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Arif, Rabia Muhammad

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Vygotsky, the Known, the Unknown, and the Misrepresented: Revisionism in Vygotsky Studies.

Rabia Muhammad Arif

Student number: 1390776

A dissertation submitted to the School of Education,
Faculty of Humanities,
University of the Witwatersrand,
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Master of Education (MEd) - *by Dissertation*

Supervised by:
Professor Dominic Griffiths

Johannesburg, South Africa

[Ethics Waiver Letter Number: HRECNMW24/08/01]

Declaration

I, Rabia Muhammad Arif (Student Number: 1390776), declare that the dissertation titled "*Vygotsky, the Known, the Unknown, and the Misrepresented: Revisionism in Vygotsky Studies*" is composed entirely by myself and it is a result of my own unaided work.

This dissertation is submitted solely for the degree of Master of Education at the Wits School of Education, Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand. It has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

I have conducted this research per the University's Research Ethics Guidelines and obtained the necessary ethical approval (Waiver letter number: HRECNMW24/08/01).

Signed:



Rabia Muhammad Arif

17 March 2025

Abstract

This dissertation critically examines the historical, ideological, and conceptual forces that have shaped the reception and interpretation of Lev Vygotsky's work. By revisiting his original texts and situating his ideas within their proper historical and theoretical contexts, the study challenges the dominant Westernized interpretations that have often obscured his true legacy. The dissertation explores the historical suppression and piecemeal translation of Vygotsky's writings, critiques the revisionist movement in Vygotskian studies, and deconstructs key concepts such as *obuchenie* (instruction), the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), mediation, and scaffolding, which have been mistranslated or misattributed in Western scholarship. It dedicates an entire chapter to the exposition of Vygotsky's original theory of Cultural-Historical Psychology, highlighting its developmental nature and transformative processes, while also uncovering often-overlooked dimensions such as *vospitaniye* (upbringing), *perezhivanie* (experience), and defectology. The study concludes by calling for a renewed focus on Vygotsky's original ideas, emphasizing their relevance for contemporary educational and psychological research, particularly in neuropsychology and inclusive education. By revisiting the past and correcting the misrepresented, this dissertation lays the groundwork for future research and application of Vygotsky's legacy.

Keywords: *Revisionism; Vygotsky Studies; Obuchenie; Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD); Scaffolding; Mediation; Higher Mental Functions; Cultural-Historical Psychology; Educational Psychology; Vospitaniye; Perezhivanie; Defectology*

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Introduction

i. Background of the Study

Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky (1896–1934) is widely regarded as one of the most influential yet misunderstood figures in psychology and education. His work, particularly in the field of Cultural-Historical Psychology, has profoundly influenced contemporary understandings of human development, cognitive development, and education. Despite his untimely death at the age of 37, Vygotsky's theoretical contributions have gained global recognition, largely through the translation and dissemination of his works in the West. However, the reception and interpretation of his ideas have been fraught with contestations, including mistranslations, misinterpretations, and ideological biases in the interpretation of his ideas, which have obscured the true depth and originality of his theoretical framework (Yasnitsky, 2012; Miller, 2011; Bulle, 2023).

Vygotsky's intellectual journey began in 1913, and his diverse pursuits – spanning literature, art, philosophy, and psychology – laid the foundation for his groundbreaking contributions to psychology. His seminal presentation at the Second All-Russian Congress of Psychoneurology in 1924 marked the beginning of his formal engagement with psychology, leading to his appointment at the Moscow Institute of Psychology. At this institute, Vygotsky, in collaboration with Alexander Luria and Alexei Leontiev developed a Marxist cultural psychology that sought to transcend the limitations of objectivist-materialist approaches to the human mind (Smet, 2015). However, political upheaval in the Soviet Union during the late 1920s and Vygotsky's premature death in 1934 left his theoretical framework incomplete, with many of his ideas only gaining prominence decades later through translations and publications in the West.

The translation and publication of Vygotsky's works, particularly in English, have played a pivotal role in popularizing his ideas. Key texts such as *Thought and Language* (1962; 1986; 2012), *Mind in Society* (1978), and *The Collected Works of L.S. Vygotsky* (1987; 1993; 1997; 1997a; 1998; 1999) have become foundational in psychological and educational research. However, scholars such as Yasnitsky (2009), Miller (2011), and Dafermos (2016), and others, have raised significant concerns about the accuracy and reliability of these texts. One example is the book *Mind in Society* which was not written or published by Vygotsky himself but was alterations of fragments of Vygotsky's writings that have led to mistranslations and misinterpretations of his original ideas. Similarly, what is considered to be Vygotsky's seminal

work, *Thought and Language* which was written over a number of years was not published during Vygotsky's lifetime.

These concerns have given rise to a 'Revisionist Revolution in Vygotsky Studies', spearheaded by scholars such as Yasnitsky and van der Veer (2016). These scholars argue for a critical reappraisal of Vygotsky's legacy, emphasizing the need to revisit his original texts and situate his ideas within their proper historical and theoretical contexts. This revisionist approach seeks to deconstruct dominant interpretations of Vygotsky's work, particularly those that have been shaped by Cold War ideologies and the 'Americanization' of his ideas. By doing so, revisionism aims to uncover a more accurate and nuanced understanding of Vygotsky's contributions, free from the biases and distortions that have characterized much of the existing literature (Yasnitsky & van der Veer, 2016; Zavershneva, 2010).

The incomplete and fragmented nature of Vygotsky's original works has further complicated the reception and interpretation of his ideas. While efforts have been made to compile a definitive and comprehensive collection of his works – such as the planned *Complete Collected Works of L.S. Vygotsky* – these efforts have yet to come to fruition (Zavershneva, 2010; Yasnitsky, 2012; Barrs, 2022). The absence of a reliable and unaltered collection of Vygotsky's texts has perpetuated the reliance on problematic translations and interpretations, underscoring the need for a critical and revisionist approach to Vygotsky studies (Zavershneva, 2010; Yasnitsky, 2012).

This dissertation seeks to address these challenges by critically examining the historical, ideological, and conceptual forces that have shaped the reception and interpretation of Vygotsky's work. By revisiting the past and correcting the misrepresented, this dissertation aims to lay the groundwork for a more accurate and nuanced understanding of Vygotsky's legacy, emphasizing its relevance for contemporary educational and psychological research.

ii. **Problem Statement**

Despite the growing body of research on Lev Vygotsky's theoretical contributions, contemporary understandings of his work in psychological and educational research remain deeply problematic. These misunderstandings stem from the reliance on extant translations and edited compilations, such as *Thought and Language* (1962; 1986; 2012), *Mind in Society* (1978), and *The Collected Works of L.S. Vygotsky* (1987; 1993; 1997; 1997a; 1998; 1999).

These widely circulated texts have not only introduced mistranslations but have also significantly altered, and at times, distorted key Vygotskian concepts. As a result, numerous ideas that have been attributed to Vygotsky – such as mediation, scaffolding, and the zone of proximal development (ZPD) – bear little resemblance to his original formulations.

A fundamental issue in Vygotskian scholarship is the misrepresentation of his work as a theory of learning rather than *a theory of development*. Concepts such as Vygotsky's *obuchenie*, which was intended to signify instruction as a mechanism in the development of higher mental functions, have been mistranslated as 'learning,' leading to the commonly accepted, but erroneous assumption that Vygotsky's theory is one related to learning rather than development. Similarly, the concept of mediation, while vital to Vygotsky's instrumental method phase theorising, has been misinterpreted as "teaching". Furthermore, the reduction of Vygotsky's conception of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) to a notion of "assisted learning" has stripped it of its developmental significance, reinforcing misconceptions about the nature of cognitive growth in Vygotskian theory.

The misattributions extend further with the integration of scaffolding into Vygotskian discourse. Although scaffolding was conceptualized by Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976) as a metaphor for tutoring, it has been linked to Vygotsky's ZPD, primarily through the work of Cazden (1979). This fusion has led to the proliferation of an instructional model that is widely accepted yet fundamentally misaligned with Vygotsky's cultural-historical approach. These distortions, compounded by decades of scholarly reliance on inaccurate texts, have solidified a dominant yet flawed Vygotsky narrative in educational research.

The delay in the publication of *The Complete Collected Works of L.S. Vygotsky*, which aims to provide an accurate and unaltered compilation of his original manuscripts, has further exacerbated these issues. Without access to a definitive and comprehensive collection of Vygotsky's works, researchers and educators continue to rely on problematic texts that do not accurately represent his theoretical ideas.

Given these pervasive misconceptions, this dissertation seeks to critically analyse the theoretical inconsistencies that have emerged in Vygotsky studies, identifying key misrepresentations and contextualizing them within Vygotsky's broader cultural-historical framework. This dissertation argues that Vygotsky's original ideas must be recovered and reinterpreted in light of archival research and recent scholarship that more accurately reflects his theoretical legacy. By addressing these discrepancies, this dissertation further intends to

contribute to a more nuanced and historically grounded understanding of Vygotsky's work, enabling future research to move beyond misinterpretations and towards a more authentic understanding and application of his theories in education and psychology.

iii. Aim of the Study

This dissertation aims to critically reassess Lev Vygotsky's theoretical contributions by tracing the historical evolution and misinterpretations of his work. It argues that Vygotsky's ideas have been systematically misrepresented due to flawed translations, selective omissions, and later scholarly reinterpretations, leading to distortions in how his theories are understood and applied in psychology and education. In particular, the dissertation examines how Vygotsky's theory has been mislabelled as "social" rather than cultural-historical and how key concepts such as mediation, the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), and scaffolding have been fundamentally distorted or misattributed.

By employing revisionist critiques and insights from original archival material, the dissertation seeks to rectify these anomalies and restore Vygotsky's ideas within their original theoretical framework. The study will also explore lesser-known aspects of Vygotsky's work, such as *vospitaniye*, *perezhivanie*, and defectology, to offer a more comprehensive understanding of his theory. Ultimately, this research aims to contribute to the advancement of cultural-historical psychology by providing a more accurate and integrated interpretation of Vygotsky's developmental approach.

iv. Research Objectives

In view of the aims stated above, this dissertation intends to:

- investigate the historical trajectory of Vygotsky's published works, examining how editorial interventions, mistranslations, and omissions have shaped dominant interpretations in psychology and education.
- critically analyse key Vygotskian concepts that have been misrepresented, extended, or misattributed in educational research, with particular focus on the distinction between Vygotsky's original ideas and later scholarly interpretations.

- interrogate the problematic Westernized interpretations of Vygotsky's theory, contrasting them with Russian perspectives and newly available archival materials.
- explore the implications of Vygotsky's shift from individually developed psychological functions to a holistic system of interconnected higher mental functions, considering his later works such as *On Psychological Systems*.
- examine generally overlooked concepts in Vygotsky's work, such as *vospitaniye*, *perezhivanie*, and defectology, and assess their significance in understanding the full scope of his cultural-historical psychology.
- propose a more accurate theoretical framework that restores Vygotsky's developmental ideas to their original complexity, offering new pathways for research and application in psychology and education.

v. Research Questions

Key Question:

The key question of this dissertation is,

"How have misinterpretations and misattributions in the publication history of Vygotsky's works shaped contemporary Vygotskian scholarship, and how can a revisionist approach provide a more accurate understanding of his cultural-historical psychology?"

To address this question a number of sub-questions needs to be addressed:

Sub-Questions:

a) How have editorial modifications, mistranslations, and omissions in the publication trajectory of Vygotsky's works contributed to distortions in how his ideas are understood?
b) What are the key misrepresented or misattributed concepts in Vygotskian educational research, and how do they differ from Vygotsky's original theoretical framework?
c) How has the Western reception of Vygotsky's ideas diverged from Russian interpretations, and what can newly available archival material reveal about the original intent behind his theoretical constructs?

d) What is the significance of Vygotsky's later theoretical shift toward a systemic understanding of higher mental functions, and how does this alter our view of his work?
e) How do Vygotsky's overlooked concepts, such as *vospitaniye*, *perezhivanie*, and defectology, contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of his cultural-historical theory?
f) In what ways can a revised understanding of Vygotsky's theory inform and improve contemporary psychological and educational research?

vi. Rationale of the Study

Vygotsky's theoretical ideas continue to shape contemporary educational research, particularly in teacher education, psychology, and the learning sciences. Vygotskian concepts – such as mediation, *obuchenie*, the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), and scaffolding – are widely cited and applied in teacher training and pedagogical models (Newman & Latifi, 2021; Davin & Kushki, 2022). However, much of what is recognized today as Vygotskian theory is based on a limited selection of translated texts—such as *Thought and Language* (1962; 1986; 2012), *Mind in Society* (1978), and *The Collected Works of L.S. Vygotsky* (1987; 1993; 1997; 1997a; 1998; 1999) – that were edited, reconstructed, and translated posthumously. These texts, while instrumental in introducing Vygotsky's ideas to a global audience, have introduced significant distortions, mistranslations, and omissions that diverge from his original theoretical intent (Yasnitsky, 2012; Miller, 2011; Bulle, 2023).

The widespread acceptance of these misinterpretations has profound implications for educational theory and practice. For instance, the concept of scaffolding, frequently linked to Vygotsky, was never part of his theoretical vocabulary, yet it has been integrated into teacher education as though it were central to his framework (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976; Cazden, 1979). Similarly, *obuchenie*, which Vygotsky used to describe the dialectical relationship between instruction and development, has been mistranslated as 'learning', reinforcing the misconception that Vygotsky's work constitutes a theory of learning rather than a theory of development. These distortions not only misrepresent Vygotsky's original ideas but also compromise the accuracy of instructional practices that claim to be based on Vygotskian principles.

Scholars within the revisionist school of thought, such as Yasnitsky and van der Veer (2016), have demonstrated how editorial modifications, omissions, and selective interpretations have contributed to an incomplete and, at times, misleading view of Vygotsky's legacy. The release of new archival materials, including previously unpublished manuscripts and notebooks, offers an unprecedented opportunity to reconstruct a more accurate representation of his work. This dissertation aligns with the revisionist critique by systematically identifying and deconstructing the dominant yet problematic interpretations of Vygotsky's theoretical contributions, particularly those most relevant to education.

Beyond merely correcting past misinterpretations, this research aims to reintegrate Vygotsky's ideas into their proper cultural-historical framework. This includes revisiting overlooked concepts such as *vospitaniye* (upbringing), *perezhivanie* (emotional experience), and defectology, which offer deeper insights into the developmental and systemic nature of his theory. These concepts, though less prominent in Western scholarship, are integral to understanding the full scope of Vygotsky's Cultural-Historical Psychology. By restoring these elements, this study not only enhances our understanding of Vygotsky's work but also provides a more solid foundation for its continued application in contemporary psychological and educational research.

The implications of this research extend beyond theoretical clarification. By addressing the distortions and misinterpretations that have shaped contemporary Vygotskian scholarship, this dissertation seeks to improve the practical application of his ideas in educational settings. For example, a more accurate understanding of the ZPD as a means for identifying developing higher mental functions rather than a mere mechanism for assisted learning can inform more effective teaching strategies. Similarly, revisiting *obuchenie* as instruction rather than learning can reshape curriculum design and teacher training programs to better align with Vygotsky's original intent.

In conclusion, this study is motivated by the urgent need to address the misinterpretations and misattributions that have shaped the contemporary understanding of Vygotsky's work. By employing a revisionist approach and engaging with newly available archival materials, this dissertation aims to restore the integrity of Vygotsky's theoretical legacy and highlight its continued relevance for advancing psychological and educational research. Through this critical reappraisal, the study seeks to ensure that Vygotsky's ideas are applied in ways that are both authentic and transformative, paving the way for future advancements in the field.

Chapter One

Understanding Vygotsky Through History

The Russian psychologist, Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky (1896 – 1934), has been hailed as a heroic pioneer in developmental psychology. Despite Vygotsky's untimely death at age 37, which left his groundbreaking theoretical developments incomplete, his works have profoundly influenced Western psychological research. To understand this influence, it is necessary to consider that his legacy emerged within a complicated historical context, and the critical comprehension of Vygotsky's works requires an exploration of this complex historical context. Consequently, this chapter examines the significant influence of the historical context in the Soviet Union and the West (especially America) on the reception of Vygotsky's writings, particularly focusing on the interplay of Vygotsky's premature passing; the strong claim of the suppression of his writings within the Soviet Union; the emergence of some of his writing in Western scholarship during the Cold War era; and the ideological divides between the Soviet Union and the Western powers which may have led, consciously or unconsciously, to potential biases in the reception and interpretation of his works. Furthermore, the chapter will also explore how the piecemeal translation and publication of Vygotsky's writings in English, influenced by these historical factors, gained significant traction in contemporary psychological and educational research and practice.

Vygotsky: The Short Life of a 'Genius' in a Hurry (1896 – 1934)

Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky, whose real name has been identified as Lev Simkhovich Vygodskiy, was born to a Jewish family in 1896, in a Russian town called *Orsha* (in present-day Belarus) (Zavershneva & van der Veer, 2018a). Lev, who later changed his surname to 'Vygotsky', was born and raised during the reign of the Tsarist regime, which imposed many antisemitic policies on the Jewish population living in Russia at the time (Yasnitsky, 2018). In addition, there was a great deal of social and political upheaval during this period, including recurrent pogroms targeting the Jewish population living in Russia. Despite the challenges young Vygotsky faced as a Jew, he demonstrated diverse interests across various areas of study which contributed to the development of his thinking and writings (Yasnitsky, 2018). He was later labelled as "a young man in a hurry" (Simon, 1987, p. 609) – reflecting his relentless scholarly drive and the tragedy of his early demise. Vygotsky's many pursuits throughout his life were cut short by his untimely passing leaving the development of his ideas and writings

incomplete. The incompleteness of his numerous writings and theoretical ideas resulted from a lack of time to develop full-fledged theories and thus had a significant impact on the subsequent reception and interpretation of his works in Russia and the West. Situating Vygotsky's intellectual trajectory within the distinct historical context of his time in Russia offers an effective lens through which researchers can understand the extent of the development of his important ideas and writings.

Before Vygotsky was born, “the legal condition of the Jews, as well as their social and economic position” in Russia began deteriorating noticeably during the 1880s (Aronson, 1977, p. 348). Antisemitism was on the rise and by 1897, the country was experiencing “Judaeophobia”, which was “caused or augmented by fear of the economic, political, or demographic threat posed by the country's more than five million Jews” (Rogger, 1973, p. 26), and led to the introduction of antisemitic legislation. Due to the implementation of antisemitic policies in the major cities in Russia and with Judaeophobia on the rise, the *Vygodskii* family relocated to a small town called Gomel. This town, located between Minsk and Kiev, was one of the few places that despite official discrimination, allowed the Jewish community to settle without facing harsh restrictions (Yasnitsky, 2018). Although the *Vygodskii* family relocated to live under better conditions, they were still affected by the political upheaval in Russia and the antisemitic policies which not only spread through Tsarist Russia, but also across Western Europe (Wistrich, 1973).

Despite all the challenges Jews faced in Tsarist Russia, the *Vygodskii* family became a prominent part of the Jewish community in Gomel. Vygotsky’s mother, Cecilia Moiseyevna Vygodskaya, was an educator by profession and she dedicated her life to taking care of her family and nurturing her children, including her son Lev. Through her parenting, she instilled an interest and a liking for intellectually stimulating activities, by engaging in reading books, attending theatre, and having family discussions regarding literature and ongoing events in the community (van der Veer, 2007). According to van der Veer (2007, p. 14), “the adult Vygotsky’s knowledge of the Russian and international literature was outstanding” and the source of this knowledge can be attributed to his family environment and upbringing.

Vygotsky did not attend elementary school within the ‘Pale of Settlement’ (areas where the Jews were allowed to settle, including Gomel) and he was instead tutored privately (Levitin, 1982; van der Veer, 2007; Wertsch, 1985b; Yasnitsky, 2018). In this regard, it is worth considering the educational setting in Russia for the Jews at the time. This is crucial in

understanding how Vygotsky's academic life took shape and his mother's possible reasons for employing a private tutor to educate him – factors that significantly contributed to developing his thoughts and writings.

Due to rife antisemitism between 1880 and the 1900s, non-Jewish children were given preference over Jewish children for admission to schools in Russia. Owing to a lack of funding and government support, there was a severe shortage of schools in many Jewish communities, and these schools only existed in about 30% of the Jewish communities within the 'Pale'. In the communities that had access to schools, the attendance of school-age Jewish children was quite limited, possibly due to discrimination, hostile treatment, or lack of resources. In 1897, a census revealed that from a group of 2530 school-aged Jewish children, only 486 students were enrolled at a Russian or Jewish school. This constituted only 19% of Gomel's school-aged Jewish children (Rappaport, 2000). Despite a movement for educational reforms in the 1900s and larger financial allocations for schools, "it seemed that no amount of money could satisfy the needs of the schools" (Rappaport, 2000, p. 84). Funding appeared to be scattered amongst the large number of schools built by this time, which led to limited and insufficient financial support at the schools. Subsequently, this led to additional issues which affected the optimal and successful functioning of these schools (Rappaport, 2000). One could perhaps reflect on these difficult schooling conditions when considering why Vygotsky was tutored privately by Solomon Ashpiz (Kotik-Friedgut & Friedgut, 2008; Levitin, 1982; van der Veer, 2007; Wertsch, 1985b).

By contrast to a traditional school setting where a teacher's attention is divided amongst several individuals in the classroom, private individual tutoring "can be tailored to the needs of the student as it allows the tutor to develop a good knowledge of the student's strengths and weaknesses" (Ireson, 2004, p. 112). This individual one-on-one attention from the tutor to the student enables the student to learn and develop more advanced skills than the average school child (Ireson, 2004). If one considers the implications of private tutoring on an elementary child in a challenging social setting, and how advantageous private tutoring can be for a student in that position, then Vygotsky too could have been at an advantage compared to an average school-going child. Not only would the tutor be able to adjust his instruction to Vygotsky's individual needs, but Vygotsky would also be in a physically safer space within the walls of his home, enabling optimal learning and development, compared to the challenging conditions of the schools under Tsarist control.

Regardless of his mother's reasoning, Vygotsky's private tuition at the elementary level had a significant impact on his early academic progress and eventually contributed to the development of his popular theoretical notions. In this regard, Wertsch (1985b, p. 4) contends that Vygotsky "profited enormously from his early years of study with his tutor, Solomon Ashpiz" who "left his students, especially one as gifted as Lev Semenovich, with well-developed, inquisitive minds". Furthermore, Ashpiz's purported use of the Socratic dialog as a form of instruction (Eun, 2019) is notable as the Socratic method encourages critical thinking and higher-quality intelligence (Saran & Neisser, 2004). It is possible that Ashpiz's skills and unique tutoring style influenced the development of Vygotsky's critical thinking skills and played a significant role in shaping his intellectual development and trajectory.

A childhood friend of Vygotsky, Semyon Dobkin (in Levitin, 1982, p. 12) states that Vygotsky "was first and foremost a thinker in the fullest sense of the word". Vygotsky's critical thinking skills allowed him to view complex problems through "different, often opposite angles" (Levitin, 1982, p. 17), demonstrating his remarkably advanced capacity to integrate diverse ideas into cohesive theoretical ideas. This impressive intellectual ability, to synthesize various complex ideas, is evident in Vygotsky's later works in which he skilfully incorporates the different areas of psychological, historical, and cultural perspectives. Dobkin (in Levitin, 1982) also describes Vygotsky as "versatile" (p. 11), "gifted" (p. 12), and a "genius" (p. 19), suggesting that Dobkin's admiration and respect for Vygotsky was largely due to the depth of Vygotsky's intellectual abilities.

Vygotsky's intellectual and scholarly pursuits, as depicted by Dobkin (in Levitin, 1982), offer valuable insights into the foundations that propelled Vygotsky's development as a scholar and a professional, as well as the development of his writings. Several biographical accounts about Vygotsky's teenage years (1909 – 1915) describe the range of Vygotsky's academic and personal interests.

For example, according to Levitin (1982),

> in spite of his young age, Lev managed to bring some extraordinary elements, worth remembering in more detail, to our studies… Vygotsky was at the time very enthusiastic about the Hegelian view of history…and he applied it to analysing historical events. (p. 12)

Similarly, van der Veer (2014) contends that

> throughout his life [Vygotsky] would remain fascinated with poetry, prose and play… [His] knowledge of the Russian and international literature was outstanding and…[he] would often quote fragments from poems, novels and plays. As an adolescent he became infatuated with Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. (p. 14)

Supporting this, Yasnitsky (2014) writes that

> being raised in a prosperous secular Jewish family, Vygotsky received extensive training in a wide range of subjects, but was leaning towards literature, arts, theatre, the history of Jewish people and culture. (p. 2)

Furthermore, Yasnitsky (2018) maintains that

> the interests of the teenage Vygodskii (1909–1915) were diverse and, in addition to the arts, literature and history, included collecting stamps, playing chess and corresponding worldwide in Esperanto – the artificial language created in the second half of the 19th century with the hopes of introducing a new means of international communication. Yet, perhaps the most long-lasting and all-embracing passion of the young Vygodskii was the culture and the history of Jews, their identity as a nation and their future as a cultural entity. (p. 6)

The foregoing biographical accounts regarding Vygotsky's early years reveal an impressionable teenager whose intellectual curiosity exceeded traditional areas of interest. His study of the Hegelian dialectical process (Levitin, 1982) indicates his early interest in philosophy, alongside his avid passion for literature (van der Veer, 2014). Additionally, Vygotsky's varied interests spanned across history, the arts, and even foreign languages (Yasnitsky, 2018). Notably, Vygotsky's concern with his Jewish background and identity (Yasnitsky, 2014) likely influenced his later theoretical ideas and developments, as it shaped his personal experiences, intellectual environment, and the cultural lens through which he viewed human development. This wide-ranging intellectual predisposition is indicative of a mind that actively sought connections, similarities, or even disparities across seemingly unrelated areas of study and research. While Vygotsky did not explicitly write about his background and environmental influences in relation to his theories, these experiences contributed to his thinking and deeper understanding of the dynamic relationships between an individual and their socio-cultural historical environments (explored in the later chapters).

Following Vygotsky's formative years, his university education was greatly influenced by the intellectual and social constraints imposed by the antisemitic Tsarist regime, which enforced a quota on Jewish university enrolment. This, subsequently, prompted him to pursue a variety of professional areas of specialization, which led to the development of varied academic pursuits. This academic trajectory consisted of several professions and intellectual endeavours, including medicine, law, psychology, special education (defectology), and child development (paedology). The multitude of these occupations played a significant role in how Vygotsky, a "novice turned into an expert", developed a series of remarkable works (van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991, p. 2). A comprehensive analysis of Vygotsky's academic and intellectual trajectory in the context of Soviet history (which considers both the scope of his intellectual interests as well as his subsequent affiliation with psychological and special education research) is essential for understanding how his pioneering works developed.

Due to the continued antisemitism in Russia, Vygotsky's admission to a university was not easy. Despite the odds and the introduction of the Jewish quota – which limited the Jews' admission into tertiary education and prevented them from becoming civil servants – Vygotsky became one of the fortunate few who was admitted into the University of Moscow by winning a ballot (van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991). To fulfil his parents' desire that he enrolled in the field of medicine, for "one month in 1913 Vygotsky actually studied medicine. However, he then switched to law, which offered the opportunity to become an attorney and to live outside the Pale" (van der Veer, 2014, p. 17). Additionally, he also attended other courses like history, philosophy (van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991), and psychology at the Shanyavsky University (van der Veer, 2014).

Significantly, Shanyavsky University was a non-governmental and 'free' university, which did not have any formal recognition or funding by the Soviet government, and as a result, could not administer formally recognized degrees. However, it played an important role in fostering intellectual growth during a time of significant social and political changes as Tsarist Russia transformed into the Soviet Union. The university achieved this through allowing many radical academics, who were previously expelled from other universities, e.g., Moscow University (Kassow, 1976), to advance their intellectual growth and continue their studies outside state-controlled systems. At this university, the psychology classes attended by Vygotsky are assumed to have been taught by a professor who later became a leading figure in Marxist psychology (van der Veer, 2014). This is particularly significant as Vygotsky's cultural-historical theoretical ideas were grounded in Marxist thinking (Jones & Magalhães, 2020; Sève,

2021), and it could have been Vygotsky's attendance at Shanyavsky University that possibly inspired these ideas and theoretical developments.

At the beginning of 1917, the year Vygotsky turned 18, significant developments occurred in Russia. During the First World War, the country was experiencing substantial political and social turmoil due to military losses, prolonged political unrest and fear, as well as financial difficulties. The Russian government later referred to these events as the February Revolution, which was followed by widespread protests, social instability, an open rebellion, and subsequently, the October Revolution (Yasnitsky, 2018). Although there is insufficient evidence to indicate that Vygotsky was directly affected by the chaos that prevailed during the 1917 revolutions (Yasnitsky, 2018), one can assume that this revolutionary time significantly affected the general population, and consequently, would have had a profound impact on Vygotsky as well. After the political uprising in October, the status quo of Russian society experienced a drastic change, and communist ideas eventually prevailed under the new government. This "gave access to power, administration, and social advancement to large sections of the population of the country, such as the Jewish minority in the Russian Empire" (Yasnitsky & van der Veer, 2016, pp. 4–5). As these opportunities benefitted the Jewish community, it would have created new opportunities for Vygotsky too, who would have had the chance to advance his academic and professional development beyond the 'Pale' (van der Veer, 2007).

After a few years in Moscow, Vygotsky returned to Gomel in 1917 and became involved in teaching. According to Yasnitsky (2018), Vygotsky held several positions in newly built educational institutions. These positions consisted of evening classes for the illiterate, schools for workers, workshops for peasant activists, and summer schools for kindergarten and elementary school educators, to advance their minimal training in literacy skills. As the wages for all these temporary jobs were quite low, Vygotsky took on concurrent multiple jobs at several institutions to earn an adequate income. At these jobs, Vygotsky taught a variety of subjects including languages, literature, philosophy and psychology, and "engaged with the education of impaired children, which encouraged him to construct a general theory of human development" (Smet, 2015, p. 13).

Following the 1917 revolutions, the Russian government "arguably provided a much richer testing ground for the idea of the productive melding of science and art" as well as "ambitious research agendas" to transform Russia and the world than would have previously existed under

the Tsarist regime (Vassilieva, 2019, p. 24). Considering that Vygotsky was Jewish, he would have felt ecstatic that legislation targeting Jews had been abolished, resulting in an opportunity for him to accomplish his academic and intellectual goals (van der Veer, 2007). It was during 1917, that Vygotsky "published an essay in which he welcomed liberation from the oppressive power" (van der Veer, 2014, p. 16). According to van der Veer and Valsiner (1991, p. 8), Vygotsky had written "four literary reviews in 1916 and approximately twice as many papers in 1924". However, excluding the 1917 essay, there is almost no evidence that his other publications were recorded during this time (van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991). This clarifies that the gap refers to the period between 1917 and 1924 and that the lack of recorded publications may be due to either their absence or their non-availability in historical records.

For fifteen years after the 1917 revolution, there was extensive progress in the development of scientific labs, research centres, and educational institutions in Russia (Vassilieva, 2019). As mentioned, during this time, Vygotsky, like many other intellectuals, became actively involved in conducting evening classes for people without formal education (van der Veer, 2007). In addition to these classes, he also delivered private lessons in Gomel (van der Veer, 2014) and

> around 1920 he [Vygotsky] managed to get a job as [a] cultural official in Gomel [...] In that capacity, he travelled all over Russia to bring the best theatrical companies, poets and novelists to Gomel. He also wrote weekly reviews of theatre performances for the local newspapers, co-founded a literary journal and a publishing house, both rather short-lived, and worked for the local Press Museum[…] In sum, Vygotsky displayed enormous activity in a great number of functions and jobs. They were all somehow connected to the goal of raising the cultural level of the public by making available high-quality education and the best of Russian and international culture. When we look at the topics that Vygotsky addressed in his numerous lectures and classes, we meet popular subjects (e.g. relativity theory), Russian literature, but also psychology and philosophy, the disciplines he got to know thoroughly at Shanyavsky University. (van der Veer, 2014, p. 21)

In 1923, Vygotsky's gradual transition from art to psychology became more apparent, after he was able to set up a laboratory at a school. With the assistance of his students, he was able to conduct minor investigations in the lab, explore previous psychological discoveries, and create original research studies. It was the findings from these studies that are assumed to be what led to Vygotsky's presentation at the 1924 *Second Psychoneurological Congress*, which took place

in Leningrad (van der Veer, 2014). This congress was considered "the most important forum at that time for Soviet scientists who worked in the general area of psychology" (Luria, 1979, p. 38). It was at this congress that Luria (1979) mentions meeting Vygotsky. In his autobiographical book *The Making of Mind* (1979), Alexander Luria (1902 – 1977) devotes a chapter to describing his first encounter with Vygotsky. Luria, known for his work in neuropsychology, described Vygotsky as a "genius" (Luria, 1979, p. 38). Reading this chapter (1979), one can detect a sense of awe in Luria's tone when he reminisces on the presentation delivered by Vygotsky at the congress. According to Luria (1979), Vygotsky effortlessly delivered complex ideas without notes or additional assistance which demonstrated his ability to dissect complex problems and foresee the future of psychology.

Although Vygotsky's biographies (van der Veer, 2007; van der Veer, 2014; van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991; Yasnitsky, 2011, 2014, 2018, 2019) do not confirm whether he specifically graduated as a psychologist, the biographies provide an account of his involvement in psychological research. This aligns with Luria's (1979) description, in which he discusses the details of Vygotsky's works on psychological ideas at the congress. Luria (1979) also reveals that it was this impressive delivery that led to the Institute of Psychology extending an invitation to Vygotsky to join their young team in Moscow. After joining the Institute of Psychology in 1924, Vygotsky was introduced to several prominent Soviet psychologists. His involvement in the Institute and exposure to numerous psychological works in progress, "undoubtedly played an important role in the development of Vygotsky's scientific thinking", which influenced his many theoretical ideas and writings (van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991, p. 44). In addition to his research at the Institute, he was also involved in researching various areas of study outside the Institute, which consisted of psychology, defectology, and paedology.

One of Vygotsky's most significant interests was the study of Defectology[1], which is defined as "the branch of science concerned with persons with handicaps such as blindness, deafness, or mental retardation" (van der Veer & Zavershneva, 2011, p. 459). His interest in the field of defectology led to his participation in the founding of the Institute of Defectology (van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991; Wertsch, 1985b) and by 1924, he was selected to be the Head of the Bureau for the Education of Physically and Mentally Disabled Children (van der Veer & Zavershneva, 2011). Through this opportunity and his concurrent involvement at the Institute

[1] The evidence for this claim can be seen in Vygotsky's correspondence where he always signed his letters "L.S. Vygotsky, Defectologist" (Yasnitsky, 2018).

of Psychology and the Institute of Defectology, he was motivated to work with several psychologists to establish theoretical ideas that linked the fields of defectology and paedology (van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991). At this point, his main aim was to explore the development of higher mental functions in children with 'defects'. Through psychological research on the genesis and possible development of these higher mental functions, Vygotsky wanted to develop theoretical notions or perhaps even a fully-fledged theory that would assist in overcoming developmental defects in these children and provide them with an opportunity to improve their lives (Yasnitsky, 2011). Vygotsky's works in defectology and paedology contributed to his professional development beyond general psychology. His engagement in the fields of defectology and paedology would have undoubtedly expanded his theoretical framework and made a major contribution to the development of his diverse writings.

In 1925, Vygotsky made his only trip to the West, "to represent the Soviet Union at the 8th International Conference on the Education of the Deaf, which took place in London" (van der Veer & Zavershneva, 2011, p. 458). A few months before the conference, the Soviet Union government received an invitation from the British government to choose and send a Soviet representative to this conference. To make the selection, officers of the highest ranks of the Ministry of Education in the Soviet Union appointed Vygotsky (van der Veer & Zavershneva, 2011). When selected, Vygotsky was given instructions by the Soviet officials, which stipulated how Vygotsky was to conduct himself at the conference and promote Soviet ideologies and principles (van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991; van der Veer & Zavershneva, 2011). Furthermore, he was required to submit a report to the Soviet authorities upon his return, providing details of his activities abroad (van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991).

Vygotsky crossed the Soviet borders to journey to a Western country when the Soviet authorities were actively promoting Soviet achievements and improving cultural diplomacy with some Western powers, particularly in Central Europe. In 1925, a Soviet organization called the 'VOKS' was founded to oversee Soviet-Western cultural diplomacy, promote Soviet achievements, and encourage communist ideologies in foreign nations. The VOKS were also involved in facilitating cultural exchanges between the Soviet Union and some Western European countries, by allowing Soviet professionals and artists to travel to the West and extending invitations to professionals from the West to come to the USSR (David-Fox, 2003). 1925 was a pivotal year in the Soviet Union's foreign policies, as the country moved from being an isolated, politically unsettled nation, to one that was rapidly developing and proud of its achievements. Although there is no evidence of Vygotsky's involvement with the VOKS,

his journey as a professional to London during this period aligned with the Soviet mission to promote cultural exchange and diplomacy with some Western nations, except for the United States. However, despite Vygotsky's travel to London, it is crucial to consider that at this point, "outside his home country, Vygotsky was, of course, completely unknown in any quality", and his works remained largely undiscovered (van der Veer & Zavershneva, 2011, p. 459).

Amid his many professional endeavours, early adulthood saw the start of Vygotsky's health struggles when he contracted tuberculosis (Luria, 1979; Yasnitsky, 2018). While the exact date of his diagnosis is unknown, the disease significantly impacted some of the most important years of the development of his thoughts and writings. One of Vygotsky's initial scholarly works entitled *The Psychology of Art*, which he worked on until 1925, was left incomplete due to his deteriorating health (Luria, 1979; Smagorinsky, 2011). He suffered from tuberculosis at the time and was confined to bed rest for months (Luria, 1979; van der Veer, 2007). The original copies of *The Psychology of Art* were lost, for unknown reasons, and recovered years later (Luria, 1979; van der Veer, 2007). It is the recovered manuscript that served as the basis for multiple subsequent publications. However, the recovered manuscript was found after a considerable amount of time had passed and is a posthumous Vygotskian text. Hence, its credibility, reliability and completeness could be questioned. According to van der Veer and Valsiner (1991), this manuscript, as well as the publications that followed, cannot be considered completely trustworthy due to the constant shifts in political tensions in the Soviet Union and the West. The radical shifts in the Soviet Union could have led to significant manipulations and alterations, and the possibility of these distortions need to be considered when referring to the rediscovered manuscript. Furthermore, one should also question the possibility that other missing notes and manuscripts could also have been lost during this time. Given the challenges in accessing Vygotsky's original writings, it is important to consider the impact of subsequent publications on the interpretation of his work, which were based on limited access to Vygotsky's original works. These later editions and translations have significantly influenced how Vygotsky's ideas have been understood and applied in psychological and educational research (van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991).

In 1926, Vygotsky suffered another attack of tuberculosis, leading to the further deterioration of his health (van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991). Despite facing significant health issues, his dedication to his research did not waiver, and he published a textbook called *Pedagogical Psychology*. The textbook, *Pedagogical Psychology*, has been considered "particularly relevant for a proper understanding of the development of Vygotsky's thinking", as this text presents

several theoretical ideas explored by Vygotsky (van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991, p. 49). The book, which resembled modern books utilised in contemporary psychological studies, was aimed at presenting students who wanted to become professional teachers with the psychological findings of the time. In this book, Vygotsky raised concerns regarding psychological issues and stated that "psychology was in a state of turmoil, lacking a unified approach and common concepts" (van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991, p. 49).

It was Vygotsky's concerns with the crisis of psychology that led him to write another manuscript between 1926-1927 (Hyman, 2012) titled *The Historical Sense of the Psychological Crisis* (Radzikhovskii & Khomskaya, 1982, p. 42). This manuscript, which was described as an "analysis of the crisis in psychology" (Daniels et al., 2007, p. 25) has been influential in the history and philosophy of psychology (Hyman, 2012). While the 'crisis of psychology' remains a complex area of study, Vygotsky's concern with this 'crisis' fostered "the ground for his systematic efforts to develop 'cultural-historical' psychology" (Hyman, 2012, p. 473). Although the 1926-1927 text only became available in 1982 to Russian scholars and was published in 1997 in English, it arguably marked a turning point for Vygotsky's concerns in the field of psychology and influenced the development of his theoretical notions in Cultural-Historical Psychology (Hyman, 2012). While it is unclear why the text was not published in his lifetime, its later release has played a significant role in understanding Cultural-Historical Psychology.

The Troika – A Union of Three

The posthumous publication of Vygotsky's works not only provided insight on the foundations of Cultural-Historical Psychology, but it also highlighted Vygotsky's aim to address pressing societal challenges through a Marxist-inspired scientific framework. Inspired by Marxism, and to provide solutions to the socio-political issues that arose in post-revolution Russia, Vygotsky was determined to develop a psychological theory that would contribute to scientific thinking and social transformation. During the 1920s, Vygotsky, along with his colleagues Alexandr Romanovich Luria and Aleksei Nikolaevitch Leontiev (members of the Institute of Psychology), purportedly formed a group called the *Troika* (Martins, 2013). Under the leadership of Vygotsky, the three psychologists "undertook a critical review of the history and current status of psychology in Russia and the rest of the world" and aimed to develop "a new, comprehensive approach to human psychological processes" (Luria, 1979, p. 40). The *Troika*,

together with five other students who were referred to as the *Pierteka*, formed the 'School of Vygotsky' (Yasnitsky & van der Veer, 2016). By 1931, some members of the School of Vygotsky, excluding Vygotsky himself, went to Kharkov, the capital of Ukraine, and formed the Kharkov School of Psychology, to constitute a new unit for further psychological research (Yasnitsky & van der Veer, 2016).

Vygotsky's collaboration with the *Troika*, particularly Luria, led to the development of his works in cultural-historical theory. In 1929, Vygotsky made a short trip to Soviet Uzbekistan in Central Asia, where he conducted various pilot studies. Although the nature of these studies and the results that these studies produced remain unclear, Vygotsky's involvement in Soviet Uzbekistan was followed by Luria's expedition to Soviet Uzbekistan in 1931 (Yasnitsky, 2018). Vygotsky's trip to Soviet Uzbekistan in 1929 likely influenced Luria's interest in the region as a fertile ground for psychological research in 1931, as "Luria's expedition meant a lot to both Vygotsky and Luria" (Yasnitsky, 2018, p. 95). Luria (1979) reveals that with Vygotsky's help, he designed a scientific experiment in Soviet Uzbekistan to study the correlation between prominent cultural changes, and how these changes influenced people's thinking and the development of their mental functions, in an illiterate society. The study continued in 1932 when Luria made a second trip to Uzbekistan, carried out a series of studies, and sent reports of these to Vygotsky in Moscow (Yasnitsky, 2018). Although this study was conducted between 1931 and 1933 during Vygotsky's lifetime, Luria continued to develop the data and eventually published a book in 1974 based on this study – long after Vygotsky's death in 1934 (Glozman, 2018). The book illustrates Luria's efforts to continue to expand Vygotsky's early theoretical notions and their subsequent development in the field of psychology.

In addition to providing support for Luria's research in Cultural-Historical Psychology, Vygotsky also produced a large volume of manuscripts for reviews, articles, and books between 1931 and 1934. He wrote these manuscripts and lectured at an "accelerating" and almost "frenetic pace" (Wertsch, 1985b, p. 13). During this time, Vygotsky

> edited and wrote a long introduction for the 1932 Russian translation of Piaget's volume *Le langage et la pensée chez l'enfant* (1923). His introduction was later to serve as the second chapter of his posthumous volume *Thinking and Speech* (1934). Vygotsky also wrote many other pieces, including 'The Diagnosis of Development and Pedological Clinics for Difficult Children' (1931a), 'The History of Development of Higher Mental Functions' (1931b), 'Lectures on Psychology' (1932), 'The Problem of Instruction and

> Cognitive Development during the School Years' (1934-b), 'Thought in Schizophrenia' (1934-C), as well as critical reviews and introductions to volumes by Bühler, Köhler, Gesell, Koffka, and Freud. (Wertsch, 1985, p. 13)

Despite his health issues, between 1924 and 1934 Vygotsky was involved in a large number of professional environments, such that "it would be tedious to list all the positions that Vygotsky held" during this time (Yasnitsky, 2018, p. 24). Interestingly, in 1931, Vygotsky reconsidered studying medicine due to his research with Luria on constituting new psychological theories. While serving as a lecturer of psychology, he enrolled as a student in medicine to achieve his goal of developing his research. Despite his frail condition during the last decade of his life, he still wrote about 200 articles and books. He persisted in working exceptionally hard despite his healthcare professionals' recommendations (van der Veer, 2007).

During the last few years of Vygotsky's life, his health deteriorated significantly as his tuberculosis attacks increased in frequency and severity. As a result, in 1934, at the young age of 37, Vygotsky passed away (Levitin, 1982; Prawat, 2000; Wertsch, 1985b). Despite a tragically short life, Vygotsky's contributions have significantly influenced our understanding of Cultural-Historical Psychology, child development, as well as the relationship between social interactions and cognitive development. Although Vygotsky was an incredibly resilient and determined person, and made many valuable contributions to psychological studies, his health issues undoubtedly impacted the development of his remarkable theoretical ideas. Due to the deterioration of his health and his premature passing, his theoretical developments were left unfinished and underdeveloped. While Vygotsky may have outlined his original ideas, his health and early demise did not allow him to explore these ideas further, nor to develop them completely. The daunting task of developing Vygotsky's works further and creating a cohesive and complete theoretical framework was left to Vygotsky's colleagues, followers, and other researchers, who attempted to put together his fragmented pieces of writing.

Another factor that contributed to the incompleteness of Vygotsky's works was the varied scope of his many interests, across several fields of study. While many researchers dedicate their lives to studying a single phenomenon, Vygotsky exhibited a multifaceted intellectual and professional curiosity. This is evident in his interests in history, poetry, theatre, arts, literature, philosophy, psychology, law, medicine, etc. While the vast scope of his interests undeniably influenced his thinking and writings, exploring these multiple areas of interest also meant that the amount of time Vygotsky would spend developing each theoretical idea was limited. The

underdevelopment and incompleteness of his ideas pose a dilemma to contemporary researchers in understanding the entirety of Vygotsky's works, as well as their application in psychology and education.

Vygotsky's early death, at a significant point of his career development, left his theoretical works unfinished, and this has raised many questions about the presentation of his works as if they were completely developed theories. Zavershneva & van der Veer (2018) claim that Vygotsky himself confessed to the incompleteness of his works on his deathbed, saying, "I will die at the summit like Moses, having glimpsed the promised land, but without setting foot in it" (2018, p. xxi). Here Zavershneva & van der Veer write "in these farewell words, we hear… that he did everything, or almost everything, that lay in his power", but he could not live long enough to see the completion of the development of his theoretical notions (Zavershneva & van der Veer, 2018, p. xxi). After his death it was his collaborators, and other scholars, who further developed his incomplete theoretical ideas, and contributed to popularizing him in contemporary psychological studies (Yasnitsky, 2011). His writings were also rediscovered and translated into other languages in the decades following his death , contributing to his posthumous fame in psychological and educational practice as researchers realised the profundity and distinctiveness of Vygotsky's theoretical ideas.

The 'Suppression' of Vygotsky's Ideas in the USSR After His Death

Following Vygotsky's death in 1934, his rise to fame in psychological and educational research was entangled with the volatile events of post-revolutionary Russia. In the 1930s, under the Stalin regime, the State imposed stringent administrative restrictions on academic networking, scientific workers, research mandates, and institutional architecture (Toassa, 2016). Yasnitsky (2009) contends that

> every text without exception produced from the mid-1930s until at least the early 1980s intended by its author for public use served the dual purposes of scientific knowledge production and exchange and, on the other hand, needed to conform with fairly strict agenda of Communist propaganda, and to express the loyalty to the Communist party ideology and its powerful bosses-patrons of science. (p. 98)

Yasnitsky (2009) further indicates that Communist propaganda severely censored the release of academic and research publications from the mid-1930s. This was just after Vygotsky's

death, and at a point where “Stalin's power became increasingly absolute” (Tucker, 1979, p. 348). Under Stalin's dictatorship and due to Stalinist propaganda, Vygotsky’s work was assumed[2] to be suppressed in the Soviet Union (Martins, 2013).

The early 1930s marked a turning point for the transformation and development of Soviet psychology. During this period, Soviet psychologists were required to base their psychological theoretical findings on the works of Marx, Engels and Lenin (Rieber et al., in Vygotsky, 1987). By contrast to the Marxism promoted in the 1930s, which emphasized dogmatic adherence to state ideology, Vygotsky’s Marxist views (explained later) aligned more closely with Western Marxist perspectives. As a result of the political climate and the requirements of the new Soviet Science, Vygotsky’s research (which consisted of psychoanalysis, *Gestalt* psychology, and the cross-cultural analysis of consciousness) was mislabelled anti-Marxist and flawed. Subsequently, Vygotsky’s research was undermined and suppressed in the Soviet Union (Rieber et al., in Vygotsky, 1987). Furthermore, Vygotsky’s research regarding the study of the mental processes of peasants in the Soviet republics portrayed peasants as mentally deficient, which violated the ban on attributing mental incompetence to peasants (Yasnitsky, 2011). Although there is no evidence to suggest that Vygotsky himself believed that he viewed all peasants as mentally deficient, his research in this area provided insights into the prevailing biases of the time, particularly regarding the rural populations. This occurred particularly at a time of the collectivisation of Soviet peasantry and agricultural development and became the official reason for the suppression of Vygotsky’s works in the 1930s (Rieber et al., in Vygotsky, 1987). Nonetheless, the extent to which Vygotsky's work was suppressed by Stalinist propaganda is an area of contention which requires careful examination. Although the traditional view claims Vygotsky's work was suppressed under Stalin's dictatorship, relatively recent research has challenged this generally accepted perspective. This discrepancy will be addressed in more substantive details later.

Although contemporary research is sceptical of the view that Vygotsky's work was suppressed because of Stalinist propaganda, it is unquestionable that the restrictive intellectual milieu of the Stalinist era posed considerable challenges to Vygotsky’s ideas being published and disseminated after he died in 1934. The relentless quest for power and ideological conservatism that characterized Stalin's government did not seem consistent with Vygotsky’s interests in the study of human development, human nature, and human consciousness (Daniels et al., 2007;

[2] This assumption has been challenged by some revisionists and will be addressed in the next chapter.

Tucker, 1979). Krementsov (1997, p. 4) describes the Stalinist state as a "dictator" that oppressed "scientists", who became "victims", who had to defend their independence to conduct and publish their research. Given Vygotsky's death, the suppression of his works due to Stalinist Science can be viewed as particularly tragic, as Vygotsky himself was unable to defend his theoretical ideas at the time.

Several researchers have endorsed "the Vygotsky-victimization narrative by noting a dramatic drop in Vygotsky's publication rate after his death, whereby from 1936 to 1956, none of Vygotsky's works was published within the Soviet Union" (Fraser & Yasnitsky, 2015, p. 138). According to Cole et al., (2006) the victimisation narrative was even supported by Vygotsky's daughter and his colleague, Luria – the man responsible for publishing Vygotsky's works after the ban was lifted in 1956. Despite the efforts to suppress Vygotsky's ideas, Cole et al., (2006) argue that in 1956, "thanks to Luria", the first of Vygotsky's manuscripts called *Selected Psychological Works* was published (p. 268). This book included a section called 'Thinking and Speech' and by 1960, again thanks to Luria, the second book called *The Development of Higher Mental Functions,* consisting of several unpublished manuscripts, was released (Cole et al., 2006, p. 268). Although Vygotsky's original Russian manuscript, *Thinking and Speech* was misplaced in 1934, it was only in 1962 that the English translation was published, titled *Thought and Language* (Ghassemzadeh, 2009; van der Veer & Zavershneva, 2018). Even though the 1962 version of *Thought and Language* eventually became an important publication for scholars researching Vygotsky's works, "it was not until the late 1970s that Vygotsky began to attract widespread attention among psychologists" (Cole, 1993, pp. 3–4).

Notwithstanding the scepticism[3] about Vygotsky's 'victimisation' narrative noted above, it is important to consider how this narrative influenced the reception of Vygotsky's ideas, especially in America. For example, in the introduction of *Thought and Language* (1962), Bruner speaks about the Stalinist suppression of Vygotsky's works which he labelled as the 'Vygotsky ban'. The suppression of Vygotsky's work during the period of the Vygotsky ban (approximately 1936 to 1956), followed by its subsequent resurgence in Western research from the 1970s onward, has become a widely accepted historical narrative (Cole, 1993; Fraser & Yasnitsky, 2015). Before exploring Vygotsky's rise in the West through English translations of his works, it is important to understand how Vygotsky, a Russian, initially gained the interest of Western scholars. This is especially significant as Vygotsky's theoretical ideas within

[3] Scepticism here refers to the extent of the posthumous suppression of his works in the Soviet Union.

Western psychology became the pivotal reason for his rise to fame in contemporary psychological and pedagogical research and practice (Doise et al., 1996).

The Reception of Vygotsky in the West – The Cold War and Beyond

Although Vygotsky's theoretical notions initially developed in the Soviet Union in the earlier years of the 20th century, the dissemination of his works experienced a surge in popularity in the West following World War II (1939-1945). While World War II did not directly affect the development of Vygotsky's ideas, it significantly influenced when and how his ideas became widely known and influential in the Western world. The reception of his works in the West should be placed in the context of a complex interplay of political, historical, and intellectual factors. After World War II an intense period of ideological differences and rivalry between the West and the Soviet Union led to the Cold War. As the Cold War progressed, there was a growing interest from the West to understand the successful intellectual and cultural traditions of the Soviet Union at the time. This curiosity, coupled with other factors (such as ideological differences, nuclear power, the Space Race, and the Education Race), affected the tense relationship between the USA and Soviet Union, and contributed to the increased attention of the West to Vygotsky's works. Thus, the Cold War climate created an interesting and unique context for the reception of Vygotsky's works in the West.

Although hostilities were brewing for some time between the USSR and the USA, it was after World War II that tensions worsened between the two superpowers. The Cold War, which primarily began due to the differences in political and economic ideologies between the USSR (a communist state) and the USA (a capitalist state), took a turn for the worse in 1947. Post-World War II alliances that were formed between the two superpowers became unstable, as they could not come to a mutual agreement over the future of their European spheres of interest. The instability between the superpowers was considered highly problematic as both superpowers were competing for supremacy and world dominance, by trying to gain control of influential European areas. At the time, communist Russia had established its control over Eastern Europe, and Western Europe was under capitalist American influence. The Americans were concerned with the economic collapse of the Western European sphere and feared that communist ideologies would spread over this region, resulting in the spread of Russian power. This fear, deeply embedded in ideological differences and coupled with the advancement of

nuclear power by both superpowers, heightened Cold War tensions (Leffler, 1984; Leffler & Painter, 2005).

In October 1957, the Cold War tensions further intensified due to the Russian launch of *Sputnik* (Zieger, 2004). "The USSR successfully launched *Sputnik* 1, the first artificial satellite to reach orbit, soon followed by *Sputnik* 2 that carried into space the first living being, the dog Laika" and by 1959, "the Soviet Union reached the Earth satellite [i.e., the moon] with their *Luna* probes E1 (which crashed into the lunar soil) and *Luna* E-2 (which orbited the moon taking photos)" (Devezas et al., 2012, p. 967). These Soviet achievements incited fear and debates in the US and began the *Space Race*. Due to the fear of falling behind in the global race for supremacy and success, both superpowers competed for technological prowess in space research and development (Devezas et al., 2012). However, the Americans acknowledged that they "grossly underestimated the remarkable capabilities" of the Russians and that the Russian accomplishments were a "wake-up call" for the Americans (Stuhlinger, 1999, p. 30).

Soviet advancements in technology, especially in the field of space exploration, caused a significant shift in American perceptions. The fear of losing power in the worldwide competition for dominance, commonly referred to as the 'Sputnik moment', prompted a crisis of confidence in America (Mieczkowski, 2013). Americans began to think they lost the space race to the Russians, resulting in America becoming a 'second power' and losing 'world prestige' (Mieczkowski, 2013). Due to the Russian success in the space race and its scientific developments, Americans considered Russia an 'educational titan'. The Americans also believed that their loss in the space race revealed that American science education, compared to their Russian counterparts, was severely limited. According to an American Navy official Rickover (in Mieczkowski, 2013, p. 156), "the principal race between the two countries was in education" and the country that triumphed in this race would become the dominant superpower. Alvarez (in Kennedy, 2005), an official at the University of California, stated that Soviet advancements in scientific research were so impressive that these advancements would lead the Western world in scientific research and developments.

The 'Education Race', as proposed by Rickover (in Mieczkowski, 2013), led to a surge in American interest in Soviet research and scholarly developments. To overcome the American crisis of confidence, and succeed in the education race against Russia, the Americans acknowledged a need for a highly educated American populace. Subsequently, special attention was paid to matters related to education, with the goal being that the US could regain its

competitive edge by investing significantly in education (Stuhlinger, 1999). America, becoming increasingly intrigued by Russian achievements and successes in research, paved the way for American students to gain from the Russian research developments. As a result, significant resources were allocated to educational initiatives in America and an Inter-University Committee was founded. A substantial increase in academic interactions between America and the USSR emerged from the committee's focus on promoting academic collaboration by providing American students with temporary study grants to visit Russia (Byrnes, 2021).

Before the founding of the Inter-University Committee, ''even the basic tenets of Soviet psychology were largely unknown to the West'' (Halpern et al., 1999, p. 322). However, as academic exchanges between Russia and America increased, Western psychologists were introduced to the previously inaccessible sphere of Russian psychology (Halpern et al., 1999). Western psychologists and scholars utilised this opportunity to explore the Russian research environment and actively began researching the theoretical works of Russian psychologists like Vygotsky. This paved the way for formerly suppressed Russian psychology to merge with Western and global psychology. This initial exposure was crucial in introducing Russian theoretical notions to a broader audience; subsequently, leading to their popularity in contemporary psychological research (Grigorenko et al., 1997).

Although American interest in Soviet research continued to increase, the Americans were unwilling to fully embrace and adopt Soviet methodologies and theories. Rather than accepting Soviet research in its entirety, the Americans primarily focused on 'removing barriers' and promoting open discussions, critiques, and debates regarding Soviet theoretical ideas. While the exchange programs offered tremendous opportunities for shared knowledge and cultural exchange, they did not result in the Americans adopting Soviet research in its totality. Rather, the exchanges encouraged a more extensive engagement with Soviet research, and the concerned researchers were motivated to consider how Soviet research could be implemented in the American context (Byrnes, 2021).

The incorporation of Soviet research into the broader context of Western research was a complex process. A prominent example of this was the reception of Vygotsky's work in America. Given the Cold War and anti-communist context in which his writings emerged in America, the Vygotsky ban could have played a role in the popularization of Vygotsky's writings. Through the exploration and interpretation of Vygotsky's writings (as these writings

were becoming increasingly available in English translations), American scholars, consciously or unconsciously, 'imposed' their own psychological concerns and understanding on these writings (see e.g., Miller, 2011). Thus, to include Soviet research in the West, American researchers may have contributed to the 'victim narrative' about Vygotsky. While the Western account of the victimisation narrative seemingly intended to highlight the challenges faced by Soviet scientists and psychologists, it arguably also transformed Vygotsky's works in ways that conformed with Western intellectual and ideological biases (Fraser & Yasnitsky, 2015). By depicting Vygotsky and the suppression of his works as victims of the Stalinist dictatorship, Western researchers could 'glorify' Vygotsky's works and move away from the perceived problematic Soviet ideologies that were the reason for the suppression of Vygotsky's works. By highlighting the suppression of Vygotsky's works, Western researchers may have intended to imply their own intellectual culture provided more scholarly freedom and was more beneficial to the development and dissemination of innovative theoretical ideas. This narrative could have strengthened Western confidence in their own intellectual and political agendas.

American scholars were central in understanding and applying Vygotsky's theoretical ideas in Western and global psychology. By applying their own cultural and intellectual perspectives to Vygotsky's ideas, they translated his concepts into a framework that seemed more accessible and applicable to the context of the United States (Ageyev, 2003). In a personal conversation with Kozulin, Ageyev (2003, p. 432) reports that it was Kozulin who noted how "on one hand, American scholars were instrumental in acquainting English-speaking audiences with Vygotsky's ideas, on the other hand, in the process of this acquaintance Vygotsky's ideas underwent a rather strong Americanization". The widespread Americanization of Vygotsky's theoretical notions emerged in the 1960s and the 1970s, following the translation of his works into English, making them more accessible to Western researchers (Mecacci, 2015).

González Rey (2014) contends that Vygotsky's popularity is owed specifically to the 1978 publication of *Mind in Society*, as this book became the most "relevant reference to Vygotsky in the West for decades since that moment" (p. 62). Valsiner (in Daniels, 2005, p. 2) "refers to the 'canalized nature' of references to Vygotsky's writing", and that "of the 1373 citations he identified, 1129 were made to either *Thought and Language* or *Mind in Society*". Cole (in Rieber & Robinson, 2004), argues that it was only in the last two decades of the 1900s that Vygotsky became extremely popular in the study of psychology and education. Cole (in Rieber & Robinson, 2004) labels the popularization of Vygotsky's works, as the 'Vygotsky boom', and dedicates an entire section in his prologue to this discussion. Cole (in Rieber & Robinson,

2004) also argues that *Mind in Society* led to the development of a large body of Vygotskian studies, including the 6 volumes of *The Collected Works* (1987-1999), that are utilized in contemporary psychological and educational research.

The Collected Works (1987-1999) has been described as the "largest to date" collection of Vygotsky's works (Yasnitsky, 2012c, p. 226) and it has been accepted as the primary collection of Vygotsky's writings Nonetheless, it also presents major challenges to how Vygotsky and his works have been interpreted and understood. Dafermos (2016, p. 27) claims that these primary texts consist of "only a few fragmented ideas, taken out of the specific context within which these ideas have developed". Similarly, Yasnitsky (2009) questions the credibility of the primary texts, as the texts were not actually written by Vygotsky himself, and the exact identity of who wrote or revised specific texts beyond Vygotsky's initial drafts remains a complex and unresolved question. However, as Moll (2013) states that it is crucial to note that these texts were compiled and altered by editors which has led to anomalies in the way that Vygotsky's works have been translated, interpreted, and applied. Ageyev (2003), who taught courses on Vygotsky in Russia and America, observed how the interpretations of Vygotsky's ideas fundamentally differed in the East and the West. As Western psychologists played a crucial role in introducing Vygotsky's ideas to a worldwide psychology platform which is quite prevalent today, how they presented Vygotsky's theoretical notions needs to be carefully examined, as these interpretations may have been based on potential biases. Consequently, these biases may have resulted in discrepancies in how we understand Vygotsky's works today.

Conclusion

In recent years, there has been a renewed interest in Vygotsky's theoretical ideas, as researchers continue to explore and apply his ideas to contemporary psychological and educational research and practice. However, it is vital to approach Vygotsky's theoretical notions with a critical lens, acknowledging the historical and ideological contexts that shaped their development and reception. By recognizing the challenges that Vygotsky faced during his lifetime; how his work was suppressed in the Soviet Union after his passing; and the reception and 'Americanization' of his works in the West; scholars can better understand the development and application of his theoretical contributions.

By critically analysing how Vygotsky's ideas have been interpreted and applied in different cultural and historical contexts, one can identify the potential biases and limitations which have

significant implications for the contemporary understanding and application of Vygotskian ideas. By considering these contexts and revisiting Vygotsky's works, scholars can begin to untangle the complex web of his thoughts and theoretical notions and develop a more ‘original’ understanding of his ideas, to continue building on his legacy. This ‘original’ understanding requires situating Vygotsky’s ideas within his broader theory of Cultural-Historical Psychology, which will be explored in subsequent chapters. However, before exploring the comprehensive exposition of his theory, it is necessary to critically examine how Vygotsky’s ideas have been interpreted and appropriated in different contexts. To this end, the next chapter will be devoted to a discussion of the critical perspectives of scholars who have challenged the ‘Vygotsky legacy’ that has been created by Vygotskian researchers in the Soviet Union and the West.

Chapter Two

Revising Vygotsky's Legacy

In recent years, there has been a resurgence of interest in Vygotsky's theoretical ideas, as researchers increasingly explore and apply his ideas to contemporary psychological and educational research and practice. However, it is essential to analyse Vygotsky's theoretical notions with a critical lens, considering the historical and ideological contexts that shaped their reception and subsequent development. By identifying the challenges that Vygotsky faced during his lifetime in the Soviet Union; how his work was supposedly suppressed in the Soviet Union after his passing; and the reception and 'Americanization' of his works in the West; scholars can better comprehend the development and application of his theoretical contributions. By considering these contexts and revisiting Vygotsky's works, scholars can begin to untangle the complex web of his thoughts and theoretical notions and develop a more 'original accurate' understanding of his ideas, to continue building on his legacy.

This chapter will be devoted to a discussion of the critical perspectives of scholars who have challenged the legacy of Vygotsky that has been created by Vygotskian researchers in the Soviet Union and the West. Furthermore, this chapter also provides a comprehensive overview of the ongoing debates surrounding the Western Vygotskian legacy that has been created by Western Vygotskian scholars. In addition, an account of the revisionist movement in Vygotskian studies, the key arguments presented by revisionist scholars, and other critical perspectives of the Western Vygotskian legacy that has emerged in contemporary psychological and educational research will be provided. Moreover, the chapter also explores the potential of utilizing a 'revisionist lens to extend revisionism' in Vygotskian studies, beyond the existing body of revisionist research, possibly uncovering new insights and perspectives on Vygotsky's original theoretical ideas.

The Vygotsky Divide: Western Vygotskian Legacy vs. Vygotsky's Original Legacy

Toulmin (1978) describes Vygotsky as the *'Mozart of Psychology'*, indicating Vygotsky's rise to prominence as a key figure in the field of psychology. The way Mozart was considered a genius of his time and celebrated as a musical prodigy whose works displayed extraordinary depth; Vygotsky has been viewed similarly, by his interpreters, who consider Vygotsky's works to be instrumental and genius in psychology. However, it is important to consider that this claim

of Vygotsky's genius was based on very limited access to his works (e.g., *Thought and Language* (1962) and *Mind in Society* (1978). In this regard, van der Veer & Valsiner (1991) argue that these wide-ranging claims about the 'genius' like nature of Vygotsky have been made in recent decades and although they are "a good means of advertising", they are "perhaps not conducive to an understanding of the content and implications of the ideas of the 'genius'" (p. 1).

Vygotsky's rise to fame in psychological research can be attributed to the "dominant and fashionable interpretations of Vygotsky's legacy" (González Rey, 2011, p. 273), that continues to shape psychological and educational thought. However, it is crucial to consider that Vygotsky's legacy is multifaceted and complex, and over the years, it has evolved beyond his initial works, due to a multitude of interpretations. Since Western scholars discovered Vygotsky in the 1960s, Vygotsky's works have become influential and popular in Western psychological and educational research (Gielen & Jeshmaridian, 1999). However, from the 1990s, critical perspectives of Vygotsky's studies have emerged, suggesting that the constructed Western Vygotskian legacy is a distorted and misrepresented version of Vygotsky's original legacy (see for example Dafermos, 2016; Miller, 2011; van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991, 1994; Veresov, 2017; Yasnitsky & van der Veer, 2016; Zavershneva, 2010). Consequently, two distinctive legacies of Vygotsky can be discerned, and understanding the dual nature of these legacies is critical to understanding Vygotsky's contributions to psychological and educational research.

The Western Vygotskian Legacy emerged in the 1960s when Western translations of Vygotsky's works were initially introduced to Western psychological and educational research. American psychologists, such as Bruner and Cole, presented themselves as "fighters for a new psychology" in the West, "of which Vygotsky was the pioneer" (González Rey, 2014, p. 62). This portrayal of Vygotsky and his circle, as pioneering figures in contemporary psychology, added prestige and value to disseminating Vygotsky's ideas in the West. However, this dissemination was not particularly based on Vygotsky's original ideas. Instead, the Western scholars constructed a new Vygotsky, which was based on limited access to Vygotsky's original works, shaped by the perceptions of the Western researchers and aligned with Western values and interests. The "capitalization"[4] (González Rey, 2014, p. 62) of the constructed Western

[4] "Capitalization" (as suggested by Rey, 2014, p. 62), refers to how Western scholars benefited from selectively interpreting and adapting Vygotsky's ideas to fit Western cultural and political contexts, particularly within Western academia.

Vygotskian legacy indicates that the West had idealized this version of Vygotsky's legacy, which deviated from the original legacy of Vygotsky.

According to González Rey (2014),

> in the 1980s, Vygotsky became a celebrity in Western psychology, and many works were devoted to his theoretical similarities with authors such as Mead, Dewey, and Bartlett, on which a new psychology began in the United States. The picture of Vygotsky given by American authors was drawn through the lenses of his interpreters. In 1985, Wertsch published *Vygotsky and the Social Formation of Mind*, making a notable contribution to the interpretation on the process of Vygotsky that advanced [in the West]. (p. 62)

The passage quoted above highlights how Vygotsky's legacy in the West was not, in fact, a direct continuation or interpretation of Vygotsky's original legacy, but rather, was a 'construction' of Western interpretations which resonated with American psychological frameworks. This Western version was immensely influential, establishing Vygotsky as a 'canonical' figure in psychological and educational research, but it was also limited in the sense that it undermined or misrepresented Vygotsky's original thoughts (Yasnitsky & van der Veer, 2016).

Although the Western Vygotskian legacy compromised and distorted Vygotsky's original legacy, the historical context within which Vygotsky's original ideas developed has "recently been re-established and Vygotsky's work needs to be reinserted here so that it can be appreciated in a fully historical way" (Alanen & Pöyhönen, 2007, p. 81). Due to the historical context of Vygotsky's works, the complexities of the dissemination of his works, and the misinterpretations of his theoretical ideas, the Western Vygotskian legacy has been questioned and criticized. As a result of the criticisms and controversies surrounding this Western Vygotskian legacy, there has been a resurgence of scholarly interest in revising and critically re-evaluating contemporary Vygotskian studies.

According to Veresov (2020), the new reality of Vygotsky's legacy is that researchers can now connect Vygotsky's original ideas to the publication of his previously unknown writing and archival findings. The release of Vygotsky's original archival notes and manuscripts (see Zavershneva, 2010; Zavershneva & van der Veer, 2018) has allowed researchers to revisit, critically analyse, and re-evaluate the 'true' legacy of Vygotsky. From the 1990s, scholars such as Valsiner (van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991, 1994), Dafermos (2015, 2016), and Veresov (2016,

2017, 2020), along with others who identify as ‘revisionists’ of Vygotskian studies (Yasnitsky, 2010, 2012a, 2019; Yasnitsky et al., 2014; Yasnitsky & van der Veer, 2016), have moved beyond the traditionally accepted Western Vygotskian legacy. Their goal is to uncover the original legacy of Vygotsky and understand Vygotsky’s original ideas within their correct context and frameworks.

Questioning the Western Vygotskian Legacy: Analysts vs. Emulators

The Western Vygotskian legacy has inspired extensive research, causing a substantial body of literature to emerge. The emergence of Western Vygotskian ideas remains highly relevant in contemporary research and practices, across a broad spectrum of disciplines and contexts (Dafermos, 2016). However, many Western researchers have adopted “only a few fragmented ideas, taken out of the specific context within which these ideas have developed” (Dafermos, 2016, p. 27). Mikhailov (2001) argues that Western Vygotskian scholars have significantly misunderstood Vygotsky’s ideas, and considerably distorted them to serve their interests and agendas. According to Alanen and Pöyhönen (2007), the translations of Vygotsky’s ideas into Western languages have often been inconsistent and unreliable. These Western translations have become the leading cause of the distortion of Vygotskian ideas. Similarly, Goulart et al., (2021) contend that due to the limited availability of Vygotsky's original texts in the 1980s and 1990s, scholars were unable to develop an accurate and comprehensive understanding of Vygotsky’s original ideas, which created a “fragmented, superficial and contradictory” picture of the existing Western Vygotskian legacy (Goulart et al., 2021, p. 124).

To better understand the complexities surrounding the Western Vygotskian legacy, Bulle (2023) distinguishes between the ‘analysts’ of Vygotsky’s original ideas and the ‘emulators’ of Western Vygotskian ideas. Bulle (2023) suggests that a significant number of Western Vygotskian researchers are ‘emulators’, whose “objective is not the exegesis of Vygotskian texts, but the development of new knowledge and hypotheses” (p. 906). The vast network of Vygotsky’s ‘emulators’ have not merely interpreted Western Vygotskian ideas, but have used these ideas as a foundation to create new ideas and theories which deviate from Vygotsky’s original concepts. The process of ‘emulation’, in this case, is likened to the emulation in computer science, where older systems are imitated or simulated onto newer hardware. In the context of Western Vygotskian research, ‘emulators’ have adapted the supposedly ‘original’ concepts of Vygotsky to fit onto newer theoretical frameworks or contexts, distorting Vygotsky’s original

ideas in the process. In contrast, ‘analysts’ are those researchers who have actively engaged with Vygotsky's original texts, critically examining his ideas and challenging their limitations. Bulle’s (2023) distinction between ‘analysts’ and ‘emulators’ can be used fruitfully to question and understand how Vygotsky’s dual legacies have been shaped. Bulle (2023) argues that a more nuanced and accurate comprehension of Vygotsky’s original legacy can only be realized through the works of the ‘analysts’, who are willing to revisit, question, and analyse Vygotsky’s original theoretical ideas.

Like Bulle (2023), Miller (2011) also observes the dual nature of the secondary literature surrounding the two distinct legacies of Vygotsky. According to Miller (2011), while a lesser portion of this literature is devoted to analysing, interpreting, contextualizing, and evaluating Vygotsky's original works, a more substantial body of Western Vygotskian research extends beyond his original ideas. The contemporary interpretation of Western Vygotskian ideas particularly focuses on the latter. Although Vygotsky is increasingly being read through secondary literature, and while studying theoretical notions through secondary literature is not necessarily incorrect, it can be problematic when the original texts have been substituted with secondary, modified accounts of the original theories. Due to the distortion of Vygotsky’s original ideas, there is a need to critically analyse the contemporary popular interpretations of Western Vygotskian ideas and identify the anomalies in these texts. To identify these anomalies, “it is necessary to engage intensively with the original texts” in order to improve our understanding of the complex theoretical notions that define Vygotsky’s original legacy (Miller, 2011, p. 6).

According to Miller (2011), some scholars have appropriated Vygotsky as a foundational figure for their own theories, often neglecting Vygotsky’s own valuable contributions, and misinterpreting his original theoretical ideas. For Miller (2011), the misattribution of theoretical ideas in Western Vygotskian studies is problematic and needs to be addressed. Miller (2011) critiques the multiple layers of research that have contributed to Western Vygotskian studies, and through this critical review, Miller paves the way for understanding Vygotsky's original theoretical ideas. Miller’s approach provides a strong critique of existing literature in Western Vygotskian studies to understand the ‘real Vygotsky’ and his original theoretical ideas. Along with Miller (2011), van der Veer and Yasnitsky (in Yasnitsky et al., 2014) list some of the major issues that have contributed to the discrepancies in Western Vygotskian studies, namely: the English translations of Vygotsky's writings are frequently misinterpreted and incorrectly translated; the works of his interpreters in the West distort Vygotsky’s own ideas;

and even the Soviet editions of the original Russian texts are problematic because they were extensively modified, censored, and even falsified, and then used in the translations into English, contributing to further discrepancies.

To address the issues highlighted by Miller (2011) and van der Veer and Yasnitsky (in Yasnitsky et al., 2014), there is a need for a *'Revisionist Revolution in Vygotsky Studies'* – as suggested by the title of the book by Yasnitsky and van der Veer (2016). For researchers to be able to comprehend and appreciate Vygotsky's contributions the revisionist school of Vygotskian scholarship is currently engaging in research that is anticipated to offer a fresh, revised and remodelled understanding of Vygotsky studies (Yasnitsky et al., 2014). Like Miller's (2011) method of revising Vygotsky's ideas through critical analysis of his original texts, the '*Revisionist Revolution*' initiated by Yasnitsky and van der Veer (2016) adopts a similar approach.

Revisionism in Vygotsky Studies

As discussed, in recent years, the understanding of Western Vygotskian theoretical notions and the Western Vygotskian legacy has been challenged by numerous researchers of Vygotsky studies (see Bulle, 2023; Miller, 2011; van der Veer, 2007; Yasnitsky, 2010, 2012a, 2019; Yasnitsky & Ferrari, 2008; Yasnitsky & van der Veer, 2016). The Revisionist Revolution in Vygotsky Studies, as championed by Yasnitsky and van der Veer (2016), has significantly contested the conventional understanding of the Western Vygotskian legacy. Yasnitsky and van der Veer (2016) state that contemporary Western Vygotsky studies consist of several problems, and these problems emerged due to the "hero worshipping" of Vygotsky, which has resulted in the formation of a "cult of Vygotsky" (p. xii). Yasnitsky and van der Veer (2016) suggest that a 'Revisionist Revolution in Vygotsky Studies' is needed to "debunk this cult" (p. xii). This is because this cult has produced a dominant Western Vygotskian narrative that entails significant historical and literary errors. Revisionism aims to deconstruct this problematic, dominant Western Vygotskian narrative by critically analysing the historical contexts of Vygotsky's original works, and revising how Vygotsky's theoretical notions have been applied in contemporary Western research.

According to Kopeček (2008), there is a degree of conceptual ambiguity concerning the term 'revisionism' in historical research. An example of how revisionism can be understood is as a challenging and controversial critique, which questions dominant historical narratives. These

narratives, integrally entwined with the field of historiography, re-present our perception of historical events. Since historiography is constantly evolving, the interpretations of past events require ongoing revision. As a result, one could propose that all historians who conduct research inevitably serve as revisionist scholars, whether they particularly identify as revisionists or not (Kopeček, 2008). This broader concept of historical revisionism, which can essentially be understood as the re-evaluation of historically dominant interpretations and a critical analysis of historical contexts (Kopeček, 2008), is analogous to the process of revisionism adopted by the revisionists of Vygotsky studies (see for instance Bulle, 2023; Cornejo, 2015; Yasnitsky, 2012b, 2012a; Yasnitsky & van der Veer, 2016).

Yasnitsky and van der Veer (2016), key figures of the revisionist movement, particularly explore, revise, and re-evaluate Soviet history and its impact on the intellectual developments of Vygotsky's works to better understand Vygotsky's theoretical ideas. When considering the historical contexts of the development of Vygotsky's works, the revisionists criticize the traditional view claiming that Vygotsky's works were suppressed under the Stalinist regime. The revisionist authors (Yasnitsky & van der Veer, 2016) state that although the suppression of Vygotsky's works in Stalinist Russia "was not an unlikely scenario", this perspective has been "grossly overestimated by Western scholars of the Cold War era and their intellectual heirs in the Soviet Union from the late 1980s" until the present day (p. 90). Although the revisionists agree that to a certain degree, the Stalinist regime and the Soviet politics of the time may have played a role in the posthumous development and dissemination of Vygotsky's works, they argue that the traditional narrative of the suppression of Vygotsky's works is oversimplistic. The revisionists suggest that even though political factors could have played a significant role in limiting the dissemination of Vygotsky's works, it was not the only factor that shaped the Western Vygotskian legacy (Yasnitsky & van der Veer, 2016).

Yasnitsky and van der Veer (2016) further contend that an uncritical acceptance of the suppression of Vygotsky's works tends to overlook the complex realities of Soviet psychology. For example, the Lysenko Affair[5], followed by the competing schools of psychology of Pavlov and Rubinstein, marginalized Vygotsky's theoretical works, as their developments for Soviet science were more aligned with Soviet psychology at the time. This marginalization affected

[5] Joravsky (1986), a Soviet Science historian, explores the Lysenko Affair as a controversial period in the USSR's science, politics, and ideologies. During the Lysenko era, science deemed 'Western' was suppressed because it did not align with the communist Soviet beliefs at the time. This suppression led to a decline in the publication and dissemination of works by Soviet scientists, including Vygotsky's, who was perceived as being influenced by Western ideologies.

the dissemination of Vygotsky's works in the Soviet Union and its subsequent dissemination in the West. The interpersonal and ideological rivalries between the competing schools of thought of Pavlov and Rubinstein meant that when Vygotsky's works were reinterpreted and applied at the time, they were reinterpreted to align with dominant Soviet psychology trends, further affecting how the problematic Western Vygotskian legacy was constructed. The revisionist observation of the impact of dominant Soviet psychology on the reinterpretation of Vygotsky's works shifts the focus from a traditional perspective of the suppression of Vygotsky's works to a more complex and intricate web of political dynamics and academic rivalries. This reframes and reconstructs the accepted history of the dissemination of Vygotsky's works. Yasnitsky and van der Veer (2016) suggest that to truly understand the original legacy of Vygotsky, one must examine the historical internal politics of Soviet psychology.

In their attempt to explore the historical Soviet context in which Vygotsky's ideas developed, the revisionists argue that some of the most significant factors that shaped Vygotsky's thought were Vygotsky's Marxist worldview and Vygotsky's engagement with the broader intellectual currents of the time. However, Vygotsky's interpretation of Marxism reflected a critical and expansive approach, which often diverged from the dogmatic Marxism promoted by Soviet authorities. Yasnitsky and van der Veer (2016) argue that the Soviet Marxist framework was inextricably linked to Vygotsky's original theoretical ideas, but this aspect has often been overlooked or omitted in Western Vygotskian studies. Sève (2021) explores the omission of Marxist ideas in Western Vygotskian studies and argues that Vygotsky's connection to Marx has been disregarded in many cases, particularly in Western research. This omission could be due to ideological factors, mistranslations of Vygotsky's original texts, and the dominance of non-Marxist interpretations in Western research. Sève (2021) highlights the omission of Marxist ideas in the initial English translation of *Thought and Language* in 1962. According to Sève (2021), the editors of *Thought and Language* (1962) removed nearly all Marxist references, eliminating the Marxist framework of Vygotsky's ideas. As a result, "the North American perception of Vygotsky was de-Marxified and this spread to the various translations of the American digest of his work", profoundly shaping the Western Vygotskian legacy by presenting his work without its dialectical materialist foundation (Sève, 2021, pp. 293–294). By exploring the socio-historical and materialist dimensions – important to Vygotsky's theoretical developments – Sève (2021) emphasizes that the original Vygotsky psychology goes beyond its traditional (mis)understanding. Although Vygotsky's theoretical ideas are useful in exploring the developmental dimension of psychology, these ideas are also deeply embedded

in the social and material conditions that shape the human mind. While Sève (2021) is not part of the Revisionist Revolution, his work in analysing the Marxist foundation of Vygotsky's original concepts has contributed to the revisionist movement.

Removing Marxist notions from Vygotsky's original framework has resulted in a Westernized and 'sanitized' version of Vygotsky's ideas (Elhammoumi, 2002). This 'sanitized' interpretation of Vygotsky's works is disconnected from the critical and transformative dimensions embedded in his original theoretical notions. In addition, this 'sanitized' version (Elhammoumi, 2002), created by Vygotsky's 'emulators' (Bulle, 2023), fails to consider that the original Vygotsky theories were deeply intertwined with a broader effort to reshape individual consciousness for a collective socialist society (Yasnitsky & van der Veer, 2016). This aim has often been obscured in Western interpretations, which are generally focused solely on individualized learning processes. As a result, Western researchers have created and shaped a Western Vygotskian legacy that was stripped of its critical, socio-political context, and neglecting this context has led to an ahistorical approach to Vygotsky's works (Yasnitsky & van der Veer, 2016). In this regard, Yasnitsky and van der Veer (2016) create a clear distinction between Vygotsky's true legacy and the Western "Vygotskian legacy" (p. 92).

According to the revisionists (Yasnitsky & van der Veer, 2016), many researchers refer to 'Vygotsky's legacy' when referring to Western interpretations of Vygotskian theoretical notions. However, this misrepresents Vygotsky's original works in the West, which have often omitted the true context within which Vygotsky's original ideas developed. Subsequently, the revisionists (Yasnitsky & van der Veer, 2016) propose that the Western version of 'Vygotsky's legacy' should be referred to as the 'Western Vygotskian legacy'. The 'Western Vygotskian legacy' is a more accurate description of the current legacy that is largely present in contemporary Vygotsky research and has often been shaped by Western academic and cultural biases. Here, Bulle's (2023) idea of Vygotsky's 'emulators' is synonymous with Yasnitsky and van der Veer's (2016) and shares a common critique of the Western Vygotskian legacy. Yasnitsky and van der Veer (2016) also focus on a broader critique of the Western Vygotskian legacy as a whole, examining and analysing its historical development and multiple interpretations. Bulle (2023), on the other hand, concentrates on specific researchers and their 'emulation' of Vygotsky's ideas, often within different intellectual traditions. Despite differences in the approach the researchers employ, Yasnitsky and van der Veer (2016) and Bulle (2023) both contribute to a more critical perspective of the Western Vygotskian legacy.

According to Yasnitsky and van der Veer (2016), the canonization process of Vygotsky's works was closely linked to the formation of a 'unified' Vygotskian school of thought. However, they believe that the idea of a unified Vygotskian school of thought presents an 'oversimplistic' and 'monolithic account' of Vygotsky's ideas . They also argue that this school obscured the full range of Vygotsky's ideas, and presented a limited account of Vygotsky's theoretical notions, overlooking the completeness and complexities of his original works. Yet, despite how the traditional perspectives have uncritically accepted the unified image of the Vygotsky school of thought, with Vygotsky as its 'saint', the revisionists believe that this is also a misconception. They argue that even during Vygotsky's lifetime, the Vygotsky school of thought was actually "far from monolithic" (p. xiv), as the members of this school conducted a diverse range of research in their own capacity and individually led many different research projects. After Vygotsky's death, the members of this school continued to engage in several research endeavours and held varying interpretations of Vygotsky's ideas. Yasnitsky and van der Veer (2016) claim that Vygotsky's circle of colleagues, students, and followers did not uniformly follow a single and coherent theoretical framework. They also claim that colleagues who were associated with, or collaborated with Vygotsky, such as Luria and Leontiev, had distinctive thoughts, approaches, and aims that often varied significantly from Vygotsky's thoughts and developments.

For example, Leontiev began developing 'Activity Theory' during Vygotsky's lifetime, which diverged significantly from, but was influenced by Vygotsky's original ideas. Although Leontiev initially worked with Vygotsky (Miller, 2011), he distanced himself from Vygotsky as "their disagreements were genuine" (Yasnitsky & van der Veer, 2016, p. 139). Whereas Vygotsky focused on "how language and other symbol systems affect the origins and development of higher mental functions as individuals learn and develop and create their systems of meaning" in the development of cognition (Mahn & John-Steiner, 2012, p. 15), Leontiev suggested the Activity Theory (which was later developed into CHAT by Leontiev's student, Engeström) to explore "the role of object-oriented activities on human development and social transformation" (Cong-Lem, 2022, p. 1097). This comparison highlights a crucial difference between Vygotsky's and Leontiev's approach to development, and the unit of analysis that each researcher employed to explore human development. On the one hand, Vygotsky focused on psychological tools (Tanzi Neto et al., 2020) as the mediating agent for development (explored later), and on the other, Leontiev focused on activity systems for

development. As such, CHAT should be considered a separate legacy in psychological research, distinct from both the Western Vygotskian Legacy and Vygotsky's original legacy.

Furthermore, the notion of a unified Vygotskian school of thought fails to acknowledge the theoretical differences between Vygotsky and other members of the purported school, presenting a false image of collaboration and agreement on all theoretical developments between the members of the group. However, according to Yasnitsky and van der Veer (2016), after Vygotsky's death,

> different constellations of Vygotsky's colleagues and students started forming their own separate groups. To an outside observer all these groups could appear to be 'Vygotskian,' but this did not prevent them from competing with each other or presenting their own group as the only genuine followers of Vygotsky's approach. (p. xiv)

The commonly accepted Western view of a unified Vygotsky school of thought (as represented by, for example, the notion of a *'Troika'*[6]) needs to be challenged. This is because different groups of thought emerged during Vygotsky's lifetime and continued to develop after Vygotsky's death, each claiming and competing to be the rightful heirs of Vygotsky's legacy. The differences in the interpretations presented by the various groups reflect academic and professional rivalry and undermine the construct of a unified school of Vygotsky–Leontiev–Luria. This critique poses a challenge to distinguish between Vygotsky's original contributions and theoretical notions, and those ideas that were developed by Vygotsky's colleagues such as Leontiev and Luria (Yasnitsky & van der Veer, 2016). This diversity and these fragmentations suggest that Vygotsky's original legacy is more complex and multifaceted than often portrayed.

From the foregoing discussion, it is clear that the revisionist movement has played a significant role in questioning the conventional understanding of the Western Vygotskian legacy. By critically analysing the canonization of Vygotsky's work, re-examining the role of translation and interpretation, and questioning the conception of a unified Vygotskian school of thought, the Revisionist Revolution has opened new avenues for understanding the complexities of Vygotsky's theoretical contributions. Ultimately, the Revisionist Revolution calls for a more comprehensive and historically informed approach to uncovering Vygotsky's true legacy,

[6] The notion of the *'Troika'* was originally proposed by Luria (2006) and subsequently, repeated by the commentators and editors of Vygotsky studies.

acknowledging his intellectual milieu's collaborative and contested nature and the Soviet political settings that influenced his thoughts.

Beyond the Revisionist Revolution: Other Critical Perspectives

While revisionists have played a fundamental role in challenging and reinterpreting Vygotsky's works, several other scholars (see Barrs, 2022; Barrs & Richmond, 2024; Chaiklin, 2003; Dafermos, 2016; Elhammoumi, 2002; Engeström & Sannino, 2010, 2020; Miller, 2011; Stetsenko, 2017, 2022; van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991, 1994; Veresov, 2017, 2020; Zavershneva, 2010; Zavershneva & van der Veer, 2018a; Zavershneva & van der Veer, 2018) have also approached Western Vygotskian[7] studies through a critical perspective. These diverse critical perspectives have provided new insights into revising and deconstructing the Western Vygotskian legacy, revealing the limitations of Western Vygotskian theoretical notions in contemporary contexts. Although not particularly classified or categorised as revisionist, these critical perspectives play a fundamental role in reconstructing Western Vygotskian studies.

In addition to Bulle's (2023) and Miller's (2011) critique of contemporary Western Vygotskian studies (as discussed earlier), Tanzi Neto et al., (2020) also question the Western Vygotskian legacy. Tanzi Neto et al., (2020) contend that Vygotsky's theories were developed nearly one hundred years ago and for these theoretical ideas to be relevant in the modern world amid existing global conflicts, "there is an urgent need to recontextualize, expand and develop his theories, taking into account currently existing societal, environmental and educational challenges" (p. 3). However, for Vygotsky's works to be relevant today, the authors Tanzi Neto et al., (2020) argue that Vygotsky's original theoretical notions, particularly those regarding dialectical materialism and development, need to be understood according to their original intended meaning. This is significant as these aspects are valuable in understanding human development in rapidly changing societies, but they have been undermined in the Western Vygotskian legacy.

According to Dafermos (2015), Vygotsky's original theoretical developments were marked by significant discontinuities, changes, and turning points, which reflected constant shifts in Vygotsky's original thoughts and ideas. Dafermos (2015) suggests that Vygotsky's original

[7] Given the way in which revisionists have referred to the Western versions of Vygotsky's works as 'Vygotsky studies', it is more appropriate to refer to these Western versions as 'Vygotskian' studies, to distinguish between Vygotsky's original works and what others have written about him.

theoretical developments were not linear or complete, rather, they evolved dynamically in response to the complex challenges presented by the environment he was in. However, despite all the theoretical notions that Vygotsky developed during his lifetime, their application in contemporary Western psychological studies “remains an open-ended unsolved question” (Dafermos, 2015, p. 21).

Dafermos (2015) presents a perspective of a dynamic and constantly evolving theory that contrasts with the revisionist approach taken by Yasnitsky and van der Veer (2016), who focus on deconstructing the historical contexts of Vygotsky’s theoretical notions, and clarifying the misconceptions about Vygotsky’s original legacy. While Dafermos (2015) advocates for a flexible Vygotskian theory that can be adapted in several ways in future research, Yasnitsky and van der Veer (2016) aims to prioritise the authenticity and preservation of Vygotsky’s original thoughts and theoretical developments. Although Dafermos and the revisionists employ different approaches to Vygotskian studies, both share a critical stance towards existing Vygotskian studies by challenging the dominant interpretations of Vygotsky’s works in the West. They do this by focusing on the historical and theoretical contexts of Vygotsky’s thoughts, and by debunking the oversimplistic myths that present Vygotsky’s theoretical ideas as a linear and complete theory.

Like Dafermos (2015), Stetsenko (2017) also shares a similar critique of the Western Vygotskian legacy, particularly focusing on the dialectical nature of Vygotsky’s original theoretical notions, and the need to develop his original ideas further in order to address contemporary political and social challenges.

Stetsenko (2017) believes that

> Vygotsky’s project can be seen as laying grounds for a novel type of psychology with a new mission devoted not to a pursuit of knowledge per se but to creating knowledge as part and parcel of a larger-scale, revolutionary social transformation that self-consciously commits and contributes to creating new forms of social life and practices based in principles of social justice and equality. (p. 33)

This statement by Stetsenko (2017) highlights a fundamental aspect of Vygotsky’s works, where Stetsenko argues that Vygotsky’s original ideas were meant to be applied in psychology as a transformative force in an ever-evolving world. Vygotsky’s works, in this regard, establish a foundation for transformative psychology that actively engages in shaping society; and this transformative psychology acts as a tool for revolutionary change that can bring about a more

just society. For Stetsenko (2017, p. 35), “this position is in continuation of Marx’s legacy”, which is a crucial framework for interpreting Vygotsky’s original ideas. Although Stetsenko (2017) emphasizes the need to develop and apply Vygotsky’s original ideas to contemporary research, she believes that this is a complicated and challenging process. These challenges occur primarily because “theories in Vygotsky’s tradition through the past decades have been of a sort best compared to the age-old style of abstract scholarly theorizing” (Stetsenko, 2022, p. 313), limiting the theories to an academic context and fixating on the historical interpretations of Vygotsky’s works. This limitation prevents the possibility of Vygotsky’s original theoretical notions significantly contributing to the development of newer theories, that could lead to social transformation in the modern-day world.

Veresov (2020), like Dafermos (2015) and Stetsenko (2017), believes in “reconstructing a holistic, systemic presentation of Vygotsky’s theory” by presenting a “new vision of the theory”, and “synthesizing a new reality” to better understand Vygotsky’s original theoretical developments (p. 109). In this regard, Veresov (2020) observes that neo-Vygotskians or ‘post-Vygotskian’ researchers, primarily part of the Western Vygotskian legacy, do believe that Vygotsky’s theory is an ‘unfinished project’, which is meant to be developed into newer theories by its interpreters. However, these neo-Vygotskians have interpreted and paraphrased Western Vygotskian studies in a way that contradicts Vygotsky’s original ideas, moving beyond the original Vygotsky.

Veresov’s (2020) critique of the Western Vygotskian legacy also aligns with Dafermos’ (2015) and Stetsenko’s (2017), in the sense that Veresov also argues against the reductionist and oversimplistic Western interpretations of Vygotsky’s works. Veresov (in Nasciutti et al., 2016; Veresov, 2016, 2020) emphasizes that Vygotsky’s theories should be interpreted within the broader context of the socio-historical and socio-cultural influences on human development. Furthermore, Veresov (in Nasciutti et al., 2016) advocates for a dialectical understanding of Vygotsky’s theoretical works, as he believes that the process of human development is “not a linear and simplistic process” (p. 90) but rather, a complex process shaped by an individual’s dynamic social context. To place Vygotsky’s theoretical ideas within their correct contexts, and to apply these ideas more accurately, Veresov (2020) encourages contemporary researchers to engage in critical dialogue and analysis, and challenge the dogmatic interpretations of Vygotsky’s works in contemporary research to move beyond the traditional approaches of interpreting Vygotskian studies.

Like Veresov (in Nasciutti et al., 2016; Veresov, 2016, 2020), Zavershneva (in Zavershneva, 2010, 2012; Zavershneva & van der Veer, 2018) also stresses that it is important to contextualize Vygotsky's theoretical works within their historical and intellectual contexts. Zavershneva argues that this is a crucial step in understanding Vygotsky's true legacy and acknowledging the evolving nature of Vygotsky's dynamic theoretical notions. Although Zavershneva is a part of the revisionist movement (see Yasnitsky & van der Veer, 2016), her approach to revisionism in Vygotskian studies differs slightly from Yasnitsky and van der Veer.

Whereas Yasnitsky and van der Veer (2016) predominantly focus on critiquing and revising the theoretical application of Vygotskian ideas, Zavershneva (see for example, van der Veer & Zavershneva, 2011; Zavershneva, 2010, 2012, 2014; Zavershneva & van der Veer, 2018; Zavershneva & van der Veer, 2019; Zavershneva & van der Veer, 2018) contributes to revisionism by primarily focusing on reconstructing Vygotskian ideas from original archival material to provide an accurate and comprehensive understanding of Vygotsky's theoretical framework. Zavershneva (2010) argues that

> there has long been a need to look into the archival documents. One reason is that the old collection of works, which to this day remains the basis for republication of Vygotsky's writings, is textologically unsatisfactory. It is well known that the policy of active editorial intervention in the original text led to a large number of unjustified semantic and de facto substitutions (and even outright changes of meaning), which continue to be reprinted in new editions. (p. 15)

Zavershneva (2016) further contends that

this source has never been subjected to systematic historical scrutiny. Even during the preparation of the Russian edition of *Vygotsky's Collected Works* in six volumes in the early 1980s, no systematic ordering of the archive took place, no inventory of the documents was made, and the manuscripts published in these volumes were not studied in any detail. Another reason to begin our study of the archive in 2006 was the unreliability of the text of the *Collected Works*, which until now remains the basis for republication of his works in Russian and other languages. It is well known that the policy of active editorial interference in the original text led to a large number of unjustified factual and semantic changes (and even replacements), which continue to be reprinted in new editions. (p. 94)

The passages above by Zavershneva (2010, 2016) highlight a critical concern in Western Vygotskian studies as she observes that the most accepted *Collected Works* of Vygotskian

studies, both English and Russian publications, are marred by translation errors and problematic editorial interventions. Miller (2011), like Zavershneva, also addresses the editorial interventions in contemporary Western Vygotskian studies and critiques how American editorial decisions have influenced the creation of the Western Vygotskian legacy, and how this legacy is meant to specifically fit into Western theoretical frameworks. As a part of this critique, Miller (2011) analyses the compilation of Vygotsky's works and argues that the editors of the *Collected Works* have arranged Vygotsky's writings in a specific sequence to appeal to Western interests and to emphasize particular Western themes. For example, *Thinking and Speech* is in *Volume 1* of the *Collected Works*, even though this material was one of Vygotsky's last written works. Miller (2011) emphasizes that the sequence of the *Collected Works* "is a rather peculiar selection that seems to call for some kind of rationale" (p. 318) because these works were translated and published in a sequence that aligns selected parts of Vygotsky's works more closely to Western concepts and interests, instead of the way in which Vygotsky himself developed his ideas.

Zavershneva's aim to study Vygotsky's original archives became possible due to the survival and preservation of the archives by Vygotsky's family. Gita, Vygotsky's eldest daughter, remained the custodian of these archives until 2010 (Zavershneva, 2010) and until 2018, "very few of these archived materials had been published" (Zavershneva & van der Veer, 2018, p. xi). As Maidansky writes "finally, in 2018, a volume of archival materials was published simultaneously in Russian and English, edited by Zavershneva and René van der Veer" (2021, p. 168). Following the release of the archival materials in the Soviet Union, the publication of *Vygotsky's Notebooks* (Zavershneva & van der Veer, 2018) featured previously unpublished archival materials from Vygotsky's original archives. The contents of *Vygotsky's Notebooks* were meticulously studied, transcribed, and critically analysed over a decade (Maidansky, 2021). Subsequently, the release of the *Notebooks* catalysed the 'Archival Revolution in Vygotskian studies' (as proposed by Yasnitsky, 2010), providing a strong foundation for revisionists and other scholars to engage with Vygotsky's original works, and to challenge the dominant anomalies present in contemporary Vygotskian studies.

Besides Zavershneva's contributions to the Archival Revolution in Vygotskian studies, the *PsyAnima* project (see Yasnitsky, 2012b) has also significantly contributed to the revision of Vygotskian studies. Like Zavershneva, the *PsyAnima* also focuses on archival research by examining Vygotsky's original notes and manuscripts, engaging in detailed textual analysis of

these archives, and contributing to the publication of Vygotsky's original writings. However, the *PsyAnima* has a more 'ambitious task' to complete, namely

> a new initiative of a group of international scholars from all over the world, who launched the hyper-ambitious and unprecedented enterprise — *The Complete Works of L.S. Vygotsky* that was previously announced and is now known under the shortened and somewhat informal name *PsyAnima Complete Vygotsky* (Yasnitsky, 2012b, p. 145).

The scholars involved in the PsyAnima project propose that there is a need for a new and complete edition of Vygotsky's works called *The Complete Works of L.S. Vygotsky,* which consists of accurate transcriptions and translations of Vygotsky's original writings. It can be argued that this project supports the revisionist movement and allows other scholars the opportunity to access Vygotsky's original works, critically examine and analyse these works, interpret them more accurately, and propose a more nuanced and accurate version of Vygotsky's original legacy. Unfortunately, due to the death of Elena Kravisova, Vygotsky's granddaughter who was leading the project to produce a new comprehensive and complete version of the *Collected Works*, the project has stalled (Barrs & Richmond, 2024). The future of developing the project remains uncertain.

Understanding the Revisionist Lens to Re-evaluate Vygotsky Studies

Yasnitsky (2012a) contends that "the revisionist movement comprises two somewhat distinct yet closely interrelated strands of research" (p. 9) – the *"critical strand"* (p. 9) and the *"constructive strand"* (p. 11). Whereas the first strand aims to critically analyse and deconstruct the problematic existing versions of Vygotskian studies, the second strand aims to reconstruct and build upon the existing knowledge of Vygotskian studies to better understand Vygotsky's original theoretical ideas. Yasnitsky's (2012a) understanding of bringing together the critical and constructive strands for revising Vygotskian studies can form a powerful critical tool that could be described as a 'revisionist lens'. This revisionist lens can be utilized to critically analyse, reconstruct, and integrate Vygotsky's original ideas that are relevant to psychological and educational research and practice.

In light of the diverse critical perspectives on Western Vygotskian studies discussed in this chapter, it is crucial to consider that using a revisionist lens would involve critically analysing dominant accounts of Western Vygotskian theories and concepts through a combination of

critical historical and archival research and subsequently, questioning these dominant and traditional interpretations of Western Vygotskian studies. By questioning the homogenous interpretations of Western Vygotskian studies, one would be searching for possible nuances, complexities, misinterpretations, mistranslations, and misattributions; particularly those that have been obscured or altered in earlier publications of Vygotsky's work.

Using the proposed revisionist lens goes beyond what the revisionists have already discussed, allowing researchers to revisit the Western Vygotskian legacy and to identify and challenge assumptions within established Western Vygotskian applications in psychological and educational research. For example, Vygotskian concepts such as the ZPD, *Obuchenie*, Mediation, and the misattributed notion of Scaffolding, could be re-evaluated, critically analysed, and challenged for their current use in education (as discussed in the next chapter). Ultimately, identifying and challenging contemporary Western Vygotskian applications in educational research allows one not only to critique previously established Western Vygotskian research, but also build upon this research to continue using Vygotsky's original theoretical notions while maintaining the relevance of his true legacy in addressing contemporary applications in education and psychology more broadly.

Utilising the Revisionist Lens to Critically Analyse Vygotsky's Publishing Trajectory – An Extension of Revisionism

Before analysing how Vygotsky's original theoretical notions have been subjected to distortions, oversimplification, mistranslations, or misattributions, it is crucial to first understand how the dissemination of these ideas can be largely traced back to the publishing trajectory of Vygotsky's works, which has profoundly shaped the contemporary Vygotskian legacy. The discrepancies surrounding the publishing trajectory stems primarily from the delayed, inconsistent and fragmented publications of Vygotsky's works; particularly in the way they were published and interpreted in the Soviet Union, and then subsequently interpreted and published in the West. These posthumous publications failed to completely capture Vygotsky's original theoretical ideas, depriving them of their original historical context (as discussed in the previous chapter). Due to the publishing trajectory of Vygotsky's works having undergone a multitude of challenges, it is important to critique this trajectory. Although scholars such as van der Veer, Yasnitsky, and the PsyAnima group have been associated with revisionism to better understand the complications surrounding Vygotskian studies, the act of revision extends

beyond their respective movements. The following part of this chapter utilizes the proposed ‘revisionist lens’ to provide a broader critique of Vygotsky’s publishing trajectory, encompassing both the works of the revisionists and the contributions from other scholars who have challenged the Vygotskian legacy, and have provided a more nuanced comprehension of Vygotsky’s original legacy.

Barrs and Richmond (2024) explain how the publishing trajectory of Vygotsky’s works has led to Vygotsky’s name being one of the most cited names in developmental and educational psychology, “yet”, till today, “paradoxically his work is not easy to access” (p. xi). Several works from Vygotsky’s original archives have not yet been translated in English, some prints are not available anymore, and this creates a “terrible irony in Vygotsky’s publishing trajectory” (Barrs & Richmond, 2024, p. xi). The irony lies in the fact that even during Vygotsky’s lifetime, due to the social and political conditions in Russia or Vygotsky’s deteriorating health that led to his early demise, Vygotsky’s original works have not been published. Despite his efforts in developing theoretical notions that were grounded in the sociopolitical and sociocultural contexts of his time, ironically, these theoretical notions reappeared after his passing and gained global recognition without their original sociohistorical contexts. Due to the interpretations based on limited availability to original texts, the posthumous interpretation of Vygotsky’s original ideas became a product of decontextualization, editorial interference, and misinterpretations. Mikhailov (in Bulle, 2023, p. 889) notes that Vygotsky’s works have been “significantly distorted” by Vygotskian scholars “to meet their own needs” and agendas. Although the later interpreters of Vygotskian studies acknowledged that they had limited access to Vygotsky’s original research, they continued to develop and apply their version of Vygotsky’s works, resulting in the canonization of theoretical developments that have been mistaken as complete theories developed by Vygotsky himself. This misattribution must be identified and ongoing research in this area of developmental and educational psychology is important for the origins of the theoretical developments, as well as their respective applications, to be understood correctly and utilized effectively.

Barrs and Richmond (2024) identify Vygotsky’s ex-colleagues, Leontiev and Luria, as the initial contributors to the posthumous publishing trajectory of Vygotsky’s works. Leontiev and Luria “published new editions of some of his works, notably *Thought and Language* (or *Thinking and Speech*)” (Barrs & Richmond, 2024, p. xi). This posthumous Russian publication, also known as the “1934 edition of *Myshlenie i rech*” (van der Veer, 2012, p. 133), “contained quite extensive editorial cuts”, alterations, and omissions of important concepts like

"pedology" (Barrs & Richmond, 2024, p. xi) – which was integral to Vygotsky's original ideas. Bulle (2023) argues that

> the case of *Thought and Language* (the title of which is an imperfect translation of the original 1934 masterpiece, *Myslenie I rec*' *'Thinking and Speech'*) is significant. The 1956 Russian edition – the source of multiple translations all over the world – had modified the 1934 text without notice, with various cuts, changes of style and substitutions of terms. The same is true of the 1982 edition, and this pattern was reproduced in the Western editions from the first translations in the 1960s (the 1962 edition reduces by two-thirds the Russian text). The new English edition by the MIT Press published in 1986, with Kozulin as translator, remains highly redacted, somewhat expanded in a revised 2012 version. (p. 892)

The editorial intervention and modifications in *Thought and Language* (1962, 1986, 2012) can also be observed in *Mind in Societ*y (1978) – another posthumous publication that is considered an important part of the publishing trajectory of Vygotsky's works. This book, which has had a profound impact on the reception of Vygotskian studies – arguably even better than *Thought and Language* – was composed by its editors who utilized selected texts and information from various sources (Bulle, 2023). The obscurities caused by the mixing of "references without chronology, and free adjustments by the editors" has created a "most notorious case" in contemporary Vygotskian studies (Bulle, 2023, p. 892). Both books adopt an approach that obscures the significant developments of Vygotsky's original thinking by disregarding chronology and incorporating editorial modifications and disrupting the traceability of the origins of the original texts. In the introduction of *Mind in Society* (1978), its editors like Michael Cole acknowledged the substantial editing that was carried out to compile the book. He admitted that it was not intended to be a literal translation of Vygotsky's work. This meant that this book omitted redundant material (as per the understanding of its editors) and additional content was added by the editors to fit Western understandings, which significantly altered the original texts in the process.

Valsiner (in Daniels, 2005, p. 2)) "refers to the 'canalized nature' of references to Vygotsky's writing", and "of the 1373 citations he identified, 1129 were made to either *Thought and Language* or *Mind in Society*" – making both publications instrumental in the shaping of the publishing trajectory of Vygotskian studies. The citation information highlights how researchers tend to canonize certain texts, perpetuating their dominance in the field. This

canonization may limit engagement with alternative or lesser-known texts by Vygotsky, which could offer valuable insights or challenge prevailing interpretations. van der Veer and Valsiner (1994) argued “that a special tribute should be paid to the role of Alexander Luria in maintaining and propagating Vygotsky's ideas” along with “Michael Cole’s help” (p. 3). In 2004, Cole wrote the preface to a book called *The Essential Vygotsky*, in which he acknowledges that he “actually spent very little time trying to understand Vygotsky's work” (p. xi) in the previous decades, and he had limited access to the original Russian writings of Vygotsky’s works which were sent by Luria. Despite Cole’s efforts in clarifying the modifications and extent of editing in these posthumous publications, these publications continue to be cited and utilized in contemporary research to present Vygotsky’s works as if it was developed and completed by Vygotsky himself – further adding to the misunderstandings and misattributions of Vygotsky’s original theoretical thinking and making him a ‘fad’ in contemporary psychological research.

After the publication of *Thought and Language* and *Mind in Society*, which surged the interests of scholars who wanted to explore and develop Vygotskian studies, the Russian edition of the *Collected Works* of Vygotsky (originally appearing between 1982 and 1984) was retranslated from the existing piecemeal English translations of his works (Barrs & Richmond, 2024). The Russian edition of the *Collected Works* was then retranslated by its interpreters and editors into English and published in the West – becoming the “largest to date” collection and primary source of information in Vygotskian studies for its later interpreters (Yasnitsky, 2012d, p. 221; Zavershneva & van der Veer, 2018). Valsiner (2021, p. 705) argues that the “difficult transfer of ideas from one society to another (Russia to Europe and onwards to North America)” is rather “complex” and “embedded in the political atmosphere” of the time – contributing to the fluctuating historical and political contexts of the theoretical notions (as discussed in Chapter One).

Concerning this, van der Veer (2012, p. 135) argues that “the Russian edition of the collected works, and translations into English were marred by gross errors and falsifications” and this collection is compiled of “fraudulent manipulations”. Similarly, Miller (2011, p. 2) contends that the “*Collected Works* is the inclusion with the original texts of various commentaries in the form of forewords, prologues, introductions, afterwords and epilogues”. This highlights the caution that Vygotskian scholars need to consider when utilizing the *Collected Works* as a primary source of information. Furthermore, Miller argues that Vygotskian scholars must distinguish between what Vygotsky actually wrote compared to what his later commentators

and interpreters have added on, in order to correctly attribute, understand and apply Vygotsky's theoretical notions in psychological and educational research. Although Miller's critique of contemporary Vygotskian studies has been considered polemical by scholars such as Kozulin, Valsiner, and van der Veer (Yasnitsky, 2013), Miller's work on revising and critiquing contemporary Vygotskian studies exemplifies how non-revisionist scholars can still contribute to the revisionist movement. Miller's work (2011) is also instrumental in identifying the anomalies that have become dominant in the Western understanding of Vygotsky's work, and challenging the purportedly authoritative Vygotskian works that have been published due to scholars such as Cole and Wertsch.

Applying a revisionist lens to Vygotsky's publishing trajectory allows us to uncover the intricate web of relationships between editorial decisions, ideological constraints, and how Vygotsky's ideas have been interpreted and reinterpreted over time. The foundational work of scholars like van der Veer, Yasnitsky, and the PsyAnima collective has provided critical insights into the complexities of Vygotsky's legacy, but this approach can be further expanded. By incorporating contributions from other scholars who engage with contemporary theories and provide alternative perspectives to understanding Vygotsky's original theoretical ideas, researchers can better understand Vygotsky's original ideas in ways that challenge traditional interpretations and move beyond the confines of the current developments of revisionism. Engaging with a wide range of perspectives not only enriches our understanding of Vygotsky's work but also ensures that his legacy remains relevant and responsive to evolving intellectual currents - on condition that there are clear distinctions in what Vygotsky actually said and wrote, versus what has been developed after his death by his later commentators and interpreters.

Important Caveat

It is crucial to note that although multiple criticisms have been levelled against the Western-inspired Vygotskian studies, this is not to suggest that the Vygotsky-inspired and Vygotsky-derived Western legacy has no merit, nor does it suggest that the 'Western legacy/tradition' which developed from the 1980's onward has no value. This Western Vygotskian legacy has developed its own theoretical understanding, concepts, and research based on the Western interpretations of Vygotsky's original ideas. As such, it has become a theoretical-research tradition in its own right and continues to form the basis for its continuing development. The

most significant aspect of this tradition is that it was inspired by Vygotsky's limited (and often poorly translated) ideas available at a particular historical juncture, and then developed (and continues to develop) an entire theoretical-research tradition of its own which goes in directions which are often incommensurate with what we have come to know of Vygotsky's original ideas, since the publication of *The Collected Works of L.S. Vygotsky.* The numerous subsequent (and previously unknown or incomplete) publications which have emerged as part of the *PsyAnima Vygotsky Project*, and archival research conducted by other individuals has brought about a different perspective which challenges the Western interpretations. Whereas these contemporary Western Vygotskian ideas are useful in psychological and educational research, they need to be clearly identified as those *derived from* Vygotsky, *but not originally and completely developed by Vygotsky himself* during his lifetime.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the nuanced and multifaceted ways in which Vygotsky's legacy has been shaped, contested, and reinterpreted since his passing in 1934. This discussion particularly focused on the ongoing divide between the Western Vygotskian legacy and Vygotsky's original ideas, which is a divide that reflects not only differences in the several interpretations of Vygotsky's ideas, but also the historical, political, ideological and cultural contexts in which these ideas have been appropriated and disseminated.

The chapter also provided an account of the revisionist movement of Vygotskian studies, as initiated by van der Veer and Yasnitsky, and how this movement has played a pivotal role in challenging the dominant Westernized understanding of Vygotsky's work. Their research has provided a critical lens through which one can re-evaluate Vygotsky's ideas, bringing attention to the factors that have shaped the Western Vygotskian legacy. Like the revisionists, other scholars have also critiqued and continue to critique the contemporary Vygotskian legacy, challenging the dominant understandings of Vygotsky's works. These perspectives push the boundaries of revisionism, suggesting that a truly comprehensive understanding of Vygotsky must go beyond the traditional research approaches, and be understood within his broader theory of cultural-history psychology (explored later).

Furthermore, the chapter also accounts for an understanding and use of the revisionist lens as a tool for re-evaluating the Western Vygotskian legacy. To expand on the process of revisionism and better understand Vygotsky's original contributions to psychological and educational

research, the next chapter will explore some of the key Vygotskian concepts that have been particularly influential in education, yet are often misattributed, mistranslated, or misinterpreted.

Chapter Three

Deconstructing the Western Vygotskian Legacy: Key Concepts and Critiques

The preceding chapters explored the complexities surrounding the historical contexts of Vygotsky's ideas, as well as the divergence of the interpretations between Vygotsky's original legacy and the Western Vygotskian legacy. In addition, it provided an account of the revisionist movement and examined its pivotal role in critiquing the Western Vygotskian legacy. Building on this foundation, this chapter shifts the focus to providing an account of the concepts that have significantly shaped the Western Vygotskian legacy. These concepts include the mistranslated notion of *Obuchenie* as 'learning' instead of 'instruction', the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), the non-Vygotskian idea of 'Scaffolding', and finally, the notion of 'Mediation'. These theoretical ideas have become cornerstones of teaching and learning in Western educational and psychological research contexts, and they first need to be understood within these contexts, before they can be critically analysed and reconsidered within their original contexts in Vygotsky's theorising.

Preliminary Observation on Translating Vygotsky

It is generally acknowledged that there have been problems with the translation of Vygotsky's writings into English (e.g., Smagorinsky, 2007). Apart from the problems of the initial availability of texts, and the more general issue of translating from one language to another while remaining true to, and retaining, as far as possible the sense and meaning of the original, Vygotsky scholars such as Wolff-Michael Roth (2011) argued that translations of Vygotsky work was not only "…frequently poor… but ideologically shaped translations into English" (p. xi) and, in a later publication, even went so far as to state that "…in some instances, [the translations] completely falsified what the scholar actually had written or said" (Roth, 2017, p. ix). Keeping these observations in mind the next sections of the discussion will focus on some of the problematic translations and interpretations of some key concepts in Vygotsky's Cultural-Historical Psychology.

The Misinterpretation and Misuse of 'Obuchenie' by Western Emulators

Obuchenie, a core concept in Vygotsky's theory of Cultural-Historical Development, has been significantly mistranslated, misinterpreted, and misused in Western educational contexts. These distortions have led to misunderstandings regarding Vygotsky's original theory, causing Western interpretations to diverge from his original intent. At the heart of this controversy is the mistranslation of *obuchenie* as 'learning' rather than its more accurate meaning of 'instruction'. This mistranslation has shifted the focus of Vygotsky's work from a theory of development, grounded in the dialectical relationship between instruction and cognitive growth, to a theory of learning, which emphasizes individual acquisition of knowledge. This fundamental misalignment has shaped how *obuchenie* is applied in educational research and practice, often reducing it to a pedagogical tool rather than understanding it as a dynamic process of cultural and historical mediation.

In *Mind in Society* (1978) the chapter "Interaction Between Learning and Development" presented an extremely abridged version of Vygotsky's original work, specifically from Chapter 6 of the 1934 version of *Thinking and Speech*, which was titled "The Development of Scientific Concepts in the Child". Very importantly, in *Mind in Society*, in contrast to the publications mentioned earlier, the word *obuchenie* was translated as 'learning' and due to the near 'canonical' status the book enjoyed, the latter translation of the word gained universal currency in the Western Vygotsky tradition. However, in the 1962 translation of *Thought and Language*, Hanfmann and Vakar correctly identify *obuchenie* as 'instruction', and they explain that there is a distinction between the process of learning and the process of development. For Vygotsky, it is not learning that presupposes the systematic development of higher psychological functions, it is 'instruction' that leads to the development of an individual's higher psychological functions. Similarly, in the 1986 revised edition of *Thought and Language*, Kozulin also translated *obuchenie* as 'instruction'. These translations were more aligned with what Vygotsky originally intended to explain, viz., that *obuchenie* encompasses the process of teaching and learning, highlighting the importance of the relationship between instruction and development.

In Chapter 6 of *Mind in Society* (1978) Vygotsky engages in a critique of at least three prevailing theoretical perspectives on the relationship between (what the translators called) 'learning' and 'development': the first of these was the view that "Learning is considered a purely external process that is not actively involved in development" (p. 79); the second held

that "learning is development" [8](p. 80); while the third "attempts to overcome the other two by simply combining them" (p. 81). However, due to the use of the word "learning" Vygotsky's critique of these perspectives is unclear. In the *Collected Works* version of *Thinking and Speech*, *obuchenie* is translated as *instruction* and consequently Vygotsky's critique of the above positions become clear: Vygotsky is identifying what he believes are the incorrect ways in which other thinkers have understood the relationship between instruction and development. For example, Vygotsky argues that Piaget subscribes to the belief that the child must first develop to a certain level *before instruction* can take place. However, Vygotsky (1962, p. 157, 2012, pp. 162–167) contradicts this view by arguing that "instruction is one of the principal sources of the schoolchild's concepts and is also a powerful force in directing their evolution; it determines the fate of his total mental development". Furthermore, Vygotsky (1986) argues that "the development of the psychological foundations for instruction in basic subject does not precede instruction but [development] unfolds in a continuous interaction with the contributions of instruction" (p. 101). Thus, while Piaget proposes that instruction is secondary to a biologically determined process of development, Vygotsky argues that instruction is a primary force that actively shapes development.

Interestingly, in 2009, Michael Cole, one of the editor/translators of *Mind in Society*, acknowledged that the 1978 mistranslation of *obuchenie* to mean "learning" did not adequately capture its original intended meaning. Cole (2009) describes the mistranslation as problematic and explains that "the importance of getting people to rethink the issues of learning and development in light of the translation of the key term, *obuchenie*, seems too important" (p. 291). Interestingly, in 2009, Michael Cole, one of the editor/translators of *Mind in Society*, acknowledged that the 1978 mistranslation of *obuchenie* to mean "learning" did not adequately capture its original intended meaning. Cole (2009) describes the mistranslation as problematic and explains that "the importance of getting people to rethink the issues of learning and development in light of the translation of the key term, *obuchenie*, seems too important" (p. 291). He then states that

> there is more than a little ambiguity about the meaning(s) of the term *obuchenie*, translated as "learning" in the chapter on "Interaction between Learning and

[8] In a 'bizarre twist' the commonly accepted notion of 'learning' (instead of 'instruction') in the Western Vygotskian tradition actually leads to the reproduction of one of the perspectives that Vygotsky criticised in *Mind in Society*, viz., that "learning is development" (sic)!

> Development" but translated as "instruction" in the corresponding portions of *Thinking and Speech* and in other textual contexts. In general, the Russian word, *obuchenie*, refers to a double-sided process, one side of which does indeed refer to learning (a change in the psychological processes and knowledge of the child), but the other of which refers to the organization of the environment by the adult, who, it is assumed in the article under discussion, is a teacher in a formal school with power over the organization of the children's experience. So, in that context, for those purposes, *obuchenie* is most adequately translated as "instruction" or "teaching." (p. 292)[9]

Although Cole later identified the importance of the instructional and complex contextual factors that are essential when interpreting and using *obuchenie*, the initial mistranslation in *Mind in Society* (1978) continues to play a role in Western education research and practices. By accepting 'learning' as the translation, Western researchers have presented Vygotsky's Cultural-Historical Theory as a *theory of learning*. This misinterpretation has led to the misconception that 'learning leads development' – a notion that has been criticized by authors such as Sutton (1988). Sutton (1988) dismisses this perspective and argues that it leads to "such absurdities as 'learning leads development'—it doesn't, teaching does!" (p. 103). However, this criticism was largely ignored and Western researchers such as Cole (1993; in Vygotsky, 1978), Rogoff (1990, 1991; 1993), Bruner (1990; in Vygotsky, 1987), and Wertsch (1985a, 1985b, 1988) (although inspired by Vygotsky's theoretical ideas), adopted the mistranslation of *obuchenie* to align with their own theoretical and research practices. As a result, the Western use of *obuchenie* focused on *learning* instead of *instruction*, and it changed Vygotsky's focus on the role that instruction can play in the development of higher mental functions to a theory concerned with learning processes and practices to enhance learning.

In these Western interpretations of *obuchenie*, core elements such as 'shared participation', 'social mediation', 'ongoing interaction', 'social constructivism', and the dynamic process of teaching and learning, contribute to the idea that *learning is a socially situated activity which involves active engagement with others and the environment*. This perspective emphasizes the social context of learning, and this became the common understanding in - what James Wertsch (1988) called – 'Sociocultural Theory'. In the latter theory the role of communication, social mediation, and cultural tools were pre-eminent and, as will be shown in the next part of the

[9] It is interesting to note that the Afrikaans word, "leer" is quite similar to "*obuchenie*". It can mean "learn" or it can also mean "teach", depending on its contextual use.

discussion, these ideas provided the basis for the development of a whole range of new ideas and extensions of ideas which were purportedly ‘Vygotskian’.

Rogoff (in Rogoff et al., 1993) builds upon the foundational concepts of learning and development presented in *Mind in Society* (1978). She focuses on the involvement of ‘guided participation’ by others for cognitive development in children, and how children learn through participation in cultural activities, highlighting the role of social interactions in cognitive development. Rogoff et al., (1993) argue that children

> learn and develop in situations of joint involvement with other people in culturally important activities. Caregivers and companions collaborate with children in deciding the nature of children's activities and their responsibilities for participation. In the process of collaboration, children adapt their knowledge to new situations, structure problem-solving attempts, and regulate their responsibility for managing the process. This guidance and participation include tacit forms of communication and distal arrangements of children's activities, as well as explicit verbal interaction. The mutual roles played by children and their caregivers rely on both the interest of caregivers in fostering mature roles and skills and children's own eagerness to participate in adult activities and to push their development. (p. 225)

This argument, focusing on social interaction in the learning process, contributes to the misunderstanding of *obuchenie* as simply learning, eliminating the instructional aspect for development.

Similarly, Bruner (1990) contributes to the Western Vygotskian socio-cultural theory of learning by discussing his views on the social aspect of learning and its implication for educational practices. His emphasis on the social and interactive aspects of cognitive development are evident in the theory of scaffolding (Wood et al., 1976), aligning with Rogoff’s idea of guided participation. Although scaffolding for learning is a complete misattribution to Vygotsky and “is a term that was not used by Vygotsky” (Pass, 2004, p. 90), it has often been incorrectly linked to Vygotsky and the notion of the ZPD (which will be explored later in this chapter). Through the idea of scaffolding for learning, Bruner proposes that a child construct knowledge through social interactions with ‘expert others’ who provide temporary support to the child, until the child can complete tasks independently (Wood et al., 1976; Wright, 2018). Like Cole and Rogoff, Bruner’s emphasis on social interactions for

learning, reduces *obuchenie* to learning, omitting Vygotsky's instructional dimension for development.

Another idea that has extended the Western Vygotskian focus on learning within social contexts, is Lave and Wenger's Theory of Situated Learning and their concept of 'communities of practice' (Lave, 1991; Lave & Wenger, 1991). Their theoretical notion (in Lave, 1991) proposes that the processes of learning "are situated in communities of practice… in which learning is recognized as a social phenomenon" (p. 63-64). This perspective emphasizes that learning occurs through active participation in shared cultural practices and social interactions, rather than directed instruction/*obuchenie,* further diverging from Vygotsky's views.

In addition to Lave and Wenger, another significant emulator of Vygotsky's works is Wertsch (1985b), whose work further contributes to the Western tradition of reinterpreting Vygotsky's original theoretical notions. Wertsch (1985b) claims that "Vygotsky's use of *obuchenie* seems to focus primarily on the learning aspect" (p. 235), diverting from the original conceptualization of *obuchenie.* Like Lave and Wenger, Wertsch also focuses on mediated action and social interactions through cultural practices for shaping consciousness and cognitive development. Wertsch (1985b) describes "consciousness as the objectively observable organization of behavior that is imposed on humans through participation in sociocultural practices" (p. 187), emphasizing the role of socially mediated processes for learning. As a result, he undermines Vygotsky's focus on the dialectical relationship between instruction and development.

Miller (2011) acknowledges both Cole and Wertsch's roles as

> [enjoying] the status of princes of the Vygotsky realm, at least in the Western part of the empire, with each in his own way having brought Vygotsky's work to the attention of English readers: in the case of Cole through his participation in the compilation and editorship of the text of *Mind in Society* (1978) that was culled from Vygotsky's writings; in the case of Wertsch through his account of *Vygotsky and the Social Formation of Mind* (1985). (p. 11)

But, for Miller (2011), both Cole's and Wertsch's perspectives are "superficial" (p. 14), promotes their own personal accounts of Western Vygotskian works and are "clearly antithetical" (p. 14) to Vygotsky's original thinking.

Miller's critique of Cole and Wertsch captures the broader argument against the Western interpretations of Vygotsky's works, which distorts the instructional and developmental dimensions of Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory of development. Furthermore, it is also significant to note that the Western emulators' interpretation of *obuchenie* as learning has significantly influenced their understanding and subsequent distortion of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). This reinterpretation shifted the focus away from Vygotsky's original emphasis on instruction as a catalyst for development and instead, reframed the ZPD within a framework of guided assistance or scaffolding centred on learning processes. The subsequent sections of the discussion will consequently be devoted to the Western accounts of the ZPD and the non-Vygotskian idea of scaffolding.

Lost in Translation: zona blizhayshego razvitiya

The concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) has played a crucial role in Western educational theory and practice. However, the way the ZPD has been interpreted by Western interpreters has significantly evolved from its original conceptual framework. Western research has reinterpreted and adapted the ZPD to align with teaching and learning, at the expense of overlooking the developmental aspects of the concept.

The translation of Vygotsky's original Russian term, *zona blizhayshego razvitiya*[10], presents a significant challenge in how the ZPD has been interpreted in Western contexts. Veresov (2017, p. 23) argues that due to the "unavailability of [original] sources and some inaccuracies in translation… the notion of zone of proximal development (ZPD) turns out to be different in terms of its theoretical content from the [original] notion of *zona blizhayshego razvitiya*". The differences in the Western translation and the original concept highlights that the two concepts are not the same. The mistranslation has been a topic of debate amongst researchers, such as Sutton (1980; 1988) and Smagorinsky (2018), who interpret *zona blizhayshego razvitiya* as the 'zone of next development' and consider this translation "as being the most concise translation consistent with maintaining the sense of the original" (Sutton, 1988, p. 105). Similarly, Barrs (2022, p. xvii) also translates it as "the zone of nearest (or next) development". According to

[10] The term, *zona blizhayshego razvitiya*, was never abbreviated or presented as an acronym by Vygotsky himself. It was abbreviated to 'ZPD' and written in capitals in Western research.

Smagorinsky (2018) and Barrs (2022), this translation is based on the documentary film *The Butterflies of Zagorsk*[11]. Smagorinsky (2018) contends that

> the zone of next development (ZNP) requires one to think in terms of long-term developmental processes such as those illustrated in *The Butterflies of Zagorsk*, where the goal is not to teach children something to do independently within 24h, but to engage in a long term process of acculturation to communication practices that serve not only to develop a competency, such as hand-based-writing and-reading, but for those processes in turn to mediate development toward socially-valued, culturally-mediated conceptual ends. These frames of mind constitute the "higher mental processes" that Vygotsky believed are at the core of concept development, the means by which human development is manifested. (p. 74)

Smagorinsky's discussion of the zone of next development, in line with what *The Butterflies of Zagorsk* presents, emphasizes that development is an ongoing process and occurs over an extended period of time. The focus is on developing skills like hand-based writing and reading within a framework that not only fosters these competences but also uses them to mediate deeper social and cultural development, particularly in disabled children. The zone of next development, in this case, reflects a process of constant development and adaptation, where instruction guides a child for the development of their higher mental functions – an idea that is fundamental to Vygotsky's understanding of development and the notion of defectology (explored in Chapter Four).

Despite *zona blizhayshego razvitiya* being translated in various ways, the most widely adopted translation, 'Zone of Proximal Development/ZPD', has become the most accepted term. In *Mind in Society* (1978), the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development was introduced in relation to the dimension of school learning, and it was described as

> the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. (p. 86)

[11] Vygotsky was always focused on long-term developmental processes, such as, for example, those depicted in the BBC documentary film *The Butterflies of Zagorsk* (1990/1992), which shows the innovative teaching methods for children at a deaf-blind school in Zagorsk, Russia (Barrs, 2022; Smagorinsky, 2018). [This documentary can be seen on YouTube at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yz5bXyxVbzU]. Anthony Bara, who posted it, labelled it as "The Zone of 'Next' Development film".

Smagorinsky (2007, 2018, 2024) criticizes this account of the ZPD and argues that it is misconstrued due to its focus on short-term learning processes, rather than long-term developmental processes (as Vygotsky's original work suggests). According to Palincsar (1998), the ZPD, specifically in the context of teaching and learning, "is perhaps one of the most used and least understood constructs to appear in contemporary educational literature" (p. 370). This misunderstanding regarding the ZPD has become canonical due to those researchers who have only engaged selectively with *Mind in Society* (1978) for their limited understanding of the ZPD (see Chaiklin, 2003; Smagorinsky, 2018, 2024; Veresov, 2017).

Barrs (2017) highlights the limitations of the ZPD presented in *Mind in Society* (1978), through Stanley Mitchell's[12] new translation and understanding of the ZPD[13]. Barrs reveals that Mitchell's translation of the ZPD is 2000 words longer than the one presented in *Mind in Society* (1978), and this recent translation emphasizes the role of *instruction* for development – aligning more closely with Vygotsky's thinking. In addition to discussing the omissions and limited length of the earlier translation of the ZPD, Barrs (2022) also critiques the use of the English word 'proximal' when translating *zona blizhayshego razvitiya*, as the word 'proximal' suggests a fixed distance between a child's current ability and the ability to do more with guidance which *reduces* the notion of the ZPD to a short-term and fixed learning process. In her book, Barrs (2022) refers to the 'P' in ZPD as both 'proximal'/'proximate' (i.e., 'zone of proximal/proximate development') to highlight the issue of translation to its readers. However, like Sutton (1980; 1988) and Smagorinsky (2018, 2024), Barrs (2022) agrees that the original Russian phrase better translates to 'the zone of nearest (or next) development', and the word 'next' (instead of 'proximal') better captures the constant and evolving developmental processes of a child. To highlight the developmental dimension of the 'ZPD', it is significant to consider that although there have been multiple debates about the translation of the 'P'/'proximal' in the ZPD, the 'D' is for *development* and not for *learning* (Chaiklin, 2003; Kellogg, 2018). Chaiklin (2003, p. 3) argues that if Vygotsky intended to "use the concept for

[12] Mitchell (1932-2011), a British scholar, known for his expertise in Russian literature and philosophy, gained acclaim for his meticulous translations, including Vygotsky's works. In 2017, Mitchell translated Vygotsky's work, and this translation appeared as part of a new edition of Vygotsky's essay "The Problem of Teaching and Mental Development" (*Pedologiya podrostka*). This edition provides a more comprehensive version of some of Vygotsky's concepts, compared to the earlier 1978 translation in *Mind in Society*. [Available on https://www.marxists.org/archive/vygotsky/works/1931/school-age.htm]

[13] Barrs (2017, 2022) refers to the capitalized abbreviated concept of the 'ZPD' when referring to the commonly accepted term, as presented in problematic publications like *Mind in Society* (1978) and in Western research more generally. However, like Vygotsky, Barrs does not capitalize or abbreviate the concept of 'the zone of proximal/proximate development' when referring to it in terms of Vygotsky's formulation which is captured in the translation by Mitchell.

all kinds of learning, then why not name it the ‘zone of proximal learning’?”, and that the concept of ZPD should be used within a developmental framework context, and not a learning one.

Despite extensive debates surrounding the translation and use of *zona blizhayshego razvitiya* in contemporary Vygotskian studies Vygotsky himself did not claim to have invented this term, let alone develop an entire theory focused on this term. According to van der Veer (2014),

> [Vygotsky] repeatedly stated that the concept was widely used in the pedological practice of that time and referred to American researchers such as Owell and McCarthy, and to the German educationalist Meumann, as originators of (aspects of) the concept. Unfortunately, these references were so vague that no one has as yet been able to clarify the origin and history of the concept and until the present day the concept of the zone of proximal development is attributed to Vygotsky. (pp. 78–79)

The complicated shared history of the origins of *zona blizhayshego razvitiya* challenges the narrow and static interpretation of the concept as the ZPD and how this concept has developed into a theory of its own. First, the shared intellectual trajectory of the term suggests that the concept was not an isolated theory but rather, an explanatory tool or heuristic device that Vygotsky used in his cultural-historical theory of development. Secondly, the way in which this problematic translation and evolution of the concept has dominated Western Vygotskian education and psychological research is also problematic, because not only did Vygotsky himself not invent this term, but he also mentioned it only sparingly throughout his works. Vygotsky only mentioned this term in eight of his writings, and its most prominent use was in Chapter 6 of *Thinking and Speech* (Chaiklin, 2003; van der Veer, 2014). This indicates that the concept was not a core element of Vygotsky’s theory, but that it actually served as an explanatory tool to explore the relationship between instruction and development.

Furthermore, between 1932-1934, the concept *zona blizhayshego razvitiya* (in the context of the relationship between *obuchenie* and the child’s mental development) was mentioned in Vygotsky’s lectures at the Herzen Pedagogical Institute in Leningrad. In 1935, these lectures were compiled and published as a book called *Mental Development of Children in a Process of Instruction* (Barrs, 2017; Vygotsky, 2019). Here, one should note that the 1935 version referred to *obuchenie* as *instruction*. Despite this translation, Barrs (2017) mentions that a chapter from the 1935 collection of Vygotsky’s papers, ‘The Dynamics of the Schoolchild’s Mental Development in Relation to Teaching and Learning’ (also translated by Kozulin in

(Vygotsky, 2011), contributed to the material published and inserted in Chapter 6 of *Mind in Society* (1978), demonstrating how the Western account of the ZPD was integrated into teaching and learning. In this case, Kozulin, quite contrary to his earlier translation of the word as 'instruction' in *Thought and Language* (1986), translated *obuchenie* as *teaching and learning*, and did not refer to *instruction* – contributing to the ongoing dissemination of the ZPD in Western educational contexts, and distorting the original intended instructional dimension within Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory.

A significant fallacy of the ZPD in the Western education and psychological research context is its association with the notion of 'scaffolding', or the misattribution of the idea of 'scaffolding for learning' to Vygotsky. However, Vygotsky never wrote about scaffolding, and it was actually an idea that was proposed by Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976). As a result of the misattribution, Western researchers have written about 'scaffolding in the ZPD' or even 'Vygotsky's scaffolding' and they have contributed towards the distortions of Vygotsky's original thinking. The next section of this chapter provides an account of scaffolding, and how it actually became linked to the idea of the ZPD. Understanding scaffolding involves examining its historical origins and this is important to comprehend the ways in which it has been adapted to fit within Western educational frameworks.

Tracing the Roots: Scaffolding and Its Connection to the ZPD

Scaffolding is often erroneously misattributed to Vygotsky[14], largely due to its association with the Western account of the ZPD. However, the way in which scaffolding is widely understood and applied in contemporary Western education contexts is not a theoretical construct that was developed by Vygotsky himself, nor was it a central idea in his original theory. This part of the discussion looks at the single occurrence of 'scaffolding' in Vygotsky's writings; the original understanding of scaffolding in the work of Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976); a critical examination of the link established between scaffolding and the ZPD by Cazden (1979) and Bruner (1987); and lastly, the implications of understanding scaffolding in connection with the ZPD.

[14] Vygotsky died in 1934, and the term 'scaffolding' first appeared in 1976.

'Scaffolding' in the Writing of Vygotsky and Luria

The scaffolding metaphor appears explicitly only once in Vygotsky's co-authored work with Luria, in *Age, Primitive and Child: Essays in the History of Behaviour*, which was published in English in 1992. The reference to 'scaffolding' was used by Vygotsky and Luria to describe, metaphorically, how external tools (such as holding an adult's hand or furniture) support a child's ability to perform physical activities like walking. These 'scaffolds' eventually lose their purpose as the child begins to complete the activity without their support (Shvarts & Bakker, 2019; Xi & Lantolf, 2021). Shvarts and Bakker (2019) elaborates on this metaphor by providing a quote from Vygotsky and Luria from *Age, Primitive Man and Child*:

> The transition to walking is usually not clear-cut. At first the child makes use of external objects, by holding on to them: he makes his way along holding onto the edge of the bed, an adult's hand, a chair, pulling the chair along behind him and leaning on it. In a word, his ability to walk is not yet complete: it is in fact still surrounded, as it were, by the scaffolding of those external tools with which it was created. Within a month or two, however, the child grows out of that scaffolding, discarding it, as no more external help is needed; external tools have now been replaced by newly formed internal neurodynamic processes. (p. 8)

In addition to this elaboration Shvarts and Bakker (2019) also state that in the original Russian text, the term 'scaffolding' is placed in quotation marks to highlight its use as a metaphor. Furthermore, as is evident from the quotation, Vygotsky and Luria's single use of the term 'scaffolding' refers to the child's biological development, and not to the educational context or to teaching.

Wood, Bruner, and Ross on Scaffolding

Within the Western context, the term 'scaffolding' was first mentioned by Bruner in 1975 as "a social support system for enhancing the development and learning of children within their various cultural contexts" (Renshaw, 2013, p. 56). Subsequently, in 1976, the concept of 'scaffolding' was proposed in *The Role of Tutoring in Problem Solving*, authored by Wood, Bruner, and Ross (Renshaw, 2013). This paper explores the nature of the tutorial process, which is defined as the method through which an 'adult' or "expert" aids an individual who is "less adult or less expert" (Wood et al., 1976, p. 89). The children in the study were given a building

task of a structure that they could not complete without assistance. The goal of the study was to examine the actions and activities that tutors engage in with children, to assist them in solving problems they were unable to solve on their own (Wood, 2001). The study revealed that an intervention by a tutor might entail much more than imitation when aiding a child in solving a problem. The tutor's intervention frequently encompasses some sort of "scaffolding" procedure that helps a novice complete a task that "would be beyond his unassisted efforts" (Wood et al., 1976, p. 90) and consequently, the tutoring process can be seen as akin to "a scaffolding process".

While the tutor may respond appropriately to the individual needs of the child, Wood et al., (1976) and Wood (2001, p. 280) believe that several "scaffolding functions" must be employed by the tutor during the tutoring process for effective scaffolding to take place (see also, Smagorinsky, 2018). These "scaffolding functions" entail the "tasks of the tutor" (Renshaw, 2013, p. 56) and they are described in the theoretical framework of Wood et al., (in Smit et al., 2013) as:

> (1) recruiting interest in the task; (2) reducing the degrees of freedom (simplifying the task); (3) maintaining direction toward the goals of the task; (4) marking critical features; (5) controlling frustration; and (6) modelling the preferred procedures by demonstrating, so that the learner can 'imitate it back'. (p. 819)

When adopting these scaffolding functions in the tutoring process, the tutor uses 'instruction'[15] as a means of guiding the child in the completion of the task by simplifying the task; pointing out the errors being made by the child and correcting those errors; keeping the child focused on the task; and helping the child control his frustration during the task. In this way, according to Wood et al., (1976, p. 98) successful tutoring becomes linked to a "theory of instruction" because the tutor engages in instruction during the tutoring process to aid the child in developing the skills that they did not have before, and also, to aid them to understand how to complete the task without assistance in the future.

It is crucial to note that although Wood et al., (1976) mention 'instruction' in the tutoring process, and link the theory of instruction to the metaphor of scaffolding, they do not provide

[15] It is important to note that this use of 'instruction' aligns more closely with the Western reinterpretation of scaffolding as a pedagogical tool, rather than Vygotsky's original concept of *obuchenie* (instruction) as a dialectical process of instruction and development.

us with information on how scaffolding itself could be exercised in teaching as a didactic process. Their idea of the association between the metaphor of scaffolding and instruction is limited to the assertion that there is a relation between the two notions. In their paper, Wood et al., regard scaffolding as a metaphor "to describe the nature of parental tutoring", and not as an actual pedagogical process (Burns & de Silva Joyce, 2005, p. 8). They believe that one might be able to better grasp what goes into the instructional process with the use of the metaphor of scaffolding as this notion of "scaffolding" presented in their article "concerns the immediate results of instruction" (Smagorinsky, 2018, p. 71). Hence, if one is to consider scaffolding as a didactic process or as a theory of learning, then one needs to go beyond the original metaphor of scaffolding as proposed by Wood et al. (1976). The original metaphor of scaffolding, as conceptualized by Wood et al., primarily focuses on the immediate and situational support provided by a tutor to a learner during a specific task. While this framework is useful for understanding how tutors can assist in achieving task-specific goals, it does not fully account for the broader developmental processes that Vygotsky emphasized in his theory of Cultural-Historical Psychology.

Cazden and Bruner on 'Scaffolding in the ZPD'

Over the past few decades, the concept of scaffolding has garnered significant attention in educational research, largely due to the influential work of Cazden (1997) and Bruner (see, for example, Bruner, 1987). This interest has led to a proliferation of studies that situate scaffolding within various educational contexts. One such context often associates scaffolding with "sociocultural theory," a framework frequently misattributed to Vygotsky, and the misinterpreted notion of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Van De Pol et al., 2010). Given that the ZPD is regarded as "one of the most important legacies to education" (Smit et al., 2013, p. 819), linking it to scaffolding has positioned scaffolding as a central concept in significant educational processes. However, it is important to note that Wood et al. (1976), who originally introduced the metaphor of scaffolding, did not frame it as a didactic process, nor did they attribute the concept to Vygotsky.

As far as we are able to ascertain, it was Cazden in 1979 who first linked the ZPD to scaffolding, "and suggested that the metaphor be expanded from the domain of parent-child interactions to teacher-student interactions" (van de Pol et al., 2010, p. 272). Cazden extrapolated the

scaffolding metaphor from “individualized teaching” (as suggested by Wood et al., 1976, p. 97) to one of group teaching which occurs in a “classroom setting” (Smit et al., 2013, p. 819).

Notably Cazden’s (1979) link between scaffolding and the ZPD was based on the version of the ZPD contained in *Mind in Society* (1978). Cazden, like many other scholars at the time, failed to place the ZPD within Vygotsky’s developmental framework and consequently promoted the ZPD as a model of learning in which a structured form of teaching and teacher assistance consonant with ‘scaffolding’ could be used. To distinguish between Cazden’s understanding of the ZPD and Vygotsky’s use of the concept in his original works, Veresov’s (2004) description offers a helpful perspective. Veresov (2004) states that for Vygotsky, the zone of proximate/proximal development “defines those functions that have not yet matured but are in the process of maturation” (p. 2). According to Xi and Lantolf (2021), Vygotsky uses an agricultural metaphor when he compares maturing functions to the buds or flowers of development, and these

> buds and flowers of fruit-bearing trees mature as they are tended by growers. The quality of the fruit that eventually emerges depends on the nature and quality of the care they receive at critical points in the maturation process—an event that is difficult, if not impossible, to capture through the scaffolding metaphor. (p. 1)

In Vygotsky's original usage, the zone of proximate/proximal development is about identifying mental functions that are in the process of development, not yet fully matured, but on the verge of maturation with the appropriate support. The quality of care that the buds receive during pivotal stages of development determines the quality of the flower that finally emerges. This, according to Veresov, (2004) and Xi and Lantolf, (2021) is an occurrence that is not that easy to describe.

Veresov, (2017) further shows that Vygotsky differentiates between the *actual level of development* and the *possible level of development* of mental functions in a child. The actual level of development determines what a child can accomplish unaccompanied and without the aid of an adult, teacher, or any other person. This level only forms part of the totality of the child’s development of mental functions (Agheshteh, 2015). At this level, the child has developed certain mental processes and functions which allow him to do things independently. The functions which have already developed can be referred to as ‘matured functions’ (Chaiklin, 2003).

Very importantly, Vygotsky argued that children's different, individual mental functions do not develop at the same rate. The nature of this development is captured very well by Valsiner and van der Veer (1991) where they observe that,

> the 'diagnosis of the level of development' becomes clearly linked with the emphasis on *heterochrony in the development of different psychological functions …Since the time points of final formation of different psychological functions differ, at any given moment some of these processes are nearing their respective moments of formation, while others have already been formed*. The task for diagnosis of development was defined by Vygotsky here… as the analysis of not-yet-emerged but now-developing processes (aside from the already actualized ones). (p. 157, my emphasis)

Based on this elaboration it becomes clear that when Vygotsky is talking about "maturing" and "matured" mental functions (or the "buds" and "flowers" of development) in the zone of proximate/proximal development he is referring to the different timing of the development of individual mental functions: some functions will be more developed ("matured functions") while others are still in the process of developing ("maturing functions")[16].

Now, due to his belief that the maturing functions in the child's zone of proximate/proximal development is paramount for the development of the child Vygotsky argued that instruction should be directed at those functions that are not yet mature. However, it is essential to identify the maturing functions before targeting their development (Agheshteh, 2015; Chaiklin, 2003; Veresov, 2004; Veresov, 2017).

According to Vygotsky, one of the ways[17] in which we can identify the maturing functions are to examine how effectively the child 'imitates' and makes use of the instruction given to them (Chaiklin, 2003). However, for Vygotsky imitation is not merely the 'copying' of an action but rather a process in which a child engages in solving a problem and displaying the signs of understanding the relations which exist in solving the problem. A child will only imitate that which he understands and that which lies within the various zones of development of the child.

[16] There appears to be an interesting similarity between Vygotsky's thinking in this regard and Piaget's idea of 'horizontal decalage' in the child's development, i.e., Piaget's demonstration that different cognitive abilities (e.g., conservation) develop at different rates within the same stage of development.
[17] The other way in which we can establish the maturing functions, according to Vygotsky, is by looking at play.

The child's maturing functions, at this point, have developed adequately to participate in instruction from another individual. The zone of proximate/proximal development, thus, can also be explained by the existence of the intellectual activity, as well as mental functions which a child can utilize "in interaction, where independent performance is inadequate" (Chaiklin, 2003, p. 9). If the child fails to imitate, then the child's mental functions required to imitate the task at hand are not present yet – and the zone of proximate/proximal development is yet to emerge (Chaiklin, 2003).

In determining the development of the child's mental functions, one can observe "larger and smaller zones of proximal development" (Chaiklin, 2003, p. 12). The relevant 'sizes' of the zones of proximal development indicate the ability of the child's mental functions in utilizing instruction to develop advanced cognitive skills – which would allow the child to develop beyond what is expected of them within a certain age range. Experiments conducted by Vygotsky indicated that a child "with a larger zone of development" had an increased number of maturing functions which would give the child the opportunity to develop his cognitive functions considerably (Chaiklin, 2003, p. 12).

From the preceding discussion, it is clear that the Western ZPD has shifted the focus from development to learning, framing it as a tool for facilitating immediate task performance through scaffolding. This shift has made it easier to apply the scaffolding metaphor within the Western ZPD, as it aligns with Western educational priorities of measurable learning outcomes and practical teaching strategies. However, when Vygotsky's zone of proximate/proximal development is understood in its original, developmental sense—as Vygotsky intended—the scaffolding metaphor becomes inadequate. Scaffolding, as proposed by Wood et al. (1976), focuses on short-term, task-specific support, whereas Vygotsky's zone of proximate/proximal development is concerned with the broader, transformative processes of cognitive and cultural development over time. Therefore, while scaffolding may be a useful tool for addressing immediate learning needs, it fails to capture the depth and complexity of Vygotsky's developmental framework.

Thus, Vygotsky's understanding of the zone of proximate/proximal development and how the ZPD is understood in the Western world goes far beyond the simple definition that Cazden had referred to when she associated the ZPD with the process of scaffolding (Xi & Lantolf, 2021). However, although it was Cazden (1979) who proposed the initial scaffolding-ZPD link,

Bruner can be identified as a pivotal figure in reinforcing this Western fusion of the two concepts.

Bruner's contribution to the popularisation of the scaffolding-ZPD idea can be seen in his prologue in *The Collected Works of L.S. Vygotsky, Volume 1* (1987). Bruner (1987) directly links teaching methods and what he refers to as 'Vygotsky's ZPD' by stating that

> ignorant learners can do far better in understanding a matter when prompted or "scaffolded" by an expert than they can on their own. The idea of the ZPD focuses attention on the role of dialogue as a precursor to inner speech, in this case the dialogue between a more expert teacher and a less expert learner. Once a concept is explicated in dialogue, the learner is enabled to reflect on the dialogue, to use its distinctions and connections to reformulate his own thought. Thought, then, is both an individual achievement and a social one. (p. 4)

Here, Bruner emphasizes the idea that learning occurs when an expert provides guidance (scaffolding) to a child within their ZPD. This simplistic connection between the two concepts reduces the idea of the ZPD to a mere teaching technique, whereas Vygotsky's original idea of the *zona blizhayshego razvitiya* was an explanatory concept in his much broader cultural-historical and developmental framework. Although Bruner's use of the scaffolding method in conjunction with the ZPD made Vygotsky's works more accessible and applicable to Western educators, it is crucial to note that it transformed Vygotsky's original thinking and opened up avenues for Western researchers to continue exploring the misattributed and misinterpreted link between scaffolding and the ZPD (Xi & Lantolf, 2021). This continued tradition has resulted in the overuse and broad application of scaffolding in educational contexts, going beyond its original meaning, and becoming an unclear and overloaded theoretical construct (Pea, 2004; Xi & Lantolf, 2021). In this regard Smagorinsky (2018) states that "when the ZPD began to mean all things to all people, it meant virtually nothing" (p. 255). Pea (2004) contends that

> the concept of scaffolding has become so broad in its meanings in the field of educational research and the learning sciences that it has become unclear in its significance. Perhaps the field has put too much of a burden on the term, and we need a more differentiated ontology to make progress. (p. 423)

Pea (2004) raises a critical point about the concept of scaffolding, arguing that its meaning has become overly broad and rather ambiguous within educational contexts. Initially introduced by Wood et al., (1976) as a *temporary support provided in individualized tutoring*, scaffolding has

since been expanded to encompass and represent ‘any form of support or facilitation’ in learning. The broader use of the term has caused oversimplification, overuse, and the overgeneralization of the concept of scaffolding, leading to its modern ambiguity and misunderstanding, often without clear distinctions or theoretical grounding.

Furthermore, the conflation of scaffolding with the Western account of the ZPD has resulted in the birth of many Western educational theories, but at the cost of losing the original intent and depth of Vygotsky’s works. By reinterpreting the ZPD as ‘synonymous’ with scaffolding, many researchers have come to view Vygotsky’s works as primarily concerned with instructional techniques for teaching, rather than as part of a broader and transformative framework for understanding human development within its cultural-historical context. This misinterpretation has profoundly shaped curriculum design, teacher training, and classroom interactions in ways that emphasize guided learning, while often neglecting the developmental, cultural and dialectical dimensions essential to Vygotsky’s original thinking.

Rethinking Mediation: Psychological Tools vs. Teaching Strategies

In addition to scaffolding, another idea that has been widely misattributed and distorted in Western Vygotskian studies is the concept of mediation. Although mediation is an integral part of Vygotsky’s broader theory of psychological tools and the cultural-historical approach to human development, it has often been misinterpreted, misunderstood, and incorrectly linked to the Western account of the ZPD and the idea of learning from a more knowledgeable other. To avoid distorting Vygotskian studies further, this section explores Vygotsky’s original concept of mediation and provides an account of the distortions that have arisen in contemporary educational research.

For Vygotsky, the concept of mediation refers to those cultural tools (such as language, symbols and artefacts) that act as intermediaries between an individual and their environment, transforming and developing the individual’s cognitive processes. According to Ghassemzadeh (2005, p. 281), “the idea of mediation of elementary [natural] mental functions by ‘psychological tools’ or ‘signs’ was introduced and formulated by Vygotsky”. In order for the elementary functions to develop into higher mental functions, the higher mental functions need to “be viewed as products of mediated activity” (Ghassemzadeh, 2005, p. 283). In this instance, the role of the mediator is not played by a person, but rather, by psychological tools which

internalizes the facilitation of cultural knowledge (Ghassemzadeh, 2005). In this sense, Kozulin (in Vygotsky, 2012) describes psychological tools as tools that are

> internally oriented, transforming the natural human abilities and skills into higher mental functions (Vygotsky noted such psychological tools as gestures, language and sign systems, mnemonic techniques, and decision-making systems). (p. xxxix)

In addition, Kozulin (in Ghassemzadeh, 2005) also contends that

> like material tools, psychological tools are artificial formations. Both are naturally social but while material tools are aimed at the control over [external] processes in nature, psychological tools master [internal] natural forms of individual behavior and cognition. Psychological tools have mostly a semantic nature, and are internally oriented, transforming the natural human abilities and skills into higher mental functions. (p. 283)

The descriptions by Kozulin accurately describe Vygotsky's use of psychological tools as internal, "cognitive instruments" that are used by individuals to transform their natural mental functions into advanced higher psychological functions – highlighting Vygotsky's use of the concept of mediation in terms of human cognition being shaped by psychological tools.

To better understand the mediation of psychological tools for cognitive development, it is important to understand that these psychological tools are 'internalized' by individuals to master abilities such as perception, memory, attention etc., (Ghassemzadeh, 2005; Kozulin et al., 2003; Vygotsky, 2012). The process of internalization is explained in Ghassemzadeh (2005), who argues that

> Vygotsky believed that initially psychological tools are directed ''externally'' toward a partner. Subsequently they turn in ''on themselves'', that is, they become a means of controlling one's own mental process. Further, they become internal (i.e. they ''go underground''). Mental functions are then mediated ''from within''. The necessity for using an external stimulus—means disappears. Vygotsky (1929) referred to this entire process as the complete circle of cultural–historical development of mental functions in ontogenesis. It provides the key to explicating the process of internalization. (p. 285)

In light of the above, the process of internalization can be understood as the transformation of external and socially shared activities, along with cultural tools, into the development of internal cognitive processes. An example of this is how a child utilizes a cultural tool like

language, externally, to communicate with others. However, the ability to externally utilize language later transforms into an internal tool for thinking (the child's inner speech). This process of internalization/transformation is key to understanding Vygotsky's use of mediation (Kozulin in Vygotsky, 2012).

Despite Vygotsky's use of mediation as a heuristic instrument in explaining the development of higher psychological functions (in the context of his cultural-historical theory), Western interpretations have often misrepresented and distorted Vygotsky's understanding of mediation (based on the socio-cultural theory). In this regard, they have transformed Vygotsky's idea of the sign as mediator (of higher mental functions) into "the mediator of the sign", i.e., psychological idea of the sign-mediated nature of higher mental functions, has been changed into a pedagogical concept related to the activity of the teacher. Consequently, in Western educational psychology, the concept of mediation has been incorrectly reinterpreted and linked to teacher-student interactions, particularly in relation to the simplistic Western account of the ZPD (see for example Bussi & Mariotti, 2008). However, important is that "Vygotsky himself never used the word scaffolding, and mediation in the ZPD" (Hardman, 2021, p. 223). Furthermore, the Western misinterpretations and oversimplification of the ZPD in itself is so problematic that linking any additional concepts or theoretical constructs to it creates significant problems in understanding Vygotsky's thinking.

As noted above, the most significant distortion is the concept of mediation in the pedagogical context, where a teacher is considered to play the role of the mediator. This shifts the focus away from the idea of cultural and psychological tools as mediators (which was integral to Vygotsky's use of mediation) and instead, prioritizes how social interactions between a teacher and a student facilitates teaching and learning (see for example Porto et al., 2019). In this case, "the teacher becomes a questioner and suggests a change from the teacher of traditional teaching to a mediating and guiding teacher" (Porto et al., 2019, p. 179). Although the idea of a teacher guiding a student to a higher level of performance is not an incorrect idea, the application of this idea of mediation (and focusing on the role of the teacher as the mediator) in the context of Vygotsky's thinking is incorrect, as it overlooks Vygotsky's emphasis on the transformative role of cultural and psychological tools in mediating cognitive and human development.

Although it is never explicitly acknowledged in the educational domain, it is possible to argue that the often-used idea of mediation as teaching may in fact be derived from either Reuven

Feuerstein or even B.F Skinner's theorising. In the next part of the present discussion, I will consequently look at both these theorists to show that what is often misunderstood to be 'Vygotsky's mediation', may in fact be the Feuerstinian or Skinnerian understanding of mediation.

Feuerstein's Mediated Learning Experience (MLE)

Another crucial distortion is the conflation of Vygotsky's use of mediation with Reuven Feuerstein's model of the Mediated Learning Experience (MLE) (see for example Fadeev, 2019; Farrell et al., 2024; Nell, 1999; Poehner & Infante, 2017). Although the two theorists have often been associated in educational psychological research "Feuerstein was not a Vygotskian or a Neo-Vygotskian; he never referenced Vygotsky's work and never indicated that he had even read any of this work" (Hardman, 2021, p. 223). With regard to the concept of mediation, Vygotsky focuses originally on psychological tools and their internalization for the development of higher mental functions, while Feuerstein's MLE diverges significantly from that idea and instead, the MLE focuses on the teacher as the mediator who guides the student through a structured process of cognitive transformation. According to Nell (1999),

> Feuerstein argued that cognition can be modified, especially in apparently "retarded" adolescents who have developed in the context of sociocultural deprivation. Such deprivation results in a lack of "mediated learning experiences" (Feuerstein, 1979, p. 539), which occur when environmental events are "invested by specific meaning by mediating agents" such as parents or teachers. Through such mediated learning, continued Feuerstein, children acquire cognitive schemes through which their repertoire of intellectual functions is constantly modified. (p. 47)

For Feuerstein, cognition is not fixed and static, but can be constantly modified and improved, even in individuals who have learning difficulties and limitations (Hadidi Zavareh et al., 2023; Nell, 1999). This idea suggests that despite challenges, with the right interventions in place, individuals can alter their cognitive functions to learn successfully and adapt (Kozulin et al., 2003). Although this idea closely resembles how Vygotsky proposes the use of instruction for development, it is crucial to distinguish the two theorists' frameworks, as they differ significantly in terms of their overall theoretical understanding. Whereas Vygotsky focuses on a broader theory of development rooted in Cultural-Historical Psychology, Feuerstein theory is more focused, and applies particularly to cognitive modifiability to address cognitive

challenges. Feuerstein's work is more intervention-oriented and does not concern itself with the broader cultural-historical contexts. Furthermore, where Vygotsky primarily addresses *typical* development in children, exploring how all individuals develop through social interaction and cultural tools, Feuerstein addresses *atypical* development, particularly in individuals with learning difficulties. Considering these differences, it is notable that Feuerstein's work is more clinical and remedial, aiming to improve cognitive functions in students with deficits.

According to Kozulin et al., (2003), another crucial distinction is that

> Vygotsky (1978) spoke about instruction being a true motor of the child's cognitive development, while Feuerstein (1990) emphasized that the instructional process can only be successful if it pays attention to cognitive prerequisites of learning. Both approaches generated applied programs aimed at the integration of the students' cognitive enrichment into the instructional process. These programs, however, differ in their treatment of the relationships between cognitive enrichment [or development] and content learning. (p. 14)

What is evident from the above quote is that while Vygotsky's idea is related to the development of cognitive function, Feuerstein's thinking is related to learning. Vygotsky sees instruction as the motor of development, integrating cognitive growth with social interaction and cultural and psychological tools. Feuerstein, on the other hand, stresses the need to address cognitive prerequisites/deficits before effective content learning can occur, focusing on targeted cognitive enrichment and modifiability. These differences are reflected in their theoretical developments, with Vygotsky's approach embedding development within instruction, and Feuerstein's approach prioritizing cognitive skills as a foundation for learning.

Skinner: Mediation as Behavioural Conditioning

An interesting way of understanding mediation for learning is to explore Skinner's concept of mediation, which differs significantly from both Vygotsky and Feuerstein. It is crucial to consider Skinner's use of mediation for learning (which has often been ignored), as it provides a significant basis for distinguishing the idea of mediation from Vygotsky's original theoretical notions for the study of human development.

B.F. Skinner, as a behaviourist, framed the idea of mediation in the context of operant conditioning, where behaviour is shaped by its consequences. Mediation, in this case, is not considered a cognitive process. Rather, it is an external mechanism or tool of conditioning and reinforcement, where environmental stimuli influence and shape learning (Perez, 2024; Vargas, 2007). In his study of behaviour, Skinner (1957) proposes a behavioural form of mediation, especially in the context of what he refers to as 'verbal behaviour' and stimulus control. Skinner (1957) defines "verbal behavior as behavior reinforced through the mediation of other person's needs" (p. 2). Mediation, in Skinner's understanding, occurs when reinforcers intervene in shaping behavior by increasing or decreasing particular responses.

For Skinner, verbal behaviour is shaped not only by direct external environmental stimuli, but also by social mediation (the ways in which societal structures mediate, shape and regulate how individuals learn and use language) (Vargas, 2007). In *Verbal Behavior* (1957), Skinner analyses how language is acquired through operant conditioning instead of cognitive processing. Unlike Vygotsky, who viewed speech as a psychological tool for development, Skinner viewed language as a learned behaviour that is reinforced through social interactions. For example, if a child says 'water', and the request is met by the listener who acts as a mediator and provides the water to the child, the utterance is reinforced in the child. Mediation, in this case, is not about internal cognitive processes or the development of higher mental functions, but about the external control of behaviour through verbal/speech cues and reinforcements due to consequences of the said verbal cues (Perez, 2024; Skinner, 1957; Vargas, 2007). Thus, while Vygotsky considered the mediation of psychological tools for higher mental functions a cognitive and developmental process, Skinner views the mediation of external stimuli and reinforcement as a behavioural and learning process – creating a stark difference in how the two theorists viewed mediation.

Skinner's concept of mediation is effective in teaching strategies and educational settings due to its reliance on reinforcement-based methods. In this regard, programmed instruction (a teaching method developed based on Skinner's principles) uses smaller instructional units followed by immediate feedback to reinforce learning (Skinner, 1968a, 1968b). Skinner's well-developed works have been successfully applied in educational settings, and his theoretical notions (including the idea of mediation in the context of behavioural conditioning) are considered appropriate for teaching and learning strategies. Exploring Skinner's use of mediation is crucial for understanding Vygotsky's original works because it highlights the fundamental distinction between their approaches to human development. While both used the

concept of mediation in their theoretical frameworks, they used the concept very differently, and this distinction clarifies that Vygotsky never used mediation for learning (as it is commonly misattributed in Western educational research).

What is important to deduce from the foregoing discussion is that the use of the idea of mediation as teaching is not Vygotsky's idea, and that educational researchers and practitioners who misattribute this understanding to him, may in fact be using an unacknowledged Feuerstinian or Skinnerian understanding of the term.

Furthermore, because Vygotsky was inspired by Hegel (Derry, 2013), Vygotsky's understanding of mediation could be derived from Hegel. Hegel's idea of dialectics highlights how cognition and human development occur through the process of mediation, in which signs, tools, and cultural artifacts shape how individuals interact with the world (see Magnus, 2001). This idea is similar to how Vygotsky applies the concept of mediation to explain the use of cultural tools, symbols, and language to facilitate the development of higher mental functions. What is particularly notable about the use of mediation is that multiple prominent thinkers, such as Marx and Hegel, have used the concept across multiple disciplines and yet, none of them originally used it as synonymous to, or in the context of, the process of teaching or learning (see for example Arthur, 1983; Magnus, 2001; Schuringa, 2021). Instead, it was a broader philosophical concept that described the transformative processes through which individuals interact with and internalize cultural and material tools.

Given this broader intellectual context, the argument that mediation as teaching is more plausibly attributed to Feuerstein or Skinner, rather than Vygotsky, becomes more convincing. Feuerstein's theory of mediated learning experience (MLE) explicitly frames mediation as a teaching strategy, where an adult or more knowledgeable peer structures interactions to promote cognitive development (Feuerstein et al., 1980). Similarly, Skinner's behaviourist approach emphasizes the role of external stimuli and reinforcement in shaping learning, which aligns with a teaching-oriented interpretation of mediation. In contrast, Vygotsky's use of mediation is rooted in a dialectical and cultural-historical framework, where mediation is a process of internalizing cultural tools and symbols to transform cognitive functions, rather than a direct teaching method. Therefore, while Vygotsky's work provides a theoretical foundation for understanding mediation, the specific application of mediation as teaching is more consistent with the frameworks proposed by Feuerstein and Skinner.

Conclusion

This chapter provided a critical analysis of the four key concepts that have significantly shaped the Western Vygotskian legacy. These included: the mistranslation of *Obuchenie* as 'learning', the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), the non-Vygotskian notion of scaffolding, and the misattribution to Vygotsky of mediation as teaching. While these ideas have become foundational in Western educational and psychological research, their widespread acceptance often obscures their original meanings within Vygotsky's theoretical framework. Tracing how these concepts have been mistranslated, misattributed, or reinterpreted, the chapter has highlighted how Western appropriations of Vygotsky's work sometimes diverge from his original formulations. This analysis underscores the importance of situating these concepts within their proper historical and theoretical contexts to fully appreciate their implications for human development. Having clarified these conceptual distortions, the next chapter shifts focus to an understanding of Vygotsky's broader theory, which is centred on Cultural-Historical Psychology.

Chapter Four

A Comprehensive Analysis of Vygotsky's Cultural-Historical Psychology

Chapter Three critically analysed how key Vygotskian concepts – such as *obuchenie*, the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), scaffolding, and mediation – have been mistranslated, misattributed, or misinterpreted in Western scholarship, often obscuring their original meanings. By tracing these conceptual distortions, the chapter highlighted the importance of situating Vygotsky's ideas within their proper historical and theoretical contexts. Building on this critique, Chapter Four shifts focus to a deeper exploration of Vygotsky's broader theoretical framework: Cultural-Historical Psychology. This chapter provides a comprehensive exposition of his theory, emphasizing its developmental nature and the transformative processes through which individuals internalize cultural tools and meanings. By examining core concepts which Vygotsky proposed during the instrumental and semantic phases of the development of his thinking, and integrating often-overlooked elements like defectology, *vospitaniye*, and *perezhivanie* into the theory, this chapter reveals the richness of Vygotsky's vision. It argues that his theory, when fully understood, offers a dynamic and holistic alternative to reductionist models of learning and development, inviting us to approach his work as a foundation for ongoing theoretical development and contemporary application.

However, before engaging in this exposition it is important to note that Vygotsky's thinking was constantly evolving - as evident from *Vygotsky's Notebooks* (Zavershneva & van der Veer, 2018) – and that he did not provide a single, definitive text encapsulating his entire theoretical framework. Instead, it is necessary to look at a range of his writings, e.g., *Tool and Symbol in Child Development; The Development of Higher Psychological Functions; Thinking and Speech*, and other writings, to get a more holistic understanding of his overarching theory. Lastly, as noted by Miller (2011, 2014) Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory of the development of higher psychological functions is an incomplete work, and should be seen as a foundation which provides the support for further theoretical development.

The Label of the Theory

In Western research, Vygotsky's theory is often mislabelled as a 'Sociocultural' Theory (Wertsch, 1985). However, this is incorrect as Vygotsky himself never proposed this title regarding any of his theoretical developments. This mislabelling reflects a broader tendency in

Western scholarship to simplify or reinterpret Vygotsky's ideas, often obscuring their original depth and intended meaning. Instead, one should consider that Vygotsky described his broader theory differently at different points in time. For example, in 1930, Vygotsky, in his foreword to Leontiev's book, described the theory as "the historical theory of the higher psychological functions [*istoricheskaia teoriia vysshikh psikhologicheskikh funktsii*]" (Keiler, 2012, p. 5). Later, he also described it as a "theory of the development of the higher psychological functions" and "conception of the historical development of the higher psychological functions," or "theory of the historical (or cultural-historical) development in psychology" (Keiler, 2012, p. 14). By 1932, Vygotsky and his colleagues (as cited in Keiler, 2012) responded to criticisms of the nature of their theory by stating that

> in its essence the so called [*tak nazyvaiemaia*] theory of the historical (or cultural-historical) development in psychology [*teoriia istoricheskogo (ili kul"turno-istoricheskogo) razvitiia v psikhologii*] denominates the theory *of the higher psychological functions* (logical memory, voluntary attention, speech-thinking [*rechevoe myshlenie*], volitional processes, etc. – *nothing more, and nothing less*. The origin and development of the higher psychological functions, their structure and their composition, their way of functioning and their mutual connections and interdependencies, the laws that govern their course and fate – all this is constituting the exact content and the true topic of these investigations. (Keiler, 2012, p. 6)

From this quotation it is evident that Vygotsky (and Leontiev) provided *a descri*ption of the theory and not a label by which it can be identified. This emphasis on description rather than labelling reflects Vygotsky's view of his theory as a dynamic, evolving framework rather than a fixed or static system. The Soviet critics of this dynamic theory, at the time, referred to it as the so-called 'Cultural-Historical Theory' and, despite its problematic origin, the label was adopted by later researchers who defended Vygotsky's thinking. However, the accuracy of this label continues to be debated (see Keiler, 2012).

Despite the lack of a definitive label, the most consistent aspect of Vygotsky's theory is its focus on the *historical development* of *higher psychological functions*, particularly their *cultural* origins. This focus emphasizes the holistic and transformative nature of his framework, which explains how individuals internalize cultural tools and meanings to develop higher mental functions. To fully engage with his theory, it is necessary to clarify how Vygotsky

understood the terms ‘cultural’ and ‘historical,’ as well as his emphasis on development over learning. This clarification is essential for understanding Vygotsky’s theory.

On the ‘Social’ and ‘Cultural’ in Vygotsky’s Thinking

While Vygotsky acknowledged the role of both the *social* and *cultural* influences on human development, he maintained a clear distinction between them. According to Smagorinsky (2024), Vygotsky understood *social* and *cultural* in specific ways. For Vygotsky,

> in the broadest sense, it means that everything cultural is social. Culture is both a product of social life and of the social activity of man and for this reason, the very formulation of the problem of cultural development of behavior already leads us directly to the social plane of development. (1997b, p. 106)

However, this understanding does not suggest that Vygotsky used *cultural* and *social* synonymously. Instead, it highlights that Vygotsky used the term *social* in terms of interpersonal relationships, social activity, and even what Marx describes as the ‘social relations of production’ (Elhammoumi, 2010).

Very importantly, Vygotsky did not conceptualize *social* as an external force acting on an individual; rather, he suggested that human development occurs when an individual is involved in, and participates in, socially organized activities (N. Veresov & Barrs, 2016). For Vygotsky, the role of the *social* in generating human consciousness and human development refers to the social structures and the interpersonal relationships (direct social interactions amongst individuals), which, in a sense, provides the context for the development of higher mental functions. As such, *it is within these social relations that individuals engage with and internalize the symbolic and cultural tools of their society* and it is the latter which are responsible for the development of higher psychological functions (Elhammoumi & Alnajjar, 2017; Zavershneva, 2014). By creating a distinction between the *social* and *cultural*, Vygotsky highlights how *social* interactions provide the *context for development*, *while cultural tools act as the mechanisms through which higher mental functions emerge*. Without this clarity, the transformative role of cultural mediation in development cannot be fully understood.

In contrast to his understanding of the *social*, Vygotsky’s understanding of *culture* was influenced by scholars such as Potebnya and Shpet (see van der Veer, 1996), “who stood in a tradition that goes back to the linguist and philosopher Wilhelm von Humboldt… a tradition

that defended a semiotic conception of culture" (van der Veer, 2007, p. 52). Furthermore, Vygotsky was also inspired by "Marxist thinkers who were inclined to regard *culture* and cultural change in terms of tools, technology and social progress" (van der Veer, 2007, p. 52). The influence of these dual strands of thinking on Vygotsky, resulted in him conceptualising *culture* in terms of language and signs as essential to human development, and *culture* as an evolving, dynamic, system of shared meanings and symbols which mediate human development.

Thus, Vygotsky's concept of *culture* goes beyond the direct social context and interpersonal interactions and communication. *Culture*, in this case, emphasises the role of cultural systems and tools in the development of human consciousness, as well as encompassing the knowledge, tools, symbolic systems (such as language etc.,), practices, and values passed down through generations within a specific historical and societal context (Maidansky, 2021; van der Veer, 1996, 2007; Vygotsky, 1997b). This expansive view of *culture* stresses its role as more than just a backdrop for development; it is an active, dynamic force that shapes human consciousness. By internalizing cultural tools like language, individuals transform their mental processes, moving from elementary to higher mental functions.

The 'Historical' in Cultural-Historical Psychology

Vygotsky's use of the term 'historical' in the descriptive label of his theory (as mentioned earlier) is deeply rooted in his engagement with Marx's and Engels' ideas, particularly regarding their notions of the material and historical conditions of human development. Vygotsky sought to operationalize dialectical principles in understanding human development and drawing parallels between Marx's historical and dialectical materialism and the processes of human ontogenesis (Sutton, 1988).

The evolution of cultural tools and the evolution of the child's development is reflected in the term 'historical' in Vygotsky's broader theory, as the term fundamentally refers to two interrelated dimensions: phylogenesis and ontogenesis. "The word 'phylogenesis' (or 'phylogeny') means historical 'evolutionary development' of a species or an organ" (Yasnitsky, 2018, p. 98), and it "is concerned with what distinguishes humans from other animals" (Palincsar, 1998, p. 354). On the other hand, ontogenesis refers to "the [individual] development from child to adult" (van der Veer, 1991, p. 74). Considering these definitions, it is evident that whereas phylogenesis refers to a broader evolution of the human species,

ontogenesis is more focused on the individual development of a child. Although these processes appear to be separate due to their conceptualization, they are in fact inseparable, as the historical evolution of the human species provides the context in which an individual develops. The dual focus on phylogenesis and ontogenesis is a core idea in Vygotsky's broader theory, and it distinguishes the theory from other theories that narrowly focus on individual or species-related developmental processes.

Vygotsky's interest in phylogenesis is evident in his exploration of human development and how this development occurs by using tools and signs. For him, phylogenetic analysis consists of the "human use of tools - especially the psychological tools of signs and symbols, including language" (Palincsar, 1998, p. 354). Vygotsky argued that these tools, which emerge and evolve over the course of human history, mediate human activity and enable the development of higher mental functions. This perspective can be attributed to Vygotsky's engagement with Engels' thinking, which posits that labour and tool use are vital to the transition from 'ape to human'(Sutton, 1988). Vygotsky adapted this evolutionary perspective into his own framework, emphasizing that the development of higher mental functions is a cultural-historical process mediated by psychological tools (Elhammoumi & Alnajjar, 2017; van der Veer, 1991).

Friederich Engels also played a significant role in shaping Vygotsky's thinking, especially in how tools are understood within the cultural-historical theory (Cenci, 2018). In works like *The Part Played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man* (1876/1934), Engels argued that tools are not only physical material objects, but tools are also those symbolic mechanisms that are fundamental to the process of labour and transformation of man. This idea is mirrored in Vygotsky's conception of mediation, in which cultural tools (such as language) act as mediators between the environment and a child, to facilitate development. Engels also argued that it is only "by labour, by adaptation to ever new operations" (p. 9), that man can develop, and that "labour begins with the making [development] of tools" (p. 13). Vygotsky takes this evolutionary perspective and adapts it into his own theoretical framework, in which the development of higher mental functions as a cultural-historical process, mediated by psychological tools (i.e., signs), allows human development to occur (Elhammoumi & Alnajjar, 2017; van der Veer, 1991).

Vygotsky's theory, therefore, focuses on how higher mental functions, such as self-control, occurs through the internalization of signs (conceptualised as 'tools of culture'). These tools,

transmitted through social activity and interaction, allow humans to navigate and understand the world. By analysing these foundational ideas – social, cultural, and historical – one can see how Vygotsky's theory transcends simplistic models of development. It offers a dynamic framework that accounts for the interplay between individual cognition and the broader cultural-historical context. This perspective not only deepens our understanding of human development but also provides a basis for understanding the complexities of Vygotsky's theory.

However, to fully appreciate the transformative potential of Vygotsky's theory, it is essential to recognize its fundamentally developmental nature. Reducing his framework to a model of learning obscures its broader implications for understanding human development as a whole. While learning focuses on the acquisition of specific skills or knowledge, development encompasses the qualitative transformation of psychological functions, driven by the internalization of cultural tools and the dialectical interplay between internal capacities and external demands. By framing Vygotsky's theory as a learning model, we risk overlooking its capacity to explain how individuals evolve cognitively, emotionally, and socially across the lifespan. This developmental perspective is what makes Vygotsky's theory uniquely suited to address the complexities of human growth and its cultural-historical dimensions.

On Development – Not Learning

Another crucial yet frequently misunderstood and overlooked aspect of Vygotsky's theory is its explicit focus on *development* rather than *learning*. The descriptive label of his theory, which emphasizes the cultural-historical *development* of higher mental functions highlights this significant orientation in Vygotsky's thinking. However, the failure to realize the developmental orientation of his theoretical framework has resulted in fundamental misconceptions and misattributions, particularly regarding those Western Vygotskian concepts that have become popular in areas of learning (as explained in Chapter Three).

Vygotsky was consistently concerned with the process of development as a dialectical phenomenon. For Vygotsky, the driving force of development lies in the dialectical interaction of opposing elements. In Vygotsky's theory

> development is conceived of as self-propulsion creating new higher psychological functions by reorganising lower ones; at the same time, psychological functions being historical-cultural constructions based on semiotic functions, they can come only from

> exterior. The article shows that the concept of zone of proximal development is the theoretical attempt to bring these two apparently contradictory postulates together. It is the contradiction between internal possibilities and external needs that constitutes the driving force of development. (Schneuwly, 1994, p. 281)

Development, as a process of self-propulsion, allows for new higher mental functions to emerge through the development and reorganization of the lower mental functions. This process suggests a complex internal transformation of mental structures, rather than *learning*, in which a child might accumulate knowledge or skills, but not necessarily go through a process of structural transformations of psychological functions. Furthermore, the emphasis on historical-cultural development of semiotic functions suggests that these functions are not innate, but instead, they are developed through historically and culturally mediated action, and not learning. The process of development relies on the contradiction between the internal processes of the individual, and the external historical-cultural tools which influence and develop internal processes. This reflects the dialectical materialist roots in Vygotsky's thinking – where an individual's internal abilities clash with the society's external demands and influences, forcing development as a process of change that happens when two forces come into conflict. Instead of merely accumulating skills, the conflict between the internal and external forces drives ongoing change in a person's consciousness and thought process, significantly impacting their psychological functioning (Schneuwly, 1994).

Schneuwly (1994) suggests that it is the zone of proximal development, as a developmental concept, which becomes central to the driving force needed to resolve the conflict between internal and external clashes of the individual and their historical-cultural contexts. Although Schneuwly (1994) uses the Western label 'zone of proximal development', he correctly argues that it is not a simple tool for teaching, nor just helping a pupil to acquire a skill from a 'more knowledgeable other', but rather, it is a developmental mechanism which primarily deals with the development and reorganisation of psychological functions. The Western failure to acknowledge that Vygotsky's theoretical framework is fundamentally about development has led to one of the most popular misconceptions, namely, the misrepresentation of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) as a concept of learning. That is, the Zone of Proximal Development has become a Zone of Proximal Learning (ZPL) (Schneuwly, 1994).

This misrepresentation of the ZPD as a learning tool reflects a broader tendency to reduce Vygotsky's theory to a set of instructional strategies, rather than recognizing it as a

comprehensive framework for understanding human development. By reframing the ZPD as a developmental mechanism, we can reclaim its original purpose: to explain how individuals internalize cultural tools and transform their psychological functions through social interaction. This perspective not only aligns with Vygotsky's intentions but also highlights the broader applicability of his theory to fields such as psychology, sociology, and anthropology, where the focus is on understanding human development in its full complexity.

Given Vygotsky's focus on development, he identifies certain laws of development (as outlined by Schneuwly, 1994). These laws state that

> 1. Development, that is to say, the appearance of new forms of psychological functioning, always operates *by a differentiation due to the coming together and reorganisation of already existing psychological functions*… 2. The different functions and systems of the mind *develop unequally and disproportionately*… [and] 3. Development is not linear or cyclic… Although it does comprise phases of linear evolution, it is the phases of revolution during which new psychological functions appear, that characterise it best and define its stages. (pp. 282-283)

These laws of development provide strong evidence that Vygotsky was not concerned with learning but rather with the development of higher psychological functions. Vygotsky explicitly focuses on development as the appearance of new psychological functions through the differentiation and reorganization of existing psychological functions. If his focus was on learning through teaching, he would emphasize the accumulation of knowledge or skills, and not the restructuring and development of psychological functions. The second law, which focuses on the disproportionate development of psychological functions, contradicts the idea that learning is central to Vygotsky's theory. In a traditional sense, learning would be a systematic, linear, and a cumulative process, but Vygotsky suggests that his focus is on the different mental functions which emerge differently at different rates and times. If Vygotsky was concerned with a model of learning, one would expect a model of consistent improvement in the acquisition of skills and knowledge. Instead, his theoretical framework describes a revolutionary process in which development occurs in sudden and drastic changes, instead of smooth incremental learning processes. This revolutionary nature of development is rooted in Vygotsky's dialectical materialist perspective, which emphasizes the role of contradiction and synthesis in driving transformation. According to this view, development arises from the tension or confrontation between opposing forces – such as the internal capacities of the

individual and the external demands of the cultural-historical environment. These contradictions create the conditions for qualitative leaps in psychological functioning, where existing mental structures are reorganized and new, higher forms of consciousness emerge.

In order to truly grasp the difference between *development* and *learning*, it is crucial to consider how *learning* is conventionally understood, and why it cannot be considered synonymous with development. In this regard, Piaget's (1997) distinction between *development* and *learning* acts as a valuable lens for interpreting the developmental nature of Vygotsky's Cultural-Historical Psychology. Gauvain and Cole (in Piaget, 1997) argue that both Piaget and Vygotsky viewed the relationship between development and learning differently[18]. However, it is important to note that both theorists similarly distinguished between these two processes, treating them as separate processes each with its own characteristics. One of Piaget's (1997) key arguments is that "development explains learning, and this opinion is contrary to the widely held opinion that development is a sum of discrete learning experiences" (p. 20). For Piaget (1997), "in reality, development is the essential process and each element of learning occurs as a function of total development, rather than being an element which explains development" (p. 20). Piaget (1997) also states that

> the development of knowledge is a spontaneous process, tied to the whole process of embryogenesis. Embryogenesis concerns the development of the body, but it concerns as well the development of the nervous system, and the development of mental functions. (p. 20)

While

> learning presents the opposite case [compared to development]. In general, learning is provoked by situations-provoked by a psychological experimenter; or by a teacher, with respect to some didactic point; or by an external situation. It is provoked, in general, as opposed to spontaneous. In addition, it is a limited process limited to a single problem, or to a single structure. (p. 20)

Piaget's distinction between development and learning is particularly important when applied to Vygotsky's theory. While Piaget emphasizes the spontaneous, organic nature of *development*,

[18] One of the egregious errors in *Mind in Society* is the chapter titled "Interaction between Learning and Development". As was noted in the previous chapter the correct term in this context should have been *obuchenie*, i.e., instruction, because Vygotsky was not talking about the relationship between 'learning and development' but about the role of instruction in development.

Vygotsky adds a critical dimension: the role of *cultural* tools and *social* interaction in mediating this process. For Vygotsky, development is not merely a biological unfolding but a cultural-historical process in which individuals internalize tools like language and signs to transform their psychological functions. This perspective aligns with Piaget's view of development as spontaneous and holistic, but it also highlights the active role of cultural and social forces in shaping human mental development. By contrast, learning, as Piaget describes, is a provoked and limited process, often tied to specific tasks or external instruction. This distinction helps clarify why Vygotsky's theory cannot be reduced to a learning model without losing its explanatory depth and transformative potential.

Having dealt with the important notions of 'cultural', 'historical' and 'development' in Vygotsky's thinking, this chapter can now shift to a focus on an exposition of Vygotsky's evolving theoretical understanding.

The Two Phases in the Development of Vygotsky's Theory

Vygotsky's broader theory, like his conceptualization of development, is not static. It unfolded across two discernible phases, each reflecting a shift in focus while remaining interconnected. Despite these shifts, both phases maintain a consistent emphasis on development and contribute to explaining the emergence of higher mental functions. This dynamic nature of Vygotsky's theory underscores its capacity to address the complexities of human development, moving beyond static or reductionist models.

The Instrumental Method Phase in Vygotsky's Theorizing

The 'period of the instrumental method' refers to a phase in Vygotsky's thinking in the early 1920's when he focused on how culturally created tools (such as language, signs, symbols) mediate higher mental functions. In this phase Vygotsky (1997b) distinguishes between two distinct, but interrelated lines of development in the history (phylogenesis) of humans: the biological line and the cultural-historical line of development. The first line of development is the process of the biological evolution of humans as a particular biological type in which we witness the appearance of new organs and the structure of the human body. The second, is the process of historical development in which the primitive human became *cultured* by creating 'artificial' organs and tools (e.g., speech and tools of labour), which led to cultural forms of

behaviour, through the mastery of tools that are created by culture (Vygotsky, 1997b). This distinction between the biological and cultural-historical lines of development is crucial for understanding Vygotsky's theory as a holistic framework. While the biological line provides the foundation for elementary mental functions, such as perception and motor control, the cultural-historical line explains how humans transcend these basic capacities through the use of cultural tools. This dual focus highlights the transformative potential of cultural mediation, which is key to Vygotsky's theory and distinguishes it from purely biological or behaviorist models of development.

The two lines of development are, in a sense, 'recapitulated' in the individual development of the child: the natural/biological line of development (biogenesis) provides the child with elementary mental functions, such as basic forms of perception, attention, volition, and motor control which Vygotsky believed provided the basis for the development of more complex forms of thinking. In contrast, according to Vygotsky, the cultural-historical line of development "consists in mastering methods of behavior which are based on the use of signs as a means of accomplishing any particular psychological operation" (Vygotsky, 1929, p. 415 as cited in Yoshida, 2006, p. 450). This recapitulation of phylogenetic development in ontogenesis illustrates Vygotsky's dialectical approach, which emphasizes the interplay between biological and cultural factors in shaping human cognition. By focusing on the mastery of signs and tools, Vygotsky highlights the active role of individuals in transforming their own psychological functions, rather than passively inheriting or acquiring them. This perspective is important to his theory and underlines its relevance for understanding the dynamic processes of human development.

To illustrate the mastery of behaviour using signs, Vygotsky relied on the research of his colleague, Aleksei Leontiev, who developed the functional method of double stimulation in his 'Forbidden Colours Experiment' (see Blunden, 2017; Gredler & Shields, 2008; Keiler, 2012). Leontiev, through this experiment, investigated how children of different ages use external stimuli to mediate their behaviour and solve problems. Leontiev's experiment was specifically designed to study the development of voluntary memory through the use of 'auxiliary tools' (Blunden, 2017; Gredler & Shields, 2008). In the experiment (explored in Gredler & Shields, 2008), children were asked to play a game where they had to remember and repeat a series of colours, but they had to abide by a rule that certain colours were forbidden and could not be identified or used in their responses. The children were then presented with the first stimulus,

a list of colours to be remembered, and later with a second stimulus, i.e., an “auxiliary stimuli” (e.g., coloured cards) which they could use to help them remember (Gredler & Shields, 2008, p. 32).

Leontiev found that when the children were presented with the problem without the ‘auxiliary tool’, they struggled to remember which colours were forbidden. However, when they were provided with the auxiliary tool, they were able to regulate their behaviour and avoided naming the forbidden colours. Thus, Leontiev’s experiment demonstrated how, by using an auxiliary tool, the child was able to solve a problem and to regulate their behaviour. This led Leontiev (and Vygotsky) to the theoretical conclusion that the auxiliary tool mediated the children’s memory and self-regulation and thus, transformed their unmediated, elementary mental function (basic memory), into a mediated higher mental function (voluntary memory) (Blunden, 2017; Gredler & Shields, 2008; Yoshida, 2006). This finding is pivotal for understanding Vygotsky’s theory, as it demonstrates how cultural tools act as mediators between the individual and their environment, enabling the transformation of psychological functions. By shifting from unmediated to mediated behaviour, the child achieves a higher level of cognitive control, illustrating the transformative potential of cultural mediation. This process is not merely about learning new skills but involves a qualitative reorganization of mental structures, which is pivotal to Vygotsky’s developmental framework.

Extrapolating further on this conclusion, Vygotsky then proposed that the “auxiliary means” (Kozulin, 1990, p. 137) in the double stimulation experiment were analogous, but not identical to the physical tools which Engels looked at in the history of the transformation of human labour. However, while physical tools were directed to the external world, the auxiliary means is not directed to the external world but directed inwardly towards the mastery of the self. As such, Vygotsky argued, the ‘auxiliary means’ could be seen as psychological ‘tools’ (Blunden, 2017; Gredler & Shields, 2008; Kozulin, 1990; Yoshida, 2006).

Following his conclusion about the nature and function of psychological tools, Vygotsky then identified language as the foundational system of signs and meanings that underpins development, and speech as the most advanced psychological tool in the development of thinking (Barrs, 2022; Vygotsky, 1987). In this case, language provides the structural framework for communication and thought, enabling the creation of shared meanings and abstract concepts. Speech, on the other hand, transforms these abstract structures into practical tools for regulating thinking and behaviour. Unlike physical technical tools, speech as a

psychological tool enables an individual to regulate their own thinking and behaviour, facilitating voluntary attention, abstract reasoning, and self-reflection (van der Veer & Valsiner, 1994). Vygotsky emphasized that speech is not merely a means of communication, but a transformative tool that restructures thought and mediates higher mental functions. For example, inner speech is "a speech function that intimately serves the child's thinking" and it "facilitates intellectual orientation, conscious awareness, the overcoming of difficulties and impediments, and imagination and thinking" (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 259). This focus on language and speech as psychological tools accentuates the centrality of cultural mediation in Vygotsky's theory. By internalizing language, individuals gain the ability to regulate their own cognitive processes, moving from external, socially mediated behaviour to internal, self-directed thought. This process is not merely about acquiring language skills but involves a fundamental transformation of psychological functions, which is focal to Vygotsky's developmental framework.

By 1931, Vygotsky concluded that the "archetypal cultural artifact through which people appropriated the culture of their community was not just any artifact, but *the spoken word*[19]" (Blunden, 2017, p. 137). Unlike some other cultural tools, such as written language, speech is universally acquired by every physiologically able child as a part of their development. Vygotsky recognized the primacy of speech in the process of human development and dedicated the final years of his life to exploring the intricate relationship between thinking and speech, which resulted in his final and seminal work, *Thinking and Speech* (originally written in 1934, and later published in *Volume 1* of *The Collected Works* in 1987) (van der Veer & Zavershneva, 2018). This emphasis on speech as the primary cultural tool highlights the transformative potential of language in shaping human development. By focusing on the development of speech and its role in mediating thought, Vygotsky provides a powerful framework for understanding how individuals internalize cultural tools to achieve complex and higher levels of psychological functioning.

The Semantic and Systemic Phase in Vygotsky's Theorizing

Based on his research on the development of speech and its relationship to thinking, Vygotsky proposed that there are four basic stages in the development of speech. His four-stage model

[19] Although Vygotsky himself sometimes used the words *speech* and *language* interchangeably, in this context, the *'spoken word'* is understood as *speech*, following Barrs' (2022) interpretation of the term.

of speech development illustrates how children progress from external communication to internal thinking. Each stage in the model indicates a shift in a child's mental development and linguistic abilities, which demonstrates the dynamic interplay between speech and thinking, within the cultural-historical framework.

In the first stage, the 'Primitive' or "Pre-intellectual" Stage, Vygotsky (1987) notes that a child merely "babbles" and the child's speech "has no constant or stable objective meaning at this point" (p. 119). At this point, the child's speech and thinking operate independently. Speech serves basic communicative functions, while thinking relies on sensory and motor experiences. This stage points out the initial separation of speech and thought, which is crucial for understanding how these functions later become integrated through cultural mediation. Without this foundation, the transformative role of language in shaping mental development cannot be fully appreciated.

This is followed by the second stage, the Stage of "Naïve Psychology" (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 114), which marks the beginning of the integration between speech and thinking. The child's speech takes on grammatical and structural forms, which remain divorced from logical reasoning. Vygotsky (1987) observes that during this stage, the child adopts "forms of speech such as 'because', 'since', 'if', 'when', or 'but'" (p. 114), but the child does this before understanding the true nature of these terms. Here, the child can be seen as having an emerging, but incomplete development of higher mental thinking, making speech a tool for social interaction and not as a tool for organizing thinking and consciousness. This stage illustrates the gradual internalization of language, as the child begins to use speech not only for communication but also as a means of structuring thought. However, the lack of logical reasoning at this stage highlights the ongoing process of development, which is central to Vygotsky's theory.

With the gradual development of the second stage, the child reaches the third stage of development for speech – the "Stage of the External Sign and External Operation" (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 115). During this stage, the child "solves the internal mental task on the basis of the external sign" (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 115). This indicates that children rely on external physical aids, such as counting on their fingers for problem-solving or memory-related tasks. Concerning the child's speech development, this stage aligns with the emergence of egocentric speech, where children speak aloud to guide their own actions. Very importantly, it is at this stage that the child's development of speech moves a step toward internalization, as their

external physical aids will eventually be transformed into inner speech and thinking. This stage is pivotal for understanding Vygotsky's theory, as it demonstrates how external tools and speech mediate the transition from external to internal thought. By relying on external signs, the child begins to internalize cognitive processes, laying the groundwork for higher mental functions.

The fourth and final stage, which Vygotsky calls the stage of "rooting"/internalization (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 115), is when a child's external actions become fully internalized as mental processes. At this stage, the child no longer relies on physical aids (like counting on fingers or speaking aloud to guide their thinking); instead, they perform these operations mentally, such as solving problems 'in their head' or using logical memory to recall information. This transformation becomes "the movement of the external operation to the internal plane" (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 115). This shift is most evident in inner speech, where children now think silently rather than talking to themselves aloud. However, external and internal speech remain interconnected, as Vygotsky notes that "one can easily be transformed into the other and each develops under the other's influence" (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 115). This is where internalization truly takes place. The child no longer speaks out aloud to themselves as they did during the egocentric speech stage. Instead, they think silently, using language internally to guide their thought processes. The child applies internalized forms of behavior that were once externally mediated (e.g., speech or actions that guided them in the past). This is the moment when external signs (like speech) are transformed into internal psychological tools which guide thinking and problem-solving. The individual can now independently use language as a mental tool, leading to the development of higher mental functions.

Having examined the development of speech, Vygotsky turned to the development of concepts in the child, using the Vygotsky/Sakharov Blocks Test (Towsey, 2006; Towsey & Macdonald, 2009; Kellogg & Veresov in Vygotsky, 2024). In these experiments, children, adolescents, and adults sorted wooden blocks of varying shapes, colours, and sizes according to specific criteria, employing the method of double stimulation to study concept formation. Vygotsky identified three 'orderings'[20] or stages in the child's development of concepts (Miller, 2014; Zavershneva, 2014), each reflecting a shift from perception-based to abstract, logical thinking. These stages illustrate Vygotsky's broader argument that development is a dynamic, dialectical process driven by the interplay between internal cognitive capacities and external cultural tools.

[20] Vygotsky discusses these 'orderings' of children's concept development in Chapter 5 of *Thinking and Speech*. Available at: https://www.marxists.org/archive/vygotsky/works/words/ch05.htm

The first stage, *Syncretism* (or 'unordered heaps'), occurs when the child groups blocks based on irrelevant factors, such as spatial proximity. This stage is divided into three sub-stages: *Trial and Error* (arbitrary selection), *Spatial Distribution* (grouping by proximity), and *Selection of Syncretic Groups* (forming groups without a logical principle) (Vygotsky, 1962). At this stage, the child's thinking is dominated by perception, lacking systematic categorization. The second stage, *Complexes*, marks a shift toward more structured thinking, though it remains grounded in practical experience. This stage includes five sub-stages: *Associative Complex* (grouping by similarities), *Complex Collections* (practical relationships, e.g., cup and saucer), *Chained Complex* (no central organizing principle), *Diffuse Complex* (features beyond practical knowledge), and *Pseudo-Concepts* (correct application without conscious awareness) (Miller, 2014; Zavershneva, 2014). While this stage represents progress, it still falls short of true conceptual understanding.

The final stage involves the development of *True Concepts*, typically emerging in adolescence. Here, the child categorizes objects based on systematic, abstract principles rather than perceptual or experiential cues (Vygotsky, 1962). Vygotsky also introduced *Potential Concepts* as an intermediate step between pseudo-concepts and true concepts, representing concepts in the process of development – structured but not yet fully systematized (Zavershneva, 2014). This progression from syncretic thinking to true concepts reinforces Vygotsky's emphasis on development over learning, highlighting the transformation of psychological functions rather than the mere accumulation of knowledge.

The blocks test exemplifies Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory, illustrating how development arises through the dialectical tension between internal cognitive capacities and external cultural tools (e.g., the blocks as mediators of thought). This process is not linear but marked by qualitative leaps, reflecting the dynamic, revolutionary nature of development.

While the preceding discussion focused on the various stages of the development of concepts, the discussion did not highlight a very important observation Vygotsky (1987) made:

> *The development of concepts or word meanings presupposes the development of a whole series of functions*. It presupposes the development of voluntary attention, logical memory, abstraction, comparison, and differentiation. *These complex mental processes cannot simply be learned*. (p. 170)

The important aspects in this quotation are that (a) the development of the different concepts can only happen *if various mental functions are developed*, and (b) these complex mental processes do not result from learning. So, once again we see Vygotsky's emphasis on 'development' as the core idea of his explanation.

Following his discussion of the development of language and the development of concepts in general, Vygotsky engages in a discussion of the development of a specific type of concept, viz., the scientific concept, in Chapter 6 of *Thinking and Speech* (Vygotsky, 1987), titled "The Development of Scientific Concepts in Childhood".

The first thing to note is that for Vygotsky

> the development of all concepts (both spontaneous and scientific) is part of the more general process of speech development. The development of concepts represents the semantic aspect of speech development. *Psychologically, the development of concepts and the development of word meaning are one and the same process*. (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 180)

This means that one should not see the child's general conceptual development as well as the development of everyday and scientific concepts independently from the process of the development of speech and thinking in the child, which was described earlier.

Importantly, in his analysis of spontaneous and scientific concepts, Vygotsky engages with various thinkers, but a significant portion of the discussion is devoted to an engagement and critique of Piaget's ideas about 'spontaneous' and 'non-spontaneous' concepts which Vygotsky reconceptualises as 'everyday' and 'scientific concepts' (Vygotsky, 1987).

Proceeding from a critique of Piaget's failure to appreciate the significance of the concepts children receive through instruction in school, Vygotsky highlights two key points: (a) these concepts differ fundamentally from the spontaneous, everyday concepts children develop in their daily lives, and (b) they play a crucial role in shaping the child's thinking and consciousness. This distinction between everyday and scientific concepts is central to Vygotsky's Cultural-Historical Psychology, which emphasizes the transformative role of culturally mediated knowledge in cognitive development. Vygotsky argues that 'everyday concepts' arise from direct experience and are tied to the child's concrete reality, but because they are unsystematic, they lack coherence and are not under the child's voluntary control – meaning the child cannot consciously manipulate or apply them deliberately. In contrast,

‘scientific concepts’ – those taught in school – are not derived from the child’s direct experience but are part of a structured system of knowledge. This systematic nature reflects the cultural-historical dimension of Vygotsky’s theory, where knowledge is embedded in social and cultural practices. Due to their systematic nature, scientific concepts enable the child to gain voluntary control over their higher mental functions, allowing them to consciously and deliberately apply these concepts in thinking and problem-solving. This process exemplifies Vygotsky’s broader argument that development is not a solitary, internal process but a dynamic interaction between the individual and their cultural environment. Vygotsky uses the term “scientific” not to refer exclusively to the natural sciences but to denote any systematic body of knowledge taught in school, such as concepts like “class struggle” and “exploitation,” which children learn through “conscious instruction” (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 22).

According to Vygotsky (1987), everyday concepts differ from scientific concepts in two key ways: the absence of conscious awareness or reflection, and the lack of intentional or volitional control over logical operations. These operations arise spontaneously during the child’s development, without deliberate effort. This spontaneous development reflects the child’s immediate engagement with their environment, but it also highlights the limitations of unmediated experience in fostering higher-order thinking. The distinctive feature of the child’s spontaneous thinking is the absence of voluntary functions, such as conscious awareness. Conscious awareness involves mental operations like abstraction, generalization, and mastery, which are systematically interconnected and essential for higher-order thinking. These operations are not innate but are cultivated through the internalization of cultural tools and meanings, a core tenet of Vygotsky’s Cultural-Historical Psychology. In contrast, everyday concepts lack this systematic structure and remain tied to the child’s immediate, concrete experiences. This contrast illustrates Vygotsky’s holistic view of development, where the interplay between everyday and scientific concepts drives cognitive growth and the emergence of higher mental functions.

Furthermore, Vygotsky argues that the two types of concepts develop in opposite directions:

> the child's spontaneous concepts develop from below to above, from the more elementary and lower characteristics to the higher, while his scientific concepts develop from above to below, from the more complex and higher characteristics to the more elementary. (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 219)

This bidirectional development reflects the dialectical nature of Vygotsky's Cultural-Historical Psychology, where individual experience and culturally mediated knowledge are not separate but mutually constitutive processes. However,

> while scientific and everyday concepts move in opposite directions in development, these processes are internally and profoundly connected with one another. The development of everyday concepts must reach a certain level for the child to learn scientific concepts and gain conscious awareness of them. The child must reach a threshold in the development of spontaneous concepts, a threshold beyond which conscious awareness becomes possible. (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 219)

This threshold represents a critical point in the child's cognitive development, where the interplay between everyday and scientific concepts becomes a driving force for higher mental functions.

Lastly, Vygotsky summarises the nature and process of the development of everyday and scientific concepts as follows:

> the strength of the scientific concept lies in the higher characteristics of concepts, in conscious awareness and volition. In contrast, this is the weakness of the child's everyday concept. The strength of the everyday concept lies in spontaneous, situationally meaningful, concrete applications, that is, in the sphere of experience and the empirical. This duality highlights the complementary roles of individual experience and cultural mediation in Vygotsky's theory, where both are essential for the full development of cognitive and conscious processes. The development of scientific concepts begins in the domain of conscious awareness and volition. It grows downward into the domain of the concrete, into the domain of personal experience. In contrast, the development of spontaneous concepts begins in the domain of the concrete and empirical. It moves toward the higher characteristics of concepts, toward conscious awareness and volition. This bidirectional movement illustrates the transformative potential of Vygotsky's framework, where the integration of concrete experience and abstract knowledge leads to the emergence of higher-order thinking. The link between these two lines of development reflects their true nature. This is the link of the zone of proximal and actual development. (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 220)

From the preceding discussion and the quotation above, it is evident that the two types of concepts do not develop separately, but interact dynamically, reshaping cognitive processes

over time (Hedges, 2012). This dynamic interaction is a cornerstone of Vygotsky's Cultural-Historical Psychology, which views development as a socially and culturally mediated process rather than an individual, isolated achievement. Furthermore, these concepts, according to Vygotsky, interact in the zone of proximal/proximate development, where instruction plays a crucial role in transforming knowledge and thinking processes (Vygotsky, 1987).

Based on the significance of instruction in scientific concepts, Vygotsky looks at the relationship between instruction and development and contends that (a) this relationship is complex, and (b) instruction and development are not independent but related processes. This interconnectedness reflects the core of Vygotsky's Cultural-Historical Psychology, which views instruction and development as mutually constitutive. Quite importantly, Vygotsky rejects, amongst others, Piaget's view that the child must develop certain cognitive structures before instruction can take place and argues that instruction can 'accelerate' the child's development under specific conditions. This rejection affirms Vygotsky's belief in the transformative potential of culturally mediated instruction, which actively shapes rather than passively follows development. To illustrate how this would happen, Vygotsky invokes a theoretical construct that he previously used in the context of a critique of intelligence testing, viz., the zone of proximate/proximal development, and argues that

> instruction is only useful when it moves ahead of development. When it does, it impels or wakens a whole series of functions that are in a stage of maturation lying in the zone of proximal development. This is the major role of instruction in development. (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 212)

Having dealt with the development of scientific concepts, and how instruction (in scientific concepts) can 'waken' maturing functions in the child, the next part of Vygotsky's theorizing (in the final chapter of *Thinking and Speech*) is devoted to the role of the 'word' in the development of consciousness. This shift marks a pivotal moment in Vygotsky's theoretical evolution, as he moves from a focus on the instrumental use of signs to their semantic and cultural significance, reflecting the broader framework of Cultural-Historical Psychology. More specifically, Vygotsky changes focus from the idea of the sign as a 'tool' to the meaning of the sign in the development of consciousness (see Miller, 2011, 2014). The focus now is no longer on the higher mental functions, but on the inter-functional relationships between higher mental functions. This transition indicates Vygotsky's growing emphasis on the systemic and relational nature of cognitive processes, where development is understood as the reorganization

of functional connections rather than the isolated growth of individual abilities. Proceeding from a critique of his earlier thinking, Vygotsky states that

> in the process of development, and in the historical development of behavior in particular, it is not so much the functions which change (*these we mistakenly studied before*). Their structure and the system of their development remain the same. What is changed and modified are rather the relationships, the links between the functions. New constellations emerge which were unknown in the preceding stage. That is why intra-functional change is often not essential in the transition from one stage to another. It is inter-functional changes, the changes of inter-functional connections and the inter-functional structure which matter. (Vygotsky, 1997a, p. 92 emphasis added)

This insight reveals the holistic nature of Vygotsky's framework, where development is seen as a dynamic reorganization of functional systems, shaped by cultural and social influences.

The shift in focus towards the sign as a meaning-bearing cultural symbol is highlighted in *Thinking and Speech*, where Vygotsky moves away from seeing the sign as a psychological tool and emphasizes the cultural context of signs, which are essential for the process of meaning-making. This evolution reflects Vygotsky's deepening understanding of the role of culture in shaping not only cognitive tools but also the very structure of consciousness. He argues that "words [as tools] are not merely an external means of communication, but they serve to organize and regulate thought" (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 71). This reiterates his understanding that signs are not just instrumental in shaping cognition, but signs are imbued with cultural significance that influence how one understands and organizes their thinking, positing "sense-making" as the main function of signs (Zavershneva, 2014, p. 87). This perspective aligns with Vygotsky's broader argument that consciousness is not a static entity but a dynamic, meaning-laden system shaped by cultural and historical contexts. Furthermore, Vygotsky highlights that "the process of internalization is not only the appropriation of external signs, but also the cultural forms of their use and meaning" (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 77), emphasizing the central role of culture in shaping the meaning of signs in the development process. This internalization process is a cornerstone of Cultural-Historical Psychology, illustrating how cultural tools and meanings are transformed into personal cognitive resources. This perspective also emphasizes that the sign functions as a medium through which cultural and social influences are internalized, leading to the development of consciousness.

Zavershneva (2014) provides a corrected translation of Vygotsky's understanding of consciousness, and how consciousness can be understood as a system of meaningful actions. Zavershneva (2014) clarifies Vygotsky's assertion, correcting translation errors from *Volume 3* of *The Collected Works*, stating that

> sense is what enters into meaning (the result of the meaning) but is not consolidated behind the sign… Sense is broader than meaning… Consciousness as a whole has a semantic structure. *We judge about consciousness on the basis of its semantic structure, for semantic structure of consciousness is the relation to the external world*. (p. 87; emphasis in the original text)

This clarification signifies Vygotsky's view of consciousness as a dynamic, meaning-laden system, shaped by the individual's engagement with cultural and historical contexts, and highlights the centrality of meaning-making in his Cultural-Historical Psychology. This clarification by Zavershneva, of Vygotsky's thinking, contributes to one's understanding of his shift towards focusing on the development of consciousness in the final years of his life, by highlighting the evolving complexity of his conceptualization of human development. This evolution reflects Vygotsky's move from a focus on isolated psychological functions to a more holistic understanding of consciousness as a system of interrelated, meaning-driven processes. As his thinking progressed, particularly in his later years, he began to view consciousness not only as a result of the development of higher mental functions, but as a dynamic, semantic system with its own structure. This shift marks a significant advancement in his theoretical framework, emphasizing the interconnectedness of cognitive, emotional, and cultural dimensions in the development of consciousness.

In Vygotsky's earlier work, particularly in his exploration of the stages of concept development, he primarily focused on how psychological functions are individually shaped and developed, often emphasizing the mediation of psychological tools as central to this development (Vygotsky, 1987). This early focus on mediation laid the groundwork for his later insights into the systemic nature of consciousness, where tools and signs are not merely instruments but carriers of cultural meaning. However, as his thinking evolved, particularly with his shift towards understanding consciousness, Vygotsky began to recognize that these psychological functions are not isolated, but are deeply interrelated. This recognition reflects the holistic nature of his Cultural-Historical Psychology, which views development as the reorganization

of functional systems rather than the growth of isolated abilities. This recognition is essential when considering the developmental trajectory of children's thinking, which progresses through stages like the formation of complexes and the gradual organization of mental functions (van der Veer & Zavershneva, 2018). These stages illustrate the dynamic interplay between individual experience and cultural mediation, a core principle of Vygotsky's framework. Only after studying these stages and their progression should we turn our attention to Vygotsky's later work on psychological systems, where he proposes that these functions operate as part of dynamic, self-organizing structures (Vygotsky, 1997a). This systemic view of psychological functions highlights the transformative potential of Vygotsky's theory, offering a comprehensive alternative to reductionist models of development.

This shift in his thinking was not just theoretical but was grounded in his research on the systematic and dynamic localization of brain functions – a view that significantly influenced his work with Alexander Luria (Luria, 1973; Vygotsky, 1997a) and later, the field of neuropsychology. This interdisciplinary approach highlights the practical and scientific relevance of Vygotsky's ideas, bridging psychological theory with neurobiological research. Understanding this evolution of thought can provide us with an insight into how Vygotsky's theories can inform neuropsychological perspectives on the interconnectedness of higher mental functions. By emphasizing the dynamic and relational nature of cognitive processes, Vygotsky's framework offers a foundation for understanding how cultural and social factors shape brain development and function, aligning with contemporary neuropsychological research on the interconnectedness of the higher mental functions. However, to fully appreciate the development of Vygotsky's ideas, it is essential to consider those areas of research that have been previously overlooked but integral to his thinking, particularly the role of *vospitaniye* and *perezhivanie* in the development of his theory, and his research in defectology, all of which played a pivotal role in his exploration of higher mental functions. These often-neglected aspects of Vygotsky's work provide critical insights into the holistic and transformative nature of his Cultural-Historical Psychology.

Overlooked Dimensions of Vygotsky's Theory: *Vospitaniye*, *Perezhivanie*, and Defectology

Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory of development plays a significant role in developmental psychology, offering a framework that emphasizes the social and cultural mediation of human

development. While concepts such as the ZPD and scaffolding (see Chapter Three) have become central to Western educational research in the context of the incorrect socio-cultural theory, other dimensions of Vygotsky's work remain underexplored or misunderstood in the context of his cultural-historical theory. This section will provide an account of these overlooked dimensions to address this gap by revisiting and critically examining three underexplored aspects of Vygotsky's original thinking: *vospitaniye*, *perezhivanie,* and defectology. These concepts, though less prominent in Western scholarship, offer profound insights into the holistic nature of human development and the complex interplay between an individual, the social interactions of the individual, and the cultural-historical factors. By returning to his original texts and situating the previously unexplored ideas within their cultural-historical context, this discussion provides a better understanding of his theory. Ultimately, this exploration not only enriches our understanding of cultural-historical psychology but also opens new avenues for research and practice in developmental and educational psychology.

Vospitaniye

Vygotsky's concept of *vospitaniye* – translated as "the process of social upbringing" (cultivation or nurturance) (DeYoung, 2007, p. 239) – offers a deeper understanding of how social and cultural environments influence and shape the development of higher mental functions. Unlike formal education, which focuses on the transmission of knowledge, *vospitaniye* encompasses the broader process of socialization, moral development, and the internalization of cultural norms and values. This concept is crucial for understanding the broader nature of Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory and its implications for psychology and education.

The concept of *vospitaniye* is a key idea in Vygotsky's theorising of child development, representing a holistic approach to education that integrates moral, social, and intellectual growth. In his writings, Vygotsky emphasizes that *vospitaniye* is not limited to formal instruction (or often misunderstood when translated into English as 'education' – see Mylnikova, 2017), but encompasses the broader social and cultural context in which a child develops. For example, in *Mind in Society* (1978), Vygotsky discusses how children develop through interactions with others in society, who mediate their understanding of cultural tools and societal norms. This process, which he describes as 'the social situation of development',

highlights the interconnectedness of development and upbringing, where the child's environment plays a crucial role in shaping their development.

Vygotsky introduces the concept of the 'social situation of development' in his discussions of child development, particularly in his work on the relationship between the child and their environment. This concept is most explicitly articulated in his writings on the dynamics of development and the role of social interaction in shaping psychological growth. While the exact phrase 'the social situation of development' is not always directly quoted for *vospitaniye* in English translations, it is a key idea quoted in his theoretical framework and is discussed in works such as *The Collected Works*. For example, in Chapter 6 of *Volume 5* (1998), Vygotsky described 'the social situation of development' as the unique relationship between the child and their social environment, which serves as the starting point for all changes in development during a given age period. Vygotsky (1998) argues

> that at the beginning of each age period, there develops a completely original, exclusive, single, and unique relation, specific to the given age, between the child and reality, mainly the social reality, that surrounds him. We call this relation the social situation of development at the given age. The social situation of development represents the initial moment for all dynamic changes that occur in development during the given period. It determines wholly and completely the forms and the path along which the child will acquire ever newer personality characteristics, drawing them from the social reality as from the basic source of development, the path along which the social becomes the individual. Thus, the first question we must answer in studying the dynamics of any age is to explain the social situation of development. (p. 198)

In this case, for Vygotsky, *vospitaniye* is deeply intertwined with the 'social situation of development', as it represents the process through which the child's social environment shapes their growth and personality. By understanding *vospitaniye* within this framework, one can see it as a dynamic, *culturally* mediated, and age-specific process that bridges the social and the individual. This perspective underscores the importance of the child's *social interactions and cultural context in their development*, highlighting *vospitaniye* as a central mechanism for fostering the child's *integration* into their *cultural* world.

Vygotsky's concept of *vospitaniye* is also deeply intertwined with his focus on the development of higher mental functions. He argued that higher mental functions, such as abstract thinking, self-regulation, and problem-solving, are not innate but are developed through social

interaction and the internalization of cultural tools (as discussed previously). Here, *vospitaniye* provides the social and cultural framework within which this internalization occurs. For example, through interactions with caregivers and peers, children learn to use language not only as a means of communication but also as a tool for thinking and self-regulation. Similarly, moral and ethical values are internalized through participation in social practices and rituals, shaping the child's understanding of right and wrong. The process of *vospitaniye* is particularly evident in the development of self-regulation, a key higher mental function. Vygotsky (1978) observes that self-regulation begins as a socially mediated process, where caregivers guide the child's behaviour. Over time, these external forms of regulation are internalized, allowing the child to regulate their own thoughts and actions, and leading to the development of their consciousness. This process is central to *vospitaniye*, as it involves the deliberate shaping of the child's behavior and attitudes through social interaction and cultural practices.

Vygotsky's concept of *vospitaniye* (and emphasis on 'upbringing') underscores the need for a holistic approach to human development. *Vospitaniye* encompasses not only cognitive development but also moral, and social development, reflecting Vygotsky's view that psychological functions are interdependent and cannot be isolated from one another – highlighting how these dimensions evolve together within the broader cultural and social context. Thus, *vospitaniye* provides a valuable lens for understanding how all aspects of an individual's development are woven together in a dynamic and holistic process.

Perezhivanie

Following Vygotsky's exploration of *vospitaniye*, which explored the holistic process of moral, social and emotional upbringing, it is essential to examine another pivotal yet often overlooked concept in his work: *perezhivanie*. While *vospitaniye* emphasized the importance of moral and emotional cultivation for development, *perezhivanie* refers to the deeply personal and subjective ways individuals experience and interpret their social environments. Translated as 'lived-through experience', *perezhivanie* refers to how individuals become aware of, interpret, and emotionally relate to specific events in their social and cultural contexts. This concept challenges simplistic interpretations of Vygotsky's work as a 'social theory', where development is seen as a straightforward transmission of social norms. Instead, *perezhivanie* reveals Vygotsky's dialectical understanding of the interplay between the individual and their

environment, offering a more nuanced framework for understanding the development of higher mental functions within his developmental theory.

According to González Rey (2016),

> in the last 10 years, however, the concept of *perezhivanie* has increasingly been the object of attention from many researchers (Fakhrutdinova, 2010; Fleer & Hammer, 2013; Fleer & Quinones, 2013; GonzálezRey, 2009; Smagorinsky, 2011, among others), mainly as result of the increased interest in the topics of emotion, motivation, and subjectivity within the cultural historical approach. However, as was common in Vygotsky's work, especially with the concepts developed by him from 1932 onward, the concept of *perezhivanie* that was used by him had different meanings at the first and the last moments of his works. At the end, the precise definition of the psychological nature of *perezhivanie* remained open and incomplete, just as was the case with the concept of sense. (p. 305)

Contemporary Vygotsky research has increasingly highlighted the importance of *perezhivanie*, demonstrating how it enriches our understanding of the affective and emotional dimensions of development. By examining how individuals refract social factors through their unique subjective *perezhivanie*, Vygotsky provides a powerful lens for exploring the dynamic and personalized nature of development. The ongoing and progressive research in this area, especially in recent years and based on his original works, has provided us with more information on how *perezhivanie* can be incorporated into understanding Vygotsky's theory in totality. Hence, it is crucial to explore the significance of *perezhivanie* in Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory, its dialectical relationship with the social for development, and its implications for contemporary research and practice.

The term *perezhivanie* originates from the Russian word for 'experience' but carries a deeper connotation, referring to the emotional and subjective interpretation of events. Although Vygotsky never offered a singular definition for *perezhivanie*, he tried to understand it as a psychological formation, and used different descriptions to understand this formation (F. González Rey, 2016). Veresov (2017) argues that "*perezhivanie* is quite difficult to explain and almost impossible to translate" and that "there is no English equivalent for this term" (p. 47). Yet, what truly matters is not the label itself, but the implied meaning and the substance it holds in explaining a phenomenon within Vygotsky's theory of development.

Shortly before his death, Vygotsky (1935/1994) adopted the Russian term *perezhivanie* to highlight the central role of affect in framing and interpreting human experience (Smagorinsky, 2011). The term has since been associated with efforts to overcome trauma, suggesting it is rooted in the emotional response to experience, particularly in its regulatory function. Vygotsky uses *perezhivanie* to describe the dramatic process by which personality develops in everyday life, arguing that environmental factors are "refracted through the prism of the child's emotional experience" (Vygotsky, 1994 cited in Smagorinsky, 2011, p. 336), thereby determining the role and influence of the social situation on the individual's development.

One of the most profound insights about *perezhivanie* is that it functions as a kind of psychological 'prism', (Smagorinsky, 2011) through which every individual's social world is uniquely processed. Veresov's (2016, 2017) analysis emphasizes that rather than exerting a uniform, deterministic influence on the development of an individual, the social environment is always experienced and internalized in a personal, affectively charged manner. This means that even when children share the same external conditions, the way these conditions are emotionally and cognitively interpreted leads to markedly different developmental trajectories. For example, while one child might interpret competitive interactions as energizing and motivating, another might find them overwhelming and withdraw, and a third might remain largely unaffected. In this view, it is not the raw social factors themselves that shape development, but the individual's unique *perezhivanie* – the way in which they emotionally and cognitively filter their social experiences. This perspective, as discussed by Veresov (2016, 2017), reveals that understanding development requires attending not only to the social environment but also to the deeply personal process by which that environment is made meaningful.

This perspective challenges the Western tendency to oversimplify 'the social' as a uniform force acting on individuals. Instead, Vygotsky's concept of *perezhivanie* highlights the dialectical relationship between the individual and their environment. The social environment shapes the individual, but the individual also actively interprets and transforms their environment through their *perezhivanie*. This dynamic interplay results in a unique developmental trajectory for each individual, shaped by the synthesis of their lived experiences and their social context.

In conclusion, Vygotsky's concepts of *vospitaniye* and *perezhivanie* offer critical insights into the dynamic, socially mediated nature of human development. While *vospitaniye* emphasizes

the importance of moral and social upbringing in shaping a child's intellectual, emotional, and moral growth within a cultural context, *perezhivanie* highlights the unique, affective ways individuals interpret and internalize their social world. Together, these concepts reveal that development is a dialectical process where social experiences are not merely absorbed but actively filtered through personal emotional and cognitive processes. This interplay between the individual's subjective experiences and their social environment underscores Vygotsky's broader cultural-historical theory, which views development as a complex, relational process involving both social interaction and individual interpretation.

Defectology

In the previous sections, the concepts of *vospitaniye* (upbringing) and *perezhivanie* (emotional experience) were explored as central elements of Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory, highlighting their role in shaping the social and emotional dimensions of development. However, to fully appreciate the extent of Vygotsky's theoretical contributions, it is essential to shift focus to his work in defectology – an area of research that not only informed his understanding of higher mental functions, but also provided a practical foundation for his broader cultural-historical framework.

Central to Vygotsky's theory is the idea that higher mental functions (such as abstract thinking, problem-solving, and self-regulation) are not biologically predetermined, but are shaped by social interaction and the use of cultural tools (Elhammoumi & Alnajjar, 2017; Zavershneva, 2014). While Vygotsky's thinking spans a wide range of topics, his research in defectology – the study of individuals with physical or cognitive impairments – played a pivotal role in the development of his broader theoretical framework (Smagorinsky, 2012). Through his work with individuals who were blind, deaf, or otherwise impaired, Vygotsky gained critical insights into the role of 'artificial instruments' (psychological tools) in cognitive development (Porto et al., 2019). This section explores how Vygotsky's defectology research informed and influenced his theory of cultural-historical development, the importance of instruction in this process, and why this understanding is crucial for further exploring and applying his work.

According to Barrs (2022), "Vygotsky, although based at the Moscow Institute of Psychology, began his career in Moscow in 1924 primarily as a 'defectologist', that is to say, a specialist in the education of children with serious physical and mental impairments and severe developmental delays" (p. 5). During Vygotsky's time, individuals with disabilities were often

marginalized, excluded, and isolated from mainstream society, and as a result, relegated to special institutions. Vygotsky (as a Jew who was also excluded from Russian society – see Chapter One) challenged this approach, arguing that such exclusion was not only socially unjust but also detrimental to the development of these individuals and their right to become active members of the society they live in (Smagorinsky, 2012). His "career was dedicated to formulating a comprehensive developmental psychology based on the premise that human development is mediated by engagement with cultural practices carried out through signs and tools" and "his work in defectology was consistent with this focus" (Smagorinsky, 2012, p. 15). In this regard, he was driven by the belief that individuals with impairments could achieve higher mental functions through the use of different culturally created psychological tools, which would specifically cater to their individual needs regarding their 'deficits' (Bøttcher & Dammeyer, 2012; Smagorinsky, 2012; Vygotsky, 1993).

Vygotsky's defectology research provided him with a unique perspective on the role of 'artificial' and 'cultural techniques' for higher mental development (Vygotsky, 1993). These techniques consist of "a special system of cultural signs and symbols which are adapted to the specific psychophysiological characteristics of an abnormal (sic) child" (Vygotsky, 1993, p. 168). He observed that individuals with sensory or cognitive impairments often relied on compensatory tools to navigate their environments and interact with others (Porto et al., 2019). For example, the raised dots in Braille serve as a substitute for written language for the blind, while dactylology (sign language) provides a visual-gestural mode of communication for the deaf. Vygotsky saw these tools not as mere compensations for deficits but as active facilitators of mental development (Vygotsky, 1993, p. 168). He (1978) believed that

> the use of artificial means, the transition to mediated activity, fundamentally changes all psychological operations just as the use of tools limitlessly broadens the range of activities within which the new psychological functions may operate. In this context, we can use the term higher psychological function, or higher behavior as referring to the combination of tool and sign in psychological activity. (p. 55)

These tools enabled individuals with impairments to develop the same higher mental functions as their peers – though it is important to note that Vygotsky did not claim their development was identical to that of typically developing children. Rather, he argued that their development followed a fundamentally different trajectory, shaped by the unique cultural tools and social interactions available to them. This insight was revolutionary and groundbreaking for the

development of Vygotsky's thinking. He argued that higher mental development is not solely dependent on biological factors but is profoundly influenced by the cultural tools available to an individual within their historical contexts. In the case of individuals with impairments, these tools (whether Braille, sign language, or other assistive techniques) served as extensions of their mental abilities, allowing them to participate as members of society. This perspective laid the foundation for Vygotsky's broader theory of cultural-historical development, with an emphasis on the mediation of cultural-historical tools through social interaction for the development of higher mental functions.

The primary objective of research in the field of defectology, according to Vygotsky (in Bottcher & Dammeyer, 2012), is to examine the unique developmental routes taken by children with various defects. As noted in the previous chapter, a child is born with natural, biologically based, elementary mental functions like perception, attention, and memory (Bottcher & Dammeyer, 2012), which are transformed by signs into higher mental functions. In keeping with his general theory of development, Vygotsky's approach to explaining the development of children with biological defects similarly proceeds from the distinction between two lines of development and the related natural and higher mental functions.

According to Vygotsky (1993), under normal circumstances, the natural and cultural-historical lines of development support each other. However, the 'fusion' of the natural and cultural-historical lines of development does not take place in the case of children with biological defects. Such defects create certain difficulties for mental development and completely different ones for the cultural-historical development of the child. Therefore, the two lines of development will diverge substantially from one another. The degree and character of the divergence will be determined and measured in each case by the different qualitative and quantitative effects of the defect on each of the two lines of development (Vygotsky, 1993). Thus, for Vygotsky, the often-problematic development of children with mental disabilities is the result of the incongruence between the biological development of the child and the structure of the cultural-historical forms of the social world in which the child is living (Vygotsky, 1993). In other words, the cultural-historical forms of the social world (which include institutions) do not support and accommodate the development of children with atypical psychophysical and mental development and constitutions in the same way.

The inconsistency between a child's biological and cultural trajectories of development has an impact on the child's psychological growth. The child's ability to acquire psychological tools,

develop higher mental functions, engage in social activities, and learn pertinent social skills is affected by their fundamental sensory, organic, or neurological defects. As a result, secondary faults frequently occur based on the original biological problems, and these secondary faults affect the child's whole development (Vygotsky, 1993).

What is important to note from the preceding discussion is that Vygotsky's defectological thinking is fundamentally dialectical, meaning that to understand the psychological development of the child with biological defects, it is essential to consider the dialectical relationship between the biological and the social. From this dialectical perspective, the most significant difference between children with and without impairments is the former group's capacity/incapacity to acquire the requisite cultural-historical forms (including psychological tools) of the social world, as compared to children without any impairments.

Based on his dialectical conception, Vygotsky, according to Kotik-Friedgut and Friedgut (2008) thus chose to emphasize 'difference' over 'deficit' on purpose. Vygotsky never labelled these children as 'defective' or 'handicapped' (in some instances, the Russian word was translated as 'backward') but referred to them as 'anomalous,' stressing that, properly treated, they may acquire cognitive levels equivalent to their contemporaries. He further observed that social attitudes toward 'anomalous children' often led to the development of a secondary disability in such children, brought on by feelings of inferiority, which, in his opinion, are the most harmful effects of physical or mental difference (Smagorinsky, 2012). Quite importantly, he believed that a so-called defect necessitates the development of compensatory faculties. Thus, for example, in his examination of blindness, he argued that it "is not only a defect, a minus, a weakness, but in some way is also the source of manifestations of abilities, a plus, a strength" (Vygotsky, 1993, p. 97). It is therefore essential that a child with 'anomalous development' should not be seen as being 'deficient' but that they be provided with the means and opportunities to develop compensatory faculties to deal with the social world.

Vygotsky emphasized that instruction for individuals with impairments should be tailored to their specific needs and abilities. Rather than isolating these individuals or forcing them into mainstream educational settings without adaptation, he advocated for specialized instruction that considers their unique challenges and strengths (Vygotsky, 1993). He argued that "the techniques for instructing a child with a defect must always differ deeply and distinctively from those used to train a normal child" (Vygotsky, 1993, p. 179). This is important for the development of the child's higher mental functions, as "instruction always leads development"

(Barrs, 2022, p. 48). This aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) perspective that instruction creates the possibilities for development rather than being seen as subordinate to developmental processes (see Daniels, 2009, p. 27). Through instruction, one can provide the tools and techniques to help children with impairments develop optimally (Vygotsky, 1978, 1993).

Vygotsky's research in defectology was instrumental in the development of his cultural-historical theory of cognitive development. By studying individuals with impairments, he gained critical insights into the role of cultural tools and social interaction in shaping higher mental functions. His emphasis on special instruction and the use of compensatory tools provides a powerful framework for understanding and addressing the needs of individuals with disabilities. His work in defectology is crucial for understanding the origins and implications of his cultural-historical theory, as it provides a concrete example of how cultural tools and social interaction can shape development, even in the face of significant physiological challenges. This focus on defectology not only enriched Vygotsky's theoretical framework but also demonstrated the practical applications of his ideas, offering a foundation for a more nuanced understanding of inclusive education and the development of compensatory strategies that empower individuals with disabilities to achieve their full potential.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided an in-depth exposition of Vygotsky's Cultural-Historical Psychology, clarifying the complexities surrounding the labels of 'social,' 'cultural,' and 'historical,' and their interplay in his theory. By exploring the instrumental and semantic phases of Vygotsky's theoretical development, it has been demonstrated how he conceptualized the transformative processes through which individuals internalize cultural tools and meanings, marking crucial stages in the development of higher mental functions. These phases, central to his developmental framework, reveal the dynamic and relational nature of cognitive growth, emphasizing the role of social interactions and cultural contexts in shaping mental processes.

Furthermore, the chapter has addressed the previously underexplored aspects of Vygotsky's work, such as *vospitaniye*, *perezhivanie*, and defectology offering a more holistic understanding of his theory. These concepts, often neglected in Western scholarship, are pivotal for appreciating the full scope of Vygotsky's vision. By situating these ideas within his broader cultural-historical framework, this chapter has highlighted their importance in deepening our understanding of human development and pointing to new directions for research and practice in psychology and education.

Summative Conclusion

Revisionism in Vygotsky Studies – What Lies Ahead?

The central question guiding this dissertation (posed in the *introduction*) – "How have misinterpretations and misattributions in the publication history of Vygotsky's works shaped contemporary Vygotskian scholarship and how can a revisionist approach provide a more accurate understanding of his cultural-historical psychology?" – has been addressed through a comprehensive exploration of the historical, ideological, and conceptual forces that have shaped the reception and interpretation of Vygotsky's works. The findings, through each chapter, reveal that the dominant understanding of Vygotsky's ideas in contemporary Western scholarship has been significantly influenced by flawed translations, editorial interventions, and ideological biases, leading to widespread distortions of his original theoretical framework. These distortions have not only obscured the true depth and complexity of Vygotsky's Cultural-Historical Psychology but have also limited its potential to inform and transform educational and psychological research.

Revisiting the Past: A Critical Appraisal of Vygotsky's Legacy

Through a structured exploration of historical, ideological, and conceptual forces, each chapter has addressed the central question and its underlying themes, offering a nuanced and revisionist understanding of Vygotsky's legacy. This begins in *Chapter One*, as it laid the groundwork by situating Vygotsky's work within its historical and ideological contexts, emphasizing the profound impact of his premature death, the suppression of his writings in the Soviet Union, and the piecemeal translation and appropriation of his ideas in the West. This chapter underscored the importance of understanding the biases and limitations that have shaped the reception of Vygotsky's work, particularly in Western scholarship. The ideological divides between the Soviet Union and the West during the Cold War era, coupled with the selective translation of Vygotsky's texts, created a fragmented and often distorted understanding of his ideas. By examining these historical forces, the chapter set the stage for a critical reappraisal of the Western Vygotskian legacy, arguing that a deeper understanding of his work requires situating it within the broader framework of Cultural-Historical Psychology.

Chapter Two explored the revisionist movement in Vygotskian studies, challenging the dominant Westernized interpretations of Vygotsky's work. This chapter highlighted the

ongoing debates surrounding the Western Vygotskian legacy and the need to move beyond traditional research approaches to develop a more accurate understanding of Vygotsky's original ideas. By examining the historical, political, and cultural contexts that have shaped the appropriation of Vygotsky's ideas, this chapter demonstrated the importance of revisiting his texts with a revisionist lens. The revisionist movement has played a pivotal role in uncovering the gaps and distortions in the Western Vygotskian legacy, providing a foundation for a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of his work.

Chapter Three shifted the focus to the key concepts that have significantly influenced the Western Vygotskian legacy, including the mistranslation of *obuchenie*, the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), the non-Vygotskian notion of scaffolding, and the misrepresentation of Vygotsky's use of the notion of mediation as 'teaching'. By critically analysing these concepts, the chapter revealed how Western appropriations of Vygotsky's work often diverge from his original formulations. For instance, the mistranslation of *obuchenie* as 'learning' rather than 'instruction' has led to a narrow interpretation of Vygotsky's ideas, obscuring the dialectical relationship between teaching and development in his framework. Similarly, the concept of scaffolding, often attributed to Vygotsky, is not found in his original texts and represents a Western extension of his ideas. This analysis underscored the importance of situating these ideas within their proper historical and theoretical contexts, emphasizing the need to revisit Vygotsky's texts to clarify their original meanings.

Chapter Four provided a comprehensive exposition of Vygotsky's Cultural-Historical Psychology, exploring its developmental nature and the transformative processes through which individuals internalize cultural tools and meanings. By examining often-overlooked concepts such as *vospitaniye*, *perezhivanie*, and defectology, this chapter revealed the richness and complexity of Vygotsky's vision and theory, demonstrating how his theory offers a dynamic and holistic alternative to reductionist models of learning and development. For example, *vospitaniye* (upbringing) and *perezhivanie* (emotional experience) highlight the interplay between social, emotional, and cognitive development, offering a more integrated understanding of human growth. Similarly, Vygotsky's work in defectology provides a powerful framework for understanding and addressing the needs of individuals with disabilities, emphasizing the role of cultural tools and social interaction in shaping development even in the face of physiological challenges. These often-neglected aspects of Vygotsky's work provide critical insights into the holistic and transformative nature of his Cultural-Historical Psychology.

Key Contributions and Implications

This dissertation makes several key contributions to the field of contemporary Vygotsky studies. First, it provides a critical reappraisal of the Western Vygotskian legacy, emphasizing the importance of the historical and ideological contexts in shaping the reception and interpretation of his work. By examining the piecemeal translation and publication of his writings, as well as the ideological divides between the Soviet Union and the West, the dissertation highlights the potential biases and limitations that have influenced contemporary understandings of Vygotsky's ideas. This critical perspective is essential for developing a more accurate and nuanced understanding of his work.

Second, the dissertation contributes to the ongoing revisionist movement in Vygotskian studies by challenging the dominant Westernized interpretations of his work and advocating for a more accurate understanding of his original ideas. By exploring the critical perspectives of revisionist scholars and examining the conceptual distortions that have shaped the Western Vygotskian legacy, the dissertation underscores the need to revisit Vygotsky's texts and situate his ideas within their proper historical and theoretical contexts. This revisionist approach not only clarifies Vygotsky's original contributions but also opens new avenues for research and theoretical development.

Third, the dissertation enriches our understanding of Vygotsky's Cultural-Historical Psychology by providing a comprehensive exposition of his theory and its developmental nature. By examining often-overlooked concepts such as *vospitaniye*, *perezhivanie*, and defectology, the dissertation reveals the richness and complexity of Vygotsky's vision, demonstrating how his theory offers a dynamic and holistic alternative to reductionist models of learning and development. These insights have important implications for contemporary research and practice, particularly in the fields of education, psychology, and even neuropsychology.

Finally, the dissertation highlights the practical and scientific relevance of Vygotsky's ideas, particularly in the fields of neuropsychology and inclusive education. By emphasizing the dynamic and relational nature of cognitive processes, Vygotsky's framework provides a foundation for understanding how cultural and social factors shape brain development and function, aligning with contemporary neuropsychological research. Additionally, his work in defectology offers a powerful framework for understanding and addressing the needs of

individuals with disabilities, providing a foundation for inclusive education and the development of compensatory strategies – an area of development which can progress this journey effectively.

So, Where Do We Go From Here?

The critical reappraisal of Vygotsky's legacy undertaken in this dissertation raises important questions about the future of Vygotskian studies. *Where do we go once we have a clearer understanding of the historical, ideological, and conceptual forces that have shaped the reception and interpretation of Vygotsky's work? How can we build on this foundation to further develop and apply his ideas in contemporary research and practice?*

1. Exploring Overlooked Dimensions of Vygotsky's Work: There is a need for continued exploration of the often-overlooked dimensions of Vygotsky's work, such as *vospitaniye*, *perezhivanie*, and defectology. These concepts offer profound insights into the holistic nature of human development and the complex interplay between individuals, social interactions, and cultural-historical factors. Future research could examine the implications of these concepts for contemporary educational and psychological practice, particularly in the context of inclusive education and neuropsychological research. *For example, how can perezhivanie inform our understanding of the emotional and social dimensions of learning? How can Vygotsky's work in defectology contribute to the development of more inclusive educational practices?*

2. Challenging Dominant Interpretations: Future research should continue to challenge the dominant Westernized interpretations of Vygotsky's work by revisiting his original texts and situating his ideas within their proper historical and theoretical contexts. This could involve further exploration of the revisionist movement in Vygotskian studies, as well as the development of new methodologies for analysing and interpreting Vygotsky's work. *For instance, how can digital archives and new translation technologies facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of Vygotsky's original texts? How can interdisciplinary approaches, such as combining historical analysis with psychological research, deepen our understanding of his ideas?*

3. Practical Applications in Contemporary Contexts: Finally, future research could explore the practical applications of Vygotsky's ideas in contemporary educational and psychological contexts, particularly in the fields of neuropsychology and inclusive education. By

emphasizing the dynamic and relational nature of cognitive processes, Vygotsky's framework offers a foundation for understanding how cultural and social factors shape brain development and function, providing valuable insights for contemporary research and practice. *For example, how can Vygotsky's ideas inform the development of culturally responsive teaching practices? How can his work in defectology contribute to the design of assistive technologies for individuals with disabilities?*

Final Thoughts

The journey of revisionism in Vygotsky studies is far from over, but by building on the insights gained from this critical reappraisal, we can continue to uncover the true depth and potential of Vygotsky's legacy. As we move forward, let us embrace the challenge of revisiting the past, correcting the misrepresented, and envisioning a future where Vygotsky's ideas continue to inspire and inform our understanding of human development.

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