

science, in a study of language the classical works of structural phonology served as a prototype.

Davydov's program did not confine itself to basics such as math and language, but also ventured into the complex and controversial fields of history and art. The acceptance of this

program was neither immediate, nor was it universal. During the 1970s Davydov's group amassed an impressive amount of evidence in favor of the theoretical learning program. At the same time it became clear that the existing cadre of Soviet teachers could not be trusted with the implementation of this program, which they did not and probably could not understand being themselves educated along the lines of empiricist thinking. In addition, there was an implicit contradiction between the free creative spirit of theoretical learning and the social conditions of its implementation. Soviet school education of the 1970s remained a highly centralized and authoritarian institutional system. School curricula and methods of instruction could not be chosen by individual school districts but were always selected by the Ministry of Education, so the only possibility for the program of theoretical learning to reach beyond the stage of experimentation was in gaining support from the educational bureaucrats. If they became attracted by a program they would then implement it statewide. The rigidity of the educational policy thus contained a threat for the program of theoretical learning even in the unlikely event of winning the approval of the establishment. In defending his program of theoretical learning, Davydov skillfully demonstrated its strong intellectual points and its relevance to the problems of the contemporary scientific and technological revolution. What he could not do—taking into account the sociopolitical climate of that period—was to project the proposed program into the reality of Soviet life and Soviet schools. To put it bluntly, if a student in the 1970s were to take a strictly conceptual-theoretical attitude toward the study of Soviet history, he or she would most probably be purged from the school as a dissident and if old enough could end up in Siberian exile. But even beyond these obvious political limitations, Davydov's program provided very few clues regarding the society he had in mind when he suggested the primacy of theoretical learning. He would hardly have objected to the view that politics, ideology and practical decision making do not obey the laws of conceptual reasoning, and yet his writings leave the impression that all Soviet schoolchildren are destined to become either scientist-theoreticians or rational critics of the false consciousness produced by different ideologies.⁴¹

■ The program, however, did not get a chance to prove itself

VYGOTSKY'S PSYCHOLOGY

on a large scale. In the early 1980s Davydov's group found itself under fire from critics and Davydov lost his position as director of the Moscow Institute of Psychology. The recent atmosphere of *glasnost*, however, seems to be giving Davydov and his program a second chance, and Davydov has been promoted to the position of vice-president of the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences. This same *glasnost* has revealed problems in Soviet schools serious enough to render the dispute between empiricists and theoreticians almost frivolous. The educational system of the "advanced socialist society" is now beset with such mundane problems as a lack of proper school buildings, absence of transportation in rural areas, a high crime rate, drug abuse, teenage pregnancy, nationalist bigotry, and so on. Taking this into account one may feel that a simple advocacy of the intellectually attractive program of theoretical learning is not feasible. Davydov and his followers would probably be compelled to engage in a social critique of a society and schooling system that does not correspond to their ideal of education. At the same time Davydov's program could be profitably used, on a limited basis, by those Western educators who have the privilege of working in a relatively affluent educational environment and whose students are seeking an intellectually rewarding course of study.