
Excerpt from:

Wink, J., & Putney, L. (2002, pp. 54-55). *A Vision of Vygotsky*, Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon

Language is how we make sense of the world. It is how words work to let us see, and know, and learn. Language is never “just a language thing.” Many of us come from a tradition that encouraged us to believe that language was really less than it is. We may have once believed that language was only neutral, single words we used like handy tools to talk with people. While language is, indeed a tool for communicating, the past decades have taught us that it is far more. Language is a privilege; language is a right; language is a tool; language is a resource. Language is thought; language is culture; language is identity. Often we only come to realize this when (1) we are in a place where our language does not work so well with others, and/or (2) when someone tries to take our language from us. Denying language is denying access to thought.

“Thought is not merely expressed in words; it comes into existence through them. Every thought tends to connect something with something else, to establish a relationship between things. Every thought moves, grows and develops, fulfills a function, solves a problem”
(Vygotsky, 1986, p. 218).

The message is clear: Language must be meaningful for thought development.

In our work with Vygotsky, we are continually struck by the complementarity of his work with that of critical theorist Paulo Freire. In the spirit of the Third Sociocultural Conference (July, 2000, Brazil), during which the research presentations focused on the importance of linking the work of these theorists for enriching both sociocultural and critical perspectives, we will provide a framework for reflection on practice as it relates to sociocultural theory. From a Vygotskian perspective, “reflection is a ‘becoming space’ for the new thinking and imagining. It is a living force of consciousness” (Shepel, 1995, p. 434). By combining the works of Vygotsky and Freire, we promote critical action for solving problems named through reflection. We will first discuss the reflection framework, and then use examples of situations to frame issues through reflective practice and critical inquiry. In the examples we share, we will also model this framework as we reflect on the connections between thought and language as they play out in authentic classroom experiences.