# Introduction: Cultural-Historical Understandings of Motives and Children's Development

How to engage children, whether pre-school or adolescents, with what is culturally valued is a universal challenge for educators and for parents. Adults expend considerable energy trying to align what matters to them and what matters to children so that cultural patterns endure and children learn to participate as productive members of society within them.

All too often these attempts at alignment are seen as a problem of how to motivate children, and the impact of such efforts is frequently short-term. However, this book is not simply about motivation. It is far more ambitious: It unravels how children's longer-term development is interconnected with why and how they take part in everyday practices.

The contributors discuss how children develop in relation to what matters for them as they are with their families, go to child-care or school and play with their friends. The central concern across the chapters is the motives that give shape to children's development as they take an active part in the practices they encounter at home, in more formal education settings and at play.

The authors come from Australia, Europe – including Russia – South America and the United States. They therefore bring together analyses of relationships between childhood and children's development under quite different societal conditions. As such, it is possible to gain a more global view of how the concept of motives has been used to solve specific cultural and local community research problems. Taken together, the country-specific studies provide a strong focus on the interplay between development, emotions, motives, identities and the social practices in which children and young people may be learners. Collectively, these chapters bring together both a historical and a contemporary view of these concepts, giving a more expansive meaning to motives.

The book has the term *cultural-historical approaches* in its title to indicate its origins in the cultural-historical approach of Lev Vygotsky, a

1

Russian researcher who studied the intertwining of learning, development
and culture and who produced his main work between 1924 and 1934. His
death, at age thirty-eight, put an end to this productive research period,
which yielded an impressive collection of manuscripts. Much of his work
was first published in Russian after his death and then later in English
and other languages. Over the intervening period, his ideas have led to a
rich vein of cultural-historical research which has continued his examin-
ation of the interplay of learning, development and culture. Much of this
diversity and development is reflected in the writing of the authors of the
chapters contained in this book, giving a fuller account of the concept
of motives.

After eighty years, there are, of course, differences in how his ana-
lyses have been developed. Nonetheless, within this diversity, consider-
able coherence remains among the cultural-historical research approaches
which have built on his work. Hence we have long believed that it would be
fruitful to bring together researchers from these approaches to discuss the
key concepts of *motives* and *emotions* in relation to children's development
and to examine their interconnections with the conditions that family and
professional practices provide for their development.

Many authors of chapters in this volume have drawn upon Leontiev's
idea of motive in relation to the problems they are working on. Leontiev
was one of Vygotsky's co-workers and has been a central figure within the
cultural-historical tradition with his introduction of the concepts of activity
and the object-motive. Leontiev has a particular view of motive, which he
explained in relation to activities and what matters in those activities: 'The
main thing that distinguished one activity from another, however, is the
difference in their objects. It is exactly the object of activity, that gives it a
determined direction. According to the terminology I have proposed, the
object of activity is its true motive' (Leontiev, 1978, p. 17).

The idea of an object-motive within a system of concepts in activ-
ity theory is used throughout this book in connection with its historical
roots which commenced with the theoretical writings of Vygotsky. In this
volume, object-motive is critiqued (see Kravtsova and Kravtsov), elabo-
rated upon (see Gonzalez Rey), but has also inspired well-known Russian
(e.g. Elkonin, Zinchenko) and Danish (e.g. Hedegaard) scholars to put
forward contemporary works which others in this volume have used to
frame or analyse their scientific investigations (see, Fleer, Sanchez Medina
and Martinez Lozano, Stenild and Sejer Iversen, Wardekker and Boersma,
Winther-Lindqvist). Many authors in this volume have also drawn upon
a range of cultural-historical theories (e.g. Daniels, Edwards, Hedegaard,

Wardekker and Boersma, Winther-Lindqvist, Zinchenko) to better understand the theoretical problems they are examining. Taken together, these ideas have allowed contributors to connect the activities that arise in the practices of the home, child-care, school or playground with the thinking and actions of children so that their engagement in activities in practices is open to scrutiny. Through this empirical and theoretical activity, many challenges, possibilities, and opportunities arise for scientific research (see Chaiklin, this volume).

## AN OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTERS

The book consists of three parts. Part One draws on studies of children and young people to explain the organising principles that underpin a cultural-historical understanding of motives, emotions, development and learning. Part Two foregrounds children's lives to exemplify the implications of these ideas as they are played out in how children are positioned as learners in home, child-care, school and play environments. The two chapters in Part Three then take the core ideas to an examination of the institutional conditions for children's engagement with opportunities for learning, by discussing motives in the organisations that shape children development. The final chapter by Seth Chaiklin draws on themes discussed in a workshop of the first edition of the chapters. He points out central topics in this discussion and the challenge for future research.

The cultural-historical research traditions that Vygotsky inspired draw particularly on the idea that children are social from birth and that children's individualities develop into their personalities through becoming members of society. In this way children come to reflect the society they have grown up in, both by how their primary functions of need and perception are transformed and by how what matters in the culture influences their emotional and motivational orientation to the world.

In Chapter 1, Mariane Hedegaard proposes that this view of development has to be nuanced with the concept of institutional practice. Children's everyday lives are lived across institutional practices as they move, for example, between home and school, and the objectives in these practices influence the development of children's motives. Hedegaard argues that the dynamic of children's activities and development has to be analysed at several planes, for example, at the levels of institutional practices, activity within the practices and children's actions. Such an analysis recognises that children's intentional actions within activities have to be the core object of enquiry when researching the development of

children's motives while they are participating in institutional practices. Elena Kravtsova and Genady Kravtsov in Chapter 2 make a case similar to Hedegaard's, suggesting that children's perspectives have to be central to our understanding of their activity. These views, they remind us, reflect Vygotsky's analyses of human will, which for him functioned as a mediating device which links personal actions. Kratsova and Kratsov propose that children's will has a central role in how they live their lives and should be a primary focus in attempts at understanding the development of children's play and learning.

The remaining chapters in the collection build on Hedegaard's premise that institutional practices mediate children's learning and development. The authors therefore all recognise that the various forces emanating from cultural settings, social relations and a child's needs are interwoven to mediate a child's actions. They also work with the view that differences between institutions can be conceptualised as differences in the practices that are at the core of these institutions. Importantly for child development, these practices influence what Vygotsky termed 'the leading activity' for a child in a given period of their development and which is reflected in the child's motives, feelings, values and identity.

In Chapter 3, Fernando González Rey picks up these Vygotskian ideas by examining emotion and the part it plays in the formation of personality through the complex configurations of the emotions that constitute a child's subjectivity. In Chapter 4, Vladimir Zinchenko indicates an important gap in psychology, arguing that whereas language has been seen as central in children's cognitive development, there has been a lack of consideration of language as a cultural medium for emotions. Zinchenko observes that language mediates what matters in a culture through communicating feelings from the moment that the child is born, and language thereby becomes a cultural medium that influences a child's emotional and motivational relation to the world from the first moments of life.

Illustrating these points, in Chapter 5, Marilyn Fleer shows, through her comparative case studies of young children, how kindergarten practices can be diverse and provide different possibilities for children to be actively engaged. Her research shows that the opportunities that children have for structuring their imitation and their creation of rules for play in the activity settings of early education can influence the development of their learning motives.

José A. Sánchez Medina and Virginia Martínez Lozano in Chapter 6 show that peer interactions, even in early childhood, exhibit a marked

cultural component. The way in which peer groups are organised, the type of activity they develop, and even the conflicts issues and the way of nego- tiating and resolving them reflect values and norms of the adult cultures in children's motives for interacting in play. Children rebuild, in their acts, this world of reference. They re-create these values and norms conforming to a *peer culture* where those cultural issues play an important role as motives that guide and organise their own acts.

The importance of practices to the development of motives means that transitions between practices can be demanding. Examining the transition from kindergarten to school, Ditte Winther-Lindqvist in Chapter 7 dem- onstrates that both continuity and discontinuity in children's experiences take place. Her study reveals in detail the restructuring of what matters for children as they enter school and how this influences their engagement. Establishing engagement across situations and institutionalised practices is also a theme in Harry Daniels' contribution (Chapter 11) in Part Three of the book. He points to the importance of the re-contextualisation of soci- etal motives within concrete situations to change the situations. In this process, changes in the local arrangement of power and control are import- ant so that children can engage in new ways and develop motives for learn- ing in school.

Part of the educational process in school involves engaging children with what is to be learnt. In Chapter 8, Kåre Stenild and Ole Sejer Iversen in their project demonstrate that mobile phones and IT technology can be used in this process. They also argue, however, that the motivational advan- tage of using mobile phones and IT technology in school will be evident at first as an educational tool when this technology motivates children's use of the subject matter knowledge in their everyday activities.

In Chapter 9, Wim Wardekker, Annoesjka Boersma, Geert Ten Dam and Monique Volman also examine school practices. They draw on their study of motives and adolescents to discuss the mutual aligning of school motives and those of young people through an innovative curriculum development. They suggest that motivation has to relate both to the child's earlier knowledge and what is meaningful knowledge for the child in the future to achieve a 'use value' which is recognised by the child.

The importance of what matters for people in practices is also found in the final section of the book in Chapter 10, where Anne Edwards's focus is the professional practices of the children's workforce, which create the con- ditions for children's engagement as learners. She discusses the weaknesses of practices, and therefore the experiences of children, where what matters

for practitioners does not include distinct professional knowledge which is open to scrutiny. She argues that responsible and responsive practice with children involves attention to working on and with the knowledge to be found in professional practices. In Chapter 11 Harry Daniels argues that reconceptualisation of societal motives within specific situations provides an important approach to formulating a theory of how to change situations. In this conceptualisation he draws on Basil Bernstein's sociology of cultural transmission. Seth Chaiklin brings the the contributions together in Chapter 12 locating motives within the wholeness approach in Cultural-Historical theory and discussing the concept of motives in relation to problems in the theory.

## REFERENCE

Leontiev, A. N. (1978). *Activity, consciousness, and personality*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

PART ONE

MOTIVES, EMOTIONS AND DEVELOPMENT

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## The Dynamic Aspects in Children's
## Learning and Development

MARIANE HEDEGAARD

Over the years I have pondered about the relation between Jerome Bruner's study of infants' intentional orientation to the world and Marx Wartofsky's philosophical conceptions of human's dynamic relation to objects, and how to relate this to A. N. Leontiev's activity theory. Bruner (1972) and his co-workers studied experimentally how infants from one month to seven months of age transform intention-oriented movements into the intentional act of reaching for objects. From this research Bruner proposed that what characterizes humans is that we are born with 'pre-adaptive structures that make a possible comparison of what is intended in an activity and what is accomplished' (Bruner 1972, p. 34). Wartofsky in his theory questioned the notion that human perception is 'natural' and argued that human perception is an activity that is mediated by artifacts such as tools and language. These mediating artifacts, Wartofsky argued, have to be seen as objectifications of human needs and intentions '*already* invested with cognitive and affective content' (Wartofsky, 1979, pp. 205–206).

What is special in Bruner's and Wartofsky's conceptions of the dynamic between persons and the world is that they do not conceptualize the dynamic of children's relation to the world starting with the child's primary needs. Rather, it is a characteristic in humans' general relation to the world, that can be seen as demands from the world onto the person. The aim in this chapter is to integrate this conception of how demands of being in the world can be related to the cultural-historical approach of children's development and Leontiev's theory of motives.

Leontiev's (1978) theory draws attention to how children's needs, through participating in collective activities, become attached to objects (in the form of material objects such as different kind of foods, or ideal objects such as the value of studying or religious beliefs) and thereby can turn into a person's motives. Theoretically this is conceptualised so that

9

a human, born as an individual, becomes a person through acquiring collective motives.

This chapter formulates a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamic which includes not only human activity, but also demands by both objects and persons in different types of institutional practice. Institutional practice will be used to extend Leontiev's conception of activity and its motives.

The objectives of institutional practices, and how they create demands for children's activities, will be the central focus in the analyses. A central argument will be that on the one hand, children learn and develop through their orientation towards the demands in institutional practices for competences, motives and values; on the other hand, children's activities personalise practice in their realisation and contribution to the activity settings of practice; thereby children create conditions for their own learning and development of personal competences and motives.

In this chapter I draw on an earlier model (Hedegaard, 1999, 2009) of the relation between children's activities, institutional practices and societal conditions. The model is extended here by the concept of activity setting. Children's activities in this version (see Figure 1.1) are seen as located within activity settings that can be found in specific practices such as family or school. Demands in these settings by objects or persons can be seen as conditions for as well as motivating children's activities. For home practices this can be the meals, homework and preparation for going to bed. In school it can be the different subject matter sessions and recess. The model in Figure 1.1 illustrates a dynamic where a child concurrently should be seen as participating in several institutional practices in her/his everyday life – for instance, in the family, school or day-care.

The following section contains a short introduction to a wholeness approach to learning and development, that allows us to anchor the dynamic of children's learning and development in a theoretical frame. This is followed by an overview of the main theoretical approaches to the dynamic aspects in children's learning and development. The discussion then, from these premises, focuses on the dynamic relations in children's everyday life in institutional practices, discussed in relation to a concrete example. From this example the relation between children's intentional actions and motive-oriented activities is discussed.

### A WHOLENESS APPROACH

In cultural-historical approaches a salient aim is to move beyond an empirical-research approach of combining elements, and instead to