

VYGOTSKY IN THE CONTEXT OF THE APPEARANCE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION AS A KNOWLEDGE FIELD

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ABSTRACT

Between 1922 and 1930, congresses about Therapeutic/Curative Pedagogy were held in Germany. The consolidation of Special Education as a field of knowledge resulted from these congresses. Although Vygotsky died in 1934 and we have not yet found any records that he participated in the German congresses, his studies indicate a dialogue with themes and authors present in 1939 at the First International Congress about Pedagogy for the Disabled, which followed the German congresses. This hypothesis is supported by the presence of references to the German congresses in *Fundamental Problems of Contemporary Defectology* (1929). Considering this panorama, this work aims to situate Vygotsky's perspective about Defectology in relation to what was being discussed about Therapeutic/Curative Pedagogy/Special Education, between the years of 1920 and 1930. It is a bibliographic study, whose sources are the annals of the Congress, scientific articles published in the early 20th century and texts by Vygotsky on Defectology.

Keywords: Defectology; Therapeutic Pedagogy; Curative Pedagogy; Special Education; Vygotsky

Vygotsky en el contexto del surgimiento de la Educación Especial como campo de conocimiento

RESUMEN

Entre 1922 y 1930 se sucedieron congresos de Pedagogía Terapéutica/Curativa en Alemania. La consolidación de la Educación Especial como campo de conocimiento transcurrede esos congresos. Aún que Vygotsky haya fallecido en 1934 y que no tengamos, hasta el momento, localizado registros de que haya participado de los congresos alemanes, sus estudios indican interlocución con temas y autores presentes en 1939 en el I Congreso Internacional de Pedagogía de los Deficientes, que se siguió a los congresos alemanes. Esta hipótesis se sustenta por la presencia de referencias a los congresos alemanes en *Problemas fundamentales de la defectología contemporánea* (1929). Al considerarse ese panorama, este estudio tiene como objetivo ubicar la perspectiva de Vygotsky sobre la Defectología frente a lo que se discutía sobre Pedagogía Terapéutica/Curativa/Educación Especial, entre los años de 1920 y 1930. Se trata de un estudio bibliográfico, cuyas fuentes son los anales del Congreso, artículos científicos publicados en el inicio del siglo XX y textos de Vygotsky sobre Defectología.

Palabras Clave: defectología; pedagogía terapéutica; pedagogía curativa; educación especial; Vygotsky

Vigotski no contexto do surgimento da Educação Especial como campo de conhecimento

RESUMO

Entre 1922 e 1930 ocorreram congressos de Pedagogia Terapêutica/Curativa na Alemanha. A consolidação da Educação Especial como campo de conhecimento decorre desses congressos. Ainda que Vigotski tenha falecido em 1934 e que não tenhamos, até o momento, localizado registros de que tenha participado dos congressos alemães, seus estudos indicam interlocução com temas e autores presentes em 1939 no I Congresso Internacional de Pedagogia dos Deficientes, que se seguiu aos congressos alemães. Essa hipótese sustenta-se pela presença de referências aos congressos alemães em *Problemas fundamentais da defectologia contemporânea* (1929). A considerar esse panorama, esse trabalho tem como objetivo situar a perspectiva de Vigotski sobre a Defectologia frente ao que se discutia sobre Pedagogia Terapêutica/Curativa/Educação Especial, entre os anos de 1920 e 1930. Trata-se de um estudo bibliográfico, cujas fontes são os anais do Congresso, artigos científicos publicados no início do século XX e textos de Vigotski sobre Defectologia.

Palavras-chave: defectologia; pedagogia terapêutica; pedagogia curativa; educação especial; Vigotski

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INTRODUCTION

In the beginning of the 20th century, Austrian Theodor Heller (1869-1938) published what became known as the basis for Therapeutic/Curative Pedagogy (Moreu, 2009). It is the *Grundriss der Heilpädagogik* (or Therapeutic/Curative Pedagogy Outline – free translation), from 1904. In this publication, the author situates this new field between Education and Psychiatry. It is possible to say that it is the beginning of the recognition of Special Education as a field of study and knowledge production.

Heller's work relates to studies that had been published between the 19th and early 20th centuries, with the creation of the term Curative Education or Therapeutic Education (*Die Heilpädagogik*). Moreu (2009) draws our attention to the publication of a scientific work, in 1861, in two volumes, Jan-Daniel Georgens (1823–1886) and Heinrich Marianus Deinhardt (1821–1880) named "Curative/Therapeutic Education with Special Attention to Idiocy and Institutions for Idiotic People" (free translation for *Die Heilpädagogik. Mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Idiotie und der Idiotenanstalten*) (Georgens & Deinhardt, 1861a, 1861b), as the initial milestone for German therapeutic/curative pedagogy and the consolidation of the term "Therapeutic Pedagogy" or "Curative Pedagogy" (*Heilpädagogik*) as a scientific field (Moreu, 2009).

The author highlights the value of the work realized especially by Jan-Daniel Georgens:

La experiencia de Georgens hay que considerarla revolucionaria, en primer lugar porque reivindicaba la educación para todos los niños con idénticos objetivos y métodos adaptados a las características de cada uno; em segundo lugar, porque contemplaba la interdisciplinaridad entre el curar y el educar: el médico luchaba contra la deficiencia, facilitando al pedagogo la tarea educativa; y em tercer lugar, porque denunciaba el carácter caritativo-asistencial de las leyes sociales, reivindicando un cambio de política que institucionalizase con carácter general la pedagogía terapéutica en los centros de idiotas. (Moreu, 2009, p. 313).

We emphasize that educational initiatives for children seen as "abnormal" had been developed in other countries with the works of pioneers such as Jean Marc Gaspard Itard (1774 - 1838) and Édouard Onésime Séguin (1812 - 1880) (Jannuzzi, 1985).

Moreu (2009) understands that Theodor Heller was inspired by the work of Georgens and Deinhardt to create "Therapeutic/Curative Pedagogy Outline". Westphal, Schelinski and Volkmar (2013) add that Heller dedicated himself to the theme of disability in other works, such as in "Super Childhood Dementia" (free translation for *Über Dementia Infantilis*), from 1907, when, according to the authors, Heller for the first time described a severe

regression in the adaptation function for children with normal development.

Pessotti (1984), Jannuzzi (1985) and Moreu (2009), among other authors, assume that the initial attention paid to people who were considered "abnormal" was due to the field of medicine; the field of education was integrated to the service provided to people as a "therapeutic resource". This origin makes it possible for us to understand the adoption of the terms "Therapeutic Pedagogy" and "Curative Pedagogy".

Moreu (2009) identifies in "Therapeutic/Curative Outline", by Theodor Heller, the advertisement of the bases of Therapeutic/Curative Pedagogy and, with it, the consolidation of this term in the academy. It is also believed that the realization of congresses in Germany between 1922 and 1930 was fundamental for such consolidation and registers the space of Universal Exhibits as another moment for academic exchange regarding the education of students with disabilities.

It is possible to highlight the fact that at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century is the period in which part of the European countries went through the process of universalization of mandatory instruction as an action by the State. Likewise, it is also the moment of growth for Psychology as a Modern Science, such as the creation of experimental laboratories. In this context, Alfred Binet (1857 - 1911) and Theodore Simon (1872 - 1961) started their works for measuring the intelligence of the children who were enrolled in French schools (Rota Junior, 2016) and published a measuring scale in 1905, which intended to establish scores for intelligence that were in accordance with what was considered suitable "mental ages" for children.

This set of ideas went around the specialized literature and was registered in different works published in the records of an event named "1st International Congress for The Education/Pedagogy of Children with Disabilities", in 1939 (Hanselmann & Simon, 1940).

Although Vygotsky passed away in 1934 and we have, so far, very few records of his participation in international congresses, his studies demonstrate an interlocution with thoughts that were introduced in these events. This hypothesis is based in the presence of references that Vygotsky makes about the congresses in the translations from Russian to the Portuguese and Spanish languages, in the manuscript from 1929 named "Fundamental Problems of Contemporaneous Defectology".

By considering this scenario, the present study has the objective to establish Vygotsky's perspective regarding Defectology and what was discussed on Therapeutic/Curative Pedagogy and Special Education, between 1920 and 1930, when Special Education was established as a field of knowledge. It is a bibliographic study and its sources are the records from the 1st International Congress for The Education/Pedagogy of Children with Disabilities, scientific publications from early 20th century, and Vygotsky's material on Defectologia.

INTERLOCUTION SPACES

The Universal Exhibits were realized between the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century and, in these events, it was possible to introduce the technical advancements reached by the participating countries in areas such as Economy, Natural Sciences, Ethnology, Commerce, Communications, Industry, Arts, and Education (Pozo Andrés, 2010). During these events, it was possible to produce a cultural scenario that is included in school manuals from diverse countries because these events were open spaces “para acoger y exhibir las invenciones que instrumentaron los primeros modos de producción escolar, desarrollados en paralelo con el origen de los sistemas nacionales de educación” (Escolano Benito, 2012, p. 151).

According to Escolano Benito (2012, p. 151), “En estas convocatorias periódicas y nómadas [as Exposições universais] se fueron crearon escenarios, audiencias y clientelas, y hasta se configuró una imagen de la escuela como institución que se abría a la modernidad en la sociedad industrial”.

It is also important to emphasize that the periods for the realization of International Exhibits and congresses on therapeutic/curative education coincide with periods for International Penitentiary Congresses, which took place in several European cities, in which there were discussions on the characteristics of the “dangerous” childhood or of the “Children at Risk” and the social problem (Leonards, 2004). In the following parts of this text, “disability” and “delinquency” are topics that were present in the principles of Special Education.

The existence of these events indicates that the period between the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century was characterized by moments of great circulation of scientific ideas and debates, which were not limited to the European territory or even the Northern Hemisphere. Such aspect is evidenced by the participation of over 30 countries in the 1st International Congress for The Education/Pedagogy of Children with Disabilities, which was organized in Switzerland in 1939.

The consolidation of what is today regarded as Special Education, as a knowledge field took place by means of events such as the ones realized in Germany between 1922 and 1930 (Moreu, 2009). Stecher (1924, p. 231), in a review that was elaborated about the “Report of the first [German] congress on curative education”³ from 1922, refers to the importance of the event, which was realized in Munich. In the beginning of the congress there was a warning the English Language had no equivalent for the word “*Heilpädagogik*” (therapeutic/curative pedagogy) and that the field would include all branches of the “educational and corrective work for students who presented defects and disabilities” (Stecher, 1924, p. 231,

free translation). There is also information that, at the time, there was the formation of a society (*Gesellschaft für peilpädagogik*⁴), and its members were “doctors, psychologists, ministers, directors, vocational advisors, court judges for underage people and staff members from diverse education and guardianship institutions” (1924, p. 231, free translation).

Stecher (1924) explains that, during the 1922 event, There was the presentation of 44 studies on diverse topics: medical approaches, psychological and psychiatric discussions, training methods and administration costs in the assistance institutions. The plan was to realize a congress like this one every two years, and the plan was carried out successfully at least until 1930. The event proposed that people from different countries, working with issues that were approached in the congress, have the opportunity to collaborate as members of a future research institute. In order to become members, professionals would have to directly participate in some branch of therapeutic/curative pedagogy (*Heilpädagogik*) by means of the publication of research works or officially working at any of the institutions, in addition to the payment of a single fee.

Stecher (1924, p. 231) concluded his review by assessing that the congress “played a useful role as a space for the compensation of information on scientific advancements that interest everyone who is professionally engaged with this work” (free translation).

In the period in which there were events on therapeutic/curative pedagogy, there was also the realization of events with attention paid to specific areas of Special Education. One example is the 1925 International Conference for the Education of Deaf people in London with the participation of Lev S. Vygotsky among approximately 500 delegates from different countries (Van der Veer & Zavershneva, 2011, Vygodskaya, 1999, Zavershneva & Van der Veer, 2018).

Interest for the theme of education of children with disabilities based on the *Heilpädagogik* matrix seems to overflow German frontiers, especially due to the recognition of the work developed by Heller and his book from 1904, so that, Theodor Heller, who passed away in 1937, was the 1939 guest of honor in the 1st International Congress for The Education/Pedagogy of Children with Disabilities, in Geneva, which was the fruit of an association named International Society for Therapeutic/Curative Education, created in 1937.

Hanselmann (1940, p.11) registers in the records of the 1939 congress that the association was constituted by researchers in the field and Heller became known as the “father of modern therapeutic pedagogy”. Würth (s. d.) adds that the society offered specialization courses,

³ Berieht uber den ersten Kongress fur Heilpddagogik. Berlin: Springer, 1923. Pp. 134

⁴ The author was probably referring to the *Gesellschaft für heilpädagogik* (rather than peilpädagogik, which is in the printed material from 1924, and could be translated as “Society for therapeutic/Curative Education”).

provided subsidies for research and/or sponsored the publications of newsletters and studies, in addition to the organization of international congresses.

The 1939 congress in Switzerland included the participation of researchers from 32 countries. The Brazilian delegate in the event was Thiago Würth, founder of the Pestalozzi Institute, in Canoas (RS). Founded in 1927 (Würth, n.d.), the Institute was probably the first school with such denomination in Brazil and focused on the Education of students with disabilities.

The opening lecture was given by Edouard Claparède, whose presentation was named "*Introduction au 1^{er} Congrès International de Pédagogie Curative*" (Introduction to the First International Congress of Curative Pedagogy). At the time, the researcher identified two tasks for scientists in this new area. On the one hand, they should take advantage of knowledge that had already been acquired by Psychology for the study of cases they were in charge of (the cases of children with disabilities). On the other hand, the study of these cases should serve the purpose of improving or even building up psychological science and mental pathology (Claparède, 1940), that is, Special Education.

Claparède started with a brief history of the attention provided to people who were, at the time, diagnosed with cretinism. He mentioned the first observations on the existence of endemic cretinism, geographically distributed, and the experiences by Itard, Séguin and Bourneville, as pioneers in this field. He highlighted the relevance of recent works (early 20th century) such as Binet tests and the use of electroencephalography, combining neurology, biology, and psychology.

The lecturer also drew attention to his alignment to a perspective that, somehow, is still hegemonic, which consists of the assumption of the primacy of genetics over the environment, that is, what can be called "genetic determinism" or "neuro-genetic determinism" (Rose, 1997). The author highlighted the relevance of the consideration of the influences of the environment and of heredity in human development. However, he admitted that "genetics teaches us that there are hereditary characteristics that always develop, regardless of the environment" (Claparède, 1940, p. 15 – free translation). This perspective provides directions to the characteristics of education that will be proposed to each child.

The content of the opening by Claparède seemed to reverberate among the participants of 1939. The close attention paid to genetic inheritance seemed to be in accordance with reports by various researchers. One example is the report by Doctor Heuyer (1940, p. 61), with a report on the situation of the pedagogy of "childhood with disability" during that period in France. The physician starts by affirming that the matter involved attention by pedagogues, physicians, lawyers, and sociologists, indicating the relation of the "child with

disability" and the social dimension, so that "the teaching of children with disabilities [...] [was] specially directed at the social adaptation of these children" (free translation) and technical education. The proposed places for assistance were boarding schools, at institutions all over the French territory.

When authors refer to the social dimension, they explicitly emphasize the figure of the "delinquent child", who frequently appears in the explanations of the participants in the 1939 congress, such as in Dellaert (1940) and Nielsen (1940).

In addition to professional education, the use of special classes was widely disseminated. They were organized in the context of mandatory public education in European countries, such as Belgium (Dellaert, 1940).

In the set of works, it is possible to identify reports on the "prophylaxis of the nerves or of mental disease" (Lutz, 1940, Wernstedt, 1940). It is important to remember that this period was highly productive in the organization of associations and societies for social prophylaxis, including in Brazil (Kassar, 1999, Kassar & Magalhães, 2023).

VYGOTSKY AND THE INTERLOCUTION SPACES

The writings by Vygotsky demonstrate interlocution with congresses in Europe between 1920 and 1930 in the 20th century, with some dialogues with researchers who participated in the 1939 Congress and with the ideas that came up at the time regarding the education of children with disabilities.

Among the events referred to by Vygotsky, there is the International Conference for The Education of Deaf Students, in 1925, in which the researcher was invited to represent to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Van der Veer and Zavershneva (2011) ponder that it is still not clear why he got invited because, at the time, Vygotsky, was a young researcher and had not yet become a well-known figure in his own country and abroad. However, in addition to his engagement with different social activities in the construction of communist society, according to the authors, Vygotsky had organized and conducted the First Congress of Special Education in Russia in 1924, when he occupied a position in the Psychology Institute of the Moscow University and was also Director of the Cabinet for The Education of Children with Physical and Mental Disabilities. Concerning his 1925 trip to visit the Congress in London, Vygotsky (1999, p. 331) tells us that in addition to London, he also went to France, Germany, and The Netherlands in order to "study the educational problems of children with disabilities in these countries and to visit laboratories and pedagogical institutes".

Concerning his participation in the Conference, there are diverging reports. In a 1999 publication, Vygotskaya reports that Vygotsky read his text entitled "*Principles of social education for deaf and dumb children in Russia*" at the event that it was received with great interest.

However, Van der Veer and Zavershneva (2011) affirm that Vygotsky's text was never read at all. One of the clues for such hypotheses, according to the authors, lies in the fact that there are no records of any presentations by Vygotsky. His text is published in the records as an *Addendum* named "Papers submitted for incorporation in the report".

On the Russian Congress of 1924, Vygotskaya (1999, p. 330) reports a presentation by Vygotsky in the event. The presentation was named "Problems in the Education of Children Who Are Blind, Deaf and Mute and Who Are Mentally Retarded". A participant affirms: "The article was like an utterly unexpected flash of lightning out of nowhere that drastically changed the course of special education" (free translation). Regarding this article, Van der Veer and Zavershneva (2011, p. 459) affirm that "the position that Vygotsky defended in his article to the congress was that the secondary social effects of a disability are the most relevant ones and that it is essential to get children involved in significant social activities" (free translation).

This perspective is re-visited in the text for the London congress in 1925. Assuming that speech does not serve only the purpose of establishing relations among children, Vygotsky defends that this advanced psychological function is "an instrument of thought" (Vygotsky, 1925, p. 230); which is in agreement with the other ideas that he defends in the publication, such as: "It is evident that blindness and deafness are biological facts. They are not of social nature, but teachers must deal with them, and most importantly, with the social consequences of these facts" (Vygotsky, 1925, p. 228 – free translation). He also affirms that "education must be appealing to children and it is not supposed to be projected against them. The interests of children must become our allies, rather than our foes (Vygotsky, 1925, p. 233 – free translation).

The excerpts above point at central axes that sustain his studies on the field of defectology and human development: the socio-genesis of advanced psychological functions; the central importance of language in the constitution of advanced psychological functions, the role played by the environment in the process of learning and development, and the role played by education in human cultural development.

It is interesting to verify in the 1924 text, produced at a moment in his life in which the author was still initiating his works in the field of Defectology, the additional explanation of the political proposal of social education for students with disabilities, which is a set of themes that the author will approach in other Defectology texts like he did in the text for the London Congress, by affirming that, concerning the education of deaf children, there is no way of handling the matter outside the general education system (Vygotsky, 1925). It is the social education that he proposes.

Also, regarding the participation of Vygotsky in the congresses of this period, regarding the topic of *Giftedness*, in the publication named *Vygotsky's Notebooks*, the authors Zavershneva and Van der Veer (2018) affirm that there are records that the researcher sent a text to the Fifth International Psycho-technical Congress, which was realized from the 23rd to the 27th of April, 1930, in Barcelona. According to these records, Vygotsky did not participate in the event, but there is evidence that his text was published with the congress material. Later on, it was sent for publication in a Soviet Union journal. The text was in Russian and it was named 'Psycho-techniques and the Psycho-physiology of work' (free translation).

Other records on the interlocution between Vygotsky and the congresses in the 1920s and 1930s, which are present in the text 'Fundamental Problems of Contemporaneous Defectology' (1929). In this text, the author criticizes the fact that most western European psychologists regarded the so-called '*moral insanity*' as an organic problem and not as a "symptomatology complex of the psychological disposition". Bringing the debate into the social sphere, the author dialogues with one of the texts in the German congresses:

Whenever we talk about the incorrect recognition of any value - Lindvorski expressed in the First Congress of Therapeutic Pedagogy in Germany – the cause is supposedly not among the congenital abnormalities of the will, neither is it in certain functional deformations. It is rather in the fact that neither the surrounding environment nor the individuals made themselves aware of these values. (Vygotsky, 2019, p. 44).

Still concerning the ideas that were disseminated at the time, Vygotsky had a singular way to dialogue with different authors even if that meant turning ideas upside down. Among the writings, it is interesting to highlight an excerpt of *Vygotsky's Notebooks* in which the author describes his experiences in the London 1925 Congress, especially regarding the speeches about the education of deaf students from the Christian perspective of caretaking rather than the medical-biological lenses that categorize deafness (Van der Veer & Zavershneva, 2011, p. 466):

Essentially, Russia is the first country in the world. The revolution is our supreme cause. In this room, only one person knows the secret of genuine education for deaf and mute students. I am that person. That is not because I am more qualified/instructed than others. It is because I was sent by Russia and I speak in the name of revolution. (Free translation).

This excerpt points at some issues that need to be considered in the dialogue with the delegates

that participated in the event, and have to do with the Vygotskian conception of education and human development. The first one, regarding the reiteration of his adherence and his commitment to the principles of the Russian revolution at the time, the idea of belonging to Russia and the constitution in/for the revolution. It points at the problems connected to the political and economic system in the organization of social life, in the process of human development and in the construction of personality, that he will approach in the text 'The socialist remaking of Human Beings' (1930) (Vygotsky, 2023).

In this sense, when he wrote that he was the only one in the room that knew about the education of deaf and mute students (terms used at the time), he presented a criticism to the ideas of that time in Europe that were ruled by the principles of curative therapy, in contrast with what he was preaching by means of the dialectic, materialistic vision regarding the roles played by the environment and social education in human development and the constitution of individual personality.

In these criticisms, very elegantly constructed and in dialogue with other texts, we can see throughout the works of Vygotsky the way he treats other authors. For example, in the aforementioned excerpt about *Giftedness* in *Notebooks*, which problematizes, among other issues, the constitutions of the advanced psychological functions, the intellect, the ways of development and learning. There are three annotations questioning Binet's psychometric assessment system. One of them is: "What are Binet's mistakes? Interpretation mistakes. The dynamics of high and low IQ" (free translation). After a few further annotations, he continues to "think of the children's concrete experience. The change in the content of Binet's tests. We cannot ignore the analysis" (free translation). (Vygotsky quoted by Zavershneva & Van der Veer, 2018, p.138). The central element of criticism, in this excerpt, seems to be the assumption that learning is dynamic and contextual, and it does not make sense to assess its structure in disconnection with the concreteness of the human experience. Even though he admits in the same annotations that laboratory studies are acceptable.

Another author with whom Vygotsky dialogue in several works was Edouard Claparède. Here, we bring the dialogue in the text named 'Defectology and development for abnormal children' (Vygotsky, 2011, p. 864), in which Vygotsky argues that in this field "the matters consists of escaping the biological confinement of psychology and venture into the field of human, historical psychology." In order to do it, he starts by problematizing the cultural development of children and the socio-genesis of advanced forms of behavior, pointing at alternative routes in the formation of these structures. In this text, Vygotsky's dialogue (2011, p.866) on the egocentric speech with Jean Piaget, who also

participated in the Geneva 1939 congress, leads him to construct his arguments on the role played by the inner discourse, in order to "plan behavior". He also refers to the studies by Claparède on the "laws of difficulty in becoming aware" in order to treat what he designates in the text as "indirect operations". In the debate with Claparède, Vygotsky simultaneously criticizes the notion that natural forms of development rule the cultural development of children and highlights the fact that, in this process, the "structure of alternative routes appears when operation through direct routes is blocked [...] the fundamental objective of the superior adaptation form consists of making it happen when adaptation by direct means becomes too difficult" (2011, p. 864-865).

Thus, by making considerations on the role of education in the reconstruction of the natural route for natural thought, he introduces the dialectic conception on the development of children, based on the distinction between two plans of development, the natural and the cultural, which, in dialogue with other authors in addition to Claparède, leads him to come up with a key notion in the Defectology studies: "cultural development is the most important means by which it is possible to compensate disability. When it is not possible to advance in organic development, there is the opening of boundless routes for cultural development" (Vygotsky, 2011, p. 869).

This idea as already present in an excerpt from a work by Vygotsky that was published in the records of the 1925 Congress: "If a psycho-physical flaw implies a social disorder, the adequate education of children implies placing them in a safe place in life, just like a misplaced organ can be put back in its right place" (Vygotsky, 1925, p. 228).

Finally, in the interlocutions with the other researchers involved in the congresses in the 1920s and 1930s in the 20th century, we can also highlight another excerpt that was found by the authors of *Vygotsky's Notebooks*, in a piece of paper that had been torn apart from its other half. In the fragment, there was an excerpt from a letter in German addressed to Vygotsky: "We cordially invite you to participate, in the name of the Swiss society for difficult children: President: O. Baumgartner, Secretary: H. Hanselmann, Zurich" (Zavershneva & Van der Veer, 2018, p. 317 – free translation). According to what we have registered in this text, Hanselmann was the president of the 1939 congress and signs the invitation.

On the other piece of the ragged sheet, there was a letter by Vygotsky, addressed to the director of the *Herzen de Leningrado Pedagogical Institute*, probably from 1933. It is not clear why Vygotsky wrote the letter on the same sheet of paper, but in the excerpt provided in *Vygotsky's Notebooks*, the letter portrays the academic situation of the time when political and ideological persecutions were happening. Specifically, the letter deals with the report by the expurgation committee in

his works in which “it was concluded that his ideas and publications were not accordance with official ideological views” (Zavershneva & Van der Veer, 2018, p. 317). In the words of Vygotsky:

[...] I was informed that my theoretical views, which I use in my works, are qualified in this resolution as “bourgeoisie and idealistic” (p. 1) as an “anti-Marxist conception” (p. 11). [...] I have always considered that my work was within the system of Soviet science, rather than without. Subjectively, I felt that, with my work, I actively participated in the construction of a Marxist psychology and, nowadays, I still think that my work also had an objectively positive meaning in the fight against idealistic and bourgeoisie theories. [Here, the text is interrupted] (Vygotsky quoted by Zavershneva & Van der Veer, 2018, p.317 – free translation).

This dialogue points at a paradox. On the one hand, it is possible to see the researcher, in his dialogue with the idealistic, bourgeoisie world, constructed his ideas by means of the principles of historical materialism and materialistic dialectics. On the other hand, we have a researcher who got expelled because of his theoretical and methodological, conceptual principles in his unsuitable interpretation of the world, according to the ideals of the Russian revolution that were acquiring new meanings in 1933.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The purpose of this text was to situate Vygotsky’s perspective regarding Defectology and the discussions of the first years of Special Education as a field of study, as a result of the so-called Therapeutic Pedagogy or Curative Pedagogy. Especially in 1920s and 1930s, there were many events, conferences, congresses and publications.

So far, it seems clear that the protagonists of this story were immersed in a new field of studies and felt great social responsibility. It is necessary to remember some aspects of this historical context: 1. The world was going through a period of wars and there were efforts towards the construction of a “Peace culture” by the recently-created League of Nations and schools were supposed to be the vehicles for the dissemination of peace with the help of course books (Leite, 2011); 2. The Soviet revolution attracted the attention of the capitalist world with its different premises and proposals (Hobsbawm, 1985, Lombardi, 2017); 3. The capitalist countries were going through a period of economic depression and, at that moment, there were two clear ideological branches: *Welfare State* and Neoliberalism (Anderson, 1996); 4. The European countries reached the universalization of mandatory instruction, from the ages of 7 to 14 years, mostly as a state responsibility (Manacorda, 1992); 5. Psychometrics affirmed itself as a promising field in modern psychology, especially propelled by the studies

of Binet, while school psychology laboratories were established in order to assess students for classification and referral to suitable classrooms (advanced, regular, easy and special) (Jannuzzi, 1985; Kassar & Magalhães, 2023); 6. The hygienist movement got stronger by means of scientific associations and publications (Jannuzzi, 1985, Kassar & Magalhães, 2023); 7. Eugenism gained followers in different countries, disguised as science (Stepan, 2004); 8. Pedagogy suffered the impact of the New Education Movement, and of modern psychology and psychometrics (Jannuzzi, 1985, Kassar & Magalhães, 2023, Manacorda, 1992).

In this effervescence of events and ideas, the Jean-Jacques Rousseau Institute, in the University of Geneva, became a center of pedagogical innovation, especially due to the works by Claparède, central figure in studies on childhood education.

Vygotsky, deep in the context of the Soviet revolution, constructs his scientific dialogue as he overflows Soviet geography and created interlocations with the novelties of academic production. However, this dialogue brings a different position from what can be identified as hegemonic conceptions of the time, because studies were based on Marxist thought, which leads him into conceiving human development from a perspective that is very different from the ones that were popular in other countries.

While Claparède and other scholars fell in love with genetic studies and incorporate premises from the natural sciences in order to explain human development, Vygotsky neither ignores, nor despises genetic inheritance. Rather, he assumes that the explanations of natural sciences are not enough to understand human development and education should dedicate itself to the social consequences (Vygotsky, 1925) of these genetic characteristics.

Another aspect with which Vygotsky’s position disagrees regarding what was widely disseminated at that moment is the argument that children with and without disabilities should attend the same school environment. This principle is against the discrimination of children based on psychometric assessments. Still, in 1925, Vygotsky assumed that educational principles should be the same for all children: social education.

Somehow, the European Congresses that dealt with therapeutic pedagogy in the beginning of Special Education took place during the same period as Vygotsky produced his works on Defectology in constant dialogue with the initial principles of the Russian Revolution and with the researchers of Western Europe. Even though he was from the same period as these researchers, Vygotsky seemed to be ahead of his time when he started the construction of a theory that still provides the basis for a promising, pedagogical praxis.

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