BOOK REVIEW

Learning in School-University Partnerships: Sociocultural Perspectives
By Amy Tsui, Gwyn Edwards, and Fran Lopez-Real, Routledge, 2009, 200 pp.

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Researchers in universities and educators in K-12 schools are often seen as having different forms of expertise when it comes to understanding education. University faculty are well-versed in educational theory and research while school-based teachers and administrators have intimate, practical knowledge about what makes schools work. School-university partnerships create opportunities for learning by providing a space for the interaction of the different forms of expertise. In *Learning in School-University Partnerships: Sociocultural Perspectives* (2009), Amy Tsui, Gwyn Edwards, and Fran Lopez-Real use sociocultural theories to analyze a partnership formed between the University of Hong Kong and local schools. They also illustrate the potential for sociocultural theories to enhance the larger literature on school-university partnerships. The authors recognize that although extensive work has been done with respect to both school-university partnerships and sociocultural theories of learning, this literature has only recently entered the larger discussion. This book sets the stage for a continuation and expansion of this discussion.

The authors use the first section of the book to provide a succinct yet thorough review of literature in the fields the authors aim to integrate. They begin by examining research on school-university partnerships and the ways learning has been understood within this literature. Much of the early literature in this field deals with the implementation of school-university partnerships, especially focusing on the need for and meanings of collaboration, cooperation, and community. The authors find that little of this early

work deals with learning processes. However, a significant focus for some newer research includes the importance of 'communities of practice': a sociocultural idea focused on processes of learning. Based on their review, the authors argue that sociocultural theories should have a larger place in research on school-university partnerships.

Two areas of neo-Vygotskian theory have been suggested as tools to enhance the understanding of school-university partnerships. The first, activity theory, suggests that goal-directed activities are carried out through mediational tools and underpinned by a system of rules, a community, and a division of labor. The authors rightly point out that "the activity theory framework leaves certain important issues unexplored" (Tsui et al., 2009, p. 34) and therefore employ a second area of neo-Vygotskian thought: the theory of social learning developed by Lave and Wenger (1991). This theory argues for the importance of participation in 'communities of practice'. In communities of practice, learning occurs through legitimate peripheral participation, boundary crossing, and identity formation. The authors provide a clear description of complicated ideas, thus effectively setting the stage for an application of these concepts.

In the second section, these sociocultural theories are applied to a series of five studies regarding the partnership between the University of Hong Kong and local schools. For each study, an aspect of sociocultural theory is used to analyze and understand the results. The first study examines the way three student teachers begin to form their professional identities through their inclusion in the community of

practice. For instance, one teacher is given workspace in a communal area while another works in seclusion. The teacher who works in the communal space experiences a form of legitimate peripheral participation that the other teacher does not experience and which helps to explain differences in the formation of their professional identities. The second study examines the identity formation of mentor teachers based on their position within a community of practice. The authors illustrate how inclusion in a community of practice, where mentor teachers can work together to determine their mode of practice, results in empowerment while exclusion from that community results in alienation. The sociocultural concept of activity systems is used in the third study to examine the practice of 'tripartite conferences' where student teacher, mentor teacher, and university tutor meet to discuss the observation of a lesson taught by the student teacher. By viewing the tripartite conference as an activity system the authors uncover the complexity involved in the formation and negotiations of the relationships and interactions that compose this structure. This allows for a more nuanced picture of this process than could be achieved without sociocultural theories. In the fourth study the 'lesson study' is examined as an activity system and boundary crossing experience. Lesson studies involve the collaborative construction and evaluation of a lesson by university tutors and mentor teachers. As an activity system and a form of boundary crossing, this experience allows the creation of dissonance for both parties by putting them into a situation where they must negotiate the underlying principles of their sepa-

rate communities of practice. By viewing this process through a sociocultural lens, it is not just apparent that learning occurs, but also how such learning occurs: through the creation of dissonance. The final study continues an examination of boundary crossing. As an element of the partnerships formed between schools and the university, a 'fellowship scheme' is established where teachers and administrators are given three months leave from their school to work at the university in an intensive program. These teachers and administrators then take their experiences back to share with their school communities. As a form of boundary crossing, this experience allows the creation of dissonance and an opportunity for learning, which shows the power that sociocultural theories have to explain the processes by which learning occurs.

Though the analysis is successful in using sociocultural theories to explain learning processes in school-university partnerships, only selected aspects of sociocultural theory are applied in each case. A unified sociocultural framework, applied to each case, would provide a more complete picture of the learning processes at work. As noted above, the authors see the sociocultural theories they describe as being complementary and that paying attention to only one "leaves certain important issues unexplored" (p. 34). Three of the studies only use concepts related to communities of practice and another focuses exclusively on activity systems. In the analysis of only one study, which focuses on the 'lesson study', aspects of both activity systems and communities of practice have been applied. The analysis of the learning processes studied would have been greatly enhanced by the application of both concepts to each study. For instance, the study of the tripartite conferences focuses on understanding these processes as activity systems. This analysis is certainly illuminating, but these conferences could also be evaluated as a community of practice with boundary crossings as the university tutor and school-based mentor teacher negotiated each other's respective forms of expertise.

This book makes a valuable contribution to the literature on school-university partnerships through its application of sociocultural theories of learning to the particular studies described. However, the most significant impact of this work lies in its ability to expose the literature on school-university partnerships to further sociocultural analysis. By providing both a theoretical exposition on sociocultural theories, and demonstrating their applicability to school-university partnerships, this work opens the door to further application of sociocultural concepts in order to better understand and improve the learning of students, teachers, and university faculty in school-university partnerships.

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