Reflection 2: Best and Worst Experiences

1. Describe a very positive learning experience you had. What was the context, and what factors mediated that experience to make it so successful?

One experience I have had that resulted in a positive learning experience is when I learned how to ride a bike with no training wheels for the first time. One important factor that allowed for me to learn a skill that was in my zone of proximal development was because of the person that was teaching me how to do it. This person was my cousin who was similar to me in age, and because of this there was less stress and anxiety of doing it wrong and not succeeding, which is what I would have probably been thinking if it was an adult parent figure teaching me. This entire experience very closely models Vygotsky’s theory of proximal development, as I went from an area of learning that I could learn on my own to one that required a more knowledgeable other person who facilitates the process of learning a new skill. In this case, the person was my cousin. The type of learning I experienced was mediated by a tool (in this case, a bike with no training wheels), my environment (being taught by a person I was not afraid to fail in front of), and social interactions (modeling the motions of riding a bike from a more knowledgeable person who fostered a carefree environment). I also remember a lot of scaffolding happening during that initial process of learning, as slowly, as I became more comfortable on a bike, my cousin allowed for me to control more and more of the bike, until I eventually was able to do it on my own. As Cohen states in page 111 of *Teaching and Its Predicaments*, “the teacher turns her knowledge and know-how into social resources of instruction: tools that learners can use, tasks that unpack the subroutines, and opportunities to practice in feasible portions.”

1. Now describe a very negative learning experience. What made it negative? What specific factors in the environment affected the outcome, and how did they affect each other?

An unsuccessful and negative learning experience I recall going through recently is when I tried out ice skating for the first time with two friends, one who was a little more experienced, and one who was unexperienced like me. The important aspects that resulted in an overall negative learning experience can be taken from Engstrom’s triangle. Firstly, the learning environment was a public skating rink during a very busy time to the point where a beginner may feel overwhelmed and scared of moving around and potentially falling around so many people. Secondly, the community included peers who were as inexperienced or a little more experienced than me, leading to a lot of struggling among everyone and no way for anyone to help another person out. Thirdly, the rules of the environment created a constricting time limit. Fourthly, the object of the learning experience was too optimistic as our skill levels were not good enough to be able to skate smoothly and without difficulty. This resulted in a disappointing outcome, as a constricting time limit made the lack of proper teaching worse, which was already not good enough to accomplish the object.

References:

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