

Beliefs about language learning: metaphor and mediation

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Key constructs

- Beliefs : what are they and why are they important?
- Mediation : sociocultural theory and the role of schooling/pedagogy in relation to the above
- Metaphor : how might it mediate beliefs and belief /development/change

Beliefs: what are they and why are they important?

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'It is not the case that beliefs are a subset of knowledge, but rather that knowledge is a subset of beliefs, those beliefs for which there is the greatest consensus, the greatest demonstrability, and the least personal identification'
(Woods, 2003; 205)



Beliefs literature

- Privately held (as opposed to Knowledge)
- Mental processes that determine thinking and behaviour but are related to action in complex ways
- Not all consciously held (occurent and non-occurent)
- Situated
- Changeable (though 'core' beliefs are more difficult to change)
- Form a system or scheme
- Have an **emotional dimension**



Definition

- *‘Any propositions (conscious or unconscious) that guide behaviour and thinking. These are created through a process of enculturation and social construction and must be inferred from what a person says or does’*

Beliefs and emotion

- beliefs are known to generate feelings or emotion, but feelings or emotions also generate beliefs

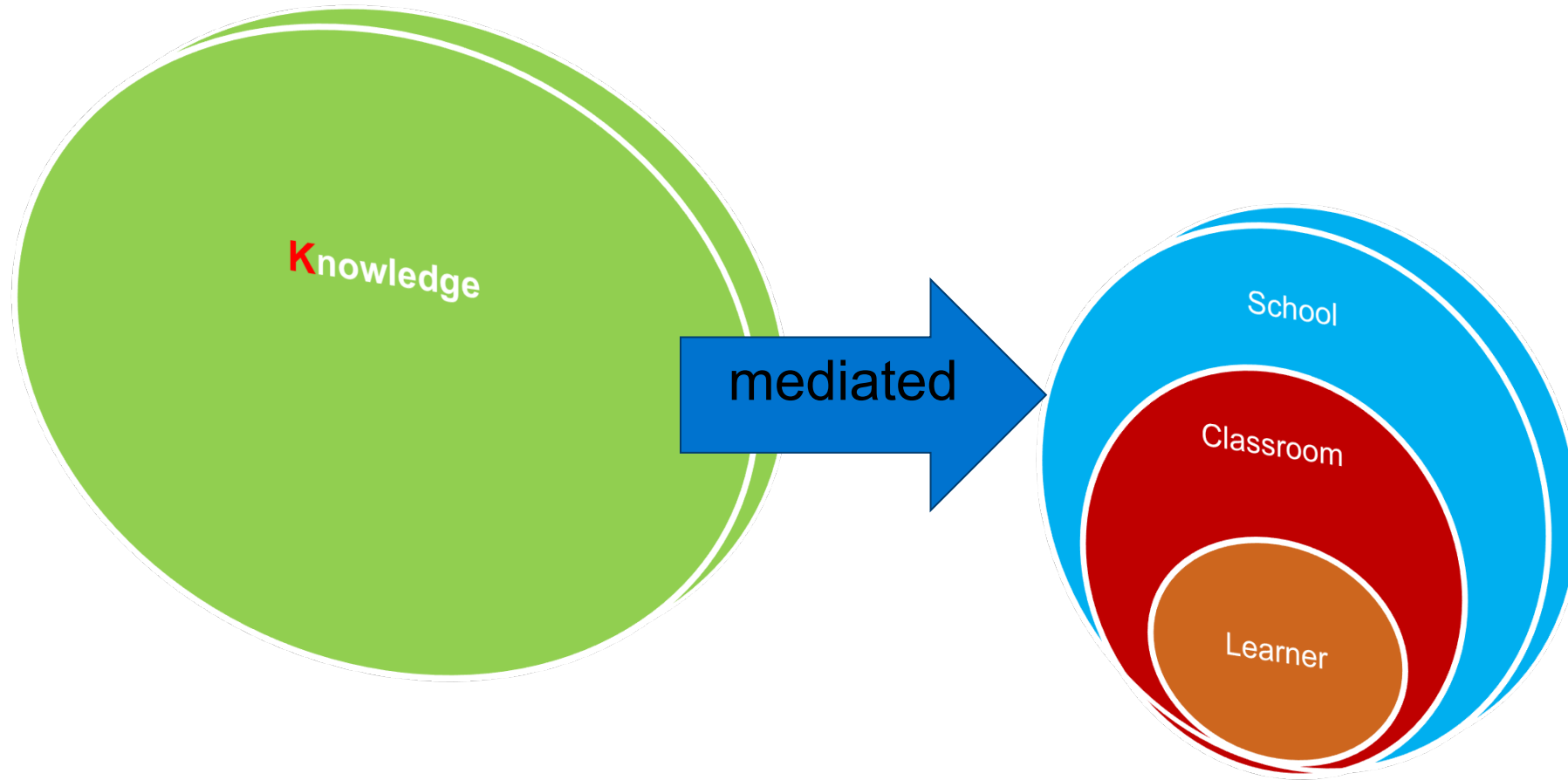
Links between cognition and affect

- Thoughts have an emotional dimension. This is not new:
- “affect and intellect are not two mutually exclusive poles, but two mental functions, closely connected with each other and inseparable that appear at each age as an undifferentiated unity” (Vygotsky, 1998: 239).
- ‘all objects are simultaneously cognitive and affective’ (Piaget, 1954, p.32).
- Renewed attention as to the relationship between the two in the cognitive sciences.



Knowledge, belief and schooling

Knowledge mediation



Mediating meaning in school contexts

- “The school as an institution, not unlike science as an institution, values the Known. But pedagogy is successful only to the extent that it can acknowledge and build upon what is personally felt and believed.” (Olson, 2003 77)




Knowledge

- *To be competent and motivated to 'know how you know' puts one in charge of one's own knowing – of **deciding what to believe and why**, of determining **how new information should be interpreted and reconciled with one's current beliefs**, and of updating and revising those beliefs as one deems warranted. In the absence of this control, beliefs are vulnerable to the **twin hazards of rigidity and fluidity**. They come into contact with external evidence only in an unstable manner, often with radical accommodations of one to the other. (Kuhn, 2000: 320-321)*

Jerome Bruner: we are all constructing a model of the world to help us construe our experience.

Sociocultural theory and mediation

- Social interaction plays a key role in developing cognition
- Intermental engagement  intramental development
- Appropriation and internalisation

- How can we know what is personally felt and believed?



SLA and the study of learner beliefs:

- Elaine Horwitz and the BALLI (Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory) Used in numerous other studies in beliefs (e.g. Horwitz, 1985, 1987; Mantle-Bromley, 1995; Cotterall, 1995, 1999; Chawan & Oliver, 2000; Diab, 2006). Mainly quantitative approaches
- Metacognitive approaches using verbal accounts, semi-structured interview e.g. Wenden(1986, 1998, 1999, 2001); Victori and Lockhart (1995)



SLA and the study of learner beliefs:

- Ethnographic classroom observation and case study (Barcelos, 2000; Aragão, 2011);
- Phenomenology (White, 1999);
- Metaphor analysis (Ellis, 2001; Block, 1992; Kramsch, 2003; Wan, Low, & Li, 2011; Fisher 2013);
- Diary studies (Nunan, 2000; Miller & Ginsberg, 1995)
- Discourse analysis (Riley, 1994; Kalaja, 1995; 2003);
- Drawings (Kalaja et al, 2008)
- Observation with stimulated recall (Barcelos 2003)
- Learning histories (e.g. Yang & Kim, 2011);
- Learning histories including visual representations (Aragão, 2011);
- Learning journals analysed for content (e.g. Navarro & Thornton, 2011; Peng, 2011; Mercer, 2011, a&b), often in combination with interviews;

The mediating role of metaphor





Metaphor

- Universal across languages
- Hallmark of languages and of culture
- ...and is a part of culture as it gives clues to meanings/access to meanings

Metaphor and cognition

- Aristotle first drew attention to metaphor's ability to express what cannot be named
- Metaphors we live by (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; Lakoff, 2008)
- 'A fundamental scheme by which people conceptualise the world and their own activities' (Gibbs, 2008, p.3).

This suggests that if we can access peoples' metaphors we can access their belief systems because the metaphors might allow for occurrent and non-occurrent thinking to be brought to light.

- Metaphor also has an emotional component

Links to belief

- Non-occurrent
- images not words?
- Emotional dimension

Analysing metaphor

Metaphoric processing : examining metaphors occurring naturally

Processing metaphor : eliciting metaphors

Links to sociocultural theory

- Metaphor making links between thought and word
- Constructing metaphors can be a form of meaning making *intramentally*
- Shared with others through interaction in a learning community, *intermental* engagement –
when someone draws the link between topic and vehicle in others' metaphors, then metaphor can be said to contribute to learning or conceptual development through the construction of shared understanding and subsequent restructuring of a pupil's own understanding.
- So metaphor might operate intermentally prior to its internalisation and intramental use.

Potential difficulties

- Is there direct relationship between use of metaphor, either elicited or as arising in oral and written discourse, and beliefs?
- The metaphors that we use in our discourse can be conceptual and are conventionalised,
- “a single metaphor can contain tautologies, inconsistencies and juxtapositions of contrasting facts.” (Oxford, Tomlinson, Barcelos, Harrington, Lavine, Saleh and Longhini 1998, p.44)



Researching beliefs using metaphor

Teachers' representations (Marchant, 1992; De Guerrero & Villamil, 2000)

Learners' representations (Ellis, 2001; Kramsch, 2003; Liskin-Gasparro, 1998; Oksanen, 2005; Turunen, 2003, Fisher 2013)

Both (Cortazzi & Jin, 1999; Barcelos 2003; Block, 1992; Oxford, Tomlinson, Barcelos, Harrington, Lavine, Saleh, & Longhini, 1998; Wan et al., 2011, 2014; Zapata & Lacorte, 2007)

Some younger learners' metaphors

1. Learning German as difficulty/impossibility
2. Learning German as drudgery
3. Learning German as mystery
4. Learning German as a challenge
5. Learning German as physical suffering
6. Learning German as pleasure



- L1 Teacher: 'Do you think it gets easier eating curry? Remember the first spoonful if you liked it or...?'
- L2 Mia: 'When I started I thought 'this is spicy', and then I got used to it.'
- L3 Teacher: 'So, you got used to it as you've had lots of spicy foods. Do you think you can get used to German?'
- L4 Students: [overlapping talk: 'No' 'nah' 'Yes you probably could.']
- L5 Zach: 'If you lived there for long enough.'
- L6 Lydia: 'No, not necessarily. If you did German for GCSE you're going to be better at it, because if we started in
- L7 Year 7 you do it for like six years or something and you're probably gonna be good at it by the end, because my
- L8 sister speaks German at home and Mum doesn't know what she saying and that's like 'cos she's done GCSE.'
- L9 Teacher: 'So someone said the first time you have curry you don't really like it and you get used to it so...'
- L10 Lydia: 'So, if you don't really like German at the moment, keep practising and stuff and you'll get used to it.'



Post intervention findings

1. Learning German as a surmountable challenge
2. Learning German as unpredictability
3. Learning German as exertion/difficulty

Participant	Change?	Appropriation and internalisation?	Congruent with behaviour?
Harry	A lot of positive change: non-conductive to conducive. Affect changes to positive	Appropriation of language about hard work paying off long term as seen in interview. Internalisation in choice of new metaphor and behaviour.	Congruent: much improved alertness in class and chooses GCSE German
Zach	A lot of positive change. Round one focused on difficulty and danger and non-conductive. Round two some 'surmountable challenge' ideas and affect changes to positive	Much appropriation of classroom language and argues with classmates that some things are worth working at suggesting internalisation	To a degree: does not choose a language GCSE and only slightly better engaged in class



Participant	Change?	Appropriation and internalisation?	Congruent with behaviour?
Lewis	Positive change. German is represented as easier, more varied and more important in round two. Moves from non-conducive to conducive. More positive affect.	Evidence of appropriation: can repeat verbatim what he heard in class about good speaking and how one measures success. Also internalisation: new metaphors created to express e.g. improved self-confidence	No change in classroom behaviour and doesn't choose German for GCSE
Jen	A little positive change in round two. 'Boredom and difficulty' turns to 'ups and downs'. No positive change in affect.	No appropriation but some internalisation (some suggestion that she can eat the 'fish pie' in round two)	To a degree. In class little change – still fairly low alertness and little engagement but chooses German for GCSE

Thanks for your questions and comments

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