

DEVELOPING A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE ROLE OF THE EMOTIONS IN THE LANGUAGE OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

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This paper presents a way of conceptualising how the emotions can affect the language of teaching and learning of the classroom. Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development, it is shown, can be expanded to incorporate emotional factors alongside cognitive and cultural factors. In explaining how this can be done, the interdependence of cognition and emotion in the language of teaching and learning is demonstrated. With the use of an example from a primary maths lesson, the emotional dimension of scaffolding is explored.

Incorporating the emotions into Vygotskian theory

This paper sets out a sociocultural approach to the emotions in learning. It argues that Vygotsky's (1988) zone of proximal development (ZPD) can be developed as a conceptual framework to allow us to understand the role of the emotions in development and learning. The argument starts with a consideration of the status Vygotsky accorded the emotions.

Vygotsky was clear about the role of the emotions in human development:

Thought is not begotten by thought; it is engendered by motivation, i.e. our desires and needs, our interests and emotions. Behind every thought there is an affective-volitional tendency which holds the answer to the last "why" in the analysis of thinking. A true and full understanding of another's thought is possible only when we understand its volitional basis. (1986, p. 252)

Not only did Vygotsky believe that emotion gave rise to thought, but he founded his theory on the premise that emotion and cognition were interdependent. He criticised any study of human development that ignored this interdependence, and saw the two as separate (1986, p. 10). This separation has been recognised as still evident in both theory and practice (e.g. Laslett 1998). It is a logical step, then, to explore the potential of the ZPD to accommodate the role of the emotions in the process of teaching and learning.

We can build onto the work of those who have explored the value of the ZPD in terms of cognitive outcomes. Mercer (1994) for example, sees talk as a social mode of thinking; language is seen as central to development, because learning takes place when socially constructed meanings are internalised and taken on by individuals. Development proceeds from the intermental to the intramental. Language is the vehicle by which knowledge is jointly constructed in the classroom, and by which learners internalise and appropriate this knowledge for themselves.

That there is a cognitive dimension to the language of teaching and learning is an idea that has become widely accepted. The concept of the ZPD is now an attractive metaphor for teachers to use when they think about the talk in their classrooms

(Maybin, Mercer and Stierer 1992). On the practical level, it means simply that if a teacher manipulates the intellectual style and content of their talk in a way that is appropriate to their learners' level of cognitive development, they will be enabling learners to construct new meanings and thereby take on new concepts. If their talk is too simple, the learners will not learn anything new. Too hard, and they will not be able to understand.

It has also become widely accepted that there is a second dimension to the ZPD, that of culture. As Cole (1985) has pointed out, the ZPD is where culture and cognition create each other. What is learnt is culturally specific, and by engaging in learning activities, teachers and learners reproduce and extend culturally specific ways of doing and knowing. So teachers must strive to make their language at the right cognitive level, and within appropriate cultural parameters. For example, it is no use asking a child to do a 'show and tell' presentation if they come from a culture where such activity is seen as inappropriate showing off. And it is accepted that those children whose home discourse practices closely match those of the classroom will find it easier to make progress there (Heath 1994).

Vygotskian and neo-Vygotskian approaches have stressed the importance of the exploring the full social context that contribute to the meanings that are created in the classroom, but when translating this into practice, have focused on the cognitive and cultural aspects of teacher-learner talk. The question now is whether we can add a third dimension to the zone of proximal development. Can we talk of teachers ensuring their talk is emotionally appropriate, as well as cognitively and culturally?

The answer is that we can, and it is through Vygotsky's own theory that we can do this. In order to be able to highlight the emotional dimension of talk, we need to take a step back for a moment and look at what we mean exactly by 'the language of the classroom'. There is more to it than just the actual words spoken. As Vygotsky points out, language is 'both a highly personal and profoundly social human process' (Vygotsky 1978, p.126). Thus there are two levels of language in the classroom: the external dialogue and the learner's internal monologue. It is only when these two coincide and become one that there is joint construction of meaning, and the intended learning can take place (I use the adjective 'intended' to mean that which the teacher wanted the learner to learn – it is possible for the learner to learn other things from the teacher who does not achieve shared meanings in the classroom. They could learn, for example, that the teacher is boring and to be avoided if possible.)

The idea that there are two levels of language is one embraced by many neo-Vygotskian theorists. In Mercer's terms, the 'social mode of thinking' becomes appropriated by the individual. Bruner (1985) talks of the process of scaffolding as being a 'loan of consciousness', and Wertsch (1985) talks of intersubjectivity. And it is through considering the nature of this inner monologue that we can highlight the role of the emotions in language. Once we have done that, we will be able to reflect on how the external dialogue can support this inner monologue on the emotional level.

Several points can be made about the nature of the internal monologue:

1. Words are understood on an emotional level as well as a cognitive level (Bloom 1993). Vygotsky (1986) stresses that what is internalised along with the word is the meanings, thoughts, needs and desires that are part of the fabric of each word. The memory of an interaction is more than just a declarative one, based on what was said. It is also procedural (Winkley 1996, p.57); that is, all of the elements of the interaction are also taken in.
2. It is fair to assume that the internal monologue is less rational than the external monologue. Not only does the subconscious input into this monologue, there is also the fact that when learning, reason is not enough; learning involves a leap into the unknown, and at such times emotions serve as transitional stopgaps in our reasoning (Dupont 1998).
3. The inner monologue is closely related with the learner's sense of self. Developing this monologue, i.e. learning, does not just involve the taking on of new concepts but it is also the process by which personal transformation is effected. To change the language of the monologue is in effect to change the person. The concept of self-esteem, considered by some as comparable in influence on performance at school to the child's IQ (White 1995, cited in Farrell 1995), therefore plays an essential role in determining the nature and progress of an individual's inner monologue. It comprises:
 - the sense of being safe, of physical and emotional security.
 - the sense of intrinsic worth and being valued for oneself
 - a sense of identity: the feeling of having a sense of self in relation to other activities and to the activities of daily living
 - a sense of affiliation: the feeling of belonging/being linked to others
 - a sense of competence: a feeling of empowerment and being able to cope with life
 - a sense of mission: having a sense of what one wants to achieve

(Winkley 1996, p.60)

These aspects of self-evaluation need to be intact for the learner to be able to desire and achieve engagement in a learning situation. How they actually manifest themselves in the internal monologue (they could be consciously or unconsciously voiced, phrased as questions or statements) is not as important as recognising that they are simply items high on the agenda in any learning situation.

These needs incorporate both the cognitive and the emotional. They are interdependent. If a learner develops competence, it is likely that they will have a greater sense of affiliation, mission and identity, and vice versa. And these elements are present whenever a learning task is undertaken. The process of appropriating the skills, thought processes and attitudes necessary for the completion of a task is termed self-regulation, and by viewing this as the development of the inner

monologue, we can see even more clearly the interdependence of cognitive and emotional factors.

The emotional aspects of scaffolding

We can characterise scaffolding as any external dialogue which supports the internal monologue when it is engaged on a task at a level of competence not previously attempted. Given the role of the emotions in this internal monologue, we need to be able to characterise classroom talk not just as a social mode of thinking (Mercer 1994) but also as a social mode of feeling. Teachers' talk needs to fill in the gaps in the internal monologue wherever they occur, and provide continual support to the emotional and cognitive support until self-regulation can occur.

Elsewhere I have looked at the ways in which teachers scaffold individual students on the emotional level (Nelmes 2000). The example below is a more general one. It concerns a year 2 maths lesson in a primary school. The transcript (see appendix 1) is from the start of the lesson, as the teacher gets 30 young children doing some maths work (aimed at getting them able to start counting from places other than 1, and being able to count backwards).

Bruner's original experiments on scaffolding –where he used mother and toddler dyads – were significantly different from the average classroom in a number of ways that are important to the understanding of how joint understandings are created in the classroom. Firstly, the emotional dimension of shared meanings was overlooked, masked by the use of dyads who have an extremely close emotional bond. The same is true of the cultural dimension. Teachers do not have the luxury of having children who are so close to them on an emotional and cultural level, and therefore they have to work harder to keep communication channels clear. They also have many more children to communicate with. The final difference is that aspects of the learner's identity – their sense of purpose, competence and affiliation- were masked by Bruner's selection of toddlers whose reasons for engaging in the tasks were probably intrinsic pleasure and wanting to please their mother. As children mature the ways in which they can interpret situations multiply and in the transcript that follows, we see that the teacher has to combine explanation of the task with generation of the desire to do it. She has to provide a loan of consciousness that covers the emotional as well as the cognitive aspects of the task. Her task is to get all the children believing that this maths (and thereby maths in general) is interesting and worthwhile in terms of their identities and individual self-esteem. She succeeds in creating the right emotional conditions (in all except the pupil Fred) by:

- Looking for and promoting the positive - she gives the impression that 'snappy maths' will be fun and successful, and she praises very publicly those pupils who are doing what she wants (sitting quietly at the start of the session). She also picks out the best bits of interactions, such as when a pupil tries standing like a statue instead of sitting as she had asked. This cleverly guides the pupil to behave how

she wants but the fact that she recognises his attempt to be a statue (i.e. being quiet and still) signals approval and recognition that he is part of the group.

- Establishing a ‘prevailing mood’ - despite the hubbub of the children returning from assembly she remains calm, quietly spoken, and overtly interested in having a fun lesson (she turns sitting down and being quiet into almost a game).
- Creating intimacy - she expresses pleasure at seeing her pupils, uses almost all the pupils’ names, remembers what some pupils did well the week before.
- Avoiding confrontation - instead of telling one pupil (Fred) who seems reluctant to do as asked, simply to come and join the group, she gives him a job to do (shut the door) and then says that at the end of the job he can come and join them.
- Taking overall charge of the group’s emotional state - she asserts that stopping the antisocial game at the end of the passage will make her happy and everyone else happy too.
- Signalling her own emotions - she apologises before enforcing boundaries, as well as saying what makes her happy, her likes and dislikes.
- Boundary-setting - she clarifies what constitutes acceptable attitudes and behaviour

Here is a teacher getting things right, by and large. What she has judged correctly is not only the students’ intellectual capability, but also their capacity to regulate their own emotions in order to cope with the demands of making mistakes, undertaking a task with only a small degree of attention in a busy and noisy classroom. Elsewhere I have explored teachers’ perceptions of children’s emotions and how they affect their capacity to perform tasks (Nelmes 2000) – terms used include emotional wherewithal, emotional resources, emotional capacity, emotional maturity. Every task a teacher sets has within it a judgement about the emotional development of the learner. At one point she warns the group that they, ‘need to listen because I’m not going to tell you any more about this so after this you’re going to have to do it by yourselves’, but she has such a close connection with them that nobody feels threatened by this – the shared meaning created by her and the students has become so strong that it becomes almost like an actor and audience at a pantomime. This is in direct contrast to her understanding with Fred, who seems from the start so wrapped up in his own thoughts he is unable to partake of the joint understanding created by the rest of the group. In contrast to the support in terms of explanation, confidence, purpose, affiliation, safety and self-worth that she gives the rest of the group, the teacher’s ultimate message to Fred, after interchanges that are marked by a lack of shared meaning, is one that may well undermine his self-esteem. At one point she asks him, ‘Are you able to do this?’. Whether this is a question relating to Fred’s intellectual or emotional capacity is not the question we need to ask – we should not separate the two aspects.

Presumably Fred is in some way trying to protect his self-esteem. The options available to him are to try to be high profile enough so the teacher has to make more of an effort to bridge the gap between the social dialogue and his monologue, to ask the teacher for more and more help to the point of overdependency, or to withdraw and decide the dialogue is not for him. These forms of negativity are cited by Kaufman, Pullen and Ackers (1998, p. 365) as being among the most common behaviour problems in the classroom.

Conclusion

My choice of a primary school maths lesson to illustrate the theory of this paper has benefits and drawbacks. The benefits are that:

- this teacher ably demonstrates through her practice a recognition that the emotions are an important dimension to the language of teaching and learning.
- The example of Fred demonstrates that desire is important to learning. We cannot know the reason for Fred's behaviour (though it is likely that it is an egocentricity relating to emotional underdevelopment), but it is clear that, emotionally, he was not on the same wavelength as the rest of the class in this particular context.

The drawbacks relate to the fact that the theory of this paper multiplies the number of factors in the construction of joint understandings, and to pick one example may lead to the assumption that this is not about a universal process. We now have a model which conceptualises the transaction between a greater range of universal factors in development (cognitive and emotional development), culturally mediated factors (socio-historically constituted ways of maturing) and how these factors relate to individuals in specific contexts (how socially mediated meanings are internalised into subjective ones). Picking one example from a primary classroom may lead to the assumption that emotions are a more important consideration for teachers of young children. This is not so. For example, there is now a growing recognition in Higher Education that greater attention needs to be paid to how students feel about learning (Nicol 1997).

The other drawback of this example is that it may lead to the assumption that the emotional dimension of the language of teaching and learning is largely about having the emotional maturity to take part in classroom activities. This would be misleading. There is more to our emotions than the commensurate development of our social skills. The emotional dimension to the language of teaching and learning is not just about successful or unsuccessful participation in classroom dialogue. And it is not about getting to a point of emotional maturity where the emotions can stop getting in the way of our cognitive advancement. It is about understanding that every critical moment in the fate of the adult or the child [is] coloured with emotion (Vygotsky 1987, p. 335)

Appendix 1: Transcript of the start of a year 1 maths class (all pupils labelled 'P' except 'Fred')

(Background: many voices)

Teacher (T): OK we need you on the carpet
(.)Hi Emma Nice to see you pack lunch good
good good(.) excuse me but we're on the
carpet Robin (softly) come on come on please

P: Apple

T: No it's not apple time it's actually because
we had an early assembly it's work time (.)
well done to Terry who's remembered that
it's not assembly time uh it's not playtime
now it's actually work time 'cause we had an
early assembly look at her sitting there she's
just like a statue actually that's brilliant and
Rebecca

P: I'm standing like this

T: No we need statues that are sitting down (.)
actually everyone who's everyone who's
around Terry is like a statue too because
Tim's sitting really still

P: Where shall I sit?

T: just by my feet here(.) and Caroline's
hardly moving her eyes and Mark's just really
still in the corner

Fred (*loud*) Where is the blue one the dark
one

T: And George is very still (.) John John
not now please (.) Right (.) Could you go and
close the door Fred and then come and join us
on the carpet please (class go quiet) OK this is
what I do every Friday I walk over and just
show you the work because do you remember
when you've done your art then you have to
do your snappy maths you have to kind of fit
it in when the classroom's all messy . Last
week when people did . do remember people
like Jolene and Caroline they did not only do
one like they were supposed to do they did
everything . some of these are hard today
though 'cos they've got about . eighty and
numbers like that on it.

(some children mumbling about the task)

T: I'm going to just show them to you . these
are called number steps are you going to
listen oh [To Fred] I said then come and sit

down please . (Takes Fred by the arms) Not
now not now . Ok you need to listen because
I'm not going to tell you any more about this
so after this you're going to have to do it by
yourselves Shh Luke D. are you looking OK
(lighter tone of voice) these are called number
OH (sigh of frustration) sorry maybe if you
sat on your bottom Fay then Fred would see
how to do it too (to F) are you able to do this?

Fred: Yeah

T: Maybe if I show you the class sitting on
their bottoms can you do the same please

Fred: Wahoo!

T: They're sitting with their legs crossed (.) if
the arrow on the page on the page points up
that means that you count to number steps up
so if that was one that would be an easy one
you'd write two three four five six seven till it
stopped

Fred: (*shouting*) Easy peasy lemon squeezy

T: Or if it started on number five you
would have to start counting on number five
five six seven eight nine ten

(several voices count with the teacher)

Fred: (*facing wrong way*) I can't see the board

T: If the arrow on your page however is a
down arrow

P: Easy

T: Easy? You think this is easy?

Several Pupils: Yes !

T: (*Raising voice to claim the floor again*)
You might have to start at 93, 92 , 91 ,90, 89,
88, 87, 86, (*theatrically*) that's not easy is it?

(Many pupils) Yes!!

T: Well I'll see how . that's that is the hardest
one Hi Tessa . well you can choose it's up to
you to choose because you go over and get
them . right eyes this way concentrating for
the art job . one . large . triangle

P: it's an isosceles

T: it is but that's a triangle it's a large isosceles triangle Can I make sure that people that people are really listening to the job please . Just going to wait for people to listen . I'm afraid that Oliver's not quite ready and Robin's not quite ready Shh! . On your bot

Fred (with a bit of string) : My worm!

T: On your bottom please

Fred: My worm!

T: (*confidentially*) Stand up a minute and we'll

Fred: You touched my worm is that your worm?

(Leads pupil out by the hand)

T: Come and sit just here until I've told the class what to do because you're interrupting I'll come and get you as soon as we do the job as soon as we start sit down please

(Returning to class who have become noisy, many shouting 'Simon says'. The class had obviously played this game on a previous occasion when the teacher had had to leave the room, only this time some of the 'Simon says' suggestions are verging on the unpleasant)

T: (returning) One(.) large(.) Triangle(.) Can I just ask you sensibly(.) It's a good idea but that(.)it's making people a bit silly doing that because it's making people like James say do something unkind to people so I don't really like it

P1: He said kill each other

T: What would actually make me really really happy I'm sorry it has to happen is if I walked out came back three seconds later class was sitting here like this that's what would make me happy that's what would make other people happy OK? Jessica are you looking one large triangle (goes on with explanation)

(running time: approximately four and a half minutes)

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