# SOCIOCULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY AND REGULATORY PROCESSES IN LEARNING ACTIVITY

Written by educational researchers and professionals working with children and adolescents in and out of school, this book shows how self-regulation involves more than an isolated individual's ability to control their thoughts and feelings, particularly in learning environments. By using Vygotsky's cultural-historical psychological theory, the authors provide a unique set of four analytical lenses for a better understanding of how self-regulation, co-regulation, and other-regulation function as a system of regulatory processes. These lenses move beyond a focus on solitary individuals, who self-regulate behavior, to center on individuals as relational, agential, and contextually situated. As agents, teachers, mentors, and their students build their learning contexts and are influenced by these self-engineered contexts. This is a dynamic perspective of a social context and underlies the view that regulatory processes are an integral part of a functional system for learning.

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# SOCIOCULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY AND REGULATORY PROCESSES IN LEARNING ACTIVITY

*Contributions of Cultural-Historical Psychological Theory*

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*This book is dedicated to my husband Jim for his
ongoing help and kind patience. It is also dedicated to
all of the children, mentors, and teachers who welcomed
me into their lives and their learning settings.*

*Lynda D. Stone*

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*Foreword*

# Childhood as a Social Category: Moving from Disposability to Actively Co-constructing the World

At the time of writing, in the month of December, in 2018, at least two migrant children – Jakelin Ameí Rosmery Caal Maquin and Felipe Gomez Alonzo – died while in US custody. In that year, youth care workers at government-contracted shelters for migrant children were charged with the sexual assault of children in their care (Haag, 2018). Laws, policies, and practices enable children to be treated as disposable. At this time in US history, children, especially working-class and working-poor children of color, are often viewed as dispensable. And, if these children are expendable, then many children and youth can also be viewed similarly due to their shared subordinated social category: childhood. Indeed, even when middle-class youth rise up and ask decision makers to treat them with inherent worth and dignity, as was the case after the massacre at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, they are mocked and regarded as patsies, or even paid crisis actors (Alter, 2018; Wootson, 2018).

To treat children as disposable also requires viewing them as less capable and as *becoming* rather than as already *being* complete persons in themselves. Relatedly, their individual and collective agency is questioned (Langhout & Thomas, 2010). I have found evidence of this disparaging social labeling in my research, where elementary school–aged Latinx children were viewed as incapable when they called attention to classism and racism and wished to document their sense of collective agency and nonviolent direct action against it in a school-based mural (Kohfeldt, Bowen, & Langhout, 2016).

Although children's abilities are often questioned, history documents their individual and collective agency. Two US-based examples are the Children's Crusade and the 1899 New York newsboys strike. With respect

to the Children's Crusade, thousands of Black children – some as young as seven years old – marched for several days for their civil rights in Birmingham, Alabama in 1963. Most of the children were subjected to police brutality and approximately 2,500 of them were arrested for their nonviolent direct action. The Children's Crusade is now viewed as a turning point for civil rights legislation, in that it was a crucial moment for President Kennedy, who had remained largely silent regarding civil rights until this show of collective agency (Children's Crusade, n.d.; Gilmore, 2014).

The 1899 New York newsboys strike lasted two weeks (Campbell Bartoletti, 1999). At this time, orphaned and unhoused children sold newspapers across the United States. Some newsboys were as young as eight years old. In New York, Pulitzer and Hearst owned the two main papers and raised the price for the papers to be bought by the newsboys but not the price for the newsboys to sell the papers. The newsboys found this model financially unsustainable, especially since Pulitzer and Hearst refused to buy back unsold papers. As a result, the newsboys called for a strike and more than 7,000 newsboys marched through the city, halting traffic. Owing to the strike, newspaper sales plummeted. Pulitzer and Hearst agreed to buy back unsold papers and the direct action inspired other newsboys strikes in Montana and Kentucky (Campbell Bartoletti, 1999).

The social category of childhood, and subsequent views of their individual and collective agency (or lack thereof), does not happen in a vacuum. Indeed, social constructions, cultural regularities, historical context and moment, and policies, practices, and procedures matter, to name only a few systems. Yet, in psychology and education, we sometimes ignore how these larger structures inform human behavior and learning. We do this at our own peril, for, when we ignore these structures, we create ahistorical, asocial, and acultural theory and analysis (Sarason, 1981).

I first met Professor Lynda D. Stone more than ten years ago, when I was a new partner in UC Links, a network of after-school programs that began in California and is now worldwide. As a youth participatory action researcher and social-community psychologist, I saw the differences between my paradigm and that of many others in the network. It was Lynda who created a bridge to show me the similarities between my programmatic research and what was happening at the prolific 5th Dimension sites that comprised a large part of the network at that time. What I most appreciate about the work that Lynda presents in this book is the bridging that she continues to do.

Lynda encourages us to engage in analysis from a framework that is broader than one person or even a dyad. She wants us to consider not only student–teacher interactions, or even student–student interactions, but also the social, relational, and contextual dimensions that shape what happens in any setting, including a learning space. Specifically, she demands that we consider children as active co-constructors and co-regulators of any space that they inhabit. In other words, through their agency and actions, they co-configure much of the world. This, however, is the paradox: although children have agency, they also experience tremendous levels of subordination, given the current social construction of the category of childhood in the United States. Moreover, if children also inhabit other subordinated social categories related to race, ethnicity, citizenship status, social class, sexuality, and so on, then they are even more inhibited in exercising their agency.

Lynda does not shy away from this paradox. Instead, she focuses on the learning environment, which is an especially challenging and poignant choice given that children in these settings are often positioned as receivers who are being regulated. Indeed, it is rare that they are conceptualized as active co-constructors and co-regulators of learning and of the cultural practices of the setting. It is even more rare for them to be seen as contributors to the social order, moral order, and relational habitus (i.e., "an ecological ensemble of relations including self, tools, tasks, and others that is intersubjectively constructed and sustained over time in formal and informal learning communities" [Stone, Underwood, & Hotchkiss, 2012, p. 66]). Through rich examples, however, Lynda demonstrates co-regulation and co-construction not only in "alternative" learning environments but also in more conventional ones, demonstrating how children co-construct these larger systems.

Through her theoretical and analytical lens, Lynda draws our attention to the social, relational, and contextual dimensions of these learning environments by carefully pointing out the traces of them in speech, intonation, mood, and more. Much like the work of anthropologist Jean Briggs, Lynda brings us in close so we can better glimpse the bigger picture. Through her approach, we see that the social and moral order is both historical and emerging, yet never completely fixed or determined, just as we see how mood is relational and moves across time and space.

At this historical moment especially, where children are seemingly viewed as disposable know-nothings, the perspective Lynda offers is a radical and hopeful one. It is radical to listen carefully to elementary school–aged children, to take them seriously, and to document the ways in

which they co-construct the world. It is courageously hopeful to see them as people who are currently helping to construct an emerging social and moral order within a specific historical context. Finally, it is generous for Lynda to provide tools for others to follow this path of seeing the bigger picture within everyday interactions and to understand how tone, intonation, mood, and more are traces of social, relational, and contextual dimensions that demonstrate the history and emergence of the social and moral order.

In community,

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# *Acknowledgments*

The key to success for individuals and communities emerges from our practices, from our relationship to family, friends, and colleagues within these practices, and from the ever flowing and changing ideas, concepts, and cultural toolkits we create with others through our practices. In my case, I collaborated with a wonderful colleague, Tabitha Hart, to write this book, and, yes, it is a book with limitations but with the genuine hope of contributing to conceptual frames for researching regulatory processes during learning practices in social contexts. Our hope is that these analytical frames can also offer ideas or tools for creating the very best learning arenas for children or adults to become active agents in the construction of their learning contexts and in the ways they regulate their behaviors for thinking, feeling, being, and doing.

My journey in this process began when, as a classroom teacher, I decided to enroll in a University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) doctoral program in education. This program changed my knowledge and ideas, my perspective on the world, and my sense of self by making it possible for me to take an interdisciplinary approach to understanding human learning and development. These changes were beautifully influenced by Professor Kris Gutierrez, my young UCLA mentor and advisor, who invited me to join in her own intellectual pursuits by accompanying her to the Laboratory of Comparative Human Cognition (LCHC) at University of California, San Diego so that we could meet Michael Cole, his colleagues, and his students. This magical meeting place is one of research, novel ideas, and, yes, care: care for children, care for families, and care for our communities. Along with Kris, I continued going to LCHC's meetings for more than three years. During this time, I learned how theory, research, and everyday practices can be woven together in practical ways to make a difference in the world. I have continued in a relationship with LCHC for more than twenty years, first as a UCLA postdoctoral fellow who helped to create and run a unique after-school program based on an approach

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developed by Michael Cole and his colleagues, the Fifth Dimension (5thD). Later, as a professor, I developed a local 5thD after-school site in northern California. The researchers and scholars in all of my experiences at UCLA, LCHC, and, later, the University of California's UC Links after-school community have influenced this book, influences for which I am deeply grateful.

My academic and research experiences lead me to reflect on my own teaching and, I am proud to say, my many successes with children. These successes are related to this book, in that the ways I helped children, without realizing it, were related to behavior regulation. To share an example, I describe Mustafa; he is a smiling third grader with big brown eyes who simply did not know how to "behave" in classroom settings. He often danced quickly across the classroom while swinging his arms in a joyful manner and, at other times, in playful ways, he would lose his focus on the tasks at hand – not at all controlling his behavior appropriate to classroom settings. At least that is what one of my colleagues thought. We co-taught together but in different classrooms and, as a consequence, Mustafa experienced different instructional practices. By mid-year, because of Mustafa's behavior, my colleague referred him to what was then called a "special education" program. Fortunately, Mustafa was not placed in this program. And, by the year's end, my colleague said to me, "You've worked wonders with him!" At the time, I did not think I had worked wonders. Rather, I thought he was just a child, a charming one at that, who needed help in learning how to participate in a classroom. I also knew that the other children had to "see" themselves in a positive, helpful, and playful relationship with Mustafa. This relationship was also one that had to be created among all of the children – it was a kind of moral understanding about how to regulate behaviors by helping each other succeed with all of their academic tasks. And, *over time*, I helped these children, along with Mustafa, come to this understanding. At the time, did I think of it as practical–moral ways of regulating behavior in a learning setting? Nope. That understanding, that theoretical knowledge, was to come later, after I had analyzed two of my video ethnographies of formal and informal learning contexts. But, once I was able to "see" this form of knowledge and how it shaped engagement, I realized it was characteristic of all learning contexts – work, school, and homes.

Over time, I came to see that I had used my own understandings of what children needed from their teachers or mentors to learn how to regulate their behavior in academic contexts. These understandings represented my own informal theories about teaching and learning. Had these informal

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theories been transformed through research into more formally articulated and socially shared theories, they may have offered others (including myself) a set of reflective tools for creating optimal learning environments in an explicit and, perhaps, more systematic approach. The analytical frames detailed in this book offer a set of tools for such an approach. They were constructed by paying close attention to learning contexts and how these contexts are created from transactions between individuals and their mentors or teachers or parents – transactions that always involve varying forms of behavior regulation.

My formal investigations into regulatory behaviors in learning situations were not done as an individual process. Three of the chapters in this book were adapted from previously published research articles and were written in collaboration with my colleagues and, at times, with my students. The chapter on the relational habitus, published in *Human Development*, includes contributions from my colleague Dr. Charles Underwood and a graduate student, Jacqueline Hotchkiss. The chapter on practical-moral knowledge was published in *Mind, Culture and Activity* and included contributions from an undergraduate student, Madeleine Kerrick, and a graduate student, Rita Stoeckl. The chapter on contextual mood was published in *Learning, Culture and Social Interaction* and genuinely co-authored by my colleague Professor Gregory Thompson. The thoughtful comments from the editors in each of the journals and from the editors at Cambridge University Press also contributed to this book. The chapter on identities of competency represented two years of analyses with my colleague Professor Tabitha Hart. Finally, I am especially grateful for the insightful comments and feedback from my colleagues Professor Basia Ellis and Provost Regina Day Langhout.

LYNDA STONE

My path toward working on this book began when I was an undergraduate student majoring in Communication at the University of California, San Diego. There, I had the great opportunity to study and work with Dr. Olga Vásquez on her after-school project La Clase Mágica. It was Dr. Vásquez who introduced me to a whole host of theoretical, methodological, and practical tools that would become the foundation of my future academic career, including how to structure a qualitative research project, from mindfully engaging in participant observation, to writing ethnographic fieldnotes, to interpreting data, and then presenting these interpretations

in a conference setting. Thank you so much Olga – I am very grateful to have had you as my teacher.

Fortuitously, it was working with Dr. Vásquez that brought me to Lynda. In 2002, I was a new M.A. student at California State University, Sacramento (CSUS). Based on my prior experience working with Dr. Vásquez and La Clase Mágica, Lynda invited me to join the research team for her own 5thD after-school site. This was an incredible stroke of fortune and it turned out to inform and shape my entire academic career. It was Lynda who taught me how to design and execute a multisited, qualitative research project, including how to write a proposal, navigate a fieldsite, record and transcribe data, use discourse analytic methods to interpret data, and write up research reports. It was also Lynda who cheered me on in pursuing a Ph.D. and ultimately becoming a professor in the CSU system myself. Along the way, Lynda has been my role model for what it means to be a good academic, public servant, colleague, and university-level teacher. Thank you so much Lynda – you have indelibly shaped my career and my life. I am so grateful for your generous mentorship and friendship all along the way.

TABITHA HART

# *Transcription Conventions*

| Layout | Speakers are indicated by initial letters of name or name. Their utterances and paralinguistic data are numbered consecutively. |
|---|---|
| - | A hyphen shown at the end of talk indicates incomplete utterances. |
| :: | Colons represent elongated speech or a stretched sound. |
| ° ° | Utterances between degree symbols indicate whispered or quiet speech in relation to surrounding utterances. |
| = | The equal sign represents latched speech, a continuation of talk, useful when a speaker (interlocutor) is interrupted. |
| (1.0) | A number inside brackets denotes a timed pause in seconds. This is a pause long enough to time and subsequently shown in transcription. |
| . | One period represents a perceptible pause in talk, thereafter longer pauses are represented by: (.) = 0.4 seconds (..) = 0.6 seconds (. . .) = 0.8 seconds |
| ↑ | An upward arrow means there is a rise in intonation. |
| ↓ | A downward arrow means there is a drop in intonation. |
| → | An arrow like this denotes a particular sentence of interest to the analyst. |
| [ | Square brackets denote a point where overlapping speech is initiated. |
| > < | Arrows surrounding talk show that the pace of the speech has quickened. |
| < > | Arrows in this direction show that the pace of the speech has slowed down. |
| ( ) | Where there is space between brackets, it denotes that the words spoken here were too unclear to transcribe or could not be heard. |
| *(( ))* | Where double italic parentheses appear with a description inserted denotes some contextual information – paralinguistic *data* such as gestures, eye gaze, body positioning, and so on. |
| <u>Under</u> | When a word or part of a word is underlined, it denotes a rise in volume or emphasis. |
| CAPITALS | Where capital letters appear, it denotes that something was said loudly or even shouted. |
| (h) | When an 'h' appears in parentheses, it means that there was laughter within the talk – these h's can be repeated to indicate longer periods of laughter, e.g., hhhhhh. |