Symposium:
Everyday and school situations: Which communities?

Didactics in art education and appropriation of cultural objects in classroom

A semiotical analysis of teaching/learning perspective

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Slides No 1 and 2.
We will focus our presentation in the discussion of the Vygostkian hypothesis of a discontinuity between forms of development in everyday situations and at school; which we will discuss on the basis of teaching visual arts at the primary school, and more particularly about the case of didactic of reception of cultural art works (Rickenmann & Mili, 2005). This didactic of reception belong to a movement which has developed since the Eighties, in particular about the problem of the relationship between schools and cultural institutions such as museums or concert halls. Our work will focus on a particular aspect of this current which considers the public reception of cultural art works as an activity about "enculturation through uses". We will illustrate our talk with a few analyzed extracts of a lesson "Using the manner of Peter Greenaway's artistic installations" that was led in fourth grade class of a primary school in Geneva (9-10 years).

In a 1st part we will briefly present the developments of the vygotskian hypothesis on teaching/learning processes as a joint construction of significations within social interactions. The teaching/learning processes are described as dynamics which go from "the external" (social practices) towards "the internal" (the psychic activity), supported by the social and semiotic dimensions of the activity.

With regard to school education, the vygotskian model of teaching/learning processes alternates elements of continuity (for example the fact of maintaining links between social practices and school practices) and elements of discontinuity or “rupture” (for example, the entry of the child in the world of "writing" in opposition to the primarily oralized world of his first years in family life).

The school forms of teaching imply "ruptures" in everyday learning processes. These ruptures are necessary because:

- There are cultural objects and related practices whose cultural operation is foreign with the everyday experience of the children;
- The teaching/learning processes related to these objects and practices requires specific (educational) situations (Moro & Rickenmann, 2004, Rickenmann, 2001) in which the pupils activity must be organized and supported by teacher’s knowledge and teaching expertise.

The aims of this paper are to understand how the sociosemiotical processes make it possible to understand the relationships between continuities and ruptures, and what are the didactical means which the teacher implements to articulate these continuities and these ruptures within the pupils learning tasks.
In a second part we will show what are the elements of continuity in the lesson "Using the manner of...". These elements are of two types:

- on the one hand, it is a question of undertaking a didactic activity related to social practices linked to artistic works ("art installations").
- on the other hand, because this kind of activity implies a "context of realization", other elements of continuity enter the classroom such as reproductions of artistic works, through which "the cultural art object" of reference emerges in the didactic context.

In a third part, we will show that the relationships between “cultural art objects of reference” and learning processes about art works and/or of an artistic genre (in our case, “the artistic installation”), are not possible that insofar as teacher introduced professional gestures and causes ruptures in everyday links that the children maintain with this cultural art objects reference. Thus, we will show that is in the incentive to modify several times their “activity postures” with regard to the uses and social practices related to this kind of art work. Thanks to which, the teacher helps the pupils to build significations about the genre of the artistic installation.

In a fourth part, we will show through the analyzed extracts, that the organisation of the teaching/learning conditions on the one hand, and the management of the dynamics of the activity, on the other hand, constitute processes of sociosemiotic mediation of the activity of the pupils.

Compared to the situationist paradigms (i.e. Lave & Wenger, 1997) in which the learning processes as signification emerge from the inter-relational dimension of the teaching mediation, we will show that in the sociosemiotic model inspired by Vygotski’s works, a more significant share is given to the cultural object and to the role of mediator of this semiotical processes in the didactic activities.

In this direction, the historico-cultural paradigm gives a historical and cultural "thickness" to the didactic situations.

Compared to another situationist currents of "communities of practices" (i.e. Lave, 1997; Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989), the concepts of instrumental act and cognitive tool (Vygotski) highlight the fact that cultural objects (languages, tools, behaviors...) which belong to "communities of practices" contribute to the learning and development of pupils; however, the vygotskian model shows that the class group never totally becomes a member of social communities of practices because the forms of school practices imply processes of discontinuity in order to make formal learning processes possible.
One of the principal contributions of the "second" Vygotski (1934/1997) is the idea according to which knowledge results from an appropriation by the individual of his relationships between material and human environment, in the form of significations. These relationships are always being mediated by signs. These signs are produced by culture in order to represent, to communicate or use the assets of historical and collective experiences.

We know today that, in an educational situation ($\Sigma n$), the links of a beginner (A1) with an object (O) which is unknown for him, are not immediate but that they are supported, mediated by an expert (E). The expertise of E consists in the fact that he knows the meaning of O, for example its use, and that he will mobilize it via a configuration of signs (Sn) which are present in the interaction to guide the activity of A1. Guidance offered by E aims at the appropriation of the use of O by A1, i.e. its “new” (for the learner) signification (SO’).

The Vygotski’s hypothesis about the sociocultural nature of the processes of learning and development, articulates three dimensions which about the educational situations:

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1. Didactical activities and art objects significations

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1) A dimension related to the social forms of the activity (A), in particular to the organization and evolution of the places of action: any knowledge for a subject results from the appropriation of his experiences of participation in the human activities of his environment. This dimension is pragmatic in the same way as Wittgenstein’s "meaning is use", and underlines the conventional and public character of activity.

In this model, the "pragmatic" concept underlines the fact that action alternation is the primitive form of social activities. The structure of alternations of the dialogue or the joint activity between two subjects which are in various places of action (Pa1, Pa2) leads to the construction of a common context of activity which changes in time;

2) A semiotic dimension (B) which characterizes a material and human environment organized in the form of "signification links". On the one hand, the concept of "semiotics" proposes the fact that any human activity takes support and mobilizes various signification systems (language(s), social practices, institutions, tools...), culturally inherited to produce the signification of the situated activity. In addition, the concept also underlines the functional and dynamic dimension of these various systems of signs, while insisting on the fact that any (new) signification link develops or modifies old significations.
These two first dimensions are structural in the sense that they constitute relatively stable forms of organization of the human activity (A) and crystallizations of the collective experience (B).

3) The third dimension, that of the sociosemiotic mediation, consists in the dynamic articulation of the two first via semiotic processes, i.e. the contextual production of significations as a situated activity.

This last dimension of the model proposes the basically dynamic aspect of teaching / learning processes.

Later developments, relating in particular to the relationship between significations and educational activity (e.g. Moro & Rodriguez, 1998; Moro, 2002) enable us today to describe the processes through which structures (learning processes like production of significations) emerge from the dynamics educational specific situations. Within the framework of this presentation we wish to show that these operations which are structured result from the joint activity like semiotic process, in which articulate:

- the pragmatic dimension of the exchange in the joint activity (A), i.e., the fact that the learner it is invited to take various places of action and to adopt various points of view about the knowledge objects structure or the knowledge related practices;
- and the dimension of interpretation (B), i.e. the fact that all new signification develops or modifies old significations.

Within the framework of this model, Vygotski asserts that discontinuities that produce education restructure all the functions of behavior. Later research made it possible to show that this process of discontinuity can take place well before school age. Works of Moro & Rodriguez (1998) show that processes take place already during the preverbal stage. Vygotski states that "as of the first days of the development of the child [...] the way of the object to the child and the child to the object passes through another person" (1931, p. 30).

For this reason many researchers prefer to characterize the various educational situations according to their degree of “formality” (i.e. Brossard, 2002). Within this framework, we can say that any learning process comprises a more or less significant degree of discontinuity or “rupture” and
implies more or less significant reorganizations of knowledge.

School educational situations imply significant ruptures on the level of the live experience of learning subjects, which are the condition of teaching/school apprenticeship “which precedes the development of the child and works on the knowledge and know-how whose psychic bases are not developed yet […]” (Vygotski, 1997, p. 29). The ruptures relate as so much the social forms of the activity (family activities vs school activities) than to the disciplinary and systematic character of a school lesson (scientific concepts vs everyday concepts).

**Slide No 7.**
The model of the sociosemiotic mediations, postulates that the learning processes about cultural (art) objects pass through discontinuities which the teacher introduces into everyday relations (of use/signification) of the pupils with cultural practices. The situation of teaching can be considered, from this point of view, as a joint weaving of significations in connection with a cultural objects which modify, at the same time, the significations for the pupils and their activity places (for example, to pass from observer, to helped, then to expert).

**Slide No 8.**
The teacher has three kinds of tools to manage continuities and discontinuities in this teaching/learning process:
At the level of structural dimensions, he sets up a learning context, that the pupils will have to transform through their acting. A first lever tool of this learning context is the learning tasks which the teacher proposes to his pupils. These learning tasks introduce a specific relationship with the second lever tools which are the contents of teaching or objects of knowing (Os).

In the vygotski’s point of view, these objects of knowing are transposed elements (Chevallard, 1989) of what is “teachable” about the cultural objects and their related practices. The object of knowing is, at the same time, a goal activity (to know art object) and a mean (because the practices related to the cultural art object implies the use of specific cognitive tools).

These two tools introduce into the didactic context the activity postures and the various significations in connection with cultural art works and their related practices, which constitute the *social practices of reference.*

A third lever is used by the teacher: the management of the activity of the pupils. This management is applied at the levels of the didactic context organisation (mésogenetical processes),
of the management of the specific activity places to each learning task (topogenetical processes) and of the advance of learning tasks as didactic time (chronogenetical processes).

We wish to show through some illustrations how the mesogenetic, topogenetic and chronogenetic processes of the teacher take part in the learning situations organisation (structural dimension) and in their management (dynamic or functional dimension).

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The analyzed lesson develops in the following way:
The duet of teachers chose the didactic step of the lessons "Using the manner of the installation Stairs (Geneva, 1994) of Peter Greenaway".
In this kind of lesson, the cultural object and the related practices take part in the definition of the functional structure of the learning sequence. From the point of view of this structure, the reference to the cultural object helps the teacher to identify the knowledge contents.
The reference to Greenaway’s “Stairs installation” makes it possible for the teachers to propose knowledge and know how contents are specifically related to the genre “artistic installation”, which are the modification of the everyday points of view through the action of the artist on public environment; this content underlines the characteristics specific to the work of reference, which are the cinematographic devices.

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The reference to the practices related to this cultural work also helps the teacher to choose the principal learning tasks. Those consist, always in the line of "Using the manner of the artist" in:
- choosing place to show their installation to the other pupils (the social practice of reference is the artist’s activity);
- and explaining this specific kind of activity to the other pupils (The social practice of reference is close to that of the cultural mediator).
These two principal tasks are accompanied by two other tasks:
- to manufacture the installation device
- and to take part in the assessment of the lesson activities.
Slide No 11.
The functional structure of the lesson is thus determined by the role that the teacher makes play about the cultural art object and genre "artistic installation", and with the related practices (to produce an installation, to the public of an installation, to be a cultural mediator...) in the choice of the knowledge objects and the learning tasks. These "didactic resources" are articulated in the didactic situation and are used by the teachers to manage continuities and discontinuities starting from the specific professional gestures.

We will present an extract illustrating, in this order, the mesogenetical, topogenetical and chronogenetical mediations in the observed lesson.

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In this episode one can locate several mesogenetical processes:

- The presentation of certain characteristics of the cultural art object (art genre) associated with the presentation of the principal learning task, makes it possible to set up the learning conditions of the artistic installation genre.

The teacher appeals:
- to lived experiences of the pupils (their experiences with respect to installations carried out in Geneva);
- to examples (pictures of installations of artists, such as the "packings" of Christo and Anne Claude);
- to “didactic memory” as knowledge contents which was appropriated by the pupils in former lessons;
- he also announces the various activity postures: what occurs when one is the public of an installation, what one seeks to produce by installing a work...

These elements of continuity with the cultural art work and reference practices will alternate, during this first phase of the lesson, with elements of discontinuity and negotiation of the didactic contract. For example, the teacher controls the answers of the pupils on the knowledge content "forms of art". Whereas he awaits answers concerning the artistic genre (painting, sculpture...), the pupils propose elements in terms of supports and techniques (papier-mâché, plaster, modelage...). With regulations such as "more general, less in the detail", "There are other manners", "it is necessary to think in general", the teacher has recourse to a one kind of school practices (i.e. generalization steps) to "breaking off" their everyday relations with school art teaching.
Thus let us observe that in the piloting of the dialogue, the teacher agrees to make a detour thanks to the significations suggested by the pupils: from the point of view of the signification construction itself, initially he takes steps towards the pupils and, in the second time, he explicitly asks the pupils "to move" towards "his" set of topics.

This allow the pupils take part in the construction of the meaning of the knowledge object, and its definite on the topics suggested by the pupils.

This is a mesogenetical process (i.e. about knowledge) because the teacher passes from "what the pupils know (how to make) "towards" what the teacher considers that the pupils “could make”.

In this second episode, which proceeds during the task "to install the device in a place of the school", one can observe an episode of management of the topogenetical processes.

The microgenetic process passes through the social regulations between teacher and pupil(s), which are a typical ritual of the "culture of the classroom". The observation of the sequence shows that at first the pupils are in a posture of waiting and following-up of the instructions given by the teacher.

The pupils are in an "action-reaction" activity: they "follow" the instructions of the teacher almost step by step, but have trouble to adopting the responsibility for the task; they set the case device a little randomly, change its place as soon as the teacher suggests exploring other places in the school.

The recurring traces of this kind of activity are

- the systematic alternation between "the teacher’s questions and the pupil’s responses",
- the arms which rise,
- the speed with which the pupils connect their answers to the remarks of the teacher.
The existence of the learning stakes of the task "to install the device in a place of the school", imply that the teacher gives the responsibility for the task to the pupils. This topogenetical process is named "didactic devolution" (of the responsibility of a learning task).

Work on the activity places of the pupils does not relate to the fact of changing the "external" aspect of their activity, but of leading them to change their posture with the fact relative to, as for the artist on the level of the social operation of its work, the pupils must assume the responsibility for their choices concerning the stakes of knowing "framing" and "installation production". In the video one sees that the teacher does not only ask questions, but that he imitates the other pupils who are the public of the pupils installation. The changes of posture show however, with the viewing of the small girl with the blue sweater, an articulation of the speech on P. Greenaway heard in class and the production of a new speech directly related to the context of the learning task, and an appropriation of the new speech by the small girl with the red sweater. One can also notice the fact that the pupils return several times "to check" the framing and the "production" of their installation.

This last indication shows us that in spite of the fact that this part of the task is based in a significant way on ritualized schemata, the presence of the object ("the installation of the device in the schoolyard") remains a fundamental element to include/understand as much the interventions of the teacher (who wants to give the truth stakes of the task), than the pupils who must make a correspondence between the speech on the installation and the effective results of their work.

As in the former extract, the children begin the task of presentation of their installation by a "schoolarly" way: on the one hand, they "recites" a speech, on Greenaway, then their own choice in this particular installation; in addition, they use the word according to a predetermined order... we are far from a spontaneous activity.

However, the doubts of one of the pupils in relation to the task envisaged encourage another pupil to speak, he does it this time in a more spontaneous way, integrating not only the "official" speech on Greenaway, but also the spontaneous speech relating to their own work.

A rapid course of the choices of installation production and framing from pupils gives us a last indication on the importance of these two stakes of the activity and the general appropriation of the artistic work by the children.
We will conclude that one of the central characteristics of the educational step is management by the teacher of two dimensions of the activity of learning:

1) a dimension relating to the structures of the educational action like a joint activity, whose prototypic operation is action alternation in connection with the different objects of knowledge. In the educational situations, this action alternation can correspond to interactive schemata ritualized by the school institution (question/answer, instruction/followed instructions...). In this case, in general the initiative and responsibility for the activity belong to the high place, generally held by the teacher or expert. But action alternation can also be that resulting from some social practice, in which the child, without leaving his institutional role of a pupil, can move to various places and roles and assume the responsibility for it (public mediator /, journalist/reader...). In a majority of the cases, for this second type of activity, the teachers have recourse to gestures of “devolution” to allow the pupils to leave a passive posture and to assume, during a time, a high place.

2) a dimension relating to the (common) semiotical operations of learning processes like sequence of semioses. In this sequence, the material aspects of the context (in our case makes it carry out an installation having to really function with respect to other pupils) as a configuration of signs, plays a structuring role for the activity of the pupils and the direction in which they can produce.

Our observations enabled us to check that the choices and handling of the cases by the pupils reveal true choices with the stakes of knowing about the sequence that was the setting in scene and framing. These few remarks allow us to question the conclusions of certain situationists researchers: the social practices of reference are not a guarantee of the operation of the didactic sequence, in particular when their borders merge with those of class practices.

Learning sequences in school imply, on the contrary, a certain degree of rupture with social practices. These discontinuities offer to learning from specific (cognitive) tools which cover the structure and interactive operation of the situations (modes of interactions teaching - pupil, pupil – pupil, but also the other "situational roles"), as much as that the average materials and symbolic systems of the didactic context (resources, teaching equipment, arranged spaces of work).

The learning significations can not emerge only of the interactions between people. The knowledge objects, as well as the practices related with these objects, also mediate the activity in class. For the teacher, they constitute a resource of planning and management; for the pupils, they are at the same
time the means and the goals of the sequences of training.

In the field of didactic, the existence of specific knowledge objects pleads for maintaining the didactic disciplinary fields in agreement with the specificity of their knowledge objects. In our case, the specific operation of this knowledge object in a disciplinary field implies particular didactic transpositions and situations of teaching/learning adapted to those specific operations.

References


