

The influence of the Russian psychological pedagogy (by L.S. Lev Vygotsky) upon the model of education curricular design in the American cultural space

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Abstract

The paper demonstrates the way in which the Russian psychologist L.S.Vygotsky, who anticipates the paradigm of the curriculum, is perceived in the American cultural space. A representative of the sociocultural constructivism in education, L.S.Vygotsky is concerned with the problem of approaching the epistemic specificity of pedagogy as a specialized science in the study of education. The process through which pedagogy turns scientific can be confirmed according to three criteria: the research object, the normativity and the research methodology. The specific research object of L.S.Vygotsky's psychological pedagogy is represented by the quality learning that pushes the development ahead, in the area of the proximal development, possible within a socio-cultural mediated training activity through the pedagogical scaffold created between educator and educated. The specific normativity asserted in the L.S.Vygotsky's psychological pedagogy is based upon two complementary principles: the creation of the scaffold and the orientation of education at the area level of the proximal development. The research methodology refers to: the method of the qualitative structural analysis; the genetic method; the comparative method and the instrumental method. L.S.Vygotsky's theory of socio-cultural constructivism has generated a revolution in pedagogy, exerting a strong influence in the US, in the field of the curriculum reconstruction, initiated by the psycho-pedagogue Jerome S. Bruner. The constructivist pedagogical model developed by L.S.Vygotsky who influenced the psychological theory of learning proposed by J.S.Bruner draws attention upon the need to capitalize on three ways of organizing the training – by action (with objects), iconic (by images), symbolic/verbal (by notions formed and developed). Despite the strongly ideologized era in which he created, the Russian educator managed to anticipate an important line of the postmodern (contemporary) pedagogy.

Keywords: *psychological pedagogy, sociocultural constructivism, scaffolding, area of the proximal development, normativity*

1. Introduction

From a *historical* viewpoint, the principle of perspective lines places the two representatives of the Russian psychological pedagogy, L.S.Vygotsky and P.I.Galperin, in the modern era. From an *axiomatic* view point, they anticipate the curriculum paradigm, to the extent that their influence on the basis of the postmodern (contemporary) American pedagogy developed since the 1960s by J.S. Bruner.

The direction of the psychological pedagogy launched and developed intensively and extensively by the two great Russian psychologists and educators was at the base of the curricular design model of the education practiced and promoted in the American cultural space. We aim to demonstrate how these educators have succeeded in anticipating an important line of *postmodern (contemporary)* pedagogy in the conditions in which they lived and created in an era full of shortcomings and strongly ideologized social orders. On this background one can also consider the contribution made by D. Elkonin, significant in the context of pre-primary and primary education, which valorizes, in *curricular* terms, the "psychology of the game".

2. Content development

Lev Simionovici Vygotsky (1896-1934) launched the *cultural-historical* theory of the psychic development, defining the connection between consciousness and language: *Мышление и речь. (Thinking and language)* 1934, *Sketches of behavioral history*, in collaboration with Soviet neurologist A.R. Luria, *Психология искусства (Psychology of art)* 1965. He founded a school of psychology with A.R. Luria, A.N. Leontiev and P.I.Zincenko.

L.S.Vygotsky is a representative of the sociocultural constructivism in education, a distinct orientation, different from the structural-genetic psychological constructivism of J. Piaget, affirmed later, in the 1960s. The difference between the two currents lies in the understanding of the relationship between learning and development. At J.Piaget, the psychic development in stages (pre-operative, concrete operational, formal, operational) determines the learning. At L.S.Vygotsky, the learning can anticipate the development if it is organized socio-culturally correctly, through special pedagogical relationships created between the adult (parents, educator, etc.) and the child, the preadolescent and the adolescent.

The great Russian psychologist defines, promotes and supports, in this direction, two original *notions* that underlie his psychological *pedagogy* with a psycho-socio-cultural orientation:

1) **The scaffolding** – defines the pedagogical relations between the *educator* and the *educated*, which must be created in a socio-cultural development-friendly environment, necessary to stimulate the development of the educated at the optimum level, in relation to its psycho-social resources, usable in the act of learning.

2) **The development proximal area** – defines the area favorable to the optimal training and development of the educated by capitalizing on the learning resources, properly organized, at the level of the correlation ("scaffolding") between the educator – the educated, existing or created by an adult, in a socio-cultural environment favorable to education and the educated.

In the plan of the *pedagogical normativity*, L.S.Vygotsky also formulates *the criterion of the use of language and interaction* with the socio-cultural environment necessary in the act of learning. In this specially created environment, the child develops:

- a) due to the interaction with the adult, who is the bearer of values, ideals and attitudes;
- b) through language, with which the child explores and studies the world around him carefully, thus perfecting his tools of thought and learning.

At the *general pedagogical* level, L.S.Vygotsky proposes or suggests *a model of training activity* based upon a *psychological theory of learning* that falls within the category of *socio-cultural constructivism*, different from *the structural-genetic constructivism*, promoted by Jean Piaget.

The theory of structural-genetic constructivism, promoted by Piaget, states that *the development* of cognitive structures of the personality of the educated (child, early school infant, pre-adolescent, adolescent), in genetic, stage evolution (pre-operative, concrete operational, formal operational) determines *the learning*.

The theory of socio-cultural constructivism, promoted by L.S.Vygotsky, will generate a revolution in pedagogy, in *the general didactics* (and in *the private didactics*) under the conditions in which learning is achieved, through the mediation of *the educating adult*, in a socio-cultural context favorable to the positive formation of the educated (child, student), anticipated and optimally oriented – at the level of *the training design*, in *the proximal development area*.

In this perspective, *the psychological theory of learning* proposed by L.S.Vygotsky in the 1930s, will exert a strong influence in the US, in the field of *curriculum* reconstruction, initiated and developed by the great psycho-pedagogue Jerome S. Bruner who has been scientifically campaigning "for a (new) theory of training." [Bruner, J.S., 1970] In the aforementioned context, the specialized literature notes that under conditions of diachronic analysis and history, "the American psychologist Jerome S. Bruner, strongly influenced by L.S.Vygotsky's research, develops and applies his ideas in education", in training, in the reconstruction of the curriculum and at the educational process level. [Bruner, J.S., 1970, p. 112].

Within *the paradigm of psychological pedagogy*, L.S.Vygotsky calls for "the model of the socio-cultural structures of training", which capitalize "the cultural socio-genesis of training", using "the instrumental method" which "studies the child not only as a developed being, but also as an educable being". through "unitary alloy" between "natural psychological functions" (related to organic maturation) and "*the higher psychological functions*" (voluntary attention, *logical memory*, *internal language*, thinking / training of notions), with the *higher pedagogical resources* of *continuous* socio-cultural development. [Днепров, Э.Д., 2011, pp. 42-57].

The "pedagogical psychology" elaborated by L.S.Vygotsky has as ***a specific object of study*** "the essence of the cultural development which consists in the clash between the cultural forms of the behavior – the adult, as a real or potential educator – that the child encounters, and the primitive forms that characterize his or her own behavior" (as *the educated*). [Vîgotski, L.S., 1971, p. 137].

The ***specific normativity*** affirmed within the *psychological pedagogy*, promoted by L.S.Vygotsky implies the following principles:

a) the creation of the pedagogical "***scaffolding***" between the *educator* (adult) and the *educated* (child, elementary school infant), at the socio-cultural environment favorable to training and development, whereby the "child" (*the educated*) acquires the efficient mechanisms of thinking and learning" [Vîgotski, L.S., 1971];

b) the orientation of education/training/learning in the direction of the training-development of *the educated* at the level of "***area of the proximal development***" which represents "what the child (*the educator*) is capable of immediately acknowledge with the help of an adult" (*the educator*). [Vîgotski, L.S., 1971, p. 320].

The research methodology is specific to the psychological pedagogy, proposed by L.S.Vygotsky implies the following *categories of methods*, which involves respecting the normativity specific to the studied field:

1) *The method of the qualitative structural analysis* highlights that in any research:

a) "one must start from the clarification of the notions, from the formulation of the basic problems" that allow the construction of "a new viewpoint on a limited number of already known data" [Vîgotski, L.S., 1971, pp. 12, 13];

b) one must observe the specificity of the object of study of the *psychological pedagogy* in which "the causal explanation – typical of the natural sciences – must be replaced by the teleological one", typical of the socio-human sciences. [Vîgotski, L.S., 1971, p. 21];

2) *The genetic method*. It highlights the fact that "the development of the higher forms of behavior (a.n. *cognitive*, but also *non-cognitive*, of the educated / child, the early school infant), a certain structure taken as a premise" of effective learning / training / education.

3) *The comparative method*. It highlights the differences between *the normal child*, "which combines the two developmental plans, *biological* and *cultural*, and *the abnormal child*, which cannot ensure an agreement between the two developmental plans, with chronic negative effects "in the field of higher psychic forms and process learning and the acquisition of cultural models of cognitive and non-cognitive behavior. [Vîgotski, L.S., 1971, pp. 40-45];

4) *The instrumental method*. It highlights the "tools" or "intellectual techniques" (language, writing, calculus, notions, schemes, drawings, diagrams, maps, formulas) acquired by the child (educated) according to some purposes proposed by the educator (adult), "aimed at mastery of one's own or other people's behavioral processes". This basic method in the L.S.Vygotskian psychological pedagogy, critically goes beyond the "natural endowment theory (Binet)", underlining the essential role of higher psychic functions "in the process of training and developing *the educated* (child, early years pupil, pupil). [Vîgotski, L.S., 1971, pp. 165-170].

The construction of the socio-cultural structures of the training, in the school context, but also in *the extra-curricular context*, requires the knowledge and capitalization of the relation between "*thinking and language*", an essential issue for the formation and management of the personality of the educated, which is the core of L.S.Vygotsky's scientific work, *a fundamental research field* by which the great Russian psychologist and educator became famous for in the USA and worldwide. (see L.S. Vîgotski, 1972, *Psychological Works*, vol. 2, Didactic and Pedagogical Publishing House, Bucharest). [Vîgotski, L.S., 1972].

L. S. Vîgotski analyzes the process of formation and development of the notions, which is so important in the training activities organized in the school context, but also in an extra-curricular context.

"*The formation of notions as a process*", involves the completion of two stages that must be designed and valorised pedagogically in relation to the specific of each discipline and stages of education:

a) the presentation of the material, object, facts, events, activities, etc. which must be defined at the conceptual level;

b) assimilating the word "with the help of which the respective notion is born" or the respective concept.

"*The development of notions*"/*concepts* during the educational process imply "three stages":

a) *the object* stage, supported didactically by "images based upon the syncretism of perception or action" – at the educational process level this psychological stage is typical for *the preschool stage*;

b) *the complex stage*, taught didactically by "associating different objects with common names", promoted at the level of "potential notions" – at the educational process level this *psychological stage* is typical for the *early school stage*;

c) *the verbal stage*, didactically supported by the "use of the word as a notion" – this step that is psychologically crossed at pre-adolescence age, will be used pedagogically throughout the middle and high school, in the university environment and in effective lifelong learning conditions. [Vîgotski, L.S., 1972, pp. 98-153] apud Sorin Cristea. [Cristea, Sorin, 2005, p. 54; Eşi, 2014,]

3. Conclusions and sugestions

The constructivist pedagogical model, developed by L.S.Vygotsky (in the 1930s), will decisively influence *the psychological theory of learning*, proposed by J. S. Bruner, which underlies the reconstruction of the curriculum in the U.S. in the years 1960-1970, with echoes to date, *a theory* with major pedagogical impact, which draws attention to the need to capitalize on three gradual ways of organizing the training – by *action* (with *objects*), *iconic* (by *images*), *symbolic / verbal* (through *notions* formed and developed) – dependent upon the age of the students, upon the stage reached by them in training and upon the particularities of each stage and education disciplines [Bruner, J.S., 1970; Eşi, 2010].

The acquisition of scientific notions in *the activity of school* (and *extracurricular*) training implies two types of learning:

a) *passive*, through reproductive memory;

b) *active*, through "direct action upon the notion" with the help of thinking;

c) The orientation of the pupils' *training* in a *positive* sense (depending on *the quality of the training objectives*, designed by the *educators*, at all levels of the education system) requires, at the level of *pedagogical normativity*:

c1) learning the *notions* "based on the major effort of the whole activism of thought" (see all the fundamental and instrumental operations of thinking as a superior logical/rational/intellectual *cognitive process*);

c2) the "development of spontaneous and scientific notions" at the level of "processes closely related to the student", reflected by the didactic principle of the interdependence between intuitive – logical knowledge, necessary in effective learning, within the specific framework of each training activity;

c3) capitalizing on learning at school age (*early* but also *medium* and *high*) as a "decisive moment that determines the whole destiny of the intellectual development of the child(the student)". [Vîgotski, L.S., 1972, pp. 165-167].

Pedagogically, L.S.Vygotsky notes, highlights and emphasizes that not every learning activity, in general, the "learning the scientific notions", in particular, is positive, with a positive impact upon the cognitive (but also non-cognitive) development of the pupils. Valuable and important *pedagogically* is "only that type of learning that pushes the development ahead". Its curricular (but also extracurricular) accomplishment training requires, in the normative plan, the construction of the optimum educator – educated "scaffolding", in a *socio-cultural context* which is favorable to *the positive formation* of the educated one, which correctly guides *the action of learning in the area of the next development*. Only in this way can *the higher prospective vocation of education as an activity*

of formation and development of the personality of the educated person (child, student, etc.) be confirmed [Cristea, Sorin, 2005, pp. 56-57].

In the elaboration of our research we considered the sources cited, important for their informational and methodological value. For a deep understanding of the ideas, phenomena and historical-pedagogical processes, we can also refer to the article which outlines the general historical framework, with reference to the history of education in Russia and to the evolution of the pedagogical thinking in Russia.

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