

(IM)PERTINENCE OF VYGOTSKY'S STUDIES IN DEFECTOLOGY (1924-1935) FOR CONTEMPORARY RESEARCH ABOUT PEDAGOGY AND CLINICS FROM AN INCLUSIVE PERSPECTIVE

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"Pathology is the key to understanding development, and development is the key to understanding pathological changes" (Vygotsky, 2025/1931, p. 189). This is the guiding thread that underpins this Dossier, entitled: "(Im)Pertinence of Vygotsky's Studies in Defectology (1924-1935) for Contemporary Research about Pedagogy and Clinical Practice from an Inclusive Perspective," organized by Daniele Nunes Henrique Silva, Ana Paula de Freitas, and Fabrício Santos Dias de Abreu.

It is important to emphasize that Vygotsky's defectological texts include studies ranging from theoretical foundations and the author's research on disabilities to cases in the field of psychopathology. In all of them, we observe the constitutive conceptual emphasis on the relation between disability and culture, with a strong emphasis on the prospective dimension of educational and clinical interventions. This conceptual framework, developed by the Belarusian psychologist, can be observed in the following works dated from 1924 to 1935: "Defect and Compensation" (1997a/1924), "Defectology and the Theory of Development and Education of Abnormal Child" (1997b/1929), "Diagnosis of Development and the Pedological Clinic of Difficult Childhood" (1997c/1931), "Thought on Schizophrenia" (1994/1934), "The Problem of Mental Retardation" (1997d/1935), among others.

Vygotsky contributed many innovative propositions while working in this area, namely:

- i. culture as a condition of development;
- ii. fundamental and structural transformations – according to which the development process must be conceived;
- iii. the general law of development of higher psychic functions;
- iv. the quantitative *versus* qualitative perspective for understanding the development of people with disabilities;
- v. the primary and secondary dimensions of disability and their impact on personality development;
- vi. teaching relations as a *locus* for the emergence of pedagogical mediations created to promote new developmental cycles; and
- vii. the dialectical relationship between the organism and the culture that affects radically transformed clinical and educational work with children, adolescents, and adults with disabilities.

Since his earliest works, dating back to 1924, such as "Abnormal Behavior" – an integral part of the work Pedagogical Psychology (Vygotsky, 1924/2003) – Vygotsky was already concerned with developing his first hypotheses on the issues surrounding the problem of classifying normality and its limitations in the field of psychology.

The concept of normality belongs to the most difficult and indeterminate scientific notions. In fact, there is no standard, but there are an innumerable number of different variations, deviations from the norm, and it is often difficult to say where the deviation crosses the limits beyond which the realm of the abnormal begins (Vygotsky, 2003, p. 257).

This concern allowed Vygotsky to specify and refine his conception of pedagogical work and therapeutic intervention by investing in the idea that promoting the development of people with disabilities occurs within the scope of social education. Here, he is referring primarily to educational and work activities that necessarily involve collective work.

This presentation was written by Daniele Nunes Henrique Silva; Ana Paula de Freitas and Fabrício Santos Dias de Abreu, organizers of the Thematic Dossier: (Im)Relevance of Vygotsky's studies in Defectology (1924-1935) for contemporary research into pedagogy and the clinic from an inclusive perspective.

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In this vein, one of the principles that tirelessly guides his work and keeps it in force to this day is the idea that the law of development for people considered normal and those with disabilities is the same. In other words, it is always the environment, instantiated by social relations, that constitutes the source of the development of higher psychic processes.

Between 1931 and 1934, his pedological work and the advancement of the semantic method fueled his studies in psychopathology, which, in turn, were deepened by his renewed approaches that included a critical revisiting of issues related to disability, already discussed by authors of his time such as Kurt Lewin and Edouard Séguin, among others. His last work in the field of defectology, entitled *“The Problem of Mental Retardation”* was published posthumously in 1935 (Vygotsky, 1997d/1935) and is directly linked to the phase of more systematized theoretical construction: the development of more general and conceptually profound psychological theory, in which the inseparability of intellect and affect is placed at the heart of his reflection about the role of meaning in the formation of consciousness.

These general statements deserve attention because they directly affect contemporary understandings of the development possibilities of these people, who are often in vulnerable situations. Scientifically and critically problematizing the (im)pertinent ideas of a prolific thinker from the early 20th century, for the fields of Psychology and Education, is the objective of this Dossier, which is part of the controversial discussions on the processes of social inclusion for people with disabilities.

Therefore, the texts gathered in this Dossier have as their main focus objective:

- i To scientifically discuss the concepts developed by Vygotsky in defectology in light of the contemporary debate about the social inclusion of people with special development.
- ii To reflect about Vygotsky’s studies based on research conducted in the fields of intellectual disability, blindness and low vision, deafness, autism spectrum disorder, and others.

In this Dossier, the articles are organized to form a conceptual and argumentative framework that connects different aspects of Vygotsky’s theory throughout his work in the field of defectological studies (1924-1935). In order to explain the interconnectedness of these arguments, we have chosen to divide the dossier into three thematic units that mutually influence each other.

The first unit concerns Vygotsky’s theoretical contributions to the field of Special Education of his time and their repercussions for contemporary studies in the fields of Psychology and Education. The dossier presents the interview with one of the greatest theorists and translators of Vygotsky’s work in the field of defectology studies: Professor Luciano Mecacci, conducted by Alessio Surian and Diego di Masi – both Italians and colleagues

of Mecacci. The interview, *“Beyond the Normative Character of Psychology,”* addresses the challenges of translating Vygotsky, in particular the translation from Russian to Italian, of the work entitled *Fundamentals of Defectology*. In it, Mecacci highlights Vygotsky’s main contributions, their impact on contemporary times, and the challenges encountered in reversing a cognitivist tendency in the interpretation of the Belarusian author, as well as the need to persevere with questions of the social genesis of the psyche. Also in this thematic unit, we have the text: *“Vygotsky in the Context of the Emergence of Special Education as a Field of Knowledge,”* written by Flavia Faissal de Sousa and Mônica de Carvalho Magalhães Kassar, which explores the author’s ideas on the critique of Orthopedic Pedagogy prevalent in Special Education at the time. During these years, Special Education was widely discussed at Congresses on Therapeutic and Curative Education held in Germany, with a strong emphasis on the limits and deficits of disability. Vygotsky, countering this trend, inaugurated a new way of understanding disability, highlighting the transformative dimension of development dependent on the cultural conditions in which the individual participates (or not). Subsequently, Daniele Nunes Henrique Silva and Ana Paula de Freitas, in the text *“At the Confluence of Vygotsky’s Pedological and Defectological Studies: The Child with Intellectual Disability,”* critically examine Vygotsky’s pedological texts—produced between 1931 and 1934—as anchor points for discussing the issue of age and disability. The authors problematize key pedological concepts—perezhivanie, the problem of the environment, pedological age, etc. – available in the book *“7 Lectures by L.S. Vygotsky on the Foundations of Pedology”* (Vygotsky, 2018) to consider the social developmental situation of children with disabilities and its relation to the problem of aging. Also in this thematic unit, we have the article written by Lavínia Lopes Salomão Magiolino and Fabrício Santos Dias de Abreu, which seeks to analyze the main concepts developed by Vygotsky in the work published after his death entitled: *“The Problem of Mental Retardation”* (Vygotsky, 1997d/1935). Their article, entitled *“The Affect-Intellect Relationship and the Proposition of Semantic Unity in the Vygotskian Approach to Intellectual Disability,”* contributes to one of Vygotsky’s last texts. This text, which has not yet been directly translated from Russian into Portuguese, raises important issues surrounding the idea of an interfunctional system, the inseparability of intellect and affect, and the notion of the dynamic unity of the semantic system. Such questions reposition the author’s entire theoretical construct on human cultural development, unequivocally highlighting the centrality of meaning in the systemic formation of psychological functioning.

The second unit of this Dossier explores Vygotsky’s shortcomings and contributions to an analytical understanding of the methodological possibilities of

pedagogical intervention in contemporary times, as well as its educational implications. The article written by Cristina Broglia Feitosa de Lacerda, Christianne Thatiana Ramos de Souza and Maria Cecília Rafael de Góes, researchers in studies on deafness, proposes a discussion on **“The education of the deaf in Vygotsky’s writings: mimicry between forms of speech”** with the aim of problematizing the reorientation of Vygotsky’s ideas on deafness, from oralism to polyglossia, from 1931 onwards. This conceptual shift by the author contributes not only to understanding the role of language in the current scenario of deaf education, but also unquestionably reveals Vygotsky’s general theses on the centrality of the semantic dimension in the structuring of higher psychic functions. Next, the article **“The Drawing of Visually Impaired Children and Their Reading and Writing Processes,”** written by Marina Teixeira Mendes de Souza Costa and Fabiana Alvarenga Rangel, focuses on the literacy processes of visually impaired children, taking drawing as a starting point. The relation between writing and drawing guides the article’s question: After all, what kind of processes of reading and writing acquisition are involved in the drawing of blind or visually impaired children? Based on fieldwork and workshops, the authors conclude that drawing, for visually impaired children, is an activity that engages the same functions observed in children without visual impairment, differing only in aspects involving the execution of the activity, which is organized, in most cases, by specialized techniques and tools. Therefore, as with sighted children, it is a fundamental activity for writing.

The third thematic unit of the aforementioned Dossier addresses issues that impact education. In this section, we explore different aspects of Vygotsky’s work that remain relevant in the debate on special education from an inclusive perspective. As we delve into the author’s ideas, we ask, what are the important developments that need to be considered when considering inclusion? The text by Régis Henrique dos Reis Silva and Anna Maria Lunardi Padilha, entitled: **“Contributions of Vygotsky’s defectological studies for school inclusion of students with disabilities,”** revisits the main concepts developed by Lev Vygotsky in his studies about defectology and, in light of these considerations, seeks to critically discuss how ableism affects people with disabilities in school education. The discussion begins with a dialectical analysis of education and disability, seeking to overcome exclusionary models of teaching relations that are still based on what children with disabilities cannot do: their incapacity and lack. The second-to-last section of the dossier, titled **“Vygotsky’s Defectology, Inclusion Policies in Santa Catarina, and the Challenges of Child Medicalization,”** is proposed by Luciane Maria Schindwein, Marilene Proença Rebello de Souza, and Olivia Milleo. Drawing on Vygotsky’s contributions, the authors critically address current

special education policies from an inclusive perspective by problematizing the medicalization processes that affect children diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and generate exclusion both inside and outside of school. The article raises concern about the significant increase in the number of individuals diagnosed with ASD enrolled in Santa Catarina’s regular education system, as well as the challenges encountered in teacher training policies. The Dossier concludes with a text by Regina Jodely Rodrigues Campos Aguiar, Patrícia Lima Martins Pederiva, Elisângela Moreira Peraci, and Lúcia Helena Cavasin Zabotto Pulino, **entitled “Art and Inclusion in Vygotsky: Cultural Accessibility in Music,”** addressing the role of art in the interface with inclusion. The focus is on cultural accessibility and the role of music as a necessary experience for human development—a topic rarely explored in academic research. This article is uniquely relevant, as it fills an important gap regarding the centrality of art as a privileged *locus* for questioning the exclusion of artistic experiences experienced by people with disabilities.

The aforementioned texts reveal a diverse spectrum of themes currently affecting the field of special education and policies aimed at inclusive education, with critical implications for pedagogical and clinical practice. It is, therefore, a meeting of theoretical and investigative propositions that deepen reflections about topics that have not yet been overcome, such as: development, culture, and the subjective formation of people with disabilities. After all, what are the parameters that establish the distinctions between the normal and the pathological? The different answers to this question, when analyzed through Vygotsky’s works, reveal the *relevance* of his work in the face of contemporary challenges and the *inconsistency* of his ideas for pedagogical and clinical practice, which is still rooted in hegemonic conceptions of development, *pathologizing* and *blaming* the individual for their different ways of being.

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