Relations Between the Individual and the Socio-Cultural: The ZPD and the ZPWE and the Philosophy of Second Hand Knowledge

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This article traces differing patterns of conceptualizing the relationship between the individual and the socio-cultural conceptions of development as they are seen through the lens of three conceptual frameworks: the cognitive-developmental, the dialogical, and the activity-participatory. In addition, it examines the ways in which these conceptualizations are related in the development, both within and between, various theoretical orientations to the analysis of development, as they have emerged in recent years.

The relationship between the individual and the socio-cultural can be problematized/conceptualized within a number of differing frameworks. In this paper, I will contrast three major classes of these that will be identified as "the developmental," "the dialogical," and "the participatory." My argument will revolve around three terms that take on different relationships and meanings within each framework. These terms are "the individual," "the social," and "culture."

THE "DEVELOPMENTAL"

In a classical cognitive developmental framework, theoretical issues revolve around sources and forms of knowledge, and whether these stem from individual experiences and activities, or whether (and to what extent and in what way) knowledge comes from socio-cultural factors such as the meditational means identified with cultural configurations, or from the social interactions with both more and less capable social others.[1]

The topic is clearly "knowledge" or, alternatively, "developmental level." There is a fairly long tradition of work in this area of developmental psychology, stemming both from Piagetian and Vygotskian sources. (e.g. Doise, Mugny, & Perret-Clermont, 1975, 1976; Vygotsky (as translated and edited), 1978).[2]

In Vygotskian terms, the relation between the social and the individual is framed in terms of the Zone of Proximal Development, which is classically defined in terms of the difference between a child's "actual" developmental level and the child's "potential" developmental level, as shown by the difference between unaided performance and performance with the aid of "a more capable other." Such a notion can easily lead to the idea that development is not only defined by the relation "actual" to "potential" but also that the there is directionality to development – it is a) unidirectional, b) scaffolded with the direction of

influence always being from the more capable to the less (which has made it particularly suited to many approaches to teaching), and c) identified by performance on "diagnostic" (or developmental level) tasks.

There is a somewhat unrecognized (or at the least backgrounded) parallel within the Piagetian tradition (Doise, Mugny & Perret-Clermont 1975, 1976), with several important differences. Doise, et. al (1975; 1976), in a series of studies on tasks concerned with the development of concrete operational intelligence (e.g. the "three mountain task"), studied the influence of social interaction on measured developmental levels. In Piaget's original test of egocentrism, the child is shown a three-dimensional model of three mountains of different sizes and colors with some additional distinguishing features (e.g. a house, snow on one of the mountains). The child is given the opportunity to inspect the array from different positions, and then is placed in one position with a doll in a different position. The child is then shown pictures of the array taken from different positions (one of which is the doll's and another the child's) and is asked to choose the picture representing what the doll would see. Younger children choose their own view as the same as the doll's – failing to distinguish the differing perspectives. Eventually, at an older age, children make the correct choice, and back it up with operationally coherent reasoning.[3]

In the Doise, et. al (2011) studies, children were tested on their own (with, of course, the doll), and again after having collaborated with another child at the same or at a somewhat more advanced "cognitive level." After that intervention, children were tested with the doll again. In these studies, *both children* showed an advance in measured cognitive level. The interaction was shown to benefit both parties. Rather than a "uni-directional" influence (from more to less capable) the effect was "bi-directional" with both parties benefiting. Rather than the model being one of teaching, the topic was the dynamics involved in interaction.

The Piagetian interpretation was that in the case of social interaction, the difference in perspectives is at the core of the interaction, and that higher cognitive levels have to be recruited in order to resolve the interpersonal discrepancies in perspective (a notably less urgent need when a doll is involved). This need to resolve discrepancies operated in both members of the pair. Note that in this theoretical formulation, the "cause" (cognitive conflict) is social, but what the cause causes is an internal process of construction. People may have perspectives that may perturb their coordinations, but, it is the inner cognitive activities that resolve them, and where the changes occur.

Thus, in the Piagetian version of the consequences of interactions with a more capable other, the social interaction has developmental consequences for both the "more" and "less" capable other. The Piagetian notion is that it is the contrast of differing viewpoints that leads to some form of constructive advance, as differences must be reconciled and higher order levels of thinking must be mobilized to achieve this. This is not like teaching or scaffolding. It is more like conflict resolution.

Within the Piagetian tradition, however, the ultimate goal of the analysis of the effect of social interaction was to identify the underlying consequence in intra-psychological terms

– i.e. the cognitive changes within each individual which are seen as "diagnostic" of developmental level. Social conflict might have been the "cause," but the effect was individual. There is, however, a different way of thinking about these issues.

THE "DIALOGICAL"

Unfolding from the confluence of internal inconsistencies between studies, and the emergence of Vygotskian theory in the United States in the late 1970's, a new form of dialogue between traditions arose. In this first phase the issues at stake were cognitive, i.e. whether cognitive progress was structurally limited or whether cognitive development could be accelerated "with the aid of a more capable other." With the belated recognition of the works of Mikhail Bakhtin (1930/1981) in the 1980's there was a subtle paradigm shift. Instead of issues being framed in terms of the impact of social interaction on individual cognitive development, the interpretive frame shifted from the impact of the social on cognition to the social dynamics and meanings that emerge in relationships – a shift toward foregrounding dialogical social relations rather than narrowly cognitive changes.

In two important articles (Perret-Clermont, 2012; Sinclaire-Harding, Miserez, Arcidiacomo & Perret-Clermont, 2011), Anne-Nelly Perret-Clermont, one of the early researchers on the social influence on individual knowledge (e.g. Doise, Mugny & Perret-Clerment, 1975) offered a profound reconsideration of the social/cognitive paradigm. Particularly instructive is the reconsideration of the "clinical interview" a hallmark Piagetian method posited as eliciting the reasoning underlying cognitive judgment – and exposing "operational structure" (see footnote 3).

In classic Piagetian studies, the clinical interview consists of a series of questions, posed by the researcher, designed to "test the limits" of the child's reasoning (Piaget and Szeminska, 1941). The function of this interview is to disambiguate the child's responses so as to make sharp distinctions, in logical terms, between seemingly "correct" responses.[4]

The structure of the interview is designed to see whether the child's answers ascend to the level of logical, scientific-like thought processes. Sinclaire-Harding, et. al., (2011) question this technique on several grounds that would have never occurred to have been raised in the initial "operational" experiments. The first point of questioning is profound – what makes the logical, scientific, the ultimate value? If the clinical interview is a dialogue between a child and a researcher with an end in mind (the logical/scientific) doesn't that focus help to obscure other features of the child's thinking, and in fact point the conversation and the report of the flow of the conversation totally in terms of the logical/scientific? What is lost are other features of the child's thinking, or of the interactions that are equally, if not more important, things to represent.

While this critique might not apply to the original clinical interview which is described as "open," "playful," etc., it is applied with great focus on the later research which attempted to codify and strictly constrain the interview "script" as the interview came to be more and more used as **the** diagnostic tool to "assign" cognitive level. Perhaps this was inevitable if the issues are constrained to assessing and assigning cognitive level. Such regularization

has several consequences. The "end-point" becomes fixed in the researcher's criteria for what is the focus of the intellectual diagnosis. Given standardization, comparative work can be done – but all with respect to the telos buried in the technique. Given "standardized" and "proceduralized" conversations, it is possible to provide the basis for comparative studies – indeed such did occur, cross-culturally, cross class, economic and racial lines. The point of the comparisons was almost always: "does this group have that (normative) level. If not, why not?"

One of the main points that the authors make is that the focus on one version of the developing mind obscures the possibilities of uncovering other aspects of thought. If, however, the clinical interview is considered dialogically, instead of diagnostically, different paths might be taken and other hallmarks of thinking exposed. Topics which are "off-topic" from a diagnostic point of view could be rendered as potentially interesting topics from a dialogical point of view.

When the "topic" of the interview is considered to be "what's in the child's mind as revealed by his or her answers to my questions" what is elided from view is the social situation of the interview, of the power relations between child an adult, of the construal, *by the child*, of what the dialogue is a dialogue about. Is the clinical interview only about logical judgment and "operative or non-operative language"? Isn't it also about social relations, the construal of the meaning of the interaction, the trying to understand the reason for being of this interaction with this strange adult? In keeping with Bakhtin's dialogical principles, a dialogue is not only between one speaking voice and another, there are other voices, inner voices, that may or may not be speaking in the room with us or within us. They are most likely speaking within us in order figure out the order of reality that we are participating in.

Opening up developmental research to the buzzing dialogues of human existence reframes the issues of the personal and the socio-cultural. Rather than a gold standard of thinking and persons more or less adequate to that standard, or inexorably developing toward that standard, or deploying their cognitions according to that standard (what one might call "the personal"), there are people engaged in interaction with perhaps individual "takes" on what is going on, but nonetheless socially enmeshed with others. There are cultural understandings of relationships, framed by institutional arrangements in which we all participate. These cultural factors, impacting on the construals of the meanings of social engagements are as much a part of thinking as are the cognitive structures considered in logical terms.

As these sorts of questions arise, the insights of M. Bakhtin and the "dialogical imagination" begin to interpenetrate "the social-cognitive." The relations between mind, culture and the social other become refigured.

THE PARTICIPATORY

Serge Moscovici, in his seminal (and long untranslated) book, *Psychoanalysis: Its Image and Its Public* (1961/2008), pointed toward the need for "philosophies of indirect experience." He was dealing with the way in which psychoanalysis was understood by, and reacted to,

by various segments of the French public, as embodied in people with different levels of knowledge and/or differing social/political commitments, and by its representation in media. He posited that there are "societies of amateur thinkers" (and the correlative "professionals") who stand at differing relationships to things thought about or known. To some extent this formulation is coordinate with Vygotsky's (2004) notion that the "same" environment could be understood in radically different ways, depending on what the person had experienced prior to the encounter. Intellectual investment and modes of encounter with the to-be-known would operate the same way. I would like to expand on the challenge of dealing with focal and indirect experience and apply it to the issue of the relationship between the individual and the cultural.

To some extent, and to my view, "the cultural" is too often used as a place-holder for things that are in need of deeper and more concrete analysis. Too often the cultural is taken as a geographical gloss (e.g. "The French are this way, the Sioux that way and the Trobriand Islanders yet a different way."). This way of thinking also "totalizes" the notion of cultural difference where differences within groups (even if only geographically defined) are ignored and a singular identifier is used. Using a deeper approach to culture, one would approach the material and the meditational aspects of culture, including both the physical and the semiotic aspects of human existence. One would come to grips with difference as well as similarity.

When one includes the material level of analysis it quickly becomes clear that living in a human society, one is never individually free from culture. Our environments are structured and patterned environments. Things act on us as much as we act on things (Latour, 2005; Valsiner, 1987). For example, in business meetings a table structures hierarchy so that, "the head" of the table outranks the sides. In a typical classroom the teacher is at "the head" of the room with privileged access to the blackboard. When children are asked to "explain themselves" they may be brought to the blackboard – but now it is a place of examination rather than a site of instruction. In preschool classes "the rug" structures the group, the teachers, and the aids. This led one of my former students to title a paper "Are Rugs People?".

In business and in academia, sitting behind a desk signals greater control than sitting or standing in front of it. A crib structures a particular relation between a child and his or her environment. I can go on to strollers, diapers, tricycles and bicycles, city streets and parks, "wilderness" and trails, etc. – but you get the point. Human environments, no matter how "naturalized" or "natural" we think of them, are fundamentally cultural. To this extent it is well nigh impossible to separate that individual from the cultural, the material from the gnostic. Culture is a medium, not a variable – it is, fundamentally, a habitus, and probably better theorized in those terms than under the gloss "culture."

The term "habitus" was introduced by Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1972, 1977; Wacquant, 1989, 1993) [5], and it implies a radical reconfiguration of the relations between individual/social/cultural. As used by Bourdieu, the notion of habitus dissolved the boundaries between the individual and the social, the cognitive and the experiential. In the words of Wacquant (with Bourdieu)(1989):

> *"Bourdieu's voluminous oeuvre presents a multifaceted challenge to the present divisions and accepted modes of thinking of sociology. Chief among the cleavages it is striving to straddle are those which separate theory from research, sever the analysis of the symbolic from that of materiality, and oppose subjectivist and objectivist modes of knowledge . . . Thus, Bourdieu has for some time forsaken the two antinomies which have recently come to the forefront of theoretical discussions, those of structure and action on the one hand and of micro versus macro analysis on the other.*
> ….
> *Bourdieu has been insistently pointing to the possibility of a unified political economy of practice and especially of symbolic power that fuses structural and phenomenologically-inspired approaches*." (p. 26)

Psychologists and anthropologists are perhaps most familiar with Bourdieu's work on "habitus" among agricultural groups in Morocco. The concepts developed there concerned, on the one hand, a rendering of the way that life is "felt" – where there is a resonance between "objective conditions" and experience. Take for example the representation of the agricultural calendar (seasons of planting, fallow, reaping, etc.) from the point of view of an anthropologist and of the farmer. The calendar as "academically" represented is a representation of a cycle, with activities following the flow of seasons and mapping in to (as I did above) a series of actions (planting, reaping, etc.). Bourdieu contrasts this psycho/anthopo(logical) representation with the ways in which the Kabyle people (a Berber tribe) experienced the agricultural seasons. Rather than a strict succession of activities there were also felt resonances between linearly separated time periods. The contrast between the cognitive/semiotic representation (in the elicited calendar) and the embodied senses of similarity and connection between different parts leads to the notion of "habitus" – the occupation of the lived world with feelings and dispositions.

While habitus in a descriptive or anthropological context exemplifies what psychologists might describe as person-environment fit, it has a more dynamic, politically charged and radical application.

Habitus as applied to bounded social groupings in homogeneous settings one may talk of person-environment fit, but it may also be used to analyze conflicts, or more saliently lack of them in heterogeneous settings, particularly when class, educational or other social divisions apply at points of necessary interaction in societies. It can be used to explain why and how people act in societies.

In Wacquant's (1989) words:

> "*the extensive and varied empirical work in which the French sociologist (Bourdieu – import mine) has addressed . . . namely, how agents who occupy similar objective positions in social space come to develop different, even opposite, systems of expectations and aspirations; under what conditions such aspirations turn out to be*

> *the internalization of objective chances; how misrecognition and ideological distortion induce dominated to accept their exclusion as legitimate.*
> . . .
> *Bourdieu's theory of habitus is an attempt to overcome the duality of structure and agency and the dead end of structural causation."* (p. 28)

The implication of this form of re-theorization is that the terms "culture" and "individual" do not stand independent of one another. One, therefore, does not talk about "internalization" or "externalization" – as if knowing crosses some border by these processes – from "out" to "in" via internalization and from "in" to "out" via externalization. There is an alternative possible theoretical/empirical direction. It lies in the conceptualization of the social as a field of the phenomenological and as a field of action, of practice.

This theoretical field might best be characterized in the terms deriving from consideration of the analytic involved in dealing with societies of "amateur" and "professional" thinkers. This reconceptualization replaces the weight that has been born by the concept of "culture" – and the influence of "culture" and "the social" on development with a new load-bearing concept – the concept of social life.

Saxe (2012) conducted longitudinal research among the Oksapmin of New Guinea in the period from 1978-2001. The Oksapmin had, in common with other groups in Highland New Guinea, used a body part counting system (traversing the body from hand to hand and counting off the significant parts).[6] With the introduction of trade, schooling, the transformation of schooling from "colonial" uses of language to "independence" uses of language[7], a once homogeneous society became internally differentiated, by age, by schooling, and by occupation (farmers, store owners, traders, etc.).

Different numbering systems (the Australian pound, followed by the Australian dollar, followed by the independence currency and always in contact with other monetary and counting systems) came into play within this historical period. The differences among the internally differentiated social groups led, as one might expect, to differences in knowledge of number systems beyond the body part system. Store owners had to deal with purchase of goods in multiple monetary forms, and communicate with customers either in associated terms, or in terms that could be mutually understood.

The internal differentiations within non-homogeneous societies provides a field of activity, coordinated or not, that presents opportunities for, and problems with, communication. It is perhaps, when people move from their own smoothly coordinated groupings into situations of heterogeneous encounter that the coordination of actions requires the emergence of "the personal" in order to be a coherent and functioning member of "the cultural." Thus, I do not see the issues in terms of "individual" and "cultural" but rather in terms of the socially coordinated, or socially dis-coordinated.

To return to the earlier discussion of cognitive developmental theory, it seems now that I would opt for a bi-directional and dialogical view of the ZPD. I would call it the ZPwe – with

the "we" signaling not "development" (almost always spoken about as a move from "lower" to "higher" or from "less" to "more"), but instead a more dialogical view, where the activities are governed more by rules of social interaction than they are of instruction.

As society develops, and as modes of social interaction continue to shift to greater or lesser degrees of mediated contact, new "rules of the game" may begin to surface and define development. For example, anyone who uses YouTube or Facebook can see the rapidly emerging movements of the social world. Things can "go viral" and propagate wildly through a social space. Some of the social terms get refigured. It becomes more important to "be with it" and "not to be out of it," than to reach or move toward some normative developmental endpoint. Digital "memes" abound (Shifman, 2014).

Myriad possibilities in encyclopedic digital space make room for a habitus (in the Kabyle sense) of "like minded" people occupying the same listserv or chat room, etc. The terms of social positioning are rapidly changing, and so too are the markers of social belonging leading to new "developmental" issues that reflect variability in the distribution of knowledge and interactional possibilities and in the requirements for belonging to socially differentiated groups.

To be sure, there are major differences to be theorized about the relation of the closed and open possibilities of change but, perhaps by focusing on the possibilities of legitimating interaction, or legitimate social action, on the practice of being a member of social groups, there will be more to be gained in understanding the dynamics of human development.

Modern societies are not homogeneous, nor equal in either their resources, knowledges, experiences, social positioning, and in many other ways. Perhaps the most critical developmental skills should be theorized in terms that relate to the negotiations of varied social spaces and the achievement of coordinated action with societal others, to protest, or to affirm, or to enjoy.

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its reception within contemporary developmental psychology. His research has centered on the relation of perceptual and developmental phenomena; cultural and cross-cultural analysis; issues of ecological validity and the creative uses of ecological invalidity in both laboratory and cultural settings.

ENDNOTES

[1] This is a bidirectional conceptualization of a usually unidirectionally defined concept associated with L.S. Vygotsky's theory, "The Zone of Proximal Development" or ZPD. (Vygotsky as edited, 1978). This expanded definition is offered here for two reasons. First, the studies stemming from the Piagetian tradition showing that social collaboration about dealing with primarily cognitive tasks benefits **both** the less capable and the more capable member of a collaborating pair.(Doise and Mugny, 1975).

[2] This reference is usually cited as Vygotsky, L.S. (1978) *Mind in Society*. This book, however was published 44 years after Vygotsky's death and is a compilation of translated sections from several texts, selected and redacted by four editors: M.Cole, V. John-Steiner, S. Scribner, and E. Souberman.

[3] "Operational" reasoning is presumed to be reasoning governed by certain logical structures. The structure of behaviors defines the "underlying cognitive level" the "justifications for a choice" constitute the "reasoning" governed by the logical structure – and is presumed to be a central determinant of whether "true" or "pseudo" structures are involved. The reasoning is elicited by a "clinical interview" and, in its origin was a fairly open question-answer conversation between adult and child where the adult would pose counter-suggestions to the child's reasoning as a way of probing.

[4] For example, in a classic conservation of continuous quantity task (where water placed in initially similar containers and judged in that condition to be of equal amount) is poured into a markedly different container, e.g. from a water glass to tall thin beaker. The child is then asked whether the amounts are the same or if the amounts are different. A "pre-operational" child might answer that the container with the higher water level is "more." However, if a child correctly predicts that the amount is the same, the clinical interview is designed to test whether the response is "truly" operational or something else. For Piaget, the operational answer would involve the judgment that nothing has been added or taken away by the operation of pouring. This judgment would indicate "reversibility of mental operations" where the pouring can be "un-thought" by the logical judgment. However, there is a less logical correct answer that looks on the surface to be logical but is not. If the child answers "you could pour it back and it would be the same" Piaget would take this as an example of "renversibility" – an empirical and not a logical judgment.

[5] Although Bourdieu is referenced here, there is controversy about the interpretation of the meaning of Bourdieu's work as it has been inserted into different theoretical spaces. The use of Bourdieu's terms here is based on two articles by Loic Wacquant (1989, 1993), also referenced here. The Wacquant articles, one with the participation of Bourdieu, attempt to

introduce a corrective. Without myself trying to judge the issue, I will be following the Wacquant texts here.

[6] This, and related materials, can be seen at www.culturecognition.com.

[7] The difference between colonial and independence schooling is, in this case and in many others, a shift from using the language of the colonizer to the use of indigenous language in formal schooling. This has been shown to be an important variable in the impact of schooling