AARE 2016 Symposium

Understanding online discussion: socio-cultural and discoursal perspectives

The dynamic life of ideas: Collaborative knowledge building in asynchronous online forums

Pauline Jones
University of Wollongong

FOLD
Fostering OnLine Discussion

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG AUSTRALIA

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY
MELBOURNE AUSTRALIA

CQUniversity
AUSTRALIA

Overview of the presentation

Theoretical perspectives

The context and data

The communication strategies in use

Profiling knowledge building

Some conclusions

Australian Government
Department of Education and Training

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG AUSTRALIA

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY
MELBOURNE AUSTRALIA

CQUniversity
AUSTRALIA

FOLD
Fostering OnLine Discussion

Asynchronous forum discussions:

Talk is the essential condition of knowing (Halliday, 1993)

Spoken and written language contribute to "ideational and interpersonal realities that we create through language"
 (Halliday, 1978, p 98)

'Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the -social level, and later, on the individual level; first *between* people (*interpsychological*), and then *inside* the child (*intrapsychological*) … All higher functions originate as actual relations between human individuals'
(Vygotsky 1978 p57)

'Language *[talk]* is the essential condition of knowing, the process by which experience **becomes** knowledge'
(Halliday, 1993 p 94)

'… talking is a way of doing – of acting on others (and through them, on our shared environment) and in the process, constructing society'
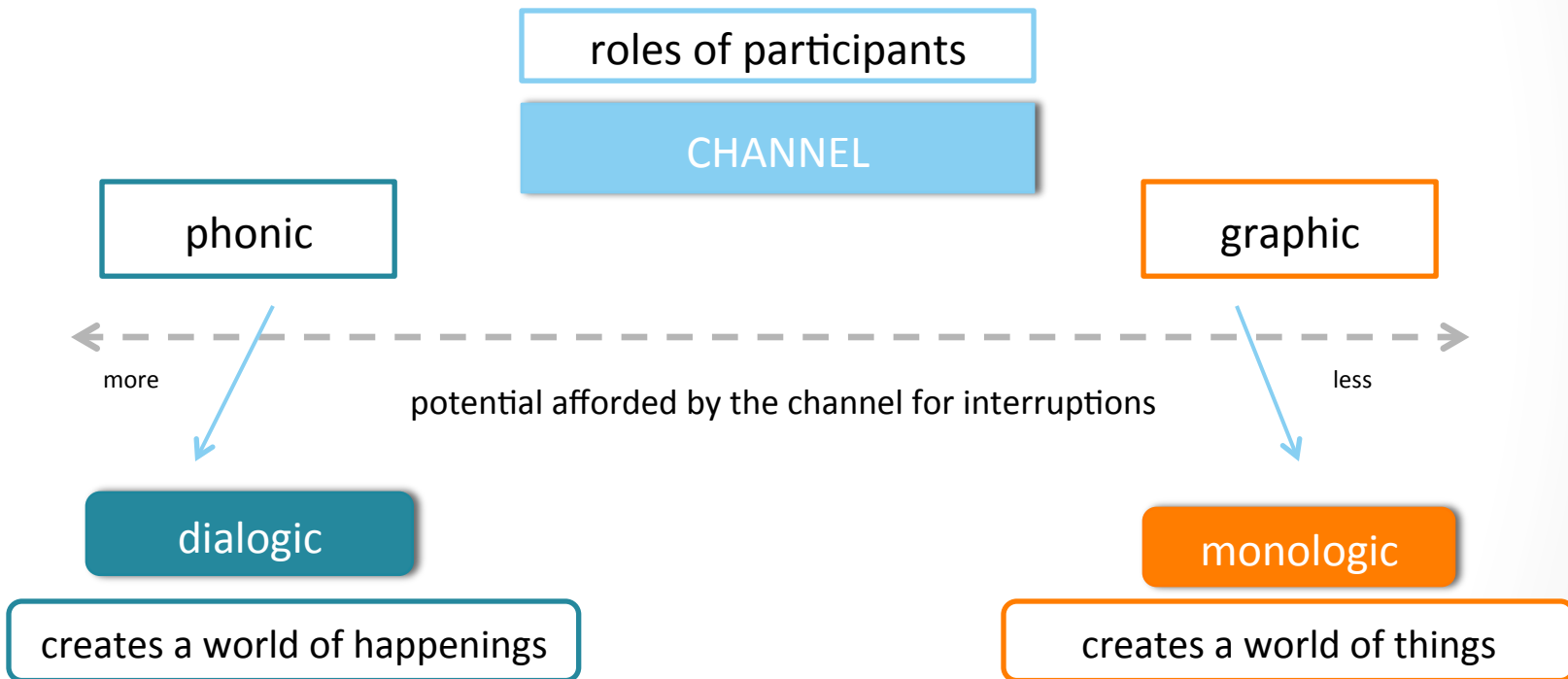(Halliday and Matthiessen, 1999, pp 523-524)

3

Australian Government
Department of Education and Training

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG AUSTRALIA

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY
MELBOURNE AUSTRALIA

CQUniversity AUSTRALIA

FOLD
Fostering OnLine Discussion

Asynchronous forum discussions:

Incongruent communicative events (Hasan, 1989)

roles of participants

CHANNEL

phonic

graphic

more ← - → less

potential afforded by the channel for interruptions

dialogic

monologic

creates a world of happenings

creates a world of things

FOLD
Fostering OnLine Discussion

The learning context

Socio-cultural studies in the Early Years

- F1.1 Introduction
- F1.2 "Children as active agents of their development and learning" Constructivist theories and socio-cultural approaches
- F1.3 "The quality of adult-child interaction: the ZPD; joint attention; intersubjectivity; scaffolding
- F2.1 "The role of language in cognitive and socio-emotional development: private and inner speech"
- F2.2 "Families, community and early childhood settings: effective communication"
- F3 "Understanding children's development: first year of life; infants and toddlers"

Context to Forum 1.2: Discussion around a case study

Children as active agents of their development and learning: constructivist theories and sociocultural approaches

An Early Years University student, Ann, was undertaking her Professional Experience in an Early Childhood Centre. She shared later that her supervising educator, Ms. Brown, would not allow her to scaffold children's reading comprehension during shared reading. The educator demanded of Ann that books be read to the children without comments or leading questions. Her concern was that Ann would impose her own understanding of the story on children which might hinder their free interpretation of the story. Mostly, Ms. Brown was concerned with Ann's questions on "story prediction". She didn't think that asking specific questions such as, "Do you think the Duck will come back?" was appropriate. To support her claim, Ms. Brown referred to the theory of Piaget which she had studied in her undergraduate degree two decades ago. **Whose position would you support? Ann's or Ms. Brown's**

The data

Forum 1.2

5 discussions

31 posts

13 students + lecturer

2 weeks

359 clauses

Australian Government
Department of Education and Training

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG AUSTRALIA

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY
MELBOURNE AUSTRALIA

CQUniversity
AUSTRALIA

FOLD
Fostering OnLine Discussion

The strategies introduced

Delahunty, Jones & Verenikina 2014

Establishing a positive space

- Naming

- Acknowledging: complementing or supporting or agreeing

Building collective understanding

- **Re-stating: to clarify or refine an idea**

- **Extending on ideas: to add more information or a different perspective**

- **Presenting alternatives: to propose a different perspective to discuss**

Discussion 1

SAM:

After reading the case, I would support Ann's position. Each week for my specific reading lessons (not the transition story time or relaxation story time etc) I will focus on one particular book for 2-3 days. I will use 'The Gruffalo' by Julia Donaldson as an example (my favourite children's book). The first day we focus on prediction of the text, sometimes I don't read the text, we just look at the pictures as a class and predict/tell the story. Through this time, I allow children to share their ideas however, I feel it necessary to indirectly scaffold the children (as Ann does in the case) by hinting or questioning to guide the children's learning. This allows children to firstly share their own thoughts during the story however be challenged and think more deeply about the text by the questions I pose.   This year when reading the Gruffalo one child pointed out "he has purple prickles on his back", however that is where the description of the Gruffalo stopped. I asked "what else can we see on the Gruffalo?" The children were thinking about the Gruffalo's appearance, they just needed further guidance to support their description. Prediction of texts is important in my classroom and I guess the approach I use is a social-constructivist. I try to tune into the children's thinking with the provision of hinting and help.

Discussion 1 cont. (i)

GRACE Hi Sam, Thanks for your sharing. I read with the children in a very similar way and agree that *scaffolding* the children's responses is very necessary. The only thing that I would add would be that I usually read the story through the first time without any interruptions, as I believe that it is essential for the students to become fully engaged with the text and the characters and to enter that imaginary world. After that initial reading, however, we discuss it and I scaffold their thoughts and comments and we discuss the vocabulary etc. :-)

LECTURER: Hi Sam and Grace It is really great to see that you both think that it is important to work together with young children to enhance their understanding of the meaning of the story. I was interested in what you Grace suggested - to read the story first and then scaffold. I would like to see what others think about it and maybe see some examples or specific details, eg would you apply this strategy to any book you are reading to children or would this depend on the complexity and the length of the story?

FOLD
Fostering OnLine Discussion

Using the <u>extending</u> strategy

with an example

SAM: After reading the case, I would support Ann's position.

Each week for my specific reading lessons (not the transition story time or relaxation story time etc) I will focus on one particular book for 2-3 days. I will use 'The Gruffalo' by Julia Donaldson as an example (my favourite children's book). The first day we focus on prediction of the text, sometimes I don't read the text, we just look at the pictures as a class and predict/tell the story.

Through this time, I allow children to share their ideas however, I feel it necessary to indirectly scaffold the children (as Ann does in the case) by hir... or questioning to guide the children's learning. This allows children to firstly share their own thoughts during the story however be challenged and think more deeply about the text by the questions I pose.

with generalising and link to 'scaffolding'

This year when reading the Gruffalo one child pointed out "he has purple prickles on his back", however that is where the description of the Gruffalo stopped. I asked "what else can we see on the Gruffalo?" The children were thinking about the Gruffalo's appearance, they just needed further guidance to support their description.

with another example

Prediction of texts is important in my classroom and I guess the approach I use is a social-constructivist. I try to tune into the children's thinking with the provision of hinting and help.

By abstracting to key concept

Using social strategies - naming, acknowledging

GRACE: Hi Sam, Thanks for your sharing.

I read with the children in a very similar way and agree that scaffold the children's responses is very necessary.

The only thing that I would add would be that I usually read the story through the first time without any interruptions, as I believe that it is essential for the students to become fully engaged with the text and the characters and to enter that imaginary world. After that initial reading, however, we discuss it and I scaffold their thoughts and comments and we discuss the vocabulary etc. :-)

Restating, Extending, Generalising, Differing

Lecturer : Hi Sam and Grace: It is really great to see that you both think that it is important to work together with young children to enhance their understanding of the meaning of the story. I was interested in what you Grace suggested - to read the story first and then scaffold

Restating Probing

I would like to see what others think about it and maybe see some examples or specific details, eg would you apply this strategy to any book you are reading to children or would this depend on the complexity and the length of the story?

Discussion 1 cont. (ii)

SAM Hi Grace, I really like your idea about reading the text first without any interruptions.

I think this would be great to do sometimes with my children to mix it up a bit and to provide them with the time to think about the setting, characters and events of the story before sharing

(I will give it a go in the next few weeks!)

Affirming, Extending

MIA Hi Grace, I like the way you read the book through without interruption, before doing that do you get the children's prediction about the story?

Affirming, Restating, Seeking +

GRACE Hi Mia,
We would always spend a lot of time predicting before actually reading the story and would discuss any concepts that I knew would arise. It's always so lovely listening to their predictions at the start, they have such amazing ideas ☺

Clarifying, Appreciating

CHRIS Hi Sam. I agree with your view about supporting children's literacy development through the use of scaffolding techniques.

This is similar to a previous subject I have completed about children's literacy, and the importance of prediction in becoming text decoders.

Affirming, Extending context

Fostering OnLine

Discussion 1 cont. (iii)

ROSE Hello Sam I also agree with your comments and support Anna's position.

I am also a little envious of Grace's suggestion of reading a story though without interruption for the first time - with my groups of three and four year olds this rarely happens :). I do expect interactions from the children and predictions, and comments that they have this story at home or read it at Library storytime last week - this all adds to our experience. We are exploring the story 'Mr Archimede's Bath' and the first time I read it I posed some questions at the beginning eg. 'I wonder what 'overflowed' means?' which I feel helps fill those gaps of knowledge and gives children an opportunity to put their ideas and thoughts into words - there may only be one or two children in the group who can answer that type of question. Seeing a little group dramatising the story with figurines in a bowl of water later on...with lots of 'overflow' on the table... reassures me that they comprehended the story.

GRACE Hi Rose,

Clarifying,

I should clarify that I teach Kinder and Year 1 and so the children that I am working with are little older than yours which makes it easier :-) We actually had to train them to listen to the stories at the beginning of the year and we did it by having small groups of children (5 or 6), and we taught them how to listen and become engaged in the story. We would always spend a lot of time before reading on predicting the text and would even look at a few of the pictures first. But once we begin reading the children are encouraged to listen and become engaged in the story. Next time we read it I encourage thoughts/ observations and probe for questions.

I love the way that you are exploring 'Mr Archimede's Bath', that sounds like lots of fun and very engaging.

Affective response

Australian Government
Department of Education and Training

Supported by the Australian Government Department of Education and Training

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG AUSTRALIA

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY
MELBOURNE AUSTRALIA

CQUniversity AUSTRALIA

Discussion 1 cont. (iv)

CHANDRA I am with Sam

Ms. Brown's position was correct as scaffolding children's reading compression during shared reading could hamper the cognitive development of the students. Piaget's cognitive development theory confirms this point that humans come gradually to acquire knowledge based on their individual level of understanding and knowledge through free interpretation, which should not be hampered by the teachers.

Further references

Boston, K., 2000. *LEADING AND MANAGING THE SCHOOL,* South Wales: New South Wales Department of Education and Training .

Falk, B., 2009. Teaching the way children learn. s.l.:Teachers College, Columbia University.

Lucas, C. J., 1969. *What is philosophy of education?.* s.l.:Macmillan.

Portin, B., Schneider, P., DeArmond, M. & Gundlach, L., 2003. *Making Sense of Leading Schools: A Study of the School,* Washingtton: The Wallace Foundation.

Sigford, J. L., 2005. *The Effective School Leader's Guide to Management,* s.l.: Corwin Press.

CHANDRA I am with Sam,

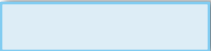But Ms Brown's position was correct too.

Australian Government
Department of Education and Training

*Supported by the Australian Government Department of Education and Training*

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG AUSTRALIA

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY
MELBOURNE AUSTRALIA

CQUniversity AUSTRALIA

FOLD
Fostering OnLine Discussion

Mapping contexts in the dialogue

| Contexts	Processes	Entities
Classroom	*read, look, predict, tell, discuss*	*My favourite children's book, the text, the story, the children, the characters, the pictures*
Specialised / professional	*scaffold, assess, supporting, engaging, guide, explore, clarify*	*Prediction of texts, the complexity and length of stories, some examples or specific details, the importance of prediction, my specific reading lessons, transition reading time, the children's learning, your ideas about reading, those gaps in knowledge, The Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF)*
Theoretical	*Is, are, causes, symbolises, results in, leads to, means*	*a social-constructivist approach, text decoders, the use of scaffolding techniques, any concepts*

FOLD
Fostering OnLine Discussion

Using the strategies in discussion 1
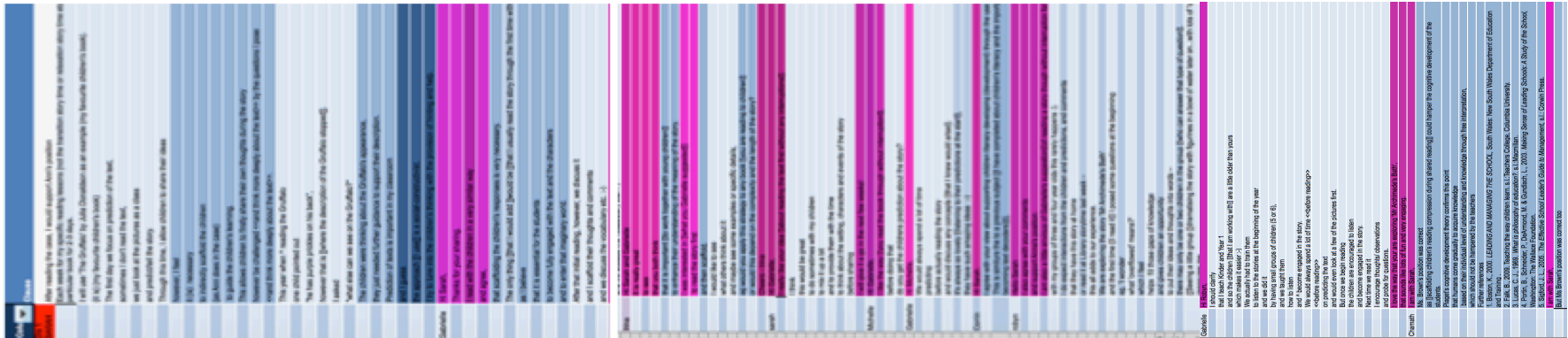
Strategies for establishing a positive space - naming, acknowledging, affirming, aligning
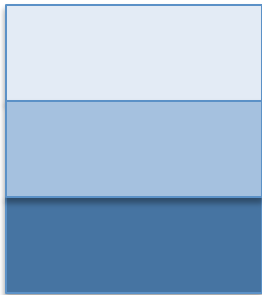
Strategies for building collective understanding - restating, extending, presenting alternatives

knowledge building as 'semantic waves'

unpacking and repacking

SG –
SD+

SG+
SD_

concept

'unpacking'

'repacking'

Collective
understanding

(from Maton, 2014, p 41)

time
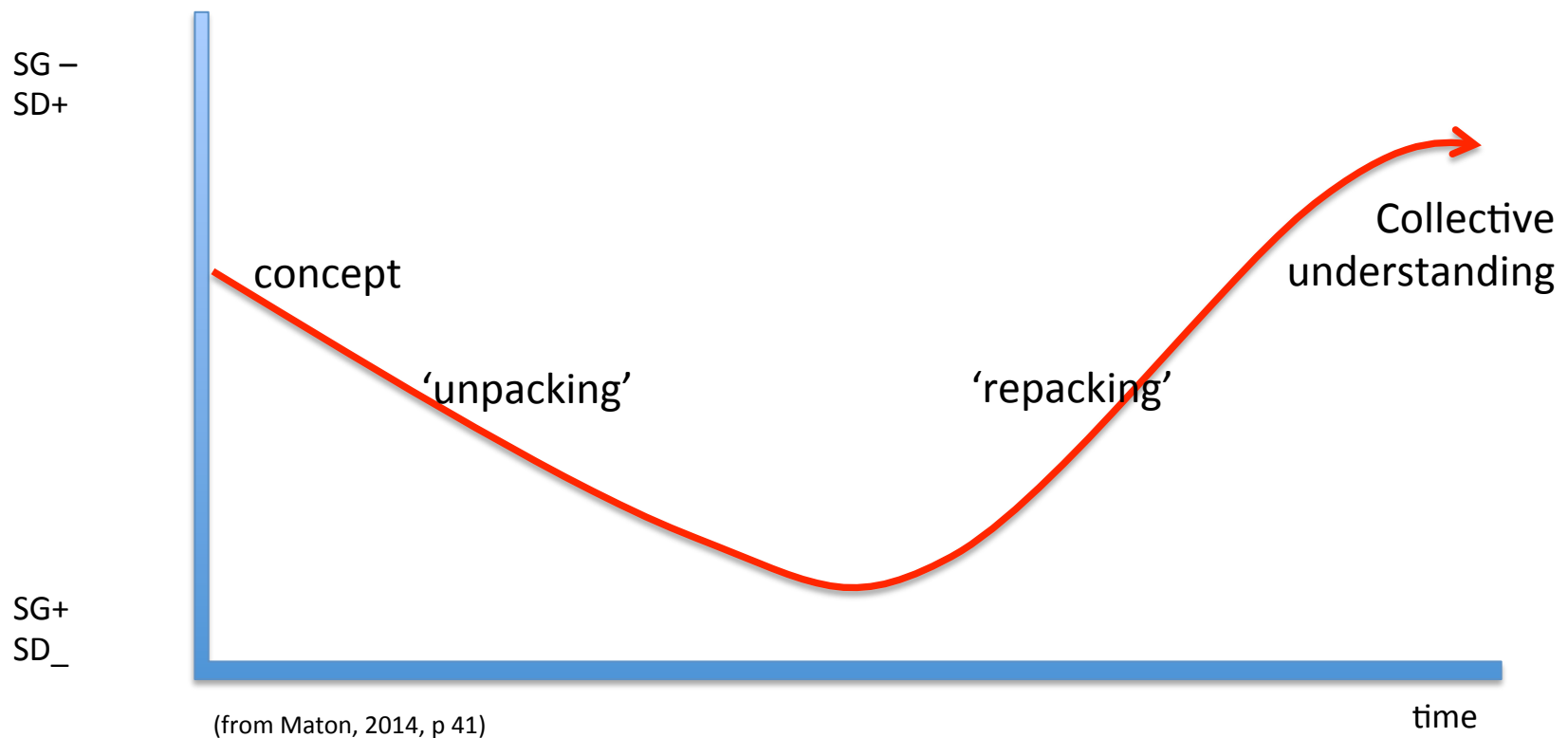
Knowledge building as socio-semantics

'Semantic Gravity refers to the degree to which meaning relates to its context. The stronger the semantic gravity (SG+) the more meaning is dependent on its context; the weaker the semantic gravity (SG-), the less meaning is dependent on its context'.

'Semantic Density refers to the degree of condensation of meaning within practices. The stronger the semantic density (SD+), the more meanings are condensed within practices; the weaker the semantic density (SD-), the fewer meanings are condensed.' (Maton 2016: 15)

NB The strength of semantic density is dependent on the context is which it is used; for example the term scaffolding is located in a complex semantic structure that affords a good many more meanings in sociocultural theory than it does in the building industry.

FQLD

Fostering OnLine Discussion

Profiling the knowledge building in discussion thread 1

SG-SD+

SG+SD-

Strategies for establishing a positive space - naming, acknowledging, affirming, aligning

Strategies for building collective understanding - restating, extending, presenting alternatives

Profiling the knowledge building in discussion threads 2-6

SG- SD+

SG+ SD-

Strategies for establishing a positive space - naming, acknowledging, affirming, aligning

Strategies for building collective understanding - restating, extending, presenting alternatives

Some conclusions

Specialist/technical context dominates these discussions

Interpersonal moves appear as 'a pulse'

Importance of pedagogic design

What constitutes knowledge practices in Educational fields and across pedagogic sites in those fields?

References

Delahunty, J., Jones, P. and Verenikina, I. (2014). "Movers and shapers: teaching in online environments." *Linguistics and Education*. 28(4): 54-78. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.linged.2014.08.004.

Halliday, M. A. K. (1978). *Language as social semiotic: The social interpretation of language and meaning*, London, Arnold.

Halliday, M. A. K. and Hasan, R. (1989). *Language, context, and text: Aspects of language in a social-semiotic perspective*, Victoria, Deakin University.

Halliday, M. A. K. and Matthiessen, C. (2004). *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*, London, Hodder Headline Group.

Halliday, M. A. K. and Matthiessen, C. M. I. M. (1999). *Construing Experience Through Meaning: A Language-based Approach to Cognition*, London, Continuum.

Maton, K. (2014). *Knowledge and Knowers: Towards a realist sociology of education*. London & New York: Routledge.

Maton, K. (2016). Legitimation Code Theory: building knowledge about knowledge-building. In K. Maton, S. Hood, & S. Shay (Eds.), *Knowledge-building: Educational Studies in Legitimation Code Theory* (pp. 1-23). London & New York: Continuum.

Resnick, L. B., Michaels, S., & O'Connor, C. (2010). How (well-structured) talk builds the mind. In R. Sternberg & D. Preiss (Eds.), *From genres to context: new discoveries about learning from education research and their applications* (pp. pp163-194). New York: Springer.

Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*, Cambridge Mass, Harvard University Press.

Language is, historically and individually, **the foundation of being human**. And **talk** – direct exchange between humans who can attribute intentionality and understanding to each other – is **the foundational act of language**. **Without talk**, we cannot achieve full humanity of **social community**. Without talk, **minds can neither grow nor become disciplined**. Without disciplined talk, scientific, mathematical, and humanistic knowledge **becomes static and unused**.'

(Resnick, Michaels & O'Connor 2014, p 163)

FOLD
Fostering OnLine Discussion

The last word from the lecturer

Hi all
Thank you so much for your insightful contribution to Forum 1.2!
It was great to see that you all were in favour of scaffolding children's reading yet cautious about possible downfalls.

Open-ended questioning which stimulates children's imagination, curiosity and motivation, was named as a good strategy allowing educators to tune into children's way of thinking. As discussion highlighted, careful scaffolding can provide children with a great opportunity to construct their understanding through sharing their ideas and views with their peers and the educator.

The EYLF is great in this respect as it encourages us to engage in ongoing communication with children to assist their learning and development. In

Forum 1.3 we will look further into adult-child interaction and discuss what constitutes its quality.

FQLD
Fostering OnLine Discussion