

The Dialogic Turn in Educational Psychology

El giro dialógico en la Psicología de la Educación

Sandra Racionero* and María Padrós**

*University of Wisconsin-Madison, **Universitat de Barcelona

Abstract: The increasing presence of and claim for dialogue in today's society has already had an impact on the theory and practice of learning. Whereas in the past individual and cognitive elements were seen as crucial to learning, since about two decades ago, scientific literature indicates that culture, interaction and dialogue are the key factors. In addition, the research project of highest scientific rank and with most resources dedicated to the study of school education in the Framework Program of the European Union: INCLUD-ED shows that the practices of successful schools around Europe are in line with the dialogic approach to learning. This article presents the *dialogic turn* in educational psychology, consisting of moving from symbolic conceptions of mind and internalist perspectives that focus on mental schemata of previous knowledge, to theories that see intersubjectivity and communication as the primary factors in learning. The paper deepens on the second approach.

Keywords: dialogic turn, interaction, dialogue, learning, successful educational actions.

Resumen: La presencia creciente del diálogo en la actual sociedad y su demanda ya han impactado la teoría y la práctica del aprendizaje. Mientras que en el pasado los elementos individuales y cognitivos se consideraban cruciales para el aprendizaje, desde hace alrededor de dos décadas la literatura científica indica que la cultura, la interacción y el diálogo son los factores clave. Además, el proyecto de investigación de más rango científico y con los mayores recursos dedicados al estudio de la educación escolar en el Programa Marco de la Unión Europea: INCLUD-ED, muestra que las prácticas de las escuelas de éxito en Europa están en la línea del enfoque dialógico del aprendizaje. Este artículo presenta el *giro dialógico* en psicología de la educación, que consiste en pasar de concepciones simbólicas de la mente y perspectivas internalistas centradas en esquemas mentales de conocimiento previo a teorías que ven la intersubjetividad y la comunicación como los principales factores en el aprendizaje. El artículo profundiza en la segunda perspectiva.

Palabras clave: giro dialógico, interacción, diálogo, aprendizaje, actuaciones educativas de éxito.

Correspondence: Sandra Racionero Plaza. CREA - Centre of Research in Theories and Practices that Overcome Inequalities. Parc Científic de Barcelona. Edifici Florensa. Adolf Florensa, 8, 08028, Barcelona, Spain (racioneropl@wisc.edu)

DIALOGIC SOCIETIES

One key characteristic of twenty-first century society is the greater presence of and valuing of dialogue in people's interactions with one another and with institutions (Flecha, Gómez, & Puigvert, 2003). Thus, today, when people want to engage in dialogue but sometimes find that power is imposed instead; violence, either symbolic or physical, is more likely to emerge (Giddens, 1994). This turn toward dialogue (Aubert & Soler, 2008) does not mean that the power relations in everyday life have disappeared, along with the structural inequalities. In fact, the information society and the neo-liberal economy have created new inequalities. However, as society experiences new cultural exchanges, developments, and patterns, as well as new values and social norms, people increasingly claim the right to dialogue, and it becomes a larger part of their reality.

The dialogic turn is occurring at many levels: personal, institutional, and political (CREA, 2003-2005, 2006-2008) and is related to an increase in life chances. The fact that people have more life opportunities increases reflexivity, because the components of tradition that used to provide people with communal bonds and sets of beliefs within the industrial society have begun to shake (Beck, 1992). In this «reflexive modernization» (Beck, Giddens, & Lash, 1994) people continuously question those old traditions, the old power relationships, norms and authorities that were created in and for the traditional modernity and debate them in public. This leads to a process of «detraditionalization» (Giddens, 1992; Heelas, Lash, & Morris, 1996).

People must now negotiate their relationships in multiple social areas, including politics, family, and work, in order to create their own lifestyle and biography. The arguments given by fathers, teachers and doctors are no longer simply assumed to be true and valid because of the speaker's social or academic status; instead, these same figures must now offer more arguments to justify their actions and opinions. As Habermas (1987) puts it, traditional authorities now have to use the force of arguments and not impose arguments by means of force. Another force driving this change is what Beck et al. (1994) call the «demonopolization of expert knowledge». Now, most citizens do not depend on the expertise of professionals to learn something about their illness or about how their children learn to read. They can browse the Internet and gain access to the latest medical treatments and best reading programs. Although new abilities are required to process the enormous amount of information available on the Internet, knowledge is no longer the monopoly of a few.

Overall, this greater search for and presence of dialogue makes social life in the information society very different from life in the industrial age. The traditional modernity of the industrial society was based on instrumental

rationality, science, and the creation of rights and norms, but in the information society we can see a dialogic modernity emerging; its basic rationality is grounded in dialogue or communicative rationality (Habermas, 1987), which enhances consensus among all subjects.

This dialogic move in society has reached the social sciences, in both theory and research. Among social science researchers, more democratic forms of knowledge building have developed that give a major presence to social actors; there is also more equity between researchers and research participants. In addition, current research policies are moving in new directions to make research respond to the real needs of society. Along these lines, the new guidelines proposed by the European Commission (EC) for the 6th and 7th Framework Programs stress the need to find ways that civil society can participate in defining and developing research policies.

In addition, theories in many disciplines—including sociology, anthropology, philosophy, linguistics, women's studies, psychology, and education—are also undergoing a dialogic turn, emphasizing the dialogic nature of social processes. In general, in all these fields the focus is placed on intersubjectivity and dialogue as key elements to explain our actions and institutions, and our possibilities for living together in a plural world (Beck, 1995; Habermas, 2000; Touraine, 1997). The theory of communicative action developed by Habermas (1984, 1987) is the most relevant in analyzing contemporary society from the perspective of communication. His theory has provided important concepts and analyses for the social sciences as a whole. Elster (1998) also describes a revival of the study of dialogue in relation to democracy. In the field of women's studies, the dialogic turn has driven the development of dialogic feminism (Beck-Gernsheim, Butler, & Puigvert, 2003), which incorporates the voices of all women in developing feminist claims and knowledge, and actions to gain gender equity. In the sociology of education, the dialogic turn overcomes the reproduction model by taking both systems and agents into account in the analysis of education (Flecha, in press).

The dialogic shift has even reached the fields of evolutionary anthropology and psychology, where in the last 30 years a growing body of research has focused on the cultural origins of human cognition (Tomasello, 1999). This research has provided evidence that the mind is dialogic, demonstrating, for example, the existence of «dialogic cognitive representations» (Tomasello, Carpenter, Call, Behne, & Moll, 2005) that arise early in the second year of life and that humans need to support certain forms of collaborative interactions and to create and use cultural artefacts that are socially constituted and bidirectional. These substantial studies focus on issues of shared intentionality, intersubjectivity, and dialogue as unique features of the human mind. The same idea of the dialogic nature of human beings was already pointed out by G.H. Mead (1934) in his conceptualization of the «dia-

logic self», and in the 1970s by Paulo Freire (2003) whose theory of dialogic action analyzed dialogism as inherent in human nature, and essential for democracy.

DIFFERENT LEARNING APPROACHES FOR DIFFERENT SOCIETIES

Teaching and learning, as it happens today in classrooms, schools and other spaces, cannot be understood apart from dialogue either, so learning conceptions have also expanded in response to the dialogic turn. Overall, conceptions of learning have evolved throughout history, influenced by particular ways of understanding social reality and knowledge. The dialogic turn in education corresponds to a move from the constructivist to the communicative view of reality and learning; it is occurring in the context of the shift from the industrial society to the information society. To explain the overall frame and implications of the dialogic turn in education, we now review the most important conceptions of learning and their underlying assumptions.

Table 1 summarises the main learning conceptions of the past few decades: the objectivist, the constructivist, and the communicative. Each implies a particular understanding of the way that learning occurs, and also of the relevant actors in the learning process, who should be trained in order to promote learning, which disciplines are involved in such understanding of learning, their didactic implications, and consequences for students' learning.

As the table shows, the objectivist and constructivist conceptions of learning were developed in and for the industrial society. The objectivist conception of learning was based on structuralist or systemic perspectives of social reality, in which reality is external and independent from the subject. Those holding this perspective believe it is possible to know reality externally, so learning was seen to occur as an expert transmitted knowledge to a novice, without much need for the learner to engage more actively in the process. Then, in a later period of the industrial society, what predominated was a subjectivist perspective in which social reality was a human construction based on meanings that have a subjective cognitive origin; from this approach evolved the idea of constructivism. For constructivists, learning is a cognitive process in which the individual connects new knowledge with prior knowledge and, in so doing, constructs new meanings about the world. It is important to point out that various versions of constructivism have been developed, applying the constructivist principle in different ways.

More recently, social realities are being analysed and explained under dual perspectives that take into account both systems and subjects (Flecha, Gómez, & Puigvert, 2003) and which see communicative processes as the

Table 1

Conceptions of social reality and associated approaches

Society	Industrial Society	Industrial Society	Information Society
LEARNING CONCEPTION	<i>Objectivist</i>	<i>Constructivist</i>	<i>Communicative</i>
SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE	Structuralist/ Systemic	Subjectivist	Dual (communicative)
Conceptualization of social reality	Reality is independent from the individuals who know and use it.	Reality is a social construction that depends on the meanings that people give to it.	Reality is a human construction; meanings are constructed in human interaction.
Conceptualization of learning	<i>Traditional teaching</i> Learning occurs as teachers transmit knowledge to student/s.	<i>Meaningful learning</i> Learning results from connecting new knowledge with prior knowledge available in mental schemata.	<i>Dialogic learning</i> Learning results from communicative interaction between the learner and all people with whom she/he interacts: peers, teachers, relatives, friends, and others.
Key agent	Teachers	Students	All people from the students' community
Training	For teachers On the content to teach and teaching methodologies.	For teachers On knowledge about the actors' learning process and their way of constructing meaning.	For teachers, relatives and community members On knowledge about the learning processes of individuals and groups through the interactive construction of meanings.
Disciplinary approach	Pedagogical	Psychological	Interdisciplinary: educational, psychological, sociological and epistemological.
Didactic implications	Development of best ways to transmit knowledge.	Importance of exploring every student's prior knowledge and then adapting the curricula.	Designing/transforming learning environments to increase communicative interaction, including involving more and diverse adults.

Adapted from Aubert, Flecha, García, Flecha, & Racionero, 2009, p. 89.

vehicles people use to construct meanings about their social reality. The learning conception for the information society that corresponds to these dual perspectives is the communicative one. In this conception, learning depends on interactions with multiple others and dialogue is the most important tool for achieving consensus. Knowledge of reality does not exist a priori but evolves through dialogue that is oriented towards gaining understanding.

The dialogic turn in education is located in the move from the objectivist and subjectivist conceptualizations of learning to the communicative ones. In this move, the key to understanding what happens in terms of learning in classrooms, schools, homes, and other learning spaces resides in social interaction, in how the social context is organised, and in particular communicative interactions in those contexts. As the articles in this special issue demonstrates, the most successful types of education offered to children today take into account, and are based on, dialogue and interaction, and incorporate these elements as central in the teaching and learning process.

FROM SHCEMA TO INTERACTION: THE DIALOGIC TURN OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

Educational psychology, one of the educational sciences that is most influential in conceptualizing learning, has also undergone a dialogic turn, as the focus of analysis has shifted from intra-mental to inter-mental activity. Specifically, the prevailing view of learning in the last half-century was influenced by research on «symbolic thinking» or «information processing» (Anderson, 1993; Bruner, 1973; Chi, Feltovich, & Glaser, 1981; Pinker, 1997). According to these theories, knowledge and beliefs are organized as «schemata», mental structures that are composed of declarative and procedural knowledge. In this perspective, learning basically means finding the right schema for a problem and then, to produce a solution knowing how to use the facts and problem-solving rules and strategies that the schema contains. This symbolic approach to thinking and learning can be situated within the subjectivist perspective described above. It was greatly influenced by the «cognitive revolution» of the 1950s, and is still at the core of many descriptions of learning and school practices. Within this framework, the mission of schools is teaching students the facts, rules, and beliefs they will need in life, and how to apply them in the right situations. However, these theories did not account for other non-mental circumstances affecting learning, and therefore have not been always able to explain why many students are struggling with learning and achieving very little despite the educators' very well planned curricula. This failure, together with new learning scenarios, led the

field to a move from schemata to another perspective, based on community, interaction and dialogue.

Even authors who were initially involved in the «schemata perspective», such as Bruner (1973), have long since acknowledged the limitations of that approach, and are now working within the «situated», «community» and «cultural» frame (Bruner, 1996). Indeed, in his *The culture of education*, in a chapter entitled «psychology's next chapter», Bruner (1996, p. 200) stated that psychology had no future aside from the study of intersubjectivity. Responding to that challenge, in the last two decades, the learning sciences have increasingly emphasized the dialogic nature of human learning; something that is clear in the growing presence of issues of intersubjectivity, social interaction, cooperation, and dialogue in the literature on learning. We call this move the «dialogic turn in educational psychology»; it has opened up a new field of study within the learning sciences that is dedicated to the study of learning through interaction and dialogue.

Building upon the histórico-cultural psychology of Vygotsky (1978), this new field of inquiry is grounded in an understanding of learning as an activity that starts in social interaction and is, therefore, socially situated. Along these lines, research on «situated cognition» (Hutchins, 1995; Lave, 1988; Lave, Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1990; Wenger, 1998) has shown that no human activity, including learning, can be separated from the community where it takes place and which shapes it (Bruner, 1996; González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Rogoff, 1990; Rogoff, Goodman, Turkkanis, & Bartlett, 2001). This principle has given rise to studies about communities of practice (Wenger, 1998), communities of dialogic inquiry (Wells, 1999), communities of mutual learners (Bruner, 1996), communities of learners (Brown & Campione, 1996), and learning communities (Elboj, Puigdemívol, Soler, & Valls, 2002).

INTERACTION, DIALOGUE AND LEARNING

Importantly, in all the accounts above, communication and dialogue are the central tools both for sharing thinking and for later internalizing what has been created inter-psychologically (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1991, 1998; Wells, 1999; Wells & Mejía Arauz, 2006). Yet the idea that dialogue can promote learning is hardly new. Learning through argumentation has largely been related to Socratic dialogues (Benson, 2000). In the area of psychology, Vygotsky's (1978) histórico-cultural theory is the most important source for contemporary studies on interaction, dialogue and learning. Using Merton's (1965) metaphor, Vygotsky (1978) is the giant from whose shoulders has evolved the study of human cognition from a socio-cultural perspective.

Vygotsky established that the origin of cognition is social, and that therefore we must look at culture and social interactions to understand the mind and human behavior, including learning.

Mikhail Bakhtin (1986), a contemporary of Vygotsky, provided key ideas for the notion of dialogic learning. He emphasized that through *responsivity*, every utterance always responds to preceding utterances and is formulated in anticipation of a future response. His ideas about *dialogic imagination* in literary interpretation are today quite influential in literacy studies. In the 1970s, Paulo Freire (2003) developed a *theory of dialogic action* which stressed the role of dialogue for learning, critical consciousness, and emancipation. Some years later, the philosopher Jürgen Habermas (1984, 1987) published the *theory of communicative action* which also claimed that all human beings are capable of using language and engaging in dialogues oriented toward understanding and consensus.

Due to the importance of dialogue to learn, learning will be better and more effective if learners participate in activities that enable them to use language in a dialogic way, building knowledge about relevant topics (Mercer, 2000; Tharp, 1988; Wells, 2001). Within this area of research, some studies have focused on the nature of the curricular activity in which students engage (Edwards & Mercer, 1987; Mercer, 2000; Wells, 1999, 2001). In this regard, Wells (1999) has developed an approach to the curriculum based on inquiry: students engage in activities that focus on an «improvable object» that can be a material or a symbolic artefact. To develop such objects students have to engage in progressive dialogue that promotes inquiry and develops knowledge. Wells and Mejía Arauz (2006) have found that when students work on «improvable objects», talk becomes a site for exploration, giving them opportunities to voice their own ideas or comment on those of others. Methodologically, research conducted from this perspective mainly uses discourse analysis to identify the extent of students' inquiry of knowledge and understanding (Cazden, 2001; Mehan, 1979; Wells, 1999).

Other studies in the dialogic paradigm take a more contextual and interactionist approach to learning through dialogue (Aubert et al., 2009; Flecha, 2000; Freire, 2003), assuming that social and cultural factors are a constitutive part of social relations and therefore shape the form and effects of communication (Searle & Soler, 2004). Research within this approach focuses on the social and structural elements involved in communication, such as issues of participation, inequality, and culture, and how they affect communicative interactions and learning opportunities. That is the case of the theory of *dialogic learning* (Flecha, 2000), which points to socio-structural, cognitive, cultural, affective, normative, and value components as influencing opportunities for voice, for meaning making in communication, and for personal and social transformation.

THE THEORY OF DIALOGIC LEARNING

The dialogic learning approach has evolved through research into how people's learning improves through social interaction. Such research, grounded in the most important contributions about dialogue from various disciplines, has come to indicate that learners reach higher levels of learning and engage in processes of personal and social transformation when the interaction involves seven principles: egalitarian dialogue, cultural intelligence, transformation, an instrumental dimension, the creation of meaning, solidarity, and equality of differences.

Egalitarian dialogue. Not all dialogue leads to deep understanding. For that to occur, those involved must commit to reach agreement by means of holding *validity claims* (Habermas, 1987). This means that the arguments put forth by participants are evaluated not according to the speakers' status, expertise or power, but based on the validity of their reasoning.

Cultural intelligence. In line with works from cultural psychology (Cole, 1998; Scribner, 1984) and studies of everyday cognition (Rogoff & Lave, 1984), the principle of cultural intelligence states that all subjects develop communicative, academic, and practical abilities that they express in communicative contexts that carry cultural meaning. This principle also acknowledges that schools need the cultural intelligence of all groups in order to enhance learning.

Transformation. Dialogic learning seeks multiple transformations: of students' levels of prior knowledge, of existing knowledge and tools, of social relations, of learners themselves, and of their contexts of development. Taken together, these transformations are the driving force for learning (Vygotsky, 1978).

Instrumental dimension. The instrumental dimension of language was demonstrated long ago. Vygotsky (1978) and Mead (1934) considered interaction to be a central mechanism for cognitive development, and Habermas (1984, 1987) did not conceive instrumental rationality to communicative rationality as mutually exclusive. Also, current research in educational psychology has shown that explaining, asking questions, arguing, and using language in other forms lead people to develop critical thinking and metacognition (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987; Fisher, 2007; Frijters, ten Dam, & Rijlaarsdam, 2008; Mercer, 2000; Renshaw, 2004; Salomon & Perkins, 1998; Wegerif, Mercer, & Dawes, 1999).

Creation of meaning. The principle of creation of meaning states that when interactions and dialogues are led and guided by the participants themselves, dialogue can become a source of personal and social meaning. Therefore, any dialogue must acknowledge the multiple dimensions that are involved in human learning and that shape identities, leaving room for par-

ticipants' *lifeworld* (Habermas, 1987), that is, their life experiences as occur in and are shaped by their cultures and communities.

Solidarity. Dialogic learning takes place in interactions that are based on solidarity, that is, that develop in egalitarian and horizontal relationships. Collaboration has shown to improve social relations and the academic achievement of all students (Johnson & Johnson, 1981; Slavin & Oickle, 1981; Slavin, 1995), but solidarity goes further because in solidarity-based dialogues, every participant has the chance to engage in conversation, raise her voice, share his perspective, receive help from others, and access the same benefits and learning results. In addition, in dialogic learning solidarity is not limited to the immediate dialogic interaction; instead, participants try to extend that solidarity to other spaces and people through collective reflections that encourage mature and critical stances (Soler, 2001).

Equality of differences. Dialogic learning is grounded in the principle that true equality includes an equal right to differences. Thus, every student, regardless of background, should have the same opportunities: to engage in dialogue, to participate in co-constructing knowledge, to share opinions, to have those opinions evaluated on the basis of the arguments provided, and ultimately to get the same academic results. Furthermore, if a group considers (in an egalitarian way) the unique knowledge and skills that every participant contributes, it can reach a solution that no member could get in isolation.

SUCCESSFUL EDUCATIONAL ACTIONS: PROVIDING SUCCESS FOR ALL FROM A DIALOGIC PERSPECTIVE

Schools across Europe that are reversing school failure and improving coexistence in the school and the community are using a dialogic approach to do so. This approach has been examined thoroughly by INCLUD-ED (CREA, 2006-2011), the research project of the highest scientific rank and with most resources focusing on school education from the Framework Program of the European Union. INCLUD-ED analyses educational strategies that contribute either to social cohesion or to social exclusion, in the context of Europe's current knowledge-based society. This analysis, conducted from an interdisciplinary perspective, includes the study of school systems, practices, educational outcomes, policies, and the connections between education and other areas of society.

The ultimate aim of INCLUD-ED is to identify successful educational actions (SEA): educational practices, universal and transferrable, that overcome school failure and improve coexistence in schools. INCLUD-ED has already identified many SEAs through 26 case studies of successful

schools around Europe; these schools are all located in neighbourhoods with low SES levels and enrol students from minority backgrounds. At all these schools, students have been shown to be doing better at school, compared to students in other educational centres with similar socio-economic characteristics. And, in six of these schools, strong community involvement is helping to reverse the inequalities.

One part of the larger study is an exhaustive exploration of what these successful schools across Europe actually do; that is, what educational actions are they implementing that are leading to their good results? The researchers have found that the successful actions and strategies in all these schools have several common features: they all involve multiple social agents in multiple educational activities and spaces, they promote interactions and dialogues among these agents and the teachers and students, and they aim to transform the socio-cultural environment so that every child will learn more. Importantly, this finding shows that as interaction, community, and dialogue are the central tenets of today's educational psychology, they are also the key components of the educational practices in Europe that are helping raise the academic achievement of all students.

DIALOGIC RESEARCH INTO «WHAT WORKS»

Neither INCLUD-ED, nor the articles in this special issue, focuses on proving or testing a dialogic theory or a particular educational intervention. This is not research based on an experimental methodology. So the authors in this volume do not describe studies designed with experimental and control groups which are then contrasted. On the one hand, the «control group» is already known: all the schools in Europe generating high rates of school failure. On the other hand, many schools are already providing ways for all children to succeed and to get along with one another better. That is, successful educational actions are already being used. Therefore, there is no need to compare groups or schools or to implement experimental interventions.

Instead, what we need to investigate are the educational actions that evidence shows are already working, in order to identify the common elements of those actions across the different schools and contexts, so they can be adopted by other schools and contexts to ensure that all children succeed. Indeed, the call from the 6th Framework Program, to which the INCLUD-ED research proposal was submitted, established the identification of «educational strategies for inclusion and social cohesion» as an urgent need for Europe's knowledge-based society (European Commission, 2004, p.8).

This orientation toward identifying «what works» requires an appropriate research methodology. That is why INCLUD-ED uses the CCM or criti-

cal communicative methodology (Flecha & Gómez, 2004; Gómez, Latorre, Sánchez, & Flecha, 2006). This methodology is applied in research that not only analyzes inequality and the mechanisms behind it, but also identifies the practices that help reverse those inequalities. In the case of INCLUD-ED, those practices are the Successful Educational Actions.

The CCM fits in neatly with the dialogic turn in society and in the social sciences. Like dialogic theories of learning, the methodology is built on the idea that knowledge is constructed through communicative interaction. Thus, the INCLUD-ED research team has identified and analysed the SEAs through continuous dialogue; it has also contrasted two kinds of knowledge: that accumulated in the scientific community about how to improve students' learning and achievement, and that coming from the daily life of the end-users of the research. These two types of knowledge are both necessary in order to more objectively understand the reality of school failure and success, to advance learning theory—and to gain more useful conclusions that help improve education.

For the INCLUD-ED researchers, the CCM made it possible to compare two sets of knowledge: theoretical knowledge and studies about the role of interaction and dialogue in the learning process, and the knowledge of teachers and other school staff, students, family members, and other community members about their experiences related to learning in successful schools. By contrasting dialogic accounts to learning, such as dialogic learning, with the perspective of the social agents in our analysis of and reflection about the educational practices that are leading children to succeed in school, we have been able to more deeply understand the role that interaction and dialogue play in promoting increased learning and in otherwise improving school practices.

DIALOGISM IN SUCCESSFUL EDUCATION ACTIONS

Among other general categories, the SEAs identified by INCLUD-ED relate to: student grouping, such as *Interactive Groups*; types of family and community involvement in schools, such as *family education* and *democratic parental involvement in decision making*; and activities of *dialogic reading*. Our analysis of these actions shows that they all follow dialogic approaches to education and learning. In all the SEAs interaction is a central tool to foster the learning of central subjects (such as mathematics and language) and improve other education-related elements such as intercultural understanding and school management. Moreover, the SEAs involve not just students and teachers, as was typical in learning conceptions from the industrial society, but also community members, whose involvement is quite crucial. In the

SEAs parents, other relatives, and adults from the neighbourhood move beyond simply participating in parties and school festivities and begin to guide students' academic learning in classrooms, libraries, and digital rooms, and engage in programs of family education.

Much socio-cultural research describes the need to involve multiple adults in children's learning activities. In this issue, Tellado and Sava argue that we must recover the original meaning of Vygotsky's (1978, p. 86) Zone of Proximal Development; he never limited children's interactions with adults to educational professionals, but instead talked about adult guidance, which includes all adults. Studies on guided participation (Rogoff, 1990), and funds of knowledge (González et al., 2005) have shown that all communities have specific ways of supporting their children's learning. Along these lines, and extending the argument about why we must include all adults in schools, Ramis and Kastrina in this issue show that all adults, including those without a substantial academic background who volunteer in schools, have many abilities that constitute a *cultural intelligence* that is central in today's diverse societies to help all children learn.

In successful schools, one of the forms through which family and community members engage in children's learning is the Interactive Groups. As mentioned, within the dialogic turn of educational psychology several researchers have looked at learning in community, and propose converting classrooms into forums (Bruner, 1996) or communities of learners (Brown & Campione, 1996). Along these lines, Interactive Groups are small and heterogeneous groups of students who work collaboratively on activities with the support of an adult, usually a community member, who promotes supportive interactions and dialogue in the group so that all the children learn the content knowledge. In their article in this issue, Elboj and Niemelä discuss Interactive Groups through the lens of Bruner's (1996) sub-communities of mutual learners. They also address the role that non-teacher adults can play in interactive groups, since their presence is one element that differentiates interactive groups from other forms of dialogic grouping in classrooms.

Further, in the successful schools that INCLUD-ED has studied, academic learning is enhanced through other learning activities in and after school hours, such as shared reading in the classroom, tutored libraries, and digital rooms. Students' relatives and other members of the community are often present during these activities, providing more and diverse opportunities for dialogue and interaction. Also, some of the SEAs are aimed at families and the community themselves. These include family education activities like the *dialogic literary gatherings*, a literacy program in which families, usually from minority and non-academic backgrounds, engage in reading and discussing classic books, such as Joyce's *Ulysses* and Kafka's

Metamorphosis. As Serrano, Larena and Mirceva explain in their article, through dialogue, the participants in these gatherings reach interpretations of these books that would have been impossible for a solitary reader. Bakhtin's (1986) dialogism is key to make meaning of what happens in these gatherings. But the learning processes in these groups extend Bakhtin's account.

Crucially, all these SEAs help to transform students' cultural contexts of learning and development both inside and outside the school and, subsequently, they improve students' learning (See Figure 1).

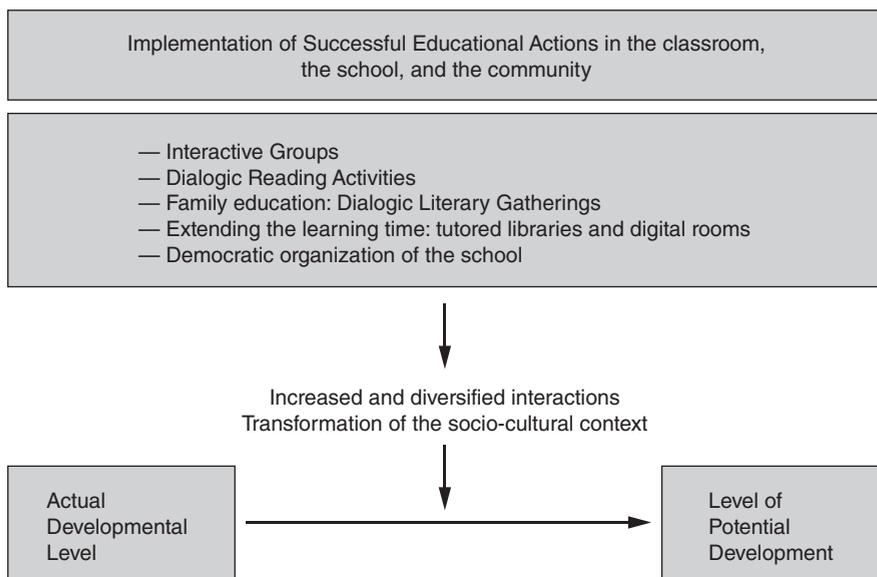


Figure 1. Successful Educational Actions transforming the socio-cultural context and enhancing learning.

This finding reiterates Vygotsky's (1978) thesis about the human capacity to transform nature and the importance of socio-cultural transformation to promote learning and development. García, Duque and Mircea in this issue examine precisely this point, dismantling the opposite standpoint: that educational interventions must be adapted to the socio-cultural context. Much research in disadvantaged contexts, and unfortunately many educational practices as well, have shown that when education is adapted to the environment, that only reproduces inequality or even increases it, reducing students' opportunities to learn and develop (Oakes, 1985; Terwel, 2005). Indeed, INCLUD-ED researchers have discovered much evidence that adaptation re-

produces and increases school failure (INCLUD-ED, 2007; INCLUD-ED Consortium, 2009). Even a century ago Vygotsky (1978) was very clear about the failure of adaptation: «learning which is oriented toward developmental levels that have already been reached is ineffective from the viewpoint of a child's overall development. It does not aim for a new stage of the developmental process but rather lags behind this process» (p. 89). And he continued: «The only *good learning* is that which is in advance of development» (p. 89).

Additionally, because the SEAs help to transform the socio-cultural contexts in which children learn and develop, they also have an impact on the identity of the students involved. According to Mead (1934), the self develops in social interaction and is made up of two phases: the *I* and the *me*. The *me* is the internalization of the expectations and dialogues we have with significant others (what Mead calls «the generalized other») and the *I* is the individual response to the *me*. Mead's notion of the dialogic self sheds light on the power of social interaction to shape how students see themselves as learners, and the impact that such images have on school performance. One key implication of the dialogic nature of identities is that by introducing changes in social interaction it is possible to help children develop positive identities as learners. Puigdemívol, Molina and Gatt, in this issue, describe the role of successful educational actions in this regard.

Another action that has increased academic achievement and peaceful coexistence between children in school is getting family and community members involved in decision-making processes and in the school's management bodies. In the successful schools studied for INCLUD-ED, this is done, for example, through *mixed committees*. In this kind of democratic involvement, parents and community members, together with teachers, and sometimes students, make decisions about many school matters, including academic issues. In working together, they increase the amount of resources and the types of knowledge that are available for improving the school; meanwhile, the intelligences are multiplied and diversified. In this sense, the mixed committees (like the interactive groups) are dialogic practices of *distributed intelligence* (Hutchins, 1995; Pea, 1993). Importantly, as Herrero and Brown describe in this issue, the study of successful schools around Europe indicates the key to greater effectiveness in such distributed organizations: do not simply put diverse people together to work but ensure that all their interactions are egalitarian.

As expected, none of the successful educational actions identified in INCLUD-ED corresponds with the learning theories of the industrial society, such as those that stated that teachers held the key to learning because they knew the students' prior level of knowledge and could thus adapt their instruction and curricula to that level (Ausubel, 1963). On the contrary, dia-

logue is a common component of all the successful actions, from the supportive talk in the interactive groups to the meetings of the mixed committees where all participants evaluate the others' input on the basis of their arguments regardless their status. This already shows that in the SEAs, dialogue does not equate to chatting. As Freire (2003) said, when that happens dialogue loses its power to transform reality and does not produce learning. In the SEAs described in this issue dialogues and interactions are mostly *egalitarian*, they recognize and build upon each person's *cultural intelligence*, they seek *transformation*, they have an important *instrumental dimension*, they are based on the value of *solidarity*, they act as sources of *creation of meaning*, and they rely on and promote *equality of differences*. The SEAs are, then, consistent with *dialogic learning*.

Finally, this special issue is in line with the normative character that Bruner (1996) sees as vital to today's educational psychology if it is to make important contributions to society. INCLUD-ED provides schools and communities with the tools to overcome school failure. Without question, these tools are universal and transferrable; they work for any school in any context. This fact contradicts the too-often-used «contextualism» in education: the idea that certain actions can succeed only in certain contexts. Contextualism works only to excuse the bad results of certain practices adopted by schools and educational systems. On the contrary, the articles that make up this monograph demonstrate that many ongoing practices around Europe are already improving academic learning, intercultural coexistence, and social cohesion in a wider range of contexts.

The most important consequence of knowing about the Successful Educational Actions is the possibility of creating a future of educational success for all children and families, in Europe and beyond. Making this dream come true should not be a question of choice.

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Sandra Racionero is a candidate for a double PhD in Educational Psychology and Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where she has also taught courses on learning sciences. She has participated in R+D studies on dialogic learning and reading, and learning communities. She now works as a researcher for the INCLUD-ED project, from the 6th Framework Program of the EU. She has co-authored the book *Aprendizaje dialógico en la sociedad de la información*. [Dialogic Learning in the information society] (2008, Hipatia) and other articles on the same topic in journals like *Cultura y Educación*.

Dr. María Padrós is a lecturer in the Department of Didactics and Educational Organization at the University of Barcelona. Her research focuses on democratic education, adult education, and gender. She directed the study *Models d'atracció dels i de les adolescents. Contribucions des de la socialització preventiva de la violència de gènere* (2006-2007). She co-authored «Learning Communities: A Whole Community Learning Together, in R.Stang. C. Hesse & A. Clarck (Eds.), *Learning Centres: Models of Organisation and Delivery Contributing to Effective Learning*. Leicester: NIACE, 2006.

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