

Individual Difference in Intellectual Development from Vygotsky's Sociocultural Perspective

Wakako Kobayashi

Faculty of Business, Aoyama Gakuin University

wakakoba@mbh.nifty.com

Abstract

What I wish to present in this paper is to review a few of Vygotsky's ideas and Vygotsky-related teaching approaches. Then here, I limit the discussion to investigate the following two aspects. 1) Vygotsky treats the individual as non-active in the

Process of intellectual development. I hypothesize that this might be one of the critical motivations of post Vygotskian, Wertsch advances the original Vygotskian works, entering the notion of Mediated Action. 2) I suggest that individual differences are not highlighted enough in the original Vygotsky's works. Again, I hypothesize that Wertsch's notion of Mediated Action might be the key concept to solve this underdeveloped aspect in sociocultural approach.

Keywords

Individual difference, Post-Vygotskian, Mediated Action, Piaget, reciprocal teaching, ZPD.

Introduction

These days, it seems eminently sensible to many psychologists (Wertsch & Tulpiste, 1992, William & Burden, 1997) as well as second language acquisition (SLA) researchers (See, Mitchell & Myles, 1998) to view the development of cognition as taking place within a social context (Kobayashi, 2008). The clear distinction between cognitive and socio-emotional aspects is increasingly blurred, especially when the researchers posit the idea of co-construction in cognition. As Schaffer (1996) indicates, the main reason why Vygotsky recently overtakes Piaget in the citation popularity is just one indication of this trend of co-construction / joint activity.

1 Research Questions and Hypothesis

What we wish to present in this paper is to Review a few of Vygotsky's ideas and Vygotsky-related teaching approaches such as reciprocal teaching, cooperative learning, apprenticeship in teaching and guided participation (Rogoff, 1990). We limit the discussion to

investigate and suppose the following:

- 1) Numerous attempts have been made by scholars to demonstrate that Vygotskian sociocultural theory puts focus on the significance of mediation through enculturation, or guided participation by teacher's or knowledgeable peer's verbal language. The questions which have been touched on from time to time, however but not exposed well enough in Kobayashi (2008), are that Vygotsky treats the individual as non-active (or more accurately not-so active) in the process of intellectual development. Here we hypothesize and suggest that this might be one of the critical motivations of a post Vygotskian notion of Mediated Action.
- 2) When we language teachers think about the actual classroom context, we consider how we effectively develop the learner's higher mental functioning, through various kinds of classroom activities, teacher's instruction, and interaction with knowledgeable peers. Whereas Piaget prefers learner's independent, discovery-based activities, Vygotsky favors guided participation, mainly by the intermental (social) effective, socio-historical-cultural approach, and semiotic-mediated approach to culture (Kobayashi, 2008). Then, we suggest that individual differences are not highlighted enough in the original Vygotskian works although teachers as mediators should adaptively design the effective instructions so that they could maximize each learner's outcome in the classroom which could be empirically quantified. Again, we hypothesize that Wertsch (1991)'s notion of Mediated Action might be the key concept to solve this underdeveloped, primitive aspect in a sociocultural approach.

2 Dealing with Individual Differences: Hypothesis

We hypothesize here like Daniels (1996) does, the practical integration of Piagean constructivism and Vygotsky's dialectical, social historical method, because Piagean stage theory contains some logical limitation in assimilation. Bidell (1992) again describes in terms of this.

Then, as we hypothesize in the research question section, a post-Vygotskian Wertsch (1991) treats more individual differences than Vygotsky's original work. For instance, post Vygotskian researchers sometimes remind themselves that an ontogenetic account is not absent in the dialectical model initiated by Vygotsky, therefore, they seek to refine some of the earlier socially determined models of internalization (Daniels, 1996, Wertsch, 1998).

3 Resolution: Reciprocal Teaching in Mediated Action, Considering Differences in Cognitive Abilities.

Socio-cultural milieu plays a role in influencing both the cognitive and affective individual differences, that is, many variables like intelligence, aptitude, learning strategies for cognitive factors and attitudes, motivation, anxiety and self-confidence.

In conducting dynamic tests in which children / learners are given some kind of feed backs as reinforcement, we consider that it is possible to empirically calculate the differences between their developed abilities and latent capacities, treating testing and effective, adaptive instructions as being of one piece rather than being distinct process, even in the Mediated Action.

4 Conclusion

So far, many SLA researchers have tried to show how individual differences affect second language acquisition in a variety of contemporary instructional contexts and settings, however, there is still room left for empirically investigating the dynamic relationships between active individuals and contexts if we teachers as mediators apply the post Vygotskian's concept of mediated action into the classroom society. We assume the notion of mediated action is partly responsible for avoiding the kind of social reductionism in the original Vygotskian works when we think about the significance of designing effective and adaptive instructions to maximize the

learners' output in the classroom.

4.1 References

Bidell, T. (1992). Beyond interaction in contextualist models of development. *Human Development 35*: pp. 306-315.

Daniel, H. (1996). Introduction: Psychology in social world. In H. Daniel (Ed.). *An introduction to Vygotsky*. London: Routledge.

Kobayashi, W. (2008). The use of culture in intellectual development from Vygotsky's sociocultural perspective. *The Journal of Engaged Pedagogy 7*, pp.5-16.

Mitchell, M. & Myles, F. (1998). *Second language learning theories*. London: Arnold.

Rogoff, B. (1990). *Apprenticeship in thinking. Cognitive development in social context*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Schaffer, H.R. (1996). Joint involvement episodes as context for development. In H. Daniels (Ed.), *An introduction to Vygotsky*. London: Routledge.

Wertsch, J.V. (1991). *Voices of mind: A sociocultural approach to mediated action*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Wertsch, J. V. (1998). *Mind as action*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Wertsch, J.V. & Tulviste, P. (1996). L.S.Vygotsky and contemporary developmental psychology. In H. Daniels (Ed.) *An introduction to Vygotsky*. London: Routledge.

William, M. & Burden, R. L. (1997). *Psychology for language teachers: A social constructivist approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.