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DEVELOPMENTAL THEORIES AND THE ACHIEVEMENT INITIATIVE IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE.

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New Zealand, like Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom, has
embarked upon a national programme to set, or in New Zealand's case reset,
objectives for the English Language curriculum. This paper is about the
developmental psychological bases for this enterprise in Aotearoa/New
Zealand.
The initiatives have created considerable controversy in Aotearoa/New
Zealand, again paralleling developments in other countries. In a sense,
this is a positive outcome in that it has focussed attention on the
characteristics and functions of the centralised curriculum. The
controversy has taken several forms. For example, by refusing to allow
members to continue to work on its implementation the Secondary Teachers'
union has used it to resist the bulk funding of teachers' salaries.
This paper is concerned with two issues. The first is a matter of political
accountability. Should educators including developmental psychologists
involve themselves in the enterprise at this time ? The second, given a
positive answer to the first, asks on what sorts of principles might a
curriculum be based. However, before we discuss this in detail we need to
comment on a preliminary concerns.
The prior concern of whether a national curriculum could be derived from
contemporary developmental psychology is relatively easy to deal with. In
one sense it is surprising that the question should even arise. But it has
in Aotearoa/New Zealand (Crombie, Kaburise & Poutney, 1992). Critics of a
centralised and assessed curriculum for English language have used the
experience of the United Kingdom in setting standards. They have argued
that the theoretical models which have informed the exercise, involving

predominantly neo Piagetian stage assumptions, are questionable. They then argue that alternatives, in particular a Vygotskian model of developmental processes, would be antagonistic to centralised goal setting and assessment.

We agree that the major alternative principles are mostly those in the sociohistorical tradition. But this is a misplaced critique. Vygotsky (1978) developed his theoretical work in the context of developing procedures for evaluation and measurement. His theoretical contribution known as the "Zone of Proximal development" was used to develop principles for more effective measurement of educational processes. Our argument is that the central issue is what sorts of developmental principles are most defensible in a national curriculum, not whether developmental principles can inform.

But prior to that question is a the fundamental issue of whether at this time and under these conditions developmental psychological principles should be used to develop a national curriculum. Recently, Michael Apple (1992) has argued that it is strategically appropriate for educators to resist attempts to create a national curriculum in the United States. Not because it is untenable, psychologically speaking. Apple is not antagonistic to the notion of having a centralised national curriculum with associated assessment. Rather, his position is that it is wrong at this time in the context of what he calls the "conservative restoration" in the United States. He describes his objection as "conjunctural", based on what a particular national system would do given who would set the agenda. Apple (1992) does discuss the possibility that a national curriculum could contribute to a more democratic vision of school reform, unifying oppositional and oppressed groups. But, his analysis leads to a pessimistic conclusion :

"Should we then support a national curriculum and national testing to keep total privatisation and marketization at bay? Under current conditions, I do not think it is worth the risk-not only because of its extensive destructive potential in the long and the short run, but also because I think it misconstrues and reifies the issues of a common curriculum and a common culture." (1992, p.25)

We share Apple's concern for an "education for diversity". Nevertheless, we want to argue that it is possible to use developmental psychological principles to resist the potential hegemonic processes and the reproduction of unequal relations of power described by Apple. In Aotearoa/New Zealand this is possible because of several matters of history and context; four of

which are notable here.

The Treaty of Waitangi has created a basis for legislative recognition of diversity. It has meant, inter alia, that Maori is recognised as an official language of Aotearoa/New Zealand. The discussion document prepared by the Ministry of Education for the development of a New Zealand Languages Policy notes

"As the language of the tangata whenua and an official language (since 1987), Maori will occupy a central place in any languages policy framework." (Waite, 1992; p.30) The first issue dealt with in the document

is the relationship between language and power..

The historical presence of a national curriculum reflects the commitment of successive governments to centralised policy. In the current context of free market ("new right") ideologies it could be argued that the removal of this state control would place at risk the philosophical positions already developed in the curriculum which might be sympathetic to education for diversity. The current "Statement of Aims for Language in the Primary School : English (Department of Education, 1986) lists eleven characteristics of language underpinning the aims of the curriculum. These include the characteristics that "Language is a learned, social activity " and "language expresses cultural background."

While there are no statements about classroom language as a vehicle of control under the second of the characteristics noted above the document says:

"Each child brings to the classroom an individual style and knowledge of language shaped by his or her background and experiences...Teachers and children who accept and appreciate these differences can enrich their own language and enhance the classroom programme" (Department of Education, 1986, p.9). In its introduction the statement says teachers should refer to the Maori language syllabus to achieve a fully balanced language programme. There are precedents and some support for this argument that centralised planning provides a safeguard. It was used by some educators to resist aspects of the decentralisation in the Tomorrows Schools reforms. Researchers monitoring the consequences of these policies have confirmed some of the dire predictions about the effects on education for schools which are located in relatively poor neighbourhoods and have high numbers of Maori and Pacific Island students (Wylie, 1992).

There is a third reason that a national curriculum might not exacerbate hegemonic processes. It is the current contestation of education by Maori educational initiatives and interventions (Smith, 1992). In this context a national curriculum might provide policy which supported those developments. It might if a national curriculum supported the principles of sovereignty expressed in "mana motuhake" and "tino rangitiratanga" and recognised that different sequences and profiles of expertise should be developed for children in Kura Kaupapa Maori.

The fourth reason is a matter of the status of current developmental theorising. Emerging theory in language and literacy provides a strong argument for conceiving expertise as socially and culturally constructed. That is, development is a matter of construction within domains of growing expertise in which the psychological properties of development reflect the psychological properties of activities in practices, rather than stages along a set and unitary sequence. Theoretical tools and a growing research base are becoming available for incorporating culture in development. This view carries very significant implications for how curricula might be set, how they might be rationalised and how development within them might be evaluated.

It is beyond the scope of this brief paper to develop this theoretical position (further analyses are contained in (e.g.) Valsiner, 1988). What we can do is sketch out a sample of illustrative developmental principles which might protect and celebrate diverse cultural and social meanings in

the education of our children.
Contrasting principles.
What follows is a discussion of two developmental principles . They are
used to illustrate how developmental theory could contribute to a national
curriculum which supports an agenda for..".a national movement for a more
democratic vision of school reform " (Apple,1992 p.24). For the purposes of
clear explication the principles are contrasted with the major alternative

position. The sort of position which Crombie, Kaburise and Poutney (1992)
claim was the foundation for the exercise in England. The sort of
theoretical position which, it is argued provides the rationale for a
curriculum which rigidly reproduces cultural and class based inequities. We
recognise that dichotomies in matters of theory often simplify and even
misrepresent.
1. Universalist and contextualist views of development.
General models of development differ in the extent to which development is
described as universal or bound by contexts of use. Universal has several
meanings. One sense is that sequences occur which define stages of
functioning that all children go through to attain full adult functioning.
Piaget's developmental analysis of the logico-mathematical properties of
our thinking (e.g. Piaget, 1977) is recognised by any student of
introductory courses in developmental psychology. Similarly, developmental
analyses of language and literacy have tended to assume single
developmental paths to end points often described in terms as the
attainment of "decontextualised" language (Snow, 1983).
A second sense is that children have a universal competence at a particular
stage of development. It is clear in the Piagetian analysis of cognitive
development. A child at a particular stage will tend to think in
qualitatively similar ways. This assumption is shared by most information-
processing models of cognition (see Ceci,1990). Performance is tied to
central processing so that all problem spaces are processed in the same
way.
Equivalent assumptions can be found for language and literacy development.
Psycholinguistic researchers have employed stage descriptions describing
children as having the potential to solve similar language problems in the
same way on the basis of a central capacity (Bloom & Lahey, 1978; Goodman,
1990). Like universalist positions in cognitive development researchers
have attempted to plot a unitary sequence of stages for all children in
which their language takes qualitatively different forms.
A radical contextualist position challenges each of these assumptions. The
alternative position sees thinking and language as the development of
expertise within contexts of use. What is said, how it is said, what it is
said for, reflect usage in particular contexts (Laboratory of Comparative
Human Cognition, 1983).
The development of literacy is a good site to examine these positions.
Universalist and contextualist assumptions can be found in theories of both
emergent literacy and acquisition at school. In the latter case the issue
is whether or not there is a single unitary path to skilful reading and
writing at school. There is a long and sometimes "great" theoretical debate

in which protagonists utilise extensive research bases .
The existence of a variety of data sources and theoretical positions itself
indicates that a contextualist position is a more adequate representation
of the data. It is possible to teach children to read and write in a number
of ways. It is possible to describe children taking alternative
developmental sequences to similar forms of expertise (McNaughton, 1987).
And it is possible to describe different forms that literacy might take in
the classroom; including "critical literacy". 1
There are some core structural properties of skill in learning to read.
These include aspects such as phonemic awareness and the integration of
multiple strategies for using graphemic, syntactic and semantic cue sources
in text (McNaughton, 1987). But the manner of their coordination in systems
for performing literate activities varies according to context.
The same is true for emergent literacy. Some core properties of skill are
identifiable in children's development before school. But their deployment
in ways of using written language varies across sociocultural groups. In
our research we have described how the activity structure of story book
reading can vary considerably from performance and recitation goals to
collaborative reconstruction of narrative. We are beginning to gather the
evidence that shows these differences are associated with different
psychological properties (McNaughton, 1991a).

A contextualist position sees development as reflecting and being
constructed within contexts of use. The significance of a contextualist
position for curriculum decisions is that it denies their architects an

absolute authoritative sequence. Such sequences are almost inevitably
hegemonic because they are constructed from samples in which the presence
of "dominant" social and cultural groups define what is normative.
Two implications follow. The first is that multiple rationales for
curriculum benchmarks need to be deployed. Clearly rationales need to
reflect the structural difficulties of different tasks for different
activities It is more difficult to learn to silently read for meaning
before learning oral reading skills than after. Rationales also need to
examine the psychological consequences of different sorts of developmental
sequences and learnings (for example, the metalinguistic advantages of
learning two languages). But they also need to be explicit about the nature
of beliefs, expectations and values for particular forms of expertise (for
example, in the context of the Treaty of Waitangi being bilingual in Maori
and english is a good goal).
The second implication is that flexibility and bandwiths of competence need
to be built into levels. A central cannon of effective teaching is that one
recognises and builds on existing expertise. Recognising the presence of
multiple developmental expressions in children's language and literacy on
entry to school and outside of school requires a curriculum for diversity.
The issue of flexibility is explored further in the next section.
2.Endogenous process or co-construction of expertise.
A closely related set of issues concerns how the processes of learning and
development are conceived. Again, a simplified contrast can be made with a

view that focuses on the mechanisms of the active learner. The constructivist framework has provided detailed analyses of children as active problem solvers. Development is constructed under the control of endogenously regulating mechanisms. Social and educative processes provide critical events that trigger processes of conflict, regulation and solution.

The emerging alternative position also views the child as actively constructing development. Similarly, the notion of development being grounded in activity is not contentious. The alternative position perhaps is best captured by Valsiner's (1988) description of co-construction. Drawing on the earlier work of Vygotsky (1978), this view argues that development is at root a social and cultural process in which children are socialized and enculturated into forms of expertise.

In emergent literacy family practices can be described which express and construct values, beliefs and knowledge of social and cultural identity (Heath, 1983). Reading and writing at school are activities which carry social and cultural messages. Recognition of this has led researchers such as Allan Luke (1992) to propose a curriculum for critical literacy. Such a proposal is consistent with the arguments presented here. A defensible goal of the curriculum would be to construct expertise in identifying social and cultural meanings in language and text.

In studies of the socialisation of language in the specially constructed cultural setting of Te Kohanga Reo we are are analysing how forms of language use and the pedagogy of language acquisition construct and reflect significant messages for being Maori (Hohepa, Smith, Smith & McNaughton, in press).

Associated with the presence of different activities and different developmental routes noted above is the appropriateness of different pedagogical forms. For example, inquiry and joint problem solving tutorials are not effective for literacy for recitation and performance. Moreover, the values and beliefs expressed and created in pedagogies can be mismatched with activity goals. In a recitation the text is an absolute authority. When reading stories for joint narrative purposes alternative meanings can be negotiated (McNaughton, 1991a).

Two implications for a national curriculum can be sketched out here too. The first is that the act of teaching is one of co-constructing expertise. Jointly held meanings are essential to this enterprise (McNaughton, 1991b). This means that the curriculum needs to plan for activity structures which are complementary with or incorporate the child's expertise developing outside of school. Alternate pedagogies embodied in the curriculum are called for as well as alternate content (see also Tharp,1989).

The second implication is critical. It returns us to Vygotsky (1978) and

the question of assessment. This theoretical position argues that the smallest unit of analysis in assessment often will be the teaching learning system within which the child functions. Vygotsky's original argument with Piaget can be restated. How often do we assess the teacher and child functioning together? Problematic development in this analysis is a joint

responsibility.

CONCLUDING COMMENT

We have argued that current developmental theorising puts us in a position of responsibility in the enterprise of resetting the national curriculum for english in Aotearoa/New Zealand. At this time it is essential that educators work to construct a curriculum for diversity. Such a call is not incompatible with high levels of expertise in activities which schools have traditionally valued. But it is incompatible with a view that sees only some forms of literacy and language as central to development.

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1 It is interesting to note unitary sequential assumptions in some writings on critical literacy, for example, Luke, 1992).