

THE PROBLEM WITH PROBLEMS

The western scientific worldview is filled with problems. I mean that literally - problems are the "stuff of life. People are socialized to see and understand themselves and others in terms of, and in the language of, problems. And with problems come- even if not always realized - solutions. In ordinary language, problems imply possible solutions just as questions imply possible answers. Identifying problems and coming up with solutions to them is the hallmark of good science, good education, good government, good diplomacy and good living. Problems are what we are taught to see; solutions are what we are taught to search for. This way of seeing and mode of thinking might be needed to fix cars and build houses, but there is little evidence that they are effective when it comes to human development issues, such as raising children, living peacefully or eliminating poverty. And yet, the problem-solution paradigm prevails, overdetermining and severely limiting the human capacity to continuously create the world. The paradigm has become the problem.

Vygotsky's tool-and-result method provides a way out of the problem (but not a solution). For the methodology with which to tackle a world filled with problems is an instrumental one. Tool for result methodology is the epistemological counterpart to the ontology of problems and solution; it is essentially a problem-solving approach. In contrast, tool-and-result methodology rejects this way of viewing and living in the world, in favor of a more unified, emergent and continuous process approach.

Nowhere are problems and paradigms more misplaced than in the practice of psychotherapy, an institution dominated by the problematizing of emotional life/activity. For the patient/client, going to a therapist means that something is wrong, and s/he will be judged according to her or his "presenting problem." For the mainstream psychotherapist, the task is to find the solution to the problem, first by naming it and then by going through with the patient/client a process of discovering the cause or source of the problem, by prescribing medication or by some combination of the two. Institutionalized psychotherapy is so organized around problems that if you do not have one that is identifiable according to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, you can be denied treatment. (One example that has received popular media coverage is Ednos, which stands for "eating disorder not otherwise specified," as reported on in the *New York Times* article entitled, "Sorry. Your Eating Disorder Doesn't Meet Our Criteria" on November 30, 2004 by Henig.)

While there has been much criticism of the insistence on diagnosis as a requirement for psychotherapy, including pleas to abandon the medical model and view psychotherapy as an art and not a science, there is less critical discussion on the problem-solution paradigm that underlies it. (Pointing out that the person is not the problem, but "has" a problem for example, does not deny the problem-solution paradigm. Orientation.) I suspect that the cognitive bias is at play here, as the problem-solution paradigm is, essentially, a cognitive model of emotionality. As I will show in Chapter 2, Vygotsky's attempt to circumvent cognition-emotion dualism inspired the further development of the tool-and-result methodology of social therapy