BOOK REVIEW: WHAT'S ALL THE COMMOTION OVER COMMIGNITION? A REVIEW OF ANNA SFARD'S THINKING AS COMMUNICATING

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Abstract

If straight edge and compass constructions are the so-called "atoms" of Euclidean geometry, if sequences are the "atoms" of Analysis, then what are the "atoms" (if any) of mathematics education? Arguably mathematics education is a much wider field than Euclidean Geometry or Elementary Analysis, however there are several fundamental things that the field purports to study, chief among which is mathematical thinking or more generally "thinking". The book under review, though it appears in a Cambridge University Press series entitled Learning in Doing: Social, Cognitive, and Computational Perspectives, is in my view situated at the intersection of Consciousness Studies, Linguistics, Philosophy and Mathematics Education. One does not come across books within the mathematics education genre that take on the tasks of operationalizing thinking and defining consciousness. This review began a year ago when an excerpt from the book was included in vol5, nos2&3 [July 2008] of the journal. My personal interest in the contents of the book lay in the promise that the book would tackle existing dichotomies in the current discourses on thinking with the aim of showing they are resolvable or even transcend-able?

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task convinced that many long-standing, seemingly irresolvable quandaries regarding human development originate in ambiguities of the existing discourses on thinking. Standing on the shoulders of Vygotsky and Wittgenstein, the author defines thinking as a form of communication. The disappearance of the time-honoured thinking-communicating dichotomy is epitomised by Sfard's term, commognition, which combines communication with cognition. The commognitive tenet implies that verbal communication with its distinctive property of recursive self-reference may be the p