

Book Review

The Socialization of Cognitive Development

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Review of: Gauvain, M. (2001). *The social context of cognitive development*. New York: Guilford. 249 pp.—ISBN 1-57230-610-6—\$22.00.

The social context of cognitive development by Mary Gauvain (2001) is the delightful fourth book in the Guilford Series on Social and Emotional Development, edited by Claire Kopp and Steven Asher. Gauvain does an excellent job of bringing together, into one accessible volume, diverse bodies of literature that inform us about how cognitive development proceeds in social context, how social, emotional, and cognitive development are intertwined, how social and emotional processes influence cognition, and how cognition influences social and emotional processes in children. To help put the book itself within the broader sociohistorical context of the field at this time, Bob Siegler's effective foreword points out the challenges that sociocultural approaches such as Gauvain's pose for information-processing accounts of cognitive development.

'Whose children are we talking about?' is the question that Siegler (1996) proposed while pointing out that the child depicted in classic cognitive development research (e.g., one who 'has' a particular cognitive operation or strategy, uses it reliably and consistently, and at some point shifts discontinuously to a more mature operation) at a minimum, doesn't appear to be anything like the real children we all know well, and at a maximum, does not exist. Similarly, Gauvain, in this book, asks 'Where are the children we are talking about?' 'In what context does cognitive activity take place?' 'Does anyone know a child whose learning during a brief teaching interaction is *not* intimately wrapped together with that child's feelings about the task, themselves, and the teacher; the quality of the social interaction during the teaching session; the child's history of interactions with the other person/teacher; and the child's and the teacher's goals and expectations?' Although we all understand at some level that children do not develop within a vacuum and even likely say these very words in our child development courses, researchers often forget this when it comes to designing and interpreting their studies. This book points out how the study of cognitive development has not paid sufficient attention to integrating the social and emotional sides to learning and cognitive activity.

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'Where is it that the stuff of cognitive development happens?' The answer to this question is the topic of the book's introduction. The answer, of course, is that the social context of everyday interactions that children have with their caregivers, peers, teachers, and others (i.e., making cookies, weaving blankets, preparing and eating dinner, discussing past or future events, playing peek-a-boo and other games) is the most important context for cognitive development. The frequency with which such everyday interactions and discussions occur, the attraction and intrinsic interest that these joint interactions and conversations carry for the child, and the strong emotional ties that typically exist between the child and the others with which s/he is engaged, all conspire together to ensure that such experiences are powerful determinants of cognitive growth. The point is made here and throughout the book that we need to study such everyday interactions that children have in their world and integrate both laboratory and non-laboratory studies in order to fully understand the contexts of cognitive development. Nevertheless, the author at times appears to come down a bit hard on lab studies.

The second chapter introduces one of the book's major goals—namely, making the case that social interaction needs to be added to the list of mechanisms for cognitive change. Indeed, this goal was accomplished by the end of the volume. Also provided in this chapter is a brief account of Piagetian and information-processing perspectives on cognitive development and the lack of serious consideration given in these approaches to the influence of the social and cultural environment. This book is quick to point out that to say that the social context is important for cognitive development, of course, does not deny the existence of biological processes and constraints within the child that may also govern cognitive growth. The book makes the point well that we have to understand both the internal and external contributions to cognitive development as well as how the two interact. The goal is to understand, as Gauvain put it: 'How are age-related developments and constraints in information processing coordinated with the assistance and support of the social world in ways that inform the child in choosing a particular course of action from the whole range of actions possible in a situation' (pp. 29–30).

The point is made here that cognitive development, and what it is that is learned from everyday teaching interactions between mother and child, are somewhat dependent on the attachment relationship between parent and child. This is a powerful example of the intercoordination of socio-emotional and cognitive development. In order for the interaction between baby and child to lead optimally to learning and positive developmental outcomes, the healthy emotional connection between the dyad appears to be needed as well, with the baby's cues being read and each others' signals being effectively transmitted and respected.

It is in Chapter 2 that the important and related concepts of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), Intersubjectivity, Scaffolding, Guided Participation, and Legitimate Peripheral Participation are briefly introduced. I would have liked to have seen more analysis and comparison between these constructs (where they overlap, where they are different), but overall the discussion here is effective. This issue comes up again, however, in Chapter 3 when new terms such as 'cognitive socialization' and the 'social community' of cognitive development are introduced, yet it is not clear how these new terms add to and contrast with the existing ones.

Given that it is mentioned here in Chapter 2, and several times throughout the book, that language plays a key role as the mediator for internalization from the social world to the individual world, I found it unfortunate and quite surprising that the literature that looks at this issue directly, namely research on children's private speech, was not

included in the discussion. Mention of the private speech literature is again sorely missed later in Chapter 6 during the discussion of the importance of talk and verbal mediation during joint and individual problem-solving.

What Chapter 3 does well is discuss larger, sociocultural backdrops and how they influence much of the content and type of social interactions in which the child participates. Activity theory is also productively introduced here as a way of thinking about and connecting both the social and the individual as units of analysis when studying human action in context. Chapter 3 also did a good job in showing (a) how cognitive processes are dependent upon the surrounding context (as illustrated by Brasillian children's math in the streets), (b) how historical changes in the cultural tools we use change the very nature of human cognitive activity (as illustrated by the abacus and by the move away from Roman numerals), and (c) how contemporary cognitive processing varies according to one's native language (as illustrated by cross-linguistic work on spatial cognition).

Although, overall, I thought the book was well-written and a delight to read, I did find the organization and redundancy of the first three preliminary chapters to be just a bit frustrating. Many of the same ideas are re-introduced in each chapter with only a slight twist or a bit more detail each time, and the reader has to wait until Chapter 4 and beyond to get into the meat of the discussion. Also, I would have liked to have seen a few more citations given in a number of places, especially in Chapters 2 and 3.

Chapter 4 is devoted to the research on joint attention, social referencing, intersubjectivity and the early socialization of attention. Here, Gauvain does a masterful job of reviewing these disparate literatures and showing how such fundamental processes as attention and goal-directed action are socialized early on, and the impact that early social interaction patterns between parent and child have on the emergence of these and subsequent cognitive skills. I thought it would have been good to include here the recent work conducted on non-human primate social cognition and on social cognitive deficits among children with autistic spectrum disorders, but I imagine this was omitted due to space restrictions.

One of the things that Chapter 4 (and the subsequent chapters of the book) did particularly well for me was to help put the 'big picture' together in terms of thinking about cognitive development in context with multiple layers and levels of analyses simultaneously: namely, individual temperamental differences within children, plus maturation-related cognitive processing constraints and affordances for the child, plus the attachment relation between parent and child at the dyad level, plus the history of the child's previous interactions in similar contexts, plus normative patterns of parent-child cognitive socialization within a particular culture and how this influences the above processes, plus variance among parents within a given cultural group in the socialization of cognition and the correlates that these may have, plus cross-cultural similarities and differences in socialization which come into play at each of the earlier levels, and finally change over historical time in all of the above.

Chapter 5 discusses memory and its social construction and reconstruction. The case is made for the centrality of memory in cognitive processing and the extant research demonstrating how social partners and cultural scripts and conventions influence the encoding, depth of processing, and the retrieval of both episodic and declarative memory is reviewed. Relations between children's memory and the formation of the self were also discussed, although I was hoping for a bit more elaboration on this interesting connection. As is true for the entire book, many effective and diverse exam-

ples are given here of discourse between parents and children and the many ways parents structure and scaffold memory development with children.

The next chapter focuses on goal-directed problem-solving, joint activity, and again does a good job of reviewing the literature on how adults, peers, and cultural artifacts, such as the computer, scaffold and influence the problem-solving process for children in many ways. Both peer collaboration and adult-child joint problem-solving are discussed in detail and clear conclusions are drawn in terms of under which conditions collaboration, interaction, and verbal interchange with others are helpful in stimulating children's cognitive development.

Chapter 7 distinguishes between problem-solving and planning on the grounds that planning is necessarily future oriented and goes on to discuss the research on the development of planning from infancy to adolescence. Differences between children's planning when alone, vs. with peers, vs. with adults, and the extent to which patterns vary by the age of child are discussed and again, the reader is impressed by the degree to which adults, early on, focus children on future events and states and assist them with planning. This chapter goes into noticeably more detail than the rest in its discussion of the research, which is likely due to the fact that planning is a topic to which the author has herself contributed much through her own research.

The book concludes with a short chapter that, among other things (a) restates the central goals of the book and shows that they were achieved (i.e., showing how social interaction is a mechanism for cognitive development), (b) points out the need for more research on the social context of cognitive development, including the study of transfer across contexts, the specific mechanisms involved in the social mediation of learning, and work on community level and cultural influences on cognitive development, (c) notes the current public interest and desire in understanding the diverse sociocultural context of children's development, and (d) makes clear how much a sociocultural approach to understanding cognitive development has to offer.

In conclusion, I found *The social context of cognitive development* to be simply a joy to read. For one like myself, who already subscribes to a Vygotskian sociocultural perspective, it is a useful resource that pulls together much of the evidence for socially mediated cognition and an important reminder of how participation in the social world is what organizes, makes possible, and gives meaning to one's experiences. For those wishing to expand their understanding of the social and cultural context of cognitive development, this volume would be an excellent place to start. It is also an important and timely work in the field. Finally, not only is this book an essential read for all developmental scholars, with or without a sociocultural perspective, but it would also serve as a good textbook. It would be an excellent supplemental text for a cognitive development course at any level, and a great primary text for a more specialized course in the social context of development. I have already 'strongly encouraged' my students to read it and I will continue to do so.

References

- Gauvain, M. (2001). *The social context of cognitive development*. New York: Guilford.
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