AERA 2013 Annual Meeting

Theme: Education and Poverty: Theory, Research, Policy and Praxis

San Francisco, California
Saturday, April 27 - Wednesday, May 1, 2013

Message from the CH-R SIG Program Chairs

Dear Cultural-Historical Special Interest Group Members,

As your SIG program chairs, we are very excited to be sending out the AERA 2013 call for proposals! We feel that the theme, "Education and Poverty: Theory, Research, Policy, and Praxis," is especially significant to our SIG members and colleagues as we often attempt to address ongoing disparities between the rich and poor in the United States and around the world that is grounded in specific understandings of the ways and means human development is understood within global contexts. We welcome all submissions, especially those that explore this general theme from a cultural-historical perspective, but would especially encourage proposals that explore the general theme from the intersections between theory and praxis.

Please note that there are very limited numbers of symposia available. Roundtables are a good option as they are set up to allow for ‘presenting’ and discussion of various papers. The distinguishing factor is that the goal of the roundtable is more discussion amongst all the participants whereas a symposium is arranged more for formal presentation of works with a discussant providing most of the connecting and critique.

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Recent Publications by CH-R SIG Members


The _Vygotsky on Education_ Primer serves as an introduction to the life and work of the Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky. Even though he died almost eighty years ago, his life's work remains both relevant and significant to the field of education today. This book examines Vygotsky's emphasis on the role of cultural and historical context in learning, while challenging theories that emphasize a universalistic view of learning through fixed, biologically determined stages of development. Given our current preoccupation with standardized outcomes and the corporatization of schooling, Vygotsky's most important ideas about education need to be reconsidered. The primer provides an overview of his two best-known ideas: the zone of proximal development and the development of thinking and speech as a means of empowerment, and discusses Vygotsky's views of the roles of critical and creative imagination in the formation of personal agency and in creative collaboration. Applications to current practices from a wide range of sources clarify and promote relevance to diverse audiences. This primer presents the essence of Vygotsky's work in language that is accessible to all students of education.

*Classroom Discourse and Democracy: Making Meanings Together* provides practitioners and scholars with a number of practical tools for realizing democratic learning environments within schools. The author, Susan Jean Mayer, draws on both Vygotskian and Piagetian developmental learning theory and on Deweyan democratic principles to theorize the importance of fostering all students’ intellectual agency and ‘interpretive authority.’ Three dimensions of knowledge are framed—foundational, expert, and personal—and the place of each of these dimensions in the construction of democratic classroom understandings is explored. Based upon a two-part analysis of the roles students played in a range of pedagogically diverse classroom discussions, three different forms of learning experience are then presented—teacher-led, student-led, and co-led learning. While all three forms of learning experience are seen as valuable to a fully realized democratic pedagogy, Mayer argues that most students, particular those living in poverty and those placed in lower track classes, need to be provided with more generous opportunities to experience the student-led and co-led forms.


Closing Chapters is far more than a history of Youngstown and its parish grade schools. This is a well-researched study of the complex forces behind urban change in the decades after 1960—the impact of deindustrialization, urbanization, changing attitudes about education, the divisions among American Catholics, the tensions in society between white and black residents, among classes and ethnic groups. Thoughtful, well-written, and often moving, this book makes a significant contribution. — JoEllen Vinyard, Eastern Michigan University

The story of America’s urban Catholic elementary schools in the latter stages of the 20th century is, to a considerable extent, one of decline and demise. Thomas G. Welsh has told the story of those schools in one of America’s cities—Youngstown, Ohio—and he has done so with thoroughness and understanding. I highly recommend the book to anyone interested in understanding the complex social forces that enveloped those schools that led to their closure. — Thomas C. Hunt, University of Dayton

Closing Chapters attempts to explain the disintegration of urban parochial schools in Youngstown, Ohio, a onetime industrial center that lost all but one of its eighteen Catholic parochial elementary schools between 1960 and 2006. Through this examination of Youngstown, Welsh sheds light on a significant national phenomenon: the fragmentation of American Catholic identity.
Overcoming the 3/4th Grade Barrier to Academic Achievement: A Strategy for Going to Scale

The following thought piece first drafted by Michael Cole in June 2009 is reprinted here with his permission.

The problem

In a number of recent discussions I have found broad agreement on one fact. Despite decades of effort, there has been no scalable strategy for getting masses of underperforming children over a significant hurdle — the qualitative shift in the elementary school curriculum I will dub the “3/4th Grade Barrier.” In math it is the movement past long division, ratios and decimals into pre-algebra. In reading it is the shift from “learning to read” to “reading to learn.”

When I point out that despite years of research and demonstrations that such a barrier can be overcome by all but severely impaired children, but it is not being overcome by great numbers of children, the response I have received from a wide variety of educationalists I greatly respect goes something like this: “If we improve teacher education and properly implement program “X” (fill in the blank, there are a lot of good candidates) the problem will go away and we will get all our kids to algebra, and if we get them that far, then the same logic can be applied to algebra: proper teacher preparation and program implementation is all it takes and the problem will be solved.”

The difficulty with this entire mind set is that we have been saying the same thing now for at least the last quarter century. Meantime, the kids in poor neighborhoods where I work are not making it past the 3/4th Grade Barrier. They are getting more and more homework thrown at them, and they cannot do the homework because it does not take into account the fact that they simply do not have the foundations to do it. Blaming teachers will not suffice— they are teaching to state standards and doing the best they can with whatever training they have and in whatever classroom situations they are facing. Getting better trained teachers and better equipped schools and well fed kids are all GREAT things to aim for. But meantime, we are losing generation after generation; the academically rich may not be getting a whole lot richer, but the academically poor are without doubt continuing to be excluded from higher levels of the curriculum.

For just as long as these discussions have been going on, people have been arguing for “more time on task.” I began my focus on after school at a time when this strategy was being touted as the solution and I have witnessed its very modest successes in those places that could afford longer school days and pushing more homework on kids whose families could either arrange to help them or arrange for them to be in a high quality after school program. But many parents, especially in poor neighborhoods, cannot help their children with their homework, and high quality after school programs with an academic orientation or even a serious academic component are very scarce and hard to sustain.

A Proposed Strategy for a Solution

While not excluding any of the currently preferred solutions to getting every kid over the 3/4th Grade Barrier, I believe the time is ripe to address the problem in a qualitatively new way and to do so NOW, when there are a number of stimulus package-related initiatives that would be a perfect way to jump start such a program. There is both an overall generic logic to the plan based on what I know about the process of development and a preliminary plan that could serve as a firm structure for planning and discussion.

The overall logic. It is a cardinal principle of development, associated with the idea of a “spiral of development” that “the end must be in the beginning.” Some form of structuration underpinning the developmental goal must be present at the beginning of the process. Yet in all of the calls for “scalability” advanced by NSF and other foundations, this principle is ignored. Rather, a process of Darwinian social science reigns: Create lots of variations and let natural selection do its work. Prove you have a good idea and “they will come.”

But perhaps we need to ask ourselves, for instance: Is the very recent human idea that it is a good thing for all young people to master algebra an adequate notion, given the rapidly changing nature of contemporary economic life? If that is the case (and I believe it IS the case), then if you want to build a scalable program, you had better build the mechanisms for scaling into the initial stages of both the research process and the practice model. It is not sufficient to demonstrate that “Program X” works in a
restricted number of circumstances and expect it to be widely adopted, unless the conditions that make possible the production of “Program X” are themselves studied. Research of this kind is expensive and takes a long time. And even so, the end is not in the beginning. That is, the social institutions which will necessarily be involved in adopting Program X are not at the table, talking to, observing, and thinking about how to implement Program X and how it will have to be modified, supported, and worried over if it is to be adopted. In social life, one size NEVER fits all. Modification is ALWAYS needed.

At a logical level, then, the strategy should be to start by bringing all known stake holders together to solve the problem IN THE BEGINNING. This does not mean that all stake holders will implement the initial stages, but they will be a part of the discussion of this implementation and will all be, in effect, “worried parents” watching it develop in its early stages. What is absolutely critical is that if the program works, they are in a position to, and expect to, become integrally involved, willing and able to contribute more resources, as time goes on and the program develops.

A Specific Proposal for July 2009. I restrict my example entirely to the 3/4th grade math program because that is what I am experimenting with at the present time. I believe strongly that precisely the same logic can be applied to reading, but want to keep this short and the specific subject matter minimally controversial so it does not distract from the macro-level systems features that I believe are essential.

The core of my proposal is the following:

1. A foundation or consortium of foundations provides support for a demonstration project, focused on the afterschool hours (either in schools or in affordable housing projects, all of which are mandated to have learning centers in them, or in traditional afterschool providers such as YMCA or Boys and Girls Clubs) to demonstrate that it is possible, even as children are experiencing difficulty in 3rd/4th/5th grades to provide proven methods appropriate to the after-school environment to enable them to understand the material being assigned in their homework and taught in their classrooms. This means multi digit addition, subtraction, decimals, long division, fractions etc. These “basic” component understandings/skills have been very well documented. The problem is to show that they will be mastered by kids providing the extra time after school.

2. To overcome the problem of chronic poor staffing in such institutions, the program will be implemented in conjunction with colleges and universities that agree to implement practicum courses (academic service learning courses) in partnership with each after school institution involved. These courses will place trained university students in settings, to work directly with the children to be served.

3. The Department of Education, the Housing and Urban Development Department, and any other National (and perhaps others) will be brought to the table at the beginning not only to be privy to, but to help in planning and organizing the infrastructure required for successful implementation and scalability. Their major commitment is not at the start of the process (except to engage it, with no financial support requested). Rather, their involvement will grow over time if the program proves successful in its alpha tests. Then they will be asked to have in place a plan for beginning to build the program into the funding of their local institutional settings. This will require, for example, a part or full time staff member at the community site to assist in supervising college students, keeping records, and participating in some form of ongoing communication with other implementing sites about lessons learned, problems encountered, etc.

4. The current nascent collection of colleges and universities, who will also be at the table initially, must also be prepared to assess their ability to expand their involvement in the program and some mechanism for enrolling more colleges and universities needs to be put in place.

Last Words
If you agree that this kind of collaborative initiative is long overdue, then some recipient of this message should promptly step forward and agree to organize a meeting of the essential players.
Announcements

The International Class

The East Side Institute’s International Class is a unique study and training program in cultural and creative approaches to human development and learning open to practitioners and scholars with a broad range of educational and life experiences—and a passion for innovation. Designed and led by director Lois Holzman (past chair and program co-chair of AERA’s Cultural-Historical Research SIG), the program provides a unique opportunity for practitioners and scholars from the US and countries around the world to study together and learn the Institute's postmodern, activity-theoretic developmental methodology and participate in innovative educational, cultural and community-building programs throughout New York City. The ten-month program combines residencies in New York City and seminars, supervision and project development sessions conducted online. Contact lholzman@eastsideinstitute.org or go to http://www.eastsideinstitute.org/IC.html.

Performing the World 2012: Can Performance Change Save the World?

The seventh Performing the World (PTW) conference will be held in New York City, Thursday, October 4 — Sunday October 7, 2012. International, cross-disciplinary, conversational, experiential, and practical-critical, PTW has come—over the decade—to play an increasingly important role in supporting and expanding “the performance turn” around the world. If you practice and/or study performance as a means of individual, community and world transformation (or want to), PTW is for you. For more information go to www.performingtheworld.org.

Honors


Congratulations to CH-SIG President Peter Smagorinsky, winner of the 2012 Sylvia Scribner Award! This honor is awarded by Division C of the American Educational Research Association to recognize a current program of scholarship by a Division C member that has significantly influenced thinking and research of learning and instruction and that represents a significant advancement in the field's understanding.
SIG Updates

Membership in the Cultural-Historical Research SIG has been holding steady, with 213 members as of publication of this newsletter. At the 2012 Annual Meeting, the SIG sponsored 6 sessions (2 roundtables, 2 symposia, 1 poster session and 1 paper session) and hopes to sponsor at least this many sessions at the 2013 Annual Meeting.

At this year’s AERA Annual Meeting, The Cultural-Historical Research SIG awarded Dusana Podlucka (CUNY) with the Graduate Student Award; the 2011 recipient was Anthony Perone (University of Illinois-Chicago).

Our thanks go to the 2011-2012 officers of the SIG:

- **President**: Lois Holzman
- **Program Chairs**: Emily Duvall & Elina Lampert
- **Secretary/Treasurer**: Lisa Yamagata-Lynch

The officers of the Cultural-Historical Research SIG for 2012-2013 are:

- **Chair**: Peter Smagorinsky, University of Georgia (smago@uga.edu)
- **Program Co-Chairs**: Emily Duvall, University of Idaho (emily@uidaho.edu), and Carrie Lobman, Rutgers University (carrie.lobman@gse.rutgers.edu)
- **Secretary/Treasurer**: Monica Hansen, University of Idaho (monica.hansen@vandals.uidaho.edu)
- **Communications Chair**: Jenna McWilliams, Indiana University (jenmcwil@indiana.edu)

Call for Submissions to the CH-R SIG Winter/Spring Newsletter

We invite you to contribute to our next newsletter, to be distributed to all members of the Cultural-Historical SIG. In the next newsletter, we will post information about the upcoming AERA 2013 Annual Meeting, as well as information and announcements relevant to our SIG members.

In particular, we would like to include the following:

- Recent publications by SIG members that advance the work of cultural-historical research.
- Publication opportunities for SIG members, such as calls for manuscripts for special issues or journals or book chapters.
- Employment opportunities, such as faculty or research openings, that may be of relevance to SIG members.
- Funding and grant opportunities for members of the SIG.
- Announcements of conferences or other events that may be of interest to SIG members.
- Any other information or announcements that may be relevant to members of the CH SIG.

Please send any items for inclusion in the newsletters to the Communications Chair, Jenna McWilliams: jenmcwil@indiana.edu.