

“Inner Spring” of Elena Kravtsova: A Word about a Scientist and a Friend

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This scientific essay focuses on the work and personality of an outstanding psychologist E.E. Kravtsova, who passed away in spring 2020, on the eve of her anniversary. Continuing the work of her grandfather L.S. Vygotsky, she regarded it not as a “family” matter, but as common heritage, where new forms of social practice, primarily educational, emerge.

Keywords: E.E. Kravtsova, L.S. Vygotsky, Cultural-Historical Psychology, zone of proximal development, play, communication, education, developmental learning.

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This text was meant to be congratulatory. On April 26, 2020, Doctor of Psychology, professor, devotee of education, Elena Evgen'evna Kravtsova was to celebrate her 70th birthday. Less than a month before the day, on the morning of March, 28 she passed away.

Weren't she L.S. Vygotsky's granddaughter, Elena would not have been a less talented researcher. Yet her talent emerged and developed in the Vygotsky family, to whom we owe not only the preservation, but also the enrichment of Lev Vygotsky's legacy. We owe it to them as much as to his immediate disciples, particularly to A.V. Zaporozhets, who became Elena's teacher. And we distinguish between two names: for those of us, who knew her for many years, she was both Lena – a friend, and Elena Evgen'evna – a colleague¹.

Gita L'vovna Vygotskaya, Lev Vygotsky's daughter and Elena's mother, could have easily defended a doctoral thesis based on her brilliant research on psychology of play and research in the field of special education. However, during her lifetime, she preferred to focus on working with her father's legacy, which became the world's psychological heritage largely due to her efforts.

Elena Evgen'evna, the granddaughter, took the next step – she redefined and reconsidered Vygotsky's work in a modern way, reinforced a number of his fundamental, yet not quite distinctly elaborated notions, bringing to-

gether a new generation of researchers. With the onset of the “educational thaw” in the second half of the 1980s – 1990s, altogether they began to promote the outcomes of this work, introducing them into the practice of education, first – into preschool learning, and later – into school and university. As a matter of fact devotees like this paved the way to the “educational thaw” itself, and many of them were unified by the name of L. Vygotsky and by the ideas of developmental learning, that became accreted to his name.

By the way, Lena strongly disliked it, when her close kinship with Lev Vygotsky was recalled in vain. She even felt a bit awkward. This is not just a matter of Lena's fascinating modesty, which she apparently inherited from Gita Lvovna, who, in her turn, – from Lev Semenovich (spending only 9 years with her father was enough for that). It is just that the right to “inherit a surname” and the right to “inherit a profession” are quite different things. The second one is mainly “obliging”, rather than granting privileges.

As far as “the profession” was concerned – the development of Vygotsky's Cultural-Historical Psychology in the 21st century, Elena Kravtsova regarded it not as a “family” thing, but as a matter of the world's science. She viewed contemporary science as capable of “fulfilling itself” in what Lev Vygotsky referred to as “highly

¹ Elena Evgen'evna, Elena and Lena are different forms of the same Russian name: full name with a patronomic, full and short forms, correspondingly.

organized practice" — the practice of the development of higher mental functions. She believed that in line with Vygotsky's ideas, science is meant to penetrate into the depths of the "highest", the "uppermost" in a human being, by fully participating in the construction of this kind of practice (more precisely, a family of practices: from educational to clinical). E.E. Kravtsova and her collaborators managed to master many pieces of this most difficult path. This is like climbing a high volcano and step by step descending the crater. But, according to Vygotsky, this is the only possible way to go: the key to the knowledge of the "lowest" lies in the "highest". Thus, Vygotsky himself started from psychology of art, the objectified world of the most complex human experiences, moving towards the emotional world of the child, where the seemingly simple affectations disguise a world equally complex — the one just emerging, not yet shaped. A world, that one needs to discern in the developed (ideal) form of a piece of art.

Many will remember Elena Evgen'evna as an outstanding developmental psychologist, specialist in child psychology, and psychologist of developmental learning. But let us not forget that *general psychology* was thought by L.S. Vygotsky exclusively as *genetic, as a science of development*. All the creative work of E.E. Kravtsova is devoted to that.

The genetic method in psychology (Lena preferred to call it "designing method") is not one of the existing methods in line with many other, but so to speak, a "method of methods". Any substantive conversation about development requires determining its unit — a unit, which Vygotsky coined the zone of proximal development (ZPD). ZPD is not an impersonal set of knowledge, competences, skills or even abilities that a person (child or adult) has to master for successful "socialization". In their own ZPD, they "encounter", first of all, other people, who embody and reveal to them this cultural, common human heritage; they build various relationships with these people, enter into multidimensional communication with them, sometimes very intimate, even if it retains business nature. And in the end, when there is no one around, they encounter ... themselves. But they may fail to make that one «encounter» (on the problematic nature of the ZPD phenomenon, see [3]). In her research, Elena Evgen'evna was able to show that the destiny of "cultural development" (Vygotsky) is determined precisely at this stage — the stage of communication in ZPD. At the same time cultural means of ZPD become the tools that a person employs to master their inner, subjective world, they become the tools of voluntary action. She reduced all that to a simple formula: "cultural behavior is 'arbitrary' behavior", which means that a person *acts voluntarily*, rather than is driven by impulses — either external or, by much more insidious, internal ones.

Mastery of the tools of cultural action, according to E.E. Kravtsova, is not the mastery of its models, but a creative process, where a small child produces such kind of instruments. This process is associated with the development of imagination and with the formation of an "inner position". Due to this reason, as Lena insisted, play is

of fundamental importance not only for preschool childhood or even childhood in general, but for the whole human life. It is the accumulator of "the power of imagination." Play — in its full development, undergoes a number of stages, and any attempts to accelerate this process can trigger serious psychological problems in the future [2]. These problems are aggravated by adults, who are supposed to play with children, yet cannot play themselves. Together with her associates Elena Evgenievna practically re-taught adults, teachers and parents of preschool children, to play [1].

It is believed that there are no victories and prizes in children's play (mostly). That is not true: sometimes there are! The main reward granted by life itself is imagination. This is the golden key to the doors of human culture. By opening these doors (remarkably diverse!) a person starts living in human world as a master of their own home. Thus, having the right to continue building it up, to continue "humanifying" it. In science, in art, in everyday activities, in anything one could possibly think of... Surprising oneself and others. Turning life into an event, and one's existence among people — into co-existence with them.

Whereas in learning, adults often seek to surprise exclusively themselves. At one of the conferences Lena said:

"For his 5th birthday, one boy was given a German spinning top with sparks coming out of it. The adults couldn't get enough of it. Only the "hero of the day" was crying. That were not the sparks that he was afraid of. He simply didn't know what to do with the present ...".

At another conference she came to a sad conclusion:

"There is a society represented by specific adults. And these adults know quite well (or think they do) what the child needs, what he or she does and what does not, what is good and what is bad. And so, the adult pulls the child by the ears, the ears grow, but the child remains the same."

E.E. Kravtsova and her associates were able to do what, perhaps, no one else managed to. Namely — to build a multi-stage system of developmental learning, covering preschool childhood, primary school age, adolescence, youth, including not only highschool, but university students as well. Within this system, learning processes unfold in the logic of meaningful inter-age communication. As a result, the learning space becomes a sphere of a unique intersection and mutual enrichment of various "zones of proximal development" of all those, who create and master it: children, teachers, parents, psychologists and education managers ...

The educational program "Golden Key", developed by the team of E.E. Kravtsova and G.G. Kravtsov for the very primary — preschool link of this system, has become widely known in Russia and draws the interest of the colleagues from all over the world as an example of bringing L.S. Vygotsky's ideas into practice. A unique model of psychological education at the university level, elaborated by E.E. Kravtsova, is the top, the "crown" of the system. This model has been successfully implemented at the Institute of Psychology of L.S. Vygotsky at RSUH for over 20 years. This model ensured the openness of the

whole system to development within the scope of professional practices (and beyond). After leaving the university, yesterday's students demonstrate their professionalism to such an extent that they are able to continue their learning, rather than simply "apply" what they acquired in class. One cannot imagine a professional psychologist with no intention for further personal development. Alma mater provided all the conditions to create such intentions. This means that professional position emerges on the basis of the personal one. And that is the whole point of developmental learning.

Indeed, according to E.E. Kravtsova, much more distant, broader, sometimes more unpredictable genetic prospects are maturing in the zone of proximal development. ZPD itself is there at least for the two. As well as the development within it. Whilst people still argue: can (should) an adult develop in the zone of proximal development of a child? Lena smiled when she heard this kind of disputes.

Lena was a "person of communication" in every sense. Communication was "the way of her life and work," and the concept of "communication" was a medium of understanding the nature of both. Sometimes we were willing to argue with her a bit: they say, after all, the reason for communication arises within the activity. And so, we had discussions. What a wonderful form of communication Lena has come up with! A form of communication for psychologists of the country and the world, working in the traditions of the Cultural-Historical Psychology! International Readings in memory of L.S. Vygotsky, annual and each time topic based. The previous discussions

were not finished yet, but the next ones were already in mind. Then at the end, each participant received a beautiful leaflet with an announcement of the subject for the upcoming Readings. What is going to happen to the Readings now? They do have a future – yet, what will it be without Elena?

Today we grieve along with all Russian and world psychology. The name of Vygotsky preserves its significance, as it follows the semantically-meaningful fairway of his ideas, expanded and deepened by E.E. Kravtsova.

We express our condolences to the members of her family, who can rightfully be called the "The Vygotsky-Kravtsovs Psychological House", to numerous students and followers, teachers, inspired by her ideas, and everyone, whose life was once radically changed even just by a single encounter with Elena Evgen'evna. The staff of Moscow State University of Psychology and Education who knew her and loved her, are grieving with us.

On the day of farewell to Lena, after a persistent heat, snow started coming down on Moscow and the Moscow region. Cold and soulless, it fell on the naked orphaned gray Earth, a bereaved "planet of people." But spring is ahead, Lena's spring, and more than one. With or without Lena – it depends on those, who welcome it. Lena did her utmost so that "your inner spring would not deceive you" (Titus Lucretius Carus) – any time of the year.

She created "inner spring" around, adultly explored spring's childish and youthful mysteries and carried this spring within herself. "Inner spring" – that was her "topic" in science, education, life.

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«Внутренняя весна» Елены Кравцовой: слово об ученом и друге

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В жанре научного эссе рассказывается о творчестве и личности выдающегося психолога Е.Е. Кравцовой, которой не стало весной этого года, накануне ее юбилей. Продолжая дело своего деда Л.С. Выготского, она мыслила его не как «семейное», а в сплетении перспектив культурно-исторической психологии, где рождаются новые формы социальной практики, прежде всего, образовательной.

Ключевые слова: Е.Е. Кравцова, Л.С. Выготский, культурно-историческая психология, зона ближайшего развития, игра, общение, образование, развивающее образование.

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