

CHAT research profile for Louis Botha

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Louis Botha is a senior lecturer at the Wits School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand. He received his PhD in the Study of Professions from Oslo University College (now Oslo Metropolitan University) in 2011. The focus of his research was, and continues to be on using cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) together with indigenous knowledges for countering dominant knowledge-making traditions.



Initial efforts in this regard include theorizing the incorporation of indigenous knowledge principles into hegemonic Western knowledge-making using third generation activity theory (Botha, 2012), and empirically investigating this using the Change Laboratory in a school setting. These efforts led Botha to developing of a networked relational model of learning which models learning and development from a relational ontological perspective as a neural network of the moments (elements) from the CHAT activity system (Botha, 2018).

A recent development in the use of this model has been to re-present the CHAT activity system as a hand-drawn or painted network of relationships between its various moments/elements. This allows those drawing the model, in their capacity as researchers or participants, to use it as an imaginative artifact in the Wartofskian sense. In this way it becomes a *why*, *what* and *how* artifact as proposed by Engeström and can be used as first and/or second stimuli in CHAT interventions (Botha, in press).

The intention of these developments is to try to align CHAT's philosophical foundations more closely with those held by indigenous and/or non-Western knowledge communities, particularly the fundamental ontological principle of relationality. In this regard, Botha is further proposing an adaptation or reinterpretation of the Marxist dialectics underpinning CHAT. Building on Engeström (1987), he suggests that the concepts of use value and exchange value in the primary contradiction can be reinterpreted as *indigenous value* and *western value* to account for the primacy of relationality in indigenous people's activity, and the ways in which coloniality extends capitalist relational dynamics. Relatedly, the germ cell of this revised dialectic changes from being the commodity to that of the relationship. These proposed re-conceptualizations are intended to take into account the ways in which indigenous people, through their activity in the context of capitalist production, are both affirmed and denigrated as relational beings under coloniality.

In his efforts to advance knowledge-making principles from the global South for the CHAT paradigm, Botha is supported by several projects. The first is an initiative by Professor Annalisa Sannino titled *Africa's Indigenous Ways of Knowing Meet Cultural Historical Activity Theory*, which is funded by the Global Innovation Network for Teaching and Learning (GINTL) for collaboration in the African context. The aim of the project is to offer globally accessible spaces for indigenous theories from Africa and CHAT to interact and explore strategies for tackling the most acute systemic challenges of our time.

A second project supporting these attempted changes is an individual project titled *Developing transformative teaching and research with the Change Laboratory*, which is concerned with

developing lecturers' and postgraduate students' capacity to identify and harness their transformative research and teaching practices. This empirical research makes use of the structured research and intervention processes of the Change Laboratory.

The third way in which CHAT perspectives from the South are promoted is through the **Joburg CHAT Collective**, a research group that has been created by Botha and several other researchers from various disciplines and institutions mostly located around the city of Johannesburg, South Africa, but also from elsewhere in the country. The Collective's purpose is to assist local CHAT researchers to develop their knowledge and skill in using and adapting the CHAT framework for local research. Currently the Collective is putting together a research project which uses the Change Laboratory to investigate and develop the transformative elements of the CHAT-based research projects being undertaken by several of its members.

Publications

Botha, L. (in press). Excessive entitlement from a networked relational perspective. In T Ratnam & C.J. Craig (Eds.). *After excessive teacher and faculty entitlement: Expanding the space for healing and human flourishing through ideological becoming*. Emerald Publishing Limited, Bingley.

Botha, L. (2018). Developing epistemologically diverse learning frameworks. *Journal of Education*, 73.

Botha, L. (2012). Using expansive learning to include indigenous knowledge. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*.