

**The Types of Communications in Education** (*Vidy Obscheniia v Obuchenii* — this book is Russian and has not yet been translated into English), by G. A. Zukerman, Tomsk, Russia: Peleng, 1993. 269 pp. \$XX.XX.

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### THE TYPES OF STUDENTS' COMMUNICATION FOR IDEAL SCHOOL

Galina Zukerman is a student of Davydov, a Russian developmental and educational psychologist who pursues a Vygotskian sociohistorical approach in Russian psychology. In title and in spirit, Zukerman's book aims to invoke and complement Davydov's book *The Types of Generalization in Education* (*Vidy obobshcheniia v obuchenii*; Davydov, 1972) that targeted and analyzed the content of school curricula from Vygotsky's sociohistorical perspective. As Zukerman states in her introduction, her goal was to find which types of classroom communication fit and support the teaching and development of the kind of critical (dialectical) thinking in students that Davydov proposed in his book to be the basis of the content of school curricula.

### ZUKERMAN'S FRAMEWORK

Zukerman begins her book with reference to El'konin and **Leont'ev's** developmental theory about leading activities (see Griffin & Cole, 1984). According to this theory, based on Vygotsky's insights (Vygotsky, 1978), the developmental periodization of children can be based on leading activities in which children are involved in a given society at a given age. In industrial societies, such leading activities can include immediate emotional communication between loving adults and infants, toddlers' manipulation of objects in collaboration with caregivers, play for pre-schoolers, learning collaboration for elementary school children, and so on. This periodization is culture-bound and not universal: In societies with different childhood trajectories, there might be different leading activities. Unlike many other developmental periodizations, the distinguishing features of leading activities are not mutually exclusive. At any given age, children can demonstrate activities from previous and future developmental stages; however, their functions are different at each stage. Zukerman complements the theory of leading activities with the notion of leading forms of collaboration. She argues that each leading activity has its own psychological content and is a distinct form of a child's collaboration with others. The distinct content and form of collaboration promotes its own psychological mold in the child.

In her book, Zukerman focuses mainly on Moscow preschool and elementary school children in experimental classrooms that use Davydov's innovative curriculum of focusing on **developmen-**

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In Russian, the words *obobshchenie* 'generalization' and *obschenie* 'communication' have the same root.

tally critical (dialectical) thinking in students as well as on traditional classrooms. The ethnicity and socioeconomic status of the children and their families were not reported in the book. In her experiments with preschoolers and elementary school children, she found that when children were given a task with underdefined conditions, each child's solutions to the problem differed from the other children's. Preschoolers more often ignored the problem and less often tried to define the conditions by themselves than did elementary school children.\* However, about half of the preschoolers and older children asked adults for help to define the uncertain conditions of the task. Zukerman interprets these findings as evidence that both preschoolers and elementary school children developed skills-requesting adult help-necessary for learning collaboration with adults (i.e., children's readiness for school).

However, preschoolers exhibited less self-reflection, which is important for creative and meaningful deviation from adults' instruction. Students' ability to realize that conditions were missing and to ask adults for additional information rather than to obediently follow the adult's instruction to solve the task (however incomplete or meaningless the task) is one of the author's main points regarding the basis of the authentic learning. As she argues, this self-reflection is both the basis for and by-product of learning collaboration (*uchebnoe sotrudnechestvo*) with adults and is the leading activity of elementary school children in a modern industrial society.

## SOCIOHISTORICAL GROUNDING OF GENUINE LEARNING

In talking about modern industrial society, Zukerman, following Davydov (1986), suggests that industrial society is facing and undergoing unprecedented changes—changes that go beyond the current sociopolitical and economical changes in Russia. This idea resonates with the notions of modernity and postmodernity in Western social theory (Hargreaves, 1995). For example, economically, modernity is based on an industrial society of mass production and mass consumption, producing the traditional school with its stress on hierarchical transmission of knowledge **from** the teacher to students.

Zukerman discusses this historical trend of industrial society and provides a brilliant **sociocultural** critique of the traditional school based on her research and empirical observations. As she points out, traditional schooling systematically takes away goal-defining, reflective, and collaborative functions and skills from children by forcing adult-run curricula, communication, control, and motivation onto the students in the classroom. In the West, postmodernity is often seen as the replacement of modernity based on economic changes and is characterized by a shift from mass production to the "information age" with its stress on flexibility, personal responsibility, collaboration, diversity, and localism of decision making (Toffler & Toffler, 1995). These economic changes are often seen as being primarily responsible for pressure for school reforms that promote "genuine" learning in students.

Zukerman's justification for an alternative to traditional education is different from this economic one. It is deeply rooted in Russian culture, in its dream for the holistic harmonic Personality, which is extremely moral, critical, creative, and productive. There is a lot of interesting conceptual tension in this construct of the holistic harmonic personality. On the one hand, it is ahistorical and universalist: It is assumed that the holistic harmonic personality has always existed.

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\*The results varied depending on the content of the task.

The cultural values of the holistic harmonic personality are announced as “‘universally humane.’\* Rooted in the Hegel-Marx tradition, this viewpoint considers modernity to be a historical limitation and particularity of the holistic harmonic Personality, or, in other words, as an underdeveloped Personality.

On the other hand, the construct of the holistic harmonic Personality is itself historic. The Russian-Soviet-German idea of societal progress has set forth the notion of historical progressive change in a society. The change progressively releases functioning of the holistic harmonic Personality. At the top of its development, each new historic phase of society is better morally and is more effective in promoting the life of the holistic harmonic Personality. The notion of the holistic harmonic Personality has allowed Russian psychologists to address whole-person issues and to build holistic theories without splitting human beings into cognitive, emotional, motivational, social skill, and other separate domains, as is often done in Western developmental psychology.

Zukerman applies this model of the holistic harmonic Personality to elementary school children, suggesting that it allows the development of the **position**<sup>3</sup> of I'm-Learner (i.e., learning how to learn by themselves and with other people). This is in contrast to the development of the position I'm-Knower (i.e., learning how to demonstrate knowledge and skills at the request of powerful others) as promoted by traditional schooling. Zukerman, following Vygotsky's claim that the social becomes psychological and Erikson's notion of identity development, describes how a child's development in school involves a chain of transformations of the child's participation in school activities. When **a child** joins school, **he**<sup>4</sup> often freely assumes the playing of the role of the student, which is characterized by the child's playing in school. Later, the child assumes the social role of student in the classroom, characterized by his obeying school norms and rules as a social ritual of unique place and time. The social role of being a student transforms into social status when **social** norms that the child obeys penetrate the whole life of the child. Finally, social status changes into the position of learner, which is characterized by the child's personal holistic beliefs. According to Zukerman, social role and social status are often forced by the community or institution onto the child, whereas playing role and position are actively assumed by the child in a creative action.

Zukerman's concepts of playing role, social role, social status, and positions seem to be forms of participation in classroom activity rather than functions produced by the external-internal dualism. It is also interesting to note that Zukerman's *internalization* is much closer to **Rogoff's** (1990) and Lave and Wenger's (1991) notion of transformation of participation than to Vygotsky's original notion of transformation of the social into the psychological.

### TYPES OF COMMUNICATION PROMOTING GENUINE LEARNING IN THE CLASSROOM

The author's investigation of what kinds of communication promote the development of a learner in the classroom resulted in some unexpected findings. Zukerman finds that communication

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\*This Russian concept *of position* can be translated as the English concept of *identity*. Both are based on self-consciousness and self-reflection. However, the Russian concept of *position* seems to reflect personal beliefs and assertion about what is moral, whereas the English concept of *identity* appears to reflect tradition, **belongingness**, and individualism.

<sup>4</sup>In Russian, gender of pronouns is defined by gender of referred nouns. The noun *child* has male gender in Russian. In this review, I assume this Russian way of referring to the word *child* as he.

supporting the development of an active learner has four necessary components: children-adult learning collaboration, learning collaboration among children guided by an adult, learning collaboration among children unguided by an adult, and the child's deliberate self-transformation. She argues that the lack of any one of the four components would defeat the developmental process of learning how to learn. A child should learn how to be involved in learning relationships with adults based on shared inquiries and guidance that respects both the child's and adult's experience and interests. Children should learn how to become part of a learning relationship with other children by learning how to involve them in their own inquiries and pursuits, which should be both helped by adults and allowed without adults to promote full-scale initiative and responsibility. Finally, a child should learn how to transform himself. As the author points out, focusing only on adult-children communication and ignoring child-child communication often may lead to the paradoxical outcome that children learn how to learn but do not want to learn. This conclusion was based on her observations of some students **from** the experimental classrooms using Davydov's curriculum.

Zukerman's approach is different from Western discussions about child's solo activity, **adult-run** guidance, children-run activities, or adult-children collaboration as mutual alternatives (cf. Rogoff, 1994; Rogoff, Matusov, & White, in press). Zukerman points out that in traditional schooling, these four components are often illegitimate and unwelcome.

### CRITICAL REMARKS

At one point, Zukerman seems to deviate from the Russian-Soviet intellectual tradition of historical progressivism and consider the difference between modernity and postmodernity to be a cultural difference. On pages 48 through 50, she acknowledges that her views about "genuine" learning and pedagogy are based on specific cultural and moral beliefs and that there might be people who disagree with these beliefs and who, thus, would reject her analysis and suggestions. This step transforms Zukerman's discourse **from** we-they objectivization of the modernist ideology and institutions as morally wrong and unproductive to I-you negotiation and discussion of modern and postmodern cultural values.

Unfortunately, Zukerman does not go far enough to incorporate this pluralism into her theory and research, which are often based on the idea of efficiency and development of desired skills in children. In the rest of the book, Zukerman treats the differences between the traditional school and her ideal educational institution as organizational rather than cultural. She seems to think that research simply can give teachers an idea about how organize their classroom activities that the teachers can then implement. Then, in a **posttest** experiment, the difference in test performance between control and experimental classrooms will be evident. The classroom is not viewed in a broader context of the whole school institution, family, economy, ethnicity, politics, and so on. Zukerman does not seem to perceive the contradiction between her sociocultural conceptual framework and pretest-treatment-posttest methodology, which fits the traditional school and promotes demonstration of knowledge and skills, whatever the "progressive" skills are. Because of former political and current economic difficulties in Russia, the author appears not to have had the opportunity to become familiar with the **sociocultural** approaches and ethnographic qualitative methods developed in the West in recent years.

I am sure that this book will be interesting for developmental psychologists, educators, and other social scientists and practitioners, especially for those who are working in **sociocultural** and

neo-Vygotskian **traditions**. Although the book has only three references to contemporary Western scholars, it raises questions, provides observations, and discusses issues that are ‘hot’ in current Western social sciences debates. It also provides references to and descriptions of interesting research and conceptual work of Russian scholars unknown in the West. I hope the book will be translated into English as soon **as** possible.

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