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The first stages of schooling: contributions from Vygotsky's last works

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ABSTRACT

This contribution will allow the texts to speak: firstly, the pedological texts and secondly recent work on the teaching of children from three to seven years of age. The concept of *perezhivanie*, presented in "The problem of the environment in pedology" (Vygotskij, 1931-1934/2018) as an indivisible unit representing on one side the milieu and on the other the unique way in which it is experienced, will permit us to elucidate the role of free play in school. This same concept will help us to initiate some reflection upon perspective taking in students, both in preschool teaching and in research sites.

Introduction

During the last few years of his life, Vygotsky produced a number of short texts and presentations on the ages of Three, Preschool, and Seven. In "Learning and Development in Preschool" (Vygotskij, (1935) (1995)), he draws our attention to the specificity of learning at this age and to the intermediate place that the age occupies between two different forms of learning: spontaneous learning (in which the child learns according to his or her own program) which is proper to the younger child, and reactive learning proper (in which the child learns following the program of a teacher) proper to the period of school learning from seven years of age onwards.

Elsewhere, Vygotsky (1933/2016/2016) explains that free play is the activity which is most propitious to the development of the child in the first stages of schooling, from three to seven years of age. It is in play that the development of the imagination begins. Imaginary situations free the child from situational constraints and permit him or her to learn to act in accordance with thinking. In play, it is no longer the object or the situation which generates meanings, but meanings which permit the child to transform the real. The child in this way surpasses what she or he would be capable of doing in a real situation; the child can use spontaneously her or his capacity for separating meaning from an object and is emancipated from the functional limits of a situation. The child takes risks, surpasses what she or he could do in a formal, imposed situation. Play in this way creates the zone of proximal development, preparatory to abstract thinking and favorable to changes in temporal relations and the child's reality.

In the same text, the necessity of making available to children ideal forms of development from the very outset will be the occasion to interrogate several modalities of teaching which have been put in place today during the first stages of schooling. The text "General Laws of Psychological Development" (Vygotskij, (1931)–34/2018) presents the question of the differentiation of psychic functions precisely, from for the preschool age of dominance by perception to the age of dominance of memory. This will permit us to analyze the role of free play from the point of view of distancing that which is perceived in

favor of the capacity to act according to thinking. Finally, starting from the study of these different texts, we suggest several paths for teaching children and learning by children from three to seven years old and we propose axes of research in order to document the particularities of teaching at this age stage.

In recent years in Switzerland, a number of changes have affected the first years of schooling. Out of a concern for better preparing children for primary school, these first years of schooling have become compulsory and have been endowed with teaching objectives inscribed in a program of study shared with the whole of compulsory education. These new requirements, added to special training for all the instructors at primary and preschool levels have given rise to the adoption by young teachers of new forms of work which are not always conducive to teaching in the first years of schooling. As Bouysse et al. (2011) wrote concerning France, the modalities of work in *école maternelle* (maternal schools, i.e. nursery school preschools) have been progressively remade in the image of modes of work proper to primary school. In this way, young teachers are increasing materials (print-outs taken from workbooks or downloaded on the internet) in the activities they are proposing for children to do. Alongside this increasingly favored mode of working, there has been a disappearance of two modalities nonetheless essential to this age: free play and collective learning. On the one hand, play is considered by a large number of teachers as not really a learning situation in which they are able to identify the knowledge which the child is making use of but rather a recreational activity to be relegated, at best, to the end of "work" in school. On the other hand, collective learning is only rarely an occasion for learners to appropriate the rules of learning together in the sense of the disciplinary tools taken up in schooling.

In confronting these changes as well as in confronting the disregard of the peculiarities of learning in children from three to seven years old, we have taken precious insights from the works of Vygotsky. From the point of view of facilitating the transition of the child to being a pupil, the transition from a spontaneous form of learning to a reactive one (Vygotski, 1935/1995), play (as defined by Vygotsky, 1933/2016/2016) seems to provide a particularly important lever facilitating learning which is foundational for successful schooling (Clerc-Georgy & Kappeler, (2017)). The support of the pedological texts (Vygotski, 1931-34/2018-34/2018) offer us a new perspective on the role of play as an activity which is generative of developmental potential in children and have illuminated the writings of Vygotsky specific to this age period. These works have opened up interesting pathways for studying development in the young child.

In "Learning and Development in the Preschool Age," Vygotski (1935/1995) located what is at stake in the first stages of schooling (3 to 7 years): for the child, it consists in going beyond an investment in learning that she or he has chosen, learning which Vygotsky calls spontaneous learning (the child learns according to his or her own plan), to an investment in the same sort in learning which is initiated or imposed by the teacher, learning which he calls reactive (the child learns following the plan of a teacher). In this way, the specifics of this age imply a particular teaching which takes into account the fact that at this age, learning occupies an intermediate position between these two forms of learning. To put it in Vygotsky's words, what is at stake in these first stages is to merge the interests of students (what they do) and the intentions of the teacher (to get them to want to do what the teacher intends them to do): "[if] we say that the child of the first age can in the process of learning and teaching do only what coincides with his interests but the child of school age can do what the teacher wants, then for the child of preschool age the relation is determined in such a way that he does what he wants but that he wants what the guide wants" (Vygotski, 1935/1995, p. 36).

To speak of spontaneous learning does not imply in any case that the motor lies within the child, where the world of adults cannot impinge in order to direct development. On the contrary, the development of the child's communications with adults will promote a wealth of learning opportunities and meanings to construct. The quality and stability of the meanings provided by the child's surroundings will predetermine the development of these generalizations.

From this first text, then, we can infer some guiding principles for teaching-and-learning in the first stages of schooling. First of all, it is difficult to impose teaching-and-learning and a common rhythm upon all learners in a single age group, and the quality of the environment for the child is essential. Then, from this point of view, the teacher should enroll the learners in some way, getting them to invest in the learning covered by the curriculum. Finally, "it is essential to ensure that the child can always find meaning in her or his own development" (Brossard and Sève, 2014, 56).

In other texts (Vygotsky, 1930/2004), 1932/1987/1987, 1933/2016/2016) dealing with the question of the role of play in the development of the child, Vygotsky defines play as an activity that children choose to invest in and in which they assign roles, freely decide to exchange them and elaborate the rules of action. This activity is considered to be a leading activity because it is most conducive to the development of the child at this age stage (Berk et al., 2006; Bodrova & Leong, 2011; Clerc-Georgy, 2020; Pramling Samuelsson & Asplund Carlsson, 2008).

Furthermore, it is through play that the development of imagination begins. Imaginary situations free the child from situational constraints and allow him or her to learn to act by thinking. In play, it is no longer the object or situation that generates meaning, but rather meanings that allow the generation of situations and the transformation of reality. The child then surpasses what the child would do in an actual situation, the child spontaneously makes use of the capacity to separate the meaning of an object from the object itself, and the child thus breaks free of limitations of the functional situation. The child takes risks, surpassing what the child can manage to do in a formal, imposed, situation. Thus, play creates the zone of proximal development, preparing abstract thinking (Van Oers, (2012)) and promoting changes in the relationship to time and to reality (Clerc-Georgy, 2016).

Play is thus the preferred form for the appropriation of tools and ways of thinking that the child observes, imitates, tries out, and transforms, the better to internalize them. In play, setting out from an imitation, the child begins to explore signs in order to grasp their meaning and appropriate tools. This appropriation/internalization is, therefore, potentially generative of development.

From these texts, interwoven with recent works on the subject, we take it that play is the leading activity of the child during this age period. It creates a zone of potential development, in particular because it allows distancing from reality, the possibility of separating the object from its meaning and the emancipation from the limits imposed by the use of situations in everyday reality. However, play nourishes itself from offers of meaning that are afforded by the environment.

From this point of view, it seems essential to think dialectically about play and programs for teaching-and-learning which favor the appropriation by pupils of fundamental tools at stake in the early stages (Clerc-Georgy, A. & al, 2020). This conception allows the teacher, from observations of moments of free play, propose learning activities that meet the interests of students and to observe the reinvestment of these learnings in new moments of play.

The reading of the pedological texts (Vygotski, 1931-34/2018-34/2018) brings new insights that resonate with many recent works on teaching three- to seven-year old children. We chose here to select three thematic entries to question the teaching in this age group as well as the research methods to be implemented in order to better understand the issues of teaching/learning in the first stages of schooling:
1) the relationship between the child and the *milieu*;
2) the need to put the child in contact with the final forms of development; and
3) changes in dominance between psychic functions.

The child-environment relationship: taking into account the child's perspective

In the text "The Problem of the Environment in Pedology," Vygotsky (Vygotskij, 1931-1934/(2018)) explains that the role, the meaning of the environmental factors varies according to the characteristics of the child. The experiences lived by the child are particularly propitious for the study of these factors, because they are refracted through the *perezhivanie* of the child. Thus, pedology does not study the environment as such, but studies it in its relation to the child. The researcher, like the teacher, must

know how to identify the relationship between the child and the environment, how the child becomes aware of an event, a situation, and how the child gives it meaning. *Perezhivanie* can be considered as a prism, an indivisible unit articulating the environment and the way in which it is lived by the child.

From this point of view, it is not so much all the personal characteristics of the child that are important to identify, but those that play a decisive role in the child's relationship to a given situation (the experience does not correspond to the sum of the child's personal characteristics). Among other influences, the influence of the environment on the development of the child is measured by understanding, conscious awareness and ability to make sense of the lived situation. This way of conceiving the relationship between the environment and the child, as a subjective and dynamic phenomenon through the experiences lived by the child, does not go without posing problems as to how this relationship may be studied (Brennan, 2014; Veresov & Fleer, 2016). Under this heading, we have play situations in which the child (re)plays "make believe," or explores the tools available in the environment. Such situations are an ideal site for the observer to gain access to the understanding that the child has of a situation, an event or the use of a tool. In play, the child plays and meta-communicates about the play (Pramling Samuelsson & Asplund Carlsson, 2008), she or he plays a role and guides the play (Fleer, 2016; L. S. Vygotsky, 1925/1971), and takes available meanings away from the environment in order to explore, try out, and negotiate them. In this way, play allows a double subjectivity: the use of tools at the level of comprehension that the child has of them and the consciousness of this use by placing what is being played out at a distance. Make-believe play favors a particular *perezhivanie*. It permits a potential conscious awareness of that which is lived and a creation of a zone of potential development.

Another use of play may be considered, which is initiated and guided by an adult as a means of teaching-and-learning. The experience thus lived, made conscious in the language of the teacher who leads play and in that of the children who recount their experience, may also encourage learning that the child experiences consciously. Dramatization promotes both a particular experience of certain types of knowledge (placing reality at a distance) and, at the same time, a conscious awareness of this experience.

Grasping the child-environment relationship therefore implies identifying the characteristics of a situation captured by the child but also, and this is what we are adding to it, identifying the offers of meaning afforded by the *milieu*, whether this be via the situations, via the tasks the child faces or via the adult's interventions such as the teacher's, who leads and guides the child in carrying out these same tasks. In other words, it is a matter of grasping what the child understands, seizing the meaning the child gives to what is going on in the *milieu*, or, again, adopting the perspective of the child. According to Sommer et al. (2013), the perspective of the child consists, for the adult, of seeking to understand the perceptions, experiences, utterances and actions of the child. The perspective of the child must thus to be distinguished from the experience of the child, from the child's lived experience (*perezhivanie*). This leads the authors to make a distinction between children's perspectives and child perspective:

> Children's perspective(s) represent children's own experiences, perceptions and understandings of their life world. In contrast to the child perspective, the focus here is on the child's phenomenology as a subject in their own world. That is what adults are going to understand through their child perspective approach (463).

This children's perspective corresponds, in this way, to what Vygotsky calls *perezhivanie*, whereas the child perspective corresponds to a comprehensive stance toward the child adopted by the teacher.

Allowing the child contact with the final forms of development

It is also in the text "The Problem of the Environment in Pedology" that Vygotskij (1931-1934/(2018)) notes that the originality of human development is that some final result of development is made available in the *milieu* for the child from the very outset. From the very beginning, this final result has an influence on development, for example, in learning to speak. The development of the child thus

takes place under conditions of interaction with the *milieu* and thanks to the fact that the child is in contact from the very outset with some ideal or final form. This form has an influence on the primordial form, on the very first steps of development. Thus, for Vygotsky, it is essential that this ideal form be available in the child's surroundings. On this note, he contends that if the child develops only among other children, if the child is not in contact with ideal forms of development, but rather in contact via peers with other basic forms, the child's development will be slowed and will not reach the level it could have reached in the opposite case. In this way the *milieu* can be considered as the source of the development of higher properties specific to humans.

Thus, without interaction with society, with people who have developed these abilities, the child will never be able to develop in himself these human properties which have been historically constructed. These human-specific properties first appear as collective forms, in cooperation with others, and they are then internalized and become individual capacities, specific to the child, such as the child's language.

Here again, play is a particularly pertinent mirror in which to observe what the child understands about the ideal forms that are afforded to him or her, as well as the tensions between these forms and the current level of development of the child. In his "History of the Development of the Higher Mental Functions," Vygotsky already noted that "Imitation is the fundamental pathway for the cultural development of the child" (Vygotski, 1928–19312014, p. 265), but also that what externally looks like simple copy is not one at all. It is "an imitation of another type, which does not simply transfer mechanically from one to the other but is linked to some understanding of the situation" (p. 267). For example, "the child who is not able to understand is not capable of imitating the adult writing" (p. 267). Thus, in play, the child "creates," at least partially, the environment in which his scenario unfolds. The possibility of pretending allows the child to emancipate himself or herself from the environment as given and to make visible for the observer what s/he has grasped of the living situations or of the use of the tools that are provided by adults. In addition, in play, the child can test different scenarios and negotiate meanings that she or he constructs in relation to other children.

This makes us aware that the adult displays the ideal forms of development, the use of tools to appropriate. Can the child observe only the visible behaviors or does the adult allow her or him to have access to the thought processes used? This question points to work that suggests how teachers who "speak their minds" may enhance the development of children's thinking (Astington & Baird, 2005). Thus, the language of the teacher and his or her ability to explain a thought in connection with daily actions or with the use of tools being appropriated would allow learners to have access to ideal forms of development to try to imitate. At the same time, the moments of observation as well as conversations with the children led by the teacher during the moments of play inform the teacher about what the children understand with respect to the meanings that are offered to them (Littleton et al., 2005; Mercer & Littleton, 2007; Rasku-Puttonen, Lerkkanen, Poikkeus & Siekkinen, 2012; van der Veen, 2017). The evolution of play therefore also depends on what is offered to the child as a *milieu* to "imitate." This is a movement of double visibility. On the one hand, the teacher displays behaviors to imitate and makes visible the processes of thought to be implemented in a given situation. On the other hand, to grasp what the child understands, the teacher will both observe the students' behaviors and interact with them or play with them in order to understand what children are taking away from the play and the knowledge which is at stake in play.

For all these reasons, we advocate a work organization in class that thinks of play and learning, of activities initiated by the child and activities initiated by the adult, in a dialectical way.

Changes in the dominant of psychic functions: from perception to memory

In the text on "The General Laws of Child Psychological Development," Vygotskij (1931-1934/(2018)) develops the idea that during the development of the child, a reconfiguration of the relationships between different aspects takes place. It is not only the psychic functions that develop, but, above all, it is the balance of power between the functions that is modified. At each age period, it is the system of inter-

functional relationships that is modified and the development of each function depends on the system in which it develops: "The development of the whole determines the development of the parts" (p. 134). The change of consciousness as a whole leads each function to place itself in specific conditions of development. At each age stage functions are differentiated from consciousness. The function that is differentiated at a given age is not simply independent of the others within consciousness but will occupy a central position in the whole system, a functionally dominant position that determines the activity of consciousness as a whole. This detachment of each function signifies a change in the activity of consciousness as a whole. Thus, at each age stage emerges a specific system of inter-functional relationships. Lastly, the dominant function is in a privileged position for its own development.

In the infant, consciousness is totally undifferentiated from the functional point of view. No function is distinguished from the general activity of consciousness. For example, memory operates, but the infant cannot recall at will. Vygotsky compares psychological development with motor development (from movements *en bloc* to finely differentiated movements). In early childhood, as consciousness begins to differentiate, one function, affective perception, occupies a central position with regard to the others. The other functions then work "through" perception. Memory only works when it can participate in the activity of perception, in the form of recognition. The thought of the child is concrete, practical and related to the limits of the perceptive.

At preschool age, the situation becomes more complex. Memory is now differentiated. If in the very young child perception did not have any competition, now, at preschool age, memory is in competition with perception, and all the other functions submit to its ascendancy. Thus, memory must reverse the relations of dominance that it had maintained with regard to perception: "perception must pass to a state of dependence, whereas memory must pass from its state of submission to a dominant position and subdue all the other functions" (1931-1934/(2018), p. 147). The whole system is transformed in such a way that memory must first ally itself with perception and then subject it to its domination. At school age, intellect will have to impose itself. The complexity of the relationships between functions is increasing and new ways of differentiating functions appear. All the functions will differentiate without necessarily going through a dominant position and, each time, the whole system that is transformed.

Make-believe play favors the distancing of perception. The possibility of transforming the real, of adopting roles, and of attributing other meanings to objects and situations than those dictated by perception, facilitates the development of the capacity to act by thought and to emancipate from the first felt impressions. In addition, this type of play encourages metacommunication, that is to say the possibility of talking about what is happening in the play, the child plays the role, creates, adapts and stages the scenario which is in the process of being unfolded. This double subjectivity promotes the awareness of the experience being lived and the deployment of tensions generating a proximal zone of development. For example, a child may express his joy at playing a character who is sad. Play is therefore a lever for restructuring the psyche in preschool age, and, as such, is the leading activity during this age period.

How to study development in the first stages of schooling?

In the text "The Characteristics of the Method in Pedology," Vygotskij (1931-1934/(2018)) defends, from a research point of view, the need to develop a synthetic method of investigation of the child which breaks down the object of study into units which contain "all the basic properties of a whole" (p. 74). Moreover, this method is a clinical one, since it studies the specificities of development by considering the symptoms, the external manifestations observed only as characteristics behind which it is necessary to look for how the development process is unfolding, how this contributes to the appearance of the symptoms. Lastly, Vygotsky's method of research is genetic-comparative in that it compares "the picture of development at different stages of age" (1931-1934/(2018), p. 88) as well as by "studying the different stages of child development by comparing children with different types of development "(pp. 89–90).

How can we study development in the first stages of schooling? Based on the method for research in pedology described by Vygotsky, as well as upon the elements drawn from his last works mentioned above, we propose here some trains of thought on three aspects: lived experience and the adoption of the perspective of the child, the progressive dominance of the memory and, play as the context of study of the development.

Lived experience and the adoption of the child's perspective

For Vygotsky,

> In a lived experience, we are always dealing with an indivisible unity of the personality characteristics and the situational characteristics of that experience. This is why it is useful from a methodological point of view, when we study the development of the child, to carry out an analysis from the point of view of the lived experience of the child. [...] the important thing is to know [what constitutional features] played a decisive role in a child's relationship to a given situation. (Vygotskij, 1931-1934/(2018), p. 116)

Let us add the distinction made by Fleer (2016) concerning the concept of *perezhivanie* considered either as a daily concept or as a theoretical concept. In the first case, it is the experience lived (taken in its phenomenological dimension, as experienced by the child) to which we can relate the idea of a children's perspective presented above. In the second case, it is a question of considering *perezhivanie* as a prism, a process of refraction that is constructed and transformed according to what the child experiences in the situations in which he is immersed. Vygotsky writes as follows:

> Finding the particular prism through which the influence of the environment is the subject of the child, i.e., it should be to the relationship between the child and its environment, the child's emotional experience [*perezhivanie*], in other words how a child becomes aware of, interprets, [and] emotionally relates to a certain event. This is a prism which determines the role and influence of the environment on the development of, say, the child's character, his psychological development, etc. (Vygotsky, 2019, p. 71)

To conduct research from the point of view of the child's lived experience today would be to focus our attention, as researchers, on two dimensions. First, to adopt the child's perspective (as presented above), which aims to describe the child's perceptions, experiences, utterances and actions in relation to the context and tasks assigned to her or him. This stance is, in a way, a prerequisite for grasping the world as it is apprehended, apperceived by the child, for studying the child's lived experiences. What is therefore aimed at is to try to apprehend the experience lived in the sense of a daily concept according to Fleer (2016). Second, this would then be a question of studying the experience lived as a process, as a prism to better understand "how these same experiences lived as daily concepts are generated, "how a child becomes aware of, interprets [and] emotionally relates to a certain event" (Fleer, 2016, p. 38).

The method of research in pedology described by Vygotsky invites us to carry out such work in a genetic and comparative perspective by studying the relationship between the environment and the child, the development and evolution of the refraction process and the characteristics of these experiences lived in the first stages of schooling. School being here a kind of laboratory for this type of study, a central question arises as to what should be studied: the process of refraction (in different environments with children of different ages), the lived experiences (which are the product of this process in different environments with children at different age periods) or the relationship between the refraction process and lived experience? A research program in this area should focus on the study of these three aspects.

Progressive dominance of memory

The development of memory and its progressively dominant role in the first stages of schooling allows the child to bring into existence what is not present in the "here and now." This opens the way for the development of the imagination and of thought detached from perception. The study of this

restructuring of the psyche (passage from perception as a dominant function to memory as a dominant function) in relation to the teaching and learning targeted during the first stages of schooling could be a particularly interesting area of research for better grasping the processes and the nature of development at work during this age period. Moreover, it would also be interesting to study the dialectical relation between the restructuring process of the psyche and the process of refraction: the one contributing to the development of the other and vice versa.

Play as the milieu for the production and study of development

We consider that make believe play is a dynamic *milieu* which is usually created by the child but which can also be elicited by a teacher, a *milieu* that will generate experiences and thus provoke a zone of proximal development.

Fleer (2016) presents an example of an imaginary play initiated by the teacher. The teacher and two children think of being inside a drop of water and imagine the pond life and living organisms in the compost installed in the classroom, learners having had the opportunity to observe these organisms beforehand under the microscope. This situation was initiated by the teacher who integrated herself, along with the students, in this imaginary situation. To support the actions and reflections of children and the development of the play, the teacher intervenes in particular by making suggestions to the children ("We are a drop of water in a pond"), by questioning them ("Imagine that you are those little creatures we've seen in the compost, but you're in a drop of water, how are you moving inside that drop of water?") or describing and commenting on their actions (the children frenetically move about, pretending to be quivering drops of water, with the teacher addressing a child and telling him: "More slowly, more slowly, it's as if you are trembling, Hugues"). This kind of staging and the interventions of the teacher help the students to embody their role, to develop the scenario of the play but also to appropriate knowledge by making use of it during the play.

Moreover, as already mentioned above, this type of play generates a double subjectivity (Fleer, 2016) in the child: he is in the play (living the emotions tied to the role he play, he goes through the experience) and takes a look overseeing the play (imagining the scenario, recreating the role of the character he takes on and meta-communicating with other children about the scenario and how to realize it, some of the roles and how to embody them). Thus, the play will allow a distancing of the real and a situation favoring a double subjectivity. In addition, play facilitates the distancing of immediate perception and the development of the use of memory, thus allowing the development of the ability to act in a manner that is both conscious and voluntary.

In this perspective and in the context of teaching in the first stages of schooling, both the play initiated by the child and the one initiated by the teacher generates an environment conducive to the development of the psyche and a particularly interesting context to study this very development. Let us discuss, in particular, four possible areas of research in this area. First of all, there is the observation and analysis of child-initiated play situations of different age periods in a school context. Secondly, there is the preparation of situations of play and interventions of the teacher (and thus of situations of play initiated by the teacher). The intention here is to act on the *milieu* in order to analyze the differential effects on the refraction process. A third axis of research consists in analyzing conversations between children or between children and teachers in play situations and, more specifically, the construction of meanings in these different contexts (Mercer & Littleton, (2007); Patterson, 2018; van der Veen, 2017). It would also be interesting to study how these conversations evolve, for example, during the course of a year. Finally, a fourth axis is to develop both theoretically and empirically the dialectical articulation of play (learning to play) and of teaching by play (learning knowledge through play).

Conclusion

The pedological works of Vygotsky recently translated into French have allowed us to identify contributions concerning different aspects about the first stages of schooling.

First of all, Vygotsky's reflections on the subject have highlighted the need to go beyond the sterile opposition between two conceptions. On one side, there is the child's first school seen primarily as a school for expression, where it is merely a matter of allowing the children to express their emotions and to let learning emerge spontaneously according to the situations met, most often initiated by the children. On the other side, there is a school focused on anticipating the primary school where it would be necessary to offer subject-based teaching focusing mainly on reactive learning through situations initiated by the teacher. Vygotsky's work invites us to overcome this contradiction and to develop a third way which thinks dialectically about the relations between these two paths. In this way, we advocate the development of a preschool that organizes activities initiated by students and activities initiated by the teacher, free play and structured activities. This third path seems the most promising with regard to encouraging the transition from spontaneous learning to reactive learning, particularly through the acquisition of learning required by and for school, what we call fundamental learning.

This reflection gives rise to several crucial questions with regard to teacher training. How can they develop professional skills that will enable them to adopt the child perspective? How can they be taught to observe, describe and take into account the lived experiences of children in both pretend play situations and more structured learning situations? Lastly, how to promote classroom interactions which carry forward learning and development?

Finally, Vygotsky's work opens new perspectives for research and development on the first stages of schooling. In our French-speaking context, didactics are thought of only in school subjects such as those defined in high school. It seems urgent to us to work on the development of a didactics specific to the stage of age 3 to 7 years, a didactic of fundamental learning based notably upon play. This didactic should take into account in particular the children's perspective and therefore anchor itself within their lived experiences.

Disclosure statement

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