

Editorial Introduction

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This special issue examines collaborative research from a methodological point of view. It considers the implications of the social processes of collaboration for the construction of scientific knowledge, in the interest, not of problematising the scientific process, but of drawing the process of collaboration into our methodological purview. Methodological scholarship has primarily been concerned with refining methodological techniques, such as questionnaires, interviews and experiments, without regard for the social conditions of knowledge construction—such as whether the research is individual or collaborative, the nature of the collaboration, or within which kind of social institution the research is carried out. We propose that the social practices through which research is conducted, the composition of the research team, the organisation of the team, and the social dynamics within the team should all be considered part of the methodology of scientific research.

The need for a methodology of collaboration arises in a situation of repeated calls for collaborative research, both from researchers and from their funders. For researchers interested in understanding human conduct, the fragmentation of knowledge along disciplinary, national, or ‘theory–practice’ divides appears as an adverse set of conditions for building holistic understandings of the real complexities of human life. This very journal aims to integrate psychological, behavioural, social

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and biological perspectives to build a universal social science. Collaborations between researchers, across the various divides, have become the main response to fragmentation. Of course, such collaborative endeavours raise as many challenges and difficulties as they do opportunities for creativity.

This special issue proposes that sociocultural psychology offers useful theoretical tools for analysing and informing collaborative research. What is the significance of collaboration as a medium for doing research? How can we theorise collaborations as a means of doing science? What are the different modes of collaboration, and what implications do they have for knowledge production? When should we use collaboration and when should we avoid it? What are the epistemological, theoretical and methodological implications of working across boundaries? The following papers and commentaries tackle these questions, using sociocultural psychological theory.

This collection of papers has developed collaboratively. It grew out of an Exploratory Workshop, organized by three of the guest editors, on the theme of “Collaborative Case Studies for a European Cultural Psychology”, held in Switzerland, in September 2006.¹ The contributions presented here have benefited from presentation, discussion and debate at the workshop.

The special issue begins with three papers, each about a major collaborative research project (Marková and Plichtová; Arcidiacono; Tartas and Muller). Ivana Marková and Jana Plichtová present a programme of research into the transitions to democracy in Central and Eastern Europe, which involved international collaborations among researchers with different languages and belonging to different societies. Another major international project, the SLOAN project on family life among middle-class working families, is then presented by Francesco Arcidiacono. Valerie Tartas and Nathalie Muller Mirza’s paper considers the tensions in an international and interdisciplinary research project in which pedagogical and technical teams collaborated to produce educational software.

In response to these substantive papers, we have five commentaries where we invited authors to extend, elaborate, contradict or debate with the original papers. Aleksandar Baucal’s contribution develops mainly on Tartas and Muller Mirza’s paper, using socio-cultural theoretical tools to conceptualise challenges and opportunities of collaborations. Reflecting on her own involvement in the SLOAN project (Arcidiacono), and considering the transition project (Marková and Plichtová), Clotilde Pontecorvo then considers the potential for collaborative research to generate new knowledge. The potential asymmetries of international, grant-funded projects comes under scrutiny in Charis Psaltis’s commentary on the SLOAN project (Arcidiacono, Pontecorvo). In the penultimate commentary, as a critical response to the driving impetus towards collaborative research in general, Aaro Toomela questions the prospects for collaborative research to produce real novelty. Finally, we, the guest editors, have considered the contributions as a whole, using the concept of emergence to reflect on how new knowledge might emerge through the

¹We gratefully acknowledge the European Science Foundation’s financial support for this Exploratory Workshop.

collaborative process. Our aim in this concluding commentary, and in the special issue as a whole, is not to critique or document practices of collaboration, but something more progressive. We aim to move toward a useful articulation of collaboration which can serve to guide future research and contribute to productive exchanges between the diverse perspectives that comprise contemporary social science.

Flora Cornish is a Lecturer in the School of Nursing, Midwifery & Community Health at Glasgow Caledonian University. She is a social psychologist with research interests in the problem of how people with divergent interests manage to coordinate collective action, in contexts including community development approaches to improving public health and the interaction between service users and health services.

Alex Gillespie is a lecturer in Social Psychology at the University of Stirling. His main theoretical interest concerns the formation of intersubjectivity, the self, and self-reflection in social interaction. This line of enquiry follows the work of James, Mead, Vygotsky and Bakhtin. He has recently published a book on this theoretical and empirical work entitled *Becoming other: From social interaction to self-reflection*, published by Information Age Publishing.

Tania Zittoun is Professor of Education at the University of Neuchâtel (Switzerland). At a theoretical level, she is interested in the semiotic processes of meaning making. Her empirical work examines people's uses of symbolic resources and their role in learning and development, as well as dynamics of transitions in the lifetime. She is the author of three books on these issues: *Transitions*, InfoAge, 2006; *Insertions*, Peter Lang, 2006; *Donner la vie, choisir un nom*, L'Harmattan, 2005.

Aleksandar Baucal is an Assistant Professor in Developmental Psychology at the University of Belgrade. His main theoretical and empirical interest is co-construction between human development and development of socio-cultural context. At a theoretical level he is searching for integration of different theoretical traditions within a Vygotskian socio-cultural approach. His current research deals with construction of new competences during interaction with others based on innovative methodology integrating both quantitative and qualitative techniques.