



Book Reviews

Downes, Paul (2020). *Reconstructing agency in developmental and educational psychology: Inclusive systems as concentric space*. Abingdon, United Kingdom: Routledge. 252 pp. ISBN 978-1-138-15885-6 (hbk); ISBN 978-1-315-10108-8 (ebk).

Book Review: “Reconstructing Agency in Developmental and Educational Psychology: Inclusive Systems as Concentric Space”

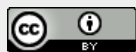
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Interpersona, 2020, Vol. 14(1), 84–86, <https://doi.org/10.5964/ijpr.v14i1.3835>

Received: 2020-06-09. Accepted: 2020-06-09. Published (VoR): 2020-07-02.

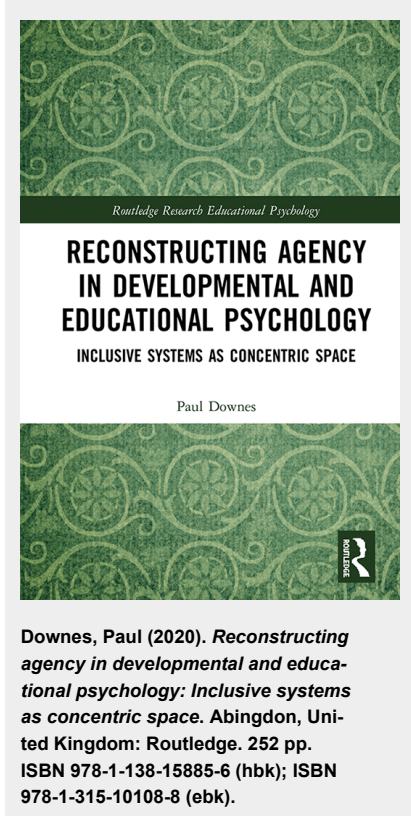
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Paul Downes has recently published “*Reconstructing Agency in Developmental and Educational Psychology: Inclusive Systems as Concentric Space*” (Downes, 2020), both as a hardback and as an e-book. This book is part of *The Routledge Research in Educational Psychology series*, which modestly aims to contributing to develop this field. The author — an Associated Professor of Education (Psychology) at DCU, the Dublin City University — has other published works on the issue, such as *Structural Indicators for Developing Inclusive Systems in and around Schools* (Downes, Nairz-Wirth, & Rusinaite, 2017).

Although examples are mostly from Europe, the main findings on this book may have important implications for educational and developmental psychology fields, in theory and practice, for many other contexts as well. From *Introduction*, the author clearly states his intent to outline the basis for a spatial ecological systems theory with inputs from many other cultures regarding concentric structures. In a constant dialogue with Bronfenbrenner and other systems theoretical analysts from the field, this work might be of interest not only to psychoanalysts or teachers, but to all of those worried about social exclusion in modern societies enough to debate issues regarding *bullying*, agency, resilience, expulsions and other very much alive topics on these pages.



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Throughout ten chapters, Downes discusses with works on the field in order to adjust his proposition of “inclusive systems as concentric spaces”. In brief, it has been divided in three parts. At the first part (Chapters 1 to 3), Downes ‘sets the scene’ on the concepts towards agency and the proposed inclusive systems. Seeking to go beyond a (mostly Western) preconception of space as a ‘*tabula rasa*’ to any culture, Downes turns to the very ‘othering’ processes as the major topics of investigation, instead of the ‘others’ themselves.

In the second (Chapters 4 to 8), another spatial shift is proposed. This time, he seeks to reconstruct resilience, early school leaving and bullying, which are usually seen as ‘isolated’ issues, in terms of the broader surrounding background (usually seen as ‘silent’). Such a background could be seen as being composed not only by ‘structural features of school systems’, but also by these systems (lack of) relations with the surrounding community. In a more relational sense, the dialogue *in-between* these (usually seen as ‘apart’) structures about *how* to address such local problems could be the very key to solve them.

The third and last part (Chapters 9 and 10) attempts to set concentric and diametric spaces as deep ‘structures of experience’. At this point, the author states very clearly that some problem are often being treated by the literature as ‘individual’, such as the ‘matters of transition’ of students from one school stage to another, when they could be in fact linked to spatial issues, such as the quality of the school environments. Local community’s participation in school is crucial, as well as many other aspects of concentric spaces as ones of ‘inclusion’ raised by the author, in the approach to the main ‘problems’ over which the field researchers are currently dwelling over.

From *Introduction* to the last chapter, therefore, the reader’s “familiarity of space” is challenged, as well as notions of “concentric” and “diametric” spatial systems. These, according to the author, are in a constant interaction that is much as precondition as a frame to cognitions, emotions and actions of subjects in a relational background. Thus much of the theoretical and practical methods to study interpersonal relations must start taking this spatial systems analysis into consideration. Such a change will not however come without a review of our own preconceptions over the structures in both the concentric and diametric spaces, all of what constitute our *protolanguage* to deal with this world.

Much more research is needed in order to develop the hypothesis that Paul Downes has boldly explored in this book towards the relative openness or closure of spaces to human action through interaction. “Inclusive systems as a concentric space” opens up a debate that will hardly ever end up in here, though it might be a great start for those seeking to address the space as more than just a ‘blank page’ in our societies.

Funding

The author has no funding to report.

Competing Interests

The author has declared that no competing interests exist.

Acknowledgments

The author has no support to report.

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