

Boundaries Within and Between Contexts

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Introduction

The point of departure of this chapter is the understanding that the way in which the social relations of institutions are regulated has cognitive and affective consequences for those who live and work inside them. The current state of the art in the social sciences struggles to provide a theoretical connection between specific forms, or modalities, of institutional regulation and consciousness. Attempts to do so tend not to be capable of generating analyses and descriptions of institutional formations that are predictive of consequences for individuals. At the same time, social policy tends not engage with the personal consequences of different forms of institutional regulation. This chapter discusses an approach to making the connection between the principles of regulation in institutions, discursive practices, and the shaping of consciousness. This approach is based on the work of the British sociologist Basil Bernstein and the Russian social theorist Lev Vygotsky.

Vygotsky and Bernstein

From the sociological point of view, Bernstein outlined the challenge of forging a connection between the principles of regulation in institutions, discursive practices, and the shaping of consciousness as follows:

The substantive issue of ... [this] theory is to explicate the process whereby a given distribution of power and principles of control are translated into specialised principles of communication differentially, and often unequally, distributed to social groups/classes. And how such a differential/unequal distribution of forms of communication, initially (but not

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necessarily terminally) shapes the formation of consciousness of members of these groups/classes in such a way as to relay both opposition and change. (Bernstein 1996a, b: 93)

The following assertion from Vygotsky recasts the issue in more psychological vein but with same underlying intent and commitment:

Any function in the child's cultural [ie higher] development appears twice, or on two planes. First it appears on the social plane, and then on the psychological plane. First it appears between people as an inter-psychological category, and then within the child as an intra-psychological category. This is equally true with regard to voluntary attention, logical memory, the formation of concepts, and the development of volition. ... it goes without saying that internalization transforms the process itself and changes its structure and functions. Social relations or relations among people genetically underlie all higher functions and their relationships. (Vygotsky 1981: 163)

Taken together, the Vygotskian and Bernsteinian social theory have the potential to make a significant contribution to the development of a theory of the social formation of mind in specific pedagogic modalities. Following Bernstein, pedagogy may be thought of a sustained process whereby somebody acquires new forms or develops existing forms of conduct, knowledge, practice and criteria, from somebody or something deemed to be an appropriate provider and evaluator (Bernstein 2000). Defined in this way, the general practitioner, the policymaker, the therapist, the broadcaster, and the journalist are all involved in a form of pedagogic practice.

A sociological focus on the rules that shape the social formation of discursive practice may be brought to bear on those aspects of psychology which argue that cultural artefacts, such as pedagogic discourse, both explicitly and implicitly, mediate human thought and action. Sociocultural theorists argue that individual agency has been significantly under acknowledged in Bernstein's sociology of pedagogy (e.g. Werstch 1998a). Vygotsky's work provides a compatible account that places emphasis on individual agency through its attention to the notion of mediation. Sociologists complain that post-Vygotskian psychology is particularly weak in addressing relationships between local, interactional contexts of 'activity' and 'mediation', where meaning is produced and wider structures of the division of labor and institutional organization act to specify social positions and their differentiated orientation to 'activities and 'cultural artefacts' (e.g. Fitz 2007).

Many sociologists have sought to theorize relationships between forms of social relations in institutional settings and forms of talk. Sociocultural psychologists, working in the post-Vygotskian tradition, have done much to understand the relationship between thinking and speech in a range of social settings with relatively little analysis and description of the institutional arrangements that are in place in those settings.

We can never 'speak from nowhere', given that we can speak (or more broadly, act) only by invoking mediational means that are available in the 'cultural tool kit' provided by the sociocultural setting in which we operate ...this does not mean that we are mechanistically determined by, or are mere puppets of, the mediational means we employ, but it does mean that constraints of some kind always exist. (Wertsch et al. 1995, p. 25)

Vygotsky provided a rich and tantalizing set of suggestions that have been taken up and transformed by social theorists as they attempt to construct accounts of the formation of mind that to varying degrees acknowledge social, cultural, and historical influences. There is also no doubt that Vygotsky straddled a number of disciplinary boundaries. Davydov (1995: 15) went as far to suggest that was involved in ‘a creative reworking of the theory of behaviorism, gestalt psychology, functional and descriptive psychology, genetic psychology, the French school of sociology, and Freudianism’.

Mediation

Recent developments in post-Vygotskian theory have witnessed considerable advances in the understanding of the ways in which human action shapes and is shaped by the contexts in which it takes place. They have given rise to a significant amount of empirical research within and across a wide range of fields in which social science methodologies and methods are applied in the development of research-based knowledge in policymaking and practice in academic, commercial and industrial settings. Vygotsky’s is not a legacy of determinism and denial of agency, as in some versions of structuralist sociology; rather, he provided a theoretical framework that rests on the concept of mediation by artefact. The argument is that artefacts are formed and shaped through cultural historical processes and, in turn, these shape those who use them to act on the world. These developments have explored different aspects of Vygotsky’s legacy at different moments. As Puzyrei (2007) noted, Vygotsky’s work constitutes a dynamic resource for modern-day researchers who will explore different facets of the texts we have available in line with their own interests and to some extent the prevailing zeitgeist. These wider social influences are seen to have mediated the development and uptake of the theory itself:

Vygotsky’s cultural-historical theory (like any great theory) resembles a city. A city with broad new avenues and ancient, narrow backstreets known only to longtime residents, with noisy, crowded plazas and quiet, deserted squares, with large, modern edifices and decrepit little buildings. The individual areas of that city may not be situated on a single level: while some rise above the ground, others are submerged below it and cannot be seen at all. In essence, it is as though there were a second city that has intimate and complex associations with the ground-level city but completely invisible to many. And the sun rises above it all and the stars come out over it at night. Sometimes dust storms and hurricanes rage, or the rain beats down long and hard and “the sky is overcast.” Life is a constant feeling of effervescence. Holidays and the humdrum follow one another. The city changes, grows, and is rebuilt. Whole neighborhoods are demolished. The center is sometimes over here, sometimes over there. And so it goes. (Puzyrei 2007, pp. 85–86)

Smardon (2010) took this line of argument somewhat further in suggesting that the Vygotskian way of seeing the world has been and continues to be marginalized in some academic settings:

Vygotskian project has been largely overlooked outside of the field of educational psychology, where Stetsenko argues it is still marginalized in comparison to other, more dominant theoretical models. Furthermore, Marxist psychology has never been a part of American sociology, a discipline that has instead focused on macrosociological Marxist models.—Thus, the Vygotskian project exists at the marginal nexus of both psychology and sociology. (Smardon 2010, p. 70)

The reasons for formation of this marginal position may be that in attempting to resolve the disconnection between disciplinary imaginations, it manages to offend both. Whatever the reasons, it is clear that many disciplines contributed to the formation of Vygotsky's ideas. For example, Van der Veer (1996) argued that Humboldt (with reference to linguistic mediation) and Marx (with reference to tool-use and social and cultural progress) influenced Vygotsky's concept of culture. Van der Veer suggested that the limitations in this aspect of Vygotsky's work are with respect to non-linguistically mediated aspects of culture and the difficulty in explaining innovation by individuals. Vygotsky's writing on the way in which psychological tools and signs act in the mediation of social factors does not engage with a theoretical account of the appropriation and/or production of psychological tools within specific forms of activity within or across institutions. Just as the development of Vygotsky's work fails to provide an adequate account of social praxis, so much sociological theory is unable to provide descriptions of micro-level processes, except by projecting macro-level concepts on to the micro level unmediated by intervening concepts through which the micro can be both uniquely described and related to the macro level.

Power and Control in Institutions

Amongst sociologists of cultural transmission, Bernstein (2000) provided a sociology of this social experience that is compatible with, but absent from, Vygotskian psychology. His theoretical contribution was directed towards the question as to how institutional relations of power and control translate into principles of communication, and how these differentially regulate forms of consciousness. It was through Luria's attempts to disseminate his former colleague's work that Bernstein first became acquainted with Vygotsky's writing:

I first came across Vygotsky in the late 1950s through a translation by Luria of a section of *Thought and Speech* published in *Psychiatry* 2 1939. It is difficult to convey the sense of excitement, of thrill, of revelation this paper aroused: literally a new universe opened. (Bernstein 1993, p. xxiii)

This paper, along with a seminal series of lectures given by Luria at the Tavistock Institute in London, sparked an intense interest in the Russian cultural historical tradition and went on to exert a profound influence on postwar developments in English in education, the introduction of education for young people with severe and profound learning difficulties and theories practices designed to facilitate development, and learning in socially disadvantaged groups in the United

Kingdom. In November 1964, Bernstein wrote a letter to Vygotsky's widow outlining her late husband's influence on his developing thesis:

As you may know, many of us working in the area of speech (from the perspective of psychology as well as from the perspective of sociology) think that we owe a debt to the Russian school, especially to works based on Vygotsky's tradition. I should say that in many respects, many of us are still trying to comprehend what he said. (Bernstein Bernstein 1964b, p. 1)

It was Vygotsky's (1978) nondualist cultural historical conception of mind claims that 'intermental' (social) experience shapes 'intramental' (psychological) development that continued to influence his thinking. This was understood as a mediated process in which culturally produced artefacts (such as forms of talk, representations in the form of ideas and beliefs, signs, and symbols) shape and are shaped by human engagement with the world (e.g. Vygotsky 1987; Daniels 2008).

Language here is a system of meanings, a relay for the social, a primary condition for the formation of consciousness and the levels and variety of its function. Relation to (the social) precedes relations within (the individual). This insight was of course, Mead's, much earlier than Vygotsky but his insight produced a very different model. The I/Me dualism of the Meadian self is a dualism endemic to European thought, perhaps even to christianity, with its distinction between inner/outer, individual/society. The relaying, mediating role of language is shared with Durkheim. (Bernstein 1993, p. xiv)

However, as Atkinson (1985) noted, despite his acquaintance with the various philosophical and anthropological authors on language and symbolism including Cassirer and Whorf and Vygotsky and Luria, Bernstein's approach epitomizes an essentially macrosociological point of view:

It is undoubtedly true that in Bernstein's general approach there is little or no concern for the perspectives, strategy and actions of individual social actors in actual social settings. (Atkinson 1985, p. 32)

Durkheim influenced both Vygotsky and Bernstein. On the one hand, Durkheim's notion of collective representation allowed for the social interpretation of human cognition; on the other hand, it failed to resolve the issue as to how the collective representation is interpreted by the individual. This is the domain so appropriately filled by the later writings of Vygotsky. The fact that Bernstein has used Mead and Vygotsky in the formulation of his model allows for the exploration of interpersonal relations at the face-to-face level in the classroom. Many of the symbolic interactionist and Vygotskian insights can be subsumed into his model, which affords the wider social dimension a central place in a general thesis.

Speech and Social Situation

Although Vygotsky discussed the general importance of language and schooling for psychological functioning, he failed to provide a framework to analyze and describe the real social systems in which these activities occur and reflect. Vygotsky never

indicated the social basis for this new use of words. The social analysis is thus reduced to a semiotic analysis that overlooks the real world of social praxis (Ratner 1997):

The feature that can be viewed as the proximal cause of the maturation of concepts, *is a specific way of using the word*, specifically the functional application of the sign as a means of forming concepts.

(Vygotsky 1987, p. 131)

Whilst it is quite possible to interpret ‘a specific way of using the word’ to be an exhortation to analyze the activities in which the word is used and meaning negotiated, this was not elaborated by Vygotsky himself. The analysis of the structure and function of semiotic psychological tools in specific activity contexts is not explored. The challenge is to address the demands created by this absence. Bernstein recognized the need for such an endeavor in his early writing:

Different social structures may generate different speech systems or linguistic codes. The latter entail for the individual specific principles of choice which regulate the selections he makes from the totality of options represented by a given language. The principles of choice originally elicit, progressively strengthen, and finally stabilize the planning procedures an individual uses in the preparation of his speech and guide his orientation to the speech of others.

(Bernstein 1964a, p. 56)

Bernstein outlined a model for understanding the construction of pedagogic discourse. In this context, pedagogic discourse is a source of psychological tools or cultural artefacts:

The basic idea was to view this (pedagogic) discourse as arising out of the action of a group of specialised agents operating in specialised setting in terms of the interests, often competing interests of this setting.

(Bernstein 1996a, b, p. 116)

In Engeström’s (1996) work within activity theory, which to some considerable extent has a Vygotskian root, the production of the outcome of activity is discussed, but not the production and structure of cultural artefacts such as discourse. The production of discourse is not analyzed in terms of the context of its production, which is the rules, community, and division of labor that regulate the activity in which subjects are positioned. It is therefore important that the discourse is seen within the culture and structures of schooling where differences in pedagogic practices, in the structuring of interactions and relationships, and the generation of different criteria of competence will shape the ways in which children are perceived and actions are argued and justified.

The application of Vygotsky by many social scientists (e.g. linguists, psychologists, sociologists) has been limited to relatively small-scale interactional contexts, often within schooling or some form of educational setting. The descriptions and the form of analysis are in some sense specific to these contexts. Sociologists have drawn on ethnomethodology or symbolic interactionism (see Makitalo and Saljo 2002 for a discussion). Here, the focus is on the creation and negotiation of social order by participants in clearly defined and categorized settings. Data collection tends to focus on what is said. As Bernstein (1993) noted, extra-contextual

structures of power and their discursive regulation are necessarily excluded from the analysis.

He also noted the limitations of symbolic interactionism which, from his point of view, are as follows:

[Symbolic interactionism] focuses upon meanings, their negotiation, the construction of identities and their careers as these emerge out of face to face encounters in well bounded contexts. Here there is opportunity for showing relations to external constraints and possibilities in which interactions are embedded but not necessarily determined. Yet there still remains the crucial conceptual issue of explicating this interrelation. This is not solved by a set of boxes which only index the very processes to be described. Symbolic interaction provides sensitive and insightful descriptions of interactions within the pedagogic format. The description it gives necessarily stems from its own selective focus. It tends to take for granted, that it does not include in its description, how the discourse itself is constituted and recontextualized. The theory focuses upon interactional formats rather than the way the **specialization of knowledge is constructed**. From the point of view of Vygotsky the “**tool**” is not subject to analysis, although the articulation of the zone of proximal development may well be. This absence of focus is common to both linguistic and psychology. (Bernstein 1993, p. xix)

Bernstein and Recontextualization: Instructional and Regulative Discourse

In his work on schooling, Bernstein (2000) argued that pedagogic discourse is constructed by a recontextualizing principle that selectively appropriates, relocates, refocuses, and relates other discourses to constitute its own order. He argued that in order to understand pedagogic discourse as a social and historical construction, attention must be directed to the regulation of its structure, the social relations of its production, and the various modes of its recontextualizing as a practice. For Bernstein, symbolic ‘tools’ are never neutral; intrinsic to their construction are social classifications, stratifications, distributions, and modes of recontextualizing.

The language that Bernstein (2000) has developed allows researchers to take measures of institutional modality. That is to describe and position the discursive, organizational, and interactional practice of the institution. His model is one that is designed to relate macro-institutional forms to micro-interactional levels and the underlying rules of communicative competence. He focuses upon two levels: a structural level and an interactional level. The structural level is analyzed in terms of the social division of labor it creates (e.g. the degree of specialization, and thus strength of boundary between professional groupings) and the interactional with the form of social relation it creates (e.g. the degree of control that a manager may exert over a team member’s work plan). The social division is analyzed in terms of the strength of the boundary of its divisions—that is, with respect to the degree of specialization (e.g. how strong is the boundary between professions such as teaching and social work or one school curriculum subject and another). Thus, the key concept at the structural level is the concept of boundary, and structures are distinguished in terms of their relationships between categories. The interactional

level emerges as the regulation of the transmission/acquisition relationship between teacher and taught (or the manager and the managed); that is, the interactional level comes to refer to the pedagogic context and the social relations of the workplace or classroom or its equivalent.

Power is spoken of in terms of classification, which is manifested in category relations that themselves generate recognition rules. Possession allows the acquirer to recognize the difference that is marked by a category, as would be the case of rules that allow a professional to be recognized as belonging to particular professional group. This is not simply a matter of finding out which service someone belongs to; it also refers to the ways forms of talk and other actions may be seen as belonging to a particular professional category or grouping. When there is strong insulation between categories (i.e. subject, teachers), with each category sharply distinguished, explicitly bounded, and having its own distinctive specialization, then classification is said to be strong. When there is weak insulation, then the categories are less specialized and their distinctiveness is reduced; this classification is said to be weak.

Bernstein (1996a, b) refined the discussion of his distinction between instructional and regulative discourse. The former refers to the transmission of skills and their relation to each other, and the latter refers to the principles of social order, relation, and identity. Whereas the principles and distinctive features of instructional discourse and its practice are relatively clear (the what and how of the specific skills/competences to be acquired and their relation to each other), the principles and distinctive features of the transmission of the regulative are less clear as this discourse is transmitted through various media and may indeed be characterized as a diffuse transmission. Regulative discourse communicates the school's (or any institution's) public moral practice, values, beliefs, attitudes, principles of conduct, character, and manner. It also transmits features of the school's local history, local tradition, and community relations. Pedagogic discourse is modelled as one discourse created by the embedding of instructional and regulative discourse. This model of pedagogic discourse provides a response to one of the many theoretical demands that have remained unfulfilled in the post-Vygotskian framework. The rejection of the cognitive/affective dualism that Vygotsky announced was not followed by a model within which a unitary conception of thinking and feeling could be discussed and implemented within empirical research.

Examining Pedagogic Modalities

Different institutional modalities may be described in terms of the relationship between the relations of power and control, which gives rise to distinctive discursive artefacts. For example, with respect to schooling, where the theory of instruction gives rise to a strong classification and strong framing of the pedagogic practice, it is expected that there will be a separation of discourses (school subjects) and an emphasis upon acquisition of specialized skills; the teacher will be dominant

in the formulation of intended learning and the pupils are constrained by the teacher's practice. The relatively strong control on the pupils' learning itself acts as a means of maintaining order in the context in which the learning takes place. This form of instructional discourse contains regulative functions. With strong classification and framing, the social relations between teachers and pupils will be more asymmetrical—that is, more clearly hierarchical. In this instance, the regulative discourse and its practice is more explicit and distinguishable from the instructional discourse. Where the theory of instruction gives rise to a weak classification and weak framing of the practice, children will be encouraged to be active in the classroom, to undertake enquiries, and perhaps to work in groups at their own pace. Here, the relations between teacher and pupils will have the appearance of being more symmetrical. In these circumstances, it is difficult to separate instructional discourse from regulative discourse as these are mutually embedded. The formulation of pedagogic discourse as an embedded discourse comprised of instructional and regulative components allows for the analysis of the production of such embedded discourses in activities structured through specifiable relations of power and control within institutions.

Bernstein provided an account of cultural transmission that is avowedly sociological in its conception. In turn, the psychological account that has developed in the wake of Vygotsky's writing offers a model of aspects of the social formation of mind that is underdeveloped in Bernstein's work. The sociocultural account of the social, cultural, and historical context is insufficient for the task that Vygotsky set himself in his attempt to formulate a general social theory of the formation of mind. Bernstein's account of social positioning within the discursive practice that arises in institutional settings, taken together with his analysis of the ways in which principles of power and control translate into principles of communication, allows us to investigate how principles of communication differentially regulate forms of consciousness.

Bernstein's work provides the basis for a language of description that may be applied at the level of principles of power and control, which may then be translated into principles of communication. Different social structures give rise to different modalities of language, which have specialized mediational properties. They have arisen and been shaped by, the social, cultural and historical circumstances in which interpersonal exchanges arise; they in turn shape the thoughts, feelings, identities, and aspirations for action of those engaged in interpersonal exchange in those contexts. Hence, the relations of power and control, which regulate social interchange, give rise to specialized principles of communication. These mediate social relations. I intend to develop an account of the production of psychological tools or artefacts, such as discourse, that will allow for exploration of formative effects of the institutional context of production at the psychological level. This will also involve a consideration of the possibilities afforded to different social actors as they take up positions and are positioned in social products such as discourse. This discussion of production thus opens up the possibility of analyzing the possible positions that an individual may take up in a field of social practice:

To understand his views on what underlies the social subjects' participation in discourse is to understand the true meaning of speaking each act of speaking is a social event, behind which lies the history of the individual and so the history of the community of which the individual is a member. (Hasan 2001, p. 6)

Mediation: Explicit, Implicit, or Invisible

Discourse may mediate human action in different ways. There is visible (Bernstein 2000) or explicit (Wertsch 2007) mediation in which the deliberate incorporation of signs into human action is seen as a means of reorganizing that action. This contrasts with invisible or implicit mediation, which involves signs, especially natural language, whose primary function is IN communications, which are part of a pre-existing, independent stream of communicative action that becomes integrated with other forms of goal-directed behavior (Wertsch 2007). Invisible semiotic mediation occurs in discourse embedded in everyday ordinary activities of a social subject's life.

As Hasan (2001) argued, Bernstein further nuanced this claim:

Bernstein referred to ... the 'invisible' component of communication (see Bernstein 1990a, b: 17, Fig. 3.1 and discussion). The code theory relates this component to the subject's social positioning. If we grant that 'ideology is constituted through and in such positioning' (Bernstein 1990a, b: 13), then we grant that subjects' stance to their universe is being invoked: different orders of relevance inhere in different experiences of positioning and being positioned. This is where the nature of what one wants to say, not its absolute specifics, may be traced. Of course, linguists are right that speakers can say what they want to say, but an important question is: what is the range of meanings they freely and voluntarily mean, and why do they prioritize those meanings when the possibilities of making meanings from the point of view of the system of language are infinite? Why do they want to say what they do say? The regularities in discourse have roots that run much deeper than linguistics has cared to fathom. (Hasan 2001, p. 8)

This argument is all the more strengthened through its reference to a theoretical account that provides greater descriptive and analytical purchase on the principles of regulation of the social figured world, the possibilities for social position, and the voice of participants.

These challenges of studying implicit or invisible mediation have been approached from a variety of theoretical perspectives. Holland et al (1998) studied the development of identities and agency specific to historically situated, socially enacted, culturally constructed worlds in a way that may contribute to the development of an understanding of the way in which the development of social capital is situated. This approach to a theory of identity in practice is grounded in the notion of a figured world in which positions are taken up constructed and resisted. The Bakhtinian concept of the 'space of authoring' is deployed to capture an understanding of the mutual shaping of figured worlds and identities in social practice. They refer to Bourdieu (1977) in their attempt to show how social position becomes

disposition. They argue for the development of social position into a positional identity into disposition and the formation of what Bourdieu referred to as 'habitus'. Bernstein was critical of habitus, arguing that the internal structure of a particular habitus, the mode of its specific acquisition, which gives it its specificity, is not described. For him, habitus is known by its output not its input. (Bernstein 2000).

Wertsch (1998a, b) turned to Bakhtin's theory of speech genres rather than habitus. A similar conceptual problem emerges with this body of work. While Bakhtin's views concerning speech genres are 'rhetorically attractive and impressive, the approach lacks ... both a developed conceptual syntax and an adequate language of description. Terms and units at both these levels in Bakhtin's writings require clarification; further, the principles that underlie the calibration of the elements of context with the generic shape of the text are underdeveloped, as is the general schema for the description of contexts for interaction' (Hasan 2005). Bernstein acknowledged the importance of Foucault's analysis of power, knowledge, and discourse as he attempted to theorize the discursive positioning of the subject. He complained that it lacks a theory of transmission, its agencies, and its social base.

Social Positioning

Hasan brought Bernstein's concept of social positioning to the fore in her discussion of social identity. Bernstein (1990a, b, p. 13) used this concept to refer to the establishment of a specific relation to other subjects and to the creation of specific relationships within subjects. As Hasan (2005) noted, social positioning through meanings are inseparable from power relations. Bernstein provided an elaboration of his early general argument:

More specifically, class-regulated codes position subjects with respect to dominant and dominated forms of communication and to the relationships between them. Ideology is constituted through and in such positioning. From this perspective, ideology inheres in and regulates modes of relation. Ideology is not so much a content as a mode of relation for the realizing of content. Social, cultural, political and economic relations are intrinsic to pedagogic discourse. (Bernstein 1990a, b, pp. 13–14)

Here, the linkage is forged between social positioning and psychological attributes. This is the process through which Bernstein talked of the shaping of the possibilities for consciousness. The dialectical relation between discourse and subject makes it possible to think of pedagogic discourse as a semiotic means that regulates or traces the generation of subjects' positions in discourse. We can understand the potency of pedagogic discourse in selectively producing subjects and their identities in a temporal and spatial dimension (Diaz 2001, pp. 106–108). As Hasan (2005) argued, within the Bernsteinian thesis there exists an ineluctable relation between one's social positioning, one's mental dispositions, and one's relation to the distribution of labor in society. Here, the emphasis on discourse is

theorized ‘not only in terms of the shaping of cognitive functions but also, as it were invisibly, in its influence on dispositions, identities, and practices’ (Bernstein 1990b, p. 33).

Within Engeström’s approach to cultural historical activity theory (CHAT), the subject is often discussed in terms of individuals, groups, or perspectives/views. I would argue that the way in which subjects are positioned with respect to one another within an activity carries with it implications for engagement with tools and objects. It may also carry implications for the ways rules, community, and the division of labor regulate the actions of individuals and groups.

Holland et al. (1998) studied the development of identities and agency specific to historically situated, socially enacted, culturally constructed worlds. They draw on Bakhtin (1978, 1986) and Vygotsky to develop a theory of identity as constantly forming and person as a composite of many, often contradictory, self-understandings and identities that are distributed across the material and social environment and are rarely durable. They draw on Leont’ev regarding the development of the concept of socially organized and reproduced *figured worlds* that shape and are shaped by participants and in which social position establishes possibilities for engagement:

[Figured worlds] distribute ‘us’ not only by relating actors to landscapes of action (as personae) and spreading our senses of self across many different fields of activity, but also by giving the landscape human voice and tone—Cultural worlds are populated by familiar social types and even identifiable persons, not simply differentiated by some abstract division of labour. The identities we gain within figured worlds are thus specifically historical developments, grown through *continued participation in the positions defined by the social organization of those world’s activity* (Holland et al. 1998, p. 41, emphasis added)

This approach to a theory of identity in practice is grounded in the notion of a figured world in which positions are taken up constructed and resisted. The Bakhtinian concept of the ‘space of authoring’ is deployed to capture an understanding of the mutual shaping of figured worlds *and* identities in social practice. Holland et al. (1998) referred to Bourdieu (1977) in their attempt to show how social position becomes disposition. They argued for the development of social position into a positional identity into disposition and the formation of what Bourdieu referred to as ‘habitus.’ It is here that I feel that this argument could be strengthened through reference to a theoretical account that provides greater descriptive and analytical purchase on the principles of regulation of the social figured world, the possibilities for social position, and the voice of participants.

The Regulation of Social Position

Engeström (1999a, b), who has tended to concentrate on the structural aspects of CHAT, offered the suggestion that the division of labor in an activity creates different positions for the participants and that the participants carry their own diverse histories with them into the activity. This echoes the earlier assertion from Leont’ev:

Activity is the minimal meaningful context for understanding individual actions.... In all its varied forms, the activity of the human individual is a system set within a system of social relations.... The activity of individual people thus *depends on their social position*, the conditions that fall to their lot, and an accumulation of idiosyncratic, individual factors. Human activity is not a relation between a person and a society that confronts him...in a society a person does not simply find external conditions to which he must adapt his activity, but, rather, these very social conditions bear within themselves the motives and goals of his activity, its means and modes. (Leont'ev 1978, p. 10, emphasis added).

In activity, the possibilities for the use of artefacts depend on the social position occupied by an individual. Sociologists and sociolinguists have produced empirical verification of this suggestion (e.g., Bernstein 2000; Hasan 2001; Hasan and Cloran 1990). My suggestion is that the notion of 'subject' within activity theory requires expansion and clarification. In many studies, the term *subject perspective* is used, which arguably infers subject position but does little to illuminate the formative processes that gave rise to this perspective.

Holland et al. also argued that multiple identities are developed within figured worlds and that these are "historical developments, grown through continued participation in the positions defined by the social organization of those world's activity" (Holland et al. 1998, p. 41). This body of work represents a significant development in our understanding of the concept of the 'subject' in activity theory. As Roth (2007) noted:

Goals and actions are free-floating, generally intelligible, cultural-historically contingent possibilities. Because concrete embodied actions articulate between society and the self, a person's identity does not constitute a singularity but is itself inherently intelligible within the cultural unit. It is because of what they see each other doing that two (or more) persons come to 'recognize themselves as mutually recognizing one another' Publicly visible actions serve as the ground of recognizing in the other another self that recognizes in me its corresponding other. It is this linkage between self and other through patterned embodied actions that have led some to theorize identity in terms of agency and culture in which a person participates (Roth 2007, p. 144)

For my point of view, there remains a need to develop the notion of 'figured world' in such a way that we can theorize, analyze, and describe the processes by which that world is 'figured.' Bernstein's (1990)a: 13 concept of social positioning seems to concur with the analysis outlined by Holland et al (1998). He related social positioning to the formation of mental dispositions in terms of the identity's relation to the distribution of labor in society. It is through the deployment of his concepts of voice and message that Bernstein forges the link between division of labor, social position, and discourse and opens up the possibilities for a language of description that will serve both empirical and analytical purposes. The distinction between what can be recognized as belonging to a voice and a particular message is formulated in terms of distinction between relations of power and relations of control. Bernstein (1990)b adapted the concept of voice from his reading of *The Material Word* by Silverman and Torode (1980):

From this perspective classificatory (boundary) relations establish 'voice'. 'Voice' is regarded somewhat like a cultural larynx which sets the limits on what can be legitimately

put together (communicated). Framing (control) relations regulate the acquisition of this voice and create the 'message (what is made manifest, what can be realized). (Bernstein 1996a, b, p. 260.)

In his last book, he continued:

Voice refers to the limits on what could be realized if the identity was to be recognized as legitimate. The classificatory (boundary) relation established the voice. In this way power relations, through the classificatory relation, regulated voice. However voice, although a necessary condition for establishing what could and could not be said and its context, could not determine what was said and the form of its contextual realization; the message. The message was a function of framing (control). The stronger the framing the smaller the space accorded for potential variation in the message. (Bernstein 2000: 204)

Thus, social categories constitute voices and control over practices constitutes message. Identity becomes the outcome of the voice–message relationship. Production and reproduction have their social basis in categories and practices: that categories are constituted by the social division of labor and that practices are constituted by social relations within production/reproduction; that categories constitute 'voices' and that practices constitute their 'messages'; message is dependent upon 'voice,' and the subject is a dialectical relation between 'voice' and message (Bernstein 1996a, b, p. 27).

Hasan (2001), p. 8 suggested that Bernstein's analysis of how subjects are positioned, as well as how they position themselves in relation to the social context of their discourse, offers an explanation of discursive practice in terms of the relations of power and control that regulate speaking subjects. However, the theoretical move that Bernstein makes in relating positioning to the distribution of power and principles of control opens up the possibility of grounding the analysis of social positioning and mental dispositions in relation to the distribution of labor in an activity. A systematic approach to the analysis and description of the formation of categories through the maintenance and shifting of boundaries and principles of control as exercised within categories would bring a powerful tool to the undoubted strengths of activity theory. This would then allow the analysis to move from one level to another in the same terms rather than treat division of labor and discourse as analytically independent items. Bernstein (1996a, b) argued that positioning is in a systematic relationship to the distribution of power and principles of control. I suggest that this approach to understanding the notion of social positioning as the underlying, invisible component that 'figures' (as in Holland 1998) practices of communication and gives rise to the shaping of identity provides an important potential development from the current status of third-generation activity theory.

Such a development requires a theoretical account of social relations and positioning. The theoretical move that Bernstein makes in relating positioning to the distribution of power and principles of control opens up the possibility of grounding the analysis of social positioning and mental dispositions in relation to the distribution of labor in an activity. Through the notions of 'voice' and 'message,' he brings the division of labor and principles of control (rules) into relation with social

position in practice. The implication is that ‘subject’ in an activity theory-driven depiction should be represented by a space of possibility (voice) in which a particular position (message) is taken up. Thus, the subject would be represented by a socially structured zone of possibility rather than a singular point. This representation would signify a move to attempt to theorize the subject as emerging in a world that was ‘figured’ by relations of power and control.

Conclusion: The Advantages of Synthesis

The language that Bernstein has developed allows researchers to take measures of school modality—to describe and position the discursive, organizational, and interactional practice of the institution. Bernstein also noted the need for the extension of this work in his discussion of the importance of Vygotsky’s work for research in education:

His theoretical perspective also makes demands for a new methodology, for the development of languages of description which will facilitate a *multi-level* understanding of pedagogic discourse, the varieties of its practice and contexts of its realization and production. (Bernstein 1993, p. xxiii)

This approach to modelling the structural relations of power and control in institutional settings, taken together with a theory of cultural–historical artefacts that invisibly or implicitly mediate the relations of participants in practices, forms a powerful alliance. It carries with it the possibility of rethinking notions of agency and reconceptualizing subject position in terms of the relations between possibilities afforded within the division of labor and the rules that constrain possibility and direct and deflect the attention of participants.

It accounts for the ways in which the practices of a community, such as school and the family, are structured by their institutional context and that social structures impact on the interactions between the participants and the cultural tools.

Thus, it is not just a matter of the structuring of interactions between the participants and other cultural tools; rather, it is that the institutional structures themselves are cultural products that serve as mediators in their own right. In this sense, they are the ‘message’—that is, a fundamental factor of education. As Hasan (2001) argued, when we talk, we enter the flow of communication in a stream of both history and the future. When we talk in institutions, history enters the flow of communication through the invisible or implicit mediation of the institutional structures. There is therefore a need to analyze and codify the mediational structures as they deflect and direct attention of participants and as they are shaped through interactions that they also shape.

In this sense, combining the intellectual legacies of Bernstein and Vygotsky permits the development of cultural historical analysis of the invisible or implicit mediational properties of institutional structures, which themselves are transformed through the actions of those whose interactions are influenced by them. This move

would serve to both expand the gaze of post-Vygotskian theory and bring sociologies of cultural transmission into a framework in which institutional structures are analyzed as historical products, which themselves are subject to dynamic transformation and change as people act within and on them.

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A.C. (Eds.)

2015, XXI, 366 p. 17 illus., 10 illus. in color., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-3-319-18764-8