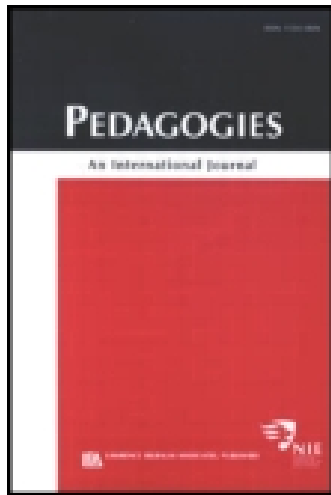


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Learning in school-university partnership: sociocultural perspectives

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corpora for general second language learning, though Kubler's chapter does mention specialized parallel corpora and comparable corpora in her description of translation teaching. But one flaw cannot obscure the splendour of the jade. Despite its minor defects, it is still a very helpful book for researchers and teachers in corpus-assisted language education.

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Learning in school–university partnership: sociocultural perspectives, by Amy B.M. Tsui, Gwyn Edwards, Fran Lopez-Real, with Tammy Kwan, Doris Law, Philip Stimpson, Rosina Tang, & Albert Wong. New York, Routledge, 2009, xii + 187 pp., US\$145.00 (hardback), ISBN 978-0-8058-5316-2

Researchers at universities and teachers in schools have different expectations in their professional pursuits, and it is particularly the case with reference to how the two strands of knowledge and expertise they have can be brought together for deepening the understanding of teaching issues in the classroom, teacher improvement through mentorship programmes in school settings and the concept surrounding what it entails to be an effective teacher in real life. The embodiment of knowledge and skills in this connection can be better materialized through initiatives formulated by researchers and supported by practitioners, and school–university partnership serves exactly this purpose. In the context of school reform in many parts of the world, Amy B.M. Tsui et al.'s *Learning in School–University Partnership: sociocultural perspectives* is a timely publication which provides a

systematic examination of teacher learning in relation to student improvement in schools. It fills a research gap in this area despite the practice that has been in place for some years.

Preceded by Tsui, Edwards and Lopez-Real's preface, where the key tenets of the book are highlighted, the book comprises three parts. Part I, "School–University Partnership and Theories of Learning", is where the authors spell out the main terrain of the inquiry. They present the specific contexts for learning in school–university partnership and the theoretical lenses they use for analyzing the issues they intend to investigate. In Chapter 1, "Contexts for Learning in School–University Partnership", the authors survey the field of school–university partnership and the relevant literature on it. They first look at the emergence of school–university partnership in the 1980s and 1990s, then present their review of the research in this area. Given that early writings on school–university partnership have tried to establish models detailing some typically prominent features of different types of partnership, the authors organize their research review under nicely created headings such as collaboration, complementarity, equivalence and community. This is important because of the vast and divergent directions of such work around the world, though typically in the United Kingdom, the United States and Australia. On the basis of the literature review, they present their school–university partnership in Hong Kong as a case study, which runs through the whole book. Chapter 2, "Sociocultural Perspectives of Learning", provides a lens through which the school–university partnership is examined and reflected upon. In the authors' view, "school–university partnership is an immensely complex enterprise. Schools and universities have different missions and they set out to achieve different goals. . . . The involvement of universities and schools in the provision of teacher education necessarily generates conflicts because of their different perspectives, cultural norms and priorities" (p. 25). This argument paves the way for their research to have a heavy socio-cultural basis, which naturally results in a necessity for investigating educational issues with reference to a critical reappraisal of major theories of learning in the field. This is exactly what the authors present in this chapter. The Piagetian perspective of learning is contrasted with that of Vygotsky's (1978). In the former, learning is primarily an individual act that is in synchrony with the learner's development; whereas in the latter, human development is not a phenomenon of an isolated cognitive event. Rather, the developmental process is mediated by the environment, including the culture in which the learner grows. Such an argument has resonance in second language learning and teacher education (e.g. Ellis, 2010; Zhang, 2010). A further theoretical development that undergirds the Hong Kong school–university partnership project is activity theory, originally developed by Vygotsky (1978) and Leont'ev (1981) and recently expanded by Engeström, Miettinen, and Punamäki (1999), Wertsch (1991), Russell (1997), Roth and Tobin (2002), among many others. Next, the authors systematically review a social learning theory developed and expounded by Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998).

Part II, "Cases of Learning in School–University Partnership", includes five chapters. In each of the five chapters, different themes are investigated and discussed at length and in depth. In Chapter 3, "On Becoming a Member of a Community of Practice", the authors explore how student teacher learning is a process of developing a professional identity, framed by Lave and Wenger's (1991) "legitimate peripheral participation" in a community of practice. The role that school–university partnership plays in facilitating these student teachers' peripheral participation is theorized and its significance in "profoundly affecting the fashioning of their incipient professional identities" (p. 47) is emphasized. Chapter 4, "Mentoring, Learning and Identity Formation", deliberates identity formation in mentors' learning, following what is discussed in the previous chapter. The key concept of identity being "co-constructed" (Wenger, 1998) is further illustrated through case

studies of three mentors. A heavy theoretical exposition of identity is presented with reference to the dimensions of identity, where power relations, engagement and alignment, among other things, are discussed in relation to the three case studies. Chapter 5, “Tripartite Conferences: Positioning and Activity Systems”, reports on the joint effort among schools, teacher education providers and mentor teachers. What is unique about the authors’ analysis of the tripartite conferences is the angle from which they look at the effectiveness of teacher learning, one that is mainly based on activity theory, where the concept of “positioning” is a key construct. Chapter 6 “Mutual Engagement and Boundary Crossing in Lesson Studies”, as the title indicates, focuses on mutual engagement between teachers and university tutors, the process being mediated by their concerted effort in lesson study. All those involved have to undergo some degree of “boundary crossing and brokering” (p. 111), where learning is afforded when teachers, mentors and university teacher educators merge into the other communities to think about their own work for more effective teacher preparation. The last chapter of this part, “Connecting Communities of Practice”, focuses on how “learning is afforded at the boundaries of communities of practice” (p. 132). Using Wenger’s (1998) notion of “boundary” in social learning theory, the authors argue that “communities of practice do not exist in isolation and, therefore, cannot be understood independently of each other” (p. 132) because boundaries “offer learning opportunities in their own right” (Wenger, 1998, p. 84). Much of this chapter is devoted to expounding these notions, such as “boundary objects”, “brokering” and “boundary spanning”, in the light of what Wenger explains. Based on a solid theoretical understanding of “community of practice”, the authors then critically evaluate their “Fellowship Scheme”, which is part of their school–university partnership research project.

I personally find Part III, “Reflections”, the most enlightening one, probably because it has only one chapter, Chapter 8, “Sociocultural Theories of Learning Revisited”, which is concise, terse and, more importantly, sole-authored. After reading all the preceding chapters, my immediate reaction when I read this chapter was that it was more cogently organized and presented. This intuitive feeling might have arisen from the fact that I had already finished reading all the previous chapters and therefore had a good understanding of the key concepts and, consequently, was well prepared for this last chapter. Whatever the reason, this chapter serves as a good conclusion to the book with the lead author Amy Tsui’s reflections on the Hong Kong school–university partnership from both theoretical and practical perspectives. Tsui’s revisit of Lave and Wenger’s (1991) “legitimate peripheral participation” in this chapter has led her to view it as having features of duality. The first sense of it is the critical condition of “peripherality”, where newcomers are not given a central and primary role in the learning process. The other sense of it is the critical condition of “legitimacy” of participation, without which real learning does not take place, as the learner is denied access to practice, and interpreted in relation to teacher learning, this means that the student teacher must be allowed to have access to the classroom, pupils, materials and any other thing that is relevant and useful to her professional participation and involvement.

What I find fascinating about this volume is the authors’ high-level theorization of what seem to be ordinary, daily affairs in schools. With the wide acceptance of socio-cultural views about learning in recent times, especially Vygotsky’s (1978) and Leont’ev’s (1978) activity theory and Lave and Wenger’s (1991) and Wenger’s (1998) conceptualization of “community of practice”, this book is a timely publication. Undergirded by these two broad theoretical underpinnings, the authors present a coherent volume that brings to the fore key issues about student teacher learning, teacher professional development through mentorship and all other aspects pertaining to teacher learning and school improvement. What I find a pity is that issues in second language education in relation to the two broad theories

of learning are not given explicit prominence, although the school–university partnership in Hong Kong is mainly about education through the medium of English or English as a second language teacher education, because of the dominance of Cantonese in society at large. Notwithstanding this minor oversight, the authors regard participation in practice in its socio-cultural context as fundamental to the process of learning, which is a great contribution to the teacher education literature. The uniqueness of the book also lies in the authors' success in bringing together the two themes in one book, school–university partnership and the socio-cultural theories of learning. Despite its focus on Hong Kong, the book is organized around a theme that cuts across international contexts. The Hong Kong Professional Development Project is used as a context for bringing forth socio-cultural and social theories of learning for school–university partnerships, which has implications for application in many other contexts around the world in teacher professional development. This book will be a valuable collection for scholars who have a particular interest in teacher education, particularly in teacher professional development, researchers in teacher education and development, policy-makers, graduate students interested in the social theory of learning as a theoretical framework for data collection and analysis and school teachers and leaders who are interested in or have already been involved in school–university partnerships.

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