

# The Concept of Drama in Vygotsky's Theory: Application in Research<sup>1</sup>

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The article focuses on some aspects of L.S. Vygotsky's early works, which are interpreted as the underlying basis of the cultural-historical theory and might be applied while conducting research in the framework of this scientific school. The concepts of "drama", "pereghivanie" and "reflective communication" as well as their role in applying experimental-genetic method in research are analysed. Results of a research project "Drama and exclusion", conducted in the UK in 2014–2015 on the basis of two arts-based organisations working with young people with various kinds of social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, are discussed. A case-study with a group of children at risk of school exclusion is given as an example of applying a "dramatic event" as a cultural tool for reorganising the social situation of development.

**Keywords:** drama, pereghivanie, theatre, reflective communication.

## Introduction

Despite the growing popularity of L.S. Vygotsky's theory all over the world, many of its aspects remain unclear or under-estimated. To a certain extent this might be explained by the complexity of Vygotsky's language that is deeply rooted in the Russian pre-revolutionary culture and is rather challenging even for a native-speaker (not mentioning translation into other languages). But there is yet another reason – a paradox that S. Aseyev labeled as "decontextualisation" of Vygotsky's works [1]. Strange as it might seem, the legacy of the founder of the cultural-historical theory is often studied without any connection to the cultural and historical context when Vygotsky was living and working, which often leads to various inaccuracies in the interpretation of his ideas. Gaining a better understanding of Vygotsky's theory requires its consideration in relation to the place and time when it was created, and this becomes particularly obvious in the light of the recent archival findings (e.g. see [8; 18]).

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chology (including that of “sign” and “perezhivanie”) are rooted in the theatrical tradition.

In this article we will focus on some aspects of Vygotsky's early works that may be regarded as the starting point of the cultural-historical theory, and that could be used as a framework for research, conducted in the tradition of this theoretical school.

### Vygotsky and Theatre: Critical Reviews

Vygotsky was born in 1896 into a big Jewish family and spent his young years in the town of Gomel'. His upbringing was quite unique: on the one hand he was shaped by the Jewish tradition, in which his family was deeply rooted, and on the other hand he was influenced by the culture of the Russian “Silver Age” — the period before the revolution of 1917 that was characterized by cultural bloom — particularly in arts and theatre. Young Vygotsky was actively involved in the cultural life of Russia. He was familiar with the famous theatre directors V.E. Meyerhold and K.S. Stanislavsky, prominent film director S.M. Eisenstein, he was also close to the literary critic J.I. Aykhenvald and poet O. Mandelstam, whose reading group he attended. During this period Vygotsky was a member of the “Khudojestvenny Sovet” (Art Council), which gave him free access to theatre performances in Gomel and its surroundings. Most probably, Vygotsky was also frequenting Moscow Kamerny Theatre, where famous poets including F. Sologub, V. Ivanov and V. Brusov held debates about arts. During this period Vygotsky tried himself as a critic, writing around 80 essays, most of which represent theatrical reviews [14; 17; 18].

According to V.S. Sobkin, acquaintance with Vygotsky's early works faces the reader with a wide range of purely psychological problems, including: “manifestations of temper of different characters in various life situations, role of social stereotypes in the formation of social behavior, interactions and communication, influence of various archetypes on the behavior of characters, peculiarities of stage actions (motives, aims and means), psychological mechanisms of understanding texts and formation of sense with the help of various language means (intonation, pauses, tempo, rhythm, plasticity, mimicry etc), socio-psychological aspects of impact of the stage on the “perezhivanie” of the audience, genre influence of the performance on the psychological mechanisms of actor's impersonation, the relation between “real” action, improvisation and template” [8, p 8–9]. Apart from that Vygotsky also touched upon numerous social issues, such as the place of theatre in the period of social transformations, collision between old and new ideological conceptions and expectations. Interestingly, in his works Vygotsky stressed the importance of a critic as of a particular cultural mediator, who contributes to the socio-cultural dynamics of theatrical life [8, p. 9].

One of Vygotsky's first theatrical reviews was published in 1917 in the journal “Letopis” (Chronicles) under the title: “Theatrical Notes”. In this work Vygotsky commented on three premieres performed in 1916 in new theatres opened in Moscow — “Electra” in Komis-

sarjevskaya Theatre, “Thamiris the cithara player” in the Kamerny Theatre and “The green ring” in the Second Studio of Moskovsky Khudojestvenny Theatre. Each premiere was staged by the theatre director and reflected the aesthetic principles of a particular theatrical school. Thus, director of the Second Studio of Moskovsky Khudojestvenny Theatre V.L. Mchedelov was consistent with the traditions of stage naturalism (K.S. Stanislavsky), however bringing some new tendencies by emphasizing the importance of personal life experience in actor's interpretation of role. F.F. Komissarjevsky, on the contrary, developed the principle of “pure theatricality”, based on the idea of conventionalism (V.E. Meyerhold), and regarded stage naturalism as one of the “illnesses” of modern theatre. Criticizing both stage naturalism and conventionalism, director of the Kamerny Theatre A.J. Tairov set the goal of creating a “theatre of emotionally saturated forms” or a “theatre of neo-realism”, which is particularly interesting in the context of our research. A.J. Tairov discussed the relation of form and content through the prism of actor's “perezhivanie”. He claimed that “on the one hand, “perezhivanie”, which has not been casted in a corresponding form, does not create a stage masterpiece per se, but on the other hand, a hollow form, which has not been saturated with emotion, is also unable to substitute the living art of the actor” [10, p. 88]. Thus, Tairov perceived the nature of “perezhivanie” as action-connected, or action-oriented — that is why on the stage it should always result in gesture.

Commenting on A.J. Tairov's interpretation of gesture, Vygotsky argued: “Being deprived of any hint of psychologisation, a gesture, rather sketchy and generalized, clear and pure, stops being a means of life-likely expression of the actor's **“perezhivanie”**, but becomes an independent **language** of the actor's creativity, whose incompleteness evokes in the audience extension and continuation of the actor's creativity. In such understanding gesture **is a sign**, representing not only the actor's emotion, but all what goes far beyond the limits of the actor's personal experience (perezhivanie). ... Creating its own language of signs and representations, which are always unequal in inner meaning and sense, and which are not identical to the substance that they are representing, the theatre of gestures approaches the type of symbolic art, and, by this, broadens and deepens “the sense” of drama” [quote from 9, p. 85]. Thus, in “Theatrical Notes” Vygotsky for the first time seriously addressed the issues of “sign” and “perezhivanie”, showing the intricate relationship between the two on the example of three theatrical performances. This review of 1917 already demonstrates that young Vygotsky was interested both in the theatrical and psychological perspective, and that his reasoning went far beyond artistic analysis. All aspects of this discussion have much in common with Vygotsky's later works — particularly “Psychology of Art” (1925), which is usually regarded as his first psychological work, and “On the Problem of the Psychology of the Actor's Creative Work” (1932), which was written almost at the end of his short life. This challenges the opinion, that young Vygotsky's interest for art and theatre was “replaced” by psychology and that writing of theatrical reviews was no more than a short-time passion.

### General genetic law of development and its connection to drama

There are strong grounds to believe that Vygotsky's theatrical background had a life-long influence on his ideas and on the theory he created. Thus, according to M.G. Yaroshevsky, Vygotsky set the goal of "creating psychology in terms of drama" [17]. Yaroshevsky argues: "Vygotsky was using the term "the drama of development". Eventually he was talking about the drama of self-development. Drama meant collision, counteraction, conflict of characters. Not an impersonal setting of external circumstances, but a dynamic system of mutual orientations, motives and actions, having their own "plot" – this is what the social environment is like, in which personality is formed as a participant of drama" [17, p. 273]. Yaroshevsky claims that Vygotsky left his descendants only preliminary drafts of "dramatic psychology", not having enough time to create a coherent conception and solve the problem of its methodology.

However, there are scholars who challenge this point of view, and one of them is N. Veresov, who claims that cultural-historical theory might be perceived as "psychology in terms of drama" with drama representing one of its key concepts. To prove that, N. Veresov draws attention to the very foundation of Vygotsky's theory – the general genetic law of development: "...any function in the child's cultural development appears **on stage** twice, that is, **on two planes**. It firstly appears on the social plane and then on a psychological plane. Firstly among people as an inter-psychological **category** and then within the child as an intra-psychological **category**. This is equally true with regard to voluntary attention, logical memory, the formation of concepts and the development of volition" [16, p. 145].

Interestingly enough, this fundamental law has numerous formulations in English, which are not always quite accurate. Unfortunately this is true of the interpretation given by M. Cole in the famous edition of 1978, and which is often perceived as the "classical" formulation of the law in the English language: "...every function in the child's...development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first between people (interpsychological), and then inside the child (intrapsychological)... [15, p. 57]. Thus, the majority of the readers who do not have the opportunity of reading the original text would not come across the words "stage", "plane" and "category" that Vygotsky used in his formulation. N. Veresov argues that "the words "on the stage" and "on two planes" are not metaphors, which might be omitted or ignored. Stage in Russian means "scene", the arena, literally the place in the theatre where actors play. Scene has two planes – the front plane (also called "the first plane") and the back plane (often called "the second plane"). According to theatre's traditions, main events of the performance should happen on the front plane of the scene (the same law we could find in visual arts). So, it means that on the stage of our development, the

category appears twice – interpsychologically (on the first, front plane) and then intrapsychologically (on the second internal individual plane). Therefore there are no two levels in development, but there are two planes on ONE stage, two dimensions of one event [13, p. 7].

According to Daniels & Downes, "this resonates with the view of development that Yaroshevsky (1989) attributes to Vygotsky. Rather than understanding a stage of development through the 'ladder' metaphor associated with Piaget, Yaroshevsky suggests that Vygotsky had a dramaturgical notion in mind when he invoked the word *stage*. The idea was that of a stage where two planes – the personal and the social – were in play. When these two planes collided, as a result of incommensurability between personal understandings and social situations, then a reforming of both may occur" [3, pp. 104–105].

Apart from the words "stage" and "planes", the concept of "category" in the general genetic law is particularly interesting. N. Veresov argues that "in Russian pre-revolutionary theatre's vocabulary the word category meant "dramatic event, collision of characters on the stage". Vsevolod Meierhold (famous Russian theatre director) wrote that category is the event, which creates the whole drama [quote from 13, p. 6]. Sergey Eisenstein, famous film director wrote: "Category is a unit of drama" [quote from 13, p. 6]. Vygotsky was familiar with the language of Russian theater and arts and had to use the word "category" to emphasize the character of the social relation, which becomes the individual function. The social relation he means is not an ordinary social relation between the two individuals. This is a social relation that appears as a category, i.e. as emotionally colored ... collision, the contradiction between the two people, the dramatical event, drama between two individuals. Being emotionally and mentally experienced as social drama (on the social plane) it later becomes the individual intra-psychological category" [13, p. 6].

The interpretation of the general genetic law of development of higher psychological functions through the prism of drama provides an efficient perspective for understanding Vygotsky's experimental method. Drama may be perceived as the cornerstone of development, and development as a process represents a series of dramatic events. From here comes that, according to Vygotsky, one of the central principles of genetic research methodology is "experimental unfolding of higher mental process into **the drama**, which happened between the people" [16, p.145]. Thus, reconstruction of a dramatic collision is one of the key elements of conducting research in the framework of the cultural-historical tradition.

### Research Project: Drama and Exclusion<sup>2</sup>

#### *A brief overview*

The research project was conducted in 2014–2015 in the UK on the basis of two arts based organisations working with young people aged from 11 to 18<sup>3</sup>. The organisations provide programmes open to all young

<sup>2</sup> Project research group: H. Daniels, I. Thompson, V. Elliott, N. Dingwall, A. Tawell, K. Munk & O. Rubtsova. For full report see [11.]

<sup>3</sup> All names and places are anonymised for ethical reasons.

people as well as specialised projects aimed at those who have various kinds of social, emotional and behavioral challenges. Many of these young people either do not attend school or are reluctant attendees, thus one of the principle goals consists in bringing the children back to the learning situation (school), creating conditions for those children to go on learning and to improve their performance.

One of the organisations tries to reach out to the country's most vulnerable young people: those at risk of isolation as a result of disadvantages such as poverty, special learning needs, mental health problems and family breakdown. Their projects are intended to enable young people to realize their own personal, social and leadership skills, grow in confidence and build self-esteem and resilience.

The other organisation represents a community theatre with young people at its heart. The theatre has a Members Committee made up entirely of young people and two of the members are also trustees of the theatre and have full voting rights. The theatre has a history of over 50 years of community engagement, theatre and dance performances and supporting new and emerging artists, as well as providing training, education and career paths. In working with young people, their objective is to give them the tools to explore who they are, what powers they have and what their responsibilities are in a rapidly changing world. Their work with young people aims to highlight issues that impact on the way people behave in society. Each year a theme is chosen for the young people to base their performances on. During the observed period, the theme was: 'What would you stand up for?'. For all of the theatres's groups and on-going programmes, every effort is made to get to know the young people and provide personalised provision for each of them. Thus, the theatre holds two registration days a year, where young people and their families are invited to meet the staff and find out more about the programmes available. Additionally, a theatre staff member meets with each young person before they start attending a group, to work out where they would be best suited. Moreover, the theatre will provide taxis with female drivers where appropriate and liaise with the young people through their preferred method of communication (mobile phone, e-mail or skype). This personalised approach helps to foster a strong sense of inclusivity within activities and community identity through the theatre.

In the framework of the research the **focus of the evaluation** is the young people's experience of the activities that they engage in and how these activities can contribute to their development and socialization.

**Research design** is based on:

- constructing descriptions of the activities which are offered across both organisations and exploring the reasons why the young people elected to participate in the ones which they attend;
- collating all available data from the young people's schools on attainment, attendance, histories of exclusion etc;
- gathering accounts of the young peoples' experience in their activities and the perceived benefits, limitations and possibilities for improvement.

**Research methods** include:

- participant observation;
- semi-structured interviews;
- group discussion methods (Nominal Group Techniques).

The project research team attended each of five groups offered across the arts based organisations, which specialize in different activities, including various kinds of arts, drama and dance. In this article we will discuss a few activities, offered in the framework of an eight to ten week drama-based intervention programme, run by the community theatre with a partner secondary school. The programme began with drama-based games and activities, and worked towards participants completing the Bronze Arts Award. Over the given period two groups were observed. The two groups were distinct: one comprised Year 7s on the 'young carers' list (Group A), a broadly interpreted category, but who were for the most part suffering from shyness and lack of integration; the other was composed of Year 7s who were in care or who had been identified as showing challenging behaviour and were at risk of becoming disengaged (this group also had poor school attendance, which improved over the course of the intervention – Group B). Group A met in school; Group B met initially in the theatre, but later sessions took place in school. Each session lasted an hour and a half. Group A began with six participants, two of whom left the school mid-programme; the other four attended weekly. Group B had eight participants. During Group B's seven sessions, the average number of sessions attended was six. Each session was led by two specialists. Sometimes the school teacher, who accompanied the children to the theatre and back to school, was also present at the sessions. The goals stated for the programme included:

- gaining experience in positive engagement with others (including the school), enhancing self-awareness, increasing confidence and self-esteem of the participants;
- increasing engagement of the participants with the school environment (improving attendance and participation in the learning process, development of basic skills necessary for successful interactions in school life – particularly listening, trust and teamwork);
- gaining an Arts Award.

In this paper we will try to analyse some aspects and results of the programme from the perspective of Vygotsky's experimental method, regarding them as a kind of "drama" in Vygotskian sense. For this purpose we will focus on the example of one session that took place in the community theatre – that was the first session in that group that the research team attended.

### **Data description**

#### *Beginning.*

Before the session everyone sat down on a chair in a circle. The group leaders asked the young people about the previous session: what they did and what skills they learned. The answers were very brief, like: "We learned listening skills", "We played games". Most of the young people were not willing to listen and a few of them were constantly interrupting. The group leaders introduced



the fieldworkers (there were two of them) to the group, saying that they would like to take part in the games and other activities. The reaction was friendly. After the introduction the group leaders asked each of the young people to introduce themselves and to say what they would like to be when they grow up. J. said he didn't know, K. said, she wants to be a dancer, L. said, she'd like to become an animator, Bn. said, he would like to be an engineer, Br. didn't say anything. As far as X. was concerned, when the group leader initially asked the young people to introduce themselves, he said to another group leader "I'm not doing that, I can't be bothered" and seemed anxious about saying what he would like to be in the future. Lastly, C. whispered her name and said she would like to be "nothing".

The beginning of the session was rather chaotic. The young people did not listen to the instructions before the games, therefore they did not quite understand the rules and figured them out only in the course of the game. Actually, nobody seemed to care about the rules — they were just running around quite chaotically, the girls mostly keeping silent and the boys making jokes and laughing. Nobody seemed to be part of a team — the young people seemed very detached, and did not talk to each other, except for two boys Bn. and Br. who declared that they are best friends and do everything together. The boys were very disruptive and provocative throughout the whole session — they were constantly interrupting the group leaders and making rude comment/singing rude songs and pretending to fight. X. often became involved in the pretend fighting too. However, despite the lack of team-building skills and communication with each other, the majority of the young people seemed willing to participate in what was going on. Only one girl — C. — refused to take part in the activities. She was sitting on a chair keeping silent/sulking because her friend wasn't there. From time to time the group leaders would address her, asking if she wanted to join in. The group was actually quite mixed — three of the boys were very disruptive, one girl was quite withdrawn and the others were quiet and shy.

### Games

#### *Ship to Shore/Captain's coming:*

The first game that the group played was called 'Ship to Shore'. The game was played first as one of the young people, X., had asked to play it. During the game, the group leaders called out commands, including, 'scrub the deck' and 'captain's coming'. The young people then had to respond to the command by making a certain action or running to a particular space. The last person to do the action/reach the area was out.

During this game, the group leaders tried to encourage C. to take part, by carrying her on the chair that she was sitting on to the other side, as if she were playing together with the team. C. smiled.

The following games were then chosen by the group leaders to try to build the group team working skills.

#### *Giants, Wizards and Elves:*

The second game was called 'Giants, Wizards and Elves'. The game is based on "rock, paper, scissors". The

giants can defeat the elves by stamping on them, the elves can defeat the wizards by tickling under their arms, and the wizards can defeat the giants by casting spells on them. Each character was acted out through a particular action, which the group leaders taught the young people.

The young people, fieldworkers, and one of the group leaders were then split into two teams (team A and team B). Team A stood on one side of the room and the other team stood on the opposite side. The groups were asked, as a team, to decide in secret what character they were going to be. Once both teams had chosen, they then walked towards each other in a line. On the count of three they revealed their character. The team that won the round then had to chase the losing team back to their side of the room. If they tagged any of the losing team members, they then had to join the winning team. The young people played around 5 rounds of this game.

At the beginning of this game one of the group leaders encouraged C. to take part. From observing C's team, it was obvious that although she didn't really want to help to decide what character they were going to be, she did however join in. She walked to the middle and acted out the character. However, at one point of the game, C. was caught by the other team and was asked to move into their team. She went over to the other side, but then walked back over to her first team, as she wanted to work with the group leader, and did not want to swap teams. C. seemed to have a good relationship with the group leader. Nobody insisted on her following the rules.

Some of the young people found it hard to listen and discuss during the game. For example, at the beginning of the game, one of the teams had not listened to the instructions and didn't understand the rules, so instead of acting out one character together, each individual person acted out a different character so the game didn't work. Within the teams, some of the young people were reluctant to participate in the discussion on choosing the character as they were too shy.

#### *Windows and Doors*

The third game was called 'Windows and Doors'. This game involved the young people and group leaders standing in a circle. One person was asked to be in the middle. The aim of the game was for the person in the middle to escape through one of the gaps in the circle. The young people on the outside (in the circle) had to try to stop the person from escaping by working with the person next to them to block the space, by bending down and holding hands. The group leaders made the game harder, by increasing the size of the circle and adding a second person into the middle. Some of the young people seemed more comfortable taking part in this game than others. Some of the girls had very closed body language. However, the young people did actually work well together to stop the person in the middle from escaping.

During this game, it seemed that C. started to take part in the game. However she was not talking to anyone.

An important stage of the game was represented by after-play discussion, when the young people could share their feelings with the other participants. Interestingly enough, the majority of the young people who had

the experience of standing in the middle of the circle said that they had felt uncomfortable and wanted to escape.

#### *Balloons*

The fourth game involved two teams again. This time, the teams were asked to stand in two parallel lines. The person at the front of each line was given a balloon. The balloon had to be passed to the back of the line, with the first person passing it over their head and the second person passing it through their legs etc. Once the balloon had reached the last person, they then had to run to the front of the line and start passing the balloon back again. The game turned into a race between the two teams to get to the other side of the room. One of the rules in the game, was that if one person dropped the balloon, they had to start again/would be disqualified. Interestingly one of the young people (Bn), thought that this meant he would get a detention — indicating that he is used to getting a detention if he does something wrong. Group leader explained that it had a totally different sense.

The game Balloons seemed to boost the young peoples' teamwork skills as they started to work in groups that were competing against each other. Interestingly, one of the disruptive boys Bn dropped the balloon in the first round, and then refused to participate as they had to start again. However his friend in the other team carried on, which encouraged him to take part in the second round. In the first round Bn's team lost, in the second round, with his help, they won. During the second round of the game, the young people started addressing each other within the group, trying to give instructions and encourage their teammates. This time the rules were respected.

#### *Shapes in 10 Seconds*

The last game of the session involved two teams once again. This time, the two teams were told that they had ten seconds to work together to make different shapes that the team leaders called out (e.g. a house, a triangle and a washing machine).

The young people continued to work as a team in this game. Both of the teams seemed quite successful in creating the shapes. In group A, the young people came up with ideas and followed the instructions from their teammates. At the end of each round (10 seconds), both of the teams performed their shape to the other team.

#### **Scrapbook (session diary)**

Each week, the young people are asked to try to reflect on their experience of the previous week's session by keeping a scrapbook. At the end of the discussed session the young people were asked to sit on the floor in a circle around a big pile of black-and-white pictures from the previous session, colorful pens, pencils, scissors and glue that the participants could use to write about their experience in the scrapbook. The group leaders also formulated the questions that the participants could use to speak about their experience: *what did you do? What did you like? How did you feel? What did you learn?* Most of the young people took part in this activity. Each of them worked on their own and they did not show their work to each other and did not discuss it with each other. Some of the young

people found it harder than others to reflect. When asked what part they liked, some responded with comments like 'the games'. When they were asked to say why they liked the games, they then said 'because they were fun'. When asked why they are fun, they then said 'I don't know'. Bn found it very hard to concentrate on this task, managing to only write a half of the first word on his scrapbook's title page. Throughout the activity Bn was distracting Br by making rude comments and singing songs.

Although the young people did not share their work with each other, many were happy to show their scrapbooks to the fieldworkers and the group leaders. J in particular seemed to be very proud of his work. Every time he finished a new part he stood up and took it to show the group leaders, who provided him with praise. Additionally, although C. had not appeared to have been engaged/enjoying herself, in her scrapbook she wrote how the sessions had made her feel amazing. However, one young person, X, when one of the fieldworkers asked to look at his scrapbook, he covered the picture of himself, as he thought he looked weird in the picture and did not want her to see it.

#### **End**

At the end of the session the young people played 'ship to shore' again. X. had asked to play the game throughout the session, so again the group leaders adapted to their needs to keep them engaged.

### **Data analysis**

Like the majority of the young people that the community theatre works with, young people from the observed group had various kinds of social, emotional and behavioral challenges. It is important to highlight that the information available for the group leaders about each young person before he or she joined the sessions was rather poor. Thus, the group leaders knew only that all of the young people had problems with attendance and school performance and were therefore at risk of exclusion. They were also aware that some of the participants came from socially disadvantaged families, had experienced violence or suffered from mental disturbances. For gaining more information about the participants it was necessary to refer to the hubs, however the group leaders did not actually do that. As a matter of fact the theatre focuses on the possibilities and capacities of the young people, on discovering their potential, and thus the group leaders do not emphasise the reasons, which led to problems in school. Their main task consists in working with the group as with a whole, creating conditions for the participants to acquire various skills (communicative, social etc) step-by-step, as well as to increase their confidence and self-esteem. According to the group leaders, they consciously avoid focusing on the difficulties of a particular young person in order to avoid labels that the young people anyway have to face outside of the theatre. The theatre is a space where nobody is interested in the past — the only thing that is important, is what the young person can do here and now. This approach might be criticized, however this is beyond the

limits of the paper. This article focuses on one fragment of the programme run by the theatre with the aim of analyzing its activities from the perspective of the experimental-genetic method.

As the participant observation demonstrates, most of the young people have difficulty in:

- listening to each other and to the adult;
- concentrating on a task set by the adult;
- following instructions;
- understanding each other;
- organizing joint cooperation etc.

In our opinion, it is important to look at these difficulties as on characteristics of each young person's **current social situation of development**, which in this case means to analyse, to what extent this young person is included into the situation of social interaction and to what extent these difficulties hampers him or her in interacting with others.

The description of the session demonstrates that the majority of the young people do not refuse to take part in the activities and are all more or less interested in the interaction. However, the interaction they get involved in turns out not constructive enough, as the young people lack in skills, which are necessary for fulfilling the task (e.g. coming to an agreement with the teammates). Thus, the limitations of the young people's current social situation of development prevent them from engaging in efficient interaction.

According to L.S. Vygotsky, it is the "collective form" that shapes the possibilities of **changing social situation of development** and – eventually – creates conditions for the development of the higher psychological functions. Thus, the aim of the group leaders is to create a particular kind of group interaction that will help young people overcome these limitations. In the case of the session that we are discussing, the group leaders are using games for this purpose.

As it turns out, game activities in the theatre were used in all of the sessions, however in the groups of newcomers (e.g. group A) the time spent on games was much longer than in the groups that the young people have been attending for longer periods of time. In the interviews, the group leaders referred to the games as to an important way of "breaking the ice", "teaching basic skills" or "being a preparatory step for the young people before they start taking part in drama or dancing". From our point of view, in the framework of the programme games become **the first form of a joint action**, and for constructing this action young people have to overcome their limitations. It is due to the development of the joint action that this kind of games (play) may be regarded as **a cultural means of transformation of social situation of development** – which eventually helps young people to move on from simple interactions in play to drama as a complex intersubject interaction.

As data testifies, at the beginning of the session the interaction of the participants in the process of play activity turned out inefficient. Thus, in the game "Giants, wizards and elves" the participants of one team do not listen to the instructions, do not understand the rules, fail to agree on what to do with their teammates and eventually fail to play the game. However in the course

of the session we observe an increase in constructive interactions: the number of contacts between the young people grows (at the beginning the participants hardly address each other), the participants start following the rules and respecting instructions, there are more and more episodes when those young people, who were either disruptive (Bn. and Br.) or reluctant to join in (C.) get involved in the activities. What leads to these positive changes? What exactly in the organization of play activity makes the young people overcome their difficulties? In our opinion, the answer to these questions is **the dramatic character of the organized interaction**.

We can suppose, that there are at least two conditions necessary for turning a game into a "drama" in Vygotskian sense. The first requires some kind of **conflict** emerging in the process of the play and resulting in the child's emotional involvement in it – that is a **contradiction, which triggers "perezhivanie"**. The other one is connected with **reflexion** and reflective evaluation of the experience that the young person gains in the process of the play. Let us look at these two aspects in more detail.

At the beginning of this article we discussed the conflict (collision) as the basis of drama. In the episodes of the play activity, that we describe, we could spot a few conflicts: the conflict between the interest for the game and inability to successfully fulfill play interaction (e.g. the beginning of the play "Giants, wizards and elves"), the conflict between the desire to attract attention (to spoil the interaction) and the fear to lose the game to a friend (game "Balloons", Bn and Br). In both cases the emerging contradiction triggers a particular emotional reaction of the participants: they start to react vividly to the events (to live them through – "perezhivat"). Apart from the conflicts discussed, the "perezhivanie" of the participants is triggered by the element of competition (the desire to beat the other team), as well as by alternation of various kinds of interaction (in pairs, in groups, in circle etc). It is due to this emotional reaction that the young people start getting involved in the offered activity, searching for the means to overcome the emerging contradictions (e.g. in the game "Giants, wizards and elves" the contradiction is overcome by following the group leaders' instructions and respecting the rules of the game). Therefore it is due to the contradiction and to the perezhivanie, which is triggered by this contradiction, that the participants get involved in the process of the play.

According to F.E. Vasilyuk [12], the concept of "perezhivanie" is extremely challenging to translate from Russian, thus the term is increasingly used without translation in the scientific literature written in English (e.g. H. Daniels, M. Fleer, N.N. Veresov). M. Fleer argues that perezhivanie may be used in two ways: as an everyday concept and as a scientific concept. Perezhivanie as the everyday concept reflects both the process of experiencing something, and specifically what is being experienced. Scientific reading of the concept encompasses the three key ideas of: perezhivanie as the unity of emotions and cognition; perezhivanie as a prism; and perezhivanie as a double subjectivity in play and the Arts [4]. In the context of our research the latter is particularly interesting, as it contributes to building the connection between play and Vygotsky's idea of "drama".

The perception of Perezhivanie as a double subjectivity resonates with the concept of *dual positioning* in play, introduced by G.G. Kravtsov and E.E. Kravtsova, who argue that Vygotsky's idea of audience is central for children's development. The dual perspective of the play which is reflected in the phenomenon of a child being a participant of the game, and at the same time being its observer, allows the child to better understand him/herself, as well as the surrounding world [5].

Another condition, necessary for organizing dramatic interaction, is represented by the joint discussion by the participants of the experience that they have gained. Here we might apply the notion of **reflective communication**, discussed by O. Rubtsova and N. Ulanova, who argue that experimental reconstruction of "drama" requires **repositioning** of the participants in the situation of social interaction as well as them reconsidering their opinions and points of view [7]. On the example of the data discussed in this article the stage of reflective communication could be illustrated by the discussion after the game "Windows and doors", in the course of which the participants told each other, what they had been feeling during the play.

Another illustration might be represented by the work on the "Scrapbook", when the young people were asked to speak about their experience (*what did you do? What did you like? How did you feel? What did you learn?*) and to present it in their scrapbooks. The main drawback of this part of the session in group A is connected with the fact that the majority of the young people were working on their own, and they did not share their work with each other. However, many of the young people were happy to show their scrapbooks to the fieldworkers and the group leaders. This motivation could be successfully used for stimulating reflective communication and creating conditions for "switching perspectives" – which is one of the key elements in the transformative potential of "drama". Thus, H. Daniels & E. Downes argue: "The culture of power through drama is that it enables existing social orders to be re-examined and negotiated through the lenses of multiple perspectives. Through participation or as a spectator, the traditional hegemonic structure is disrupted and may be per-

manently transformed" [3, p. 107]. The transformation of the activities of the young people in group A (Session description) could be illustrated by the example of the games "Baloons" and "Shapes in 10 seconds". If at the very beginning of the game young people failed to follow and even to listen to the instructions, at the end of the game they demonstrated skills of team work and fulfilled the tasks set by the group leaders.

Switching perspectives is extremely important as it contributes to the "dramatic event" being re-played and re-considered in the system of interactions and relationships by the participants of the experimental situation [6], which eventually leads to the shift of their social situation of development (see fig. 1).

Further steps of our research are connected with a more detailed analysis of the transformative potential of play and arts-based activities in the work with vulnerable young people.

### Some concluding remarks

The interpretation of the general genetic law of the development of higher psychological functions through the prism of drama, which presupposes interaction of the two planes (social and individual) as well as a particular kind of contradiction emerging in the process of interaction, may be regarded as an efficient perspective for understanding Vygotsky's experimental method. This interpretation allows to introduce the notion of **reflective communication** that is based on the idea of repositioning of the participants as well as of their reconsidering their opinions and points of view, which contributes to the "dramatic event" being re-played and re-considered in the system of interactions and relationships by participants of the experimental situation and eventually leads to the changes in their social situation.

An important challenge in such analysis is connected with investigating how the young people themselves introduce the means of overcoming the emerging conflicts in social interaction and how these means contribute to transforming the social situation. Answering this question will help to gain a better understanding of how the real social situation influences the individual "drama" of each participant.

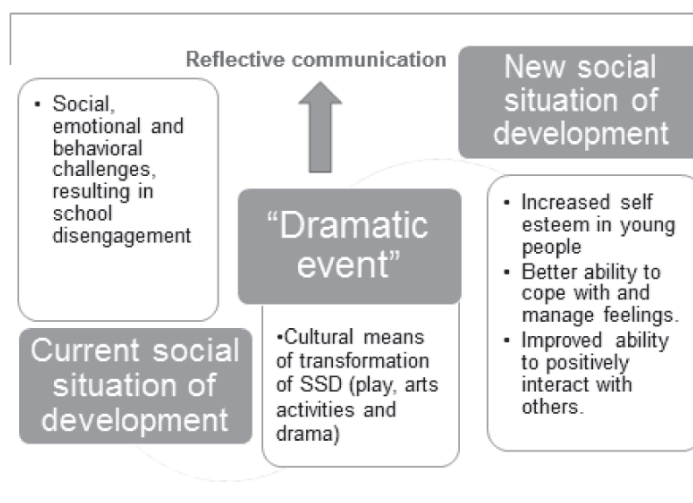


Fig. 1. Reflective communication.



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