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ON FOUNDERS AND SUCCESSORS
ОБ ОСНОВАТЕЛЯХ И ПОСЛЕДОВАТЕЛЯХ

**Turning Psychology “into a Science
of the Living Human Being...”:
On the Psychotechnical Character of Research
of the A.N. Leontiev school of the 1940s.**

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This paper analyzes select 1940s works of A.N. Leontiev’s school of psychological thought in light of the methodological principles of psychotechnical cognition which F.Ye. Vasilyuk formulated on the basis of L.S. Vygotsky’s ideas about practice as a constructive principle of psychological science. The paper refutes the assertion that Soviet-era cultural and activity psychology had no psychological practice in its own right and demonstrates that such practice did really exist, had a distinctly activity-oriented nature, and contributed to the advancement of the activity theory. It was the practice of movement recovery which a team of psychologists, put together by A.N. Leontiev, practiced at the military hospital in Kourovka, fusing “psychotherapy”, research, and education into an inseparable whole. We observe that unity in Z.M. Istomina’s 1948 research, discussed in this paper in light of the eight general principles of psychotechnical cognition identified by F.Ye. Vasilyuk. Revisiting the Leontiev school’s heritage is relevant in the context of the ongoing conceptual revolution in psychology, for many methodological principles and provisions of activity psychology were ahead of their time.

Keywords: methodology of psychology, activity, practice, psychotechnical approach, A.N. Leontiev, F.Ye. Vasilyuk, Z.M. Istomina.

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Превратить психологию «в науку о живом человеке...»: О психотехническом характере исследований школы А.Н. Леонтьева 1940-х гг.

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В статье представлен анализ некоторых работ школы А.Н. Леонтьева 1940-х гг. в свете методологических принципов психотехнического познания, сформулированных Ф.Е. Василюком на основе развития идей Л.С. Выготского о практике как конструктивном принципе психологической науки. В опровержение утверждений о том, что в культурно-деятельностной психологии советского времени не было своей собственной психологической практики, показано, что такая практика имела место, причем она отличалась особым, деятельностным, характером и, в свою очередь, способствовала дальнейшему развитию теории деятельности. Таковой была практика восстановления движений, осуществляемая командой психологов, собранной А.Н. Леонтьевым в госпитале Коуровки; в этой практике «психотерапия», исследование и обучение были представлены в неразделимом единстве. Это единство наблюдалось и в исследовании З.М. Истоминой (1948), проанализированном в настоящей статье в свете выделенных Ф.Е. Василюком восьми общих принципов психотехнического познания. Новое обращение к наследию школы А.Н. Леонтьева актуально в контексте совершающейся в настоящее время концептуальной революции в психологии, поскольку многие методологические принципы и положения психологии деятельности опередили свое время.

Ключевые слова: методология психологии, деятельность, практика, психотехнический подход, А.Н. Леонтьев, Ф.Е. Василюк, З.М. Истомина.

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Introduction

This article addresses some aspects of the academic legacy of A.N. Leontiev and his school of thought which created an activity approach in psychology as an integral part of the cultural and activity movement that has become international. The abbreviation CHAT (Cultural-Historical Activity Theory) appearing in the English-language literature fairly accurately captures the unity of the cultural-historical and activity approaches, although attempts to pit them against each other again – unsuccessful, in our opinion – are made from time to time in the literature.

Although, as B.D. Elkonin rightly noted, “a lot has been written and said about the theory of activity” [17, p. 4], he believed that one should reread its authors’ works from time to time, “...mastering the way of thinking embedded in them. Reread along with mastering and understanding the structure of A.N. Leontiev’s truly brilliant and unique experimental research” [ibid.]. We believe that in addition to the works B.D. Elkonin referred to in his paper, these are the empirical stud-

ies that Leontiev and members of his school conducted in the 1940s. They are largely widely heard and, judging by the popularity of the review article written by the head of the school and dedicated primarily to the studies of that period, which was recently translated into English [18], they also interest contemporary psychologists, including those abroad. However, various textbooks and monographs retelling results of those studies, often miss their connection with the underlying methodology whose origins should be sought in L.S. Vygotsky’s work.

F.Ye. Vasilyuk described Vygotskyian cultural-historical psychology as “...psychotechnical in its original conceptualization, [and] in its methodological ‘genotype’” [1, p. 211]. This is evident in Vygotsky’s analysis of the historical significance of the psychological crisis, the exit from which he saw in restructuring the principles of psychology so that “...they can withstand the supreme test of practice” [3, p. 387], whereby practice is no longer a “colony of theory”, but instead its “supreme court” and embeds “into the deepest foundations of scientific operation and rebuilds it from beginning to end”

[ibid., pp. 387–388]. The “supertask” of this psychology is “...not so much to explain the psyche as to understand it and master it” [ibid., p. 387].

F.Ye. Vasilyuk considered the A.N. Leontiev’s experimental studies of memory mediated by psychological tools as materialization of this original concept, in which, in his opinion, Leontiev studied not memory in general, but “...social mnemotechnics, the collaborative activity of two persons, the experimenter and the subject” [1, p. 210]. Another example of successful materialization of the psychotechnical approach for F.Ye. Vasilyuk was P.Ya. Galperin’s theory of planned stage-by-stage formation of mental actions, as the very name of the theory suggests.

However, E.Yu. Patyaeva, commenting on the further development of the psychotechnical approach in Russian psychology, believes, following F.Ye. Vasilyuk, that the psychotechnical “methodological genotype” “...could not be deployed and operationalized to the full extent” in the time of L.S. Vygotsky, A.N. Leontiev and P.Ya. Galperin, “because domestic psychology had no practice of its own; it could only be integrated into pedagogical, medical, or engineering practice” [13, p. 72].

However, it is impossible to agree with the above thesis. The present paper demonstrates that the Leontievian school’s activity psychology did have a practice in its own right, and that it successfully implemented the psychotechnical approach, which is obvious from the study of 1940s works of that school in this context. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to revisit some of them anew through the prism of the general principles of psychotechnical cognition, which F.Ye. Vasilyuk highlighted in his works, despite certain differences distinguishing its various approaches. This technique which E.Yu. Patyaeva used discussing [13] B.V. Zeigarnik’s well-known study of the memoriation of completed and uncompleted actions, appeared very curious and fruitful to us, and we use it in this paper to analyze Z.M. Istomina’s work published in 1948.

Revisiting “ancient” texts that seem to have long faded into history, is very relevant in the context of the ongoing “conceptual revolution in psychology” that A.P. Stetsenko detailed and analyzed in her article [20]. In her opinion, the Leontievian school, as an integral part of the cultural and activity movement, appears to be a “guest from the future” in this context, as modern world science is turning to such principles of psychological cognition which that school of thought formulated and implemented long before this turn.

Live Relationships of Living People

V.T. Kudryavtsev rightly noted that the true supertask of L.S. Vygotsky’s doctrine as the founder of cultural and activity psychology was not the substantiation of his ideas about the sign-symbolic determination of consciousness, but “live relations of living people” [6, p. 141]. L.S. Vygotsky insisted, not without reason, on creating a “psychology in terms of drama” — a concrete, rather than abstract, psychology, which, as G. Politzer’s put it, abolished the human being and made processes the acting party [14, p. 257]¹.

A similar intention to make psychology a truly vital science underlay the scientific program of the newly formed Kharkov school in the early 1930s, whose recognized leader was A.N. Leontiev. Although the development of the central problems of this program (the relationship between practical activity and consciousness) initially seemed to the Kharkovites a kind of alternative to L.S. Vygotsky’s research in the last years of his life, it was soon understood that the movement “from consciousness to activity” meant only a return to Vygotsky’s original concepts. A.N. Leontiev wrote in his notes, *Materials on Consciousness*, which commentators attribute to 1940–41, “What was that *original* concept? It consisted of finding in the *way of life* of man the key to his C[onsciousness], [and] connecting life with consciousness. ‘Behind consciousness, life is revealed.’ ‘Psychology is the science of a special, higher form of life’” [9, pp. 38–39; italics in the word “*original*” stand for spaced italics in the Russian text. — E.S.].

A.N. Leontiev would write in his *Methodological Notebooks* around the same time that he always sought to turn psychology “into a science about the living human being, into a science ‘about the most important thing’” [7, p. 181]. He had good reasons to select activity as the initial category for building his system of psychological concepts, one of the definitions of which states that it is a molar and non-additive “...unit of life mediated by mental reflection” [ibid., p. 65]. Leontiev, viewing activity as a substance of consciousness and psyche, offered another definition of psyche (non-standard for the then and — and even for the present-day — psychology) as a function (or, as they later referred to it in his school, a functional organ) of activity as the latter’s inherent attribute. According to these views, the psyche cannot be seen apart from activity in any form of the latter, and any “work with the psyche” meant “work with activity”, namely, its formation, change, and/or its eventual correction in case of some pathology.

¹ See the discussion of this scientific program of L.S. Vygotsky in correlation with the G. Politzer’s legacy, on the one hand, and in correlation with its further development in the doctrine of A.N. Leontiev and his school about deed, on the other, in the author’s earlier paper [19].

These general ideas found their impressive embodiment and, importantly, further development and practical application in rehabilitation of patients at the specialized combat casualty rehabilitation clinic set up in the military hospital at Kourovka, a town of near Sverdlovsk, on September 6, 1942. A.N. Leontiev's team developed techniques for restoring movements in the patients' injured arms on the basis of the psychological theory of activity and N.A. Bernstein's activity physiology; the work continued later in collaboration with the Central Institute of Traumatology and Orthopedics after the return the MSU staff to Moscow in 1944.

It should be expressly noted that this was an explicitly psychological and not medical practice (in which psychologists would have played a supporting role); this practice was not reduced to either psychological counseling or psychotherapy in the usual sense of these words. The authors of the book in which they summarized their results explained the meaning of this highly organized practice, "In order to successfully restore the function of *an organ*, it is necessary to restore the activity of the subject and to remove interfering inner attitudes. [10, p. 6; italics in the words "*an organ*" here stand for spacing in the original text – E.S.]. The motives of the patient's activity played, as was demonstrated and proved in the process of "live relations of living people" at the Kourovka hospital, the main role in this rehabilitation, "...for functional methods of treatment are active methods, in which the patient is not just exposed, but must himself act energetically to restore the function, the more motivating power this restorative activity will have for him, the stronger motives it will contain and the greater will be the chances of success" [ibid. p. 174].

The psychologists noticed, in particular, that many patients' obvious desire to spare their injured arms most often restricted movements in the injured limbs. That made it difficult to restore normal movements in the usual way, i.e. by rehabilitation and strengthening exercises that the medics practiced in rehabilitation hospitals; whereas integration of movements into other activities, meaningful to the patient, sooner or later reversed the sparing attitude, making recovery surprisingly fast.

Kourovka patients were engaged to work for this purpose in occupational therapy workshops, where practical tasks were tailored to actualize the patients' significant motives for their activity, and, consequently, had a positive meaning to them. The psychologists carefully made sure that such tasks were not imposed on the patients without taking this meaning into account; e.g., the work-

like movements in meaningless hammering nails into planks or doing minor repairs of clothes or boots, which were of no interest to most wounded soldiers, were totally unsuitable for the purpose. Instead, the tasks the psychologists developed at Kourovka involved operations incorporated into collective meaningful work activities that had real, significant material results. Then the patients' attention focused not on their injuries, but on the work.

The manufacture of wooden window frames and metal fittings for them in the hospital's carpentry and locksmith workshops to be installed in new houses built in war-destroyed Stalingrad, for example, was a socially significant activity that aroused the patients' great interest. It offered them an opportunity to carry out strictly definite work operations with a corresponding productive result (and at the same time leading to eventual recovery of necessary movements), and let the patients feel at all times "sharing one great common cause" [10, c. 182].

The psychologists' laboratory studies proper of motor activity in injured limbs followed the same principles. One of them was, for example, P.Ya. Galperin's and T.O. Ginevskaya's well-known investigation where the subjects had to solve several motor tasks; the psychologists measured the amplitude of their arms' movements while the subjects were solving them. As a matter of fact, the number of those tasks was not three, as some retellings of the results of that fine work assert, but five, with the last task being objectively fully identical to the first one². Many of the subjects demonstrated a significant increase in the amplitude of movements of their injured arms while solving the last (i.e. fifth) task, as compared to the first, right in the progress of the study, i.e., practical work was carried out to change the subjects' activity right in the course of communication with them, including its physiological support.

As a matter of fact, the patients' limb movements recovered in the process of real meaningful activity often without purpose-oriented occupational therapy or special exercises. A.N. Leontiev and A.V. Zaporozhets's book provides a number of examples of how the hospital's reality, with the convalescent soldier patients involved in doing everyday tasks of the hospital's support services, worked as psychotherapy of a kind, and movements of the injured arms recovered as if spontaneously, because while solving those tasks, the patients actualized meaningful (until then potential) motives.

Many other studies which Leontiev's school began in the mid-1940s, when he came to head the Department of Child Psychology at the Psychological Institute, em-

² Briefly, the subjects' movement tasks were these: the first instruction (Task A1) was, "Close your eyes and raise your hand as high as possible... higher." The second task (A2) involved the same with open eyes, against a lined screen. In the third (task B) the subject was instructed to raise his hand to a certain number on the screen named by the researcher. The fourth instruction was to take in hand a certain object that the researched named. The fifth task (A3) was the same as A1 [10, p. 13].

phasized the significance of motives of actual activities of “living people”.

Our further objective, as stated earlier, will be to analyze Z.M. Istomina’s 1948 work in light of the peculiarities that F.Ye. Vasilyuk identified in psychotechnical cognition in general, despite certain, rather substantial, differences distinguishing various psychotechnical approaches.

Fusion of research, education and practice

Briefly, the essence and objective of Z.M. Istomina’s research [5] was to reveal the mechanisms of arbitrary memorization in preschool children, i.e. the study of emergence of special (“mnemonic”) actions in children’s activity. It was hypothesized that emergence of such actions depended on specific motives of children’s activity that made memorization and recall meaningful. The preschoolers of different age groups were to memorize meaningful words (five to eight in different experimental series) under conditions of usual laboratory experiments involving memorization and recollection (children were told that these were “special” lessons) on the one hand, and, on the other hand, as part of deliberately staged role-playing games, which actualized or created motives that were more significant for preschoolers for corresponding actions of memorizing and recalling. The experimenter who acted as the daycare center’s director, instructed children to “buy” this and that at the “store”, whose “manager” was the experimenter’s assistant. The next task was to investigate how various means of accomplishing the above goals, i.e., mnemonic operations, originate and evolve³.

Several series of tailored formative experiments furthered a detailed study of the formation of arbitrary mnemonic processes, i.e., functional development of memory in the course of experimental studies. The experiments formed in children who could not yet actively memorize, the ability to set special mnemonic goals for themselves and thus the ability to memorize; and after that, the ability to find and improve the means to achieve this goal, i.e., mnemonic operations, which improved memorization performance.

We will present now the results of a new reading of Istomina’s paper in light of the general features of psychotechnical theory or, more generally, of the system of “psychotechnical cognition” identified by F.Ye. Vasilyuk [1], omitting most interesting data Z.M. Istomina obtained in her study, and without discussing the dif-

ferences revealed in the investigated processes formed in preschool children of different age groups. Despite some subsequent amendments made by Vasilyuk [2] to the list and the phrasing of those general features, we found no fundamental differences from the previously presented.

1. **Values.** The psychotechnical system, which includes practice as its living organ, according to Vasilyuk, “...must consciously choose its value position in the context of all basic values, [i.e.] truth, goodness, beauty, holiness, usefulness, etc.” [1, p. 185], which distinguishes it from the classical science and, in general, from the “classical rationality”, which sees the sole value in “objective truth” independent of anyone’s subjectivity. Psychotechnical cognition corresponds in this respect, according to F.Ye. Vasilyuk, to V.S. Stepin’s “post-non-classical” type of rationality.

This value principle quite obviously underlies the theory of activity in general and the study discussed here in particular. A.N. Leontiev always emphasized that the measure of development of one individual person is determined by the extent to which the individual becomes a “man of humanity” [7, p. 168], pompous as it sounds. This “vertex” (as L.S. Vygotsky termed it) aspiration is not innate according to cultural and activity psychology; it forms in ontogenesis in the process of personality formation, i.e. the individual’s self-assertion in the life of society, in the whole, “...within which he can only exist and develop as a human being” [8, p. 389].

A.D. Maidansky, reviewing in the same context certain aspects of A.N. Leontiev’s like-minded co-thinker E.V. Ilyenkov’s work, specifically his discussions of the problem of free will, argues that Ilyenkov solved the problem in the traditions of activity psychology; he understood the will as a psychological function of subordination of an individual’s activity to the goals and norms of social life: “The will, like the entire higher psyche, is a social function. Other people and society that they represent dictate the child’s will initially. My freedom begins with obeying others and is essentially compelling myself in fact, to cultural behaviors and lifestyles” [12, p. 93].

This value attitude was implicit in the Leontiev school’s 1940s empirical studies. “Introducing the preschooler to the life of humanity” in Z.M. Istomina’s work consisted just in developing the child’s ability to regulate arbitrarily the processes of memorization and recall. While stating that this development process is much slower in real life, Istomina made it her task to induce

³ It appears that Z.M. Istomina’s study identified, along with the inducing and meaning-making functions of motive, its so-called structuring function, although not labeled with a appropriate word combination. Only 30 years later O.K. Tikhomirov’s school, which developed and is still developing certain ideas of cultural and activity psychology, began to identify, discuss, and investigate the structuring function of motive in relation to adult subjects’ thinking activity [16, pp. 116–124].

the child to “run faster” down this path [5, p. 73] in a series of specially designed formative exercises. That, among other things, made the child readier for adequate entry into school life.

Note that this work has not lost its relevance. Today’s studies show that the level of intellectual readiness for schooling in modern preschoolers goes along with a low level of personality readiness, i.e. with insufficient arbitrary behavioral regulation, especially noticeable when compared with children who lived in Soviet-era socio-cultural conditions. That, in turn, is due to a lower level of development of modern preschoolers’ story-role play [11; 15].

2. Addressee. The addressee of the psychotechnical theory, according to Vasilyuk, is the practicing psychologist who thinks in terms of precedents, clinical cases, and so on. He expects answers from this theory to a number of questions. *Why?* (What are the meaning, ultimate goals, and values of counseling, training, etc.?). *What* exactly can and should he do? *How* does he achieve the desired results? *Why* do certain actions produce this or that result, and what mechanisms are behind it? [1]. To add, from E.Yu. Patyaeva’s point of view [13], which we share, a researching psychologist adhering to the same strategy can also be the addressee of psychotechnical cognition. It will be further shown that one can find answers to all these questions in the theory of activity and, accordingly, in Z.M. Istomina’s study conducted in its context.

The first question (“*Why?*”) was answered above. Z.M. Istomina answers the question “*What?*” as follows: it is necessary to organize the child’s activity most adequate for effectively developing arbitrary memorization and recall actions. It is easiest to do so in preschool age children in certain cultures using story-role play, for the goal (memorization) has for the child a very concrete and actual meaning if determined by the motives of the game. In the meantime, “neither the goal of memorization nor the very memorization follow directly from the content of the motive” in laboratory conditions, for “both these moments are related to each other in a manner external to the child” [5, p. 85].

How does one achieve the desired results? By tailored training drills impacting not only the activity practiced in formative experiments, but also other activities, and here, too, the game was in the first place in terms of developmental effect.

Why do certain actions produce the desired result? The psychologist can only answer this question in a deep study of the integral system of principles and propositions of the activity theory, but in short, the answer is as follows: since any mental process (in this case, memory) is a function (functional organ) of children’s activity,

change of the activity and its structure changes the mental processes corresponding to this activity.

3. Subject of cognition. The psychologist, according to Vasilyuk, ought to take an interested, participatory and personal position in psychotechnical practice in accordance with his ultimate values, but he is not the only cognitive subject: his clients, group participants, act as equal and indispensable partners, and in some particular moments of advancement to the truth a “dialogical ‘cumulative subject’ of cognition” emerges [1, c. 186].

A similar kind of “cumulative subject”, we believe, emerged in Z.M. Istomina’s studies. She treated children not as “average subjects”, but rather as partners in games or lessons. The game necessarily involved two adults: the experimenter (“store manager”) and his assistant (“daycare center’s director”). As in the case of movement recovery in patients with combat injuries, children were not passive objects of influence; their joint activity with the adults followed two patterns: in the lessons the experimenters set mnemonic goals for the children, while in the story-role play the children had to identify the goals themselves, yet all the same in joint activity with the adults.

That took into account how the subjects perceived the situation: the protocols recorded not only what each child said, but also how they accepted the instructions to “buy” something in the “store” (in the story-role play) or to memorize words (in the lessons); whether the children used any memorization techniques; how they later reproduced the words in the “store”; etc. The children’s own perception of the situation manifested itself, for example, in their perplexed questions they asked to the adults (in 4–5 year old children’s “special” lessons), “Why do you keep saying, ‘memorize, memorize?’” One child of that age said, “I do not know how to memorize here, I only know how to memorize at home”. Six- and seven-year-olds were able to memorize arbitrarily and could even evaluate their ability, although their memorization in “special” lessons was also less effective than in play: for example, a six-and-a-half-year-old boy asked the experimenter, “Only speak slower, or I won’t remember” [5, p. 80].

4. Contact. The psychologist’s contact with the subjects, according to Vasilyuk, is not an inevitable evil, but a necessary condition for psychotechnical work, and that contact is intense, unique, and emotional. This is all traceable in Z.M. Istomina’s research. The children’s contacts with adults in the play were, for example, in the following forms, among others: when a child came to “shop” in the “store” and could not recall what he or she had been told to “buy”, the “store manager” would ask the “shopper”, “Have you named everything, haven’t you forgotten anything?”

The children also came in live contact with the experimenters in the same way. For example, “shoppers” who had forgotten what they had to buy in the “store”, would turn to the “store manager” and show the shopping checklist, saying, “Look what it says here, because I forgot”. One forgetful “shopper” wanted to return to the “daycare center” so that the “director” would remind him what else he had to buy.

5. Process and procedure of research. Neither of these needs to follow any rigid program that cannot be deviated from in the slightest; the program of psychotechnical research can vary throughout its course, contributing to the participants’ self-exploration and self-discovery. Communication was individualized each time in all cases and series of Z.M. Istomina’s experiments, taking into account not only the children’s chronological age, but also other factors, which manifested itself in unique dialogues between the subjects and the experimenters. Naturalness and liveliness particularly distinguished the play experiments, of course; the psychologists found out later [5, p. 58] that children kept playing the game they liked outside the context of research.

Moreover, repeating the play in the formative experiments showed that the exercises arranged by the experimenter, developed the children’s very motivation of the play activity, which is closely related to goal-setting. At first, the children’s concrete activity motive was just to go to the “store” as “shoppers”, without setting the goal to memorize the instruction and to reproduce it, i.e., merely exercising the social function of “shoppers”. The subsequent experiments — some starting from the second — changed the meaning of the game for the children: they “shopped” knowledgeably, i.e. knowing they had to buy not just some groceries, but those needed for the “daycare” (one child would even hurry the “store clerk” to pack the “goods” faster, because “the kids are waiting out there”). The motivation of the game was thus different now: the function of the “shopper” was now included in a relationship with other people — those who give instructions and those who carry out them. Those experiments actually comprised “teaching to play” that A.N. Leontiev’s school insisted on orally and in writing since the inception of the school in Kharkov.

6. Knowledge. According to F.Ye. Vasilyuk, knowledge obtained in the process of psychotechnical research is not about something external or impersonal; on the contrary, this is knowledge of “you” and “myself”. The examples cited above illustrate this point of psychotechnical cognition too, so we will limit ourselves here to citing a couple of new ones. The researchers reported a

case where a 6 years 7 months old child who, after playing shopping and successfully carrying out the “daycare director”’s instruction, told the experimenter, “I have now understood how to play”, and would later use appropriate memorization techniques [5, p. 79]. Another child of about the same age told the experimenters before the third learning repetition of the game, “Now I know how to memorize. I’ll be walking and repeating it to myself” [Ibid.] Another subject of four and a half years old, who had forgotten what he had been told to “buy”, realized that “he had not listened well” and asked permission to go back to ask what he had to “buy” [Ibid., p. 63].

7. Subject of the theory. F.Ye. Vasilyuk’s discussion of this point of the psychotechnical system appears to be very controversial. It is hard to agree with his definition of the subject of the psychotechnical theory in general (and, therefore, the activity theory in particular) as “...not a theory of some ‘object’ (psyche, activity, [or] thinking), but a theory of psychological work with the object. It is a *theory of practice*” (Vasilyuk, 2003, p. 189). But if “...practice, education, and research constitute a single whole” [13, p. 77]⁴ in a psychotechnical system, then how can one contrast a theory of this or that “object” and a theory of “working with it”? F.Ye. Vasilyuk clarified his position in the synopsis of his doctoral dissertation, “Practice is not just enlightened inside and justified outside by the scientific theory; [...] it rather participates itself in the creation of this theory as the main research method” [2, p. 4]. One can then agree with this and find just this kind of connection between “theory” and “practice” and — more broadly — between research, education and practice in psychology of activity in general and in Z.M. Istomina’s study we are reviewing here in particular.

It appears that this latter research (and other similar studies of the 1940s published in the same volume of the proceedings of the Department of Child Psychology at the Psychological Institute) fully implemented the idea (formulated already by L.S. Vygotsky) that shaping the psyche implies both work with it and studying it as an “object” at the same time, for the development of the human psyche always occurs in children’s joint activity with adults (we mean ontogenesis here), albeit unintentional and unplanned in real life, yet intentional and planned in many experimental studies of A.N. Leontiev’s school.

8. Correlation between the scope and method. Omitting discussion of the assertion — one that is close to F.Ye. Vasilyuk’s previously cited reasoning — that “...the general scope of the psychotechnical theory is its

⁴ According to E.Yu. Patyaeva, these characteristics distinguished K. Levin’s studies of the last period, and, in her opinion, only psychotechnical theory is suitable for describing research of that particular type.

very method which facets and creates a space for psychotechnical work with the object” [1, c. 190], we agree that the description of method in such studies merits increased attention. This fully applies to Z.M. Istomina’s study, where this description is thoroughly detailed.

Thus, having looked at Z.M. Istomina’s research on the basis and in development of activity theory ideas through the prism of the principles of psychotechnical cognition as named by F.Ye. Vasilyuk, it can be confidently asserted that the psychotechnical nature of the research of A.N. Leontiev’s school (at least in the 1940s), and the very activity theory, is beyond any doubt.

Conclusion

Re-reading the Leontiev school’s 1940s works convinces us that the ideas of the activity theory, materialized and developed in certain types of “highly organized practice”, steadily made their way like grass through cracks in the pavement, despite the peculiar socio-cultural conditions of that era. The psychologists’ practical work in the forms in which it could only exist at that time, drove the substantial development of the system of ideas of activity psychology, especially as regards the doctrine of motives, which was only briefly discussed in this article.

We leave out of our discussion a problem calling for a particularly careful analysis, namely, that of similarities and differences between the different psychotechnical approaches proposed in the Leontiev school’s classic works, and those of A.N. Leontiev’s immediate disciple F.Ye. Vasilyuk, who nevertheless developed that approach in a substantially different direction. The evidence of this lies at least in the fact that F.Ye. Vasilyuk referred to *perezhivanie*, which he regarded as a particular “inner activity aimed at overcoming critical life events”, as the central category of the psychotechnical system that he had developed and named “the understanding psychotherapy” [2, p. 5], whereas A.N. Le-

ontiev’s central category of psychology was activity which he understood much more broadly and viewed in all the diversity of its forms, including its initial, practical forms. A.N. Leontiev argued at the memorable discussion of his book *Outline of the Development of the Psyche* in 1948 that it was precisely this understanding of activity that allowed one to say that psychology was moving away from a contemplative point of view to become an active transformative psychology, “We control, we build, [and we] plan a system of man’s relationships with the world, i.e. his activity in the surrounding reality. We change, by doing so, his consciousness, [and] his psyche. This is how things actually stand in our practice. But what is a relationship? I never mean anything by this term but a really *embodied* relationship, i.e. a life process, a real process of activity, even if only in a theoretical form” [4, c. 338].

Yet, for all the differences, sharing by adherents of various psychotechnical approaches of the common focus on work with concrete whole living people in various life settings distinguishes them favorably from traditionalist research psychologists who still actually deal with abstract human beings. F.Ye. Vasilyuk argued that the only chance for psychology to become a true science was to change fundamentally. He was deeply convinced that this change was “...genotypically inherent in domestic psychology. It needs in fact only to become itself and not to hide its talent — a talent *of its own* — in the ground, but to invest it, materialize its inherent potentials, [and] to turn from a psychology of activity into an active and vital psychology” [1, p. 196].

True, the last statement needs, we believe, to be corrected in light of what has been laid out in this paper. This transformation began in A.N. Leontiev’s school long ago and has materialized in some places. However, new efforts are needed to keep this transformation going, or, in G. Politzer’s words, the same individual processes will remain as “actors” on the stage of 21st century psychology, while the concrete whole acting human being will be finally “abolished”.

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