

Vygotsky 1: Introduction, Background

# Vygotsky in the Classroom



Cultural-Historical Activity Theory in Teaching.  
Dr. Natalia Gajdamaschko, October 6, VCC, Vancouver, Canada.

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# In Memory, Gita



# Cultural, Historical and Instrumental Psychology

- Vygotsky liked to call his approach "cultural," "historical", or "instrumental" psychology. Each term reflected a different feature of the new approach to psychology that he proposed. Each emphasized different sources of the general mechanism by which society and social history mold the structure of those forms of activity that distinguish man from his animal neighbors.
- "Instrumental" referred to the basically mediated nature of all complex psychological functions. Unlike basic reflexes, which can be characterized by a stimulus-response process, higher functions incorporate auxiliary stimuli, which are typically produced by the person himself.
- The "cultural" aspect of Vygotsky's theory involved the socially structured ways in which society organizes the kinds of tasks that the growing child faces and the kinds of tools, both mental and physical, that the young child is provided to master those tasks. One of the key tools invented by mankind is language, and Vygotsky placed special emphasis on the role of language in the organization and development of thought processes.

(A.R. Luria, The Making of Mind)

## ***Law of Cultural Development***

“Any function in the child’s cultural development appears on stage twice, on two planes: First it appears on the social plane, then on the psychological, first among people as an interpsychological category and then within the child as an intrapsychological category” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 57).

Cole, M. & Gajdamaschko, N. (2010). Lev Vygotsky and context: Toward a resolution of theoretical disputes. In *Sociocultural Perspectives in Psychology: Constitutive, Strongly Relational Approaches*. S. Kirchner & J. Martin (eds). SUNY University Press (Palgrave)

Cole, M. & Gajdamaschko, N. (2007). Vygotsky and culture. In *The Cambridge Companion to Vygotsky*. H. Daniels, J. Wertsch & M. Cole (eds), Cambridge University Press.

## ***Development, Crisis of Development and “Conversations with the Future” in my Classroom***

For Vygotsky, crises in a student’s development reflects dialectical contradictions between the student’s immature appropriation of cultural tools within her or his actual level of development and future culturally appropriate way of dealing with the situation in proximal, future development of the student.

Cole, M. & Gajdamaschko, N. (2009). The concept of development in cultural-historical activity theory: Vertical and horizontal. In *Learning and Expanding with Activity Theory*. Sannino, A., Daniels, H. & Gutierrez, K (eds). Cambridge University Press.

## ***Written language as cultural tool, teaching and dialog***

- Vygotsky considered written language as a special cultural tool which requires abstract, voluntary and conscious efforts and thus can facilitate conceptual development in learning activities.
- The psychological functions on which written speech is based have not even begun to develop in the proper sense when instruction in writing starts. It must build on barely emerging immature processes (1989, p.183)
- Therefore, dialogue is an essential part of my classroom (whether in class or on WebCT)

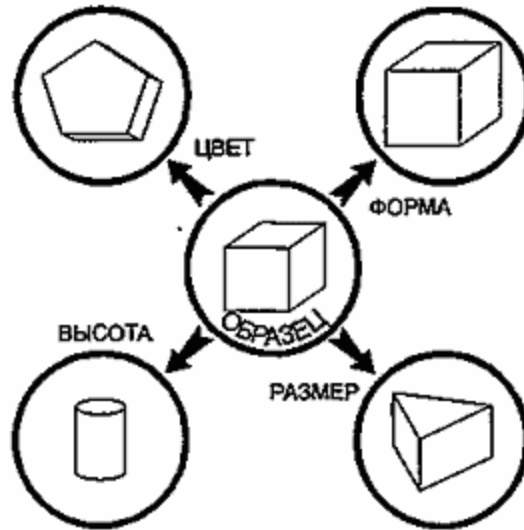
Egan, K. & Gajdamaschko, N. (2003). Some cognitive tools of literacy. In *Vygotsky's Theory of Education in Cultural Context*. A.Kozulin and others (eds). Cambridge University Press.

# Written, Inner and Oral Speech

The development of writing does not repeat the developmental history of speaking. Written speech is a separate linguistic function, differing from oral speech in both structure and mode of functioning.

Inner speech is condensed, abbreviated speech. Written speech is deployed to its fullest extent, more complete than oral speech. Inner speech is almost entirely predicative because the situation, the subject of thought, is always known to the thinker.

# The Role of Language in Thought Development (part 1)



# **The Role of Language in Thought Development (part 2)**

- Everyday and Scientific Concepts
- Zone of Proximal Development
- Role of Language in Instruction

# Abstract and Concrete in Concept Development

- Scientific concepts require focusing on unobservable abstract features that are difficult to derive from everyday practice, their acquisition depends on quality of instruction.
- In Vygotsky, dialectical logic abstract and concrete are reversed categories (compared to Piagetian formal logic).

## Further Study...

For more information about Vygotsky's Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), please visit <http://vimeo.com/groups/39473>

To find out about SFU's upcoming Master of Education program in Post-Secondary Curriculum and Instruction that focuses on Vygotsky's educational theory, please visit <http://cgp.educ.sfu.ca> or email Dr. Gajdamaschko at [nataliag@sfu.ca](mailto:nataliag@sfu.ca)