

Language, learning and discourse
in
culturally diverse learning situations

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Language, discourse and learning

- **Language as a cultural tool**
- **Culture and cognitive patterns**
- **Culture and communication patterns**
- **Teacher/student interaction**
- **Discourse and learning**

Language and cognition

Lev Vygotsky

The role of culture/social interaction (1)

- Sociocultural environment ALL IMPORTANT for cognitive development
- Different contexts create different forms of development
- Cognitive processes (language, thought, reasoning) develop THROUGH social interaction
- Language (signs) is a tool of cultures used in social interaction
- Cognitive development is a product of CULTURE

“An intelligence is the ability to solve problems, or to create products, that are valued *within one or more cultures*”

(Gardner, 1993 p.x)

Lev Vygotsky

The role of culture/social interaction (2)

- Vygotsky emphasised the role of:
 - social interaction
 - instruction
- Central idea:
 - Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD):
 - the difference between the level of actual development and potential development

The Zone of Proximal Development

Vygotsky defined the Zo-ped as the difference between a child's "actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving" and the level of "potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p. 46)

Scaffolding

Jerome Bruner

- Interpersonal communication necessary for development – (socio-cognitive theory)
- Language forms the basis of understanding
- Development relies on active intervention of expert others
- Based on interaction with adults or more capable peers
- Relies on mediators developing reciprocal behaviour with the child (collaborative learning)

‘communicative competence’ the **SPEAKING** framework

- S** setting and scene (where and when does it happen?)
- P** participants (who is taking part?)
- E** ends (what do the participants want to achieve?)
- A** act sequence (what is said and done?)
- K** key (what is the emotional tone, e.g. serious, sorrowful, lighthearted?)
- I** instrumentalities (what are the ‘channels’ e.g. verbal, written, and ‘codes’ e.g. languages, speech styles?)
- N** norms of interaction and interpretation (why ‘should’ people act like this?)
- G** genre (what kind of speech event is it?)

“When I use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said, in a rather scornful tone, “it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less.”

“The question is,” said Alice, “whether you can make words mean so many different things.”

“The question is,” said Humpty Dumpty, “which is to be master – that’s all.”

(Lewis Carroll, Through the Looking Glass)

Discourse

“The way in which information is communicated, the context in which this information is evaluated and the implicit social values involved can be collectively defined as discourse.”

(Allan, 2003)

Discourse thus embodies meaning and social relationships and marginalises others from the debate by determining the frame of reference within which their standpoint may be judged.

Allan, 2004, p15

3 Uses of Discourse

1. Presentation of situations of domination as legitimate.
2. To mask the existence of these situations.
3. Reify current social relationships as natural.

(Thompson, 1984)

Discourses which compete with a multicultural identity

- ‘English-only’
- ‘one-at-a-time’
- ‘the decline of standards’

(Chick, 2001)

- ‘Native speaker teachers’
- ‘student-centred learning’
- ‘work’, ‘products’
- ‘public praise’

Communicative strategies

Literate



Oral

- Topic-centered
- Presume little shared knowledge
- Require precise detail
- Linear, single topic
- Single perspective
- Thematic focus or temporal orientation

- Topic-associated
- Less detail – more presumed shared knowledge
- Context orientation
- Sequential shifts – using pitch and tempo indicators
- Multi-themed

Classroom Discourses

AMERICAN

- Interactive
- Creative
- Participatory

JAPANESE

- Quiet
- Obedient
- Do not question teachers

Classroom Discourse

- appropriate language
- turn-taking
- overlap times
- teacher talk and student talk
- when to talk and when not to
- whom to talk to and whom not to
- answering questions
- understanding instructions - signalling

Context

Low

High

- Logical and linear
- Communication specific
- Extract information from text
- Context-free setting → transferable skills

- Relational and contextual
- Communication associative
- Find meaning in text
- Context more important than content

Classroom discourse -Diagnostic questions

- What knowledge do students from diverse backgrounds know about the stated and unstated classroom rules and their variations?
- What discourse rules characterize the school setting and how do they compare to what the student has learned at home?
- Are there possible areas of conflict between the school and classroom rules and those of the students' own cultures?
- Are the students aware of these areas? Are students from diverse backgrounds aware of individual differences in rule application among teachers?

Culture, Language and Cognition

- Higher cognitive functions developed in Mother Tongue
- Bilingualism → Meta-linguistic patterns
- Bilinguals score consistently higher on standardised tests
- Meta-cultural awareness → enhanced cognitive abilities

Conditions for optimal learning

- Provide mother-tongue teaching
- Provide inclusive content-based ESL learning
- Encourage children to use their first language around the school
- Use other language resources, classroom displays, library books
- Use different languages in signs, communications, newsletters etc.
- Provide for cooperative same-language learning groups
- Create units of work that incorporate other languages
- Encourage students to write in their own language for school magazine
- Be aware of language skills bias in assessment
- Instruct students in accepted classroom discourse*
- Vary types of classroom discourse *