Teacher’s Name: **Dr El Ouchdi-Mirali Ilhem**

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Course Title: **Learning through the ZPD**

1. ***Introduction***
* According to Vygotsky, in order to solve any situation, the child uses language his eyes and hands to communicate that generates a real coordination between perception, language and action. This is the basic analysis of the specificity of the human behaviour. Accordingly both Vygotsky and Dewey agree language organizes our ideas and thinking whereas thought organizes our perception and actions.
* Thus, language and thought are the two main tools that determine the good achievement of an action. He believes that ideas are transmitted through generations and within the same society influenced by all the parameters that influence the behaviour of people. The entire cultural heritage is shared and transmitted through language either written or spoken as well as through science, technology and literature.
* Bruner agrees totally with Vygotsky and believes that the most important zone in any learning process is ZPD. On the other hand, he believes that the innate capacities the child possesses at birth with are not enough and the social background is very important. The L.A.S.S is the system that helps the child in making investigations in his ZPD until he masters completely the linguistic system.
1. ***Language, Culture and Education***
	1. **Bruner’s view of education**: the aim is not to involve learners in culture through education. On the contrary, education should make the learners participate in culture as well as to negotiate and react to its meaning that is a total contradiction of the traditional education which role is limited at transmitting knowledge and values and considers the one who knows more teaches those who know less through various techniques and mainly through language.
* Language plays a very great role in the learning process. Bruner describes the works of Michael Halliday that he considers as the most complete. Halliday argues that the function of language goes through two major classes: pragmatics and mathematics. The former involves all the instrumental, interactional and personal functions. In short this class gathers all that enables the learner to distinguish himself from others and also to use language in order to obtain his needs by influencing others opinions and attitudes.

Michael A. K. Halliday, Learning how to mean (London: Edward Arnold, 1975)

* On the other hand, the latter gathers imaginative and informative functions as well as “heuristique”. Accordingly, thanks to heuristique the learner obtains from others corrections and information, whereas the imaginative function enables us to go beyond the actual parameters in order to create new things and new worlds; the last function shows that not all people share the same opinions and do not possess the same data yet they are able to transmit it through communication or narration.
* On the other hand, Bruner believes that a fourth function elaborated by Jackobson should be added that of metalinguistic. Metalinguistic consists of thinking about one language the way it is used and developed in order to be functional at different levels of communication and sciences as well as literature and history.
* Nevertheless, the functions proposed by Halliday serve the great role language plays in general and particularly in the educational system. He considers that using language involves all the lexical and the grammatical parameters that function at the same time in order to enable the learner to grasp the learning process and strategies he is in contact with Roman Jackobson, Linguistics and Poetics », in Selected Writings, III (La Haye: Mouton, 1981)
* On the other hand, through questions and dialogues, the teacher raises the interest of the learner and makes him part of his learning process. This motivation makes the child eager to learn and to give his opinion. As a result, the child shares the data he possesses with other members of his community that develops a social feeling of belonging to a group and intellectual abilities like negotiation, discovery, creativity and communication.
* According to Bruner, language used in education must be an invitation to thinking and creation of culture and should not be abstract and objective dealing only with facts. Moreover, it should involve the learner in his learning by initiating him to argumentation and developing his metacognition.
* Bruner views language with two facettes, the former is the means of communication and the latter a means to represent the world we live in and to describe it. That is to say, the way we speak tells a lot about what we think and the way we represent the topic we are dealing with and our attitude as well as negotiations are typical characteristics of our behaviour in the world we live in
* In short, Bruner considers that the role of language is not to transmit information; it rather creates knowledge and reality on the one hand and is part of this reality on the other hand. As a consequence, the attitude one develops towards knowledge defines the personality and the self for if the learner is able to develop what Bruner names the reflexive intervention of knowledge, he will be able to use it in order to give an opinion or an argument. On the other hand, if the learner does not develop the reflexive intervention of the knowledge he is confronted to , he will not be able to act from an external point of view and thus he will be controlled by all the data he collects through time.
* That is to say, the social experience is determined by the model of behaviour that corresponds to the situation and includes the body movements, intonation, dressing.. However the cultural artifacts, involve other parameters such as linguistic terms, instruments (chairs, tables computer, books..) and signs like giving a present at birthday. The first illustration given by Raner(1991) is the parents try to control how, where and when their child responds to an insult either by encouraging him or discouraging him and this determines the “kinds of intensity of emotion the child develops”
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* Meanwhile the second illustration concerns babies since when restricting their movements, parents inculcate passivity whereas giving them free expression develops active personalities. Adding to this, he says that “holding babies so that they face toward other people or toward individual caretaker similarly inculcates collective or individualistic self-concepts, respectively” . Accordingly, our attitude in different situations is shaped by our emotional reaction for we become angry when a deliberate harm is felt for example. Hence all our actions and behaviours are activated by a stimulus and conditioned by our socio-cultural background as it is clearly exposed in the following diagram Ratner(1991 :173-4)
* Stimulus  motives
* (Physical, perception
* Social, sense emotion
* Individual) Receptor sensation  action

  recall

 needs

* Culture cognitive cognitive

 Tools schemata schemata

 (Knowledge, (knowledge,

 expectations, expectations,

 values) values )

* For more details figure one shows that culture, in all its parameters including tools, promotes the cognitive schemata either in a direct (written or oral instructions) or indirect way (religious values already acquired).the cognitive schemata in question, is directly conditioned by sensations, emotions, motives, needs and perception that shape the action in relation with the socio-cultural context. In this respect Vygotsky (1997) states:
* Ultimately, for Man the environment is a social environment because even where it appears to be natural environment, nevertheless, in relation to man there are always definite social elements present…in this interaction with the environment man always makes use of his social experience.

Vygotsky (1997b: 53-4)

* 1. **Vygotsky’s Approach**
* The example used by vygotsky shows that the cognitive development is the result the child’s problem solving experience that he achieves with another human being like his mother or caretaker. Hence the role of the adult is to transmit culture to the child through his mother tongue. That is to say culture is an important element that shapes the child’s socialization as it is clearly classified by Doolittle (1997: 83-103) when pointing out the works of vygotsky:

 1-“Culture makes two sorts of contributions to a child's intellectual development. *First*, through culture children acquire much of the content of their thinking, that is, their knowledge. *Second*, the surrounding culture provides a child with the processes or means of their thinking, what Vygotskians call the tools of intellectual adaptation. In short, according to the social cognition learning model, culture teaches children both what to think and how to think.

2- Cognitive development results from a dialectical process whereby a child learns through problem-solving experiences shared with someone else, usually a parent or teacher but sometimes a sibling or peer.

 3- Initially, the person interacting with child assumes most of the responsibility for guiding the problem solving, but gradually this responsibility transfers to the child.

1. Language is a primary form of interaction through which adults transmit to the child the rich body of knowledge that exists in the culture.
2. As learning progresses, the child's own language comes to serve as her primary tool of intellectual adaptation. Eventually, children can use internal language to direct their own behaviour.

 6- Internalization refers to the process of learning--and thereby internalizing--a rich body of knowledge and tools of thought that first exist outside the child. This happens primarily through language.

 7-Interactions with surrounding culture and social agents, such as parents and more competent peers, contribute significantly to a child's intellectual development.”

* Doolittle, in these seven points, summarises vygotsky’s approach of the socio-cognition of the child. He argues that when acquiring culture, that develops and shapes the process of thinking, the child needs to be more involved in his social behaviour. This social insertion is achieved through interaction with others that starts at a very early age and confronts the child to different situation that he is supposed to adapt himself in and various experiences he is asked to solve. Hence, all these processes are taking place at the same time and are vehicled by the mother tongue
* In this same view Joan Kelly Hall (2002) refers in his book to the woks of Vygotsky, 1978, 1986 and those of Wertsch, 1991, and 1994. Both of them agree that knowledge, acquired from culture, assists the fulfilment of the different skills that make the child more capable element in his society. The knowledge acquired is clearly defined by Bruner (1983, 109) who does not consider it as thinking or as the outcome of the intellectual activities and experiments but as the ***"internalizing of tools that are used within the child's culture".*** He also considers that language is the key of knowledge for it is through words and symbols that what is felt and known is conveyed. Adding to thisBurner (1983) states that language ***"****is the primary way that concepts can be taught and questioned. It is also the increasing ability to deal with a variety of activities simultaneously and sequentially****".*** Burner (1983:110)

8-In his definition, Bruner shows the importance of language in the development of knowledge that is a whole process that starts at birth and goes step by step till it reaches a high levels and degrees with the help of members of the family and peers as it is stated Doolittle (1997: 83-103) when describing the works of vygotsky.

 A difference exists between what child can do on her own and what the child can do with help. Vygotskians call this difference the zone of proximal development.

 9-Since much of what a child learns comes form the culture around her and much of the child's problem solving is mediated through an adult's help, it is wrong to focus on a child in isolation. Such focus does not reveal the processes by which children acquire new skills.

* Vygotsky makes a difference between what the child knows and is able to do on his own and the achievement that needs help. All the interferences, what the child knows and what he is about to know, takes places in as named by Vygotsky Zone of Proximal Development as defined in the following statement:

 *The ZPD is the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers.*

 *Vygotsky(1978.quoted in Hall 2002 :49*)

* When quoting vygotsky ,Hall (2002) raises an important elements in the socio-cognitive development since he refers to the zone of the mind where all the connections are made. This zone is the place where the already acquired experiment paves the way to the new ones for what the child is unable to realise today; he will be able to do it tomorrow. Tharp, R.G. & Gallimore, R. (1988) put a diagram where all these processes are mentioned:



* In the diagram above, Tharp & Gallimore (1988) explain the child’s development by including the cultural influence and tools as well as the peers. The basic parameter in zpd is collaboration. Each time the child is confronted to a new Learning situation collaboration is needed as it is described by vygotsky p. 86, 1978 who considers “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers.”
* Adding to this, the diagram refers to the second important point raised by Vygotsky that is internalization. Acquiring knowledge entails the combination of socio-cultural heritage as well as the contribution of peers or technology. All these processes are combined and automatically used to the identification and understanding of the new data that is internalized in order to be at hand when needed in another process. Infact, every new data paves the way to the next one.
* With reference to the diagram, Vygotsky declares that acquiring knowledge goes through four stages. The first and the second ones take place in the zone of proximal development for when the child is in contact with new data his social environment including his parents; peers … assist him by giving him explanations for example. This takes place in the first stage whereas and the second one the child understands and starts to participate in the analysis by giving his own contribution to the situation. Nevertheless the process changes in the two last stages, it is no more a matter of assimilation but rather that of internalization. At the third stage the child internalizes what he has understood so that its meaning and use will be automatic and deeply rooted in his brain, meanwhile the last step is when the knowledge acquired becomes so clear and obvious for him that he uses it freely in a natural way. Thus what is the end of a whole process is transformed to the starting point of a new one.