

Dossier: VYGOTSKY'S DEFECTOLOGY

## Vygotski's theories on Defectology: contributions to the special education of the 21st century

*Teorizações de Vygotski sobre a Defectologia:  
contribuições à educação especial do século XXI*

*Teorizaciones de Vygotski sobre Defectología:  
contribuciones a la educación especial del siglo XXI*

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### ABSTRACT

This text exposes the pertinence of L. S. Vygotski's (1896-1934) theoretical-methodological assertions to the Soviet Defectology at its original birth, when our today's Basic Education universalization did not exist yet, to Special Education of the 21st century, when the right to Education in democratic states is regarded as a means of social and educational inclusion. The author turns out to be revolutionary for subsidizing an integrated vision of the constitution of the human psychic activity, defending the plain possibility of humanization, the formation of cultural building of human species in both able and disabled people.

**Keywords:** Vygotski; Special Education; Defectology.

### RESUMO

O texto expõe a pertinência das asserções teórico-metodológicas de L. S. Vygotski (1896-1934) à Defectologia Soviética em seu contexto original, quando a Educação Básica não era universalizada, e as coloca em perspectiva para o século XXI, quando a Educação é assumida como direito para todos, nos Estados democráticos e sob a perspectiva da inclusão social e educacional. O autor revela-se revolucionário por subsidiar uma visão integrada da constituição do psiquismo humano, por defender a possibilidade de humanização, a formação do edifício cultural nas pessoas com e sem deficiências.

**Palavras-chave:** Vygotski; Educação Especial; Defectologia.

### RESUMEN

El texto expone la pertinencia de las afirmaciones teórico- metodológicas de L. S. Vygotski (1896-1934) a la Defectología Soviética en su contexto original, cuando la Educación Básica no era universalizada, y las pone en perspectiva para el siglo XXI, cuando la educación es asumida como un derecho para todos, en los Estados democráticos y desde la perspectiva de la inclusión social y educativa. El autor se revela revolucionario por subvencionar una visión integrada de la constitución del psiquismo humano, por defender la posibilidad de humanización, la formación del edificio cultural en las personas con o sin deficiencias.

**Palabras clave:** Vygotski; Educación Especial; Defectología.

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## INTRODUCTION

Psychology, as science and area of action, takes educational action not only when it links or directs its knowledge to school practice. In addition to the recognized interventions it may have in the particular scope of School/Educational Psychology, its educational character is manifested when it explains how human beings are constituted as such, that is, when it shows openly the factors that compete or are inherent to this constitution. Assuming this conception, the text seeks to contribute to the formation of psychologists and other professionals involved with human development. It aims to expose the pertinence of L. S. Vygotski's (1896-1934) theoretical-methodological assertions to the Soviet Defectology in its original context, at a time when Basic Education was not universalized, and put them in perspective for the 21st century, when now Education is assumed as a right and law for all, in democratic states and under the aegis of social and educational inclusion.

The work of Vygotski credits him as theoretician of a Psychology that assumes a developmental, therefore, an educational, role, able to subsidize or inspire research and professional activities, especially in the areas of Psychology and Education. This is particularly important because social life in the first decades of the 21st century has presented challenges of all kinds, whose confrontation and overcoming stimulate the academy to recover such knowledge already conquered. One of these clashes concerns the problem of social exclusion which, according to Vygotski's theory, becomes a hindrance to the development of human psychic activity.

Under the methodological matrix of Historical-Dialectical Materialism, Vygotski already theorized, in so geographically and culturally diverse spaces as distant as from our ones, that what is properly human in each individual is formed in a socio-historical way and that what differentiates one from the others is not biologically given from birth. This central thesis led him to theorize on areas of Psychology as art, personality, learning and human development, among others, always relating the social constitution of the psychic activity to the objective, material conditions. He, with A. R. Luria, A. N. Leontiev, and others, theorised in a society in which a large portion of the workers experienced exclusion from basic and worthy conditions of existence and were challenged to face real and naturalized problems that hinder ontogenetic development of men with and without disabilities in a scientific way. The framework of this Soviet psychological school aroused from researches about *Defectology*, a term used by Vygotski (1997a) and Vygotski and Luria (1996) for an area of theoretical studies and of practical and professional intervention, a domain now called Special Education.

Stating that the biological limits in the deficiency are not in themselves an impediment to psychic development, Vygotski pleads for a Psychology to be indeed educational. Instead this, social relations can prevent someone, even without disabilities, from develop as much as he could. The poorest are among the most vulnerable to non-development, not by poverty itself, but because of the limited access to cultural tools and products already conquered by humanity, higher qualitative objective and subjective means of living, such as science, art or philosophy, for instance. A poor appropriation of material and cultural goods prevents almost all the population to use them as raw material for new elaborations, a noticeable negative impact on the course of human development. Important objectivations depends on the formal educational service, the universal public basic school, a main point for the vygotskian theory.

## SPECIAL EDUCATION IN BRAZIL AND VYGOTSKI'S THEORY

The current recovery of Vygotski's theory occurs in a very different context in which his investigations took place. Illiteracy, as an item of comparison, was very high in Russia. Statistics of that period are controversial. It is relevant here what V. I. Lenin (1870-1924) tells (LÊNINE, 1977) about Russian instruction between 1897 and 1920, that in European Russia, out of every 1,000 inhabitants, 229 read and write in 1897 and, in 1920, 330, with notable disadvantage for women in both years. Until the October Revolution of 1917, says Boldirev (19--), three-quarters of the Russian population under Czarism was illiterate, "about 80 percent of children and adolescents did not go to school; dozens of non-Russian peoples lacked the possibility and the right to have schools in their mother tongue" (p. 3). Vygotski's Defectology faced the problem of basic non-schooling not only for people with disabilities, but for the population as a whole. If not by the Stalinist censorship, limiting his investigations and publications, his proposals might have had a greater impact on ordinary and special education. Also he died at the height of his elaborations, before his thirty-eight years old.

After a century, the recovery of Vygotskian thought takes place in a country with a notably reduced young and adult illiteracy: 11.5% in 2004, 8.7% in 2012, and 7.0% in 2017 (IBGE/PNAD – *National Household Sample Survey*). Although encouraging, this percentage needs careful analysis, as it also reveals the conditions of national social exclusion. Illiteracy among people over 60 years of age is 19.3%, and among blacks and mulattos aged 15 years or over, 9.3%, while among whites aged 15 years and over, it is 4%. The distribution of illiteracy

is also unevenly among the regions of the country, with people aged 15 years and over: North 8%, Northeast 14.5%, South 3.5%, Southeast 3.5%, and Center-West 5.2%. But, according to the *National Education Plan* (PNE – Goal Nine), Brazil aim to eradicate illiteracy until 2024.

Such data partially reveal the effectiveness of educational public policies for Basic Education in its different modalities: Special Education, Youth and Adult Education, Field Education, etc. Being not sufficient, the term “functional illiteracy” was created to designate those who, despite going to school, can not master and use with propriety what it teaches.

The current public policies to confront illiteracy are linked to the “global movement for inclusive education, considered as a political, cultural, social and pedagogical action” unleashed “in defense of the right of all students to be together, learning and participating, without any type of discrimination”, as states the *National Policy on Special Education in the perspective of Inclusive Education*. Under that policy,

Inclusive education constitutes an educational paradigm based on the conception of human rights, combining equality and difference as inseparable values, advancing in relation to the idea of formal equity in contextualizing the historical circumstances of the production of exclusion in and out school (BRASIL, 2008, p.1).

If this policy, one way or another, positively impacts Primary and Higher Education, to investigate schooling at all levels points increasing difficulties arising from socioeconomic exclusion, challenging teachers, students and other professionals. Back to the comparison, the constitution of a new society from the ruins of the civil war during Russian post-revolutionary years led Vygotski to criticize the instituted traditions and set up the foundations of a new Defectology, but since the revolution was exactly confronting socioeconomic and educational exclusion it was not necessary a specific proposal of inclusive education or inclusive schools. Although they are different contexts, then and now, such critical conceptions in Psychology and Education, and the struggle for a school that could be good for all, are applicable to both.

Nowadays, to rely on Vygotskian foundations means to seek having an educational activity, to confront every barrier “that limits or prevents the person’s social participation, as well as enjoyment, fruition and exercise of their rights to accessibility, freedom of movement and expression, communication, access to information, understanding...” (BRASIL, 2015, Article 3º). Limitations must be faced rigorously and continuously, under penalty

of having a large part of the population, with and without disabilities, succumbing to the dulling of the development of what characterizes human psychism: Superior Psychological Functions (SPF).

Criticizing his contemporary bourgeois Defectology, Vygotski denounced pedagogical work carried out in special/auxiliary schools, which despised the sound potentialities of the students to focus more in their injuries and physical limits, what they did not possess. The main error of old Defectology: to look for what was not healthy or upright and rely solely on identification and description of problems – usually taken as strictly biological in nature. For him this is a great barrier not only didactic, but scientific, for Special Pedagogy, taking away the scientific object of special pedagogues and leaving little or nothing to pedagogical work – merely to apply educational tasks – since to conceive formation limits as purely biological and too much focused in physical factors, reduces education only to Medicine and Biology.

The complete set of hardships in educational formation under capitalist mode of production in those of its peripheral countries are not mere “accidents of fortune” or “human difficulties”, but a social production, real place and way designed for education by capitalist social relations. “School failure” is the term established in Brazil by M. Patto (1990) to define this broad phenomenon of education’s “place/way”, a concept that generated lots of studies along recent decades, confirming the “impediment barriers” denounced by Vygotski (1997a) and that able and disable students “failure” in common or special school is not due to their weaknesses or deficiencies but is a social product that can be historically overcome. Present day universal enrollment of people with or without disabilities, expansion of public schools and illiteracy almost eradicate, different from Vygotski’s Russia, allows higher achievements.

Advanced technology, like remote access to distant places, presents new social and educational development conditions: urban, architectural, transportation, communication and information, attitudinal and work processes (BRASIL, 2015). Thus, better means to identify everything that hinders psychic development, humanization, because development of psychic activity is in historical and dialectical relation to materiality in Vygotski’s work, and superior quality of things and material conditions that serve as means in educational activity change the pattern of humanization. Therefore, exclusion is not a psychological and interpersonal phenomenon, depending only on self conduct, individual decision and behavior toward social relations, given opportunities in a concrete historic-cultural environment. Socioeconomic and educational exclusion derive or are

embedded in the conditions of reproduction of existence. Accessibility to schooling alone can not solve the antagonism between humanity's production of wealth, its concentration on a small social group, and its opposite, mass expansion of poor people and below poverty line. To recognize, identify and tackle economic inequalities is fundamental to fight against social exclusion, and affirm the right of all to development.

Vygotskian theories, a rich chapter in the history of educational ideas, demand quality to be ensured in schooling accessibility, to allow the appropriation of human achievements, bringing people's humanity to higher and more complex plans, although he did not advocate school inclusion in 1920/1930 in the same way it would be formalized in the 1990s. But his perspective guide educational systems policies' formulation/implementation and constitute the matter of History of Education researches, linking abled and disabled human development to instruction and learning, interfering in the unique biographies of those who enroll themselves, remain and achieve, or not, the conclusion of their formal studies.

As evidenced by Manacorda (2006) and Saviani (2007), in most different countries and historical moments, schooling became a privilege of certain groups or social classes, but today, changes to maintain existence, mode of production, and its contradictions, imposed the democratization of education. To recognize who could be educated, how, when, and under which conditions, became topic of studies and propositions, as demanded by the civilizing process. However, to defend a school for all is not new. The philosopher J. A. Comenius (1592-1670), considered as father of modern didactics, wrote about "the art of teaching all to all," including the intellectual handicapped:

It should not be an obstacle for us to see that some are rude and stupid by nature, but it just recommends and makes this universal culture of the spirits more urgent. In fact, the more one is slow or rude in nature, the more needs to be helped, so that, as far as possible, be freed from his weakness and brutality. It is not possible to find such an unhappy spirit that culture can not bring some improvement (COMÊNIO, 1957, p. 140).

Indeed, before Vygotski, at the dawn of modernity, Comenius already recognized the educability of people with disabilities. To recover these two classic authors, among countless that marked their names in the History of Education and Special Education – traditionally organized as isolated educational care for disabilities and also as substitute for common education – inspires us to remain struggling for accessment to better quality schooling.

## SPECIAL EDUCATION AND ITS LEGISLATION IN BRAZIL

In order to reach the current moment, when Special Education becomes a teaching modality and has as its perspective inclusive education, much has been done. It is interesting to follow the different terminologies, conceptions, didactic-methodological strategies and purposes that led to the creation of specialized institutions for the intentionally educational service. In Brazil, during the Empire period, were created two institutions: *Imperial Institute of the Blind Boys* (1854), now *Benjamin Constant Institute*; *Institute of the Mute Deaf*, now *National Institute of Education of the Deaf* (1857). Subsequently, the Pestalozzi Institute (1926), specialized in the care of people with intellectual disabilities, and the *Association of Parents and Friends of the Exceptional* - APAE (1945) were founded.

These Brazilian initiatives seemed to be the educational "vanguard," yet they still remained within the bourgeois epistemological framework and in the midst of a slow transition country to the fullness of the typically modern capitalist mode of production through a long "non-classical bourgeois revolution," as Fernandes points out (2006). Much less was there what the Russian and Soviet group had been investigating under Vygotski's leadership after the Russian Revolution of October 1917. It is true that in the early decades of the twentieth century Vygotskian critiques and propositions were not disclosed to far beyond those countries close to the Soviet Union, but even then, its elaborations would take time to reach Brazil. This is understandable, since not even in his country the author had its theory widely divulged and accepted, during its short time of life and even later. Thus, it is possible to identify that other theoretical conceptions about learning and development subsidized Brazilian educational policies and practices.

In legal terms, it was in 1961 that the educational service for people with disabilities came to be contemplated in Law N. 4.024/61 (LDBEN – *National Education Bases and Guidelines Law*), which provided for the so-called "exceptional" right to education. This was amended by the subsequent LDBEN N. 5.692/71, which shows the use of the term "deficiencies":

Art. 9. Students with physical or mental disabilities, those who are considerably behind the regular enrollment age, and gifted students should receive special treatment, in accordance with the norms established by the competent Education Councils (BRASIL, 1971).

This new law does not provide for the organization of a system of education capable of revolutionizing and



morphing the development of the target audience of Special Education, as Vygotsky and Luria (1996) advocated in the 1930s: to bring pupae to become butterflies. The Soviet writers already had some educational experience of this nature. For example, in 1910, in St. Petersburg, the first school for deafblind children was opened (BASILOVA, 1962). Such a school changed after 1917 and worked until 1940. In Kharkov, from 1923-1925 to 1936, a similar institution functioned under Sokoliansky, quoted a few times by Vygotski (1997a). However, the best-known school for deafblind children was founded in 1963 in the city of Zagorsk (AS BORBOLETAS ..., 1992; MESCHERYAKOV, 1979).

Education of deafblind as an example of intervention that impacts and revolutionizes the life of students, precisely because of the difficulty in teaching language, compromising the whole development of the psychic activity, because it is the word that is the cell of consciousness (LURIA, 1986). Although the Zagorsk Home was a boarding school, which today could be considered as a segregator, it removed its students from isolation precisely by the domain of living language, according to a pedagogical proposal based on the philosophy and methods advocated by Vygotski and collaborators. There was already research and “pilot projects” in specialized or Special Education with remarkable results before enacted LDBEN 5.692/1971. In 1973, was created the *National Center for Special Education* (CENESP) to promote national expansion and improvement of attendance, allowing continuity in Higher Educational. Then, the “perspective of integration” was hegemonic in Special Education yet.

After a two decades military regime, a new democratic Federal Constitution of 1988, known as “The Citizen Constitution”, recognized that “social rights are education, health, work, leisure, security, social security, protection of motherhood and childhood, assistance to the homeless, in the form of this Constitution” (BRASIL, 1988, Article 6). It also includes:

Article 205. Education, the right of all and the duty of the State and the family, shall be promoted and encouraged with the collaboration of society, aiming at the full development of the person, his preparation for the exercise of citizenship and his qualification for work.

Art. 206. The teaching will be taught on the basis of the following principles:

- I – equal conditions for access and stay in school;
- II – freedom to learn, teach, research and disseminate thought, art and knowledge;
- III – pluralism of ideas and pedagogical conceptions, and coexistence of public and private educational institutions;

IV – free public education in official establishments;

V – valuation of teaching professionals, guaranteed by the law, career plan for the public teaching profession, with professional salary floor and entrance only by public competition of tests and titles, ensuring a single legal regime for all institutions maintained by the Union;

V – valuation of teaching professionals, guaranteed by the law, career plans for the public teaching profession, with professional salary floor and admission exclusively by public examination of tests and degrees; [Drafting given by Constitutional Amendment N. 19 of 1998]

V – valuation of school education professionals, guaranteed by law, career plans, with entrance only by public competition of tests and titles, those of public networks; [Redaction given by Constitutional Amendment N. 53, of 2006]

VI – democratic management of public education, according to the law;

VII – guarantee of quality standard;

VIII – National professional salary floor for professionals of public school education, under the terms of federal law.

Vygotski’s books began to be translated and published in Brazil in this context, attracting attention of researchers and scholars. Roughly, they were interested in democracy and occupied in responding to major national issues, such as the ills of public education – whose practice was far away from the spirit contained in the *Magna Carta*.

In the next decade, emblematic both for the world and Brazil, Law 8.069/1990, *Statute of Child and Adolescent* was enacted, providing the obligation of parents or guardians to enroll their children or pupils, with and without deficiencies, in the regular school system. At the same time, international documents, as *World Declaration of Education for All*, derived from a meeting in Jomtien (UNESCO, 1990), and *Salamanca Declaration and Action Line on Special Educational Needs* (UNESCO, 1994), though were not laws, also began to guide the formulation of public policies for inclusive education worldwide. In the international context, the fall of USSR and emergence of the USA as the sole societal model, emerged conceptions of revision of capitalism itself, its contradictions, ideas and practices, lacking, however, to trace deeply the origins of social exclusion, like the report *Education: a treasure to discover*, (UNESCO, 1996). Social life alternatives seemed to be limited to a reformulation of capitalism when the fight for school inclusion was proposed.

The moment demanded the overcoming of an alarming picture of intellectual/educational abandonment of a large part of the population, with or without disabilities. It was essential to review the causes of school exclusion and to promote changes in education systems

to ensure access and permanence for all in school. If, in the analytical documents produced, the root of exclusion, that is, the logic of capital accumulation, was not shown, it was claimed that schools would begin to combat discriminatory attitudes and to accommodate all children, regardless of physical conditions, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic, street, work, advent of distant or nomadic populations, or under other conditions that could cause strangeness to the school. In this direction, in 1994, the *National Policy for Special Education* was published, which guided “instructional integration”, providing access to the common classes of regular education of students in (...) conditions to accompany and develop the curricular activities programmed of ordinary education, in the same rhythm as the normal students” (BRASIL, 2008, p. 19).

A great educational debate of this decade in Brazil led to a new LDBEN 9.394/1996, partially updated by Law 12.796/2013, recognizing demands of students with disabilities, global developmental disorders and high skills/giftedness. Educational systems should ensure:

- I – specific curricula, methods, techniques, educational resources and organization, to meet their needs;
- II – specific terminability (...);
- III – teachers with adequate specialization at the intermediate or higher level, for specialized care, as well as regular teachers trained to integrate these students into the common classes;
- IV – special education for work, aiming at its effective integration into the life in society (...);
- V – equal access to the benefits of supplementary social programs available for the respective level of regular education (BRASIL, 1996, Article 59).

The new century saw the *National Education Plan*, Law 10.172/2001, and its *National Guidelines for Special Education in Basic Education* (BRASIL, 2001), determining that educational systems should provide enrollment and quality education to all students with special educational through schools, as Special Education character is to carry out specialized educational services, complementing or supplementing schooling. It shows clearly how the Special Education is one of the teaching modalities. The Plan points as tendencies:

- integration/inclusion of the student with special needs in the regular system of education and, if this is not possible according to the needs of the learner, perform attendance in specialized classes and schools;
- extension of the regulation of special schools to provide support and guidance to integration programs, in addition to specific assistance;
- improving the qualification of elementary school teachers for this clientele;

- expansion of the offer of training/specialization courses by universities and normal schools (BRASIL, 2001, Item 8).

The Plan states the construction of an inclusive school that guarantees the fulfillment of human diversity, establishes objectives and goals for educational attendance to students with disabilities, global developmental disorders and high skills/giftedness.

In 2003, the Ministry of Education implemented the *Inclusive Education Program: The Right to Diversity*, whose objective is to support the transformation of education systems into inclusive educational systems, promote a broad process of training of managers and educators in Brazilian municipalities, in order to guarantee the right of access for all to schooling, offer of specialized educational services and guarantee of accessibility.

Lately, it was constituted the *National Policy on Special Education in the Perspective of Inclusive Education* (BRASIL, 2008, p. 6-7), to ensure an inclusive education system at all levels of national education, providing environments that maximize academic and social development in line with the goal of full participation and inclusion. Thus, people of any age group with disabilities would not be excluded from general educational system on the basis of their conditions, that is, must be on an equal basis, free of charges, but with quality. So says the *Brazilian Law on the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities*, 13.146/2015, known as Disabled Persons Statute, in Article 2: “A person with a disability is considered to be one who has a long-term disability of a physical, mental, intellectual or sensorial nature, which, in interaction with one or more barriers, may obstruct their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with other people” (BRASIL, 2015). To lay down those barriers is to observe the rights of people with disabilities as citizens. Article 27 ensures:

Education constitutes the right of the person with deficiency, ensuring an inclusive educational system at all levels and lifelong learning, in order to achieve the maximum possible development of their physical, sensory, intellectual skills and abilities, according to their characteristics, interests and learning needs.

**Single paragraph.** It is the duty of State, family, school community and society to ensure quality education for the people with disabilities, placing them safe from all forms of violence, neglect and discrimination.

Along with Brazilian government laws and guidelines and international conventions, demanding participation of civil society, recognizing and observing the educability of people with disabilities, it is necessary the effective contribution of academic-scientific community in favor

of the target-audience of Special Education. A main contribution would be precisely the explanation of elements that justify or explain how much schooling can notably and significantly impact the development of those who experience educational mediations.

### VYGOTSKI AND THE UP-TO-DATENESS OF HIS THEORIES

In the 1920s and 1930s, Vygotski (1997b) had already pointed psychological science as an effective historical force to profess and then perpetuate a given apparent understanding of the constitution of society and of human psychic activity itself. As for Barroco (2007), the way many psychological approaches conform reality and human beings to certain conceptions and not the opposite, from material, social and historico-cultural conditions into theory, work through epistemological mechanisms that naturalize and essentialize reality and reduce it to biological and individual patterns, excluding inner and productive contradictions that turn life and society a living process, passable to continuous change, and that individuals derives from collective social life. Since his former job as school teacher, says McCagg (1989), Vygotski was aware of educational problems with mentally handicapped children, studying the area of Defectology. Engaged in formulating a new Psychology to the central problems of human existence (school, work, clinic), he emphasized historicity, that research should not be limited to sophisticated speculation or laboratory models, separate from the real world.

*Selected Works – Volume V: Foundations of Defectology* (VYGOTSKI, 1997a), only in 1983 translated from russian into spanish, is a postumous collection of articles, abstracts and author's speeches produced between 1924 and 1932, recompiled and published in 1935. Its first part refer to general problems of Defectology, its founding principles and state at that time. The second discusses special issues: deafblindness, deafness, blindness, abnormality, mental retardation. The third gather experiments and scientific reports on collateral problems of Defectology concerning methodology and other aspects. Through a dialectical exercise of thought and writing, he criticizes the philosophical foundations of the education of individuals with disabilities, or with some other special condition, the forms of evaluation and referral for attendance in auxiliary schools, the methods and contents of Special Education, launching his propositions – fundamental elements for a revolutionary Defectology, its principles and ends. It brings materials of his contributors from the Institute of Defectology as well as authors he polemizes from abroad, like J. Piaget, A. Binet, A. L. Gesell, M. Montessori, A. Adler, among

others. Here, as for Lubovsky (1996), Vygotski laid the groundwork for a *Special Psychology*.

A fundamental aspect of his theory is to take sound parts of individuals to compensate others, organs or functions, compromised by deficiencies, using a concept already worked out by Adler, regarding the role of education as a determining process in the transformation of biological man with limitations in a cultural man who makes compensations. For Adler, organ failure that leads to compensation creates a particular psychological position for the child by which, only, deficiency influences in his development, that can be manifested by a feeling of inferiority, the psychological complex that arises on the basis of the social position suffering the influence of disability. Vygotski (1997a, p. 15) criticizes Adler on “limited and erroneous reduction of environmental influence in a child development process, the ‘inferiority feeling’, the philosophical inconsistency of the concept of ‘overcompensation’, and others”. He argues:

One can and should disagree with Adler while he attributes to compensation process a universal meaning in any psychic development, but now, as it seems, there is not a defectologist who denies the primordial importance of the personality's reaction to defect, the compensatory processes in development, that is, that extremely complete picture of positive influences of defect, about development, its complicated zigzags, a picture we observe in each child with a defect (VYGOTSKI, 1997a, p. 15).

For Vygotski (1997a), Adler's conception is based on the relation “deficiency-feeling of inferiority-compensation”, which demands criticism, because not so direct a relation, since upon it act social forces, the very social position of a given disability and either the person with it. The Adlerian conception refers to a connectionist formulation: stimulus (deficiency) and response (feeling of inferiority, compensation), while the Vygotskian one points to socio-historical mediations between one and the other. Vygotski defends a good education directed towards individuals with and without disabilities, on behalf of the social project for equality among men. From his writings, and from other Soviet educators and psychologists, it is clear that educational perspectives reflected the revolutionary social project (BARROCO, 2007).

Nowadays, when contradictions of every order increase and are required immediate actions or palliative projects, for psychologists and teachers who work in Education, is of the utmost importance to acknowledge this. Therefore, to gather elements of analysis to deal with the distance between idealized and realized life, to explain contradictions to comprehend the whole that synthesizes



contemporary human life is, in fact, an educational action.

Considering that Psychology assumes a critical character when it seeks to explain the constitution and development of what is properly human, identifying what leads individuals to behave in one way or another in different geographic, social spaces and historical periods, allows us to recognize Historico-Cultural Psychology as critical. Such theoretical perspective takes learning and human development themselves as the fruit of a dialectical relationship between what humanity has built and developed and what individuals are or could *become*, as Leontiev (1978) points out. Referring to Smirnov [1957], Leontiev (1978, p. 151) writes:

For this reason, the early works of Soviet psychology advanced, on one hand, with the thesis of human psychic activity as function of a material organ, the brain that expresses itself in the reflection of objective reality, and on the other hand, these early works strongly advanced the thesis of the role of social environment and of the class concrete historical determination of the human psychic activity.

Russian and Soviet Education historical data reveal how much importance was given to education of the new generation, since the school presented itself as a means to prepare the “society without classes”, a way to reeducate the young generation in the communist spirit. Social education, in a Marxist-Leninist perspective, should be an attentive one to objective life, to creative man, humanized by labor activity. The proposal to take the work as reference for educational process is defended by Soviet educators like Krupskaya, Pistrak, Blonsky, Lunatcharsky, Pinkevich, who regard the need to impregnate the school with the idea of work, with the concept of human relations and thereby inculcate the proletarian view of the world. It had marked the work of Vygotski (1997a), as defending that a person with disability could have the support for his work, which should not be only of craftsmanship. Imbued with the idea that everyone can learn and develop, he also argued that teaching must be good and revolutionary, transforming people with limitations into emancipated, free people. That is why the relation between Russian/Soviet society and its educational model, to build a new society, is imperative to understand the potency of Vygotski's work, his criticisms and propositions to Psychology and to common and Special Education.

In the post-revolutionary years, the New School (also known as *New Education*, *Active School* or *Progressive School*, in Europe and the USA) tendency was remarkable, partly for the New School presented itself as an advanced proposal able to face the archaic, traditional, czarist, bourgeois school. Even before 1917, when there was

no project for a national system of socialist education, proposals were made for a unique secular education for all. This system was only achieved over the following years. In the 1930s, reforms were made to emphasize an appreciation of scientific content, appropriation of systematized knowledge to form the new Man, the classroom as a teaching space. After the initial period of repeated dissemination of Marxist-Leninist ideas, it was concluded necessary to understand them and master the science of history, employing it in the most diverse areas. The philosophical foundations, the guiding principles, the educational objectives, for the common Soviet education were elaborated in the sense of overcoming bourgeois society and the consolidation of communism. Cultivating the seeds of the collective and valuing socially useful work was the key, and Vygotski channeled such defenses and objectives into the field of Defectology.

In the years of his prolific scientific production, happen a call for children, youngsters, adults and seniors, to build a nation pauperized by czarism, ruined by wars. Understandably, the expression “vigorous collective” appears in Soviet publications referring to the population itself, as well as to the ethical principle to be cultivated among all, everywhere, including in auxiliary/special schools. Quite the opposite of its meaning today, “collective” by that period had the sense of generating the new Man; not like those “semi-free”, as Lenin referred to the illiterate; nor like the “primitive”, as Vygotski and Luria (1996) referred to those whose SPF were not yet developed to standards already possible at the time; neither merely “enlightened” by academy, as typical of the czarist bourgeoisie. Rather, a new Man must master superior psychological mechanisms to apprehend the world, act on it, transform it and to be transformed by it. Vygotskian School acknowledged as possible, and a phylogenetic need, of Man to pass from the condition of primitive development to the cultural development, thus emancipation, made possible by evolving, unfolding, SPF, which allow abstraction and, as far as possible, domain of instrumental relationships (VIGOTSKI, 2001), comprehension of the totality (VYGOTSKY, 2004). One of its most relevant elaborations is that people with disabilities can be as alienated or free as those without disabilities. The problem of non-development is not due to the type of disability and the degree of impairment caused, but to the limits that social classes impose on men (VYGOTSKY, 2004).

Vygotskian implications for the 21st century demand to study his production in the scope of Defectology, a field to research the limits of human learning and development, revealing the unconditional defense of socially formed human potentiality, privileged space to formulate/prove his main theses on human learning and development.



Based on Vygotsky's (1996, 1997a, 1997b, 2000, 2001), Vygotsky and Luria (1996), here follows some of them:

1 – Man with and without disability is humanized by work activity and by cooperation with his peers. Vygotski directs the defense of polytechnic education in the scope of regular and auxiliary/special schools, in order to value socially useful work.

2 – For people with and without disabilities, the process of constitution of the human psyche follows the same sense, interpsychological-extrapsychological-intrapsychological, elevating the practical activities, based on the direct sensorial relation, to the abstract ones, the individual and to the group ones. In this conception of development, the higher psychological functions are already found among men before integrating singular individuals.

3 – Understanding the biography of someone, with focus on the history of their learning, should consider that the laws of human development proper to the phylogenetic plane are not reedited in the ontogenetic development. At the time of birth and in the first years of life, the child with and without disability does not have the physical and psychological conditions to work, that is, he will not be transformed by his work. However, (as) born in a humanized world, already constituted by products and processes proper to a given level of spiritual wealth, fruits of the human social work with which it comes to live and to use it to a certain extent, it will develop. From the beginning and throughout existence you can appropriate what is social, as much as it is allowed and interested.

4 – People act as mediating agents, using signs to signify the world to new generations and continually reproduce life at given level. Even severely compromised by neuromotor, sensory, intellectual physical deficiency, it is possible to conquer human creations already here and elaborate new objectifications. Agents who care for and interact directly with the handicapped person, sharing the same culture, will turn what is external and strange to him into the organs of his individuality. It tends, according to the mediations experienced, to assume by identity the characteristics of a given epoch, society and culture. Well-trained professionals with favorable conditions for their instrumental mediations are essential to the whole process, from an almost vegetative state to the humanized world.

5 – The special/auxiliary school must be strong. Vygotski refutes a established practice of “a weak school for the weak” and advocates strength where there is weakness, a special school with scientific curricular content similar to the common one. Until the 1950s, in order to meet mentally retarded, blind, deaf and deafblind, special Soviet schools, while boarding schools and day-care centers, characterized general educational

establishments, but with practical training (BOLETIM, 1958, p. 21).

6 – Educational process must bring about transformations, revolutions in people with or without disabilities. Vygotski considered necessary to elaborate appropriate methodologies for the process of development but understood not to be the method itself which forms new men and a revolutionary education, but its principles, ends, philosophical foundations and contents: determinants of the reactionary or revolutionary character. Set of factors that qualitatively change the higher psychological functions (of those who are) of the learners.

7 – The curricular content should not be neglected, since scientific concepts are instruments for the disabled person to apprehend the world and intervene in it. The more qualitatively relevant educational experiences it has with scientific concepts, the more it tends to develop sophisticated psychological ways of interacting with the world; the more free it can become in relation to the immediate objective reality, the more it can perform analyzes, syntheses and generalizations, as well as consciously govern its conduct.

8 – Neuromotor/sensory or intellectual physical deficiency generates some form of positive or negative compensation. Education can help the person under such condition to create and/or dominate collateral paths of development, finding substitutive tools/means to apprehend external world and externalize internal elaborations. Resources can be taught/made available to and developed by a person. Collateral paths replace the ones shared by ordinary individuals, leading, albeit in a slower way, to achieve their ends. Finding other ways, people can develop compensation by replacing what is not integral with functions that are. When this success overcomes the activity level of average people of that society, it is overcompensation. This theorization displays that there is no limit to human development and, dialectically, a deficiency may lead to compensation or to overcompensation.

9 – Impediment is not in the deficiency, deficit or biological defect themselves. They only assume this status if society recognizes them as such, for under such a condition implies only a differentiated mode of development and not necessarily an impeding factor. The bigger question is not the biological problem itself, but the social repercussions it causes.

10 – Through social education, people with disabilities could achieve full development of human faculties, the cultural formation committed to the collective, an increasingly oriented, conscious, self-regulated and self-governing. In the bourgeois society, personality formation is corrupted, bounded by alienated and unidirectional development. Even science can be means or factor of

alienation, if it is not a way to overcome that corrupted formation.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In dealing with exclusion and inclusive education, the fundamental question is to achieve the smallest gap between the level of development of the human race and that of that of the individual. Vygotsky does not defend a society that respects differences, even though a difference, when respected, may offend others, but proposes the struggle for emancipation, a human society that does not produce great differences of appropriation and usufruct of historical production. It is the only way to reconcile the vygotskian elaborations in the Soviet Defectology with the principles of the current Inclusive Education. Vygotsky defends a school that teaches relevant contents, in a radical and qualitative way, a Psychology that explains and demonstrates the intrinsic relation between objective socio-historical conditions and personal biography of those who fail, evade, or even of those successful ones in schooling.

In Special Education, it is usual to dismiss approaches permeated, as the Vygotskian, by science of History, but it occurs because during the day-to-day practice in resource-classes, special-classes and both special and common schools for students with different types of commitments and needs, dominates a false idea that a teacher only needs to master some mere techniques or strategies. It is not uncommon to disregard the influence from philosophical, political, and ethical direction taken by educators and managers of education on student learning and development. Vygotski's theory runs precisely against this conception.

Vygotski's central problem in Defectology was not only the struggle for the cause of people with disabilities; the defense of educability of mentally retarded, deaf, blind, deafblind; their educational and daily coexistence with people without disabilities; teaching of a given idiom or language; insertion in the labor market, as advocated by today's laws and guidelines. Unlike nowadays, his own time Russia/USSR began the defense and acknowledgement of minorities, aiming at educational assistance to women, orphans, marginalized youngsters, people with deficiency, etc. Therefore, his struggle was a general one, for the humanization of Man, of every Man.

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