Sociocultural Psychology and Caring Pedagogy: Exploring Vygotsky’s “Hidden Curriculum”

Mark B. Tappan

*Education and Human Development*
*Colby College*

In this essay, I analyze the value presuppositions implicit in Lev Vygotsky’s sociocultural perspective on learning and development, and thus explore what might be called Vygotsky’s “hidden curriculum”—the unstated goals and messages of his educational–developmental psychology. I do so by bringing Vygotsky’s work into dialogue with that of Nel Noddings, who articulated an approach to ethics and moral education that highlights the centrality of care and caring in human life. I argue, ultimately, that the value assumptions and presuppositions embedded in Vygotsky’s psychology—in both its original and its contemporary forms—are similar to those that inform Noddings’ conception of care and caring pedagogy, and thus that Vygotsky and Noddings share common moral concerns and commitments, particularly with respect to the characteristics of positive learning experiences.

Over the last decade or so, scholars in education, psychology, and related disciplines have paid increasing attention to the work of Lev Vygotsky (1934/1986, 1978, 1987, 1993), because it highlights, in very helpful ways, the social, cultural, and historical foundations of educational and developmental processes. Vygotsky’s sociocultural (or sociohistorical) psychology focused primary attention on the ways in which “mediational means”—that is, both physical tools and psychological signs—appropriated from the social world necessarily shape human mental functioning. As such, it also assumed that the developmental origins of higher mental functioning must be found in social–communicative interactions, as “intermental” processes—social relations—which are themselves shaped and mediated by semiotic, linguistic, and discursive mechanisms—are internalized to become “intra-mental” processes–functions (see Wertsch, 1985, 1991).

The educational implications and applications of Vygotsky’s sociocultural psychology have been explored in great detail by a number of researchers and practitioners (e.g., Cole, 1996; Davygod, 1995; Forman, Minick, & Stone, 1993; Martin, Nelson, & Tobach, 1995; Moll, 1990; Rogoff, 1990; Rogoff & Wertsch, 1984; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988; Wertsch, 1985, 1991; Wertsch, del Rio, & Alvarez, 1995). Vygotsky’s perspective has been particularly influential in literacy, problem solving, mathematics and science education, second-language learning, and peer collaboration, especially among those working with economically, socially, or linguistically disadvantaged children (see Chang Wells & Wells, 1993; Cobb, Wood, & Yackel, 1993; Gallimore & Tharp, 1990; Moll & Greenberg, 1990; Tudge, 1990). To these researchers and practitioners, Vygotsky offered a compelling account of how collaboration with adults or more capable peers facilitates the development of higher mental functioning, as children appropriate and internalize modes of speaking, acting, and thinking that are first encountered in the context of such collaboration (see Minick, Stone, & Forman, 1993).

Like any psychological or pedagogical perspective, however, Vygotsky’s approach is not value neutral (see Cirillo & Wapner, 1986). Rather, it entails a specific set of moral commitments and ethical assumptions that, both implicitly and explicitly, shape the way it is used, the developmental interpretations it offers, and the educational implications it generates. Although the value presuppositions embedded in Vygotsky’s sociocultural psychology have not, heretofore, been systematically explored, these nevertheless may hold the key, I argue, not only to understanding the popularity of Vygotsky’s work, but also to solving one of the most vexing questions facing the contemporary educational community—namely, what values should our schools teach? (See Fine, 1995.)

My aim in this essay, therefore, is to analyze the implicit value presuppositions associated with the sociocultural per-
spective on learning and development, and thus to explore what might be called Vygotsky's "hidden curriculum"—the unstated goals and messages of his educational–developmental psychology (see Jackson, 1968; Kohlberg, 1981). I do so by bringing Vygotsky's work into dialogue with that of Nel Noddings (1984, 1992, 1994, 1995).

Over the last decade or so, in a series of influential books and essays, Noddings has articulated an approach to ethics and moral education that highlights the centrality of care and caring in human life. For Noddings, to care and to be cared for are fundamental human needs: We need to care for others in order to live a full and fulfilling life, and we need care from others in order to survive. "A caring relation," Noddings (1992) argued, "is, in its most basic form, a connection or encounter between two human beings—a carer and a recipient of care, or cared-for" (p. 15). Not only has Noddings provided an extensive philosophical analysis of the roots of the care perspective, she has also considered the implications of this perspective for the practice of moral education, focusing on four central components of a caring pedagogy: modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation.

My argument is that the value assumptions and presuppositions embedded in Vygotsky's sociocultural psychology—both its original and its contemporary forms—are similar to those that inform Noddings' conception of care and caring pedagogy, and thus that Vygotsky and Noddings share common moral concerns and commitments, particularly with respect to the characteristics of positive learning experiences. I begin with an overview of the educational and developmental implications of Vygotsky's sociocultural psychology, before turning to a summary of Noddings' ideas about care and caring pedagogy. I then bring Vygotsky and Noddings into dialogue, to explore the ways in which Noddings' educational philosophy helps to illuminate and amplify the values implicit in Vygotsky's educational–developmental psychology. I conclude with some thoughts about the contribution that the work of Vygotsky and Noddings, taken together, might make to the theory and practice of moral education in the contemporary world.

**VYGOTSKY'S SOCIOCULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY**

Three claims capture the fundamental assumptions of Vygotsky's sociocultural psychology: (a) Higher mental functions can only be understood when one analyzes and interprets them genetically or developmentally; (b) higher mental functioning is mediated by words, language, and forms of discourse, which function as psychological tools that both facilitate and transform mental action; and (c) forms of higher mental functioning have their origins in social relations, as intermental processes between persons are internalized to become intramental processes within persons (see Wertsch, 1985, pp. 14–16). Because these three assumptions are critical to Vygotsky's perspective, let me briefly explicate each.

For Vygotsky, a reliance on a genetic or developmental method means that it is impossible to come to a full understanding of any aspect of individual mental functioning without first analyzing and exploring its developmental history—focusing, specifically, both on its origins and on the transformations it undergoes from earlier to later forms. In other words, a particular mental act or activity (e.g., solving a problem using inner speech) cannot be viewed in isolation as a unique and discrete mental achievement. Rather, it is the final step in a gradual developmental process—a process that entails qualitative, not quantitative, transformations in both the content and structure of the act or activity in question:

We need to concentrate not on the *product* of development but on the very *process* by which higher forms are established. ... *To study something [developmentally] means to study it in the process of change*. ... To encompass in research the process of a given thing's development in all its phases and changes—from birth to death—fundamentally means to discover its nature, its essence, "for it is only in movement that a body shows what it is." (Vygotsky, 1978, pp. 64–65; italics in original)

Thus, for Vygotsky, a developmental analysis is not one among many possible approaches to understanding and explaining mental functioning—it is the primary approach, forming the foundation for all other theoretical analyses or empirical research.

Vygotsky's second claim, that in order to understand the mind we must understand the tools that mediate and shape its functioning, led him to focus particular attention on the role that psychological tools, or "signs," play in human mental life; ultimately, he considered language the most important of these. When a psychological tool, like language, begins to play a part in a particular mental function (i.e., begins to mediate that function), that function, Vygotsky argued, is fundamentally transformed:

By being included in the process of behavior, the psychological tool alters the entire flow and structure of mental functions. It does this by determining the structure of a new instrumental act, just as a technical tool alters the process of a natural adaptation by determining the form of labor operations. (Vygotsky, 1981b, p. 137)

Psychological tools, however, do not simply facilitate the operation of existing mental tasks; rather, the introduction of new psychological tools transforms and reorganizes a given function. Vygotsky (1934/1986, 1978) argued, moreover, that this transformation is particularly salient in early childhood when, with the advent of egocentric speech (as an intermediate step toward inner speech), language begins to be used as an instrument of thought in its own right, a tool that helps the child plan activities and solve problems. Two sets of facts, he argued, support this general conclusion:
(1) A child’s speech is as important as the role of action in attaining a goal. Children not only speak about what they are doing; their speech and action are part of one and the same complex psychological function, directed toward the solution of the problem at hand.

(2) The more complex the action demanded by the situation and the less direct its solution, the greater the importance played by speech in the operation as a whole. Sometimes speech becomes of such vital importance that if not permitted to use it, young children cannot accomplish the given task. (Vygotsky, 1978, pp. 25–26; italics in original)

In other words, “children solve practical tasks with the help of their speech, as well as their eyes and hands” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 26).

Vygotsky’s third claim, that higher mental functions in the individual have their origins in social processes and social relations, is captured most succinctly in what Wertsch (1985) called the “general genetic law of cultural development” (p. 60):

Any function in the child’s cultural development appears twice, or on two planes. First it appears on the social plane, and then on the psychological plane. First it appears between people as an interspsychological category, and then within the child as an intrapsychological category. This is equally true with regard to voluntary attention, logical memory, the formation of concepts, and the development of volition. We may consider this position as a law in the full sense of the word, but it goes without saying that internalization transforms the process itself and changes its structure and functions. Social relations or relations among people genetically underlie all higher functions and their relationships. (Vygotsky, 1981a, p. 163)

Key to this process is the phenomenon of internalization, in which “an operation that initially represents an external activity is reconstructed and begins to appear internally” (Vygotsky, 1978, pp. 56–57). As such, Vygotsky’s approach provides a developmental perspective on the ways in which such higher mental functions as thinking, reasoning, remembering, and willing are mediated by language and other semiotic mechanisms, and on how such functions necessarily have their origins in the interpersonal relationships that constitute human social life.

These three claims form the core of Vygotsky’s theoretical framework, and thus outline the parameters of his sociocultural psychology (Wertsch, 1985). Within these parameters, Vygotsky articulated unique and (increasingly) influential ideas about the relation between learning and development—ideas that reflect, in particular, his assumptions about the social origins of mental functioning. Rejecting both the view that development precedes learning and the view that learning and development coincide, Vygotsky (1978, 1987) proposed a new approach, one that focuses attention on the relation between learning and development in school-age children. The key to this approach is Vygotsky’s claim that in order to accurately match instructional strategies to a child’s developmental capabilities, we must determine not only her actual developmental level, but also her level of potential development.

The actual developmental level represents what the child knows and can do at the present moment. It is typically assessed based on tasks that the child solves independently: “We give children a battery of tests or a variety of tasks of varying degrees of difficulty, and we judge the extent of their mental development on the basis of how they solve them and at what level of difficulty” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 85). The actual level of development, in other words, captures only those mental functions that are fully formed, fully matured, fully completed—the “end products of development” (p. 86).

As a result, Vygotsky (1987) argued, the actual level of development ultimately provides an inadequate measure of “the state of the child’s development”:

The state of development is never defined only by what has matured. If the gardener decides only to evaluate the matured or harvested fruits of the apple tree, he cannot determine the state of his orchard. Maturing trees must also be taken into consideration. The psychologist [similarly] must not limit his analysis to functions that have matured. He must consider those that are in the process of maturing. (p. 208)

Thus, Vygotsky claimed, we must also determine the upper limit of the child’s ability, what the child knows and can do with help, with assistance and guidance from others who are more competent. These are the so-called maturing functions, and only when they are considered will we have a complete picture of the child’s developmental potential.

The “zone of proximal development,” or (ZPD), proposed Vygotsky (1978), “is the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (p. 86). To illustrate how the ZPD works in real life, Vygotsky (1987) provided the following example:

Assume that we have determined the mental age of two children to be eight years. We do not stop with this, however. Rather, we attempt to determine how each of these children will solve tasks that were meant for older children. We assist each child through demonstration, leading questions, and by introducing the initial elements of the task’s solution. With this help or collaboration from the adult, one of these children solves problems characteristic of a twelve year old, while the other solves problems only at a level typical of a nine year old. This difference between the child’s mental ages, this difference between the child’s actual level of development and the level of performance that he achieves in collaboration...
with the adult, defines the zone of proximal development. In this example, the zone can be expressed by the number "4" for one child and by the number "1" for the other. These children are not at the same level of mental development. The difference between these two children reflected in our measurement of the zone of proximal development is more significant than their similarity as reflected in their actual level of development. Research indicates that the zone of proximal development has more significance for the dynamics of intellectual development and for the success of instruction than does the actual level of development. (p. 209; italics in original)

The ZPD, in other words, captures those functions and abilities that have not yet matured, that are in the process of maturing, that can be accomplished only with assistance. Vygotsky (1978) called these the "buds" or "flowers" of development—to distinguish them from the "fruits" of development that are the functions and abilities that the child can accomplish independently. Consequently, he argued, "the actual developmental level characterizes mental development retrospectively, whereas the zone of proximal development characterizes mental development prospectively" (pp. 86–87).

Vygotsky's (1978) conception of the ZPD thus highlights the critical relation that he believed always exists between intermental functioning (experienced most commonly in educational settings) and intramental functioning (experienced most commonly as individual developmental achievements) in a given sociocultural context:

An essential feature of learning is that it creates the zone of proximal development; that is, learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate [initially] only when the child is interacting with people in his [sic] environment and in cooperation with his peers. Once these processes are internalized, they become part of the child's independent developmental achievement. (p. 90)

In other words, as a result of the collaboration that takes place in the ZPD, externally oriented and socially constituted learning processes between persons become internally oriented and semiotically mediated developmental processes within persons. Thus, as Wertsch (1984) suggested, "the zone of proximal development [represents] an instantiation of Vygotsky's general genetic law of cultural development" (p. 12), and it illustrates how the social world (in the form of more competent adults or peers) guides the child as she develops the array of higher mental processes she will need to become a fully functioning member of her society.

Much more could, and undoubtedly should, be said about the basic elements of Vygotsky's sociocultural psychology (see, e.g., Kozulin, 1990; van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991; Wertsch, 1985). Nevertheless, I hope my brief presentation has been sufficient to provide the foundation for the argument I want to pursue in the remainder of this essay: Namely, that the value presuppositions embedded in Vygotsky's sociocultural psychology reflect the same moral concerns and commitments that inform Nel Nodding's conception of a caring pedagogy. Therefore, let me turn now to a brief consideration of Nodding's work.

NODDINGS' CARING PEDAGOGY

Central to Nodding's conception of care is her claim that caring must be understood as a fundamentally relational activity. Thus, it seems appropriate to begin by considering the characteristic qualities of both the carer (the one caring) and the recipient of care (the cared for). Both must partake of, and contribute to, this relationship in ways that befit their respective roles, argued Nodding (1992); otherwise, the relationship cannot be considered a caring one.

The primary quality of the one caring is an experience of "feeling with" the other that is best characterized, Nodding (1984) said, as "engrossment"—where the one caring genuinely hears, sees, or feels what the cared for is trying to convey. This process of engrossment, however, does not simply involve "putting oneself in another's shoes," or projecting oneself into another's place; rather, it involves receiving the other into oneself; seeing and feeling with or as the other (Nodding, 1984, p. 30). This process, moreover, is not exclusively an emotional one. Although an emotional response to another is certainly a central element of the kind of engrossment or reception that characterizes the one caring, cognitive processes play an equally important role.

The one caring is also characterized by what Nodding (1984) called "motivational displacement," wherein the one caring shifts all of his or her attention to needs of the cared for, to respond in a way that helps the cared for:

My motive energy flows toward the other and perhaps, although not necessarily, toward his ends. I do not relinquish myself; I cannot excuse myself for what I do. But I allow my motive energy to be shared; I put it at the service of the other. (p. 33)

In other words, when the one caring truly receives the cared for, and becomes engrossed in his or her situation, there is more than feeling and thinking involved; there is also a motivational shift that necessarily leads to action.

The attitude or consciousness of the cared for, on the other hand, requires "recognition and spontaneous response," according to Nodding (1984, p. 78). Just as the one caring must receive and become engrossed in the needs, interests, and concerns of the cared for, so must the cared for receive the caring that is offered. The cared for also must acknowledge the receipt of that care—responding, in either word or deed, or both, in a way that shows that he or she recognizes that the one caring has acted on his or her behalf. And it is this act of recognition and response, finally, that the one caring receives as part of ongoing engrossment in the cared for. Thus, the
cycle of caring comes full circle, and the process and the relationship, continue (Noddings, 1992, p. 16).

One final point about the caring relationship before turning to Noddings' model of caring pedagogy: Noddings (1992) assumed that neither the role of the one caring nor the role of cared for is fixed and static; the roles are not, in other words, permanent labels for individual actors. Rather, in her view, caring relationships, particularly in their mature form, are characterized by reciprocity and mutuality: "They are made up of strings of encounters in which the parties exchange places; both members are carers and cared-for as opportunities arise" (p. 17).

How can teachers help their students to learn both to care and to be cared for? As I have indicated, Noddings' (1992) model of moral education from the care perspective consists of four central components. The first of these is modeling, whereby students are shown how to care by teachers, parents, and other adults acting as caregivers. Students do not learn to care simply by being told how to care; rather, they learn to care by example, by being shown how to care, in the context of caring relationships with their caregivers. Examples of modeling care include showing children how to care for pets, helping older brothers or sisters to learn how to feed and care for younger siblings, or encouraging adolescents to accompany parents or teachers on visits to elderly friends or relatives in nursing homes (p. 22).

Noddings cautioned, however, against caregivers giving too much attention to themselves as models, which can distract them from the cared for. Self-reflection, on the part of caregivers, is important in order to assure that what is being modeled is appropriate and effective caring, but as Noddings (1995) argued, this shift of focus from the cared for to the one caring (however well intentioned) "has its dangers and carried too far, it actually moves us away from caring" (p. 140). Modeling nevertheless serves a critical role in the process of educating for care. Students not only observe the practice of caring first hand as it is carried out by competent caregivers, but also are encouraged to begin to act as caregivers themselves.

Dialogue is the second component of moral education from a care perspective. Following Paulo Freire (1970), Noddings (1992) argued that genuine dialogue is not just talk or conversation, and it certainly is not an oral presentation of an argument; rather, it is open-ended and indeterminate, where "neither party knows at the outset what the outcome or decision will be" (p. 23). Dialogue represents a joint quest for understanding, insight, appreciation, or empathy; moreover, it permits the one caring to talk about what he or she is trying to show or model—engrossment in the cared for; a genuine interest, that is, in what the cared-for thinks, feels, and does (Noddings, 1995, pp. 140–141).

As such, dialogue manifests the fundamental phenomenology of the caring relationship—engrossment on the part of the one caring, and reception and response on the part of the cared for:

Dialogue serves a central purpose in moral education. It connects us to each other and helps to maintain caring relations. It also provides us with the knowledge of each other that forms a foundation for response in caring. Caring (acting as carer) requires knowledge and skill as well as characteristic attitudes. We respond most effectively as carers when we understand what the other needs and the history of this need. Dialogue is implied in the criterion of engagement. To receive the other is to attend fully and openly. Continuing dialogue builds up a substantial knowledge of one another that serves to guide our responses. (Noddings, 1992, p. 23)

The third component of moral education from a care perspective is practice. Learning how to care takes practice, hard work, perseverance, just as does acquiring any new set of skills, abilities, and attitudes. Like modeling, the emphasis on practice highlights the importance of the active, engaged, experiential quality of caring and learning how to care. "If we want people to approach moral life prepared to care," Noddings (1992) argued, "we need to provide opportunities for them to gain skills in caregiving and, more important, to develop the characteristic attitudes of caregivers" (pp. 23–24). Such practice in caregiving can occur perhaps most readily in the home, as girls and boys alike "attend to the needs of guests, care for smaller children, perform housekeeping chores, and the like" (Noddings, 1995, p. 143). Because girls in this culture are "expected" to care for people, they get plenty of practice simply because they are girls; boys, on the other hand, must be given special encouragement to practice caregiving in all of its many forms and manifestations.

But practice in caring also can occur in schools. For example, cooperative learning experiences can provide students with the opportunity to engage in genuine, mutual, caring relationships with other students. In addition, many high schools have instituted community service projects as a way of ensuring that students gain practice in caring. While these programs have laudable aims, by and large, they must be structured carefully and monitored closely in order to be fully effective:

Community service must be taken seriously as an opportunity to practice caring. Students must be placed in sites congenial to their interests and capacities. The people from whom they are to learn must model caring effectively, and this means that they must be capable of shifting their attention gently and sensitively from those they are caretaking to those they are teaching. Students should also participate in a regular seminar at which they can engage in dialogue about their practice. (p. 144)

The fourth and final component of moral education from a care perspective is confirmation. Noddings (1992) followed Martin Buber (1965) in defining confirmation as "an act of affirming and encouraging the best in others"—encouraging, in so doing, the development of the cared for's "better self" (p. 25). Thus, if a student commits a harmful or uncaring act,
a caring teacher must nevertheless respond by giving that student the benefit of the doubt, and by attributing to him or her the best possible motive(s) consonant with the reality of the situation:

By starting this way, we draw the cared for’s attention to his or her better self. We confirm the other by showing that we believe the act in question is not a full reflection of the one who committed it. (Noddings, 1995, p. 144)

The process of confirmation, according to Noddings, does not follow a standard formula, procedure, or set of rules. Rather, it entails a genuine response to the other, in the context of a specific set of circumstances. Trust is critical, as is continuity, both of which characterize the kind of ongoing relationship between teachers and students, parents and children, that gives rise to both recognition and response:

Carers have to understand their cared-for’s well enough to know what it is they are trying to accomplish. Attributing the best possible motive consonant with reality requires a knowledge of that reality, and cannot be pulled out of thin air. When carers identify a motive and use it in confirmation, the cared-for should recognize it as his or her own. “That’s what I was trying to do!” It is wonderfully reassuring to realize that another sees the better self that often struggles for recognition beneath our lesser acts and poorer selves. (pp. 144–145)

In sum, Noddings’ approach offers a moral perspective rooted in what she called “pragmatic naturalism” (Noddings, 1995). The relational grounding of the ethic of care focuses on moral actors, on those with whom they act and interact, and on the conditions under which these interactions occur. As such, the ethic of care does not assume or presume a moral foundation outside of actual human interaction:

It does not depend on gods, nor eternal verities, nor an essential human nature, nor postulated underlying structures of human consciousness. Even its relational ontology points to something observable in this world—the fact that I am defined in relation, that none of us could be an individual, or a person, or an entity recognizably human if we were not in relation. (p. 139; italics in original)

In other words, the ethic of care—and its pedagogical implications and applications—provides a way to think about, and act on, the moral dimensions of human relationships qua relationships. In so doing, I argue, it enables us to see clearly the moral dimensions embedded in Vygotsky’s profoundly social and relational psychology.

**SOCIOCULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY AS CARING PEDAGOGY**

In this section, I explore some of the interesting and important connections between sociocultural psychology and caring pedagogy. In so doing, I consider how the four elements of Noddings’ model of moral education from a care perspective—modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation—clarify ideas and assumptions that are central to Vygotsky’s conception of the relation between educational processes and developmental dynamics that exist within the ZPD. I also briefly take up the apparent contradiction between Vygotsky’s focus on cognitive processes and Noddings’ focus on affective–motivational processes, arguing that to represent Vygotsky’s and Noddings’ respective concerns in this way is, in fact, to misunderstand and misrepresent their work.

**Modeling**

Vygotsky (1978) argued that a full understanding of the concept of the ZPD necessitates a reevaluation of the role that imitation plays in learning. The traditional view is that imitation and learning are simply mechanical processes and that only the independent activity of children, not their imitative activity, can be used to determine their level of development. In contrast, Vygotsky claimed that “human learning presupposes a specific social nature and a process by which children grow into the intellectual life of those around them” (p. 88)—a process, that is, in which both imitation and modeling play important roles:

Children can imitate a variety of actions that go beyond the limits of their own capabilities. Using imitation, children are capable of doing much more in collective activity or under the guidance of adults. This fact, which seems to be of little significance in itself, is of fundamental importance in that it demands a radical alteration of the entire doctrine concerning the relations between learning and development. One direct consequence is a change in conclusions that may be drawn from diagnostic tests of development. (p. 88)

Writing from a Vygotskian perspective, Gallimore and Tharp (1990; see also Tharp & Gallimore, 1988) suggested that modeling—“the process of offering behavior for imitation” (p. 178)—is one of six fundamental “means of assistance” by which teachers and parents can help children to achieve higher levels of performance as they move through the ZPD:

Modeling is a powerful means of assisting performance, one that continues its effectiveness into adult years and into the highest reaches of behavioral complexity. In the educational setting, both expert teachers and peer models are highly important sources of assisted performance, for children and adults alike. (p. 179)

Although Gallimore and Tharp acknowledged that children often imitate models that are unintentionally offered, and thus socialization is largely accomplished via children’s imitation of adults’ unreflective acts and actions, they also argued
that when modeling is deliberate it is very effective in promoting both learning and development.

Recall that Noddings argued that modeling provides students with concrete examples of caring by competent caregivers, so they are not told how to care but are shown how to care—shown, that is, how to engage in positive, mutually supportive relationships with others. Modeling plays a critical role in the process of educating for care, as students not only observe the practice of caring firsthand, but are also encouraged to begin to act as caregivers themselves. In emphasizing modeling as a central component of moral education from a care perspective, Noddings thus highlighted the fundamental role that assisted performance plays in fostering and facilitating the development of care.

Although Vygotsky and Noddings differ on the content of what should be modeled and imitated—Vygotsky focusing primarily on cognitive–linguistic actions and activities, Noddings focusing more explicitly on moral, caring actions and activities—I argue that the similarity between these two approaches ultimately lies more in the process by which modeling and imitation are understood, ideally, to occur. In other words, Vygotsky’s psychology manifests caring elements because, from a sociocultural perspective, modeling and imitation are not conceived as mechanical, disembodied processes, but instead, necessarily function in the context of an ongoing, supportive, caring relationship between parent and child, teacher and student, or more competent and less competent peers. In the absence of these positive relational characteristics, modeling and imitation are simply not effective means of assisting performance and promoting development (see Díaz, Neal, & Amaya-Williams, 1990).

**Dialogue**

Vygotsky’s conception of the relation that exists between the more expert teacher and the less expert student in the ZPD is fundamentally dialogical in nature. In fact, one of the ways Vygotsky (1934/1986, 1987) described the ZPD was as the place where the child’s empirically rich, but unsystematic and disorganized spontaneous concepts meet and enter into dialogue with the adult’s abstract and decontextualized, but systematic, logical, and rational scientific concepts. As a result of this meeting/dialogue, the child’s concepts become more systematic and organized, whereas the adult’s concepts become more empirically grounded (see Kozulin, 1986). This ongoing dialogue between learner and teacher, moreover, is critical to Vygotsky’s understanding of the process of internalization, as intermental processes, which occur most often in conversation and dialogue, become intramental processes, which occur most often as inner speech or inner dialogue. “Once a concept is explicated in dialogue, the learner is enabled to reflect on the dialogue, to use its distinctions and connections to reformulate his [sic] own thought” (Bruner, 1987, p. 4).

This raises, however, the problem of interpretation or “intersubjectivity” in the ZPD; specifically, how do adults and children agree on the details and dimensions of the task with which they are faced, and about which they are in dialogue? Wertsch (1984) offered a helpful clarification of this issue, arguing that whereas adult and child typically have different initial understandings of that task (“situation definitions”), it is indeed possible to construct a joint (i.e., dialogical) understanding of it that enables the child to reach his or her level of potential development:

Adult–child collaboration at the potential level of development often involves...a situation definition [that] represents objects and events in a way that will allow communication between the adult and child. In some cases, it corresponds to the child’s actual level of development. That is, the dyad can attain intersubjectivity on the basis of the child’s intrapsychological situation definition. However, this is not always the case. In many instances, the negotiated intersubjective situation definition that defines the potential level of development is often one that requires the child to change his or her understanding of objects and events. This change can involve the child’s shifting to the adult’s situation definition, or it can involve a shift to a viewpoint somewhere between the adult’s and the child’s original intrapsychological situation definitions. (p. 13)

Recall that Noddings (1995) argued that dialogue is “the most fundamental component of the care model” (p. 140); as such, it mirrors the primary characteristics of the caring relation: “a carer must attend to or be engrossed in the cared-for, and the cared-for must receive the carer’s efforts at caring” (p. 140). In other words, the dialogic and intersubjective negotiation of situation definitions that necessarily characterizes parent–child or teacher–student interactions in the ZPD entails precisely the kind of open-ended, coconstructed dialogue that Noddings believed is central to moral education from a care perspective. Consequently, even though Vygotsky assumed that the “teacher” typically takes either a somewhat more active or directive role, or takes on both roles, in his or her dialogue with the “student” than Noddings envisioned, I argue that their underlying assumptions about the nature and quality of this dialogue are essentially the same: Ideally it is a genuine “I–Thou” encounter (see Buber, 1970), marked by a strong interest on the part of both teacher and student in sustaining their connection and in maintaining the caring relation that they share (Noddings, 1992).

Nevertheless, it is also important to acknowledge that such dialogic, caring relationships between teachers and students, or parents and children, do not always proceed smoothly; in fact, they are often marked by significant experiences of conflict, contention, or disagreement. This is a point on which both Vygotsky and Noddings agree—it is also a phenomenon well documented in both the sociocultural literature (see Chang-Well & Wells, 1993; Litowitz, 1993; Tudge, 1990) and the literature on care and caring (see Brown & Gilligan,
1992; Gilligan, 1982; Gilligan, Ward, & Taylor, 1988). Moreover, both Vygotsky and Noddings would agree, I think, that such experiences of conflict and struggle, within the context of ongoing relationships, are crucial to the development of trust, respect, responsiveness, and care.

Practice

Key to Vygotsky’s theoretical perspective, as I have described it, is the assumption that human action is fundamentally mediated action, and thus to understand the development of higher mental functioning we must understand the ways in which children’s action and practical activity in the world are transformed, not only by the use of physical tools, but also by the use of psychological tools, signs, and other semiotic and linguistic mechanisms.

The most significant moment in the course of intellectual development, which gives birth to the purely human forms of practical and abstract intelligence, occurs when speech and practical activity, two previously completely independent lines of development, converge..., as soon as speech and the use of signs are incorporated into any action, the action becomes transformed and organized along entirely new lines. (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 24)

Moreover, Vygotsky’s emphasis on mediated action highlights the role that practice, and practical activity, play in moving from educational experiences to developmental transformations within the ZPD (see Wertsch, 1985, 1991).

As Rogoff (1990) argued, child development results from processes of guided participation, wherein caregivers and children collaborate in ways that enable children to practice the skills, attitudes, and values of mature members of their society (p. 63). “Central to Vygotsky’s theory,” said Rogoff, “is the idea that children’s participation in cultural activities with the guidance of more skilled partners allows children to internalize the tools for thinking and for taking more mature approaches to problem solving that children have practiced in social context” (p. 14). Within the ZPD, therefore, children and their more competent partners both actively engage in, and thus transform, specific cultural practices:

The rapid development of young children into skilled participants in society is accomplished through children’s routine, and often tacit, guided participation in ongoing cultural activities as they observe and participate with others in culturally organized practices..., Children seek, structure, and even demand the assistance of those around them in learning how to solve problems of all kinds. They actively observe social activities, participating as they can. (p. 16)

Recall that, for Noddings (1995), practice is critical to moral education from a care perspective: “to develop the capacity to care,” she argued, “one must engage in caregiving activities” (p. 143). Thus, from one angle, Vygotsky’s emphasis on practical activity and mediated action, rather than mere reflection, echoes Noddings’ emphasis on the importance of the active, engaged, experiential quality of caring and learning how to care. From another angle, the kind of practice that Noddings envisioned as central to moral education from a care perspective can be seen as encouraging the kind of guided participation that Vygotsky understood to be necessary for developmental transformation to occur as children gradually internalize the forms of mediated action required for engaging in cultural practices and activities (like caring) that are the hallmarks of mature members of their culture. In the end, therefore, although Noddings was once again more specific about the content of the kind of practice she advocated than was Vygotsky, I argue that not only are there caring assumptions embedded in Vygotsky’s psychology, but there also may be sociocultural assumptions embedded in Noddings’ pedagogy.

Confirmation

Via his conception of the relation between learning and development, Vygotsky sought to promote a radical shift in our way of thinking about children. We should not, he argued, focus simply on the child’s actual level of development—on the skills, abilities, attitudes, and habits of mind that she can exhibit on her own, without assistance. To do so is to attend essentially to the past, to the end products of development, to see the child retrospectively. What we should do, instead, is to focus on the child’s potential level of development—on the skills, abilities, attitudes, and habits of mind that she is capable of exhibiting, with a little help now, but soon, and forevermore, on her own. “‘Good learning,’” argued Vygotsky (1978), “is that which is in advance of development” (p. 89). To attend, in this way, to the child’s “growing edge” is to do her a much greater service in the end. For in seeing the child as a “bud” or “flower,” and in assisting her to reach the highest level she is capable of attaining, we act on behalf of her future, rather than dwelling on her past:

Pedagogy must be oriented not to the yesterday, but to the tomorrow of the child’s development. Only then can it call to life in the process of education those processes of development which now lie in the zone of proximal development. (Vygotsky, 1993, pp. 251–252)

Recall that, for Noddings (1995), confirmation entails encouraging the development of the cared for’s “better self”; “To confirm others is to bring out the best in them” (p. 144). This kind of confirmation, in other words, not only fosters and

1 Although Noddings did not quote Vygotsky in any of her work on care and caring pedagogy, she did refer to Vygotsky’s work in several of her publications on mathematical problem solving (see Noddings, 1985, 1988).
facilitates the child’s development, but it also solidifies the kind of trusting, mutually supportive relationship between teacher and student that is of primary importance for both Vygotsky and Noddings. Consequently, it is here, in its unwavering commitment to confirming the child’s developmental potential, and to seeking ways to encourage the child to reach that potential, that Vygotsky’s sociocultural psychology perhaps most clearly manifests its commitment to care.

In highlighting Vygotsky’s and Noddings’ common commitment to confirmation, however, I do not mean to imply that either would attribute a child’s failure to act morally solely to a lack in her development. Such a failure may well be due to a lack of motivation, to the absence of relevant values, or to a host of other nondevelopmental reasons. Nevertheless, both would agree, I think, that when a child’s moral transgression is due to lack of understanding, communicating to her the best attribution for her action, and thereby confirming her better self, provides an important scaffold that will likely promote further development.

Finally, I consider the apparent contradiction between Vygotsky’s primary focus on cognitive processes, and on promoting cognitive development, and Noddings’ primary focus on affective–motivational processes, and on promoting the development of close, responsive, caring relationships. While these differences might, for some, attenuate the connections between Vygotsky’s and Noddings’ respective projects for which I have argued, in the final analysis I believe these differences disappear.

Noddings (1984), in describing the one caring, clearly argued that care and caring are not simply affective processes, but are necessarily enhanced by subsequent thinking, reasoning, and problem solving:

I have claimed that the one-caring is engrossed in the other. But this engrossment is not completely characterized as emotional feeling. There is a characteristic and appropriate mode of consciousness in caring. When we are in problem-solving situations, the characteristic and appropriate mode of consciousness is, usually, one of rational objectivity. It is a thinking mode that moves the self toward the object. It swarms over the object, assimilates it. Hence, in caring, my rational powers are not diminished but they are enrolled in the service of my engrossment in the other. (pp. 33, 36; italics in original)

So, too, Vygotsky (1934/1986) argued that affective and motivational processes ultimately lead to cognitive processes; suggesting, therefore, that the final step in the analysis of the inner planes of verbal thought leads beyond thinking to feeling and willing:

Thought is not the superior authority in this process. Thought is not begotten by thought; it is engendered by motivation, i.e., by our desires and needs, our interests and emotions. Behind every thought there is an affective–volitional tendency, which holds the answer to the last “why” in the analysis of thinking. A true and full understanding of another’s thought is possible only when we understand its affective–volitional basis. (p. 252)

Consequently, I argue that Vygotsky, like Noddings, believed that cognitive processes are generated by emotional–motivational processes. More important, however, both Vygotsky and Noddings ultimately questioned the necessity of making a clear separation between cognitive and affective–motivational processes, thereby highlighting not only the fundamental link that necessarily exists between thinking and feeling, mind and body, but also the enormous value, with respect to cognitive, intellectual, social, emotional, and moral development, that comes from experiencing close relationships and meaningful dialogue with others.

CONCLUSION

In this essay I attempted to bring the work of Lev Vygotsky and Nel Noddings into dialogue, to explore what I have called Vygotsky’s “hidden curriculum”; that is, the value presuppositions and moral commitments embedded in Vygotsky’s educational–developmental psychology. I presented a brief summary of Vygotsky’s and Noddings’ respective theoretical perspectives, and I tracked the parallels between Noddings’ four components of moral education from a care perspective—modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation—and Vygotsky’s conception of the relation between learning and development. I conclude, therefore, that Vygotsky’s sociocultural psychology represents a form of caring pedagogy, and that the values of care, concern, and responsiveness in relationships that Noddings identified as central to a care perspective are also part and parcel of Vygotsky’s approach.

Let me take this argument one step further: Any time that children enter the ZPD, and are engaged in a process of guided participation, whereby teachers, parents, or more competent peers assist them in developing a new capacity among the outcomes of that process (in addition to increased ability vis-à-vis that particular capacity) is likely to be an increase in their ability to care. There is also likely to be an increase in their propensity to engage in caring activities; as caring activities that necessarily begin as joint intermental processes between persons are appropriated, mastered, and internalized to become intramental processes that the child can accomplish alone. In making this claim let me stress, once again, that I do not assume that the content of these experiences of guided participation necessarily focuses on care, caring, or caregiving, per se. Rather, following John Dewey’s (1938/1963) dictum that “we learn what we do,” and Marshall Mc Luhan’s

\[\text{In fact, as Noddings’ (1985, 1988, 1992) own work suggested, the content of these learning experiences may well be mathematics, history, geography, or science.}\]
pronouncement that "the medium is the message." I argue that the critical outcome of any learning experience is not so much its purported content; rather, it is the process or method through which that learning occurs. Thus, one of the outcomes of a Vygotskian-informed learning experience is likely to be care, because, simply put, Vygotsky's sociocultural psychology advocates, at its core, a caring, relational, dialogical process as the key to good learning.

This suggests, therefore, that there is a largely unrecognized moral dimension to the efforts that have been made in recent years to apply Vygotskian principles to educational practice (see Forman, Minick, & Stone, 1993; Moll, 1990). That is to say, any serious attempt to operationalize Vygotsky's conception of the ZPD, to encourage teachers to guide and assist students in performing tasks or solving problems for which they initially need help, but which they can gradually accomplish on their own, represents a form of moral education, specifically, a form of caring pedagogy. While it certainly may not be explicit, such an educational experience nevertheless provides a critical starting point for teachers interested in encouraging the development of care, compassion, and responsiveness in their students. Such a conception of the moral dimensions of Vygotskian-informed educational practice, moreover, may provide an answer to those who argue that moral education must not be a simple add on, but rather must pervade both the curriculum and the entire teaching-learning process (see Lickona, 1991).

These theoretical claims and speculations clearly deserve further exploration, both empirically and in practice. Such an exploration should entail devising ways to assess the formation and transformation of care and caring, in order to evaluate the development of care in children and adolescents participating in various socioculturally informed educational programs. This exploration should also use sociocultural principles and insights to design and implement specific educational interventions and programs to foster the development of care. Ultimately, however, the most productive approach—vis-à-vis theory, research, and practice—must be to work toward an integration of Vygotsky's and Noddings' respective insights.

When they are taken together, these two perspectives give rise to an interesting reconceptualization of the relation between moral education and moral development. Moral education, in this view, entails a process of guided participation whereby children are helped by parents, teachers, and more competent peers—via modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation—to become more caring, to act in ways that are more responsive to others' needs. These attainments initially occur within the ZPD, as new forms of caring and responsiveness are introduced, and the children are guided and assisted in their efforts to relate to others in these new ways. This is the essence of moral education (or moral learning), and it sets the stage for moral development.

Moral development occurs when the child begins to internalize these new forms of mediated action—these new forms of caring—as intermental processes (experiences of guided participation that occur in the ZPD) are transformed into intramental processes (aspects of the child's moral understanding, moral sensibility, and moral volition or action). Key to this developmental process, of course, is the fact that caring, like all forms of higher mental functioning, is mediated by words, language, and forms of discourse. Internalization occurs, therefore, as semiotically and linguistically mediated caring actions and relationships between persons become caring actions that the child can perform on his or her own (see Tappan, 1992, 1997).

Consequently, perhaps we can better understand, and implement, Noddings' (1992) conception of how schools can promote the development of care by assisting and guiding children as they engage in a wide range of caring activities ranging from caring for self, to caring for others, to caring for the natural world, to caring for ideals. All these activities require that children receive initial guidance and support from teachers, parents, other adults, and more competent peers. The activities all also require that children enter and traverse a ZPD wherein educational and developmental processes enable them to gradually internalize a repertoire of caring activities that begin, necessarily, as joint ventures with others.

In the end, therefore, Vygotsky's and Noddings' perspectives obviously have much in common, and joining them in dialogue clearly enriches and extends both bodies of work. I hope my efforts here will encourage others to examine and to explore the connections between sociocultural psychology and caring pedagogy.

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