

L. S. Vigotski's studies about disability: Developments for psychology and pedagogy today

Estudos de L. S. Vigotski sobre deficiência: Desdobramentos para a psicologia e pedagogia na atualidade

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Summary

Historical-Cultural Theory makes essential contributions to disability studies, called “defectology”. Lev Semionovitch Vigotski, the main name at the forefront of this science, revolutionized the psychology field and education in this area that concerns the development of people with specific needs. Despite this, several concepts that encompass these studies are poorly understood and/or incorrectly explored. This article aims to present in a critical way the relations between the “normal” and the “pathological” by articulating the following concepts: the role of the “environment” in development; the importance of the “collective” in development; the “defect” problem; “biological compensation” versus “social compensation”; and the role of “diagnosis” for human development, in addition to understanding “social education”, addressed in Vigotski’s posthumous work that makes up Tome V - Fundamentos da Defectologia. From a bibliographic review analysis of defectology studies, it was possible to conclude that understanding the author’s ideas in a contextualized and critical way is fundamental, especially tensioning the contradiction among normal and pathological and other concepts when questioning the social construction around deficiency. It was also interesting to contribute to the debate about possible developments of

Resumo

A Teoria Histórico-Cultural traz contribuições essenciais sobre os estudos da deficiência, denominada “defectologia”. Lev Semionovitch Vigotski, principal nome à frente dessa ciência, revolucionou o campo da psicologia e da educação nessa temática que concerne ao desenvolvimento de pessoas com necessidades específicas. Apesar disso, diversos conceitos que abrangem esses estudos são mal compreendidos e/ou explorados incorretamente. O presente artigo tem como objetivo apresentar criticamente as relações entre o “normal” e o “patológico” articulando os seguintes conceitos: o papel do “meio” no desenvolvimento; a importância do “coletivo” no desenvolvimento; o problema do “defeito”; “compensação biológica” vs. “compensação social”; e o papel do “diagnóstico” para o desenvolvimento humano, além de compreender acerca da “educação social”, abordados na obra póstuma de Vigotski que compõe o Tomo V - Fundamentos da Defectologia. A partir de uma análise bibliográfica revisada dos estudos defectológicos, foi possível concluir que compreender as ideias do autor de forma contextualizada e crítica é fundamental, especialmente tensionando a contradição entre o normal e o patológico e os demais conceitos ao questionar a construção social em torno da deficiência. Interessou, ainda, contribuir para o debate sobre possíveis

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these studies today, especially for education and psychology, in addition to moving away from the conceptual mistakes and distortions that give instruments to the theoretical ideas that deal with this topic.

Keywords: Historical-Cultural Theory. Deficiency. Defectology. Psychology. Education.

Introduction

The L. S. Vigotski's (1896-1934) works, who is one of the main precursors of Historical-Cultural Theory, are relevant and revolutionary nowadays, especially with regard to work on child development – pedological studies – and in a more specifically studies about disability – called defectology¹ (Tunes et al., 2020). Such theoretical propositions have a vast contribution and are also references in the psychology and pedagogy fields. Despite its theoretical relevance, conceptual mistakes and distortions in the reading of the work are still observed, which results in the theory emptying, impoverishment and instrumentalization (Prestes, 2012).

In this sense, this article aims to critically present the relations between the “normal” and the “pathological” in Vigotski, articulating the following concepts²: the role of the “environment” in development; the importance of the “collective” in development; the “defect” problem; “biological compensation” versus “social compensation”; and the role of “diagnosis” for human development, in addition to understanding how these postulates are linked to the socialist program of “social education”.

All of these themes were exhaustively presented by Vigotski in the posthumous work that makes up Tome V - Fundamentos da Defectologia (Vigotski, 1924-1934/2019). The analysis, based on a bibliographical review, focuses on the following texts: “O defeito e a compensação” (1924a/2019);

desdobramentos desses estudos na atualidade, especialmente para a educação e psicologia, além de se afastar dos equívocos conceituais e distorções que instrumentalizam os ideários teóricos que versam sobre essa temática.

Unitermos: Teoria Histórico-Cultural. Deficiência. Defectologia. Psicologia. Educação.

“Princípios da educação de criança com defeitos físicos” (1924b/2019); “Problemas fundamentais da defectologia” (1929a/2019); “Os postulados fundamentais do trabalho de investigação pedológica na esfera da criança difícil” (1929b/2019); “A defectologia e o estudo sobre o desenvolvimento e a educação da criança anormal” (1931a/2019); “O coletivo como fator para o desenvolvimento da criança com defeito” (1931b/2019); “O diagnóstico do desenvolvimento e a clínica pedológica da infância difícil” (1931c/2019); e “O problema dos processos compensatórios no desenvolvimento da criança com atraso mental” (1931d/2019) – which make up Volume V.

We included in the analysis the text “Comportamento Anormal” (Vigotski, 1924-1926/2003), a chapter from the book *Psicologia Pedagógica*. Considering the interrelation between pedology and defectological studies, we articulate the discussion with two texts from the book “7 Aulas de L.S. Vigotski – Sobre os fundamentos da pedologia” (1933-1934/2018), namely: “Second class. The definition of the method in pedology” and “Segunda aula. A definição do método na pedologia” e “Quarta aula. O problema do meio na pedologia”. Finally, we intertwine the discussion with texts by current authors who debate the concepts in question.

The presentation and critical review of the concepts aim to enable the reader to conduct a contextualized study of Vigotski's ideas. We understand that a mischaracterized use of the original assumptions, which started, especially, from the need to build a new society, aligned with communist ideas, brings harm to the understanding of the totality that makes up the construction of Vigotski's thought to the present day. It is therefore essential to know the

1 It is important to clarify that defectological science or defectology is still called that in Russia today. There are undergraduate courses in defectology there and the trained professional is known as a defectologist (Tunes et al., 2020).

2 The terms were kept as used at the time only in direct quotations and in text titles. “Defect” refers to “deficiency”; “Difficult” and “abnormal” can be understood as children with disabilities.

historical context in which these studies emerged. After all, since the beginning of the revolution, in his first writings, Vigotski (1924-1926/2003) had already announced that:

The education problems will only be definitively resolved when the social system problems are definitively resolved. Any attempt to construct ideals of education in a socially contradictory society is a utopia because, as we have seen, the only educational factor that determines the child's new reactions is the social environment and, as long as this contains insoluble contradictions, these will cause fissures in education rather than thought and inspired. (p. 220)

Historical contextualization and pedagogical and defectological studies

The overcoming of bourgeois society to socialist – the main goal of the Russian Revolution of October 1917 – brought at its core the defense of the new individual's formation, forged in the new society construction. The changes required, in addition to political and economic restructuring, a social reorganization that was based on the revolutionary principles and ideals postulated by Karl Marx and Frederic Engels (Freitas, 2017; Prestes, 2012). Such postulates gave rise to the emergence of a new social project. With the involvement of intellectuals allied to the socialist movement, this struggle took place in several areas, in order to continue the ideological conflicts that were developing in revolutionary Russia.

The confrontations to carry out this project also took place on a scientific level, when developing reformulations in the understanding of the human being essentially connected to the notion of class struggle – coined on historical-dialectic materialist methodological bases – had a direct link with the construction of socialist society (Freitas, 2017; Prestes, 2012). Education has become one of the fundamental means of develop the concrete bases of

this social transformation and the field of interest of pedagogues and psychologists contemporary to the revolutionary process (Krupskaya³, 1918/2017). In this conjecture, Krupskaya (1927/2017) stated that:

The school organized by capitalist states is a teaching school, a coercive school, which suppresses the child's independence, impedes the development of the human personality, distorts it. Only a school of work, a school closely linked to the surrounding life, with the interests of the child, which opens up to him different spheres of application of his strengths, is a school that teaches collective life, that places high goals in front of the children and that, through for the first time, it creates conditions for the development of human personality. (p. 140)

Here, the intention to change the purposes of the school was strengthened, so that it was not a privilege of the bourgeois class: accessible education for the entire population (Krupskaya, 1918/2017). From this, the need to develop a totally new conception of pedagogical and psychological science comes into focus. In order to establish new foundations for understanding development and with the aim of understanding the new human being of socialist society, scholars from different areas committed themselves to creating a science that could carry forward the revolutionary project in its ideological dimension (Freitas, 2017).

In the field of development and education, among scholars interested in the subject and committed to the ongoing revolution, the name of Lev Semionovitch Vigotski stood out. Recognized as one of the great names that emerged in the 20th century, the author's written production was intense and vast for a short life (he died prematurely, at the age of 37, of tuberculosis), outlined in an interdisciplinary interest, completing studies not only in the areas

3 Nadezhda Konstantinovna Krupskaya (1869-1939), Lenin's companion (1870-1924), was a fundamental player in the Russian Revolution, having been one of the main responsible for the educational political organization of the People's Commissariat for Education, called Narkompros, the Russian educational system. She is the one who defines the concept of social education on which Vigotski is based and defends so that it is possible to overcome disability.

of pedagogy, psychology, but also art, philosophy and literature, which defined the nature of his production (Prestes, 2012). Interested in implementing the revolutionary project, he attempted to carry out the social transformations desired by the Russian population not only through his intellectual production, but also actively in this process, as director of the Subdepartment for Social and Legal Protection of Children with Disabilities under the People's Commissariat for Public Education⁴ – from 1924 –, in addition to founding and presiding over the most important Institute of Defectology in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics - USSR (Blanck, 2003).

The study of child development – pedology –, and more specifically of people with disabilities – defectology – are fundamental parts of his works. Vigotski focused on defectological studies in a special way, having been consultant and scientific director of the Experimental Institute of Defectology of the People's Commissariat for Instruction, from its opening in 1929, until his last days of life (Prestes & Tunes, 2015). In this sense, he described how the Commission would organize itself in the years following the revolution:

Our entire plan was drawn up based on the demands of the corresponding institutions, firstly, the main direction of social education and polytechnic education, the effective production plans of the different institutes, their demands about research topics and, finally, the themes that were introduced by the commission itself (...). (Vigotski, 1929b/2019, p. 277)

The new political panorama demanded from the sciences concrete solutions to the social problems inherited from the former tsarist regime, and the psychological field needed to respond, urgently, to the demands it faced, in view of the new conditions imposed by events. For this reason, the scientific concepts formulated by Vigotski must be interpreted within the set of his work, and in relation to its historical context and founding basis: Marxism.

This condition was put forward by the author himself at the time, together with the work plans for children with disabilities, which he aimed to put into practice in the years following the revolution. In his words, it was a priority:

(...) for the next five years, the review of the problem of difficult children, carried out in the years of the Revolution; the determination of the methodological and theoretical basis, in principle, of the new pedology of difficult children; the development and continuation of the same line where it is only possible to create, as a result of the collective work of several years, the new pedology of the difficult child *on a Marxist basis*, must constitute the fundamental tasks of this work. (Vigotski, 1929b/2019, p. 273-274, emphasis added)

In this sense, suppressing Marxist references in Vigotski's works led to distortions in his interpretation and questioning regarding his historical-dialectical materialist basis, resulting in the application of concepts in a shallow and/or biased way (Prestes, 2012). The studies about Pedology and defectology, as part of Vigotski's theoretical framework, are no exception: they urgently need to be interpreted in the light of the author's propositions about cultural development with an emphasis on concrete experience. Understanding the human being as historical presupposes considering psychic phenomena from their social genesis (Vygotsky, 1929/2000). Studying them means understanding the history of the human psyche, completing the social history of its constitution.

Vigotski (1929/2000) sought, in historical-dialectical materialism – a method that is based on the understanding of concrete reality, considering the contradictory historical movement and its transformations –, resources to investigate the state of crisis in which psychology found itself, whose production did not take into account the social and historical nature of psychic phenomena. The hegemonic psychological theory, at the time, was only concerned with studying them from a dualistic analysis and focusing on the biological.

4 The People's Commissariat for Public Education – which had the abbreviation Narkompros – it would be equivalent to the Ministry of Education in Brazil (Freitas, 2017).

For the author, psychology, when developing its general science, should adopt a “realistic-objective perspective” (Vygotsky 1928-1931/1991, p. 169) to promote the theoretical analysis of scientific knowledge. In this way, he reaffirmed the Marxist precept that reality determines human experience and, therefore, also determines the object of science and its method, making it impossible to understand scientific concepts apart from the reality in which phenomena manifest themselves (Marx & Engels, 2007).

When seeking to constitute a new psychological science, Vygotsky (1929/2000) was interested in building a psychology whose object of study was consciousness, and tried to understand personality in the dialectical relationship with the environment: the human being himself and his constitution should be the object of the new psychology. By adopting consciousness as an object of study, psychological science could overcome more traditional dualistic conceptions. With this, its objective was to establish itself as a monistic, materialistic and objective science, understanding the human being in its historical dimension, in addition to its biological, social and cultural dimensions (Delari Jr., 2015). For Vigotski (1929/2000, p. 23), “the whole peculiarity of man’s psyche is that one and another history (evolution + history) are united in it (synthesis)”.

Anchored in these assumptions, the defectology postulates – texts produced between 1924-1934 – set themselves on the opposite path to the hegemonic development model of the time, which directed the focus only to the biological, to the lack and, consequently, to the deficit. For Vigotski (1924-1926/2003) “every corrupt legacy of the previous way of life, of bourgeois morality, must be definitively swept away from the school” (p. 211). This, opposed to the precepts aligned with the hierarchical capitalist society, was oriented towards social education – which Vigotski defended strenuously (Vigotski, 1924a/2019; Vigotski, 1924b/2019; 1929a/2019; 1929b/2019). According to the author, only “social education will overcome disability” (1929a/2019, p. 67), placing it as a driving force for social transformation.

Vigotski (1924b/2019) stated, however, the revolution that moved to reorganize the school did not affect the special school. For him, the task consisted precisely of linking the pedagogy of children with disabilities “to the general principles and methods of social education and finding the system that allows special pedagogy to be combined with the pedagogy of normal childhood” (Vigotski, 1924b/2019, p. 91). He also assessed that the work continued “without being linked, neither in theoretical nor practical aspects, with the general foundations of social education and with the public education system of our Republic” (Vigotski, 1924b/2019, p. 9).

What is understood is that the issues surrounding special education at the time – which persist to this day – are related to the absence of an educational project such as that of social education. (Vigotski, 1931b/2019). We have a critical cycle: developmental limitations become exclusively an individual problem, which leads the person to exclusion from the collective. This exclusion, in turn, simultaneously slows down both the development of the person and social education itself, which is based on collective pedagogy (Vigotski, 1931b/2019).

Therefore, the concept of social education is central to understanding defectology studies: it is necessary to see it in a circle, from beginning to end, in a continuous live wheel: “*In order not to build on the sand*, to avoid superficial empiricism and eclectic approach that differentiated it in the past, to move from a therapeutic pedagogy to a creatively positive pedagogy” (Vigotski, 1929a/2019, p. 68, emphasis added). Although the author’s studies have significant repercussion, being a theoretical framework widely debated today, the latest discoveries of his work and access to new translations have brought important collaborations and interpretative expansions about the topic (Prestes, 2012). Based on this, we ask: How are Vigotski’s theoretical concepts articulated and how do his propositions relate to the problems faced in everyday life in the field, particularly pedagogical and psychological?

The question of “normal” and “pathological” in Vigotski’s work

In order to critically present the relations between the “normal” and the “pathological”, articulating the other concepts that will be further explored, we believe that it is essential to understand, initially, how development occurs. For Vigotski (1928-1931/1991; 1933-1934a,b/2018), this process occurs from the constitution of cultural psychic functions (or higher psychological/psychic functions), in systemic terms: which prioritizes looking at procedural development, instead of focusing exclusively on the product. In doing so, he draws attention to the plasticity of the central nervous system; the way in which functions are organized in an interfunctional, dynamic and non-hierarchical way (Padilha, 2015).

The psyche develops from the continuous restructuring of cultural psychic functions – perception, language, thought by concept, logical memory, voluntary attention, imagination, emotion, etc. (Vygotsky, 1928-1931/1991) –, which are related, transforming throughout ontogenesis. At times, one assumes protagonism in relation to the others, this alternates throughout the pedagogical age due to the relations that the subject establishes with the environment.

In this way, psychological development occurs just like in an orchestra: each instrument has its importance, but it is the ensemble that resonates the music (Luria, 1981). With regard to development that diverges from the expected pattern, Vigotski (1931d/2019) also highlights that “the child with mental retardation is not only made up of defects and insufficiencies: his organism reorganizes itself as a whole” (p. 183). For the author, it is necessary to understand the entire development process and not just the defect, the disability itself. Therefore, it demands attention to the following question: “what conditions are given in the social environment and under what circumstances is the collective experienced in the development process and in educational work with new generations?” (Padilha, 2018, p. 66).

In “Defeito e Compensação” (1924a/2019), Vigotski’s first text on disability issues, the author states that “the defect alone does not decide the destiny of the personality, but the social consequences and its socio-psychological realization” (1924a/2019, p. 74). For him, disability can only be understood in terms of the social conditions that engender socio-psychological forms of personality formation. Such forms result in a person’s position of inequality when compared to their peers who present the socially expected standard development.

In the text “O problema dos processos compensatórios no desenvolvimento da criança com atraso mental” (1931d/2019), Vigotski states that it is necessary to “recognize which of the particularities is primary and which is secondary” (p. 198), differentiating the defect into two categories: the “primary defect concerns a structural or functional deficit of an organic type (...), while the secondary defect results from a complex of social, cultural and educational factors that are grafted onto the primary defect” (Mecacci, 2017, p. 128). In line with this, Vigotski (1931d/2019) disagreed with the emphasis on the primary defect – limited to biological factors – because the child is reduced to their disability, making their education simplified to the idea that there is a need for *repair, a cure* for the defect. The author specifies that, at the same time that the defect exists, the “possibilities of compensation to overcome the defect (...) must be included in the educational process as its driving force” (Vygotski, 1924a/2019, p. 78).

In the text “Comportamento Anormal” (1924-1926/2003), Vigotski states that there is a fine line between “normal” and “abnormal”, in the same way that the frequency with which psychopathological characteristics appear in human behavior is subtle. In the author’s words: “(...) it is often difficult to say where the deviation exceeds the limits beyond which the scope of the abnormal begins. These limits do not exist anywhere and, in this sense, *the norm represents the mere abstract concept*” (Vigotski, 1924-1926/2003, 257, emphasis added).

At the core of the issue of disability is its social construction. Society standardizes what normal development is, linked to certain theories about development itself that disregard the dialectical and, therefore, contradictory totality between subject-society. In these terms, “normal pathological differentiation is relative to the social context and the reference group” (Mecacci, 2017, p. 127). This means that, having extrapolated these ideas to the present day, such concepts are questionable, as they are based on an intrinsic contradiction. Either way: **it is very difficult to establish what is normal, what is a defect and what is pathological. The multiple determinations between these concepts overlap, merge, contradict, merge and refute each other systemically throughout our lives.**

In the book: “7 Aulas de L.S. Vigotski – Sobre os fundamentos da pedagogia” (1933-1934/2018), in the fourth class, when discussing the problem of the environment, Vigotski states that “in the development of the child, what must be obtained in the end, as its result, is given, from the beginning, by the environment” (1933-1934/2018b, p. 85). The Belarusian author argues that the environment is a source of development. This statement is fundamental when we think about the issues of defectology and the role of collective work (Vigotski, 1931b/2019).

In his text: “O coletivo como fator para o desenvolvimento da criança com defeito” (1931b/2019), Vigotski vehemently criticizes the social and educational segregation of people with disabilities, prevalent in his time – and still existing today –, clarifying that this perspective is rooted in the erroneous idea of lack of value, that these people are dysfunctional and/or inferior. Vigotski (1931b/2019) shows that:

(...) primary symptoms that result directly from the core of the defect are so closely related to that core that they cannot be overcome until the defect itself is eliminated. And since eliminating the defect, in the vast majority of cases, is a practically impossible task, it is also natural that the fight against the primary symptoms is doomed, in advance, to failure. (p. 295)

From his approach, as we have already highlighted, it is not possible to think about development in an abstract and singular way, as cultural determinations drive the emergence of new developmental cycles. This means that **outside of the social space, of intentional collaborative work, cultural psychic functions are reduced to their elemental nature; impossible to carry out in terms of a conscious psychic activity typical of the human race.**

Regarding this, Vigotski (1931b/2019) states that:

(...) the difficulties that the abnormal child experiences in collective activity are, nevertheless, the cause of the insufficient development of higher psychic functions. This is the fundamental conclusion that the entire analysis of the problem leads us to. However, *the collective, as a factor in the development of higher psychic functions, unlike the defect as a factor in the insufficient development of elementary functions, is in our hands.* It is practically as irremediable to fight against the defect and its direct consequences as it is, conversely, legitimate, fruitful and promising to fight against difficulties in collective activity. (p. 297, emphasis added)

It concludes, therefore, that the main point of the issue is the relation between “collective collaboration and the development of higher psychological functions, between the development of the collective and the personality of the abnormal child” (Vygotski, 1931b/2019, p. 311). This draws our attention to another Vygotskian conceptual premise: compensatory processes.

And what is compensation? The concept of compensation developed by Vigotski is quite complex. Even today there are theoretical divergences in the treatment of the issue. In general, Vigotski (1931b/2019) opposed the tradition of studies in the field of defectology that defended the idea that defective organs should be replaced by others to perform similar functions, consequently mitigating the barriers caused by the defect. A good example of this is the defense that blind people, despite not

seeing, have better developed tactile skills. Despite this, Vigotski (1931d/2019) emphasizes: “Unlike teleology, our analysis of compensation does not start from the forces of internal impulse” (p. 187). For the author “(...) the collective social life of the child and the collective character of his conduct, in which he finds the material for the formation of the internal functions that arise in the process of compensatory development, constitute, to a large extent, the compensation reserve” (Vigotski, 2031d/2019, p. 187).

In the text: “A defectologia e o estudo sobre o desenvolvimento e a educação da criança anormal” (1931a/2019), Vigotski points out that the issue centrally permeates the cultural sphere – and not organ replacement. In other words, when faced with an impossibility, produced by the disability, the individual creates alternative developmental routes to overcome it. In his own words, he states that “cultural development is the main sphere in which compensation for disability is possible. Where successive organic development is impossible, the life of cultural development opens up, in an unlimited way” (1931a/2019, p. 252). These routes are not given endogenously, they depend on the environment and, therefore, are linked to the artificial mediations in which the person is inserted and which occur within the scope of social relations. What we have, in fact, is that the emergence of these new alternative development processes replaces, superstructures and balances, on new bases, psychic functions, promoting new neural and functional nexuses. “Therefore, a new, peculiar type of development is created” (Vygotsky, 1929a/2019p. 39).

In his text “Princípios da educação de crianças com defeitos físicos” (1924b/2019), Vigotski states that “the task is restricted to ensuring that the change in the social link with life is achieved by some other means” (p. 93). We want to highlight that this *other way*, understood as alternative and indirect means, arises only from the countless possibilities that are found in culture, which the author vehemently highlights (1929a/2019; 1931a/2019; 1931b/2019). Our following formulation derives

from this: **the obstacle caused by the defect is not the problem, but the path – and also the solution –, as the “missing path can be compensated” (Vigotski, 1924b/2019, p. 95) depending on the collaborative work that emerges in social, pedagogical and therapeutic mediations.**

In the text “Problema Fundamentais da defectologia” (1929a/2019), (1929a/2019), Vigotski postulates the central thesis of defectology: “the child, whose development was complicated by a defect, is not simply less developed (...) he is a child, however, developed in another way” (1929a/2019, p. 31). It is recommended, from this, that all people will develop, even if through alternative and indirect paths. For the author (Vigotski, 1929a/2019), when based on the principle of compensation, we understand development as essentially creative. In addition to the common objectives that existed between general education and special schools, in relation to the latter it is “(...) the creative character *that makes this a school of social compensation, of social education, and not ‘a school of children with mental retardation’, which requires them not to adapt to the disability, but to overcome it*” (p. 67, emphasis added). And so, he concludes:

In the practical sphere, in the sphere of education, as we tried to demonstrate, *defectology has before it tasks whose solution requires creative work, and the creation of special forms. To solve these and other problems of defectology, it is necessary to find a solid foundation for both theory and practice.* (Vygotsky, 1929a/2019, p. 68, emphasis added)

We understand from this that it is essential to discuss the issue of diagnosis. For Vigotski (1931c/2019), its use should be a means to understand the child’s singularities and how to boost their development; however, this is not what happens today.

Contributions of Historical-Cultural Theory on diagnosis

The schooling context, with its specific times and spaces, tends to emphasize expected standards of development. This homogenization highlights, in

these plural subjects, only their inadaptable ways. This results from the excessive referral for evaluation of children and adolescents who differ from this standard, resulting, for the most part, in diagnoses (Ricci & Tuleski, 2018). In other words, socially constructed categories described about those who diverge from the development considered normal. And, although it is understood that diagnoses are often necessary to guarantee public policies in today's society, what is actually observed is a massive use of these reports with an end in itself: a demarcation, a label (Ribas, 2020).

It is necessary to break with the naive belief that "it is enough for some individuals, groups or communities – who position themselves as possessing power and decision – to assume the discourse that school is for everyone" (Padilha, 2015, pp. 327-328), as we are still far from moving towards what, in fact, can be called an inclusive school. "The challenge is to build and put into practice in the school environment a pedagogy that can be common or valid for everyone (...) capable of serving students whose personal situations and corresponding learning characteristics require a differentiated pedagogy" (Beyer, 2006, p. 280). We are still far from this achievement, given the understanding that permeates assessment issues, such as the growing pathologization and increase in medicalization in the society nowadays. Despite this, Historical-Cultural Theory makes important contributions to this field, which are little known and debated.

In the text: "O diagnóstico do desenvolvimento e a clínica pedológica da infância difícil" (1931c/2019), Vigotski states that diagnostic issues are of utmost importance, although he disagreed with their use only as a reproduction of symptoms in nomenclatures. He also believes that a pedagogy that gave little or no attention "to practical work and the culture of developmental diagnosis" is an error (Vigotski, 1931c/2019, p. 414). From this, he proposes an opposite path to what exists, to date, to discuss the topic: looking at diagnosis as a means, as an aid to understanding child development. In this sense, he discusses a step-by-step process to carry out a pedological diagnosis that contributes

to the development of children with disabilities (Vigotski, 1931c/2019).

Firstly, the author proposes that it is necessary to carefully consider the complaints of parents and children, as well as other contexts such as school and clinic. Children's interpretations need to be taken into account, even if they present themselves as different from how they are, since "the fact remains a fact, valuable to a higher degree for the researcher. The fact of self-evaluation" (Vigotski, 1931c/2019, p. 416). It becomes important to confront the facts, compare and criticize them so that it is possible to reach one – or some – conclusions. With regard to practical pedological research, Vigotski (1931c/2019) states that the methodological and scientific task is to establish a fact "that is not directly given in the present. From symptoms, to what is behind these symptoms, from confirmation of symptoms to diagnosis of development, this is the path of investigation" (p. 416).

Secondly, it is necessary to understand that the source that provides the basis for all information is the history of the observed child's development, which includes not only hereditary issues, but also their environment, intrauterine development and the history of their education. It is necessary to make a journey from the external to the internal, based on the causal description, in which each piece of information serves the purposes of the whole, with the aim of discovering their relation and understanding "a given period of history as a single, coherent whole, a unit driving force, tending to discover the laws, relationships and movements on which it was built and to which this unity is subordinated" (Vigotski, 1931c/2019, p. 419). It is interesting, in addition to the pathological moments of biological aspects, to understand the variants that constitute the child, "to study their destiny and establish the fundamental laws of the relationship between a determined hereditary capacity and the line of the child's subsequent development" (Vigotski, 1931c/2019, p. 424).

In the next moment, attention is needed to hereditary influences in unity with issues related to the environment, to understand this

person-environment relation as a whole, in which the child's development takes place. This is because development is not the sum of hereditary character and environment, and leads us to a "false path; dualism hides from us the fact that development is an uninterrupted process (...) and not a puppet directed by two strings" (Vygotski, 1931c/2019, p. 427). The next step consists of developmental symptoms, which should present the child's pedological status and identify what has been achieved so far, in addition to qualifying the phenomena and facts observed. It is understood here that it is necessary to understand the diagnosis of the development course (Vygotski, 1931c/2019).

In the chapter referring to the second class, from the book: "7 Aulas de L.S. Vygotski – Sobre os fundamentos da pedologia" (1933-1934a/2018), when speaking of the pedological method, the author points out that "comparison is the main method with the help of which we can obtain our knowledge about the character and trajectory of the child development" (Vygotski, 1933-1934a/2018, p. 54); but understands that this comparison must be between the child and himself at different periods of his development. This conception is opposite to what is observed with current diagnoses, which aim to compare a child with their peers. For Vygotski (1933-1934a/2018), the diagnosis should, in fact, be used as a "possibility to imagine, to have an idea of the path of development" (p. 55), that is, to represent the development followed by the child.

Vygotski (1931c/2019) still lists some common errors regarding the topic – which can be identified until today –, such as: a) symptomatic/empirical diagnosis – data collected in a fragmented way; b) etiological/causal diagnosis – based on one or another state without considering the dynamic process; c) typological diagnosis – labels and demarcations, bearing in mind that all existing diversity in singularity must be treated, without reducing it to a standard.

The author states, in the opposite direction, that it is necessary to carry out an etiological analysis, trying to understand the entire mechanism of the symptom: how it developed, through which paths

it appeared and maintained and how it is caused. Not surprisingly, he understands the diagnosis process as an investigation, which he must describe as a continuous circle of research. If the diagnosis takes into account the complex structure of the personality and helps to "determine its structure and dynamics, the etiological analysis must show us the mechanism of the dynamic connection of the syndromes in which this complex structure and the dynamics of the personality are manifested" (Vygotski, 1931c/2019, p. 440). The next moment consists of the prognosis, which aims to assume the child's development path, based on all previous moments. This moment is essential, as it must identify what could happen with this development in later periods, which is why it requires constant observations in this dynamic investigation process.

Finally, the last moment proposed by Vygotski (1931c/2019) is the pedagogical/therapeutic determination, which must be complete and "provide precise and fully determined and clear indications with regard to the measures that must be applied to the child" (Vygotski, 1931c/2019, p. 441). **We therefore formulate that: it is urgent to (re) think critically about the use of diagnosis in our days, since, based on defectology and pedology studies, Vygotski (1931c/2019; 1933-1934a,b/2018) gives us the basis to systematize its use in the opposite way – as a path to boost development.** This formulation takes us back to the concepts discussed throughout the text, which support this statement – "normal and pathological"; the "role of the environment", as a source of development and "social compensation" – and is directly related to the conception of an education that necessarily considers the subject's trajectory as historical and cultural.

For Vygotski (1931c/2019), pedological diagnosis is like research, considering the people who carry it out as researchers. The author defends, as we pointed out before, a "creatively positive" investigation (Vygotski, 1929a/2019, p. 68). In other words, move towards the development of cultural psychic functions based on an interpretation supported by this entire step-by-step process. He emphatically

describes that “psychometrics only provides a starting point for analysis or points out the plan for shaping the picture. Clinical or diagnostic methods require not only exact measurement, but also creative interpretation” (1931c/2019, p. 431). To this end, “defectology must be based on a dialectical-materialist philosophical foundation, on which our social education is structured” (Vygotsky, 1924/2019, p. 68). Based on Marx, Vigotski (1929/2000) points out that *“through others, we constitute ourselves”* (p. 24, emphasis added).

From the understanding that this cultural environment constitutes and is constituted in the relation among people, and that development is possible in this relation, it is urgent to discuss the constant (re)social construction of disability and the reproduction of concepts that label and dehumanize. Difference is what is most human, so the focus needs to be on how to drive development beyond it. Diagnosis can be a means to achieve this, if used as recommended by the Historical-Cultural Theory.

Conclusion

From the critical analysis of the fundamental concepts of defectology and pedagogy, it becomes important to reflect about how to use the assumptions of the Historical-Cultural Theory in a solid and effective way. It is necessary to understand it, avoiding its shallow reproduction: it is necessary to see beyond looking, which means focusing on theory, and constantly putting it into evidence in pedagogical and psychological practice. It is urgent that we criticize the main official documents on education, since several of them, despite citing Vygotskian assumptions, do not adopt the Historical-Cultural conception with the necessary rigor; rigor that would certainly lead to proposals for coherent practices.

Vigotski’s central ideas allow him to be seen as a precursor of prospective conceptions of the development of people with and without disabilities, so that the focus is not only on the deficit, but on the potential of people in different development conditions. Its importance to the fields of education

and psychology is salutary, as it goes against the movement that relativizes these practices and disseminates neoliberal models that seem effective in theory, but still reinforce the contrast between “normal” and “pathological” (Vigotski (1929a/2019; 1931a/2019). A theory in unity with practice: the focus is on human development as a whole, without fragmentations, considering particularities without ignoring limitations, but placing emphasis on how to boost human development, guided by social education and in the creative nature of the mediations that make this process possible.

We agree with the authors Sawaia, Magiolino and Silva (2022) that the Historical-Cultural Theory gives us support to understand the human psyche as a drama *“and, thus, prevent what we consider variations in the emotions processual way from being reduced to the pathological or biological – affection, passion, feeling – and whose genesis is social; the subjects’ own living conditions”* (Sawaia et al., 2022, p. 119, emphasis added). It is urgent to emphasize that *“what one is, or what one can become, has a direct relationship with the complex of social relations in the space where we live”* (Padilha, 2018, p. 66, emphasis added). Thus, *“what can reduce the power of life, entangling people in the web of servitude, [can] increase it, promoting freedom”* (Sawaia et al., 2022, p. 119).

Therefore, as the song describes, *“é preciso estar atento e forte”* (you need to be attentive and strong)⁵: considering the social construction surrounding disability, the environment can not only be a source of development but also a source of impediment, depending on the circumstances. May theoretical knowledge be the catalyst for truly effective practices and may concrete reality be the spark for necessary changes, which, over the course of history, will be constantly reconsidered based on theory. To paraphrase Lenin, theory without practice is useless, but equally, practice without

5 Excerpt from the lyrics “Divino Maravilhoso”, a song composed by Caetano Veloso and Gilberto Gil, in 1968 (a period in which Brazil was experiencing the tensions of the dictatorship) and which was marked by Gal Costa’s voice, due to his emphatic interpretation of the song. Taken from: https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Divino,_Maravilhoso

theory loses direction; one needs the other – dialectically. In other words, *practice drives our need for knowledge at the same time that our knowledge put into practice validates theory.*

Without the intention of ceasing our reflections here, we understand that in a school and clinical environment it is essential to make use of Vigotski's prepositions, as well as the concepts presented here so that, in practice, each and every child has the opportunity to develop and feel like you belong completely, without needing to "be included". *If in relations becoming is being constituted and in them we can limit or enhance possibilities, our position is that we are a liberating power in the process of human development.*

Considerations

This article aimed to critically present the relationships between the "normal" and the "pathological", articulating the following concepts: the role of the "environment"; the importance of "collectivity"; the "defect" problem; "biological compensation" versus "social compensation"; and "diagnosis" in human development, in addition to understanding "social education", addressed in the posthumous work that makes up Tome V - Fundamentos da Defectologia (Vigotski, 1924-1934/2019).

The critical presentation of the aforementioned concepts attempted to enable a better understanding of defectological studies in dialogue with pedagogical studies. In this sense, we analyze concepts that are fundamental to tension the contradiction between normal and pathological and question the social construction around disability. This discussion was also interested in contributing to the debate about the developments of these studies today, especially in psychology and education, in addition to moving away from conceptual mistakes and distortions that give instruments to theoretical contributions that disconnect it from the assumptions of historical-dialectic materialism. In other words, they move away from the need to understand and explain the objects and phenomena investigated, such as they truly are in psychological and pedagogical practice.

It is essential, then, to emphasize that concepts are linked in a cyclical way, as a unit that makes up the whole. However, the issue of social education stands out, which permeates the entire scope of this article. As the author describes, it "*is the only scientifically based path of his education. At the same time, it is only the only one capable of reestablishing the missing functions, where they do not exist due to a biological deficiency of the child*" (Vigotski, 1932/2019, p. 327, emphasis added). It also emphasizes that it can overcome loneliness, since what is impossible on the individual level is possible on the level of social development (Vigotski, 1932/2019).

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