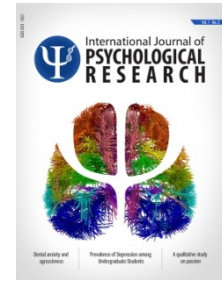




The Historic Importance of L. S. Vygotsky's "The Psychology of Art" and Some Problems of Modern Psychological and Pedagogical Field

La importancia histórica de L. S. Vygotsky: "La Psicología del arte" y algunos problemas de la Psicología y Pedagogía Moderna.



Reflection

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ABSTRACT

The article deals with the importance of L. S. Vygotsky's paper "The Psychology of Art" in the present time. The shortage of ideal values is the reality of this time that in a certain way arises the issues of children and young people's cultural evolution. Cultural and historic theory of L. S. Vygotsky touches this problem in a special way. It is the influence of art and culture, psychological and pedagogical processes that is a key element of the personality's evolution. L. S. Vygotsky's approach that appeared at a historic period of disturbances in the Soviet state is a fructiferous tree. This tree has a special branch that is an ethical choice between the good and evil.

Key words:

Cultural-historical psychology, game, psychological-pedagogical processes, The Psychology of Art, psychology of the child's development, L. S. Vygotsky.

RESUMEN

El artículo trata de la importancia de la obra de L.S. Vygotsky: "La Psicología del Arte", en la actualidad. Al respecto, la falta de claridad en la modernidad, condujo a que se planteara la problemática de los niños y la evolución cultural de los jóvenes. La Teoría cultural e histórica de L.S. Vygotsky aborda este problema de forma particular; es la influencia del arte y la cultura en los procesos psicológicos y pedagógicos, un aspecto fundamental para la evolución de la personalidad. El enfoque de L.S. Vygotsky surge en un período histórico conflictivo e inestable en la Unión Soviética como una propuesta interesante y promisoría. Esta postura teórica deriva indudablemente en una elección ética entre el bien y el mal.

Palabras Clave:

Psicología cultural-histórica, juego, procesos psicológicos y pedagógicos, psicología del arte, psicología del desarrollo infantil, L. S. Vygotsky.

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1. INTRODUCCIÓN

In the sphere of psychological achievements Lev Vygotsky succeeded as the famous researcher of the psychological problems, which were discussed and properly studied in his source works. The main significance of scientific views of Vygotsky is that they had not lost their actuality through the time and are greatly developed even nowadays. The main feature of the stylistic nature of Vygotsky's works is their dialogical character.

Development of the modern society is going on through crises, which penetrate social, economic and professional spheres of a personality. It is seen in the change of the usual social-cultural field and vital valuables. On the other hand, intensification of the social life dynamics results in the formation of new mental realities, mediating individual development. The adaptation instinct impels people to change themselves in accordance with the changing situation in the conditions of uncertainty.

The situation evolved and goals of individual development and enhancement set the problem of searching for the constants as the points of rest of existence, which are unchangeable and can serve as a matrix to form internal life and personality's external activities. There are categories and notions in psychology, which can help to develop the subject of constants in the area of individual self-development. The 'Ideal' belongs to this category and the 'Ideal form' is a notion. These terms are usually taken as philosophic ones, but at the same time, they have psychological content filled with social, historical and individual experience.

The best way to uncover the problem of the ideal in psyche is cultural-historical method. The characteristic feature of this method is that it can be considered not only within the context and development, but in regression. The above-mentioned approach provides the opportunity to study the achievements of the core basis as a start of the phenomenon considered through cultural layers.

We know that Vygotsky viewed the development within two types of forms: ideal and real ones. Real forms are genuine, natural human traits, which serve as the organic basis for psychical qualities development. Initial psychical functions are transformed in the course of development into the higher psychical functions thought in notions, sensible speech, logic memory, arbitrary attention, will, senses etc., which are new formations of the ontogenetic development, but they already exist in culture in the form of samples of thoughts, values and norms of social relations, activities etc. We can say that it was quite a promising trial to build methodological

experience accumulated in the humanities knowledge in the field of fast developing branch, which psychology is.

Lev Vygotsky's work "The Psychology of Art" was published after his death, that was interpreted by some scientists as a proof that the work had not been completed (Leontyev, 1968).

At present, however, we can clearly see its double historical meaning. Firstly, the work laid ground to a new concept that was later called cultural – historical psychology. Secondly, the great ideas of a genius like Vygotsky were impossible to appreciate and adopt at that time. They had to wait. As one can see, Vygotsky's work turned out to be the work for future generations.

2. VYGOTSKY'S THE PSYCHOLOGY OF ART

"The Psychology of Art" was based on Vygotsky's earlier works of 1915-1922 and it was their original outcome in the field of psychology. Representing the intelligentsia of the so-called "Silver Age in Literature", Vygotsky felt greatly anxious about the revolutionary events coming. «In this daily turn of time, endless chain of the light and dark, there is an hour, the most vague and subtle hour, an elusive threshold of the night and day, before the very dawn when morning has already set in, but it is still dark. At this hour the time turns into something unsteady and shaky like a quaking bog, threatening us with failure. This is the most dramatic and mysterious hour. Our soul suffers the same sensations when we read the tragedy of Hamlet ...» (Vygotsky, 1968).

This Shakespearean hero would become the main support point for Vygotsky's position in the science and social medium. Having adopted the revolution, Vygotsky did not become a revolutionary. But having accepted the Marxist philosophy, Vygotsky hoped that the strict, objective science would make it possible to form a new individuality, by applying high ideas, which had never been in practice before. As for the Human Psychology he was going to develop it as a science based on the laws of cause-and-effect relationships (not mechanistic) and to define the criteria for the description of the human activity.

At the beginning of the 20th century the intelligentsia, that remained in Russia, were mostly keen on Marxism. As a traveller waits for sunrise, many representatives of intelligentsia hoped that the new era would bring new possibilities for the development of science. Nobody knew then which social changes and breakdown would the 20th century bring to Russia.

In "The Psychology of Art" Vygotsky displayed an artistic use of the dialectical method. He created a



new vision of the problem, a new approach. He gave his opponents a chance to express themselves. At the same time he encouraged his readers to form their own opinion. This phenomenon is called "living". It means that new and unknown phenomena emerge from already known and understandable ones right on the spot.

It is still a mystery whether Vygotsky managed to overcome his disappointment in Marxism. We can only suggest that at the time of the dramatic fight and grandiose construction of a new state the scientist, who studied psychology of handicapped children, had to be a humanist.

Lev Vygotsky's contribution into the methodological principles of psychology was largely determined by the fact that he from the very start of his scientific work in studying the consciousness and psychology of the child's development formulated his own understanding of the above-mentioned problem based on the "superior" analysis of the art psychology as the most highly-developed form of human activity. He was interested in the issues of personality changes and effective communication of people in the cultural and historical environment. Only then he spread the results of the analysis on the research of the "psychological routine" – simple mediated mental acts (Kudryavtsev, 2009).

"The Psychology of Art' studies the peculiarities of human factor developing within the created work of art and in the process of art perception. The aim of L. Vygotsky was to reveal the real depth of the "mundane" human psychology through those subtle peculiarities. "Our study was aimed at the revision of the traditional psychology of art and at the attempt to outline new areas of the research for the objective psychology – to raise the problem, to provide the method and the main explanatory principle" (Vygotsky, 1968). As the main task of his research he pointed out the analysis of the structural features of a work of art, the reconstruction of aesthetic reactions and the inward activities caused by an art work. According to L. Vygotsky it was the way to penetrate into the mystery of classics – its perpetual importance – and to find the answer why, for instance, Greek epic or the above-mentioned Shakespeare's tragedy can still influence on the minds and feelings and remain unattainable samples of art and morals.

Having adopted the laws formulated by Hegel and adapted to the social medium by Marx, L. Vygotsky skillfully used the dialectical law of inner contradiction applying it as the way of cognition of the main point of phenomenon and mechanism of its development. He reconsidered the contradiction between the affect and the intellect, the dichotomy of

the contents and its form in the work of art and created the methodological ground for the law of genetics on the child's development as cultural development. He comprehended the contradiction between the affect and the intelligence (Elkonin, 1989), dichotomy "contents and form" within the piece of art, creatively approached the issue of artistic form and thus established methodological prerequisites for the further wording of the genetic law for a child development as cultural one.

According to L. Vygotsky the meaning and function of art are not in its form, as the form is not independent or self-evaluating. The true meaning of the form is revealed only when it is considered with its regard to the content and material, which it transforms and gives it a new life in the contents of art works.

Undoubtedly, art affects the feelings of people and the art work embodies this process in itself. Feelings, emotions and passions enter into the work of art and are transformed there. The artistic device creates the metamorphosis of the substance and the metamorphosis of feelings as well. L. Vygotsky stresses the essence of this transformation in the course of which the feelings elevate over individual feelings, are generalized and become common feelings. Thus, the meaning and function of the poem about melancholy is not to convey the melancholy of the author and infect us with it (it would be too sad for the art, as L. Vygotsky notices,) but to convert that melancholy so that people could discover a more authentic and humane truth and see it from another angle (Leontyev, 1968).

According to L. Vygotsky, the phenomenon of emotional experience in art is the affective emotional process, a persistent desire developing in two opposite directions, but striving for common final point. That is the final point of the explosive culmination leading to the transformation and clarification of the feeling. In order to reflect this major inner motion L. Vygotsky uses the classical term catharsis. According to the author it contains the mechanism of production of "superior" generic humane emotional experience.

L. Vygotsky gives several definitions to the term. The most popular and widely cited one belongs to his colleague A. N. Leontyev, who considers that the meaning of this term in Vygotsky's theory does not coincide with that suggested by Aristotle, but it is close to the plain meaning advanced in Psychoanalysis. Thus, catharsis for Vygotsky is not just the process of overcoming the suppressed affective attractions, saving from evil through art. It is more like meeting a personal challenge, discovering more authentic truth of life phenomena and situations (Leontyev, 1968).

It should be noted that both L. Vygotsky and Aristotle express the same opinion on the emotional

relaxation, but differ in their views on the time period of the relaxation. Aristotle considered the emotional relaxation possible at the end of a tragedy, its dénouement (Rabinovich, 1991). L. Vygotsky moved the boundaries of catharsis and showed catharsis feeling as if it is a stepping stone for a person to climb to new life discoveries through the art. According to the author catharsis contains the mechanism forming high generic emotional experiences of a person every time newly embodied in the feelings of each individual psychological structure.

In his further works L. Vygotsky put forward several important maxims of the cultural historical approach to the development of a personality. He considered both the language and culture as an ideal form. Mastering these cultural forms is the purpose, and a means of development of the new person. The affirmation of this objective character of ideal forms embodied in the form of affective-semantic structures of the human consciousness favoured further development of this idea by other scholars (Elkonin, 1989).

3. VYGOTSKY METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Methodological principle used by L. S. Vygotsky is as follows: “the superior is the key to cognition and transformation of the inferior”. This principle requires the shift of the scientific thought conventional movement vector “from the inferior (underdeveloped, simple) to the superior (developed, complicated) to the vector of “from the superior to the inferior” when analyzing the phenomena of the human being’s psyche (Kudryavtsev, 2009).

Here D. B. Elkonin saw non-classicality of the theory of Vygotsky, who to his mind was the creator of the new psychological theories different from all the existing ones at that period of time (Elkonin, 1989). V. P. Zinchenko sees the major novelty of the theory in the fact that according to Vygotsky the initial forms of affecting and notional formations of the human consciousness exist objectively outside every person as pieces of the art or in some other material creations of the people (Zinchenko, 1996). Those personal formations as well as sign and symbolic ones represent the ideal forms of culture connected with every individual psychic structure. They are objective in their existence in the space of culture and they are subjective in the process of the individual’s emotional experience interaction with the cultural phenomena. Such sublimity was the reason why A. R. Luria considered Vygotsky’s theory to be romantic one then (Zinchenko, 1996). One can be amazed that

psychology aligned with the culture as an ideal form was created at the time following the revolutionary events and carrying all the burden of destruction.

Some time earlier the problem of exclusion of intellectual-moral and cultural principles from the sciences on human being was touched by L. N. Tolstoy (Kudryavaya, 1999). The great writer understood well all the danger of the “soul loss” in psychology and in natural sciences, reducing the human being only to the subject of the research. There are well-known killing descriptions of the scientists given by Tolstoy: “They are like plasterers... who taking an advantage of the commissioner’s absence in the drive of hard work would plaster windows, icons, scaffolding, and didn’t design walls yet and would be glad to see from their plasterer’s point of view that “everything looks smooth and even”” (Tolstoy, 1948).

He said that shadows, but not the objects are under study, and that scientists had completely forgotten the object, whose shadow they had been studying, and plunging deeper and deeper in that shadow they get nowhere and feel happy that the shadow is so solid (Bratus, 1999).

Vygotsky’s goal: look at processes and not objects: development follows learning.

One can be absolutely sure to affirm that the majority of the 20th century scientists considered psychology to be a science and only few of them realized that psychology is an essential part of culture that cannot be deducted as one cannot deprive the song of the words.

L. S. Vygotsky became the witness of changing and re-melting the culture that had great influence on the composition of his works. Thus, for example, his ethics was characterized by changes connected with the class approach peculiar to the Soviet times. According to this ethics L. S. Vygotsky interpreted such philosophical categories as “beauty”, and “benefit” from the point of Soviet conception of class division of people. As we can see from his works, he considers these notions to be the result of formation of the social personality, and only then he reveals the ethic problems of them.

Probably because of that his fortune and work itself were the examples to transfer the images of culture into the life. Nowadays his concepts allow us analyzing the psychological and pedagogical issues of the present.

The author interprets the basic ethical problems based upon the principle that includes the idea of “not doing any harm”. This principle assists in author’s interpretation of two universal categories of “Good” and “Evil”. He shows that changing people’s minds through the time and under social conditions

can influence their understanding, as we can observe, for example, in the twentieth century.

In Russia due to V. V. Mayakovski's poems bad – well dichotomy became firmly established for a long time. Ethical categories put the developing personality in dependence on the social approval or reproach. Ethics was transforming into etiquette that is a code of norms of behavior.

As it is commonly known the morality is formed in the period of childhood up to the young age. It is connected with the peculiarities of psychological and physiological development of children and teenagers. The main activities they perform in this age are playing and educational ones. In relation to the playing activity we can say that 1970s years were marked by appearance of the new types of unusual toys, for example, hostile creatures, which were antagonistic to people. For the first time the image of troll was offered by Finnish writer Tove Jansson in the 1930s.

Trolls (Swedish Troll, mn.ch. Trolle) are creatures from the Scandinavian mythology, inhabiting numerous fairy-tales and myths. Trolls were represented as mountain creatures associated with the stone, as a rule, hostile and antagonistic to people. A troll is a typical figure of literary productions and films of fantasy genre.

Later they appeared on TV and then in shops for sale. Those archetypical characters in their essence changed children's minds showing them the existence of the other different world that attracted them by the new forms of interaction. Thus, we may observe the appearance of transformers, i.e. angular toys, which were impossible to break. If earlier breakage of a toy was irreversible, transformers allowed changing the form of the toy and their returning to the previous form. It is even interesting what would come of it.

The game actually serves a model of behaviour. Especially it is seen at the example of education of the preschool children, whose upbringing is characterized by the playing activity prevailing. L. S. Vygotsky emphasized that their behaviour in the game with using toys is a certain role-play, where children perform different behavioural schemes. His ideas are confirmed by the articles in the magazines devoted to computer games, where the authors stress that as a behavioural model the game develops such abilities as the ability to take decisions quickly and act respectively. However such computer games may have destructive influence on the children's minds as the computer games include battling with enemies within the part of game. So, to protect children from this, it is necessary to pay attention to the development of the legislative basis for allowing or

banning some games and toys, which may harm children's consciousness. For example, such law already acts in Belarus. In Russia this problems are under discussion.

The game forms a personal world outlook of a child. As an important feature of modern games, rationalism takes the leading position. The main goal is achieving "the prize" at the end of game. The results depend on the player's skills. So, the game loses the act of surprising, instead it prepares children to conduction of some habitual activity. It is a way of forming habits more than the way of gaining real-life experience.

Rationalism promotes to destruction of morality as it ruins the very personality. The person begins to reject everything that contradicts to the laws of rationality. Irrational ideas acquire the status of something inadequate or untypical. Thus, modern computer games change the mind of children. They form the idea that it is very simply to trap into the different world, so children may lose the ability to differ the virtual world from the real one. The same is confirmed by the writer V. Rasputin, who emphasizes that the line between these two worlds is gradually vanishing. As a result the moral laws of the virtual world are rendered into the life in reality.

With the modern games children are vulnerable in their contacts with different types of trolls. For centuries, though, culture has advanced a different mode of behaviour with regard to the evil spirits and evil characters. It was recommended to fear them, instead of playing with them. Russian writers N. V. Gogol and M. Yu. Lermontov described in their works what might happen to those, who stay in contact with the evil.

During the transitional periods moral foundations of culture weaken, instead the image of evil is romanticized and strengthened. It gains popularity and as if acquires rights in this world. This changes the accents of what is "good" or "evil" from the area of morality into the legal sphere, because understanding of the virtual world as the real one means that we must accept it, instead of fighting it: some may think the evil is that category they can choose as better for themselves. However, by the unwritten law, if a person does not choose the good, as F. M. Dostoyevsky said, the good cedes to the evil.

Nevertheless, the dragons, vampires and other creatures of the virtual world have been always understood as creatures of antagonistic nature for the real human world. At first, their appearance is usually monstrous in the games. In order to bring the good it is necessary to fight them. However, the problem is when evil hides behind the ordinary appearance. It

reminds the legend of Trojan horse that was a present inside which the enemies of Trojans waited the very time to attack the enemies.

Let us take another example. The annual pilgrimage takes place in the North of Russia, in Kirov Region at the beginning of June. This action is six hundred and ten years old. It is connected with an object of worship and a vow of Vyatka tribes. The relic esteemed must be once a year at the beginning of June brought the place, where it first appeared. For that purpose people cover afoot a long distance of 90

kilometers to the destination and 60 kilometers back. (Figure 1). Thousands of people: the old and the young, children, physically fit or disabled, participate in the action. Overcoming difficulties together with their parents children learn to do the good (Khinkanina, 2011). It is in this cultural and historic event that all three constituents of psychology of the art are existent and revealed in the consciousness of every participant: imagination, emotional experience and catharsis.

Figure 1. 90 km forth and 60 km back



Figure 2. Do you want me to tell you a fairy-tale?



4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The highest values as kindness, patience, and mutual aid are transferred from one generation to another. Unfortunately, it is hard to conduct the research for that matter. As well as the analysis of beauty and art phenomena can grade the feeling from it so in the specified example people are afraid to lose the feelings they have.

These examples of cultural “artifacts” influence on having a different ground by the children and they have a different influence on the children’s development.

Until nowadays the image of morality is the legendary fairy-tale Cinderella: they worked much, they did not put a finish to the thing started, and they often decreased in value or were simply ignored (Khinkanina, 2010). However, the present studies, as well as the signs of moral degradation of humans, on one part, and acculturation on the other hand, arise more and more questions that psychologists have to answer. How can we give back to the human being “the superior” lost by him and for what sake? The question about what prevails, i.e. common sense or nonsense, is still under consideration of psychologists.

So, characteristic features of L. Vygotsky’s approach are as follows: 1. Addressing Other; 2. Acquiring the ideal form through experience and ‘category’; 3. Initially, in ontogenetic development of the human there exists the ideal form, which interacts with the real one: from the first steps of child development, the higher ideal form affects the establishment of initial forms of the child mentality. A reference point of cultural historical theory is the idea of correlation of the real and the ideal forms.

Other schools of thought also turned to the problem of the manifestation of the ideal in psyche, which I will be speaking about a bit later.

So, in the 20-30s years a new line as the cultural-historical theory of psyche had been laid in the development of psychology in Russia. Vygotsky’s disciples developed the notion of the ideal and ideal forms: A.N. Leontyev was doing it from the view point of philosophic substantiation; A. Luria was developing the notion from the view point of the connection of free active action and social life. A. Zaporozhets wrote about the ideal as of an internal, idealized model - a percept-image of a perceived subject. D. Elkonin took into consideration the objective character of the patterns represented in culture.

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