



'use your words'

a sociocultural approach to the teacher's role in the transition from physical to verbal strategies of resolving peer conflicts among toddlers

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ABSTRACT

In resolving peer conflicts among young children, a sociocultural approach stresses the importance of creating a Zone of Proximal Development through the teacher's use of dialogic tools. This approach is questioned and modified following a review of studies of toddlers' peer conflicts and of language acquisition. In the early years, the non-symbolic, social function of speech predominates. Only gradually do toddlers learn to understand the decontextualized, symbolic function of language that teachers tend to use when they try to discuss feelings, intentions or causes of a peer conflict. Teachers are easily deceived by toddlers' formulaic phrases. Teachers are advised to respect young children's (non-verbal) logic-in-action and to use interactive strategies that foster togetherness. Young children have to experience dialogic tools as meaningful moves in conflict resolution that can be integrated into the (non-verbal) strategies they already have developed.

KEYWORDS *early education; language acquisition; non-verbal communication; sociocultural approach; teacher's role*

introduction

'Use your words.' Teachers often intervene in young children's conflicts by reminding them of this precept. Although most teachers acknowledge that children's pushing, shouting and hitting is normative behaviour at the age of two to five years, their educational goal is to guide young children's transition from physical to more culturally appropriate and approved verbal strategies of resolving peer conflicts. In this paper, we discuss the teacher's role in this

process of transition from a sociocultural perspective. Firstly, we review some basic sociocultural insights into the role of teachers. In particular, we focus on the teacher's role in learning to resolve peer conflicts. We then discuss the sociocultural approach to peer conflict resolution by reviewing recent research of peer conflicts and language development. Finally, we will discuss our main contentions concerning the teacher's role in learning to 'use your words.'

the teacher's role in the child's Zone of Proximal Development

In recent years there has been a growing interest in the application of Vygotsky's theory to early childhood education in daycare centres and pre-schools (David, 1996; Ebbeck, 1996; Smith, 1996). The sociocultural approach to this issue emphasizes the sociocultural system within which children learn *and* which is jointly created by children and adults in an interdependent relationship. The key principle of this approach is that all development begins with social interaction, and that development consists of the internalization of social processes. According to Vygotsky's theory, children participate in cultural activities with skilled partners and come to internalize the tools for thinking that they have practised in social situations. Internalization is not a passive process. Children play an active role in constructing their own unique understanding within the cultural context.

Barbara Rogoff (1990) and others have shown that children can perform much more skillfully together with others than they could alone. More experienced partners are important for the child's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Vygotsky explains this key concept in his theory of education as follows:

We propose that an essential feature of learning is that it creates the zone of *proximal development*; that is, learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when a child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers. Once these processes are internalized, they become part of the child's independent developmental achievement. (Vygotsky, 1978: 90, our emphasis)

The ZPD is a dynamic region of sensitivity to learning in which children develop through participation with more experienced members of the culture. Rogoff (1990) uses the term 'guided participation' to include both the notion of guidance (or scaffolding) and participation in culturally approved activities. Guided participation means permitting children to do as much as they can themselves while what they cannot do is filled in by the mother's (or other tutor's) activities. According to Anne Smith (1996) the sociocultural approach correctly puts the emphasis on the role of the teacher. *If the teacher is truly working in the child's ZPD she is actually moving the child forward in her*

understanding, instead of leaving her in the original state' (Smith, 1996: 95). Stressing the role of the teacher is not an argument for a top-down approach. Smith emphasizes that the child will only move progressively forward when the child has an active role and when the teacher is sensitive to the child's understanding.

Vygotsky's theory offers important principles for early childhood education. To be applied in daily practice, however, these principles need to be specified at a more concrete level. In the literature we have found two examples of a Vygotskian approach to peer conflict resolution among young children: one publication of Göncü and Cannella (1996) and one of Buzzelli (1995). These papers are based on studies in nursery schools and kindergartens for children of three years and older. The authors look at conflict resolution as a problem-solving activity that requires adult guidance, like solving puzzles or classifying objects. 'It is the responsibility of adults to make available to children, during their joint effort to resolve children's conflicts, culturally valued skills that children can use later without the adult's assistance' (Göncü and Cannella, 1996: 60). Both papers stress the teacher's use of dialogic tools in order to create a ZPD.

Göncü and Cannella consider *questioning* as the most effective tool for teachers to guide children towards an acceptable resolution; the questions being about what happened and why it happened, about children's feelings and consequences of their behaviour, and about mutually acceptable solutions. According to Buzzelli (1995), the dialogic tools of the teacher consist of repeated formulaic phrases for *correct and appropriate things to say* ('may I join in?'), the use of *joint knowledge markers* ('what is *our* rule about hitting?'), or the use of *cued elicitation to lead the children to preset conclusions*, and *providing words* for their feelings or mental states. Göncü and Cannella (1996) and Buzzelli (1995) argue that through teacher-guided dialogues children can appropriate the verbal tools for reflection, self-control and finding mutually satisfying solutions.

underestimation of young children's non-verbal skills

Although both papers contain interesting insights and valuable practical ideas, we are of the opinion that something very important is missing: the recognition of children's active role in peer conflict resolution. In addition, the authors underestimate the role of non-verbal interaction in the resolution of peer conflicts. The papers demonstrate precisely the top-down approach that Anne Smith warned against. Current research in child care centres shows that children younger than three years are already capable of conflict resolution without teacher guidance chiefly when they are engaged in joint play before the onset of the conflict, especially by using *non-verbal strategies* (De Waal,

2000; Singer, 2002; Verbeek et al., 2000). Research with toddlers (Singer and Hannikäinen, 2002) also shows that their teachers rarely rely on the kind of questioning recommended by Göncü and Cannella (1996) and Buzzelli (1995). These research findings provoke three challenging questions to the sociocultural approach. First, is the role of verbal strategies in the development of conflict resolution overestimated in Vygotsky's theory? Second, how to conceptualize young children's transition from non-verbal strategies to culturally valued verbal strategies? Third, what is the teacher's role during this transition?

lower and higher psychological processes

First, we discuss the strong emphasis on dialogic tools in conflict resolution: to talk it out, rather than resort to physical force. This dictum is deeply rooted in our post-modern western culture. All children have to make a transition from physical to verbal strategies of conflict resolution; obviously teachers have to encourage children to 'use their words' instead of their physical power by pushing or hitting.

Although Vygotsky lived almost a century ago, today we still share his assumption that the development of speech is the key process in the civilization of the individual. According to Vygotsky (1978; 1987), the appropriation of systems of signs (language) opens up the possibility of thinking about situations that are not directly perceptible. The child's development of speech is basic to his or her development of the higher psychological processes, for instance 'creative imagination', 'planning', 'voluntary attention' and 'regulation of actions by will'. He argued that young children are almost totally bound to the practical situation. Their actions are determined by their physical needs and impulses which are stimulated by whatever they observe in their immediate environment. Their speech is an emotional form of behaviour and has only a social function. Their first vocabulary does not have a symbolic function: 'the child grasps the external structure word-object earlier than the inner symbolic structure' (Vygotsky, 1962: 50). This function frees word meaning from the context of the speech situation and enables reflective thought. Only with the development of speech and the higher psychological processes, Vygotsky hypothesized, will children become able to control their impulses and act according to social and moral rules of politeness and respect (Miltenburg and Singer, 2000). The child then uses words as an instrumental, mediated method to solve a problem, and achieves 'a much broader range of activity' (Vygotsky, 1978: 26). Vygotsky's theory has been criticized for its separation of lower from higher psychological processes. Van der Veer and Van IJzendoorn (1985) have shown that Vygotsky made too categorical a distinction between the lower and higher psychological processes, and that his conception of lower processes as 'natural' and 'passive' is false. An abundance

of research has demonstrated that mothers and babies communicate quite well without words, and that babies actively participate in this interaction process. According to Emde et al. (1991), parent and infant *co-construct procedural knowledge* (routines, rituals, recurring little shared jokes) that is crucial for the development of a 'moral self' in infants and a sense of belonging to a parent, family and cultural group. As a result of face-to-face, turn-taking behaviour with caregivers, infants gradually learn rules for turn-taking and reciprocity, for give and take, together with the powerful motive for using these rules: 'together' is so pleasurable. They argue that this procedural knowledge is a basic form of morality, long before the child is able to verbalize moral rules (Emde et al., 1991: 261). Procedural knowledge is also constitutive of the infant's first *preverbal sense of control and agency*: because of shared regularities, the infant is able to influence his or her caregiver. Recent research of peer interactions between babies and toddlers arrives at similar, and even more striking conclusions (Corsaro, 1997; Oliveira and Rossetti-Ferreira, 1996; Stambak and Sinclair, 1993; Verba, 1993). Of course babies and toddlers are unable to discuss in advance a script for a joint play, but they do have activity ideas at a sensorimotor level (Singer, 2002). They construct a logic-in-action. During their joint play, children co-construct meanings by using non-verbal means such as gestures and facial expressions accompanied with vocal signs and later on with simple words. They show a capacity for interpersonal coordination and mutual adjustment. Joint play of toddlers often has the character of a collage of changing story lines (Oliveira and Rossetti-Ferreira, 1996). Observing this, we may respond by lamenting the lack of coherence and planning in their joint play, but we would do better to respond by being amazed at their improvisational talent.

Even in peer conflicts, toddlers' capacity for mutual adjustment is obvious. Young children cooperate far more than they fight with each other. When they meet strong resistance toddlers often give up, without fighting or crying for the teacher's help. And where they do persist in trying to get what they want, they are careful not to spoil the good relationship with their opponent. They withdraw for a while and try again, smile or bargain by offering playthings. Ethological studies suggest that young children's tendency to de-escalate a conflict is especially strong in situations where they were playing together before the onset of the conflict (De Waal, 2000; Verbeek et al., 2000).

At a sensorimotor level, therefore, young children are capable of mutual adjustment, co-construction of meanings, appropriation of cultural tools and preverbal forms of agency; whereas Vygotsky mainly discussed these phenomena in relationship to the development of the higher psychological processes. In our view, the role of non-verbal and physical strategies of children has been undervalued. In addition, the 'non symbolic, social function' of speech, which predominates in the early years, remains unexplored.

the transition from non-verbal to verbal strategies

How should we conceptualize young children's transition from non-verbal to culturally valued verbal strategies? Both continuous and discontinuous processes are at work in the preverbal and verbal period of the child's development. Moreover, within the early verbal period, there are developmental changes which necessitate a rethinking of the use of verbal strategies in teacher's intervention in peer conflicts. We will now look more deeply at recent studies of language acquisition.

A number of researchers emphasize the continuity of the transition from non-verbal to verbal communication. The early interaction of adult and child is seen as a proto-conversation, characterized by looking, touching and making vocal signs in close face-to-face communication. There is ample evidence of the toddler's performance as a meaning-maker through prelinguistic articulatory resources. Locke (1995) refers to children's varied use of their voice, before the middle of their first year, to express discomfort, to call for their mother and make requests. Halliday (1975), in observing his son Nigel from nine to 18 months, has shown how Nigel used his articulatory resources to express his wants, to regulate others, to get in touch and express his feelings: his vocalizations had instrumental, regulatory, interactive and personal functions. Children's first communicative strategies function to 'bring the other into a state of togetherness'. They are 'equivalent to non-verbal interactive acts' and 'do not qualify as symbolic speech use; rather than reflecting on or representing some piece of reality, they *are* pieces of social reality', as Ninio and Snow (1996: 68) observed in a series of studies with children aged 12 to 32 months. Gestures and vocalizations are part of a single display system (Bates, 1979). 'No' or 'me' are examples of early utterances during peer conflicts that accompany hitting and pushing. In the period between eight and 20 months, mothers report a decrease in the use of gestures and a gradual predominance of verbal utterances in the communication between child and adult (Ninio and Snow, 1996). Should we therefore consider the acquisition of language as a mere substitution of the non-verbal by the verbal? What is known about children's development of language use towards utterances that 'reflect on and represent some piece of reality'?

Recent studies of changes in children's comprehension and production of language in the early period emphasize discontinuity. These changes point to a reorganization of the child's communicative system, but they often are difficult for caregivers to recognize as such. Although the acquisition of turn-taking principles in proto-conversations may be seen as a gradual process, the content of the conversation changes dramatically. The infant, who is initially focused on face-to-face exchanges with the caregiver, begins to respond to the reciprocal demands of the interaction in the middle of the first year. In the

process of internalizing the social routines in which it is involved, the child creates a mental representation of the event, and an advanced form of imitation, 'mimesis', arises, as a prelinguistic system of communication (Nelson 1996). Imitation becomes 'a unique vehicle for elaborating the similarity between self and other, and for understanding that others, like the self, are sentient beings with thoughts, intentions, and emotions' (Meltzoff, 1990: 141, quoted in Nelson, 1996: 102). Then, for the child, the content of the conversation is changing. From nine months on children begin to grasp the idea that the behavior of the other is intentional or meaningful. That is, they come to understand that the eye movements, gestures and sounds of the other are *relevant* to the social interaction and they are going to understand the underlying intention. From this moment on, Carpenter et al. (1998) observe a development in sharing and following attentional focus with the other person, the first use of gestures to communicate, learning through imitation, and, around the first birthday, the referential use of language. According to Tomasello (2001a: 150) this may be considered 'a social cognitive revolution' which 'sets the stage for the second year of life in which it [the child] begins to learn imitatively the use of all kinds of tools and artifacts, with linguistic symbols being one special case'.

The subsequent process may be viewed as fundamentally a development towards decontextualization, a detachment from being tied to the practical situation, a detachment which Vygotsky thought was characteristic of the higher mental processes. What are children doing with their language during this process towards decontextualization? And in what sense is language a special case compared to non-verbal communication?

The process towards decontextualization relates to the meanings of words as well as to the uses of words. Regarding the meaning of first words, Barrett (1995) distinguishes social-pragmatic words which fulfil a *pragmatic function* ('no' in a situation of opposition), *context-bound words* of which the use is limited to a specific situation ('down' only while the child is in parent's arms) and *referential words* which are used as names for classes of objects, actions, or qualities of objects and events. According to Nelson (1996), first word meanings refer initially to the whole event. Experiencing the adult's use of words, these 'event representations' become differentiated, and specific categories are extracted from their binding to the context of the whole event. The word meanings change accordingly. In addition, Halliday (1975) and Ninio and Snow (1996) observe that, around 18 months, a word is no longer bound to a single function, but may now have more functions. The latter authors consider this developmental change towards 'pragmatically flexible' forms as a 'revolution' (Ninio and Snow, 1996: 105).

An example in the daycare centre of such a context bound-meaning comes from our own case study of Cas. Cas, a one-year-old boy, takes away a desired

object from another child, and says '*diehadik*' (*thatwasmine*). This utterance is a formulaic phrase – Cas has not yet acquired the separate words that make up the utterance, or the past tense of verbs. He has just learned this formula in a similar situation when he himself was the victim of another, older child. Whereas the function of the utterance of the older child was to give a reason – that he had the right to play with the object – Cas only learned the utterance as a relevant tool to underscore his action. According to Veneziano and Sinclair (1995), the emergence of reasons is not the result of the acquisition of new words: linguistic forms were already used, but they acquired new functions. Ninio and Snow (1996) report that reasons are still 'extremely marginal' at 32 months.

Regarding the decontextualization process of the *use* of words, Halliday (1975) describes how his son Nigel uses his words in *new, different* contexts in the 16th month. Whereas previously he has used a vocalization referring to 'stick' to ask for the object (regulatory), now the context is one of recall and, somewhat later, prediction: the vocalization now means 'I saw a stick when I was out for a walk', or 'I shall see sticks when I go out for a walk.' By referring to past or future, he abandons the here-and-now, and starts to talk about *ideas*. This new *informative* function arises out of the earlier functions expressing feelings and interest, and marks the transition to the adult system, in which the informative function is dominant. This function is essentially decontextualized. However, it still takes years before this decontextualization process reaches its mature form. The use of language as a representational medium undergoes important changes, changes that are instigated by talking with other people about the child's experience and experiences of the other.

teacher's and children's use of language

In an adult's communication, the informative function may relate to experiences, but often concerns hypothetical situations, conventions, opinions, attitudes and so on. Even in conversations with young children, adults may adhere to these uses. Despite ample evidence of fine tuning in motherese (Snow, 2000), a number of studies also show that there may be a mismatch between parents and children under three years (Durkin, 1995). In the following example, a teacher intervenes in a conflict between Alban, three years 11 months and Nathan, three years seven months. In her conversation with Alban, she refers to a hypothetical situation of a 'quiet' Alban, to attitudes of the other child in that hypothetical situation, to reasons for attitudes in that hypothetical situation, wants of the other child, etc.

Nathan: [gilt]
Teacher: Alban.

- Teacher: Zo ben je, zo ben je Nathan pijn aan het doen. [Well, you are, you are hurting Nathan.]
- Nathan: Hij ging de tent kapot maken. Ik wil dat niet en Thijs dat wil dat ook niet. [He broke the tent. I don't like that; nor does Thijs.]
- Teacher: Alban misschien kun je de tent, Alban kun je alsjeblieft de tent weer goed maken? Want dat heb jij gedaan. [Alban, perhaps you could, Alban, could you please repair the tent? Because you did that.]
- Alban: (runs away to the kitchen)
- Teacher: Nou ik help je wel Nathan. Ik, ik ga met Alban praten. Alban is niet in een goede stemming om te luisteren. [Now I'll help you Nathan. I'll go and talk to Alban. Alban is not in the right mood to listen.]
- Teacher: Alban kom eens even. Nee nee alban. Alban ik wil, Alban, doe eens een beetje rustiger. Weet je wat? Ik denk dat als je wat rustiger kan spelen dan zal Nathan het wel leuk vinden om jou in de tent te hebben. Want hij vindt het niet leuk als je de, als je de tent steeds kapot maakt, en dan wil hij dat je weggaat. En hij wil niet als je, en als je heel druk bent dan doe je Randa pijn, en dat vindt Nathan ook niet leuk. Daarom wil hij ook niet jou in de tent hebben. En als je heel druk doet dan af en toe per ongeluk doe je iemand pijn. En Randa is een vriendinnetje van Nathan. Hij wil niet dat je Randa pijn doet. Dus hij wil niet met jou spelen. Dus rustiger en dan en dan is het makkelijker voor andere kinderen met jou te spelen, o.k.? Dus een rustige Alban. [Come now, Alban. No, no Alban. Alban I want, Alban be a bit calmer now. You know what? I think if you can play a bit more calmly then Nathan would welcome you in the tent. Because he doesn't like it if you destroy the tent, and then he wants you to go away. And he doesn't want you, if you are over-excited you hurt Randa, and Nathan doesn't like that either. That's why he doesn't want you in the tent. And if you are too excited now and again you hurt someone by accident. And Randa is a friend of Nathan. He doesn't want you hurting Randa. And so he doesn't want to play with you. So play more calmly and then it will be easier for the other children to play with you, OK? So be a quiet Alban.]
- Alban: Dan ga ik, dan ga ik, weet je, dan ga ik ergens anders een spel [?] doen. [Then I'll go, you know, I'll play somewhere else.]
- Teacher: Da's ook een goed idee. [That's a good idea, too.]

Although the conversation relates to an experience, the teacher relies fully on a symbolic representation of the background and solution of the conflict. It may be seriously questioned how much the child understands of this verbal strategy of the teacher.

We think the crucial point is that children's expanding vocabulary and emerging grammar may deceive the teacher. Young children, as Vygotsky (1962) points out correctly, 'grasp the external structure of words', but their word meanings are different from the structure and use of words in the adult's system. A teacher may take formulaic phrases or verbal context-bound utterances ('diehadik' - 'thatwasmine') as if the child is already competent in using advanced verbal strategies. She may intervene in children's conflicts by proposing strategies of negotiation and sharing, as in the following example of Otto. Otto desperately expresses his wish to play with Jim's toy. He repeatedly

says 'together' ('*samen*'), while trying to take a toy from Jim. Although he takes over the teacher's verbal maxim of playing together, his non-verbal behaviour is obviously aimed at overpowering Jim and to snatch his toy. He uses the formula 'together' for his own purpose, which is exactly the opposite of what is his teachers mean by 'together'.

In daily conversation, and particularly in the emotional context of a peer conflict which is very conducive to understanding others (Dunn and Brown, 2001), young children know the relevant verbal strategies. Their pragmatic use is appropriate to the situation, but the 'inner structure' of their word meanings is restricted. They have to learn how words relate to each other: the inner structure of the system of emotionally-laden words ('doesn't like', 'hurt') and words referring to mental states ('excited', 'calm', 'quiet'), relations between statements of cause and effect ('if you are overexcited you hurt R'), explanations expressed in successive utterances ('And R. is a friend of N. He doesn't want you hurting R. And so he doesn't want to play with you.') etc. They have to learn to use their symbolic-representational competence as a powerful tool to reflect on events. Beside the 'revolutions' of earlier periods (the discovery that *sounds* are relevant to the context and may serve as social acts, and the discovery of *how* words are relevant in different contexts), the child now learns that the context of *the other words* is relevant to meaning. Instead of the context of the particular situation, the child learns how utterances relate to a language context, how peer conflicts may be solved by using symbolic tools.

In this sense, language becomes a special case compared to non-verbal communication. By the *referential, informative* function of language, new categories of strategies of conflict resolution are opened up: justifying, arguing, creating compromises by referring to ideas about the future, perspectives or alternatives, are made available only through language. The following example may illustrate how it works. Cas and Bob solve a conflict by referring to concepts that have no non-verbal counterpart. Concepts of time typically evolve as a consequence of the development of higher mental functioning

Situation: Cas (three years one month) and Bob (two years ten months) are playing in the kitchen-playhouse. Cas has a spoon.

- Bob: he mag ik dat? [Can I have that?]
Cas: nee, ik had hem gepakt! [No, I have taken it!]
Bob: Mag ik het ook *even*? [Can I have it also *just for a while*?]
Cas: Ja *straks*. [Yes, *soon*.]

By referring to time, Bob is able to modify his request – 'just for a while' – which enables Cas to accommodate Bob. Cas accedes to the time restriction and proposes that Bob has the spoon a bit later.

In what sense are the 'dialogic tools' of the teacher effective? Actually, there

is a vast amount of literature about misunderstandings between adults and children. Durkin (1995) discusses a number of these studies and concludes not only that these misunderstandings are 'productive', 'constructive', 'beneficial to the learner', but he even considers them as 'central to the dynamics of progress' (Durkin, 1995: 233). By their strong motivation to communicate, young children actively strive to evaluate linguistic information. They monitor adult language and behaviour for cues to understand them, and respond according to their partial understanding. McTear (1984) suggests that children follow such rules as 'if there is a question give an answer, even if you do not understand it'. He shows how the child's inaccurate linguistic comprehension and production encourages parents to ask for explanation and to collaborate with the child. Children *learn* to use the environment (Tomasello, 2001a; 2001b).

the teacher's role revisited

The question, now, is how to conceptualize the role of the teacher in the children's development of conflict-management, in which language has such an important role. We propose to rethink 'the dialogic models' of Göncü and Cannella (1996) and Buzzelli (1995) from the following perspectives.

fitting in children's logic-in-action

Teachers have to understand that conflicts are a natural part of social life and playing together; and that young children, in general, are well equipped to resolve their conflicts on their own. Their first main task is to facilitate and to fit in the conflict resolution strategies that young children have already developed. Young children's tendency to resolve conflict constructively is closely related to the quality of the relationship with their opponent before the conflict arises. Therefore teachers have to ensure that they foster positive relationships between the children. By structuring the room, time and play objects, they can prevent an excess of conflict (Singer and Hannikainen, 2002). A positive sense of togetherness in the group of children can be fostered by teachers by giving individual attention to all children and by introducing rituals and routines in which the children can actively participate (Corsaro, 1997; Singer, 2002).

In cases where teachers want to intervene in peer conflicts, they have to respect the logic-in-action of all children involved. They have to mediate between the children and aim to ensure that the children's play continues (Singer and Hannikainen, 2002). Respecting young children's logic-in-action means that teachers should positively confirm the activity ideas of both opponents: both opponents are right in their own way. Bonica (1997) argues

that this positive confirmation of both opponents clears the way for mutual acceptance between the children at a relational level. In addition, teachers have to appeal to young children's improvisational talents in the here and now. They should focus on the practical possibilities of continuing the play together or separately by suggesting compromises, introducing new elements in their play or by distraction.

mediating through language

While mediating between toddlers in daycare centres, teachers often verbalize directives, justifications, clarifications of the feelings and activity ideas of the children involved (Singer and Hannikainen, 2002). They also use 'joint knowledge markers' and practical verbalized maxims, as Buzzelli recommends: 'don't hurt', 'use your words', 'take turns' or 'play together'. On the one hand, our studies in daycare centres show that toddlers are able to appropriate practical dialogic tools. Two- and three-year olds who propose taking turns during a conflict are not exceptional. But on the other hand, teachers should be aware that young children may incorporate new linguistic tools into their own communicative system without immediate appropriation of the meanings and functions of those forms in the teacher's use of language. The example of Otto's formula 'together' is revealing in this respect. Another example is young children's use of the rule 'use your words'. When teachers suggest that toddlers should ask permission and talk rather than using physical force, they often accept this suggestion. They ask for permission, but if their opponent says 'no', they lapse into their old habit of pulling and pushing to get what they want. Probably, these children have interpreted asking as a formulaic means of getting their own way rather than initiating a negotiation as their teachers intended.

Creating a Zone of Proximal Development

This brings us to the debate on the range of the ZPD. In studies of the ZPD relating to problem-solving activities one can often observe progress in children. In collaborative play, adults may easily experience the level of children's operations with objects, as in puzzles or building towers, and changes in successive sessions. The case of social development and language development is different. As we have pointed out earlier, even 'revolutionary' changes are difficult to recognize. In the beginning of this paper, we quoted Göncü and Cannella to the effect that adults should make available skills that 'children can use *later* without the adult's assistance'. However, studies of language acquisition, like Bruner's (1978) on speech acts and McCabe and Peterson's (1991) study of narratives, show a considerable time lag between

the language of the mother and the language production of the child. Ninio and Snow (1996) showed in their longitudinal study of 12-month- to 32-month-old children, that children and their mothers had their own repertoires, which converged *only in the long run*. They report that the language of the mothers with children under three years had a constant level of speech use, which indicates that mothers do not simplify below a certain level. The authors suggest that the role of the language of the mother is that it provides the children with a 'stable verbal interactive frame *to grow into*' (Ninio and Snow, 1996: 112). When children understand that the words of adults are *relevant* to the context of the situation and later, the context of the other words, they gradually discover their way with words. This creates another argument for fitting in the logic-of-action of the children involved in the conflict. Their language is, essentially, an experientially-based system. In the daycare period, teachers may sustain the development in children's thinking, from intelligent practical action with language as a tool to manipulate ongoing activities, to intelligent reflective action with language as a tool to free oneself from the immediate context. Children have to experience the powers of negotiation, such that 'use your words' may satisfy their wants of control and relationship. In creating interactive strategies which foster togetherness, teachers enable young children to experience dialogic tools *as meaningful moves* in conflict resolution.

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