

# Preface of the Series Editor

## Educating for What?

### In Searching for New Coordinates for the Twenty-First Century Education

This book *Alterity, Values, and Socialization: Human Development Within Educational Contexts* written by Angela Uchoa Branco and Maria Cláudia Lopes-de-Oliveira witnesses the authors' commitment to unfold the complex topic of values in human development and educational practices. The volume covers a wide range of issues (from inclusion, to creativity, to migration, etc.) related to the management of education with respect to values and alterity in a multicultural society. It critically combines the dialogical approach in educational contexts with the sociogenesis of the human values in a cultural psychological perspective. Branco and Oliveira, in fact, propose an innovative look at the value developmental processes that account for the complexity of ontogenesis in highly culturally structured social setting as the school systems.

This book nicely complements the previous one in the Books series edited by Meijers and Hermans (2017) that is the first book in which the Dialogical Self Theory is applied to the field of education. More specifically, *Alterity, Values, and Socialization: Human Development Within Educational Contexts* focuses on the idea that values at school cannot be produced by authority but only by dialogue. It provides the readers with the theoretically and empirically foundations for understanding values in education as the products of collective activity, rather than emanating from abstract universals.

While scholars in the field of developmental and educational psychology generally agree upon the relevance of the values in the ontogenesis of the human species, this topic is often disregarded in the current academic debate or—if considered—it has been treated from a cross-cultural perspective that overlooks the endogenous process of value education and the local specificities. The

cross-cultural value approach, indeed, focuses on inter-individual differences between contexts using culture as an independent variable. From this perspective, values are considered as given entities or fixed categories that can be studied or—even worse—“extracted” from individuals (Branco & Valsiner, 2012). This volume, instead, shows the process of emergence and dialogical construction of values and alterity *in interaction*.

Why the value’s issue went through such a kind of scientific underestimation? Probably because it calls for a definition of the horizon of human development and urges an answer to the question of “What we are educating for?”

As Tateo pointed out:

Educational institutions have the specific purpose of instantiating the system of values of a given cultural community by creating an environment that sets the acceptable range of developmental pathways, including the age steps and the transition processes that the individual can follow to become a legitimated member of the community. (2015, p. 32)

Thus, the never solved educational dilemma is the tension between guiding and following the human development.

This becomes of terrific importance if we consider the global impact of the outcome hierarchies created by PISA that have pushed many school systems into being tightly focused and regulated. The impact of testing systems resulted in teaching becoming more focused on externally determined, specific success criteria. The foundations for teaching and learning become distorted and driven by a deterministic output regulated system, in detriment of the full development of children’s lives and learning.

By observing the current situation of educational contexts and the variety of social settings in which life unfolds, I notice the coexistence of antagonist tendencies: inclusion of larger sections of students, who were once excluded from education for historic reasons AND the pressure on competitiveness, productivity, and leadership competences; the development of student’s potentialities AND the standard homogenized teaching in schools; the openness toward “the different others” (as in the case of immigrants) as an opportunity for enriching people’s experience AND the fear that the local culture is threatened by this Alterity.

Any discourse about values in human development and educational practices evokes, then, the *phantasm* of who is the “Men” of the future, what kind of human being we are promoting.

Also, the value’s issue dramatically shows the poorness of the scientific reductionism which permeates the contemporary academic world, almost incapable of a holistic perspective on the human being and his psychological functioning (Valsiner, Marsico, Chaudhary, Sato & Dazzani, 2016) which, instead, is the very core of the cultural psychology perspective.

After all, as Branco and Valsiner highlighted:

Values *are* culture, not *of* culture [...]. They guide our conduct, yet are ephemeral when we try to locate them. They are everywhere in human lives, and by being there, they are nowhere to be found (2012, p. xiii).

Educational contexts are the human arena for starting to detect *values in action*, how they frame our cultural ecology and our life development. Branco and Oliveira will gently guide the readers in exploring values, alterity, dialogicality and culture as possible coordinates for a renewed culture of education in the twenty first century.

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