

The time of Vygotsky: from fundamental science to modern practice

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Dear colleagues and readers of the journal!

You are holding the latest issue of the journal “Cultural-Historical Psychology” (No. 1, 2026). It is dedicated to the 130th anniversary of the founder of the cultural-historical scientific school, the outstanding scholar Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky. While working on this issue, we saw our task as reflecting the main trends in the development of cultural-historical psychology (CHP) and highlighting those among them that today largely influence the practical resolution of urgent issues in the social sphere and education.

The thematic issue consists of four interconnected sections: an analysis of the content of the initial assumptions and ideas of cultural-historical psychology (1); the results of experimental studies conducted using the concepts of cultural-historical psychology (2); presentation of new approaches to personnel training that implement methods of cultural-historical psychology (3); and an introduction to the results of international research within the framework of CHP (4).

The first section, “Theoretical and methodological foundations of cultural-historical psychology”, opens with a transcript of L.S. Vygotsky's speech, published here for the first time, based on his report to the American psychologist Carl Leshley (April 29, 1931). In this speech, Vygotsky publicly outlined his ideas of “psychological physiology,” introduced the concept of “extracerebral connections” between the human brain and the cultural environment, through which higher psychological functions and any processes of conscious, “voluntary” activity of a person are carried out. The publication continues with a detailed commentary by A.D. Maidansky on the transcript of L.S. Vygotsky, which includes an analysis of the main points of Vygotsky's new theory. The author also examines the development of ideas related to psychological physiology, reflected in A.R. Luria's notebooks.

The article by N.N. Nechaev titled “L.S. Vygotsky: re-reading anew. Part 2” is dedicated to the analysis of the early period of L.S. Vygotsky's scientific work. The author discusses Vygotsky's report at the II Psychoneurological Congress in 1924, as well as a number of works from that period, including the manuscript of the scientist's fundamental scientific work “The Historical Meaning of The Crisis in Psychology”.

In the article by V.K. Zaretsky and A.B. Kholmogorova, titled “On the concept of “reflection” in L. S. Vygotsky's cultural-historical psychology: from the origins to the present day”, an analysis of the content of the concept of “reflection” is conducted. The authors trace the dynamics of L.S. Vygotsky's views on the content and role of this concept in the processes of human development. Reflection is considered by them as a “fundamental mechanism” that has a principle significance for the practice of learning, psychological rehabilitation, and psychotherapy.

The section is concluded by the article by O.V. Rubtsova, “On the concept of “experience” in cultural-historical psychology” in which the author continues the discussion of key concepts of cultural-historical psychology. The author demonstrates how this concept evolves in the works of L.S. Vygotsky himself – gradually gaining a context: from an emotional-meaningful generalization of experience in early aesthetic texts to an understanding of “experience” as a dynamic unit of consciousness and a “prism” of the social situation of development.

In the second section, “Experimental studies in the tradition of cultural-historical psychology”, based on the analysis of a wide range of experimental data, the phenomenon of “experience” and its role in the play activity of preschool children are discussed (O.V. Salomatova).

The section is continued with a study on the role of video fragments of activity in the joint solving of experimental research tasks by adolescents (O.B. Konstantinova). The author presents a variant of the socio-genetic method for researching the formation of children's concepts, based on the key concepts of CHP – “collaboration” and “zone of proximal development”. It is shown that in the context of children's interactions with each other and with adults, video fragments serve as a means of mediating the participants' search for the content of the task object and methods of organizing joint activity. This process “initiates” communicative-reflective processes that contribute to the development of thinking processes.

The third section, “Training of personnel using methods of the cultural-historical scientific school”, opens with an article by A.A. Margolis titled “Teacher’s thinking in various research paradigms: from cognitive psychology to cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT).”

J. Hardman, in the article “A little knowledge is a dangerous thing: a cautionary tale for users of Vygotsky’s work”, aims to analyze concepts such as “scaffolding”, “mediation”, spontaneous and scientific concepts, “zone of proximal development,” and also to demonstrate the fundamental importance of correctly applying these concepts for the purpose of children’s education. The author warns that the tendency to perceive Vygotsky’s works in a simplified, everyday manner – found in most educators studying with honors for a bachelor’s degree – does not contribute to, and in some cases hinders, the effective application of these concepts in the process of teaching children.

Using the formation of a system of concepts of cultural-historical psychology among students as an example, V.V. Rubtsov and I.M. Ulanovskaya, in their article “Practicum as an activity-based technology for students to master methods of designing joint learning activity for schoolchildren (using the example of the Master’s program “Cultural-Historical Psychology and Activity-Based Approach in Education)” demonstrate the effectiveness of targeted practical exercises for mastering the ways in which master’s students organize team-based learning activities. Developing and describing lesson scenarios by future teachers that include organizing students’ collaborative work, followed by modeling these scenarios, as well as reflection and assessment of the results, helps cultivate students’ ability to design and implement productive forms of joint work among schoolchildren.

In the article by E. Rzyankina and S. Kenny, “AI programmatic tools: exploring an evolution of e-textbooks in higher education”, cultural-historical theory is considered as the theoretical foundation for analyzing the role of educational tools. The article presents data that allow for a new evaluation of the possibilities of electronic textbooks in education and help determine their role as means of organizing students’ activities.

The fourth section of the issue, “Research in the system of cultural-historical psychology: International experience,” opens with I. Ivich’s work “Cultural-historical theory of L.S. Vygotsky’s psychological phenomena”. This is a scientific biography of L.S. Vygotsky, written by a well-known Serbian scholar who deeply understands the content of the fundamental concepts of cultural-historical psychology. The article presents a professional dialogue between an expert on Vygotsky’s ideas and representatives of traditional approaches in psychology. I. Ivich points out the main goal of the founder of cultural-historical psychology, which differs from the established approaches to the problem of development. From his perspective, “finding a principled solution to the relationship between physiological and psychological processes, discovering connecting links between individual and social psychology – these are some of the main points of Vygotsky’s scientific program.”

In the article by A.V. Makhnach and A.I. Laktionova, “Integration of theoretical approaches of L.S. Vygotsky and U. Bronfenbrenner in studies of youth resilience in Russia and South Africa”, based on the results of a comparative study, data are discussed indicating that the resilience of young people in Russia and South Africa has a stable social and cultural component.

In the article by E. Rzyankina et al., “Cultural-historical reflection on learning, place, and legacy of Vygotsky”, the importance of personal academic experience in deepening the understanding of the foundations of cultural-historical theory (CHT) and activity theory (AT) is discussed.

In the materials by M.E. Sisneva et al., “Cultural-historical guidelines and innovative approaches to the development of special education: outcomes of the Beijing Symposium”, an analytical review of the outcomes of the international symposium on the ways to develop special education is presented. The symposium was organized by the College of Special Education of Beijing Union University in October 2025.

This thematic issue of the journal inaugurates a new scientific series of regional editions dedicated to presenting and analyzing the development of cultural-historical psychology in various countries and regions. The goal of the series is to show how the conceptual framework and methodological foundations of cultural-historical psychology are revealed and transformed in different scientific and educational contexts, as well as in practices of educational psychology, psychological assistance, and support. The dialogue between Russian and South African research traditions within the system of CHT in this case highlights a stable conceptual core of the cultural-historical approach and indicates new directions for its development in the context of emerging social risks and challenges.

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