

CHAPTER 2

SYMBOLIC SELVES IN SOCIETY: VYGOTSKY ON LANGUAGE AND FORMATION OF THE SOCIAL MIND

Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky's examination of the processes and effects of symbolic participation on the formation of the human mind provides insight into how the symbolic organization of human consciousness is part of our integration into socially shared forms of expression, meaning, and activity. Vygotsky's work, carried out in the early years of the Soviet Union, was neglected in the West and elements were suppressed under Stalin, but since the 1960s the power and significance of his work has been increasingly evident both in Russia and the West. There have been numerous explications and interpretations of his work, which I will not attempt to reproduce here (See, for examples, Daniels, 1996; Daniels, Wertsch & Cole, 2007; Kozulin, 1990; Van der Veer, 2007; Van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991; Veresev, 1999; Wertsch, 1985). Rather, I will explore how his approach to psychology connects individual cognition and affect to social role, activity, and consciousness as a social being—and therefore one's reflective engagement with the world, particularly as that engagement is mediated by language and writing.

The work of Vygotsky will provide a meeting point for much of the work I will describe in the ensuing chapters, but not because that work follows directly from Vygotsky. Only a distinct part of it was done with any significant awareness of Vygotsky or even working from common sources. But rather Vygotsky's interdisciplinary style and the particulars of his ideas invite the synthesis of social, psychological, linguistic, and historical concerns. I have over many years found his work to be ever fresh because it is so open—despite many aspects of the work undeveloped, others barely gestured at, and others inaccurate about particulars we have later discovered as we have gained more data about sequences of child development and the cognitive capacities of other animals. Nonetheless, his ideas allow us to move back from the largest issue of society, culture, and history back into the complexity of human selves, thoughts, feeling, and development as we engage with the world. From the point of view of teaching, learning, and development, his theory respects students' motivated and autonomous selves, yet recognizes how deeply those selves are saturated with social interactions and resources and how those selves grow into the possibilities of the worlds available to them. Similarly, from the point of view of writing, his theory provides a way

of understanding the formation of deep interiority and individuality of meaning within a world of communicative interaction and social exigency, and it provides a means for accounting for meaning that arises in forms not yet attached to words and then becomes transformed as it takes shape in meaningful language—without resorting to ill-defined wells of thought entirely separate from language.

LINGUISTIC STRUCTURE AND LITERARY AFFECT: VYGOTSKY'S CATHARSIS

In the turmoil of Russia between revolutions, Vygotsky simultaneously attended two universities, gaining a degree in law following a traditional curriculum at Moscow State University while simultaneously earning a degree in literature and aesthetics at the alternative Shanyavskii People's University (Wertsch, 1985, p. 6). Then taking a position teaching language and literature in a high school in his home village of Gomel, during the early years of the revolution he became an active member of cultural life, publishing widely on cultural matters (Van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991; Veresev, 1999). Vygotsky became interested in the psychological effects of literary works, in particular the relationship between the literary structure of the work and affective states aroused in the reader. Even as an undergraduate student of literature he saw a crisis in aesthetics torn on one side by a purely individualist psychology of perceptions and imagination of the audience and on the other by an idealist philosophy that considered the "nature of the soul" and not the material facts of reader response. When he returned for an advanced degree in psychology in the early 1920s, he continued to work on the same problem, arguing in his dissertation on the *Psychology of Art* for a more situated and embodied view of the response evoked by texts that are historically situated within ideological structures of their time. In this work (Vygotsky, 1971), he himself does not provide any concrete socio-historic analysis; in fact, at this point he sees the sociological and historical study of ideology as distinct from psychology. He, nonetheless, does pursue detailed analyses of how texts can evoke particular states of emotion, and thus mediate experience. While he was later to see ideology as bearing on the material conditions that shape psychological response, for the time being he was content to consider the audience located in the act of reading the text or witnessing a play as the right level of analysis to understand affect. Indeed throughout his career he was to maintain focus on the individual acting within a limited situation, usually mediated by specific available artifacts.

In the primary example of a psychology of art, a detailed analysis of Bunin's story "A Gentle Breath," Vygotsky directs our attention toward the contradictions

built in the story between the dismal facts of life of a young woman and the light-hearted, though misguided, spirit that carries her attractively through life. The narrative rearrangement and selection of events and the movement through the consciousnesses of several characters brings to poignancy the attractive delusions that lie behind the woman's dismal fate. It is in the affective poignancy of the tension that the story achieves its aesthetic power.

Similarly, in considering Hamlet (reworked from an earlier school essay on the subject) he looks for the logic of Hamlet's wavering and erratic behavior not in a psychological explanation of the protagonist's character, but in an aesthetic of motive and digression that places the audience in a state of emotional tension and contradiction. The words, the logos, of the play do not present a coherent logic of an argument but rather comprise a device to arouse the audience's emotion. He points to an additional level of affect that arises when we look on or reflect on this character who seems so to tease our emotions and not resolve them: we are left in a state of puzzlement. Most critics pursue this puzzlement directly by trying to find an answer to the "Hamlet problem," the explanation of Hamlet's behavior. Vygotsky sees these critics as responding to an external logic imposed on the play's events rather than understanding it. He would rather we ended where the play ends, overwhelmed with the contradictions and conflicts that resolve only in a tumble of conflicting and absurd actions.

Vygotsky considers his wedding of formalist, structural accounts of texts with an analysis of the affective states of the audience evoked by these structures as a theory of catharsis—"a discharge of nervous energy" resolving conflicting affect aroused by the work of art. Consciousness is not directly dictated by the ideological contents of texts, but rather consciousness is activated and placed in troubled spaces. Consciousness and the affect that infuses it arise in the problematic tensions the mind struggles with; thus he finds a way to link consciousness with the material structures of language and the materiality of the cognizing being, yet nonetheless granting the individual a personal place of responsive consciousness which is not a mysterious other arising from in an ineffable core of individuality. Although he is concerned with response, he is careful to note that since we do not know the minds and affects of readers and writers we can only attempt to understand the emotion-evoking devices in the texts. We do not necessarily feel what Shakespeare felt, or Bunin, or what any onlooker now or in the intervening centuries may have felt, yet if the play or story does affect us, it is by the devices in the artistic artifact designed to arouse our embodied emotions.

In this early work, we can already see Vygotsky's interest in states of consciousness as influenced by textual devices; he sees language mediating experiences. He sees his psychology of art as a materialist form of interpretation

rather than an idealistic one, a realistic psychologically serious correction of the purely intellectualized symbolic analysis of the formalists. For Vygotsky the symbolic constructs of ideas serve to arouse bodily sensation of emotion rather than simply evoking more ideas. He includes introspective observations of his own breathing rates in reading the story, and was soon, in his first psychological experiments, to measure breathing rates of subjects reading the Bunin story (Van der Veer, 2007).

At about the same time Vygotsky completed the *Psychology of Art* as his Ph.D. dissertation in psychology in 1925, he was delivering his first papers at psychological conferences, arguing for the need to study consciousness, but with the behaviorist caveat that language was itself not to be interpreted as a direct and reliable introspective report of consciousness, but rather as part of the process of reactions involving consciousness (Vygotsky 1925, 1999). That is, language and utterance were to be considered as behaviors in relationship to consciousness, rather than as the contents of consciousness. Just as he had considered the lack of attention to the affective states aroused by art as the cause of a crisis in aesthetics, he viewed the lack of attention to states of consciousness in relation to behavior the cause of the crisis in psychology. Further he argued for practice, the application of psychology to real world problems, as the necessary motive and test of psychological theory and research. That is, the human needs confronted in application call into question abstracted theory and unrealistic findings by re-embedding research into the complex and concrete processes of life, at the same time as people engaged in practice need strong theory and research to guide their work. The result of the interaction of research and practice will be stronger, more useful, and more concretely grounded theory. Vygotsky's own thinking was deeply influenced by his foray into practice, in the area of defectology (a term jarring to contemporary sensitivity about stigmatization), the field we would now call disability studies or special education. He was deeply engaged in practical work in this field from 1924 until 1930, when the institutional base of his fieldwork collapsed in the face of political decisions (Veresev, 1999, p. 127).

GOALS, OBSTACLES, AND EMPOWERMENT: VYGOTSKY'S ADLER

Vygotsky's attention to consciousness and the tensions within it helped him cast a new perspective on the fate and struggles of the disabled in attempting to live their lives. Rather than seeing the psychology of the disabled as just a matter of what capacities they had and didn't have, LSV paid attention to the way in which people reacted to their limited abilities and the kinds of social positions

they were cast into by their disability. At this point in his intellectual journey, he was also particularly attracted to the work and thought of Alfred Adler who was concerned with people's desires to reach their goals and to overcome obstacles or frustrations in reaching those goals. Adler considered people as active agents: you could not understand people's behavior only on the basis of biology and history. Rather you had to know what they wanted and then what they understood they needed to do or overcome in order to get what they wanted. Adler as well posited a general developmental desire of all individuals to gain increasing power over situations, particularly in comparison to others who might be viewed as potential competitors, models, comparators, or obstacles. This is especially true of children who seem relatively more powerless than other people around them, but are biologically, neurologically, and cognitively in a period of development—with the promise of them becoming more capable and more able to equal or best those around them. This modeling and competition has a strong sociological component, as the developing child draws the range of desirable goals, opportunities, possible means of action, and possible competences from what she sees around her. The child develops into the social relations and socio-culturally formed situations and roles around her (Adler, 1907).

These issues of desire for competence and power over one's life are particularly poignant in relation to the disabled who find themselves in a world designed by and for the typically abled, and a social world that additionally stigmatizes and creates limited roles for the disabled, as Vygotsky began noticing. While the disabled may directly attempt to compensate for or overcome their disability by other means (whether by appliance like the blind man's stick, increased attentiveness and reliance on other faculties, or social cooperation), Vygotsky noted they also needed to overcome the kinds of social roles they were cast into by others—whether as objects of scorn, pity, or paternalism, all of which limited and framed the possibilities of action, relations, and situations they could participate in. Further the disabled need to overcome the difficulties of a world designed for the convenience of the abled—a world that puts curbs on roads, places steps at the entrance of buildings, and organizes space and activities through visual cues such as street signs and traffic lights (Vygotsky. 1993).

In line with these observations about social roles and material obstacles, Vygotsky recognized that the desire for power to participate competently was not driven so much by a generalized sense of desire or lack, but more drawn by the concrete opportunities available in one's society. People set their goals and possibilities from the available choices, and thus frustrations occur when people cannot be part of what is going on around them. This is very much in line with what sociologists would consider reference group behavior and social modeling (Merton, 1968b) and what Bourdieu (1993) would consider the social field of action.

While Vygotsky first held more closely to an Adlerian view of direct super-compensation for perceived inferiority which would lead the disabled person to try to overachieve in just those areas they found themselves most challenged, he moved to a broader view of the restructuring of mind, personality, and organism around the conditions and opportunities the person found themselves in. Thus over-compensation (finding alternative pathways to the same goals that others have) became not the only possible dynamic, but rather a reorganization of the self to deal with the circumstances one found oneself in. As more recent neuroscience has suggested this can be seen even at the most basic level of neurocognitive organization developing in the young child. As will be discussed in the next chapter, Vygotsky had an interest in the neurological foundations of what he was noting and with his colleague Luria began to study medical neurology. Luria was to become one of the pioneers of modern neurology in which he was to take what he called a “romantic” view (Luria, 1979) not just as biological facts, but of the organization of a personality coping with circumstances and neurological conditions.

Some of these means of reorganization could entail organizing new tools into consciousness, as the blind person learns to gain visual information through a stick, or through collaboration with the seeing-eye dog, or through alliance with others with a different range of skills. Here we can start to see the growth of Vygotsky’s awareness of how much the mind grows in relation to mediating tools and relations. These extensions of the self he saw as becoming part of the organization of the self. This went beyond his earlier recognitions in the psychology of art that cultural artifacts such as poems can create temporary states of consciousness that then activate bodily sensations or reactions. Here the tools and relationships are actively taken on and employed in pursuit of one’s desires and life, empowering, but also organizing consciousness and personality. One learns not only how to attend to and control the stick or dog, one learns to sense through them, to perceive the world through them, and to think through knowledge gained via these media. We just don’t pass through a poem for a temporary sensation; insofar as that artifact becomes a long term mediating tool in our life, we come to live through it, making it part of our fundamental orientation, activity, means of sensing, and acting.

COGNITIVE TOOLS

All these issues poignantly and strikingly evident in relation to the disabled provided Vygotsky a way to rethink the development of the more typically abled. In the early 1920’s at the beginning of his career as a psychologist while

he was still learning the field he had written a volume on paedology (excerpted in Van der Veer & Valsiner, 1994). Toward the end of the decade he returned to issues of development and education, in a series of publications that were to come to stand for his cultural historical theory and his distinctive contribution. This work has been extensively summarized and is available in English through several translations of *Thought and Language*, and the collection *Mind in Society* and in a less refined version in *Studies on the History of Behavior: Ape, Primitive, and Child* (Vygotsky & Luria, 1993). My discussion of this work will emphasize particular lines growing out of the earlier work and pointing towards its relevance for symbolic communication, cultural evolution, formation of the cognition in relation to social communication, and particularly literacy.

In this more fully developed theory he took an interest in cognitive tools that extended or externalized our thought, allowing us to carry on symbolic activity outside of ourselves: the knot tied around the finger to stimulate memory, the abacus to keep track of and manipulate numbers, the South American quipo used to record messages and history, and ultimately language, spoken and written. To investigate how we used these external symbolic tools to carry out cognitive tasks, he conducted experiments using the technique he called double stimulation, in which the original task stimulus was supplemented by a secondary set of stimuli which the experimental subjects could use to help carry out the primary task. For example, in the forbidden colors task, children were asked a series of questions about the color of objects, but in their answers told they could not mention two colors nor could they repeat a color used to answer a previous question. When they were given a deck of color cards to assist them in the task, children of age five to six years either did not use these cards, or if they did, the cards distracted them from the primary task. Children of eight or nine years old used the cards to identify the color names that were used and forbidden or to identify the colors still available for answers, but they were inconsistent (or not fully disciplined) in using them. Children of ten to thirteen years used the cards in a consistent, disciplined strategy and made few errors. Adults made few errors whether or not the cards were available, as they were able to keep track mentally of the disallowed and allowable color names (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 41).

From such experiments Vygotsky identified what he called the second stimulus system, the set of signs which we learned to use to regulate our behavior. The process by which these signs were internalized was observed through watching how young children seemed to talk to themselves. Earlier such private speech had been thought as simply egocentric, but Vygotsky noted how the utterances coordinated with the tasks that the child was carrying out as well as imitated prior conversations with others as together they carried out

similar tasks. That is, the child was drawing on remembered social resources to reenact privately an activity coordinated or directed through language. Just as an adult had attempted to direct the child's behavior through language, now the child directed his or her own attention and activity through similar language, though increasingly fragmented over time as the fuller forms of language no longer seemed necessary for self-direction. With time the reliance on the external device of language seemed to vanish as the child could carry out the task without spoken self-regulation. Vygotsky hypothesized that the language turned inward and became the basis of symbolic thought, changing its form as it became internalized.

By such mechanisms we can see how prior experiences of language become formative elements in the development of individual thought—not by direct importation of a language symbol or ideological system, but because the child first interacts with the language in the course of activity and then redeploys that language as part of self-regulation in tasks including his or her own interactions with others. That is, language becomes the child's own as he or she uses it in particular circumstances of life, fulfilling individual needs at the moment. Out of this process the individual creates personal meanings. In use, language becomes transformed into meanings which influence perceptions and actions and which become the bases of novel communications with others, so that the individual populates those words with his or her own intentions, as Bakhtin was to write later (Bakhtin, 1981). Personal use of language, however, is saved from solipsism because when it is used again to communicate with others, the need to be understood by others disciplines it towards social norms of meaning, as George Herbert Mead was pointing out on another continent a few years before (Mead, 1913).

While Vygotsky considered the expression of personal meaning within the social sphere in the last chapter of *Thought and Language*, his psychological interest in the development of mind was more directed toward how language moved inward as signs to direct self-regulation and self-organization. Because of this interest he distinguished signs as different from tools, because he saw language as most significant in regulating the self as signs became internalized. Following this interest and characterization of language as sign rather than tool (See Vygotsky, 1978, 19-30), he was able to develop a rich system of self-directed, self-monitored consciousness based on the internalization of socially received language which comes to transform the self. Because of Vygotsky's concern with the development of the self, he does not develop as fully the ways in which our mind continually is transformed in more mature social interactions, how we come to develop our impulses and thoughts by externalizing them and thereby become socially committed to them in our identities and actions,

and how our participation changes the social field. Nonetheless, much of his evidence is drawn from how people deploy their symbolic resources within tasks. Further, his analysis of a child's learning scientific (or schooled or socially disciplined) concepts examines how children's spontaneous concepts come to be transformed by organized interaction with received knowledge coming from a history of cultural and communal testing, validation, organization and reasoning (Vygotsky, 1986, Chapter 6). However, he tends to treat that scientific knowledge as fairly fixed—neither reinvigorated nor transformed by new participation. He did not yet make the link between individual personal development and larger cultural development, though he does recognize culture itself as resulting from a human history of invention.

Yet even from Vygotsky's limited social and cultural account of knowledge formation, we can see the importance of the particular symbolic systems and activities one participates in and internalizes in shaping the kinds of tasks one can carry out and in the organization of one's mind in relation to the tools and tasks. The historical accomplishment of a culture is made available to each new child as he or she finds meaning and use in the available tools and artifacts which can be redeployed for the child's own purposes in the social settings and activities he or she finds themselves in. The discursive and activity landscape the child perceives provides an opportunity space for the child's development and participation. While Vygotsky largely seems to be thinking only of broad socio-historical cultural movements as shaping the available forms of cognitive growth available to the child, he seems at times to be aware of the multiplicity of socially organized positions people find themselves in, as he considers for example the role of stigmatization in shaping the interactions of the disabled and thereby channeling cognitive growth along particular paths (Vygotsky, 1993).

More fully, however, we may consider the effect of having available specific kinds of cognitive tools associated with particular groups or professions, in carrying out specialized tasks. People who engage in the legal tasks of corporate law in the United States in the early twenty-first century carry out substantially different tasks and thinking than biochemists working for those very same corporations. Their tasks require them to do different things; the cognitive tools they must learn and think with support different kinds of work and are themselves differently organized; the kinds of symbolic interactions with their interlocutors are significantly different; and they organize their own thinking in different ways in relation to these tasks, tools, and relations. Koranic scholars in sixteenth century Baghdad, court poets in Elizabethan England, pre-Columbian Mayan scribes each follow their own line of cognitive development in relation to tasks, tools, and relations they participate in. We do not need to look at the highest ends of literacy in radically different circumstances to see the

impact of differentiation of cognitive development, but need only to consider the way young children's engagement with ball sports or drawing or word games will focus their attention, modes of thinking, and self-reinforcing social relationships within others engaged in those activities and associated social arrangements. These experiences, activities, and relationships shape sets of skills and cognitive orientations that initiate trajectories of competences throughout their life. Within the worlds of literacy we can see the differing consequences among the children who have a taste for fiction, a taste for political biographies, or a taste for books about zoology.

Developed cultural practices and forms, identifiable as distinctive genres, discourses, disciplinary languages and tasks—the typified practices that characterize the differentiation of our social and cultural worlds—can be seen in Vygotskian terms as particular sites of activity deploying particular cognitive tools and supporting different lines of psychological development. Individuals in learning and internalizing these cultural forms, use them to regulate their own perception, thought and ultimately participation with others. Medical doctors, for example, within the typical settings, events and communicative forms of consulting office, hospital and professional meetings, use their medical knowledge to examine, diagnose, and administer treatment to patients who may have little understanding of medicine.

SECOND ORDER SYMBOL SYSTEMS AND CONSCIOUSNESS DEVELOPMENT

Alphabetic writing, Vygotsky notes, is a second order symbol system that offers a visual sign for the spoken word, rather than directly representing a perceivable or an imaginable object. The words in speech provide a symbolic representation of the events and objects discussed at only one remove, except for reflexive second order speech that references words as language (“What do you call this tree?”). Writing, however, creates a second order representation. That is, written words are symbols of spoken words. This of course is most pronounced in alphabetic languages where written words record the sound of a word, which then has an attributable referent or meaning. However, even pictographic or ideographic or rebus languages use the symbols to represent the word (despite some possible graphic association with the objects or events referred to). Pictographs are highly stylized and selected around a limited and typified vocabulary—that is what distinguishes them from simple drawing. They then can be used to create hybrid and elaborate complexes, again with standardized word associations rather than open-ended complexes of non-

linguistic associations. Even where the immediate language is not spoken, but visual, as in a sign language, the written representation again provides a somewhat durable second order representation of the immediate transient word.

Writing's second order nature abstracts writing out of the immediacy of perceived, unfolding experience, and creates a need to reconstruct some indexical relation to an embodied reality, beyond that required in spoken language which can typically draw on the material context of utterance to ground its indexicality. That is, what one talks about is often visible or can be pointed toward or gestured about, but in writing it is typically harder to tell what the text is talking about. Further, the writing only indexes the spoken language and thus all meaning must be indicated through the relation to the spoken, with the spoken further stripped of its material context. Thus the relation of the written to the spoken presents a problem almost as soon as a writing system develops beyond the most concretely iconographic. This is perhaps the reason that one of the earliest forms of knowledge to emerge in most written languages is some version of linguistics (Bazerman & Rogers, 2008a). Writing transforms more immediate, situationally and viscerally prompted use of language into an independent linguistic object that can be more easily and reflectively manipulated and managed, and is therefore more easily and more pressingly studied, for purposes of strategic and precise effectiveness.

Writing as a means of reflection and self-regulation can transform the local in relation to distant situations; even more, writing can create new places for symbolic participation that transform the participants and provide new venues for self- and mind-making in interaction with other literate participants. Some forms of writing do stand in immediate relationship to on-going embodied experiences, such as the shopping list that guides mall behavior or the series of instructions that regulates the preparation of pre-packaged food. But other forms of writing enact social relations and activities that operate at a reflective distance to our daily activities, such as reporting and commenting on political events, contemplating principles of effective leadership style, or playing with the possibilities of imagined romance. Through these second order reflections on more immediate experience, created in a second order medium already abstracted from more immediate symbolic practice, writing interaction can enter in and through consciousness, influencing the writer and readers in ways that may not be quickly forgotten or dispensed with. Unlike spoken language where words are inspired or compelled by the immediately unfolding events and then leave no trace to prompt or constrain memory, writing leaves an external mark for us to look on later, transforming our attitudes and perceptions of the utterance.

As we get drawn into literate interactions we recognize and seek out the textual places where they take place. For some these sites of literate interaction

became major sites of identity and interaction, drawing on increasingly intense cognitive and affective engagement, thereby shaping their literate minds and personalities, in accordance with the domain of texts and interactions they find most engaging. Because of the visibility of the linguistic artifact and the removal from daily time and space, such spaces are conducive to creating reflective distances and stances towards material events, the literate events one participates in as a reader and writer, and the texts that mediate those events. Writing thereby facilitates interiority as we commune more with other literates than with the people around us. With interiority we orient toward the interaction played out in our mental construction and reconstruction of the meaning of our texts and the texts of others. Additionally, writing facilitates interpretation, criticism, irony, and other stances that put us at a questioning distance from our interactions. But interiority and questioning also foster creative behavior, allowing us to return to our embodied world with fresh perspectives, ideas, and resources to address life problems and challenges.

INTERACTION AND SELF-REGULATION: INFLUENCING OTHERS AND INFLUENCING THE SELF

Understanding language as both interactive and self-regulatory suggests an often-confusing dialectic about language. Theorists of language and particularly writing often see language as deeply personal, formative of character and expression, tied to our deepest experience and thoughts. Vygotsky notes how we build our thinking and transform our experiences (including the kinds of presymbolic experiences and eidetic memory and thinking available to children prior to development of language) through our growing linguistic experience, and he himself in the final chapter of *Thought and Language* has deeply poetic reflections on language as fragments of our innermost thoughts. On the other hand, others see language and writing as rhetorical and interactive, shaped by social purpose and effect, little driven by anything like an essential expressive self. Vygotsky also suggests such perspectives when considering how the parent uses language to help the child solve a puzzle or the blind gain through social means information not available through eyesight. Finally there are those who suggest that language is a meaningful system that exists outside any of the participants or particular utterances or usages, whether that language consists of stable resources and rules or that language is a locally produced, ad hoc artifactual construction. These three perspectives align with three major approaches to writing—the expressive, the rhetorical, and the linguistic.

Vygotsky gives us a way of understanding how all of these are operative simultaneously as we develop cognitively through social participation, using the available language purposefully. Language is simultaneously within, between, and outside people. Writers need to look externally to the communicative forms, to the organized relations with others, and the ad hoc communicative and rhetorical problems of the moment; and internally to the self, organized and attentive to the evolving discursive situation in order to develop ideas, communicative intentions, and meanings.

We can see how these issues come together in considering perhaps the most well-known of Vygotskian concepts—the Zone of Proximal Development (often called ZPD). In his writings he articulates the concept most clearly in relation to assessing a child's capacity for learning. He states the most important thing to measure is not what the child can do by him or herself (say, in the traditional paper and pencil IQ or achievement test) but in measuring those things that the child can do with assistance of an adult or more skilled peer. This identifies the area of learning a child can engage in leading to development (Vygotsky, 1978, Chapter 6). This ZPD identifies activities where students can enter into novel or challenging collaborations, guided or regulated by the speech or other actions of the more skilled other—speech and actions that can then go from interpersonal regulation to intrapersonal regulation. In this way the child can learn new practices, principles, concepts, and activities which later he or she may be able to carry on by him or herself and ultimately internalize within his or her cognitive repertoire. Further, at some point the elements learned within the ZPD reorganize and coalesce into a new functional system, changing the relations and functions of the previously acquired parts, reorganizing perception, reasoning, and activities. This transformation to a new form of thinking which reorganizes previous ones constitutes development, in contrast to learning. For this reason Vygotsky says learning leads development (Vygotsky, 1986). This process of reorganization based on conceptual development (in Hegelian terms called sublation or *aufhebung*) provides a way that both genres and mentorship can induct one into specialized forms of perception, reasoning, and practice, such as those associated with scientific and academic reasoning, as well as professional practice (See Bazerman 2009, 2012).

The more skilled participant in ZPD interactions has already internalized the disciplined functional system that constitutes expertise in the activity. This disciplined functional system provides structure to both partners' contributions, making available to the less knowledgeable partner hints about a different form of consciousness available for perception, reasoning, and action. While the student at first may hear and even heed the comments of the adult or more skilled partner, these are at first only taken as specific pieces of guidance or

information. At the moment of development, however, the learner comes to see events, activities, or relations from the perspective of the more skilled partner, and the learner reorganizes his or her way of functioning and thinking; consciousness has been raised. The ZPD can, in theory, identify both what is next to be learned and the depth or extension of what can be learned (that is, how far with help the learner may reach beyond him or herself and still participate in comprehensible activity). Further, awareness of the learner's developmental challenges within the ZPD can attune the more skilled partner to providing the kind of support that may be needed to maintain that learner's participation. Even more, the skilled collaborator can become attuned to the learner's changing states of awareness, perception, and conceptual grasp (that is, forms of consciousness) and can recognize whether and when learners have made developmental leaps—that is, whether the learners have internalized the higher mode of thinking. Teachers regularly talk about when students show such moments of insight, or “when the lights go on.” Such moments are often accompanied by changes in bodily posture, composure, and facial expression.

Writers regularly use the support of cultural tools of genre, of the ideas and information of others, the challenge presented by others' ideas, as well as the constraints of the task at hand to learn how to create the text, which in turn may bring about a change of personal consciousness. The pressures of the social situation and availability of cultural resources help writers to extend beyond what they already have thought, said, or written. Writing under the pressure of new thoughts composed for the situation out of words and ideas from within and around the writer can seem a deeply felt personal expression of the self at the same time as it contributes to social identity and agency, articulating the writer's self onto the social stage—a self-creating act. As writers draw on the common resources of language available to all and familiar to the readers, they become the writer's words, words meaningful to the writer. As the challenge of the interaction stretches the writer, he or she may also reinvent aspects of the language—seeking new words, phrases and metaphors, combining genres, and forming new concepts. Further, the organizational and argumentative challenges of texts that extend over paragraphs, pages, or volumes, can stretch the writer to reorganize thoughts and knowledge. Additionally, the devices of exposing textual organization (like outlines, section headings, and transitional statements) may provide ways to think through organizational problems in composition and revision, creating new coherences in reasoning. The process of writing, using common resources, leads writers to make up or compose their minds, sometimes in ways that bring new thoughts to the social sphere of discussion.

For this dynamic of linguistic, cognitive, and social learning and development to occur, enriching the social and personal and linguistic resources, the task

must be neither so humdrum and familiar that repeating familiar formulas is sufficient nor so difficult to be beyond the writer's comprehension, articulation, and participation. The situation, support of others (perhaps teachers, coaches, or editors), and resources in the culture and language must be sufficient for the writer to maintain goals and directed activity, while still being able to think new thoughts and write new things. If the writer is asked to address something beyond what he or she can even inchoately make sense of, the learning and creation collapses, and the writer either gives up or reinterprets the task in more familiar terms.

These textual artifacts once produced are commitments of the self: phrases the writer has worked through and terms for private purposes and social effect. The textual artifacts are also potential spaces of meaning for others. Writer's words can populate other people's minds with thoughts and associations, can provide new things for them to consider, and new ways to rearrange and reorganize what was already available to them. Or writer's words can simply in a new context remind them and reinforce thoughts and emotions they have already held. The text may present a forced march of logic and evidence for readers or it may open up large areas of speculation and association, tapping into the readers' own concerns and meanings. In that or any other event, the text acts as a potential support and extension of their own thought. But just as for the writer, for the reader also the task and words must be meaningful—that is, readers must be able to attribute meaning to the signs, viewing them as neither too trivial nor too difficult to attend to and enlisting them into concerns that hold their attention. A text that works to project the writer's meanings into the reader's mental space in a sense then acts as a zone of proximal development for the reader—a space of symbolic exchange, a space of participation that activates behavior, sensation, thought, bodily emotional response, and ultimately new ways of seeing issues and selves. In this process we can see echoes of Vygotsky's earliest observations from the psychology of art on the cathartic effect of literature, where he recognized that the textual structure in evoking aesthetic response gives release to latent tensions within the reader created by the sequence of textual meanings.

PLACES OF PLAY, SELF-ARTICULATION, AND DEVELOPMENT

Vygotsky's theory of aesthetic catharsis also has its echoes in his later theory of play (Vygotsky 1978, chapter 7), in that both literature and play to him set in motion frustrations or unfulfilled motives that are in tension with one's circumstances or other motives. Vygotsky particularly notes that

play is driven by desires for development and empowerment that cannot be yet realized in worldly activity (that is, world-transforming work), often because of the child's lack of developments, skill, capacities, or social role. In Vygotsky's characterization of the motives for play we see the influence of his work with the disabled and his Adlerian recognition of the motive to gain specific forms of empowerment to participate in the opportunities of the world. Children play parents or teachers or drivers of automobiles trying on those roles not available to them in life. Children may also play at being themselves if they want to mitigate the consequences of their actions, or to explore the regulations or expectations the self-consciously conceived role seems to impose. LSV cites the case of two sisters, aged five and seven, who proposed to each other that they play sisters, and in so doing invoked rules as to how they thought sisters ought to behave toward each other (Vygotsky 1978, pp. 94-95). The play involves establishing a set of "as if" rules that define game obligations and become guides for regulation of the other and self in the game. Insofar as the child becomes engaged in the game, the child becomes committed to the rules, activities, motives, and moves of the game. More developed games in fact have motives built into the rules, such as "The goal of this game is to place the ball in the opponent's net by various legal maneuvers." Further, satisfactions are gained through one's participation in the game, which take one beyond the motives that first drew one into the game.

We can see literature, the arts, and other forms of entertainment as particular places of play, each of which create their own organizations of activity and consciousness that provide place for enacting frustrations, desires, tensions, or other emotions transferred from other spheres of life where they cannot be directly enacted. In the course of play there is not only a release, but a reinvention of the self, developing into new possibilities of being that seemed blocked at first in other domains. These new possibilities of being can then be resources brought from the play domain into non-play situations. These resources can include enhanced individual skills, confidence, and reworked motives, but also the invention of new concepts, ideas, and actions that provide useful tools in other domains or that provide a perspective on other domains transforming conceptualization of activities. Thus we have the continuing critical roles literature, art, and humor have played on society and individual lives. We often see new ideas of social and material possibility tried out, envisioned and communicated through literature, as in socially projective novels of George Elliot or the worlds of science fiction. Or we have unpleasant and socially unrecognized realities portrayed under the playful cover of art, as in late nineteenth century realist literature. In another vein of social transformation in play, we can see the communal cohesion forged over a sports team sometimes mobilized to civic or corporate ends. And we

see with adults the constant trying on of meaning of life and events through fictions, as well as fantasies of what might be.

Art and entertainment as well become their own disciplines which individuals affiliate with and in which they develop identities, modes of thought and feeling, perceptions, and ways of life. These disciplines and social domains become sites of transformative work and take on economic and institutional presence in the form of industries (such as book industries, sports industries, theme park industries) and socially supported cultural organizations (such as theaters and schools) which serve the fantasy, projective, and developmental needs of large publics and become major parts of the cultural landscape, supporting modes of being and forms of consciousness.

Yet the role of play and imagination, and writing's role in creating it, extends beyond the more overtly recognizable imaginative and playful genres of art. Writing is often produced in situations at some distance from where it is communicatively presented—that is we can work at our own desk long before it is presented to readers, or as part of a collaborative team weeks before a report must be presented to a group of managers. We have time to play around with possibilities, represent alternative realities and plans, organize and reorganize our textual goals and plans, interpret and reinterpret data. We can try out alternative strategies in the face of intractable arguments and resistant audiences. This playing around with the possibilities of our textual creation means that the process of writing allows us to explore different possibilities of meanings we can project into the social world. Indeed many of the disciplines of knowledge and theory formulation have extensive play spaces for speculations and hypotheses based on the exploratory possibility of “what if” an idea were true or useful. Hypotheses and speculations born in the “what if” mode can become the motivation for gathering evidence, doing experiments, or engaging in other modes of inquiry. If the speculation turns out to be persuasive, it can turn into the knowledge, inventions, and projects of the future, transforming the shared life of society.

Although Vygotsky's approach to communication may suggest that talk and writing may begin in immediate social and material needs of the individual and community, it also offers possibilities of writing transforming consciousnesses, knowledge, and society. A realistic understanding of the role of play in life and the activity systems built around play, leads us to a more extensive view of writing in our world, which helps explain why some forms of writing are associated with extending human imagination, feeling, and perception. Many of the forms of writing people may think of as mundane have that same transformative effect, whether to develop a school curriculum, or to project a corporate financial reorganization, or to develop a rehabilitation plan for a released prisoner.