

The Interactive Experience

By Ulla Kofoed

Dewey, Vygotsky, Bruner and Bakhtin's theories form the background for the pedagogical ideas in creating a school/home cooperation, which traverse language, culture and environment and has relevance to the learning process. That is, an angle on parent cooperation that focuses on bilingual pupils' educational and language development, where it is the pedagogical work with pupils that form the starting point and foundation for school/home cooperation. Bilingual parents are encouraged to get involved in the pupils' experiences with respect to creating coherence between school and home in the educational process. This connection is an important step in the pupils understanding of how professional knowledge gained at the school, can be combined with their own personal experiences. At the same time, this cohesion can contribute to the understanding of the world they live in. Use of the concept "experience" should be viewed, respectively, both from the pupils and the parental perspective. In relation to the pupils the concept must be understood as a part of the pedagogy and as a basis for learning. However, in relation to the parents, the concept is understood as part of the exchange of personal experiences, which will form the basis for a common cross cultural understanding.

It can be difficult to acquire knowledge under school conditions when the scheme of things the pupils meets at school, are not confirmed in everyday life. Pupils with different abilities, cultures, languages, backgrounds and premises, must, in spite of these differences, attend school to acquire knowledge individually and communally. Education must therefore be perceived as that, which can help pupils learn to use cultural tools to form meanings and a sense of reality, in order to adjust to, and help change the world they live in.

For Bruner, Vygotsky and Bakhtin, language and communication are the main conditions

to enable learning and thinking to take place. Communication is the gateway between cultures and human thought, where we use language to understand and think for ourselves and to express our thoughts to others. Therefore, language becomes central in the learning process and in linking new knowledge to existing knowledge. Consequently, if bilingual pupils are to improve their learning, cooperation between school and the home is of prime importance to the pupils' learning processes. It demands forms of communication and of shared experiences, a lack of these will be a hindrance. In this perspective, school/home cooperation is no longer just about informing the parents. It is, about creating activities and environments, where pupils, parents and teachers come into contact and form a dialogue and where pupils and parents get to know the schools textbooks and equipment. The most important is not necessarily to be unanimous, but to develop a mutual understanding and establish common denominators. For Dewey, Bruner and Vygotsky, subjects are built around action based experience, but only Vygotsky and Bruner see the subjects as an expression of cultural representations. One of Bruner's central theses on education is that the school is not culturally detached. Education itself does not stand alone and cannot be organised as if it does. It exists within a culture, and culture is also about power, distinction and reward. This entails that education is never neutral and without social and economic consequences - it will always be political. Education is, in this way, an essential materialisation of one culture's way of life and not just a preparation for it. The subjects taught, the mentality and the spoken registers that are encouraged in the pupils cannot be separated from how the school is situated in the pupils' life and abilities. Culturally the most important subject in school is the school itself. [Bruner]

In addition to the context of learning, the social aspect of learning also includes the pupils' cultural baggage and is a central part of the learning process itself. Therefore, the organisation of communities in specific situations creates the space where learning in respect of the pupils and understanding in respect of the parents can unfold. Bruner suggests rethinking the class room as a group who teach each other and the teacher as the one who orchestrates and encourage participation. The only instruction is that when it comes to humans', learning is an interactive process where humans learn from each other and not just from 'show and tell'. Bruner speaks of talent and possibilities, where the pupils learn different ways to use their consciousness by learning to master culture's tool box and, here, language is a central part. Bruner finds it important to create traditions in the classroom and to participate in the common process of creating and preserving culture, thus creating a feeling of community. **Experience:** The child's development of concepts and words demands that a number of functions are developed, such as, attention, logic memory, abstraction, comparison and distinction. All these complicated psychological processes cannot be perceived as simple memory or learning by heart (Vygotsky) but the experience can be used as a tool of control in pedagogy and as a principle in the organisation of teaching and the school/home cooperation.

The tool of control is rather complex, in that, the experience has to be perceived as the starting point of proficiency, self-control, experience, knowledge and learning. The verbal (communication, dialogue, language and storytelling) is the central tool. This applies to the pupils as a basis for their development of respect, trust, reflection and mediation of learning and to the parents in the understanding of the school's values and practices. It also applies to professional and informal situations and being able to express agreement and disagreement in class, as well as to the process where the pupils adapt, reflect and communicate their experiences. Here, the parents act as supporters in their native language and in relation to the pupils' earlier experiences as well as the family's present and shared experiences.

The purpose of including the shared experiences is that they form the basis for differentiation, for the community of discourse and experience and for a democracy which transverses the individual, social and cultural upbringings. By implementing the experience in the daily lessons the pupils get the opportunity to process and reflect upon their shared experiences both verbally and in writing with the teachers, each other and their parents. Thus, the parents' personal experience, background, language, and culture become resources that influence the learning process of the pupils. From this point of view, the pupils get the opportunity to further process and reflect upon their experiences in their own language. With the help from parents they can compare them with earlier personal experiences. In this perspective the pedagogical meaning of experience becomes fundamental and forms the basis of the pedagogy and the school/home cooperation.

This places the pedagogical thinking as a kind of pedagogy of experience where the concept "experience" is the central dimension for communication and dialogue. As a consequence of this view of pedagogy, Dewey's theory, on how one acquires knowledge through participation in practical learning activities and through the relation with other people, becomes most central. Creating the possibility of a shared experience for the pupils and the parents is not enough; at the same time the teacher also has to have a goal which requires a plan and a method of action for the pupils to develop learning.

The teacher Besides summoning meetings and arrangements, the teacher also has to consciously plan and organize the experience situations in order to support an interaction which takes advantage of individual verbal, written and practical resources. This is valid both in respect of the pupils' foundation of learning but also in respect of the parents' foundation for understanding. The way in which the teacher organize the teaching of the pupils and cooperate with the parents can either further or hinder social relations. This means that besides viewing the experience as a foundation for dialogue, the organization and the teacher's influence and understanding have to meet the expectations that the children and

adults have from the culture and society which they are a part of. These are essential factors for the school/home cooperation to have an impact on the pupils' learning processes. **The parents as supporters**

As the following example will illustrate:

The teacher gives the pupil an extract from the textbook to read at home.

The following day the pupil reads the piece almost flawlessly. But when the teacher asks what the piece is about, the pupil becomes silent.

The teacher explains that the pupil has to read and discuss the piece with her mother.

The pupil comments that her mother does not understand Danish.

The teacher employs the situation to point out that it is important that the pupil speaks with her mother in their native language and explains that her mother can help her understand the text. The following day the pupil is able to both read the text and tell the story.

The example illustrates how important the role of the mother is in the development of the child's understanding of concepts. By including the mother, as a person of more knowledge and as support for the child in the learning process in their shared native language, the pupil will reflect and expand his or her understanding of concepts. The parents will also be included as an important part of their child's learning process. The recognition of the native language and the cultural norms will strengthen the child's motivation for learning and development. It will also strengthen the parents' interest and involvement in the Danish educational system. [The framework of the class](#)