of value education and the local specificities (Branco and Valsiner 2012).

Why the value's issue went through such a kind of scientific underestimation? Probably because it calls for a definition of the horizon of human development and urges an answer to the question of "What we are educating for?" (Branco and Lopes-de-Oliveira 2018; Valsiner et al. 2018). Thus, the never solved educational dilemma is the tension between guiding and following the human development (Tateo 2018). This becomes terrific important if we consider the global impact of the outcome hierarchies created by PISA that have pushed many school systems into being tightly focused and regulated. As some of the authors in this special issues argued, the impact of testing systems resulted in teaching becoming more focused around externally determined, specific success criteria (Szulevicz 2018; Boll 2018). The foundations for teaching and learning become distorted and driven by a deterministic output regulated system, which is a detriment of the full development of the children's lives and learning (Li and Xu 2018; Chemi 2018; Matthiesen 2018). Also, the value's issue dramatically shows the poorness of the scientific reductionism which permeates the contemporary academic world, almost incapable of an holistic perspective on the human being and his

psychological functioning (Valsiner et al. 2016) which, instead, is the very core of the cultural psychology perspective. Educational contexts are the human arena for starting to detect the *values in action*, how they frame our cultural ecology and our life development. Any discourse about values in the human development and educational practices evokes, then, the *phantasm* of who is the “Men” of the future, what kind of human being we are promoting.

The Third Challenge: Practice or Theory?

All the authors of this special issue dived, in a way or another, in the tumults water of the Educational Psychology polluted by different social demands in our globalized society. As we have discussed so far, this discipline has been asked to provide ready-made solutions of many different problems: from the inclusive education to the disruptive behaviour and lack of school discipline, from the increased competition between national educational systems to the reduced student learning outcome in the progressively outcome-based school system (Szulevicz and Tanggaard 2017), from the socially disadvantaged children to the new highly complex tasks in the modern workplaces, from the standardized testing to the need of cultivating creativity (Chemi 2018).

Very often, these social demands are formulated in terms of individual problems: something is wrong/strange/weird with the student’s traits, characteristics and abilities. The usual and pressing request from the school is of a resolute and decontextualized intervention on the single problematic case minimizing, as much as possible, the interference with the regular school activity. Educational psychologists do not have any magic power and even if it is apparently alluring and caress our professional or academic narcissism, the side effect of these requests is too risky and ends up to flatten or, even worse, collapse educational psychology in a patchwork of small interventions.

Educational psychology is not a *patchwork* of practices, but, instead, is an *artwork* where theoretical knowledge, methodological instances and culturally situated meaningful interventions (in a specific educational context) are indissolubly interwoven (Marsico et al. 2015). Thus, educational psychology deals with both practice and theory where practices are not just a matter of actions, but they encapsulate theory while theory illuminates the course of the actions and provides the general framework for understanding the human conduct (Jensen de López 2018; Boulanger 2018).

By analysing the concrete and situated educational intervention in a specific setting (from Chinese to the Scandinavian one, from Central Europe to North America, as in this special issue), we can learn a lot of what is the value-driven “philosophy” behind, what the established power relation between social actors is and, even, what ultimate idea of growing people, education and citizenship is promoted. Educational psychology is in crisis. No doubt! It loses its own “horizon” that is ultimately about the way in which we *become human* (Dazzani 2016) turning into a variety of small interventions subservient of this or that new trend, new request, new emerging problem. What we need is a new utopia instead of the current myopia of the educational practices. Cultural psychology of education calls for both the situatedness of the human experience and the theoretical generalizations of the teleogenetic nature of the *psyche* (Marsico 2017; Marsico and Valsiner 2018; Valsiner 2014).

The New Agenda for the Education of the Future

The international workshop held at the Centre for Cultural Psychology (Aalborg University, Denmark) at the end of January 2017, has been very productive. It promoted not only a vivid discussion that fed the papers presented in this special issue, but also a short term visit in Shanghai (East China Normal University) of some of us for discussing the new educational practices in the Chinese kindergartens and primary schools. This scientific cooperation led to establish the *International Centre of Excellence on Innovative Learning, Teaching Environments and Practices “IBEF- Ideas for the Basic Education of the Future”*.

IBEF is the utopia that comes through and is a milestone of the international programme promoted within the framework of Cultural Psychology of Education. This International Centre of Excellence is located at East China Normal University (Shanghai, China), that coordinates a large network of Universities all over the world¹ (Aalborg University, DK; University of Salerno, Italy; Federal University of Bahia, Brazil and Luxembourg University among the others).²

IBEF builds upon already existing national and international excellence and joins researchers in the field of Cultural Psychology of Education. It is a high visibility collaboration that seeks to have an international impact on research and society. The Centre of Excellence “Ideas for the Basic Education of the Future “on Innovative Learning, Teaching Environments and Practices, aims at looking beyond the current trends in basic education and at identifying the most innovative and edge ideas, to study and understand how to implement them on the long-term. The Centre studies and disseminates innovative learning and teaching environments and practices for the future.

The Axes: Global Locality

As the papers presented in this special issue have greatly discussed, educational issues belong to the grand societal challenges that the entire world are facing today. Societal developments have an effect on the daily lives of families, children and adolescents as well as on schools and local communities. Migration and increasing diversity in society put new issues on the agenda for education. How well early childhood education and care, schools and education in general are able to respond to these challenges has an enormous impact on social cohesion and economic development. To address these complex issues, there is a need for knowledge of how teaching and learning practices can be developed in innovative ways and in new learning environments. The false “Myth” circulating in the field of Education is that some cultural or geographical areas

¹ The International Centre of Excellence is coordinated by an international scientific board:

Professor Xiao-Wen Li (<http://faculty.ecnu.edu.cn/s/683/t/7439/main.jspy>);

Professor He Min (<http://faculty.ecnu.edu.cn/s/523/t/5519/main.jspy>);

Professor Jaan Valsiner (<http://personprofil.aau.dk/130747>);

Professor Giuseppina (Pina) Marsico (<http://docenti.unisa.it/023114/home>);

Professor Luca Tateo, (<http://personprofil.aau.dk/130534>).

² Each partner university has a dedicate website of IBEF through which one can reach all the other partners. Here the website of the University of Salerno, Italy; <https://sites.google.com/unisa.it/gris/ibef>. Visit the website to learn more about mission, activities and partnership

are more developed in teaching/learning practices. Such areas usually correspond to the most wealthy nations. For example, Finland has been regarded for years, as one of the most successful education systems globally. Only far Eastern countries such as Singapore and China outperform the Nordic nation in the influential Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) rankings. Factors that has been used to explain the success of the Finnish educational system includes (but is not limited to): single-minded focus on teaching excellence, collective school responsibility for helping learners that struggle, a climate of trust between educators and community, it recognizes the huge importance of early childhood education, it gives local schools the autonomy to address local needs by decentralizing administration, it guarantees a uniform and free (including meals, transportation and school materials) education for all students. As a result, Finnish students score is higher than most of their peers on international assessment tests. One might say that Finland has succeeded in taking out the potential of the traditional school system or paradigm to a great extent, which it should be commended for. However, despite the success Finland has embarked on one of the most radical education reform programs ever undertaken by a nation state. In this latest educational reform to keep improving the curriculum and making its pupils more equipped to succeed in the modern world, Finland has rethought the concept of a subject for its basic schools. This does not differ that much to all the concerns that Li and Xu (2018) and He (2018) have pointed out in this special issue regarding collectivism vs individualism in the new educational interventions in Chinese school system.

Innovation, then, can spring from anywhere and requires to be adequately cultivated, not only economically but also in terms of cultural ground and collective efforts. Therefore, in Cultural Psychology perspective the education of the future must be regarded global in its vision yet local in its solutions. Thus, one of the axis of the Centre of Excellence is to promote actions to foster a visionary education for the future that consider local solutions to global challenges. Through a set of concrete actions (like analysing schools of excellence worldwide, defining best practices, co-designing, scaffolding and implementing innovative activities within the associated partners) the Centre of Excellence IBEF tries to offers answers to the three challenges I addressed above. *Diversity in Focus*, *Values in Action* and *Theory in Practice* are the pillars for the future of education worldwide that the Center of Excellence is pursuing.

Acknowledgements I want to express my gratitude to Jaan Valsiner, Xiao-Wen Li, He Min and Luca Tateo for the enthusiasm and the great work we have done in establishing the International Centre of Excellence on Innovative Learning, Teaching Environments and Practices (IBEF). We are being greatly supported by André Melzer and Isabel Albert (University of Luxembourg) and by Virginia Dazzani (Federal University of Salvador da Bahia, Brazil). Science should not be confined in the national or disciplinary borders. IBEF is a promising example of this crossing border action in science we want to promote.

References

- Albert, I., & Barros Coimbra, S. (2017). Family cultures in the context of migration and ageing. *Integrative Psychological and Behavioral Science*, 55, 205–222.
- Albert, I., & Ferring, D. (Eds.). (2013). *Intergenerational relations: European perspectives on family and society*. Bristol: The Policy Press.

- Birkeland, Å., & Ødemotland, S. (2018). Disorienting dilemmas - the significance of resistance and disturbance in an intercultural program within kindergarten teacher education. *Integrative Psychological and Behavioral Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12124-018-9433-y>.
- Boll, T. (2018). Psychologists and neoliberal school reforms: Multi-faceted problems calling for multi-faceted interventions. *Integrative Psychology and Behavioural Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12124-018-9419-9>.
- Boulanger, D. (2018). Continuity of learning in discontinuous Conditions: Children experience of transition in irreversible time. *Integrative Psychology and Behavioural Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12124-018-9430-1>.
- Branco, A. U., & Lopes-de-Oliveira, M. C. (Eds.). (2018). *Human development within educational contexts - alterity, values and socialization*. *Cultural Psychology of Education*, 6. Cham: Springer.
- Branco, A. U., & Valsiner, J. (2012). *Values as culture in self and society*. In A. U. Branco & J. Valsiner (Eds.), *Cultural psychology of values* (pp. vii–xviii). Charlotte: InfoAge Publishing.
- Bruner, J. S. (1960). *The process of education*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Bruner, J. S. (2007). Cultivating the possible, address at Oxford dedication, Jerome BrunerBuilding. <http://www.education.ox.ac.uk/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/Transcript-Cultivating-the-Possible.pdf>
- Chemi, T. (2018). Critical places beyond the psychology of well-being and competitiveness. *Integrative Psychological & Behavioral Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12124-018-9435-9>.
- Chiu, M. M., Pong, S. L., Mori, I., & Chow, B. W. (2012). Immigrant students' emotional and cognitive engagement at school: A multilevel analysis of students in 41 countries. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 41, 1409–1425. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-012-9763-x>.
- Dazzani, V. (2016). Education: The process of becoming. In J. Valsiner, G. Marsico, N. Chaudhary, T. Sato, & V. Dazzani (Eds.), *Psychology as a science of human being: The Yokohama Manifesto, annals of theoretical psychology*, 13 (pp. 337–348). Geneva: Springer.
- De Luca Picione, R., & Valsiner, J. (2017). Psychological functions of semiotic Borders in sense-making. *Europe's Journal of Psychology*, 13(3), 532–547. <https://doi.org/10.5964/ejop.v13i3.1136>.
- de Sousa Bastos, A. C., & Barros Filho, D. (2015). Learning at the family–school boundary: When new roles and identities are created. In G. Marsico, V. Dazzani, M. Ristum, & A. C. Bastos (Eds.), *Educational contexts and borders through a cultural lens – Looking inside. Viewing outside. Cultural psychology of education*, 1 (pp. 295–308). Cham: Springer.
- Dorsch, H. (2018). The issue of schooling....or How to tame a horse. *Integrative Psychological and Behavioural Sciences*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12124-018-9437-7>.
- Fanøe E. S., Marsico, G. (2018). Identity and belonging in third culture kids: Alterity and values in focus. In A.U. Branco and M.C. Oliveira (Eds). *Alterity, values and socialization. Human development within educational contexts, cultural psychology of education*, 6 (pp. 87–102). Cham: Springer.
- Fleer, M., & van Oers, B. (Eds.). (2018). *International handbook of early childhood education*. Cham: Springer.
- Guimarães, D. S. (2017). Amerindian psychology: Cultural basis for general knowledge construction. In B. Wagoner, I. Bresco, & S. H. Awad (Eds.), *The psychology of imagination: History, theory and new research horizons* (pp. 221–238). Charlotte: Information Age Publishing.
- He, M. (2018). Creating play atmosphere and time for children in Chinese kindergarten: Difficulties and reflection. *Integrative psychological and behavioural Sciences*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12124-018-9445-7>.
- Jensen de López, K. (2018). Situating culturally embodied play ecologies of preschool Children: Lost in Transition. *Integrative Psychological and Behavioural Sciences*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12124-018-9439-5>.
- Li, X. W., & Xu, S. S. (2018). Developmental Psychology research based on educational practice in China. *Integrative Psychological and Behavioural Sciences*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12124-018-9438-6>.
- Marsico, G. (2015a). Striving for the new: Cultural psychology as a developmental science. *Culture & Psychology*, 21(4), 445–454. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354067X15623020>.
- Marsico, G. (Ed.). (2015b). *Jerome S. Bruner beyond 100. Cultivating possibilities, Cultural psychology of education*, 2. Cham: Springer.
- Marsico, G. (2016). The Borderland. *Culture & Psychology*, 22(2), 206–215. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354067X15601199>.
- Marsico, G. (2017). Jerome S. Bruner: Manifesto for the future of education. *Infancia y Aprendizaje, Journal for the Study of Education and Development*, 40(4), 754–781. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02103702.2017.1367597>.
- Marsico, G. (2018a). Development and education as crossing socio-cultural boundaries. In A. Rosa & J. Valsiner (Eds.), *The Cambridge handbook of sociocultural psychology* (2nd ed., pp. 302–316). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Marsico, G. (2018b). Psyche as a cultural membrane. In G. Marsico & J. Valsiner (Eds.), *Beyond the Mind: Cultural dynamics of the psyche* (pp. 537–544). Charlotte: Information Age Publishing.
- Marsico, G., & Tateo, L. (2018). *The emergence of self in the educational contexts, Cultural psychology of education, 8*. Cham: Springer.
- Marsico, G., & Valsiner, J. (2018). *Beyond the Mind: Cultural Dynamics of the Psyche*. Charlotte: Information Age Publishing.
- Marsico, G., Dazzani, V., Ristum, M., & de Sousa Bastos, A. C. (Eds.). (2015). *Educational contexts and Borders through a cultural Lens: Looking inside, viewing outside*. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Maruyama, M. (1963). The second cybernetics: Deviation amplifying mutual causal processes. *American Scientist, 51*, 164–179.
- Matthiesen, N. (2018). Control and responsibility: Taking a closer look at the work of ensuring well-being in Neoliberal Schools. *Integrative Psychology and Behavioral Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12124-018-9418-x>.
- Meijers, F., & Hermans, H. (2017). *The dialogical self theory in education: A multicultural perspective, Cultural psychology of education, 5*. Cham: Springer.
- Sovran, T. (1992). Between similarity and sameness. *Journal of Pragmatics, 18*(4), 329–344.
- Suárez-Orozco, C., Suárez-Orozco, M. M., & Todorova, I. (2010). *Learning a new land, immigrant students in American society*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Szulewicz, T. (2018). Psychologists in (Neoliberal) schools – What kind of marriage? *Integrative Psychology and Behavioral Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12124-018-9444-8>.
- Szulewicz, T., & Tanggaard, L. (2017). *Educational psychology practice. A new theoretical framework, Cultural psychology of education, 4*. Cham: Springer.
- Szulewicz, T., May, E. R., Marsico, G., & Valsiner, J. (2016). When disruptive behaviour meets outcome-based education. *Psihologija, 49*(4), 447–468. <https://doi.org/10.2298/PSI1604447S>.
- Tateo, L. (2015). Continuity and discontinuity of the educational context: Early leavers' in-between life stories. In G. Marsico, V. Dazzani, M. Ristum, & A. C. de Souza Bastos (Eds.), *Educational contexts and Borders through a cultural Lens* (pp. 29–52). New York: Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-18765-5_3.
- Tateo, L. (2018). Education as a dilemmatic field. *Integrative Psychological & Behavioral Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12124-018-9429-7>.
- Tateo, L., & Marsico, G. (2018). The synthetic and syncretic nature of human culture. *Human Arenas, 1*(1), 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42087-018-0004-z>.
- Valsiner, J. (2014). *An invitation to cultural psychology*. London: Sage.
- Valsiner, J. (2015). The purpose of purpose. In G. Marsico (Ed.), *Jerome S. Bruner beyond 100. Cultivating possibilities. Cultural Psychology of Education, 2* (pp. 3–17). Cham: Springer.
- Valsiner, J., Lutsenko, A., Antoniouk, A., (Eds.). (2018). *Sustainable cation: Cultivating knowledge makers. Cultural psychology of education, 7*, Cham: Springer.
- Valsiner, J., Marsico, G., Chaudhary, N., Sato, T., & Dazzani, V. (Eds.). (2016). *Psychology as a science of human being: the Yokohama manifesto. Vol 13 in Annals of Theoretical Psychology*. New York: Springer.
- Vygotsky, L.S. (1933/1984). Krizis semi let. In: L.S. Vygotsky (ed), *Sobranie sochinenii*. Vol. 4. Detskaia psikhologija (pp. 376–385). Moscow: Pedagogika.

Giuseppina Marsico is Assistant Professor of Development and Educational Psychology at the University of Salerno (Italy), Affiliated Reasercher at Centre for Cultural Psychology, Aalborg University (Denmark), Visiting Professor at Ph.D Programme in Psychology, Federal University of Bahia, (Brazil) and Honorary Associate Professor in School of Psychology University of Sideny (Australia). She is a 18 years experienced researcher, with a proven international research network. She is Editor-in-chief of the Book Series Cultural Psychology of Education (Springer), Latin American Voices - Integrative Psychology and Humanities (Springer), co-editor of SpringerBriefs Psychology and Cultural Developmental Sciences (together with Jaan Valsiner) and Annals of Cultural Psychology: Exploring the Frontiers of Mind and Society (InfoAge Publishing, N.C., USA, together with Carlos Conejo e Jaan Valsiner). She is also co-editor of Human Arenas. An Interdisciplinary Journal of Psychology, Culture and Meaning (Springer), Associate Editor of Cultural & Psychology Journal (Sage), Social Psychology of Education (Springer), and member of the editorial board of several international academic journals, (i.e. IPBS- Integrative Psychological & Behavioral Science, Springer). E-mail: pina.marsico@gmail.com; gmarsico@unisa.it

Affiliations

Giuseppina Marsico^{1,2,3,4}

✉ Giuseppina Marsico
pina.marsico@gmail.com; gmarsico@unisa.it¹ Department of Human, Philosophical and Educational Sciences (DISUFF), University of Salerno, via Giovanni Paolo II, 84098 Fisciano Salerno, Italy

² Centre for Cultural Psychology, Aalborg, Denmark

³ Federal University of Bahia, Salvador, Brazil

⁴ IBEF- International Centre of Excellence on Innovative Learning, Teaching Environments and Practices, ECNU, Shanghai, China

Integrative Psychological & Behavioral Science is a copyright of Springer, 2018. All Rights Reserved.