

Zone of Proximal Development as a Negotiating Space: Microanalysis of the Activity of Disciplining in Childcare¹

Hiroaki Ishiguro

[Abstract]

In this talk I will discuss teaching-learning process as the negotiating space in the activity of disciplining in a childcare center. Discipline is an essential aspect of human social life, which is seemingly transmitted from adults to children. Only human transmits knowledge or skills constructed by the preceding generations in the form of “cultural learning” (Tomasello, 1999). Thus, transmission of culture in human society is supported by the teaching-learning processes between adults and children. In the context of subject content learning Vygotsky (1978) proposed the concept of “zone of proximal development” as the collaborative space between a learner and more capable others: between the learner’s current level of performance and the same learner’s performance in the near future. This idea was applied by later researchers as “scaffolding” (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976) or “reciprocal teaching” (Brown, Ash, Rutherford, Nakagawa, Gordon, & Campione, 1993). This group of researchers focused on identifying effective conditions to open the zone and promote their learner’s internalization in the academic subject’s domains. From their standpoint, learners do not have space for negotiation concerning what should be learned; learners are passive recipients of knowledge and skills. Discipline etymologically refers to an act of training disciples, often the unconscious physical act of training one how to behave. It is a seemingly passive act for those who have been disciplined to assimilate into the norms of their society. However, my analysis of micro-interaction in the activity of disciplining in a childcare center revealed children’s dexterous “tactiques (tactics)” (Certeau, 1990). In the guided participatory occasions I analyzed, including mealtimes with caring and collective behavior, children were changing the rules and the meanings given by a teacher, while at the same time collaborating with them. I will conclude this talk by discussing the implications of conceptualizing the zone of proximal development as a space for negotiation.

keywords:

Zone of Proximal Development, Discipline, Cultural Learning, Tactics, Authoritative discourse

Contact information: Ishiguro, Hiroaki, Rikkyo University, 3-34-1 Nishi-Ikebukuro, Toshima-ku, Tokyo, Japan 171-8501, ishiguro@rikkyo.ac.jp

Today I will talk about the fact that adults are unable to discipline their children in the manner that they desire. This is equivalent to an instructor being unable to execute a plan for a learner. Human development is closely related to the activities of teaching and learning. "Cultural development" (Vygotsky, 1978) requires the process with a cultural artifact (Cole, 1998). An instructor cannot easily carry out every detail of what he or she prepared beforehand. Teaching strategies change according to the learner during the learning process.

The teaching-learning process can be compared to a pathway. While campus planners design routes by which students will travel, it is the students themselves that determine the relative usefulness of these routes, creating paths where there were none as the necessity arises. Just as the campus planner cannot foresee every circumstance with regard to traveling about the university, so too the teacher cannot foresee the multitude of forces at work in a classroom setting on a particular day. This is to say that the experience of teaching in a given situation on a given day often dictates the teaching methods used, regardless of what was planned. The topic of my speech concerns just such improvised bypasses in the social learning process.

The Teaching-Learning Process with Regard to the Activity of Disciplining

Discipline prepares a child to be a responsible member of the community. I will discuss teaching-learning as the negotiation of space in the activity of disciplining. Discipline is a necessary condition of human social life. Only humans transmit knowledge or skills constructed by the preceding generations in the form of "cultural learning" (Tomasello, 1999). The transmission of culture in human society is maintained by the teaching-learning that occurs between adults and children and the activity of disciplining is no exception.

Learning is usually seen as the internal and formative process of storing social knowledge. Internalization seems to enable a child to participate in an existing society. This idea contains two important premises: One is that the child receives a norm that is stable within the homogeneous community, and the other is that child learner is a passive recipient with regard to the internalization of the norm. Put another way, the child is expected to be the person who obeys in relation to the preexisting social order through the action of internalization.

Human beings are the only species that appropriate inherited knowledge from the prior generation. Leontiev (1965) described it as the third kind of experience, and we have a schooling system for children in order to organize this experience effectively.

The Zone of Proximal Development as the Frame for the Teaching-Learning Process

The zone of proximal development (ZPD) is the currently accepted view with regard to teaching-learning and development. Vygotsky (1978) proposed the concept of a "zone of proximal development," defining it as the collaborative space between a learner and more capable individuals. This zone exists "between the learner's current level of performance and the same learner's performance in the near future." The concept of the ZPD has the potential to explain "the paradox of development." The paradox of development refers to a phenomenon of "performance before competence" (Bruner, 1983). The person who performs a given

action necessarily has the ability to perform that action. Likewise, a person who does not have the same ability cannot perform the action. Everyone immediately realizes that this logic falls into a circular argument such as the well-known question of the “chicken and egg.”

The ZPD concept provides an interesting suggestion: We can compensate for ability with teamwork. Put another way, a task that cannot be completed by one person is generally more likely to be completed through collaboration. The idea of collaboration for the completion of a task is important with regard to the human social environment in which a child grows. This environment has been called a “zone of promoted action” (Valsiner, 1989) or a “field of promoted action” (Reed, 1996), but the point to consider is that we are all, as humans, surrounded by others on a regular basis. When children learn to perceive significant affordances within their specific social situation, they then become legitimate members of society.

In the ZPD as a social device for cultural transmission, there are knowledgeable others and an ignorant child learner. Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976) insist that the role of the more capable other in the collaboration is to “scaffold” the child’s leaning. Similarly, Berk & Winsler (1995) summarize the function of the other as follows: “An essential element of scaffolding is that the participants in social interaction negotiate, or compromise by constantly striving for a shared view of the situation—one that falls within the child’s ZPD.” Brown, Ash, Rutherford, Nakagawa, Gordon, & Campione (1993) describe the “reciprocal teaching” method as an effective means of collaborative learning. The goal of this method is to create a quasi-dialogue in a psychological plane through reciprocal teaching in a group. This group of researchers focuses on identifying effective conditions that facilitate the opening of the zone and promote the learner’s internalization.

From the standpoint of the abovementioned authors, learners do not have space for negotiation concerning what should be learned. Learners are passive recipients of knowledge and skills. The combination of an active instructor and a passive learner necessarily forms an asymmetrical power relation. Griffin & Cole (1984) insist that the dialogue in the ZPD is not between a child and an adult but between the present child and the future child.

The Learner’s Position as Consumer

Discipline is a daily practice in homes, schools, and other institutions. As for the research on practice in the psychological domain, I think the authors of the book, “Everyday Cognition” (e.g., Lave & Rogoff, 1984) elucidate the cognition and action with regard to practicing. Since then, many researchers have reported that learning is embedded in everyday practices, emphasizing the “situatedness” of these everyday practices in relation to learning and development. The teaching-centered view on the learning-teaching process has been changed to a learning-centered view. The new focus of the research is not how children internalize instructed contents, but how certain resources are utilized in learning.

The drastic change from the teaching-centered view to the learning-centered view can be seen as one subspecies of the general transition from a production-centered view to a consumption-centered view (Certeau, 1980). Discipline reminds us of Foucault’s theory of power (Foucault, 1975). Certeau (1980) asserts that Foucault focuses on the disciplining device in order to exercise power from the producer’s side².

He insists that this “microphysics of power” privileges the productive apparatus, thereby producing the “discipline.” He proposes that researching the consumer is required, asking the question, how does a consumer use the apparatus in everyday practice? In short, he emphasizes the active nature of a consumer:

What popular procedures (also “miniscule” and quotidian) manipulate the mechanisms of discipline and conform to them only in order to evade them, and finally, what “ways of operating” exist from the counterpart, on the consumer’s (or “dominee’s”?) side, of the mute processes that organize the establishment of socioeconomic order. (ibid., p. xiv)

These “ways of operating” constitute the innumerable practices by means of which users reappropriate the space organized by techniques of sociocultural production. (ibid., p. xiv)

I agree to his claim that a practice should be investigated from the point of view of the consumer, that is, the user. Discipline in early childhood should be examined. Certeau (1980) adopts two unique terms in order to differentiate between the producer’s behavior and the consumer’s behavior. They are “strategy” and “tactic.”

Strategy is “the calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that becomes possible as soon as a subject with will and power (a business, an army, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated. It postulates a place that can be delimited as its own and serve as the base from which relations with an exteriority composed of targets or threats (customers or competitors, enemies, the country surrounding the city, objectives and objects of research, etc.) can be managed” (ibid., p.35-36).

Tactic is “a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus” (ibid., p.37).

“The space of tactic is the space of the other. Thus it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign proper” (ibid., p.37).

Wertsch (1998) shows a clear example of the difference between strategy and tactic. He asked a forty-six-year-old man from Estonia about what happened when Estonia was incorporated into the Soviet Union. Then the man told the official story taught in school, incorporating elements of an unofficial story at the same time. Teaching an official history in the school is the strategy to manage the threats of heterogeneity for the creation of a unity in a nation. Estonian people provided a counter-narrative. The counter-narrative is not used only as a tactic whereby the unofficial history is inserted into the official narrative as a fragmentary argument, but also as something occupying its own space in the underground as a strategy. The counter-narrative might have been used within families and local areas to a great extent. Wertsch (1998) points out a conscious usage of tactic and strategy in narrative. The Estonian people became conscious of the difference between the two kinds of narrative with regard to their history. It is important to note that learners, and especially children in early childhood, are usually unaware of their use of tactics.

Learning to Eat During the Lunchtime Meal in a Nursery³

In a Japanese daycare nursery, there is a meal system for all institutions, and they are obliged by law to follow the regulations of the system. The reasoning behind this is that children must eat healthy for their development. Ensuring that children eat all the food with which they are provided, then, is a very important task for nursery teachers. Children have to stay in their chairs during mealtime until the teachers announce the end of the period. Teachers make a concerted effort to persuade children to eat all of the food provided. For example, one nineteen-month-old boy pushed his plate to the center of the table because he didn't like the food. The nursery teacher pushed the plate back to its original place.

I will examine cases dealing with children aged between zero and two years. It is important to note that there are a number of fundamental differences between these ages. The one-year-old babies usually sit in a baby chair by the nursery teachers. A baby chair strictly regulates the movement of the child. Children in a baby chair cannot escape from the chair by themselves. The two-year-old children sit in normal chairs, and a child who is able to walk can move from the chair if he or she so desires. This setting gives children a bigger potential for movement, however many of them do not move from the chair. Why is this so?

It is possible to explain the difference between the one-year-old and the two-year-old in terms of self-regulation. The baby chair is a cultural tool used to regulate the body of a child. On the other hand, what regulates the two-year-old children is a psychological factor. The explanation is based on the transitive theory, detailing the transition from an other-regulated phase to a self-regulated phase. This theory corresponds to Bruner's "loan of consciousness" (1986). A child is the passive recipient who internalizes the social norm that adults exemplify. It is a theory similar to the concepts of acculturation and socialization.

Strategy with Regard to Eating Instruction

What actually happens during mealtime for children? Let me analyze it in detail. When one eleven-month-old baby started to eat in his baby chair, one female nursery teacher sat beside him on the floor and put her meal tray there. On the tray, there was bread on a plate, stew inside a bowl, and cooked food on a plate. We should pay attention to the placement of the food. Remember that the food is on the floor and the baby could not touch the food by himself. The setting regulated the child's behavior in the sense that the nursery teacher took a privileged position in the management of the child by placing the food on the floor. The assumption was that the child could not eat for himself. The teacher's actions effectively told the child that he was prohibited from touching the food. This can be called a systematic strategy used to control the child's behavior. The baby did not have his own space to manage.

The fifteen-month-old baby in a normal chair was sitting very close to the table, with no space between the table and his chair. As the table and the chair were not attached, the possibility to move still existed. The nursery teacher set the food down in front of the child so that he could eat by himself. However, he had not yet mastered all of the skills necessary to eat. The same "sequential offering system" was utilized. The teacher set the food on the table sequentially, putting only one type of food in front of the child at a time. The food that the teacher wanted him to eat was set in front of him and the food that the teacher did

not want him to eat was left for a food carrier or taken away. The fifteen-month-old child got his own manageable space, but the teacher still continued to manage his space by offering foods in a sequential order.

Tactics for Negotiation

For both the eleven-month-old child and the fifteen-month-old child, the eating space was controlled by a nursery teacher. However, we see the different features in each instructional sequence. Through these sequences, we can see the dexterous tactics of a child.

As for the eleven-month-old baby, the nursery teacher often carried a piece of bread to the baby's mouth directly. This means that the teacher's hand functioned as the baby's hand. The nursery teacher, however, could not control his opening mouth. The baby's mouth is immediately regulated as an intentional act. Before eating, the baby must have paid attention to the food that the teacher supplied. The teacher held the spoon up in front of the baby's face so that he could look at it. She also called the baby's name to get his attention. The teacher had a hard time of getting his attention with regard to the food even though she occupied his eating space.

Past the first year of life, a child can eat food by himself with a spoon. The definition of "having eaten enough" is a negotiable matter between an adult and a child. In general, the starting point or ending point of any event is not precisely predicted in advance; these points are consequently decided after the event. The boundary point from the preceding event to the next one is situation dependent. This means that the ending point cannot be precisely decided by anyone.

Nursery teachers manage all the daily activities of the daycare nursery. The end of mealtime is also announced by the teachers at the beginning of the lunch time. They tell children, "Please eat until 12:30 today, then you will play with blocks, Legos, and picture books." Children usually eat eagerly at the beginning, but soon begin to become dull⁴. In such a case, nursery teachers must negotiate regarding the definition of the end of mealtime. Children usually make some kind of effort, but still do not entirely finish the foods they don't like. Teachers have a professional mission regarding the proper nutrition of the children, so that they must encourage the children to eat. This situation creates a difficult problem for both children and teachers. How do they solve the problem?

One girl aged two-years and one-month old had a plate placed in front of her with a half-cut orange on it. She licked the surface of the orange with her tongue for a long time. She suddenly passed it away to me. I told her to eat it by herself and she covered it under her small towel and then covered it with the upper half of her body, sitting in this way for quite some time. I informed the nursery teacher, who praised the child's effort to eat and permitted her not to eat more. After lunch, the teacher told me that this was a normal behavior for the girl. This was her tactic for food that she dislikes. This process shows collaborative solving for this kind of problem. The child did not refuse to eat any food, but still managed to avoid eating. The teacher did not force her to eat at all, but confirmed the child's effort, thereby finishing the eating instruction.

The teachers often say to children, "If you eat a little bit more of it, then I'll let you go." They regard it as important to confirm children's efforts rather than the outcome itself. To what extent should children eat

is negotiable. The teacher's decision of finishing does not only depend on the eaten quantity but also the message in child's act of eating. A clever reaction can relieve a child from his or her scrape. I think that there are many variations among different societies in relation to the negotiation of eating in such institutions, but certainly children use dexterous tactics in any society.

What Does the Negotiation Teach Us?

What is learned from examining children's use of tactics? In the previous cases, the children employed tactics in relation to eating with teachers. A child aged one year might not use these tactics intentionally; however, the child will soon learn the functional meaning of the tactic through repeated interaction. They may come to understand the situational meaning of "finishing eating" by experiencing such an event repeatedly. Their tactics may gradually become a conscious strategy embedded in everyday practice. It is important to know that the usage of tactics in the beginning is not on purpose and influenced the teacher's instructions. Teachers' reactions tell the child that they are using a tactic, and children discover what they can and can't get away with by examining their teachers' responses. Phrases such as "Eat your fill" are absolutely right. No one can deny it, and it should necessarily be treated as "an authoritative discourse" (Bakhtin, 1981).

The authoritative word demands that we acknowledge it, that we make it our own; it binds us, quite independent of any power it might have to persuade us internally; we encounter it with its authority already fused to it. The authoritative word is located in a distanced zone, organically connected with a past that is felt to be hierarchically higher. It is, so to speak, the word of the fathers. Its authority was already acknowledged in the past. It is a prior discourse. It is therefore not a question of choosing it from among other possible discourses that are its equal. It is given (it sounds) special (as it were, hieratic) language. It can be profaned. It is akin to taboo, that is, a name that must not be taken in vain (ibid, p342).

Instructors often use authoritative words for their instruction. During mealtime, teachers usually announce, "Do not leave food on your plate," but the children truly learn to what extent and how they should eat through negotiation with teachers. During the negotiation process they might hear the teacher's response as "an internally persuasive discourse" (ibid). If so, the negotiation process promotes children's acquisition of internally persuasive discourse.

Internally persuasive discourse - as opposed to one that is externally authoritative - is, as it is affirmed through assimilation, tightly interwoven with "one's own word." In the everyday rounds of our consciousness, the internally persuasive word is half-ours and half-someone else's (Bakhtin, 1981, p.345).

An authoritative word may be turned into an initial resource used to search an internally persuasive word through negotiations. "Eat all your food" does not indicate the goal to be attained but a condition for negotiation. An instructor and a learner participating in a same activity should negotiate an actual goal

every time. According to Vygotsky and Bakhtin, human interaction is necessary for development. However, the learning space in the ZPD is occupied by the instructors as “*more capable others*” (Vygotsky, 1978). On the other hand, Bakhtin (1981) insists that a person should meet with an internally persuasive discourse for searching his or her original voice. Internally persuasive words can be heard in the zone of negotiation even if they appear nonverbally. When the person meets with some internally persuasive discourses in a situation, a conflict between the discourses may arise. The person can then select words that are appropriate for the situation. This internal struggle leads to “ideological becoming,” which “refers to how we develop our way of viewing the world, our system of ideas, [and] what Bakhtin calls an ideological self” (Ball & Freeman, 2004).

Concluding remarks

In this presentation, I examined only the case of a lunchtime meal in a nursery. Even in the first socialization period when children are not fluent language users, instructors cannot decide how and what they teach. What is learned by a learner is not planned by instructors. Strictly speaking, everything in the teaching-learning process is negotiable for the participants. The concept of the ZPD, however, lacks such a negotiable aspect. An extra small way anywhere is nothing but the consequential trace by pedestrians. Nobody intends to progress in such a way. The path is a transitory one for users. It represents the negotiating process among ordinary practitioners.

Notes

- 1 This paper was presented in the keynote regional panel of the second congress of the International Society for Cultural and Activity Research, Sept. 10, 2008, University of California, San Diego.
- 2 It refers to “*Surveiller et Punir; Naissance de la prison*” written in 1975. Foucault developed his idea on power after the book was published. But I do not discuss it here.
- 3 For more information, see the following article which was written after this talk: Ishiguro, H. (2016). How a young child learns how to take part in mealtimes in a Japanese day-care center: A longitudinal case study. *European Journal of Psychology of Education*, 31(1), 13-27.
- 4 The reason why children eat calmly at the beginning is that they eat preferable foods at first, leaving the foods they like less until the end.

References

- Bakhtin, M.M. (1981). *The Dialogic Imagination: Four essays*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Ball, A. F. & Freeman, S. W. (2004). *Bakhtinian Perspectives on Language, Literacy, and Learning*. Berkeley: University of California.
- Berk, L. E. & Winsler, A. (1995). *Scaffolding Children's Learning: Vygotsky and Early Childhood Education*. Washington: National Association for the Education of Young Children.
- Brown, A. L., Ash, D., Rutherford, M., Nakagawa, K., Gordon, A., and Campione, J. C., (1993). Distributed

- expertise in the classroom. In Salomon, G. (Ed.), *Distributed Cognitions: Psychological and Educational Considerations*, Cambridge University Press. Pp.188-228.
- Bruner, J. S. (1983). *In Search of Mind: Essays in Autobiography*. New York: Haper & Row, Publishers.
- Bruner, J.S. (1986). *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Certeau, M. de (1984). *The Practice of Everyday Life* (S. F. Rendall, Trans). University of California Press. (*L'invention du quotidien, I: Arts de faire*, Union générale d'editions 10-18, 1980.)
- Cole, M. (1998). *Cultural Psychology: A Once and Future Discipline*. Belknap Press.
- Griffin, P. & Cole, M. (1984). Current Activity for the Future: The Zo-ped. In B. Rogoff & J. V. Wertsch (Eds.), *Learning in the "Zone of Proximal Development."* *New Directions for Child Development*, 23, 45-64. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Foucault, M. (1978). *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Vintage Books. (1975. *Surveiller et Punir; Naissance de la prison*. Paris: Gallimard.)
- Lave, J. and Rogoff, B. (1984). *Everyday Cognition: Its Development in Social Context*. Harvard University Press.
- Леонтьев, А. Н. (1965). *Проблемы развития психики. 2-е*, М: МЫСЛЬ. (Leontiev, A. N. *Problems of the development of the psyche*. 2nd ed. M: Thought)
- Reed, S. E. (1996). *Encountering the world: toward an ecological psychology*. Oxford University Press.
- Tomasello, M. (1999). *The Cultural Origin of Human Cognition*. Harvard University Press.
- Valsiner, J. (1989). *Culture and the Development of Children's Action: A Theory of Human development*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Vygotsky, L.S. (1978). *Mind in Society*. Harvard University Press.
- Wertsch, J. V. (1998). *Mind as Action*. Oxford University Press.
- Wood, D., Bruner, J.S., and Ross, G. (1976). The role of tutoring in problem solving. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 17, 89-100.