

Angela Uchoa Branco
Maria Cláudia Lopes-de-Oliveira
Editors

Alterity, Values, and Socialization

Human Development Within Educational
Contexts

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Foreword

Relative Symmetries in Dialogical Relations: A Necessary Fiction

It is nice to be in a dialogue—when your perspective upon what the dialogue is about is safely in a dominant role, which is to be maintained. If it is not—you are likely to want to move it to such place. The classic example used by Ragnar Rommetveit (“Mr. Smith”) illustrates such moves. At the manifest content level, the observation is clear—a certain “Mr. Smith” is mowing the grass in his garden on a Saturday morning. Yet this ongoing event acquires quite opposite meanings for a certain Mrs. Smith—the wife of Mr. Smith—who is getting telephone calls from her friends:

A neighbour prying into the miserable marital relations of the Smiths may even tell us that he “sees” Mr. Smith AVOID THE COMPANY OF HIS WIFE. And this may indeed also be the way in which Mrs. Smith, left alone in the kitchen with the morning coffee in front of her, makes sense of what is going on.

This, let us assume, is also the gist of what she is muttering to herself as she is sitting there, feeling angry at her husband and sorry for herself. We hear her say: “He is once more avoiding a confront...”. At this moment her bitter voice is drowned by the sound of the telephone, and she picks up the receiver. It is her friend Betty who is calling, and Betty initiates her chat by asking “That lazy husband of yours, is he still in bed?” To which Mrs. Smith answers: “No”,

Mr. Smith is WORKING this morning, he is mowing the lawn.

A short time afterwards Mrs. Smith receives another call, this time from Mr. Jones, who, she tacitly takes for granted, as usually when he calls, wants to find out whether Mr. Smith is free to go fishing with him. He asks: “Is your husband working this morning?”. And Mrs. Smith answers “No”,

Mr. Smith is NOT WORKING this morning, he is mowing the lawn.

Mrs. Smith is on both these occasions telling the truth, and in everyday ordinary English. (Rommetveit, 1992, p. 26)

This classic example of relativity of meanings is used widely in socio-cognitive language analyses to demonstrate how the meaning of the same event can cardinally

change over very short time frame, depending on the assumptions of the intentions of the other by the person who is making the meanings. Yet it can also be seen as an example of negotiation of the position of the self in dialogical relations. Mrs. Smith's dialogical power position—that of knower about Mr. Smith and his current activity—is *maintained as the same* ["I know and I tell you X (or non-X)"] despite the use of diametrically opposite meanings in the two conversations. Fluctuations of meanings can occur in rapid sequence without changing the dialogical power relations. Actual possibilities—the true relativity of a dialogue—need to be distinguished from the façade of such relativity in the manifest event.

Efforts to produce a change into an ongoing dialogical relation may need forms of dramatization to accomplish that. Children learn to dramatize their meaningful quests in social settings. Fatima Mernissi remembers from her Moroccan childhood how the children handled the negotiation of the relative nonsymmetry in their dialogues at home:

We children were not usually allowed to go to the movies either, but we staged our own revolts, just like the women, and sometimes were finally granted permission. When I say "we," I mean Samir really, for I had a problem with screaming at grownups and showing my displeasure by jumping up and down like he did, or better still, rolling on the floor and kicking bystanders. Staging sedition was a tricky business and never stopped being so for me, if only because of Mother's strange attitude. Often she encouraged me to rebel, and kept repeating that relying on Samir to be aggressive for the both of us would not do. But whenever I threw myself on the floor and started screaming at her, she would stop me on the spot. *"I did not say you ought to rebel against me! You should rebel against all the others, but you still have to obey your mother. Otherwise, it would lead to chaos. And in any case, you should not rebel stupidly. You ought to carefully consider the situation, and analyze everything. Rebel when you know there is some chance you may win."* After that, I spent much energy analyzing my chances to win whenever it became evident that these people were taking advantage of me, but even today, almost a half-century later, the answers I come up with are always the same: inconclusive. (Mernissi, 1994, p. 117 added italics)

Dramatization entails creating an attention catching focal point in the given dialogical context. Dialogues are filled with dramas—from the temper-tantrum of a toddler in the middle of a supermarket to the daily declarations of loyalty to the country—or from watching an opera in the theater to joining the theater of war as an enthusiastic soldier. Relativity of the dialogical positioning is in the service of some kind of monologically "fixed" knowledge or power position.

Our educational practices have encoded the relativity of dialogical positions into their "toolbox". The real educational practice includes the combination of both of these conditions—persons in dialogue are structurally unequal partners (adult > child; teacher > learner) who in the process of the teaching<>learning encounter exchange roles in a dynamic sequence (Maciel, Branco, & Valsiner, 2004). Relativity of dialogue is first of all the readiness to alter one's positions with intentionality of changing something in the relations. The teacher pretends not to understand giving the leadership role in the teaching<>learning process to the inexperienced learner. The latter tries, and tries again, until the problem is solved by the learner or by the teacher regaining the dominant role in the process. Dialogues

are a form of dance of constant negotiation of the knower roles, and educators who master the dynamics of that dance in ways that look mutually equal are the most skillful leaders of the education process.

A move from absolute to relative symmetries notion for dialogical relations is the central feature of this volume and needs further theoretical elaboration. This can be accomplished via temporally emerging asymmetries or through intransitive structural setups. In this foreword, I briefly outline both options that exist in human educational practices worldwide.

Jaan Valsiner

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Preface of the Series Editor

Educating for What?

In Searching for New Coordinates for the Twenty-First Century Education

This book *Alterity, Values, and Socialization: Human Development Within Educational Contexts* written by Angela Uchoa Branco and Maria Cláudia Lopes-de-Oliveira witnesses the authors' commitment to unfold the complex topic of values in human development and educational practices. The volume covers a wide range of issues (from inclusion, to creativity, to migration, etc.) related to the management of education with respect to values and alterity in a multicultural society. It critically combines the dialogical approach in educational contexts with the sociogenesis of the human values in a cultural psychological perspective. Branco and Oliveira, in fact, propose an innovative look at the value developmental processes that account for the complexity of ontogenesis in highly culturally structured social setting as the school systems.

This book nicely complements the previous one in the Books series edited by Meijers and Hermans (2017) that is the first book in which the Dialogical Self Theory is applied to the field of education. More specifically, *Alterity, Values, and Socialization: Human Development Within Educational Contexts* focuses on the idea that values at school cannot be produced by authority but only by dialogue. It provides the readers with the theoretically and empirically foundations for understanding values in education as the products of collective activity, rather than emanating from abstract universals.

While scholars in the field of 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. The

cross-cultural value approach, indeed, focuses on inter-individual differences between contexts using culture as an independent variable. From this perspective, values are considered as given entities or fixed categories that can be studied or—even worse—“extracted” from individuals (Branco & Valsiner, 2012). This volume, instead, shows the process of emergence and dialogical construction of values and alterity *in interaction*.

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?”

As Tateo pointed out:

Educational institutions have the specific purpose of instantiating the system of values of a given cultural community by creating an environment that sets the acceptable range of developmental pathways, including the age steps and the transition processes that the individual can follow to become a legitimated member of the community. (2015, p. 32)

Thus, the never solved educational dilemma is the tension between guiding and following the human development.

This becomes of terrific importance 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. The impact of testing systems resulted in teaching becoming more focused on externally determined, specific success criteria. The foundations for teaching and learning become distorted and driven by a deterministic output regulated system, in detriment of the full development of children’s lives and learning.

By observing the current situation of educational contexts and the variety of social settings in which life unfolds, I notice the coexistence of antagonist tendencies: inclusion of larger sections of students, who were once excluded from education for historic reasons AND the pressure on competitiveness, productivity, and leadership competences; the development of student’s potentialities AND the standard homogenized teaching in schools; the openness toward “the different others” (as in the case of immigrants) as an opportunity for enriching people’s experience AND the fear that the local culture is threatened by this Alterity.

Any discourse about values in 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.

Also, the value’s issue dramatically shows the poorness of the scientific reductionism which permeates the contemporary academic world, almost incapable of a holistic perspective on the human being and his psychological functioning (Valsiner, Marsico, Chaudhary, Sato & Dazzani, 2016) which, instead, is the very core of the cultural psychology perspective.

After all, as Branco and Valsiner highlighted:

Values *are* culture, not *of* culture [...]. They guide our conduct, yet are ephemeral when we try to locate them. They are everywhere in human lives, and by being there, they are nowhere to be found (2012, p. xiii).

Educational contexts are the human arena for starting to detect *values in action*, how they frame our cultural ecology and our life development. Branco and Oliveira will gently guide the readers in exploring values, alterity, dialogicality and culture as possible coordinates for a renewed culture of education in the twenty first century.

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Giuseppina Marsico

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