

The importance of Vygotsky's teachings for modern psychology of the blind

Vygotsky Lev Semenovich (1896-1934)



It is generally recognized today that Vygotsky is a bright phenomenon in the history of the world culture. Vygotsky's name is known not only in Russia, but also in Europe and America. The present conference is yet another proof of that. Vygotsky was one of the first Russian scientists entrusted with the task to represent the Russian defectology and psychology in foreign countries. In the summer of 1925 he takes part in an international congress in Berlin as a Russian delegate. In 1926 Vygotsky represents Russia at the International conference on training and education of deaf children in England making a presentation on the «Principles of social training of deaf-and-dumb children in Russia». Vygotsky makes trips to Holland and France to study the problems education of abnormal children and get acquainted with psychology laboratories in these countries.

Vygotsky formulated his theoretical views and ideas almost a hundred years ago, but they still haven't lost their value today. His scientific interests were quite varied (literature, philosophy, history, medicine, art etc.). Many generations of

scholars in different fields of knowledge - literature, philosophy, psychology, and pedagogics – turn to Vygotsky's ideas. Vygotsky is known not only as a scientist and theoretician, but also as a teacher-theorist, outstanding personality, humanist and educator.

To get a deeper insight into the sources of Vygotsky's teaching and scientific activities in pedagogics and psychology of the blind, let me address the key facts of his life and creative activities. Vygotsky's life and activities fell on a very difficult and dramatic period of world history. He was born in Orsha, Belarus in 1896, not too many years before one of the world's most famous events – the October revolution of 1917 in Russia, which split the world into two antagonistic camps, two ideological systems. His childhood and youth years passed in the city of Gomel. After the revolution Russia begins reorganizing all its public life, system of scientific knowledge and education system, including the theory and practice of teaching children with limited health abilities, on a new ideological basis - on the basis of communism (Marxism and Leninism) principles.

Changes in the public life were complicated by objective problems – dislocation of social, economic and political life after the civil war. Despite the complexities of social and economic and political conditions in the country Vygotsky got fine education. From his youth he showed a particular interest in literature. In 1917 Vygotsky simultaneously graduated from two higher educational institutions – the law school of the Moscow Imperial University and the history and philosophy department of Shanyvsky Moscow Public University. In his student years Lev Semenovich Vygotsky gives a lot of attention to the analysis of works of art, he begins research into art psychology. His diploma thesis at Shanyavsky's was devoted to Shakespeare's Hamlet and it was later published as part of his « Psychology of Art» monograph.

Lawyer by training, literary critic by one of his early professional hobbies, he begins professional work in education and enlightenment. Since 1919 Vygotsky works as a school teacher, teaches literature, gives lectures on esthetics, logic, psychology in various educational institutions – a junior teachers' college, further

training courses for teachers. His teaching activity gave rise to his interest in problems of psychology, children's psychology and psychophysiology.

1924 is a major landmark in Vygotsky's life and scientific activity. He makes a presentation at the Second Congress on Psychoneurology in Petrograd in front of such known scientists as V.M. Bekhterev, A.A. Ukhtomsky and other well-known experts in medicine, physiology and psychology of the day, which earns him the invitation to work at the Institute of Experimental Psychology in Moscow. This marks the beginning of a special period in Vygotsky's life. He starts working in the field of theoretical and practical defectology. L.S. Vygotsky was not only a scholar and teacher, but also a master of organization. In 1926 with his assistance, a laboratory of abnormal childhood psychology was opened at the Medico-pedagogical Research Center (8 Pogodinskaya Ulitsa). In 1929 its facilities were used to set up the Experimental Institute of Defectology under the Commissariat (Ministry) of Education, which was later reorganized into the Scientific Research Institute of Special Schools and Children's Homes. Today it is the Institute of Correctional Pedagogics of the Russian Academy of Education. Vygotsky takes an active part in building up the new socialist school.

He works in the department of social-and-legal protection of minors at the National Commissariat of Education, heads the department of education of physically handicapped and mentally retarded children.

Vygotsky attached paramount importance to defectology problems. When filling in the mandatory personal questionnaire for employees of the National Commissariat of Education, answering the question «In what branch do you consider your services the most useful? » he wrote: «In the field of education for the blind and deaf-and-dumb children». However his death put an abrupt end to all his huge plans. On June, 11th, 1934 Vygotsky died of tuberculosis. He was 38.

Vygotsky was later remembered and written about by scientists all over the world — J. Piaget, K. Lashley, K. Lewin, J. Bruner, K. Koffka, A. Meyer. The American philosopher and psychologist Stephen Toulmin called him «the Mozart in psychology». He was called «the genius in science», compared to Pushkin in the

Russian literature. Despite L.S. Vygotsky's popularity and recognition as a scientist, many of his works were banned in Russia for many years. Many of Vygotsky's fundamental works were not published in Russia or abroad until several decades later. In 1962 J. Bruner calls Vygotsky's book «Thinking and Speech» published in the USA the best publication of the year.

In Russia Vygotsky is considered the founder of psychology and defectology. The concept of "defectology" was widely used in Russia from the start of building up a new socialist school and throughout the Soviet period. The term used as the first element of the word is *defect*. In the Soviet pedagogics and psychology, children with physical and mental underdevelopment, including blind children, were known as «defective children». In the late 1930-s, along with the term «defective children», the term «abnormal children» also gains currency. Vygotsky also uses these concepts both in his numerous works and titles of his works («On the Psychology and Pedagogics of Children's Defectiveness» (1924); «Defect and Supercompensation» (1927), «The Fundamental Problems of Modern Defectology» (1929); «The Collective as a Factor in the Development of the Abnormal Child» (1931), etc.).

In late 19th and early 20th century the process of psychology emerging as an independent branch of science was accompanied by discussions concerning its subject matter and research methods. That historical period in Russia was marked by heightened interest in foreign psychology schools and development directions. Russian scientists, including Vygotsky, were quite familiar with psychology achievements in European countries – Germany, France, England, and also America. Russia was open to exchange of knowledge and ideas with representatives of various foreign psychology schools, many of them also gaining supporters and in Russia.

During that period there were two distinctive and radically different approaches to human psyche – objective (natural scientific) and subjective (introspective, descriptive). At the same time, the post-revolutionary development of Russian psychology was in many respects connected with ideological

restrictions. In late 19th and early 20th century Russia the scientists faced an alternative - either reflexology with its strictly scientific objective approach to behavior, or psychology with its analysis of consciousness and subjective method of research.

The problem of choosing the key direction in psychology was solved in favor of the natural scientific approach, first of all that of the Pavlovian and Bekhterevian schools based on materialistic philosophy and Marxism-Leninism ideology. The introspective psychology with its main category - "consciousness" loses its positions, and reflexology becomes the dominant direction. The category of *reflex* and idea of reflexology become widely accepted not only in Russia, but also abroad. It is known that in America reflexology becomes the basis for behaviorism, which gains wide support.

In 1920-s Freud's psychoanalysis also becomes greatly popular in Soviet Russia. It enjoyed popularity especially among young Soviet scientists actively searching for their own subject in psychology, which wouldn't be dissolved in reflexology. A.R. Luriya, the founder of Russian neuropsychology and one of Vygotsky's closest followers, was Freud's ardent admirer. Luriya was the academic secretary of the Psychoanalytic Society in Moscow, corresponded with Freud and popularized his ideas in Russia. Soviet psychologists, in line with the ideas of Marxism, try to reconsider the human consciousness problem by postulating its dependence on being. Ideas of the social essence of consciousness gain currency, which corresponded to the class approach to personality in the Soviet science. Introduction of Marxist principles in psychology forms in a system of two coordinates: individual (consciousness as a brain function) and social (influence of the environment).

After the October revolution, methodological analysis of world psychology achievements becomes Vygotsky's major research area. In his works he constantly resorts to elucidation of works by famous foreign colleagues, writes prefaces to Russian translations of publications by representatives and founders of psychoanalysis (Freud), behaviorism (Thorndike) and gestalt psychology (Koffka).

His analysis of the world psychological science status of the late 19th-early 20th century is presented in such works as «Consciousness as a Problem in the Psychology of Behavior» (1925), «Historical Meaning of the Crisis in Psychology» (1926), «Psyche, Consciousness, the Unconscious» (1930), etc.

Vygotsky tries to define the basic development prospects for psychology from the viewpoint of a new methodology. According to him, the crisis in psychology can be overcome by applying the dialectic method, which assumes the unity of mental and physiological processes. Vygotsky writes in his work «Psyche, Consciousness, the Unconscious»:

«... we should not study separate, taken out of their totality mental and physiological processes, which thus become absolutely incomprehensible to us; we should consider the whole process, which is simultaneously characterized both objectively and subjectively» («Psyche, Consciousness, the Unconscious»). According to Vygotsky, the unity of the mental and physiological shouldn't lead to the idea that they are identical. He notes:

«Dialectical psychology posits recognition of the originality of the psychophysiological uniform processes that represent higher forms of human behavior, which we suggest to call psychological, as distinct from mental, processes, and by analogy with what is called physiological processes» («Psyche, Consciousness, the Unconscious»).

Vygotsky's world outlook was Marxist. However his theoretical researches went beyond Marxist ideology. In the early periods of his scientific activity Vygotsky was a follower of reflexology and considered that the future of psychology lies in finding a causal explanation for consciousness phenomena via reflexological techniques. He saw the advantage of the latter in their objectivity and natural-scientific strictness. Later he came to criticize the extreme ideas of reflexology as it ignored the study of consciousness, which led to the complete negation of psychology as an independent science. At the same time Vygotsky also subjects descriptive psychology to a profound critical analysis. As he said, descriptive psychology «understands mentality as an absolutely isolated sphere of

reality where no laws of matter are valid and which is a pure realm of spirit». In this area, no causal relations are possible; its orientation is towards subjective methods of research, understanding and ascertaining the sense.

Vygotsky tries to determine the fundamental laws of consciousness and its mechanisms on the basis of world achievements in psychology – both Russian and international. In 1920-s he designs a model of human behavior based on the concept of speech reaction and thus attempts to distinguish the physiological approach from the psychological. He puts forward the idea of conscious regulation of human behavior of the person, and correlates it to culture forms - language and art.

Vygotsky reconsiders the basic approaches to defining the subject of psychology, discovers a new vector of psychology development. He tries to combine "behavior" and "consciousness", which in psychology were categories that reflected two different spheres of human life. In his concept the category of consciousness acquires a new status. He introduces into psychology a new system of coordinates – culture (in the form of speech, language, word). Vygotsky showed that man possesses a special kind of mental functions which he named higher mental functions, that is memory, attention, logic thinking and so on. He formulated the so-called "general genetic law of cultural development". He emphasized that the higher mental functions in their development have a social origin both in phylogenesis and in ontogenesis. Vygotsky writes:

*"... Any function in cultural development of the child appears on the scene twice, in two planes, first - social, then - psychological, first between people as an **interpsychic** category and then within the child, as an intrapsychic category. It equally concerns volitional attention, logic memory, formation of concepts, will development... Certainly, transition inside from the outside transforms the process, changes its structure and functions" (History of Development of Higher Mental Functions, 1931).*

By analogy with the Marxist understanding of tools of labor as causing changes not only in the external nature, but also in the person itself, he introduces a new

concept – that of *sign*. According to Vygotsky, the sign is a «psychological tool» that transforms the psyche from its natural (biological) to its cultural (historical) form.

Thus Vygotsky laid the foundation for a new direction in psychological researches, which were subsequently developed in the works of A.N. Leontiev, A.R. Luriya, A.V. Zaporozhets, L.I. Bozhovich and others. In Russian psychology Vygotsky's theory became known as the «cultural-historical concept of the development of human psyche». The basic ideas of this theory find reflection and development in his research in the field of defectology.

The period between 1924 and 1927 is often called «the period of defectology» in Vygotsky's scientific activity. During this time he moves from Gomel to Moscow and conducts large-scale examination of children suffering from various intellectual and physical defects. For Vygotsky, the study of specific features in the mental development of the blind, deaf and mentally retarded was also of general theoretical value, being the source of understanding the general psychological laws of forming higher mental functions.

Study of the development in the presence of sensory and intellectual defects enables a deeper insight in the essence of not only pathological, but also normal psychic manifestations. It also enables us to detect what (in a latent and complicated form) exists and occurs in normal development conditions. Vygotsky, like Pavlov before him, considers blindness, deafness and other defects to be «specially arranged natural experiments that can reveal, often with a tremendous force, the true nature and structure of the process we are interested in» (Development of Higher Mental Functions, 1960). Development of the child with intellectual and sensory disorders began to be considered from the viewpoint of uniform laws of ontogenesis. The principle of comparative research becomes one of major research principles not only in general psychology, but also in defectology, including psychology of the blind. Thus Vygotsky was able to overcome the gap between defectology and general psychology, to show common development mechanisms of the child in the norm and in pathology. Vygotsky

constantly developed and supplemented his theoretical research in psychology on the basis of studying abnormal children.

At the same time, Vygotsky's basic ideas were realized in the theory of abnormal development – mental development of children with physical and mental development defects.

In the late 19th – early 20th century an enormous amount of empirical material on development features of children with various physical and mental defects – the blind, the deaf, the mentally retarded - was accumulated both in Russia and in other countries (A. Segen, P.Ya. Troshin, A.S. Griboedov, A. Adler, M. Montessori and others). From the end of the 19th century a special education system starts being formed in Russia; schools are opened for blind and deaf children. In 1881 schools for blind children open in St.-Petersburg, and in 1882 in Moscow. By end of the 19th century there were 26 schools for the blind in various Russian cities – Kiev, Kharkov and others. Schools for deaf children also open, and there appear medico-pedagogical establishments for the mentally retarded. The experience of teaching and vocational training of children with physical and intellectual disturbances is subjected to analysis and generalization.

However there was no systematic research devoted to the (physiological, psychological, social) nature of children with developmental deviations. An interest in studying the psychology of the blind in Russia was shown as early as the 1880-s. On the one hand, research into the effect of blindness on the mental development was conducted within the framework of general psychology. On the other hand, the notions about special features of mental development in the presence of serious vision disorders are the generalization of observations made by teachers of the first educational institutions for blind children in Russia.

Thus G.P. Nedler, headmaster of a school for the blind in St. Petersburg, in his work «The Most Unfortunate among the Blind» (1889) points out a deep originality of mental development of the blind. In his opinion, loss of the sight entails the impossibility of achieving the standard level of intellectual development. Within the framework of general psychology, comparative

experimental research was conducted into the thresholds of sensitivity, sensations and perceptions of the blind by G.I. Chelpanov and A.A. Krogius. In 1909 A.A. Krogius publishes his work «From the Spiritual World of the Blind ». At the same time it is introspection that remains the basic method of research. Application of experimental methods was limited. The higher mental functions – memory, thinking, imagination of the blind are still considered inaccessible for experimental study.

The 1917 revolution brought about substantial changes in the theory and practice of general and special education. In 1919, by a government decree, schools for children with problems in physical and intellectual development were for the first time integrated (as of December, 10th 1919) into the general state system of educational institutions of the country. The same decree laid foundations for the new approach to training and education of the blind, and their preparation for public life. Ideas of many non-Marxist scientists were not taken into consideration while developing theoretical foundations for Soviet school activities. It became necessary to reconsider the experience of working with abnormal children accumulated by that time in accordance with the principles of communist education.

Development of the theory and practice of training and upbringing of children with physical and mental development defects on the basis of principles of communist education proceeded against the background of sharp theoretical disputes and discussions.

The 1920-s pedagogical discussions covered important and topical problems – the class approach in education, ratio between the biological and social in the child's development. New goals and content of education for the new generation were being determined. Known Russian scientists P.P. Blonsky, V.M. Bekhterev, V.P. Kashchenko and others, as well as skilled teachers of the pre-revolutionary school, were involved in the creation of the new school.

In 1924 the Second Congress on Social and Legal Protection of Minors was held in Moscow. Vygotsky made the keynote presentation «On the Current Status

and Problems in Education of Physically Defective and Mentally Retarded Children». In this report he raised a whole number of problems significant for defectology as a whole and for its branches, and also for psychology of the blind.

The basic provisions of Vygotsky's abnormal development theory were formed in the course of establishment of the «Cultural-historical Development of the Psyche» theory. Vygotsky's approach to the child with physical and intellectual defects corresponded to the interpretation of general problems of human consciousness and behavior.

In opposition to biologization concepts, Vygotsky puts forward the thesis about common psychological laws governing the development of children with sensory and intellectual defects. His assertion that there is no basic difference between sighted and blind children became the basic principle of the psychology and pedagogics of the blind. The idea of the common laws governing the development of children with physical and mental development defects had been mooted before Vygotsky by physician and psychologist G.Y. Troshin in his book (*Anthropological Bases of Education. Comparative Psychology of Abnormal Children. Petrograd, 1915*).

Vygotsky writes: *«Recognition of the community of laws governing the normal and pathological development is the cornerstone of any comparative study of the child. Where we deal with normal development, these laws are realized under one set of conditions. Where we observe atypical development deviating from the norm, the same laws, being realized under a completely different set of conditions, acquire a qualitatively original, specific expression which is not just a lifeless copy of the typical children's development»* («*The Collective as a Factor in the Development of the Abnormal Child* »). The postulate was of principal value for the theory and practice of training and education of blind children. It destroyed the traditional defectological point of view according to which the laws of normal development cease to operate at a visual deficiency. In the following decades this was confirmed in many experimental studies by Russian scientists.

The comparative experimental studies of the blind and normally sighted

schoolchildren were conducted at the Defectology Research Institute in Moscow and in Leningrad. In 1929 a Chair of Pedagogics of the Blind was opened at Leningrad Herzen State Pedagogical Institute. In 1967 a problem laboratory for research into psychological features of the blind and visually impaired schoolchildren was set up by that Chair. It was located on the premises of boarding school # 1 for the blind visually impaired schoolchildren (today bearing the name of K.K. Grot). The laboratory researchers conducted comparative studies of mental cognitive processes (sensations, perception, notions, memory, thinking, attention, speech and imagination) of schoolchildren with normal and impaired sight under the guidance of A.G. Litvak, founder of the Russian psychology of the blind.

The results of comparative experimental studies confirm Vygotsky's thesis about the commonality of laws governing the mental development of schoolchildren with normal and impaired sight. The study results were generalized by the doctor of psychological sciences A.G. Litvak in his «Psychology of Blind and Visually Impaired».

Of substantial value for psychology of the blind was also Vygotsky's thesis about divergence of the cultural and biological in the course the abnormal child's development and about the possibility of overcoming it by finding «bypasses» in the course of training and education. Vygotsky substantiates his position on the cultural and biological developments divergence (which at normal development merge in a single process) by stating that all human culture developed at a certain constancy of the human biological type with the normal psycho-physiological organization.

Vygotsky writes: *«a defect, by creating a deviation from the stable biological type, causing loss of some functions, lack or damage of organs and more or less essential reorganization of the entire development on new bases and according to a new type, would thus naturally disrupt the normal course of processes of the child's cultural accustomation»* («Development of Higher Mental Functions», 1969)

All features of education for abnormal children (the deaf, the blind) were

originally reduced to replacing «some ways of formation of conditional associative links with others». To eliminate a defect, some signals - visual - are replaced with others – tactile. In this context L.S. Vygotsky remarks that «A single Braille point made more for the blind than a thousand philanthropists: possibility to read and write proved to be more important, than «the sixth sense» and the ingenious touch and hearing capabilities». Vygotsky was able to convincingly show that, in the presence of somatic impairments, the influence of the biological and cultural has a peculiar character as the defect creates a deviation from the stable biological type and alters development and maturation processes.

Convergence of maturation and development based on the use of «bypasses» should form the basis for compensation. According to Vygotsky, creation of development bypasses for the abnormal child is the "alpha and omega" of special pedagogics. Vygotsky's ideas on «bypasses» and the sign as a psychological tool imparted a truly humanistic orientation to the abnormal childhood pedagogics.

Vygotsky's ideas lead to a radical reconsideration of the basic categories of defectology. He subjects to revision the concepts of "defect", "disease", "defectiveness". In opposition to the biologization approach to the essence of development in the presence of a defect, he considers defectiveness (including blindness) not a medical but a social problem.

In the late 19th - early 20th century there was no uniform theory explaining the effects of blindness on mental development in Russia. Representatives of introspective psychology (A. Krogus, G. Chelpanov) come to the conclusion of accelerated development of the blind in comparison with the higher mental functions' norm: logic memory, volitional attention, thinking, imagination.

An opposing view is expressed by V. Rudnev, G. Nedler and others who consider that blindness has a negative impact on all aspects of human corporal and mental life. This is manifested by a chronic developmental lag, presence of peculiar features of character, bad habits. These views were based on philosophical notions – rationalistic philosophy of idealism, sensualistic philosophy. In the late 19th - early 20th century the theory and practice of teaching the blind were greatly

affected by reflexology and Freud's psychoanalysis. For example, V.A. Protopopov, basing his views on reflexology tenets, claimed that any mental act could be reduced to the associative motor reflex. It was on that base that programs were developed for overcoming blindness and incorporating the blind in social life.

Reflexologists thought that, for an adequate reaction to external irritants, it would be enough to develop a number of associative motor reflexes. A.A. Krogus, sharing Freud's theories, considers that the blind often acquire negative moral and volitional traits, as well as premature and perverted sexual instincts. He explained that by various reasons, including insufficient sublimation of sexual energy. ("Psychology of the Blind and its Significance for General Psychology and Pedagogics". Saratov, 1928). The explanation of developmental features of the blind from sociologization positions also becomes widespread.

Vygotsky subjects to critical analysis both Russian and foreign theories of mental development of the blind. He aspires to overcome a one-sided approach to explanation of the mental development laws for the blind child from positions of vulgar-materialist and idealistic psychology.

Vygotsky opposes the doctrine of the vicariate of the senses, which was widespread at that time. Vygotsky writes in his work «The Blind Child»:

«According to this view, loss of one of the perception functions or a lack of one organ is compensated by the enhanced functioning and development of other organs. Entire legends were created about a supernormal tactile acuity of the blind; it was said about wisdom of the good nature, which takes with one hand and returns what it has taken with another, and which takes care of its creatures; it was believed that every blind person, just by virtue of this fact, is the blind musician, i.e. a person gifted with an exceptionally acute musical ear; discovery was claimed of a new, special, sixth sense at the blind that was inaccessible to the sighted.

All those legends were based on true observations and facts from the life of the blind, which were however falsely interpreted and consequently distorted out of recognition». For the first time in the Russian psychology and defectology,

Vygotsky considers the psyche, including the child's psyche, with anomalies of development from the viewpoint of dialectic materialism.

Many scientists (Adler, Stern) had considered social aspects of child development, including that of children with sensory impairment. But it was Vygotsky who considered social aspects to be not secondary but primary. According to him, it is not the defect in itself that determines the fate of the personality but its social consequences, its social-psychological realization. Vygotsky develops his ideas about the defect, its consequences and possibilities of compensation on the example of persons with visual pathology. In his work «The Blind Child», for the first time published in 1983, Vygotsky convincingly shows that any defect, any corporal lack including blindness is an essential factor that changes the person's relationship with the surrounding world around, which as a result produces «social abnormality of behavior», «social dislocation».

As he writes: *«the direct consequence of a defect is to lower the child's social position; the defect is realized as a social dislocation. All links with other people, all things that determine the person's place in the social environment, his/her role and fate as a participant in life, all functions of the social being undergo reconstruction».*

Vygotsky supports his conclusions about the social nature of defectiveness using a historico-genetic analysis of the blind person's position in society and attitude to him/her. Vygotsky was one of the first to consider the role of various public consciousness forms (religious, everyday, philosophical) in forming inadequate perception notions and stereotypes of the blind person. Vygotsky's conclusions on the society's attitude to the blind person have not lost their value even in today's world.

Current research and practice confirm Vygotsky's position that the gravest consequences of blindness are connected with interruption and restriction of social contacts. Basing his view on blind persons' statements, Vygotsky remarks that the lack of sight in itself is not a psychological fact, as the blind don't feel they are immersed in the dark (or the deaf in silence). Blindness becomes a psychological

fact only when the person starts communicating with healthy people distinct from him/her. Being incapable of distinguishing color shades of the surrounding world does not mean that such people experience permanent anxiety because they feel this problem is unsolvable. The social aspect of a physical defect has the greatest and most important consequences when difficulties in personal self-realization become the most perceptible.

Within the framework of research into the social nature of the children's defectiveness problem, Vygotsky considers the concept of defect and its structure. His ideas about the systemic structure of consciousness are reflected in understanding the essence of defect and its influence on various mental functions.

He singles out two groups of symptoms in the abnormal development. These are the primary disturbances that directly follow from the biological character of the disease (for example, hearing, sight or locomotor apparatus disorders, local cerebral cortex lesions), and secondary disturbances, which arise in the presence of a primary defect in the course of the abnormal child's social development.

He writes: *«All modern psychological research into the abnormal child is imbued with the basic idea that the picture of intellectual backwardness and other abnormal development forms has an extremely complicated structure. It is erroneous to think that absolutely all the symptoms characterizing this picture as a whole can be directly and immediately isolated from the defect as from the basic kernel. Actually it appears that the features, through which this picture manifests itself, have very complicated structure. They display an extremely intricate structural and functional interconnection and dependence. In particular they show that, along with the primary features of such a child following from his/her defect, there are secondary, tertiary and so on complications that follow not from the defect itself, but from its primary symptoms. There arise, as it were, additional syndromes of the abnormal child, something like a complex superstructure over the basic picture of the development...»* .

The primary goal of psychology of the blind is the study of secondary deviations that can be caused by the presence of a primary somatic defect. As

Vygotsky writes: «the action of a defect always proves to be a secondary, not a directly reflected one... The child doesn't feel his/her defect directly. He perceives the difficulties, which result from the defect».

Hence, as the basic directions of special pedagogics should be compensation and correction, as well as prophylaxis of secondary defects.

The problem of prophylaxis of secondary deviations continues to remain a priority in the modern theory and practice of special education too. On the one hand, the typical prevalence of neuroses, neurosis-like states and various neuropsychic disorders among the visually disabled is related to problems with obtaining sensory information. On the other hand, in the course of spontaneous adaptation of the blind and visually impaired to the defect, pseudo-compensatory device and strong behavioral stereotypes are formed, which require correctional work to overcome them. The Practice of education and training of abnormal children testifies that early pedagogical intervention allows to appreciably neutralize negative influence of the primary defect, and to facilitate the compensatory adaptation process. One of the basic problems to whom Vygotsky gives particular attention, was defect compensation. He elaborates it his numerous works devoted defectology problems. (On the Psychology and Pedagogics of Children's Defectiveness; Principles of Upbringing Abnormal Children; On the Problem of Children's Character Dynamics; The Basic Problems of Modern Defectology; The Collective as a Factor in the Development of the Abnormal Child).

Vygotsky develops his ideas about compensation on the example of persons with visual pathology. He criticizes the existing biologization compensation theories. Quoting Lusardi, he writes: «the finger will never teach the blind to really see». In this respect, physiology is a stricter teacher than psychology. Relying on E. Binder's, E. Meuman's, W. Wundt's experimental researches, Vygotsky points out that, in the field of physiological functions, compensation may be presented as regular exercise and adaptation. This results in reorganization of the entire mental sphere.

Developing his ideas about defect compensation, Vygotsky finds that his views have much in common with A. Adler's theory. Adler considered that any child is endowed with relative inferiority in the adult society and regarded any childhood as an age of uncertainty and sensation of inferiority, and any development as the development aimed at overcoming this condition by compensation (A. Adler, 1927).

L.S. Vygotsky firmly believed in recognizing the superiority of healthy, positive trends inherent in the inadequate development at a visual pathology. «Blindness is not only a defect, a minus, a weakness, but also in a certain sense a source of revealed abilities, a plus, a force» («The Blind Child»).

In his work «Defect and Supercompensation» (1927) he subjects Adler's basic ideas to a careful analysis paying particular attention to the supercompensation idea. On the basis of Adler's theory, Vygotsky also considers that the trend toward supercompensation is applicable to the blind, and therefore the statement that «the blind child's entire life and development will proceed in line with his/her blindness» cannot be recognized as correct. This would mean that the problem of restricted development capabilities should be accepted and reconciled with. Blindness can become a stimulus for development.

However, Vygotsky critically reviews and develops Adler's theory, considering various development variants of in the presence of a defect. Vygotsky remarks that a happy outcome is not the only possible one. It would be naive to think that every disease invariably comes to a safe end and that every defect happily transforms itself into a talent. He writes: "*Any struggle has two outcomes. The second outcome is supercompensation failure - a clear victory for the feeling of weakness, asocial behavior, building protective positions from the weakness and its transformation into a weapon, fictitious purpose of existence, in effect madness, impossibility of normal mental life of the personality — flight into illness, neurosis. Between these two poles there is a huge and inexhaustible variety of various degrees of success and failure, endowments and neurosis — from minimum to maximum*» («The Blind Child»).

When rendering special (corrective) assistance to a child, one should not jump to definitive conclusions about the child's "defectiveness" until the results of "compensation outcome» become clear. Quoting V. Steinberg's words: «We are not blind, we just cannot see», he proves the importance of proper attitude toward the existing problem, which would determine two basic variants of the person's socialization — either compensation or neurosis. As shown by modern Russian researches (A.G. Litvak, Yu.G. Demyanov and others), congenital or acquired visual pathology involves a number of negative changes in the emotional sphere, which is the most sensitive component in the person's general reaction to blindness.

Empirical research data allow us to single out certain characteristic features of the emotional sphere of the visually disabled: a general decrease in the emotional tone, slackness, apathy, a combination of asthenic manifestations with hypersensitivity to external irritants, higher vulnerability during interpersonal interaction and so forth. Emotional instability, frequent change of mood - from hopes of health improvement and better life to deep despair – are closely connected with asthenic-neurologic manifestations. Typical for many visually disabled persons are hypochondriac moods connected with fears for their health. At the same time they can underestimate the gravity of their condition, have unreasonable hopes of recovery, which is connected with psychological protection mechanisms and subconscious ousting of severe traumatic anxieties. Anagnosia (negation of obvious disease manifestations) provides a certain psychological comfort only until the person faces reality. Then it can lead to serious psychological traumas, intrapersonal conflicts, frequent frustrations that disorganize the person's vital functions, which is manifested as undue fussiness, irritation, aggressiveness, feeling of loneliness, helplessness and so forth.

According to research data, psychological disintegration psychological in the blind can approach a pathological level. Persons with medical and biological restrictions are distinguished by their high level of anxiety and lack of self-confidence. They are noted for excessive pliability in social contacts, avoidance of

conflicts, lower spirit of rivalry, tendency to look for help and support from people around them. Negative emotional states and elevated stress due to impossibility or difficulty of satisfying their vital needs reduce the level of cognitive processes. They can also be manifested by inadequacy of behavior and significantly complicate the social-psychological adaptation of the visually disabled.

From Vygotsky's understanding of the essence of defectiveness followed his conclusion about the leading role of social factors in overcoming negative consequences of blindness. L.S.Vygotsky put forward and substantiated the necessity of social compensation of the defect as a problem of the paramount importance. He writes: "It is probable that the mankind will sooner or later conquer blindness and deafness and dementia, but they will be much earlier conquered socially and pedagogically than medically and biologically».

In his work «The Basic Problems of Modern Defectology» Vygotsky pointed out the complex character of social determination of compensation, which consists of the unity of social realization of the defect and the complex of inferiority arising in this connection, and of orientation toward adaptation to an environment intended for people without deviations. Vygotsky underlined the integrity and unity of personality development in the norm and in pathology. The basic difference in socialization of the blind and the sighted child lies in originality of its ways and means. This unity is manifested in the common ultimate goal - adaptation to the requirements of social life. Therefore compensation necessarily assumes orientation toward the future, mastering a social position, achieving a full-fledged social value.

According to Vygotsky, the leading part in social compensation of visual pathology is played by speech, mastering the art of words. During this process the child absorbs social and cultural experience. Comparing the development of the blind and the deaf children, Vygotsky comes to the conclusion that, since the human culture is to a greater degree focused on visual and not on acoustic perception, the blind, compared to the deaf, have a wider spectrum of compensation possibilities because their ability to speak gives them the chance of

achieving a full-fledged social value. As Vygotsky aptly put it, «blindness is conquered by the word» (The Blind Child).

Considering blindness as a social problem, Vygotsky lays the foundation for a humanistic paradigm in the theory and practice of teaching children with grave visual pathology. His views are a theoretical substantiation of the social model of disability, which in recent years has become the most widespread in solving the problems of social integration of the disabled in Russia.

Vygotsky managed to convincingly show that society's notions of health and illnesses, norm and pathology are changeable, dynamic and in many respects are determined by the cultural-historical conditions of an epoch. They depend on the character of public consciousness, system of axiological orientations, social aims, and stereotypes. In essence, the borderline between the healthy and the sick is a social construct. Accordingly, the inability of the disabled to perform various kinds of activity, problems in adaptation, isolation from the society "mainstream" – are in many respects the result of the social notions prevalent in a given society.

Integration of people with limited capabilities is first of all determined by the organization system of the society itself. At the same time, within the framework of the social disability model, the importance of physical dysfunctions or defects in the disabled person's life is not underestimated; great value is attached to rehabilitation and to the development of compensatory capabilities and resources for adaptation. Today our country is overcoming the negative consequences of ideologization of public and scientific life, and actively building a civil society. On the one hand, defect compensation, rehabilitation and integration of the disabled is related to objective, social factors, humanization of society, readiness of the society to create conditions needed by the disabled. On the other hand, success of the integration depends on the active attitude of the person with grave visual impairment.

In our research devoted to problems of social adaptation and integration of the visually disabled in modern conditions we identified the basic factors that determine the possibilities of integrating the blind and visually impaired in social

life. Thus, integration of the visually disabled into a society is determined by a set of external and internal, objective and subjective factors

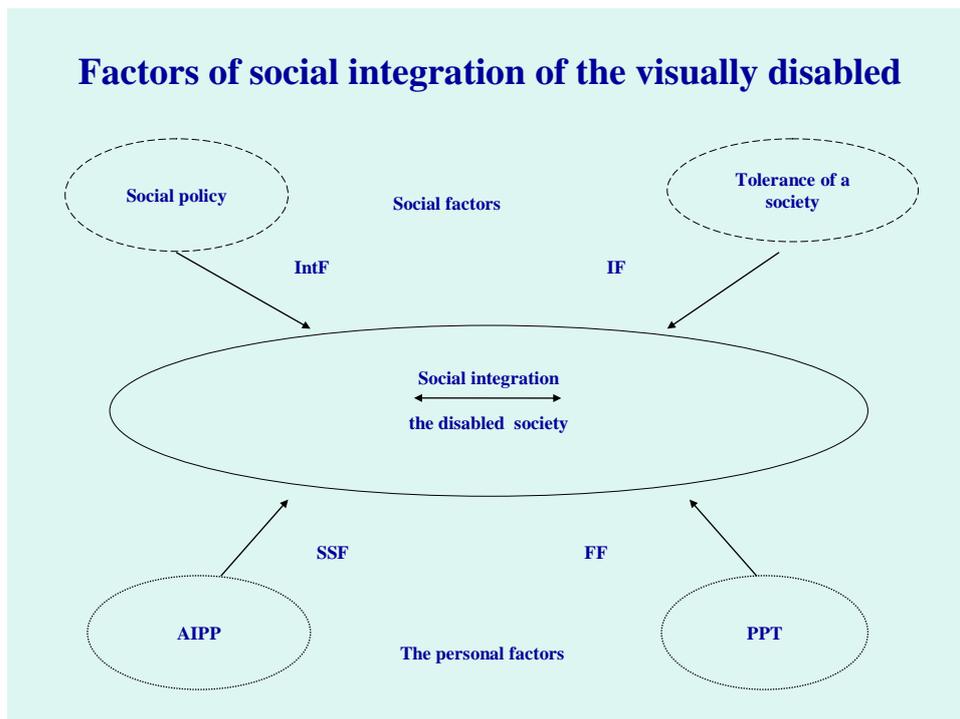


Fig. Factors of social integration of the visually disabled

Symbols: AIPP – adaptation-integration potential of personality; PPT– personal potential of tolerance; IF - intentional function; IF - inclusion function; SRF - self-realization function; FF - facilitation function

The objective factors, external in relation to a separate individual are social factors - social policy, tolerance of the society. Each factor performs its functions providing definite aspects for the process of integration.

Social policy (considered as activity of state authorities involving regulation and harmonization of relationship between the disabled and society, achievement of a balance of interests of the disabled as social groups, and improvement of the quality of life) performs the intentional function (IF). That is it determines the prospects and integration strategy, directs the activity of various social institutes, coordinates the efforts of various organizations, develops a legislative base and a system of social measures for including the disabled in public life, forms a vital environment without barriers for the disabled.

Tolerance of society as a system of social aims for equitable interaction equal with the visually disabled realizes, in the course of integration, the *inclusion function* (InF) – provides a favorable social environment for inclusion of the visually disabled in the process of interaction with the society of people with normal sight.

Thus, social factors ensure inclusion of the disabled in the social environment, create conditions for their equitable interaction with people with normal sight, provide for equal civil rights and opportunities.

Subjective, internal factors of social integration are the personality factors that determine the readiness of individual society members (both the visually disabled and people with normal sight) for integration, recognition of equal opportunities, interaction as a dialog between partners.

The process of equitable social interaction is greatly complicated by inadequate social attitudes between the visually disabled and people with normal sight caused by their perception stereotypes. In spite of the recent years' positive changes in the attitude to people with limited capabilities, our society has not yet overcome the existing communication barriers between these two groups. The attitudes involving avoidance of communication with "atypical", "special" people, which were pointed out by Vygotsky in his time, are widespread even today. Contradictory ideas about the blind as "special" people are widespread in the public consciousness. On the one hand, they are thought to have supernormal abilities - musical, intellectual, and sometimes mystical. On the other hand, the blind person is perceived as helpless, defective, needing guardianship and assistance both from the state and the people around him/her. In this connection, purposeful social and psychological work on forming an adequate realistic image of the blind person in modern society is urgently needed.

One of ways for overcoming the negative stereotypes and contact avoidance attitudes is increasing public awareness about the visually disabled, their capabilities, as well as about their social and psychological problems. Also necessary are seminars and training courses directed at developing appropriate skills and techniques of tolerant communication, enhancing their communicative competence. Healthy people should learn to understand people with limited visual capabilities, know both their real problems caused by the defect and real capabilities for performing various kinds of activity.

At the same time, social integration, as a process for inclusion of people with grave visual impairments in equal relationships, assumes dialogical relations between the visually disabled and society. This requires not only the sighted people's readiness for interaction with the visually disabled, but also personal activity on the part of the blind and visually impaired.

The results of our empirical study enabled us to single out a system of multi-level individually typological and personal properties mediating successful adaptation and integration in society. We have designated their totality as the adaptation-integration potential of the person.

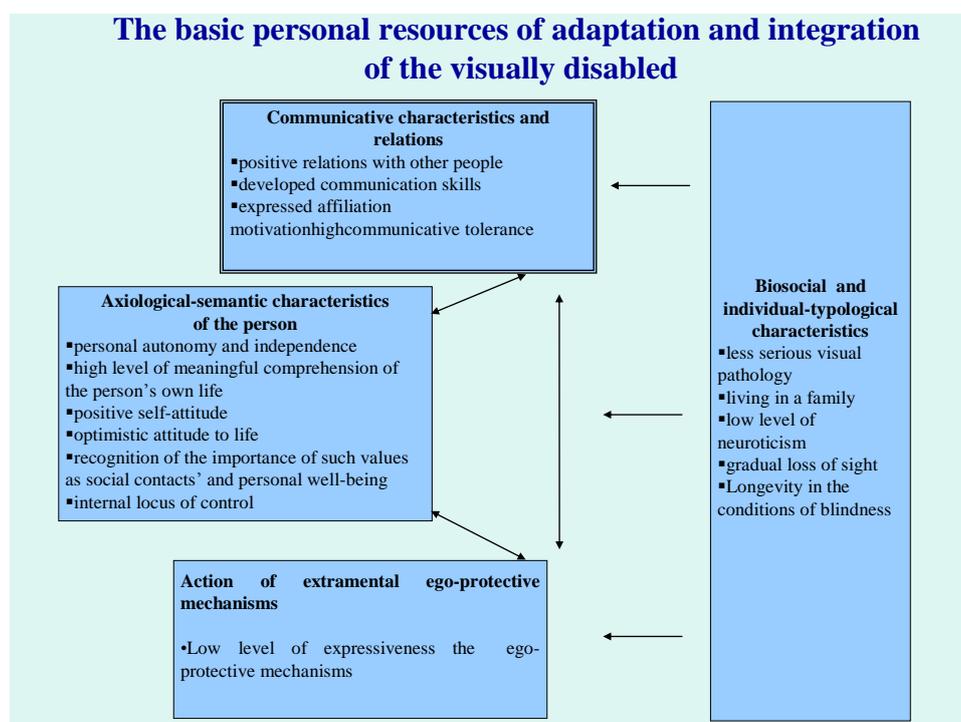


Fig. Personal resources of social adaptation and integration of the visually disabled

Axiological-semantic characteristics of the person are the central personal resource mediating the possibility of successful adaptation and integration of the visually impaired in society. Adaptivity and readiness for inclusion in social relationships assume a high level of conscious activity of the person connected with personal autonomy and independence, high level of meaningful comprehension of the person's own life, positive self-attitude, optimistic attitude to life, recognition of the importance of such values as social contacts' and personal well-being, and a moderately expressed internal locus of control. The axiological- semantic characteristics mediate the features and attitudes and the system of relations of the person. First of all, readiness for integration and adaptedness to society is determined by the system of positive relations with other people, developed communication skills, expressed affiliation motivation at a low fear of rejection, and high communicative tolerance of the visually disabled.

A high level of adaptation and integration assumes a decrease in the action of extramental ego-protective mechanisms, conscious attitude to difficult reality situations and internal conflicts.

Personal resources of adaptation and integration are mediated by individual-typological, biosocial characteristics of the visually disabled and by abnormal factors. People with a low level of neuroticism, living in a family, with less serious visual pathology, gradual loss of sight and only a short-time experience of blindness or visual impairment possess more expressed personal resources of adaptation and integration.

Difficulties with adaptation and integration are more often experienced by the partially sighted, people with congenital visual impairment, and those who suddenly lost sight at an adult age.

Analysis and generalization of the empirical results indicated that there are three basic types of adaptation-integration contradictions that would imply

different relation types between inclusion in society and adaptation.

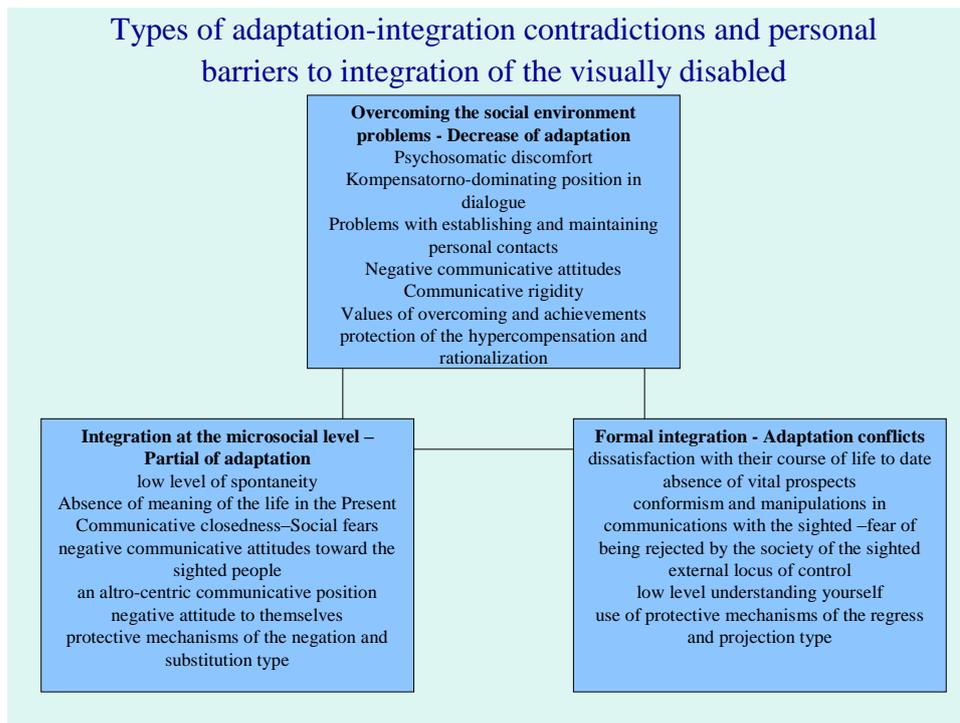


Fig. Types of adaptation-integration contradictions and personal barriers to integration of the visually disabled

Each type is characterized by expressiveness of certain personal characteristics of the visually disabled, which are personal barriers to adaptation and integration .

The first type of adaptation and integration difficulties is integration on the principle of "overcoming the social environment problems». In that case inclusion in public relations and interaction with sighted people would be the result of the activity of the visually disabled themselves without being accepted by the sighted, with the disabled upholding their interests in an alien and adverse social environment. The excessive efforts required to achieve inclusion in society lead to difficulties of adaptation, in particular at the emotional level, to higher fatigue and neuropsychic stress. Such visually disabled people would typically display egocentric trends, aspiration to domination as a compensation for their emotional experience of inferiority, orientation toward individual achievements, problems with establishing and maintaining personal contacts. They often use protection of

the hypercompensation and rationalization type to eliminate internal conflicts

The second type of difficulties is defined as integration at the microsocial level. Such visually disabled persons are included only in the nearest social environment – people they work with, their group of friends, their family and the like. They experience difficulties in broader social integration; they are dissatisfied with self-realization opportunities or public activities they perform on the same level as the sighted. Their adaptation has a partial, fragmentary character: they are selectively adapted only for those spheres of life, which are habitual for them and live a limited life in a small world of their own. The personal barriers of inclusion in society for such people are: a low level of spontaneity, social fears, low level of meaningful comprehension of their present life, communicative closedness and negative communicative attitudes toward the sighted people in combination with an altro-centric communicative position, readiness to sacrifice their interests for the sake of maintaining positive relations with other people, negative attitude to themselves and lack of self-confidence, use of protective mechanisms of the negation and substitution type.

The third type of difficulties in integration is «formal integration». It is characterized by the visually disabled achieving external indicators of integration, such as having a job or being a student, having a family, public activities and so on. But at the same time these people experience a subjective dissatisfaction with their inclusiveness in society, social frustration and vulnerability, dissatisfaction with their social status, material security, leisure opportunities, dissatisfaction with relations with the sighted. Typical for such people are adaptation conflicts: high adaptation in one sphere is connected with low adaptation in another. The personal adaptation and integration barriers are: dissatisfaction with their course of life to date and absence of vital prospects, conformism and manipulations in communications with the sighted, fear of being rejected by the society of the sighted, external locus of control, use of protective mechanisms of the regress and projection type.

Analysis of personal resources and barriers to adaptation and integration

shows that a significant direction of psychological support for the visually disabled involves raising the person's level of adaptation-integration potential. This includes the creation of conditions for self-acceptance and acceptance by other people, formation of internal responsibility for own life and ability to establish the partner relations with surrounding people, help in comprehending the unique sense of life, orientation to the values of social contacts and personal well-being.

Real integration of the blind and visually impaired, overcoming their social rejection, formal inclusion in society and partial isolation of the disabled – these are the prospects of further development of contemporary society.

The research findings testify that the visually disabled also need social-psychological support for overcoming the feeling of isolation from other people, inferiority, avoidance of communication with the sighted. In our opinion, the most effective measures in this respect would be organization of joint business, cultural and leisure events, integration training sessions held in groups attended by both sighted and blind people. On the whole, contemporary correctional psychology needs further development and enhancement of the methodology and practical techniques aimed at forming equitable interaction as the basis for social integration of the blind in contemporary society.

Thus, the internal resources for developing the modern theory of mental development of people with grave sight impairments are contained in the theoretical and methodological propositions formulated by Vygotsky in early 20th century, which are still valid today. These are, first of all, propositions about the complex structure of defect, about secondary deviations in the development of the blind and visually impaired people being socially conditioned, about social mechanisms of compensation of visual defects. Vygotsky did not directly deal with problems of pedagogics and psychology of the blind. He considered common development problems of children with various intellectual and sensory impairments, but in fact many key ideas of modern Russian psychology of the blind were originally formulated in his fundamental works.

