

**Vygotskian Perspectives on Literacy Research: Constructing Meaning
through Collaborative Inquiry**



Review Author[s]:
Joan Kelly Hall

The Modern Language Journal, Vol. 84, No. 4, Special Issue: A Century of Language Teaching and Research: Looking Back and Looking Ahead, Part 1 (Winter, 2000), 587-589.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0026-7902%28200024%2984%3A4%3C587%3AVPOLRC%3E2.0.CO%3B2-7>

The Modern Language Journal is currently published by National Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/journals/nfmlta.html>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is an independent not-for-profit organization dedicated to creating and preserving a digital archive of scholarly journals. For more information regarding JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

fields. To support their view of FoF, they emphasize minimal intervention while supplying FoF within a communicative context. They also provide a brief review of research findings derived from experimental and quasi-experimental studies on FoF, focus on forms, and focus on meaning to determine the strength and limitations of those approaches.

Unlike Long and Robinson, DeKeyser and Swain suggest more explicit, metalinguistic components of FoF activities in their respective chapters. DeKeyser argues his position from the basis of the psychological perspectives, asking what forms to focus on and discussing how and when FoF should take place. Swain focuses on the roles of output (talking and writing) in L2 learning through studies of French immersion classes, where students are in many ways very fluent, yet their accuracy lags far behind that of native speakers. She states that verbalization of accuracy problems allowed learners to reflect on them and apparently served as one source of their linguistic knowledge. She describes the usefulness of collaborative work in promoting output and L2 learning and the significant role of teachers who must attend to the accuracy of these activities. The different perspectives in this section capture the diverse views of researchers within the scope of FoF defined in the initial chapter of this volume.

The second section consists of four empirical studies on aspects of FoF. Joanna White investigates the effectiveness of FoF instruction involving different types of input enhancement provided within a communicative context with ESL classes in a French elementary school near Montreal. Doughty and Varela investigate the feasibility and effectiveness of incorporating a FoF into communicative instruction to determine whether and how learners' attention can be drawn to formal features without distracting them from their original communicative intent. Williams and Evans investigate what kind of focus and on which forms. Harley shows that an instructional FoF can have lasting impact on the L2 proficiency of child learners.

The third section consists of two chapters that address pedagogical implications of the findings of research on FoF, including some of the practical concerns of classroom teachers. Lightbown focuses on the importance of timing, that is, when FoF techniques should be deployed. Doughty and Williams focus on pedagogical choices in FoF and suggest the following six decisions in implementing FoF: (a) whether or not to undertake FoF, (b) reactive versus proactive FoF, (c) the choice

of linguistic form, (d) explicitness of FoF, (e) sequential versus integrated FoF, and (f) the role of FoF in the curriculum.

This volume draws attention to the issue of connecting grammatical form to meaning during primarily communicative tasks. The issue sweeps across the entire scope of second and foreign language learning and instruction. This work is an important step into a critical topic area, but much more needs to be explored. Longer-term studies will allow for new learning to be assessed. The communicative approaches employed are so critical that they need to be more clearly elucidated and greater participation of classroom teacher-researchers should be encouraged.

The book is well conceived and all of the articles are thoughtfully edited into an integrated study of FoF in Second Language Acquisition (SLA). Although all of the writers are within the communicative tradition, they nevertheless advocate a wide spectrum of approaches from minimal incidental grammar instruction to significant planned grammatical components in the curriculum. The work herein has emerged from the SLA field, but it will be of interest to all language teachers. Examination of issues of accuracy is timely, and this volume is indeed a welcome addition to the field of SLA. It will also make a valuable contribution to the field of L2 learning and teaching and be of interest to foreign language teachers.

YOSHIKO SAITO-ABBOTT

California State University, Monterey Bay

LEE, CAROL D., & PETER SMAGORINSKY. (Eds.). *Vygotskian Perspectives on Literacy Research: Constructing Meaning through Collaborative Inquiry*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. Pp. xii, 280. \$59.95, cloth; \$19.95, paper.

Back in 1996 I had the opportunity to attend a conference sponsored by the Assembly for Research of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) that was recommended by some colleagues who are members of NCTE. At that time I was an avid reader of Vygotsky's writings as well as of those using Vygotsky's theory of development to inform their own research, and so I jumped at the chance to attend. Over the 3 days, a group of about 300 of us listened to the invited speakers and participated in break-out sessions and small-group discussions. I came away from

that conference excited about the new theoretical and empirical directions research on learning was taking and with ideas for how I might rethink my own explorations into the learning of other languages. This volume, most of the contributions to which were developed from papers given at that conference, has rekindled and extended that excitement.

According to the editors, the purpose of the volume is to bring together contributions that draw on some of Vygotsky's core tenets as a way to extend theoretical and empirical understandings of literacy and literacy development and, in the process, to transform Vygotsky's theory so that it can better address new social challenges. The text is divided into two sections. The first, "Paradoxes in Vygotsky's Account of Development," is comprised of two chapters whose purpose is to explicate some conceptual incongruities found in Vygotsky's writings. In the first chapter, Wertsch explores the contradictory ways in which Vygotsky treats the nature of meaning in his writings and presents the reader with a useful framework for understanding the unresolved conflict. In the second chapter, John-Steiner and Meehan reveal the complexities embedded in the relationship between the concepts of internationalization and creativity. The second section of the volume, entitled "Studies of Collaborative Inquiry," is comprised of eight chapters whose specific purposes seem more varied. In their introduction, the editors assert that these contributions present the notion of collaborative inquiry as an overarching goal for education. However, at least to this reader, the frame seemed more an artifact created by the editors to tie together a fairly diverse set of papers than a theme explicitly attended to by individual chapter authors. Despite this slight distraction, each chapter is worth reading for the particular perspective it brings to Vygotsky's work. Three in particular may be useful to those interested in second and foreign language learning.

In chapter 11, Moll questions the normative notion of culture that is typically found in the field of education. Drawing on theoretical insights from social and cultural anthropology, Moll argues for a more dynamic view of culture in which both consensus and conflict play a part and where resources are viewed not as products of any one individual but as distributed across human practices. He proposes a research focus based on this perspective of culture that seeks to have classroom teachers document productive activities of community households to uncover what he terms the "funds of knowledge" (p. 258) that underlie

these activities. The purpose of such research, Moll argues, is to help teachers reshape their understanding of the worlds outside of their classrooms so that they see not the limitations but the possibilities represented in these sources and, consequently, use this new understanding to transform their instructional practices.

Those in applied linguistics and language teaching should find this chapter useful for two reasons. First, Moll's perspective on culture can help us reconceptualize the notion of culture as it is currently used in the field and, in so doing, help us transform our own classroom practices. Second, the notion of biliteracy presented in the chapter expands in positive ways current thinking about the learning of other languages, at least as articulated in the new National Standards for Foreign Language Learning. Also, in noting that biliteracy "mediates the intellect not only by providing access to the real world of the community and by offering the expanded possibilities of broader or different experiences of the literate world, but also by creating new worlds that have not existed before" (p. 266), Moll adds conceptual support to recent notions of multicompetence.

Readers may find two additional chapters beneficial in terms of the conceptual frameworks used to examine sets of data. Weaving together Vygotskian and Bakhtinian concepts into an integrated theoretical framework in chapter 6, Dyson takes the reader on an exploration of children's worlds as they are created and contested in their school writings. In doing so, she reveals the complex and contradictory ways that children's social worlds are linked to their textual ones. More generally, she critiques the assumption about treating children as apprentices to adult worlds. Rather, she suggests, given that "children are participating and forming a social and historical childhood that we ourselves have not experienced" (p. 144), we need to examine their worlds as social and ideological spaces in their own right whose particular perspectives can help reshape our adult worlds. Finally, in chapter 7, Gutierrez and Stone lay out a theoretical and methodological orientation to the study of classroom life in which concepts like *official*, *unofficial*, and *third spaces* are used to make visible the social organization of learning communities. Such a framework allows us to see the multiple discourses through which teachers and students accomplish learning and thus should be of interest to those who study the discursive practices by which students of a second or foreign language are socialized into their learning communities.

Despite the fact that the book is addressed primarily to teachers and scholars of English as a first language, there is much to recommend this book to those in second and foreign language learning who are interested in Vygotsky's ideas and how they are being used both to inform and to transform research on learning. Thanks to the clear, fluent, and engaging writing found in all the chapters, even newcomers to Vygotsky's writings will find it a useful addition to their libraries.

JOAN KELLY HALL
University of Georgia

PHILLIPS, JUNE K., & JAMIE B. DRAPER. *The Five Cs: The Standards for Foreign Language Learning: Video and WorkText*. Boston: Heinle, 1999. Video: 30 minutes. WorkText: pp. ix, 91. \$36.95, paper (includes video).

The expressed purpose of this video and accompanying text is to "familiarize administrators, parents, teachers and students with the national standards for foreign language education" (p. vii). The package consists of a 30-minute color video that presents two teachers and their students as they learn French or Spanish and, more pertinently, their opinions of and reactions to the teaching and learning of the languages via lessons based on the national standards (the 5 Cs). Users of the materials are encouraged to watch the video at one sitting if possible, and then to work through the coordinating worksheets that lead the users, whether students or professionals, to reflect upon what they have viewed. The authors maintain that the materials are sufficiently flexible to be used by practicing professionals for inservice school programs or by preservice teachers in postsecondary methodology courses, whether for individual self-study or in group discussions.

The video presents an overview of the national standards, followed by videotaped class sessions that demonstrate the concepts identified in the five national goals. The teachers featured on the tape comment on their activities, as do some of their students. Also, local school administrators comment on the significance of the activities featured on the video. The *WorkText* (authors' label and spelling) provides follow-up activities organized into several categories. "Reflections" is a page for users to note their reactions to the video and the concepts presented in the *WorkText*.

There are "Preview" activities that cause the user to consider various aspects related to the upcoming theme before doing any of the "Analyze," "Relate," or "Create" activities that follow. As readers may suspect, "Analyze" asks users to react to the video clip and, further, to scenarios from ACTFL's *Standards for Foreign Language Learning*. "Relate" prompts practicing professionals to examine their own classroom practices in light of the concepts presented in the materials, whereas "Create" encourages users to develop their own activities or units based on the concepts examined previously. Throughout the *WorkText*, there are sections labeled "Key Concepts" that are essential for understanding the standards and working with them in foreign language classrooms. The *WorkText* ends with a discussion of the curricular weave in the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning* and a brief classified bibliography. An appendix consists of translations into English of the scenes on the video in French or Spanish.

The quality of the video is very good, in terms of both production values and content. Viewers see experienced and capable teachers working with students on the objectives of the standards, and the teachers' and administrators' comments provide further insight into the rationale for and success of the standards-based lessons. The students' observations reinforce the success of the units. No dissenting voice is heard on the tape. All of the students comment how much they enjoy being able to understand the target language and use it adequately in a variety of settings.

If used as intended, the *WorkText* will in fact cause practitioners to examine how and what they teach. The "Key Concepts" are clearly and succinctly presented and, subsequently, the activities related to specific video segments (or, in some cases, to the entire tape) prompt both careful examination of the standard(s) under consideration and serious introspection by the user. Professionals who use these materials will understand better the concepts that underlie the national standards and, perhaps more important, will examine how their own teaching practices conform (or fail to conform) to the standards.

The authors assert that the materials can be used with preservice teachers in methodology classes. Certainly the models presented by the two superior and dedicated teachers in the video segments are welcome additions to any methods class, and the overview of the standards is unquestionably helpful to these students. Nonetheless, the use of these materials for the purpose of introducing methods students to the standards without the original *Standards for Foreign Language*