Socio–cultural Perspectives and Mediated Use of Language in the Community of Faith: Widening Perspectives*

Simon SinWoong Park**

I. Introduction

People in a community of faith (COF) use different language when they develop their faith through the community. Walter Brueggemann has said that “[p]eople of faith must be bilingual” and “[t]hey must have a public language for negotiation at the wall. And they must have a more communal language for processing behind the gate, in the community, out of sight and range of the imperial negotiation.” According to him, people in a COF use different language (story, metaphor, religious terms, and so on) and the language in a COF causes them to take apart from other areas. As a result, language reflects the story and life experiences of a particular community, and it deeply relates with their own faith and even identity.

From this understanding of language and language use, in this article, the author (1) shows the importance of language in a COF, (2) Vygotsky, and his followers’ understanding of language and subsequently (3) investigates literacy argument as a language usage with a socio–cultural perspective, in particular, by those who were influenced by Vygotsky such as Cole.

---

* An earlier version of this paper was presented at the annual meeting of the American Association for Adult and Continuing Education (AAACE) Conference in Las Vegas, NV, November, 9, 2012. The author revised the original paper to this article.

** Graduate Assistant at Pennsylvania State University. Pennsylvania State University Ph. D. Candidate.


2) Ibid.

Scribner, and other literacy scholars. Finally, (4) by examining Vygoskian socio–cultural psychological tradition and literacy argument, this paper indicates several possible challenges to Christian religious education, when the Christian education stakeholders, including parents, children, and Christian education administrators use language in order to enhance faith in a COF.

II. Community of Faith (COF) and Language

According to Seymour, there are five approaches to Christian education: religious instruction, faith community, spiritual development, liberation, and interpretation. Among them, the goal of faith community is “to build the congregation into a community where persons can encounter the faith and learn its life–style” and the subjects of learning are “persons struggling to identify with the Christian community: congregation seeking to be faithful.” Simply put, a COF aims to provide people a place to encounter the faith of others and learn the religious life–style through interaction with others in the community.

On this very point, Vogel states that the goals of education in a COF as that of “calling individuals to listen and share life experiences and stories as they intersect with one’s faith story” and “building community through worship, study, witness, and service.” In that statement, she emphasizes sharing stories and building the community through study (maybe Bible and their creed) and witness of their faith. After all, in a COF, the usage and the role of language is essential to build up the community and to educate the members of the COF where the language in the COF can be a pressing component of Christian education. Not surprisingly, Westerhoff points out that the people in a relevant community share “a common memory or tradition, com-

4) In this paper, the author uses “the community of faith” rather than “church,” because COF is more relational and interactive. Indeed, Westerhoff explained that COF is “small enough to maintain meaningful, purposeful interactions among its members,” since it can more provide people opportunities to share “common” memory, tradition, stories, and language. John H III. Westerhoff, Will Our Children Have Faith? 2nd ed. (New York: Seabury Press, 2000), 52.
6) Ibid.
7) Vogel, Teaching and Learning (1991), 76.
8) Ibid.