

TOWARDS INCLUSIVE SOCIO – CULTURAL THEORIES AND PRACTICES NIGERIA. (Lev.Semenovic.Vygotsky, 1896-1934)

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Abstract

This paper tries to explain the relationship of socio – cultural theory and inclusive education practices in Nigeria. A review of the major tenants of socio – cultural theory that relate to special education is presented. An analysis is made as how socio – cultural theory can serve as a theoretical framework which can address the needs of teachers and students and improve the development of inclusive schools practices.

Introduction

Inclusive education is a process of enhancing the capacity of the education system in any country to reach out to diverse learners. The basis of inclusion is that special needs pupils have a right to the benefits of a full school experience, with needed modifications and supports, alongside their peers without disabilities who receive general education. Inclusionists contend that special classes, separate schooling, or other forms of removing children with disabilities from the regular environment should occur only when the nature or severity of the disability of the child is such that education in regular classes (with the use of supplementary services) cannot be accomplished.

Inclusive education differs from previously held notion of *integration* and *mainstreaming*, which tended to be concerned principally with disability and 'special educational needs' and implied learners changing or becoming 'ready for' or deserving of accommodation by the mainstream. By contrast, inclusion is about the child's right to participate and the school's duty to accept the child. Inclusion rejects the use of special schools or classrooms to separate students with disabilities from students without disabilities. A premium is placed upon full participation by students with disabilities and upon respect for their social, civil, and educational rights. Inclusion gives students with disabilities skills they can use in and out of the classroom.

On the other hand, inclusive socio-cultural theories by Lev. Vygotsky stated that Vygotsky's was equally critical of segregation and mainstreaming. In his early workings he advocated what is known as "full inclusion model (Lipsky and Gardner, 1996). Vygotsky's passionately argued what he called" "the social prejudices against the special needs "Vygotsky express firm conviction that special needs education should not be just a diminished version of regular education, but a speedily designed setting where the entire staff of the school are able to exclusively serve the individual needs of the students

with disabilities, special needs need special trained teachers, a differentiated curriculum, special technological auxiliary means and simply more time to learn. All these should be available in the methods of teaching that should be changed not the school setting. Students must always be maintained as much as possible within the inclusive social and cultural environment of the school.

- Vygotsky's view of inclusion as an appropriate design for special needs education a view of literature within his general theory of child development. Vygotsky's created a comprehensive and practice oriented paradigm of educating person's with special needs. Vygotsky's idea that the development by the social aspect of his/her organic impairment creates a new perspective for socialization/acclturation of special needs. Vygotsky's develop his unique vision for future model of special needs education practice which he called "inclusion based on positive differentiation" positive deferential approach" according to Vygotsky, means a favorable social outlook on a person with a disability from a point of view his/her strengths, not weakness in an inclusive settings.

This paper, therefore consider the relationship and consistency of socio –cultural theory to inclusive education practices in Nigeria.

The Russian educational psychologist and semanticist Lev, Vygotsky's (1896-1934) was first and foremost known in the west through his theories on the social origins of higher mental functions. Vygotsky's contribution to the methodology of psychological sciences as well as to psycholinguistic, developmental, cognitive psychology and special needs education. Is well known in United States as well as Western Europe.

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 contemporary practical work with inclusive education. In Russia Vygotsky's work in the field of special needs education and psychology have been crucial for the establishment of methodology in special education practice.

- The socio-cultural aspects of disability understanding the nature of disability and the means to compensate for it are the core of many system of special education vygotsky's was instrumental in the perception that:
- Disability is a socio-cultural developmental phenomenon and referred proceedings from learning and socio-cultural theory.
- Disability consist of "primary disability (organic impairment), secondary disability (distortions of higher psychological functions due to social factors and other interactions).

For vygotsky's, the primary disability may limit the acquisition and the use of some social skills and means that person acquire knowledge at a slower rate, however it is the person's social milieu that severely limit the course of development and lead to the delays or differences that are characteristic of many people with disabilities. Vygotsky's explained that the many behavioral traits such as passivity, dependence and lack of social skills that are thought to characterize people with intellectual disabilities, are the product of poor

access to socio-cultural knowledge, lack of social interactions and attitudes change, access to social experiences leading to the development of the secondary disability.

In order to prevent or remediate the development of secondary disability, vygotsky's proposed that changing social attitudes should be one of the first goals of special educators and regular teachers.

- Disability as a developmental process vygotsky's stressed that disability will change during development and that it is sensitive to the influence of remediation programs and social influence in the regular schools. The principles of person development include social learning through the internalization of external cultural activities into internal psychological processes. Within the context of development there are two classes of functions: there are natural and cultural, these relate conceptually to primary and secondary disabilities. Vygotsky's thought that if the paths of development diverge from normal to social development because of the person's disability, then the person is socially deprived. This leads to the emergence of delays and deficiencies.
- Qualitative versus quantitative differences in understanding of disability. Traditionally, person's with disabilities are just delayed in their development pattern or in the case of person physical and sensory impairments are normally psychologically developing person but are different in their physical make up. (eg. Deafer blind). This view was interpreted by vygotsky's as quantitative differences of development. But for him a person whose development is impeded by a disability is not simple "a person less developed then his peers, rather he has developed differently, and that is in a qualitatively different way. Vygotsky stated two major differences in the development of person with a disability as;
- The development of compensatory strategies emergence of social complications of the disability compensatory strategies are a result of the person's personality his/her experience and education. After they have been acquired then the person with disabilities well is able to develop the cultural or higher order concepts. Compensatory strategies are needed when the direct path to learning is blocked. They offer an indirect path to the same goal through mastery new psychological tools. Vygotsky's emphasized that it is not a physical disability itself but its social complications that is the distortion of the relationship with other more experienced people, which affects the quality of the person's development (Vygotsky, 1993).

The social/cultural view of disability and understanding of the qualitative differences in development of person's with disability led to the development of the zone of proximal development and dynamic assessment.

- Zone of proximal assessment development: According to Vygotsky's, person's with special needs will have qualitatively distinct zones of proximal development (Vygotsky's, 1993). Its usefulness in this field is that it is capable of revealing the hidden potential of the person with special needs rather than just the current level of development (level of independent performance) does not sufficiently describe the

development of a person, rather it indicates what is already developed or achieved, that is a yesterday of development; the level of assisted performance indicates what the child can achieve in the future, what", is what the child can become) Vygotsky's, 1986). In special needs education it is specially important not to concentrate on yesterday development but on tomorrows as the gap between the independent performance and an appropriately assisted performance in person's with special needs might be of a great significance due to initially distorted communication.

The above principles of socio-cultural theories can be related to inclusive education practices in the Vygostky view on inclusion as an appropriate design for special needs education Vygostky created a comprehensive and practice oriented paradigm of educating persons with special needs. He maintained that students should be maintained within the regular inclusive social environment of the school Vygotsky advocated the full 'inclusion model' which stated that the student with special needs should be in regular classroom with support services delivered to the student.(Wolfensberger, 1980, Stainback & Stainback, 1996), there should be complete acceptance of special need students in a regular classroom regardless of whether the students are working above or below the typical academic level of their age.

On the other hand, Inclusive education in Nigeria is a process of enhancing the capacity of the education system in any country to reach out to diverse learners. The basis of inclusion is that special needs pupils have a right to the benefits of a full school experience, with needed modifications and supports, alongside their peers without disabilities who receive general education. Inclusionists contend that special classes, separate schooling, or other forms of removing children with disabilities from the regular environment should occur only when the nature or severity of the disability of the child is such that education in regular classes (with the use of supplementary services) cannot be accomplished. Today in Nigeria, special educators, parents of students with disabilities, policy-makers and other stakeholders continue to debate the benefits and challenges of this education paradigm (Ajuwon, 2008). The discussions have been shaped largely by the principle of inclusion, which stresses that ordinary schools should cater to all children and young people, regardless of their circumstances or personal characteristics. In both low- and high-income countries, proponents of the policy of inclusive education are now reaffirming their commitment to education for all and acknowledging the urgency of providing education for their marginalized citizens. The momentum for the inclusive education movement derives from the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO's) proclamation that, among other things, emphasizes that "Regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all." p. IX. (UNESCO, 1994). Further, according to Article 18 of the same blueprint, advocates buttress their stance by noting that: "Educational policies at all levels, from the national to the local, should stipulate

that a child with a disability should attend the neighborhood school that is the school that would be attended if the child did not have a disability p. 17; (UNESCO, 1994)

This latter principle appears to be what is implied in Nigeria's National Policy on Education (2004, p. 49), which tangentially references the concept of inclusive education within the broader Universal Basic Education scheme. Consequently, some vocal advocates now see inclusive education as a favored approach to responding to the needs of all students in ordinary schools. Thus, as inclusion of students with disabilities into regular classrooms becomes a reality within public schools in Nigeria, it becomes imperative to determine the perceptions of special educators toward this practice. These special educators, most of whom have been trained in the country, are gradually being recognized as key stakeholders in the implementation of the strategic inclusive practices at all levels of the education system.

In the years 1924-1934, Vygotsky studies the psychological development among disabled persons, (Zankoy, 1936). Vygotsky introduced a new understanding of handicaps as a development process, rather than a static condition; “(...) not as the sum of (disabled persons) defects and his shortcomings (...)” (Beinet et al, 1983). Vygotsky considered disability as a “social aberration” (1993;66), According to Vygotsky, a social spring form of child’s changing social, environmental relations causing disturbances in social behavior. Special need education was the main empirical domain from which Vygotsky obtained data to support his theoretical conceptions. Vygotsky considered special education as a huge natural laboratory where general psychological laws were discovered on the basis of the various anomalies indeed many of the major concepts of his cultural/historical theory were conceived. Formulated and elaborated upon within the special education theoretical framework and terminology (Wertsch, 1985, Kozulin 1990, Yaroshevsky, 1993) The term Defectology according to Vygotsky referred to the study of the person’s with disabilities and the methods of their evaluation, education and bringing in inclusive settings.

In Nigeria full inclusion is the integration of all students, even those that require the most substantial educational and behavioral supports and services to be successful in regular classes and the elimination of special, segregated special education classes Special education is considered a service, not a place and those services are integrated into the daily routines and classroom structure, environment, curriculum and strategies and brought to the student, instead of removing the student to meet his or her individual needs

Inclusion, in Nigeria, if related to socio-cultural theories, it enhanced social interaction as a big benefit for students of all levels of ability. Friendships, otherwise unimaginable, form, and these bonds allow students to understand diversity in ways that textbooks and formal classroom lectures can’t. Diversity proves important in creating an open-minded society. Throughout their lives, students will encounter others who do not think or act as they do; by learning how to work and interact with these individuals, they gain an advantage not only in the classroom, but also in life in general.

Inclusion can also trigger enhanced collaboration between educators. For example, if a child has a learning disability that makes it difficult to read, teacher may need to confer with other teachers to find a way to help that student with word problems. Also in classrooms, students with special needs become engaged in their education as opposed to staying unchallenged inside segregated classrooms. In other words, inclusion gives students with disabilities the best chances to thrive academically. There is also a newly developed body of evidence derived from co-teaching, where the special education teacher joins with the general education teacher for areas of student weakness. The team approach is proving to be possibly one of the best methods of including special education students, while providing both accommodations and modifications and specially designed instruction.

Conclusion

Vygotsky theoretical and methodological findings is the most powerful style source of professional inspiration for current and coming generations of special needs education professionals, the uniqueness of Vygotsky's approach lies in his understanding of the disability not as a "biological impairment having psychological consequences but as a socio-cultural development phenomenon. Vygotsky argued that a disability is perceived as an "abnormality" only when and if it is brought into the social context. The human brain, eye, ear, or limb are not just physical organs, impairment of any organ "leads to a restructuring of social relationships and to a displacement of all the systems of behavior (Vygostky, 1983), and the most appropriate design for educating special needs is in an inclusive settings.

Recommendation

The implementation of inclusion in Nigeria on the other hand, will inevitably create new and increased demands on special educators, as well as other stakeholders. With the growing number of inclusive schools, special educators are expected to make adaptations and accommodations to the curriculum, their instructional techniques and evaluation procedures, as well as their classroom behavior management styles. Those specialists who are already engaged in inclusive schooling must be provided with sufficient instructional resources, while at the same time encouraged to continue their efforts to reach out to all learners.

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