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Scaffolding social and emotional learning in an elementary classroom community: A sociocultural perspective

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1. Introduction

Teachers are well placed to create a supportive learning environment and promote positive relationships through scaffolding social and emotional learning (Anderman, Andrzejewski, Carey & Allen, 2011; Arnold, & Walker, 2008; Lovat, Dally, Clement & Toomey, 2011; Meyer & Turner, 2002, 2006; Perry, Turner & Meyer, 2006; Walberg, Zins, & Weissberg, 2004). From a Vygotskian (1978) perspective teaching is conceptualised as relational and occurs within a social and cultural context where “norms, values, rules, roles and relationships are socially constructed” (Kovalainen & Kumpulainen, 2007, p. 141). The findings from major values projects, conducted in Australia and similar overseas studies, reaffirm the benefits of students expressing their ideas and feelings to reflect on values (Australia. Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009a, 2009b). This approach encourages students to be more active in their learning and provides the practical and pedagogical structures to build positive relationships, in the “values-rich ambiences of learning that include explicit values discourse” (Lovat et al., 2011, p. 33).

The focus for this paper is on the critical role of emotions and relationships in the affective dimensions of learning. Social practices are examined to understand how to scaffold students’ social and emotional skills through explicit values education. The current research was designed and conducted by the classroom teacher who was also the researcher, providing an authentic and situated perspective for the data analysis. Vygotsky’s (1978) zone of proximal development (ZPD) is used to theorise scaffolding the affective dimensions of learning and Rogoff’s (1995) planes have been used to frame the data analysis. Rogoff’s community, interpersonal and personal planes are a compatible framework to analyse the social aspects of scaffolding within the affective dimensions of learning. Although the planes are inseparable each can be foregrounded in turn to highlight particular scaffolds that are inextricably linked across the planes when working with the class or small groups of students. Next, in the theoretical perspectives, the choice of Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory, the ZPD and assisted learning are elaborated to theorise the affective dimensions of scaffolding students’ social and emotional learning.

2. Theoretical perspectives

2.1 Sociocultural theory

In sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978) the supposition is that learning, motivation and emotions are interconnected processes. Discussions about feelings reflect students’ emotions and may illuminate their social and emotional development, yet emotions “have not figured prominently in motivational or instructional research” (Meyer & Turner, 2006, p. 378). Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural view of learning is central to recent conceptualisations of motivation where motivation emerges from the social context and is evident through both collaborative and individual action (e.g. Rogoff, 1992, 1995). This highlights motivation as a socially and culturally situated concept. Although motivation is
not a central concept discussed in this paper it is acknowledged that it is inherent in students’ attitude and values and how they participate in the social practices of the classroom. The implication is that the social and emotional aspects of learning are deeply-rooted in the classroom’s social and cultural practices. In order to conceptualise the process of scaffolding in the classroom Vygotsky’s (1978) notions of the ZPD and assisted learning are examined.

2.2 Zone of proximal development and assisted learning

Vygotsky’s (1978) concept of the ZPD has been elaborated by Bruner (1986), using the metaphor of scaffolding, to describe how students are assisted in their learning by more experienced adults through structuring activities in graduated steps to build cognitive challenge. The process is more commonly associated with academic learning (Arnold & Walker, 2008; Cumming-Potvin, Renshaw & van Kraayenoord, 2003; Lutz, Guthrie & Davis, 2006) but has the potential to inform affective learning (Goldstein, 1999). Cumming-Potvin et al. (2003) argue that working in the ZPD is better described as multi-tiered scaffolding process, rather than Bruner’s (1986) more linear approach. This reflects a more dynamic and interactive learning process so which concurs with Rogoff et al.’s (2003) research. Vygotsky’s (1978) ZPD and the role of emotions have also attracted much interest in relation to scaffolding, to develop an extended version of the affective ZPD (Levykh, 2008; Goldstein, 1999). Despite lack of consensus on the interpretation of an extended version of the ZPD, Goldstein (1999) argues that it is useful to foreground the affective aspect of the learning process to understand the critical role of emotions, which is espoused in this paper.

Another related notion to the ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978) is assisted learning when developing new concepts. Vygotsky argues that current learning can be conceptualised as the zone of actual development (ZAD) and this is where minimal learning occurs because the child is doing what he/she can already do without assistance. But when the learner is challenged beyond their ZAD, and assisted by more capable others, to work within the ZPD then there is potential for new learning. Conversely, if teaching is situated beyond the ZPD the child will not develop new strategies. In the current research it is considered that developing a collaborative community of practice, with a focus on positive relationships, creates ideal conditions for scaffolding within the ZPD because the teacher develops an intimate knowledge of students’ social and emotional development. This is discussed in the next section through a brief comparison of the theoretical origins of collaborative and cooperative learning to situate collaboration in a community of practice to scaffold the affective dimensions of learning (Australian Government, 2009a, b; Goldstein, 1999; Hart, 1992; Lave & Wenger, 1991).

3. Scaffolding a collaborative community of practice

3.1 Collaborative learning

The terms collaborative and cooperative learning are often used interchangeably to refer to students working together, but their theoretical origins are quite distinctive. Cooperative learning is sourced from a social cognitive perspective of learning to support the development of cognitive skills (Hill & Hill, 1993). It is highly structured to maximise purposeful interaction and talk between the students as they work towards specified outcomes, encouraging reflection and deeper levels of thinking (Hill, 2012). Johnson, Johnson and
Johnson Holubec’s (1994) research advocate five elements for group work: individual accountability; social skills or collaborative learning; positive interdependence; face-to-face interaction and group processing (Johnson et al., 1994; Johnson & Johnson, 2003). To promote successful group work, the teacher’s role is to teach these elements and the prerequisite social and communication skills, through structuring the student groups and assigning roles.

In contrast, collaborative learning shifts the focus from the individual to the social and contextual aspects of the classroom (Hart, 1992; Johnson & Johnson, 2003). Collaborative learning is often used when referring to sociocultural or social constructivist perspectives. The assumption is that knowledge is a social concept. It is through the discussion and exchange of ideas with others, who have different backgrounds, knowledge and experience, that learning occurs (Battistich & Watson, 2003). This implies a more open-ended approach to teaching where students have increasing control over the experience of working in a group (Hart, 1992). Often collaboration can be initiated by the students as a normal part of classroom activities. The teacher’s facilitative role is to create a context for collaboration by empowering students, teaching the skills to collaborate and developing students’ maturity through negotiation with their peers. This stance was adopted for the current research through the implementation of social practices that promoted collaboration.

Developing a collaborative learning environment also provides the context for values discourse and highlights students’ emotions as an integral part of learning and motivation (Lovat et al., 2011). As students learn to volunteer to share ideas with their peers, and develop values such as trust, tolerance and empathy, they are also developing valuable life skills (Australian Government, 2009a, 2009b). Consequently, it is vital for teachers to identify their students’ current understandings (ZAD), to target teaching within the ZPD. This process requires skill to diagnose the appropriate level of scaffolding which may be an issue if teachers do not have the expertise or the time to interpret the situation accurately (Howe, 2013; Palincsar, 1986).

3.2 Collaboration in a community of practice

Common elements of communities of practice include “a set of relations among persons, activity, and the world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 98). Hence, communities of practice exist in many forms so individuals can be members of multiple communities, therefore having access to a variety of sources from which to make meaning. Similarly, Wenger’s (1998) elements comprise “sustained mutual relationships which can be harmonious or conflictual; shared ways of engaging in doing things together and a shared discourse reflecting a certain perspective on the world” (p. 136). These elements emphasise the collaborative nature of activities to generate shared understandings about how the community operates (Matusov, 1999; Rogoff, 2003).

Different types of communities of practice define how relationships and ways of doing things in the communities are endorsed (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Matusov, 1999; Rogoff, 1995, 1998; Wertsch, 1998). How participation is defined in a community of practice, to create contexts where teachers and students can negotiate their relationships is fundamental to creating the affective ZPD. The assertion that the teacher’s role, as the expert or more experienced person is to induct a learner into a community of practice
(Lave and Wenger, 1991) indicates the need for teachers to assist students to understand how to participate in such a community.

Bruner (1986) argues that through the process of negotiation and sharing, communal and cultural learning develops a child’s sense of belonging to a culture, culminating in membership in society. Emphasising the social nature implicit in developing a community, Bruner proposes:

Most learning in most settings is a communal activity, a sharing of the culture. It’s not just that the child must make knowledge his own, but that he must make it his own in a community of those who share his sense of belonging to a culture. It is this that leads me to emphasize not only discovery and invention but the importance of negotiating and sharing - in a word, of joint culture - creating as an object of schooling, and as an appropriate step en route to becoming a member of an adult society in which one lives out one’s life. (p. 127)

The social and cultural practices of the classroom create the context to develop shared endeavours where values can be examined and discussed. Students learn the meaning of how to participate in the community and have the opportunity to develop a sense of belonging. Teachers’ interactions with students create zones of opportunities that can be directed to scaffold students’ social and emotional development. Ideally teachers need to target working within the ZPD which Vygotsky (1978) asserts is true learning.

3.3 Scaffolding within the affective ZPD

Over the last 20 years, a growing number of theorists have questioned research that precludes emotions and interpersonal relationships in understanding learning (Noddings, 1984, 1992, 2005; Meyer & Turner, 2002, 2006; Goldstein, 1999; Goldstein & Friedman, 2003). More recently Renshaw (2013) highlights ‘the affective dimension as an enabling condition for scaffolding to be effective, whether between a teacher and a class, or within a dyadic relationship’ (Renshaw, 2013, p. 58), reaffirming the centrality of the emotions in learning. To theorise the ZPD in terms of the emotions, Goldstein (1999) argues that the ZPD is analysed as a relational or interpersonal zone, highlighting Vygotsky’s understanding of the central role of affective, personal relationships in cognitive development. The context for the research and the reasons for the choice of qualitative research methodology and data collection methods are examined in the next sections.

4. Background to the studies

4.1 Research participants and schools

Fifty seven students, aged 8-11 years, participated in two separate studies at two different elementary schools. In Classroom 1 (Bushlands, 2004) a composite Year 4/5 class, with thirty one 10-11 year old students, had a gender distribution of 9 boys and 5 girls (Year 4) and 9 boys and 8 girls (Year 5) respectively. In Classroom 2 (Seaview, 2007) there were 26 Year 3 students who were aged 8-9 years old and there was a gender distribution of 13 girls and 13 boys. Both schools were located in the metropolitan area of Western Australia. Bushlands School was situated in a low socioeconomic area, where many of the families spoke English as an additional language. As a result Bushlands received supplementary Government funding for teaching Literacy and Numeracy. Bullying was also an issue so Bushland’s priority was ‘values education’ to address the pastoral care
needs of the students and their families. In contrast, Seaview was situated in a high socioeconomic area where the majority of families had two incomes. There were fewer incidences of bullying but students demonstrated other social and emotional issues such as anxiety about their academic performance and learning. The school’s priority was ‘higher order thinking skills’ to improve academic outcomes. Despite the socioeconomic differences between the schools, the teacher/researcher replicated the research to address similar social and emotional needs through teaching values explicitly and providing authentic student leadership opportunities.

4.2 Qualitative research methodology

Qualitative research methodology endeavours to understand the world of the participant by situating the researcher with all their values and assumptions in that world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, 2005; Patton, 2002). Fraser (2007) advocates questionnaires as a means to delve into the perceptions of students and teachers. This was deemed inappropriate for this close level study where the focus was on social and emotional learning. Instead an action research process of ‘plan, act, and reflect’, to prioritise the planning and targeting of data collection, was chosen, which Carr and Kemmis (1986) argue is appropriate for problems grounded in the naturalistic setting of the classroom. In larger scale studies quantitative research methods that aim to control variables and suggest hypotheses to make predictions, rely heavily on statistical methods, but may lack details about the classroom context (Boekaerts, 2011). When research is conducted by the classroom teacher it can be argued that there is more flexibility to include data from authentic classroom activities and less intrusion for students because there is an established relationship with their elementary teacher.

4.3 Data collection - teaching and research tools

The focus on the students’ social development is reflected in the choice of specific strategies to teach social skills through explicit values education. The data collection period extended from the beginning of each school year for a full year for both studies. The second study was extended for another full year with a target group of 12 students who were interviewed once each term. The data for this paper is taken across the two studies and includes extracts from students’ reflection logs and interviews as well as dialogue from the classroom social practices and teacher/researcher’s reflection log. The majority of teaching and research tools were similar for both classrooms; to collect in-depth qualitative data from students, parents and teachers that could be triangulated with the teacher/researcher’s field notes and interpretation of video transcripts from class activities.

In Table 1 that follows, the teaching and research elements listed (see column 1) were data sources that assisted the teacher/researcher to diagnose students’ social and emotional development to target scaffolding within the ZPD (see column 2). The type of data collected reflected how the teacher/researcher worked within the affective ZPD while promoting core values. The progress of students, to make new friends, develop their confidence to work with others, express their opinions and develop participative decision making skills, are evidence of growth in the affective dimensions of learning. The data sources, research validity and ethical concerns are elaborated in the sections that follow prior to an in-depth discussion of the data analysis before the findings are presented.
Table 1 Data sources from teaching and research elements for teacher/researcher’s scaffolding purpose

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data sources from teaching and research elements</th>
<th>Scaffolding purpose</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Five Class Agreements (‘Y’ charts)</td>
<td>Make links to students’ background knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Mutual Respect (interpersonal)</td>
<td>Develop and make explicit shared understandings about the core values of the community</td>
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<td>2. Appreciating others (interpersonal)</td>
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<td>3. Attentive Listening (communication)</td>
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<td>4. Participation/Right to pass (inclusion)</td>
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<td>5. Personal Best (positive learning mindset)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Daily Social Circle (5 minutes)</td>
<td>Practise communication and social skills (Class Agreements) to build a caring and inclusive classroom</td>
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<tr>
<td>Children sat in a circle at the beginning of each day, stated their name and how they felt</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weekly Class meetings</td>
<td>Develop a democratic process of participative decision making, underpinned by collaborative values</td>
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<td>Both the teacher and students raised concerns about classroom/playground issues</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sociograms (Conducted every 8 weeks)</td>
<td>Promote new friendships and team building opportunities to develop social and emotional skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students nominated peers they would like in their new group</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lift ups</td>
<td>Show appreciation to others, to build positive relationships, promoting the values of caring and inclusion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Authentic opportunities to give and receive supportive comments</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student reflection logs</td>
<td>Provide ongoing data about the development of friendships, social and emotional skills and values to facilitate the teacher/researcher’s role to target scaffolding within the affective ZPD</td>
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<tr>
<td>Completed throughout the week</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Student and parent interviews</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Semi structured interviews conducted each term</td>
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<tr>
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Establishing classroom routines with a social focus assisted setting expectations that the core values, embedded in the Five Class Agreements would be applied each day. Y charts were used to examine abstract concepts such as the Class Agreements and Student Leadership, to develop shared understandings and teach interpersonal and communication skills explicitly. Students brainstormed the content of the ‘Y’ charts at the beginning of the year using three sections: Looks Like (Actions: what children do); Sounds Like (Words: what children say); Feels Like (Emotions: how children feel). These charts made links to students’ background knowledge and made explicit shared understandings about the community’s core values. They were displayed as a permanent reference in the classroom and became the basis for the measurement of students’ affective development when the teacher/researcher made links to these values and could observe changes in student behaviour over the course of the school year.
To support students’ development of interpersonal and communication skills, the daily *Social Circle* was conducted at the beginning of each day. Students held a “talking stick” and used the scaffold “My name is… I feel… because…” The teacher/researcher modelled to the students how to share information about feelings. Students always had the right to pass but most were eager to participate. This strategy practised communication and social skills through the application of the Class Agreements to build a caring and inclusive classroom.

In order to develop a democratic process of participative decision making the teacher/researcher modelled and scaffolded how to raise issues and lead a discussion at the weekly *Class Meetings*. As students developed confidence they ran the class meetings and the teacher/researcher led from the sidelines. At the beginning of each meeting the agenda items were prioritised by the students and the person who wrote the item led the discussion. Decisions were made and reviewed the following week. This process made transparent how peers were resolving issues and the progress made each week. Students developed participative decision making skills with the consistent use of this social practice which could be applied in small group work.

About every eight weeks new social groups of 4-6 students were formed with a leader and vice leader elected by the students according to leadership characteristics that had been brainstormed early in the year. *Sociograms* were used as a strategic tool to promote positive relationships by grouping students with role models who displayed social and emotional maturity. These groupings have been extensively analysed elsewhere (Morcom, 2005). The teacher/researcher constructed groups (based on students’ nominations) that were likely to support students’ aspirations to develop new friendships and improve academic learning. Promoting new friendships and team building opportunities were central to developing social and emotional skills.

*Lift ups* were used as a regular feature in the classroom to show genuine appreciation towards others, build friendships and promote community cohesion (Webb, Farivar, & Mastergeorge, 2002). Formal sessions were modelled by the teacher/researcher, using specific examples of how students had assisted others in the classroom or playground. There was also a box of coloured envelopes and paper, freely available to students to write ‘Lift ups’, without teacher direction. These notes were kept by students in beautifully decorated boxes and became treasured items.

*Student reflection logs* and *student and parent interviews* were conducted throughout the research and provided ongoing data that could be triangulated with sociometric and class data to target scaffolding within the affective ZPD. The teacher/researcher could assist students by coaxing from the sideline which is a similar strategy used by Palincsar and Brown (1984).

### 4.4 Research validity

Confounding factors in classroom research contribute to the challenges of attributing student learning to the scaffolding processes described in the findings of this paper (Howe, 2013). A more general view of scaffolding has been adopted, using Rogoff’s (1995) participatory appropriation, guided participation, and apprenticeship theory, to clarify themes and trends in the data analysis. Rogoff’s (1995) theory deviates from Vygotsky’s (1978) position that learning occurs only when there is an ‘inter-mental’ to ‘intra-mental’ shift (internalisation). This may raise questions as to the validity of qualitative research when we take students’ comments at face value. To strengthen the argument for the success of scaffolding a variety
of data sources are presented across two research projects that indicate similar views by students who participated in comparable social practices at two schools with quite different socioeconomic conditions. The reader will assess the validity of the claims based on transparency of the research methodology and the discussion of the findings. Combining data from diverse sources about the participants, with detailed contextual details, also provided triangulation validity of the data. The use of self-reports and surveys were limited in this research with young students because there are issues with consistency in understanding the questions and therefore the reliability of the responses, which also may not offer sufficient detail. Similarly the researcher may not interpret the intended meaning correctly for students’ self-reports or surveys (Karabenick, Wooley, Friedel, Ammon, Blazevski, Bonney, 2007).

4.5 Ethical concerns

The dependency issues for the classroom teacher conducting research with their students highlights legitimate concerns about collecting data particularly when it is of a personal nature (such as students’ feelings). It was clearly stated on the consent letters to parents and students that there was no compulsion to agree to participate in the research and consent could be withdrawn, without explanation or disadvantage. The critical friends for the research were part of the administration teams at each school. They had established community relationships through the normal course of their work and were in an ideal position to support participants if they had any concerns about the research. There was full participation for both projects with a 100 percent informed consent which indicated to the teacher/researcher the value of the research for the participants. To ensure anonymity for the participants and the schools pseudonyms were used when reporting the findings. At the conclusion of each project the teacher/researcher presented the preliminary research findings to parents and their children at semi-informal evening meetings to provide feedback and thank the participants for their full support.

4.6 Data analysis

In the early stages of the project the teacher/researcher used a manual open coding of emerging patterns/themes based on the discussions at Class Meetings (Yin, 2012). As additional data were collected, particularly from the individual student reflection logs and parent and student interviews, it was possible to cross-reference data for triangulation validity. Using Rogoff’s (1995) analytical planes provided a systematic approach to organise and interpret large amounts of qualitative data. At the community plane, Rogoff (1995) uses the metaphor of apprenticeship to examine how individuals participate with others in culturally organised community activities. The interpersonal plane (guided participation) focuses on the processes and systems of involvement between people as they communicate and coordinate efforts (Rogoff, 1995). The personal plane (participatory appropriation) refers to individuals transforming their understanding and responsibility for activities through participation. Rogoff (1995) suggests that through participating in an activity or situation the individual changes and this experience prepares them for subsequent similar activities or situations. In Table 2 that follows there is a summary of the relevant teaching and research elements (reorganised from Table 1), using Rogoff’s (1995) planes (see first column). Then the scaffolds are listed to demonstrates multiple levels of scaffolding throughout the classroom practices to develop students’ social and emotional understandings (see second column). The affective dimensions of learning that are embedded in the social practices have been italicised to make explicit the scaffolds that the teacher/researcher used.
Table 2 Summary of social practices for the community, interpersonal and personal planes (Rogoff, 1995) to scaffold social and emotional development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social practices</th>
<th>Scaffolds</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Community plane social practices for apprenticeship</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| 1. Five Class Agreements [“Y” charts] | • Develop shared understandings about the core collaborative values underpinning the community of practice  
• *Feels like* section of “Y” chart connected behaviour (actions and words) with emotions |
| 2. Daily Social Circle | • Develop a language to express feelings  
• Provide an opportunity to learn more about peers and the teacher  
• Learn what makes others happy, sad… to develop empathy  
• Develop values of trust, tolerance and mutual respect |
| 3. Weekly Class Meetings | • Develop the classroom context as a safe place to express opinions  
• Take risks and share ideas  
• Develop ideas to resolve issues  
• Take responsibility for behaviour  
• Develop a sense of belonging to the community |

**Interpersonal plane social practices to guide participation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social practices</th>
<th>Scaffolds</th>
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</table>
| 4. Sociograms and team building activities | Teacher/researcher placed students in supportive groups to scaffold students to  
• *Make new friends*  
• *Learn how to be a group leader*  
• *Learn how to support a leader*  
• *Learn to work with a variety of students* |

**Personal plane social practices to appropriate ways of participating**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social practices</th>
<th>Scaffolds</th>
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</table>
| 5. Lift ups  
6. Student reflection logs | Teacher/researcher scaffolded the students though modelling and reflecting to assist students to  
• *Express genuine appreciation towards each other*  
• *Reflect and articulate personal meaning for class social activities* |

*Adapted social practices from Gibbs (2001)*
The doctoral study (Morcom, 2012) on which this paper is based examined developing student motivation, conceptualised as ‘negotiated participation’ in a collaborative community of practice. In the case study findings four sets of focal student groups were examined using the themes listed below.

1. Leadership in the classroom to realise social and academic potential;
2. Student and teacher motivation to resolve social issues in an equitable manner;
3. Pro-social behaviour to address bullying issues and
4. Inclusive behaviour to integrate students with special needs in mainstream.

The affective aspect of scaffolding was implicit in the discussion of student motivation yet emotions played a central role in developing social and emotional skills as the students learned to enact the values of mutual respect and attentive listening. When re-examining the data for this paper the aim is to be explicit about scaffolding the affective dimensions of learning (see Table 2 above). The focus in the findings is examining data from the community plane (Social Circle and Class Meetings) about how students reached a consensus to make decisions. In particular Tina’s data are examined to demonstrate how social learning intersected with learning at the other two planes to develop participative decision making skills. Tina is featured in the first Class meeting extract (community plane) and then later in the year with her peers in a small group situation (interpersonal plane), electing group leaders. Tina’s journey exemplifies the personal issues and challenges faced by all students to learn how to reach a consensus, as they learned to work with different personalities in new group situations. Tina was a target student who was interviewed the following year in her new class (2008). Extracts from Class Meetings, teacher/researcher’s reflection log and student interviews illustrate the longitudinal journey for students to develop mutual respect for each other and the skills of participative decision making.

5. Findings and discussion: Rogoff’s (1995) analytical planes

5.1 Community plane: Social practices for apprenticeship

The five Class Agreements set the parameters for participation so students felt safe to take risks, contribute ideas and develop responsibility for their behaviour. At the beginning of the year, developing students’ social knowledge about each other was important because many experienced social anxiety about friendships and some lacked the social skills to initiate and play games with others. This is evidenced in the extract from the first Class Meeting agenda (Bushlands, February, 2004).

- I am worried about having no one to play with when my friend isn’t at school.
- I never get to play with the sports equipment because the same people use it and don’t share.
- Nobody wants to play my games with me.

The daily Social Circle and the weekly Class Meetings were timetabled as part of the normal classroom routine and offered an authentic context to teach and reinforce core values (Class Agreements) and social skills explicitly at the point of need. In the extract from the social circle (see below) students developed a language to express feelings (happy, sad, excited or angry) and learned important social information about the daily life of their peers which could potentially inform their friendships in the future.
Social circle (Term 4, 2007)

Teacher modelled
My name is ___ and I feel excited for two reasons. Today is my son’s birthday and we are going out for dinner tonight.

Students said in turn: My name is ___ and I feel ___
- Happy because I am going to Sarah’s house today
- Angry and happy, angry because my baby sister kept me awake last night but happy to be at school
- Excited because I am going to Daniel’s party next week
- Sad because my rabbit died on the weekend
- Excited because I am learning to play tennis after school today
- Excited because we are going to Bali next week
- Happy and happy because my team won at the weekend and I got the coach’s award
- Angry because I had a fight with my brother this morning before school
- Happy because my mum is having twins
- Angry because next weekend I am going camping
- Excited because my cat scratched me this morning
- Happy, sad and excited because I am going to Ella’s house after school, I lost my ring but it’s my birthday soon and I may get another one
- Excited, excited and excited because I am going to a friend’s house after school and today we are making our castles and my mum is coming to help in the classroom

During the Social Circle students were reminded to listen attentively to each other and demonstrate mutual respect with appropriate body language. This behaviour was also reinforced in the Class Meetings. In the following extract (taken from the second Class Meeting at the beginning of the year) Tina (Year 3, Seaview) was expressing her views and Trent offered a suggestion. A number of students said, “Ooh, she’s already said that!” Through questions directed towards students who were not showing mutual respect the teacher/researcher scaffolded within the affective ZPD to make explicit the agreed core values and the basic social skills necessary to develop a classroom community.

Teacher: Thank you very much Tina [as Tina moves back to her seat].
While Tina was running this part of the class meeting I was actually observing how people were behaving and how respectful you were when sharing ideas. This is something we have to practice. This why we have class meetings too. When people give their ideas [pause] what do we need to do, when they give an idea? What’s our job, as the audience?
Jared have you got an answer for that?
[Asks to go to the toilet. Other students put their hands up.]
Derek when others are giving ideas what do we need to do?
Derek: We need to be listening.
Teacher: Amber, you need to listen to this. [Overlapping with Derek].
Teacher: We need to be listening. How do we show we are listening? Anna.
Anna: Look at the person.
Teacher: Thanks. Yes. Look at the person. How else? It’s a bit hard when we are
facing this way. What other things do we do? Amber?

Amber: We sit up nicely and look at them.

Teacher: Ok, show some respect. And Alex?

Alex: And, um. [mumbles quietly] I was going to say that.

Teacher: You were going to say that too. That’s really good!

Teacher: Okay, [speaks slowly] if someone says something you don’t agree with or repeats something, how should you respond to that? What should you say? Or what shouldn’t you say? [pause]

So if someone says something, like we had a few people that repeated ideas, because it is hard to hear. There is noise around the place and some people have got a very soft voice. [pause]

I want you to think now, if you are saying an idea, and you’ve got, say, two things to say and you’ve only said one idea, and somebody has already said it and they say, “I have already said it”, and you haven’t even go the second idea out, how do you think that person might feel about saying the second idea? How do you think William?

William: Um.

Teacher: How do you think they might feel? Do you think they will want to share their idea?

William: No

Teacher: No. Trent how did you fell when you were told you were repeating somebody else’s stuff?

Trent: Not very good.

Teacher: Okay. You were trying to give a little of yourself, weren’t you, to the group to share your ideas? [Trent nods in agreement] So, if people say things you don’t agree with, how, what would be a better way of dealing with it? What can you say to them? Amber?

Amber: We could just say [pause] well, um, we have already said that, but in a nice way, not in a mean voice.

Teacher: So in a polite voice, not a mean voice.

[Teacher pauses as writes these points on the whiteboard.]

Because the way you speak to someone is important. It communicates a lot to them. [meeting continues]

(Transcript from video recording, February 9, 2007)

As the year progressed the weekly Class Meetings generated more enthusiasm and commitment from students to participate. This was a positive change but created issues during discussions if students perceived their opinion was not heard or valued. Similarly, when students changed groups, new social dynamics were created and there were comparable problems. The teacher/researcher was aware of the situation and reflected how to respond to scaffold students.

I need to provide opportunities for meaningful student talk and change patterns of interacting to improve student learning… the challenges for all students is to enact “mutual respect” and “self control” during discussions… some students do not have clear boundaries for acceptable behaviour as defined by their peers… There is constant tension between the teacher and students to maintain classroom order but also flexibility that students will grow socially and emotionally if trust is placed in them to do so. This is a process of mutual respect and learning. (Teacher/researcher’s reflection log, 12 September, 2007)
The teacher/researcher conducted a series of Philosophy lessons with students to model how to agree and disagree in a respectful manner. During the fourth round of changing social groups Tina disagreed with the group decision about new group leaders. She became frustrated, forgetting the group protocols of taking turns and speaking in a respectful tone. Tina requested more time to resolve the situation which occurred the next day. Most of Tina’s group were using the dialogue they had learned from the Philosophy lessons: “I agree with…. but I also think…” or “I disagree and I think….”. As the discussion progressed, Tina became extremely agitated because the group did not agree with her point of view. She took more turns speaking while shouting over and interrupting other group members. The teacher/researcher used this incident to reflect on emotions with the class and debriefed with Tina’s group, using these two questions: “How were you feeling?” and “Were you listening to each other?” Once the students expressed their emotions the session was concluded with these summative comments from the teacher/researcher before transitioning into the next lesson.

It is very hard to take it when people say ‘yes’, ‘no’…, it can be very hard. Some people were getting a bit personal and not giving good reasons. That’s why we need to have good reasons and not get too personal. I know not everybody is happy, but everyone agreed to have a go. I am very proud of all the people who stuck with it. (Teacher/researcher’s reflection log, 14th September, 2007)

The time spent on these discussions proved worthwhile for all students. In Tina’s interview she articulated the challenge (it’s hard) when her ideas were rejected by others but eventually embraced the core values of the community (attentive listening, mutual respect) so she could compromise and accept her peers’ point of view.

In grade 3 I learned how to solve problems and discussing but it’s hard when some people don’t like any ideas but theirs. I like people who are different from me, don’t so the same things as me. That is interesting. …Last year I liked learning about agreeing and disagreeing (Student Interview, Tina, Term 1, 2008)

It can be argued that Tina’s social development was enhanced because the teacher/researcher worked within the affective ZPD to provide social guidance. Tina stated that she learned during the social circle that it was ok for her to express her feelings and acknowledged she learned how to ‘agree on things’.

Last year was more challenging, but I really liked it…I wish we had class meetings, there are lots of things we could discuss, we could agree on things…This year, we tell the teacher, we can’t really do anything, the teacher does something. (Student Interview, Tina, Term 1, 2008)

Tina realised the value of expressing her point of view and being a part of the decision making process when Class Meetings were not a feature in her new classroom (Year 4, 2008). Tina’s peers had similar issues making decisions (during the research year) when new groups were formed. They would revert to unhelpful behaviours to get their own way but learned to disagree in a respectful manner to reach a consensus by the end of the year.

5.2 Interpersonal plane: Social practices for guiding participation

To develop team building skills for the last round of Tribes (Week 2, Term 4, 2007) students were asked to design and construct a large dragon as a symbol for their group. They had to make decisions about the size, design and colours. By Term 4 many students were becoming astute at assisting their group to reach a consensus but this was not the case for all students.
After the activity students reflected on their contributions towards the final outcomes. One could argue that all students had a vested interest in creating a logo that was representative of their ideas but had the challenge of showing mutual respect while reaching a consensus.

**Group 1**
People argued all the time, including me. People stuck to their idea. I contributed a lot because I solved a lot of problems. (Martin)
I contributed a lot but I wasn’t heard. (Trent)
I think I was listening for most of the time and for 5 minutes I wasn’t. (James)
We all got something to do but when we did the colours it didn’t go well. It was hard. (Sandra)

**Group 2**
We could not decide what colour it was going to be. I made it hard for the group. (Katie)
We mostly agreed to the dragon but one wasn’t very ok but then that person agreed. I didn’t cry or try to get my own way. (Sally)
We all agreed to the same dragon. There were no complaints. I felt I was listened to and I agreed to everything. (Anna)

**Group 3**
Not all people in my tribe argued. Some people changed their mind when we were almost finished. We went around in a group and asked for each person’s ideas. I let them borrow my textas for the colouring. (Sean)
We just talked about it and agreed. (Caydan)
We went around and agreed…I drew most of it. (Simon)

**Group 4**
We didn’t argue. Everyone agreed. We worked together and built on each other’s ideas. I gave lots of ideas. I didn’t sulk. I built on ideas. (Crystal)

Group 1 had the most difficulty reaching consensus partly because they did not follow the protocols for group discussion and the core values of the class. They shouted above each other to be heard and demonstrated disrespectful behaviour by withdrawing from the group discussion. James admitted that he wasn’t listening for 5 minutes. Martin recognised he was in a position to assist the group to reach a resolution. Trent was frustrated because he felt he wasn’t being heard. James opted out of the discussion and Sandra tried to support the group but recognised the challenges of reaching a consensus. Conversely the other three groups worked well because they listened to each other and took turns before reaching a consensus. Two students in Groups 2 and 4, resisted immature behaviours such as crying (Sally) and sulking (Crystal) to persuade group members to agree with them. The students’ reflections enabled the teacher/researcher to target scaffolding within students’ affective ZPD with the following focus questions at the next Class Meeting (Term 4, 29th October, 2007).

1. Should you change your mind about your decision to please a friend or help the group make a decision?
2. Do you think you should lose a friend if you disagree with them?
3. What behaviours have you seen when people don’t get their own way?

The affective components of these questions link to children’s emotions because the issue of friendship was very personal. If students are feeling insecure, lack confidence and don’t have many friends it takes courage to think about the other group members and vote accordingly.
Through skilful modelling and scaffolding, the teacher/researcher and more experienced peers supported other students to take responsibility for participation in activities and make decisions on sound reasoning. As students enacted the core values of the class they learnt to respect decisions made by peers and not engage in immature behaviours during discussions. One could argue that these positive outcomes would not have been achieved unless students felt safe to express their ideas and discuss issues candidly, with expert teacher scaffolding that paid attention to the affective aspects of learning.

5.3 Personal plane: Social practices for appropriating ways of participating

At the community plane the Class Meetings provided a forum for students to learn from peers how to resolve issues and develop friendships based on the core values of the community of practice. Having positive role models in the small groups (interpersonal plane) also supported personal development when students developed self confidence and self control to express their emotions in a socially acceptable way. A representative sample of students’ interviews (conducted in November, 2004) provides evidence of students’ personal transformations.

- It has been really calm for me because people take care of each other. Last year I didn’t have many friends but this year I have made friends even with the girls. (Student interview, Joey-Year 4, 2004)
- I have more friends now and I don’t feel so shy because I can be myself and people aren’t so mean to me anymore. I can feel safe. (Student interview, Mary-Year 5, 2004)
- Last year I felt lonely and played in the sandpit on my own. I used to dig tunnels. This year I have… (Gives a list of friends) (Student interview, John-Year 4, 2004)
- Before everybody would bottle things up and not get to tell the whole class. I learnt to ask for help when I needed it so I didn’t get so upset. (Student interview, Angela-Year 5, 2004)

Joey, Mary and John were shy students who could be anxious and had difficulties making friends. Angela had poor self control when others did not agree with her so she was not popular with her peers. These students’ reflections illustrate the benefits of creating a collaborative community of practice to provide positive role models where students learned to respect and care for each other which are valuable life skills. The important issues for students from both projects relate to the affective domain (friendships and caring) and values (mutual respect for each other’s opinions) so students can learn the skills of participative decision making. In the final interviews Claire, Eileen and Denis illustrate the development of students’ thinking in relation to their social knowledge and skills and values.

- The meetings have been good because I learnt stuff I didn’t know before. If I didn’t like you I could still talk to you and be friendly. I learnt about respecting people you don’t like. This year is better than last year because I know everybody in the class and I can get along with most people. (Student interviews, Claire, Year 4, 2004)
- I think when we share problems we can solve them. Like if John’s group was doing well or not so well you can see what you can improve. The teacher talks to us and helps us share our problems. Not as many people would talk to each other because boys don’t think it is cool to talk to girls. We wouldn’t know how to sort out our problems. We wouldn’t share our feelings before but now in class meetings we share
these feelings. If we have a fight and disagree nobody laughs at you. (Student interviews, Eileen, Year 5, 2004)

I learnt not to argue and be sensible. I have been happy to come to school because there’s nothing to do at home and I have friends at school. (Denis- Year 5, 2004)

Claire didn’t have many friends initially but gradually widened her social circle because she developed confidence and social knowledge. Eileen was popular with her peers and widened her friendship group to include boys. Her peers followed her example. Denis had bullied his peers for nearly five years but ceased by the end of the year. One could argue that developing the social knowledge of how to be a friend allowed Denis to make new choices and enjoy the benefits of a large friendship group based on the value of mutual respect. The most common agenda items for Class Meetings revolved around relationships and friendships for both projects. This is evidence of the longitudinal and complex nature of the process of developing positive interpersonal relationships. The consistent use of social practices developed a personal sense of belonging when students realised they had the support of their peers.

6. Conclusion

Teachers, as the expert or more experienced people, have the opportunity to provide optimal learning conditions in the classroom to induct learners into a collaborative community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Rogoff et al., 2003). This research has demonstrated how explicit values education scaffolded social and emotional learning, developed peer group friendships and promoted a sense of ‘togetherness’ (Van Oers&Hännikäinen, 2001) as the basis for classroom community. The social practices highlight a student centred approach where primacy is given to students’ emotions, an area that has been neglected in classroom research (Noddings, 1984, 1992, 2005; Meyer & Turner, 2002, 2006; Goldstein, 1999; Goldstein & Friedman, 2003). Each social practice developed apprenticeship, guided participation and appropriated ways of participating. Collectively the social strategies scaffolded affective growth in the ZPD. Over a school year Tina came to appreciate the value of group diversity in decision making. When students worked together as a class group (community plane) or in smaller groups (interpersonal plane) the core values embedded in the five Class Agreements were applied. Enacting negotiated values during all social practices scaffolded students to appropriate ways of participating (personal plane) that were consistent with the community’s values. As a result students felt safe to participate in shared endeavours and developed the collaborative skills to work together. They experienced the social and emotional benefits of developing friendships and having the ongoing support of their peers during the year based on mutual respect.

Juxtaposing theory and practice, the significance of this qualitative research lies not only in the practical illustrations of how to structure a collaborative learning environment (that could be replicated by other teachers interested in this approach) but in the re-conceptualization of ‘scaffolding’ within the theoretical framework of Rogoff’s (1995) three analytical planes of sociocultural activity. This enables researchers to understand scaffolding as part of wider apprenticeship activity systems (Rojas-Drummond, Torreblanca, Pedraza, Vélez, & Guzmán, 2013). Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory, in particular the notions of ZPD and assisted learning, offer a conceptual framework to research collaborative learning in an elementary classroom community. Researchers recognise that “teacher’s work includes dealing with students’ affective, as well as cognitive, response to the subject matter being taught” (Rosiek, 2003, p. 399). Thus, it can be argued that positive relationships are central to building
academic success (Battistich, & Watson, 2003). More research is needed to understand the complexity of the teacher’s role to scaffold practices that socialize students to participate fully in the cognitive and affective aspects of learning. Developing teacher’s capacity to be responsive to students’ social and emotional needs so they can assist students to become successful learners remains a challenge (Howe, 2013; Palincsar, 1986).

References


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