

Advice as a social tool

The situation

During my late school years, I began facing emotion-related challenges that my parents or teachers couldn't advise me on. At first, I relied on scaffolds like YouTube videos, Reddit posts and Philosophy quotes to self-regulate my emotions. Eventually, I started rehearsing this using an imaginary "wise other", and later, multiple imaginary characters with distinct personalities (similar to IFS) and now, I no longer need to verbalise my problems and advice or have imaginary conversations physically (through text or speech) and can advise myself mentally by fluidly switching between me and the "wise other".

Vygotsky's Theory

Advice itself is the mediating tool here, with the goal being self-regulation from an unproductive or hazardous emotional state. The advice I got from internet acted as scaffolding, allowing me to make less decisions on what to hear and what to do. I rehearsed this (similar to private speech for language) using journaling and imaginary advisers, and finally internalised it, and the advisory council along with it.

Engestrom's Theory

There is a larger system that I was part of. Namely, the self-help community on the internet. The subjects are people who are facing problems in their life and the object is to function in the best way possible in that context. The community consists of advice-givers and advice-receivers. They interact with each other under the rules of societal norms, sub-Reddit rules, some extra rules of the community itself, such as not joking in serious situation, or saying things like "It isn't that bad".

A key contradiction is the conflict in nature of advice coming from different philosophical lenses; such as acting virtuously and responsibly according to Stoicism, or acting out of spite and free will according to the existentialists.

Personal Insight

Vygotsky's theory made the most sense of my experience because the development stages that I went through were very similar to the stages that he describes. Engestrom's theory is less relevant here because I remained only a benefactor of the activity system, and not a contributor.