

**'The final, definitive version of this paper has been published in *Feminism & Psychology*, Vol/Issue, Month/Year by SAGE Publications Ltd, All rights reserved. © [Sarah Crafter]**

## **Cultural Psychology and Deconstructing Developmental Psychology**

**Sarah Crafter**

Institute of Education, Thomas Coram Research Unit

### **Abstract**

This paper looks at points of convergence and divergence between the different branches of cultural psychology and Burman's ideas in *Deconstructing Developmental Psychology* (DDP). The paper discusses the relationship between the developing ideas in cultural psychology over time and some of the shared theoretical and conceptual criticisms put forward in DDP. This takes into account some of the differences between symbolic approach, activity theory and an individualistic approach to cultural psychology. In turn, some of the bigger themes within the book are discussed such as the role of 'normalisation' and demarcation of age, and studying the child in context and how these relate to the different account of cultural psychology and the influence these themes have had on the author's own work. Since this paper details a personal research journey, examples are taken from work on home-school mathematics education, child language brokering and young caring. Using these examples, the paper examines how cultural psychology is interested in the mediation between culture and the person, whilst DDP asks us to question the stories and assumptions embedded within developmental psychology.

## **Key Words**

Cultural psychology, cultural diversity, social cognition, child language brokering, mathematics learning, young caring

## **Corresponding author**

Sarah Crafter

Institute of Education, Thomas Coram Research Unit, 27-28 Woburn Square, London,  
WC1H 0AA

s.crafter@ioe.ac.uk

This paper aims to look at points of convergence and divergence between cultural psychology and the critique offered by Burman on the influence of mainstream developmental psychology. My early research work was, and continues to be, strongly grounded within a cultural psychological framework. Equally, Burman's book has had an impact on my thinking, so this paper draws on some key themes raised in her book and then examines how this has influenced my own academic work as a cultural psychologist. For readers unfamiliar with cultural psychology there are divergent branches that attend to different features of, what is essentially, an interest in the relationship between culture and the psyche (Shweder et al. 2006). Ratner (1999) suggests there are three broad approaches to cultural psychology, all of which are influenced in some capacity by the work of Vygotsky (1978). They are the symbolic approach, activity theory and an

individualistic approach to cultural psychology. The symbolic approach defines culture as shared symbols and meanings, or as Shweder (1996) would put it, a shared reality composed of values and beliefs. These symbols organise what we do in practice. The activity approach would suggest that psychological phenomena are formed as part of socially organised activities. The individualistic approach places the onus on individuals and their ability to mediate culture and construct it in ways that suit them (Ratner, 1999). Scholars working within cultural psychology have not always worked exclusively within only one of these domains. However, I will aim to show how some of the themes developed within *Deconstructing Developmental Psychology* attend to different aspects of these branches.

Certainly my own work has crossed over the boundaries represented by the three approaches within cultural psychology described above. My doctoral work looked at parents' and teachers' experiences and representations of their child's mathematics learning as they make the transition between home and school. Consequently, I was interested in the area of cultural psychology that is concerned with linking sociocultural contexts with cognition (most often associated with activity approach). However, I was also interested in how identities and representations were mediated by practice. This started out as an interest in home mathematical practice but later branched into a wider concern about the different roles and responsibilities of children in culturally diverse settings. Through collaborations with colleagues these interests expanded to include 'atypical' activities such as young caring and child language brokering.

One illuminating finding from my doctoral thesis about home mathematical practices, was that parents and teachers evoked different constructions of child development and in turn, had mismatched ideas about what mathematical practice they thought children capable of, depending on age. This mismatch sometimes created tensions for home learning because teachers' expectations were often higher than parents. So began a point of introduction to Burman's (2008) *Deconstructing Developmental Psychology* (DDP)<sup>1</sup> and the debates raised within the critical-developmental psychology arena. Later on in this paper, I also describe convergent moments where I borrow themes from DDP to enhance the cultural psychological framework used in my subsequent research. This includes wrestling with points of divergence. I begin by looking at the development of cultural psychology as a branch of study, linking this with convergences expressed by Burman in DDP.

### **Cultural psychology and its beginnings**

Cultural psychology was born out of a critique of cross-cultural psychology that is similar to the one made by Burman in her book. In particular, around psychology's overriding tendency to apply Western practices as the basis for all other cultural practices (Valsiner, 1989). Culture, within paradigms such as cross-cultural psychology was, and continues to be, treated as an independent variable with clearly defined categories around race or gender, for example. Michael Cole, was an early challenger to these ideas within cultural psychology through his work with the Kpelle in Liberia. Cole (1977; 1995) was sent to

---

<sup>1</sup> I take the second edition as my point of reference for discussion in this paper.

Liberia “to figure out why Liberian children seemed to experience so much difficulty learning mathematics” (Cole, 1995, p. 23). Like many researchers travelling to non-Western contexts he attempted to apply American-based learning models and methods to the Liberian context. Cole and colleagues soon became disillusioned with this approach and realised that the Kpelle were proficient at using mathematical processes linked with functional logic (rather than taxonomic categories associated with Western mathematical approaches). The move away from looking at outcomes of tests to studying process, via socioculturally specific experiences, perhaps demonstrates the most significant shift from cross-cultural to cultural psychology (Cole, 1995). This is not necessarily the first iteration of cultural psychology in the history of the area but it was a significant movement against the ‘cognitive revolution’ of the 60s (Shweder, 1990).

When discussing the paradigmatic problems of cross-cultural psychology, Burman’s book focused on the implications for cultural norms in parenting, child rearing, and the way in which political considerations structured our very ideas of childhood. In cultural psychology, it might be argued that work within the symbolic approach offered the closest convergence with this perspective, believing in shared cultural beliefs that rationalise and justify how we behave (Shweder et al. 2006). However, whilst Burman’s work asked us to question the ways in which cultural norms are entrenched in political structures, the symbolic approach largely ignored institutional considerations (Ratner, 1999). Take for example Shweder’s (1995) seminal work on family sleeping arrangements in different cultures (he compared Orissa in India and Illinois in America). He argued that co-sleeping practices in India between parents and children were born out

of moral imperatives, whereby parents believed co-sleeping facilitates a gradual shift towards interdependent relationships. Parents in America tended to value independence and placed children in separate bedrooms comparatively earlier. Ratner (1999) argued that such perspectives ignore the material or resource considerations i.e. parents in western cultures tend to have more space, making separate sleeping viable. Having said that, both Shweder (1995) and later Rogoff (2003), argued that space played a very minor role.

Wider political and organisational considerations were not so prominent in early iterations of the activity approach to cultural psychology, however, this work made significant strides in connecting mental activity and culture. For example, Cole's work focusing on *cognition* and *learning* as it is embedded in the cultural, led me to concentrate my endeavours on linking sociocultural contexts and children's learning. I became interested in how parents' cultural models of what counts as mathematics might lead them embrace or reject implicit home mathematical approaches such as cooking, as a learning tool (Crafter & Abreu, 2013).

The foundation for understanding the mismatches between home and school came from the work on situated or social cognition (Lave, 1988). Lave proposed that cognition is a complex social phenomenon that is highly influenced by the contexts, values and practices in which we are situated. Therefore, how we use knowledge in everyday contexts, differs considerably from ways of learning used in school or in the laboratory. These notions may seem somewhat benign now, but at the time mainstream cognitive

psychology was intent on studying central processing and maintaining “person-free psychology” (Shweder, 1990, p.21). Burman, in DDP, similarly described the intense focus in the 1970s and 80s on cognitivism and endless testing of Piagetian claims. Lave’s work ran counter to these mainstream cognitive ideas. Her work with tailors in Liberia led her to conclude that neither the skills learnt in school, nor the skills learnt in tailoring, generalised very much beyond the context in which they were utilised (Greenfield & Lave, 1982). This was keenly evident in the study she conducted with supermarket shoppers in the US. Shoppers often felt more comfortable using mathematics in the supermarket setting, than in a traditional arithmetic test. Moreover, they took into account other contextual issues when buying, such as cupboard and storage space, as well as weight and prices calculations (Lave, 1988). Lave’s work introduced the idea that subjects like mathematics should not be studied as though they are independent of context and that cognition is a deeply social concept.

One of Burman’s critiques of mainstream developmental psychology focused on the generalisation of concepts developed in the ‘west’ that were subsequently universalised to other non-western cultures. A similar critique of children’s development across different cultures was being played out within cultural psychology. To give you an example, alongside Lave’s work, there were several other researchers addressing learning in out-of-school contexts in non-Western societies. The critique put forward by Lave and others working under the umbrella of cultural psychology was that mainstream cognitive approaches to “information processing” positioned the child as a vessel waiting to be filled with knowledge. This perspective inadvertently placed the child in a passive role by

assuming they were not agents in this process. The children I interviewed and observed in my own research on mathematics learning at home and school frequently demonstrated acts of resistance in their learning. One mother told me her son actively avoided playing any board games involving numbers at home because he was wise to the fact that this was subtly trying to teach him mathematics.

There was also the assumption within mainstream cognitive psychology that processes learnt in school were automatically transferred to other everyday contexts; referred to as knowledge transfer. Knowledge transfer work, often carried out in laboratory tests, proposed that knowledge learnt in one context is carried ‘within’ the individual to another context, and in turn that environments are assumed to be either static or unimportant to the learner (Beach, 1999). Studies on children’s ‘street mathematics’ provided an interesting challenge to the idea of knowledge transfer, which by-the-by, continues to dominate much of cognitive psychology (Carraher, Schliemann & Carraher, 1988; Nunes, Schliemann & Carraher, 1993). For example, child street vendors were found to perform complex forms of mathematics that did not follow approaches taught in school. Moreover, street children often performed better in everyday settings (i.e. the market place) than school-like settings (Nunes, Carraher & Schliemann, 1987). In my own research, one ten year old that I interviewed described how she preferred her father’s way of doing mathematics, which she described as the ‘Nigerian way’, rather than the schools. However, whilst at school she was conscious of needing to do maths in a ‘school way’ (Crafter & Abreu, 2010).

Nearly four decades of socially situated cognition research has shown that learners with varying amounts of school experience use a complex combination of everyday and school-based knowledge. Using Ratner's (1999) breakdown of the different approaches to cultural psychology, much of this kind of work follows an activity theory perspective. More than the symbolic approach described above, activity theory shares greater common ground with DDP because the social conditions and systems under which people's everyday activities operate are a critical lens of study. Arguably, the symbolic and individualist approaches to cultural psychology have paid less attention to issues of economic and political change that prominently weave its way through DDP. The activity approach is a notable exception. For example, a longitudinal study by Saxe and Esmonde (2005) showed how local counting systems of the Oksapmin from Papua New Guinea had altered over the last thirty years in response to economical and political changes. In other words, they were able to link changing mathematical cognitive activities with change to commercial conditions.

Ideas developed under the banner of cultural psychology through the 70s, 80s and 90s share some convergence with Burman's treatise in DDP. In particular, both reflect the frustrations with mainstream psychology for its lack of situating psychological phenomena within social and cultural contexts. Burman's treatise in DDP asks us to question the assumptions taken-for-granted in mainstream developmental psychology. She entreats us to look critically at how shared meanings become normative expectations, bearing resemblances to the symbolic approach in cultural psychology. It would take an

activity theory approach within cultural psychology to address structural influences. The next section turns to a major theme with DDP; the discussion of ‘normalisation’.

### **The role of ‘normalisation’ in cultural psychology**

One of the themes from Burman’s book that has had a significant impact on my thinking has been the critique of developmental psychology’s ‘normalising’ of childhood. In my research area on children’s home-school mathematics learning (as well as other subject areas), there has been a critique of approaches that draw on racialised assumptions to make measured comparisons between the skills of minority ethnic children with majority ethnic children (Gillborn, 2010). This has sometimes led to the ‘deficient model’ of parenting and families who are perceived negatively because their practices do not fit with the expectations set up by dominant institutions like school. In my own research, home practices undertaken by families from diverse backgrounds did not match the ‘normal’ approaches valued by the school (Crafter, 2011). The problematising of the ‘deficient’ child or ‘deficient’ parent can be perceived as a key point of convergence between Burman’s treatise on deconstructing developmental psychology and cultural psychology. In her section on ‘The home and the school’ Burman writes about the blaming of individual and cultural deficits for children’s underachievement in school. A similar argument was made in 1998 by Michael Cole who published a paper titled ‘Can cultural psychology help us think about diversity?.’ The paper was published two years prior to the commencement of my doctoral research, so it became a pivotal influence on my thinking. Cole argued that classrooms are sites where, as well as finding *within*

community differences (and *between* community differences), ethnic diversity could be seen as a resource in education activities, not a deficit.

Therefore, a key driver for my own research on home-school mathematics learning became to harness the implicit and explicit mathematics of home with diverse communities without succumbing to discourses of deficiency. For example, in my own conversations with parents from a range of backgrounds about their child's mathematics learning, I found that all parents wanted their children to do well and all described being involved in that process in some capacity. However, the cultural resources available to parents and the expectations of what involvement might look like, did not necessarily match the expectations of the school (Crafter, 2012a).

Even so, Burman's interrogation of the very concept of childhood became an additional contribution to the ideas I had already garnered from cultural psychology. Burman's work, and DDP in particular, prompted deeper reflections on the meanings and discourses associated with 'whose childhood' was under study. As illustrated above, cultural psychology sought to avoid universalising childhoods by focusing on the relationship between children's development and socio-contextual change (Fleer & Hedegaard, 2010). Burman (p. 77) talked about the way 'the child *as child* functions as an index, a signifier 'civilisation' [original emphasis]'. In many respects this view corresponds to the symbolic or 'mentality-laden practices' described by Shweder et al. (2006, p.730). These 'mentality-laden practices' include the 'customary', 'normal', 'communicative-exchanges' and 'institutions'.

Although I have offered a few examples, up until this point, relating DDP to my work on cultural psychology and home-school mathematics learning, this is thinking conducted in hindsight. My first real introduction to DDP came in 2004 when I became the researcher on an ESRC project led by Lindsay O'Dell on the constructions of childhood through children's work (O'Dell et al 2005). Foremost, this project examined young people's normative representations of work and deliberately sought out their opinions on work that in the UK, might be considered non-normative, like young caring and language brokering (Crafter, O'Dell, Abreu & Cline, 2009). The critical-developmental element of our theoretical framing meant we were able to interrogate the dominant ideas of the 'parentified child' and 'deficient mother' (O'Dell, Crafter, Abreu & Cline, 2010), so eloquently questioned by Burman in DDP. However, reflecting on particular ideas or meanings only goes so far in examining the psychological effects of activity (Ratner, 1999). We wanted to understand young people's normative understandings of children who work, whilst being able to say in what way they influence the practice of being, say, a young carer.

Proponents of the individualistic approach to cultural psychology would argue that individuals construct a personal culture within a collective culture. DDP predominantly offers a critical commentary on what Lawrence and Valsiner (2003) might call collective constraints. In other words, the focus is on socially organised frameworks and discourses adopted by developmental psychology and their wider significance. My colleagues and I sought to understand the processes involved in people navigating or 'counter-

constraining' the personal and the wider context (Lawrence & Valsiner, 2003). As an example, a teenage language broker (interpreter for a family member) in the above-mentioned study told me during an interview that, in her view, missing school to translate is wrong because it has a detrimental impact on one's educational future. She was presented with a vignette scenario of a teenage boy who missed school to translate for his mother. When asked for her views on the boy's mother in the story she replied "I don't think she even realises, I don't think she realises that he shouldn't miss school... she'll think that if you miss school it's like normal, fine, nothing is gonna happen. Maybe she might think the same as my mum." This young woman knew that in UK society, 'normal' expectations are that education takes precedence over family obligations. However, she later went on to say that she regularly missed school to help her family and would continue to do so if they needed her. In other words, she understood the 'collective constraints' around cultural expectations for attending school, but would personally act 'counter' to these if necessary.

To sum up this example illustrates how societal assumptions about the importance of education acts as her 'signifier civilisation' because it is the 'normal' position. She is able to articulate this 'normative' representation and puts it 'on display', perhaps for the interviewers benefit. However, in practice her life is 'counter constrained' by her work as a child language broker.

### **Normalisation of childhood and the demarcation of age**

Understanding children's development by the demarcation of chronological age has formed the cornerstone of mainstream developmental psychology in ways that, Burman argued, contributed to normative constructions of childhood. Vygotsky's work, which underpins many ideas within cultural psychology, provided a different lens to study development. Burman argues in chapter 12 (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition) that the use of Vygotsky's conceptual ideas in the West have been a 'pick and mix' approach. In other words, Western researchers chose aspects of Vygotsky's work that most suited their purposes. Not surprisingly, educationists were particularly enamoured with the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The ZPD encouraged the move away from age as the demarcation against which to measure success, to a concept of future potentiality. This is justifiably attractive.

To some extent the concept of the ZPD suits Burman's critique well, in that less emphasis is placed on the demarcation of age by looking instead at what a child can achieve with the right guidance. Also the concept of ZPD does not fall prey to another of Burman's critiques, which is that the child in much of developmental psychology is studied in isolation or separate from their context. Burman highlights in her book that there is a great deal more to Vygotsky's work than the ZPD, and cultural psychology drew more heavily on other concepts like activity, mediation and cultural practice.

Cultural psychologists have long been interested in action or activity in context, often taking activity as the unit of analysis under study. In cultural-historical psychology for example, three key interconnected ideas evolve around mediation of cultural tools (or

artifacts), historical development and practical activity (Cole, 1996; 1998; Wertsch, 1985). The concept of mediation has evolved in a variety of ways across cultural psychology but its origins lay in the work of Vygotsky's contemporary Luria, who focused on the use of tools as cultural artifacts (Luria, 1928). In relation to work with children, tools, like mathematical symbols or classroom discourses, mediate human psychological processes (Abreu & Elbers, 2005). Early on, this work focused the relationship between mental and physical tool use and the individual (Abreu, 2000). Later on, mediation was examined as a social relationship in interaction with the use of particular tools (Elbers & de Haan, 2005). Since then, mediation has looked beyond face-to-face interactions to look at social representations and their relationship with cultural practice (O'Toole & Abreu, 2005).

The concept of mediation as a relationship between social representations and cultural practice, and how these might connect to children's development, became a key interest in my own work. Cultural practices were said to relate to what people do, including observable activities (Miller and Goodnow, 1995). Rogoff, Baker-Sennett, Lacasa & Goldsmith (1995) introduced their study on the Girl Scout Cookie Sellers whose growing development and competence at selling cookies linked with institutional, community and personal 'planes' of activity. In other words, cultural practices shaped the trajectories of development (Abreu & Hale, 2009). Moreover, Girl Scout Cookie Selling was often a mother-daughter project, with practices reinforced by mothers' own histories as sellers.

My research with parents from different cultural backgrounds showed me that age as a demarcation to the universal child is tenuous at best. Returning to Burman's, and indeed my own concerns with the role school can play in ascribing disadvantage or deficit to certain home backgrounds, led me to look at what resources parents use to make sense of their child's schooling. The parents in my research frequently used their own cultural models of child development to try and make sense of their child's success at school. Most importantly, these models were not always shared with the school institution thereby putting the parents and children at a disadvantage (Crafter, 2012a, 2012b). This also suggests that parents from a variety of cultural backgrounds do not necessarily enact models of parenting adopted by mainstream psychology; though they may be aware of them as a general representation and feel 'deficient' as a result. A similar point is made by Lin and Iverson (2012) in a study looking at learning English as a Foreign Language in Taiwan. These authors talk about the strong political and economic drive in Taiwan for young people to be able to speak English. They also challenge a simplistic assumption about achievement gaps between urban and rural students that dominate educational discourse. Taiwan has several ethnic cultures, each with different cultural and historical legacies that influence young peoples' access to resources for learning English. Work within cultural psychology has often attempted to bridge our understandings between the cultural history the child is immersed in, and the child's current development.

Burman does acknowledge in her book that some of the shortcomings associated with Vygotsky's work have been subsequently incorporated into later branches of cultural psychology. There has perhaps been a deliberate attempt by some proponents of cultural

psychology to answer to the criticism that only the most ‘compatible’ aspects of Vygotsky’s work were accepted in the West by returning to ideas like mediation and activity theory. One other criticism of cultural psychology has been the lack of exploration into wider structural and political perspectives. Burman raises the point that activity theory, as branch of cultural psychology, did also address cultural-political contexts. However, all branches of cultural psychology, including activity theory, could do more to speak to Burman’s critical feminist perspective by looking at gender and power relationships within the cultural-political.

### **Studying the child in context**

Another theme within Burman’s book that has had a profound effect on my work has been her questioning of the ‘dependent child’. Cultural psychology had already drawn me in the direction of ‘non-normative’ roles within families and communities but the focus had mainly been on the role of ‘participation’ or ‘apprenticeship’ in children’s learning. Greenfield’s (1999) work with Mayan communities in Mexico is one such excellent example. She described how young girls’ weaving apprenticeships were highly guided by a teacher, usually the mother, in accordance with the development of the learner (and certainly not by any demarcation of age). She also showed, on returning to the community 20 years later, how economic changes led to different cultural practices. For example, older siblings became the main teacher for weaving whilst mothers sewed garments to sell.

However, Burman's questioning of the very concept of the 'dependent' child in relation to the 'responsible' adult opened up new ways of looking at cultural practices within families for me. These ideas would certainly influence my work with colleagues on child language brokering (CLBs; see Cline, Abreu, O'Dell & Crafter, 2010). CLB's are children and young people who interpret for family members and peers who cannot speak the local language. They transcend the 'normative' assumptions available in some societies because their brokering activities can mean they mediate in sensitive situations and take on 'adult-like' responsibilities (e.g. in some cases negotiating with police on behalf of parents). Evidence also suggests that these activities are often split along gendered lines, with the eldest young woman in the family taking on the responsibility (Weisskirch & Alva, 2002; Orellana, 2003). These studies have also found that it is immigrant mothers who are most likely to need the help of their children to navigate an unfamiliar cultural context.

Certain branches within cultural psychology have moved their focus towards the study of the self in context, particularly trying to conceptualise identity, the cultural psychology of self (Benson, 2001), dialogical self (Hermans, 2001, 2002) and symbolic resources (Zittoun, 2006). For my part, the work of Wenger (1998) and his communities of practices framework, alongside work by Abreu and Cline (2003) on processes of identity development were very useful. My work with parents, teachers and children on home-school mathematics in culturally diverse settings, threw to light some interesting ways in which 'others' were identified, how this impacted on 'being identified' by others, and the resulting influence on mathematical 'self-identities' (Crafter & Abreu, 2010). More

recently, the emergent work on Dialogical Self Theory provided our team interested in young carer identities a way to look at multiple internal dialogues and how these speak to 'I' positions with significant others in children's lives (O'Dell, Crafter, Cline & Abreu, 2012). In the study on children's work, young caring and language brokering described above, young respondents positioned the vignette characters (we had two vignettes with boys and two with girls) along gendered lines. In terms of young caring, boys were often positioned as more 'uncaring' as summed up in this quote by Estelle (who was not a young carer herself):

*Yeah, my mum would say that boys are not as caring. I think so as well because my brother is as bad. If something happens it's always me who goes to my mum 'oh mum, are you ok?' my brother would be like, if she says 'ok' then he's like 'all right then' and then just go, go and do their business. I think that girls are more supportive and more emotional so they tend to help more than boys, I think anyway*

Equally, Ely (2004) wrote how teacher's responses to boy and girls who were young carers differed along gendered lines. For example, boys reported getting into trouble for showing tiredness and girls had bigger issues with lateness.

### **Concluding thoughts**

For me, Burman's ideas in DDP provide a critical lens of reflection about developmental psychology and the study of childhood more generally. Indeed, in the opening paragraph

of the book she writes that DDP ‘comments upon rather than replaces mainstream accounts of development psychology’ (p.1). She goes on to describe ‘deconstruction’ as ‘bringing under scrutiny’ the frameworks under which much of developmental psychology operates. In doing so, she brought to bear some conceptual ways of looking at childhood that have been subsequently taken up by those influenced by her work. I have focused on convergences in the development of cultural psychology, the problem of universalisation, the role of ‘normalisation’, the slipperiness of age as the main demarcation for the study of childhood and the problems with assumptions about childhoods being a gradual trajectory towards appropriate adult responsibilities.

In my view, the main divergence between DDP and the different branches of cultural psychology is in the focus of enquiry. Burman’s focus was not on the processes of mediation between culture and the psyche as a unit of analysis, as it is for cultural psychology. Rather, Burman invites us to question the stories we tell within psychology; how they are perceived, reconstructed and retold. DDP encouraged us to think about developmental psychology as a story in its own right. Cultural psychology provided me with the research tools for examining the co-constitution of mind and culture, and its emerging diversity.

DDP provided deeper insights my own suppositions about what constitutes childhoods in ways that cultural psychology had not previously challenged me to do. For example, although Vygotskian scholars interested in the Zone of Proximal Development had contested age-related demarcations for children’s learning success, DDP provided a

slightly different focus by discussing the power of our ‘representations’ of age normalisation. Burman showed how ideas about children’s age-related development become cemented as a ‘normal’ way to develop. In my research over the years I have found many of these assumptions embedded in the discourses of teachers, parents and young people. Difficulties then arise when ideas about child development between home and school are at odds with each other.

Miller and Kofsky Scholnick (2000) suggest that Vygotskian theory, cultural psychology and feminism are theoretically and conceptually compatible enough to act as a bridging disciplines within developmental psychology. In writing this paper I have learnt that cultural psychology and DDP have offered more points of convergence than points of divergence. Cultural psychology gave me the theoretical resources to focus on the mediation between diverse social and cultural contexts and children’s learning. DDP provided the space to tell a different story about developmental psychology.

### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank Jane Callaghan and Lindsay O’Dell for the comments on early drafts of this paper. My thanks also go to Lindsay O’Dell, Guide de Abreu and Tony Cline – their rich discussions about cultural psychology and critical-developmental psychology have deeply influenced all my work. I would also like to extend my thanks to the reviewers for their useful and insightful comments

## References

Abreu, de.G. (2000). Relationships between macro and micro sociocultural contexts: Implications for the study of interactions in the mathematics classroom. *Educational Studies in Mathematics*, 41, 1-29.

Abreu, G. de, & Cline, T. (2003). Schooled mathematics and cultural knowledge. *Pedagogy, Culture and Society*, 1, 11-30.

Abreu, G. de, & Elbers, E. (2005). Introduction: The social mediation of learning in multiethnic schools. *European Journal of Psychology of Education*, 20, 3–11.

Abreu, G.de., & Hale, H. (2009). ‘Self’ and ‘other’ imposed withdrawing in social interactions at school: Portuguese students talk about their experiences in adjusting to school in Britain. In M. César & K. Kumpulainen (Eds.), *Social interactions in multicultural settings* (pp.91-116). Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

Beach, K.D. (1999). Consequential transitions: A sociocultural expedition beyond transfer in education. *Review of Research in Education*, 24, 101-139.

Benson, C. (2001). *The cultural psychology of self: Place, morality and art in human worlds*. London: Routledge.

Burman, E. (2008). *Deconstructing developmental psychology*. Hove: Routledge.

Carraher, T. N., Schliemann, A. D., & Carraher, D. W. (1988). Mathematical concepts in everyday life. In G. Saxe & R. M. Gearhart (Eds.), *Children's mathematics: New directions in child development* (pp. 71–88). San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Cline, T., Abreu, de.G., O'Dell, L & Crafter, S. (2010). Recent research on child language brokering in the United Kingdom. *Mediazioni: Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies on Language and Cultures*, 10, 105-124.

Cole, M. (1977). An ethnographic psychology of cognition. In P. N. Johnson-Laird & P. C. Wason (Eds.), *Thinking* (pp. 468–482). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Cole, M. (1995). Culture and cognitive development: from cross-cultural research to creating systems of cultural mediation. *Culture & Psychology*, 1, 25–54.

Cole, M. (1996). *Cultural psychology: A once and future discipline*. USA: Harvard University Press.

Cole, M. (1998). Can cultural psychology help us to think about diversity? *Mind, Culture and Activity*, 5, 291–304.

Crafter, S (2011). The social construction of home and school learning in multicultural communities. In L. O'Dell & S. Leverett. (Eds.), *Working with children and young people: Co-constructing practice* (pp.131-142). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Crafter, S. (2012a) Making sense of homework: parental Resources for understanding mathematical learning in multicultural settings. In E. Hjørne, G. van der Aalsvoort & G. de Abreu (Eds), *Learning, Social Interaction and Diversity – Exploring Identities in School Practices* (pp. 53-68). Rotterdam: SENSE Publications.

Crafter, S. (2012b). Parental Resources for understanding mathematical achievement in culturally diverse school settings. *Education Studies in Mathematics*, 81, 31-46.

Crafter, S., & Abreu, de. G. (2010). Constructing identities in multicultural learning contexts. *Mind, Culture and Activity*, 17, 2, 1-17.

Crafter, S., & Abreu, de.G. (2013). Exploring parents' cultural models of mathematical knowledge in multi-ethnic primary schools. In G. Marsico, K. Komatsu, & A. Iannaccone (Eds.), *Crossing boundaries: Intercontextual dynamics between family and school* (pp. 2009-228). Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.

Crafter, S., O'Dell, L., Abreu, de.G., & Cline, T. (2009) Young peoples' representations of 'atypical' work in English society. *Children and Society*, 23, 176-188.

Elbers, E., & de Haan, M. (2005). The construction of word meaning in a multicultural classroom. Mediation tools in peer collaboration during mathematics lessons. *European Journal of Psychology of Education, 20*, 45–59.

Ely, S. (2004). ‘If they don’t recognize it, you’ve got to deal with it yourself’: Gender, young caring and educational support. *Gender and Education, 16*, 65-75.

Fleer, M., & Hedegaard, M. (2010). Children’s development as participation in everyday practices across different institutions. *Mind, Culture, and Activity, 17*, 149-168.

Gillborn, D. (2010). The colour of numbers: survey, statistics and deficit-thinking about race and class. *Journal of Education Policy, 25*, 253-276.

Greenfield, P.M. (1999). Historical change and cognitive change: A two-decade follow-up study in Zinacantan, A Maya community in Chiapas, Mexico. *Mind, Culture, and Activity, 6*, 92-118.

Greenfield, P., & Lave, J. (1982). Cognitive aspects of informal education. In D. A. Wagner & H. W. Stevenson (Eds.), *Cultural perspectives on child development*. San Francisco: Freeman.

Hermans, H.J.M. (2001). The construction of a personal position repertoire: Method and practice. *Culture & Psychology, 7*, 323-366.

Hermans, H.J.M. (2002). The dialogical self as a society of mind. *Theory and Psychology, 12*, 147-160.

Lave, J. (1988). *Cognition in practice*. UK: Cambridge University Press.

Lawrence, J.A., & Valsiner, J. (2003). Making personal sense: An account of basic internalization and externalization processes. *Theory & Psychology, 13*, 723-752.

Lin, W-C., & Ivinson, G. (2012). Ethnic cultural legacies and learning English as a foreign language: A social-cultural study in Taiwan. In E. Hjørne, G. van der Aalsvoort & G. de Abreu (Eds.), *Learning, Social Interaction and Diversity – Exploring Identities in School Practices* (pp. 69-84). Rotterdam: SENSE Publications.

Luria, A.R. (1928). The problem of the cultural behaviour of the child. Offprint from *The Pedagogical Seminary and Journal of Genetic Psychology, 35*, 493-506.

Miller, P.J., & Goodnow, J.J. (1995). Cultural practices: Toward an integration of culture and development. *New Directions for Child Development, 67*, 5-16.

Miller, P. H., & Kofsky Scholnick, E. (2000). *Towards a feminist developmental psychology*. New York: Routledge.

Nunes, T., Carraher, D.W., Schliemann, A.D. (1987). Written and oral mathematics. *Journal for Research in Mathematics Education*, 18, 83-97.

Nunes, T., Schliemann, A., & Carraher, D. (1993). *Street mathematics and school mathematics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

O'Dell, L., Abreu, de.G., Cline, T., & Crafter, S. (2005). Young peoples' representations of conflicting roles in child development. Final Report for the Economic and Social Research Council No. RES-000-22-0549.

O'Dell, L., Crafter, S., Abreu, de.G., & Cline, T. (2010). Constructing 'normal childhoods': Young people talk about young carers. *Disability and Society*, 25, 643-655.

O'Dell, L., Crafter, S., Cline, T., & Abreu, de.G. (2012). Researching children and young people's lives: The problem of interpretation in vignette methodology. *Qualitative Research*, 12, 702-714.

Orellana, M.F. (2003). Responsibilities of children in Latino immigrant homes. *New Directions for Youth Development: Understanding the Social Worlds of Immigrant Youth*, 100, 25-39.

O'Toole, S., & Abreu, G. de (2005). Parents' past experiences as a mediational tool for understanding their child's current mathematical learning. *European Journal of Psychology of Education*, 20, 75-89.

Ratner, C. (1999). Three approaches to cultural psychology: A critique. *Cultural Dynamics, 11*, 7-31.

Rogoff, B. (2003). *The cultural nature of human development*. Oxford: OUP

Rogoff, B., Baker-Sennett, J., Lacasa, P., & Goldsmith, D. (1995). Development through participation in sociocultural activity. *New Directions for Child Development, 67*, 45-65.

Saxe, G., & Esmonde, I. (2005). Studying cognition in flux: A historical treatment of Fu in the shifting structure of Oksapmin Mathematics. *Mind, Culture & Activity, 12*, 171–225.

Shweder, R.A. (1990). Cultural psychology – what is it?. In J.W. Stigler, R. A. Shweder & G. Herdt (Eds.), *Cultural psychology: Essays on comparative human development* (pp.1-43). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Shweder, R.A. (1996). True Ethnography: The Lore, the Law, and the Lure. In R.Jessor, A.Colby & R.S.Shweder (Eds.), *Ethnography and human development: Context and meaning in social inquiry*. US: University of Chicago Press, (pp. 3-14).

Shweder, R.A., J. Goodnow , G. Hatano , R. Levine , H. Markus & P. Miller (2006). The cultural psychology of development: One mind, many mentalities. In W. Damon (Ed.), *Handbook of Child Psychology*. New York: John Wiley and Sons.

Shweder, R.A., Jensen, L., & Goldstein, W.A. (1995). Who sleeps by whom revisited: A method for extracting the moral goods implicit in practice (pp. 21-39). In J.J. Goodnow, P.J. Miller and F. Kessel, (Eds), *Cultural practices as contexts for development: New directions for child development*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers,.

Valsiner, J. (1989). From group comparisons to knowledge: A lesson from cross-cultural psychology. In J. P. Forgas & J. M. Ines (Eds.), *Recent advances in social psychology: an international perspective* (pp. 501–510). North-Holland: Elsevier Science.

Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind in society: the development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press.

Weisskirch, R., & Alva, S. (2002). Language Brokering and the Acculturation of Latino children. *Hispanic journal of Behavioral Science*, 24, 369-378.

Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity*. US: Cambridge University Press.

Wertsch, J.V. (1985). *Vygotsky and the social formation of mind*. Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Zittoun, T. (2006). *Transition: Development through symbolic resources*. Greenwich, Connecticut: Information Age Publishing.

### **Biographical Note**

Dr. Sarah Crafter is a Senior Research Officer at the Thomas Coram Research Unit in the Institute of Education (University of London). Her background is in cultural-developmental psychology. Her research interests include home and school learning, parental involvement in mathematics, culturally diverse childhoods and cultural identity development. Her work also examines the concept of ‘normal’ childhoods in relation to children who work; particularly young carers and language brokers.