

Vygotsky`s Social Constructionist View on Disability:

A Methodology for Inclusive Education

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A short summary

This article analyses Vygotsky's social constructionist view on disability and its practical implementation in contemporary inclusive education. The article focuses on the main concepts in Vygotsky's theory on dysontogenesis (presented as a *social constructionist view on disability*), constituting the cultural-historical psychological basis for the Russian model in the contemporary inclusive preschool education. In this article a short presentation of methodological basis of special education in Russia will be given. The aim with the article is to cover following questions: 1) What is the core of the social constructionist understanding of learning and development in dysontogenesis? 2) How can we achieve an appropriate understanding of handicaps as a socio-cultural developmental phenomenon in accordance with Vygotsky's social constructionist views on disability? 3) How may Vygotsky's theory on dysontogenesis be implemented in contemporary inclusive classrooms?

Keywords:

Social constructionism, Vygotsky, children with disabilities, inclusive education, Russia

Introduction

The Russian educational psychologist and semiotician Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934) is first and foremost known in the West through his theories on the social origins of higher mental functions and semiotics. Vygotsky's contribution to the methodology of psychological sciences as well as to psycholinguistic, developmental and cognitive psychology is well known in the United States as well as in Western Europe. Vygotsky's theories on methodology in special education and psychology have, however, remained relatively unknown outside Russia to this day. In his later works (1924-1934), first published in English in 1993 as "*The Fundamentals of Defectology*", Vygotsky developed a methodological framework for special education and psychology, with relevance for contemporary practical work with inclusive education. In Russia, Vygotsky's works in the field of special education and psychology have been crucial for the establishment of methodology in special educational practice. In international research literature, Vygotsky's view on disability, his theoretical and methodological concepts regarding special education, have largely escaped attention.

In this article, a short presentation of the methodological foundations for inclusive education will be given, analyzing several of Vygotsky's concepts, mainly presented in his work on "*The Fundamentals of Defectology*". Based on *the theory of dysontogenesis*¹ as well as his general theory of child development - generally known in the West as the Cultural-Historical Activity Theory, CHAT, (Stetsenko 2005) - Vygotsky formulated a practice-oriented paradigm of education for children with special needs. Vygotsky's social constructionist epistemology constitutes a basis in developing a unique vision for future models of special education, of *an inclusion based on positive differentiation* (Gindis 2003). According to Vygotsky's theory on dysontogenesis (TD), a positive *resource oriented*

¹ Dysontogenesis (gr. «*dys*» — anomaly, «*ontos*» — being, «*genesis*» — development) – deficient development compared to normal individual development

approach implies a favourable societal view on children with disabilities, giving preference to strengthening and empowerment of individual skills rather than the traditional stress on weaknesses or deviations.

This article will mainly focus on the vygotskian socio-constructionist view on disability, Vygotsky's theory on dysontogenesis and its practical implementation in inclusive education. The article may also be helpful for a practical understanding of Vygotsky's social constructionist view on disability qua methodology in inclusive education.

The methodology applied in this investigation is based on qualitative, theoretical-historical research; more precisely *document analysis*. The documents include both primary and secondary sources, including Vygotsky's original (1924 -1934) works and works of the so-called neo-vygotskians. The article presents an interpretation of Vygotsky's TD in a narrative form, using a *narrative approach* to the methodological basis for inclusive education in Russia.

This investigation will focus on certain "*Grand Tour Questions*" (Creswell 1994, 14-15), such as the *core of Vygotsky's Theory of Disontogenesis*. The main *sub questions* (Milles & Huberman 1984) will be as follows: **1)** What is the core of social constructionist understanding of learning and development in dysontogenesis? **2)** How to achieve an appropriate understanding of learning and developmental phenomena, based on Vygotsky's social constructionist views on disability? **3)** How may Vygotsky's theory on dysontogenesis be implemented in contemporary inclusive classrooms?

Limitation

The relativism of my research position implies that “all we can have are the various points of view of actual persons reflecting various interests and purposes that their descriptions and theories sub serve” (Smith & Deemer 2000:879). In my study, I do not claim to having achieved an absolute knowledge of Vygotsky’s theory on dysontogenesis. According to Githa Vygotskaya,² a great number of Vygotsky’s works in the family-archives has not yet been published (not even in Russia). The qualitative methodology in this study has been based on “*Verstehen* as [an] epistemological principle” (Flick 2006). My intention here has been to present my own *vision* of Vygotsky’s theory on dysontogenesis, a vision informed by 15 years of academic and clinical studies in the Russian cultural-historical psychological tradition, working as a speech therapist, neuro-psychologist and teacher. The main limitations in my study, are revealed in the physical inability to include all relevant sources. This investigation should be regarded as a narrative of my experience as researcher. The limited emphasis of this research has focused on the original works of Vygotsky, available only in Russian and partially in English. The English translation (1993) of such basic vygotskian works as “The Fundamentals of Defectology” introduces to the English-speaking world of scholars the basic vygotskian social constructionist idea and concept of disability. But the English translation contains several significant misunderstandings (Gindis 1995; 2003). This study is a personalized and detailed account of my journey into the world of Vygotsky. It is my hope that educators who want to implement the theory on dysontogenesis into practical work do not take this information for granted but use it to ”construct” their own Vygotsky. I encourage thoughtful and critical reading of my study, and even disagreement with any of my conclusions.

² Githa L.Vygotskaya, the daughter of Lev Vygotsky in personal conversation, august 2005, Lutkaryno, Russia.

Definitions

The terms used in this investigation are in accordance with Vygotsky's original terminology: dysontogenesis, mediation, social situation of development, zone of proximal development, age-related psychological novel formations, social aberrations, cultural introduction, primary and secondary defects, developmental detours, as well as definitions used by the Russian neo-vygotskian school (e.g. leading activity). The terms will be defined in such a manner so that the context in which the words are being used will be easily intelligible (Creswell 1994, 106). The term social constructionist, characteristic for vygotskian epistemology and cultural-historical psychology, will be used as an alternative to the term social constructivist and other approaches to development in ontogenesis.

Social constructionism qua epistemology

Flick (2006:78) suggests that "social constructionism [...] is not a unified program, but is developing in parallel fashion in a number of disciplines: psychology, sociology, philosophy, neurobiology, psychiatry, and information science". In the social sciences, *social constructionism* can be defined as an epistemological principle and approach based on a sociological theory on knowledge developed by Berger and Luckmann (1966). According to this approach, knowledge is socially constructed in communicative practice. Communication, according to social *constructionists*, is a social process of constructing reality (not a cognitive epistemological process as *constructivists* tend to claim, cf. Pearce 1995). Thus, *social constructionism* stems from an epistemological position redefining psychological constructs such as "mind", "self" and "emotion" as socially constructed processes, to be „removed from the head and placed within the realm of social discourse“ (Gergen 1985:271). From this

perspective “knowledge is not something people possess in their heads, but rather something people do together” (Gergen 1985:270).

Social constructionism is characterised by a relativistic epistemology³. It claims that, methodologically speaking, Vygotsky was one of the first *social constructionists* and “*pre-postmodernists*” in psychology (Neuman & Holzman 1997:25) and that Vygotsky pioneered a sociocultural approach to understanding cognitive processes in childhood development (Shaw 2006). Vygotsky’s cultural-historical theory formulated a basis for the emergence and development of *social constructionism* (Yankun 2006), and for the epistemology of socio cultural approach to learning and development (Thorne 2005). According to Vygotsky, higher mental functions are not independently constructed by children in early ontogenesis, but “rather than that, the development of mental process is *mediated* by adults in the context of social interactions with children” (Karpov 2005:10). Thorne claims that the Vygotskian concept of mediations is more than a means for solving problems and creating learning possibilities. Rather, “the process of mediation-in-interaction can be understood as part of the methods by which members construct learning environments, tasks, identities, and contexts” (Thorne 2005:399).

Social Constructionism (not to be confused with *constructivism*) formulates an epistemological basis for Vygotsky’s Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) as well as his Theory on Dysontogenesis (TD). The general views of Vygotsky’s CHAT and TD constitutes a theoretical basis and methodology for modern inclusive education in contemporary Russia. In this article a short presentation of contemporary preschool special education in Russia will be given, looking into the main concepts of Vygotsky’s theory on

³ Epistemological relativism - theories are historically-situated; best understood when located in the conditions of their emergence (e.g. intelligence).

dysontogenesis. Thus, the following subquestions will be highlighted: *What is the core of the social constructionist understanding of learning and development in dysontogenesis?*

Theoretical framework of Inclusive Education in Russia

In accordance with Vygotsky, contemporary Russian scholars tend to promote an educational model in which the borderlines between ordinary and special education tend to be less distinctive – almost to the degree of extinction (Rodina 2007, in press). Consequently, ordinary education has to become “inclusive” (Vygotsky 1993; Malofeev 2000, 2001; Zaitsev 2004). Research indicates that the development of the special educational system in post-soviet Russia has been characterized by basic forms of inclusion, *internal* as well as *external* (Van Rijswik, Foreman & Shipitzina 1996); the internal form being implemented in the special educational system; the external form presupposing interaction between special and mass education (Shipitzina 2001). Thus, the process of inclusion in contemporary Russia, tend to be implemented in a somewhat spontaneous fashion (Malofeev 2000).

Vygotsky’s theoretical and methodological works in the field of remedial (special) education include his general cultural-historical theory as well as his *theory on dysontogenesis*, also known the theory of distorted development (Gindis 2003:202). Vygotsky’s original *theory on dysontogenesis* (TD) partly corresponds with his CHAT. Both the CHAT and the TD concern the characteristics and peculiarities of infant psychological development, the zones of proximal development, developmental education, the socio-cultural origin of disability, applying a dynamic approach to disability, emphasizing the importance of the social situation of development etc. This was recognized in the practice of special education in the USSR and later became the theoretical basis for inclusive education in post-soviet Russia (Malofeev 2001, Rodina 2007, in press).

Bakhurst (1991:61) correctly described Vygotsky as “concerned with the question of how psychologist’s methodology...can *infect* [italics added] the object of their analysis”. Vygotsky also had, as the founder of cultural-historical methodology in defectology,⁴ considerable influence on the foundations of special psychology (Lubovsky 1996). In the years between 1924–1934, Vygotsky studied the psychological development among disabled children. The significance of Vygotsky’s defectological research⁵ may be valued by its general influence on the psychological theories on the development of higher mental functions – reflected in the basic works on developmental psychology. The *idea of development* – which later became fundamental in Vygotsky’s cultural-historical theory - was crucial in Vygotsky’s defectological perspectives (Zankov 1936).⁶ This article will have to be limited to looking into the fundamental concepts of Vygotsky’s TD and CHAT – highly important in the practice of inclusive education.

The Social Constructionist view on Disability

This article will be investigating the fundamental concepts of Vygotsky’s *theory on dysontogenesis* and his cultural-historical theory– significant for the practice of inclusive education. There is quite a wide range of perspectives on and approaches to Vygotsky’s theories and methodology concerning *upbringing, education and evaluation of children with disabilities*. Certain perspectives, described in detail below, have been fundamental in the establishment of a national system of inclusive education in Russia (Rodina 2007, in press) and constitute the core of the social constructionist view on learning and development in

⁴ “The Russian term *Defectologia* implies a multidisciplinary science and refers generally to methods of evaluation in the study of children with disabilities. *Defectologia* includes relevant branches of medicine and psychology as well as pedagogy” (Judge & Oreshkina 2004:245).

⁵ The publication of Vygotsky’s *The Fundamental of Defectology* (1984/1993) has created a knowledge base for the theoretical elaboration and practical implications of Vygotsky’s ideas within North American system of special Education (Gindis 2003:200)

⁶ “From Vygotsky’s earliest scholarly works on the peculiarities of the development among mentally retarded and physically disabled children, there’s a straight forward connection to the theory on higher psychological functions” (Zankov 1936:4f.).

dysontogenesis: Vygotsky's developmental approach including the concept of zones of proximal development, the concept of social situation of development, the concept of leading activity and age-related psychological new formations, the dynamic and socio-cultural approach to disability - including the idea of the structural complexity of disabilities, the resource oriented (salutogenetic) approach to disability. How can we achieve an appropriate understanding of disability as a socio-cultural developmental phenomenon, based on Vygotsky's social constructionist view? Vygotsky (1993:30) was basically opposed to quantitative diagnostics, labelled by Vygotsky as "the arithmetical conception of a handicapped condition". Vygotsky introduced a new understanding of handicaps as a developmental process, rather than a static condition: "(...) not as the sum of [the disabled child's] defects and his shortcomings (...)" (Bein et al. 1983/1993:304). Vygotsky's focus on the dynamic nature of disability is very significant for certain special didactic aspects, taking into account the constant change in structure and content of a disability taking place in the developmental process influenced by education and remediation (Gindis 2003:204).

Vygotsky considered disability as a "**social aberration**" (1993:66), without refusing the primateship of biology. According to Vygotsky, "social aberration" spring from children's changing social, environmental relations – causing disturbances in social behaviour.⁷ As a consequence of Vygotsky's concept of *a complex structure of disability* in the understanding of "abnormal development", it is necessary to distinguish between *primary* disability (organic impairment), *secondary* and *tertiary* disability (cultural distortions of socially conditioned, higher mental functions). Focusing exclusively on *primary* reasons for disability implies ignoring the developmental processes. Vygotsky suggests that distinct symptoms may be observed in the complexly interrelated *primary* reasons.

⁷ "The psychological makeup of a [disabled] person arises not primarily from the physical handicap itself, but secondarily as a result of those social consequences caused by the defect" (Vygotsky 1993, 67).

Vygotsky presents a dynamic assessment of disability. The structure of disability is too complex in order to be studied by simply summing up symptoms. *Primary* disorders (i.e. visual and hearing, language and speech-related, motor and CNS-related impairment) lead to the child's "*exclusion*" from the socio-cultural, traditional and educational environment – in turn causing *secondary* (socio-cultural) disability. Due to *primary* disorders, the child displays a distorted connection to culture as a source for development of higher mental functions (Vygotsky 1993). According to Vygotsky (1993), children with disabilities tend to have a special need for "*detours*", i.e. in other special educational environments (adapted educational *milieu*). This *milieu* may provide necessary conditions for the "*cultural introduction*"⁸ of children with disabilities and realization of mankind's inherent socio-cultural experience. Thus, the Vygotskian stress on the structural complexity of functional disability has considerable impact on special education. Vygotsky stresses the importance of a distinction between *primary* and succeeding symptoms in the study of upbringing, teaching and education of children with different disabilities. The elementary functions – being *primary* deficient, resulting from the very nucleus of directly interconnected deficiency – are *less* subject to remediation. According to Vygotsky, *secondary* developmental complications – as the social and psychological consequences of primary disabilities – are less resistant to and *more* subject to elimination. *Secondary* (socio-cultural) disability may be prevented and eliminated by medical and educational means.

⁸ Russ. "Vrashchivanie v kulturu" may also be translated as "growing into culture", "getting rooted into culture" or "inculturation", according to Mead.

The impact of the sociocultural approach to disability in inclusive education

Vygotsky stressed the importance of the dynamic, socio-cultural nature of disability for the methodology of inclusive education.⁹ He also stressed the importance of social learning in the upbringing and education of children with disabilities. As far as Vygotsky is concerned, “disorder” is not a tragedy. Psychological-physical insufficiency is determined by a certain social setting, arrangement, or “aberration”, hindering children’s normal socialization. Vygotsky criticized the parents’, teachers’ and psychologists’ pathological approach to “child abnormality”. Vygotsky focused on child health, not on “disorders”.

The significant need for social interaction among children with disabilities (Rubinshtein, 1979), does not immediately become a need through social intercourse; it is rather preserved as a need for assistance, thus causing *secondary* (socio-cultural) developmental complications. Parents and many teachers continuously pity, and consequently help, the helpless children with disabilities, thus hindering the *zone of proximal development*, and causing *secondary* disability. The excessive surveillance, the manifold limitations, and the deprivation of independency, the long-term period outside the child collective - all these factors were crucial to the occurrence of *secondary* socio-cultural disability among children with an intellectual disability (Rodina 2005). These factors constitute a *secondary* complication of *primary* (biological) disability, several developmental disorders like Cerebral Palsy, as in the case of Natasha (Rodina 2005),¹⁰ and an intellectual disability, as in the case of Vladislav (op cit).¹¹ Acquisition of experience using objects and tools, getting acquainted with their physical characteristics, is thus interfered. This may explain the apparently absent need for new impressions and the rapid loss of parental hope for potential development of

⁹ As a matter of fact, “education must cope not so much with these biological factors as with their social consequences” (Vygotsky 1993:66).

¹⁰ Natasha is a 5 year old girl (at the CI) with Cerebral Palsy and PDD-pervasive developmental disorders

¹¹ Vladislav is a 4½ year old boy (at the CI) with Down’s Syndrome

self-sufficiency and independence among children with disabilities. Parents tend to limit awareness of organic needs and their satisfaction; *the child is protected, but is not developing*. Obviously, Vygotsky's view on the negative developmental consequences for children with disabilities due to *secondary* complications of *primary* disabilities, confirms this. The research results in my case study (Rodina 2005) were presented to the staff, as well as to all parents of the children being studied, i.e. to all those being involved in the creation of social situations of development and the necessary conditions for a "*cultural introduction*" (Vygotsky 1929).

The social situation of development and leading activity

In the 1930s, Vygotsky worked out the concept of social situations of development¹². It is important to note that Vygotsky conceived the social situation of development as a dynamic relation, not as a context. The concept of age related psychological novel formations – influencing the social situations of child development – was fundamental to Vygotsky's theory on development (Kravtsova 1996)¹³. Nevertheless, Vygotsky's term "social situation of development" was practically replaced by the term "leading activity"¹⁴ in 1944, in order to explain the dynamic changes in developmental processes (Petrovsky & Petrovsky 1983). According to Davydov (1986), the terms "social situation of development" and "leading activity" are, as already mentioned, synonymous. According to Elkonin (1999), role play is essential to leading activity in preschool age. New research in preschool age psychology suggests five typologically distinct and yet cyclical interconnected kinds of regular play among preschool children: the "director's" or "producer's" social-dramatic play, the plot-

12 „... a completely original, exclusive, single, and unique relation, specific to the given age, between the child and reality, mainly the social reality that surrounds him. We call this relation the social situation of development at the given age" (Vygotsky 1932/1998, 198).

13 „[It] determines wholly and completely the forms and the path along which the child will require ever newer personality characteristics, drawing them from the social reality as from the basic source of development the path along which the social becomes the individual" (Vygotsky 1998:198)

14 „The social situation of development is above all the child's relation to social reality. This relation is realized through human activity. It is therefore justified to use the term 'leading activity' synonymously to the term 'social situation development" (Davydov 1986:240).

based role play, symbolic play, rule-based play and, finally, a plot-based role play at a qualitative new level of development (Kravtsova 1996:5). Social play constitutes the source for development and forms the basis for the *zone of proximal development* (ZPD) - and inclusive education *is* fundamentally developmental. A main task for inclusive learning is to bring about a transformation of ZPD as well as the zone of *actual* development. Observations of groups of peers in communication with other peers and adults indicate a continuous broadening of the ZPD, enabling a correction and compensation for *secondary* and *tertiary* disabilities (Lisina 1985; Zuckerman 1994).

According to Vygotsky's social constructionist view on development and learning, the social situations of development is a source for the development of consciousness: "The ontogenesis of consciousness is considered a process of continuous change of activities [leading activity and social situation of development] within the 'system-child-society'. During each stage, a leading activity is identified, the mastering and appropriation of which is connected to the most important psychological novel formations of this age" (Veresov 2005:1).

Vygotsky's concept of social situation of development is significant in the field of special education, and constitutes a theoretical basis for the State Medical Pedagogical-Psychological Commission (SMPPC) in Russia. Diagnostics of social situation of development - as a relation between child and mediated environment - is significant in the field of inclusive education. A major task for the SMPPC has been to determine the optimal conditions for the realization of children's (with structural developmental disorders) potential in social integration. This analysis of dialectical relations in child environment is based on the key concepts in the *theory on dysontogenesis*.

Peer collectives as mediators for socio-cultural development

Vygotsky highly appreciated the role of social and collective life experience for children with disabilities. According to Vygotsky (1931/1993), the personality of children with disabilities is not determined by their disability, but rather by their social environment and its dialectical interaction with the child, i.e. a socio-psychological realization of disability. Thus, the social aspect is crucial in the upbringing of children with disabilities. In the collective, the child “finds the material to build the inner functions which are realized during the process of compensatory [collective] development” (Vygotsky 1993:127). Vygotsky (1993) stressed that interaction with peers (or collective upbringing) is one of the most important socio-cultural conditions for development and socialization among children with disabilities. In his works in the early 1930s, Vygotsky focused on the dialectical development in order to explain how children internalise dialogues with others, gradually acquiring understanding of the social and cultural meanings of various practices. These meanings mediate the relationship between language and cognition: problem-solving is seen as an interactive process. Through interaction, children can extend their ‘internal’ limitations and thus exceed their *zone of proximal development*. According to Vygotsky’s social constructionist view on learning and development, the social environment is *not just a context* in which children develop, but rather a *source of development* of mental processes (higher mental or cultural functions). They are “not independently constructed by children (as constructivists would say) ... the development of mental processes is mediated by adults [significant other] in the context of social interactions with children” (Karpov 2005:10-11).

The Resource-Oriented Approach

Vygotsky (1993), studying children with disabilities, primarily focused on children’s intact *abilities* (resources). According to Vygotsky, the resources of children with disabilities

should constitute a basis for an optimal development of the children's potential. Criticizing the pathology- and symptom-centred approaches in special education, Vygotsky (1993) was one of the first to stress the importance of neologisms like *empowerment* and *resource oriented approach* in the study of children with disabilities. Health resources – shared by all child personalities – became basic to this new approach. Vygotsky changed focus from abnormality and disorders to sources of health among children with disabilities, thus attempting to find some compensation for functional disabilities¹⁵. Vygotsky was one of the first to point out a paradigmatic shift, from the mechanisms and symptoms of disability (pathogenesis) to health resources (salutogenesis). The main task in a special educational context is therefore, according to Vygotsky, to provide support for intact functions among children with disabilities, thus enabling a realization of these resources. This vygotskian resource-compensatory and empowerment-psychological theory, formulated in the 1930s, is analogical to the later development in American psychiatry (for example Aron Antonovsky's [1996] theory on salutogenesis).

On the basis of resource oriented approach, Vygotsky (1993) promoted a thesis on the establishment of *developmental detours* in order to deal with the problem of learning among CD – the vygotskian “*alpha and omega*” in special needs education (Vygodskaya & Lifanova 1996): “disorders” do not call for adaptation. The state of “disorder” has to be overcome – for example through a socio-cultural-dysontogenetical search and realization of individual “*developmental detours*”. In examining any primary disability, the focus on child health and positive, developmental potential will have to be maintained. Therefore, Vygotsky pointed out that special educational practice consists of a creation of *developmental detours* for abnormal children.

¹⁵ “[...] the reserve of compensatory forces is, to a large degree, to be found in the social-collective life of the child” (Vygotsky 1993:127).

How may Vygotsky's theory on dysontogenesis be implemented in contemporary inclusive classrooms? In order to establish optimal social situations of development among children with disabilities in inclusive kindergartens, it is important to focus on remedial-educational work concentrating on formation and semiotic development of child activity (Rodina 2007, in press). The establishment of individual remedial educational programs and selections of remedial-developmental tools, will require a thorough analysis of the structures of disabilities, determining the psychological structures of the ZPD. Thus, remedial and corrective approaches to atypical development could only be realized through a process of developmental, inclusive education, at a maximum exploitation of the sensitive stages, in accordance with the social situation of development and the ZPD. The main adult responsibility is to lead the child into the general culture – in child collectives in the case of inclusive education. The ZPD suggests that the adult, in every stage and at different levels, should give the child certain tasks and responsibilities, thus including it into the surrounding *milieu*.

In contemporary Russian inclusive kindergartens, remedial and educational work represents a system of educational measures aiming to eliminate *secondary* and *tertiary* disabilities among children with disabilities through socialization in peer-collectives. The theoretical basis for inclusive education suggests a distinction between *general* (table 1) and *particular* (table 2) principles of organization of remedial-educational and developmental processes in inclusive kindergartens. Table 1 below, presents Vygotsky's basic cultural-historical concepts of TD and their interconnection with general principles of inclusive, developmental education, constituting a general model for inclusive education. Table 2 below, illustrates the interconnection between some of Vygotsky's views on CHAT and TD, constituting a particular organizational model of remedial and inclusive education.

Conclusion

Vygotsky's works in the domain of special education have not yet been appreciated in the West - in spite of the fact that he formulated the probably most unique, comprehensive and human paradigm for special education in the 20th century (Gindis 1995). It is a fact, though, that a number of new and highly relevant documents appearing in Russian publications since the period of *perestroika* and *glasnost*, have generally received scarce, if any, attention among Western scholars.

Within his general theory of child development (CHAT), Vygotsky introduced a practice-oriented paradigm for the education of children with special needs, based on his so-called *special theory*, also known as the *theory on dysontogenesis* (TD). The theory on dysontogenesis - implying a *socio-constructionist approach* to learning and development in dysontogenesis - represented an alternative to "behaviourist, nativist or constructivist" (Karpov 2005:10) approaches to learning and development. Based on the *socio-constructionist approach* to distorted development, Vygotsky developed a unique vision for future models of special education, implying *an inclusion based on positive differentiation*. *The Grand Tour Question* of this study was to look into the *core of Vygotsky's Theory on Dysontogenesis (TD)*. This was highlighted by looking into the three sub-questions.

According to Vygotsky's theory on dysontogenesis, a positive approach implies a favourable societal view on children with disabilities, directing the focus point not on weaknesses and disorders, but on the strengthening and empowerment of individual skills. The core of the socio-constructionist understanding of learning and development in dysontogenesis - The vygotskian theory on dysontogenesis (sub question 1) - is the concept of *primary defects*, *secondary defects*, and their dialectical interaction. Developing the theory on dysontogenesis, will require a thorough analysis of the dialectical relationship between *primary* and *secondary* disabilities, a disability-specific 'Zone of proximal development'. The

concept of inclusion requires studies of internalization of external cultural activities into internal processes via psychological tools and mediated learning in relation to high-and low-incidence disabilities.

According to Vygotsky's theory on dysontogenesis, handicaps are considered as a *sociocultural developmental phenomenon* where compensation will have to come from socialization and cultural enlightenment. He shows that "defects" (impairments) varies psychologically in different cultural and social environments. In this article we have been looking into Vygotsky's view on disability as a *socio-cultural developmental phenomenon* (sub-question 2) - dysontogenetical concepts of *primary defects* (organic impairment) and *secondary defects*, or "cultural consequences of primary defects" (distortions of higher mental functions due to social factors). In his search for alternatives to the standardized tests applied to disabled children, Vygotsky introduced the concept of the *Zone of Proximal Development*. In the field of education and upbringing of disabled children, Vygotsky claimed that the most efficient compensation for the loss or weakness of natural functions can be achieved through the development of the higher mental functions. In Vygotsky's view, the main objective of special education should be the implementation of a "*positive differential approach*", that may help to develop higher mental functions among handicapped children's overall personality.

According to Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory on dysontogenesis, disabled children's development is largely determined by the social implications of his/her organic impairment. "This created a new perspective for socialization/acculturation and cognitive development of children with special needs" (Gindis 2003). The vygotskian social-constructionist concept of remediation and compensation for abnormal development (cf. sub-question 3) – realizable only in the process of developmental education with an optimal exploitation of the sensitive stages of development, taking into account the social situation of development, so fundamental for the Zone of Proximal Development and Leading Activity – constitutes a

methodological basic for contemporary preschool inclusive education in Russia. Significant *results* in this field of study may serve as a theoretical basis for the *elaboration of principles* of remedial-educational work in *inclusive classroom*, based on the methodology of inclusive developmental education. This theoretical basis for inclusive education suggests a distinction between *general* and *particular* principles (cf. tables 1 and 2) in the organization of remedial-educational and developmental processes in inclusive education. The developmental character of the inclusive approach in education enables personal and socio-cultural development among disabled children. Vygotsky (1929) stressed that in regard to children's personal and cultural development in the process of common upbringing, socialization is essentially nothing else but a process of "*human culture striking roots*" - in Leontiev's (1978) words a "*period of humanisation*" in preschool childhood.

Table 1: The General Model

Implementing the theory on dysontogenesis (TD) in inclusive preschool education

<i>General principles of inclusive education</i>	<i>The cultural-historical theory on dysontogenesis</i>
Preschool children’s age-related psychological-physical potential and sensitive stages of Higher Mental Functions (HMF)	Exploitation of sensitive stages of psychological development
A uniform psychological development in onto- and dysontogenesis: “One can and must measure the blind, the deaf-mute and the mentally retarded by the same measures which are applied to a normal child” (Vygotsky 1993:80)	View of TD on the general regularity of child psychological development in onto- and dysontogenesis
The complex structures, levels and occurrence of disorders. Ontogenetically peculiarities of children with disabilities. Optimal combination of general development, remedial-compensatory and rehabilitative-educational work.	TD’s view on primary and secondary disability and the “social aberration” as a particular ontogenetic development: divergence of biological and social factors in atypical children’s developmental process.
The principle of dynamic assessment to dysontogenesis (atypical development). Studying children with disabilities in dynamical development, age-related psychological novel formations related to social situation of development, as well as personal and cultural development.	The dynamic nature of disability
The principles of resource oriented approach (salutogenesis). Intact functions and compensatory	Resource-oriented approach to the theory of compensation in regard to HMF in dysontogenesis.

developmental mechanisms in the establishment of social situation of development in socialization process of children with disabilities.	
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The table below presents possible approaches to realization of some concepts of TD and CHAT in inclusive education, as well as individual organizational principles related to remedial-rehabilitative and developmental education.

Table 2: The Particular Model

Implementation of TD and CHAT in inclusive preschool education:

<i>The Particular principle for inclusive education</i>	<i>General CHAT and the theory of dysontogenesis</i>
The common processes of diagnostics and corrective-remedial development. Remediation of psychological-physical disorders in ontogenesis in only possible when taking into account results of diagnostics and analysis of social situation of development among children with disabilities, the level of parental needs and claims, as well as the level of available resources	Views on social situation of development, socio-cultural characteristics of disability. The resource oriented approach
General developmental tendencies among normal and abnormal children suggest that children with disabilities – just as normally developed children – should go through all stages of ontogenetic development, but in their own pace.	General regularities of child psychological development in onto - and dysontogenesis
The developmental character of remedial education. Age-related and structural peculiarities of disorders. Early stages of remedial education are determined by a temporal acceleration of the development and pace,	The structural complexity of disability, social situation of development, views on ZPD and age-related psychological new formations

in connection with an elimination of developmental aberrations. Learning is developing only when ZPD is taken into account.	
The activity approach to learning and upbringing of children with disabilities in preschool suggests applying all types of remedial-educational measures in accordance with LA in preschool age: in play, in work and in graphic and constructing activity	Leading activity and the sign-symbolic basis of social situation of development.
The personality-centred character of child-adult-peer-communication (personal interaction)	The concept of ontogeny in adult-child-peer-communication (Lisina). This concept is a part of the neo-vygotskian approach to child development

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