
Scaffolding and assisted performance in multilingual classrooms

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Introduction

Vygotskian-inspired sociocultural theory and related theoretical approaches ask us to read carefully the story of the classroom as it is generally told and to act towards how it might be; not as distanced teachers, researchers or implementers of policy - possibly putting to one side our own histories and practices - but as agents within a template of possibility. In agreeing with Lave (1996), we must ask ourselves what kinds of people are 'becoming' in our classrooms? Approaching an answer to this question, Young (1992, p 2) argues that classrooms and the activity within - especially the nature of the talk - should be of a kind:

which aims to equip each new generation of learners with problem-solving powers beyond those of the old generation which is teaching them.

Put another way, teachers need to assist the children in their care to be better thinkers than they are themselves.

Through a series of everyday scenes and some brief snapshots from my recent classroom experience, in this paper I provide a practical recount of some attempts I have made to explore pedagogy from a sociocultural perspective in a multilingual primary classroom.

After a brief description of my own teaching context, which shapes the perspective I relate here, I will present some observations of the kinds of talk experienced by children as they move beyond the domain of the family into the wider world, and the relationship of that talk to learning. Following Mercer (1995), I will distinguish between the different kinds of classroom talk that have roles to play in the social, cognitive and linguistic development of children in multilingual primary classrooms. I then offer some suggestions to assist children in grappling with school learning and provide opportunities for scaffolding. Although I will make reference to structure, especially in relation to planning lessons, I will focus mainly on classroom talk.

Background

I come to this work from a primary teaching background both as a classroom teacher and a teacher of English as a Second Language (ESL). In more recent times, this led me to working as an ESL teacher educator with the responsibility of teaching undergraduate primary students. Throughout my work with both children and undergraduate students, I have attempted to find means of assisting learners to engage with the learning at hand in some deep and productive way - be it the solar system in a Year 3/4 multilingual classroom (SCAE Video Group 1988); practicum experiences in a Diploma of Education course (Dufficy 1993); classroom observation in a Year 4 Bachelor of Education class (Dufficy 1997); history in another Year 3/4 multilingual classroom (Dufficy 2000); or more recently, teaching in a multilingual kindergarten for one day a week.

My interest in assisted performance and scaffolding has been, and continues to be, influenced by these experiences and endeavours. In the remainder of this paper, I outline my current thinking in relation to these notions and sociocultural theory in general.

Kinds of learning: hand-over and assisted performance in everyday learning

Scene 1 - Learning to be a soccer player

Tom is in Year 4 at school and in winter I usually find myself watching him play soccer with his local team. While the kind of discourse used at Saturday morning soccer has parallels to Shirley Brice Heath's (1991) sociocultural description of a youngster's baseball team, my interest is drawn to how the learning of soccer is carried out over the course of a young player's career. In general, beginners of both teams usually form a large, massed group on the field, all chasing the elusive ball. What's interesting for me, however, is the assistance given to these novice soccer players.

Task constraints include playing on a much smaller field than standard, with eight rather than eleven in the team, and the time for each half is less. Coaches provide further assistance by running with their team on the field, to point the kids in the right direction. The goalkeeper's parent is allowed to stand next to the (small) goal to guide his/her performance.

From a sociocultural perspective, the coach's teaching is proleptic in orientation because he/she presupposes that children understand soccer as a 'precondition for creating that understanding' (Cole 1996, p 183), in much the same way as parents immediately start talking to a baby moments after birth (Macfarlane 1977). As described above, however, this proleptic orientation is supported by various 'scaffolds', designed in such a way that novices can play successful soccer. Over the next few years, these scaffolds are gradually removed.

This out-of-school learning is specifically designed for success. Part of this common-sense process of everyday learning and teaching is the belief that soccer can be learnt by playing it. In other words, the material to be learnt is ‘handed over’ to the learners. There is also a realisation that handover is not sufficient; most will not learn soccer (or like it) unless their performance is assisted.

I might also mention that while I have not taken a great deal of notice of the kind of language used by the coach and the team in general, there are some features of this talk that stand out. First, and most clearly, the coach is very explicit about what he/she wants the team or individuals to do. There is no invisible pedagogy here. Half-time talks are both strongly classified and framed in that the focus is soccer and the coach’s voice is the one heard. Interestingly, though not surprisingly, the team calls the coach by his/her first name. Social discourse reemerges in pre- and post-game exchanges, where the coach talks more in the manner of a friendly and trusted adult.

Scene 2 - From one discourse world to another

I acquired the responsibility of taking my youngest son and his two cousins to pre-school before I went on to work. Each morning we would enter the gate to find the teacher, called Nada, setting out various toys and activities for the children to play with. Invariably she would see the kids coming through the gate and call out:

‘Hi, Tommy! Hi Danny! Hi Emmy!’

To this, they would usually reply,

‘Hi Nada!’

Often the children would bring something with them to school, and if Nada had time she would ask them about it or respond to their initiations. The talk here was the kind the children were generally familiar with because their grandparents, aunts, uncles, older cousins and family friends often responded in the same kind of way.

When Tom started ‘big school’, I was there each morning of the first week and watched as, not unexpectedly, he was introduced to the beginnings of what Mercer (1995) has called ‘educational’ discourse. The children would line up outside the room and begin the morning’s linguistic routine. The teacher would say:

‘Good morning children.’

The children, at least those who spoke English and were prepared, replied:

‘Good morning Ms A.’

In that first week, there were often a few tries at this before entering the room. Sometime later, when a question was asked at the dinner table, Tom put up his hand.

Scene 3 - Acquisition of a child by 'educational' discourse

Even at pre-school, 'educational' discourse is often the 'default' option (Cazden 1988). In the following example from Wood et al (1980, cited in Tsui 1995, p 8), Lee comes to school and initiates an exchange with his teacher not unlike the kind he has probably made at home, remembering that Wells (1979) has found that around seventy percent of exchanges between parents and young children are initiated by the child.

Lee has found a horse chestnut and brings it to his teacher to show her.

1 Lee I want to show you! Isn't it big?

Lee approaches his teacher and initiates a conversation with the enthusiasm of the young, bringing his experience and communicative expectations into the classroom. In a way, his opening is akin to the 'guess what?' opening often used by some young children to engage others. The response of 'what?' means that 'presence has been confirmed, love asserted, connectedness and communication reaffirmed', whereas 'being denied that shared warmth can be extremely traumatizing' (Restak 1991, p 134). The interaction continues as follows:

2 Teacher It is big, isn't it? What is it? [known-answer question (kaq)]

3 Lee A conker.

4 Teacher Yes.

5 Lee Then that'll need opening up.

6 Teacher It needs opening up. What does it need opening up for? (kaq)

7 Lee 'Cos the seed's inside.

8 Teacher Yes, very good. What will the seed grow into? (kaq)

9 Lee A conker.

10 Teacher No, it won't grow into a conker. It'll grow into a sort of tree, won't it?

11 Can you remember the (kaq) –

12 Lee Horse chestnut ['acquired' by routine]

13 Teacher Horse chestnut - good. Put your conker on the nature table then.

For the purpose of this paper, I will deal only briefly with the nature of this exchange, leaving aside the prospectiveness and function of each utterance (see Wells 1999 for a discussion of these perspectives). However, in terms of the kinds of moves being made, this interaction conforms to the traditional 'Initiation, Response, Follow-up' (IRF) pattern. In this case, the follow-up also includes explicit evaluation (lines 4, 8, 10, 13).

In line 2, the teacher responds first with what might be interpreted as enthusiastic agreement, but then proceeds to ask a question to which she already knows the answer. This is a crucial epistemological move, because it can be seen as representing a knowledge assertion on the teacher's part that is couched in recognisable 'educational' discourse, taking precedent over the 'social' or 'everyday' discourse Lee might have expected given his limited experience at school. Lee then responds and his response is evaluated as correct. Not to be deterred, he initiates once again, only to encounter the same pattern of echoic response followed by a question to test his knowledge. Once established, this pattern of IRF continues for the remainder of the exchange.

This brief extract does not necessarily represent the predominant interaction patterns of this teacher; the fact that it is easily recognisable suggests that it is representative of the predominant pattern in most classrooms most of the time. Note that I am not arguing here that such a pattern has limited use as a tool to achieve certain purposes, especially when the participants are 'in league' with the 'tool'. By 'in league', however, I mean that both participants have a sense of shared purpose in a particular way of talking to get a job done. In lines 11 and 12 above, it may appear that Lee is 'in league' because his answer is in congruence with the question. He has clearly understood that he is not being asked whether or not he can remember. And since he lost control of the topic in line 2, he is playing by the rules more than sharing a common purpose with the teacher. He has been, and is being, 'acquired' by the discourse.

I am suggesting that for different kinds of educational talk, we need different configurations of interactive possibilities. This is particularly important in multilingual classrooms, where many children are learning English as an additional language. Our goal should be to engage children in challenging learning; making discourse 'spaces' available as opportunities for them to grapple with new ways of talking that are often not readily experienced, in English, outside the classroom.

Scene 4 - (possible) Discourse options

Accepting that we cannot know the full circumstances of the above interaction, it is still worth considering some interactive options. The following is five different options:

- 1 Lee I want to show you! Isn't it big?
- 2 Teacher It is big, isn't it?
- 2.1 Teacher It is big, isn't it? What is it? [unknown-answer question (uaq)]

2.2 Teacher It is big, isn't it? Where did you find it? (uaq)

2.3 Teacher It is big, isn't it? I used to collect those too!

2.4 Teacher It is big, isn't it? I wonder why they fall off trees?

While these options are contingent upon the reality of the classroom moment, they are worth considering for several reasons. First, they have the potential to promote longer stretches of language that demand grappling with grammar, to which the teacher can respond (and giving that teacher further insight into the language development of the child). In a similar way, the teacher gains insight into the child's thinking. If scaffolding is to occur in the zone of proximal development, then the zone must be reached, and one way of doing this is through the use of more open patterns of discourse.

Further, these options encourage a child to practise constructing joint understandings of the world. Rather than the teacher assuming control of knowledge and testing the child's 'fit' to that conception, the options provide for the potential of knowledge sharing. And crucially, they build trust – what I consider the most important element in any talk about scaffolding and assisted performance. With trust, lifeworlds are shared in classrooms; viewpoints are both expected and supported; class members summon the courage to pose questions, disagree and enter the wider social conversation on the issue; and patterns of discourse might come to be seen for the role they can play, including the IRF.

Referring to secondary school, Nystrand and Gamoran (1991, pp 257-8), argue that limiting classroom exchanges to the single traditional mode is at the heart of why life in schools is 'emotionally flat'; classrooms may be orderly, but they are frequently 'lifeless'. Van Lier (1996 p 48) notes that children come to school with 'curiosity and a spirit of exploration', but this is 'gradually killed off there'. Van Lier then cites Maslow (1971, p 195), who argues that 'the present school system is an extremely effective instrument for crushing peak experiences and forbidding their possibility'.

Scene 5 - The discourse of history?

I will use one more classroom example to lay the groundwork for the remainder of the paper. This example (New South Wales Department of Education and Training 1998, p 5) comes from a secondary classroom and is particularly relevant in the context of this paper because it is a history class.

1 Teacher What was the basic item of clothing worn by both women and men?

2 S1 It was a sort of dress, long for women and knee length for men.

3 Teacher Yes, but what was its correct name?

4 S2 Tunic.

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|----|---------|--|
| 5 | Teacher | That's right. What else did married women wear? |
| 6 | S2 | They wore a second tunic with long sleeves over the top. |
| 7 | Teacher | Does anyone remember what this was called? |
| 8 | S3 | It sounded a bit like 'stole' but I can't remember exactly. |
| 9 | Teacher | It was called a 'stola'. |
| 10 | S4 | Men wore togas over their tunics. |
| 11 | S5 | Boys wore purple and white togas until they turned fourteen, when |
| 12 | | there was a special celebration and they got a white one. |
| 13 | Teacher | Good. Did colour have any other significance? |
| 14 | S6 | Yes, only senators and emperors or members of their families |
| 15 | | could wear purple. A senator's toga had a purple band all around it. |

The Department includes an analysis with this interaction, which is interesting because of the way it has collocated terms from different theoretical perspectives. For example, it uses the term 'scaffolding' alongside behaviourist notions of 'stimulus', 'response' and 'reinforcement'. Rounding out this unusual linkage, it draws upon terms from the genre school of pedagogy in reference to the discourses of various school subjects, such as 'explicit', 'commonsense understandings' and 'technical'.

More relevant to this paper, however, is that the extract makes explicit claims as to what the Department considers effective teacher-pupil talk for the subject of history. As an exemplar of 'doing history', this transcript shows a heavy reliance upon the IRF pattern of interaction. History, according to this pattern, is the ability to know discrete pieces of information. As Wells (1998, p 28) has stated in relation to our educational institutions:

more attention seems to be given to memorising facts and being able to reproduce the generalisations and theoretical explanations found in textbooks than to developing an understanding of this information that can inform and guide action.

Children (like Lee) begin to learn the ways of the secondary classrooms from their earliest days in kindergarten (Willes 1983), where - and this is of crucial relevance in multilingual classrooms - children are often required to 'leave their life situations at the door' (Neisser 1976, p 137). If Lee's experience is representative of what he is likely to encounter interactively in the classroom, then it is little wonder that such a seemingly benign force, such as the IRF, could be the educational equivalent of 'wind and rain, that doubtless contribute to the slow weathering of the pupil's psyche' (Jackson 1992, p 48). Thus - adapting McDermott's (1996) phrase - the process of acquisition of a child by a discourse proceeds.

Learning and teaching in school: conditions for scaffolding and assisted performance

By including these small scenes of everyday and school experience, I have introduced the ways with words (to use Heath's (1983) well-known phrase) that children bring to broad social encounters, specifically those occurring in school, and the new 'ways' they frequently meet there. However, school learning is of course different from the out-of-school learning I have briefly described.

School learning differs in that there are usually 30 or more children in a relatively small space for long periods of the day with one teacher. It is different, certainly in urban centres like Sydney, because the teacher does not always share the language, dialect or sociocultural background of the children. Further, the teacher works within increasingly rigid guidelines with an ever-increasing range of responsibilities. Importantly, it is different because school serves to teach our young how to use language in ways valued and 'listened to' by society; to learn 'educated' discourse, in Mercer's (1995) terms. Lastly, it differs from out-of-school learning because some children will succeed and some will fail.

In the remainder of this paper, I take the view that to broaden the discourse possibilities in a classroom, we need to consider how the conditions and orientation of classroom learning might be envisaged to both assist learning and provide opportunities for the scaffolding of a child's entry into and experience with 'educated' discourse. My discussion of this will be centred on the following snapshot of a Year 3/4 history class.

Snapshot 1 - Setting the conditions for entering the 'educated' discourse of history in a Year 3/4 multilingual classroom

The class in question was learning about the colonisation of Australia, a topic in the Stage 2-subject Human Society and its Environment. My goal was to assist the children to engage with the complex and abstract nature of 'first contact' between indigenous and colonising groups. Prior to this lesson, two lessons had been devoted to the journey of the First Fleet from Portsmouth to Gamay and later Warrane, where Sydney now stands.

The lesson I will describe needs to be seen in the larger framework of the unit, which includes material on:

- 1 The journey to Australia
- 2 The arrival of the First Fleet - Eora reactions
- 3 The Eora: technology and culture
- 4 The colonists: technology and culture
- 5 Resistance and cooperation

This framework might be considered as a macro scaffold, since it would be beyond the ability of the children to engage with issues of resistance and cooperation without first developing a background to such a complex phenomena. For this reason I decided that to explore resistance, it would be important to know how the Eora could resist. I thus decided to involve the class in an investigation of tools in general and weapons in particular. In addition, I considered it important to look at Aboriginal law and customs to better understand what eventuated in the first decade after contact. I decided upon the following sociocultural-derived questions to guide the class within the Unit and individual lessons:

What do the children need to think about?

How can I assist them to do this?

What do they already know about this issue?

How might I organise what they know?

How can I assist them in comprehending the text?

After viewing/reading/listening, how can I assist them to engage with the issues?

How can I develop dialogue about the issues and engage the children with the discourse of history?

These kinds of questions potentially orientate both the teacher and the children towards a conception of knowledge and its development that fundamentally differs from the view that knowledge is information and history is an unproblematic story. It is little wonder that with this latter view as a backdrop to learning in schools, the IRF is the predominant mode of classroom discourse.

As for all new learning however, my challenge for the Year 3/4 class was to devise ways in which the children could engage with the 'content', using constraints to give them defined and achievable goals. In other words, I sought to 'hand over' the content to these learners. I was also interested in the opportunities of such a process for engaging the children in the broad contemporary discourse about the recent history of Australia. Organising lessons from this perspective, and keeping in mind the multilingual nature of the class, I used the above questions to frame my approach to lesson planning. One example of these kinds of lessons is outlined below.

Table I - Lesson 3: first contact

Scaffolding engagement	Lesson stages
What do the children need to think about?	Concepts such as resistance, cruelty, justice, customs, fear, curiosity, tradition, technology,

think about?	horror, sorrow, law, trust etc.
How can I assist them to do this?	Show short excerpt from the movie Independence Day of aliens arriving on Earth
What do they already know about this issue?	Encourage dialogue describing reactions, relating personal experience/reaction
How might I organise what they know?	Categorise possible options on whiteboard: ignore/cooperate/communicate/resist
How can I assist them in comprehending the *text?	Show overhead transparency (OHT) of characters Map out story with opportunity to predict [pairs] Watch video Review predictions [pairs/whole class]
After viewing / reading / listening, how can I assist them to engage with the issues?	Complete modified three-level guide [pairs]
How can I structure dialogue about the issues?	Show OHT of collated opinions (grid). Encourage dialogue about different interpretations

**The text in this case is a video depicting a group of Indigenous Australians meeting two convicts for the first time.*

This lesson outline incorporates some of the elements, or conditions, for scaffolding and assisted performance I mentioned at the beginning of this paper. To begin with, engagement is achieved not through a process of teacher questioning for a known answer, but by the presentation of the familiar for the whole class to consider.

In everyday practice, it is not uncommon for lessons to begin with the children searching about for the focus within a routine of questions and answers. Oddly, to my way of thinking, this routine is then followed by the announcement of the topic. One of the stumbling blocks in coming to an assisted performance/scaffolding orientation is developing both the confidence and strategies for handing over the 'content' in a way that connects with or engages the children in the first place.

A second and related issue is how texts are approached. Rather than take away from reading, viewing or listening, prior tasks that assist in mapping the content in some way (as described by Cazden 1994) scaffold and make richer the act of comprehension. Instead of just asking them to guess, I routinely 'tell' the children

what a text is about (in various ways), so they can get on with the task of puzzling over the meaning.

In the lesson described here, prior to viewing a video depicting a group of Indigenous Australians meeting the English (two escaped convicts) for the first time, I gave the children pictures and short descriptions of the main characters and a short recount of the story (with pictures). I then asked the class to predict likely events in pairs.

With the text already 'mapped' and the text itself read, viewed or listened to, some interesting issues about content can be explored. In this particular case, I used a modified three-level guide (Morris & Stewart-Dore 1984). This is an example of handing over the issues of the text with certain constraints - eg trying to reach a consensus with a partner. Such guides are a useful tool to assist children in making judgements about a text's meaning, and are in sharp contrast to the more common series of questions that are often asked children after they have read a text. What is of real interest here, however, is that such an activity sets up conditions for dialogic scaffolding that might not otherwise be realised.

In the video I showed my class, one of the convicts was speared for a crime against the group. As the pairs of children attempted to reach a consensus, I moved from group to group, learning about their comprehension - their thinking. But since the issue of whether or not the spearing of the wrongdoer by traditional law is cruel is not made explicit in the video, I had to offer a viewpoint. I believe that this is a rich domain for learning, because the teacher can use dialogue to show how he/she has arrived at a viewpoint. Using repeated examples of the same kind - across a unit, grade or school - can give children opportunities to learn the ways of doing history. The problem is made one of joint activity, it is challenging, and performance is assisted.

After the above activity, I asked each pair to contrast their understandings with that of the other pairs in the class. In this particular instance, I used the grid represented in Table II to enable the children to view the positions taken by other pairs on a given statement.

Table II - Scaffold for class dialogue

Statement	Agreement (no. children)	Disagreement
1 In the beginning, the group lived by the sea.	27 (100%)	
2 Some children found three convicts on the beach.		27
3 The group lived a happy and carefree life.	21	6

life.		
4 Children in the group didn't go to school so they didn't know very much.	2	25
5 Aboriginal law and justice were cruel.	16	11
6 It was impossible for the group to resist the white men.	10	17
7 British law and justice were cruel.	23	4
8 The tools used by the white men were better than those used by Alinta's group.	26	1

Not surprisingly, the literal comprehension of the video causes little disagreement (eg statement 2, Table II); conflicting views tend to emerge in the domain of inference and application of ideas. Because the children have already taken a position on these issues and these are clearly displayed on the grid, dialogue can now follow. The problem of meaning has been put into the shared arena, so there is less need for viewpoints to always go through the teacher first. Again, with sensitive, contingent assistance, the teacher can encourage those with differing points of view to directly engage in educated discourse.

Snapshot 2 - Joining the cultural conversation: co-constructing perspectives on relationships

Two weeks after the exchange which is reported below, Inga Clendinnen (1999), an Australian historian, joined the cultural conversation of the Year 3/4 class by writing:

Governor Phillip arrived determined to coax the Aboriginal inhabitants around his new settlement of Sydney to 'a high opinion of their new guests'. He continued to woo them, even resorting to kidnapping to persuade them of the excellence of his intentions, with no significant improvement in relations.

The following exchange stems from a question raised by Made.

Made: Um, I want to ask a question. If Governor Phillip wanted to make friends with the Aborigines, why did he chain Bennelong up then?

1 T What are you ... what are you thinking?

2 S4 Pretty dumb.

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- 3 S5 Pretty bad.
- 4 T Pretty bad? What's a word that could be more descriptive of ...
- 5 Ss (multiple suggestions)
- 6 S6 Pretty strange.
- 7 T Pretty strange?
- 8 Ss (multiple suggestions)
- 9 T Yeah, well that could be an interesting thing to talk about in that
- 10 question ... about ...
- (the children are going to re-address these questions in smaller groups shortly)
- 11 I think that Made's brought out a very interesting point, that at the
- 12 beginning part with the chaining it's a pretty ... pretty strange
- 13 way ... though they seemed friendly after that.
- (Michael raises his hand)
- 14 Um, Michael?
- 15 S7 Maybe he didn't like, um, Bennelong in the first place. Why would you
- 16 chain up your friend and then -
- 17 S8 Probably because ... he's trying to make friends to learn their language
- 18 to take over the land.
- 19 S9 Yeah.
- 20 S10 Yeah.
- 21 Ss: (...)
- 22 S8 To make friends (...)
- 23 T So you think his motivation was ... ah ... to get the land rather than to be
- 24 real friends?
- 25 S11 He pretends being nice to them. He would've, like, conned them into ...

Without reading too much into such a short extract of classroom talk, it is nevertheless different in nature from my two examples earlier. Firstly, Made has been able to ask a challenging historical question in the context of a whole class dialogue. Secondly, the teacher pursues the thinking of the children and not a correct answer to Made's question, as she is working in the interpretive domain.

In line 4, the teacher pushes the children to clarify a response by asking them to move beyond 'bad'. She then takes up a response, 'pretty strange', and links it to what Made had previously asked. This clarification and linking move (lines 9-13) prompts a further suggestion from Michael (S7). Note here that Michael's contribution, though it follows a teacher move, is not in response to a question. Subsequently, Michael's contribution is added to (line 17) and this pushes the understanding further by introducing the idea of the need to learn the Eora language to get land. In line 23, the teacher then 'ups the ante' by doing two things. She re-voices (O'Connor & Michaels 1996) the contribution, which has the effect of giving the floor back to the child. In doing this, she also shifts the register by introducing the grammatical metaphor 'motivation'.

Dialogue of this kind does not happen by chance. It comes about within a much larger framework, which has at its heart the notion of assisted performance for what are challenging tasks. To talk the talk of history in this way, children need to have both structures and opportunities to deal with the complex issues at hand.

Conclusion

The notion of learning being first and foremost an interpsychological phenomena suggests that teachers pursue a social rather than psychological theory of learning. This view has particular relevance for work in multilingual classrooms because, as Lave (1996, p 149) points out, theories which

Reduce learning to individual mental capacity/activity in the last instance blame marginalised people for being marginal.

A sociocultural view, on the other hand, stands in sharp contrast to the dominant epistemological and psychological paradigms that have shaped theory, research and practice in education for 'a number of generations' (Renshaw 1998, p 83). Within these dominant paradigms, distinct from culture and history, an individual's identity emerges naturally in a series of universal stages.

Consequently, psychological research has often reflected the assumption that 'it is possible or even desirable to investigate the individual removed from his or her social or cultural context' (Wertsch 1991, p 85) and led to theories of learning, development and school achievement that focus on the individual and that downplay and marginalise cultural and communicative factors (Mercer 1993).

Thus, in the context of this paper, I have referred less to reinforcement, stimulus, entering behaviour input/output and motivation, and more to engagement,

structuring, hand-over, assistance, scaffolding, dialogue, opportunities and contexts. Classrooms need to be places where teachers assist children to perform/act in many different ways using tools of different kinds, but particularly discourse. The traditional, easily recognised classroom discourse of the IRF variety tells a story in which children are constrained socially, cognitively and linguistically. Any real change will only occur within a broader conceptualisation of teaching and learning. A Vygotskian-inspired sociocultural framework can assist teachers to develop new narratives for classroom practice.

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