

Dear 21st Century Educators,

I don't remember exactly when I said the made the following statement, which was repeated in print long after my death:

*To the naive mind, revolution and history seem incompatible. It believes that historical development continues as long as it follows a straight line. When a change comes, a break in the historical fabric, a leap—then this naive mind sees only catastrophe, a fall, a rupture; for the naive mind history ends until back again straight and narrow. The scientific mind, on the contrary, views revolution as the locomotive of history forging ahead at full speed; it regards the revolutionary epoch as a tangible, living embodiment of history. A revolution solves only those tasks which have been raised by history; this proposition holds true equally for revolution in general and for aspects of social and cultural life. (Quoted in Levitin, 1982, inside front cover)*

During my short life of 38 years, the locomotive of history was traveling at full speed. The Bolsheviks seized power in 1917 and there was so much to do to support the Revolution and to transform the culture, support people to develop and learn, and create a truly Marxist psychology. Although I didn't know how to do it (it wasn't knowable; it was only creatable) I knew it would require a new conception of science, of method, and of human beings. I did what I could, with my dedicated colleagues. And then I died.

Looking at where we've come in 2012, I see how naïve I was. Yes, I was aware, in the last decade of my life, how politics and ideology contaminated science and education in my country. But I never dreamed that in capitalist America schooling would become utterly and completely politicized. That creating new understandings and new kinds of practices of learning and development—some of them done in my name—would have so little impact on how schools function.

It seems I was correct about revolution solving those tasks raised by history. But I was mistaken in putting my faith in science. I didn't foresee what science would become—a religious worshipping of the ahistorical and acultural particular. I applaud those of you who affirm the philosophical and political power of the ontological socialness of human beings. Who insist that the creativity and joy of the learning-development dialectical unity of early childhood is a human right at any and all ages. And who recognize that this historical task cannot be solved by science “alone,” because it is a cultural and political task. I wish you the best.

Lev Vygotsky

From: [We Saved the Best for You—Letters of Hope, Imagination and Wisdom for 21st Century Educators](#) (editors [Tricia Kress](#) and [Robert Lake](#)) – a letter “from Lev Vygotsky” authored by Lois Holzman.