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Vygotsky, "Defectology," and the Inclusion of People of Difference in the Broader Cultural Stream

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This essay reviews Vygotsky's work on defectology. First, Vygotsky's cultural heritage as a Jew during the transformation from Tsarist Russia to the Soviet Union is considered as a factor in his views on defectology and inclusion. The review then outlines his perspective on the "defect," including his definition of "defect," his view of the generative potential of overcoming the obstacles of biological difference, and his consideration of the secondary defect of low self-worth that follows from being treated as different and defective. Finally, the review considers his defectological writing as part of his broader effort to formulate a theory of situated, mediated human development. This section includes attention to how cultures provide developmental contours within which to promote both individual and collective development toward particular ends; how collective activity provides the socialization through which those developing outside the diagnostic norm may proceed toward such collective ends; and how Vygotsky conceived of education in order to address the developmental needs of evolutionarily different children. The paper concludes with the implications of Vygotsky's work for the education of children of difference.

Keywords: Vygotsky, defectology, abnormal psychology, special education, mediation

The Collected Works of L. S. Vygotsky, Volume 2: Fundamentals of Defectology gathers essays and lectures that focus on *defektologia*, a term that refers to extranormative¹ characteristics of the human makeup that have typically been the concern of the fields of abnormal psychology, learning disabilities, and special education: sensory difficulties with hearing or speaking, motor impairments, and cognitive functioning below the normal range. Most efforts to discursively characterize people of difference have erred toward the language of deficiency. As noted by Rieber and Carton (1993) in the Plenum² translation's Foreword and Acknowledgements, "Terms like *mental backwardness* (*umstvennaia otstalost'*), *feeble mindedness* (*slaboumie*) and *oligophrenia* with its three gradations of mental retardation (debility, imbecility, and idiocy) were, perhaps, appropriately descriptive and decorous in the 1920's but they can seem somewhat obsolete, unscientific or even a touch unseemly and unkind today" (p. vii; emphasis in original). These terms have begun to yield to kinder, gentler terms to describe those who depart from the human norm in either their physical or cognitive capabilities. Such people are now described with such terms as "exceptional learners," suggesting that they are different but not inferior.

Yet the language of deficit and the perspective that accompanies it often persist in both common and scholarly language, as evidenced by the terms *learning disabled*, *abnormal psychology*, and *mentally handicapped*, not to mention *defectology*. The language and ideology of deficit remains at large in spite of efforts to attend more respectfully to the issues of difference that concerned Vygotsky as he undertook to address how best to educate the approximately seven million children who were psychologically traumatized and physically wounded during the events and aftermath of the brutal violence of the consecutive and interlocking periods of first World War I and the Bolshevik and Russian Revolutions of 1917 that toppled the last of the Romanov dynasty, Emperor Nicholas II, and launched the Soviet era.

In this paper I review Vygotsky's (1993) work on defectology, a branch of his writing that has received limited attention in English translation. A search using Harzing's *Publish or Perish* software at the beginning of 2012, for instance, found that his volume on defectology, or individual chapters within the volume, have been referenced 58 times out of the total of 23,183 citations to his publications. Resurrecting this relatively untapped line of inquiry in Vygotsky's corpus thus has a certain historical value.

Volume 2: Fundamentals of Defectology is not, however, simply a museum piece. It provides insights into the socialization of extranormative children that seem fresh and vital nearly a century after their original writing. This 21st century relevance is a function of the social-cultural-historical framework through which Vygotsky understood and interpreted human diversity and socialization, a perspective that is useful both for the sorts of children of difference that serve as his focus, and for people who depart from the evolutionary norm in other ways, e.g., in terms of mental health variations, a topic I take up in other work (Smagorinsky, 2011, in press). Although his views are at times sheathed in what appears in retrospect to be a naïve belief

¹ I use the term "extranormal" and its derivatives rather than "non-normal" because terms such as "non-normal" assume the normativity of normality. I see "extranormal" as a more inclusive term that suggests additional possibilities from having a sensory or cognitive makeup outside the evolutionarily normal range. I adapt this term from my explorations of extranormality and neuroatypicality in mental health considerations (see, e.g., Smagorinsky 2011, in press).

² See Van der Veer and Yasnitsky, 2011, for a caution regarding the authenticity of most translations of Vygotsky into English, including this volume.

in the noblest aspirations of the nascent Soviet Union in which he lived, his articulation of the social context of human difference, and his sharp interrogation of the notion of normality, remain highly provocative and worthy of reconsideration and repurposing for considering issues of diversity that now face educators and society in general.

To conduct this inquiry, I begin with a consideration of the possibility that Vygotsky's ideological grounding as a Jew during the transformation of his homeland from the Byelorussian satellite of Tsarist Russia to a member state of the Soviet Union influenced his views on defectology. I then provide an outline of his views on the "defect" and its role in one's development of the higher mental functions that enable full participation in a culture's social life. I finally consider his defectological writing as part of his broader effort to formulate a theory of human development that takes into account the mediation of social, cultural, and historical factors.

Defectology in the Context of Vygotsky's Ideological Grounding

Vygotsky's complex ideas were grounded in his cultural experiences and in the rising tide of Marxism that swept Eastern Europe at the time of World War I and thereafter. I next consider formative experiences that helped to shape Vygotsky's perspective in three areas: His upbringing as a cultural Jew during an era of intense anti-Semitism, his views of extent beliefs about extranormativity grounded in Christianity, and his appropriation of Marxism both in his general approach to psychology and in his attention to defectology. I then consider the conundrum that this meld of cultural influences presented for his approach.

Vygotsky's Jewish Heritage

I first offer a tentative reading of Vygotsky's formative experiences, grounded in his upbringing as a Jew from the Byelorussian Pale of Settlement and the perspective that his youth afforded him. In doing so I rely on secondary rather than primary sources in order to generate a hypothesis concerning how anti-Semitism may have helped to form his view of how to integrate the developmentally different into mainstream society. It is tempting to argue causally from Vygotsky's Jewish culture to the ideas he developed regarding extranormativity, given the close parallels between historical Jewish experiences and the perspective they allowed on human society, one that appears available through Vygotsky. Yet doing so is not warranted, even if the two often juxtapose quite neatly, given my remoteness from understanding the nuances of Vygotsky's life and personality. At the same time, the parallels may be worth making and conceivably have some explanatory power in understanding the origins of Vygotsky's view of the developmentally different. I thus offer the following correspondences with an awareness that some caution is required in establishing their analogous features firmly and with causal conviction, and with an understanding that this effort could be criticized for overreaching.

Vygotsky's Jewish heritage, according to Kotik-Friedgut and Friedgut (2008), "was an integral part of his early life and identity. He embraced it wholeheartedly, absorbing Jewish language, history, philosophy, and culture, alongside those of Russia and of the world" (p. 15). But one can be a Jew in many ways. Vygotsky appears to have been a cultural Jew more than a practicing or observant Jew, an orientation that no doubt would have proven problematic in profoundly anti-Semitic Tsarist Russia and then the explicitly atheist Soviet Union. Kotik-Friedgut and Friedgut (2008) assert that Vygotsky maintained his Jewish heritage closely throughout his life, ultimately

subsuming Jewish culture within “his universal humanism.” Vygotsky, they continue, “sought to blend harmoniously all the interacting elements of the world in which he lived, to define his own place in that universe, and to integrate himself within the society; not to be ‘the other,’ rejected for being different” (p. 16). They characterize Vygotsky’s feeling of displacement and quest for belonging as similar to the dilemma of Shakespeare’s character Hamlet, the subject of Vygotsky’s doctoral research. Hamlet’s existential dilemma haunted Vygotsky’s early search for his place in a Soviet society where he was an outsider as a Jew and as a native of Byelorussia in the Pale of Settlement, a territory to which Jews had been confined for over a century, beginning with the reign of Catherine the Great in the latter half of the eighteenth century.

Vygotsky’s personal experiences as a social other were considerable. First, he was born into a Jewish society that had, for several generations, been oppressed under Tsarist rule. In his history of the Jewish people, Johnson (1988) writes that “Gradually, over the [19th] century, an enormous mass of legislation discriminating against Jews, and regulating their activities, accumulated. . . . In the last half-century of imperial Russia, the official Jewish regulations formed an enormous monument to human cruelty, stupidity, and futility” (p. 359). Russia was the only European nation to include anti-Semitism within the official governmental policy, which enabled them to help organize pogroms beginning in 1871 in Odessa. These genocidal attacks on Jews became intensified after 1881 following the assassination of Alexander II, leading to the May Laws that formalized discrimination against Jews. Johnson argues that

the whole aim of the regime was to bolster its crumbling popularity by attacking an easy target. The Nazis were to use exactly the same technique of violence-led legislation. Hence the thirty years 1881-1911 were a long calendar of anti-Jewish actions: 1882, May Laws; 1886-9, restrictions of Jewish entry to the professions and reduction of the Pale area; 1891, over 10,000 Jews expelled from Moscow; 1893-5, huge expulsions from non-Pale areas; 1894-6, introduction of the spirits monopoly, an economic catastrophe for the Jews; from 1903, a series of vicious pogroms, in which Jews were not merely robbed but killed. At Kishinev in 1905 fifty Jews were murdered and 500 injured. In Odessa, a four-day pogrom in 1905 killed more than 400 Jews. In Bialystok, the police and the army joined in the pogroms of 1906. From 1908 to 1911 there were more large-scale expulsions. (pp. 364-365)

The death figures might appear low relative to those amassed a generation later by Adolf Hitler, yet they must be viewed in the larger context of their terrorist intent to create fear, intimidation, and ostracism from the core of society among the Jewish population. This hateful environment helped to shape the culture into which Vygotsky was born in 1896; as Cole (1996) has argued, from their initial, nascent contact with adults, children “are already the objects of adult, culturally conditioned interpretation. . . . They come bathed in the concepts their community holds about babies just as surely as they come bathed in amniotic fluid” (pp. 183–184). Vygotsky undoubtedly entered life surrounded by a sense of exclusion and rejection, feelings reinforced through his experiences as a member of a reviled and scorned cultural group. The overthrow of the Tsarist regime by the Bolsheviks barely tempered anti-Semitic feelings among Soviets, who maintained repressive policies toward Jews throughout the Soviet era (Rossman, 2002).

Vygotsky faced anti-Semitism directly. When he was 7 years old, his father helped to organize a secular Jewish self-defense unit in the face of an impending pogrom that devastated his community. The pogroms in Jewish shtetls under Nicholas II from 1903-1906 were particularly intense and brutal, a period that also encompassed the publication and widespread distribution in Russia of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, forged as the minutes of a meeting of Jewish leaders in which they purportedly planned a world takeover of print media and economic institutions, the subversion of gentile morals, and the destruction of civilization. This fraudulent document contributed greatly to the scapegoating of Jews to justify the pogroms and subsequently to serve the goals of anti-Semites both in Eastern Europe and beyond: from opponents of the Russian Revolution who conflated the Bolsheviks with the Jews, to Henry Ford, to Adolf Hitler, to Anwar Sadat, to the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem Sheikh Ekrima Sa'id Sabr, and no doubt well into the future.

Vygotsky's life opportunities were limited by the Pale of Settlement that concentrated Jews such that they were easy targets for pogroms. Following his school days, Vygotsky faced a quota system of 3% Jews in Moscow and St. Petersburg universities, within which he would have qualified automatically as gold medal winning student if not for a rules change that entered students on the basis of a lottery system, from which he was nonetheless chosen by "a miracle" that undoubtedly left him undertaking his university studies "with a bitter taste in his mouth" (Kotik-Friedgut & Friedgut, 2008, p. 22).

Concurrent with these lifelong feelings of exclusion and related quest for acceptance, Vygotsky sought to develop an educational approach in the field of defectology that promoted inclusion rather than the separation and degradation that followed from viewing extranormative children as not only different, but defective. This goal appears to be consistent with concomitant efforts at promoting an integrated society, such as the formation of the Association for the Enlightenment of the Jews of Russia, which "had been founded as a means of integrating Jews into Russian society through modern education and use of the Russian language rather than the Yiddish vernacular" (Kotik-Friedgut & Friedgut, 2008, p. 18).

Johnson (1988) notes that as a population dispossessed of land and nation for several millennia in the European, Eurasian, and Mediterranean worlds, Jews have historically been a highly adaptable people, finding niches that enabled them to serve as societal assets even as they were generally despised and suppressed. Vygotsky himself lived during such a period in Eastern Europe, during an intense period of ruthless pogroms yet before the genocide of the Nazi Holocaust, and up to a decade short of the subsequent formation of the state of Israel in 1948. Over the course of this history, Jews learned how to adapt to local conditions as a way to survive the deadly anti-Semitism that inevitably and perpetually surrounded them. Indeed, Vygotsky (2004) asserts that "A creature that is perfectly adapted to its environment, would not want anything, would not have anything to strive for, and of course, would not be able to create anything. Thus, creation is always based on lack of adaptation, which gives rise to needs, motives, and desires" (p. 29). Jews, including Vygotsky himself, therefore had to use their imaginations to project possibilities that might not have been evident to the settled, well-adapted people of the host communities around which Jews had to construct their lives.

I propose that this historical disposition may have contributed to Vygotsky's views on adaptations required to bypass evolutionarily different physical and cognitive makeups, which I will review later. As a Jew who sought inclusion in the mainstream opportunities of the new Soviet Union following the overthrow of the brutally discriminatory Tsarist regime, Vygotsky entered his field with a clear and personal understanding of how constructing outsiders as "the other" produces devastating feelings of inferiority and how the ability to adapt within an understanding society enabled those who were socially ostracized to become full participants in cultural life. This perspective became central to his approach to the treatment of those whose physical capabilities fell outside the evolutionary norm.

Vygotsky and Christian Perspectives on Difference

Van der Veer and Zavershneva (2011) report that during his 1925 trip to London as the Soviet representative at the 8th International Conference on the Education of the Deaf, the young and then-obscure Vygotsky expressed incredulity about what he saw as the misguided views of the Christian specialists who dominated the meeting. In his subsequent work on defectology, Vygotsky (1993) roundly criticized what he understood to be a Christian perspective because of its valorization of human suffering as a key to salvation. In contrast, he believed that neither suffering nor salvation was at stake in anyone's education, particularly those diagnosed with having special needs.³ Suffering is not an intrinsically noble experience in Judaism, as evidenced by the Talmudic belief that "There is no merit to the mind, in punishing the body." The rabbis do say that although suffering may lead to deeper understandings, one should neither seek it out nor valorize it as contributing to a higher level of existence (P. Azaroff, personal communication). In contrast, the Christian perspective that he encountered in his European colleagues⁴ is derived from the belief that Christ's suffering on the cross serves as an exemplar for the lives of his followers.

Vygotsky (1993) equated the Christian beliefs that he found in the European psychologists of his era with paganism, locating its orthodoxies in the ancient world and the belief in "the mystical powers of the soul" and "the Christian medieval view of the positive role of suffering, of the infirmity of the flesh" (p. 107). In fundamental contrast, Vygotsky felt that humane and supportive settings, not the experience of affliction as a way to improve the soul, should characterize the education of those lacking normative functions. Vygotsky particularly contested what he saw as Christian beliefs about the importance of suffering. Regarding German schools for the deaf and blind, for instance, in spite of their many advanced technical advantages, Vygotsky found that

³ I am neither a Christian, nor a Jew, nor a communist, and so have no dog in this fight. In the name of full disclosure, I should note that my grandparents on my father's side were Jews from Vygotsky's home city of Gomel who emigrated to New York City in 1913 and 1916 to escape pogroms; my mother's people were German and Irish Catholics, the latter of whom were mid-nineteenth century potato famine refugees. I am an atheist, although have attended both Episcopalian and Methodist churches at different points in my life and identify strongly with the Jewish intellectual tradition. I also experience life as a person of difference due to departures from the mental health norm (see Smagorinsky, 2011, in press) and so identify strongly with Vygotsky's outline of a humane approach to considering difference.

⁴ Vygotsky referred to "the Europeans" as a separate geographical and political category of scientists from the Soviet society of which he was a part.

an unbearable savor of the alms house, a musty atmosphere of some kind of crypt, and an unhealthy pious air wafts from every page [of their publications]. According to N. Hoppe . . . what is most important in the upbringing and education of blind-deaf-mute children in Germany is that they should bear with faith and patience the cross laid upon them by the Lord and should learn in their darkness to hope for eternal light. (p. 83)

Vygotsky's views on the integration of body, mind, spirit, and environment take on an interesting complexity when placed in the context of ancient religious differences between Christians and Jews. Johnson (1988) makes critical distinctions between the two belief systems. He argues that Philo of Alexandria, a Jew whose life overlapped with that of Jesus Christ and who is viewed by some as key thinker in the formation of Christianity, was influenced by the Greeks and thus

separated the body and soul in moral terms and even referred to the body as an emotional, irrational "plotter" against the rational soul. But mainstream, rabbinical Judaism rejected a body-soul dichotomy. . . . Body and soul, it taught, were one and jointly responsible for sin, therefore jointly punishable. This became an important distinction between Christianity and Judaism. The Christian idea that, by weakening the body through mortification and fasting, you strengthened the soul, was anathema to Jews. (p. 154)

Johnson's (1988) distinction appears evident in Vygotsky's (1993) work in two critical ways. First, he strongly contested any teasing apart of the human being into separate realms such as the body and the soul, the mind and the body, cognition and emotion, and so on. Rather, he sought an integrated approach in which all aspects of a person are unified both within the body and between the person and the culture through the process of mediation. Second, he rejected the Christian view he found among European psychologists that society should pity the different and view their suffering as a means to a stronger soul whose only salvation came through religious faith. He believed that earthly labor, not faith in the intangible Almighty, should be the focus of the human quest for meaning.

In this regard, Johnson (1988) finds that Jews and Christians depart on the question of worldly action. Jews, he maintains, are oriented to law. As a consequence, Johnson concludes, "Judaism is not so much about doctrine—that is taken for granted—as behaviour; the code matters more than the creed" (p. 162). This principle appears to provide a Bolshevik-era Jew with a psychological framework for accepting Marx's emphasis on labor, which became central to Vygotsky's (1993) perspective on difference: Through productive labor, a person of extranormal makeup can participate in routine social practices and so feel more a part of society. Judaism is often portrayed as a code of deeds (*mitzvot*), not of doctrine; rabbis often allude to the story that when the Jews accepted the Torah, they told God, "Na'ah'se v'nishma" [We will do and we will hearken] such that action precedes understanding (D. Rubin, personal communication). I next look at the role of Marxism in Vygotsky's career, one that appears well-aligned to the Soviet outsider yet one that was insufficient for full acceptance into the party's ideological center, where faithfulness to Marx needed to be aligned with faithfulness to Lenin and Stalin.

Vygotsky and Marxism

Vygotsky (1993) took a materialist view of defectological education based on the premise that “Communist pedagogy is the pedagogy of the collective” (p. 208). This collective has a particular cultural updraft that leads individuals toward group ends. Rather than viewing children with extranormative makeups as being too handicapped to be taken along with this draft, Vygotsky saw this culturally-channeled, inexorable progress toward a developmental ideal to be available, although not through customary means:

As soon as we have before us a child deviating from the norm—a child afflicted by some psychophysiological deficit—then even a naïve observer will see that convergence immediately gives way to a strong divergence, to discrepancy and disparity between the natural and the cultural lines of child development. Left to himself and to his own natural development, a deaf-mute child will never learn speech, and a blind person will never master writing. In this case education comes to the rescue, creating artificial, cultural techniques, that is, a special system of cultural signs and symbols which are adapted to the specific psychophysiological characteristics of an abnormal child. (p. 168)

With this perspective, Vygotsky (1993) entered a nature-nurture dispute that remains in play in the 21st century. On the one hand stood those whose focus was on biology. These psychologists included Piaget, whose biological stage theory Vygotsky disputed throughout his career. On the other hand stood researchers like Vygotsky, who used Marxist principles to argue on behalf of the collective labor force as a shaping cultural factor in human development. This emphasis on social mediation through cultural tools with historically-developed purposes runs throughout his work on defectology, as well as his work in all areas of psychology.

To this day, however, people debate the extent to which Vygotsky was or was not truly a Marxist psychologist. Zinchenko (2004) argues that Vygotsky’s psychology was more Spinozan than Marxist (cf. Zavershneva & Surmava, 2006; cited in Kotik-Friedgut & Friedgut, 2008). Kotik-Friedgut and Friedgut report that Vygotsky’s experiences as “the other” included occasions when he was viewed as an “insincere Marxist” (p. 34). Vygotsky’s contemporary Rudneva (1937/2000), writing around the time of his death and no doubt opining with the Soviet leadership in mind, characterized Vygotsky as anti-Leninist, anti-Marxist, counter-revolutionary, bourgeois, leftist, idealist, mechanistic, fascist, uncritical, pseudotheoretical, scurrilous, anti-scientific, absurd, slanderous, reactionary, demagogic, erroneous, harmful, a pedagogical distortionist, opposed to Party directives about schematism, an opponent of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks), and affiliated with stupid psychologies.

And yet, Vygotsky frequently labeled his work as Marxist. Kotik-Friedgut and Friedgut (2008) note that in Vygotsky’s childhood home of Gomel, “The Jewish community was predominantly religious and traditional, intolerant of deviants, but quite naturally it was subject to all the revolutionary and modernizing undercurrents that affected the entire empire in this period” (p. 18). As a serious student of scholarly demeanor, and as an outsider seeking inclusion, Vygotsky was undoubtedly caught up in this wave of Marxist influence. New evidence indicates that Vygotsky personally embraced the political imperatives of the Soviet Union and willfully applied them to his formulation of a Marxist psychology. Van der Veer and Zavershneva (2011)

report that during his 1925 trip to the 8th International Conference on the Education of the Deaf, Vygotsky recorded the following reflection in his notebook:

In essence, Russia is the first country in the world. The Revolution is our supreme cause. In this room only 1 person knows the secret of the genuine education of the deafmutes. And that person is me. Not because I am more educated than the others, but [because] I was sent by Russia and I speak on behalf of the Revolution. (p. 9)

As Van der Veer and Zavershneva (2011) note, this newly-discovered notebook confirms Vygotsky's wholehearted embrace of Marxist principles and their critical role in his formulation of a comprehensive psychology of cultural-historical human development. Although his work was ultimately viewed as a threat by Soviet party leaders and their most compliant psychologists (Van der Veer, 2000), he nonetheless demonstrated himself at age 28 to be a patriotic and Marx-influenced Soviet psychologist who, as his notebook further reveals, was often bored and indifferent during the proceedings, which he felt were grounded in questionable Christian beliefs about the human condition. Whether he was the right kind of Marxist to suit the state is one question demonstrably answered by "No." Whether he was influenced by Marx, however, appears to be beyond question.

The Conundrum of Vygotsky's Heritage

Vygotsky's effort to apply cultural-historical Marxist principles to psychology at times could be viewed as enigmatic in that it assumes that the broader culture's notion of telos necessarily provides an appropriate overall developmental channel for whole populations to navigate life in a unified fashion. In his conception, the broad teleological direction in which a society moves provides the updraft in which development occurs, with extranormal makeups being redirected in a roundabout manner to fit within this channel. At one point, he waxed quite rhapsodically about the Young Pioneers, a communist youth group being socialized into Soviet ideology. He proposed labor-oriented schools in which deaf children would create a form of self-government and become organized so that "Living skills, social behavior, initiative, leadership qualities, collective responsibility grow and strengthen in this system." He continued,

this social educational system for the deaf is crowned by a children's communist movement, i.e., participation in the Young Pioneers, which involves children in the life of the working class and acquaints them with the experiences and struggles of adults. The heartbeat of the world is felt in the Pioneer Movement; a child learns to see himself as a participant in life on a world scale. In this child's play, the sprouts of those serious thoughts and actions ripen which will play a decisive role in this life. What is new in all of this, is that for the first time the child enters the mainstream of present day life. Moreover life is directed toward the future whereas it had been based on past historical human experience.

At the top level the children's Pioneer Movement turns into the Young Communist Movement, a sweeping, wide-scale, social and political education whereby the deaf-mute child lives and breathes with his whole country. His pulse, his efforts, his thoughts beat in unison with the masses. (1993, p. 120)

I have the advantage of hindsight, through which I understand that Soviet leaders took this idea of thinking in unison with the masses to require utter conformity with their ideological positions, with the threat of death or exile to brutal labor camps hanging over dissenters. I was not present during the period of intense optimism and idealism that often accompanies the establishment of a new regime, particularly one established to advance the lot in life of the common person historically oppressed by the aristocracy. Vygotsky appeared caught up in the romantic optimism of a new society founded on the principle of shared, rather than competitive, goals and the humane possibilities that such a vision afforded.

If the goal is cultural assimilation, as suggested by Vygotsky's encomium, then this emphasis on being swept up in the collective has merit. Soviet communism, however, quickly turned repressive to the point where psychologists and other academics were put to death for unorthodox beliefs. Enrollment in the Young Pioneers and Young Communists surely facilitated the sort of collectivist mentality that served party ideology well, at the expense of creative thinking of the sort ultimately crushed or sent into exile by party leaders and their police. Working from a collectivist perspective thus requires a certain measure of care so as to separate out the problems following from ideological enforcement of a party line, and the Marxist tenets that can produce a sensitive, supportive educational environment for all children, including and especially those whose physical provisions do not follow the conventional evolutionary pattern.

Vygotsky's View of the Defect

In this section I focus on what Vygotsky (1993) considered to be a "defect," a term his conception of human development generally disputes. In interrogating the phenomenon of blindness, Vygotsky argued that the absence of sight requires one to generate compensatory faculties such that it "is not merely a defect, a minus, a weakness, but in some sense is also the source of manifestations of abilities, a plus, a strength" (p. 97). In this section I outline Vygotsky's (1993) definition of a "defect"; elaborate his view of the *generative potential of feelings of inadequacy* to develop alternative means for engaging socially; and detail his views on what he considered to be the crucial problem of educating the extranormal child, the creation of a *secondary disability* produced through the social stigma that leads to feelings of inferiority, which to Vygotsky are the most deleterious consequences of physical or mental difference.

Defining Defect

In critiquing efforts provided by the special education approaches of his day, Vygotsky (1993) asked, "Who can be reared from all of this? Does this not sooner transform a normal child into a mentally retarded child rather than develop in the retarded child those *mechanisms of behavior, psychology, and personality which have not yet meshed with the sharp teeth of life's intricate gears?*" (p. 73; emphasis in original). Vygotsky situated variations from the evolutionary norm in the context of his broader emphasis on human development, rather than taking the customary approach of attempting to amplify the underdeveloped or absent capacity toward the norm. "It is extremely difficult to get rid of the philanthropic, invalid-oriented point of view" toward difference, he argued (p. 75). Rather, he grounded his approach in efforts to assimilate people of difference into mainstream society by cultivating the potential of the whole person by means of "roundabout" means of mediation made available to achieve cultural ends. Vygotsky's approach was thus positive, optimistic, future-oriented, and dedicated to cultivating potential; "no theory," he maintained, "is possible if it proceeds from exclusively negative premises" (p. 31).

As such, Vygotsky (1993) deliberately focused on difference rather than deficit. Kotik-Friedgut and Friedgut (2008) maintain that Vygotsky “never called these children ‘defective’ or ‘handicapped’ but referred to them as ‘anomalous,’⁵ insisting that, properly nurtured, they could attain levels comparable to their peers” (cf. Feigenberg, 1996, p. 69). Kotik-Friedgut and Friedgut ground this emphasis on the potential of the forsaken in the Old Testament value, written in Psalms, 118:22, which Vygotsky (1934/1982, p. 79) refers to in *Thinking and Speech*: “The stone, rejected by the builders, has become the capstone of the corner.” Vygotsky (1993) built on this premise to argue that “a child whose development is impeded by a defect is not simply a child less developed than his peers but is a child who has developed differently” (p. 30).

This view reveals the developmental grounding of his approach to the whole of psychology. Compared to a fully functioning adult, perhaps a child of difference would be considered defective given the absence or minimal presence of a critical cognitive, motor, or sensory means for engaging the world. But a child, to Vygotsky, is a work in progress, one who can circumvent areas of difference to develop new capacities for a satisfying and productive life in society. Vygotsky’s (1993) developmental emphasis stood in contrast to the biological perspectives on difference current in his day and still available. He critiqued those who viewed areas of difference as instances of biological defects. He was adamant about the misguided views of those who take the position that “children develop ‘along biological tracks’ [such that] we may dismiss the laws determining the social development and formation of a normal mind. This mechanistic notion is unfounded methodologically speaking.” Rather, he argued, the appropriate approach is to consider “the alliance of social and biological regularities in child development” in a dialectical fashion (p. 124).

The potential for more optimistic, future-oriented, and possibility-centered settings for development is available, he argued, and should become the focus of educational psychology and practice. In producing difficulties, a “defect” stimulates compensatory processes such that “The child’s physical and psychological reaction to the handicap is the central and basic problem—indeed, the sole reality—with which defectology deals” (Vygotsky, 1993, p. 32). To Vygotsky, then, the “defect” is only a problem to be circumvented through other means. He believed that “The mentally retarded child does not consist of gaps and defects alone; his organism as a whole is restructured. The personality as a whole is balanced out and compensated for by the child’s developmental processes” (p. 125). This emphasis on the whole of a child’s personality and his or her physical and cognitive capabilities separated him from those who viewed departures from the evolutionary norm as isolated problems to be treated directly. The comprehensive, integrated, potential-oriented perspective that he took in contrast emphasizes the possibilities for culturally-mediated developmental processes to produce capabilities that lead to fully productive lives in social context.

Generative Effects of Feelings of Inadequacy

Vygotsky saw the feelings of inadequacy that often accompany cognitive or physical difference to have two very different effects on those affected. On the one hand, the feelings of inadequacy could serve to motivate positive new ways of engaging with society. On the other hand, feelings

⁵ If Kotik-Friedgut and Friedgut (2008) are right in this view, Vygotsky’s more sensitive and appreciative terms did not always make it through the Knox and Stevens (1993) translation of Volume 2 of the *Collected Works*.

of inadequacy could be reinforced socially to produce the secondary disability of profound insecurity and questions about personal worth.

I first focus on the response to feelings of inadequacy that produce a generative action to circumvent the source of the feelings. Vygotsky (1993) argued that “*Via subjective feelings of inadequacy, a physical handicap dialectically transforms itself into psychological drives toward compensation and overcompensation*” through adaptation (p. 33; emphasis in original; cf. Lee, 2008). This transformation requires a concerted volitional effort that is socially reinforced as a fruitful avenue for promoting a healthy developmental pathway. This approach relies on the principle of compensation, which involves a circumvention of obstacles by means of adaptation that allows for full participation in a culture’s social life. Rather than serving as a weakness or deficit, an extranormative makeup can be constructed as “a plus, a source of strength [that] has some positive implications!” (p. 56).

Vygotsky (1993) viewed compensatory development to be an instance of a generative response to difference, one that “represents a continually evolving adaptive process. If a blind or deaf child achieves the same level of development as a normal child, then the child with a defect achieves this *in another way, by another course, by other means*” (p. 34; emphasis in original). Tulviste (1991) summarized the cultural-historical approach by positing that human development occurs in relation to problems posed by the environment, such that frameworks for thinking form within cultures for addressing the obstacles and challenges posed by natural and human settings. This insight relates well to Vygotsky’s (1993) perspective on the treatment and education of the evolutionarily different. In order for one to engage productively with obstacles so that compensatory processes take on this generative function, Vygotsky argued that a “defect” needs to be reconsidered for its potential to motivate a productive adaptive response, to produce a new order through cultural channels: “Cultural development is the main area for compensation of deficiency when further organic development is impossible; in this respect, the path of cultural development is unlimited” (p. 169).

A feeling of inadequacy can thus have a beneficial effect when learners are treated as productive people adapting to their environments. The environment is composed largely of the cultural setting of development and how it has evolved to address the problems and obstacles that its people face. For those who lack capabilities such as sight, “creating special cultural tools” or “mastering common cultural forms with the help of special pedagogical methods” creates alternative developmental pathways, “*because the most important and decisive condition of cultural development—precisely the ability to use psychological tools—is preserved in such children*” (p. 47; emphasis in original).

This insight suggests the presence of two dialectical issues and processes. First, the child of difference must adapt to the world through alternative cultural tools, such as braille, because, as Vygotsky (1993) noted, “The cultural forms of behavior serve as the only path of education for an abnormal child. This path means the creation of roundabout ways of development at that point where it proves to be impossible to proceed by direct paths” (p. 168). The reciprocal process concerns the need for the people around the child to accept these alternative mediational means nonjudgmentally and respectfully. The general lack of providing such supportive environments

contributes to the other possible outcome of engaging with the world through alternative means, the secondary disability that consists of feelings of inadequacy, which I explore next.

The Effects of Secondary Disabilities

Vygotsky (1993) asserted that “the social aspect formerly diagnosed as secondary and derivative, in fact, turns out to be primary and major. One must boldly look at this problem as a social problem” (p. 112). This insight regarding the role of the social environment on the development of those whose makeup lies outside the evolutionary norm serves as one of Vygotsky’s great recognitions regarding the education and other modes of cultivation that mediate human development. It relies on the Marxist principles of the value of productive labor and the role of mediating settings in human development. It also serves as among his greatest points of departure from his day’s view of difference as deficient and in need of pity and remediation in isolation from the whole of human development.

Vygotsky noted that “Blindness is not a disease but the normal condition for a blind child; he senses his uniqueness only indirectly and secondarily as a result of his social experience” (p. 81). This observation situates his perspective on difference as, first, one grounded in efforts to normalize difference in terms of the child’s orientation to the world; and second, as one that views the people around the child of difference as facilitators of a potentially disabling environment of pity, rejection, scorn, and other negative means of reinforcement that lead to feelings of inferiority. Rieber and Carton (1993) conclude that Vygotsky believed that “the very basis of successful compensation for defects consists of encouraging the ability to surmount feelings of inferiority and the establishment of self-esteem” in order to take into consideration “the feelings of the individuals suffering from defects” (p. vii)—with “suffering” a curious choice of terms given Vygotsky’s repeated assertion that focusing on one’s suffering reflects what he regarded as a Christian, nonmaterialistic valorization of pain as a way to elevate the soul, and the accompanying response of pity that virtually dooms such children to lives of misery.

Vygotsky asserted that through the creation of future-oriented mediational settings, alternative pathways of development may be opened and cultivated. This postulation then transforms the notion of a “defect” into more of a condition that calls for an extranormal means of mediation that could conceivably lead to enhanced engagement with the world, a possibility that Vygotsky illustrated with the example of his older contemporary Helen Keller, who was rendered unsighted and unhearing by an illness at age 19 months, yet developed other capabilities unimagined in her era for mediating her development, all within the setting provided by her tutor Anne Sullivan, herself of limited vision and thus aware of other ways of perceiving and acting on the world.

This attention to settings was a critical dimension of Vygotsky’s concern for children lacking normative means of engaging with the world. Rather than segregating children to protect them from their deficits, he saw the need to integrate them fully into collective life in ways that contributed to their development of the capabilities that would lead to satisfying lives in cultural context. Focusing solely on the physical shortcomings, he believed, would lead to little progress toward this end. Rather, settings must be constructed such that each person’s strengths are cultivated and developed. In his vision, a “norm” is only useful to account for what is typical and

is of little use in considering the atypical. Norms thus do not set the standard, but provide one way of being in the world. *What is defective in this conception is the environment that supports normative conceptions of human development*, not the person who departs from that norm. Education, wrote Vygotsky, “must cope not *so much with these biological factors as with their social consequences*” (p. 66; emphasis in original).

Vygotsky’s (1993) interest in the secondary disability follows from his conclusion that the effects of difference become social when others view them as stigmas and people of difference appropriate that perspective and understand themselves to be deficient. With this insight he tied his attention to defectology to his broader interest in the necessary integration of all aspects of human development with one’s affective engagement with the world (Vygotsky, 1971, 1994, 1999a, 1999b). “Full social esteem,” he insisted, “is the ultimate aim of education inasmuch as all the processes of overcompensation are directed at achieving social status” (1993, p. 57).

Vygotsky (1993) distanced himself from the intellectualist theory about retardation in children extant in his day (and still available), which overlooked the fundamental relation between cognition and affect. To Vygotsky (1993), “the unity of intellect and affect in the development of normal and of mentally retarded children” is the cornerstone of a dynamic theory of mental functioning. Any conception that separated the intellect from the whole of organic functioning is impoverished and misguided. This attention to the role of affect in overall human development appears related to his attention to *perezhivanie* (Vygotsky, 1994), or what my colleagues and I (Author & Colleague, 2011) have called *meta-experience*: the manner in which experience is experienced so as to frame new experiences. Children of difference who are treated as defective carry this experience to new experiences in ways characterized by feelings of inferiority and deviant social orientation. These feelings in turn frame yet new experiences such that the belief in one’s inadequacy and social dysphoria becomes reinforced continually over time. Addressing these feelings by treating the evolutionarily different as part of the whole of society’s fabric, Vygotsky believed, is critical to enabling one to develop the higher mental functions characteristic of general cultural ways of engaging with the world.

His position on this matter put him at odds with the prevailing beliefs of his day, which focused on difference as defect to be amplified. Vygotsky (1993), however, asserted that “since the elimination of the defect is impossible, it is natural that the struggle with the primary symptoms has been doomed beforehand to futility and failure” (p. 198). Rather than focusing on the source of difference, Vygotsky took the longer, more developmental view that the goal of all human development is the development of higher mental processes, i.e., cultural constructs that enable the reapplication of general principles from one setting to another so as to address similar problems in new configurations. Socializing people to participate in overall cultural practices, rather than repairing defects, requires the development of roundabout mediational means that help to produce higher mental functions for full social participation.

To Vygotsky (1993), “The distinction between primary and secondary developmental delays . . . has deep practical interest because secondary complications and delays are the more responsive to therapeutic pedagogical activity where mental retardation and the symptoms deriving from it are the direct cause and, consequently, cannot be eliminated” (p. 256). Ever the practical educator, he found a realistic approach to addressing how to teach children who lack normative

functioning. One cannot implant seeing eyes in a blind child. But one can construct a setting in which feelings of inadequacy that follow from the absence of sight are elided by treating the child's condition as normal. What matters is that, by some means, the child develops higher mental functions, with or without the benefit of sight. In sight's absence, higher mental functions can be developed that approximate those available to the sighted; and indeed, the development of alternative mediational means could conceivably lead to capacities for insights not available to the sighted, even as alternative means of reading (e.g., through Braille) may be employed to engage with texts. Such a child is not to be pitied or closeted away, but encouraged and embraced as a productive member of society.

Defectology in the Context of Vygotsky's Developmental Approach

As suggested by his orientation to the value of life in a collective, Vygotsky's career was dedicated to formulating a comprehensive developmental psychology based on the premise that human development is mediated by engagement with cultural practices carried out through signs and tools. His work in defectology was consistent with this focus. In the sections that follow, I review how the various papers included in Volume 2 of the *Collected Works* situated his account of defectology within his broader interest in how cultures provide developmental contours within which to promote both individual and collective development toward particular ends, and how for those with extranormal makeups, alternative pathways must be made available so that "roundabout" routes toward these cultural endpoints is possible; how collective activity provides the socialization through which those developing outside the diagnostic norm may proceed toward such mutual ends; and how he conceived of education in order to address the developmental needs of extranormal children.

Biology and Culture in Human Development

Vygotsky (1993) felt that focusing on the area of difference underconceptualized one's capacity to develop through other means and to reach human potential outside conventional channels. This circumvention, no matter how different from the pathway taken by the evolutionarily normal, takes place within the teleological bounds of a culture's broader channels and pathways. Vygotsky continually emphasized the importance of fitting in societally in the midst of critical biological and developmental difference. Researchers, he argued, should "study not merely the biological character but also how it develops in various conditions of the social environment in which the child must build his character" (p. 140). Vygotsky's attention to human development emerged from Pavlov's inclination "to view all behavior as consisting of both unconditional, hereditary reflexes and conditional reflexes acquired through individual experience" (p. 111) in social context⁶. Educationally, he viewed all attention to biological extranormativity as residing in the realm of the social.

Vygotsky's (1993) views on defectology, like his other views on human development, drew on the premise that understanding personality requires a future-oriented perspective that emphasizes how one can learn to take part in a culture's teleological direction. He contrasted his view with that of Freud, to whom "all of life is determined in early childhood from elementary combinations and, without exception, boils down to living out childhood conflicts." In contrast, argued Vygotsky, a psychology oriented to the future views personality "as an integral process

⁶ The translators (Knox and Stevens) note that Pavlov's term has imprecisely been translated as "conditioned response" rather than the more accurate "conditional response."

which *struggles forward* with objective necessity toward an ultimate goal, toward a finale, projected by the demands of social existence” (p. 160; emphasis in original).

Although oriented to the future, Vygotsky’s psychology was fundamentally grounded in the past and present, as indicated by the emphasis on cultural tools developed through historical practice and social conditioning through engagement with others. These factors, however, do not anchor one permanently in past experiences, as with Freud, even as the past is always present in new experiences. Vygotsky’s future-oriented psychology viewed individuals as part of collective life that develops its means of engagement with the world through historical practice and is directed toward teleological ends. Its focus on the future therefore relies on means of cultural engagement that will continue to propel it toward a satisfying future according to a collectivist framework for concurrent personal and social growth.

This belief in a future that follows from established cultural pathways, and that is grounded in meta-experiences that in turn frame new experiences, is evident in his remarks about the social conditioning of people with physical differences, a process involving two facets: “The social effect of the defect (the inferiority complex) is one side of the social conditioning. The other side is the social pressure on the child to adapt to those circumstances created and compounded for the normal human type” (p. 36). These insights suggest the roles of two related factors in human development: telos, a sense of optimal outcome for individuals and their societies (Wertsch, 2000); and prolepsis, the means by which people’s social futures are subtly shaped by the assumptions and actions of those who surround them (Cole, 1996). These factors are critical in considering human trajectories and how people with extranormal makeups embark on life pathways that are mediated socially and culturally. These pathways are marked and encouraged by cultural tools and signs that provide the overall flow of societal direction and purpose. The tools and signs are not simply landmarks and signposts, however. They are imbued with the residue of cultural practice (Cole, 1996) and thus, as Knox and Stevens (1993) note, “it is not the tools or signs, in and of themselves, which are important for thought development but the *meaning* encoded in them” (p. 15; emphasis in original).

Vygotsky’s (1987) outline of higher mental functions—those that are culturally-specific and form the basis of social life—informed his view of educating children of difference. “The greatest possibilities for the development of the abnormal child,” he wrote, “most likely lie in the higher, rather than the lower, functions” (p. 198); i.e., in the frameworks for thinking appropriated through cultural practice, those available through life in the collective. He argued that children of difference, like any others, appropriate ways of thinking and acting from collective activity. As a consequence, the appropriation of social norms leads to self-regulation or voluntary processes within the contours of those norms. In the case of a neuroatypical makeup, a roundabout or alternative pathway leads to the appropriation of those norms. Vygotsky (1993) thus emphasized social factors in understanding the impact of the human environment on children: “the reserve of compensatory forces is, to a large degree, to be found in the social-collective life of the child” (p. 127).

One’s character thus develops not organically but in relation to social experiences. Vygotsky (1993) noted that “we shall never understand fully the human personality if we are to look at it statically as a sum of phenomena, of acts, and the like, without an integral biographical plan of

personality, without a main line of development which transforms the history of a man's life from a row of disconnected and separate episodes into a connected, integral, life-long process" (p. 156). Vygotsky's (1993) focus on the integration of personality separated him from contemporaries (and their antecedents) who focused on parts, such as a hearing loss, rather than on the whole of a personality. He noted that "the developmental stages in normal and in abnormal children flow continuously and organically from one another, as the action does in a well-ordered drama. If we want to understand the outcome, we have to sit through all the acts" (p. 253).

Socialization through Integrated, Collective Activity

Vygotsky (1993) argued that in considerations of defectology, individually-oriented ways of considering achievement are misguided. For the learner, collaborative action in everyday social activity helps to foster alternative pathways toward conventional ends. Just as important, however, are the beliefs and actions of the collaborator, who must cease to view the evolutionarily different child as deficient: "the task is not so much the education of blind children as it is the reeducation of the sighted. The latter must change their attitude toward blindness and toward the blind. The reeducation of the sighted poses a social pedagogical task of enormous importance" (p. 86).

One could make similar arguments about most diagnostic and instructional efforts: *Creating a setting for learning and assessment that takes developmental issues into account is of paramount importance*. In this sense the zone of proximal development is, as Moll (1990) argues, more than the individual learner's range of potential. Rather, the zone of proximal development extends to the whole of the context, including the sequence of cultural practices that have produced it, such that collaborators and their degree of intersubjectivity with the learner, the mediational means by which learning is accomplished, the cultural values of the setting that suggest where learning should be directed and how it should be carried out, and other environmental factors are implicated in what someone learns and how that learning unfolds. Vygotsky further believed that in order for those of evolutionarily divergent makeups to be appropriately guided in their learning, the collaborators must adopt a new perspective on difference, one that treats it as a set of conditions to be accommodated and channeled toward conventional cultural ends rather than as a handicap to be pitied or amplified. He emphasized the normativity of the handicap to the handicapped: "The fundamental idea," he maintained, "is to overcome the very notion of a handicap" (p. 93).

The collaborative activity that he advocated accomplishes more than the assistance of a learner. Just as critical, it requires the education of the collaborator, who must learn to view extranormal children as lacking handicaps and in need of alternative means of achieving conventional cultural ends. To Vygotsky (1993), "In developing collective thinking . . . *we are eliminating the very reason for the underdevelopment of psychological functions in a blind child*, opening up before him uncharted and unlimited possibilities" (p. 205; emphasis in original).

Vygotsky's (1993) solution was somewhat paradoxical. On the one hand, he argued that collaborative work is a central factor in children's cultural development, with collective action providing the contours for the development of higher mental functions. Here he appears to argue against the segregation of extranormal children for educational purposes. Collaborative labor and

learning with those meeting the diagnostic norm should always be available to provide the cultural stream in which their development occurs. At the same time, he believed that, rather than mainstreaming such children in conventional schools in which this stream is readily available, special schools of defectology should be designed for group education of the extranormal. In a school serving unsighted children, for example, “Collaboration with the sighted must become the basis for vocational training. This basis creates true interaction with the seeing, and *work* turns out to be that narrow door through which the blind enter life. Create healthy work and all the rest will come of its own” (p. 86; emphasis added).

Labor thus serves as a central aspect of human development, regardless of one’s biological makeup. Feeling productive addresses the problems of stigma that comprise the secondary disability that, more than the original source of difference, impinges on one’s developmental potential. The child’s consequent achievements and the positive feelings that accompany them, however, take place outside the true mainstream of education, although Vygotsky never identified the transitional point from these segregated settings to a fully integrated participation in social life.

This emphasis on collective life, albeit in a specialized environment, reveals a major tension between Vygotsky’s (1993) belief in the importance of the *collective* and the ultimate *individual* appropriation of cultural practices via cultural tools. Balancing attention to the two foci is a challenge that permeates Vygotsky’s work in general. With respect to the education of those exhibiting difference, he argued that self-regulation carried out in coordination with the activity of others leads to the appropriation of new concepts. Gaining acceptance through developing means of participating in the broad activities and direction of a culture is thus a primary goal of the collective activity that guides and mediates the learning of extranormal children. This emphasis on the collective can become problematic when the collective’s goals and practices become oppressive or otherwise threatening to the development of a healthy society, which quickly became the hallmark of Soviet society.

Vygotsky’s (1993) attention to cultural practice as the process in which all development is embedded provided the framework within which he considered the matter of defectological education. For all children, psychological development is culturally channeled to enable the appropriation of conventional mediational tools. Vygotsky thus argued for a developmental perspective that takes into account the full range of issues that inform a Marxist psychology: a reliance on a genetic (or developmental) method, an integration of all facets of human functioning into a comprehensive psychology, attention to the role of cultural practice as the principal mediator of higher mental functions, the assertion of higher mental functions in service of teleological ends as the goal of personality formation, and the role not only of the individual in context but of the social responsibility of the collective to care for and promote a normalized development of each member of its society.

Normalizing the Education of Extranormal Learners

Vygotsky’s (1993) vision for the education of extranormal learners was geared toward the ultimate developmental goal of achieving social status. Toward this end, although he believed in the construction of special schools for defectological education, he assumed that the entire process of development is identical for children of difference and those who meet the diagnostic

norm. Confronting and overcoming obstacles presented by the environment, he believed, “is what incites a person to advance developmentally toward a teleological end” (p. 105), suggesting that all development is social and culturally mediated toward a future end. Life’s basic goal, he presumed, is to become socialized.

Even in separate schools, he believed, children of normal and extranormal biological makeups should be educated in a similar manner, with the primary difference being the cultivation of alternative pathways to participation in routine cultural practices emphasized in the special schools of defectology. He implored his readers to consider that the education of all children, regardless of the norms they follow, should contribute to the development of a socially-accepted adult capable of “social labor, not in degrading, philanthropic, invalid-oriented forms . . . but in forms which correspond to the true essence of labor” (p. 108-109).

Vygotsky’s writing on defectology is short on practical examples of the sort of education he envisioned; the pieces assembled in Volume 2 of the *Collected Works* lay out the theoretical approach he proposed for the new Soviet educational system. In these schools, he sought to promote the development of engaged and productive citizens of the Soviet society, including those whose potential typically got snuffed out early in the developmental process by assumptions of inferiority and deficit that not only produced a general feeling of pity and charity toward the infirm, but exponentially reinforced those feelings within extranormal children, thus rendering their prospects for social inclusion, status, and happiness nearly unattainable. He believed that few children, much less those of evolutionary difference, reach their potential. With children from within the evolutionary norm rarely reaching the upper limits of their possibilities, extranormal children treated as invalids (in the senses of both being sickly and lacking validity) were stuck at the lowest end of their social potential.

Most schools set aside for the biologically different, he argued, were socially constructed as a “school for fools” in which “the very fact of the child’s attendance at this school meant a degradation in his social position. . . . The shadow of inferiority even falls on the teacher at this school” (p. 137). Vygotsky’s solution was not mainstreaming, which is the current resolution to the isolation and status issues that follow from a classification; but creating better schools for extranormal children, those that involve meaningful, productive labor that helps a society reach toward its goals. This labor needs to have a conceptual dimension, rather than being strictly menial: “a retarded child masters abstract thinking with the greatest difficulty because the school excludes from its material anything which demands any attempt at abstract thinking, and it bases its instruction on concreteness and visual methods” (p. 138). In contrast, he believed, schools of defectology needed to be spoken about as schools of exceptional learning whose goal it was to promote, with attention to developmental issues, integration of extranormal children into the current of social life, such that upon their graduation they exhibited the higher mental functions that enabled full participation in this full social stream, even if they navigated its waters with unconventional psychological tools.

Discussion

Like many, I long considered Vygotsky’s (1993) work on defectology to be a tangential strand of his work. My interest in mental health and its general characterization as a disabling condition (Smagorinsky, 2011) initially brought me in contact with his defectological writing. I now see Vygotsky’s (1993) interest in creating a more inclusive society for people of difference as among

the most compelling aspects of his theory of human development. Even for those who have no particular interest in biological departures from the evolutionary norm, this work makes an important contribution to his general, comprehensive approach to culturally-mediated developmental psychology and, I would argue, deserves greater attention than the paucity of citations it has garnered suggests.

The notion of the secondary disability is profoundly important and ought to inform any educational program about any group of people, particularly those that include populations whose makeup requires adaptation through roundabout means. Vygotsky disputed the emphasis on biological orientations to human activity and development that dominated the psychology of his day, and his efforts continue to be carried out by those working in his tradition against the persistent belief that nature trumps nurture in human development. Just as Piaget's biological stage theories remain current in schools of education and other fields interested in the psychology of learning, strictly intellectualistic views of mentation persist in perspectives in which cultural groups are characterized according to presumably innate, static capabilities identified through measurements claimed to be culturally neutral (e.g., Herrnstein & Murray, 1994, whose conclusions about racially distributed intelligence, inferred from "intelligence tests," remain influential in such groups as the Bradley and Heritage Foundations, the American Enterprise Institute, and other powerful private research organizations).

Vygotsky's (1993) assertion that a primary cause such as the loss of sight is amenable to cultural mediation toward a society's higher mental functions is, in contrast to biological determinism, a hopeful and future-oriented way of regarding departures from the evolutionary norm. What concerned him should concern 21st century educators as well: the effects of being treated as a lesser person through society's assumption that difference is tantamount to deficit, a problem that helps create the devastating secondary disability of feeling inferior, helpless, dependent, and in need to pity and charity. Vygotsky's solution to this problem was twofold: to provide alternative means of mediation for people of difference, and just as importantly, to re-educate people to view difference more equitably and generously so as to reduce or eliminate the social context that produces the secondary disability of stigma and low self-esteem.

This argument is not only important in such fields as special education, but in all areas of cultural difference. In contrast to Herrnstein and Murray's (1994) view that factors such as race are correlated with degrees of intelligence, researchers such as Moll (1990) find that departures from society's norms do not represent deficient ways of being, but rather that they represent forms of activity designed to suit specific cultural goals. Thus when Latin@⁷ students drop out of school at disproportionate rates, instead of concluding that they lack the intelligence to succeed academically, he argues that schools are not responsive to the ways in which they have learned to learn in their home and community settings. His solution, similar to Vygotsky's, is to re-educate the educators about the students' home lives so as to inform their teaching in culturally responsive ways. Vygotsky's work thus has relevance for any population considered by the dominant group to be deficient, whether as a consequence of biology or culture.

⁷ I use the term "Latin@" rather than "Latino/a" as a way to diminish the foregrounding of either gender in referring to this population. The @ symbol conveniently locates the *o* and *a* in the same figure such that neither is dominant.

Another implication of Vygotsky's (1993) defectological writing is his insight that human development involves the integration of the whole of the individual's functioning in relation to cultural mediation. Toward this end he provides one of his most powerful, and overlooked, arguments for the integration of mind and body, affect and cognition, and mind and society. The construct of the secondary disability serves as a nexus for these related factors. Mind and body are interrelated to the extent that a biological difference may be adapted in one's appropriation of a society's higher mental functions, such that one experiences difference in positive ways that frame new experiences in hopeful and empowering ways. The foregrounding of affect in the developmental process, in conjunction with the possibility of engaging in satisfying cultural labor, is a critical aspect of Vygotsky's formulation that can inform any consideration of the role of difference in integrating one's work in a broader, future-oriented, constructive cultural stream.

One implication that Vygotsky overlooks is the possibility that a society may be headed in a destructive direction. His own Soviet society, like the Nazi movement that was underway at the time of his death, was predicated on the elimination of dissensus through violent means. Idiocultures such as the current wave of militia groups in the U.S. similarly have violent, hateful goals that they impress on their young. Vygotsky (1993) speaks of the Young Patriot and Young Communist movements of the Soviet Union, which he saw as positive ways to acculturate children of difference into the collective's forward movement. Even in his lifetime, however, the vision of a Soviet utopia had begun to fragment into totalitarianism. The teleological goals of a society, then, do not necessarily provide the ideal medium for human development, even if they might provide powerful means of, and incentives for, inclusion.

No setting can be created unproblematically, as Sarason (1972) has argued in relation to schools. Indeed, optimism can blind planners to the inevitable problems that arise and in turn contribute to the failure of designs to work as planned. Vygotsky's (1993) vision of a humane approach to difference serves more as a blueprint for broad societal action than a specific educational program. Undertaking his project undoubtedly would involve extraordinarily extensive re-education of teachers and other collaborators about the potential for roundabout means of mediation for producing ultimate social inclusion for those who depart from the evolutionary norm. Achieving this goal on even a modest level, however, would result in profoundly more satisfying lives for people of difference in society, regardless of its ideology. For that, it is an effort worth making.

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