

Abstract

The present study examines the relationship between the practices of schooling and classroom teaching and learning on the one hand and learners' cognitive development and functioning on the other. The study uses innovative system of ideas in developmental and educational psychology, originally formulated by Lev Vygotsky to investigate the interrelations between learning, instruction and development.

Carried out in a rapidly changing socio-cultural context of Venda, South Africa, the study examines the realities of schooling practices that exhibit both continuity with the past practices of society and some profound transformations that together lead to a multi-dimensional and a complex picture of cognitive development in learners. By examining the relations between the cultural practices of schooling and its socio-historical context on the one hand, and the consequent psychological process on the other hand, the present study offers an opportunity for exploring processes that may be more opaque in relatively stable socio-cultural contexts of schooling.

The observations on the history of schooling in South Africa in general, and in Venda in particular, support the theoretical formulation that particular practices of schooling, themselves originating from and continuing larger social-historical processes, represent contexts in which learning and development take place and are shaped. The empirical investigations revealed that even the socio-cultural contexts of schooling characterized by strong ruptures, such as in South Africa, nonetheless carry on some vestiges of their past practices that affect today's learning and development of learners.

The study concludes, extending the prevailing theoretical formulation, that the social and cultural setting of schooling in Venda is multifaceted; manifesting

instances of indigenous practices, the traditions of past missionary practices, as well as the traditions of the past, apartheid schooling. By taking into account these socio-cultural influences, the study provides crucial insights into the regularities of cognitive and conceptual developmental processes taking place in conditions of rapid social change in the course of the schooling of today's children in Venda. The study furthers our understanding about the regularities of the socio-cultural and historical processes of schooling in conditions of rapid social change, and concludes by proposing ways of improving contemporary educational practice in South Africa, grounded in sound psychological knowledge and research about school transformation and classroom teaching and learning improvement.

Key Words: Venda primary education, Missionary schooling, Apartheid schooling, Socio-cultural theory, Activity theory, Vygotsky, Piaget, Zone of Proximal Development, Outcomes Based Education, Revised National Curriculum Statement.
