

## Development Makes History, Where Inside Meets Outside

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Bernard Schneuwly in his essay "Contradiction and Development: Vygotsky and Paedology" (1994) elaborates a less examined set of implications of Vygotsky's work, in order to consider how development occurs at the intersection of the individual student and the curriculum. In doing so, Schneuwly implies but does not make explicit a mechanism for the evolution of society through individual developmental discovery, as I will elaborate below. Since I am working only from Professor Schneuwly's work published in English, however, I recognize he may well have covered everything I have to say and more in his extensive publications in French and other languages.

In explicating Vygotsky's idea of development in "Contradiction and Development," Schneuwly highlights two points. First he notes that the individual confronts the contradiction between his or her own structures of thought formed from prior experience and the satisfaction of needs in the world outside oneself. Development, and the zone in which it arises, occurs at the meeting of these two forces. Schneuwly notes:

The concept of the zone of proximal development ....springs from the meeting point between external needs and internal possibilities; it is the tension created by this intersection - it constitutes the meeting point between two kinds of processes: one relatively systematic, functioning step by step in a regular progression, going into different aspects of a system one after the other; the other proceeding abruptly, by reorganisation of various elements of the mind, creating entirely new systems and modifying the old ones. (Schneuwly, 1994a, P. 289)

This formulation in most respects might seem familiar to commentators on Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and consistent with Vygotsky's account of scientific and spontaneous concepts and their relation. This view of the ZPD also directly and explicitly underlays Schneuwly's work on writing pedagogy in relation to cognitive development (Bronckart & Schneuwly, 1991; Schneuwly, 1996; Schneuwly et al, 2017). Most germane to my own professional concerns, Schneuwly (1994) notes how changes in writing practices bring about changes in thought.

Schneuwly, however, by invoking "external needs" highlights a less noted aspect of Vygotsky's reasoning: while growth is driven by needs, needs are only realized as objects in the external environment. That is, needs reach beyond the internally felt sense to be conceived for the satisfaction as objects in the world. These needs, in particular, lead the individual to interact with the environment through the semiotic systems and artifacts that mediate relations with others. Further the institutional experiences of education provide access to the semiotic means and social opportunities associated with culturally shared scientific or organized systems of thought. Yet in interacting with the world and shared cultural semiotic systems the

individual has only limited capabilities in understanding the world and in influencing others. This is where tension or frustration or contradictions occur that drive development, as one expands, reorganizes or modifies the internal psychological structures and relations. In these moments of tension the individual discovers the possibilities and constraints of the world and invents ways to think about and act within the environment for more successful needs satisfactions. This drives the individual to engage more deeply with the semiotic system and the organized bodies of knowledge made available in schooling, institutions, or other organized social domains that seem attractive to the individual. The sense the individual makes of these semiotic systems becomes internalized within his or her own perception. Development occurs in this struggle, with the individual neither directly imbibing the ambient cultural system directly without modification, nor rejecting it outright to insist on previous spontaneous structures. The individual rather reconstructs these cultural semiotic systems in self-propelled dialectic struggle to meet needs.

This drive towards needs satisfaction in dialectical relation to a less than hospitable world echoes those who influenced Vygotsky: "Democritus through Spinoza and Hegel to Marx," as Schneuwly notes (1994a, p. 283). For Marx, for example, labor serves to transform the world to make it more habitable (Fromm, 1961), thus internal sense of discomfort with the world leads us to seek to engage with and transform the world. Vygotsky also, though less noted, was influenced by the psychiatrist Adler, who saw humans as agents, driven by a desire to gain control over their environments to increase satisfactions (Adler, 1907). Vygotsky initially engaged with Adler's thinking in relation to the struggles of those with physical disabilities (Vygotsky, 1993), then implicitly adopted this theme of gaining control over the environment in his account of motive, action, and development for the remainder of his career (Bazerman, 2013). This desire for needs satisfaction, even when desires were frustrated by a lack of power to control or act successfully in the environment, for example, pervaded his account of play and the kind of development that occurred through play (Vygotsky, 1978, pp. 92-104), as Schneuwly notes in his essay (1994a, p. 288).

Schneuwly also implies a general mechanism by which the social semiotic environment is constantly changing. This goes beyond his explicit recognition of "culture contemplated as a historical product of social life, as an ensemble of sign systems or semiotic systems that is the driving force of development" (1994a, p. 284, see also Schneuwly, 1993) to point out that culture is dynamic and participatory in its dynamism. The idea of cultural evolution is thematic in sociohistoric views of human consciousness. While cultural evolution is implied within Vygotsky's recognition of different cultural environments and varying semiotic resources available to each child, he does not discuss how environments change and in fact treats what is available at the moment as stable, as though history were frozen in the current moment. This imputed stability then makes it appear that the organized scientific concepts offered by the teacher and other social institutions encapsulate authoritative pathways for development to be engaged in the child's

ZPD (Vygotsky, 1986, Chapter 6). That is, the teacher or more knowledgeable peer would know precisely the knowledge that the developing child will come to know. Nonetheless, Vygotsky also sees the child's development in the ZPD is idiosyncratic as the child reinvents these concepts in relation to their prior experience.

This contradiction between apparent stability of cultural knowledge and the child's conceptual reinvention of knowledge forms the dialectical tension that drive's Schneuwly's essay. Schneuwly's resolution is that the teacher's developmental plan does not define the actual path for the student's development, but is only a heuristic fiction that makes cultural semiotic "tools available and creates the conditions necessary for the child to build" new psychological systems (1994a, p. 288). But then the student remakes the available resources in his or her own mold. The teacher as well is creative in making fictions to inspire and guide development, responsive to how the teacher understands the particular developmental trajectories of the child. In this creative act the teacher remakes the environment, finding new ways to communicate with the ZPDs of different children. And the child further remakes the environment by his or her uptake and transformation of the resources made available. The classroom interaction is thus the site of constant semiotic reinvention and negotiation.

Though Schneuwly does not in this essay explicitly consider processes of cultural change, his account of local educational reinvention provides a more general mechanism for cultural evolution. Just as distance exists between the teacher's plan and the student's realization of development, in every interaction in life conceptual distance exists between interactants, even when they meet to mutual satisfaction over shared semiotic resources. Each interactant projects a personal understanding of the situation, invoking a personalized set of concepts, even as each crystallizes these understandings in social shared semiotic forms to engage those they interact with. Those other interactants, using those same shared semiotic resources, in turn interpret, respond to, and reconstruct thoughts from their own perspectives. Tensions of understandings, motives, and perceptions within those interactions may challenge each of their understandings or inspire new semiotic inventions, potentially instigating development in the individual, the shared interaction, and the communal resources. This fluidity of the local environment leads to constant reinvention of interaction and thinking, which then may become incorporated into larger patterns of social and cultural change. These new ways of life in turn change the environment for each individual who enters into the semiotic space, creating new challenges that drive further change. So each interactant experiences and perceives the semiotic environment from an individual perspective and develops as a unique individual, contributing to and transforming the environment for themselves and others.

Despite not articulating a larger theory of social semiotic change, Schneuwly does consider the historical changes in the ideas and practices that organize schooling, and thereby affect the environment within which students develop. In a series of essays many of them collaboratively written, Schneuwly examines the historical

development of approaches to schooling, theories of child development, and institutions of education--precisely as they grow as responses to their environments at the same time as changing the environments for the development of children in schools. Schneuwly recognized how particular historical actors responding to their experienced conditions propose ideas and institutional practices that influence the developmental opportunities of students in schools. In the context of Schneuwly's sociocultural thinking, historical accounts of educational thinking and practice expose the conditions under which ideas and policies arise and the transformations wrought by newly proposed ideas and policies.

In creating such accounts Schneuwly provides means for reflecting on our current ways of thinking, institutions, and practices that grew out of and incorporated these ideas. He, thereby, encourages us to participate in the continuing evolution of education as a dynamic field. Even more directly he and his co-editors create publication space for educationists to engage in this historical reflection to inform current educational action. Schneuwly has edited in English at least one book (Hofstetter & Schneuwly, 2006) at least six special issues of journals (Montangero & Schneuwly, 1996; Hofstetter & Schneuwly, 2002; Hofstetter & Schneuwly, 2004; Hofstetter & Schneuwly, 2009a; Hudson & Schneuwly, 2009; Hofstetter & Schneuwly, 2013b). No doubt there are many more in other languages. The introductions by him and his co-editors then provide conceptual syntheses to advance that reflection. These collections overall set out the rise and institutionalization of educational research in Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth century, the ideas of New Education over that same period, and the concurrent changing educational assessments and curricular policies.

The importance of the nexus of all these developments is examined in an article co-written by Späni, Hofstetter and Schneuwly on "Interweaving Educational Sciences and Pedagogy with Professional Education: contrasting configurations at Swiss universities, 1870-1950," (2002) appearing in one of these special issues. This article analyzes how the differing perceived social, pedagogic, and professional situations at four different Swiss universities give rise not only to different intellectual orientations and institutionalization of academic structures, but different teacher education programs and different engagement in regional educational reforms--with of course implied consequences for the children attending schooling in the regions (for a further elaboration of the Swiss case, See also Hofstetter & Schneuwly, 2011, and for consideration of the relationship of ideas, institutions, and educational practice, see Hofstetter & Schneuwly, 1999a and 1999b and Schneuwly & Vollmer, 2017).

Since these inventions of ideas, policies and practices arise in the dialectical meeting of internalized ways of thinking and perceived external conditions that constrain and offer opportunities for satisfying needs, they are also saturated with the dilemmas faced by actors positioned within historical situations. Thus theoretic, pedagogic, institutional, and policy choices are themselves inventions arising dialectically from prior orientations propelled by needs to interact with the external

world. The dilemma of policy choices is examined most sharply in the historical chapter "Bovet's dilemma," co-authored by Hofstetter and Schneuwly (2008). This essay examines Pierre Bovet's ambivalence towards standardized testing expressed in a series of speeches given at a 1931 conference on examinations. Standardized, quantized testing contradicted all Bovet's commitments and ways of thought as a Professor of Experimental Pedagogy at the University of Geneva, director of the Rousseau Institute, follower of Jean Piaget and advocate of the New Education movement. All of these commitments argued for respecting the judgment of teachers in response to local observed needs of children. On the other hand, Bovet recognized that in the first part of the twentieth century the standardized assessment movement advanced the role of scientific, objective research in education, which was an important goal for him and his institute. Further Bovet recognized that standardized assessments to assure basic competence of military recruits had improved all schools in Switzerland in the latter half of the nineteenth century until World War I. So Bovet was left with how to balance "the needs for control of scholastic performance" and the "freedom of the teachers and needs of the children" (2008, p. 93). Bovet wends his way between the two ideologies by asking the pragmatic question of what is most useful for advancing education in what way in any particular situation. Bovet, however, does not fundamentally resolve the dilemma of which set of ideas about assessment should guide the environment children will meet in schools. Articulating this still-current tension, Hofstetter and Schneuwly keep the question of what we should do alive, prodding further development in our thinking.

Hofstetter and Schneuwly in another article (2013a) note a similar contradiction within the International Bureau of Education (IBE). The IBE was formed between the wars to advance international standards for schooling and eventually became part of UNESCO. Hofstetter and Schneuwly point out the Piagetian theories of development that guided the IBE recommendations for common curricula relied on an invariant model of child development, apart from the local political, cultural, and social circumstances. This universalist approach, in tension with the varying circumstances of education and development in each country, was considered a necessary political stance to sidestep regional and political differences while making the case for advancing education in each country. The coauthors see the choices made, as with Bovet, as pragmatic situational responses. Again, the dilemma of gaining the cooperation of diverse governments with an agenda of global education improvement remains with us today, and prompts our future development.

Beneath the dilemmas of both Bovet and the IBE is the emergence of New Education, based on the scientific study of child development, which is the focus of two editorial collaborations of Hofstetter and Schneuwly (2006, 2009a). In particular, in their introduction to a special issue of *Pedagogica Historica* devoted to New Education (2009a), Hofstetter and Schneuwly provide a broad overview of the various thinkers, practical reformers, and administrators in this movement in the early part of the twentieth century, as elaborated in the articles that follow in the issue. In their own article in this issue Hofstetter and Schneuwly (2009b) contrast

the thinking of two contributors to the New Education movement, the Swiss Edouard Claparède and the Russian Lev Vygotsky. Both agreed that education must be grounded in the scientific study of child development and both also agreed that development was driven by needs, feelings, interests, and other internal states of the child. But Claparède saw these forces for development as invariant results of biological formation, although they may be realized differently under different social and cultural conditions and in response to the changing capacities of the child. Education needs to engage and serve those impulses. Claparède indeed named the institute he founded after Rousseau (the same later directed by Bovet). Thus Claparède is skeptical about the systematic presentation of disciplinary knowledge as an imposition on natural development, and admits disciplinary education only through what we would now call student-driven inquiry. Teachers must, accordingly, be immersed in the understanding of development and attuned to the needs and emerging impulses of students more than any disciplinary knowledge to be transmitted.

Vygotsky agrees with Claparède on the centrality of development in education and the driving role of child impulse, perception, and need, in what he called "a continuous process of self-propulsion," but he saw these internal drivers as being transformed by new ways of thinking gained through social interactions, starting with the family but extending through schooling, the community, and beyond. Thus for Vygotsky systematic introductions to disciplinary knowledges, practices, and semiotic means of interaction provide opportunities for the expansion and transformation of the child's way of thinking. Thus, while he condemns rote memorization and indoctrination of transmitted disciplinary contents (as does Claparède), he sees value in systematic presentation of organized systems of disciplinary knowledge (in contrast to Claparède) as a means of engaging students in new ways of thinking initially outside students' previous ways of life. Teachers, therefore, need to understand both their subject and their students, to be able to engage students in zones of expansion into new ways of organizing thoughts, or their ZPDs. Rather than school only following the natural impulses of the child, as Rousseau or Tolstoy might propose, the school environment, according to Vygotsky, must challenge the student to struggle with the cultural inheritance of the organized knowledge of school subjects.

Education is Schneuwly's subject, and he is insistent throughout his publications in distinguishing educational sciences (or its earlier twentieth century version Paedology) from other fields such as psychology or sociology that might contribute to it (see for example Schneuwly 1994a; Späni, Hofstetter & Schneuwly, 2002; Schneuwly & Leopoldoff Martin, 2011). The improvement of education is his object, as it is the object of all educators and educational researchers. The semiotic resources of the ideas, policies, and pedagogies are the tools by which educationalists share, cooperate, and conflict in this endeavor. To understand and develop those communal disciplinary semiotic resources, to come up with better ideas about education, it is not sufficient to elaborate and advocate for previously determined ideas. Rather development requires struggling with the semiotic

environment of the ideas of the field, the history of those ideas, and how those evolving ideas have arisen from and been responsive to their environments. This struggle reorganizes our thought into new stories about education, realizing the self-propelling human struggle for the improvement of our lives by supporting the development of generations of students.

The mechanism of cultural change suggested by Schneuwly and made more explicit in this essay grows out of contradictions first identified in Vygotsky's theory of development, and elaborated by Schneuwly's elaboration of the history of educational thought as an ongoing dialectic struggle. As Schneuwly remarks about teachers' curricular fictions, the organized coherences he seeks in his historical accounts will prove their value not in the timeless truth of the claims he presents, but in how successful those semiotic representations are in bringing the communal endeavor to new levels of development. We cannot help but continually struggle with our evolving environment, propelling ourselves into the world that is becoming from what it has been. We cannot help but make the world our object, for that is where we live. For those of us who have chosen education as our site of action, as has Schneuwly, we cannot but help participate in the process of education's constant reinvention to speak to and advance our times--making history.

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