

Unfulfilled Ambitions of Russian Pedologists (At the Turn of the 20th Century)

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Received April 14, 2013; Revised May 20, 2013; Accepted May 21, 2013

Abstract This article discusses the question that remains unanswered to this day: why Pedology, so actively developing in the early 20th century, not only in Russia but also abroad, faded away after just three decades? Was Pedology a pseudoscience as stated by the ideology of Bolshevism? Were the ideas about creating and educating a new man, developed and supported not only by leading Russian pedologists, such as: Basov, Blonsky, Vygotsky, Nechayev but also by foreign pedologists, for example: Granville Stanley Hall, Alfred Binet, James Mark Baldwin, significantly flawed from the start? Or was it due to the goals set by pedologists that were too ahead of their time and just like unique seeds failed to grow in a rocky soil? How relevant is the problem of creating a useful science about a child that allows us to see peculiarities of a child's development. Is it time to reflect on those problems raised by so many pedologists of the past?

Keywords: Russia, pedology, ideology, methodology

1. Introduction

In the modern world of psychological literature a lot of works were devoted to a famous Russian pedologist Lev Vygotsky and published by foreign and Russian authors [10,11,12,28,30,31,32,33,38,39,40]. No doubt, Vygotsky's theory is well known as a psychological approach to the child development but his pedological works remain underestimated. Having analysed existing studies on the history of psychology, we can assume that as it stands, there is no evidence suggesting that the subject of formation of pedology as the newly emerged science in Russia (at the turn of the 20th century) has been explored or addressed. This conclusion explains the choice of the topic for this article.

The need for understanding the historical path of Pedology in Russia is relevant for a number of reasons:

- to expand the field of historiography by incorporating data on the formation of Pedology in Russia at the beginning of 20th century, taking into account the features of socio-economic and cultural background;
- to highlight the importance of building relationships and provide an adequate assessment of the achievements of different psychological schools of the past;
- to provide a different perspective on contemporary problems of integration of science.

At the base of our study is Qualitative research. It uses a historical approach, allows one to discuss past and present events in the context of the present condition, to reflect and provide possible answers to current issues and problems.

A systematic methodology for this qualitative research is grounded theory (GT).

Another method used in the study is a constant comparative method, which will allow us to compare works of leading psychologists in order to detect similarities and differences and the reasons for their occurrence.

This study will attempt to illustrate the use of a constant comparative method as a framework for the organization and analysis of qualitative research data. It will provide a brief overview of the constant comparative method, examining such processes as categorization, comparison, inductive analysis, and refinement of data bits and categories.

2. Methodology

2.1. Categorisation of Subjects

The Russian National Library in St. Petersburg contains 833 books on Pedology, published in the period between 1904 and 1936. Most studies on the psyche of the child published at that time can be divided into a number of groups: textbooks on Pedology, methods and programmers of Pedology, age-appropriate stages of mental development, abnormalities in mental development, professional orientation and the role of environment in the mental development of children.

Here you can see the chart that represents all 6 categories in percentages.

Figure 1 illustrates that the highest percentage of books is taken by the role of environment in the mental development of children (40.6%). A large number of works on this subject is explained by the main purpose of Pedology as a newly emerged science, which was the aim to create a person of the new formation. It was designed to grow a new breed of a man. According to the views of

famous pedologists (Vigotsky, Blonsky, Basov and others) human beings are dependent on the socio-cultural context. The explanation of human behavior doesn't lay in the depths of the brain or the soul but in the external living

conditions of individuals and, most of all, in the external conditions of their social life and in their socio-historical forms of existence.

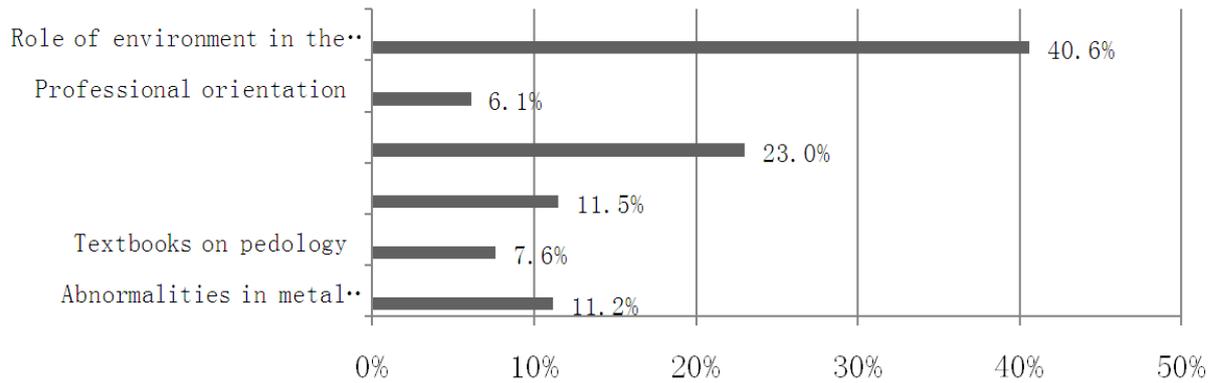


Figure 1. Percentages of books published according to subject in the period 1904 to 1936 (Source: The Russian National Library in St. Petersburg)

Such a large volume of books about methods and programmers of Pedology (23.0%) can be explained by the fact that Pedology as a science was in its formative stages. As a result of that, questions of the subject matter and research methods were key to pedologists and caused a lot of debates. Average amount of work on Pedology was related to the problems of abnormalities in mental development (11.2%) and age-appropriate stages of mental development (11.5%). This is due to the fact that amongst pedologists there were a lot of doctors. Most of

the books devoted to the age-appropriate stages of mental development (11.5%) were also written by doctors. The small volume of books about professional orientation (6.1%) can be explained by the fact that those problems only began to be developed by pedologists at that period of time.

2.2. The Dynamics of Development of Pedology as a Science in The Context of Time

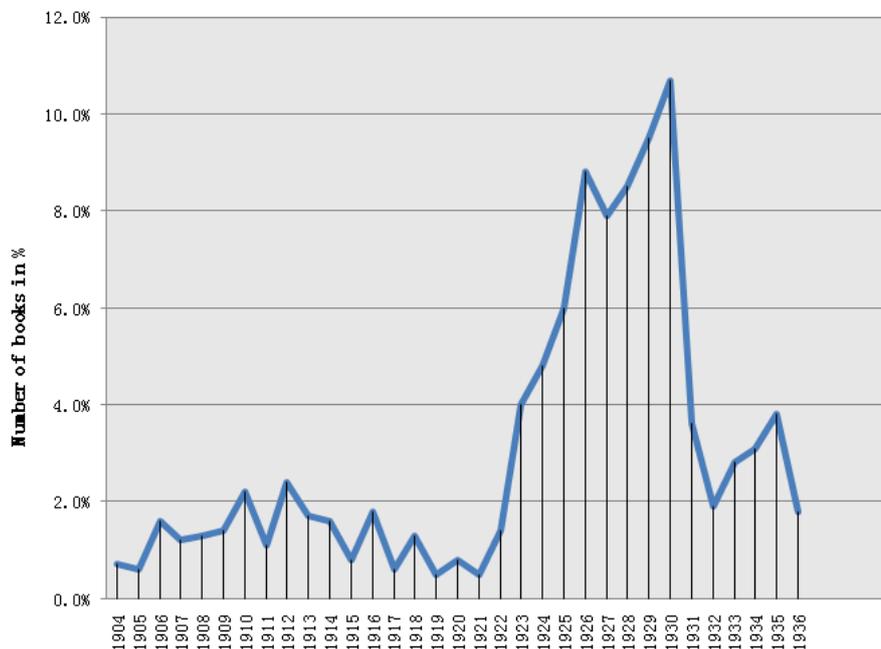


Figure 2. The dynamics of development of pedology as a science between 1904 and 1936

Figure 2 shows that we can highlight three stages in the development of Pedology as a science in the period between 1904 and 1936.

2.3. The First Stage in the Development of Pedology

The first stage: from 1904 to 1922 can be characterized as the period of formation of Pedology as a new branch of

psychological knowledge in Russia, it shows slow accumulation of pedological books published at that time.

The second stage: from 1923 to 1930-is the period when Pedology reached its peak, accompanied by the dramatic growth of the number of works published on Pedology.

The third period: from 1931 to 1936 is the period of stagnation and an overall sharp drop in the number of books published on Pedology.

In 1904, Nechaev pioneered Russia's first pedagogical courses, that were set to study an individual as the subject of education. Not only teachers but also parents attended such pedagogical lectures. They were taught by qualified specialists with high academic potential. Subjects in the first pedagogical courses were: Pedagogy, General Psychology, Study of defective children, Psychophysiology, Child Psychology, Anatomy, Nervous and Mental Pathology, Child Hygiene, Criminal Anthropology, Comparative Psychology and others.

Very popular among trainees were the lectures by A.A. Krogius (1871-1933). His doctoral dissertation was about "The spiritual world of the blind". Krogius investigated the process of memorization of the blind using the method of H. Ebbinghaus. According to his observation in all cases the blind memorized texts better than the sighted. Krogius's studies were well-known to his colleagues in the West. He gave lectures at the International Psychological Congresses in Innsbruck, Rome and Göttingen.

In 1908 in Moscow A. Bernstein opened a similar to Nechaev's laboratory. By February 1917 the following laboratories were opened and working:

- Laboratory of Experimental Psychology and Child Neurology at the Neurological Institute of A.J. Kozhevnikov, under the direction of G.I. Rossolimo;
- Moscow Medical and Pedagogical Experimental Station, under the direction of V.P. Kashenko (later renamed to Moscow Medical and Pedagogical Clinic);
- Psychological Institute at the 2nd Moscow State University, under the direction G.I. Chelpanov;
- The Central Pedagogical Institute, under the direction N. A. Ribnikov (1921).

In the first decade of the 20th century the first programmes devoted to the study of children began to develop. One of the most complete and popular programmes was proposed by Grigory Rossolimo (1860-1928) and was called the method of "psychological profiles" [24].

The method of "psychological profiles" by Rossolimo was a multidimensional programme for studying personality, which consisted of a number of experimental psychological methods. Summarising their results, the researcher could obtain an extensive understanding of the individual characteristics of a particular child. The originality of the method lay in the compilation of test tasks, and in the way the results were processed. The results of the study were presented in a visual schedule, which enabled analysis of the tested individual. Rossolimo derived a formula which transformed image data into arithmetic data. By the mid-twenties the method was used in more than 150 laboratories all over Russia. The "psychological profile" method was widely known abroad. It was used by Lipmann, Claparède, Schulze, Gieze and others.

During the first period some very traumatic events took place in Russia. In 1905 Russian Revolution brought enormous losses of population. In 1914 Russia entered the First World War. In 1918 the Russian Civil War began. Those developments also brought many new victims: there was an increase in the number of homeless children and it was especially hard for the teenagers to experience the loss of loved ones. Pedology conducted numerous studies on the emotional state of children and adolescents at the given period of time. Their work concluded that the

youth were especially affected by such changes amongst whom there was a vast rise in suicide attempts.

That problem was addressed by a general practitioner E. Radin who developed a questionnaire intended for students of various educational institutions of St. Petersburg. The research suggested that young people were very much disappointed with their lives in general. It revealed two types of disappointment: aggressive and apathetic. The principal cause of apathy was the desire to pursue strong sensations and as a result young people were suffering from emotional detachment. Others were characterized as lonely isolated from any form of communication individuals lacking ability to build relationships with other people [22].

Pedologists were also concerned about the growing crime amongst children. Gindes concluded that there were two main causes for criminal behavior. The majority of youth crime was the result of socio-economic environment in which children lived. Crime was the "social product", caused by environment and upbringing. Gindes considered homelessness to be the main social cause of juvenile delinquency: "Unlimited freedom enjoyed by the homeless, destroying it, corrupts and entails an unnatural crime in the transitional age" [14].¹

The emergence of Pedology in Russia was also linked with socio-economic and political situation in the country in the early 20th century. The Soviet Union embarked on building a great state of strong power. Such a state needed to educate "the new man", who could not only restore the economy, but also build a new communist government. The Pedology as a new science was designed to solve that problem, perform an important government order.

2.4. The Second Stage in the Development of Pedology

Year 1923 marked the starting point when Pedology flourished, reaching its peak in 1930. The sharp growth in the number of publications from 1.4% in 1922 up to 4.0% in 1923, with the highest number of publications at 10.7% in 1930.

The rapid growth of Pedology was supported by the following fact: in 1928 there were several academic establishments already opened in Moscow:

National Research Institute for Scientific Pedagogy at Second Moscow State University (1926, A.P. Pinkevich);

Academy of Communist Education (1923, has three pedagogical laboratories: S.S. Molozhavy, P.P. Blonsky, A.B. Zalkind);

State Institute of Experimental Psychology (1924, K.N. Kornilov);

Department of Children's Health Hospital for Nervous Diseases at the First Moscow State University (1923, G.I. Rossolimo);

National Institute of Social Hygiene People's Commissariat of Health (1923, A.V. Molkov);

The higher educational courses at the Second Moscow State University (1924, A.B. Zalkind);

Research Institute of Occupational Diseases (1923, L.S. Bogolepova).

A number of important pedagogical events took place during the second period:

¹ All translations from Russian are by the present author.

The first All-Russian psycho-neurological Congress (1923);

The second Congress of social legal protection of minors (1923);

The second All-Russian psycho-neurological Congress (1924);

The first All-Russian Congress of teachers (1925);

The second All-Union pedagogical Conference (also known as "Pedological Meeting") (1927);

All-Union pedagogical Congress (1928);

The first All-Union Congress on the study of human behavior (also known as "Behavioral Congress") (1930);

The third All-Russian child welfare Congress (1930).

In our view, it was during the second period when Pedology sought to fulfill the social order of the Russian communist party - the creation of a new Marxist and Leninist Psychology. It should be noted that at the beginning of the second period pedologists truly believed that the social environment was able to change the biological nature of a person. For many pedologists the failure of the pedological doctrine became evident a lot later followed by the great disappointment in their high hopes and expectations.

A radically new approach was developed by K.N. Kornilov, which suggested that every person was the product of their social environment. Kornilov outlined his views on the principles that had to be used to build the new Soviet Psychology in his report "Modern Psychology and Marxism" [17] at a Psychoneurological Congress in 1923. He announced that the nature of mental processes is the only true materialist point of view. In his speech at the Congress, Kornilov expressed sharp criticism of Western Empirical Positivist Psychology, as being highly subjective, individualistic and not reflecting true reality. According to Kornilov, Empirical Psychology was the study of isolated, unintegrated aspects of the human psyche, such as, for example, "ability", "memory", "attention" and others. He believed Marxist Psychology, on the contrary, aimed to present personal development and its major properties with integrity, depending on the influence of the social environment. It should be noted that not all Western Psychology was rejected by the leader of Soviet Psychology, Kornilov. He thought it was possible to accept some of the ideas of American Behaviorist Psychology, Watson's doctrine in particular. However, Kornilov thought it necessary to add into Watson's concept, social factors besides biological factors that were affecting human behavior. Kornilov became the head of the Institute of Psychology in Moscow, and initiated the change of the name of the institute to the Institute of Reactology. The leading theme of the institute was the "Investigation of the indigenous Psychology of the Moscow proletarians by the method of determining the rate of reaction"[21]. There is no doubt that the leading theme was the political agenda of the Bolshevik party. Indeed, there was no difference in the speed of mental reaction of the proletarians who lived in Moscow, and the proletarians of any other city. Nevertheless, none of the staff of the Institute dared speak out against the designated theme. Thus, Psychology had to serve the ideological requirements of the new state.

This was evidenced by the growing number of studies which analysed the role of the social situation in a child's development. These changes were linked to a new wave of

communist ideas: bringing up a new person in a new society under different social conditions. It was thought that the character of a young person was determined by the type of work s/he was involved in. The industrial factor prevailed over others, making it the "constant" value, whilst gender and age were considered to be the "variables". Psychologists believed that in order to understand young people's behaviour they had to analyse every aspect of their living conditions.

One of the founders of Pedology was P.P. Blonsky (1884-1941), Professor at Moscow University. Blonsky was a well-known figure in the Soviet Government. He worked with Lenin's wife, Nadezhda Krupskaya in the scientific education section of the State Academic Council. According to Blonsky: "Pedology studies a complex of symptoms at different phases and stages of childhood in their temporal sequence and in their dependence on various environmental conditions" [7].² By the end of the 30's Blonsky was disappointed in Pedology, he actively debated with supporters of socio-genetics. He believed that the stages of human development laid down by the nature cannot be improved under the influence of social environment. Blonsky was a teacher of Vygotsky (1896 - 1934), who studied at the University of Shanyaysky in Moscow. According to Vygotsky's concept, the environment is the source of development. He formulated a number of laws of mental development in children: the law of metamorphosis, the law of telling the differences in tempo and rhythm, the law of the development of higher mental functions and others.

The last few years of the second period were the years of tough ideological control over the activities of scientists from the Bolshevik Party. Responding to the demands of the Party, special attention was paid by psychologists to the influence of the social environment on a child's life. Joravsky wrote, that "although numerous psychological schools freely contended, the Party tended to favor theories that were, or claimed to be, objective, materialist, determinist" [15].

The Commissariat of Education held a Pedologists Meeting in Moscow in 1927 which marked the start of the crisis of Pedology as a science. The main issues raised in that meeting were: to study of the role of the environment, heredity and physical development, the importance of the society as a factor in shaping a child's personality. There was also a lot of controversy around the issue of research methods in Pedology. As a result of the discussions the view of socio-genetics (such as Zalkind, Zaluzhny) prevailed over the opinions of others. In 1929 the First Pedological Congress took place where a presentation was made by A.B. Zalkind (1888-1936), the chief methodologist in Pedology [41]. Zalkind graduated from the medical faculty of Moscow State University. From 1917 to 1920 he was Director of the Petrograd Psychotherapeutic Institute. After 1925 Zalkind was forced to distance himself from psychoanalysis and publicly repented of his "connections" with Freudianism, directed his scientific aspirations towards the developmental problems of Pedology. In 1930 he headed the Institute of Psychology, Pedology and Psychotechnics in Moscow.

² All translations from Russian are by the present author.

In his speech at the First Pedological Congress Zalkind encouraged scientists to start building a class Pedology, and to fight against dissent in science. Of course that approach forced scientists to observe a rigid political correctness in their works. That led Pedology to evolve into a servant of state policy, which meant there was no freedom of speech in science and the search for the truth was prohibited. After 1929 a hounding began of scientists whose ideas did not conform to the political setting of the Bolshevik Party.

2.5. The Third Stage in the Development of Pedology

The third period was the period of stagnation of Pedology and it started in 1931. The sharp drop in the number of publications from 10.7% in 1930 down to 3.6% in 1931 can be explained by the increased ideological pressure from the Bolshevik Party on pedologists, which led to the overall disappointment in Pedology as a science.

In our view, 1930 was the turning point for Pedology: the remaining 6 years were years of fruitless attempts by the majority of scientists to prove government ideologies in science both theoretically and practically. At the All-Union Congress on the study of a man in Leningrad in 1930. Pedology was politicized further. In Pedology the period of "witch hunting" begins on the pages of "Pedology" journal, edited by Zalkind, where Arkin, Bechtereve, Shelovanov and others were badly criticized for their work [3,9,13,20].

Between 1929 and 1931 Basov's brilliant work "General principles of Pedology" was subject to the most severe criticism for its abstract-formal approach to the study of the mind of the child [4]. M.J. Basov (1892-1931) was a student of Lazursky. From 1924 to 1931 he worked as a Professor of Pedology and Psychology at the State Institute of Pedology in Leningrad and at the Leningrad Pedagogical Institute in the name of Herzen. Between 1920 and 1930 he was accused of being anti-Marxist and to re-instate his name he left science and took up mechanical fitter apprenticeship. Soon after he received a small injury at the factory which caused blood infection and death in 1931. On his deathbed Basov asked his wife to bring up their daughter to be a strong and loyal Communist. It should be noted that Basov was the first to underline the importance of "a person" who plays an active part in building the environment. This idea was later developed further by Vygotsky.

In 1936 a new regulation was announced by the All-Russian Central Committee of the Communist Party of Bolsheviks called "Pedological distortions in the system of National Committees of Education". According to the new regulation, Pedology was declared to be reactionary bourgeois science. The Bolshevik Party set a number of tasks for the scientists - one of which was to criticize all of the works on the theory of Pedology that had been released in the press up until year 1936.

Just one year after the publication of the new regulation a large number of articles criticizing pedologists appeared in the press [23,25,26,27,42]. Svadkovsky called Pedology "the servant of the capitalists» [27], which was intended to justify "Nazi educational policies," according to which education was only available for the chosen [27]. Svadkovsky was saying that because of pedological

research, hundreds of children were classed as mentally retarded, and only a small group of "normal" children could receive complete education.

The testing method used by the pedologists sparked fierce debates and attracted strongest critique [25,42]. Zaluzhny wrote that "the testing methods were developed and served as justification for the inequality of human beings and the human race». [42]. In addition, he pointed out the fundamental differences in the purposes of pedological studies. The bourgeois Pedology was testing "in order to exploit individuals and use them to their advantage," whilst in Russia "the interests of each individual would come first and it was important to enrich people's knowledge and skills, without which they would not be able to become great communists" [42].

As a result, work on Developmental Psychology ceased for many years. Only in 1948, works on Child Psychology by Ananjev and Leontjev started to appear [2,19].

Many pedologists led difficult lives. For example, Nechaev was convicted of Anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda and deported to Kazakhstan in 1935. He spent the last days of his life in a small town called Semipalatinsk and died in 1948. Zalkind loyally served the party and the government, criticizing pedologists and their works. However, having read the new regulation of 1936 in the newspaper, he died of a heart attack on his way home.

3. The Reasons for the Elimination of Pedology In Russia

Pedology as a science was gradually nearing its crisis, not only because of ideological pressure from the Bolshevik Party. Just like any other newly emerging science, Pedology had a number of unresolved methodological problems. This was stated by Vygotsky in his report during the joint Meeting of Psychotechnicians in 1931. Vygotsky believed radical empiricism to be the main cause of the crisis and the end of Pedology in the West and in America. He believed that Pedology as a single independent science of child development can only form methodologically and practically through the dialectical and materialist understanding of its subject. Vygotsky identified two criteria for defining the subject of Pedology:

1. Complexity as a necessity in understanding of the inner structural processes of child development.
2. "Development" the meaning of which was interpreted by Vygotsky not from the pure genetic point of view, but as an explanatory principle, i.e. the development and its inner essence should serve as the research object of Pedology [35].

There are different hypotheses explaining the ban of Pedology as a science. According to one of them, Pedology ended its existence after the death of leading pedological experts - Basov, Vygotsky, Lazursky, Rossolimo [8,21]. Some authors assume that Pedology was banned because it was led by Nadezhda Krupskaya, who was very much hated by Stalin [1,21]. According to another hypothesis, pedologists tested Stalin's son, and gave his level of mental development a low score [5]. However, these hypotheses as admitted by the authors themselves had no actual evidence. I absolutely agree with

the opinion of Yaroshevsky, who said that the elimination of the entire scientific field was incorrectly explained by Stalin's whim or random circumstances of his personal life [37].

All pedological institutes were closed in 1936 after the new regulation took effect and pedologists themselves were sent away. All pedological publications were destroyed. The press began an active criticism of Pedology. For example, Ruskin wrote, that the poor level of diagnosis of children's intellectual development by unqualified pedologists resulted in the grade repetition becoming a mass phenomenon of the Soviet school.

In Leningrad, in school years 1935 to 1936, around 14% of 7 to 13 year old pupils stayed behind to repeat their secondary school grades. Ruskin wrote that "the main reason for grade retention was not the poor heredity or the circumstances of life, as considered by pedologist Blonsky, but the poor educational standards of teachers themselves". [23]. However, the accusations against Blonsky were unfounded. In Blonsky's report, called "Pupils repeating a year at school" during an All-Union Congress on the study of human behavior (1930), he specified a number of reasons for grade retention, such as: low IQ, poor health, reduced working capacity, younger age in comparison with their classmates, complex social environment. In addition, children who had been transferred from rural schools to the schools in the City were also lagging behind their peers. [6].

Blonsky suggested new directions in the fight against grade retention:

- Rationalization of the school system (the correct merger of classes, introduction to semester transfers: from one class to another, etc.);
- Effective organization of work with parents and extracurricular work with children;
- Preventive measures to improve the health of a child, good nutritional regime. [6].

In my opinion, a major contributor to pedological crisis was the fact that the work of pedologists in schools suffered from significant deficiencies. A lot of pedologists had little or no adequate education, as a result of which their research was of poor quality and their test results were flawed. The idea of formation of Pedology as a complex science that studied a child was ingenious; however it was lacking methodological elaboration. Even now, I believe there is a need in creating a structured science that would cover all areas of child's development as a whole. This is why I feel it is very important that we go back to the roots of the idea that laid at the base of the start of Pedology and re-think, re-use and re-create its concept, which will bring benefits to our current scientific knowledge and understanding of a child at its central point.

After Pedology ended its existence, its research findings in general were not utilised or implemented in any educational processes. We can relate to the main principles of Pedology underlined by Petrovsky that are in my opinion are very current and can be used in the modern science.

According to Petrovsky, Pedology was based on four main principles:

- The principle of the holistic approach to the study of the child, using data obtained from various sciences;
- The genetic principle, to include Vygotsky's proposed idea of the zone of proximal development;

- The principle of taking into consideration the social context, that is, the living conditions of the child;
- The principle of making a diagnosis of the level of a child's development with the purpose of providing the child and the child's parents with psychological assistance. [21].

4. Conclusion

It suffices to say that goals set by pedologists at the turn of the 20th century were too ahead of their time and, as a result, could not be achieved under the socio-economical conditions. The process of globalization and the conditions of a modern world have made it possible to create a complex science that would allow us to study a child and see the peculiarities of a child's development from different perspectives.

Many of the problems that psychologists have been trying to resolve nowadays were already present at the turn of the 20th century. The study of the history of Pedology teaches a modern psychologist to have a careful attitude towards a child, taking into account his mental capabilities. In the modern world, on the one hand, no one argues with the fact that a child's psyche is versatile and, consequently, we need to create necessary conditions for its further successful development. However, on the other hand, it is also important to remember that a child's mind has its limitations and, therefore, it requires a careful approach. Equally, this applies not only to psychology but also to many other sciences, for example ecology, where we tend to abuse limited natural resources and by doing so causing permanent damage to our planet, in the same way a child is driven to perform to the great expectations of his parents. I think that ideas of psychologists living in the past could perhaps be a source of inspiration for our present day debates. This will teach us to avoid repeating their mistakes and remembering their achievements. That is why we need to know their names and ideas. We are living an era in which the importance of historical knowledge must be highlighted more than ever before to enable us to move forward into the future.

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