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культурно-историческая
ПСИХОЛОГИЯ

cultural-historical
PSYCHOLOGY

Cultural-historical psychology
in BRICS countries



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On the system of categories of the cultural-historical psychology

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Abstract

The article discusses the systemic structure of cultural-historical psychology (CHP). At its “core” lies the concept of personality as “the social within us,” introduced by L.S. Vygotsky in contrast to the traditional notion of personality as a collection of individual psychological traits. By identifying a number of system-forming categories of the CHP, the authors examine their interrelations and their role in the formation and development of this theoretical framework. It is demonstrated that, by arriving at understanding of personality as a “psychological system,” Vygotsky laid the foundation for a “systemic perspective” on the processes of development and disintegration of higher psychological functions. His theory belongs to the Copernican type of scientific systems, as it incorporates the “movement of the observer” — cultural-historical development of human personality.

Keywords: system, cooperation, vraschivanie, sign mediation, zone of proximal development (ZPD), perzhivanie, affect, personality

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О системе категорий культурно-исторической психологии

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Резюме

В статье обсуждаются особенности системного строения культурно-исторической психологии (КИП). Ее «твердым ядром» является понятие личности как «социального в нас», введенное Л.С. Выготским в противоположность традиционному понятию личности как совокупности психологических черт индивида. Выделяя ряд системообразующих категорий культурно-исторической психологии, авторы рассматривают их взаимосвязь и роль в процессе становления и развития этой теории. Показано, что, выйдя на понимание личности как «психологической системы», Выготский тем самым закладывает «системную точку зрения» на процессы развития и распада высшей психики. Его теория принадлежит к коперниканскому типу научных систем, поскольку в ней учитывается «движение наблюдателя» — культурно-историческое развитие человеческой личности.

Ключевые слова: система, сотрудничество, вращивание, знаковое опосредствование, зона ближайшего развития, переживание, аффект, личность

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The true is real only as a system.
Georg Hege

The problem we now turn to — complex and far-reaching — can hardly be resolved within the limits of a single article. Aware of this, we have chosen to focus primarily on the systemic structure of CHP and several of its key, system-forming categories, in order to clarify the role each plays in the development of this research program.

1. Personality as “the social within us”

It is well known that in creating a “new psychology of the human,” L.S. Vygotsky relied on the categorical system of *Capital*, which reflects, in logically pure form, the system of bourgeois productive relations. This system has its own elementary “cell” — the commodity. In the earliest surviving draft of the CHP system, Vygotsky draws an analogy between the commodity and personality (the “I”). Both are “sensuous-supersensuous” things, i.e., social in nature. Personality is constructed in the image of social relations between people: “The I is the social within us” (Vygotsky, 2017, p. 112).

The concept of personality does not describe the totality of all psychological traits of an individual (as is still often assumed today), but only and exclusively *the highest, sociogenic layer* of the psyche. The idea of the social nature of personality forms the cornerstone of CHP, or, in Vygotsky’s own words, “the key to the psychology of the human being.”

The “substance” of commodity relations, according to Marx, is human labor. All other economic categories appear as “modes” of this universal substance, and capital itself is nothing other than “objectified labor.” Marx’s teaching, like social life itself, revolves around this “sun of labor.” It is in the course of this process that both personality and the commodity emerge — indeed, all specifically human (cultural) forms of behavior and psychic life.

Vygotsky adopts this axiom of the materialist understanding of history: “Labor was the cradle of all higher psychological functions, of all the highest forms of behavior specific to humans” (Vygotsky, 1935 p. 38).

Vygotsky’s breakthrough was the discovery of a *parallel between the tool of labor and the sign* — above all, the word. Just as tools gave humans power over external nature, signs made it possible to actively transform both others’ and one’s own psyche, to regulate behavior and inner life. This technology of self-regulation constitutes the psychological advantage of humans compared to animals.

According to A.N. Leontiev, we know that Vygotsky made this discovery at the end of 1924 or the beginning of 1925. A year later, he elaborated on the idea of the “in-

strumentality of the word” in a notebook written during his stay at the hospital in Zakharyino:

“So, the difference of the word: it is an artificially created stimulus (cf. technique), it is a tool of behavior... Speech behavior differs from non-speech behavior as labor differs from animal adaptation... The word is a special stimulus for regulation, for organizing behavior — both others’ and one’s own.” (Vygotsky, 2017, pp. 106–107).

Vygotsky then declares his break with reactology: the psyche is a form of *active*, not reactive, behavior. It filters the flow of external stimuli, selecting those that make it possible to act more effectively.

“It is an organ of selection, a sieve-sifter, transforming the world so that it becomes possible to act. This is its positive function... The selection of truly higher forms takes place in the psyche. Red, blue, loud — it carves the world into portions so that I can eat it without breaking my teeth.” (Vygotsky 2017, p. 129).

Living activity, which actively “devours” the world, is the “sun” around which the psyche revolves, including the human soul. True, Vygotsky does not state this conclusion directly. It was further developed within CHP by A.N. Leontiev and his colleagues (Leontiev, 1974; Leontiev 1981). Still, even Vygotsky was already studying the “genetic knots uniting the child’s thinking and practical activity,” and this activity is understood by him as *the foundation and driving force* of the development of thinking.

If the psyche is a form of active engagement with the external world, then any change in the nature of this activity leads to a transformation in the character of psychic life. When activity, in its development, rises to the level of labor, it is precisely in the context of labor that higher forms of the psyche arise — along with their artificial tools: signs. Like its “substance” — labor — human psychic life is both social and artificial. Personality is not a gift of nature; it is created by people themselves through the use of signs, from the “raw material” of natural psychological functions.

In Vygotsky’s notes from 1926, we already find a fully formed “hard core” of the theoretical system that would later come to be known as cultural-historical psychology. Thanks to these notes, we can observe *the birth of the CHP system*.

2. Cooperation

Scientific systems do not arise from nothing — *ex nihilo* — especially not in the human sciences. Cooperation is a category that links Cultural-Historical Psychology (CHP) to the historical epoch in which Vygotsky lived and worked. It was a time of a great dream: the vision of a world commune founded on “planned cooperation”

(Marx)¹. The idea of cooperation was, quite literally, in the air. For example, P.P. Blonsky was developing his own “system of cooperation” for adolescents in the second stage of labor school.

It is not difficult to demonstrate the system-forming character of the category of cooperation within the conceptual framework of CHP: we encounter it in the formulation of the general genetic law of cultural development of the psyche, in the definition of the zone of proximal development, and in the foundations of Vygotsky’s special pedagogy, which teaches the “overcoming of defect” through cooperation.

At the same time, the category of cooperation is not, strictly speaking, specific to CHP. It is not a concept that emerges from within cultural-historical theory itself; rather, it is the soil out of which the tree of cultural-historical theory grew — alongside many other psychological and pedagogical systems. For instance, in Chapter 2 of *Thinking and Speech*, Vygotsky critically discusses the role of the concept of cooperation in Jean Piaget’s theory of the development of children’s thinking (based on the scheme: egocentrism → constraint → cooperation).

Vygotsky began using the category of cooperation from the earliest stages of his scholarly work — even before his engagement with reactology and prior to his move to Moscow. In his very first academic publication (a collection prepared in Gomel and printed at a local press), Vygotsky argues against the “individual-craftsman” model of educating blind children:

“Such labor does not train for cooperation... Cooperation with sighted individuals must become the foundation of labor education. Upon this foundation, true communication with the sighted can emerge, and labor will become the narrow doorway through which the blind child enters life. Create healthy labor — and all else will follow.” (Vygotsky, 1924, p. 20)

In essence, Vygotsky directly links the concept of cooperation with labor and the labor education of children. “Healthy labor” includes cooperation as an integral attribute. In this respect, Vygotsky’s understanding of cooperation is fundamentally different, for example, from that of P. Janet, who viewed a wolf pack’s hunt as an example of “true cooperation” (*une véritable collaboration*).

In his mature period, Vygotsky came to regard cooperation as the mode of cultural development that is uniquely human. In relation to consciousness as a whole, and to each psychological function in particular, cooperation is *the starting point* of development — the very first, “interpsychological” stage. “Every higher psychological function was once a form of psychological cooperation,” Vygotsky tirelessly repeated (Vygotsky, 1924, p. 20).

In the postwar period of CHP’s history, research primarily advanced along the line of concretizing the

concept of cooperation. This work gave rise to several new concepts, such as task-oriented communication (A.I. Meshcheryakov), joint distributed action, and jointly distributed (learning) activity (V.V. Davydov, V.V. Rubtsov), among others.

Today, the category of cooperation / joint activity has been most thoroughly developed in the research of V.V. Rubtsov, who grounded *the socio-genetic method* for studying the development of children’s concepts in relation to the organization of learning interactions². In the work of V.V. Ageev, Yu.V. Gromyko, R.Ya. Guzman, A.G. Kritsky, A.V. Konokotin, and other followers of socio-genetic psychology — drawing on the system of core concepts from CHP and activity theory — experimental data have been obtained that describe in detail the organization of joint action. These studies also reveal the psychological characteristics of various forms of interaction (cooperation) between child and adult, as well as among children themselves, and their correlation with the development of cognitive and communicative-reflexive processes.

At its core, the conceptual design of the socio-genetic method rests on a fundamental law formulated by L.S. Vygotsky, according to which social interactions (“social relations,” or later, “joint activity”) are not a factor of development, but it’s *very source*: “Behind all higher functions and their development stand *genetically social relations — real relations among people, Homo duplex* (Latin: ‘the double human’)” (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 54; emphasis in original — *Authors*).

Two key points should be emphasized here. *First*, as G.A. Zuckerman stresses, “...social relations are not the space or conditions of development, but the very substance of the interpsychological function — that which exists *between* people, belonging to no one. The interpsychological does not appear in relationships; it is the relationship” (Tsukerman, 2006, pp. 61–73). Indeed, as Vygotsky put it, “Every higher psychological function was once external because it was social before becoming internal, genuinely psychological; it was initially a social relation between two people” (Vygotsky, 1984, p. 145). *Second*, in Vygotsky’s conception, the word genetic derives not from “genetics” but from genesis — that is, development. And this development is not understood as a simple accumulation of certain characteristics or quantitative growth, but as a process of qualitative transformation. In other words, Vygotsky clearly indicated that it is precisely real, that is, living, developmental relationships — interactions between people — that determine the nature of the qualitative changes which will constitute the child’s emerging psychological functions. “...The course of one internal process depends on the emergence

¹ “In planned cooperation with other workers, the laborer dissolves individual boundaries and develops their species-wide potentials” (Marx, 2017, p. 356).

² For further details, see: (Rubtsov, 2024).

and flow of another” (Rubtsov, 2006, pp. 14–24). Such an understanding of the connection between social interaction and development inevitably led researchers to address the problem of identifying effective ways of organizing joint activity – among children, between children and adults, and among children themselves.

In V.V. Rubtsov’s research, based on the experimental method “Ring of Objects,” connections were analyzed between the nature and mode of children’s interaction during the process of solving a learning task (cooperation) and the level of development of operational structures associated with the intellectual operation of class inclusion (Rubtsov, 1996, pp. 99–110). As a result, different types of cooperation were identified, each reflecting specific modes of joint action that serve as indicators of cooperation under conditions of distributed activity among participants.

Cooperation based on orientation to a single feature of a structural element. This type of cooperation was characterized by participants focusing primarily on the possibility of completing their own individual operation. They did not identify connections between individual operations, nor did they treat such connections as the subject of special analysis. As a result, the “shared” task was divided into a series of independent tasks that each participant solved on their own, without regard for the developing sequence of others’ actions.

Cooperation based on orientation to two features of a structural element. This form of cooperation involved overcoming the focus on individual operations. Children regarded the overall result of the task as dependent on the sequence of mutually substitutable individual operations. However, this sequence and interdependence, as identified by the participants, remained rigidly tied to the specific conditions of the task. As a result, they were unable to regard the mode of interaction itself as a shared strategy for joint problem-solving.

Cooperation based on orientation to the connection between features of structural elements. In this form of cooperation, children identified the organization of joint activity itself as a distinct task. The way this activity was organized became a subject of explicit analysis and reflection.

Overall, the study showed that the formation of scientific concepts is not possible in “cooperation” or “communication” in general, but only within certain forms of cooperation – specifically, when (1) the very mode of organizing joint activity becomes the subject of participants’ analysis, and (2) such analysis mediates the process of solving the material task.

These results were further specified in a study by V.V. Rubtsov and A.V. Konokotin (Rubtsov, Konokotin, 2020), who examined the specific features of children’s interaction strategies during joint task-solving in balance experiments. They succeeded in tracing the dynamics of the emergence of joint action and demonstrated that the interconnection of communication processes,

action exchange, mutual understanding, and reflection serves as an indicator of children’s entry into cooperation. This cooperation is characterized by specific ways of jointly solving tasks and by the distinctive structure of emergent child – adult co-communities (*soobschnost’*).

According to the data, it is justified to distinguish four types of interaction, and correspondingly, four types of cooperation among children, which determine the process of concept formation in the context of joint activity:

Pre-organizational type of interaction is largely comparable to the first type of cooperation previously described. In this case, the process of solving the task and its result appeared to the children as the product of their individual activity. There was no purposeful communication. Verbal utterances did not refer to the content of the task. Participants were primarily focused on overcoming the limitations of performing individual actions within the material field of the task. Individual operations were treated as independent from one another.

Reflection, when it did occur in this type of interaction, was expressed as *egocentric speech* or as concrete actions aimed at (1) evaluating the outcome of one’s own action, (2) evaluating the outcome of a partner’s action, or (3) analyzing the potential connection between one’s own action and the partner’s.

Organizational type of interaction. In this form, the characteristics of cooperation observed in the previous stage became more specific. Communication began to develop, aimed at regulating the interaction process, and reflection emerged that supported analysis of the possibilities for transforming the task field based on the integration of individual actions. In addition, participants began to shift from reflecting solely on the outcome of their individual actions toward orienting themselves to the joint action as a whole. They began to understand the shared result as a way of coordinating individual operations.

These emerging processes of communication and reflection became the foundation for mutual understanding – that is, for comprehending each participant’s intentions regarding the method for solving the material task. However, while the children began integrating their individual operations, the mode of organizing the joint action itself did not yet become a subject of analysis. As a result, this organizational type of interaction remained unstable and often broke down into isolated individual actions.

Organizational-reflective type of interaction. This type is characterized by a transformation in the object of the task: the object of the task became, for the participants, the mode of interaction itself. This new, qualitatively different task began to mediate the solution of the material task, which, in turn, served as the condition for identifying essential relationships within the object or phenomenon under study.

The nature of communication also changed, acquiring the form of participants jointly discussing their understanding of how the behavior of the object being

studied changes in connection with transformations in the mode of cooperation. This type of interaction can be regarded as specifically educational, enabling participants to go beyond the limits of the “zone of proximal development” set by the adult. In this form of collaboratively overcoming difficulties, participants did not simply master discrete knowledge or skills but acquired ways of organizing joint activity itself. These ways define cooperation — between children and with the adult — as the very medium of problem-solving.

Pseudo-organizational type of interaction. This form of interaction outwardly resembles the organizational type of cooperation, but the “real” interaction is substituted by the activity of one participant, who takes over the initiative in solving the task, while merely “using” the partner’s potential.

The key conclusion drawn by the authors of the study was that the modes of interaction characterizing cooperation in joint activity are intrinsically linked to the content of the emerging concept (in this case, “balance”). Participants who demonstrated an organizational and reflective-analytical mode of interaction were able to formulate a general rule for solving balance problems and to identify a shared principle for solving this class of tasks. At the same time, while participants with an organizational interaction style primarily relied on the rule “weight + distance,” those who exhibited a reflective-analytical mode were guided by the multiplication rule “weight × distance.” These data once again confirmed that modes of cooperation are directly related to the nature and content of the concepts being formed. Cooperation, when it is specific to educational contexts, takes place within special forms of *obschnost* that are marked by mutual understanding and by participants’ grasp of the adult’s intention in structuring the “zone of proximal development.”

3. Sign-mediated action and *vraschivanie* (ingrowing)

From a psychological standpoint, every process of cooperation is mediated by tools and/or signs. A sign emerges as a means of influencing another person’s behavior. The word, in particular, was originally a “command for others” (an idea Vygotsky drew from Janet).

Once it has fulfilled its mediating function in cooperation, “the tool becomes unnecessary. *The activity moves inward*,” Vygotsky wrote in pencil on a scrap of paper. “*Ingrowing [vraschivanie] at first completely replicates the instrumental act inside — but later there are reductions, shortcuts, and deep transformations*” (Vygotsky, 2017, pp. 159–160).

Sometimes, a mental image of the tool remains (e.g., a mnemonic map or verbal “stimulus-means” such as a

counting rhyme, proverb, or prayer); sometimes, a symbolic tool is created (numbers, hieroglyphs, letters, musical notation); and sometimes the tool vanishes without a trace — what remains is only the pure scheme of the activity, and the entire act appears once again as direct and unmediated.

According to Vygotsky, there are three main types of *vraschivanie* of the instrumental act into the psyche³:

From this point forward, the individual becomes capable of *cooperating with themselves*, in their inner world — a world that arises precisely as a result of the ingrowing of external, interpsychological forms of cooperation. *Vraschivanie* creates the “semantic field” where the personal life of the mind unfolds: inaudible dialogues are held, actions are contemplated, processes of reflection and self-awareness take place. It transforms raw natural material — affects and innate psychological functions (orienting and speech-related, the two “signal systems”) — into higher psychological functions. Just as one cannot build a boat or raft without material that floats, higher psychological functions can only be constructed from appropriate “natural” or “elementary” components, as Vygotsky put it.

The resistance of “nature” leads to a sharp reduction and simplification of cultural forms of activity at the initial stages of *vraschivanie*. Some of them “get stuck” part-way through their internalization process, unable to complete the “path inward” (Vygotsky). Silent reading, for instance, was rare even in Ancient Greece and Rome. For a child and their mentor — always in joint effort — it takes considerable work to “liberate” a psychological function from the grip of gestalts and practical action schemes.

After Vygotsky, the concept of *vraschivanie* did not receive further theoretical development. It was displaced by the concept of *interiorization*, interpreted in the Piagetian spirit as a transition from the sensorimotor to the mental plane, according to A.N. Leontiev’s definition (whereas for Vygotsky, the starting point was the interpsychological plane — cooperation between adult and child — not individual sensorimotor activity). Sign mediation and “signification” (the creation and active use of artificial signals) were reduced to banal “verbalization” and pushed to the periphery of research interest. In A.V. Zaporozhets’ work, the concept of interiorization was extended even to perceptual processes not mediated by signs and performed — also by animals — strictly individually, without any cooperation.

If interiorization represents *the socialization of the natural*, then *vraschivanie* (ingrowing) is *the individualization of the social*. Vygotsky sharply emphasized this fundamental distinction: “Not the gradual socialization introduced into the child from outside, but the gradual individualization arising from the child’s inner sociality is the main path of child development” (Vygotsky, 1934, p. 282).

³ For further details, see: (Rubtsov, 2024).

The study of the psychological structure of the process of cooperation constitutes a key stage in the formation of the system of cultural-historical psychology (CHP). To this end, Vygotsky developed the instrumental method, whose experimental foundation was the famous method of double stimulation. Based on this method, fundamentally new data were obtained on the process of concept formation in children, the essence of which consists in “assigning meaning to a meaningless word.”

Key stages in the further development of the concept of interiorization within CHP include:

- P.Ya. Galperin’s elaboration of the method of forming mental actions with predetermined properties;
- the Zagorsk experiment by A.I. Meshcheryakov and E.V. Ilyenkov, which revealed how children acquire primary forms of cultural behavior and everyday (“spontaneous,” in Vygotsky’s terms) concepts in the course of jointly distributed material activity;
- and V.V. Rubtsov’s research on the formation of scientific concepts in conditions of collaborative educational activity.

The role of signs in learning cooperation was also studied within the framework of the socio-genetic method by A.G. Kritsky, A.V. Konokotin, and others. A.G. Kritsky (Kritsky, 1988) developed experimental situations of limited communication, where participants’ direct interaction during task-solving was blocked (e.g., by spatial separation or use of digital/computer-based environments). According to the findings, participants not restricted in their interactions (control group) were able to coordinate their actions more easily and rapidly and to exchange opinions; however, the semantic content of their interaction was limited. As a result, children had difficulty adapting when the material conditions of the task changed. Without distinguishing signs as tools for organizing and coordinating interaction, they remained within the level of “playful” cooperation and failed to identify the generalizable properties of the model they were working with.

In contrast, in groups where difficulty was introduced, participants developed a need to formulate a shared method of action and to find tools for coordinating their interaction. The development of such signs marked a shift from a playful to a learning-oriented focus. This was reflected in a move away from random trials aimed at identifying specific properties of the material situation, toward trials oriented at identifying ways of coordinating interaction and organizing joint action — and through that, modeling a shared method of action.

A.V. Konokotin also developed experimental situations with “uncertain” conditions (e.g., unscaled balancing apparatus), in which participants were required to independently create tools for solving the task. These tools, in turn, defined and structured their mode of interaction throughout the problem-solving process (Konokotin, 2023, p. 213).

The results confirmed that creating conditions in which participants are confronted with the need to construct sign-based means for productive interaction and task-solving enables them to shift from actions determined by immediate, situational, materially grounded conditions to the plane of mental, “ideal” actions. In the unfolding process of “signification” and “re-signification” of the object of action, the transformation of objective reality relied on participants’ representations of the essential properties of the object. This enabled them to jointly externalize their individual conceptions of the object’s characteristics, make these explicit and open to analysis, coordinate and reconcile them — and, ultimately, to collaboratively search for a solution to the task.

At the same time, the topic of *vrashchivanie* of *meanings* into the child’s psyche — through the formation of senses — and Vygotsky’s initial research into the semantic structure of consciousness unfortunately remain underdeveloped to this day. As he wrote: “Meaning enters into the instrumental operation as a ‘third link,’ mediating the relation between sign and object. Meaning, psychologically speaking, is the internal structure of the sign operation. The sign mediates through meaning. We used to take the sign in the context of behavior; now we must consider it in the context of consciousness” (Vygotsky, 2017, p. 306). In this view, meaning constitutes *the unit of verbal thought*. Vygotsky called for us to “uncover systemic organization in psychology through the analysis of meaning” (Vygotsky, 2017, p. 355). He began this work in his final book, *Thinking and Speech*.

4. The zone of proximal development

The concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) emerged in cultural-historical psychology (CHP) later than many others, but it gained widespread recognition both in Russia and internationally. It is conceptually linked to *vrashchivanie* through Vygotsky’s well-known “garden metaphor.” The zone of proximal development, according to Vygotsky, contains “functions not yet matured,” whose development requires the support of an adult — especially a teacher. Only a foolish gardener judges the orchard by the fruits that have already ripened, Vygotsky said. Proper education differs from training in that it leads development, guiding it forward by orienting not only to what is already present and mature, but above all to what is emerging and will soon take the lead in the structure of consciousness.

The ZPD serves as a kind of unifying framework for the theory of CHP, linking together its “core” concepts: cooperation, sign mediation, *vrashchivanie* (ingrowing), consciousness, and others. It explains the central developmental mechanism in L.S. Vygotsky’s theory: how the social becomes individual, how the inter turns into the intra — that is, what later came to be known as

the general genetic law. The concept of the ZPD connects three major dimensions of human life: education, development, and psychological health (Zaretsky, Kholmogorova, 2020).

The enormous heuristic potential of the ZPD concept began to be recognized by researchers and practitioners many years after L.S. Vygotsky's death. This led not only to its rapid dissemination across various branches of psychology but also to ongoing debates about its interpretation. Vygotsky did not manage to fully unify the various ideas he expressed in different contexts, which is one reason for the ambiguity and diversity of contemporary readings of his theory of the ZPD.

Scholars of Vygotsky and his intellectual legacy recognized the ZPD's explanatory potential and sought to build developmental theory on its foundation. However, they did not always pay attention to its constructive potential — that is, its capacity to inform the design of developmental conditions, to guide the developmental process, and to solve concrete developmental challenges in practice (a vision of psychology as practical *theory* that Vygotsky himself strongly advocated).

International followers of Vygotsky, in promoting his ideas, often relied on a simplified definition of the ZPD from a 1935 pamphlet written for teachers. There, the ZPD is defined as the distance “between the level of actual development, 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...” (Vygotsky, 1935, p. 42).

Below are key theses about the ZPD as they relate to cooperation and *vrashchivanie*:

- In the ZPD, the child jointly performs actions *with another person* (an adult or more capable peer) that they cannot yet perform alone.
- The experience the child acquires by acting jointly within the ZPD can become their own, thereby enabling “steps in development”; it is through this process that the *ingrowing* (*vrashchivanie*) of behavioral strategies and higher psychological functions occurs.
- The ZPD encompasses those actions that the child can carry out *consciously* in collaboration with an adult — what is unavailable to the child's consciousness cannot yet be appropriated⁴.
- In the ZPD, the child acts in *cooperation* with the adult; from this follows the idea of the child's agentive position in joint activity as a necessary condition for development.
- Teaching leads development, and a single step in instruction can mean a hundred steps in development.

An attempt to newly synthesize these theses led V.K. Zaretsky to develop the multi-vector model of the

ZPD (Zaretsky, 2007). This model conceptualizes child development in cooperation with the adult as movement along the vector of educational activity, which is accompanied by “steps in development” along multiple possible vectors — all of which, in one way or another, are connected to the child's engagement in learning.

5. Affect and *perezhivanie*

Shortly before his death, L.S. Vygotsky stated that “the true dynamic unit of consciousness, i.e., the full unit from which consciousness is built, is *perezhivanie*” (Vygotsky, 1984, p. 383).

This statement marks yet another (and ultimately final) radical shift in the development of the entire system of cultural-historical psychology (CHP). If *perezhivanie* is the “cell” of consciousness, which has a systemic structure, then consciousness is nothing other than *a system of perezhivaniya*. This means that every single form, function, and phenomenon of consciousness must be explained through the concept of *perezhivanie*, must relate to this dynamic — i.e., constantly changing, emerging and vanishing — unit, and must in some way be anchored in *perezhivanie* (just as in the capitalist system all processes are ultimately anchored in the commodity — real or ideal, i.e., money).

Vygotsky did not manage to complete this task, and therefore did not finish building the new theory of consciousness he envisioned. Since then, this task has rarely been taken up again, and the very concept of *perezhivanie* has long remained at the periphery of cultural-historical theory. Nevertheless, Vygotsky succeeded in analyzing the affective-semantic nature of *perezhivanie*, and in doing so, gave us the key to understanding the newly emerging system as a whole.

An openly available definition, overlooked by many, reads:

“*Perezhivanie* must be understood as the internal relation of the child, as a person, to a certain moment of reality” (Vygotsky, 1984, p. 382).

The emphasis here must be placed on the word internal, since, in addition to this internal relation (*perezhivanie*), the child is also connected to reality through an external relation — namely, *activity*. “The child's relation to the environment and the environment's relation to the child are given through the *perezhivanie* and the activity of the child himself,” Vygotsky clarified (Vygotsky, 1984, p. 383). *Perezhivanie* and activity, these two fundamental relations between the human personality (not only the child) and the external world, constitute the internal and external — or in Vygotsky's own terms, the phenomenal and the objective — dimensions of a person's life activity.

⁴ This leads to the notion of the boundaries of the ZPD. The importance of recognizing these boundaries is emphasized, for example, by W. Stiles, who notes that the primary error of the psychotherapist is “working outside the zone of proximal development” (Stiles, Gabalda, Ribeiro, 2016).

According to his notebooks, by the end of his life Vygotsky envisioned CHP as a three-story building:

The ground floor is instrumental psychology, which studies the “direct movement from life to consciousness.” This work was carried forward by A.N. Leontiev and the Kharkov school.

The second floor is the investigation of the world of consciousness, populated by *perezhivaniya*, meanings, and senses. This is the domain of *Thinking and Speech*.

The third and uppermost floor is “acmeist” psychology, or the study of how consciousness transforms and illuminates life.

“Of course, the cell depends in its development on the organism. Meaning depends on consciousness, and consciousness on life. But meaning changes consciousness, and consciousness changes life. *The reverse movement — from consciousness to life — is the key*. Spinoza... The direct movement (from life to consciousness) is only important insofar as it enables us to understand the *reverse movement — from consciousness to life* (consciousness transforms life), the dependence of life on consciousness” (Vygotsky, 2017, pp. 413–414).

In ontogenetic development, this shuttle movement corresponds to the “zigzag of free, meaningful action”: the shift from concrete action to conceptual thought, and back — from thought to action, now conscious and deliberate. The road from consciousness to life, and from thought to action, winds through the mountain ranges of *affect*.

Affect is the psychological form of expression of an organic need — a natural steering mechanism of activity in all living beings: desire, joy, anger, fear, and so on. Affect constitutes the “cell,” or “unit,” of the psyche as such⁵. Hence: “To study the order and interrelation of affects is the principal task of scientific psychology” (Vygotsky, 1936, p. 211).

This, in broad strokes, is the coordinate system within which the “late” Vygotsky built his theory of consciousness in general, and the concept of *perezhivanie* in particular. Drawing on Spinoza’s definition of affect as “a state of the body that increases or decreases its potency to act (*agendi potentia*),”⁶ Vygotsky began to formulate his own theory of affect as: “a holistic psychophysiological reaction that includes both *perezhivanie* and a certain kind of behavior, and represents a unity of the phenomenal and objective dimensions” (Vygotsky, 1984, p. 214).

Thus, according to Vygotsky, *perezhivanie* represents nothing other than *the phenomenal aspect of affect*. One

cannot understand what *perezhivanie* is without referring to the concept of affect — just as one cannot understand what price is without knowing the concept of value. This is clearly demonstrated by the recent “Symposium on *Perezhivanie*.”⁷

In the best works available today on the concept of *perezhivanie*, research is generally carried out on the first or, less frequently, the second “floor” of CHP. *Perezhivanie* is related to the general genetic law of cultural development and the concept of the social situation of development (Veresov, 2016; Fler, González, Veresov, 2017; Veresov, Fler, 2016), and a dual “emotional-cognitive refracting of the environment in *perezhivanie*” is acknowledged (Meshcheryakov, 2008 p. 107). At the same time, nearly all discussion has neglected the domain of “acmeist psychology”: the mastery of one’s own *perezhivaniya* through awareness and reflection; their regulation in childhood or theatrical play; the creation of artificial, cultural emotions; the subordination of affects to concepts; the establishment of a rational order and structure among affects.

Vygotsky saw *perezhivanie* as *a conscious affect*, or affect that has become a phenomenon of human consciousness. From its objective side, this same affect appears as a form of activity or behavior⁸. *Perezhivanie* and action are, in essence, one and the same — expressed in two different ways.

The development of the child’s psyche may be understood as the growth of conscious awareness (*prise de conscience*, in the terms of Clapar de and Piaget) in the sphere of inner emotional experience. Vygotsky, following Busemann, defines reflection as “the redirection of *perezhivanie* from the external world toward the self,” and so forth.

After Vygotsky’s death, the concept of *perezhivanie* as the “affective relation of the child to the environment” was developed by L.I. Bozhovich. However, she adopted a one-sided, strictly phenomenal definition of affect — as “a prolonged, deep emotional experience.” As a result, affect became a type of *perezhivanie*, and this reductionist interpretation was attributed to Vygotsky, despite the fact that she simply ignored his actual definitions with their clear references to Spinoza.

Bozhovich then criticized Vygotsky’s own concept of *perezhivanie* on the grounds that he linked it to meaning, endowed *perezhivaniya* with meanings, and explained them through concepts. In doing so, she argued, Vygotsky reduced psychological analysis to “purely subjective

⁵ “Affect is the alpha and omega, the beginning and end, the prologue and epilogue of all psychic development” (Vygotsky, 1984 p. 297).

⁶ Vygotsky cited and extensively commented on Spinoza’s activity-based (or “dynamogenic,” as he put it) definition of affect, finding experimental confirmation of it in the works of W. Cannon and C. Sherrington, K. Lewin, and M. Prince. Emotion is not an epiphenomenon; it must do something — “it must activate us.”

⁷ In 2016, the journal *Mind, Culture, and Activity* dedicated a special issue (vol. 23, no. 4) to this topic: “Symposium on *Perezhivanie*.” Notably, among a dozen articles, not a single one refers to the “Theory of Emotions.”

⁸ The terms “activity” and “behavior” often merge in Vygotsky’s writings. Expressions like “type of behavior” and “form of activity” are used interchangeably, separated by commas, and behavior is defined as “all activity.” At times, however, he distinguishes between them — for example, when referring to “behavior in the process of activity.”

tive processes,” isolating *perezhivaniya* from “real-life relations” (Bozhovich, 1968, pp. 153–157).

The true continuation of the “acmeist psychology” project was taken up — thanks to B.V. Zeigarnik and her school — in the field of *pathopsychology* (Zeigarnik, Kholmogorova, Mazur, 1989). Special attention deserves the work of A.Sh. Tkhostov and colleagues, compiled in the monograph *Cultural-Historical Pathopsychology* (Tkhostov, 2020). Their studies of the development of voluntary emotional regulation (through sign-symbolic operations) effectively fulfill Vygotsky’s scientific testament, and in some respects even go beyond it — especially in their engagement with the concept of post-voluntariness.

An excellent contribution to the second floor of the system is offered by E.Yu. Zavershneva, who proposes her own interpretation of Vygotsky’s hypothesis about the cause of neuroses: namely, the inability to translate an affective complex into *perezhivanie* (Zavershneva, 2017). In another article, she presents valuable insights into the semantic nature of (Zavershneva, 2015).

An original approach to the problem of *perezhivanie*, based on Vygotsky’s ideas, was developed by F.E. (Vasiluk, 1984). His ideas merit a separate discussion.

Vygotsky’s Copernican revolution (in place of a conclusion)

There are two types of scientific systems: some depict a subject under the form of the observer, others — under the form of eternity. The first type is exemplified by Ptolemy’s geocentric model; the second — by Copernicus’s system (or the solar system as it truly is). Systems of the first type always contain “their own” truth — a partial or local truth; systems of the second type are the truth itself — however incomplete or inexact it may still

be⁹. They do not offer a “private” or “relative” truth, but a *universal* scientific system.

Cultural-Historical Psychology did not acquire the character of a universal system immediately. “We introduced the systemic point of view too late... *Now* I understand all of this more deeply,” wrote Vygotsky “contra A.N.” (Leontiev) in 1932 (Vygotsky, 2017, p. 321). Two years earlier, in his lecture “On Psychological Systems” (October 1930), Vygotsky acknowledged that in the study of various psychological functions, their interrelation in the processes of development and disintegration of higher psychological functions had been overlooked. As a result, “we lost sight of the concept of personality” as a system of tertiary connections — the kinds of connections that form among psychological functions in adolescence through reflection and self-awareness. It was precisely this turn toward understanding personality as a psychological system that gave CHP its truly systemic character. The beginnings of this breakthrough can already be seen in the 1929 manuscript “The Concrete Psychology of Personality” (Vygotsky, 1986).

Vygotsky, like Copernicus, managed to account for *the movement of the observer* — that is, cultural-historical development of human personality itself. The principle of historicity allowed Vygotsky to conceptualize the human psyche *sub specie aeternitatis* — not from the narrow, historically bounded viewpoint of the “observer” (from which emerges the entirety of today’s descriptive and explanatory psychology).

This constitutes the revolution that Vygotsky accomplished in global psychology.

Thanks to the recent “archival revolution,” we are now able to discern the outlines of the system he envisioned but did not live to complete. The time has come to align the current trajectory of CHP with these contours — to determine where we are headed next.

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⁹ Just as Copernicus mistakenly believed that planets move in circular orbits at constant speed, and astronomical calculations in such a system naturally produced significant error.

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Toward the construction of educational practices grounded in the conceptual system of cultural-historical psychology

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Abstract

The paper analyses how key concepts of cultural-historical psychology — zone of proximal development, joint activity, vraschivanie (the cultural grafting of individual action), perezhivanie, sign mediation, and reflection — can serve as design principles for effective educational practices and technologies. Three practices are examined in detail: the reflexive-activity approach (RAA), which helps learners overcome academic difficulties and stimulates both cognitive and personal development; the diagnostic technique “Mosaic,” devised to assess the formation of meta-disciplinary competences in primary-school children through the organisation of cooperative activity; and “Multimedia-Theater,” a qualitatively new form of organising adolescents’ learning activity that, by means of systematically arranged role experimentation, fosters the central neoformations of this age period. The cases show how the core principles and propositions elaborated by L.S. Vygotsky — and later developed by his students and followers — can be effectively integrated into contemporary educational practice.

Keywords: cultural-historical psychology, educational practice, reflexive-activity approach, multimedia-theater, role experimentation, diagnosis of meta-disciplinary competences, joint activity, zone of proximal development, reflection, perezhivanie, vraschivanie, sign mediation

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К проблеме конструирования образовательных практик на основе системы понятий культурно-исторической психологии

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Резюме

В статье рассматривается применение фундаментальных понятий культурно-исторической психологии — зона ближайшего развития, совместная деятельность, вращивание, переживание, знаковое опосредствование, рефлексия — для проектирования эффективных образовательных практик и технологий. Особое внимание уделяется таким практикам, как *рефлексивно-деятельностный подход (РДП)*, направленный на оказание помощи учащимся в преодолении учебных трудностей и способствующий их когнитивному и личностному развитию; *диагностическая методика «Мозаика»*, задачей которой

выступает оценка сформированности метапредметных компетенций учащихся младшего школьного возраста в области организации совместной деятельности; «Мультимедиа-театр», позволяющий через специально организованный процесс ролевого экспериментирования формировать центральные новообразования подросткового возраста и являющийся одной из качественно новых форм организации учебной деятельности подростков. Представленные в статье практики наглядно демонстрируют, каким образом основополагающие принципы и положения культурно-исторической психологии, заложенные Л.С. Выготским и впоследствии развивавшиеся учениками и последователями его научной школы, могут быть эффективно интегрированы в образовательный процесс.

Ключевые слова: культурно-историческая психология, образовательная практика, рефлексивно-деятельностный подход, мультимедиа-театр, ролевое экспериментирование, диагностика метапредметных компетенций, совместная деятельность, зона ближайшего развития, рефлексия, переживание, вращивание, знаковое опосредствование

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Introduction

It is impossible to discuss cultural-historical psychology (CHP) solely in theoretical terms without considering how its fundamental principles are implemented in practice — and, in fact, how they serve as the foundation for practical psychology. As I.V. Dubrovina states, “L. =S. Vygotsky largely predetermined the development of practical child psychology” (*italics in the original*) [6], drawing specific attention to the words of L. Binswanger, who observed that “there is no science in which theory and practice follow such divergent paths” [4]. For Vygotsky, it was evident that the crisis in psychological science (the echoes of which we still experience today) was largely due to the fact that: “...practice was a colony of theory, entirely dependent on the metropolis; theory, in contrast, was not dependent on practice at all. Practice was considered a deduction, an application, generally an operation outside of science, post-scientific, beginning only where scientific activity was thought to have ended. The success or failure of practice did not in any way affect the fate of theory” [4].

Vygotsky saw the solution in the inseparable synthesis of these two domains: on the one hand, practice, which “poses problems, serves as the supreme judge of theory, as the criterion of truth, and dictates how concepts should be constructed and how laws should be formulated” [4]; and on the other, a living system of developing concepts that form both the methodology and the method of investigation. The unity of practice and methodology is the key principle of CHP that elevates it beyond the status of a conventional theory and grants it paradigmatic significance.

This principle of unity between methodology and practice finds full expression in the experimental-genetic or genetic-modeling method developed by

L.S. Vygotsky. Its key feature — enabling it to serve both as a research method and as a conceptual model for practical tools — is its focus on reproducing the genesis of higher mental functions (HMFs) and cultural forms of behavior and activity. For this reason, the method is also known as the formative experiment. It is built upon the conceptual unity of a set of notions that constitute the theoretical-methodological framework of CHP:

- The concept of cooperation reveals the role of social interactions that unfold in the form of emotionally significant, “dramatic” events;
- The concept of sign/sign mediation emphasizes the key role of cultural means (signs, symbols, and symbol systems) that initially function as tools of social communication between participants;
- The concept of *vrashchivanie* identifies the mechanism of development;
- The zone of proximal development defines the leading role of learning as a driving force of development;
- The concept of *perezhivanie* affirms the principle of unity between affect and intellect;
- The concept of reflection highlights the child's individual activity in mastering cultural modes of action.

Each of these concepts both characterizes a specific aspect of objective reality studied by CHP (the structure of consciousness, the relationship between learning and development, between natural maturation and cultural growth, the sources of development, etc.) and imposes specific requirements on the organization of research and professional practice. What is crucial here is that the distinction between the researcher and the practitioner is minimal. The practitioner operates with scientific concepts as tools, means of organizing activity aimed at the formation, development, or correction (depending on their specialization) of higher

mental functions, behavior, and forms of activity in the child. The researcher, by contrast, is focused primarily on studying the concepts themselves, for whom “...their correspondence to facts is merely a means, a technique, a way of verifying their applicability” [4]. But even this distinction is provisional. Every practitioner, in fact, evaluates the suitability of the concepts they use (together forming a method) in terms of the effectiveness with which they achieve their intended outcomes. In this sense, I.V. Dubrovina rightly notes that “...a psychologist does not only — or even primarily — study and investigate, but rather helps and constructs” [6]. In this way, thanks to L. S. Vygotsky, the practical psychologist and the research psychologist were reconciled: every cultural-historical psychologist became both a practitioner and a researcher.

It is also important to note that none of the concepts forming the methodological foundation of CHP can be regarded in isolation as “self-sufficient” or “exclusively explanatory” (see Vygotsky’s critique of such an approach in *The Historical Meaning of the Crisis in Psychology* [4]). Nevertheless, in any particular study or practice, a given concept may serve as a system-forming one. The following sections present several educational practices based on the holistic methodological system of CHP concepts — each of which unfolds the system in its own way, depending on which concept predominates. Moreover, each practice illustrates the dynamic development of CHP’s conceptual apparatus and shows how practical work can transform and expand the theoretical-methodological tools of this scientific tradition.

Practice 1: Reflexive-activity approach to providing psychological and pedagogical support in overcoming learning difficulties

Reflexive-activity approach (RAA) to providing psychological and pedagogical support to students in overcoming learning difficulties represents a direction within cultural-historical psychology that can be understood as one possible realisation of L.S. Vygotsky’s idea that “instruction leads development,” that is, the notion of developmental instruction [5]. Its full name is: a practice of psychological and pedagogical support for students in overcoming learning difficulties that promotes their cognitive and personal development [9].

Learning difficulty is understood not as a deviation from the norm, but as an inherent aspect of the educational process — and as a resource for development. According to L.S. Vygotsky, educational activity implies that the child attempts what they have not yet mastered; hence, errors and difficulties naturally arise, which create a need for adult assistance. If a child per-

forms only what they can already do independently, no development occurs. On the other hand, if the task is incomprehensible and entirely beyond the child’s reach, it will not foster development and may even be harmful. Therefore, learning difficulties are necessary for both instruction and development: they create the conditions and motivation for developmental movement.

For this reason, the RAA does not aim to prevent or correct learning difficulties. Rather, it seeks to support the child in overcoming them in a way that contributes to development. What kind of developmental steps are we speaking of? Vygotsky does not answer this question directly, but in *Thought and Language*, he writes that “one step in instruction may mean a hundred steps in development” [3]. These steps, therefore, may take various forms and proceed in different directions. In the practice of the RAA, many cases have indeed shown that one instructional step can catalyse multiple steps in development [10]. But how is this possible?

The central mechanism linking instruction and development in CHP is the concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) — a key construct in the RAA. Drawing on reflective analysis of support practices with children, adolescents, and adults, as well as on a careful reading of Vygotsky’s writings on the ZPD (which, notably, were underexplored by many of his followers), the RAA has significantly reinterpreted this concept. It now employs a multi-vector model of the ZPD, which describes the mechanisms linking instruction to development across several axes: cognitive, personal, and social. That is, development in the context of overcoming learning difficulties may unfold along several vectors, and the model also incorporates a mechanism of self-development, which helps explain Vygotsky’s claim that one step in instruction can mean a hundred in development [8].

Self-development becomes possible when the student takes a subject-position in the learning process [11], becoming the agent of action and reflection — in other words, the agent of overcoming their own difficulties. Meanwhile, the adult (teacher, psychologist, parent, etc.) takes on the role of helper, consultant, or collaborator.

In this way, the RAA implements in practice one of Vygotsky’s fundamental ideas: that development occurs through cooperation between the child and adult, when the child receives assistance within the ZPD.

While Vygotsky never formulated this thesis explicitly, it can be inferred from his texts. Unfortunately, he did not manage to develop a full account of what kind of assistance promotes development. Though he offered many examples, he left unanswered the questions of how, by what means, and under what conditions adult support can actually foster development.

It is clear, however, that not all assistance within the ZPD is developmentally productive.

Therefore, the RAA — as a practice (or technology) of developmentally oriented assistance — devotes significant attention to the following questions: “How should we help?”, “How should we not help?”, and “In what ways can help be given?” Accordingly, the theoretical core of the RAA, which is closely integrated with its technological aspect, is described as a triad:

- Principles — the commitments that a specialist in the RAA seeks to realise in practice;
- Constraints — prohibitions that follow logically from these principles;
- Technologies — examples of how the principles and constraints are enacted in concrete support situations.

This triad is supplemented by a fourth component — situations, that is, the question of when assistance should be provided.

The activity of a specialist working within the RAA can be described as a sequence of acts (a term used by Vygotsky himself) or actions carried out in diverse contexts of interaction, when the child seeks help or clearly needs it. If we assume that the key moment in a learning situation is when the child encounters difficulty and cannot complete the task independently — yet feels the need to advance in learning and development — then the adult must create such a situation of difficulty, but one that remains within the child’s ZPD.

Technologically, this is achieved by presenting the child with a sequence of tasks of increasing complexity. This makes it possible to identify which tasks the child can complete independently and at which point they begin to encounter difficulties or make errors. This marks the lower boundary of the ZPD in relation to learning activity. If the task sequence is sufficiently long, there will come a point where the child no longer understands what is required of them and cannot even consciously accept assistance. This constitutes the upper boundary of the ZPD.

Thus, the lower boundary lies between the ability and inability to act independently, and the upper boundary lies between the ability and inability to engage in conscious cooperation with an adult. Incidentally, when Vygotsky emphasises the importance of consciousness in adult — child interaction, he explicitly rejects the then-popular term “intellectual imitation” and instead speaks of the child’s actions as carried out in cooperation or under the guidance of an adult (see [2], [3], [5]).

In the RAA, difficulty and error are never viewed as accidental. Indeed, correctness may be accidental — for example, if a child does not know whether to write “a” or “o” in a word, they might guess correctly 50% of the time. But if they make a mistake, it is not

accidental. Difficulties and errors are understood as indicators of inadequately formed strategies of action.

For instance, primary school children often write words “as they hear them,” without considering that some sounds in Russian are not represented by their “own” letters, or that the number of sounds exceeds the number of letters, requiring deliberate analysis to determine which letter (or combination) corresponds to a given sound.

Hence, working on the method of action means helping the child recognise and reconstruct their approach. The core principle here is reliance on reflection. Reflection enables the child to become aware of their way of acting, to liberate themselves from its automatic hold (as children and adults alike often act without understanding what, how, or why they are doing something), to grasp what needs to be changed in their method, and then — either independently or again with the adult’s reflective support — to reorganise their action strategy.

The moment in a lesson when the student is working on the transformation of their method of action is of critical importance for the child’s development. If, at the moment of difficulty — when reflective work on understanding and restructuring one’s action is underway — the adult intervenes by suggesting a solution, demonstrating an example, or offering other instrumental help, then the opportunity to take developmental steps is lost [15], because the intellectual effort that could have led to development is performed by the adult instead of the child.

For this reason, a practitioner working within the RAA does not rush to intervene. They hold a pause, waiting to discern whether the child has exhausted their internal resources or still has reserves. The adult intervenes only when it becomes clear that the child has done everything they can. In such cases — resembling a “block” situation in the process of solving a creative task [7] — the adult seeks not to compensate for the child’s instrumental deficit, but rather to support them in overcoming a reflective deficit, posing reflective (non-leading) questions that help the child remain the subject of the difficulty-overcoming process. In doing so, the well-known maxim of Maria Montessori, “Help me do it by myself” [14], is realised, as is Immanuel Kant’s idea that a child should arrive at correct thinking independently [12].

From the standpoint of the RAA, instrumental help can be likened to attempting to insert a foreign part into a functioning mechanism — one that doesn’t quite fit — or replacing one part with another. By contrast, the metaphor for reflective help is organic: under the child’s own active efforts, supported reflectively, new functions “grow”, like branches of a tree. L.S. Vygotsky also employed an organic metaphor when he described the processes occurring in the

ZPD as involving the child's appropriation of shared experience — what he called *vrashchivanie*. But this is a kind of *vrashchivanie* that leads to the cultivation of new methods, functions, personal qualities, and relationships. Vygotsky emphasised that the concept of the ZPD can be extended to the personality as a whole [5]. After all, joint efforts are not limited to solving math or language problems. One can also jointly work through: a passive attitude toward learning, a habitual refusal to understand the teacher, unwillingness to exert effort, inability to reflect on one's own actions, or the inability to cope with anxiety, fear, or agitation.

It is precisely this explanatory and constructive potential of the ZPD that has led, in the 21st century, to its adoption not only in developmental and educational psychology, but also in pedagogy, counseling, psychotherapy, coaching, organizational psychology, and beyond.

The core principles of providing assistance to students in overcoming learning difficulties via the RAA include:

- Establishing a relationship of cooperation;
- Supporting the child's subject-position;
- Creating a situation of difficulty during the lesson;
- Working within the student's ZPD;
- Providing help grounded in reflection;
- Working with the method of action;
- Establishing and maintaining positive emotional and meaning-based contact;
- Ideally, working at the epicenter of the ZPD, that is, with the key difficulty whose resolution would most effectively promote development.

The greatest developmental effect of assistance is observed when the child overcomes learned helplessness: that is, when they perceive themselves as incapable of overcoming difficulties, do not believe in success (self-efficacy is “at zero”), and refrain from effort, convinced it would be futile (“nothing will work anyway”). Suddenly, with adult help, the child discovers that they can cope with the difficulty on their own — the adult did not do it for them, but helped them do it themselves. In that moment, the child has a kind of epiphany: they realise they can act independently. Where before there was a conviction — “I’ll never manage,” — there now emerges a new one: “I can do it, I just have to figure out how.” (see, e.g., [10] — the case of the student O. and the case of Pasha).

The RAA, as an approach to providing developmentally oriented psychological and pedagogical support, first began to take shape in 1997 [9] and has since been applied to work with a wide range of children and adults: students in general education schools who experience learning difficulties; orphans (including those with disabilities or severe somatic illnesses); adolescents with deviant behavior; teens undergoing rehabilitation from substance abuse; university stu-

dents; and adults with disabilities. The range of issues for which the principles and elements of the RAA are appropriate has continually expanded. Today, the field is shifting from the classic dyad “instruction — development” toward a triadic model: “education — development — health”, in which education (instruction) is seen as the driving force of development (leading it forward, in Vygotsky's terms), and development is seen as a condition for mental health [23].

Practice 2: The diagnostic method “Mosaic”

Within the framework of cultural-historical psychology (CHP), the concept of cooperation — between children and adults, and between children themselves — occupies a central position as a source of development. This is fully expressed in the fundamental law of the development of higher psychological functions (HPFs): “Behind all higher functions and their relations stand genetically social relations — real relations — *homo duplex* (the double human being). Hence, the principle and method of personification in the study of cultural development: the division of functions between people — the personification of functions. For example, voluntary attention: one person masters, the other is mastered. Again, the division in two of what is fused in one — an experimental unfolding of a higher process (voluntary attention) into a miniature drama.” [1] This proposition, along with L.S. Vygotsky's ideas on the leading role of instruction in development and on the formation of scientific concepts in children, received practical elaboration in the Elkonin—Davydov system of developmental education. Within that framework, a key problem was the original form of learning activity as a collectively distributed activity — shared among children and adults, and among children themselves. Later, methods for organising such collectively distributed forms of educational activity were systematically developed in the works of V.V. Rubtsov, V.V. Ageev, Yu.V. Gromyko, R.Ya. Guzman, A.Yu. Korostelev, A.V. Konokotin, and others. Their research has produced empirical evidence of the positive impact of collective activity on students' cognitive development. In particular, in studies led by V.V. Rubtsov ([17], [18]), the socio-genetic method was developed to investigate the formation of concepts in childhood. This method foregrounds the concepts of cooperation and joint activity as system-forming elements within the general methodological framework of CHP. As V.V. Rubtsov writes: “The foundation of this method lies in the principle of mutual mediation between the object-related structure of the task and the structure of joint activity: the content of the object, which defines the conceptual content being mastered, is mediated by the

modes of interaction among participants in a given social situation.” [16] This approach has formed the basis for the concept of the cultural-historical type of school [19].

In the practice of developmental education, a crucial role is played by the organisation of diverse forms of meaningful interaction between students as they search for ways to solve learning tasks. This interaction serves, on the one hand, as a source and driving force of children’s cognitive development, and on the other, as a mechanism of their socialisation. Creating conditions – and more than that, provoking students to engage in discussion, debate, and expression of viewpoints using sign-symbolic tools (e.g. diagrams, models) – is a distinguishing feature of developmental education compared to traditional educational practices. The aim of such dialogue is to generate a new mode of action in a problem situation, one that is collectively produced in the course of solving the task [20]. Consequently, one essential requirement for any diagnostic tool used to assess the developmental effects of primary education is that it must establish both quantitative and qualitative indicators of students’ communicative competence. These competences are expressed in the construction of productive educational interactions and in the organisation of joint actions aimed at solving a common task [22].

The “Mosaic” method models such collectively distributed joint activity, oriented toward collaborative problem solving, and enables both quantitative evaluation and qualitative description of how interaction is constructed within a group. It allows researchers to observe how group dynamics evolve and how they can be adjusted or improved over the course of the collective search for a solution [21].

1. Operating principle

The Mosaic method simulates a situation in which students must engage in collectively distributed activity to solve a shared task. Elements of a mosaic are distributed among participants in a group, and these elements must be assembled to form specific geometric figures. Importantly, participants do not know in advance what figures are to be assembled, nor which elements their peers possess. Thus, the practical task – assembling four geometric shapes – becomes a search task, requiring participants to identify the possibilities available within two sets of constraints:

- Object-level constraints, such as the form and size of the mosaic pieces;
- Social-level constraints, arising from the distribution of elements across the group members.

Only by coordinating the search for geometric configurations with the coordination of individual capabilities – that is, determining who possesses which elements – can the task be successfully completed.

Furthermore, in the course of solving the problem, the group must generate its own means of communication, tailored to the specific demands of the task. This includes developing a shared language for describing one’s own pieces or missing components of the mosaic.

The Mosaic method possesses several distinctive features:

- The central requirement of the model is to create conditions under which the task can be solved only through interaction among group members. To achieve this, the puzzle elements are distributed so that no individual participant can complete the task alone. Moreover, since each of the four target geometric figures is pre-divided into two parts, success at each stage (i.e., assembling one figure) requires cooperation between two group members who hold the necessary pieces. However, it is not known in advance who possesses which pieces – this must become the subject of group discussion and problem-solving.
- The task must be simple. Since the object of study is the ability to organise productive group interaction around a shared goal, the outcome should be determined not by the difficulty of the task but by the quality of communication and cooperation.

- The method is designed not merely to register the presence or absence of interaction, but to allow for measurement and substantive analysis of its effectiveness, techniques, and dynamics throughout the problem-solving process. To support this:

The task materials are selected so that students have multiple attempts at solving the problem. In Mosaic, the group is asked to assemble four geometric figures, giving participants the opportunity to test hypotheses and assess strategies during the process – not just retrospectively.

A procedure is designed that artificially complicates direct problem-solving and necessitates strategy building, hypothesis generation, and substantive communication. For this reason, the materials include: inappropriate elements (e.g., pieces that are similar in size, shape, or colour but incorrect), extraneous pieces (not part of any target shape), fully formed distractor shapes, and visual barriers that prevent participants from seeing one another’s pieces. Each of the four group members can see only their own set, which is hidden from others.

The material itself is deliberately “noised”: irrelevant features such as colour are included; distinctions between suitable and unsuitable elements are made subtle (size, shape); and figure segments are cut in ways that may lack clear geometric names – or names at all.

- These strict constraints on the structure of the collectively distributed task ensure that the entire process is forced onto the verbal plane. This enables researchers to record and analyse verbal data on how students: conduct analysis, formulate hypotheses, de-

velop a shared descriptive language, identify and analyse errors, etc.

2. Materials

The Mosaic task is built around a simple puzzle: 16 coloured mosaic tiles from which four geometric figures can be assembled (a circle, square, triangle, and hexagon — or parallelogram). Each figure consists of only two parts. The full set also contains extra pieces that do not fit any of the listed shapes due to differences in form or size. The pieces are divided into four equal sets, distributed in such a way that no set contains both parts of any one figure. These sets are assigned to the four members of the group. As a result, each child holds a set of elements that is insufficient to solve the task alone — the assembly of every shape requires cooperation.

3. Indicators of effectiveness

A key advantage of Mosaic compared to other diagnostic tools for assessing social competences is that it provides an objective indicator of effective group interaction: the number of geometric figures successfully assembled. This indicator reflects the accuracy of the group's collaborative solution. Observation of the group's activity during the task enables the researcher to identify:

The group's strategic approach,

The quality and content of group communication,

How interaction unfolds and changes throughout the process.

Analysis of results obtained using the Mosaic method has shown that students in traditional education experience serious difficulties in constructing productive group interaction. Although they enjoy the activity and the task, their communication and problem-solving efforts proceed in parallel, failing to integrate — which results in very low group performance. By contrast, in schools employing developmental education, where children engage in inquiry-based learning and are encouraged to communicate and collaborate while solving tasks, students show entirely different strategies. Their interaction is task-oriented; they build shared tools (e.g., ways of describing elements), develop a common language, plan steps, monitor interim results, and adjust their methods of cooperation accordingly. Large-scale statistical analyses demonstrate that students in developmental education settings perform 2.4 times better than those in traditional schools. These results confirm the effectiveness of the developmental education system, which is grounded in the practical implementation of cultural-historical psychology. The Mosaic method, therefore, provides strong diagnostic support for evaluating the development of social competences in primary school students.

Practice 3: The “Multimedia-Theater” model of organizing adolescent theatrical activity

The theoretical foundations of L. S. Vygotsky and his followers provided the basis for an innovative educational practice known as “*Multimedia-Theater*”, developed at the Center for Interdisciplinary Studies of Contemporary Childhood at MSUPE under the direction of O.V. Rubtsova between 2019 and 2023. The Multimedia-Theater represents a unique form of organizing theatrical activity among adolescents, aimed at their development, learning, and social formation. Unlike other forms of adolescent drama in education, this model creates conditions for *role experimentation* — a process through which teenagers explore new social roles and forms of community (obschnost).

O.V. Rubtsova conceptualizes role experimentation as the leading activity of contemporary adolescence. Through it, adolescents interiorize — *vrashchivayut* — a system of social roles as culturally mediated signs. Drawing an analogy with Vygotsky's concept of *perezhivanie*, Rubtsova treats the social role as *a unit of personality and environment*, in which the external (social) and internal (personal) dimensions are unified.

The authors of the practice emphasize that, within a specially designed theatrical environment, adolescents do not merely perform roles — they engage in a creative reinterpretation of the social meanings of roles through their own individuality. In other words, adolescents do not simply act out scripted roles on stage; rather, they infuse them with their own life experience, personal values, and orientations. This results in *the personal experiencing of the role*, which manifests in the form of *perezhivanie*.

In addition, Multimedia-Theater intentionally constructs “micro-dramas” — brief, emotionally charged situations in which adolescents externalize (extroject) their inner contradictions and psychological conflicts. During sessions, participants engage in theatrical exercises, etudes, and improvisations that place them in imagined but psychologically meaningful scenarios. The emotional responses that arise in these moments are not treated as side effects but as central developmental mechanisms. These emotional processes enable adolescents to make qualitative shifts in the formation of key age-specific neoformations — particularly self-awareness and reflection.

Thus, the Multimedia-Theater allows educators and psychologists to purposefully construct the adolescent's *zone of proximal development (ZPD)* by coordinating two complementary developmental processes:

- *Interiorization* of new cultural signs (roles), through which adolescents, in the context of rehearsal and performance, acquire new forms of role-based interaction and models of community;

- *Exteriorization* of internal conflicts, expressed outwardly through symbolic theatrical forms on stage.

In this model, interiorization means that adolescents assimilate new ways of relating and acting through their theatrical engagement. Exteriorization, in turn, refers to the artistic expression of inner psychological tensions typical of transitional age. The Multimedia-Theater thus stands as a compelling example of how perezhivanie becomes a psychological-pedagogical instrument: it is not treated as a spontaneous emotional occurrence, but is intentionally embedded in the educational design of the activity. *It becomes the central mechanism through which developmental effects are achieved.*

The practical implementation of Multimedia-Theater in school requires a special organisation of the educational process. The experience presented in the works of O. V. Rubtsova and T. A. Poskakalova shows that introducing this model is possible both within extracurricular activities (electives, clubs) and by integrating elements of drama into subject curricula (not only in the humanities). From 2019 to 2025, the model was piloted in a number of schools in Moscow and the Moscow region, covering a total of over 700 adolescents aged 13–15.

Based on the results of piloting the model, the authors of the project formulated the main principles for organising theatrical activity with adolescents:

First, the model is oriented not so much toward the creation of an artistic product as toward *the processual aspect of theatrical activity*. The emphasis on process is linked to the fact that the main goal of Multimedia-Theater is the construction of the zone of proximal development of adolescents, not the staging of a play as such.

Second, the model involves *a variety of types of activity* and the active participation of adolescents at all stages of the project. The key task of Multimedia-Theater is to create conditions for role experimentation. Unlike traditional drama clubs, where students usually rehearse roles based on a prewritten script, in this model adolescents are engaged in *a complex of diverse activities* related to the preparation and realisation of a performance. They not only act on stage, but also participate in script writing, directing and acting training, technical support, and working with *digital technologies*, including filming and editing videos that later become part of the performance (hence the name Multimedia-Theater).

Third, the model must be clearly structured by implementation stages: from motivational introduction (getting acquainted with the project), through the stages of script development, rehearsals, and creation of multimedia elements, to the final performance. Each stage has its own objectives and content, which can be flexibly modelled based on the characteristics of the specific learning group. Particular attention is given to the engagement stage: it is important to form adoles-

cents' *internal motivation* for participating in theatrical activity, especially considering that many may have no prior experience with such projects. At this stage, voicing expectations, emotions, and possible fears by the students themselves is used to reduce anxiety before engaging in this new type of collective activity.

Fourth, it is very important that Multimedia-Theater presupposes *a rejection of traditional pedagogical hierarchy*: here the teacher acts as a co-participant in the adolescents' creative activity, not imposing their own ideas or a fixed script. The teacher's role is to moderate discussions, help formulate ideas for the performance, and – most importantly – to create conditions for reflection, during which participants can rethink the experience and perezhivaniya that emerge throughout the work on the performance.

Over the course of six years of research, the Multimedia-Theater project has demonstrated its high significance for solving a wide range of educational, developmental, and pedagogical tasks. Its potential for implementation is visible both at the level of individual schools and systemically – including in the context of programs for education and prevention of juvenile delinquency. Let us consider several key aspects of the model's significance, supported by empirical data:

1. Development of soft skills and meta-subject competencies

Regular participation in Multimedia-Theater leads to noticeable improvements in adolescents' communication skills, creative abilities, self-esteem, and reflection. According to a longitudinal study (Poskakalova & Khusnutdinova, 2024), over two years of participation in the project, students showed statistically significant improvements in offline communication and levels of socialisation (ability to cooperate, adopt social norms). Importantly, these positive changes were stable: the skills acquired in the first year persisted into the second year of the project. The study also showed that Multimedia-Theater supports the development of an active, competent communicative position – adolescents become more confident in real-life social interaction. These findings are consistent with the results of 2020, where already after several months of participation in the theater project, students demonstrated growth in communicative and regulatory learning actions, as well as improvement in academic performance. Thus, Multimedia-Theater contributes to the development of *21st-century skills*: collaboration, creativity, emotional intelligence, critical thinking, and others.

2. Upbringing and the formation of value orientations

Theatrical activity, integrated into the educational process, provides broad opportunities for *the formation of adolescents' value orientations*. Through choosing

performance topics and collective enactment of moral dilemmas, students internalise ethical concepts and values. Within the project, adolescents themselves create scripts that address issues relevant to them, such as bullying, responsibility in social media, relationships with parents, questions of conscience and duty. The collected data confirm that during the project, participants of Multimedia-Theater interiorised humanistic values — they became more tolerant, empathetic, and conscious in their actions. Teachers in various schools and classrooms also reported positive changes in the behaviour of at-risk adolescents: many showed a decrease in aggression and an increase in responsibility. In several schools, the model has proven to be an effective tool for the prevention of risky and deviant behavior.

3. Relevance to current school challenges and federal educational standards (FGOS)

The pedagogical significance of Multimedia-Theater is also confirmed by its relevance to pressing problems in contemporary schooling. First, *the crisis of motivation* among adolescents. Today, the psychological-pedagogical community points out that traditional lesson formats struggle to hold the attention of teenagers who are immersed in gadgets and the Internet. Multimedia-Theater offers them an activity close to their culture (including work with video, digital storytelling), thus restoring interest in offline interaction. Second, the problem of *fragmentation and conflict* among adolescents, especially in large schools. Joint theatrical work has a strong unifying effect: children learn to collaborate, understand one another, and respect differing viewpoints. Third, the model correlates with new educational standards, enabling the formation of personal educational outcomes and competencies in accordance with FGOS.

4. Flexibility and scalability of the model

An important advantage of the model is its adaptability to various contexts. Multimedia-Theater can be implemented both in urban and rural schools, as it does not require expensive equipment or props. Furthermore, the experience of Multimedia-Theater may be useful for out-of-school institutions (creative centers, youth clubs), and even in correctional education: there is evidence of participation by children with developmental disabilities, who were also successfully engaged in the project.

Thus, the pedagogical significance of the Multimedia-Theater model lies in the fact that it offers a modern, scientifically grounded response to the challenges of education in adolescent schools. It is not just an amateur drama club, but an activity-based educational technology whose effectiveness is confirmed by empirical research. It combines development and learning, contributes to group cohesion, serves as a

means of preventing adolescent risk behaviors, and at the same time integrates harmoniously into the educational process. In the current context of searching for new forms of organising educational activity (including in the framework of the national project on creating school theaters), the accumulated experience of organising theatrical activity represents significant practical value for the education system as a whole.

Conclusion

The examples of psychological practices in education presented in this article — practices developed on the basis of the fundamental concepts of cultural-historical psychology (CHP) — serve as an illustration of the heuristic potential of its theoretical propositions and of the possibilities for unfolding the ideas of L.S. Vygotsky, above all for solving practical problems related to creating conditions for students' development within the educational process. Moreover, the practices discussed here demonstrate the “living nature” of cultural-historical psychology: while rooted in the fundamental concepts of this scientific school, they themselves reveal new aspects of its methodological and methodical foundation. Reflexive-activity approach places at the center the concepts of zone of proximal development and reflection, emphasizing their system-forming role within the conceptual apparatus of CHP — particularly in the way they allow us to understand child — adult cooperation as the creation of a reflective space, within which the child masters new methods of action that enable them to overcome learning difficulties. Initially, the child acts by means of these strategies together with the adult (within the ZPD), and then, through reflection, the child appropriates them. In this way, shared experience is *vrashchivayetsya* (grafted) into the child — or interiorized. The Multimedia-Theater model and the Mosaic diagnostic method, in turn, represent the practical implementation of the socio-genetic method, which regards as the key mechanism of cognitive development the process of qualitative transformation of the social situation, driven by the development of forms of joint, collectively distributed activity.

Today, cultural-historical psychology is experiencing a new and vivid period of flourishing. Interest in the work of L.S. Vygotsky and his followers remains strong both in Russia and internationally. Increasingly, researchers are focusing on the application of Vygotsky's theory to a broad spectrum of practical tasks — social, psychological-pedagogical, and educational. It is evident that the future prospects of applying CHP in practice depend on an understanding of this approach as a coherent conceptual system, one that reveals the inseparable unity of its object and its method.

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Practice-oriented science based on cultural-historical psychology: history and prospects

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Abstract

Context and relevance. Education systems around the world are facing the challenges of global changes in technology, the labor market, and demography. Strengthening the interaction between science and practice in education is considered one of the conditions for a successful response to these challenges. In the USSR and post-Soviet Russia, precedents have been created for building productive cooperation between scientists and practitioners in education based on cultural and historical psychology, which are relevant in the current situation inside and outside the country. **Objective.** The article examines the genesis and content of the idea of a practice-oriented science of education in the context of modern discussions about barriers, opportunities and promising models of interaction between researchers and practitioners. **Hypothesis.** The «practice-oriented science» approach can help in responding to the current challenges of transforming education systems in Russia and the world. **Methods and materials.** Two groups of publications are analyzed: 1) reflecting modern discussions about the gap between science and practice in education and ways to overcome it, the search for effective forms and mechanisms of cooperation between researchers and practitioners; 2) characterizing the history of the conception and implementation of practice-oriented science in education in the USSR (Russian Federation). **Results.** The foundations and key characteristics of the practice-oriented science of education in Russia are presented. The connection of its development with the processes of development of psychological and pedagogical science and general education in the USSR (Russian Federation) is shown. **Conclusions.** The «practice-oriented science» approach has prospects for implementation in Russia and the world to meet the challenges of transforming education systems, but it needs to be developed taking into account the experience of developing and implementing other models of partnership between researchers and practitioners, current discussions and the socio-political context.

Keywords: cultural-historical psychology, practice-oriented science, developmental education, design

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Практико-ориентированная наука на базе культурно-исторической психологии: история и перспективы

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Резюме

Контекст и актуальность. Системы образования во всем мире сталкиваются с вызовами глобальных изменений технологического уклада, рынка труда, демографии. Одним из условий успешного ответа на эти вызовы видится укрепление взаимодействия между наукой и практикой в образовании. В СССР и постсоветской России созданы прецеденты выстраивания продуктивного сотрудничества между учеными и практиками в образовании на базе культурно-исторической психологии, актуальные в современной ситуации внутри страны и за ее пределами. **Цель:** изучить генезис и содержание

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замысла практико-ориентированной науки об образовании в контексте современных дискуссий о барьерах, возможностях и перспективных моделях взаимодействия исследователей и практиков. **Гипотеза.** Подход «практико-ориентированная наука» может помочь в ответе на актуальные вызовы трансформации систем образования в России и мире. **Методы и материалы.** Анализируются две группы публикаций: 1) отражающие современные дискуссии о разрыве науки и практики в образовании и путях его преодоления, поиски эффективных форм и механизмов сотрудничества исследователей и практиков; 2) характеризующие историю замысла и реализации практико-ориентированной науки в образовании в СССР (Российской Федерации). **Результаты.** Представлены основания и ключевые характеристики практико-ориентированной науки об образовании в России. Показана ее связь с процессами развития психолого-педагогической науки и общего образования в СССР (Российской Федерации). **Выводы.** Подход «практико-ориентированная наука» имеет перспективы реализации в России и мире для ответа на вызовы трансформации систем образования, но необходимо его развитие с учетом мирового опыта реализации иных моделей партнерства исследователей и практиков, актуальных дискуссий и социально-политического контекста.

Ключевые слова: культурно-историческая психология, практико-ориентированная наука, развивающееся образование, проектирование

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Introduction

It is commonplace today to state that global changes in technology, labor market, demography create challenges for new generations and increase the responsibility of education systems to prepare for life and work in the future world, and form a demand for changes in existing models of education in order to realize this responsibility. There is a realization that the prescriptions offered for education as an answer to the challenges of the future have been left unfulfilled or ineffective (Elfert, Ydesen, 2024). There is a process of decolonization of scientific knowledge or epistemological decolonization, in which the hegemony of Western theories and methodologies in the sciences of education is criticized (Knobloch, 2020). This process, on the one hand, has actualized the question of countries' sovereignty in educational policy and science, developing authentic strategies that consider unique historical and cultural contexts, integrating national traditions and indigenous knowledge. On the other hand, it sets the agenda for the search for theoretical and methodological alternatives that could unite countries in scientific dialog and cooperation. This vector, in particular, is being discussed today within the BRICS framework (Barbosa Gouveia et al., 2024).

One of the reasons for the observed crisis in education is the problematic, if not also crisis situation regarding the interaction between science and educational practice. The debate about the gap

between science and practice in education has a long history (Korthagen, 2007), but it is currently intensifying (Schlicht-Schm lzle et al., 2024). It addresses the quality and reliability of research findings, the relevance of the research agenda to the problems of practice and the feasibility of practical use of the results, the accessibility of research findings to practitioners, their trust in them, and their motivation for application (Broekkamp, van Hout-Wolters, 2007; Supplee, 2023).

Proposed solutions tend to focus on one cause or element of the chain linking science and practice. Thus, as an incentive to focus science on practical problems, the assessment of impact, which is understood as change or benefit to the economy, society, is increasingly used. The criterion of impact is becoming more and more important in evaluations of science, including in the situation of crisis of scientometric criteria (Bornmann, 2013; Penfield et al., 2014). However, this movement is subordinated more to the objectives of justifying science funding and accountability than to the goals of educational and social progress (Hallonsten, 2021). Not practitioners with their vision of the practical impact of research outputs, but managers with performance metrics and ratings act as evaluators in this process.

Another model of problem solving assigns a central role to intermediaries (knowledge brokers) who select, integrate, adapt research results, and ensure the diffusion of knowledge into practice through various channels. They interact both with

scientists, addressing the challenge of “translating” scientific knowledge into practical knowledge, and with practitioners, seeking to ensure that they understand and contextualize scientific data, develop their research capacity, and simultaneously support the value of intuition and practical reflexive knowledge (Malin, Brown, 2019; Rycroft-Smith, 2022).

An area of focus for strengthening the link between science and practice such as the evidence-based approach, which focuses on the systematic application in educational practice of research findings with empirical evidence of the effectiveness of certain methods, technologies obtained using reliable methods (Slavin, 2020; Gorard, 2020; Owen et al., 2022). Specialized resources are created to provide practitioners with information about approaches and programs with proven effectiveness (<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk>; <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/>; <https://ies.ed.gov/>), and school funding is linked to their use (Slavin, 2020). The evidence-based approach in education faces criticism (Hammersley, 2005; Wrigley, 2018). In particular, it is argued that evidence-based education neglects the expertise of teachers, limits the voice of practitioners in educational decision-making (Biesta, 2006).

That said, there is an emerging consensus that the solutions used do not bridge the gap and new ways of thinking about the links between research and practice are needed, seeing the path to bridging the gap as a bidirectional one in which the transformation of both research and educational approaches needs to be understood and addressed so that science and practice develop in tandem (Farley-Ripple et al., 2018).

The search for optimal models of partnerships between researchers and practitioners is being conducted today by advanced communities around the world (Penuel et al., 2021; Hadar, Baharav, 2025).

In the USSR and post-Soviet Russia, the followers of cultural-historical theory and the activity-based approach in education have set precedents for building productive collaboration between researchers and practitioners.

In this article we show that within the framework of cultural-historical psychology not only the most important theoretical ideas were formulated, which demonstrated their practical value and became the basis for building effective practices of developmental education, but also the original idea of practice-oriented science — a new type of relationship between science and practice of education and,

more broadly, social development — was formed and practically tested. We reveal the key characteristics of practice-oriented science and substantiate that this model of science can help to meet the challenges of transformation of education systems in Russia and the world.

Main part

Practice-oriented science based on the cultural-historical approach: genesis and precedents

In its basic theoretical ideas (“zone of proximal development”, “social situation of development”, “learning leads to development”) cultural-historical psychology initially laid down a special relationship between scientific research and educational practice. It clearly required a methodology that not only allowed for a deeper scientific knowledge of the natural processes of development, but also for the purposeful transformation of these processes within the framework of research. The cultural-historical approach in psychological science and education was closely connected with the Marxist pathos of total transformation of man and society, including overcoming the determinism of development by natural factors.

Initially, the followers of the cultural-historical approach and then of the activity approach saw the limitations of traditional laboratory research methods and proposed a new experimental method, later called “genetic-modeling” (Medvedev et al., 2010). Later on, in the works of P.Y. Under the influence of Halperin and his followers on the one hand, and Davydov and his school on the other, this approach developed into the method of formative experiment, focused on the purposeful formation of abilities with given properties (Foundations of General (Genetic) Psychology, 2022).

Many outstanding representatives of cultural-historical and activity approaches actively interacted with pedagogical practice, starting with the study of conditions of effective learning and moving on to the development and experimental testing of programs, methods, technologies and didactic systems of general education: D.B. Elkonin, L.V. Zankov, V.V. Repkin, N.E. Shuleshko, I.S. Yakimanskaya. In 1959, the staff of the Laboratory of Psychology of Primary School Children of the Research Institute of Psychology of Primary School Children of the USSR APN USSR headed by

D.B. Elkonin began a formative experiment in the 1st grade of the 91st school of Moscow. In 1961, the laboratory was headed by V.V. Davydov and experimental training was also deployed in elementary school in the village of Mednoe, Tver region, No. 11 in Tula, No. 17 of Kharkov, No.4 of Dushanbe.

The results of the experimental work attracted the attention of scientists and teachers, but for quite a long period of time the relevant questions were whether the facts on which the developers relied were not laboratory artifacts that could not be reproduced in the conditions of a mass school. It was stated that “a barrier was erected between the new system and the school (not at all for scientific reasons), which was overcome only in the late 1980s”, when teachers in schools in Krasnodar Krai and Kharkov began to teach first-graders using developmental education programs (Repkina, 1997).

V.V. Davydov and his collaborators, having proposed the author's system of developmental education, make the most decisive and consistent steps, going “beyond the walls” of laboratories, creating experimental classes and schools, not only in Moscow, but also in the regions. This has become possible not only due to the energy of scientists, but also due to the interest of practitioners, who become not just recipients of knowledge, but active participants in the process of its creation. The number of teachers, schools, and regions involved in the practice of developmental education began to grow rapidly, and soon classrooms, and even schools, were becoming “crowded” with the new science. A realization was forming that experimental practices could reach only a limited number of children, although their observed effects were an argument for scaling up.

At the same time, the depth of changes in the forms of organization of the educational process and especially in the content (and developmental education raised for the first time the question of content transformation), which began to be proposed by scientists, could not be implemented within the framework of the existing Soviet system of education. The demand for more large-scale changes to realize the concept of developmental education – more precisely, at this stage, the concept itself – focused on the idea that the development of a child's abilities could be achieved through changes in educational processes and, more broadly, in education management processes. These processes involve including the child

through the creation of educational development programs for territories and for the country as a whole. In terms of timing, this coincided with a period of fundamental changes in the country and society, which included reforms in education. Followers of the cultural-historical approach and developmental education become one of the leaders of the reform processes, offering them scientific foundations and support in the form of so-called practice-oriented science. This term began to be used in the 90s of the 20th century to oppose the traditional type of scientificity realized in the studies of the USSR Academy of Education and the Russian Academy of Education, including many followers of the CPS and activity approach, as well as in foreign science of that time.

In practice-oriented science, the scientist initially organizes work on the transformation of existing activities (processes, communities) together with practitioners, works in close contact with those who create new educational practices: methodologists, teachers, managers, parents; the entire environment surrounding the child; the entire socio-cultural sphere. Psycho-pedagogical research and development of this type is oriented not to the discovery of new “pedagogical truths”, but to the improvement of the practical state of affairs. Science generates such knowledge, on the basis of which it is possible to build fundamentally new educational practices. The development and implementation of educational innovations involve teachers, school heads, specialists and heads of educational authorities and local administrations. Various forms of interaction between researchers and practitioners are being worked out: seminars, organizational and action games.

The scale of ambitions of practice-oriented science was most vividly articulated in the program article by Y.V. Gromyko and V.V. Davydov (Gromyko, Davydov 2011). Davydov (Gromyko, Davydov 2011). The article stated that the ideal reality of formation and problem-targeted development of the region should be reflected in the content of education and in the structure of education as a whole; “breakthroughs”, i.e. qualitative advances in science, engineering, technology, etc., should be translated into the content of general education. The concepts of IEP and developmental learning are beginning to be applied not to an individual child, his/her development and learning processes, but to education and even to the country and the world as a whole.

The idea of practice-oriented science has become not only a response to the challenges of education, but also to the challenges to the organization of scientific research, a strategy for the transformation of psycho-pedagogical science itself. The new type of scientificity requires a special methodology. In this capacity, design began to be used in the 90s. The methodology of design in education has a direct connection with cultural-historical psychology and the research models developed in it. In the process of developing this theory and its practical application, the experimental-genetic method of research introduced by L.S. Vygotsky and his collaborators, naturally turned into the method of formative experiment or genetic-modeling method, in which an important role is played by design, — V.V. himself notes. Davydov (Davydov, 1996). In the 90s, this initial version receives an expanded interpretation in the works of V.V. Rubtsov, E.I. Isaev, V.I. Slobodchikov, Y.V. Gromyko. (Rubtsov, Ivoshina, 2002; Slobodchikov, 2003; Isaev, 1997; Gromyko, 1996.)

Another essential feature of practice-oriented science is its polydisciplinarity, which implies special technologies and methods of communication between specialists of different profiles and their participation in the development of educational practice. Practice-oriented science implies correlation and synthesis of many knowledge and values of different status and modality — scientific and life-practical, spiritual and political, ethical and aesthetic. Their synthesis into a scientific and pedagogical program cannot be realized within a separate, mono-subject discipline (Slobodchikov, 2008).

Therefore, practice-oriented science seeks support outside the natural science approach dominating in modern educational sciences. This, according to its leaders, is due to the specificity of the object, which is the sphere of education. This type of object is not exclusively natural, natural, but also has mechanisms of self-consciousness and self-modification, which makes it impossible to apply traditional methods of natural science research to it (Slobodchikov, 2008).

This support is found in the anthropological approach. Anthropological (educational) knowledge should be not so much about what is — as in any science of nature — as about how it should (or — can) be. Its initial basis is not the doctrine of objectivity and generalizability of what is, but the value and meaning of human existence itself. Humanitarian

(human-centered, anthropic) sciences should be built in accordance with axiological (value) bases, which allow building practices of actual cultivation of "humanity proper in man".

Overcoming the gap between science and practice in practice-oriented science is not limited to the field of epistemology and axiology, but involves a change in the position of the scientist, scientific groups, on the one hand, and practitioners, on the other. It becomes constructive, managerial, oriented to the organization of practical processes. We see in it a similarity with the position of scientists in the field of natural sciences, who in the second half of the 20th century launched large-scale projects related to the development of the atom and space (Kurchatov, Korolev). In this position, the scientist expands the range of his roles and competencies. He must master the methodology of design, must be able to formulate the problems of practice and develop strategies for the development of education, to determine the immediate and ultimate goals, to create projects of activities that can ensure the development of education, and to develop ways to implement the projects. In turn, the practitioner — teacher, due to a certain form of reflexion and specially organized polyprofessional interaction is able to occupy the position of researcher, constructor, designer. (Isaev, Slobodchikov, 2012).

In the 2000s, the continuation and a new level of development and concretization of the concept of practice-oriented science was the proposal of the "School of the Future" model based on the provisions of cultural-historical theory and the activity approach. This model was seen as a response to the challenges and risks of modern society, which are provoked by the rapid disintegration of existing social institutions and established communities of people, the intensive process of functioning and formation of new types of communities and types of activities.

This model was not only seen as a way to overcome the limitations of the existing and virtually unchanged school institute built on the ideas of Jan Amos Comenius, but also as an alternative to existing models ("Chinese School of the Future", "European School of the Future", etc.). It considered changes both inside and outside of education, in particular, for the first time in the tradition of the TRC so thoroughly considered the issue of additional education of children and digital technologies in education (Gromyko, Rubtsov, Margolis, 2020).

It should be recognized that in the first decade of the 21st century the concept of practice-oriented science was practically unclaimed in Russia. As noted above, the concept of practice-oriented science of the 1990s was formed and began to be realized in the conditions of education reform in Russia in the late 80s – early 90s, when scientists received a “mandate” to change practice, and practitioners received autonomy in the implementation of initiative and innovation on the ground. The proximity of this situation to the nuclear and space projects noted above is manifested in this aspect as well. Further, in education, the mandate for its transformation has been transferred from academics and practitioners to financiers, who have rebuilt education on market principles to save public expenditure and profit from the private sector, and to industry representatives, who have made these profits by promoting their products, in recent years primarily digital ones. Both the previously convincing ideas of competency-based approaches, social-emotional learning, in conjunction with psychometric monitoring of educational outcomes, and today, the more recent ideas of the neuro-affective turn and precision education governance respond to neoliberal economic values, satisfy the needs of the labor market, and encourage the marketing, privatization, and commodification of education. Their goal is to mobilize (non)cognitive and emotional regulatory strategies, prompting subjects to adapt to the prevailing sociopolitical order.” (Yliniva et al., 2024).

At the same time, the potential of cultural historical theory to organize formative interventions as a powerful way of conducting socially influential theoretical research has been in demand abroad. The theory of expanding learning activities proposed by J. Engeström's theory of expanding learning activities began to be used in a number of countries to transform the practices of education, health care, and social work (Sannino, Engeström, 2018).

The prospects for practice-oriented science based on cultural-historical psychology today are important to consider not in isolation, but in the context of intensifying the construction and testing of models of partnership between researchers and practitioners (educators, local community) in the 21st century.

Attention to the “voices” of practitioners and their inclusion in the research process is discussed as an important condition for improving the impact of research and developing evidence-based practice

(Hemsley-Brown, Sharp, 2003). In turn, researchers' partnership with practitioners creates a sense of social responsibility and an understanding of the real contribution of research to social life (Ansley, Gaventa, 1997).

Engaging practitioners by building partnerships with researchers is being defined as a new research paradigm and is being implemented under different names: participatory research, collaborative research, participatory inquiry (Galletta & Torre, 2019; Penuel et al., 2021).

In the US, for example, the best known approach is the research-practice partnerships approach, a long-term collaboration between practitioners and researchers to explore practice problems and develop solutions for school improvement (Donovan, 2013; Coburn et al., 2021). It builds trust, creates a sense of social responsibility, ensures greater use of research in decision-making, and improves educational outcomes (Sjölund et al., 2023; Kamga et al., 2023).

At this stage, it is not only supported on a large scale by government and private philanthropic organizations, but has itself become the subject of research on how and under what conditions partnerships improve education, how to ensure the appropriate quality of partnerships (Welsh, 2021; Cooper et al., 2020).

The organization of such partnerships is based on a negotiation process, developed rules and procedures (Coburn et al., 2021). An important characteristic is the long-term nature of partnerships: they are not limited to the local research issue and publication of individual research results, but consistently develop the research field and initiate new projects. Models of partnerships between researchers and practitioners, partnership schools are being implemented in other countries, taking into account their specific contexts (Hadar, Baharav, 2025; MacMahon, et al., 2022).

The paradigm of researcher-practitioner partnerships encompasses not only educators but also community members — “community-academic partnerships”. In different variants of implementation, school and community partners are involved in designing research programs, collecting data, interpreting results, preparing data-based solutions, and analyzing their translation into practice. Research is organized in such a way as to draw on a variety of knowledge (teachers and administrators about the school, parents and community members about ways of life, values, cultural and historical ex-

periences). This helps to increase the ecological validity of research methods, the validity of research-based practices, and the benefits of the innovations that are implemented (Bowers, 2017; London, Claassen, 2023).

This approach is particularly relevant for transforming societies, in particular the BRICS countries. In South Africa, for example, universities are striving to become active community partners, rethinking approaches to building university engagement with external social partners, and actively engaging the local community in research to provide a deeper understanding of the context for research and implementation (Ebers hn, 2015).

Conclusion

The crisis of the dominant model of mass education has as one of its causes the ineffective interaction between science and practice. Strengthening productive links between science and practice can become one of the leading conditions for restructuring education to maximize the development of each person's abilities and ensure social justice and well-being in society.

In the 20th century in Russia on the basis of cultural-historical theory the idea of practice-oriented science of education was formed. The precedents of its realization demonstrated the potential of this type of science in solving the problems of children's education, development of child-adult communities and territorial educational systems. At the same time, both internal and external circumstances did not allow to continue the realization of this concept on an adequate scale.

Global changes in the political and socio-cultural situation actualize the demand for practice-oriented science, giving (in Russia — returning) to it the “mandate” to transform education both in our country and in other countries.

In justifying these prospects, it is important to frankly note not only the opportunities, but also the debatable aspects and limitations.

As applied to the situation in Russia, it is necessary to expand the scope of tasks solved by the practice-oriented science of education, linking the traditional problematics of the development of ways of thinking, the formation of types of activities and types of communities with the issues of justice and inclusion, which previously in the Soviet/Russian tradition of cultural-historical psychology

were not given sufficient attention (Kosaretsky, 2023), the issues of upbringing and personal development, as well as covering the areas that are intensively developing in the 21st century: new formats and technologies of education.

Cultural-historical theory in psychology in the period of its birth (post-revolutionary construction of a new society) carried the features of anthropological and social utopianism characteristic of many new directions of science and art of that time, the pathos of total transformation of man and society (including overcoming the determinism of development by natural factors). These characteristics in their specific version became typical for the design methodology of the last third of the 20th century.

In the current situation, they and the accompanying energy of agency are undoubtedly valuable for overcoming determinism of another type — globalist marketing-technocratic determinism.

At the same time, the role of natural sciences in understanding the processes of development and learning has changed markedly over the years: the achievements of genetics and neuroscience cannot be ignored, but should be included in a dialogue with them, actualizing the above-mentioned polydisciplinarity as a characteristic of practice-oriented science and taking into account the fundamental complication of epistemological discussions since the end of the 20th century.

On the other hand, the historical experience of the 20th century in various spheres, which clearly demonstrated the risks of social experimentation and design without regard for natural processes and subjective experience, obviously influenced the transformation of social and human sciences. In this respect, the considered anthropological approach in education emerges, on the one hand, in line with the general scientific paradigm shift, on the other hand, in response to the trends of humanization and personal orientation of education in the educational policy of the late 80s of the 20th century.

In Russia, it is formalized within cultural-historical psychology and the theory of developmental learning in dialogue with the school of S.L. Rubinstein — A.V. Brushlinsky regarding the category of subjectivity, the concepts of person-centered education (I.S. Yakimanskaya), pedagogical support (O.S. Gazman), and the ideas of Christian philosophy. Today it is the best defense against any form of determinism (biological, social, economic). In the case of practice-oriented science in education, it raises the question of participation in research and

design not only of practitioners (managers, teachers, local community), but also of learners (Gillett-Swan & Baroutsis, 2023).

One cannot step into the same river twice. The political situation in the country is markedly different from the considered period of the 1980s–90s of the 20th century, when the leaders of practice-oriented science, as noted above, received for a while a “mandate” to implement a number of multiscale projects. The nature of the “mandate” to scientists to transform education, and its very possibility in the current structure of distribution of power and authority, is a complex topic for discussion. In turn, the situation of potential partners of science — practitioners, leaders of the managerial and pedagogical community — is different. The boundaries of their autonomy are noticeably reduced, and grassroots initiatives and innovations are not encouraged.

In justifying the advantages and potential of practice-oriented science, it is important not to deny, but on the contrary, to support the need to develop other approaches that strengthen the link between science and practice, including those we have discussed above. In particular, for Russia and post-Soviet countries, it is crucial to promote an evidence-based approach, including increasing the number of experimental studies

and developing open data resources on the effectiveness of practices and programs. (Kersha et al., 2025; Evidence-Based Approach: A Guide to Verification of Programs, Technologies, and Practices in Education and Social Sphere: A Training Manual, 2024).

In turn, outside the country, practice-oriented science based on the cultural-historical approach has, in our opinion, a number of competitive advantages in relation to other models of interaction between science and educational practice and may be in demand, primarily in countries striving for epistemic decolonialization (Asea, 2022).

At the same time, as we have seen, in contrast to the second half of the 20th century, the world has already accumulated interesting experience of approbation of approaches to the interaction between researchers and practitioners in different sociocultural contexts, which is important to study and relate to the domestic methodology.

Hence, it is not only possible, but probably more important to consider these prospects of practice-oriented science based on cultural-historical psychology not only on the basis of Russian precedents, practices and project proposals, but also involving partners from friendly countries, forming international teams of researchers and practitioners.

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The landscape of cultural-historical psychology in BRICS+ countries: a bibliometric analysis

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Abstract

Context and relevance. The active development of cultural-historical psychology within the framework of international research demonstrates a significant expansion in the geographical distribution of publications over the past two decades, notably driven by the increasing contributions of BRICS+ countries. Nevertheless, the dynamics of publication activity, the structure of international collaboration, and the thematic evolution of cultural-historical psychology remain underexplored from a bibliometric perspective. **Objective.** This study aims to conduct a bibliometric analysis of the publication landscape in cultural-historical psychology between 2005 and 2024, with particular attention to the contribution of BRICS+ countries. **Research Questions.** The study examined: 1) the dynamics and geographical distribution of publication activity in the field of cultural-historical psychology, including the contribution of BRICS+ countries, over the period 2005–2024; 2) the structure of international scientific collaboration and the distribution of scientific influence; 3) the thematic structure of the field and its transformation over the past two decades; and 4) the contribution of the journal *Cultural-Historical Psychology* to the development and internationalisation of scientific communication. **Methods and materials.** The study incorporates: 1) a corpus of 4,332 publications identified through key terms relevant to the cultural-historical approach; 2) 947 publications from the journal *Cultural-Historical Psychology*; and 3) 949 publications citing articles from the same journal, sourced from Scopus, OpenAlex, and eLibrary.ru. The bibliometric analysis employed PRISMA protocols, R (bibliometrix), VOSviewer, and Python-based analytical tools. **Results.** The findings reveal a steady and, in some cases, accelerating growth in publication activity across BRICS+ countries: sevenfold in Russia, 3.7 times in Brazil, and 4.8 times in China over the study period. Publications from BRICS+ countries display a thematic shift towards educational and developmental issues. Despite increasing international citations, scientific collaboration within the BRICS+ bloc remains limited. The journal *Cultural-Historical Psychology*, which will mark its twentieth anniversary in 2025, occupies a central position in the publication landscape: it brings together authors from 49 countries, is cited in works from 61 countries, and more than one-third of citing publications appear in top-tier journals (Q1, International Scientific Journal & Country Ranking 2024). **Conclusions.** The publication landscape of cultural-historical psychology is characterised by global growth, with BRICS+ countries assuming an increasingly prominent role. Strengthening international cooperation within the BRICS+ bloc and fostering sustainable transnational networks represent key prospects for further advancement. The journal *Cultural-Historical Psychology* continues to serve as a major international scientific platform and contributes to the consolidation of the publication core within the field.

Keywords: cultural-historical psychology, bibliometric analysis, BRICS+, OpenAlex, PRISMA, bibliometrix, VOSviewer

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Ландшафт культурно-исторической психологии в странах БРИКС+: библиометрический анализ

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Резюме

Контекст и актуальность. Активное развитие культурно-исторической психологии в структуре международных исследований демонстрирует, что за последние два десятилетия география публикаций в этой области существенно расширилась, в том числе за счет нарастающего вклада стран БРИКС+. При этом динамика публикационной активности, структура международного сотрудничества и тематическая эволюция культурно-исторической психологии остаются малоизученными в контексте библиометрической оценки. **Цель:** провести библиометрический анализ публикационного ландшафта культурно-исторической психологии в период 2005–2024 годов, определив вклад стран БРИКС+ в его развитие. **Исследовательские вопросы.** В исследовании проанализированы: 1) динамика и география публикационной активности в области культурно-исторической психологии, включая вклад стран БРИКС+, за период 2005–2024 годов; 2) структура международной научной кооперации и распределение научного влияния; 3) тематическая структура и ее трансформация за два десятилетия; 4) вклад журнала «Культурно-историческая психология» в развитие и интернационализацию научной коммуникации. **Методы и материалы.** В исследование включены: 1) 4332 публикации, отобранные по релевантным культурно-историческому подходу ключевым словам; 2) 947 публикаций в журнале «Культурно-историческая психология»; 3) 949 публикаций, цитирующих публикации из журнала «Культурно-историческая психология», из баз: Scopus, OpenAlex, eLibrary.ru. Библиометрический анализ выполнен с применением инструментов PRISMA, R (bibliometrix), VOSviewer, Python. **Результаты.** Установлено, что страны БРИКС+ демонстрируют поступательный и, в ряде случаев, ускоряющийся рост публикационной активности: в России — в 7 раз, в Бразилии — в 3,7 раза, в Китае — в 4,8 раза — за исследуемый период. В публикациях стран БРИКС+ зафиксировано тематическое смещение в сторону образовательной и возрастной проблематики. Международная кооперация внутри блока БРИКС+ остается ограниченной, несмотря на рост международной цитируемости. Журнал «Культурно-историческая психология», отмечающий в 2025 году свое 20-летие, занимает центральное место в публикационном ландшафте: он объединяет авторов из 49 стран, цитируется в публикациях из 61 страны, более трети процитировавших публикаций размещены в высокорейтинговых журналах (Q1, International Scientific Journal & Country Ranking 2024). **Выводы.** Публикационный ландшафт культурно-исторической психологии характеризуется глобальным ростом, в котором страны БРИКС+ играют все более значимую роль. Усиление международной кооперации внутри блока БРИКС+ и развитие устойчивых транснациональных сетей — важная перспектива для дальнейшего роста. Журнал «Культурно-историческая психология» продолжает выполнять ключевую функцию международной научной платформы и вносит вклад в формирование публикационного ядра культурно-исторической психологии.

Ключевые слова: культурно-историческая психология, библиометрический анализ, БРИКС+, OpenAlex, PRISMA, bibliometrix, VOSviewer

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Introduction

The cultural-historical approach occupies a prominent position among contemporary theo-

retical and methodological paradigms in the social and human sciences. Its foundational principles — regarding the sociohistorical nature of the mind, the mediated character of higher psychological

functions, and the formative role of joint activity — have provided a robust framework for a wide range of current research and applied fields, including developmental education, neuropsychology, pedagogy, and transdisciplinary studies of human development (Dafermos, 2018; Engeness & Lund, 2020; Roth & Lee, 2007; Arievidtch, 2017; Rubtsov, 2024). Amidst increasing interdisciplinarity, the rapid digital transformation of society, and heightened attention to issues of educational access and quality, the cultural-historical approach is gaining renewed significance (Daniels, 2008; Gromyko, 2023). It proves particularly relevant in the search for effective solutions in the domain of educational inclusion and in shaping an agentive subjectivity within rapidly changing sociocultural contexts (Stetsenko, 2023; Lubovsky, 2024).

Research grounded in the cultural-historical approach is actively conducted across Europe, Latin America, Africa, and Australia, reflecting processes of internationalisation and a sustained growth of interest in the cultural-historical tradition (Meshcheryakov, Ponomareva, & Shvedovskaya, 2022; Rubtsov et al., 2019). This growth is manifested in an increasing number of publications, the expansion of international scholarly networks, rising citation rates, and the emergence of new research centres. Nevertheless, the scientometric dynamics and geographical development of cultural-historical psychology remain insufficiently explored, particularly in relation to the contributions of the Global South, including the BRICS+ countries. These nations have demonstrated a consistent increase in scientific output, expanded investment in education and research, and the formulation of distinctive research priorities that complement — and at times challenge — Western academic models (Carla, 2013; Pouris & Ho, 2014; Sooryamoorthy, 2023; Selenica, 2025). Of particular interest are developments in the social and human sciences in the BRICS+ region, where growing attention is being paid to issues of education, social justice, intercultural dialogue, and social inclusion — topics that have long been central to cultural-historical psychology (Edwards, 2017; Daniels, 2002, 2012; Smagorinsky, 2022). However, to date there has been a lack of comprehensive bibliometric studies capable of systematically describing the dynamics, geography, institutional landscape, and thematic foci of the publication domain in cultural-historical psychology, with an emphasis on the contribution of BRICS+ countries.

The present study aims to address this gap. Its uniqueness lies in the application of a bibliometric

approach to the comprehensive description and visualisation of the publication landscape in cultural-historical psychology and activity theory within BRICS+ countries. This approach enables not only a quantitative assessment of scientific productivity but also the identification of key institutional centres, international collaborations, and thematic cores within the field..

In bibliometric research, particular attention must be given to the construction of the publication sample. Given limited access to commercial scientometric tools, the open bibliometric database OpenAlex is increasingly recognised as a promising alternative to Scopus and Web of Science (Alperin et al., 2024). However, the use of OpenAlex requires careful data verification (Alperin et al., 2024; Simand et al., 2024; Haupka, 2024), as meta-data inconsistencies — particularly in author affiliations and bibliographic references — have been observed. For example, the integration of OpenAlex into the PLOS Open Science Indicators project has confirmed its potential for monitoring open science practices, while also revealing limitations in retrieving licence information and interdisciplinary publications. These characteristics necessitate prior data normalisation and enrichment. In the present study, additional procedures for data verification, cross-validation, and enrichment were implemented, allowing the advantages of OpenAlex to be leveraged while ensuring bibliometric data quality control.

The **aim** of the present study is to conduct a comprehensive bibliometric analysis of the contribution of BRICS+ countries to the research landscape of cultural-historical psychology between 2005 and 2024. The analysis focuses on identifying the dynamics and geographical distribution of publication activity, the structure of international scientific collaboration, key thematic clusters and institutional centres in BRICS+ countries, as well as assessing the role of the journal *Cultural-Historical Psychology* in advancing and internationalising scholarly communication. This objective is pursued through bibliometric methods that examine publication productivity, citation patterns, network interactions, temporal trends, and thematic structures, drawing on data from both open-access and commercial scientometric databases.

Within the framework of this study, the following research questions were formulated:

RQ1: What are the key trends in the dynamics and geographical distribution of publication activ-

ity in the field of cultural-historical psychology from 2005 to 2024, including specific patterns of growth in BRICS+ countries?

RQ2: What is the structure of international scientific collaboration in cultural-historical psychology, which stable transnational partnerships have emerged over the past two decades, and how is scientific influence distributed based on citation indicators?

RQ3: What substantive directions, theoretical concepts, and research foci shape the thematic structure of the publication landscape in cultural-historical psychology, and how has their representation evolved over the past twenty years?

RQ4: What is the role of the journal *Cultural-Historical Psychology* in the development and internationalisation of scholarly communication in the field, and to what extent does it contribute to shaping the international research agenda?

Materials and methods

Data sources

The bibliometric analysis was based on data retrieved from the following citation databases: OpenAlex, Scopus Preview, the Scopus API for non-commercial use, the Russian Science Citation Index (RSCI), and the PsyJournals.ru portal. These sources provided a representative coverage of publications in the field of cultural-historical psychology for the period from 2005 to 2024. The integration of data from multiple sources enhanced the completeness and reliability of the analysis. The temporal scope of the study spanned 20 years – from 2005 to 2024.

Search strategy and sampling

The search strategy builds upon the findings and methodological approaches developed in our previous bibliometric studies on cultural-historical psychology (Shvedovskaya, 2016; Rubtsov et al., 2019; Meshcheryakov et al., 2022). The sample for the present study was constructed using the set of keywords employed in those works, which have demonstrated their relevance for identifying publications aligned with the cultural-historical approach. In particular, the keyword list in the study by Rubtsov and colleagues (2019) was developed through expert assessment by 50 leading Russian scholars in the field of cultural-historical psychology, thereby ensuring the content validity of the search strategy.

In the present study, the keyword set included the following terms: “cultural-historical psychology,” “cultural-historical approach,” “cultural-historical activity theory,” “sociocultural activity theory,” “Vygotsky,” as well as various combinations of these terms. When constructing the search queries, synonymous and orthographic variations (e.g., “Vygotsky” and “Vigotsky”) were taken into account. Searches were conducted in the Scopus, OpenAlex, RSCI, and PsyJournals.ru databases using the titles, abstracts, and keywords of publications. The search was performed on metadata available in English, although the language of the publications themselves could be any.

The use of this search strategy ensured the comparability of results with previous studies (Rubtsov et al., 2019; Meshcheryakov et al., 2022) and expanded both the temporal and geographical scope by including publications over a longer period (2005–2024) and incorporating additional data sources.

The selection of publications for subsequent analysis was carried out using the PRISMA algorithm (see Figure 1). As a result of the screening process, three bibliometric datasets were constructed (Shvedovskaya et al., 2025).

1. **CHP** – publications that include references to the cultural-historical approach and related concepts in the title, abstract, or keywords.

2. **J-CHP** – all publications from the journal *Cultural-Historical Psychology* over the entire period of its existence (2005–2024).

3. **CJ-CHP** – publications in which articles from the journal *Cultural-Historical Psychology* are cited as a source.

Search query for the CHP dataset

```
TITLE-ABS-KEY ( ("cultur*histor*  
psychol*" OR "cultur* histor*  
psychol*" OR Vygotsk* OR Vigotsk*)  
OR ("cultur*histor* activ* theor*" OR  
"cultur* histor* activ* theor*") OR  
("soc*cultur* activit* theor*")) AND  
PUBYEAR AFT 2004 AND PUBYEAR BEF 2025
```

Source: Scopus, using the open API. A total of 6014 records were retrieved using the query (as of 19 February 2025).

Search query for the J-CHP dataset

An SQL query was executed on the internal database of the PsyJournals.ru portal, retrieving all articles published in the journal *Cultural-Historical Psychology*.

As a result, 1018 records were obtained for the period from 2005 to 2024, of which 947 records remained after excluding forewords, editorial notes, and brief communications (as of 15 April 2025).

Search query for the CJ-CHP dataset

```
PUBYEAR AFT 2004 AND PUBYEAR  
BEF 2025 AND (REF("10.17759/  
chp") OR REFSRCTITLE(({Kul'turno-  
istoricheskaya psikhologiya} OR  
{Cultural-Historical Psychology})) AND  
NOT {Cambridge Handbook of Cultural-  
Historical Psychology}))
```

Source: Scopus, using the open API. A total of 1909 records were collected, covering the period from 2005 to 2024 (retrieval date: 16 February 2025).

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

The analysis included publications that met the following criteria: — Document type: research articles and review articles; — Source type: journal publications; — Language: any; — Publication period: 2005–2024.

For the CJ-CHP dataset, an additional criterion was the presence of bibliographic references to articles published in the journal *Cultural-Historical Psychology*.

The following were excluded from the analysis: — conference proceedings, editorial notes, letters, and interviews; — duplicate and redundant records.

Data preprocessing

Following the retrieval of the initial datasets, a series of normalisation procedures was carried out:

- standardisation of country names;
- consolidation of author name variants (using OpenAlex IDs and algorithmic aggregation);
- removal of duplicate records across Scopus and OpenAlex;
- normalisation of publication year, document type, and language.

Data enrichment

CHP and CJ-CHP

Data enrichment for the CHP and CJ-CHP datasets was performed using the OpenAlex API. A Python-based query script was used to retrieve metadata from OpenAlex based on unique publication identifiers (DOI, PMID), or — if these were unavailable — by matching the title and year of publication (results were accepted only when a single match was returned). The enrichment covered the following

categories: author and affiliation data (institution and country); abstracts; algorithmically generated keywords; subject areas (*topic field* in OpenAlex, *Subject Areas* [SUBJAREA] according to Scopus classification); and subject categories (*topic subfield* in OpenAlex, *Subject Area Categories* [SUBJMAIN] in Scopus). In cases where OpenAlex did not provide enrichment data, supplementary metadata were retrieved from Scimago Journal & Country Rank (SJR), using the *Areas* and *Categories* fields. Matching was conducted based on the Scopus *Source Identifier* and the SJR data for the year preceding publication. Integration of information from both sources was made possible through the shared All Science Journal Classification (ASJC) taxonomy. Minimum criteria for successful enrichment included: at least one author listed; affiliation data (organisation and country) for the first (or only) author; and the presence of an English-language abstract with a language identification probability of no less than 75% (determined using the Python-based language detection library fastText and its model *lid.176.ftz*; Joulin et al., 2016a; 2016b). If any of these minimum criteria were not met, manual enrichment (verification) was performed via direct retrieval of the publication.

J-CHP

The number of citations in Scopus was retrieved using the open API, based on the following query:

```
ISSN(2224-8935) OR ISSN(1816-5435)  
OR DOI(10.17759/chp*)
```

Source: Scopus, using the open API. A total of 359 records were retrieved, covering the period from 2018 to 2024 (retrieval date: 25 April 2025). Citation data from Scopus were used to enrich 330 of these records.

To further enrich citation data for publications in the journal *Cultural-Historical Psychology*, a search was conducted in the “Journals” catalogue of the Scientific Electronic Library eLibrary.ru by entering the journal title, publisher, or ISSN, followed by accessing the list of articles published in the journal.

As a result of year-based filtering for the period from 2005 to 2024, a total of 1083 records were retrieved. After applying a document-type filter to exclude brief communications and editorial articles, 942 records were selected (retrieval date: 14 May 2025).

The final consolidated dataset included the following fields: article title, abstract, keywords, list of authors, affiliations, country, year of publication, citation count, reference list, and number of cited references.

Analytical tools

Data analysis and visualisation were carried out using the following tools::

- **PRISMA**: for documenting the inclusion/exclusion process of publications;
- **R** (version 4.4.2) with the packages *bibliometrix* (version 4.2) (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017) and *tidyverse* (version 2.00) (Wickham et al., 2019): for initial data processing, descriptive statistics, and data visualisation;
- **IBM SPSS Statistics** (version 23): for inferential statistical analysis;
- **VOSviewer** (version 1.6.20): for visualising co-authorship and keyword networks;
- **Python** (version 3.13.2) with the packages *BeautifulSoup* (version 4.13.3), *fastText* (version 0.9.3), *pandas* (version 2.2.3), *PyAlex* (version 0.15.1), *pybliometrics* (version 4.1), *pycountry* (version 24.6.1), and a custom script (available upon request): for data collection, enrichment, and preprocessing.

The use of the OpenAlex database offers both advantages (openness, scale) and limitations: incomplete affiliation data, variability in journal in-

dexing, and the absence of certain metadata (e.g., licences, DOIs). These limitations were partially mitigated through cross-verification with the Scopus and RSCI databases.

Accordingly, the final CHP dataset comprised 4332 publications covering the period from 2005 to 2024. Within this dataset, two subgroups were identified. If at least one author was affiliated with a BRICS+ country, the publication was assigned to Subset 1 (hereafter “BRICS+”), comprising 1391 records (32,1%). Publications without any authors affiliated with BRICS+ countries were assigned to Subset 2 (hereafter “GR,” referring to the Global Rest), comprising 2941 records (67,9%).

Results

Trends in publication activity in Cultural-Historical Psychology (2005–2024)

An analysis of publication activity over the twenty-year period revealed a steady increase in

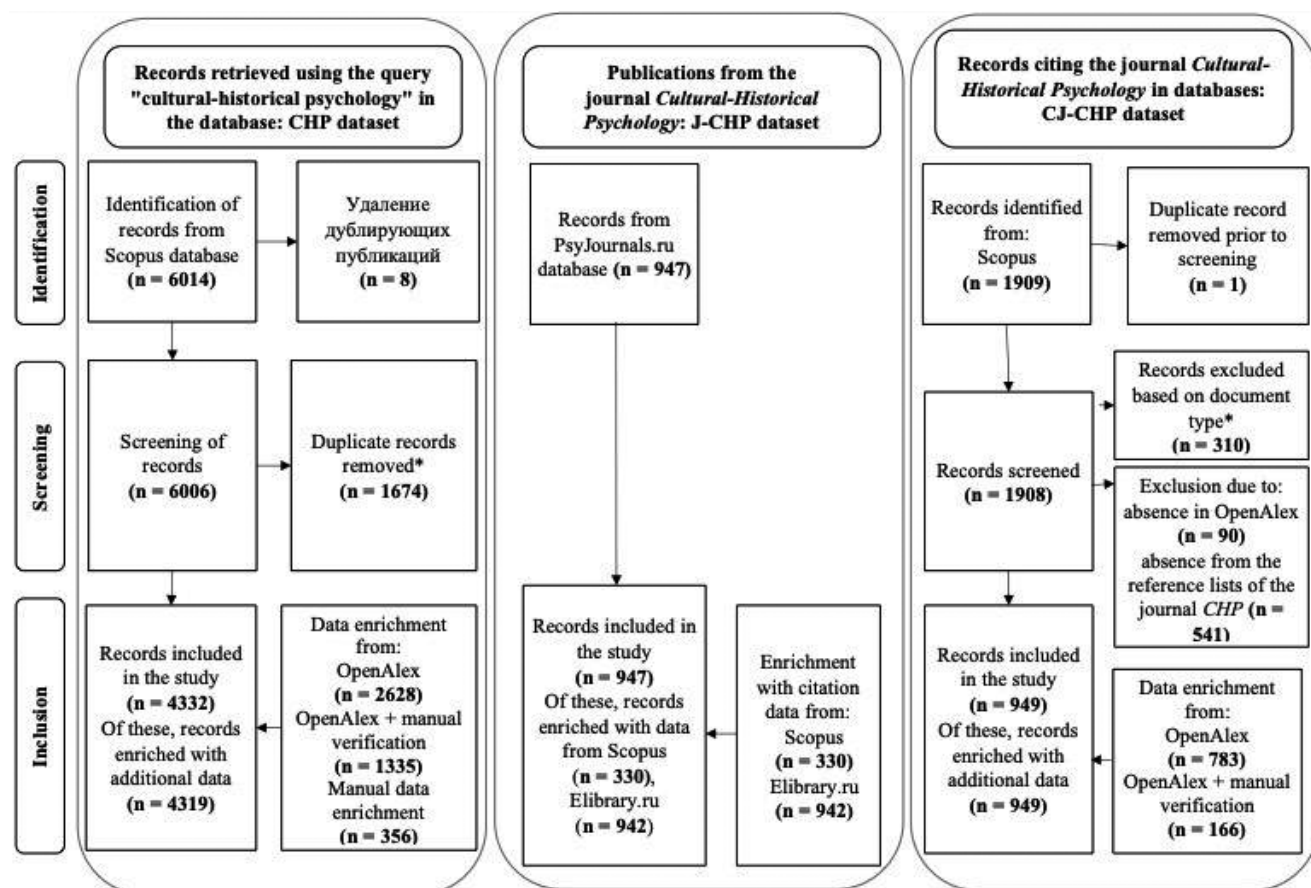


Fig. 1. PRISMA flow diagram for the selection of publications on the topic of cultural-historical psychology (Available at Appendix A (online)): «*» — The analysis included publications of the document type «article» and/or «review» published in journals during the period from 2005 to 2024

the number of publications related to cultural-historical psychology, both in BRICS+ countries and in the rest of the world (Global Rest, GR group).

An analysis of the overall publication growth in cultural-historical psychology across the two country groups – modelled using a regression approach (Fig. 2) – revealed nearly identical annual growth rates: an average increase of 6,99 publications per year in the BRICS+ group and 6,76 publications per year in the GR group. In both cases, the linear growth model provided a good fit to the observed data, with coefficients of determination of $R^2 = 0,92$ for BRICS+ and $R^2 = 0,89$ for GR.

Despite the persistent gap in the absolute number of publications, the growth rate in BRICS+ countries is comparable to – and, in certain time intervals, even exceeds – that of other countries. This becomes particularly evident when comparing publication activity normalised by the number of countries in each group: the average annual increase per country is higher in the BRICS+ group (0,699 publications per year per country) than in the GR group (0,338 publications per year per country).

The temporal analysis reveals a transition from isolated publications in the early period (2005–2009) to sustained and intensive annual publication activity over the past ten years. The most pronounced positive trends were observed in Brazil, Russia, and China.

In Brazil, the number of publications increased from 34 in 2005–2009 to 178 in 2020–2024, representing more than a fivefold growth compared to

the initial period. In Russia, the increase was even more steady and consistent: the number of publications rose from 30 in 2005–2009 to 223 in 2020–2024, indicating more than a sevenfold growth over the study period. In China, a particularly sharp rise was observed in the most recent five-year interval, with the number of publications growing from 16 in 2015–2019 to 76 in 2020–2024 – an almost five-fold increase.

For countries in the GR group, significant growth was observed primarily in the first half of the study period. In the United Kingdom, the number of publications increased from 66 in 2005–2009 to 102 in 2010–2014; however, subsequent years showed a decline-dropping to 77 publications in 2015–2019 and to 76 in 2020–2024. In Canada, the most notable decrease was recorded in the most recent five-year period, with the number of publications falling from 60 in 2015–2019 to 44 in 2020–2024.

A comparative summary analysis confirms that, since 2020, Russia has nearly reached parity with the United States in terms of annual publication output in the field of cultural-historical psychology. Between 2020 and 2024, Russian authors published 223 articles, compared to 215 articles from the United States. These findings indicate a convergence in publication volume within this research domain between Russia and leading Western countries.

It can be concluded that BRICS+ countries not only exhibit a stable increase in the number

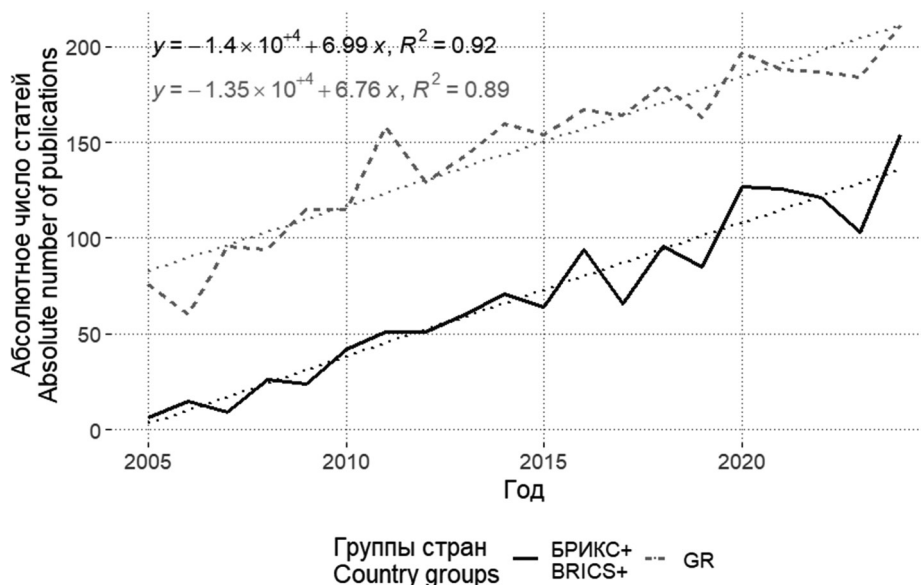


Fig. 2. Dynamics of the number of publications on the topic of cultural-historical psychology from 2005 to 2024 in the BRICS+ (n = 1391) and GR (n = 2941) country groups: — linear trends, upper left corner shows linear regression results for BRICS+ and GR groups

of publications on cultural-historical psychology, but also demonstrate growth rates that, when normalised, are comparable to or even exceed — those observed in GR countries. This supports the notion that an independent and dynamically developing scholarly domain in cultural-historical psychology is emerging within the BRICS+ region.

A temporal analysis confirms the transition from isolated publications in the early years of the study period (2005–2009) to sustained annual activity over the past decade. This trend is particularly pronounced in BRICS+ countries such as Russia, Brazil, and China. To provide a more detailed illustration of the dynamics, the five most productive countries from each group — BRICS+ and GR — were selected. For each country, the total number of publications was calculated across four time intervals: 2005–2009, 2010–2014, 2015–2019, and 2020–2024 (Fig. 3). To model the dynamics of publication activity, third-degree polynomial approximation was applied, enabling the identification of both periods of growth and phases of deceleration.

The analysis of publication trends (Fig. 3) reveals that, despite an overall increase in publication activity across both country groups, the nature of this growth differs significantly. In BRICS+ countries, growth is predominantly pro-

gressive and, in some cases, rapid; however, the rate of increase varies between countries. Brazil experienced the sharpest early surge, with the number of publications rising from 34 in 2005–2009 to 127 in 2010–2014 — an increase of more than three and a half times. In subsequent periods, the growth rate slowed: 149 publications were recorded in 2015–2019 and 178 in 2020–2024. In both cases, the increase compared to the previous period was relatively moderate (less than 20%). Thus, Brazil's trajectory may be described as following a saturation model, characterised by rapid initial growth followed by stabilisation at an attained level.

In Russia, the growth in publication activity was more consistent and steady. The number of publications increased from 30 in 2005–2009 to 75 in 2010–2014 (a 2.5-fold increase), then rose to 151 in 2015–2019 (a further twofold increase), and reached 223 in 2020–2024 (a 1.5-fold increase). This pattern reflects a stable and incremental expansion of research activity, with no indication of saturation.

China presents a particularly noteworthy case, as publication activity remained low during the first two periods. Only 16 publications were recorded in 2015–2019, followed by a sharp increase to 76 publications in 2020–2024. This trend indicates a rapid surge of interest among Chinese re-

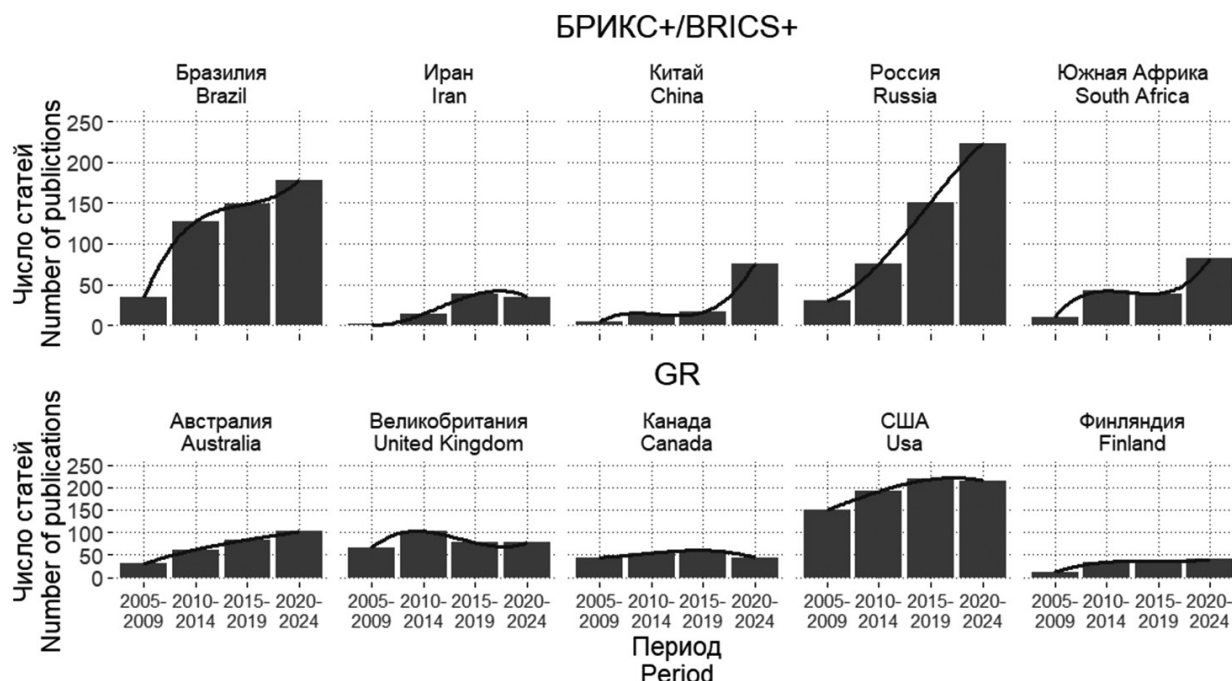


Fig. 3. Dynamics of the number of publications on the topic of cultural-historical psychology in the most publication-producing (TOP-5) countries of BRICS+ ($n = 1338$) and GR ($n = 1697$) groups for the period from 2005 to 2024: — approximation of the number of publications by a cubic polynomial

searchers in the field of cultural-historical psychology in recent years.

The GR group demonstrates a different trajectory. In most countries within this group, the main increase in publication activity occurred at the beginning of the analysed period, followed by either a deceleration or a shift towards decline. In the United Kingdom, the number of publications rose from 66 in 2005–2009 to 102 in 2010–2014 (a 54,5% increase). However, a gradual decrease followed: 77 publications were recorded in 2015–2019 (a 24,5% drop compared to the previous period), and 76 in 2020–2024, showing virtually no change.

A similar trend was observed in Canada: following an increase to 60 publications in 2015–2019 (a 36,4% rise compared to the previous period), the number of publications declined to 44 in the subsequent interval (a 26,7% decrease).

Australia and Finland exhibited significant growth in the early part of the study period: in Australia, the number of publications increased from 30 to 62 (more than doubling), while in Finland, it rose from 10 to 42 (more than a threefold increase). However, in subsequent time intervals, growth rates also slowed, and in some cases stabilised.

Thus, it can be concluded that publication activity in the field of cultural-historical psychology continues to grow steadily in BRICS+ countries, whereas in several leading GR countries, growth rates are slowing or stabilising at their current levels. The polynomial approximation of publication trends illustrates divergent developmental trajectories for the two groups (Fig. 3): BRICS+ countries are characterised by upward curves indicating continued growth, while in some GR countries, the polynomial suggests a deceleration or even a potential future decline in interest. These trends highlight the importance of further examining publication strategies in BRICS+ countries as a dynamically developing scholarly domain in cultural-historical psychology.

Geographic distribution of publication activity

The distribution of publication activity by country revealed substantial differences between BRICS+ nations and the remaining countries in the GR group. An analysis was conducted of the most productive countries in terms of the number of publications on cultural-historical psychology between 2005 and 2024 (Fig. 4). Within the BRICS+ group, the highest number of publica-

tions during this period was recorded in the following countries: Brazil – 488 publications; Russia – 479; South Africa – 173; China – 110; and Iran – 88. These are followed by Indonesia, India, and the United Arab Emirates, although their figures are considerably lower. In Ethiopia and Egypt, publications on cultural-historical psychology are virtually absent, which may indicate both the limited presence of cultural-historical psychology as a scientific tradition and the low level of indexation of research outputs from these countries in the databases used.

Within the GR group, the highest number of publications was recorded in the following countries: the United States – 774 publications; the United Kingdom – 322; Australia – 278; Canada – 202; and Finland – 121. At the same time, the five-year trend in publication activity reveals a rapid increase in Russia, particularly over the past decade. Russia experienced a 101,3% increase in publications from 2010–2014 to 2015–2019, and a further 47,7% increase from 2015–2019 to 2020–2024. As a result, since 2020, Russia has nearly equalled the United States in terms of annual publication output in cultural-historical psychology. During the period 2020–2024, 223 publications were registered from authors affiliated with Russian institutions, compared to 215 articles from the United States.

To assess the scholarly impact of publications by authors from BRICS+ and GR country groups, an analysis was conducted of citation dynamics normalised by the number of years since publication, separately for each group (Fig. 5).

The results indicate that, overall, a higher number of citations is observed in GR countries. However, the citation trends differ between the two groups. In BRICS+ countries, the number of citations shows a steady upward trajectory, with an average annual increase of 0,033 citations according to linear regression analysis. In contrast, GR countries exhibit a downward trend, with the average number of citations per year declining by 0,042.

To assess the structure of international scientific collaboration in the field of cultural-historical psychology, a country-level co-authorship network was constructed based on the CHP dataset ($n = 4332$ publications). The analysis was performed using VOSviewer (version 1.6.20) with the VOS clustering algorithm. The network was generated using the fractional counting method, and a threshold was set requiring a minimum of

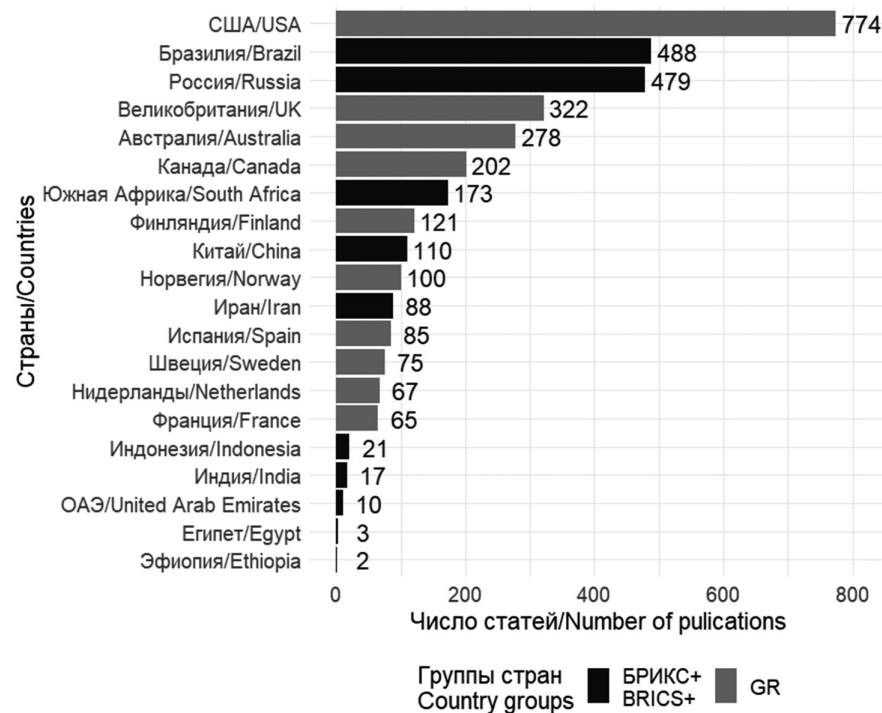


Fig. 4. Number of publications on cultural-historical psychology in the most productive groups of BRICS+ and GR countries in terms of number of publications from 2005 to 2024

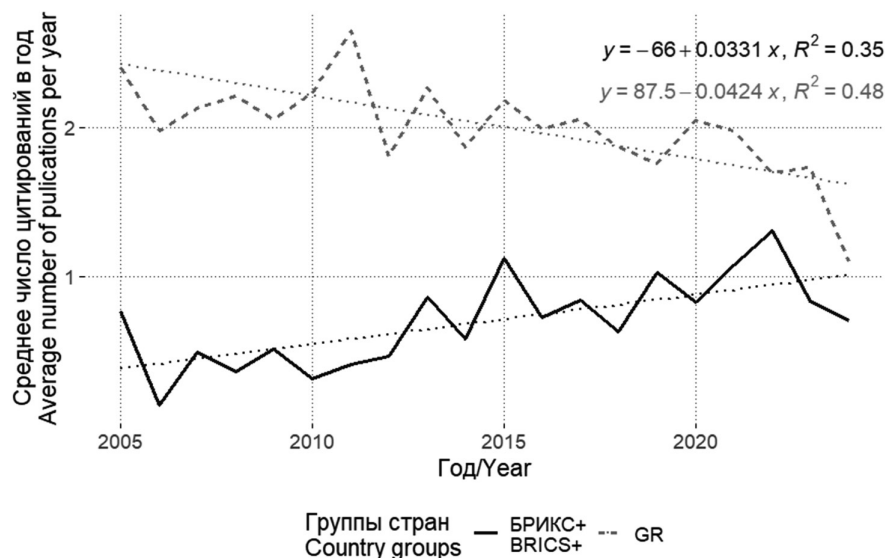


Fig. 5. Publications on the topic of cultural-historical psychology by year in the two groups of BRICS+ and GR countries for the period from 2005 to 2024: The number of citations is normalized to the number of years since publications in the two groups of countries; — linear trends; linear regression results are shown in the upper right corner

five publications and at least one citation per publication (Fig. 6).

The analysis identified twelve clusters of international co-authorship, reflecting regional configurations of collaboration. BRICS+ countries were distributed across the following clusters:

- Cluster 1 (red — 9 countries): Brazil, together with Finland, Spain, France, Mexico, Portugal, Greece, Colombia, and Croatia (a cluster of Latin

American and Southern European cooperation);

- Cluster 3 (blue — 7 countries): Russia, in collaboration with South Korea, Japan, Singapore, Israel, the Czech Republic, and Puerto Rico (a cluster of East Asian-Russian cooperation involving active participation from Asia-Pacific countries);

- Cluster 4 (yellow-green — 7 countries): China and India, together with the United States, Norway, Sweden, Hong Kong, and Thailand (a tran-

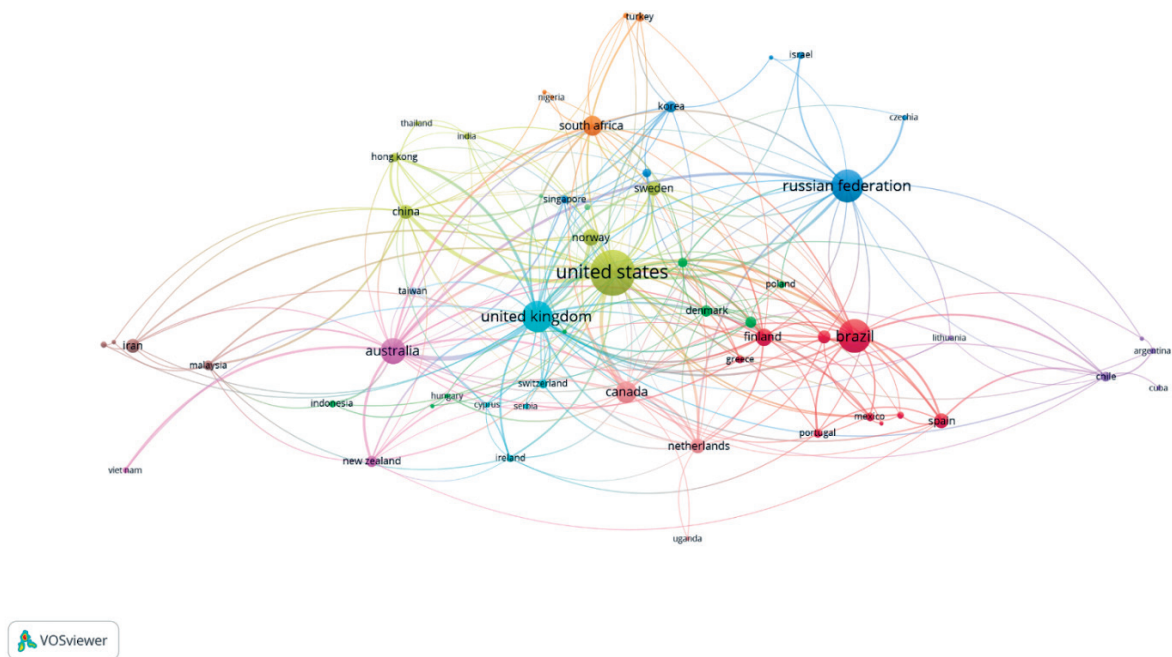


Fig. 6. International co-authorship network by country in the field of cultural-historical psychology (analysis using VOSviewer): the size of nodes corresponds to the number of publications; the thickness of edges corresponds to the intensity of co-authorship (number of joint publications); the colour of nodes reflects membership in the intra-group interaction cluster

sregional collaboration cluster linking Asian and European countries);

- Cluster 7 (orange – 5 countries): South Africa and the United Arab Emirates, in cooperation with Turkey, Nigeria, and Ghana (a cluster representing expanding collaboration across Africa, the Middle East, and Turkey, indicative of Global South engagement);

- Cluster 8 (brown – 4 countries): Iran and Saudi Arabia, in collaboration with Malaysia and Bangladesh (a cluster of Middle Eastern and Asian cooperation).

The remaining clusters reflect a range of regional and thematic configurations. Cluster 2 represents the core of English-speaking international collaboration. Cluster 5 highlights strengthening regional cooperation in Asia. Cluster 6 consists of Northern and Eastern European countries and is characterised by a high density of intra-group collaboration. More localised regional networks are seen in Cluster 9, which reflects South American cooperation, and Cluster 10, which represents African regional collaboration with relatively low connection density. Additionally, Cluster 11 (Belgium and Austria) and Cluster 12 (Serbia and Slovenia) represent small, stable cooperative groupings within Europe, primarily based on bilateral or small-group partnerships.

No strong and consistent co-authorship links were identified among BRICS+ countries. Only isolated instances of international collaboration were observed: between Brazil and South Africa

($n = 2$), Russia and South Africa ($n = 2$), Russia and Brazil ($n = 1$), Russia and China ($n = 1$), and Brazil and China ($n = 1$).

Research Centre Productivity and Impact

An analysis of publication counts from 2005 to 2024 across the two country groups also enabled the identification of the most productive institutions. Productivity was measured as the total number of instances in which an organisation was listed for the corresponding author (reprint author). The top 20 most productive institutions from the BRICS+ and GR groups include universities, with a combined total of 2052 institutional affiliations (Fig. 7).

The highest publication output between 2005 and 2024 was demonstrated by two Russian universities: Lomonosov Moscow State University (115 publications) and Moscow State University of Psychology and Education (94 publications). They are followed by three institutions from GR countries – University of Helsinki (Finland, 81 publications), Monash University (Australia, 77 publications), and Pennsylvania State University (USA, 75 publications). Notably, two additional Russian institutions appear among the most productive: the National Research University Higher School of Economics (8th place, 48 publications) and the Psychological Institute of the Russian Academy of Education (20th place, 23 publications).

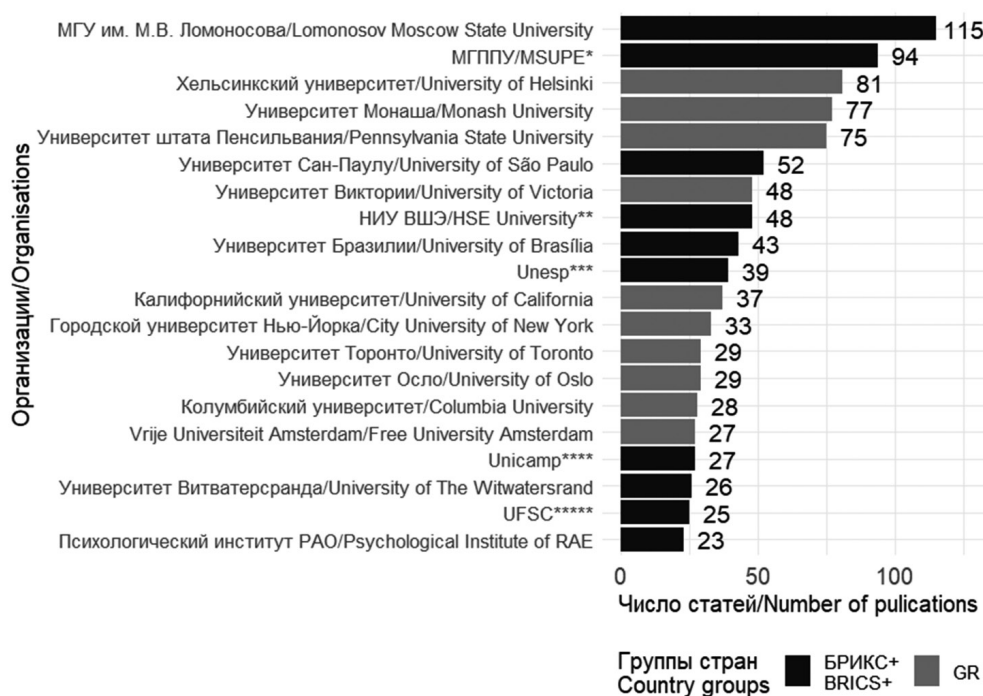


Fig. 7. Ranking of the most productive research organizations by number of publications in BRICS+ (n = 492) and GR (n = 464) countries from 2005 to 2024: 10 most productive organizations in each of the country groups are selected; abbreviations: «*» — Moscow State University of Psychology and Education; «**» — National Research University Higher School of Economics; «***» — São Paulo State University; «****» — State University of Campinas; «*****» — Federal University of Santa Catarina

For a more detailed analysis of the most productive institutions from BRICS+ countries, additional indicators were calculated for the top 10 organisations with the highest number of publications. These included the total number of affiliated authors, the total number of citations, and the average number of citations per publication (Table 1).

The results show that, in some institutions, the number of authors is lower than the number of publications — this is particularly characteristic of Russian universities such as the Higher School of Economics, Moscow State University of Psychology and Education, and Lomonosov Moscow State University. In these institutions, there is an average of approximately 1,5 publications per author.

Table 1

Ranking of the TOP-10 organisations in terms of the productivity of publications on the topic of the cultural-historical psychology of the BRICS+ country group over the period 2005–2024 (n = 492)

Position	Organisation	Number of publications	Number of authors	Total number of citations	Average number of citations per publication
1	Lomonosov MSU	115	78	587	5,1
2	Moscow State Psychological and Pedagogical University	94	60	304	3,2
3	The University of São Paulo (USP)	52	69	170	3,3
4	National Research University Higher School of Economics	48	29	119	2,5
5	University of Brasília	43	46	214	5,0
6	São Paulo State University	39	48	227	5,8
7	State University of Campinas	27	24	87	3,2
8	University of The Witwatersrand	26	31	204	7,8
9	Federal University of Santa Catarina	25	34	73	2,9
10	Psychological Institute of RAE	23	27	50	2,2

A similar pattern is observed at the University of Campinas (Brazil). Of particular interest is the analysis of the average number of citations per publication. In this sample, the highest citation averages are demonstrated by institutions from South Africa – most notably the University of the Witwatersrand, where the average number of citations per article is 7,8. This figure exceeds that of most other research centres.

Thematic trends in Cultural-Historical Psychology

To identify the thematic structure of the included publications and its evolution over time, an analysis was conducted of the representation of the top five subject categories (*topic subfield* in OpenAlex; *Subject Area Categories* [SUBJMAIN] according to the Scopus classification) within publications from the ten countries with the highest publication counts over the past 20 years. The twenty-year period was divided into four equal five-year intervals. A streamgraph (Fig. 8) visualises the distribution of the main subject categories across different time periods and countries.

The results indicate that the proportions of the main subject categories within publications on cultural-historical psychology have remained relatively stable over time; however, several trends are noteworthy. The contribution of the *Education* category – comprising a total of 1416 publications – has remained consistent throughout the study period, fluctuating between 25,9% and 29,2%. The

share of publications classified under *Developmental and Educational Psychology* (1159 publications) has gradually increased, rising from 29,3% in 2005–2009 to 34,8% in 2020–2024. A modest increase is also observed in the category *Sociology and Political Sciences* (480 publications), whose share grew from 10% in 2005–2009 to 12,4% in 2020–2024.

At the same time, a decline was observed in several thematic areas. The proportion of publications classified under *Social Psychology* (292 publications) decreased from 9,3% in 2005–2009 to 6,3% in 2020–2024. A similar downward trend was recorded in the category *Human Factors and Ergonomics* (755 publications), whose share fell from 22,4% in 2005–2009 to 15,3% in 2020–2024.

Thus, while the overall subject structure of the publication corpus remains relatively stable, moderate shifts can be observed – specifically, an increasing interest in developmental and educational psychology, accompanied by a declining share of work in social psychology and ergonomics.

The distribution of subject categories by country shows that the highest proportion of publications classified under *Education* was recorded in Australia (171 out of 400 publications, 42,8%; here and below, percentages refer to the total number of publications from each country), Brazil (255 publications, 42,6%), and South Africa (110 out of 259 publications, 42,5%). Substantial figures were also observed in the United States (395 publications, 35,9%), China (54 out of 145 publications, 37,2%), and the United Kingdom (167 out of

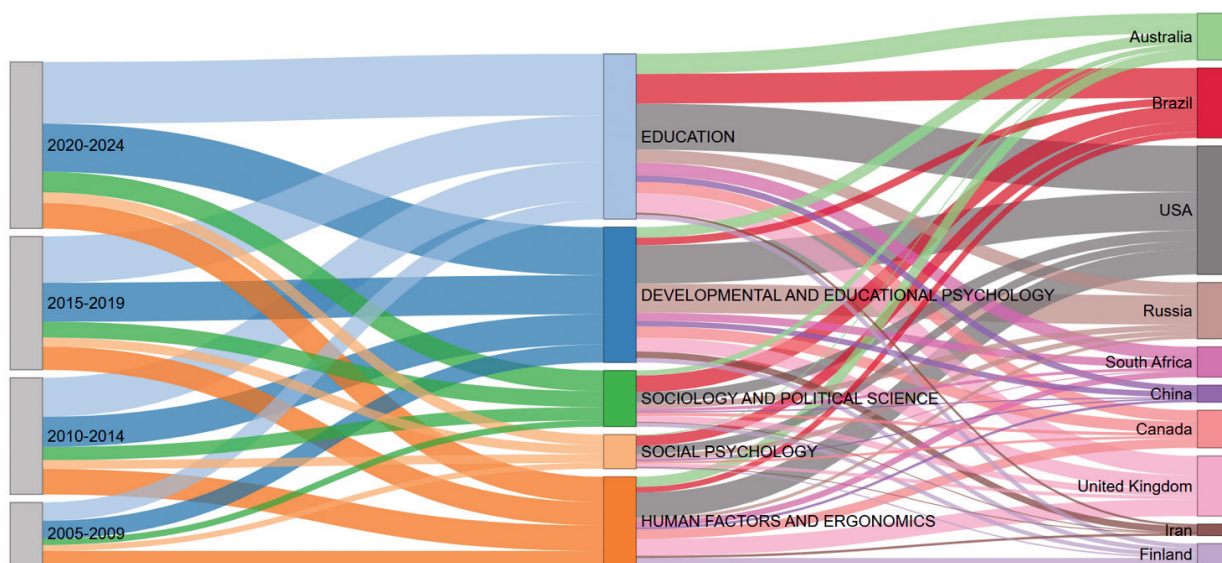


Fig. 8. Sankey diagram of the ratio of the five most frequent subject area categories of publications on the topic of cultural-historical psychology in different periods from 2005 to 2024 in different countries: The interactive version of the diagram is available at Appendix B (online) – when hovering the cursor over any element of the interactive diagram, the corresponding data is displayed

515 publications, 32%). The lowest representation in this category was found in Iran (18 out of 98 publications, 18,4%), Finland (38 out of 182 publications, 20,9%), and Russia (111 out of 482 publications, 23%).

The category *Developmental and Educational Psychology* is most prominently represented in Iran (56 out of 98 publications, 57,1%), Russia (250 out of 482 publications, 51,2%), and China (48 out of 145 publications, 33,1%). In most other countries, the proportion of publications in this category ranges between 20% and 30%. The lowest value was recorded in Brazil, where only 64 out of 598 publications (10,7%) were related to this thematic area.

The category *Sociology and Political Sciences* is most prominently represented in Brazil (142 out of 598 publications, 23,7%) and Finland (35 out of 182 publications, 19,2%). In other countries, the share of publications in this category ranges from 8% to 11%. The lowest proportions were recorded in China (27 out of 322 publications, 6,9%) and Iran (2 out of 98 publications, 2%).

The category *Social Psychology* accounts for the highest proportion in Brazil (88 out of 598 publications, 14,7%). In most other countries, this category represents between 5% and 10% of publications. Exceptions include Iran (2 out of 98 publications, 2%), Australia (8 out of 400 publications, 2%), and South Africa (5 out of 259 publications, 1,9%), where the share of publications in social psychology is minimal.

The category *Human Factors and Ergonomics* is most prominently represented in Finland (59 out of 182 publications, 32,4%), the United Kingdom (143 out of 515 publications, 27,8%), Canada (81 out of 322 publications, 25,2%), and Australia (87 out of 400 publications, 21,8%). In other countries, the share of publications in this category is considerably lower. The lowest proportions were recorded in Brazil (49 out of 598 publications, 8,2%) and Russia (27 out of 482 publications, 5,6%).

Publications in cultural-historical psychology span 23 major subject areas (*topic field* in OpenAlex; *Subject Areas* [SUBJAREA] according to the Scopus classification). Based on the frequency distribution of publications across these areas, a subject area word cloud was generated to visualise their representation within the cultural-historical psychology publication dataset (Fig. 9).

To compare the representation of different subject areas between the two country groups, the proportion of publications associated with each

area was calculated separately for BRICS+ and GR countries (Table 2).

Among the subject areas represented in cultural-historical psychology publications from BRICS+ and GR countries (2005–2024), the most prevalent is *Social Sciences*, which appears more frequently in the GR group (42% of publications) compared to the BRICS+ group (36,1%). In contrast, the field of *Psychology* is more prominently represented in BRICS+ publications (33%) than in those from GR countries (28,2%). Notably, the share of publications classified under *Computer Science* is significantly higher in BRICS+ countries (10,3%) than in the GR group (4,3%).

An additional point of interest is the analysis of citation impact across subject areas. For each area, two indicators were calculated: (1) the total number of citations and (2) the average number of citations per publication. For further in-depth analysis, the ten subject areas with the highest average citation rates were selected (Table 3).

Among the ten subject areas with the highest average citation rates, the top-ranking categories were *Business, Management and Accounting* (25,2 citations per article), *Decision Sciences* (21,3 citations per article), and the relatively uncommon category *Nursing*, which showed an average of 18,2 citations per article based on a total of 11 publications. In contrast, the more prevalent subject areas such as *Social Sciences* and *Psychology* had lower average citation rates – 15,3 and 15,8 citations per article, respectively.

It is important to note that, despite the thematic coherence of the publications included in the CHP dataset, different scientific fields exhibit distinct citation practices. For instance, publications in mathematics tend to accumulate citations at a slower rate compared to those in other disciplines. Even within a single field – particularly in the social sciences and humanities – the average citation rate may vary significantly depending on the methodological approach employed (Akoev et al., 2021). Therefore, citation metrics should be interpreted with caution when comparing across subject areas.

To further explore the semantic structure of publications on cultural-historical psychology (CHP dataset, 2005–2024) affiliated with BRICS+ countries, a keyword co-occurrence network was constructed. The analysis was conducted using VOSviewer (version 1.6.20), based on the titles and abstracts of the publications. A binary counting method was applied, capturing the number of documents in which a given term appeared



Fig. 9. Cloud of subject areas for publications on the topic of cultural-historical psychology in 2005–2024: absolute frequency of area occurrence (out of 4,332 articles) is given in parentheses

Table 2

TOP-10 Most Frequent Subject Areas of Publications on Cultural-Historical Psychology from BRICS+ and GR Countries (2005–2024)

Position	Subject area	Publications of BRICS+ (n = 1391)	Publications of GR (n = 2941)	All publications (n = 4332)
1	Social sciences	36,1	42	72,6
2	Psychology	33	28,2	53,7
3	Arts and humanities	10,4	11,3	19,9
4	Computer science	9,7	4,3	10,8
5	Health professions	2,9	3,8	6,3
6	Medicine	1,7	2	3,5
7	Neuroscience	1,2	2	3,1
8	Decision sciences	1	1,2	2,1
9	Environmental science	1	0,4	1
10	Business, management and accounting	0,7	1,8	2,6

Note: Areas to which more than 1% of publications are attributed are included.

Table 3

TOP-10 subject areas with the highest average citation rate for cultural-historical psychology publications from 2005–2024 (n = 4158)

Position	Subject area	Number of publications	Total citations	Average number of citations per publication
1	Business, management and accounting	114	2875	25,2
2	Decision sciences	89	1898	21,3
3	Nursing	14	255	18,2
4	Neuroscience	135	2336	17,3
5	Engineering	66	1102	16,7
6	Psychology	2326	36802	15,8
7	Medicine	150	2313	15,4
8	Social sciences	3144	48132	15,3
9	Health professions	273	3903	14,3
10	Mathematics	72	999	13,9

Note: The ten areas with the highest average number of citations per publication are selected.

at least once. Automatic processing yielded 25 007 terms, of which 400 met the threshold of appearing in at least 20 documents. A relevance score was calculated for each term, and 60% of the most relevant terms were retained for further analysis (Fig. 10). During visualisation, technical terms such as “article”, “review”, “respondent”, “level”, “indicator”, “result” and other non-substantive words were excluded. The final network consisted of 239 key terms.

As a result of the analysis of the keyword co-occurrence network based on the CHP publication sample affiliated with BRICS+ countries (2005–2024), three substantive clusters were identified. *Cluster A1* (red, 124 terms) comprises terms related to the theoretical and methodological foundations of cultural-historical psychology. *Cluster A2* (green, 73 terms) includes concepts pertaining to the domain of learning and education. *Cluster A3* (blue, 42 terms) reflects research focused on communication and interaction.

To further analyse the semantic structure of publications affiliated with GR countries, a separate keyword co-occurrence network was constructed for the period 2005–2024 ($n = 1391$). The analysis was conducted using VOSviewer (version 1.6.20), based on the titles and abstracts of the publications. A binary counting method was applied, recording the number of documents in which a term appeared

at least once. Automatic processing yielded 46 746 terms, of which 1263 met the threshold of appearing in at least 20 documents. A relevance score was calculated for each of these terms, and 60% of the most relevant terms were retained for further analysis. The final network comprised 405 key terms (Fig. 11).

Based on the analysis of the keyword network constructed from the CHP publication sample affiliated with GR countries, three substantive clusters were identified:

Cluster B1 (red, 162 terms): unites concepts related to Vygotsky’s ideas in contemporary psychology, including theoretical frameworks and their development within various academic schools;

Cluster B2 (green, 145 terms): focuses on research dedicated to the application of cultural-historical psychology in educational practice and professional development;

Cluster B3 (blue, 98 terms): covers topics associated with developmental psychology, the category of childhood, and the concept of the zone of proximal development.

In both samples, a prominent thematic cluster is devoted to educational practice and professional development (Cluster 2 in both networks), confirming the sustained interest of researchers in the applied potential of cultural-historical psychology within the educational domain. At the same time,

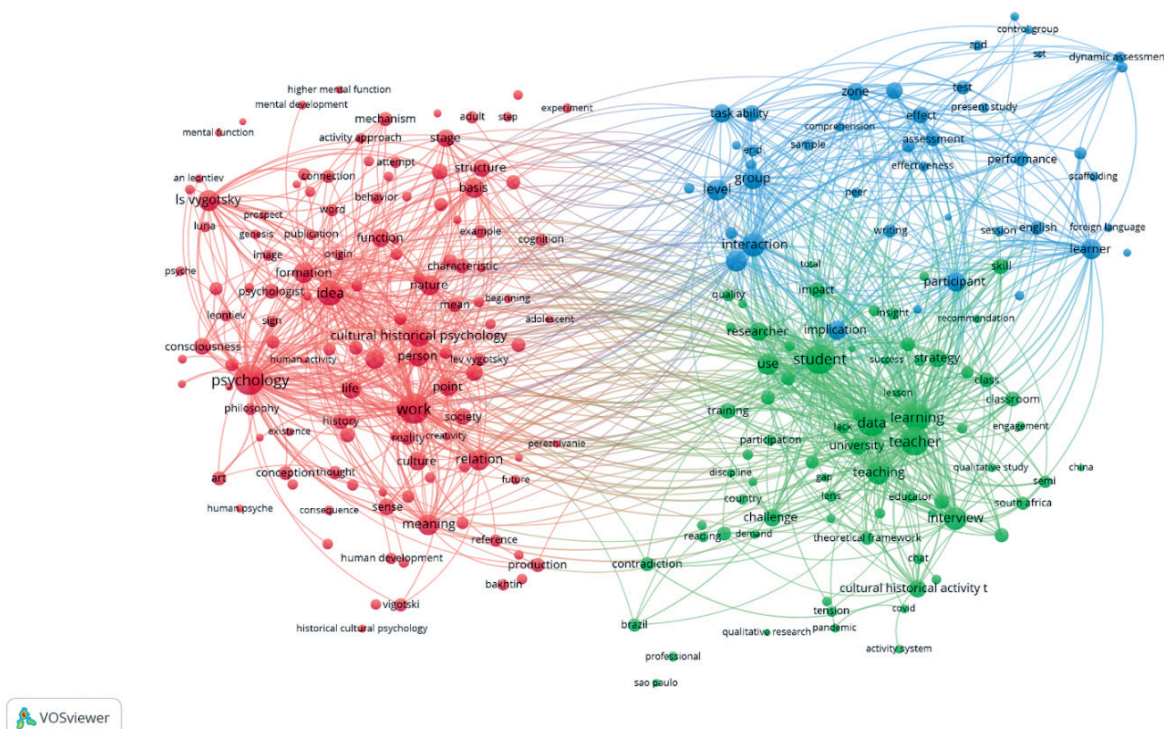


Fig. 10. Keyword network of publications on cultural-historical psychology affiliated with BRICS+ countries (based on analysis using VOSviewer)



Fig. 11. Keyword network of publications on cultural-historical psychology affiliated with GR countries (based on analysis using VOSviewer)

the BRICS+ sample features an extensive cluster focused on the theoretical and methodological foundations of the cultural-historical approach (Cluster A1), whereas the GR sample places greater emphasis on the interpretation and development of Vygotsky's ideas within the field of psychology (Cluster B1). In addition, the GR network reveals a more clearly delineated cluster centred on developmental issues, the zone of proximal development, and childhood (Cluster B3), reflecting the strong position of Western research schools in the area of developmental studies. In contrast, the third cluster in the BRICS+ network is focused on the theme of communication and interaction, which may indicate research priorities aimed at the study of dialogue and joint activity.

This difference in the semantic structure of key terms suggests that BRICS+ countries maintain a focus on the theoretical reflection and methodological development of cultural-historical psychology, whereas in GR countries, applied interests predominate – particularly relating to the adaptation and operationalisation of Vygotsky's ideas in the contexts of education and psychological development.

In the analysis of keywords with respect to temporal dynamics, the metric *Average Publication Year* (Avg. pub. year) was used. To highlight the most significant keywords, technical and general cultural terms were excluded from the analysis. For

each priority keyword, the number of publications in the CHP sample in which it appears over the entire analysed period is subsequently provided.

The priority thematic emphases by year in publications from BRICS+ countries are distributed as follows (Fig. 12):

- In 2015, the most frequently occurring keywords were: *Bakhtin* – 51 mentions, *constitution* – 41, *Soviet psychology* – 25.
- In 2016, predominant terms included: *psychology* – 344, *history* – 94, *conception* – 74, *Vygotski* – 68, *Luria* – 44.
- In 2017, keywords shifted towards theoretical concepts: *L.S. Vygotsky* – 165, *mediation* – 155, *zone of proximal development* – 116.
- In 2018, the focus shifted substantially towards educational themes: *student* – 323, *teacher* – 304, *learning* – 275, *interaction* – 205, *teaching* – 185, *cultural historical psychology* – 170.
- In 2019, the educational orientation continued to strengthen: *learner* – 154, *challenge* – 115, *cultural historical activity theory* – 112, *impact* – 97, *skill* – 97, *classroom* – 86.
- In 2020, terms more unique to the sample emerged: *face* – 27, *perezhivanie* – 25, *Vygotsky's sociocultural theory* – 23.
- In 2021–2022, topics related to the pandemic and methodology came to the fore: *pandemic* – 30, *covid* – 28, *qualitative study* – 28.

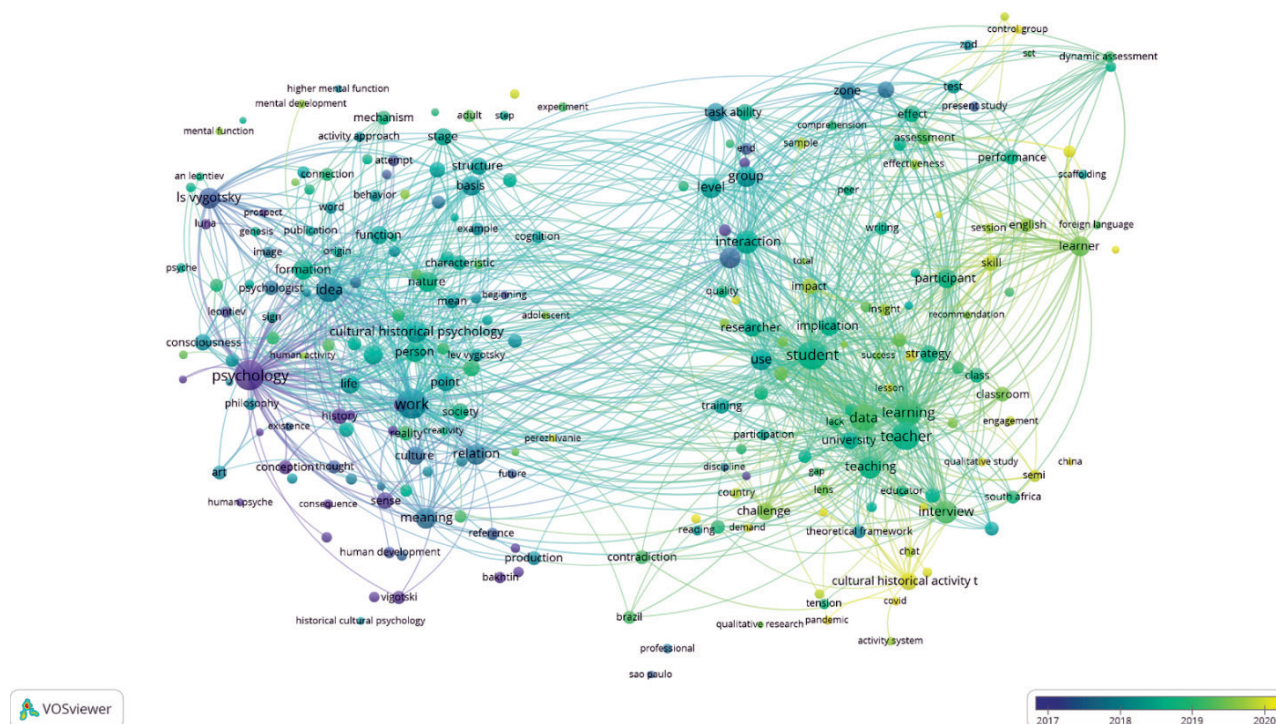


Fig. 12. Temporal structure of the keyword network of publications on cultural-historical psychology affiliated with BRICS+ countries (analysis based on the average year of publication)

Temporal analysis of keywords in publications from GR countries reveals a different pattern of thematic emphasis compared to BRICS+ publications (Fig. 13). The average publication year for the GR sample is 2012,5, notably earlier than that of

the BRICS+ sample (2015,4), which may indicate an earlier onset of publication activity within the GR group.

The thematic priorities of publications by year in the GR sample are distributed as follows:

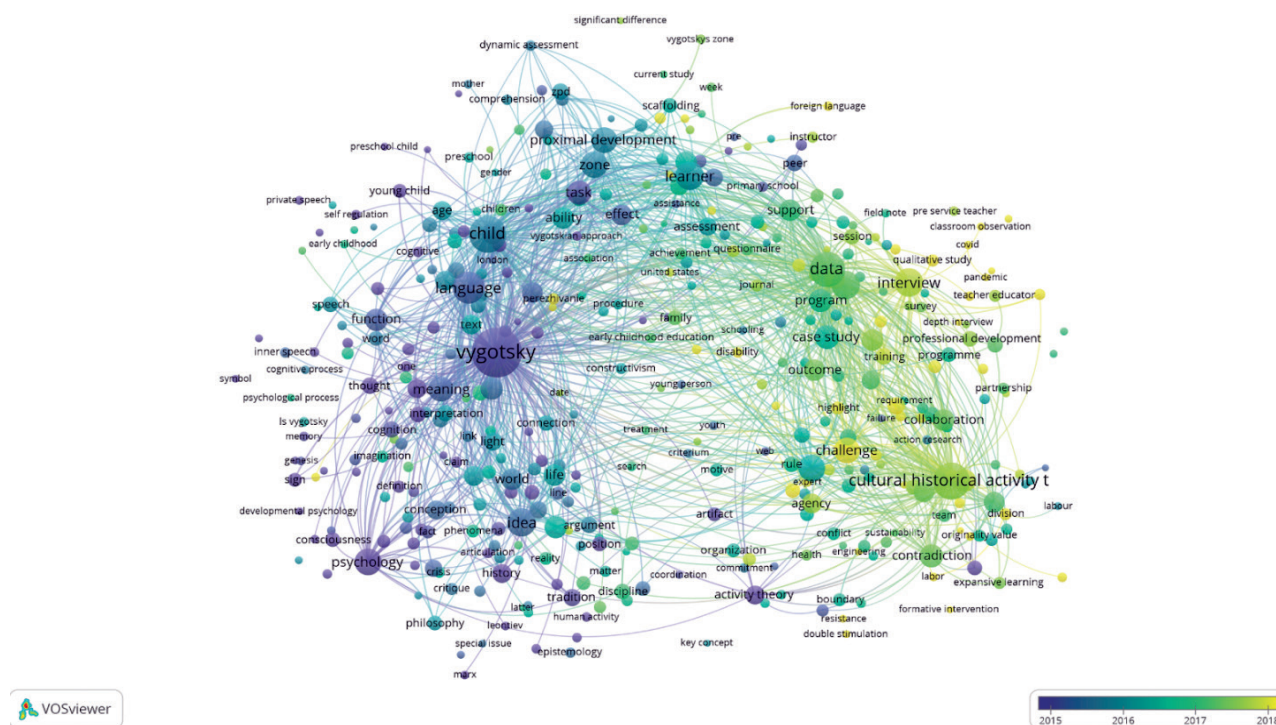


Fig. 13. Temporal structure of the keyword network of publications on cultural-historical psychology affiliated with GR countries (analysis based on the average year of publication)

- In 2012, the most frequently occurring terms were: *Bakhtin* – 66 mentions, *Cambridge* – 31, *private speech* – 30.

- In 2013, priority terms included: *Piaget* – 97, *consciousness* – 86, *psychologist* – 67.

- In 2014, the focus shifted to concepts such as: *activity theory* – 155, *mind* – 151, *thought* – 117.

- In 2015, there was a significant increase in mentions of: *Vygotsky* – 1010, *child* – 548, *language* – 417, *learner* – 323, *zone of proximal development* – 296.

- In 2016, emphasis moved to topics such as: *community* – 285, *case study* – 238, *program* – 217, *life* – 196, *ability* – 195.

- In 2017, leading themes included: *cultural historical activity theory* – 554, *participant* – 334, *contradiction* – 216, *CHAT* – 211.

- In 2018, the most frequently mentioned concepts were: *challenge* – 274, *higher education* – 71, *leader* – 64.

- In 2019, focus areas included: *Vygotsky's sociocultural theory* – 50, *stakeholder* – 43, *labor* – 33, *engineering* – 27.

- Between 2020 and 2022, themes related to educational practice and the pandemic emerged: *perezhivanie* – 54, *pedagogical practice* – 35, *covid* – 34, *pandemic* – 24.

A comparative analysis of the temporal dynamics of key thematic directions in publication samples affiliated with the BRICS+ and GR groups reveals both common trends and significant differences in thematic priorities and research development rates.

Publication activity on cultural-historical psychology began somewhat earlier in GR countries, as evidenced by an earlier average publication year (2012,5 compared to 2015,4 in BRICS+). In the GR sample, theoretical and methodological issues – including activity theory, Vygotsky's ideas, and problems of consciousness and thought – were actively developed as early as the beginning of the 2010s. GR publications rapidly adapted cultural-historical psychology to the international research agenda, integrating it into fields such as education, leadership, and sociocultural studies. Furthermore, global challenges, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, were reflected in GR countries earlier than in BRICS+.

In BRICS+ countries, the thematic dynamics reveal a later but more intense growth, with a gradual shift from theoretical and methodological foundations – including figures such as Bakhtin, Vygotsky, and Luria, as well as the concept of mediation – towards educational and applied issues.

Since 2018, there has been a marked emphasis on key educational concepts: learning, teaching, interaction within educational settings, as well as the adoption of cultural-historical activity theory in pedagogical research. Research in BRICS+ countries predominantly focuses on educational practice and applied developments, while maintaining an ongoing interest in the theoretical origins and methodological foundations of the approach.

The observed differences in temporal dynamics and thematic emphases may be partly attributable to journal indexing practices in international scientometric databases (ISDB). In particular, a significant portion of journals from BRICS+ countries began to be actively indexed in Scopus and other international databases considerably later than leading journals from GR countries. The delayed inclusion of BRICS+ journals in ISDBs may have limited their international visibility in earlier periods and constrained the reflection of publication activity in bibliometric sources until the mid-2010s. This temporal shift towards more recent publications in BRICS+ countries is thus partially related not only to actual growth in scientific activity but also to expanded access to international databases, enabling more comprehensive recording of publications from these countries.

Sources of publications on Cultural-Historical Psychology

Research in the field of cultural-historical psychology (CHP dataset) has been published across 1409 different sources (journals). Considering the total number of articles ($n = 4332$), the average number of articles per journal is 3,1 (median = 1).

To analyse the sources most actively publishing work on cultural-historical psychology, the total productivity of each journal was calculated, and the twenty journals with the highest publication counts were identified. For these journals, the total and average (per published article) citation counts were also computed. These twenty journals account for 492 publications, representing 11% of the entire dataset (Table 4).

It is noteworthy that two of the three most productive journals are published in Russia – *Cultural-Historical Psychology* and *Voprosy Psikhologii*. Additionally, two other Russian journals are included in the top 20: *Psychology in Russia* (7th place) and *Voprosy Filosofii* (19th place). These data underscore a strong national core of publication activity in Russia and highlight the leading role of Russian

Table 4

TOP-20 most productive journals on the topic of cultural-historical psychology in 2005–2024

Position	Sources (Journals)	Number of publications	Total citations	Average number of citations per publication
1	Cultural-Historical Psychology	134 (3,1%)	491	3,7
2	Mind, Culture, And Activity	102 (2,4%)	2379	23,3
3	Voprosy Psikhologii	97 (2,2%)	145	1,5
4	Learning, Culture and Social Interaction	61 (1,4%)	706	11,6
5	Psicologia Em Estudo	52 (1,2%)	133	2,6
6	Integrative Psychological and Behavioral Science	51 (1,2%)	655	12,8
7	Psychology In Russia: State Of The Art	49 (1,1%)	187	3,8
8	Psychological Science And Education	44 (1%)	99	2,3
9	Cultural Studies of Science Education	41 (0,9%)	443	10,8
10	Культура и психология / Culture And Psychology	40 (0,9%)	815	20,4
11	Psicologia Escolar E Educacional	34 (0,8%)	54	1,6
12	European Early Childhood Education Research Journal	31 (0,7%)	764	24,6
13	Language and Sociocultural Theory	31 (0,7%)	265	8,5
14	Teaching and Teacher Education	30 (0,7%)	678	22,6
15	Cadernos Cedes	30 (0,7%)	33	1,1
16	Frontiers in Psychology	30 (0,7%)	271	9,0
17	Psicologia E Sociedade	29 (0,7%)	165	5,7
18	Educational Studies in Mathematics	27 (0,6%)	707	26,2
19	Voprosy Filosofii	24 (0,6%)	15	0,6
20	Theory & Psychology	23 (0,5%)	891	38,7

Note: The percentage ratio relative to the total number of articles included in the database is indicated in parentheses.

journals in shaping and sustaining the scholarly field of cultural-historical psychology.

Publications in international journals receive significantly greater scholarly impact in terms of citations. The highest average citation rates were recorded in the journals *Theory & Psychology* (38,7), *Educational Studies in Mathematics* (26,2), *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal* (24,6), *Mind, Culture, and Activity* (23,3), *Teaching and Teacher Education* (22,6), and *Culture and Psychology* (20,4). Russian journals exhibit lower average citation rates — generally below 2 citations per publication — with the exceptions of *Cultural-Historical Psychology* (3,7) and *Psychology in Russia: State of the Art* (3,8).

Contribution of the journal

***Cultural-Historical Psychology* (2005–2024)**

An analysis of publication sources highlights several journals that accumulate the highest number of publications on cultural-historical psychology. Among them, the internationally peer-reviewed journal *Cultural-Historical Psychology* holds a prom-

inent position. In 2025, the journal will celebrate its 20th anniversary. Over this period, it has become a key platform for publications on cultural-historical psychology and related fields, playing a significant role in the development and internationalisation of scholarly communication in this domain.

Publication activity of the journal

To provide a more detailed account of the journal *Cultural-Historical Psychology*'s contribution to the development of the research field, a dedicated analysis was conducted of its publication activity, geographical distribution, and citation impact.

For this purpose, a specialised dataset, J-CHP, was compiled within the scope of this study, comprising 946 publications published in *Cultural-Historical Psychology* between 2005 and 2024 (Shvedovskaya et al., 2025). The analysis identified the number of countries with which the corresponding authors were affiliated. The dataset includes 49 countries, six of which belong to the BRICS+ group (Russia, Brazil, India, China, South Africa, Iran), while the remaining 43 countries fall within

the GR group. For each country, total publication counts and overall citation numbers (based on Scopus and RSCI data) were calculated. Table 5 presents the ten countries with the highest number of publications in *Cultural-Historical Psychology*.

Unsurprisingly, the largest number of publications in the sample is authored primarily by researchers affiliated with Russian institutions. In addition to Russia, significant contributions to the journal's publication activity were made by authors from Australia (21 publications), the United Kingdom (19 publications), the United States (18 publications), Brazil (17 publications), Germany (12 publications), and Israel (10 publications).

The highest average citation counts per publication (according to RSCI and Scopus data) were recorded for authors from the United States (8,9/17,7 citations per article), Russia (2,7/12,9), Israel (2,3/17,6), and Australia (6,5/11,6). These figures indicate that publications by authors from these countries contribute not only quantitatively but also significantly to the journal's scholarly impact.

The citation counts of articles published in the journal *Cultural-Historical Psychology* over the years, normalised for the time elapsed since publication, allow for the comparison of publications from different years while accounting for the varying "age" of each article (Fig. 14).

Table 5

TOP-10 countries by number of publications in the journal «Cultural-Historical Psychology»

Position	Country	Number of publications (since 2005 / since 2018)	Citations (RSCI) (total/average)	Citations (Scopus) (total/average)
1	Russian Federation	770/285	9946/2,7	778/12,9
2	Australia	21/8	244/6,5	52/11,6
3	United Kingdom	19/6	63/0,8	5/3,3
4	USA	18/7	318/8,9	62/17,7
5	Brazil	17/9	16/0,9	8/0,9
6	Germany	12/3	70/0,7	2/5,8
7	Israel	10/6	176/2,3	14/17,6
8	Greece	8/5	30/1	5/3,8
9	Canada	8/3	105/1	3/13,1
10	Armenia	3/3	3/0	0/1
Other countries (n = 39)		113/40	696/4,1	164/6,2

Note: The number of publications is given in two versions for comparison with citation data from the Scopus database, which is only available from 2018. Average number – per publication.



Fig. 14. Average number of citations of articles published in the journal «Cultural-Historical Psychology» in the scientific databases RSCI (n = 941) and Scopus (n = 330): the number of citations is normalized relative to the number of years since publication; — linear trends, linear regression results are shown in the upper right corner

An analysis of citation counts for publications in the journal indicates an overall upward trend from 2005 to 2024 (based on RSCI data). According to the results of a linear regression model, the average annual increase is 1,02 citations. However, the applied linear model captures this dynamic with limited accuracy ($R = 0,39$), suggesting a more complex pattern of change.

The results indicate that the number of citations declined somewhat between 2010 and 2013, whereas a sharp increase in citations was observed during 2018–2020. This growth coincides with the journal's inclusion in the Scopus database, which likely contributed to the expansion of its visibility and international accessibility. In subsequent years, a decline in citation counts has been noted; however, further investigation is required to determine whether this is related to changes in publication volume, shifts in thematic focus, or temporal lags in citation accumulation.

Thematic trends in journal publications

To analyse the thematic structure of publications in the journal *Cultural-Historical Psychology*, a frequency count of author keywords was conducted. The sample included 903 articles published between 2005 and 2024. These publications contained 2959 unique keywords, reflecting the journal's broad thematic range.

Unsurprisingly, the most frequently occurring keywords were *cultural-historical psychology* (147 publications, accounting for 16,3% of the sam-

ple) and *L.S. Vygotsky* (60 publications, 6,6% of the sample). All other keywords appeared in fewer than 5% of publications.

For further analysis, keywords with a frequency of at least 10 mentions (in more than 1% of publications) were selected. Based on this list, a word cloud of the most frequently occurring terms was generated (Fig. 15).

The keyword analysis reveals that, in addition to the most obvious and expected terms such as *cultural-historical psychology* and *L.S. Vygotsky*, frequently occurring keywords include *zone of proximal development* (49 mentions, 5,4% of publications), *activity* (45 mentions, 4,9%), *activity theory* (36 mentions, 3,9%), *development* (35 mentions, 3,8%), and *reflection* (33 mentions, 3,6%).

It should be emphasised that the predominance of terms related to activity and developmental approaches confirms the sustained interest in the key categories of cultural-historical theory and activity theory within the journal's publications. Of particular note is the inclusion of the term *perezhivanie* (mentioned in 29 publications, 3,2%). The frequent use of this term may reflect a tradition of active theoretical and practical engagement with the concept within the journal.

The frequency analysis of keywords demonstrates a reliance on the classical conceptual framework of cultural-historical psychology, alongside the continued research interest in more contemporary developments within the Russian psychological school.



Fig. 15. Author keyword cloud in publications of the journal «Cultural-Historical Psychology» in 2005–2024: The most frequent words, «cultural-historical psychology» and «L.S. Vygotsky», were excluded, and the remaining keywords, which occurred in more than 1% of publications, were selected; the absolute frequency of their occurrence (out of 903 articles) is given in brackets

The thematic dynamics of publications in the journal *Cultural-Historical Psychology* over the twenty-year period allow tracing changes in research emphases and key concepts that have captured authors' attention. To this end, keyword mention frequencies were calculated separately for four five-year intervals (2005–2009, 2010–2014, 2015–2019, and 2020–2024) (Table 6).

As in the previous section, the keywords “cultural-historical psychology” and “Vygotsky L.S.” were excluded from the analysis because they have consistently remained the most frequent ones in all time periods. Among the rest of the term collection, five of the most frequent keywords for each period were selected. In some cases, the number of selected words exceeds five due to the coincidence of frequencies.

The results of the analysis indicate that in earlier periods (prior to 2015), the terms *activity* and *activity theory* consistently featured among the most frequently occurring keywords. In later intervals (from 2015 onwards), *activity* continued to retain its significance, whereas *activity theory* fell out of the top frequency ranks, possibly reflecting a shift in research focus from methodological considerations to more applied and specific investigations.

It is also noteworthy that in the first two time intervals (2005–2009, 2010–2014), the keyword *culture* ranked among the most popular, whereas its frequency significantly declined in later years.

Notably, in the most recent five-year period (2020–2024), four of the five most frequently occurring keywords are directly related to developmental issues: *zone of proximal development*, *development*, *learning*, and *preschool psychology*.

Additionally, it is worth noting that in recent years, more specific terms related to developmental and educational topics have increasingly appeared in the thematic spectrum, whereas earlier periods were dominated by more general theoretical con-

cepts. This shift may indicate a gradual transition from methodological research to empirical and practice-oriented studies.

Analysis of the impact of publications from the journal Cultural-Historical Psychology

To assess the scholarly impact of the journal *Cultural-Historical Psychology*, the CJ-CHP dataset was compiled, including publications that cite articles from this journal as sources. The analysis covers the entire period from the journal's inception in 2005 through to 2024.

The dataset includes publications affiliated with authors from 61 countries, reflecting the broad geographical reach of the journal's scientific influence. For each country, the total number of citing publications was calculated, based on the affiliation country of the corresponding author. From these data, the twenty countries with the highest number of publications citing articles from *Cultural-Historical Psychology* were selected (Table 7).

Citation counts. Unsurprisingly, the highest number of citations of publications from the journal *Cultural-Historical Psychology* was recorded in Russia: 497 out of 949 citing publications (52,3% of the total citing works identified). Citation counts from other countries are significantly lower. The highest numbers of citing publications outside Russia were observed in Australia (63 publications, 6,6%), the United States (40 publications, 4,4%), Norway (32 publications, 3,4%), Brazil (31 publications, 3,3%), and China (28 publications, 3,0%). In all other countries, the number of citing publications does not exceed 16 per country.

Quartiles of citing journals. To assess the status of citing publications, an analysis of the quartiles of the journals in which they were published was conducted based on SJR data. Quartile information for the sources was available for 775 out of 949 publications, representing 81,7% of the sam-

Table 6

Frequency dynamics of key terms in the journal «Cultural-Historical Psychology» for the period 2005–2024

Five-year period	TOP keywords (absolute frequency of occurrence)
2005–2009 Total words – 971, publications – 208	activity theory (9), activity (8), zone of proximal development (8), perezhivanie (8), culture (7), thinking (7), speech (7)
2010–2014 Total words – 1462, publications – 234	activity (12), culture (10), reflection (10), consciousness (10), personality (9), activity theory (9)
2015–2019 Total words – 1493, publications – 235	development (12), activity (10), zone of proximal development (10), personality (10), perezhivanie (10), reflection (10)
2020–2024 Total words – 1564, publications – 245	zone of proximal development (17), activity (12), development (11), learning (10), preschool psychology (10)

Note: excluded are «Vygotsky L.S.» and «cultural-historical psychology», the most frequent words in each five-year period.

Table 7

**Number of citing articles of the journal «Cultural-Historical Psychology» by country
(TOP-20 countries with the highest number of citing publications)**

№	Country	Number of citing publications	Country group
1	Russia	497	BRICS+
2	Australia	63	GR
3	USA	40	GR
4	Norway	32	GR
5	Brazil	31	BRICS+
6	China	28	BRICS+
7	Greece	16	GR
8	Spain	16	GR
9	South Africa	15	BRICS+
10	Germany	13	GR
11	United Kingdom	13	GR
12	Sweden	10	GR
13	France	10	GR
14	Switzerland	10	GR
15	Israel	9	GR
16	Chile	8	GR
17	Finland	8	GR
18	Kazakhstan	7	GR
19	Canada	7	GR
20	Netherlands	6	GR
Other countries		89	

ple. Of these 775 articles, 296 (38,2%) were published in first quartile (Q1) journals, 200 (25,8%) in second quartile (Q2), 235 (30,3%) in third quartile (Q3), and only 40 (5,8%) in fourth quartile (Q4) journals. Thus, approximately one third of all citing articles appeared in highly ranked journals. Results from a one-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test confirmed a statistically significant deviation from a uniform distribution ($z = 10,633$, $p < 0,001$), supporting the conclusion that publications from *Cultural-Historical Psychology* are highly cited in prestigious scientific journals. This finding underscores the international significance of the journal and its integration into the global scientific community.

Co-authorship. The constructed country-level co-authorship network based on publications citing the journal *Cultural-Historical Psychology* (CJ-CHP dataset, $n = 949$) corroborates the geographical data presented in Table 7. The analysis was conducted using the fractional counting method with an inclusion threshold set at a minimum of five publications and at least one citation per publication. These criteria were met by 33 countries out of 256 represented in the overall sample (Fig. 16).

The results of the assessment of BRICS+ countries' contribution to the development and inter-

national visibility of cultural-historical psychology are reflected in the structure of the co-authorship network among publications citing the journal (Fig. 16). Nine clusters were identified, among which BRICS+ countries are involved in the co-authorship networks of four clusters.

- *Cluster 1B* (red): Brazil (30 publications), in cooperation with France, Greece, Italy, Serbia, and Switzerland – a Latin-European cluster reflecting active connections of Brazilian researchers with Southern and Western Europe.

- *Cluster 4B* (yellow-green): South Africa (15 publications) and Iran (9 publications), in collaboration with Hong Kong – encompassing interregional ties of the Global South involving the Asian research space.

- *Cluster 5B* (purple): China (31 publications), cooperating with Japan, Malaysia, and the United States – representing Asian-American collaboration.

- *Cluster 6B* (turquoise): Russia (506 publications), closely linked with Belarus and the Czech Republic – an Eastern European cooperative cluster with Russia occupying a leading position.

Other clusters formed by countries in the GR group are not detailed in this section, as the primary objective of this stage of the study was to identify the positions of BRICS+ countries within the in-



Fig. 16. International co-authorship network by country based on publications citing articles from the journal Cultural-Historical Psychology (analysis using VOSviewer).

ternational co-authorship network of publications citing the journal *Cultural-Historical Psychology* and to assess their scientific collaboration ties.

The thematic diversity of works citing articles from the journal *Cultural-Historical Psychology* is characterised by a broad scope. The sample encompasses 118 distinct subject categories, underscoring the multidisciplinary nature of the journal's influence.

The most frequently occurring thematic categories are as follows:

- *Education* – 416 publications, accounting for 43,8% of the total;
- *Social Psychology* – 313 publications (33,0%);
- *Psychology, miscellaneous* – 298 publications (31,4%);
- *Developmental and Educational Psychology* – 272 publications (28,7%);
- *Cultural Studies* – 150 publications (15,8%);
- *Applied Psychology* – 144 publications (15,2%).

The wide distribution of thematic categories indicates that research published in the journal *Cultural-Historical Psychology* is in demand across diverse scientific fields, encompassing both fundamental and applied domains. The proportion of publications by subject category is visualised as a thematic category word cloud (Fig. 17).

To delineate the semantic field of publications citing articles from the journal *Cultural-Historical Psychology* included in the CJ-CHP sample

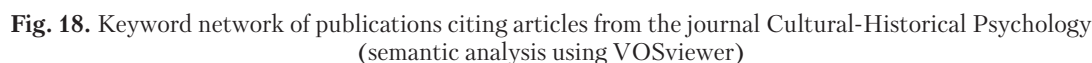
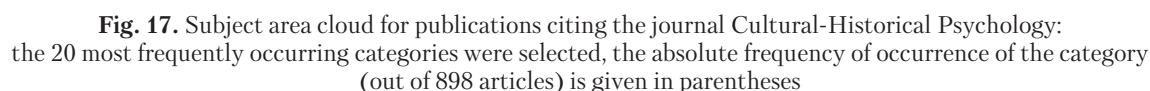
(n = 949), an analysis was conducted using VOSviewer on the titles and abstracts of citing works. A binary counting method was applied, recording the number of documents in which each term appeared at least once.

The automatic processing yielded 19 608 terms, of which 293 met the threshold of at least 20 mentions in documents. A relevance score was calculated for each term, and 60% of the most relevant terms — comprising 176 concepts — were retained for further analysis.

In preparing the visualisation, technical and generic scientific terms lacking substantive specificity for semantic analysis were excluded from the sample. These included *questionnaire*, *abstract*, *year*, *value*, *literature*, *low level*, *etc.*, *review*, *sample*, *survey*, *notion*, *respondent*, *event*, *comparative analysis*, *paper*, *topic*, *test*, *level*, *factor*, *characteristic*, *scale*, *empirical data*, and *effect*. The final semantic network comprised 153 key terms (Fig. 18).

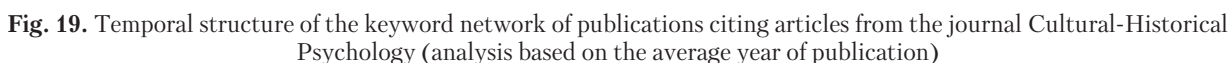
Semantic analysis of publications citing the CJ-CHP sample revealed three clusters of key terms reflecting the substantive dominants of scholarly works referencing articles from the journal *Cultural-Historical Psychology* (Fig. 18).

- *Cluster 1G* (red, 79 terms) – Key concepts of cultural-historical psychology. This cluster encompasses terms related to the development and interpretation of core concepts within cultural-historical psychology across various theoretical



- *Cluster 3G* (blue, 3 terms) – Social situation, development. Despite the small number of terms, this cluster forms a distinct group related to the category of the social situation of development,

Temporal analysis of keywords in the CJ-CHP sample (Fig. 19) was conducted using the metric *Average Publication Year* (Avg. pub. year), which reflects the dynamics of thematic directions in publications citing articles from the journal *Cultural-Histor-*



ical psychology as a dynamically developing, internationalised, and thematically diverse scientific field, in which BRICS+ countries demonstrate a progressive expansion of their scholarly presence and growing influence.

Contribution of BRICS+ countries to publication growth (RQ1)

- In 2019, the most frequent terms were: *family* – 52 mentions, *category* – 33, *young child* – 26.
- In 2020, emphasis shifted to terms such as: *child* – 276, *concept* – 220, *perspective* – 129, *psychology* – 122, *knowledge* – 100.
- In 2021, dominant terms included: *approach* – 230, *education* – 211, *relationship* – 206, *learning* – 176, *teacher* – 173.
- In 2022, prominent terms were: *activity theory* – 32, *pandemic* – 30, *disability* – 27, *higher education* – 26.

Discussion

The results of the bibliometric analysis characterise the publication landscape of cultural-histor-

International scientific collaboration and scholarly impact (RQ2)

The structure of international scientific collaboration in cultural-historical psychology is characterised by dense networks in non-BRICS+ countries and limited cooperation within the BRICS+ bloc. Local research centres dominate within BRICS+ countries, with few stable inter-country collaborations observed among them. Isolated partnerships have been recorded between Russia, Brazil, China, and South Africa, aligning with findings from other studies (Pouris & Ho, 2014; Sooryamoorthy, 2023) that highlight the fragmented nature of scientific integration in the Global South.

Citation analysis, however, indicates that the international impact of publications from BRICS+ countries is increasing. In recent years, there has been growth in the average annual number of citations, and articles authored by researchers from Russia, China, Brazil, and South Africa have attracted the attention of international research groups.

Thematic directions and their transformation (RQ3)

Temporal and semantic analyses of publications in cultural-historical psychology over the period 2005–2024 reveal a stable substantive core related to activity theory, mediation, the zone of proximal development, and development (Cong-Lem, 2022; Veresov, 2024). In BRICS+ countries, there remains a pronounced interest in the theoretical and methodological foundations of cultural-historical psychology, with an emphasis on developmental and educational issues (Gromyko, 2023; Kholmogorova, 2016).

The thematic analysis of publications citing articles from the journal *Cultural-Historical Psychology* shows that applied and interdisciplinary research dominates in other countries, whereas BRICS+ countries maintain a focus on the foundational concepts of cultural-historical theory.

Thematic shifts in BRICS+ countries towards educational and social research have been actively recorded since the mid-2010s, likely related to the later inclusion of national journals in international scientometric databases (Alperin et al., 2024). BRICS+ countries demonstrate an intensive transition from theoretical and methodological research to applied and educational agendas, reflecting the integration of national schools into the global sci-

entific community and the expanding applicability of cultural-historical psychology in contemporary social contexts.

Contribution of the journal *Cultural-Historical Psychology* to internationalisation (RQ4)

The journal *Cultural-Historical Psychology* continues to hold a leading position within the publication landscape of cultural-historical psychology, as evidenced by its inclusion in global research networks (Rubtsov et al., 2019; Meshcheryakov et al., 2022). Semantic analysis of citing publications indicates the journal's multidisciplinary impact, with dominant themes related to education, social and developmental psychology, cultural studies, and social inclusion.

The journal's growing international visibility is further confirmed by a citation geography spanning 61 countries, with 38,2% of citing publications appearing in first quartile (Q1, according to SJR) journals. Active citation clusters involve Brazil, China, Russia, and South Africa; however, transnational connections within the BRICS+ bloc remain sparse.

Conclusion

The results of the conducted bibliometric analysis confirm that cultural-historical psychology remains one of the most dynamically developing fields within the humanities. BRICS+ countries demonstrate not only growth in publication activity but also increasing integration into the global scientific agenda. At the same time, distinct thematic priorities are emerging, consistently associated with developmental and educational issues.

Nevertheless, international cooperation within the BRICS+ bloc remains fragmented and requires further development. The absence of stable transnational networks may hinder the formation of intercultural research schools and limit the global contribution of BRICS+ countries to the advancement of this scientific domain.

These findings underscore the growing importance of research conducted within the cultural-historical psychology paradigm, the relevance of which may be driven by:

- identifying and overcoming barriers and opportunities for expanding international collaboration among BRICS+ countries;

- analysing transformations in national science policies that incentivise publications in high-ranking international journals;
- investigating the integration of cultural-historical psychology into interdisciplinary research amid digitalisation, social inclusion, and global challenges.

Continued bibliometric monitoring with a focus on collaborative and thematic shifts will enable timely identification of key growth points and strategic priorities in cultural-historical psychology as a global scientific discipline.

Limitations. This study has several limitations that should be taken into account when interpreting the results.

1. Limited source selection. The analysis was based on data from Scopus, OpenAlex, the Russian Science Citation Index (RSCI), and PsyJournals.ru. Although these databases encompass a substantial body of publications, they may exclude works published in local journals not indexed within these systems.

2. Uneven country coverage. Publications from BRICS+ countries may be underrepresented in international bibliometric databases compared to those from other regions, potentially affecting the observed trends and partly explaining the delayed growth in publication activity and citation rates.

3. Search strategy limitations. Despite employing relevant keywords, the terminological variability in the description of cultural-historical psychology, as well as overlaps with other theoretical frameworks, may have resulted in incomplete coverage of the literature, particularly in multidisciplinary fields.

These limitations outline promising directions for future research, including more in-depth qualitative content analysis, the expansion of the database to incorporate local and regional journals, and a more detailed examination of factors that facilitate or constrain the development of international scientific collaboration in the field of cultural-historical psychology.

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Appendix

Appendix A. PRISMA flow diagram for the selection of publications on the topic of cultural-historical psychology: «*» — The analysis included publications of the document type «article» and/or «review» published in journals during the period from 2005 to 2024. <https://doi.org/10.17759/chp/2025000004>

Appendix B. Sankey diagram of the ratio of the five most frequent subject area categories of publications on the topic of cultural-historical psychology in different periods from 2005 to 2024 in different countries: when hovering the cursor over any element of the interactive diagram, the corresponding data is displayed. <https://doi.org/10.17759/chp/2025000004>

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Contribution of the authors

Anna A. Shvedovskaya — developed methodological approaches and conducted analysis and interpretation of the obtained results.

Victoria V. Ponomareva — participated in developing research tools and preparing an analytical review of literature, data processing, analysis and visualization.

Aleksei A. Korneev — data processing, analysis, and visualization; preparation of the draft manuscript.

Nikolai V. Samorodov — data curation; formal analysis; investigation; software; writing — original draft.

All authors participated in the discussion of the results and approved the final text of the manuscript.

Вклад авторов

Шведовская А.А. — разработка методологических подходов, анализ и интерпретация полученных результатов.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Конфликт интересов

Авторы заявляют об отсутствии конфликта интересов.

Ethics statement

The study is a bibliometric analysis based on publicly available publication data and does not involve personal data, medical information, or the participation of human or animal subjects. In accordance with international and institutional guidelines, ethical approval was not required.

Декларация об этике

Исследование представляет собой библиометрический анализ, выполненный на основе открытых данных, содержащихся в публикациях, не затрагивает персональных данных, медицинской информации и не предполагает участия людей или животных. В соответствии с международными и институциональными требованиями получение одобрения этического комитета не требовалось.

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The subject-symbolic approach to psychological support practice with children and adolescents

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Abstract

The subject-symbolic approach is grounded in cultural-historical theory and addresses a critical gap in the field of psychological support for children and adolescents. It offers a framework for overcoming emotional, behavioral, interpersonal, and self-related difficulties in individuals with typical development as well as those with mild developmental deviations, while also providing support for their caregivers. The approach integrates assistance in resolving these issues with the broader developmental tasks of the child. Its central premise is that psychological support should aim to foster the child's subjectivity and consciousness by restructuring subject-subject relationships and interactions with their immediate social environment, taking into account age-specific and individual characteristics. Transformational change is made possible through the awareness of the symbolic meaning embedded in experience (*perezhivanie*). A symbol is understood as a cultural form that mediates subject-subject relationships and their representation in individual consciousness. The paper proposes original techniques for joint work with children and their parents, based on the use of symbolic forms.

Keywords: subject, symbol, consciousness, subject-subject relationships, interaction, psychological development, *perezhivanie*, psychological structure of the defect, psychological support

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Субъектно-символический подход к практике оказания психологической помощи детям и подросткам

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Резюме

Субъектно-символический подход основан на культурно-исторической теории и восполняет пробел в оказании психологической помощи, направленной на преодоление эмоциональных, поведенческих проблем, проблем межличностных отношений и взаимодействия, самоотношения у детей и подростков с нормотипичным развитием и легкими отклонениями в развитии, а также для оказания помощи их родителям. Подход совмещает помощь в преодолении данных проблем и решении задач психического развития ребенка. Основная идея подхода заключается в направленности помощи на развитие субъектности и сознания ребенка за счет перестройки его субъект-субъектных отношений и взаимодействия с ближайшим окружением с учетом его возрастных и индивидуальных особенностей. Изменения обеспечиваются благодаря осознанию смыслового содержания переживания, выраженного в символической форме. Символ понимается как культурная форма опосредствования

субъект-субъектных отношений и их представленности в сознании индивида. Предлагаются оригинальные методы совместной работы с ребенком и его родителями, основанные на использовании символических форм.

Ключевые слова: субъект, символ, сознание, субъект-субъектные отношения, взаимодействие, психическое развитие, переживание, психологическая структура дефекта, психологическая помощь

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Introduction

In the practice of providing psychological assistance to children and adolescents, specialists often encounter requests related to resolving current issues that emerge at specific developmental stages and are primarily linked to interpersonal relationships and social interactions. These issues may arise in both typically developing children and adolescents as well as those with mild developmental deviations. Commonly observed interpersonal difficulties include emotional problems, peer interaction challenges, strained relationships with parents, behavioral disorders, and issues of self-perception.

A range of approaches has been developed to address these challenges. Among them, various forms of cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) have gained the greatest popularity. Other methods based on psychodynamic and humanistic paradigms, as well as art therapy, play therapy, and narrative approaches, have also been applied. Most handbooks on child and adolescent psychotherapy emphasize the importance of accounting for the specific features of their psychological development. However, this consideration is usually mentioned only in passing and lacks thorough theoretical elaboration. The issue at hand goes beyond developmental age norms: these interpersonal difficulties are simultaneously products of development and factors capable of altering the trajectory of a child's psychological growth.

Typically, psychological issues that manifest during certain life stages are difficult to strictly distinguish from developmental deviations. This is especially true for so-called mild developmental anomalies — such as dysfunctions in particular cognitive functions, attachment disorders, learning difficulties, or specific emotional response patterns. For instance, difficulties in constructing speech-motor programs may hinder peer com-

munication, provoke aggressive behavior or social withdrawal, and thereby exacerbate the initial developmental concern. This creates a pathological developmental cycle that intensifies the original issue. Even in the context of normative development, relationship and interaction problems may act as triggers for pathological changes in the child's mental health.

This leads to the necessity of a methodological synthesis between perspectives on psychological development and the mechanisms underlying the emergence of current psychological difficulties. In other words, it is essential to simultaneously address both developmental tasks and acute psychological problems, recognizing how the latter shape the child's social developmental context.

Achieving this synthesis requires an appropriate conceptual framework and developmental theory. In our view, cultural-historical psychology offers such a framework. However, practical applications of this approach have traditionally focused on forming of the psyche and correcting its abnormal development. Areas related to child psychotherapy — especially those targeting personal issues, emotional experiences, and the child's relationships with others — remain underexplored within this tradition.

Our research on symbolically mediated interactions and social relationships in children and adolescents, both typically developing and those with mild developmental disorders, conducted using the experimental-genetic method, has revealed key developmental patterns and mechanisms. These findings enabled the development of effective psychological correction techniques (Polyakov, 2022). These techniques have proven applicable and beneficial in practical work with children and their families, particularly in addressing interpersonal, emotional, behavioral, and self-related difficulties. Based on this work, we have formulated an approach rooted in cultural-historical psychology, which we term the subject-symbolic approach.

Theoretical basis

One of the central concepts underlying the described approach is the category of subject – subject relationships, which manifest in the child’s interactions with others. This category makes it possible to bridge two perspectives: (1) addressing developmental difficulties that are shaped by the nature of these relationships and (2) resolving the contextual psychological challenges that arise at specific stages of development. Within cultural-historical psychology, subject – subject relationships represent the foundational mechanism behind all major transformations of the child’s psyche, brought about through participation in social practices – including psychological support. We conceptualize these relationships as symbolically mediated, subjectively meaningful connections between two or more subjects, expressed through their shared experience and actions.

The application of this category entails several important consequences for psychological practice with children and their families:

(a) Psychological support primarily targets the correction or construction of subject – subject relationships within the child’s immediate social environment, most often with parents. Accordingly, family-based interventions are essential when addressing intrafamilial relationships. Peer-related challenges must also be considered in their broader interpersonal context.

(b) Transforming these relationships directly influences the mechanisms of psychological development. Relationship difficulties should be understood in terms of their potential to foster or inhibit development. This developmental impact serves as the core criterion for evaluating whether relationships are normal or deviant.

(c) Many psychological issues are the child’s and environment’s shared reaction to the child’s individual psychophysiological characteristics. These responses represent a form of co-experienced affective engagement with those features.

The issue of co-being and development raises a phenomenological question: in what form does one subject exist for another – how is the child perceived by others (primarily parents or caregivers) and how do others exist for the child? At the psychological level, how does the Other act in the child’s inner world, and vice versa? This prompts us to engage the problem of consciousness. Within cultural-historical theory, consciousness is understood as a functional organ of the psyche that enables individuals to construct meaningful relationships with the world; it develops ontogenetically

through subject – subject interaction and is mediated by cultural forms – namely, signs and symbols (Vygotsky, 1982, 1983a; Leontiev, 1983; Zinchenko, 2006).

Importantly, not all experience fully embodies consciousness. L.S. Vygotsky linked the origin and operation of consciousness to intersubjective relations expressed in external interaction. He regarded *perezhivanie* (lived experience) as the unit of analysis that refracts both the self and the Other (Veresov, 2016; Vygotsky, 1983a, 2001): “Every higher psychological function was external because it was social before it became internal, that is, psychological; it was originally a social relation between two people” (Vygotsky, 1983a, p. 145). *Perezhivanie* reflects the child’s relationship with the environment (Vygotsky, 1984, 2001). Regarding the connection between *perezhivanie* and consciousness, he writes: “To be conscious of one’s experiences means nothing other than possessing them as objects (stimuli) for other experiences. Consciousness is the experience of experiences, just as *perezhivanie* is the experience of objects” (Vygotsky, 1982, pp. 88–89). This highlights the reflexive character of consciousness – its capacity to respond to psychological experience, rooted in actual interactions with others.

F.E. Vasilyuk and T.D. Karyagina emphasize that not every experience qualifies as *perezhivanie* – only those in which the subject (the self) enters into a relation with the experience (Vasilyuk & Karyagina, 2017). N.E. Veraksa likewise emphasizes that it is impossible to build or modify a child’s relationship with the surrounding world or to master cultural tools without engaging with *perezhivanie* (Veraksa, 2024). In his account of the “crisis of age seven,” Vygotsky demonstrated that the child’s social situation of development – i.e., relationships with others emerging at a given stage – can be analyzed through *perezhivanie* (Vygotsky, 1984). The structural dimension of consciousness and *perezhivanie* is further elaborated in the works of Vygotsky, Leontiev, and Zinchenko, who consistently underscore the importance of meaning as the link between subject and world (Vygotsky, 1982, 1983b, 1984, 2001; Zavershneva, 2015; Zinchenko, 2006; Leontiev, 1983; Polyakov, 2022a, 2022b).

Thus, working with conscious *perezhivaniya* becomes the key to transforming the child’s subject – subject relationships with others – thereby modifying the child’s social developmental situation. This, in turn, alters the subjective significance of life events and changes the child’s emotions and behavior. In practice, it is critical to address not only the child’s *perezhivaniya*, but also those of their imme-

diate social circle — especially parents. This opens the possibility for mutual recognition, emotional attunement, and the real presence of the Other as a subject. In many cases, problems brought forth by families can be addressed by enabling the child and parents to recognize each other's *perezhivaniya*. In this context, relationships and consciousness represent two dimensions of the same psychological reality. By working with conscious experience, we restructure the child's relationships with others.

Conscious experience (*perezhivanie*) is mediated through the use of cultural forms — signs and symbols. We distinguish between signs and symbols based on the type of experience they address and the psychological capacities required to master them (Polyakov, 2022a, 2022b). A sign is considered a cultural form that represents subject — object relations and instrumental activity within consciousness. A symbol, in contrast, functions as a cultural form that expresses unique subject — subject relations — a form of co-existence that makes individual subjective realities intelligible.

Thus, the conscious awareness and restructuring of subject — subject relationships and interactions requires the use of symbolic forms in working with children and their families. We argue that it is important to differentiate between various symbolic forms according to their psychological functions in the structure of consciousness and their role in supporting the formation of the individual as a subject engaged in relationships with others (Polyakov, 2022a, 2022b). For example, when working with identity-related difficulties in children aged 9–10 and older, the use of autobiographical narratives has proven effective (Nurkova, 2022; Polyakov, 2022a; White, 2007).

In order to address a child's psychophysiological traits and the *perezhivaniya* associated with them, we apply the concept of the psychological structure of the defect, initially proposed by L.S. Vygotsky, developed by V.I. Lubovsky, and further elaborated in our work (Vygotsky, 1983b; Lubovsky, 2018; Polyakov, 2024). This concept refers to a hierarchically organized model of atypical psychological development in which a central defect (a primary impairment or characteristic) generates a wide array of secondary manifestations, as well as the subject's psychological response to it. This model is essential for revealing the mechanism underlying a given psychological difficulty and for identifying the main targets of psychological support.

Let us illustrate the above with a clinical case, which we will continue to develop throughout this article.

*The parents of an 8-year-old girl with preserved intellectual abilities sought help for autoaggressive behavior — the child was hitting, scratching and verbally demeaning herself. The aim of psychological support in such cases is not merely to eliminate the behavior but to uncover the psychological mechanism behind its emergence. This necessitates a thorough consideration of the psychophysiological traits of both parties in the relational dynamic (particularly the mother and child) as well as an exploration of the symbolic expression of their *perezhivaniya* regarding the situation. The girl was characterized by heightened emotional sensitivity, especially attunement to her mother's emotions. Combined with the mother's anxiety over the child's emotional well-being, this formed a particular interactional cycle within the "parent — child" system. The child's constant awareness of her mother's worry — and her belief that she was the cause of that worry — led to self-rejection.*

The therapeutic process focused on transforming the mother's attitude toward the child's emotional state and her ways of responding to it. This, in turn, brought about changes in the child's emotional expression, her self-perception, and, as a consequence, improved the mother's emotional well-being as well.

The central idea of the subject — symbolic approach

The central principle of the subject — symbolic approach lies in offering psychological support to the child and their caregivers, aimed at restructuring subject — subject relationships and interactions through the conscious exploration of the meaning-laden symbolic representations of emotional experience.

This approach is directed toward fostering and supporting the child's subjectivity, understood as the awareness and enactment of meaningful relationships with the world — above all, with significant others. The subject — symbolic approach facilitates the mutual understanding of the meaning behind symbolic manifestations of subject — subject relations between the child and their parents.

The external manifestations of the subject (child, caregiver, peer), along with the underlying affective components of experience, are viewed as symbolic forms that express what is subjectively significant for the individual and represent their relationships with the world, especially with others.

This method addresses children and adolescents between the ages of 6 and 19, as well as their parents.

Returning to our earlier case:

In analyzing the girl's autoaggressive behavior, it was essential to determine what this behavior meant to her. We came to understand that it reflected a negative self-perception — she believed she was "bad" — and symbolized her subjective experience of the relationship with her mother, in which she felt responsible for her mother's distress. The mother, in turn, experienced anxiety and helplessness, unable to alleviate her daughter's suffering, while overvaluing the child's emotional comfort. This example underscores the importance of assisting both participants in their relationship to recognize the symbolic meaning of their respective experiences.

A key element of the approach is the involvement of as many direct participants in the child's relational system as possible. This enables them to "see" and recognize one another, to understand what lies behind external behaviors, emotional reactions, and verbal expressions, and to more rapidly externalize and reflect upon the underlying relational issues. Joint work thus acts as a catalyst for transformation.

It is precisely the work with the symbolic representation of experience within consciousness that provides the foundation for psychological practices aimed at addressing behavioral, emotional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal difficulties. Through symbolic forms, experiences are objectified, becoming accessible for reflection by both the individual and their social environment. It should be noted that such experiences often underlie learning difficulties in school-age children, deviant behavior in adolescents, and represent one of the most critical factors in atypical development.

At the core of *perezhivanie* lies the subjective significance — or meaning — of lived experience. It is always unique and individual. However, uncovering that meaning requires attending to its sensory — expressive components: movements, sensations, mental imagery, thoughts, the affective tone of emotions, impulses toward action, and more. These components are significant not in themselves, but as means for revealing meaning.

The meanings of experience may be directed toward the Other or toward oneself and may vary widely. Each *perezhivanie*, shaped by the subject's individuality, contains conflicts arising from misalignments between the positions of participants in a relationship. These conflicts define the personal significance of future transformation and create motivation for the subject's active engagement in that transformation.

Conflicts may arise from contradictions between the child's capacities and desires, between what is

meaningful to the child and what is important to the parent, or between the child's wishes and the adult's demands. For example:

- a child wants to be accepted by peers but is excluded;
- a student disrupts lessons while adults demand rule compliance;
- an adolescent is overwhelmed by anxiety and a sense of inadequacy, which the parents find perplexing;
- a child rages at their own helplessness while doing schoolwork;
- a child tries to express their distress, but parents refuse to believe them.

Importantly, the position of the Other may be external (i.e., the real behavior of another person) or internalized by the child. In the latter case, the drama unfolds on the internal plane of the child's consciousness. In essence, the child's developmental drama is closely tied to the discrepancy between who they are and how close others perceive — and expect — them to be. This is why psychological support must help both the child and their caregivers become aware of how they see each other and who the child really is.

In psychological practice, it is crucial to consider not only the content and meaning of the conflict for each party but also their respective responses. The way a conflict is responded to determines whether it becomes a source of developmental difficulty or of personal growth.

A subject's response may take various forms:

- the conflict may be unrecognized, ignored or avoided;
- it may be overcompensated through excessive achievement;
- the desire underlying the conflict may be suppressed;
- the child may conform to the expectations of adults or peers, suppressing personal aspirations;
- aggression may emerge in response to seemingly insurmountable contradictions;
- or the conflict may be accepted and actively worked through.

These responses themselves often become the focus of therapeutic work with both child and caregivers.

Let us return to the parent — child case to further illustrate this.

The mother's realization that her own behavior was reinforcing the child's self-rejection and aggression catalyzed a transformation in how she responded to her daughter's emotional expressions. Initially, the girl "tested" this new relational stance — crying, hitting herself — to see whether her mother's attitude

had truly changed. Over time, she calmed down, reassured by the fact that her mother no longer responded with distress.

Previously, the mother's deepest need had been to ensure her child's emotional and physical well-being, while the child's emotional safety depended on sensing the mother's calmness. The change in their mutual responsiveness was what brought about the shift in the girl's emotional state and behavior.

In another example, a mother sought help for her 10-year-old son's disruptive behavior at school, refusal to complete homework, and disobedience at home. The boy exhibited provocative behavior in class and passively resisted his mother's demands. She adopted a strict stance, emphasizing obedience and social norms.

The child perceived the attitude of both his teachers and his mother as limiting his autonomy and right to self-determination. His behavior served as a symbolic protest against this relational dynamic.

Becoming aware of this underlying conflict prompted both mother and child to reconsider their roles and behaviors. The mother's need to exert control and the son's need for autonomy had previously collided; understanding this helped them begin to transform their relationship.

Thus, within the subject — symbolic approach, work is centered on subject — subject relationships as they appear in the lived experience of participants and are expressed in their mutual interactions. The goal is to bring about changes in these relationships such that all participants recognize, accept, and account for one another's subjectivity. Such relationships activate the core mechanisms of normal child development.

Methods of psychological support in the subject — symbolic approach

The application of support methods within the subject — symbolic approach should not be equated with a rigid technology. First, the choice of method, its form, content, and sequence depend largely on the child's and family's own initiative and preferences. One child may respond best to working with autobiographical narratives, another to modeling with clay, and a third to the use of metaphors. What is essential is that the subject generates or selects symbolic forms that express their experience — rather than relying solely on prefabricated symbols designed by the psychologist (the latter being acceptable only in exceptional cases). It is worth noting that many psychotherapeutic approaches commonly provide therapists with “ready-made” metaphors for client work (Stoddard & Afari, 2021).

Second, the same method can serve diverse goals and be adapted to the specifics of a given case. Thus, the subject — symbolic approach adapts its working methods to each individual situation, shaped by the family's request, the nature of the issue, the child's developmental level, family dynamics, and the stage of work. It avoids the use of fixed therapeutic protocols — predefined sequences of interventions — which are often associated with problem-oriented approaches. Rather than focusing on problems alone, the subject — symbolic approach focuses on the child and the family as relational subjects. The goal is to foster developmental interaction with the child.

The overarching aim of support is to promote mutual awareness of lived experience (perzhivanie) between the child and their social environment. More concretely, the following changes in awareness may occur:

- the adult's recognition and acceptance of the child's needs, emotional experiences, and innate (individual) traits and capabilities (e.g., parents may underestimate the depth of their child's emotional life or believe the child is being manipulative);
- the child's understanding of their own needs and the possibilities for meeting them;
- the adult's clarification or revision (when necessary) of their relational position toward the child, including expectations and their implementation;
- the adult's (and sometimes the child's) recognition of interactional cycles that perpetuate the problem — and their subsequent revision;
- the adult's awareness of the child's developmental potential and the conditions required to support it, including a reevaluation of their idealized developmental expectations (e.g., viewing an ideal child as fully obedient may contradict the child's actual development);
- the child's awareness and resolution of internal contradictions in their worldview (e.g., a 9-year-old girl, following joint work with her anxious mother, who feared her daughter's obsessive protective rituals, remarked: “These are just thoughts in my head, so they're not real — and I don't need to worry about them”);
- the adult's recognition and resolution of intra-familial conflicts rooted in unresolved personal issues (e.g., contradictory unconscious attitudes toward the child in one or both parents).

To structure the support process, the following stages can be identified:

1. Analysis of the child's and adult's lived experiences and their underlying meanings — revealing the nature of the conflict (collision);
2. Clarification of the initial and desired psychological states of the child or their relationships with others;

3. Identification of each party's response to the conflict and support in recognizing and accepting it;

4. Search for constructive ways to resolve the conflict (collision) or pathways to the desired state, from both the child's and adult's perspectives;

5. Mastery of these constructive strategies by the child and/or caregivers;

6. Consolidation of change: real-life application, anticipation of future scenarios, and planning for further action.

The sequence and necessity of these stages are not fixed and may vary based on context. At times, mutual recognition of the core issue by parent and child is sufficient. In other cases, this insight reveals deeper layers. Sometimes, a full progression through all stages is required.

Categories and examples of methods in the subject – symbolic approach

Within the subject – symbolic framework, the methods of psychological support can be provisionally divided into two groups:

1. Methods aimed directly at identifying and transforming subject – subject relationships and the child's interactions with parents or peers, as well as clarifying the caregiver's position;

2. Methods focused on fostering the awareness of one's own experiences in both children and caregivers (Polyakov, 2022b).

Methods in Group One include:

- Symbolization of experience: The child and caregivers create symbolic representations of their experiences in each other's presence – reflecting interpersonal relationships, emotional states, and self-perceptions. This may include storytelling, metaphorical descriptions, drawing, sculpting, or representing both troubling and desired (goal) states. These methods help disclose the unique meanings embedded in inner experiences (memories, sensations, movements, mental images, events), making them intelligible to significant others. *For example, in the case of the girl with autoaggressive behavior, her mother constructed a metaphorical image of the "ideal mother" as Moominmamma (from Tove Jansson's stories) – a figure representing emotional containment and calm, which the mother felt she was failing to embody.*

- Graphical and verbal modeling of interactional cycles: Cycles of relational dynamics contributing to or alleviating the problem are explored through drawings, diagrams, or descriptive dialogue. In the case above, the mother created a visual model of how her worry and sense of helplessness, mirrored by the child's emotional hypersensitivity,

reinforced the daughter's self-negativity – forming a closed loop. Recognizing this helped the mother respond more calmly to her daughter's emotions, which in turn improved the child's self-confidence and emotional regulation.

- Joint description of shared experiences: Child and caregiver (or peer) collaboratively reflect on a specific event or behavior, aiming to understand and acknowledge each other's perspectives.

- Identification of valuable personal qualities: Working with the child's lived experience, the psychologist helps uncover strengths – even those masked by "negative" traits such as anxiety, passivity, impulsivity, or cognitive limitations. These insights are shared with the child and caregivers to reframe aspects of the self that had previously been rejected.

Methods in Group Two include:

- Position-shifting (decentering): The subject is encouraged to view events from the Other's perspective – such as imagining a parent's view of their own behavior or engaging with an imagined interlocutor.

- Symbolic transformation of experience: Auto-biographical memories are reinterpreted or "reconfigured" imaginatively. The child may use metaphors, drawings, or sculpting to represent a desired (goal) state that contrasts with a problematic one. *For instance, the previously described 10-year-old boy, who exhibited provocative behavior, defined himself as "irresponsible" and sculpted a fragile dandelion to represent this self-perception: "It's small and doesn't matter to me." When asked to create a contrasting image of "responsibility," he sculpted a water lily, explaining: "It floats far from the shore, and no one touches it." This metaphor helped the boy and his mother recognize his resistance to excessive and rigid control over his behavior.*

- Objectification through dissociation: Under-recognized or rejected emotional states are externalized and treated as separate from the self, allowing for greater awareness and coping. The child is shown that they are not identical to their limitations or emotions. For example, anger or anxiety may be described as an external entity: "What does your anger look like? What does it make you do? How do you act when it's not there?"

- Exaggeration of symbolic expression: Certain expressive gestures, intonations, or phrases may be amplified or repeated to help the subject become aware of the deeper meanings they carry.

- Distancing from experience: The child may be invited to observe their own emotions "from the outside," as if watching a film, reducing their intensity and enabling reflective insight.

Conclusion

The subject – symbolic approach in counseling children and their families opens new avenues for applying cultural-historical psychology to the domain of psychological support – particularly in addressing behavioral and emotional difficulties, interpersonal conflicts, and self-related problems in children with typical development as well as those with mild developmental deviations. This approach emphasizes the value of developing the child's subjectivity and seeks to create conditions that facilitate the child's mastery of cultural forms of relating to others and engaging in social interaction.

The approach is grounded in the idea that the formation of the child as a cultural subject is possible only within particular relationships with other subjects – relationships that unfold in symbolic

forms of interaction and are represented in lived experience (*perezhivanie*). *Perezhivanie* manifests in intentional actions and behavior and is structured by subjective meaning, which integrates sensory experience and reflects an invisible bond with other subjects.

The goal of psychological support, therefore, is not simply to achieve emotional comfort or correct behavior, but to help the child and their caregivers become aware of what is meaningful to the child and to respond to it in light of the child's development as a cultural subject. The subject – symbolic approach facilitates mutual awareness of experience between children and their parents through engagement with its symbolic representation – enabling them to see and accept each other as subjects of relationship and thus laying the foundation for the child's normal development.

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The concept of “perezhivanie” in the works of L.S. Vygotsky and the prospects for its consideration in the modern theory and practice of special psychology

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Abstract

Context and relevance. The concept of “perezhivanie” is not fully developed by L.S. Vygotsky, but it is quite often encountered in his latest works. In his works, L.S. Vygotsky seems to be groping for the content of the concept of “perezhivanie”, and at the same time he writes about experience (perezhivanie) as a dynamic unit of consciousness. The development of defectology, and then special psychology, as a scientific psychological direction working with children with special needs, is inextricably linked with the name of Lev Semenovich Vygotsky. Actualization of the concept of “perezhivanie” can be of particular importance in the context of psychological and pedagogical assistance to special needs children, strengthening its humanistic focus, as well as operationally clarifying methodological developments. **Objective.** To determine the role of the concept of “perezhivanie” in the value system of special psychology, and how this concept changes the attitude to the theory and practice of working with children with special needs. **Methods and materials.** Theoretical analysis of the works of L.S. Vygotsky and his followers, as well as a phenomenological description of stories from the practice of interaction with a special child and his relatives, which demonstrate the value of experience that changes the attitude to reality and the behavior of children with special needs. **Results.** The analysis indicates the prospects for the concept of “perezhivanie” to change the paradigm of research within the framework of developing cultural-historical psychology in general and special psychology in particular. **Conclusions.** The development of the concept of “perezhivanie” can open a new dimension in the theory and practice of psychological and pedagogical work with special needs children, their families, as well as in the topic of inclusion – in organizing the process of including a special child in society.

Keywords: perezhivanie, cultural-historical psychology, special psychology, soul, children with special needs

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Понятие «переживание» в трудах Л.С. Выготского и перспективы его раскрытия в современной теории и практике специальной психологии

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Резюме

Контекст и актуальность. Понятие «переживание» у Л.С. Выготского не является в полной мере разработанным, но достаточно часто встречается в его последних работах. Л.С. Выготский в своих работах как бы нащупывает содержание понятия «переживание», и при этом именно о переживании пишет как о динамической единице сознания. Развитие дефектологии, а затем и специальной

психологии как научного психологического направления, работающего с детьми с особенностями в развитии, неразрывно связано с именем Льва Семеновича Выготского. Актуализация понятия «переживание» может иметь важное значение в контексте психолого-педагогической помощи особым детям, усиливая ее гуманистическую направленность, а также операционально уточняя методические разработки. **Цель.** Определить роль понятия «переживание» в системе ценностей специальной психологии, а также то, каким образом это понятие изменяет отношение к теории и практике работы с детьми с особенностями развития. **Методы и материалы.** Теоретический анализ работ Л.С. Выготского и его последователей, а также феноменологическое описание историй из практики взаимодействия с особым ребенком и его близкими, в которых проявляется ценность переживания, изменяющего отношение к действительности и поведение детей с особенностями в развитии. **Результаты.** Проведенный анализ указывает на перспективность разработки понятия «переживание» для смены парадигмы исследований в рамках культурно-исторической психологии в целом и специальной психологии в частности. **Выводы.** Разработка понятия «переживание» может открыть новое измерение в теории и практике психолого-педагогической работы с особыми детьми, их семьями, а также в теме инклюзии — в организации процесса включения особого ребенка в общество.

Ключевые слова: переживание, культурно-историческая психология, специальная психология, душа, дети с особенностями психофизического развития

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What is all this about, what is it about?
We understand little in life.
It is a riddle, a mystery, a darkness,
But you can live like this,
Without understanding a single word.
After all, a tear still shines,
And silver laughter sounds,
And the poor heart beats.
Larisa Miller

The development of the theory and practice of working with children with pronounced psychophysical characteristics is directly related to the name of Lev Semenovich Vygotsky. A broad and multifaceted field of knowledge with the telling name of "defectology" received a qualitatively new direction of development in connection with the scientific insights of Lev Vygotsky, his associates, students and followers. The cultural-historical theory was created not in the abstract from the demands of life, but precisely with the focus on solving real practical problems, including the tasks of teaching children with developmental disabilities. On the one hand, the defectology that existed at that time was, according to A.A. Puzyrei (1986), one of the sources of the cultural-historical theory, on the other hand, this theory itself became the methodological and theoretical basis of modern defectology, including special psychology as its structural component.

The idea of the development of higher mental functions, the key role of symbolic mediation, the need to include a special child in culture and, accordingly, the development of special developmental bypasses — this huge layer of new ideas and practical moves in defectology was based on the brilliant reflections of Lev Semenovich Vygotsky. Special psychology as an ap-

plied branch to the greatest extent allows testing and applying the general theoretical provisions of L.S. Vygotsky to a specific area of reality and is the basis for checking the truth of these theoretical premises and developments.

And now I would like to draw attention to the concept of "perezhivanie", which can be traced in the works of Lev Semenovich Vygotsky, which he emphasizes in his latest articles, pointing to "perezhivanie" as a possible dynamic unit of analysis of consciousness. It is this concept that can be of particular importance in the context of psychological and pedagogical assistance to special needs children, their families, and society as a whole, strengthening, on the one hand, its humanistic inclusive focus, and on the other hand, requiring an increasingly clear, detailed and thorough development of the general direction and specific methods of working with different children.

Let me say right away that this work does not set the task of a detailed and deep analysis of the concept of "perezhivanie" itself, does not solve the problem of finding a clear definition of this concept, but an attempt is made to identify the value of this concept and show the need for its further development to strengthen and deepen the positions of cultural-historical psychology

in general and special psychology in particular — as a practice of cultural-historical psychology. The article presents reflections that are based, on the one hand, on the works of Lev Semenovich Vygotsky from different periods of his life, and on the other hand, on the author's own active practice of working with special needs children.

By accepting and developing the concept of "perezhivanie" as the main one, as the core one for human psychology, as a dynamic unit of consciousness, we may be able to come closer to such a substance that is not amenable to direct scientific research, but at the same time very important for psychology, as the soul. At the same time, it must be acknowledged that at the beginning of the 20th century, when the development of the cultural-historical concept began, there was a very strong desire to refuse to mention the soul, to disown the metaphysical part of psychology, which is not amenable to strict scientific study from a natural-scientific standpoint. At that time, the position of creating a new man, building a new, more perfect society was actively manifested, therefore the new psychology (according to L.S. Vygotsky himself) was oriented toward materialism, objectivism and the biosocial basis in man (Vygotsky 1999, pp. 14–15). But experiments in building a new man and a new just society throughout the 20th century, frankly speaking, did not lead to positive results. And now, at the present time, in the 21st century, after all the experiments to create a new man, as well as in connection with the developments and rapid progress in the field of artificial intelligence, the task is to establish how to be a man, and then how to remain a man. And this is already a difficult task, and this is more than enough in general. Here I join the thoughts of A.G. Asmolov that at the present time it is time to realize and accept the fact that in general it is difficult to be a man and that it is very difficult to preserve the soul and human dignity in rapidly changing civilizational conditions (Asmolov, 2025, p. 28). At the current historical stage, most likely, the task is to preserve the original human dimension, which is not subject to copying and reproduction by artificial intelligence. And this dimension may be precisely the "perezhivanie" that is closest to the mysterious soul of man, which eludes direct scientific study, but manifests itself in artistic descriptions that recreate and awaken experiences, and can lead to a deep inner understanding and awareness of that basis of life that usually defies verbal description and rational explanation.

It is surprising that Lev Semenovich Vygotsky in his earliest works, which some authors consider pre-psychological, delved deeply into issues related to the existential metaphysical manifestations of the soul: ("Tragicomedy of Searching" (2022), "The Tragedy of Hamlet" (1998), "Psychology of Art" (1998). Later, already in those works that are directly psychologi-

cal, Vygotsky carefully developed the mechanics of the work of mental processes, the mechanics of their transition from lower natural functions to higher, arbitrary and self-regulating ones. But then, in his last articles, he came to the need to revise the starting point, the unit of psychological analysis and settled on the concept of "perezhivanie", which nevertheless again brings us closer to the search for the unique integrity of the soul of each person. I think that this view of the consideration of the dynamics of the content of the works of Lev Semenovich Vygotsky is promising for further work on the development of cultural-historical psychology. It is not worth stop at quoting Vygotsky's texts, we must try to understand the logic of the movement of his thoughts and continue to develop the content that develops the cultural-historical concept and its practice, in particular special psychology.

And if now, at this historical stage in the 21st century, we boldly look reality in the eye, a reality in which the issues of preserving human dignity and the uniqueness of his soul are extremely relevant, and after that we boldly and clearly accept into development Vygotsky's idea of perezhivanie as a dynamic unit of consciousness, then new perspectives will open up — a whole range of questions and problematizations will be actualized again, starting from existential questions (which is very important!) and ending with more technical and operational ones, clarifying the concepts of cultural-historical psychology, such as "cultural development", "higher mental functions", "zone of proximal development", "arbitrariness", "mediation", etc. I also believe that it is precisely within the framework of special psychology and pedagogy in direct work with special needs children that the meaning of experience as a dynamic unit of consciousness becomes even more distinct.

Let's start with the fact that Lev Semenovich Vygotsky in one of his last works "The Problem of Mental Retardation" points out the absence of a positive characteristic of the personality traits of a mentally retarded child (Vygotsky, 2003, p. 324). And this is really so, unfortunately. Let's admit honestly that the very name of the vast field of knowledge "defectology" focuses on the defect, which, of course, inevitably causes a negative semantic connotation. No matter how hard we try to maintain positive humanistic attitudes, the initial mention of the defect invariably leads to the image of a breakdown, a shortcoming, a flaw that a child with special psychophysical development has. And we must admit that this is a big problem — the belittlement of the value of a person if he was born (or in the course of life became) different from typical development, especially in the direction of reducing some adaptive capabilities. After all, when you read a scientifically substantiated description of, say, a mentally retarded child, you come across the fact that everything is worse, less, more primitive, etc. But life shows that this is not al-

ways and not entirely true, that in certain moments in life a child or adult with mental retardation can show himself to be very worthy and even wise (I'm not afraid of such a word). And perhaps it is not without reason that in his work entitled "The Problem of Mental Retardation" Lev Semenovich Vygotsky postulates the need for a holistic consideration of affect and intellect, which probably underlies the concept of "perezhivanie": "We must rise above the isolated metaphysical consideration of intellect and affect as self-sufficient entities, and recognize their internal connection and unity" (Vygotsky, 2003, p. 354).

Returning to the problem of positive characteristics, let us note the following fact: despite the existing "defect", for example, a decrease in intellectual capabilities, this child with developmental disabilities lives, and he already has experiences in which, to one degree or another, his own unique life flows, at one level or another, is recorded, is realized. And this in itself is valuable. And if there are any violations or deficits — sensory, cognitive, operational (activity-related) or a complex combination of them — then this does not at all diminish the life of the child and his family. Moreover, these experiences can be so deep that they can lead to such realizations that it would be difficult to even expect or anticipate their appearance in a person (child or adult) with reduced intelligence or impaired mental functions. But practical experience of communication and interaction with special needs children and adults shows that such deep realizations happen. It also happens that ordinary, normotypic people do not always get into this depth, they can, as it were, skip past the experiences that give these non-standard deep realizations.

As an example, we can turn to the remarkable description of the girl Rebecca, created by the famous British psychoneurologist Oliver Sacks (Sacks, 2006, pp. 228–238). Rebecca had a pronounced developmental disorder caused by genetic deviations. I will quote the author's description: "... Rebecca had a partial cleft palate, which caused a whistling in her speech; short, stumpy fingers, with blunt, deformed nails; and a high, degenerative myopia requiring very thick spectacles — all stigmata of the same congenital condition which had caused her cerebral and mental defects. She was painfully shy and withdrawn, feeling that she was, and had always been, a 'figure of fun'" (Sacks, 2006, p. 229). Oliver Sacks, as a qualified psychoneurologist, noted that Rebecca's intellectual abilities were also limited: "gross perceptual and spatio-temporal problems, and gross impairments in every schematic capacity — she could not count change, the simplest calculations defeated her, she could never learn to read or write, and she would average 60 or less in IQ tests (though doing notably better on the verbal than the performance parts of the test)..." (Sacks, 2006, p. 230).

But at the same time, Dr. Sacks noted the girl's attraction to books, by the way, she showed deep attachments, she was characterized by strong experiences, which she, surprisingly, knew how to express in ways accessible to her: "...the language of feeling, of the concrete, of image and symbol, formed a world she loved and, to a remarkable extent, could enter. Though conceptually (and 'propositionally') inept, she was at home with poetic language, and was herself, in a stumbling, touching way, a sort of 'primitive', natural poet. Metaphors, figures of speech, rather striking similitudes, would come naturally to her, though unpredictably, as sudden poetic ejaculations or allusions..." (Sacks, 2006, p. 229).

Oliver Sacks is surprised that despite all her defects, Rebecca possessed harmony, that her inner world of experiences was full of deep contemplation, which allowed her to accept and comprehend life in some of its important essential categories. "but at some deeper level there was no sense of handicap or incapacity, but a feeling of calm and completeness, of being fully alive, of being a soul, deep and high, and equal to all others. Intellectually, then, Rebecca felt a cripple; spiritually she felt herself a full and complete being..." (Sacks, 2006, p. 230).

"What was the basis of her integrity and balance?" Oliver Sacks wonders. "The answer lay outside the realm of schemas and abstractions. I found myself thinking of her fondness for tales, for narrative composition and coherence. Is it possible, I wondered, that this being before me — at once a charming girl, and a moron, a cognitive mishap — can use a narrative (or dramatic) mode to compose and integrate a coherent world, in place of the schematic mode, which, in her, is so defective that it simply doesn't work? And as I thought, I remembered her dancing, and how this could organize her otherwise ill-knit and clumsy movements" (Sacks, 2006, p. 232).

So, the reason for such integrity may be in the unique coherence of internal experiences, in which the mental processes included in this unity are dynamically successfully and harmoniously combined, which somehow express the secret of Rebecca's soul? In addition, I highlighted the words of Oliver Sacks about the artistic, dramatic method, i.e. about the view of life that was very close to Lev Semenovich Vygotsky. In order to fully illustrate my thoughts, I will allow myself to quote a fairly large excerpt from this narrative.

I saw Rebecca sitting on a bench, gazing at the April foliage quietly, with obvious delight. Her posture had none of the clumsiness which had so impressed me before... She could have been any young woman enjoying a beautiful spring day. This was my human, as opposed to my neurological, vision.

As I approached, she heard my footsteps and turned, gave me a broad smile, and wordlessly gestured. 'Look at the world,' she seemed to say. 'How beautiful it is.' And then there came out, in Jacksonian spurts, odd, sudden, poetic ejaculations: 'spring', 'birth', 'growing', 'stirring',

'coming to life', 'seasons', 'everything in its time'. I found myself thinking of Ecclesiastes: 'To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven. A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time ...' This was what Rebecca, in her disjointed fashion, was ejaculating — a vision of seasons, of times, like that of the Preacher.

Having realized that Rebecca remains a complete and harmonious being in conditions that allow her to organize herself artistically, I was able to go beyond the formal, mechanical approach and discern the human potential hidden within her...

The goal of psychological and neurological testing is not just to find flaws but to break a person down into their component functions and deficits. As expected, this approach left Rebecca in tatters. But now, on this spring day, miraculously, before my eyes, the disparate parts had come together to form a harmonious and balanced being...

We pay too much attention to our patients' defects and too little to their surviving abilities; Rebecca was the first to point this out to me. To use technical jargon once more, we are too much concerned with 'defectology' and too little with 'narratology,' the forgotten and absolutely necessary science of the concrete (Sacks, 2006, p. 235).

Then, in November, Grandma died, and the light and joy of April turned to darkness and sorrow. Rebecca was shaken, but she held herself with remarkable dignity. This fortitude — this new spiritual dimension — added another plane to the bright, lyrical side of her soul that had so struck me before.

I went to see her immediately after hearing the sad news, and she — frozen with grief — received me in her little room in the now-deserted house. Her speech again reminded me of Jackson's 'eruption,' but this time it consisted of short exclamations full of bitterness and suffering:

'Why did she leave?!' Rebecca cried, adding, 'I'm not crying for her; I'm crying for myself.' And then, after a pause: 'Granny's fine. She's in her Long House.'

The Long House! Was it her own image or a subconscious response to the words of Ecclesiastes?

'I'm so cold,' she went on, huddled — 'but it's not outside. Winter is inside. Cold as death.' She finished: 'Grandma was a part of me. A part of me died with her.'

It was a real grief, and Rebecca emerged in it as a full-fledged personality — complete and tragic — without a hint of mental retardation. After half an hour, warmth and life began to return to her, and, having thawed slightly, she said:

It's winter now. I'm dead, but I know that spring will come again.

Rebecca was right: the healing work of grief was slow, but the wound gradually healed. An old aunt, the sister of the deceased grandmother, who had now moved in

with Rebecca, helped a lot. The synagogue, the religious community, and above all the shiva ritual and the special position of the 'mourner' helped. I hope that frank conversations with me brought her some relief. Finally, dreams helped, which she recounted vividly. These dreams precisely followed the known stages of healing of a mental wound (Sacks, 2006, p. 234).

In the above-proposed fragment of Oliver Sacks' story, it is clearly seen that the change of focus in psychological analysis — from Rebecca's physical, adaptive, intellectual disabilities to her experiences — "perezhivanie" — opens up a new dimension in the perception and understanding of this girl as a person with a living soul, perceiving and realizing her life; a girl who deeply and wisely experiences and realizes important life events. And we see truly positive characteristics of Rebecca's personality; we feel the value of her life, the lives of those around her, and life in general.

I would also like to tell you one of my personal stories that made me think about the importance of a child's experiences — "perezhivanie" — about the soul, about the possibilities of mutual understanding not only and not so much through words. This story happened to me and to a boy, Yaroslav, six years old. Yaroslav has a complex developmental disorder associated with a genetically determined disease called tuberous sclerosis, which — along with somatic disorders — also causes damage to the nervous system: epilepsy, speech disorders, and intellectual decline. The boy underwent complex treatment associated with surgical intervention on the brain to reduce epilepsy — as one of the consequences of the underlying disease — and he still takes anticonvulsants. Of course, many skills that are easy for ordinary children to learn are difficult for Yaroslav; at six years old he practically did not speak. My task was to establish communication with the child using pictograms — a way to include mediation in communication in ways accessible to him. It should be said that despite severe impairment in speech communication, Yaroslav is actually a sociable boy — facial expressions, vocalization, behavior — all speak for him; but he cannot speak in the usual way — in words or speech — except for agreement "yes" and, more rarely, refusal "no." He is happy to interact with others, but it is difficult for him to accept and understand those games and tasks which require obedience, repetition of desired actions, quick learning of skills — most often useful or convenient for adults. That's why Yaroslav has a prickly nature; disagreement; a desire to make reality convenient for himself rather than for adults who constantly demand something that is probably useful but boring or suspicious.

Learning to exchange images with Yaroslav was difficult. The boy avoided even touching the pictures, wanted to get what he wanted immediately or bypass the proposed rules. And if he didn't get it, he refused to interact at all and started looking for another ac-

tivity. And he always came up with something! Even in a practically empty room, where all the toys were with an adult, Yaroslav found a piece of paper, simply stamped his feet, took off his socks, and always looked at the adults' reaction, provoking them to interact on his terms.

But gradually, Yaroslav and I managed to make positive friends with the cards and to understand that they can and should be passed around or glued to a tablet because it helps to play and communicate.

And now I am approaching the key dramatic story with Yaroslav. We met again at the lesson, and again he had a certain stubbornness to do things his own way and not agree to my suggestions. Yaroslav played with my toys for a while and even asked for a card, but then tried to snatch the toy; I did not allow it without exchanging the card. The boy showed a reaction of free resistance and began to look for something interesting in the practically empty room — after all, I am the "banker" — I have all the toys, which I will gladly give out but only in exchange for a card with the appropriate picture.

Yaroslav began stubbornly looking for a replacement for my toys. And, oh horror! In the far corner of the room under the radiator, he found a piece of glass. Indeed, a month earlier, another boy broke a glass mug in this room; we carefully cleaned everything up — there seemed to be no traces left — but not for Yaroslav: he found it! This is his superpower — to find something unexpected for others and change their plans and intentions.

Of course, Yaroslav was happy! Such a large piece of glass that you can carry in your hand; through which you can look at the light; with which you can scratch a wall or a chair — how many games you can come up with using this piece of glass! And most importantly — you can be independent from an adult, from his box of toys, and from his demands — even such minimal ones as exchanging a card for a toy.

My task was to take away this dangerous object — which, of course, is not a toy for a child. It was obvious that running after it and taking it away was dangerous — most likely Yaroslav would regard it as a game; if he tried to take it away himself, he might squeeze the glass in his palm by force — and then everything would really be bad.

I tried to outwardly treat his find as emotionally calmly as possible, not to run after him, but at the same time enthusiastically playing with my toys from the box. In the end, Yaroslav came up and became interested in the massager, which was humming and rattling. The boy came up to the table where I was sitting and put the piece of glass down; at the same time, he looked at me very expressively, as if saying: "This is my toy and you can't touch it." But what could I do — I, of course, quickly grabbed this piece of glass and threw it out the window. Yaroslav's reaction was immediate, it was pre-

dictable and fair — he was offended, indignant, because his only toy that he personally found was treacherously taken away from him! The boy threw himself on the floor, screamed, turned to the wall and was not going to talk to me anymore.

I paused to think, and, frankly, in quiet despair, I sank to the floor by the wall next to Yaroslav, who was lying and screaming in despair. I would like to emphasize the similarity of our experiences: I was also in despair, because the lesson was ruined, because such a treacherous action of mine could forever break the thin bridge of trust that we had been building for so long... Experiencing the full depth of the failure, I began to speak in a quiet, calm voice with complete respect and sympathy for his experiences, his *perezhivanie*. Slowly and with all sincerity, I told him that I was very sorry, that I understood his offense and sympathized with him very much, because it was his toy. But I had to take it away, because in fact it was a very dangerous object, not a toy. And I apologized for my treachery. I offered to look at my toys and choose what he liked. I really empathized with him and shared my experiences — "*perezhivanie*". Let me remind you that the boy was non-verbal and the question of his complete understanding of my words remained open, but in addition to words there were also my emotional experiences, my attitude towards Yaroslav, towards his and my actions in the situation.

Surprisingly, after a while Yaroslav got up from the floor, came up to me and pointed to a balloon. I asked: "Should I blow up the balloon?" — He answered: "Yes." Then we played together, Yaroslav took the cards and passed them on, looked at similar pictures on the cards — a blue ball and a light blue balloon. He tried to figure out what was drawn there so that he could ask me for it. And after some time he just came closer, hugged me tightly and trustingly — these were the most precious moments of understanding and gratitude.

After the lesson, while Yaroslav was with another specialist, I talked to his mother. I told her how the lesson went and how I managed to get out of a difficult situation with a piece of glass, how Yaroslav hugged me in a burst of trust and gratitude. I sincerely told his mother that Yaroslav's ingenuity in finding his alternative activities is in fact an indicator of his personality's activity, his inner experience of independence, his desire for self-reliance. And that I respect him for the challenges that I have to accept from him at each lesson. And his mother also sincerely thanked me. I think that this is very important for parents, for their difficult experiences that fill every day in a difficult, non-standard life situation.

I would like to emphasize one more aspect of the problem of studying *perezhivanie*, namely, taking into account the interaction of *perezhivaniya*. Here is one of the memoirs about the practical work of Lev Semenovich Vygotsky: "... during one of the clinical analyses that

he regularly conducted at the EDI (Experimental Defectological Institute) base and to which almost half of the pedagogical Moscow flocked, Vygotsky was shown a child brought from the countryside. Everyone in the village considered the boy feeble-minded, and only his own grandfather stubbornly did not accept this general verdict and, as it turned out, he was right: the grandson was found to have hearing loss, and the feeble-mindedness was secondary, imaginary. 'Thank you, chief,' the old man said, approaching Vygotsky and bowing low. 'Thank you for recognizing my grandson and treating me, an old man, with respect. I have been to many places, but only here have I seen good people' (Vygotskaya, Lifanova, 1996, pp. 158–159).

It should be noted that what is important in this story is not only identifying the real reason for the deviation in the grandson's development, but also taking into account the grandfather's perezhivaniya, a respectful human attitude to the experience of pain and despair that constantly accompanies the parents of special needs children, because this is the social situation of development in which the child develops, his perezhivanie and his consciousness are formed.

"When you touch suffering, if you manage to give a little strength to the despairing, something strong and true falls upon you — love, probably" — this is a quote from the book "The Not Scary World" by Maria Berkovich. In this book, you can also find many valuable artistic descriptions of communication with special needs children and observations of the perezhivaniya of these children, as well as the author herself (Berkovich, 2014, p. 22).

By paying attention to experiences — "perezhivanie", we will be able not only to explain, but first of all to accept (!) a special child and his family into society, and this radically changes the point of view, allows us not to dwell on shortcomings, defects, but to adjust our view, our optics to what the child already has, and then to search for what resources this child and his family have. I think that almost all specialists working in practice will agree that children manifest themselves differently, reveal their skills and capabilities depending on the attitude towards them, as well as towards their immediate environment. And here a special perspective arises for considering and clarifying the content of the child's zone of proximal development, i.e. the development of the concept of "perezhivanie" will allow us to clarify, continue the development of such an important concept as the "zone of proximal development", and this is especially important and even necessary for special psychology.

If we return to the problem of the social situation of development, in which the child develops, including the inclusion of a sign as the most important element for the formation of higher mental functions, then the drama, the collision that occurs during the interaction

of an adult and a child, the clash of their experiences and the solution of some of their internal tasks by the child himself are very important. According to the law of cultural development, in which higher mental functions are formed, the basis is a contradiction, conflict, dramatic collision between a child and an adult (Veresov, 2016). I think it is important to keep in mind that this law works in both directions; a new understanding, awareness through experience can appear not only in a child, but also in an adult. And these mutual experiences not only matter and create the social situation of development itself, but also determine the angle of resolution of a dramatically tense social situation. After all, an adult also solves his/her internal problems, and then the question of coordination, mutual understanding between an adult and a child arises, and this is especially acute in the situation of teaching a child with deviations in psychophysical development, since children have different sensitivity, different interests and capabilities that still need to be identified and the situation organized in such a way that an adult can find himself/herself on the same territory of experiences with a child, so that a dramatic collision is not reduced to just a superficial emotional outburst, but systematically affects the entire psyche and leads to new contents of consciousness. If we accept the concept of "experience" as the leading problematic, then we make more vital and truly dramatic the question of how and in what way to create a situation of formation of higher mental functions in a child with special needs, how to provide him/her with cultural development, what kind of workarounds should be built in each specific case. It is also worth considering the impact that a child has on an adult, on his/her experiences, understanding and awareness. And here the process is important, the search itself, movement in the right direction, dynamics, since often achieving the normative level of development of higher mental functions, arbitrariness and self-regulation in behavior in children with special needs is not always possible. We observe human imperfection even under the condition of normotypic psychophysical development, and what can we say about those complex paths of development when there are psychophysiological disorders. But here the movement itself, the direction, any achievements — both large and small — are important, since first of all, it is the experiences, their quality and depth that matter.

And again returning to the question of the soul, we can say with confidence that it is in special psychology, as in no other field of psychology, that the problem of the existence of consciousness and soul in man in conditions of imperfection, the breakdown of the biological basis of the psyche, aggravated by the situation of social isolation, is acutely revealed in a dramatic way. The tragic note of the deep experience expressed by Lev Semenovich Vygotsky in his brilliant work on Hamlet sounds especially tense: "The very fact of human exist-

tence — his birth, his life given to him, his separate existence, isolation from everything, isolation and loneliness in the universe, abandonment from the unknown world to the known world and his constant dedication to two worlds that flows from here — is tragic" (Vygotsky, 1998, p. 324).

For a special child and his family, this tragedy is especially acutely felt, especially deeply experienced, and from this an incredibly deep existential understanding can be born, although it may not be expressed in a complex, ornate form, but very simply, but hitting the most essential point.

It may seem strange, but I will return to the earliest recorded manuscript of the young Lev Vygotsky, entitled "The Tragicomedy of Searches" (Zavershneva, 2022). In this manuscript, Vygotsky speaks not only about the soul, but also about the path of maturation of the spirit, which passes through the crucible of despair, tragedy and decay, but with the possibility of searching for the meaning and justification of life, constantly groping for an acceptable, possible and worthy way of life for a person. A child's illness, a deviation in his development, a search for an opportunity to organize a worthy way of life in society, capturing the manifestations of his soul — this is probably the greatest existential request, causing deep tragic experiences in parents, and the child himself is in the field of these experiences. The whole world must be justified so that it is possible to live on. Most often, there is no single correct solution, no final reconciliation, but there are searches, there are the most important moments of the emergence of solutions, the emergence of opportunities for reconciliation. The life of a child with special needs must be justified in its entirety, and this justification is contained in life experiences.

Conclusion

1. Recognition of the concept of "perezhivanie" as the main, core concept for cultural-historical psychology in general and special psychology in particular will allow us to treat the value of any person with respect and care, regardless of their intellectual and adaptive capabilities, and will ensure the initial application of an existential and humanistic approach when working with children with special needs. The experiences of each person are unique; they are hidden in the inner world of consciousness, mysterious, and cannot be ranked quantitatively by assigning points, as in assessing cognitive intellectual indicators. This allows us to avoid an unhealthy dichotomy — dividing people into smart and stupid, useful and useless, important and unimportant, promising and unpromising.

2. If we put the concept of "perezhivanie" at the forefront, then special psychology in theory and practice

can be considered as a direction in which it is necessary to consider the value of human life as such and then create conditions for the maximum possible development of mental functions in order to provide support for adaptation and the creation of a decent way of life.

3. The appeal to the concept of "perezhivanie" causes the need for careful work on the operationalization of this concept, the development of its substantiated content, and the definition of what experience is, what its internal components are, and how their changing dynamic unity manifests. To do this, it is necessary to again turn to the works of L.S. Vygotsky, carefully study the law of cultural development formulated by him and how this law manifests itself in life — how, on the basis of this law, a person develops cultural conscious forms of relationship with reality. After all, the main consequence arising from this basic law is the recognition of perezhivanie as a unit of consciousness (Veresov, 2007). Then there is a need to clarify basic concepts of cultural-historical psychology such as "higher mental functions," "zone of proximal development," "mediation," "arbitrariness," etc., taking into account the developed content of the concept of experience.

4. Careful development of the concept of "perezhivanie" leads to the need to clarify methodological approaches in specific areas of work with children with special needs. Taking into account the reality of the child's experiences and his social environment, it is possible and necessary to individualize teaching strategies, more effectively organize a child's life with certain developmental features, optimize interaction with society, and solve inclusion issues — all while taking into account shared experiences. Priority is given to teaching ways of understanding and expressing one's experiences through cultural means and inclusion in social conditions and interactions where a child with special needs (and later an adult) can live with dignity, adapting to difficult life circumstances.

5. When actualizing the content of "perezhivanie," not only does the final result become important but also the process: searching for workarounds, interaction among people's experiences, moments of insight in forming new contents of consciousness. The movement toward seeking normality can be filled with creative experiences; what matters here is not only achieving results but also experiencing important life realizations through these experiences. Development occurs constantly; not only does an adult teach a child and contribute to his consciousness development, but a child also teaches an adult — filling his life with new challenges that lead to deeper understanding. The goal is not merely measurable social success but daily work on creating one's own life story — composed of various experiences embodied in real actions — where each day gains special value through a search for meaning even in simple everyday tasks.

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The thinking body in social space: philosophical foundations of inclusion in the framework of the cultural-historical approach (based on the works of L.S. Vygotsky and E.V. Ilyenkov)

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to analyze how the philosophical ideas of L.S. Vygotsky and E.V. Ilyenkov can be used today to understand and interpret the concept of social inclusion. In his reflections, Ilyenkov relied on Spinoza's ideas that thinking is inseparable from the "thinking body". Although modern discussions of inclusive education more often discuss the concepts of "autonomy", "authenticity" and "embodiment", they paradoxically lack the concept of "subject" which was central to Soviet educational psychology created in the cultural-historical tradition. It can be assumed that the reason for this is an overly rational and intellectualized idea of this "subject". This means that if in this tradition we discuss a child with a disability as a subject of pedagogical influence as a "thinking body", there is a risk that the emphasis will again be on the word "thinking" and not on the word "body". A rationalized arrangement of accents will exclude the idea of "affect" in all discussions of a self-determining subject as the goal of pedagogical influence and child development in general. However, if the goal of education, including inclusive education is to imagine Spinoza's "thinking body" acting in the space of other bodies as a subject, then "subject" may turn out to be the concept that will combine autonomy, authenticity and embodiment. From the point of view of the cultural-historical approach the "thinking body" moves among bodies that are according to Ilyenkov (following Marx) are "non-organic bodies of human". This environment consists almost completely of the objects that were made by humans or adjusted by humans for humans' use. On the other hand, the thinking body moves among other "thinking bodies", that is, in the social environment. It is this movement (which simply cannot be divided into two different types of movement in two different environments) that forms the "thinking body" both as a "body", with its affects and physical reactions and as "thinking" with its understanding of the world and attitude towards it. Using this interpretation of human being is possible to come up with additional aspects for conceptualizing "inclusion"

Keywords: E.V. Ilyenkov, L.S. Vygotsky, Spinoza, intellectual disabilities, "thinking body", social inclusion

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Мыслящее тело в социальном пространстве: философские основания инклюзии в рамках культурно-исторического подхода (по материалам работ Л.С. Выготского и Э.В. Ильенкова)

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Резюме

Целью данного исследования является анализ того, как философские идеи Л.С. Выготского и Э.В. Ильенкова могут быть использованы сегодня для понимания и интерпретации понятия социальной инклюзии. В своих размышлениях Ильенков опирался на идеи Спинозы о том, что мышление неотделимо от «мыслящего тела». При том, что в современных дискуссиях об инклюзивном образовании чаще обсуждаются понятия «автономности», «аутентичности» и «воплощенности», в них парадоксальным образом отсутствует понятие «субъекта», которое было центральным для советской педагогической психологии, созданной в культурно-исторической традиции. Можно предположить, что причиной этого является слишком рациональное и интеллектуализированное представление об этом «субъекте». Это значит, что, если в данной традиции обсуждать ребенка с инвалидностью как субъекта педагогического воздействия в качестве «мыслящего тела», есть риск, что акцент опять окажется на слове «мыслящее», а не на слове «тело». Рационализированная расстановка акцентов исключит представление об «аффекте» во всех рассуждениях о самоопределяющемся субъекте как цели педагогического воздействия и развития человека в целом. Однако если целью образования, включая инклюзивное образование, представить «мыслящее тело» Спинозы, действующее в пространстве других тел, как субъекта, то «субъект» может оказаться тем понятием, которое соберет в себе и автономность, и аутентичность, и воплощенность. С точки зрения культурно-исторического подхода, «мыслящее тело» движется среди тел, которые являются «неорганическими телами человека», т. е. в среде предметной. С другой стороны, мыслящее тело движется среди других «мыслящих тел», т. е. в среде социальной. Именно это движение, которое, в принципе, невозможно разделить на два разных типа движения в двух различных средах, и формирует «мыслящее тело» и как «тело», с его аффектами и физическими реакциями, и как «мыслящее» с его пониманием мира и отношением к нему. Используя такую интерпретацию человека, можно подойти и к дополнительным возможностям концептуализации понятия «инклюзии».

Ключевые слова: Э.В. Ильенков, Л.С. Выготский, Спиноза, интеллектуальные нарушения, «мыслящее тело», социальная инклюзия

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The concept of inclusion came to the Russian-language academia from Western literature, and due to this fact, most authors working with this concept both in theory and practice prefer to conduct discussions about this concept referring to Western philosophers (Shemanov, 2014; Alekhina, Shemanov, 2022). This approach seems logical, since in Russian-language literature this concept has not been directly discussed and has not been the subject of philosophical consideration until recently. The question of whether a term can be considered from the point of view of ideas that existed before its emergence may seem illegitimate, but such an analysis is often the only way to situate a new term

within the generally accepted categories and semantic structures already available in a given community. This text presents an attempt to conceptualize the concept of inclusion, namely social inclusion related to disability, within the framework of cultural-historical approach, using the works of E.V. Ilyenkov and L.S. Vygotsky.

To begin with, it is worth referring to the authoritative definition of the term. Below are definitions from two of the world's most popular dictionaries. The definition from the Cambridge Dictionary is very general and says that inclusion is “the idea that everyone should be able to enjoy the same facilities, activities and experiences, including people with disabilities or other prob-

lems”¹. A more detailed definition is in the Oxford Dictionary: “the practice or policy of providing equal access to opportunities and resources for people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized, such as those who have physical or intellectual disabilities and members of other minority groups”².

Both of these definitions are good, although they are functional rather than conceptual, which is perhaps why neither answers the question: “To what end?” or “Why should we provide this equal access?”; and to answer these two questions, a third (and most important) question must be answered: “What will this equal access actually do for people with disabilities?” Really “equal” opportunity, as it says? Probably not likely. On the other hand, in liberal discourse, to say “equal opportunity” is quite enough, because afterwards it depends on how the person is going to use this opportunity. And here it is worth paying attention to the term “people with intellectual disabilities”, and add also “people with mental disabilities”. In general, everyone else, including people with physical problems or minorities, are quite capable of evaluating and utilizing opportunities in one way or another. They are also able to find some meaning and purpose for their use. But what about people with intellectual and mental health problems? How can we get to the core of their inner world and include them in society? And include them as who or what? And most importantly, for what purpose? What is it for us and these people (if we decide to divide our society into “us” and “them” for analytical purposes)?

Of course, the answers to these questions apply to all excluded groups and individuals, but by placing these questions in the context of so-called ‘mental abnormality,’ it is possible to expose an irreparable flaw in such definitions, which tend to be used for policy-making and pedagogical interventions; these definitions miss the point. To speak to this essential point, philosophers who attempt to provide a substantive definition of inclusion ask how does this concept apply to people with intellectual disabilities (Shemanov, 2014). Many authors have already criticized the constructivist approach to the social model of disability on which inclusive policies and practices are based. In addition, in disability studies there are authors who consider people not just as “equals” and in this sense “the same,” but also as “others” who have the right to individual and collective expression of their otherness within the framework of the cultural, rather than social, model of disability (Devlieger et al., 2003).

Nevertheless, turning to the Soviet philosophical tradition allows us to consider the concept of inclusion

from a different perspective and to outline ways of understanding it anew for interaction with people whose form of disability seems to be the most problematic — with people who have intellectual or mental disabilities — thus clarifying the very concept of inclusion.

The prevailing contemporary ethics in disability studies is primarily concerned with the opposition between the “social” and “medical” models of disability. The social model, unlike the medical model, focuses not on the individual and his or her bodily (read disease!) problems but on the characteristics of the social environment, which perceives a person with a disability as “not-normal.” It is precisely because of the characteristics of the environment — from infrastructure to attitudes towards people with disabilities as a form of illness or some kind of “exotic” — that such people are hardly seen on our streets and in public places, let alone their active participation in political or public life, or even just being in the workplace. It should be recognized that the social model works quite well for physical and sensory problems, which can be overcome by creating a “barrier-free infrastructure” and changing attitudes towards people with these types of disabilities. When it comes to certain psychological disabilities — individuals with ASD or schizophrenia who have high intellectual functioning are now also accepted in some communities and workplaces. Nevertheless, significant intellectual disabilities and actual antisocial mental disorders are rarely at the center of policy discussions. They are either avoided or placed on a general list of “people for inclusion,” among many others, without much detail (as is done in the dictionary definition above). The situation seems to be that when we talk about mental disorders, the old debates of so-called “biogenetic” and “sociogenetic” approaches loom behind all documents — from laws to inclusive schools’ charters.

This opposition between “biological” and “social” in human being was extremely important and at some moment very typical for Soviet psychology. Today, this opposition is constantly masked by various kinds of “bio-socio-cultural” conceptualizations designed to reconcile this contradiction. That is why it is now so important to turn to the legacy of such a radical Soviet thinker as Ewald Ilyenkov, who never gave anything “biological” a single chance in the interpretation of human behavior and never tired of repeating in these words or the others that “...everything human in man... is 100% — not 90 or even 99 — the result of the social development of human society...”. (Ilyenkov, “Biological and Social in a man”³, see as well Ilyenkov, 1968). However, nowadays, one can easily come across the following articles

¹ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/inclusion> — last visit on 1.08. 2024.

² <https://global.oup.com/academic/category/dictionaries-and-reference/?lang=en&cc=gb> — last visit on 1.08.2024.

³ <http://caute.ru/ilyenkov/texts/sch/biosoc.html>

even in linguistics journals (and who would doubt that speech is a purely human characteristic?): “Language in the bio-socio-cultural concept: lexical and grammatical ‘levels’” (Druzhinin, Karamalak, 2017). Such texts are based on the works of famous neuropsychologists such as U. Maturana and F. Varela, and cognition in them is defined through the special structure of “neural networks distributed throughout the human body and ensuring the operation of higher nervous activity in an infinite variety of structural interactions” “man-environment” through certain cognitive/learning mechanisms, i.e. literal ‘memorization’ of the organism’s sensorimotor reactions to repeated (recurrent) and complicating (recursive) external stimuli, resulting in the construction of this or that behavioral distinction – knowledge.” (Druzhinin, Karmalak 2017, p. 5; Maturana, Varela, 2001). About such interpretations of the human psyche (which, in fact, do not differ in any way from the description of the animal psyche) Ilyenkov sarcastically wrote 40 years ago that they lead “to a ‘socio-bio-chemical-electrophysical-microphysical-quantum-mechanical’ understanding of the essence of man.” (Ilyenkov, 1984b)

And yet, for all his “sociologizing position,” to what extent did Ilyenkov deny the factor of corporeality in the life of the individual? As a consistent Marxist and materialist, Ilyenkov could in no way follow such a denial. And for him the concept of “body” in the definition of a human being played a huge role. An important part of Ilyenkov’s ideas was based on the views of Benedict Spinoza. In his reflections Ilyenkov relied on Spinoza’s ideas that thinking is inseparable from the “thinking body”. In his turn, Spinoza followed Ren Descartes in the notion that it is possible to separate one body from another only if it is in motion. But for Spinoza, no body can move independently of other bodies; all bodies affect each other in motion. However, if these bodies are “thinking bodies,” they can choose how to move depending on the influence of other bodies. Spinoza went quite far in evaluating the role of motion in relation to thinking. He insisted, for example, that the purely “abstract” idea of the geometric figure of a circle does not come to us from the realm of “pre-existing ideas” but arises after the constant repetition of the movement of our hands drawing circles or following some rounded shape. (Ilyenkov 1984a, pp. 26–47). Ilyenkov’s refusal to separate the bodily from the psychological was based on this very point: “...the thinking and the body are not two different things existing separately and therefore able to interact, but *one and the same thing*, only expressed in two different ways. ... The thinking body cannot cause changes in the thinking, cannot influence the thinking, for its existence as a “thinking body” is thinking. If a thinking body does not move/act, it is no longer a thinking body, but just a body. If it acts, it is in no way influence on thinking, for its very action constitutes thinking. ...

Thinking is *not the product of action, but action itself...*” (Ilyenkov 1984a, pp. 30–31 – italics E.I.).

This idea was literally realized in the method of work with deaf-blind children in Zagorsk, where the whole process of cognition was based on the repetition of movements, and was brilliantly described by Ilyenkov in his unfinished essay “The Poem about the Spoon”. The spoon as the hero of this text was a symbol of the so-called “non-organic” human body, an example of our environment, which is completely transformed by our needs and goals. Here Ilyenkov follows Marx, who develops this idea of Spinoza and says that man, moving in the natural environment, transforms it to suit himself, turning the whole environment into an “extension” of his biological (organic) body (Ilyenkov, 1984a, Ilyenkov, 1984b). In this respect, the “barrier-free environment” that is promoted in the framework of the social model of disability can also be regarded as a part of the “non-organic human body”, an environment customized to certain bodily features.

This idea of Ilyenkov, based on the works of Spinoza and Marx, certainly applies not only to the physical interaction of bodies, but also to psychological and social interaction, since the body that is thinking is in the interaction. According to Spinoza, any collision of bodies is reflected on them in the form of “affect”, and “affect” is defined very simply – what increases the body’s capacity for action (in the broadest sense) can be regarded as positive affect, what reduces the body’s potential is negative affect. However, when considering the moment when the interaction of bodies takes on special significance, it is necessary to turn to the works of another scholar who is at the very center of the line that begins with the ideas of Spinoza and Marx and ends with Ilyenkov’s interpretation of the “thinking body” and the “inorganic human body.” This figure is Lev Vygotsky.

If we retell Vygotsky’s ideas in terms of Spinoza-Ilyenkov, we will get a story about the meeting of some thinking body with other thinking bodies (an adult and a child, a child with other children, etc.), due to which the ability of this body to move-think will increase. Although, in an unfavorable scenario of this encounter, such ability may not change or may even become less. And here the “story of the meeting” makes a turn and comes back to the question of the correlation of biological and social in a human being, in this case in a developing child, and even more precisely in such a child who has certain intellectual disorders, which can make the meeting of thinking bodies problematic. Whence can the problem arise? From the bodily deficiencies of one of the thinking bodies, namely from the mental retardation of the child caused by the specifics of his brain? Vygotsky’s answer to such an assumption is complete disagreement. Moreover, Vygotsky’s position is directly opposed to this assumption (although, at first glance, this assumption seems quite rational and consistent

with common sense). The essence of human development according to Vygotsky is about the development of higher, not elementary mental functions. In this sense, the logic of trying to develop the most primitive skills in a mentally retarded child and avoiding work with thinking is deeply flawed. So, the encounter of any thinking bodies must take place at the level of higher psychological functions.

Vygotsky in his work "On the Question of Compensatory Processes in the Development of the Mentally Retarded Child" wrote about it as follows: "If we speak about the group of mentally retarded children, whose retardation is based on pathological insufficiency or brain damage, then there the core of debility itself and all phenomena related to insufficiency are the most difficult to be pedagogically influenced. They yield only to indirect, training, stimulating constant influence. But since you are powerless to eliminate the root cause, you cannot eliminate the phenomena that belong to the core. It is quite different when we speak of secondary, tertiary, fourth and fifth order complications. They arise on the basis of the primary complication, are removed in the first place and, as one of the modern authors puts it, the removal of a secondary complication in a mentally retarded person changes the whole clinical picture of debility to such an extent that modern clinic would refuse to recognize debility if the process of educational work were brought to an end" (Vygotsky, 1983, p. 130).

In this logic, the developmental disorders of a mentally retarded child are not related to the organic defect itself, but to the fact that secondary disorders arise on its basis, but the cause of these new disorders is not the primary biological deficit, but the wrong work in the process of interaction with such a child. If we return again to the terminology of Spinoza and Ilyenkov – the meeting of "thinking bodies" was incomplete, insufficient, because it did not lead to an increase in the capabilities of this child. For a full-fledged meeting, the child needs an adequate environment and interaction built in a specific way. "Underdevelopment of higher functions is connected with the cultural underdevelopment of the mentally retarded child, with his falling out of the cultural environment, from the "nourishment" of the environment. Because of this insufficiency he did not experience the influence of the environment in time, as a result of which his retardation accumulates, negative properties accumulate, added complications in the form of social underdevelopment, pedagogical neglect. In the environment in which he grows up, he took less than he could; no one tried to connect him with the environment; and if the child was little and poorly connected with the children's collective, secondary complications may arise" (Ibid., p. 129–130). The accumulation of "negative properties" suggests that the "affect" of this encounter of thinking bodies was negative.

The way in which Vygotsky emphasizes the importance of the "children's collective" is noteworthy here. In another text called "The Collective as a Factor in the Development of the Defective Child" he insists on this and says that the children's collective should be diverse (Vygotsky 1983, pp. 196–218). In the part of the article that deals with mentally retarded children, he writes about how important it is that children in the collective have different degrees of mental retardation or levels of development, because this is what helps the retarded child to develop. Interestingly, in the notes to this text, the compilers write a phrase that rather contradicts Vygotsky's own words. Note comments on the word "collective", which appears for the first time in the text in the second paragraph without additional definitions: "When Vygotsky spoke of a collective in relation to defective children, he meant to unite them in a common group according to some single characteristic (age, belonging to the same category of anomaly, degree of development or underdevelopment) (Ibid., p. 354). However, in the article itself, Vygotsky writes the following: "We think that it would be more correct to say not that in free children's collectives new sides of the personality of a profoundly retarded child are revealed (which is true in itself), but, rather, that in these collectives the personality of a profoundly retarded child really finds a living source of development and in the process of collective activity and cooperation rises to a higher stage. Now we can see how profoundly anti-pedagogical is the rule according to which we select homogeneous collectives of retarded children for convenience. By doing this, we not only go against the natural tendency in the development of children, but, what is much more important, we, depriving a mentally retarded child of collective cooperation and communication with other children above him, aggravate rather than alleviate the immediate cause of the underdevelopment of his higher mental functions." (Ibid., p. 209).

This fragment seems to be extremely important for understanding the principles of inclusion from the perspective of cultural-historical approach. As a rule, the well-known (and in many foreign universities – the only known) concept of "zone of proximal development" (ZPD) is by default associated with the interaction between a child and an adult. However, it is much more common for children to understand other children better than adults. No matter how precise and accurate a teacher or educator's task he or she places in the ZPD, children's play and children's interactions with each other are no less, and perhaps even more important for a child's development. Vygotsky was always thinking about a certain zone that sets the perspective for the development of higher mental functions in any child, and he made no exception for children with intellectual disabilities. Another thing is that the requirements to such a "free children's collective" and to the teacher who

works with it can be very high. In the conclusion of the section on mentally retarded children in the article in question, he writes: “We see the paramount importance of the pedagogy of the collective in the whole structure of the education of the retarded child. We see what value is acquired by common collectives of retarded and normal children, what importance is acquired by the selection of groups and proportions of intellectual levels in them. Here we find a basic pedagogical law which is hardly a general law for the whole education of the abnormal child”. (Ibid., p. 210).

Thus, the idea of inclusive education in its very essence is very much in line with the ideas of cultural-historical pedagogy: it makes sense to give children themselves the opportunity for an interaction that will be a meeting of “thinking bodies” with positive affect.

And yet, closing the circle, we should return to the question that was posed at the beginning of this article — what is the purpose of such a meeting? What is the meaning and ultimate goal of inclusion? Of course, the answer to this question is related to the idea of who in general a person is, and in particular, in what capacity a person acts in the philosophy of education, without which it is impossible to talk about social inclusion.

We would like to refer to one of the serious new works that discuss the philosophical and methodological foundations of inclusion, namely the handbook *Philosophical and Methodological Foundations of Inclusive Education* (Alekhina, Shemanov, 2022). The second and third chapters, which provide a theoretical analysis of the various concepts that define our understanding of inclusion, cannot but be admired for how comprehensively and capaciously they present all the concepts important for this topic. Unfortunately, the cultural-historical approach is presented in these chapters in a very short and general block of one page (Alekhina Shemanov, 2022, pp. 123–124), which emphasizes that “the unfolding of this topic in many ways still awaits its researcher”, which is hard to disagree with.

At the beginning of the second chapter of this handbook, a glossary can be found, in which concepts such as “authenticity and autonomy of the individual” are given: “The concept of autonomy is based on the notion of a rational, self-aware, responsible for its volitional decisions Ego, which strives above all for self-actualization and securing for itself this right to autonomy. Authenticity means following oneself, one’s own nature, commitment to the authentic image of one’s own being”. (Alekhina, Shemanov, 2022, p. 59). Both are based on a conceptualization of “self-determination”: “Ch. Taylor distinguishes two aspects of authenticity. The first includes the moments of creativity and construction, associated with independence and even opposition to social rules, which can reach the point of conflict with moral norms. The second, however, requires, according to Taylor, an openness to the horizon of significance, i.e.

a system of life values that claim to be universal (ideas about good and evil, about man and his freedom, about God, etc.). ... Taylor emphasizes the inappropriateness of preferring the first aspect of authenticity (autonomy without reference to a universal horizon of significance) to the detriment of the second (reference to a horizon of significance that presupposes the freedom of the other and rejects violence), since this preference leads to extreme subjectivism and immoralism”. (Ibid.).

Just below, the same glossary discusses the concept of embodied personhood, emphasizing that “social constructionist scholars limit themselves to how the body is represented in the social constructions of the individual or the discourse of society, in its representations and practices, or in culture. The body is reduced to a social construction, to a discourse, or to its representation in a person’s experiences (in the phenomenological approach). In this case, the human personality is considered not as a whole encompassing body and spirit, holistically expressing itself in material culture and its meaning, but only primarily as a source of discourse, in which corporeality is represented in the order of signs, which represent not the bodily reality itself, but social relations (relations of power, dominance, status, etc.).” (Ibid., pp. 59–60). Thus, this manual pays significant attention to the problem of corporeality in different interpretations of disability and its role in the organization of inclusive education. (Ibid.).

In this connection, we would like to return to the notions of the “thinking body” and the “non-organic human body” that Ilyenkov developed. While this manual discusses the concepts of “autonomy,” “authenticity,” and “embodiment,” it paradoxically lacks the concept of the “subject,” which was central to Soviet educational psychology, which was created in the cultural-historical Vygotskian tradition. We can assume that the reason for this is a too rational and will-oriented view of this “subject”. And if we try to discuss the child as a subject of pedagogical influence as a “thinking body”, there is a risk that the emphasis will again be on the word ‘thinking’ rather than on the word “body”. A rationalized arrangement of accents will exclude the idea of “affect” in all discussions of the self-determining subject as the goal of pedagogical influence and the process of human development in general. However, it is worth recalling that the “principle of the unity of affect and intellect” was one of Vygotsky’s leading principles, and Spinoza was the hero of one of his last (unfinished) works.

If the goal of education, including inclusive education, is to conceive of the “thinking body” acting in the space of other bodies as a subject, then the “subject” may turn out to be the notion that brings together autonomy, authenticity and embodiment. From the point of view of the cultural-historical approach, the “thinking body” moves among bodies that are “non-organic human bodies,” that is, in the environment of humanly

adjusted objects (subjects -in the sense of A.N. Leontiev, continuing Vygotsky's ideas). On the other hand, the “thinking body” moves among other “thinking bodies”, that is, in the social environment. It is this movement, which in no way can be divided into two different types of movement, that forms the thinking body both as a “just body”, with its affects and physical reactions, and as a “thinking body”, with its understanding of the world and its attitude to it⁴.

It seems not coincidental that Soviet psychology and philosophy have recently become increasingly popular worldwide. Even if foreign scientists and educators mainly pay attention to its instrumental aspects, Halperin's instrumentalization is different from the tools used, for example, in Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) by behavioral educators and therapists. The same can be said of the Soviet tradition of neuropsychology, originating with A. Luria, a student of Vygotsky, when comparing it with the research abroad that is so fashionable today. Certainly, there are “tools” and “tools”. And understanding the purpose of using these tools is crucial, and it depends precisely on the educational philosophy and on the vision of a human as a “human being”.

In conclusion, I would like to quote Alexander Suvorov, professor of psychology, Ilyenkov's most famous and devoted student and friend from the Zagorsk boarding school for deaf-blind children. Describing the dia-

lectic of the relationship between the “authentic” and the “brought in” in mental development, he wrote: “and provocation with guidance, and one's own attempts; and development, and self-development... — but not that which is laid down in the “genes of daddy and mommy,” but that which is laid down in jointly shared activity...” (Suvorov, 1998, pp. 183–184).

Thus, interpreting inclusion from a cultural-historical approach can stimulate new research that could help answer many relevant questions. What is the ultimate goal of inclusion? Where can we find the ‘authentic’ person in inclusive policies and pedagogies? What happens to the “thinking body” that thinks differently than we are used to when we engage with it? Where will the thinking of a child with mental retardation go if the social environment (even if unconsciously) expects this development to stop sooner or later and remain “insufficient” due to “natural” limitations? How will a person who grows up in an environment where their movement in the social field will be constantly restricted by the negative or ignoring reactions of others behave? Are we really in control of our reactions or are we sending an invisible message to the children about their diagnosis and our expectations? All these questions await answers that cannot be found unless we pay close attention to the philosophical foundations of the pedagogy we create and practice.

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⁴ A discussion of Spinoza's notion of conatus could have been appropriate here, but the scope and aims of this article do not allow it. A more detailed interpretation of conatus and collectivity can be found in my other text (Bagdasarova, 2023)

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The author declares no conflict of interest.

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Ethical approval was not required for this study as it was theoretical in nature and did not involve human participants.

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From tradition to innovation: The cultural-historical vector of educational practices and the socialization of children in contemporary society

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Abstract

The goal of this study is to explore chess teachers' perceptions of the transformation of childhood in the context of cultural-historical psychology, their views on traditional and innovative aspects of chess education, and their impact on the internalisation of value orientations, as well as on the development of children's socialisation and cognitive functions. **Methods.** The empirical part of the study is based on a survey of 104 chess teachers working in Armenian schools. Both quantitative methods (factor and correlation analysis) and qualitative methods (content analysis of open-ended responses) were employed. Particular attention is given to how teachers themselves perceive developmental changes in children, the transformation of value orientations, and their own role in fostering children's agency. **The results.** Teachers view chess as a symbolic activity through which children learn to plan, forecast, and analyze the consequences of their decisions — thus acquiring essential cross-curricular skills.

Keywords: primary school students, meta-subject competencies, chess education, socialization, learning activity, value orientations

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От традиции к инновации: культурно-исторический вектор образовательных практик и социализация детей в современном обществе

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Резюме

Цель исследования — выявить представления преподавателей шахмат о трансформации детства в свете культурно-исторической психологии, их восприятие традиционных и инновационных аспектов шахматного образования и их влияние на интериоризацию ценностей, развитие социализации и когнитивных функций у детей. **Методы.** Эмпирическая часть исследования построена на

анкетировании 104 учителей шахмат в армянских школах. Были применены как количественные методы (факторный и корреляционный анализ), так и качественные (контент-анализ открытых ответов). Отдельное внимание уделяется тому, как сами педагоги осознают изменения, происходящие в детском возрасте, трансформации ценностных установок, а также свое участие в развитии субъектной позиции у ребенка. **Результаты:** Шахматы воспринимаются учителями как знаковая деятельность, в которой ребенок учится планировать, прогнозировать, анализировать последствия своих решений — т. е. формирует базовые метапредметные навыки. **Выводы.** Восприятие шахмат как образовательной практики тесно связано с возрастом, стилем преподавания и личным педагогическим опытом, подтверждается количественными данными, полученными с помощью факторного и корреляционного анализа. Преподаватели воспринимают шахматы не только как инструмент интеллектуального развития, но и как средство формирования личностных, нравственных и педагогических качеств.

Ключевые слова: младшие школьники, метапредметные компетенции, шахматное образование, социализация, учебная деятельность, ценностные ориентации

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Introduction

The study of the characteristics of a 21st-century individual requires examining several interrelated issues. It is particularly important to understand which factors influence personality development and socialisation at different stages of life, and how these influences can be managed. “Since childhood, as a complex system in which a growing individual is formed, now exists in a fundamentally new historical situation and is undergoing deep and serious changes, the need arises for an expanded programme” (Feldstein, 2009).

As a result, educators and experts increasingly highlight problems in children’s development and learning. According to 90% of surveyed teachers, students’ motivation to learn is declining; 82% report issues with concentration and memory (Gevorgyan, 2023). Therefore, it is necessary to analyse how teachers perceive these changes in childhood and how the pedagogical community responds to the challenges involved.

In L.S. Vygotsky’s theory, child development occurs through the acquisition of cultural tools, with play being one of the most important. The transition from traditional play to organised joint educational activity provides a foundation not only for the internalisation of cognitive operations but also for social norms, ethics, and behavioural patterns (Vygotsky, 1984). Modern childhood is being transformed by digital technologies, changing social roles, and new educational demands. This

study also draws on the concept of learning activity as presented in cultural-historical psychology and activity theory, particularly in the works of D.B. Elkonin and V.V. Davydov (Elkonin, 1974; Davydov, 1986), and their followers.

The key features of learning activity include the development of reflection, planning, task condition analysis, and the formation of universal learning actions (Rubtsov & Ulanovskaya, 2020). These features also align with the concept of the child’s agentive position (Zaretsky et al., 2020). One educational practice that meets these criteria and promotes both socialisation and interdisciplinary development is Armenia’s chess education programme.

The Federal State Educational Standard for Primary Education reflects the concept of key competencies (4Cs), defining educational outcomes as abilities in reflection, communication, interaction, and collaboration (Rubtsov, Isaev, & Konokotin, 2022). Contemporary studies (Karakus, 2023; Kazemi et al., 2023; Maracine, Mihaescu, 2023; Sala, Gobet, 2024; Sutar, Patil, 2023; Tachie, Ramathe, 2022), confirm that chess supports the development of interdisciplinary competencies such as critical thinking, planning, self-regulation, and decision-making.

A key role in the development of such competencies is played by joint activity: collaborative discussion, hypothesis coordination, mutual monitoring, and strategy building. Students engaged in activity-based learning show higher indicators not only in cognitive but also in social development.

Research in Armenian schools highlights the perception of chess as a socialising educational activity. In this context, Goncu's idea (1999) is especially relevant — each society defines what is important for a child's development. Research (Polivanova et al, 2013).showed that the plots of children's games reflect interpersonal relations already in the preschool years. The findings (Rogoff et al., 2003) support this position. The introduction of chess into educational practice can be seen as an example of learning where the child masters not only the game but also the principles of strategy, logic, patience, and respect for the opponent.

As Schwartz, Bransford, and Sears (2005) point out, learning through cultural practices allows students to interpret knowledge through personal and cultural relevance.

However, several questions remain unresolved: to what extent do educational practices promote socialisation and value formation? And how well do teachers' perceptions of traditional and innovative methods align with the demands of modern education?

The goal of this study is to explore chess teachers' perceptions of the transformation of childhood in the context of cultural-historical psychology, their views on traditional and innovative aspects of chess education, and their impact on the internalisation of value orientations, as well as on the development of children's socialisation and cognitive functions.

Methods and sample

The study involved 104 chess teachers from various regions of Armenia. The sample included teachers of different ages, teaching experience, and pedagogical styles, allowing the inclusion of a wide range of ideas and practices. To obtain valid and diverse data, the following methods were used:

- Custom-designed questionnaire: Included items about modern children, such as patience, adaptability, and interest in traditional games.

- Rokeach's Value Orientation Method: Teachers ranked values according to how strongly they believed these were formed through chess education.

- Content analysis of educational materials: Chess textbooks, manuals, and digital courses used in schools were assessed. A group of 10 experts (teachers, psychologists, and methodologists) evaluated materials based on 8 criteria.

To analyse quantitative data, the following methods were applied:

- Comparative subgroup analysis
- Correlation analysis
- Factor analysis

Results

The results from the custom-designed questionnaire revealed that teachers with different lengths of teaching experience perceive the value of chess education differently. Teachers who frequently use innovative methods gave significantly higher ratings to chess as a tool for children's socialisation.

Teachers who frequently use innovative methods, such as digital platforms, game-based strategies, and group work, rate the impact of chess on children's socialisation significantly higher. Particularly high ratings are obtained by those who regularly apply innovations, which highlights the importance of a methodological approach in chess instruction (Table 2).

The highest-rated statement was: *“Modern children adapt more quickly to new learning formats.”* (Average score — 3.94). This indicates that the majority of teachers acknowledge that the new generation perceives innovations more easily and adapts more quickly to changes.

The lowest-rated statement was: *“Children's interest in traditional games, including chess, has declined.”* (Average score — 2.49). This figure suggests that most teachers do not share concerns about a decreasing interest in chess.

Table 1

Category of Teaching Experience

In-service teaching experience	Average score	Standard deviation	N
11–20 years	3,24	0,44	38
More than 20 years	3,06	0,47	33
Less than 5 years	3,06	0,53	15
5–10 years	3,21	0,53	18

Table 2

Frequency of Using Innovative Methods

Application frequency	Average score	Standard deviation	N
Sometimes	3,03	0,44	24
Rarely	2,76	0,81	3
Often	3,18	0,47	64
Constantly	3,32	0,47	13

Statements such as “*decreased patience*,” “*deterioration of self-regulation*,” and “*negative influence of digital technologies*” received scores in the range of 3.2 to 3.5, indicating neutral or slightly positive agreement.

The intercorrelation matrix (Table 3) shows the degree of consistency or contradiction in teachers' responses to 7 key statements related to significant changes in primary school children.

The strongest positive correlation was found between the indicators “*Quickly adapt to new formats*” and “*Ability to perform multiple tasks simultaneously*” ($r = 0.45$). This suggests that teachers who view children as quick adapters also tend to rate their multitasking abilities highly.

Moderate positive correlations were found between “*Decline in interest in traditional games*” and “*Digital technologies reduce strategic thinking*” ($r = 0.36$). Moderate correlations were also observed between “*Decline in interest in traditional games*” and “*Self-regulation has worsened*” ($r = 0.32$).

These correlations indicate that teachers who observe a decline in interest in traditional games are also more likely to believe that children are losing self-regulation and strategic thinking skills.

Teachers rated chess highest for its impact on:

- Democratic and civic competence (3.38)
- Independent learning and development (3.36)

Table 3

Spearman Intercorrelation Matrix Based on Chess Teachers' Ratings of Seven Characteristics of Modern Childhood

Parameters	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Less patient and attentive group	1	–0,04	0,12	0,04	0,1	0,19	0,08
2. Group of lower level of interest in traditional games	–0,04	1	0,36*	–0,07	0,1	0,32	–0,06
3. Strategic mindset level decreased because of digital technologies	0,12	0,36*	1	–0,01	0,01	0,22	0,05
4. Speedy adjustment to formats	0,04	–0,07	–0,01	1	0,17	–0,27	0,45*
5. Traditional methods do not always prove to be effective	0,1	0,1	0,01	0,17	1	0,2	0,29
6. Self-regulatory skills have declined	0,19	0,32	0,22	–0,27	0,2	1	0,06
7. Multitasking ability	0,08	–0,06	0,05	0,45*	0,29	0,06	1

Note: «*» —correlation is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 4

Psychological Interpretation of the Impact of Chess Education on the Development of Students' Key Competencies (Based on Teachers' Ratings)

Eight Key Competences of Secondary Education of the Republic of Armenia	Average score	Standard deviation
1. Language and communication competencies	3,07	0,75
2. Autonomous learning and self-growth	3,36	0,71
3. Self-awareness and social skills	3,16	0,74
4. Democratic and civil competencies	3,38	0,69
5. Digital and media literacy	2,7	0,81
6. Cultural competencies	3,16	0,8
7. Mathematical and natural-science competencies	3,22	0,74
8. Economic competencies	3,18	0,83

Value factor analysis identified five dimensions, the most significant being personal and intellectual development, including qualities such as critical thinking, reflection, and social responsibility.

Expert evaluations of chess teaching materials also confirmed the value of the programme, especially in strategic thinking, emotional development, and digital-methodological innovation.

Table 5

**Rotated Factor Loading Matrix for Five Factors
(Terminal and Instrumental Values of Chess Teachers)**

Factor Loadings by Components	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5
T1. Self-discipline	1,421884	1,162856	–0,55186	0,853485	–0,31502
T2. Autonomy	1,856276	1,3832	–0,11291	0,626002	–0,0415
T3. Flexibility	1,877472	–1,83307	–0,70855	0,0507	–0,58551
T4. Creative outlook	1,177311	–2,15923	–1,07705	0,301838	0,335811
T5. Individual stance	1,689758	–0,69353	–0,57259	0,401238	–0,12098
T6. Openness to embrace novelties	1,715524	0,964009	–0,12131	–0,00565	0,339006
T7. Discipline	2,06705	–0,46454	–0,33151	–0,34167	1,062264
T8. Digital tools	1,66184	0,786847	0,342761	0,032285	–0,15229
T9. Motivating learners	1,719723	–0,46968	0,830609	–0,0962	0,136056
T10. Self-coordination	1,785228	–0,14627	0,767975	–1,55484	–0,2736
T11. Creative learners	1,650783	1,619877	–1,14181	–0,7369	0,142857
T12. Educational innovations	1,414023	0,259213	–1,06144	0,005223	0,219193
T13. Public recognition	1,920997	–0,38913	–0,81324	–0,28252	–0,41002
T14. Material prosperity	1,737946	0,691528	–0,30524	0,077581	–0,25603
T15. Self-growth	1,606038	0,416432	–0,50115	–0,17257	–0,6117
T16. Intellectually advanced learners	2,098611	0,087307	0,64425	–0,74693	0,083696
T17. Inner balance	1,944071	0,017614	0,880282	–0,22709	0,042703
T18. Critical thinking	1,897133	0,449946	1,204822	0,83786	0,127055
T19. Social responsibility	1,976346	–0,55433	0,845023	1,133925	–0,20967
T20. Chess traditions	1,918069	–1,49539	0,73254	0,170199	0,152556
T21. Collaboration	0,065109	–0,04971	0,016535	–0,10921	–0,28208
T22. Tolerance	–0,01581	–0,03149	0,100396	–0,1104	–0,33651

Note: the table presents the numerical values of the factor loadings obtained by the principal component method with Varimax rotation.

Table 6

**Expert Evaluation of the Content and Methodological Potential of Chess Teaching
Materials Used in Schools**

№	Indicator	Average score	Standard deviations	Coefficient of Variation
1	Do the instructive materials imparted contribute to the development of a strategic way of thinking?	4,00	0,82	0,20
2	Are the respective sets of digital tools, game-based methods, and group-based methods applied?	4,14	0,90	0,22
3	Do the instructive materials imparted contribute to the development of emotional intelligence, self-expression, and reflection?	4,29	1,11	0,26
4	Are the tasks designed to increase in difficulty, in line with age-based peculiarities, gradually?	3,71	1,25	0,34
5	Are the materials imparted sufficiently inclusive and adjusted to the variety of respective needs?	3,86	1,46	0,38

№	Indicator	Average score	Standard deviations	Coefficient of Variation
6	Are the materials relevant to the formation of the system of values?	3,86	1,46	0,38
7	How emotionally responsive and interested do young learners become due to these assignments/tasks?	4,00	1,53	0,38
8	How do the materials imparted combine the traditional and contemporary pedagogical approaches?	3,67	1,75	0,48

Discussion

This study provides a new perspective on socialisation and the development of key competencies through the lens of the cultural-historical approach. Teachers emphasise chess's role in fostering responsibility, rule-following, and self-management. According to Zuckerman, reflective actions are a key element in the ability to learn. Teachers highlighted that chess helps children plan, accept rules, and develop emotional resilience. The reflective-activity approach also supports student agency when tasks are suitably challenging. Positive views of chess were more common among experienced and flexible teachers. Expert ratings matched teacher feedback, identifying: — Emotional intelligence and reflection — Game-based and group methods — Strategic thinking Factor analysis confirmed five clusters

of educational values: 1. Personal and intellectual development 2. Social recognition and external motivation 3. Pedagogical and organisational skills 4. Humanism and openness 5. Stability and order

Conclusion

The study shows that teachers perceive chess not only as a cognitive tool, but also as a means of fostering personal, moral, and pedagogical values. They associate chess with self-regulation, resilience, and respect for rules.

This view is closely linked to teachers' experience and instructional style, as confirmed by statistical analysis. Thus, chess education can be seen as a culturally significant practice where innovation and tradition are successfully combined.

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Vahan Zh. Sarkisyan — application of statistical, mathematical or other methods for data analysis; conducting the experiment; data collection and analysis; visualization of research results

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Difference not deficit: The Teach-Assess-Teach dialectical pedagogical model for transformative education

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Abstract

Pedagogics is never and was never politically indifferent, since, willingly or unwillingly, through its own work on the psyche, it has always adopted a particular social pattern, political line, in accordance with the dominant social class that has guided its interests.

L.S. Vygotsky (1997b, p. 348)

This quote from Vygotsky indicates how education functions as a mechanism for political ends. This is perhaps most evident in a country such as South Africa where the apartheid regime systematically undereducated and marginalised black¹ students in schools in a bid to produce workers for the, amongst other things, mines. A multicultural society, South Africa has 11 nationally recognised languages, which, together with its history of segregation lends itself to the use of cultural historical theory to understand the complexities in this society, especially in relation to education. Seeking to overcome the segregated education of the past, South Africa embarked in the late 1990s on a move towards inclusive education, where neurodiverse² and neurotypical children would be primarily included in the same classrooms. It is in the notion of inclusion, then, that Vygotsky's understanding of defectology as entailing a dialectical approach to development, that sees development as resulting from how an individual experiences and is experienced in social context provides a useful lens for investigating pedagogy. In this paper a model of pedagogy for inclusive education is outlined with reference to a single case study of students doing their Honour degrees at a university in Cape Town. Findings from 52 students indicate that the model of pedagogy outlined in this paper not only facilitates more interaction in a lecture hall but is also useful for helping students to access high level concepts.

Keywords: defectology; inclusive education; pedagogical model

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¹ The use of racial categories is recognised as problematic in the 21st century. However, these words continue to be used in the South African context and have some ability to focus social justice interventions.

² I use the term neurodiverse here to distinguish children who do not follow the evolutionary norm that neurotypical students do.

Различие, а не дефицит: диалектическая педагогическая модель для преобразующего образования «Обучай — оценивай — обучай»

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Резюме

Педагогика никогда не была политически нейтральной, поскольку, добровольно или вынужденно, через свою работу над психикой она всегда принимала определённый социальный образец, политическую линию в соответствии с господствующим социальным классом, который руководил ее интересами.
Л.С. Выготский (1997b: с. 348).

Приведенный фрагмент текста объясняет, как образование может использоваться для достижения политических целей. Особенно это заметно в Южной Африке, где во времена апартеида чернокожие³ студенты были недообучены и маргинализированы, чтобы подготовить их к тяжелой работе, прежде всего работе в шахтах. Южно-Африканская Республика представляет собой многонациональное общество, в котором 11 официальных языков и богатая история их разделения, что делает важным использование культурно-исторической теории для понимания проблем системы образования. После окончания апартеида в конце 1990-х годов Южная Африка начала переход к инклюзивному образованию — т. е. к тому, чтобы нейроразнообразные⁴ и нейротипичные дети учились вместе в одних классах. В этом контексте идеи Л.С. Выготского о дефектологии помогают понять развитие человека как результат его взаимодействия с обществом и окружающей средой. Это важно для разработки методов обучения, которые учитывают социальный опыт каждого человека. В статье предлагается модель педагогики для инклюзивного образования на основе исследования студентов магистратуры в университете Кейптауна. Анализ данных 52 студентов показывает, что эта модель помогает сделать лекции более интерактивными и способствует лучшему усвоению сложных понятий.

Ключевые слова: дефектология; инклюзивное образование; педагогическая модель

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Defectology and the South African context

The shifts in the South African educational (and political) landscape are not dissimilar to the situation that Vygotsky faced in 1924 when he left Gomel. Much like Moscow in the 1920s, the new democratic dispensation in South Africa post-1994 was concerned specifically with redesigning education so that it would include all children. This change attempted to move the country away from a notion of deficit, which in the past had been informed by IQ scores showing that Black and White children were intellectually different, with Black stu-

dents identified as having sub-optimal IQs, effectively pathologizing Black students as developmentally delayed (Dubow, 1991). Considering this and against a political background of segregation, Black children were given inferior education termed 'Bantu' education, where students were not permitted to learn subjects such as mathematics or science. Similarly, White students who were differently abled were sent to 'special' schools, effectively hidden away from the 'normal' public. The new democratic dispensation of 1994 was, therefore, keen to shift this negative view of students by developing a policy of inclusive education for all.

³ Использование расовых категорий признается проблематичным в XXI веке. Тем не менее, в южноафриканском контексте эти термины по-прежнему применяются и могут способствовать акцентированию внимания на вопросах социальной справедливости.

⁴ Мною использован термин «нейроразнообразные» чтобы отличить детей, которые не соответствуют эволюционной норме, присущей нейротипичным студентам.

The purpose of this paper is to mobilize Vygotsky's defectology work to understand inclusivity in a multicultural, multilingual context like South Africa. It is important to note that Vygotsky's defectology is not synonymous with how we use the term 'special education needs' today. The field of defectology in Russia in his time encompassed the deaf, blind, seriously developmentally delayed, and students with speech and language deficits (Petrovsky & Yaroshevsky, 1998). Blind and deaf students would, of course, be considered neurotypical, while students with serious developmental delays or speech and language impairments would be considered neurodiverse in the 21st century. What I note here is that defectology was not specifically engaged in the study of children who would today be found in inclusive classrooms presenting with behavioral, mental health, or learning difficulties where the etiology of such disorders is found in the social rather than the individual. However, the theoretical foundation of defectology that locates deficits within a dialectical relation between the individual child and the social context certainly provides a basis for this work in inclusive education. Indeed, the move to use defectology to describe learning difficulties, mental health challenges, and emotional behavior has developed since Vygotsky's time (Daniels and Lunt, 1993; Smith-Davis, 2000; Malofeev, 2001; see esp. Smagorinsky (2012) for a discussion on mental health and defectology). Specifically, Vygotsky's assertion that how one responds in a social situation to a child presenting with a 'disability' has a powerful impact on the child's development.

Responding to a child with Down Syndrome, for example, as differently abled rather than disabled, in a context of care and respect impacts how this child experiences him/herself in the world. A child with DS has no notion that there is any kind of deficient functioning until s/he encounters the social realm where people react either with respect and care (as Vygotsky would argue they should) or treat the person simply as deficient. It is in the response from the social realm that development unfolds. This understanding of how mediated interaction can positively impact developmental delays informs this paper. I note, though, that the current paper deals with an inclusive model of pedagogy premised on social justice by focusing more on educational delays as barriers to learning that cause developmental delays rather than focusing on organic disability.

Inclusion, here, refers both to students who have learning/behavioral diagnoses as well as to students who are neurotypical but present as learning disabled. In relation to neurotypical students, in contexts where social upheaval has led to homelessness, poverty, food insecurity, and violent living conditions, these students simply have not had access to the kind of cultural tools needed for development. For example, a news item on the radio in Cape Town recently reported that 1,600 children in the Western Cape province (where this paper is located contextually) were admitted to hospital for serious gunshot and knife wound-related injuries in October and November 2024 (Cape Talk, 26/11/2024; 6:43 a.m.). In such a context, the source of a student's apparent de-

velopmental deficiency is not natural but cultural. For example, research (Stewart, 2015) indicates that trauma signs and symptoms mimic those of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). We may well anticipate that children who have suffered gunshots or knife wounds can present with signs of ADHD and be medicated rather than receiving the requisite help for trauma-related responses: a missed opportunity to intervene in a way that is affirming and not pathologizing. This is why Vygotsky's view of special needs as being located not solely in the child but in the socio-cultural context in which the child is developing is of central interest to countries such as South Africa. The current paper seeks to answer two questions:

What can an inclusive, developmental pedagogy look like?

How do students experience this type of pedagogy in a university setting?

Sociocultural context

Like Russia in the 1920s, South Africans have experienced monumental changes to their way of life since the end of apartheid. While apartheid may be over, the historical traces of inequality persist in all aspects of South African life, especially in schooling. Locating any difficulties with learning or emotional regulation solely within an individual child fails to account for the disparate upbringing, education, and access to cultural tools faced by different children in South Africa. The truly transformative nature of Vygotsky's approach to defectology lies, for me, in the positive view of what traditional psychologists would see negatively as a deficit. It is society's response to differently abled individuals that must change, not the individual her/himself. This is well captured by Vygotsky's contention that the education of the blind child is "...not so much the education of blind children as it is the re-education of the sighted. The latter must change their attitude toward blindness and toward the blind. The re-education of the sighted poses a social pedagogical task of enormous importance" (p.86). In an inclusive pedagogy, instead of seeing a child as 'stupid' or deficient, imagine viewing all children as having something to offer the world; a perspective that all students can attain knowledge, but some may do so faster and others more slowly.

While Vygotsky's defectology is generally used to discuss children with developmental delays of organic etiology, the current paper will focus on neurotypical students — many of whom have serious educational delays due to poor schooling, violent contexts, mental health issues, sometimes social dislocation (as youngsters), and poverty. While the model of pedagogy outlined here is used with neurotypical students, I will argue that this model can be equally effective when teaching differently abled students — either in schools or in higher education. The study reported here is located at a university in South Africa. In this institution, depression and anxiety levels among students are 45,9%, significantly impacting

how students can approach their work successfully (Van der Walt, Mabaso, Davids & De Vries, 2020). Even the most ardent Western psychologist trained in psychopathology would find it difficult to locate the etiology of these disorders solely within individual deficits. When almost half of the student body suffers from anxiety and depression, the causes must lie in the dialectical relationship between individual and social context — demanding a pedagogical model capable of reaching and teaching all students.

The Teach-Assess-Teach model of pedagogy

The model of pedagogy described in this paper draws on the work of Vygotsky (1986), Hedegaard (1998; 2020), Craig (1996), and Wood et al. (1976). For Vygotsky (1986), the only pedagogy that is useful is that which moves ahead of development, working on what he refers to as ‘buds’ of development. In this pedagogical praxis, learning leads development through the guidance of a culturally more capable other in a unique social space called the zone of proximal development (ZPD), where abstract concepts — initially external — are internalised by the novice. These abstract concepts, Vygotsky (1986) calls scientific concepts, and they are decontextualised, abstract in nature, and can only be acquired through teaching. Conversely, although dialectically entailed, everyday concepts are those concepts that the child uses to make sense of the abstraction being taught. For knowledge to develop, one needs scientific and everyday concepts to be intertwined in the developmental process. A scientific concept alone is hollow and devoid of sense for the child; while the everyday concept provides sense to the scientific concept, the scientific concept comes fully into conscious awareness through the everyday, and this leads to the acquisition of a meaningful concept. How exactly one intertwines these concepts in development is outlined in Hedegaard’s double-move, where “... the teacher guides the learning activity both from the perspective of general concepts and from the perspective of engaging students in ‘situated’ problems that are meaningful in relation to their developmental stage and life situations” (Hedegaard, 1998:120). The engagement in discrete tasks in classrooms can be facilitated, I argue, using scaffolding — a form of task-related methods for engaging students in a lesson (Wood et al., 1976).

A brief caveat, however: scaffolding is not mediation; while mediation is geared toward development, scaffolding is aimed at discrete tasks (Smagorinsky, 2020). A scaffold can be seen metaphorically as a scaffold used in building; as the building becomes more stable, the scaffolds are removed. So too in a teaching situation: when the student becomes more proficient in problem solving, the scaffold for a specific task is withdrawn. Scaffolding is not a Vygotskian term and is not related to development — as mediation is — because it takes place in real time during a lesson, while mediation unfolds over a series of lessons and over time. For the purposes of the model I have developed, though, scaffolding can be used to engage students in dis-

crete tasks during single lessons. The types of scaffolding one can use take the form of recruitment, demonstration, direction maintenance, frustration control, and reduction in degrees of freedom. These pedagogical tools are useful for completing tasks in a lesson and form part of the teaching used in the Teach-Assess-Teach (TAT) model I outline in this paper.

The TAT model of pedagogy owes much to the work of Craig (1996) and her colleagues at the former Natal University in the 1990s. Tasked with opening access to the university for students who were previously denied access, the Teach-Test-Teach (TTT) programme sought to afford students’ access to university through a structured programme. While the TAT model is concerned with inclusive pedagogy and not with access per se, much of the logic of the TTT programme is useful in classroom contexts. For Craig (1996), for students to acquire knowledge, they needed to develop the ability to metacognitively reflect on their own approach to knowledge. This requires that the student can distance themselves from the opinions and beliefs they hold and develop arguments based on evidence drawn from reliable sources. This, in turn, requires that students can judge what counts as valid evidence by appreciating the disciplinary norms and epistemic weight underpinning the evidence they draw from — say — journal articles (Muller, 2014; Craig, 1996). A student must be able to step out of their everyday understanding to deal with novelty. Assessment in the TAT model is continuous and serves the function of ascertaining what students know and what they still need to know. Importantly, feedback is elaborated, and what counts as a valid answer is set by disciplinary norms. Pace is determined more by the students than by the teacher, with control over pace lying more with the students than with the teacher. Students are required to engage in dialogue during lessons, and questioning is encouraged. The focus on dialogical interaction as important in learning is well established in the literature (Lefstein & Snell, 2013; Khun, 2018; Howe, Hennessey, Vrikki & Wheatley, 2019; Dessingue & Wagner, 2025). Very specifically, the focus of dialogue is on developing what Mercer and colleagues refer to as exploratory talk that is representative of reasoning (Mercer & Wegerif, 2002; Mercer & Dawes, 2008; Mercer, Wegerif & Major, 2019). Figure 1 presents a graphic depiction of the TAT model.

As can be seen in Fig. 1, the first step in this model is to create cognitive conflict in the student. Motivation, for me, draws much on Piaget’s work where disequilibrium forces a student/child to seek resources to overcome dis-ease. In this way, motivation is not external but internal and is driven by an uncomfortable disequilibrium that must be overcome for the student to learn. While external motivation, such as praise or an interesting hook to start a lesson, is useful in learning (all learning requires motivation), I argue that external motivation is transient and does not ensure that a student stays engaged in what unfolds in the lesson. Once the student is motivated to learn, the teacher can begin teaching using the double-move, situating the abstract

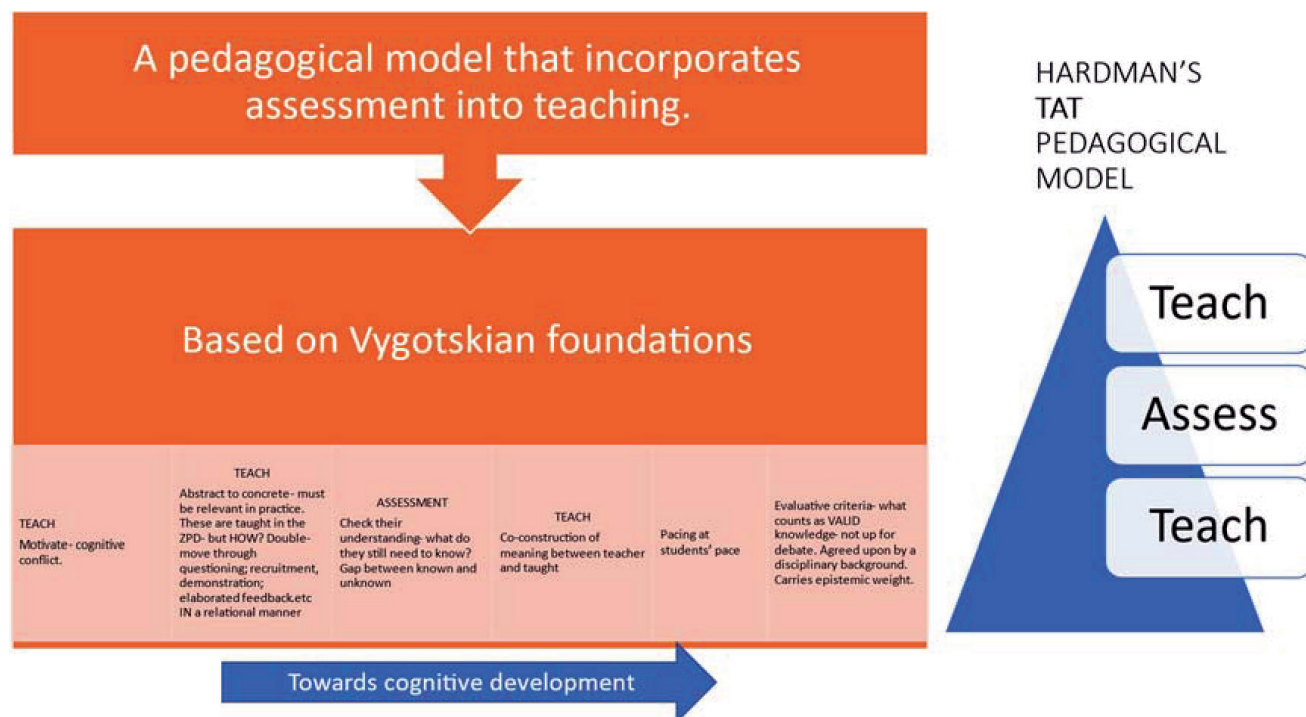


Fig. 1. TAT model

concepts being taught in the situated lived experiences of the students. Scaffolds such as questioning can serve to keep engagement on specific tasks. Assessment is then used as a mid-point in teaching to ascertain what the students know and what they still need to learn. This knowledge informs the next round of teaching. Teaching unfolds in a space that is characterised by respect and an ethics of care. Here, an ethics of care recognises the unique student and what they bring to the lesson and adopts a moral stance towards teaching/learning, recognising that learning is about both cognitive and affective development. It is difficult to appreciate how a student could learn in a space where they feel threatened or unable to voice their own opinions. Pacing is controlled by the teacher but loosely so, enabling students to move at a pace that enables them to learn. Feedback here is elaborated, and what counts as a valid answer — in regard to disciplinary norms — is outlined. Students are encouraged to provide reasons for their answers, whether right or wrong, and questions such as ‘how’ and ‘why’ provide the impetus for discussion.

In the study reported in this paper, students are learning about theories of development; very specifically, in this paper, they are required to engage with Piaget’s notions of assimilation and accommodation. To create a space of cognitive conflict, students are given 30 seconds to look at Fig. 2 below and then given 30 seconds to replicate this diagram. This task seeks to challenge them as they are required both to solve this figure and to indicate how they remember it.

It is impossible for a human brain to remember all the elements of this diagram without some kind of cognitive structure to do so. There are simply too many elements for the brain to remember. When asked how they

remembered the diagram, some students indicated they used their everyday concepts; the diagram looks like a house with a roof and an aerial. Almost everyone remembers the cross because it is a religious symbol that has different meanings for different religious groups. Everyday concepts alone, however, are insufficient to remember this diagram; three central abstract concepts are needed to do so: an understanding of shape, colour, and number. Students often express surprise that they had used these abstract concepts to remember the diagram because they did so unconsciously — that is, in a fossilised manner and without reflecting on it, as these concepts

HARDMAN'S CONCEPTUAL FIGURE

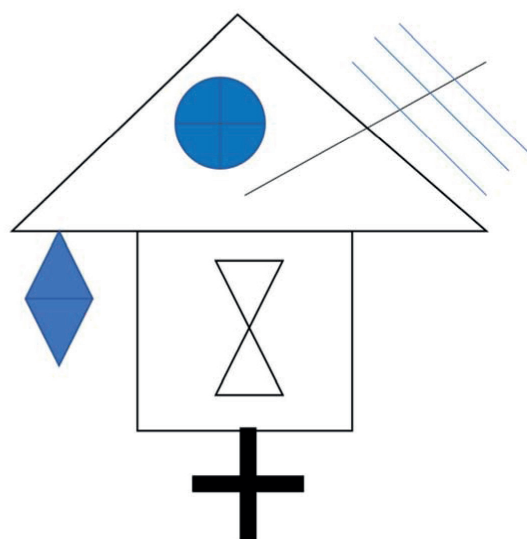


Fig. 2. Hardman's conceptual image

are deeply embedded in their understanding. Once students were motivated to engage with the teaching, the lesson proceeded to introduce Piaget's (1976) notions of assimilation and accommodation. These concepts are, themselves, imbued with cognitive conflict because they do not resemble what is meant in English by these terms, forcing students to discuss among themselves what these concepts can mean to them. This part of the lesson was conducted through group work during which students discussed the concepts and provided examples — examples they could share with the class — of these concepts.

Methodology

This study adopts a case study design within an interpretivist paradigm. A case study is useful for in-depth analysis that focuses on how something happens in the context. As this paper addresses a question that requires interpretation, the study is located within an interpretivist paradigm. The theoretical basis for this paper, cultural-historical theory, lends itself well to an interpretivist paradigm.

The students

A group of students registered for an honours course in Education at a large university in South Africa volunteered to take part in this study. There were 52 post-graduate students who took part in this study, with an average age of 36 years and a range from 24 to 56 years. Forty-eight students were in-service teachers, and the remaining four students were not teachers. Thirty of the in-service teachers were primary school teachers, and 18 were high school teachers. The four students who were not teachers were unemployed and studying full-time towards an honours degree. Of these four students, three were male and one was female. The lecturer (who is also the researcher) is a white female who has been teaching at the university for just over two decades. This module introduces students to theories of development and learning, beginning with the work of Piaget, which is the focus of this paper. The module runs for 12 weeks, with sessions once a week lasting 2 hours. Students are usually assessed by means of a single essay at the end of the module. In this group, however, given that it tests a novel pedagogy, students were awarded marks for engagement in discussions throughout the module. This constituted 20% of their final mark, with the essay accounting for the other 80%.

The study took place at a large university in the Western Province of South Africa. This university has approximately 5000 academics and 26000 students across its various campuses. Demographically, the student body is approximately 25% Black African and 22% white; the remainder are either from other racial groups or are international students.

The lecturer

As the lecturer and researcher in this study, I found it important to reflect on my own engagement in this

teaching/learning space. I am a white woman with 24 years' experience in teaching, learning, and educational psychology. I consider myself to have a distinctly different demographic profile from most of my students in this particular study. The privilege (perceived and real) entailed in being white in South Africa, given its history, is not lost on me. I felt it was important to constantly reflect on the asymmetrical power relations that could easily emerge in this course. This required giving time and space to group discussions and encouraging dialogues, balancing the need for students to acquire the correct concepts in the course with the need not to completely disregard dialogue that may not have been directly on topic. It also required that any coding of the work be undertaken by me and another researcher.

Analysis

Data was collected in the form of exit slips, which asked students for their opinions on: 1) what aspects of this pedagogy worked well, and 2) what did not work and could be improved.

Findings and discussion

Students' perceptions of the pedagogical model

In the final lecture, students were given an exit slip to answer two questions: 1) what they liked about the pedagogy, and 2) what could be improved in the model. Two themes emerged from the data: increased interaction and more accessible content.

Increased interaction

This theme pointed to the fact that students experienced increased interaction in the lessons. Research indicates that interaction in lessons — where students are able to gain talk time and engage with each other — is optimal for learning (REF).

PT: (36-year-old female primary school teacher) *The readings and interactive nature of the lectures helped me remain engaged.*

JS: (25-year-old female high school teacher) *XX's (the lecturer) pedagogies were amazing! The examples, continuous interaction in class, and overall understanding of context were very useful for me.*

BN: (37-year-old male high school teacher) *Learning from colleagues and their ideas on how to teach certain subjects, as well as the activities, were valuable.*

AW: (26-year-old female high school teacher) *I think engagement is one tool teachers can use to bridge the gap between not understanding and gaining knowledge, and Prof XX is very engaging.*

SB: (35-year-old high school teacher) *Interactive lessons.*

What we can see in the extracts above is students' appreciation of the interactive nature of the pedagogy used in this module. This plays out both in terms of learning from colleagues (BN) as well as from the interactive nature of the lectures (PT).

A second theme that emerged from the exit slips was the accessibility of the content covered in the course.

Accessible content

The following are responses to the prompt: What worked pedagogically in this course?

JK: (30-year-old male primary school teacher). *I thoroughly enjoyed this course. Keep being you, Prof. The best!!! The readings were hard, but you made them really user-friendly. Your explanations of the concepts were so clear, and your real-life examples really helped me understand the concepts because I haven't done any psychology before.*

MN: (29-year-old female primary school teacher). *I liked that you used relatable examples to explain concepts. This made the work easier to grasp because I could link it to something I understand.*

SD: (34-year-old high school teacher). *The structure of how each concept was approached was excellent. Each concept led into the next seamlessly and made it easy to understand.*

IV: (48-year-old male high school teacher). *Her methods are so great that I understood every concept, even though I don't have a psychology background. Every section was engaging – that is what works most.*

SJ: (30-year-old primary school teacher). *I really enjoyed the teaching process. The explanations/module were well explained and easily digestible.*

As can be seen above, students found that this pedagogy made concepts more accessible by being engaging and by using real-life examples to facilitate understanding. Regarding aspects that did not work about this pedagogy, students indicated that nothing was problematic; however, 7 out of 52 expressed a desire to learn more about neurodivergent students.

Conclusion

This paper began as a 21st century pedagogical response to Vygotsky's defectology. The paper outlines a pedagogical model for inclusive education, where students' voices are included in the co-construction of meaning in an honours module at a university. The TAT model discussed in this paper aims to include students in meaning making, through teaching, assessment and re-teaching in such a manner that no student is left behind in the class. The paper aimed to develop a model of inclusive pedagogy and to describe students' experiences of this model. Results suggest that the pedagogical model provides students with an interactive space and makes the work more accessible. This is a small case study, and a caveat needs to be inserted about its generalisability. There appears to be promise in this pedagogical model to include the voices of all students. However, further research is required in this area.

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Conflict of interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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Автор заявляет об отсутствии конфликта интересов.

Ethics statement

This research has ethics approval under the reference number: EDNREC20250203. Written consent was obtained from participants. All names are pseudonyms to protect anonymity.

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Childhood, politics, and socio-cultural positionality: the critical analysis

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Abstract

Childhood is a socially constructed phase of life shaped by political, economic, and cultural forces. While often perceived as a natural and universal experience, childhood is deeply influenced by governmental policies, socio-cultural norms, and historical contexts. This paper explores how political structures and socio-cultural positionality shape childhood experiences across different societies. By drawing from theories of social construction, political influence, and cultural diversity, the study examines the impact of policies, media, and economic factors on children's rights and identities. It also discusses contemporary challenges such as digital childhood, globalization, and social inequalities. This interdisciplinary analysis highlights the need for policies that recognize childhood as a dynamic and context-dependent experience rather than a fixed biological stage.

Keywords: childhood, politics, socio-cultural positionality, social construction, globalization

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Детство, политика и социально-культурная позициональность: критический анализ

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Резюме

Детство — это социально сконструированная стадия жизни человека, формируемая политическими, экономическими и культурными силами. Хотя зачастую этот период воспринимают как естественный и универсальный опыт, детство глубоко зависит от государственных политик, социально-культурных норм и исторических контекстов. В данной статье исследуются механизмы, с помощью которых политические институты и социально-культурное окружение влияют на формирование детского опыта в различных обществах. Беря во внимание теории социального конструирования, политического воздействия и культурного многообразия, мы рассматриваем влияние государственных политик, СМИ и экономических условий на права и самобытность детей. В исследовании также затрагиваются современные проблемы, такие как цифровое детство, глобализация и социальное неравенство. Междисциплинарный анализ подчеркивает необходимость разработки политических стратегий, которые признают детство как динамический и зависящий от контекста опыт, а не как фиксированную биологическую стадию.

Ключевые слова: детство, политика, социально-культурная позициональность, социальное конструирование, глобализация

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Introduction

Often idealized as a universal and innocent stage of life, childhood is really strongly molded by political ideas, economic systems, and cultural standards. Historically, childhood was not always considered a separate stage; until the 18th century, children were frequently viewed as small adults expected to contribute to household labour and society from an early age (Aries, 1962). Modern views on childhood, on the other hand, stress the importance of rights, education, and protection as well as how social, political, and economic circumstances shape children's experiences.

Through legislation, rules, and rights frameworks, political systems help to define childhood significantly. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) established a global standard for children's rights, yet disparities persist in how different nations interpret and implement these policies. Policies on healthcare, education access, and economic disparities directly influence children's prospects and well-being (UNICEF, 2021).

Likewise, socio-cultural positionality — shaped by variables including race, class, gender, and ethnicity — affects children's lived experiences. For example, kids from underprivileged areas frequently suffer systematic inequities in legal protection, healthcare, and education (hooks, 1994). Cultural expectations also shape childhood development; in collectivist societies, children are brought up with a strong feeling of collective duty, whereas in individualist cultures, independence and self-reliance are stressed (Rogoff, 2003).

Given these intricacies, this article aims to investigate the interaction between politics, socio-cultural positionality, and childhood. It looks at how children's reality is shaped by various political systems, media portrayals, and cultural frameworks. Drawing from multidisciplinary studies, this paper emphasizes the manner in which childhood is built, lived, and changed across various social settings. It is a theoretical paper and discourse analysis has been used as an approach.

Theoretical framework

Understanding childhood through a socio-political and cultural lens requires engagement with key theoretical perspectives that highlight its constructed nature. This section explores three primary theories: (1) the social construction of childhood, (2) critical theories on childhood and power structures, and (3) socio-cultural theory. These frameworks provide insight into how political systems, cultural contexts, and power dynamics shape children's experiences.

The social construction of childhood

Childhood is a socially and culturally constructed idea that changes with time, place, and social settings rather than a set biological stage. From the social constructionist viewpoint, historical, economic, and political structures as well as cultural ideas and social expectations shape infancy (James & Prout, 2015). Unlike a universal and natural stage of human development, childhood is perceived differently in different communities shaped by gender, class, race, and historical period. This part looks at how childhood is constructed, how its meanings change across different cultures and historical settings, and how power relations affect children's experiences.

Defining childhood as a social construct

The social constructionist approach challenges biological determinism by emphasizing how society, culture, and politics affect children. This perspective is important when comparing childhood experiences around the world because children have different autonomy, labour involvement, and rights.

Childhood has evolved considerably. Philippe Ariès (1962) famously claimed medieval Europe had no understanding of children. Children were considered “miniature adults” who worked and socialized without apparent maturity. After the Enlightenment and industrial capitalism, childhood became a distinct and protected stage of life, shaping modern education and child work laws (Cunningham, 2014).

This perspective shift shows how social and historical factors affect childhood. Modern Western society views children as innocent, defenseless, and in need of care, which reinforces strong boundaries between childhood and maturity (Jenks, 2005). Not everyone agrees. Many non-Western societies have young children take on chores, supporting sibling care or home work (Rogoff, 2003). Thus, the idea that youngsters should avoid work and decision-making is cultural rather than biological.

Cultural variations in childhood

Cultural variances highlight even more that childhood is not a one, universal experience. Many Indigenous groups, for instance, encourage children to learn by participating in community life instead of through official schooling (Nsamenang, 2006). By contrast, Western conceptions of children stress organized schooling, play, and postponed entrance into the labour (Montgomery, 2009).

Furthermore, gender expectations influence how various communities build infancy. From early age, boys and girls are socialized into separate roles in many societies, hence affecting their future possibilities and obligations (Connell, 2009). These differences show how infancy is ingrained in more general social systems, hence

reflecting and repeating society standards and power dynamics.

The role of power in constructing childhood

Power dynamics — including legal institutions, educational programs, and media representations — also affect the construction of childhood. Governments and institutions define childhood by laws governing age of consent, education, and labour, so reinforcing certain assumptions about what it means to be a child (Reynaert et al., 2009). Furthermore, decisions affecting children's lives frequently exclude their voices, so putting them as passive subjects instead of active social agents (James & James, 2012).

Media and commercial sectors help to mold childhood even more by stressing consumer identities, gender norms, and ideas of “suitable” conduct. Digital technology's growth has eroded conventional borders between childhood and maturity, hence challenging new issues regarding children's autonomy, privacy, and agency (Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020). These changing ideas of childhood show that social, political, and economic pressures are always reshaping the notion.

The social construction of childhood may be considered to question the notion that childhood is a universal or fundamentally biological period of life. Rather, historical change, cultural beliefs, and power systems defining what it means to be a child shape childhood. Understanding childhood as a social construct helps to highlight the need to rethink policies and practices that could support inequities in children's lives and enables a more inclusive knowledge of different childhood experiences.

Critical theories on childhood and power structures

The study of childhood has developed beyond developmental psychology and biological determinism to include critical theories investigating how power shapes children's lives. Critical perspectives on childhood question prevailing stories that depict children as passive, dependent, and lacking agency. Rather, these points of view emphasize how political, economic, and social power structures affect childhood experiences, access to resources, and chances for engagement in society (James & Prout, 2015). To grasp how power shapes children's social positions and lived experiences, this part investigates critical viewpoints on childhood including Marxist, feminist, postcolonial, and Foucauldian theories.

Marxist perspectives on childhood and capitalism

Marxist philosophy questions how capitalism shapes infancy as a time of need and vulnerability. Not just a biological period, childhood is also a social category formed by economic systems (Qvortrup, 2009). Often in capitalist society, children are seen as economic dependents, therefore highlighting the need for adult wage labour and the commodification of childhood via consumerism (Zelizer, 1985).

From a Marxist viewpoint, one major criticism is the commercialization of childhood, in which children are

targeted as consumers via advertising, branded toys, and digital entertainment (Buckingham, 2011). As richer children have more access to educational resources and social capital, this process simultaneously forms children's identities and strengthens economic disparities. Therefore, infancy is a social creation shaped by economic and class systems rather than just a developmental stage.

Feminist theories on childhood, gender, and power

Feminist views on childhood investigate how gender expectations and patriarchal power systems affect children's experiences. Often from early age, conventional gender norms are forced on youngsters, hence affecting their socialization, prospects, and life outcomes (Connell, 2009). According to feminist academics, childhood is a location of gendered power dynamics where boys and girls are socialized into varying expectations of behaviour, responsibility, and future roles (Walkerdine, 1990).

Feminist points of view also emphasize the gendered work split in parenting. Historically, women have been given the main responsibility of caring, hence supporting the idea that childhood is a realm of maternal protection and emotional work (Hochschild, 2012). This viewpoint coincides with economic disparities since working-class and underprivileged women frequently bear more weight in juggling paid job and family obligations. Feminist academics also underline the importance of questioning strict gender stereotypes in media representations and preschool education in order to build more fair society structures (Thorne, 1993).

Postcolonial and critical race theories on childhood

Postcolonial and critical race theories question Eurocentric ideas of childhood that overlook the experiences of children in non-Western settings. Often reflecting children in the Global South as either victims in need of rescue or as ‘underdeveloped’ relative to Western criteria, Western discourses on childhood (Burman, 2016) tend to reinforce stereotypes and neocolonial power relations. By putting Western definitions of childhood and development onto different cultural contexts, these stories reinforce neocolonial power relations.

According to critical race theorists, racial hierarchies affect childhood experiences by means of systematic inequalities in education, healthcare, and law enforcement (Gillborn, 2008). For instance, Black and Indigenous children in many Western nations experience greater levels of school discipline, exclusion, and monitoring than their white counterparts (Ladson-Billings, 2006). These differences show how childhood is not a neutral or universal experience but one profoundly shaped by racial power dynamics and legacies of colonialism.

Foucauldian perspectives: surveillance, discipline, and childhood

Michel Foucault's power and discipline theories explain how institutions control childhood. Schools, courts, and hospitals influence children's behaviour and identity through monitoring and discipline (Foucault, 1977). Discipline practices in schools include hierarchi-

cal power systems, behavior management, and standardized testing (Devine, 2002).

As technology advances, parents, schools, and companies monitor children's online behaviour (Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020). By mirroring society's concerns about control, risk, and deviance, these systems reinforce power dynamics that limit children's independence and self-expression. Foucault shows how knowledge and discipline institutions regulate infancy by defining "normal" and "acceptable" behaviour.

Michel Foucault's (1980) thoughts on power and speech help explain how political and institutional institutions affect infancy. Social control over children's behaviour, knowledge, and agency comes from legal and educational systems. Schools use standardized curricula and behavioural norms to punish children and make them compliant (Foucault, 1977).

To sum up, the important theories on childhood question conventional developmental models by stressing how power systems shape children's experiences. Marxist points of view draw attention to the economic exploitation of children; feminist theories investigate gendered power relations; postcolonial and critical race theories attack Eurocentric prejudices; and Foucauldian analysis shows how institutions control childhood by means of discipline and surveillance. Applying these critical viewpoints helps academics and legislators to strive for more fair and inclusive approaches to childhood that acknowledge children's agency and different socioeconomic reality.

Socio-cultural theory and childhood

Socio-cultural theory offers a lens through which to see childhood as a process molded by social interactions, cultural norms, and historical settings. Unlike biological or cognitive theories that highlight universal stages of child development, socio-cultural theory stresses the influence of social environment, language, and cultural practices on children's learning and identities (Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978). This point of view questions the idea of childhood as a static, natural stage and instead frames it as a dynamic and culturally ingrained experience. Key ideas of socio-cultural theory, its consequences for childhood development, and its significance in modern educational and social environments are discussed in this part.

Key principles of socio-cultural theory

One of the most important theorists in socio-cultural theory, Lev Vygotsky (1978), claimed that social contact drives cognitive growth. He proposed the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which defines the distance between what a youngster can do alone and what they can accomplish with advice from more informed people, whether parents, teachers, or peers. Vygotsky believed learning to be a socially mediated process in which children gain knowledge and abilities by interacting with their surroundings.

Scaffolding — the transient support given by an adult or more knowledgeable peer to assist a youngster finish a

task they would find difficult alone — is another important idea in socio-cultural theory (Wood et al., 1976). The assistance is progressively removed as the child's ability increases, so enabling independent problem-solving. This method emphasizes the importance of social connections in promoting emotional and cognitive growth.

Socio-cultural theory also stresses the need of cultural tools and language in forming children's ideas. Language is a tool for cognitive growth as well as a way of communication. Children absorb cultural values, problem-solving techniques, and ways of thinking particular to their communities by means of discussion, narrative, and social interactions (Wertsch, 1991). Therefore, depending on cultural ideas, customs, and social behaviours, childhood development differs between societies.

The role of culture in childhood development

One of the key benefits of socio-cultural theory is the awareness that cultural settings impact childhood. Emphasizing that children learn by participating in cultural events rather than by solitary individual development, Barbara Rogoff (2003) built on Vygotsky's concepts. Many non-Western cultures, for instance, believe that children learn by observing adults and participating directly in family chores and community events rather than by formal education. This questions Western-centric paradigms of childhood that give play-based learning and organized education first priority.

Based on their socio-cultural surroundings, cross-cultural research has revealed notable differences in how children learn and develop. For example, Indigenous tribes in Latin America and Africa stress shared learning and responsibility from early age, where kids help in family labour and decision-making (Gaskins, 2006). By contrast, Western countries tend to encourage individualism, organized education, and postponed autonomy in childhood. These contrasts show how infancy is not a universal experience but rather strongly ingrained in cultural beliefs and economic structures.

Implications for education and socialization

Social theory must be rethought in light of the tremendous changes in the modern world, according to this article. Though cognitively significant, classical theory's assumptions, conceptions, and procedures are increasingly out of sync with digitalization, decolonization, climatic crises, and evolving global power dynamics. The regeneration of social theory necessitates a shift in how we define the social, whose knowledge matters, and how we study.

First, the critique of universalism and positivism emphasizes the need for a pluralistic epistemology that accepts diverse knowledges. Revitalized social theory positions Indigenous, feminist, postcolonial, and Global South thinkers as integral to theoretical growth, not supplementary.

Second, conceptual novelty matters. Relational, processual, and hybrid frameworks better reflect modern life's interconnection and dynamic than binary and rigid categories. Theorists must consider human, non-human,

material, and digital actors, widening social science ontological frontiers.

Third, this transition requires methodological renewal. Ethical, collaborative research must oppose extractive norms and emphasize reciprocity, reflexivity, and accountability. Participatory, decolonial, and digital research methods demonstrate rigor and social engagement.

Social theory revitalization is a continuing effort. It requires humility, openness, and inventiveness because theory is constantly temporary, intertwined in the world it explains, and affected by power. Social theory must imagine more just, inclusive, and sustainable futures in an uncertain and changing world.

Childhood and politics

Childhood is a politically charged idea influenced by government policies, legal frameworks, and ideological discourses, not only a biological or developmental era. Political systems shape how childhood is defined, safeguarded, and lived throughout different countries. The function of the state in forming childhood, the effects of policies on children's life, and the political representation of children's rights are discussed in this part.

The role of the state in shaping childhood

Governments shape childhood through laws, schools, and social policies. The state determines childhood's beginning and conclusion, who is a child, and their rights and safeguards (James & James, 2012). Many nations set the legal age of adulthood at 18, although culture and politics affect this.

Juvenile justice, compulsory education, and child labour policies reveal how different parties see youth. Some emerging countries allow child labour under specific conditions, while others prohibit it until adulthood (Boyden, 2013). These discrepancies highlight how political economics impact childhood.

Political discussion also references childhood to advocate policies and changes. When discussing immigration, social welfare, or education funding, politicians often utilize child protection to advance their interests (Wells, 2015). Political decisions are sometimes influenced by economic and ideological reasons; therefore, these policies may benefit children but not necessarily.

Policies affecting children: education, labour laws, and healthcare

Government policies affect children's school, healthcare, and social services. By defining children's growth and education organization, compulsory education legislation have substantially impacted childhood (Moss, 2012). Educational access and quality remain uneven, especially for poor children.

Child labour laws vary globally. While international organizations like the ILO aim to end child labour, economic and political realities in many nations compel youngsters into the job. Sometimes child labour laws ne-

glect low-income families' financial realities, resulting in laws that don't benefit children (Liebel, 2020).

Healthcare restrictions determine how much dietary and medical aid youngsters receive. Universal health care systems allow children more access to medical services, but private systems may vary by socioeconomic status (UNICEF, 2021). Some nations prioritize pregnancy and child health, whereas others less prioritize child welfare.

Political representation of children's rights

After the 1989 UNCRC ratification, political debate has shifted to children's rights. The UNCRC established global children's rights to education, healthcare, and protection from exploitation (UNICEF, 2019). Despite almost universal approval, these rights are implemented differently in each country.

Children cannot vote or participate in politics; hence they lack political representation. Therefore, adult-led advocacy groups, NGOs, and politicians frequently represent their interests (Reynaert et al., 2009). Young activism has grown, especially with Greta Thunberg's climate advocacy, but children's voices are still often ignored in politics (Kallio & Hakli, 2013).

The politicization of childhood in contemporary debates

Policy debates on education, immigration, and climate change often politicize childhood. International condemnation of family separations at crossings has shaped immigration discussions by affecting migrant children.

Climate change activism by youngsters has shown how political decisions influence youth. Young activists claim current political systems imperil future generations, emphasizing the need for more inclusive legislation that considers children's perspectives (Prout, 2019).

To conclude, governmental institutions, policies, and ideologies profoundly affect childhood.

Through education, labour regulations, and healthcare, governments shape childhood across socioeconomic and cultural contexts. Despite global awareness of children's rights, political representation remains a barrier, needing continual activism and systemic change to guarantee children's voices are heard.

Socio-cultural positionality and childhood

Different social, economic, and cultural settings shape childhood experience unevenly. Socio-cultural positionality — shaped by elements including class, race, gender, ethnicity, and nationality — defines the possibilities, obstacles, and identities children create. This part looks at how childhood interacts with social class, race and ethnicity, gender, and cultural variety, hence showing how these aspects shape children's experiences in many nations.

Class and economic inequality in childhood

A child's quality of life, educational access, healthcare, and well-being are all affected by socioeconomic

status. In contrast to food poverty, limited schooling, and poor healthcare, wealthy children often have better education, extracurricular activities, and healthcare (UNICEF, 2021).

Economic inequality shapes children. Early variations in baby development show in high-income nations; wealthier infants benefit from better cognitive and social environments (Lareau, 2011). However, economically disadvantaged children may face poor schools, unstable homes, and more stress and trauma (Evans, 2004).

Race, ethnicity, and childhood inequality

Race and ethnicity affect childhood experiences, especially in countries with colonialism, systematic racism, and discrimination. Racial and ethnic minority children face structural inequalities in education, health care, and legal protection (Gillborn, 2008).

Black and Latino kids in the US are more likely than white youngsters to attend underfunded schools with harsher discipline (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Indigenous children in Australia, Canada, Asia, and Latin America endure systematic barriers to adequate education and healthcare due to colonial policy.

Migrant and refugee children face greater legal issues, dislocation, and discrimination worldwide. Immigrant children struggle with language, cultural, and social service exclusion in many host nations (Lundberg, 2020).

Gender and childhood socialization

Gender influences how children are reared, educated, and treated. Boy and female roles are often set in early childhood, with expectations about their behaviour, interests, and career objectives (Connell, 2009).

Traditional gender norms hinder females' schooling and personal liberties in many nations. Cultural beliefs around gender roles, home duties, and early marriage prevent millions of girls from attending school, according to UNESCO (2020). However, boys may be pressured to be strong and emotionally controlled, which might harm their mental health and development (Kimmel, 2010).

Cultural differences in childhood socialization

Cultural norms shape childhood. Many non-Western cultures prioritize collectivism and cooperation in childrearing, while Western countries emphasize individualism and independence (Rogoff, 2003). These cultural differences affect children's family and community roles, schooling, and parenting.

Children in many Asian and African societies are expected to help with family chores and respect elders, reflecting religious values. However, Western countries prioritise children's freedom and self-expression, helping them form independent identities (Lancy, 2015).

Cultural differences affect educational practices and discipline. While some cultures encourage lenient and child-centered approaches, others believe tough discipline is required for character development (Bornstein, 2012). These variances show how culture

shapes childhood, challenging universal child development theories.

The impact of globalization on childhood identity

By affecting cultural values, language, media exposure, and social interactions, globalization has greatly formed childhood identity. Children are growing up in a world quite different from that of past generations as information, commodities, and people transcend borders in greater numbers. Although globalization has increased educational possibilities and promoted cultural variety, it has also raised questions about cultural degradation and identity crisis. Considering both good and bad consequences, this part investigates how globalization influences childhood identity.

The role of media and technology during childhood

Digital technology's fast development has significantly changed childhood experiences by changing how kids engage with the world, get information, and create their identities. Media and technology can both empower people and create possible hazards, hence prompting debate regarding its influence on children's political awareness, socialization, and well-being. Digital childhood's effects, media's influence on children's political awareness, and ethical issues about children's interaction with technology are all covered in this part.

Digital childhood and the rise of social media

Technology has transformed childhood in a world where digital devices, social media, and online learning are essential. Children's growing technology use affects their cognitive development, social connections, and educational opportunities, reflecting "digital childhood" (Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020).

Many youngsters today utilize digital devices for entertainment, communication, and education, exposing them to screens early on (Holloway et al., 2013). Digital tools enable online learning and global contact, but they also raise concerns about screen time, cyberbullying, and data privacy (Chaudron et al., 2018).

Social media especially shapes children's identities and peer networks. Tik-Tok, Hub, Instagram, and YouTube allow kids to follow global trends, be creative, and join communities (Boyd, 2014).

Media influence on children's socialization and political awareness

The media shapes children's worldview through politics, culture, and social issues. TV, movies, and digital platforms show kids stories that reflect social norms and power structures (Buckingham, 2013).

Digital media has substantially increased children's political exposure. Young people can engage in political discourse, activity, and civic awareness via social media (Kellner & Share, 2019). Climate activism, led by Greta Thunberg, as mentioned earlier has grown in popular-

ity among children and teens, highlighting how media affects young people's political engagement (Pickard, 2019).

Online content quality and reliability remain concerns for children. Misinformation and biased news can influence children's political opinions by reinforcing stereotypes (Jenkins et al., 2016). Developing critical thinking skills to responsibly navigate digital content has made media literacy education increasingly important (Hobbs, 2010).

The commercialization of childhood through media

Digital media's commercialization of kids generates ethical questions around how companies and advertisers focus on youngsters. Digital marketing has led to youngsters being exposed to ads on streaming services, gaming platforms, and social media, usually without knowing the persuasive intent behind them (Montgomery, 2015).

Research indicates that marketing tactics using influencers, product placements, and interactive material to influence their purchasing behaviour notably affect children (Nairn & Fine, 2008). This has sparked discussions on the morality of child-directed advertising and the necessity for more rigorous rules to shield children from exploitative marketing tactics (Gunter et al., 2005).

The digital divide and inequalities in access to technology

Although digital technology has opened doors for education and communication, it has also strengthened socio-economic inequalities among youngsters. Often as a result of economic, geographic, or physical constraints, the "digital divide" describes the disparity between children with access to technology and those without.

While children from low-income homes may lack fundamental technology capabilities, those from wealthy backgrounds have more access to high-speed internet, digital devices, and online learning materials (Van Deursen & Van Dijk, 2014). Global problems like the COVID-19 epidemic have drawn even more attention to this digital inequality as differences in online education access impacted children's academic achievement (UNICEF, 2021).

Ethical and psychological concerns in digital childhood

Digital technology is altering children, making mental health, data privacy, and online safety concerns more pressing. High screen usage in children is linked to anxiety, depression, and sleep issues (Twenge et al., 2018). Cyberbullying and online harassment also harm children's mental health and self-esteem (Kowalski et al., 2014).

Kids often use digital platforms to collect personal data for targeted marketing and monitoring, raising data privacy concerns (Lupton & Williamson, 2017). Many parents and children are unaware of how their data is used, raising permission and digital rights concerns (Livingstone et al., 2018). Children's digital privacy laws have gained support from advocacy groups advocating

for stricter data collection and online safety (Staksrud & Livingstone, 2009).

Thus, media and technology have changed modern childhood, offering both opportunities and challenges. Digital tools give youngsters education, social connections, and political knowledge, but they also raise worries about digital inequality, commercialization, and misinformation. Providing equal access to technology, protecting children's online experiences, and promoting media literacy are needed to solve these issues.

Challenges and future directions

Significant obstacles remain in guaranteeing an equitable and fair childhood experience for all children even with developments in child rights, education, and technology. Socioeconomic inequality, political unrest, environmental change, and digital hazards still impact infancy in multifaceted ways. Key issues affecting children worldwide are discussed in this part along with possible future paths in policy, research, and activism.

Socioeconomic inequalities and access to opportunities

The ongoing socioeconomic disparities that influence children's access to education, healthcare, and social mobility are among the most urgent issues in childhood studies. Although international bodies like the World Bank and UNICEF have worked to lower child poverty, especially in low-income and marginalized areas inequalities still exist (UNICEF, 2021).

Children from economically underprivileged households are more prone to suffer malnutrition, subpar education, and bad health outcomes (Walker et al., 2011). The world wealth disparity also implies that whilst some kids gain from sophisticated healthcare and elite private education, others lack fundamental needs like stable housing and clean water (Pickett & Wilkinson, 2015).

Future initiatives ought to emphasize closing these gaps by means of fair policies including universal access to high quality education, free healthcare for children, and social safety nets for families in poverty (Sen, 1999). Long-term remedies addressing the underlying causes of childhood disparities should be carried out by governments working with non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

The impact of climate change on childhood

As global temperatures rise, natural disasters, and resource depletion disproportionately affect children, climate change is becoming a major threat to their futures (UNICEF, 2019). Children in developing nations, especially coastal and rural ones, are more likely to be uprooted, hungry, and exposed to natural disasters (IPCC, 2022).

Climate concern increases youth fear and despair about the future (Hickman et al., 2021). In India, kid activists are leading the fight against climate change by promoting action, education, and responsibility. Young Indian activists fight climate change by disseminating knowledge and taking action. Many know Ridhima Pan-

dey, who petitioned, and Licypriya Kangujam, who has battled for climate action since 2018. These activists are pressuring governments to address climate change and inspiring others.

To mitigate these risks, climate policymakers must prioritize children's needs. Youth must participate in decision-making. Education on sustainability and climate resilience in schools should prepare future generations for environmental issues (Chawla, 2020).

Political instability and the plight of refugee children

Children in areas impacted by war, political strife, and forced migration suffer great difficulties that undermine their physical and mental well-being. UNHCR estimates that more than 36,5 million children globally have been forcefully displaced by armed conflict, persecution, and economic instability as of 2022. Often, these kids suffer from a lack of fundamental healthcare, trauma, and interrupted schooling.

To guarantee their access to safe housing, schooling, and psychosocial assistance, policies giving child refugees and asylum seekers top priority must be strengthened (Lundberg, 2020). To offer humanitarian help and relocation initiatives for children impacted by violence and displacement, international cooperation is required.

Digital risks and children's online safety

Digital privacy, cyberbullying, and false information have all grown increasingly important as kids spend more time online. Although technology provides great social and educational advantages, it also exposes children to exploitation, manipulation, and mental health concerns (Livingstone et al., 2017).

Governments and technology businesses have to cooperate to provide child-friendly digital spaces that give safety, privacy, and media literacy top priority. Stricter data protection legislation for minors, social media content moderation, and awareness campaigns about online threats are among policies required to maintain children's digital well-being (Staksrud & Livingstone, 2009).

The future of childhood studies and policy development

Looking ahead, the field of childhood studies must continue evolving to address the complex and dynamic factors shaping children's experiences. Future research should focus on:

- Intersectionality and childhood: Examining how race, gender, class, and disability intersect in shaping childhood experiences.
- Children's agency and participation: Expanding efforts to include children's voices in policymaking and advocacy efforts.
- Post-pandemic childhood: Studying the long-term effects of COVID-19 on children's education, mental health, and socialization.
- Global South perspectives: Moving beyond Western-centric frameworks to incorporate

To summarise, although many romanticize childhood as a time of innocence and safety, actual events like economic inequality, political unrest, and digital threats undermine this image. Dealing with these problems calls for worldwide cooperation, inclusive policy development, and a dedication to strengthening children's voices. Ensuring that every child has access to a safe, encouraging, and empowering environment has to stay a worldwide goal as society develops.

Conclusion

Political, socio-cultural, and economic institutions affect childhood, a complex and dynamic time. Historical contexts, political policies, cultural expectations, and technological advancement shape an experience. This study examines how political beliefs, socio-cultural positionality, and digital transformations affect childhood, focusing on power, privilege, and inequality.

Political discussions over childhood highlighted the state's effect on children's rights, education, labour regulations, and social protections. While political and economic factors affect implementation in different nations, international treaties like the UNCRC set universal standards for children's wellbeing. Children still lack direct political representation, making advocacy and youth action essential to ensure their voices are heard.

In its socio-cultural positionality analysis, this study showed how class, race, gender, and culture affect childhood experiences. Socioeconomic gaps strongly influence education, healthcare, and social mobility. Cultural standards affect parental behaviours, gender expectations, and childhood notions, challenging the idea of a universal experience. Cross-cultural interaction and cultural uniformity have further affected childhood due to globalization.

Another major concern is how media and technology affect childhood. Technology has expanded children's access to knowledge and political participation, but it has also caused cyberbullying, privacy difficulties, and misinformation. Digital platforms' commercialization of childhood raises ethical problems about consumerism and children's autonomy, emphasizing the need for stronger digital literacy and child-centered internet policies.

Digital risks, political unrest, climate change, and economic inequality remain major concerns. These issues require global cooperation, inclusive policymaking, and more child participation in society and politics. Governments, teachers, and child welfare groups must work together to give every child a safe, supportive, and empowered upbringing.

In conclusion, childhood is not just a biological stage but a social and political construct. Understanding it through an interdisciplinary lens — incorporating political science, sociology, and cultural studies — allows for a more nuanced perspective on the forces that shape children's lives. By acknowledging the diversity of childhood experiences and advocating for policies that prioritize children's well-being, societies can work towards a more just and equitable future for all children.

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Digital learning for mixed-ability classrooms: psycho-diagnostic challenges and educational psychology perspectives

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Abstract

Context and relevance. In Indian secondary schools, science classrooms often include students with varying learning needs, posing a challenge to traditional teaching methods. With increasing emphasis on inclusive education, particularly under the National Education Policy 2020, teachers are turning to digital tools to manage this diversity. However, the lack of structured diagnostic methods and adequate training hinders effective implementation. Educational psychology theories suggest that addressing learners' individual needs through informal diagnostic insights, supported by technology, can lead to better outcomes.

Objective. The purpose of this study is to explore how digital learning strategies, informed by educational psychology and informal psycho-diagnostic techniques, can support differentiated teaching in mixed-ability science classrooms. **Hypothesis.** It is assumed that combining digital tools with diagnostic observations helps teachers better engage diverse learners and design personalized instructional strategies. **Methods and materials.** A qualitative research approach was used, involving 20 science teachers from both private and government secondary schools in Delhi NCR. Data were collected through classroom observations, teacher interviews, and reflective notes. The study used the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) and SAMR (Substitution, Augmentation, Modification, Redefinition) models, alongside theories from Gardner and Vygotsky, to analyze teaching practices. **Results.** Teachers employed observation-based diagnostics and basic digital tools such as videos, simulations, and quizzes. While some moved towards modified instruction, most lacked training and access to advanced digital infrastructure. Despite challenges, a clear link emerged between diagnostic awareness and meaningful use of digital methods. **Conclusions.** Integrating informal diagnostic strategies with digital teaching tools enables more inclusive and responsive instruction. Strengthening teacher training and digital access is vital to make science education more adaptive to diverse learners.

Keywords: inclusive education, digital learning, differentiated instruction, mixed-ability classrooms, psycho-diagnostic strategies, science teaching

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Цифровое обучение в классах с разным уровнем подготовки: психодиагностические проблемы и перспективы педагогической психологии

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Резюме

Контекст и актуальность. В средних школах Индии уроки по естественным наукам часто проходят с учениками, у которых разные потребности в обучении. Это создает трудности для учителей, использующих обычные методы преподавания. В связи с большим вниманием к инклюзивному образованию и в рамках Национальной образовательной политики 2020 года, учителя всё чаще используют цифровые инструменты, чтобы лучше справляться с этим разнообразием учеников. Но у них есть проблемы: нет четких методов диагностики и отсутствие подготовки. Согласно теориям педагогической психологии, если учителя смогут лучше понять индивидуальные потребности каждого ученика с помощью неформальных методов диагностики и технологий, это поможет улучшить результаты обучения всех учеников. **Цель.** Цель исследования — изучить, как цифровые стратегии обучения, основанные на теориях педагогической психологии и неформальных психодиагностических методах, могут поддерживать дифференцированное обучение естественным наукам в классах с разным уровнем способностей учеников. **Гипотеза.** Предполагается, что сочетание цифровых инструментов с использованием диагностических методов помогает учителям лучше вовлекать учеников с разным уровнем подготовки и разрабатывать индивидуальные учебные стратегии. **Методы и материалы.** Использовались качественные методы исследования, в рамках которых было опрошено 20 учителей естественных наук из частных и государственных средних школ в национальном столичном округе Дели. Данные собирались посредством наблюдений в классе, интервью с учителями и заметок. В исследовании применялись модели Технологического педагогического контент-знания (TPACK) и SAMR (замена, накопление, модификация, переопределение), а также теории Говарда Гарднера и теории Л.С. Выготского для анализа методов преподавания. **Результаты.** Учителя использовали диагностические методы на основе наблюдений и простые цифровые инструменты, такие как видео, симуляции и викторины. Хотя некоторые педагоги перешли к модифицированным методам преподавания, большинство не имели достаточной подготовки и доступа к современным цифровым технологиям. Несмотря на трудности, явно прослеживалась связь между осведомленностью о диагностике и эффективным использованием цифровых методов. **Выводы.** Интеграция неформальных диагностических методов с цифровыми учебными инструментами позволяет обеспечить более инклюзивное и гибкое обучение. Улучшение подготовки учителей и расширение доступа к цифровым технологиям являются важными для того, чтобы сделать обучение естественным наукам более адаптивным к потребностям разных учеников.

Ключевые слова: инклюзивное образование, цифровое обучение, дифференцированное обучение, классы с разным уровнем способностей, психодиагностические стратегии, преподавание естественных наук

Финансирование. Данное исследование не было профинансировано за счет внешних источников.

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Дополнительные данные. Дополнительные данные, включая журналы наблюдений и анонимизированные интервью с учителями, доступны по запросу у ответственного автора.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Indian science classrooms increasingly represent a microcosm of learner diversity, influenced by disparities in socio-economic background, linguistic exposure, and prior academic achievement. Although the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 envisions an inclusive, competency-based education system, classroom practices often reflect a one-size-fits-all approach. Teachers are frequently underprepared to deal with the nuanced instructional demands posed by mixed-ability groups, particularly in the context of science education, which requires conceptual understanding, procedural fluency, and application skills. As noted in Arora & Chander, 2023, despite recognition of inclusive education in policy discourse, pedagogical strategies remain largely undifferentiated. This research addresses this gap by exploring how digital technologies — ranging from interactive simulations to curated video content — can be strategically employed to support differentiated learning in science classrooms.

Drawing on Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), the study conceptualizes digital tools as potential mediators between learner capability and curricular demands. The study further leverages Gardner's (1983) theory of Multiple Intelligences to identify opportunities for individualized instruction. The introduction situates the research within India's current educational landscape and argues for a model that integrates digital affordances with psycho-diagnostic responsiveness. Educational psychology provides essential frameworks for understanding learner diversity in cognitive and emotional dimensions. In mixed-ability classrooms, theories of cognitive development and individual learning styles are instrumental in shaping effective instructional design. As highlighted in Arora & Chander, 2023, Vygotsky's ZPD remains central to differentiating instruction. Teachers as observed during fieldwork (Arora & Chander, 2023) often scaffolded content using peer tutoring, concrete aids, and visual reinforcement to match students' proximal development levels.

Bruner's concept of scaffolding (1966), which suggests the gradual withdrawal of support as learners gain mastery, was evident in task-based collaborative work where students transitioned from guided instruction to independent problem-solving. This aligns with cultural-historical views of learning as a socially mediated process. Gardner's Multiple Intelligences theory informed several classroom interventions. For instance, role-play in one government school allowed kinesthetic learners to engage with scientific processes. Another classroom used student drawings to depict scientific phenomena, thus accommodating visual learners. The VARK model also found application, as teachers structured activities using multimedia content and manipulatives to align with learner preferences.

2. Research objectives and questions

Research objectives

The study aimed to:

1. Explore how science teachers identify and interpret learner diversity — cognitive, emotional, and linguistic — through informal psychodiagnostics techniques in the absence of formal psychological services.
2. Examine the pedagogical integration of digital tools in mixed-ability secondary science classrooms, focusing on how these tools are aligned with diverse learner profiles.
3. Evaluate the extent to which established educational psychology theories — particularly Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), Gardner's Multiple Intelligences (MI), and Bruner's scaffolding — on differentiated instruction in real classroom settings.
4. Develop a culturally contextual instructional framework that connects informal psychodiagnostic responsiveness with digital pedagogy for inclusive and meaningful science learning teaching in Indian secondary schools.

Research questions

To address the above objectives, the study explored the following questions:

1. RQ1: How do science teachers in diverse Indian classrooms identify cognitive, linguistic, and emotional learner variability without access to formal psycho-diagnostic services?
2. RQ2: What informal diagnostic tools or strategies (e.g., behavioral observations, reflective journals, learning logs) are employed by teachers to guide instructional adaptations?
3. RQ3: Which digital tools are most frequently integrated in mixed-ability science classrooms, and how do these tools correspond with learners' readiness, preferences, and cognitive styles?
4. RQ4: How do teachers incorporate psychological theories — such as Vygotsky's ZPD, Gardner's MI, and Bruner's scaffolding — into the planning and delivery of digitally supported, differentiated instruction?
5. RQ5: What pedagogical challenges do teachers encounter in implementing diagnostic-responsive digital instruction across varying school types (government, private, urban, semi-urban)?
6. RQ6: How do students perceive the effectiveness of differentiated digital learning approaches in enhancing their engagement, understanding, and participation in science classrooms?

3. Educational psychology perspectives

3.1. Cognitive development theories

Educational theories from Piaget, Bruner, and Vygotsky offer essential insights for understanding mixed-ability classrooms. Piaget's cognitive developmental stages suggest middle school learners primarily benefit

from concrete operational tasks involving hands-on activities (Piaget, 1952). Classroom observations affirmed the effectiveness of activity-based science experiments aligning with Piaget’s theory.

Bruner’s scaffolding technique was frequently used, demonstrating gradual withdrawal of support as learners became independent (Bruner, 1966). Additionally, Vygotsky’s ZPD provided a foundation for peer-supported instructional strategies. Observations revealed improved learning outcomes when students received scaffolded peer interactions within their ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978).

3.2. Learning styles and multiple intelligences

The VARK model (Visual, Auditory, Reading/Writing, Kinesthetic) further guided teachers in lesson planning, ensuring multimodal instruction that catered to varied learning styles (Fleming, 2001). Classroom strategies included animations, peer discussions, worksheets, and role-playing activities, validating Gardner’s multiple intelligences theory (Table 1).

4. Digital learning tools and techniques

4.1. Integration of digital technology

Integration of digital technology in Indian classrooms, though advocated by NEP 2020, varied significantly based on infrastructure and teacher readiness. The Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework and the SAMR (Substitution, Augmentation, Modification, Redefinition) model were employed to assess digital integration levels (Puentedura, 2013). Digital tools utilized included DIKSHA videos for content reinforcement, PhET simulations for interactive visualization, and Google Forms for formative assessments. Teachers who effectively combined technological, pedagogical, and content knowledge achieved higher instructional effectiveness, moving beyond basic substitution towards task modification and redefinition. Nevertheless, disparities existed between private schools with extensive digital resources and government schools limited by infrastructural constraints (Arora, 2023).

In Indian classrooms, particularly in science education at the secondary level, psycho-diagnostic challenges emerge due to the lack of access to formal assessment tools and trained professionals. Teachers often rely on informal techniques such as behavioral observations, anecdotal records, and parental feedback to assess learner needs (Chander, 2011; Arora & Chander, 2023). These observational strategies help teachers adjust instructional strategies in real-time, especially in contexts with

limited psychological support infrastructure. Despite the informality, these approaches are crucial for early detection of issues like attention deficits, social withdrawal, and performance inconsistencies. Data gathered during field visits revealed that customized interventions — like peer mentoring, flexible grouping, and visual scaffolding — were frequently deployed based on such insights (Arora & Chander, 2023). The importance of teacher well-being also surfaced as a key theme. Emotionally resilient teachers showed a higher capacity for diagnosing and responding to student needs. Psychological support systems for educators themselves remain a policy gap, suggesting future directions for inclusive frameworks to extend beyond students alone (ResearchGate, 2024).

Digital learning tools, when deployed effectively, can act as cognitive amplifiers, enhancing the learning process by providing opportunities for visualization, interaction, and individualized pacing. In the context of Indian secondary education, the implementation of such tools is uneven and influenced by infrastructural and pedagogical readiness (Zhao & Frank, 2003). The present study adopted the SAMR model (Puentedura, 2013) and the TPACK framework (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) to evaluate the depth of technology integration observed in science classrooms.

The role of digital technology in transforming Indian classrooms has gained prominence through national initiatives like DIKSHA and policy shifts under NEP 2020. In the observed schools, digital tools were integrated to varying degrees depending on infrastructure, teacher training, and learner readiness. These tools ranged from multimedia lessons to interactive simulations and assessment platforms. The study employed the TPACK (Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge) framework to analyse teacher competencies across three intersecting domains: content knowledge, pedagogy, and technology use. Teachers who demonstrated stronger integration of all three domains created lesson plans that moved beyond basic substitution to modification and redefinition, as conceptualized in the SAMR model.

5. Theoretical framework

This research is situated within the broader discipline of cultural-historical psychology, which emphasizes the socially mediated and culturally situated nature of learning and development. Rooted in the theoretical lineage of Vygotsky, the study positions the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) as a diagnostic lens for understanding learners’ potential and framing instructional interven-

Table 1

Learning modalities used in science classrooms

Modality	Instructional strategy	Example from field
Visual	Use of animations and digital diagrams	PhET simulations
Auditory	Oral explanations, discussions	Peer teaching
Reading / writing	Worksheets and summarization exercises	Concept maps
Kinaesthetic	Experiments, role-plays, model making	Magnet kit usage

tions. The integration of digital tools is not seen as isolated technological upgrades, but as instruments embedded in a cultural context that mediate knowledge construction, peer collaboration, and teacher scaffolding. In this way, the study aligns with cultural-historical approaches by exploring how sociocultural tools — such as language, group roles, and technology — shape and transform the learning trajectories of diverse learners in Indian classrooms.

The conceptual underpinnings of this study are grounded in a triad of psychological and pedagogical theories that support inclusive and differentiated instruction in mixed-ability science classrooms. These include Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences (1983), Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978), and Bruner's model of scaffolding. Each contributes uniquely to understanding learner diversity, especially when mediated through digital technologies. Gardner's framework highlights that students possess distinct cognitive strengths — such as linguistic, logical-mathematical, visual-spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, musical, and naturalistic intelligences — which demand corresponding differentiation in content delivery and assessment formats. In the classrooms studied, teachers were seen incorporating multiple representations such as storyboards, practical activities, and reflective logs to align with this plurality.

Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) offers a cultural-historical lens to examine how peer mediation, language, and tools (including digital ones) scaffold student learning. Observations in urban and semi-urban

schools demonstrated that when teachers positioned students within their ZPD — especially using peer collaboration and guided digital interactions — engagement and conceptual clarity improved notably. Bruner's scaffolding model complements the ZPD approach by suggesting gradual release of responsibility to the learner. Teachers adapted instructional pacing and digital tool usage based on informal diagnostic observations, such as real-time feedback and group participation.

These theoretical orientations coalesce in the instructional design adopted in this study. The following conceptual flowchart (Fig 1) visualizes how these frameworks interlink with digital pedagogy and psycho-diagnostic responsiveness to address learner heterogeneity in science classrooms.

6. Psycho-diagnostic challenges in mixed-ability classrooms

Addressing the diverse needs of learners in a mixed-ability classroom necessitates that educators employ diagnostic practices tailored to individual challenges. However, formal psycho-diagnostic services, such as the availability of trained school psychologists or educational counselors, remain largely absent from the infrastructure of Indian schools, particularly in government-run institutions. This significant gap places the responsibility solely on teachers, who often turn to informal strategies developed through their own expe-

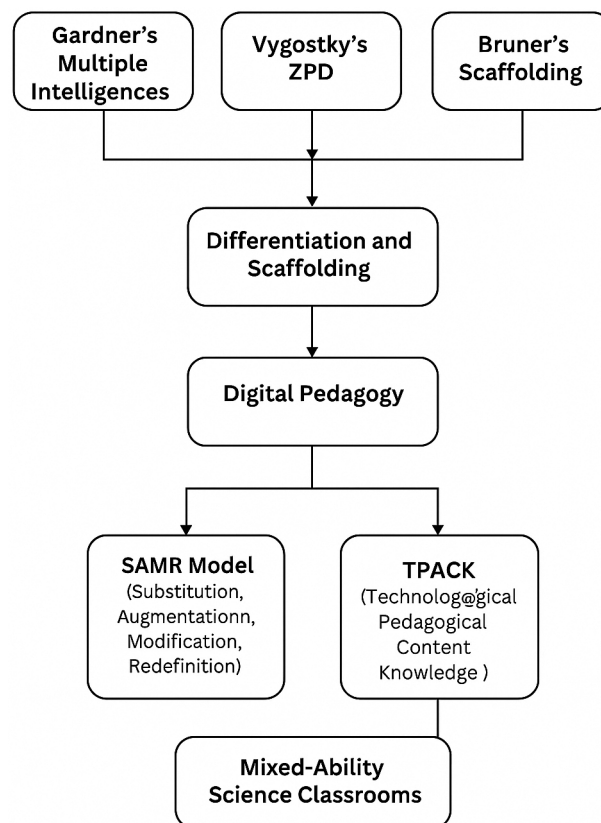


Fig. 1. Instructional framework based on Gardner, Vygotsky, Bruner, and digital pedagogies (adapted from Arora & Chander, 2023)

riences, shared practices from colleagues, or personal instincts honed over time. These adaptive methods play a vital role in understanding student difficulties and customizing teaching approaches to ensure effective learning outcomes.

In many cases, teachers construct observation checklists, maintain learning logs, or record anecdotal instances to monitor and evaluate student behavior, levels of participation, and overall engagement. These records allow educators to identify patterns and recurring issues, such as tendencies to avoid tasks, incomplete assignments, frequent inattention, or lack of verbal interaction during class activities. By analyzing these trends, teachers can pinpoint learners who require targeted modifications to instruction or remedial interventions. Such informal diagnostics become crucial in bridging the gap where formal systems are unavailable, helping educators support students more effectively.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has set forth ambitious goals to foster learner-centric environments that promote inclusivity, curriculum flexibility, and competence-based education. Yet, despite these guidelines, the absence of structured diagnostic training leads many teachers to rely on uniform instructional strategies that may not cater to the varied needs of their students. Instead of implementing differentiated teaching methods, educators often struggle to adapt their practices to accommodate mixed-ability groups. This challenge underscores the urgent need for teacher development programs that emphasize psycho-diagnostic skills, enabling educators to navigate diverse classroom dynamics with greater confidence and precision.

In such contexts, teachers often approach diagnostic challenges by developing personalized strategies that align with their unique teaching circumstances. These strategies, despite being informal, have proven instrumental in addressing student-specific needs and enhancing learning experiences in classrooms that lack access to psychological expertise or resources. By leveraging their observations and intuition, educators contribute significantly to creating more inclusive and adaptive learning environments that support students' individual growth and success.

7. Research methodology

This section expands on the preliminary methodological overview presented earlier, providing a transparent

account of research design, sampling logic, data-collection instruments, and analytic procedures. The level of detail adheres to COREQ guidelines (Tong, Sainsbury, & Craig, 2007) to ensure replicability and evaluative rigour.

7.1. Philosophical orientation

The study is grounded in *interpretivism*, recognising that knowledge about classroom practice is co-constructed by participants and researchers (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A *constructivist* stance (Crotty, 1998) shaped the open-ended data-generation processes and the inductive – deductive analytic cycle. This ontological and epistemological positioning legitimised thick description, teacher narratives, and micro-interactional evidence as primary data. This research adopted a qualitative case study approach aimed at exploring how digital pedagogies are implemented in mixed-ability science classrooms, with an emphasis on psychodiagnostics awareness and responsive instructional practices. The design aligns with the interpretivist paradigm, acknowledging the complexity of classroom realities and the subjective meanings constructed by teachers and learners. As outlined in the thesis, the methodology was selected to accommodate the context-specific nuances of Indian classrooms, particularly in government and private secondary schools in Delhi NCR. A constructivist lens, informed by Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, guided the research design and interpretation of findings.

7.2. Multiple – case study design

Following Yin (2018), a *multiple – case* design enabled analytic generalisation across six bounded cases – three government and three private, co-educational, Hindi-/English-medium secondary schools in Delhi-NCR. Each 'case' was a Grade 9 science classroom observed over nine consecutive instructional periods (≈ 360 minutes). Case boundaries were demarcated by school, teacher, and academic term, allowing within-case depth and cross-case contrast (Stake, 2006).

7.3. Participant recruitment

Purposive sampling identified six science teachers (4 female, 2 males; teaching experience 5 – 23 years). Student assent ($n = 180$) and parental consent followed Directorate of Education guidelines (Table 2). Pseudonyms protect identities.

Table 2

Data collection matrix

Phase	Instrument	Purpose	Sampled artefacts
P1	Structured observation checklist	Map digital-tool flow, interaction patterns	36 lesson logs, 216 time-stamped field notes
P2	Stimulated-recall teacher interviews	Elicit diagnostic reasoning and tool selection	6 verbatim transcripts ($\approx 54\,000$ words)
P3	Focus-group student dialogues	Capture learners affect and perception of differentiation	12 audio files, 90 student comments
P4	Document harvest	Triangulate enacted vs. planned curriculum	42 lesson plans, 18 Google Forms, 27 PhET screenshots

8. Observations

Here are the observations from the data collected.

8.1. Classroom-level digital pedagogy patterns

The study revealed significant variations in digital tool adoption across school types as mentioned in Table 3 below.

Teachers in private schools used a combination of DIKSHA, PhET, and Google Forms, aligning with TPACK competencies. In contrast, government schools largely relied on DIKSHA videos in substitution mode. In one example from School A, a teacher introduced the topic of force using a DIKSHA video. This was followed by a PhET simulation allowing students to change variables such as mass and slope. Students were then asked to complete a Google Form that assessed conceptual understanding.

This sequence (Table 4) illustrates a transition from augmentation to modification, as learners interacted with content in non-linear, choice-based formats. At the substitution and augmentation levels, DIKSHA videos and digital worksheets were employed to reinforce textbook con-

tent. In classrooms with higher digital literacy, tools like PhET simulations enabled task redesign – aligning with the modification and redefinition stages of SAMR (Arora & Chander, 2023). Google Forms and mobile-based quizzes were used to support formative assessment, providing instant feedback loops that enhanced student engagement. At the substitution level (Table 5), PDF-based materials replaced textbooks. Augmentation included DIKSHA app videos with rewind capabilities. However, it was in private schools where meaningful modification occurred through collaborative digital tools (e.g., Google Docs) and redefinition with simulation labs (e.g., PhET).

Teachers’ digital integration was examined through the lens of the SAMR and TPACK models. The majority of usage remained within the Substitution and Augmentation levels, with higher-order modification and redefinition noted only in select private schools with robust infrastructure (Table 6).

Anecdote: “We use DIKSHA videos at the start of each topic – it helps set context. But the real change came when we let students play with simulations and change variables on their own.” – Science Teacher, School A

Table 3

Summary of digital tool usage in observed schools

Tool	Function	Context of use
DIKSHA App	Content delivery (videos, PDFs)	Used for concept introduction and reinforcement
Google Forms	Formative assessment and feedback	Post-lesson quizzes and polls
PhET Simulations	Interactive visualizations	Teaching magnetism, atomic structure
PowerPoint	Structured visual explanations	Summary slides, visual mapping
YouTube	Supplemental videos	Showing real-life applications of science

Table 4

Levels of digital adoption in the observed schools using the SAMR framework

Level	Description	Classroom example
Substitution	Technology replaces traditional methods without change in task	Digital textbook used instead of print (Arora, 2023)
Augmentation	Technology adds functional improvements to traditional tasks	Online MCQs with instant feedback
Modification	Technology allows for significant task redesign	Collaborative Google Docs assignments
Redefinition	Technology enables previously inconceivable tasks	Virtual labs and simulations using PhET (Arora, 2023)

Table 5

School type and integration depth

School type	Digital resource availability	Integration depth (based on SAMR)	instructional impact
Private Urban	High	Modification, Redefinition	Enhanced engagement, feedback loops
Government Semi-urban	Moderate/Low	Substitution, Augmentation	Visualization, basic reinforcement

Table 6

Table digital adoption across schools (SAMR-aligned)

SAMR level	Government Schools (%)	private Schools (%)	tools employed
Substitution	80%	30%	PDFs, DIKSHA videos
Augmentation	65%	55%	YouTube tutorials, online MCQs
Modification	30%	60%	Google Docs for collaborative tasks
Redefinition	10%	45%	PhET simulations, remote experiments

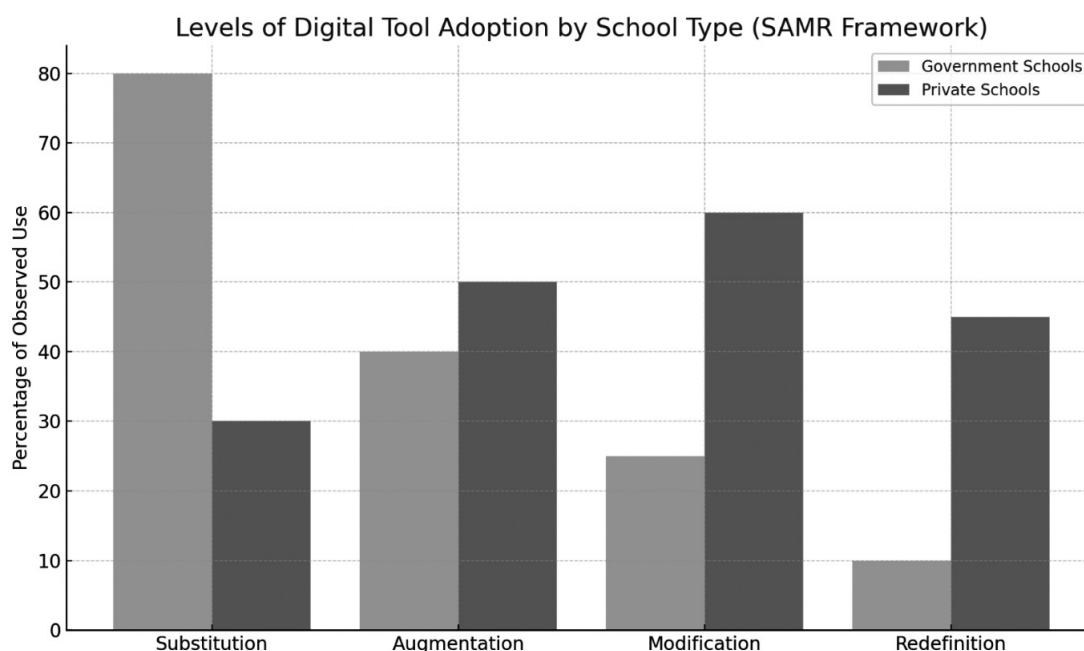


Fig. 2. Levels of digital tool adoption by school type

Here is a visual representation (Fig 2) of digital tool adoption levels in science classrooms across government and private schools, based on the SAMR framework:

- Government schools predominantly remain at the “Substitution” level (80%) with limited progression to “Redefinition” (10%). Substitution is more common in government schools (80%) where digital tools simply replace traditional methods without significant instructional redesign.
- Private schools demonstrate more advanced digital integration, with higher engagement in “Modification” (60%) and “Redefinition” (45%). Augmentation and Modification show higher usage in private schools due to better infrastructure and teacher readiness. Redefinition remains limited overall but is significantly more present in private institutions.

Anecdote 2: Use of PhET simulations (school A)

“We used the simulation on magnetism. Students could vary the mass, observe changes... It really helped the quieter ones come forward and explain their understanding without having to write.” (*Science Teacher, School A*)

Visual and interactive content served dual purposes: clarifying concepts and accommodating non-traditional learners who struggled with written tasks.

8.2. Psycho-diagnostic techniques

Teachers rarely had access to formal psycho-diagnostic tools. Instead, instructional decisions were grounded in continuous behavioral observation, peer group dynamics, and performance logs. Classrooms with stronger diagnostic practices were better able to align tools with learner needs. For instance, learners struggling with English were paired with bilingual peers, and visuals were emphasized. In several cases, role-based group activities helped mitigate withdrawal and boosted self-efficacy among quieter learners (Table 7).

One teacher from School B shared: “I started maintaining a notebook just to record what topics each child

is struggling with. Over time, I could predict who would need a slower pace or more visuals.” Another common practice was the use of informal socio-emotional mapping. Teachers used structured group activities to observe peer dynamics and interpersonal confidence. Instances of social withdrawal or consistent exclusion from peer interactions were flagged and addressed via seating arrangements or peer-buddy systems.

Across contexts, teachers employed informal diagnostic strategies such as:

- Learning logs to identify low performers
- Peer mapping to observe social withdrawal
- Homework completion patterns for behavioral cues

In several case studies (Table 8), the teacher’s diagnostic awareness led to significant shifts in student performance. One student initially labelled as “slow” due to non-submission of homework was found to be experiencing parental neglect due to migration. A personalized homework schedule and emotional support led to improved attendance and classroom interaction. However, these successes were tempered by systemic challenges. These strategies allowed teachers to identify outliers, especially in classrooms with 40+ students, often without any technological aid. In many instances, diagnostic actions preceded digital implementation.

Such insights led to *instructional adaptations*, including:

- Group reshuffling
- Simplified task sequencing
- Use of bilingual content

Anecdote: Resource Gap and Student Frustration “We had this video on respiration in English and Hindi, but the terms didn’t match our textbook. The children were confused, and I had to re-teach.” (*Teacher from a semi-urban government school*). These anecdotes illustrate the tension between policy vision (NEP 2020) and field realities.

Table 7

**Common learning challenges and informal psychodiagnostics practices observed classrooms
 (adapted from Arora & Chander, 2023)**

Challenge	Observation method	Pedagogical response
Frequent absenteeism	Parent meeting, health review	Adjusted pacing, digital catch-up content, modules on mobile devices
Language delays	Oral probing, written baseline test	Use of bilingual instruction aids
Attention deficit behaviours	Behavioural observation log	Task segmentation, tactile cues
Conceptual confusion	Pre/post worksheets	Peer remediation and group review sessions
Inattention	Behaviour Checklist	Task chunking, shorter instructions
Inconsistent performance	Peer interaction monitoring	Role rotation in group tasks, mentorship model
Anxiety/withdrawal	Peer feedback,	Peer buddy system, reduced homework
Poor comprehension	Repeated questioning, logs	Visual scaffolds, bilingual instructions

Table 8

Diagnostic indicator and instructional response

Diagnostic indicator	Observation Method	Instructional Response
Inattention	Behavior observation checklist	Proximity control, task chunking
Anxiety or withdrawal	Parent-teacher dialogue, journaling	Reduced homework load, peer buddy support
Inconsistent performance	Learning log review	Customized assignments and flexible deadlines
Low group participation	Peer interaction monitoring	Role rotation in group tasks, mentorship model

8.3. Multiple intelligences and instructional design

Teachers exhibited varying awareness of Howard Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences. While none formally cited the framework, their practices demonstrated alignment. Classroom observations (Table 9) revealed intentional multimodal design in lesson planning. Teachers reported referencing the VARK model and Multiple Intelligences to diversify delivery modes. In science, kinesthetic learners benefited from hands-on kits, while visual learners thrived on diagrams and simulations.

These adaptive strategies underscore the organic evolution of differentiated instruction – even without explicit training – guided by teacher intuition, field experience, and basic ICT familiarity (Fig 3).

- Kinesthetic strategies (e.g., magnet kits, role play) were most used (65%)
- Visual tools like PhET simulations and Power-Point came next (60%)
- Auditory strategies such as peer explanation and group discussion were at 55%
- Reading/Writing modalities (e.g., summaries and worksheets) had 50% usage

Anecdote: “I let some kids draw circuits rather than explain them in words. That’s how they think – visually. And their answers were often more accurate.” – Teacher, School C

8.4 Mapping of key findings with objectives

Objective 1: To explore how teachers identify and respond to learner variability

Key findings: Teachers employed informal psychodiagnostic tools such as observation checklists, behavior logs, and reflective notes. These helped identify challenges like attention lapses, language barriers, and emotional withdrawal. The absence of structured diagnostic tools made teachers depend heavily on intuitive and experience-based methods.

Objective 2: To examine how digital tools are used to support differentiated instruction

Key findings: DIKSHA videos, PhET simulations, and Google Forms were frequently used. In private schools, the use of digital simulations led to task redefinition, whereas in government schools, technology was often used at the substitution level due to infrastructural limitations. Teachers aligned content with VARK modalities.

Objective 3: To assess the extent to which psychodiagnostic insights shape pedagogical decisions

Key findings: Teachers adjusted grouping strategies, task complexity, and pacing based on behavioral observations. For instance, students with low verbal engagement

Table 9

Instructional strategies and multiple intelligences

Intelligence type	Observed strategy	Classroom example
Visual-spatial	Diagram-based explanations	Atom structure drawing for Class 9
Bodily-kinesthetic	Role plays, model making	Explaining food chains via group acting
Verbal-linguistic	Oral narration, journaling	Students explaining Newton's laws in Hindi
Interpersonal	Group work, pair collaboration	Peer explanation tasks in diverse groups
Logical-mathematical	Simulation-based analysis	Titration demo using interactive applet

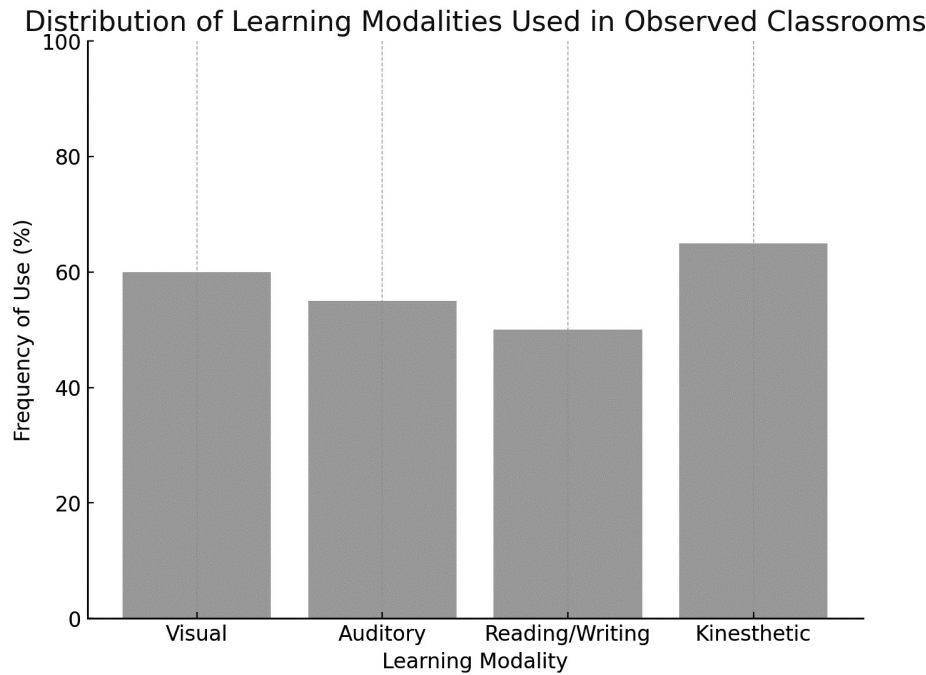


Fig 3. Distribution of learning modalities used in observed classrooms” showcases how frequently visual, auditory, reading/writing, and kinaesthetic strategies were employed

were placed with peers who could support them through collaborative work. Visual aids and simplified content formats were used for students with language delays.

Objective 4: To analyze the role of visual aids, multimodal tools, and differentiated grouping in enhancing participation and conceptual understanding

Key findings: Use of role-plays, science models, realia, and drawing-based science explanations were documented. Students who struggled in pen-paper tests were more responsive in kinesthetic or visual formats. Videos and animation-based tutorials supported recall and engagement. Figure 2 (SAMR integration) and Table 3 (Digital Tool Use) from the thesis substantiate this.

9. Results & discussion

Table 10 below captures the Objectives and their key insights.

Objective 1: Learner variability and diagnosis

Findings support the view that informal psychodiagnostics — despite being intuitive — were instrumental in identifying and responding to learner needs. These prac-

tices echo Vygotsky’s idea of individualized scaffolding within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), though in a non-institutionalized form. The absence of systemic diagnostic infrastructure reveals a significant policy gap.

Objective 2: Digital differentiation

Digital tools acted as cognitive enablers when employed thoughtfully. In contexts where the TPACK framework was applied, learning experiences moved beyond surface engagement to deeper conceptual understanding. However, unequal access to digital tools widened the instructional gap between private and government schools.

These approaches affirm the theoretical alignment with Gardner’s intelligences and Vygotsky’s ZPD — where peer scaffolding allowed students to bridge conceptual gaps.

1. The findings of this study emphasize that the success of digital and diagnostic strategies in mixed-ability classrooms depends not only on tools and content but also on the teacher’s preparedness. Despite the availability of digital infrastructure in several schools, there was limited translation into inclusive pedagogical practices due to gaps in teacher training.

2. Feedback from students (field interview notes) suggested:

Table 10

Key insights

Objective	Key insights
1	Informal psycho-diagnostic methods like learning logs and socio-emotional observations help detect learner needs
2	Digital integration varies widely; private schools use SAMR modification/redefinition levels more effectively
3	Diagnostic responsiveness shapes instructional alignment more than the availability of digital tools
4	Multimodal teaching, rooted in Multiple Intelligences and VARK, results in better inclusion and engagement

- a. Preference for blended formats (video + teacher support)
- b. Improved conceptual understanding when digital content was interactive
- c. Reduced anxiety in peer-supported environments

Objective 3: Pedagogy informed by diagnosis

In alignment with Gardner's theory, differentiated instruction strategies were evident — especially among teachers who triangulated observation with learner preferences. This finding validates the hypothesis that digital pedagogy must be guided by diagnostic insight to be truly inclusive.

Objective 4: Visual and kinaesthetic strategies

Multimodal instruction enhanced student engagement and participation, particularly for students who struggled with conventional assessment formats. Role-play, peer group activities, and tactile experiments became vehicles for expression among kinaesthetic learners.

10. Results and conclusion

This section synthesizes the core findings from classroom observations, teacher interviews, student work samples, and institutional documents across a diverse range of government and private schools in the Delhi NCR region. The data were analysed using a combination of thematic coding and alignment with the research objectives, specifically focusing on psychodiagnostic awareness, differentiated instruction, and the integra-

tion of digital tools in mixed-ability science classrooms. This section presents the empirical findings of the study drawn from field observations, teacher interviews, student feedback, and visual documentation across mixed-ability science classrooms in Delhi NCR.

The results affirm that meaningful digital integration in mixed-ability classrooms cannot be decoupled from diagnostic consciousness and pedagogical flexibility. In the absence of clinical tools or professional support, Indian teachers are building context-sensitive, humane strategies that reflect both their constraints and their commitment. However, for the model to scale, policy frameworks must include diagnostic training modules, ICT grants for schools, and localized digital content aligned to curricular goals.

Challenges in diagnostic-responsive instruction

Despite promising practices, significant systemic barriers inhibited deeper implementation:

1. Infrastructure gaps: In at least four government schools, there was only one smartboard per school shared across classes.
2. Training deficits: Teachers in these settings had only attended 2-3 DIKSHA modules with no hands-on ICT workshops.
3. Overcrowding: Student-teacher ratios exceeding 50:1 made individualized attention nearly impossible.
4. Psychodiagnostic methods for teachers: Supporting teacher emotional health enhances their diagnostic capacity, as emotional bandwidth correlates with student responsiveness.

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Both authors participated in the development of the paper from inception, including discussion of the results, and approved the final text of the manuscript.

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Decolonising pedagogy in post-apartheid South Africa: the expanded understanding of Vygotsky's theory and new postulates

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Abstract

Context and relevance. The paper examines contemporary post-apartheid pedagogy and its underlying epistemologies that position teachers and their students as passively conforming to prescribed knowledge and concepts disconnected from practical realities, goals, and students' personal pursuit of meanings. **Objective and Hypothesis.** Such an approach, premised on values of adaptation to the status quo of preexisting models and procedures, fails to promote knowledge premised on values of contribution to collective social practices and self-identity development. **Theoretical basis.** That is, pedagogy so conceptualised in the logic of colonial orthodoxies and solipsistic epistemologies, inevitably denies students and their teachers their inherent capacities for agency and meaningful engagement with reality. **Results and discussion.** Therefore, in instantiating decolonising approach to pedagogy, a young student the teacher had deemed to be experiencing learning difficulties, enacts her embodied knowledge¹ and is thereby posited as debunking the logic of colonial epistemologies that underpin contemporary post-apartheid pedagogy. **Conclusions.** The student is therefore presented as enacting her culturally situated community practices and knowledge traditions which she embodies, despite the continued exclusion of such knowledge practices within contemporary post-apartheid pedagogy.

Keywords: decolonising pedagogy, transformative agency, post-apartheid pedagogy, indigenous knowledge, Vygotsky's cultural-historical framework

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¹ Translator's notes: **Embodied knowledge** is a concept according to which knowledge is not only theories and mental ideas but also related to our personal experience, sensations, and how our body interacts with the surrounding world. This approach suggests that we learn through practical actions and personal experience, demonstrating how the body helps us understand and perceive reality. The concept of embodied knowledge challenges the outdated view that mind and body are separate entities and emphasizes that bodily perception is important for developing our knowledge and skills.

Деколонизация педагогики в постапартеидской Южной Африке: расширенное понимание теории Л.С. Выготского и новые постулаты

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Резюме

Контекст и актуальность. В статье анализируется современная педагогика в постапартеидской Южной Африке и ее основные идеи, которые представляют учителей и учеников как пассивных участников, просто следящих за установленными знаниями и концепциями. Эти знания часто оторваны от реальных условий, целей обучения и личных поисков смыслов самих учеников. **Цель и гипотеза.** Такой подход, который основывается на необходимости приспосабливаться к существующим моделям и правилам, не способствует развитию знаний, связанных с участием в общественных практиках и формированием личной идентичности. Иными словами, педагогика, которая основана на колониальных взглядах и замкнутах в своих представлениях знаниях, лишает учеников и учителей их естественной способности быть активными участниками и по-настоящему взаимодействовать с окружающей реальностью. **Результаты.** Таким образом, при использовании деколонизирующего подхода к обучению, ученица, которую учитель считал испытывающей трудности в обучении, проявляет свои знания через действия и тело (телесные знания)². **Выводы.** Это показывает, что ученица оспаривает идеи колониальных способов мышления, которые лежат в основе современной педагогики в постапартеидской Южной Африке. При этом она демонстрирует свои культурные практики и знания, связанные с ее сообществом, несмотря на то, что такие знания и практики часто игнорируются или исключаются в современной системе образования.

Ключевые слова: деколонизирующая педагогика, трансформирующая агентность, педагогика постапартеидской Южной Африки, традиционные знания, культурно-историческая теория Выготского

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Introduction

Three decades after the post-1994 negotiated democratic transformation from apartheid schooling and society to a post-apartheid democratic dispensation, pedagogy and schooling in South Africa more generally have remained largely untransformed — beyond the usual surface-level veneer — changes that left deeper colonial structures and ideological foundations essentially unscathed. Instead, colonial and Western-centric epis-

temologies have progressively entrenched themselves deep into the structure of pedagogy and schooling, with the majority of students not performing at the level and with the quality expected of a transformative society that has just been emancipated from oppressive apartheid and colonial systems.

Post-apartheid pedagogy in South Africa, in its contemporary manifestations, is therefore deeply rooted in colonial ideals, espousing Western hegemonic epistemologies and a world rendered hierarchical in its

² Прим. перев.: **Телесные знания** (embodied knowledge) понятие, согласно которому знания — это не только теории и умственные идеи, но и то, что связано с нашим личным опытом, ощущениями и тем, как наше тело взаимодействует с окружающим миром. Этот подход говорит о том, что мы учимся через практические действия и личный опыт, показывая, как тело помогает нам понимать и воспринимать окружающую реальность. Концепция телесных знаний оспаривает устаревшее представление о том, что разум и тело — это разные вещи, и подчеркивает, что восприятие телом важно для того, чтобы развивать наши знания и навыки.

racialized implications. By espousing methodological individualism, students' needs, interests, and goals are disregarded, and students' creativity and personal sense are denied. Consequently, teachers resort to mechanically connecting knowledge to their students' subjective experiences.

Therefore, the norms of Eurocentric epistemologies and associated orthodoxies were rendered logical and indispensable for the socioeconomic success and survival of post-colonial societies. For example, in arguing for the organization of contemporary post-apartheid pedagogy, the review committee stated that: "What we need to provide is a clear statement of the 'powerful knowledge' (Young, 2007) that offers better learning, life, and work opportunities for learners — especially for teachers who have been dispossessed in the past, who are insecure in the present, and uncertain of the future. Certainty and specificity about what to teach and how to teach it will help restore confidence and stability in the system and enhance the learning opportunities we provide for our students" (Department of Education, 2009, p. 62).

The idea of neutral, value-free, universal knowledge — 'powerful' in itself — is often presented as a ready solution to prevailing socioeconomic needs of societies. Contemporary interpretations of Vygotsky's framework have also adopted such assumptions rooted in the idea of a historical telos. As Jones (2021) has argued, despite the crucial emancipatory goals underpinning Vygotsky's theory — such as progress — the idea cannot escape scrutiny within the context of decolonization of knowledge and pedagogy. Jones (2021), however, admits that Vygotsky continuously revised his theory until his untimely death in 1934. Such revisions remain relevant today as a way to counter coercive models and interpretations that promote colonial domination and control — and thereby deny the validity and legitimacy of local indigenous knowledge and traditions.

Theoretical basis

In proposing a form of pedagogy for post-apartheid schooling, Miller (1984), for example, argues that pedagogy must engender, on the part of African children, Western culture and thought processes. Further, to this end, Miller (1984) argues — in contradistinction to Cole's (1996) position regarding the pedagogy of minority students in the American context — that models of schooling based on cultural relativism could, unfortunately, reproduce the same inequalities that apartheid schooling had produced. That is, Miller (1984) argues against a model of schooling that caters to cultural diversity vis-à-vis African students, as this, in his view, would inevitably result in what he termed "cultural zoos." Such an approach, according to Miller (1984), would further lock African students into their cultural milieus and thereby restrict their conceptual capacity for successful learning and development — similar to what had been the case under the discredited apartheid schooling (Miller, 1984; Matusov, 2008).

In a similar vein, Van Vlaenderen (1999) reports that African students in her study demonstrated knowledge assumptions, concepts, and problem-solving approaches involving the perception of knowledge as 'situationally bound,' emphasizing 'reciprocal interdependence with others,' and foregrounding 'social harmony.' At the same time, these students assumed an inherent connectedness between 'cognitive and affective aspects' of knowledge (Van Vlaenderen, 1999, pp. 172 — 173). As a result, Van Vlaenderen (1999) concludes that these young people perceived the process of solving problems as predominantly interpersonal. That is, according to Van Vlaenderen (1999), the students perceived knowledge and truth as not absolute and not independent of those who defined them. Therefore, Van Vlaenderen (1999) suggests that these students need assistance in relinquishing their culturally constrained ways of thinking and problem-solving and should be provided with more effective cultural tools for competing on the global stage.

Similar calls for African students to abandon their culture and traditions of knowledge and language practices in favor of Western epistemologies and worldviews have continued from the early days of post-apartheid schooling and society in South Africa into the current decade of student decolonial movements such as #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall (see Hardman, 2024; Griffiths, 2019; Jansen, 2017; 2019). Strong reactions to calls for decolonizing pedagogy — which have spread into an international movement spanning South Africa, the United Kingdom, and many other countries — were unfortunately met with strong critiques and skepticism. For example, Jansen (2019) argues that calls for decolonization amount to 'retrogressive nativism' and a 'retreat to indigenization' (Jansen, 2017, p. 167; 2019, p. 62; Griffiths, 2019, p. 6). Griffiths (2019) also supports this view by arguing that such calls resemble "narrow," 'essentialist,' and 'isolatory practices,' instead of representing a "genuine decolonization" agenda. According to Griffiths (2019), in agreement with Mbebe (2016), genuine decolonization requires 'an active reckoning with the forces of globalization' that involves 'the acceptance of the Humboldtian University in the global South' (Griffiths, 2019, p. 6).

Nonetheless, in contradistinction to the sceptical posture of mainstream commentaries within South African scholarship, Hardman (2024) argues from a Vygotskian interpretive framework for a pedagogy that includes the voice of the previously marginalized in a pedagogical developmental space where a culturally more competent other (the teacher) guides the student towards the co-construction of meaning as a mechanism for decolonial pedagogy. However, Hardman proposes that such an approach fails because pedagogy is political and requires political will to shift the structures that have existed for centuries. Consequently, Hardman (2024) advocates a Kierkegaardian leap of faith involving critical engagement with the colonial canon and its pedagogical basis. Such engagement would, for example, involve re-evaluating how teachers teach, prioritizing the kind of knowledge that students need to navigate the 21st century (Hardman, 2024, p. 156).

Indeed, there is an unmistakable need to shift the paradigm regarding the contemporary post-apartheid approach to pedagogy in South Africa. However, it remains unclear whether this shift should be merely a corrective action based on a simple review of prevailing methods and their associated knowledge assumptions. This is especially critical given the current approach to pedagogy, which tends to favor solipsistic and mentalist approaches that position both students and teachers as passive participants who have no will or agency to realize their history and create their desired future – enacting goals and interests – and thereby transforming society and themselves.

Therefore, it is essential to address the erosion of agency among students and teachers – including the development of students’ self-identity – by challenging the myths of the Western canon and associated orthodoxies that render culturally situated knowledge and community practices irrelevant and personal sense insignificant. These myths require thorough debunking once and for all. At the same time, a decolonizing approach to pedagogy should be premised on the philosophical centrality of activism and on students’ and teachers’ agency as the foundation for a pedagogy based on learning-by-doing – or performative pedagogy – rather than merely epistemic approaches that promote solipsism and objectivist methodologies.

Loss of agency and conflict of motives

Van Oers (2015) reports a similar consequence of pedagogy regarding conflict of motives and loss of agency on the part of teachers and their students within Dutch primary schooling. Owing to the neo-liberal reform programme in the Netherlands, teachers and their students found themselves in the deep end of a fixed curriculum model, premised on the idea of “school as an economic production factor.” Within the context of neoliberal schooling, teachers and students are rendered passive participants without agency, and students’ ability to make sense of problem situations by relating knowledge to personal motives is compromised (van Oers, 2015, p. 20). The demands for teachers and students to follow strict procedures, prescribed methodologies, and pre-established routines – in line with the fixed curriculum model – inevitably lead to conflicts of interest on the part of teachers and students vis-à-vis the enactment of personal sense and agency.

The fundamental problem with such neoliberal models of pedagogy, as van Oers (2015) contends, is that they inevitably undermine the goals of fostering agency, critical reflection, innovation, creativity, and social responsibility – especially by positing curriculum contents and structures as neutral instruments that can be implemented mechanically. As a consequence, concepts, skills, and values become commodified, taking on objectified meanings which, in turn, lead to alienation and loss of agency and identity development. For van Oers (2015), to overcome the negative effects of the commodification of knowledge and the associated objectification of meanings – vis-à-vis teachers’ conflict of motives and

their students’ ability to relate knowledge to personal motives and make meaningful sense of problem situations – a play-based pedagogy for reinforcing agency was introduced.

This “playfully formatted activities,” according to van Oers (2015), become the “auxiliary means” or mediating tools for overcoming the assumption that pedagogy can be implemented with teachers merely serving as mechanical links between subject matter knowledge and concepts and students’ subjective experiences (van Oers, 2015, p. 20). Consequently, according to van Oers (2015), this model helped teachers act with agency and be creative and innovative in their teaching – meaningfully connecting pedagogy to the needs and interests of their students – while simultaneously fulfilling political demands for transmitting objectified meanings within the prescribed curriculum policy framework.

The logic of colonial legacies

For example, Enslin and Hedge (2023) have argued that with the expansion of the colonial system, education served as a de facto instrument of its legitimation and validation, with schooling and knowledge in general subjected to the evolving logic of colonial and neoliberal ideologies. Knowledge – and education in particular – served to justify and legitimize the logic of the colonial world order, within its inherent injustices. At the same time, the validity of indigenous cultures and the associated knowledge, practices, and traditions was systematically undermined. Therefore, knowledge was rendered in the logic of colonial structures and their practices of control and domination.

The unwarranted assumption about the inherent inferiority of culturally situated knowledge practices and the associated indigenous knowledge traditions vis-à-vis Western epistemologies and worldview populations needs to be challenged, and myths about the infallibility of Western canons debunked. Stetsenko (2023), for example, citing Newton (2009), presents a view debunking the belief that the task of physics is to find out how nature operates independently of our questions and methodologies. This view is also supported by Popper’s (1994) perspective that scientific knowledge is hypothetical or conjectural. This view, undoubtedly, debunks the common assumption – and the associated politically expedient belief – that by following a ‘true’ scientific method and adhering to Western canons of science, we are – in some way – able to arrive at objective, neutral, value-free data and facts, and an incontrovertible truth – once and for all (Stetsenko, 2023).

Contemporary, post-apartheid pedagogy, in its fundamental organization, therefore embodies the ethos of adaptation to the status quo of political quietism, including associated coercive epistemologies premised on assumptions of neutral, value-free, objective facts and incontrovertible truth. Consequently, as in the case of Young’s (2007) post-industrial UK context, goals of post-apartheid schooling came to serve the economic goal of securing employment and participation in free-market economic activities. Therefore, post-apartheid

schooling organized along neoliberal lines is envisioned in instrumental terms with standardized assessment as the regulatory mechanism for ensuring teacher accountability to authorities. With pedagogy defined in terms of products — specialized disciplinary content — as opposed to process and quality engagement — knowledge in contemporary post-apartheid schooling is organized as a commodified product regulated essentially by standardized assessment procedures.

This approach prioritizes political goals of transmitting culture and objectified meanings at the expense of meaningful activities geared towards social transformation and personal sense-making — including self-identity development. In this pedagogical approach, students and teachers are positioned as passive; meanwhile, teachers' roles are reduced to mechanically linking concepts to students' subjective experiences. Consequently, rather than encouraging teachers and students to relate knowledge to their personal circumstances, interests, and goals, contemporary post-apartheid pedagogy advances a canonical view based on pre-established procedures — orthodox ways of doing things — as well as Western canonical knowledge reified in concepts, methodologies, and procedures.

The point here is not to reject knowledge and science outright — in a proverbial manner of throwing out the baby with the bathwater. Rather, it is to sift sound pedagogy from coercive Western orthodoxies which — as Cooper (2005) has argued — justify privileges through rhetoric that claims scientific authority “to sell the idea that historical inequities should be embraced as biological inevitability” (quoted in Stetsenko, 2023, p. 30)

Centrality of activism and agency

Therefore, in forging a pedagogy premised on moral and ethical commitment to a future-in-the-making (Stetsenko, 2007), a future not deferred but unfolding and enacted in the here-and-now of pedagogy that is realized in — and through — agentic practices of teachers and their students. Commitment to a future-oriented pedagogy undoubtedly implies recognition of the historical injustices of colonial and apartheid society and schooling, while simultaneously committing to social transformation, which is achieved through practices oriented towards future possibilities involving what ‘ought to be’ rather than ‘what is’ (Stetsenko, 2023; 2007).

Therefore, what is fundamental is that the organization of such a decolonizing approach to pedagogy is not based on the rational dimension of knowledge — questions of how knowledge is validated based on its truth value. This approach has unfortunately characterized hegemonic epistemologies, including contemporary post-apartheid pedagogy, resulting in conflicts of motive on the part of the majority of teachers whose activities of teaching remain confined to the prescript of the fixed curriculum structure. At the same time, this approach denies students their potential for making sense of the subject matter by relating knowledge to personal motives, interests, and goals.

On the contrary, post-apartheid pedagogy ought to be organized in such a way that teachers and their stu-

dents are not only positioned for passive adaptation — fitting in and coping with established procedures, including following putatively unalterable Western norms and canons. Rather, post-apartheid pedagogy — premised on ethical and political grounding and geared towards emancipatory goals for society and schooling — should prioritize providing cultural tools that enable students and teachers to agentively take up and creatively employ them in their quest to overcome the ethos of adaptation, passivity, and neutrality — as well as the attendant solipsistic and contemplative epistemologies.

The cultural tools for achieving this profoundly anti-colonial and anti-hegemonic standpoint, premised on ubuntu ontology and proffering profound human interconnectedness, social harmony, solidarity, care, and togetherness, are embedded in culturally situated community practices embodied by students who carry these practices and enact them as part of their learning and development. This study therefore posits a pedagogy premised on knowledge traditions and culturally situated community practices, which have historically been excluded from mainstream pedagogy and continue to be marginalized in contemporary post-apartheid pedagogy. These practices, which range from indigenous knowledge traditions and approaches to teaching and socialization practices in traditional forms of schooling, as well as indigenous performance traditions such as storytelling performances, dance, and song — all make up a vast and intricate tapestry and a rich repository of didactic approaches and methodologies.

The anti-colonial methodologies and approaches herein proposed are therefore profoundly contradictory to the ethos of adaptation to the status quo, including the values of acquiescing to coercive epistemologies that promote hierarchical and racialized social structures and educational outcomes. That is, the political ideology of an isolated individual who develops in total isolation from others — in competition with — and in complete alienation from — society and culture is superseded by the ideology of agentic contribution to social transformation and self-development. The decolonizing approach to pedagogy emphasizes the ethos of agentic contribution as opposed to passivity and political quietism, as well as collective community practices geared towards social transformation, self-realization, and identity development.

Consequently, there is a convergence of ethical-political and ontological issues in the decolonizing approach to pedagogy postulated herein. The process can be understood as presupposing what Stetsenko (2020a&b) has named a forward-looking activism — an activism that is profoundly purposive, with future-oriented actions that are inherently ethical and geared towards changing the world given a sought-after future. That is, as Stetsenko (2020a&b) argues, it is impossible to imagine a possible future without locating ourselves in its present instantiations — and consequently, equally impossible to situate ourselves in the present and its history unless we can imagine its future and simultaneously commit to creating it, thereby bringing this future into being.

Results

Muthivhi (2025, forthcoming) provides a detailed account of a non-epistemological, decolonizing approach to knowledge and pedagogy grounded in culturally situated community practices and knowledge traditions embodied by students and enacted in the course of their everyday activities. In this discussion, examples of culturally situated practices such as traditional performances, storytelling traditions, etc., are presented, and their implications for promoting the ethos of agentic contribution to collective social practices and self-identity development are explained. In this performance of culturally situated knowledge practices, students learn about communal values such as responsibility for each other, collaboration, accountability, and caring for each other and the environment — including a worldview-level assumption about personhood — the self and the other — as profound interconnectedness phenomena.

Bele's enactment of embodied knowledge practices

In this account, an instance of a ten-year-old girl, Bele (pseudonym used), is described. Bele, a sixth-grade learner in a primary school in Sibasa, northern South Africa, was observed showing a demonstrable lack of confidence in the written task the class was completing. Contrary to the openness with which many of her counterparts showed their work and confidently discussed it, Bele avoided what could potentially be an embarrassing situation for her by hiding her work from view and shying away from discussing it with the researcher. The teacher, explaining what seemed like an odd situation, told the researcher that Bele was a slow learner who had already been referred to authorities for a specialist intervention program.

However, to my surprise, after I had finished my observation and was about to leave the classroom at the stroke of the bell for midday break, Bele drew my attention, calling me 'teacher,' and indicating that she wanted to dance for me. Before I could acknowledge her, a chorus of voices from her peers joined her in complimenting her and urging me to observe her performance as well. I was amused by the offer and expressed how honoured I was. There was a sense of great anticipation among Bele's peers as she went to the front of the classroom and began her performance. Unlike her prior withdrawn self during the written task — marked by an unmistakable sense of insecurity — Bele now exuded confidence and self-assurance. With her peers applauding, Bele performed an intricate traditional dance of tshigombela, with elegant movements of legs and hands — occasionally jumping and stomping ground with both feet while hands were gracefully thrown up and down and front and back; sometimes one hand landed on her back while the other stretched out in front. After the performance, Bele elegantly performed the traditional u losha tribute, connecting seamlessly with her audience, who responded with cheers of joy and expressions of gratification. I was genuinely impressed and joined in acknowledging the masterful skill displayed in these elegant and graceful routines.

Immediately after this event, the teacher, who had just informed me a little earlier during the written task that Bele had a learning difficulty, which had already been reported to the authorities, approached me to explain that the girl was in fact the best performer in the whole school. He further explained that Bele came from a traditionally oriented family background and was therefore extremely talented in traditional performances. Bele was therefore also responsible for teaching other students and the teachers in the school, and their school was rated one of the best among the schools in traditional performances in the whole region. I was certainly most disconcerted by the revelation of this patently self-contradictory situation, vis- -vis Bele's learning and development within a schooling system that only prioritises fixed curriculum products, objectified meanings, and abstract, mentalist approaches. Such approaches, unfortunately, deny students their inherent abilities to relate knowledge to personal motives and make meaningful sense of problem situations.

Discussion

Performatory pedagogy: a process of knowing-through-doing

Therefore, knowledge, according to this approach, becomes possible within the framework of students and their teachers' commitments and identifications with possible futures. That is, the ethical dimension of knowledge — regarding what is good and what is bad, or what is right and what is wrong — including decisions about what to do next, framed within the imagined goals of a sought-after future — undoubtedly grounds all action possibilities. Consequently, projected future-oriented goals — as imagined endpoints — define the entire dynamic process of human development as an agentic contribution to collective social practices. As Stetsenko (2020a) has proposed, it is this inherent human subjectivity that arises as an activist process of committing to a sought-after future. As Stetsenko (2020a) has argued, this commitment to a sought-after future:

[...] position us to see what is through the prism of how the present situations and conditions came to be and, also, in light of the imagined and sought-after future, of what we believe ought to be. Thus, the historicity and situativity of knowledge are ascertained alongside the focus on its ineluctable fusion with an activist future-oriented stance. An endpoint defines the whole dynamics of human development and society, of knowing-being-doing; without and endpoint (albeit flexible and ever-changing, like a horizon that shifts with every step we make), it is impossible to move forward, to move at all (Stetsenko, 2020a, p. 9, emphasis in original).

Muthivhi (2021) describes a pedagogy enacted by a teacher at a primary school in the northern part of South Africa, deliberately envisaging a transformative future that is different from her and her students' prevailing conditions of resource scarcity, socioeconomic disadvantage, and the constraining neocolonial and neoliberal

pedagogy that systematically excludes and marginalizes culturally situated community practices and indigenous knowledge traditions as inappropriate for the purposes of formal schooling. With a commitment to the goals of social transformation and identity development, this teacher employed culturally situated community practices and indigenous knowledge traditions — engaging her students in traditional performances, exploring their local conditions, analyzing the sociopolitical and historical factors that explain those conditions, and also positing pathways for their transformation.

The decolonizing approach herein proposed is grounded in the ethos of collective community practices, revealed in and through culturally situated knowledge traditions and community practices embodied by students who enact such knowledge practices and traditions as historically relevant, contextually meaningful, and personally significant activities of their learning and development. That is, students in the vast majority of South African classrooms who have, unfortunately, been denied the opportunity to enact their embodied culturally situated knowledge practices — and hence, self-identity development — come to realize the relevance of their socio-political and cultural-historical context and the associated knowledge practices to their learning and development. At the same time, teachers who have been equally compelled to mechanically link curriculum products — objectified meanings in the form of concepts, ideas, and facts — to their students' subjective experiences overcome the alienating effect of objectified meanings.

That is, teachers begin to perceive curriculum contents through the prism of their students' culturally situated knowledge practices, guiding them as they enact the meanings embedded in their embodied knowledge practices and thereby experiencing knowledge as it is revealed in and through culturally situated practices. Therefore, knowledge is revealed in the process of transformation from embodied practices into concepts manifested in — and through — the process of inquiry; it is not static, reified curriculum products or concepts frozen in time, immutable and fixed once and for all. Instead, students are guided through critical exploratory activities embedded in their culturally situated knowledge practices and enacted through performative activities geared towards critically exploring knowledge and concepts during their process of transformation.

This process, as Vianna and Stetsenko (2011) have argued, can be understood as an agentic process of collective contribution to communal practices and simultaneously as a process of active recreation of cultural tools vis-à-vis their application as tools of meaningful quest and, therefore, identity development. The perspective, therefore, simultaneously links processes situated in communal practices to students' forward-looking and future-oriented activist practices of social transformation. In their connection to pedagogy, these future-oriented, forward-looking activist practices of identity development are therefore viewed not merely as an outcome of teaching and learning but as the very substance and fabric of pedagogy, and the vehicle through which a

culturally situated, decolonizing approach to pedagogy can be realized.

According to this view, knowledge is transformed both by teachers and their students into tools for social transformation and self-realization — and, simultaneously, as a tool for the meaningful pursuit of self-identity development. Therefore, pedagogy grounded in an ethos of agentic contribution to social transformation and identity development demands that teachers and students take charge of the process of teaching and learning and thereby transform knowledge — and their pedagogy — through an active recreation of cultural tools as an enactment of their envisioned future and identity development.

In this approach, therefore, the notion of identity development is severed from the assumptions of difference, separation, and opposition — such as those entailed in the postulation of racial segregation and tribal-ethnic ideologies that historically underpinned colonial and apartheid regimes in South Africa. On the contrary, identity development in the transformative worldview — grounded in values of solidarity, care, and responsibility — emphasizes the positive ethos of care, solidarity, responsibility, and accountability. The values of the common good; ubuntu — postulating profound human interconnectedness; justice; and equity are privileged over the values of self-contained individualism, pernicious competition, and various forms of dichotomies and antagonisms — such as those manifested in tragic concepts and associated practices related to dogmas like racial segregation, slavery, ethnicity, gender, religion — and various other incarnations of neo-colonial and neoliberal regimes that are at the core of many contemporary tragedies: apartheid doctrines, fascism, genocides — and many other calamities affecting our societies today.

Conclusion

Vygotsky's framework, including its contemporary post-Vygotskian extensions, offers important methodological and theoretical tools for interrogating contemporary post-apartheid pedagogy and its underlying epistemological foundations. That is, this framework — in its extensive — and still growing — expansions and elaborations — offers new insights into possible research trajectories geared toward uncovering neocolonial and neoliberal practices and approaches that promote forms of rationality and objectivity which continue to diminish and deny the legitimacy and validity of culturally situated knowledge practices and traditions under the guise of neutrality and objectivity.

Indeed, the epistemic postulation of knowledge based solely on its rationality and validity — at the expense of its ethical grounding within contemporary post-apartheid pedagogy in South Africa — raises critical questions about the fairness and impartiality of such an approach. An approach to pedagogy conceived in such unjust and inherently discriminatory ways — premised on quaint colonial assumptions and ingrained hegemonic preju-

dices — only perpetuates centuries-old stereotypes and self-fulfilling prophecies of putatively inherent deficiencies of non-Western cultures and knowledge traditions. Consequently, this affects the learning and developmental trajectories of students from such cultures within Western-dominated systems of schooling, such as those in contemporary post-apartheid education.

Consequently, the present analysis of the realities of this form of schooling and pedagogy — including its underlying epistemologies — rather than seeking to propose another fixed and dogmatic approach to pedagogy, posits an approach that grounds knowledge not solely and exclusively on epistemic issues at the expense of the ethical dimensions of knowledge, and addresses questions about how knowledge — and pedagogy — could or ought to be organized in ways that are fair and just for communities and students from non-Western and especially African cultural and community backgrounds. This is not necessarily a call for ‘retrogressive nativism’ or ‘narrowly conceived relativism,’ as some critics of decolonizing approaches to pedagogy have charged, but rather a just call for fair implementation and enactment of pedagogy that dispenses with the persistent myths promoted by neo-colonial and neoliberal epistemologies — premised on

principles and normativities of objectivity and neutrality (Muthivhi, forthcoming; Stetsenko, 2023).

Therefore, as opposed to a pedagogy premised on the discredited view that knowledge — and the associated practices of classroom teaching and learning — can be enacted as absolute, ahistorical, and devoid of human subjectivity, the decolonizing approach herein proposed grounds pedagogy in the ethos of agentic contribution to social transformation. Consequently, knowledge production — and the associated pedagogical practices — is only possible within its philosophical centrality as activism — a morally grounded and socially connected struggle by teachers and their students to realize a ‘sought-after future,’ a ‘future-in-the-making’ embodied in the potential of students, which they enact in the here-and-now of their schooling — despite the continued exclusion of such potential within contemporary post-apartheid pedagogy.

Limitations: More in-depth research on the dynamic nature of students’ creative and innovative enactments of culturally situated embodied knowledge practices will be crucial for understanding complex, future possibilities for decolonising the coercive western and eurocentric epistemologies and their associated approaches to pedagogy in post-apartheid schooling and society.

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Play Brigade project Brincadas as insurgent pedagogy: play, agency, and transformation in the context of BRICS+ education

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Abstract

This article presents the *Brincadas*-COLINA project, a Brazilian educational initiative that emerges at the intersection of geopolitical changes and epistemic reconfigurations in BRICS+ societies. Based on the principles of engaged multiliteracy, curriculum de-encapsulation, and Insurgent Pedagogy¹, the project brings together children, educators, and families from quilombola, indigenous, and urban periphery communities in collective learning experiences. In this article, we focus on the first Brincadas session in 2023. Data were analyzed through videos, photos, interviews, artistic productions, and collaborative reflections. Data analysis was carried out through critical reflection actions: describe, inform, confront, and reconstruct (Smyth, 1989). The results demonstrate how artistic, dialogical, and embodied activities allowed participants to resignify ethical-political suffering and exercise collective agency. By situating Brincadas within broader pedagogical movements in the Global South, this study contributes to theorizing education as a tool and outcome for social and epistemic justice.

Keywords: *Brincadas*, BRICS+, engaged multiliteracy, curriculum de-encapsulation, ethical-political suffering

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¹ **Translator's note:** Insurgent Pedagogy is a term describing an educational approach that opposes traditional, authoritarian, or oppressive teaching methods. It focuses on developing critical thinking, resisting social and political injustices, and actively engaging students in the process of knowledge creation and social transformation.

Мятежная педагогика и проект «Игровая бригада» (Brincadas): игра, агентность и трансформация в контексте образования стран БРИКС+

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Резюме

Статья рассказывает о проекте Brincadas-COLINA — бразильской образовательной инициативе, которая возникла в условиях изменений мировой политики и новых подходов к обучению в странах BRICS+. Brincadas-COLINA основан на принципах активного обучения через мультимедийные средства, переосмысления учебных программ, а также на идеях мятежной педагогики². В проекте участвуют дети, учителя и семьи из общин киломболо, коренных и городских бедных районов, которые вместе учатся и делятся опытом. В статье описывается первая сессия этого проекта в 2023 году. Для анализа использовались видео, фотографии, интервью, художественные работы и совместные размышления участников. Анализ проводился в четыре шага: описание ситуации, предоставление информации, обсуждение проблем и поиск решений (по методике Smyth). Результаты показывают, что художественные и диалоговые активности помогли участникам переосмыслить свою боль, вызванную несправедливостью, и обрести силу для совместных действий. Исследование показывает, как такие подходы и проекты могут способствовать развитию образования как инструмента и результата социальной и эпистемической справедливости.

Ключевые слова: Brincadas, игровые практики, БРИКС+, активная мультиграмотность, деконструкция учебной программы, этическое-политические страдания

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Introduction

In recent decades, BRICS countries — Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa — have gained increasing relevance in shaping global educational agendas. Together, they account for more than 40% of the world's population and nearly a quarter of global GDP (IMF, 2023). Their education systems have expanded rapidly, with improved access to primary education, rising enrollment in secondary and tertiary levels, and growing participation in transnational initiatives (UNESCO, 2014; Gupta, 2017). However, this quantitative progress

reveals persistent structural contradictions. Educational inequalities remain stark, quality is uneven, and policies often fail to reflect the sociocultural realities of marginalized populations (Wolhuter, 2023).

The recent expansion into BRICS+, incorporating countries such as Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, has added layers of geopolitical and cultural complexity. These countries bring diverse educational histories, infrastructures, and social challenges. Although this enlargement may strengthen South-South cooperation, it also intensifies the challenge of developing educational policies that are both in-

² Мятежная педагогика (Insurgent Pedagogy) — это термин, описывающий образовательный подход, который противостоит традиционным, авторитарным или подавляющим методам обучения. Он ориентирован на развитие критического мышления, сопротивление социальной и политической несправедливости, а также на активное вовлечение учащихся в процесс создания знаний и осуществление социальных преобразований (прим. переводчика).

clusive and responsive to contexts marked by inequality and historical injustice.

Reports on BRICS educational systems emphasize the uneven distribution of progress. Gupta (2017) notes that despite improvements, India and South Africa still struggle with gender parity and equitable access, whereas Brazil and Russia stand out for their relative investment in public education. A UNESCO (2014) urges alignment across education levels, as a tool for both economic growth and social justice. More recently, Wolhuter (2023) points to the exacerbation of existing disparities during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially among marginalized communities, and highlights the need for systems that promote inclusion, resilience, and flexibility — objectives that remain distant in many BRICS+ contexts.

These disparities are further illustrated in Table 1, which summarizes key educational indicators across the five original BRICS countries — Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. The comparison includes models, literacy rates, and education investment. These figures highlight how uneven policy implementation, structural investments, and historical legacies continue to shape educational outcomes. For instance, while South Africa shows the highest percentage of GDP invested in education, it still faces the effects of apartheid’s legacy in its hybrid model. India, with the lowest literacy rate, struggles to reconcile rapid economic development with inclusive access. Brazil stands out for investment levels, yet continues to reproduce inequalities through under-resourced schools, particularly in peripheral regions.

Romariz (2019) argues that educational inequality in BRICS countries results from stratified school systems, low investment in human capital, and limited access to quality education. In Brazil, despite legal guarantees and urban expansion, regional disparities persist, and public schooling often reproduces silencing and symbolic violence.

This aligns with the concept of ethical-political suffering (Sawaia, Strappazon, & Maheirie, 2022), a structural form of pain rooted in the denial of one’s capacity to act and transform lived conditions. Rather than fostering liberation, schools frequently reinforce conformity and exclusion.

Han’s (2015) notion of the performance society intensifies this suffering: freedom is reframed as obligation,

and individuals internalize the imperative to self-optimize, interpreting failure as personal fault. Education becomes a site of anxiety, self-surveillance, and affective depletion.

Souza’s (2019) concept of precarious habitus expands this critique by showing how racialized and working-class populations in Brazil internalize feelings of inferiority and fatalism. Instead of disrupting this logic, schools often reproduce it through rigid assessments and neoliberal standards of success.

Against this backdrop, the Brincadas-COLINA Project emerges as a counter-narrative. Developed in peripheral communities in São Paulo, it engages children, educators, and families in insurgent acts of play, storytelling, ecological exploration, and collective meaning-making grounded in Freirean pedagogy (Freire, 1970), cultural-historical theory (Vygotsky, 1997), and a transformative activist stance (Stetsenko, 2023).

This article investigates how the first Brincada of 2023 operates as a transformative pedagogical practice within the BRICS+ educational context. Through engaged multiliteracies and curriculum de-encapsulation, it explores how collaborative, dialogical, and multimodal practices confront structural injustices and reclaim agency, resistance, and emancipatory educational futures in the Global South.

Ethical-political suffering, the performance society, and the precarious habitus

This section deepens the analysis of educational exclusion and resistance in Brazil, whose contradictions mirror broader BRICS+ tensions. It connects theoretical concepts like ethical-political suffering, precarious habitus, and the performance society to the lived realities of students and educators, situating Brazil within global debates on neoliberalism, symbolic violence, and affective economies in education.

In Brazil, exclusion is ontological and political. Ethical-political suffering (Sawaia et al., 2022) describes the systemic denial of one’s power to act and transform reality — a structural effect of domination that erodes voice, agency, and belonging. This suffering is exacerbated by neoliberal reforms that dismantle collective bonds and promote self-management disguised as free-

Table 1

Key educational indicators in BRICS countries

Aspect	Brazil	Russia	India	China	South Africa
Educational model	Federal, decentralized	Centralized with state control	Mixed, private influence	Centralized, national goals	Hybrid, legacy of apartheid
Compulsory education	Ages 4–17	Ages 6–17	Ages 6–14	Ages 6–15	Ages 7–15
Literacy rate	~94%	~99,7%	~78%	~96,8%	~87%
Internationalization	Limited, with funding challenges	High scientific output, low mobility	Growing, with focus on IT and medicine	Leader in academic mobility and scholarships	Increasing efforts, but still limited
Education investment (% of GDP)	~5,9%	~3,8%	~3,0%	~4,0%	~6,2%

dom, aligning with Han's (2015) concept of the performance society. In this context, schools shift from spaces of emancipation to arenas of competition, docility, and burnout.

Han clarifies the emotional economy of schooling: autonomy masks coercion; success and failure are internalized as personal responsibility. Education becomes a site of permanent assessment, where creativity and play are marginalized. Crucially, this regime overlays deep racial and economic inequalities. Souza's (2019) precarious habitus demonstrate how Brazil's working vulnerable internalize inferiority, forming dispositions of exclusion and fatalism. Schools often reinforce this symbolic violence by demanding neoliberal performances from students denied basic recognition and stability.

This contradiction, between the call for autonomy and the reality of exclusion, results in subjective disintegration. Students and teachers are encouraged to see themselves as agents yet constantly reminded of their conditional worth. Ethical-political suffering thus becomes both a diagnosis and a call to restore collective agency and reimagine education.

These dynamics intersect with Mbembe's (2018) necropolitics and generate a necroeducation (Liberali, 2020) in Brazil: a system that disciplines some bodies while erasing others, valuing merit over collective survival. Despite formal schooling, symbolic and material violence persist. In this context, concepts like performance society (Han, 2015) and precarious habitus (Souza, 2019) become operative logics rather than descriptors.

This system normalizes abandonment: overburdened teachers (Amaral, Meaney & Lemos, 2024), disconnected poor and Black students (Toquet o, 2024), and silenced LGBTQIA+ learners (Fiorotti, 2024) are symptoms of structural design. Garrido (2024) names this the *necrocurriculum*, which erases Black, Indigenous, and popular epistemologies. Soares (2024) and Oliveira (2024) show how Deaf Indigenous students and sign language educators are excluded from curriculum, and from recognition.

Here, exhaustion is racialized, gendered, and classed. Meritocratic ideals mask necropolitical exclusion. Yet resistance persists. The Brincadas Project (Liberali & Carrijo, 2024; Modesto, Diegues & Tiso, 2024) offers a powerful response through collective play, memory, and imagination. At CIEJA Perus I, educators addressed basic needs and restructured learning amid policy neglect (Fialho et al., 2024). Dantas (2024) calls for curricular representation of marginalized communities, Garrido (2024) advocates for a curriculum of life grounded in care and resistance.

These initiatives challenge the pedagogy of death and point to insurgent alternatives for the BRICS+ educational landscape. In a world marked by global inequalities, the task is to dismantle the architectures of exhaustion that define who learn, who rests, and who is left behind. Brazil reveals the workings of necroeducation and the potential of insurgent pedagogy (Liberali, 2020).

A transformative insurgent pedagogy for BRICS+ education

This section outlines an insurgent pedagogy responding to ethical-political suffering, necroeducation, and neoliberal subjectivation. Drawing from critical pedagogy, cultural-historical theory, and decolonial thought, it proposes learning as co-authorship and resistance, to confront symbolic violence in BRICS+ systems.

Transformative pedagogy, under conditions of structural exclusion and exhaustion, must center collective agency, ethical engagement, and insurgent imagination. This entails rethinking what is taught, how learning occurs, and whose knowledge is legitimized. Freire (1967, 1970) and bell hooks (1994, 2008) insist on education as a political practice of freedom grounded in love, community, and dialogical participation. Love sustains critical consciousness and cultivates solidarity.

Vygotsky (1933/1966) frames play as a symbolic activity through which children exceed immediate conditions and imagine new realities. Symbolic transformation begins in early development and continues through collective world-making. Stetsenko (2017) expands this view by defining agency as an ethical stance that emerges through shared action. Education, then, invites participation in constructing new social orders rather than adapting to existing ones.

These perspectives challenge dominant curricular models that isolate school knowledge from lived experience. Engeström (1991) names this disconnection as curricular encapsulation, where learning centres on abstract symbols rather than meaningful activity. Encapsulated schooling privileges routine and performance while marginalizing relevance and agency.

Engeström (1987; 2015) proposes expansive learning as an alternative: a process rooted in contradiction, critical reflection, and the collective reorganization of practice. More recently, Engeström, Kajamaa, and Titz (2023) introduced expansive de-encapsulation, emphasizing student-led projects that transcend institutional and disciplinary boundaries.

Building on these concepts, Liberali (2023; 2025) introduces curriculum de-encapsulation as both pedagogical and epistemic intervention. Curriculum is redefined as a historically situated, dialogical activity system, shaped by ethical and political engagement. Rather than a fixed sequence of content, it becomes an open and evolving space grounded in learners' realities.

Curriculum de-encapsulation challenges hegemonic hierarchies by including excluded voices and dismantling rigid structures. It integrates socially urgent content and affirms knowledge as a contested, lived, and co-created process. Central to this is the notion of funds of *perezhivanie* (Liberali et al., 2023), experiential resources formed through lived tensions and relational histories. These resources, activated through language, image, and memory, mediate agency and collective transformation.

Within this framework, the Brincadas Project takes shape as insurgent pedagogy. Through collective play, multimodal creation, and co-authored meaning-making,

Brincadas enacts curriculum de-encapsulation. It creates spaces of presence in contexts of symbolic erasure, where play mediates educational justice and affective repair. Liberali, Mazuchelli & Modesto-Sarra (2021) show how these practices resist symbolic violence and affirm the capacity to imagine different futures, especially among racialized and LGBTQIA+ communities.

Curriculum de-encapsulation confronts performative, technocratic, and exclusionary models by grounding education in relationality, plurality, and collective authorship. In BRICS+ contexts shaped by inequality, this insurgent pedagogy enables learners and educators to co-create dignified, transformative educational realities.

Toward a transformative, insurgent pedagogy: Brincadas and the de-encapsulation of curriculum

Ethical-political suffering, precarious habitus, and performative violence demand a reconfiguration of education, especially in BRICS+ contexts of inequality and epistemic erasure. Education, in these settings, must become a critical, collective, and insurgent praxis oriented toward justice and transformation.

Vygotsky (1933/1966) emphasizes imagination and play as symbolic tools central to development and transcendence. This symbolic capacity fuels the co-construction of alternative realities. Stetsenko (2017) expands this by framing human development as collaborative world-making: agency arises through ethically situated, collective action to transform oppressive conditions.

In this dialogical and affective process, funds of perzhivanie (Author et al., 2023) are activated, understood as historically rooted emotional-intellectual resources that mediate agency in contexts of constraint. They mediate the creation of new meanings and possibilities.

Within this framework, Liberali (2020, 2022) proposes engaged multiliteracy as a pedagogical stance that goes beyond multimodal skills. Literacy is approached as tool-and-result: a mediational process enabling ethical, critical, and collective action. Rather than a technical skill, it becomes a practice of reading and transforming the world, aligned with Freire's (1970) emancipatory vision.

This orientation demands de-encapsulation of the curriculum (Liberali et al., 2022), an opening of rigid disciplinary boundaries in favor of relational, problem-based learning. A de-encapsulated curriculum is responsive to learners' experiences, valuing epistemic diversity and collective inquiry over fixed content mastery. It centers knowledge production in lived tension and situated ethics.

The Brincadas Project exemplifies this approach through insurgent play, multimodality, and collaborative authorship. Ecological walks, TikTok manifestos, affective maps, and co-narration create spaces where participants imagine and reconstruct their worlds.

Brincadas mobilizes life experiences as epistemic resources, expanding participants' funds of perzhivanie through shared tensions and re-signified memory. Each activity functions as both a mediating tool and material-

ization of agency, enabling participants to narrate other futures grounded in justice and affect.

This pedagogical stance offers an alternative to performance-oriented and colonial curricula. It proposes an education centered on ethical positioning, critical imagination, and collective Liberaliship, and actively resisting it. engaged multiliteracy, affirms the right to learn from life, to speak across modes and languages, and to transform shared realities from within.

Methodology

This study is part of the Brincadas-COLINA project, a pedagogical and research initiative grounded in Critical Collaborative Research (Magalhães, 2004; Liberali, 2018), which brings together researchers, educators, children, and families to collectively reflect on and transform educational practices. The methodological approach draws from the Creative Chain, a process in which participants engage in cycles of creation, reflection, and reconstruction, rooted in principles of equity, co-authorship, and situated knowledge.

The data analyzed in this article come from the first Brincadas session of 2023. Students and teachers from quilombola, indigenous, and urban public schools participated. The session was structured by engaged multiliteracy (Liberali, 2022) which is based on the Freirean conception in its three interconnected phases: immersion, emergence, and insertion. These phases guided participants through shared experiences involving play, storytelling, art, movement, and dialogue.

Data were generated through multimodal means: video and audio recordings, photographs, artistic artifacts, field notes, and interviews with participants. The analysis followed Smyth's (1989), four critical reflective actions framework: Describe (what happened), Inform (understand the context), Confront (identify contradictions), and Reconstruct (imagine alternatives). This framework enabled a layered interpretation of how subjects engage with and respond to structural injustice.

Ethical procedures were ensured through informed consent, ongoing dialogue with participants, and collective reflection. The research privileges local knowledge and lived experience, resisting extractive logics and reaffirming the transformative potential of collaborative inquiry.

Findings and discussion

To explore the transformative pedagogical potential of the Brincadas Project in the context of BRICS+ education, we analyze the first meeting of 2023, held on March 25th. This meeting marks the beginning of the second phase of the project, in which the Collectives of Investigation and Action (COLINA) were formed. It functions as a threshold moment that inaugurates a new cycle of dialogical, affective, and political engagement among different educational communities. By revisiting this foundational session, we aim to understand how the practices of

immersion, emersion, and insertion — rooted in Freirean pedagogy — generate spaces of collective agency, resistance, and curriculum de-encapsulation. The activities and interactions documented here serve as a powerful entry point to reflect on how ethical-political suffering, precarious habitus, and insurgent play are negotiated and reimagined through engaged multiliteracy practices.

The first session of Brincadas COLINA took place on March 25th, 2023, at the Pontifical Catholic University of S o Paulo. Participants came from different schools; some members are part of quilombos, others belong to indigenous communities, while others come from rural and urban regions within the State of São Paulo.

As an icebreaker during the immersion phase, participants played “What do they call me,” sharing names used by family and teachers. This activity enabled sharing identity markers and affective connections, drawing on their funds of perezhivanie (Liberali et al., 2023). Then, they were invited to walk around the auditorium to music, forming pairs when the music stopped to exchange names, origins, and ages — beginning to build a collective presence and mutual recognition.

To deepen these connections, participants were divided into groups by colors (Fig. 1). Each received a strip of colored paper with questions to explore in a Poetic Circle: *If the whole world gained superpowers, what would yours be? What is your biggest dream? What do you do when you get nervous or anxious? What do you do together? How do you feel about the past? How do you feel about the future? Among others. These poetic circles*

served as entryways into dialogical and creative engagement with each other's histories while fostering principles of engaged multiliteracy (Liberali, 2022).

One of the groups created the following poem:

When I am well, I control time and a whirlwind of good and bad feelings comes to me We need to study for the future because we don't know what is coming I train to forget the problems I study to ease the absence of my father — he is the one who encouraged me to start everything Even with time stopped, I feel the absence of my father, I can't train my mind

Following this, researchers presented a reconstruction of the painting *Os Operários* by Tarsila do Amaral (Fig. 2), integrating their own faces into the composition. This collective re-imagining of a Brazilian symbol of labor and diversity functioned as an act of curriculum *de-encapsulation* (Liberali, 2023), as it brought cultural, historical, and political imagery into the shared object of reflection. The proposal was that diversity and the fight for justice, as expressed by the painting, would also represent the research group.

By mobilizing visual and cultural memory as shared artifacts, this moment illustrates how *curriculum de-encapsulation* (Liberali, 2023) transforms symbolic resources into collective inquiry. As a *tool-and-result* (Newman, Holzman, 1993), this act redefined what counts as curriculum, shifting from standardized content to insurgent, situated meaning-making.

The icebreaking activities, poetic circle, and *Os Operários* moment enabled the creation of a dialogical



Fig. 1. Group divided by colors



Fig. 2. *Os Operários* and the reconstruction of the painting

field of shared meaning-making that transcended basic introductions. As Freire (1967, 1970) and bell hooks (1994) propose, literacy is a practice of freedom — participants began to read and write the world together.

Moreover, it provides engaged multiliteracy, transcending the communications dimensions of the very first contact people from different settings had. By joining the three different moments participants could get to know each other and construct knowledge at the same time. The introductions provide an opportunity for participants to reflect on and share their ways of being in the world.

Next, in the emersion moment, two groups worked with two different tasks in four rooms. Groups A and B discussed Identities and Differences. The first task in these groups was to talk about privilege and race inequality. In the hallway, participants had to follow the instructions: *If your parents were present in your childhood, take a step forward; If you have lost your home because you live in a risky area, take a step back; If you have never studied in a public institution in basic education, take a step forward; If you have had difficulty making friends or getting a job because of your race/ethnicity, take a step back.* After answering these questions and walking accordingly, participants were asked to look around to check what they saw in the scene.

This embodied activity materialized what Souza (2019) defines as precarious *habitus*: the internalization of exclusion and inferiority by marginalized individuals, shaped by historical oppression and naturalized by the meritocratic discourse. Such *habitus* reproduces feelings of unworthiness and frames structural inequality as personal failure. As Souza (2019) and Han (2015) argue, such exercises surface the symbolic violence embedded in daily life, as well as the emotional economy of performance society.

After this embodied experience the groups were invited to discuss the game in smaller groups, in two rooms. As a second step, the researchers played two songs, addressing inequality, race, and social struggle and asked the participants to pay attention to the respective lyrics to discuss inequalities, vulnerabilities and identities, correlating the songs to the game they played. They were asked to prepare a presentation to share their conclusions to the large group. Drawing from Freire (1970), these moments of critical reflection were acts of *emergence* — spaces to name the world in order to change it.

Simultaneously, Groups C and D developed proposals to promote critical reflection by relating environmental racism to the discussion on Identity. The groups created two installations with images and objects of people and places, which referred to an affluent area and a vulnerable area of the city (Fig. 3). After preparing their installations in the form of posters, the groups created a theoretical exposition about the installations. Later, there was a discussion on racism and prejudice, followed by a theoretical exposition on Ecological Racism.

Their expositions and subsequent discussions invoked necropolitical frameworks (Mbembe, 2003), situating their lived experiences within systemic racialized injustices. This dialogue revealed how systemic disregard for marginalized territories and communities exemplifies the workings of necroeducation, where the curriculum often erases racialized and impoverished lives, denying them recognition and space for epistemic agency (Liberali, 2024).

Participants were then invited to present themselves through dance, performance, and music — co-creating multimodal manifestos. These activities illustrate how knowledge production in Brincadas functions as tool-and-result (Newman, Holzman, 1993): creative acts that are both means and outcomes of transformation.

In the insertion into reality moment, all groups were involved in the construction of resistance collectives to discuss the concept of identity in relation to the topics addressed. Each group presented their performances, reflecting on the ideas discussed in the four rooms. Group A represented people looking at the cover of a book and not understanding anything. They used this reflection on the cover of a book as a metaphor for this attitude of people towards those different from themselves and the need to read different realities (Fig. 4).

Group B prepared a rap based on the following sentence *All we have is us*, from the song *Principia* by the rapper Emicida. The presentation consisted of a group of white people going into the room by the left side, while a group of black people going into the room by the right side, forming a mix of colors in the middle, singing a parody of *Principia* (Fig. 5).

You who think we are nobody, We are much more than the someone, Black, white, indigenous, children and adults, We repudiate racism, prejudice and insults, We support equality, unity and social justice, All we have is US!!!



Fig. 3. Group work



Fig. 4. Group A presentation



Fig. 5. Group B presentation

Group C portrayed the unfair conditions in which they lived and demanded that their rights be taken into consideration, using another Brazilian song (“*Problema Social*”) (Fig. 6):

Indigenous leader: If I could, I would demarcate indigenous and quilombola territories. Quilombola leader 1: If I could, I would offer quality education to everyone. Quilombola leader 2: If I could, I would give quilombola territory to everyone.

These performances functioned as insurgent acts of co-Liberaliship (Stetsenko, 2017), in which marginalized knowledge, pain, and desire became publicly visible.

As bell hooks (2008) affirms, joy, music, and movement are radical pedagogical tools that affirm humanity in the face of dehumanization.

These multimodal performances are emblematic of engaged multiliteracy (Liberali, 2022), which, as a tool-and-result, mediates agency and meaning while being itself transformed through collective enactment. Here, literacy becomes an act of epistemic and political creation, that is central to insurgent pedagogy.

The entire process was resumed with the theoretical discussion about the three moments of the meeting: immersion, emersion and insertion, through photos.



Fig. 6. Group C presentation

The session ended with all the participants dancing samba songs that refer to the creation of unity and collective.

Groups A, B, C and D collaboratively exposed unjust conditions rooted in racism and prejudice, resisting the neoliberal fragmentation that isolates and devalues collective life. By expressing their ethical-political suffering (Sawaia, 2006), shaped by racialized exclusion and territorial threat, they reaffirmed their power to act. Through collective communication and engaged multiliteracies, participants transformed pain into creative resistance, solidarity, and hope.

Ethical-political suffering, as conceptualized by Sawaia et al. (2022), emerges when subjects are denied the power to recognize and act upon the social structures that oppress them. Through the poetic circle, performances, and collective actions, participants began to restore their capacity to act by voicing their stories, memories, and hopes, disrupting silence and reclaiming visibility.

In this scenario, as we mentioned before, learning could be reimagined as a process of co-Liberalship and resistance as a way of challenging the symbolic violence education in BRICS+ societies. Through collective tools – language, image, movement, memory – they generated spaces of rupture and reconfiguration. They put into evidence the ethical political demands that emerged from their collectively lived experiences. Despite their different contexts, the different groups are exposed to situations of oppression and necropolitics and precarious *habitus*.

The first session was designed as part of the COLINA initiative, with the main objective of establishing the foundations for meaningful interaction among groups from different institutions. This initial moment served as a platform for participants to connect for the first time and recognize themselves as part of a larger collective. Throughout the encounter, the activities were carefully structured to foster integration, dialogue, and collaboration, encouraging participants to share their experiences, expectations, and visions. The session therefore focused on nurturing a sense of unity and a shared object – both essential for building a solid foundation for future project proposals and reaffirming the importance of cooperation and shared understanding in sustaining a proactive and engaged collective.

By collectively addressing themes such as racism, loss, exclusion, and identity, participants shared experiences of necroeducation and precarious *habitus* and

reconstituted their ethical-political agency. Brincadas thus functioned as insurgent pedagogical spaces, where suffering was re-signified into action and lives deemed disposable under necropolitical regimes were reclaimed through collective voice and creativity, as summarized in the Table 2 below.

Through the analysis of the first session of 2023, which inaugurated the second phase of the project and launched the COLINA, we shared how Brincadas cultivates educational spaces of insurgency. These spaces enable participants to re-signify suffering into collective agency and transformative praxis. In doing so, Brincadas confronts the isolation and instrumentalism imposed by neoliberal schooling, reclaiming curriculum as a co-authored, plural, and justice-driven endeavor.

Final remarks

The Brincadas-COLINA project exemplifies how education can operate as an insurgent force against structures of exclusion and epistemic erasure. Rooted in Socio-Cultural-Historical Activity Theory and informed by critical, decolonial perspectives, the project mobilizes collective play, multiliteracies, and curriculum de-encapsulation as practices of resistance and re-existence.

By engaging children and educators from historically marginalized communities in dialogical and creative processes, Brincadas reconfigures learning spaces into territories of co-authorship and political imagination. The transformation of ethical-political suffering into expression and action illustrates how affect, embodiment, and meaning-making are central to educational transformation.

Instead of positioning participants as passive recipients of knowledge, the project recognizes them as epistemic subjects capable of naming the world, confronting structural contradictions, and imagining alternatives. In doing so, Brincadas challenges conventional schooling logics that reproduce silencing and hierarchization.

As BRICS+ nations face increasingly complex educational inequalities, the Brincadas experience invites researchers, educators, and policymakers to rethink curriculum as a living process anchored in voice, territory, and justice. The pedagogical movements offer a methodology that is capable of activating transformative agency.

By reclaiming play as a serious act of world-making, Brincadas affirms education as a space of possibility, where collective experiences generate knowledge, belonging, and hope.

Table 2

Summary of the first encounter's contributions to project goals

Component	Key activities	Theoretical contributions	Response to project goals
Immersion	Games, poetic circle, identity sharing	<i>Funds of Perezhivanie</i> (Author et al., 2023); <i>Engaged Multiliteracy</i> (Liberali, 2022)	Establishing collective presence and affective connection
Emersion	Privilege walk, song analysis, installations	<i>Precarious Habitus</i> (Souza, 2019); <i>Necropolitics</i> (Mbembe, 2003); <i>Freirean Pedagogy</i>	Critical reflection on structural inequalities and positionality
Insertion	Performances, manifestos, samba circle	<i>Co-Authorship</i> (Stetsenko, 2017); <i>Curriculum De-encapsulation</i> (Author, 2023); <i>Hooks</i> (2008)	Creation of collective responses and resistance pathways

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Mônica Lemos — participation in the planning and execution of the training sessions; contribution to data generation and analysis; co-writing and reviewing different stages of the manuscript.

Luciana Kool Modesto-Sarra — participation in the planning and execution of the training sessions; contribution to data generation and analysis; co-writing and reviewing different stages of the manuscript.

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Language teacher education through social activity: the cultural-social-historical perspective from Brazil to the BRICS

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Abstract

This article analyses how language teacher education in Brazil can be reimagined through the lens of cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT), addressing broader educational challenges shared across BRICS countries for social transformation (Tanzi Neto, 2021). Drawing from a Critical Collaborative Research (PCCol) (Magalhães, 2007; Liberali, 2012) project with five English teachers in Technological Higher Education, the study proposes Social Activity (Liberali, 2009, 2025) as a central curricular principle in the teaching-learning of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Valente & Ribeiro, 2023; Diegues, 2025). It seeks to answer the following guiding question: How can language teacher education in Brazil – when grounded in Social Activity and cultural-historical principles – contribute to culturally responsive and socially transformative pedagogical practices within BRICS contexts? To explore this question, a series of reflective workshops was conducted with English teachers at a Technological Faculty in São Paulo (FATEC-SP), Brazil. Based on participants' local realities, the workshops aimed to foster critical pedagogical reflection and collaboratively develop teaching practices that meaningfully respond to the sociocultural contexts of their students. Findings reveal that a reflexive, collaborative approach to teacher education – deeply rooted in teachers' lived experiences and social demands – enhances professional agency, intercultural awareness, and reconfigures teacher identity. The Brazilian case study highlights potential pathways for BRICS nations to resist instrumentalist, neoliberal educational paradigms and to adopt transformative, contextually grounded language education practices.

Keywords: language teacher education, English for specific purposes, social activity, cultural-social-historical activity theory, BRICS, critical collaborative research

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Образование преподавателей иностранных языков через социальную деятельность: культурно-историческая перспектива от Бразилии к странам БРИКС

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Резюме

В статье исследуются новые подходы к подготовке преподавателей иностранных языков в Бразилии с использованием положений культурно-исторической теории. В ней рассматриваются более широкие образовательные проблемы, которые объединяют страны БРИКС, и их связь с социальными изменениями. Авторы опираются на проект совместного критического исследования с участием пяти преподавателей английского языка в области технического высшего образования. В рамках этого проекта предлагается использовать концепцию социальной деятельности как главный принцип при обучении английскому языку для специальных целей (например, делового английского или профессионального английского). **Цель работы** — понять, как обучение преподавателей языков в Бразилии, основанное на принципах социальной деятельности и культурно-исторической теории, может помочь развивать педагогические практики, которые учитывают культурные особенности студентов и способствуют социальным изменениям в странах БРИКС. Для этого авторы провели серию мастер-классов с преподавателями английского языка на Технологическом факультете в Сан-Паулу. В ходе занятий участники обсуждали свои реальные ситуации и вместе разрабатывали методы преподавания, которые успешно отвечают нуждам их студентов и учитывают их культурный контекст. **Результаты** показали, что подход, основанный на совместной рефлексии и опыте учителей, помогает им стать более инициативными, лучше понимать межкультурные различия и переосмысливать свою профессиональную роль. В целом, кейс из Бразилии показывает возможные пути для стран БРИКС сопротивления навязанным неолиберальным образовательным моделям и внедрения практики обучения иностранным языкам, которые учитывают конкретные социальные и культурные условия.

Ключевые слова: образование преподавателей иностранных языков, английский язык для специальных целей, социальная деятельность, культурно-историческая теория, БРИКС, критическое совместное исследование

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Introduction

Education in BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) and now with BRICS+ (Saudi Arabia, Egypt, United Arab Emirates, Ethiopia, Iran, and Indonesia) operates under the tension between national development agendas and global market imperatives. These nations share challenges such as deep social inequality, colonial legacies, and external pressures to align education systems with neoliberal logics. In this geopolitical scenario, English language education becomes both necessary and a locus of ideological dispute. As a lingua franca, English holds the promise of social mobility and access to global opportunities. However,

without a critical pedagogical approach, English teaching risks becoming an instrument of symbolic domination, reinforcing linguistic imperialism and structural exclusion.

In Brazil, this contradiction is acutely felt in the context of Technological Higher Education, where ESP has gained institutional space as part of workforce development strategies. Nevertheless, ESP instruction in Brazil often reflects decontextualized models imported from the Global North, neglecting the social realities and aspirations of both students and teachers. As Tanzi Neto (2015) argues, the teaching of English in Brazil must be rethought as a social and ideological practice, embedded in specific historical, cultural, and institutional contexts.

Rather than focusing solely on linguistic skills, ESP should function as a site for critical reflection, identity construction, and collaborative transformative action.

This article responds to that call by examining a teacher education experience rooted in CHAT and organized around the concept of Social Activity (Liberali, 2009). This approach emerges from a Brazilian tradition of Applied Linguistics, which views language education as inherently political and socially situated (Moita Lopes, 2006). It aims to move beyond technicist or neoliberal paradigms, instead promoting agency, collaboration, and critical reflexivity in teacher development. As we emphasize in this article, this requires a reorientation of teacher education programs to center the lived experiences, affective dimensions, and collective engagements of educators.

The present study, developed through Critical Collaborative Research (Magalhães, 2007; Liberali, 2012), involved a series of workshops with five English teachers at a São Paulo Technological Faculty. Grounded in participants' local realities, the workshops sought to design and reflect on ESP teaching practices that respond meaningfully to students' sociocultural contexts. By taking Social Activity (Liberali, 2009) as a curricular organizer, the process emphasized the co-construction of knowledge, ethical-political commitment, and the recognition of linguistic education to social transformation (Tanzi Neto, 2021).

Central to this experience is the notion of critical-social transformation as defined in cultural-historical psychology: not simply as structural change, but as the creation of new forms of subjectivity, interaction, shared meaning, and new ways of socially acting in the world. According to Liberali (2012), transformation is inseparable from dialogue, contradiction, and the expansion of what is possible within a given social world. Teacher education, from this perspective, becomes a process of becoming — one that links theory, practice, emotion, and ideology in dynamic ways.

Within the BRICS context, Brazil's experience resonates with broader efforts to resist educational sovereignty and resist hegemonic pressures. The contradictions explored in this research — between English as empowerment and English as imposition, between local needs and global norms — mirror those faced in India's postcolonial multilingualism, South Africa's efforts to decolonize language policy, and China and Russia's balancing of national identity with internationalization. This article argues that CHAT, when operationalized through grounded, collaborative pedagogical practices, can provide a viable framework for rethinking teacher education in BRICS countries.

In this light, we pose the following guiding question in this study to be reflected and discussed: *How can language teacher education in Brazil — when grounded in social activity and cultural-historical principles — contribute to culturally relevant, socially transformative pedagogical practices within BRICS contexts?*

English for specific purposes (ESP)

The teaching of ESP, known in its seminal literature by this name, experienced significant expansion starting in the 1960s, within a post-World War II context in which English communication became essential due to the geopolitical position of the United States at the time (Valente & Ribeiro, 2023). This growth was later intensified by globalization and technological advancement, which increased the demand for faster and more purpose-driven language learning (Valente & Ribeiro, 2023). However, in its conception, we understand that this approach, though relevant in professional and academic contexts, can be criticized for its restrictive and instrumental view of language, which may come at the expense of a broader, critical, and transformative linguistic education. To avoid this limitation, Valente & Ribeiro (2023) argue that, precisely because it is not confined to academic and professional matters, it is essential to incorporate social contexts into the teaching of ESP.

By focusing exclusively on the immediate needs of a specific group, such as business professionals, medical practitioners, academia, or tourists, traditional approaches to ESP reduce language to a mere tool for functional communication, thereby neglecting its cultural, historical, social, and affective dimensions. Such an approach can limit learners' potential to engage with the language in deeper and more creative ways, overlooking aspects such as literature, artistic expression, identity construction, and the transformative power of language. As a result, the traditional view of ESP often relies on a model grounded in functionality and efficiency, ignoring essential sociocultural dimensions of language learning and reinforcing a utilitarian logic that reduces language to a technical tool, stripped of its identity-constructing and political potential. For this reason, it is crucial to consider more contemporary discussions within the ESP framework that incorporates broader social contexts (Diegues, 2025).

In line with this perspective, Bourdieu (2022) argues that language is a field of power — its symbolic power operates as a selective mechanism in society, enabling or constraining speakers' social and linguistic inclusion. ESP instruction, by targeting specific groups, may inadvertently reinforce existing social and cultural hierarchies. Instead of promoting an inclusive and emancipatory language education, ESP can become a tool for maintaining the status quo, limiting the transformative potential of language.

In summary, ESP or LinFE (*Língua para Fins Específicos*¹) approach represents a national evolution of what was previously known in the literature as ESP, and it has increasingly gained ground within academic discourse. It is a constantly evolving approach, with goals and needs that must be addressed in today's educational and sociocultural contexts.

¹ In Portuguese.

According to Hutchinson & Waters (1987), British educators and researchers who systematized the ESP approach, ESP should be understood as an approach rather than a product, as it encompasses theoretical assumptions surrounding language and learning. As they assert, “ESP is not a product, but an approach to language teaching which is directed by specific and apparent needs of particular learners” (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987:16).

Almeida Filho (2015) complements this understanding by defining “approach” as a set of ideas, knowledge, beliefs, and principles regarding what language is, what foreign languages are, and how language learning and teaching take place. This includes conceptions about human nature, the classroom environment, and the roles of teachers and students in the teaching-learning process. We align with this perspective, and we understand that all the teacher’s actions in the teaching-learning process reflect their underlying approach, from course planning to classroom delivery.

Hutchinson & Waters (1987) also emphasize that ESP developed in phases, undergoing a series of stages that evolve at different paces depending on the specific national and educational contexts. To understand this historical trajectory, they outline five key stages that contributed to the development of ESP. Importantly, the authors highlight that ESP is not a uniform or universal phenomenon, but rather one that has evolved heterogeneously across diverse settings.

Cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) in the Brazilian context

In Brazil, the CHAT has been widely applied across various fields, especially in education, teacher development, school psychology, and social projects. Based on the foundations laid by Vygotsky and further developed by authors such as Leontiev and Luria, this theory influences pedagogical practices that understand human development as a socially mediated and historically situated process. In the educational field, the theory has guided approaches that value the active role of students and the cultural artifacts that mediate consciousness in school environments as essential elements in the construction of knowledge. Within this perspective, language is conceived as a fundamental cultural tool, and learning is understood as a collaborative and interactive process rooted in students’ social and cultural experiences.

In teacher education, CHAT has served as a foundation for programs that emphasize critical praxis, reflection on teaching practices, and professional development through dialogue and collaboration among educators. Brazilian scholars such as Magalhães, Liberali, Fidalgo, among others, contributed significantly to consolidating this perspective, promoting the development of teachers who are aware of their social role and their insertion in contexts marked by inequality and systemic contradictions. This critical vision is also reflected in school psychology, where the theory supports practices that

consider the student as a whole, considering their social, familiar, and cultural relationships. As a result, educational interventions are no longer limited to cognitive aspects but include the historical, social, and political dimensions that influence the teaching-learning process.

Moreover, the theory has inspired numerous academic studies at Brazilian universities such as University of São Paulo (USP), Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo (PUC-SP), Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ), Federal University of São Paulo (UNIFESP), Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte (UFRN), where research groups explore themes related to inclusion, human development, teacher education, and public policies. This theoretical framework is also strongly present in social and community projects, particularly in initiatives focused on popular education, critical literacy, and work with populations in situations of social vulnerability. These actions reaffirm the theory’s commitment to social transformation, understanding that human development emerges from active participation in meaningful social practices.

In this sense, researchers, teachers, coordinators, practitioners, activists in this field in Brazil work with teaching-learning as a socially situated process mediated by cultural tools, as mentioned, but emphasize the dialectical relationship between individual agency and collective activity. It is especially relevant to teacher education in countries like those of the BRICS, where systemic contradictions are abundant and demand pedagogical approaches that are sensitive to local realities. Thus, CHAT, in its multiple expressions, has played a central role in shaping more human, critical, and transformative educational practices in our context.

In the Brazilian educational context, CHAT is perceived as a theoretical and methodological framework that, according to Liberali, Mateus, and Damianovic (2012:7), can be understood as a theory of human nature. This perspective views activity as intrinsic to the human being, given their immersion in social relations (Oliveira, 2012). The theory aims to understand how the human being — including their consciousness — is shaped within the context of social activities, based on the premise that individuals cannot be dissociated from the sociocultural environment in which they are situated (Cenci; Damiani, 2018). In this sense, as Rodrigues (2012:41) states, “social life is essentially practical,” and it is through praxis that individuals produce their means of subsistence — a historical product resulting from human actions within society.

Rodrigues (2012) also highlights that, from the CHAT perspective, there is an integrated relationship between individuals and the world. This means understanding people as historically situated beings, located in a specific time and space, embedded in contexts shaped by economic, social, cultural, political, and historical dimensions. Consequently, human development is a socially and culturally mediated process.

Thus, social and cultural interactions play a central role in individuals’ cognitive development, as both learning and development are “integrated, situated, dis-

tributed, and co-produced within contexts, while also being intrinsically interwoven with them” (Stetsenko, 2008:477).

Another key aspect of the theory is its emphasis on the mediation of cultural tools — especially language — in the development of human thought. Learning, in this view, is conceived as a collaborative process in which individuals construct knowledge together through social interaction. In this regard, Magalhães (2012:15) asserts that language plays a mediating and constitutive role in the formation of individual consciousness, emerging as an essential element in critical and collaborative relationships, and contributing to the understanding and transformation of social, cultural, historical, ethical, and political conditions that influence both individual and collective action and thinking.

Learning, therefore, occurs as individuals internalize cultural tools and use them to solve problems in their environments. Human activities, at all stages and levels of organization, are understood as social creations and should be interpreted as outcomes of historical processes (Daniels, 2002).

Furthermore, as Tanzi Neto, Liberali, and Dafermos (2020) point out, Vygotsky’s cultural-historical theory has been reinterpreted by numerous scholars around the world, particularly in response to the complex challenges of contemporary science. These reinterpretations have broadened the possibilities for understanding and fostering human development across various social, cultural, and educational contexts.

Social activity as curricular organizer

In line with CHAT, which understands individuals as active agents, creators, and transformers of knowledge and the world around them, Social Activity is presented as “the motive that drives the teaching-learning activity” (Liberali, 2009:15), enabling subjects to act reflectively and transformatively (Liberali, 2009:10). This activity is conceived as a central curricular organizer, aiming to bridge the gap between school and life, allowing learners to connect what they learn with the demands of real life (Liberali & Santiago, 2018:20). From this perspective, a curriculum based on Social Activity promotes pedagogical practices grounded in CHAT, with a focus on the articulation between theory and practice in the teaching-learning process (Santos, 2015).

Founded on Leontiev’s (1977/1997) concept of coordinated actions carried out by a group to achieve a shared objective, Liberali (2009) argues that the teaching-learning process through Social Activity enables coordinated actions by individuals working toward a specific goal, emphasizing the fulfillment of participants’ needs in the context of “life as it is lived” (Marx & Engels, 2006:26). In a society marked by multiple demands, diverse representations of reality, and coexisting worldviews, it is essential to develop participatory modes that offer analytical and critical foundations, so that individuals can make conscious decisions about who they are and wish

to become, the attitudes they prefer to adopt, and why (Liberali & Santiago, 2018:20). Within this context, Rodrigues (2012) highlights that teaching-learning processes must consider students as social beings with both individual and collective needs and interests, shaped by their socio-historical-cultural context. Therefore, learning environments should simulate real-life situations that foster active participation. In alignment with this view, Vendramini-Zanella and Delboni (2021:251) state that Social Activity consists of subjects who are aware of their needs and are driven by a specific purpose or desired object.

Incorporating Social Activity into English language teaching-learning is not only feasible but also valuable, as such activities reflect real human actions and help develop learners’ full potential (Richter, 2015:62). Participants are encouraged to effect change within their contexts and broader society, with this transformative capacity acting as a driving force that inspires them to envision and pursue improved living conditions and greater civic engagement. Consequently, according to Vieira and Liberali (2021), language teaching grounded in Social Activity seeks to recognize individuals’ everyday actions and aims to empower them to master the discursive genres relevant to effective participation in those activities. In selecting the Social Activities to be addressed in the classroom, the idea is that additional language learning should serve to enrich personal and cultural development, since “activities related to cultural participation involve language issues” (Liberali, 2009:16). This approach is also supported by the intrinsic connection between Social Activities and everyday life, as they emphasize collective action undertaken to achieve a shared motive or goal, thereby meeting the concrete needs of the individuals involved (Liberali, 2009:11).

In order to elucidate the components of an activity—namely, “agents (subjects) who recognize their needs and are motivated by a purpose (object), which is mediated by artifacts (instruments, tools) through a relationship among individuals (community), constituted by rules and the division of labor” (Liberali, 2009:19) — and to relate them to the activity examined in this study, Table 1 below presents the components of activity as proposed by Liberali (2009), drawing on Engeström’s (1999) representation.

Rodrigues (2012:54) argues that a curriculum organization grounded in Social Activity seeks to support teachers in the comprehensive process of instructional planning, which includes the design, sequencing, implementation, and reflection on tasks to be carried out by students, as well as on the teacher’s own classroom practices. In addition, such a framework entails a critical examination of the curricular content to be addressed, considering the lived realities of students and beginning from their needs to identify the most relevant social activities to be incorporated into the pedagogical approach (Liberali & Santiago, 2018:26 – 27).

Within the context of ESP, this means expanding the scope of language teaching to include discussions on power, identity, and inequality — topics often shaped by colonial and neoliberal ideologies. Rather than repro-

Table 1

Components of activity	
Component	Description
Subjects	Those who act in relation to the motive and carry out the activity
Community	Those who share the object of the activity through the division of labor and rules
Division of Labor	Intermediate actions performed through individual participation in the activity, which alone do not fully satisfy participants' needs. These include the tasks and functions assigned to each subject involved in the activity
Object	That will fulfill the need – the desired object. It is dynamic in nature, transforming as the activity develops. It involves the articulation between what is idealized, dreamed of, or desired, which evolves into the final object or product
Rule	The explicit or implicit norms established within the community
Artifacts / Instruments / Tools	The means by which nature is modified to achieve the idealized object. These tools can be controlled by their user and reflect the subject's decisions. They are used either to achieve a predefined goal (instrument for a result) or can be formed throughout the activity itself (instrument and result) (Newman & Holzman, 2002)

Source: Liberali, 2009:12

ducing dominant narratives, educators are encouraged to foster a dialogic classroom environment where learners critically engage with the sociohistorical dimensions of language and power.

Drawing from decolonial theorists such as Maldonado-Torres (2008), Mignolo (2017), Quijano (1999), and Walsh (2012), this pedagogical stance emphasizes the need to unveil, and question taken-for-granted discourses rooted in coloniality. Quijano (1999), for instance, conceptualizes coloniality as a persistent structure of power that outlives colonialism, shaping knowledge, identities, and social hierarchies. Mignolo (2017) extends this by calling for epistemic disobedience – that is, a delinking from Eurocentric frames of reference to re-center subaltern knowledges and practices. Maldonado-Torres (2008) further deepens the critique by exposing the logic of dehumanization embedded in coloniality, arguing for a decolonial turn that reclaims human dignity through ethical and political action.

In educational settings, as Walsh (2012) suggests, this entails not only including diverse perspectives but actively resisting epistemic violence and enabling students to construct alternative, pluriversal meanings. Language education, from this vantage point, becomes a transformative space for disrupting hegemonic narratives and cultivating critical, inclusive subjectivities capable of imagining and enacting more just social worlds.

This critical orientation is particularly pertinent within the BRICS framework, where the negotiation of national identity, linguistic diversity, and global participation remains a central concern. By embedding discussions that confront colonial legacies and racist structures-framed within broader liberal discourses-language education can better respond to the socio-cultural differences of BRICS participants. Without necessarily engaging in politically sensitive critiques, especially in multilateral contexts, such a focus allows for an ethically grounded and contextually sensitive approach to teacher education. Ultimately, it strengthens the emancipatory potential of language pedagogy while respecting the geopolitical complexities that define BRICS cooperation.

In this perspective, the teaching-learning framework proposed by LinFE serves as a curricular orientation

tool. It aims to map out the structure and operational dynamics of a Social Activity, to establish meaningful interactions among the constituent elements of the activity system, thereby promoting a more situated and contextually responsive educational experience.

Materials and methods

This research was conducted at a public Higher Technological Education Institution in the State of São Paulo, called the Faculty of Technology of Praia Grande, located in the city of Praia Grande, in the Metropolitan Region of Baixada Santista, São Paulo, Brazil. Higher Technological Education in Brazil is characterized by undergraduate programs known as Higher Education Technology Courses, which typically last around two years and are aimed at developing technologists – professionals qualified in specific fields.

A Higher Education Technology Course stands out as a form of Higher Education that, by combining theoretical and practical knowledge, offers fast, practical, and market-oriented appropriation, setting it apart from other modalities such as bachelor's and teaching degrees.

With a strong emphasis on the immediate appropriation of acquired skills, Higher Technological Education becomes appealing to students seeking to enter the job market with specific competencies: “Its specificity lies in the fact that it provides specialized training in scientific and technological fields, granting graduates the skills to work in specific professional areas” (MEC, 2024).

This research is methodologically grounded in the Critical Collaborative Research framework, hereafter referred to as PCCol, as conceived by Magalhães (2006). It aligns with the critical research paradigm in which the teacher-researcher investigates both the actions of the participants – that is, the students – and their own pedagogical action.

PCCol, whose critical-interventionist foundation is rooted in collaboration as a methodological principle, is: “partially derived from action research, although the concept of collaboration in the research process is, for us, central” (Magalhães, 2007:151–152).

Accordingly, Magalhães (2006:156) describes PCCol as an interventionist research method that:

- involves all participants in the mediation, collection, analysis, and understanding of concepts, in value judgments, and in decision-making processes regarding what to do and how to act;
- provides tools for all participants to engage in observing, questioning contradictions, and appropriating and using new mediational tools to analyze and reorganize their own practices;
- enables the analysis and understanding of different discursive perspectives, considering multiple voices, viewpoints, and approaches.

When considering collaboration, it is important to understand that within PCCol it is intrinsically tied to critical collaboration, which has been: constructed over the years to challenge a Cartesian view of collaboration/cooperation, incorporating categories such as contradiction, conflict, intervention, mediation, negotiation, and resistance (Magalhães & Fidalgo, 2019:11), that is, critical collaboration because it challenges lexical and structural choices, and is fundamentally grounded in discourse.

Table 2

Description of meeting

Schedule	Activities
Social activity	1. Opening of the session with the song “ <i>Feelin’ Groovy</i> ” by Simon & Garfunkel
	2. Discussion of section “1.3 Social Activities” from the text “ <i>Foreign Language Teaching</i> ” by Liberali (2009)
	3. Collaborative co-construction of a mural with ideas and keywords related to Social Activity
	4. Discussion of the components of Social Activity
	5. Selection of intervention contexts for Social Activity
	6. Initial development of the Social Activity for each selected intervention context
	7. Completion of the session evaluation questionnaire

Source: Diegues 2025:112

The session began with the song “Feelin’ Groovy” by Simon & Garfunkel, selected by one of the teacher-participants. She shared the personal significance of the song, which led the group into a discussion on the importance of slowing down and reflecting on life in an increasingly fast-paced world. The teacher-participants shared their experiences regarding the pursuit of balance between work, study, and self-care, touching on activities such as meditation, reading, and physical exercise.

Subsequently, the concept of Social Activity was discussed drawn from Liberali’s (2009) text. The reading emphasizes the importance of reflecting on one’s life and transforming it toward more meaningful participation in society, highlighting the role of the CHAT in teaching-learning. During this session, key points were raised

concerning the integration of students’ real-life experiences into the teaching-learning process, thus promoting agency and developmental potential.

Following the theoretical discussion, participants collaboratively constructed a mind map (see Figure 1) on Social Activity, highlighting key components such as subjects, object, tools, and division of labor.

The practical task for this meeting involved selecting three intervention contexts related to Social Activity that consider the students’ socio-historical-cultural backgrounds. The teacher-participants selected teaching-related contexts, namely: (1) presenting a scientific paper, (2) writing an email, and (3) producing a video résumé. The session concluded with a discussion on the preparation of the components of Social Activity for each of the selected intervention contexts.

In Table 3 below, we present Excerpt 1, followed by its data analysis and discussion.

The excerpt above (Table 3) and the mind map (Figure 1) highlights the collective construction of meaning in education, focusing on the integration of theory and practice through the concept of Social Activity (Engestr m, 1999; Liberali, 2009). Researcher’s initial intention was to provoke reflection and dialogue among participants regarding the relationship between what is learned and what life demands (Liberali & Santiago, 2018). Teacher 1’s remarks emphasize the necessity of connecting educational content to students’ lived experiences, promoting meaningful learning based on real-life relevance and personal identification with the topics discussed. This perspective aligns with a critical

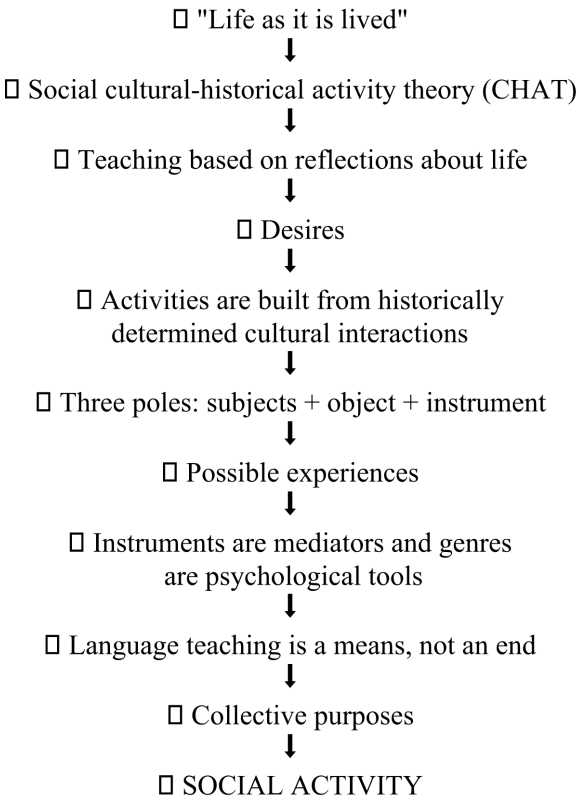


Fig. 1. Collaborative Mural on Social Activity
Source: Diegues, 2025:114

Table 3

Excerpt 1

Researcher: [...] *we can start with you — I'd like you to briefly share what you understood from the text, what social activity means to you, and the key points you noted.*

Teacher I: Well, I try to bring it into our reality, and it's something I believe in. Experience sustains the construction of lesson content and engages students — or draws them in — so they can have a reference point, something they can identify with, making it meaningful. I loved the phrase “life as it is lived,” because it's from there that we can develop our strategies. There's no use in teaching something disconnected from the reality we live in — or that our students live in — because it will lack meaning. It's crucial that it has meaning for them. One important thing I noted — I even sketched a mind map — is that we must start from the subject. From the subject, we move to the object, because there must be a desire, a motivation, to develop the activities. These activities need to be instrumentalized, there has to be a network, rules, and division of labor. There must be collective participation, and it must have meaning.

Teacher II: Can I say something in my defense? I just remembered that this was part of a class I took — I think it was a course on teaching methodologies — and we had to design an activity based on social activities. I'll try to find it on my old computer. I remember I created something like “going to the movies,” and it included *The Big Bang Theory* — it turned out pretty well.

Researcher: Thank you, would you like to add something?

Teacher III: [...] A few points really caught my attention. I highlighted what [Teacher I] mentioned about reflecting on “life as it is lived.” So, bringing the reality of that community into the classroom, and from that reality, developing the activities. Correct me if I'm wrong, because honestly I've never read much about social activities — maybe I misunderstood something — but my understanding is that we bring the community's reality and always work toward a collective goal. So, foreign language activities aren't defined solely by a linguistic aim — like acquiring a grammatical structure. They position themselves as tools. That's how I interpreted “tools”: the activity allows for collective thinking. These activities are constituted through interactions — this is something the author emphasizes in the text — interactions that are part of culturally and historically situated contexts. All of these elements permeate our teaching practice and also the learning process. I found it interesting that she mentions there is no such thing as an isolated activity. Rather, there is a network, a system of interconnected activities. [...]

Researcher: That's a crucial point — thank you, everyone. Regarding social activity, it is grounded in CHAT, which sees subjects as always interacting with one another. In these interactions, within the collective construction of an activity, mediated by an object or a shared goal, and through the use of tools, they are situated in culturally and historically dependent contexts. Something you said, [Teacher III], is particularly insightful — that it's not only about language as an end in itself. This is something we've been reflecting on a lot. We've been questioning and discussing other theoretical perspectives, and this one highlights that teaching English isn't just about teaching the language per se. We must approach language teaching through many other lenses. Social activity opens up multiple possibilities — ways of being, acting, living, and feeling the world, we are a part of, in all its cultural and historical depth.

Source: **Diegues, 2025:113**

approach that values the design of activities grounded in the subject, their interactions, and collective participation (Magalhães, 2007, 2009, 2012). In this regard, we underscore the *social role of the classroom*, which goes beyond the mere transmission of content and becomes a space for the formation of critical and engaged citizens. Within this context, teaching contributes to participants' understanding of the interconnections between learning and its application in social, professional, and cultural contexts.

Furthermore, Teacher III adds to the discussion by stating that *language teaching transcends the acquisition of linguistic structures*, functioning also as a tool for collective action embedded in specific historical and cultural contexts (Liberali, 2009). In this sense, the type of knowledge and interactions fostered through teaching contribute to the development of learners' identities, enabling them to perceive themselves as historical and social agents capable of transforming their realities through language. The view of human beings and society promoted through the pedagogical practice illustrated in the excerpt is founded on principles of collectivity, autonomy, and critical reflection (Magalhães, 2007, 2009, 2012). The human being is understood as an active subject who learns and constructs knowledge through interaction with others and the world, in a continuous movement of transformation.

Researcher reinforces that *social activities*, grounded in CHAT, provide opportunities for education to become multidimensional and meaningful, breaking away from the traditional and reductionist views often found in foreign language teaching. Thus, the excerpt, rooted in the participants' discussion based on Liberali's (2009) text, highlights the transformative potential of teaching through multiple forms of interaction, reflection, and action.

However, activities such as producing video r sum s or writing professional emails only become pedagogically powerful when students recognize their relevance and feel seen through them. Integrating students' perspectives-through feedback, dialogic engagement, and participatory curriculum development-not only validates their agency but also fulfills the transformative discussion of language education rooted in CHAT.

Conclusions

This study demonstrates that language teacher education in Brazil, when grounded in Social activity and cultural-historical principles, holds significant potential for fostering culturally relevant and socially transformative pedagogical practices, not only locally but across BRICS contexts. Through the PCCol process, we

observed how reflective, dialogic engagement allowed teacher-participants to reinterpret their professional roles, reconnect with students' lived realities, and develop pedagogical strategies rooted in ethical, political, and transformative commitments.

By centering the concept of Social Activity as both a curricular organizer and a reflective lens, educators moved beyond utilitarian or technical approaches to ESP. Instead, they embraced language teaching as a sociocultural, ideological, and identity-shaping practice. The collaborative design of activities such as preparing scientific presentations, composing professional emails, and creating video résumés illustrates the viability of integrating students' real-life needs into language learning, while also resisting the neoliberal logic often imposed on education systems in BRICS countries.

The findings reinforce the relevance of CHAT in shaping a teacher education paradigm that is responsive to systemic contradictions, historically situated, and ethically grounded. This perspective enables

teachers to become agents of change within institutions that are often pressured to align with market-driven imperatives. Within the broader BRICS context—marked by diverse cultural heritages, postcolonial dynamics, and geopolitical tensions—this Brazilian experience offers a pathway toward collaborative resistance, decolonial epistemologies, and pluriversal approaches to language education.

Ultimately, this study affirms that when teacher education prioritizes dialogue, collective activity, and transformative social action, it not only enriches the professional development of educators, but also fosters pedagogical practices that are responsive to diverse social realities. By centering collaboration and critical engagement, such approaches actively contribute to the construction of more inclusive and equitable educational landscapes—both locally, within specific communities and institutions, and globally, as part of broader movements toward social justice and educational democratization.

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Вклад авторов

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Научная статья | Original paper

Dissemination of L.S. Vigotski's cultural-historical theory in Brazil

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Abstract

Context and relevance. The article presents brief information on how the works of L.S. Vygotsky and his collaborators arrived and spread in Brazil and data from a survey on the Platform of the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development of the National Agency for Scientific and Technological Research (CNPq), more specifically, on the Directory of Research Groups (DGP) which records data and production of research groups in Brazil. **Objective.** The survey focused on research groups in the areas of education and psychology and sought to identify Brazilian research groups that indicate, in their titles and summaries of activities, that they carry out research based on the cultural-historical theory of L.S. Vygotsky. **Methods and materials.** We carried out a survey to see how many research groups are active in Brazil working with cultural-historical theory, specifically in the areas of education and psychology. The survey was carried out through a series of searches on the DGP-CNPq's parameterized consultation page, between June 1 and 10, 2025. **Results.** The survey showed that of the total of 154 groups found according to the descriptors chosen, 140 groups (90.9%) are in public educational institutions and 14 (9.1%) in private institutions. This data shows the importance that public educational institutions attach to recording activities carried out by groups of their researchers. **Conclusions.** Although the arrival of Vygotsky's works in Brazil took place almost 40 years ago, the dissemination of his thought unfortunately took place based on translations and editions that mutilated his writings and thus misrepresented important ideas from his studies and theoretical-methodological investigations. The survey presented in this text does not go into this issue in depth, nor does it discuss the bibliographical references used in the intellectual production of the research groups registered with DGP-CNPq. We have restricted ourselves to some more general aspects of the current scenario, even though we know, as has been pointed out, that it does not correspond exactly to reality.

Keywords: cultural-historical theory, Vygotsky, scientific research, psychology, education

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Распространение культурно-исторической теории Л.С. Выготского в Бразилии

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Резюме

Контекст и актуальность. В статье представлен краткий обзор того, как работы Л.С. Выготского и его соавторов появились и распространились в Бразилии, а также данные опроса, проведенного на платформе Национального совета по научным и технологическим разработкам (CNPq), а именно в

разделе «Каталог исследовательских групп» (DGP), который регистрирует данные и результаты деятельности исследовательских групп в Бразилии. **Цель.** Опрос был направлен на выявление исследовательских групп в области образования и психологии, которые содержат в названиях и описаниях своих работ информацию о том, что они проводят исследования на основе культурно-исторической теории Л.С. Выготского. **Методы и материалы.** Мы провели опрос, чтобы определить, сколько исследовательских групп активно работают с культурно-исторической теорией в Бразилии, особенно в областях образования и психологии. Опрос осуществлялся посредством серии поисковых запросов на странице параметризованной консультации DGP-CNPq4 в период с 1 по 10 июня 2025 года. **Результаты.** Опрос показал, что из общего числа найденных 154 групп, согласно выбранным дескрипторам, 140 групп (90,9%) находятся в государственных образовательных учреждениях и 14 (9,1%) — в частных учреждениях. Эти данные демонстрируют важность, которую придают государственные образовательные учреждения регистрации деятельности своих исследовательских групп. **Выводы.** Хотя работы Выготского появились в Бразилии почти 40 лет назад, распространение его идей, к сожалению, происходило на основе переводов и изданий, искаженных и урезанных, что привело к неправильному представлению о важных идеях его исследований и теоретико-методологических разработок. Представленный в этом тексте опрос не углубляется в этот вопрос и не рассматривает библиографические источники, использованные в научной деятельности зарегистрированных в DGP-CNPq исследовательских групп. Мы ограничились некоторыми более общими аспектами текущей ситуации, хотя и осознаем, как было отмечено ранее, что она не полностью соответствует реальности.

Ключевые слова: культурно-историческая теория, Л.С. Выготский, научные исследования, психология, образование

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Introduction

The aim of this study was to identify and analyze the dissemination of Lev Semionovich Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory in Brazil. To this end, information was sought from the Directory of Research Groups in Brazil (DGP-CNPq)¹, managed by the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq) and linked to the Lattes Platform, a Brazilian database designed to record and monitor scientific and technological activity in the national science, technology and innovation system.

In Brazil, the creation of this Directory by the CNPq was anchored in two reasons: (I) “the need to build a single science and technology (S&T) information system to support the formulation of indicators” (Chiarini *et al.*, 2022, p. 6); and (II) the continuous advance “of information and communication technologies (ICTs), with computerization and the *boom* of the internet and the *world wide web* (www)” (Chiarini *et al.*, 2022, p. 6) which, in a way, forced many countries to adopt these tools. It was launched in 1993, before the Lattes Platform, with the aim of achieving unity and uniformity in data and statistics on science and technology in Brazil. It was gradually institutionalized and then the biannual censuses, statistical summaries and a tool for drawing up dynamic tables became available free of charge to the entire academic community, all coupled to the Lattes Platform (Chiarini *et al.*, 2022). Since the production of knowledge is a col-

lective activity, the CNPq understood that it would be up to the State to create a scientific and technological information base for groups of researchers, thus treating the research group as a unit of analysis with one or, exceptionally, two senior researchers who would lead the assistant researchers, the technical support staff, as well as the students, all around a common interest, sharing equipment, facilities and resources in the scientific research activity. Since it was set up, the DGP-CNPq has undergone several updates and has proved to be an efficient, accurate and fast tool, able to identify the researcher, where they are, what they do and what they have produced recently.

It has been common to analyze the characteristics and scientific output of research groups via the DGP to characterize the state of the art of research areas in Brazil (see, for example, Prado and Sayd, 2004; Moreira, Vilan Filho and Mueller, 2015).

Therefore, due to its characteristics, the DGP is an instrument capable of providing precise information and indications of the ways in which Lev Semionovich Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory has been assimilated and disseminated in Brazil.

Methods and materials

It is quite difficult, if not almost impossible, to pinpoint the date on which Lev Semionovich Vygotsky ar-

¹ At the time of the search, the Directory was in version 2.0.8.10. Its access link is: http://dgp.cnpq.br/dgp/faces/consulta/consulta_parametrizada.jsf

rived here. Perhaps we can only point to past events and some dates that attest to when he had already begun to wander around this remote West. In other words, we can identify clues and, by following them, perhaps we can establish some signs of his presence among us and the times when he began to visit us.

For example, on a copy of the book by A.R. Luria and F.I. Yudovich, bought at a bookstore around 2023, entitled *Language and intellectual development in children*, you can see someone's signature in ink, with the date Aug/94. The copy belongs to the 2nd edition (1987) of a translation by José Cláudio de Almeida Abreu, a professor at the Faculty of Languages and Literature of the Federal University of Minas Gerais. The first edition of the work was published by Artes Médicas in Porto Alegre in 1985. As we know, A. R. Luria was one of Lev Semionovich's closest collaborators and there are several mentions of him in the book mentioned here. The same occurs in two books by the same author published previously in Brazil: (1) in *Curso de psicologia geral*, especially in volume IV, published in 1979; and (2) in *Fundamentos de neuropsicologia*, published in 1981. So, we already know that since 1979, Vygotsky was already in these tropical parts of the West, accompanying Luria.

We know that the book *The Social Formation of the Mind*, (originally published in English under the title *Mind in society — the development of higher psychological processes*) had been circulating here in Brazil since 1984. However, the organizers of this volume state in the preface: "The work of bringing together originally separate works has been done quite freely. The reader should not expect to find a literal translation of Vygotsky, but rather an edited translation from which we have omitted apparently redundant material and to which we have added material that seemed important in terms of making Vygotsky's ideas clearer" (John-Steiner *et al*, 1999, p. XIV). In other words, it cannot be said that the texts were written by Vygotsky, so the decision has been made here to disregard him.

Furthermore, and more importantly, we also know that by tracing the dates of publication of translations of works by Lev Semionovich and his two closest collaborators, A.R. Luria and A.N. Leontiev, we can begin to identify the trails that lead us along the map of the assimilation of cultural-historical theory in Brazil. Table 1 shows information on works translated into Portuguese that have circulated and are still circulating in these surroundings and of which we are aware.

Looking at Table 1, as far as we know, Luria was the first author of the *troika* to be translated into Brazilian Portuguese. This was done by Paulo Bezerra, who translated directly from Russian, and was published in 1979. In the excerpts from the translation below, we can see, right at the beginning of the first volume, Luria's grandiose presentation of his master and friend L.S. Vygotsky: 1. "The ways of overcoming the crisis in psychology were first formulated by the outstanding Soviet psychologist Lev Semionovich Vygotsky (1896–1934); they became the basis for the subsequent evolution of psychology as a science, at first in the USSR and then beyond its borders" (Luria, 1979, p. 5); 2. "... For Vygotsky, the main task in overcoming this crisis consisted in making the higher and specifically human forms of conscious activity the object of research and focusing on them from the point of view of scientific analysis, causally explaining their origin and defining the objective laws to which they are subordinate" (Luria, p. 6, emphasis added); 3. "... As Vygotsky observed, the attempt to focus on the psyche as an immediate function of the brain and to look for its source in the recesses of the brain is as futile as the attempt to consider the psyche as a form of existence of the spirit. The psychic life of animals arises in the process of their activity and is a *form of representation of reality, it is carried out by the brain, but it can only be explained by the objective laws of this representational activity*. Similarly, the higher forms of conscious activity, active attention, arbitrary memorization and logical thinking that are specific to man cannot be considered a natural product of the evolution of the brain but are the *result of the specific social form of life that is characteristic of man*. In order to causally explain the higher psychic functions of man, it is necessary to *go beyond the limits of the organism and look for their sources not in the recesses of the soul or in the peculiarities of the brain, but in the social history of mankind*, in the forms of language and social work that have been constituted throughout the history of society and have brought to life more perfected types of communication and new forms of conscious activity" (Luria, 1979, p. 6, emphasis added).

Luria's presentation is undoubtedly highly motivating for the reader who is looking for new insights into the study of human behavior. Certainly, his words motivated new searches in the direction of the theorist he was talking about. In other words, Vygotsky was already looking for us and we undoubtedly went to meet him.

Table 1

**Works by Luria, Leontiev and Vygotsky published in Brazil
 (in alphabetical order by the first author's surname)**

Author/authors	Title, city, publisher, date	Translated from	Translator
Leontiev, A.; Vygotsky, L.S.; Luria, A.R. and others	<i>Psychology and pedagogy — psychological bases of learning and development</i> ; São Paulo: Editora Moraes, 1991; 2007.	Not informed	Rubens Eduardo Frias
Leontiev, A.N.	<i>The development of the psyche</i> . São Paulo: Centauro, 2004.	French	Rubens Eduardo Frias.

Author/authors	Title, city, publisher, date	Translated from	Translator
Leontiev, A.N.	<i>Activity, consciousness and personality</i> . Bauru: Mireveja, 2021.	Russo	Priscila Marques
Luria, A.R.	Course in general psychology (<i>Volumes I to IV</i>). Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1979.	Russo	Paulo Bezerra
Luria, A.R.	<i>Fundamentals of neuropsychology</i> . São Paulo: Edusp, 1981.	English	Juarez Aranha Ricardo
Luria, A.R.	<i>Thought and language — Luria's last lectures</i> . Porto Alegre: Artes Médicas, 1987.	Russian	Diana Myriam Lichtenstein and Mário Corso
Luria, A.R.	<i>The construction of the mind</i> . São Paulo: Ícone, 1992.	English	Marcelo Brandão Cipolla
Luria A.R.	<i>The mind and memory — a little book about a vast memory</i> . São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 1999.	English	Claudia Berliner
Luria, A.R.	<i>Cognitive development</i> . São Paulo: Ícone, 2010.	English	Fernando Limongeli Gurgueira ²
Luria, A.R. and Yugovich, F.I.	<i>Psychology and Pedagogy — psychological bases of learning and development</i> . Porto Alegre: Artes Médicas, 1987 (1st edition — 1985).	Not informed	José Cláudio de Almeida Abreu
Vygotsky, L.S.	<i>Theory and method in psychology</i> . São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 1996.	Spanish	Cláudia Berliner
Vygotsky, L.S.	<i>Psychological development in childhood</i> . São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 1998.	Spanish	Cláudia Berliner
Vygotsky, L.S.	The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of <i>Denmark</i> . São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 1999.	Russian	Paulo Bezerra
Vygotsky, L.S.	<i>Lev S. Vygotsky: Manuscript of 1929</i> . Campinas: SP, ano XXI, 2000.	Russian	Alexandra Marenitch
Vygotsky, L.S.	The construction of thought and <i>language</i> . São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2001.	Russian	Paulo Bezerra
Vygotsky, L.S.	<i>Pedagogical psychology</i> . São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2001.	Russian	Paulo Bezerra
Vygotsky, L.S.	<i>Psychology of art</i> . São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2001.	Russian	Paulo Bezerra
Vygotsky, L.S.	<i>Pedagogical psychology</i> . Porto Alegre: Artmed, 2003.	Spanish	Claudia Schilling
Vygotsky, L.S.	Imagination and creation in <i>childhood</i> . São Paulo: Ática, 2009.	Russian	Zoia Prestes
Vygotsky, L.S.	Imagination and creativity in <i>childhood</i> . São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2014.	Russian	João Pedro Fróis
Vygotsky, L.S.	<i>Imagination and creation in childhood</i> . São Paulo: Expressão Popular, 2018.	Russian	Zoia Prestes and Elizabeth Tunes
Vygotsky, L.S.	<i>7 lessons by L.S. Vygotsky on the foundations of pedagogy</i> . Rio de Janeiro: E-Papers, 2018	Russian	Zoia Prestes, Elizabeth Tunes and Claudia C. G. Santana
Vygotsky, L.S.	Fundamentals of defectology (<i>Tome V.: Fundamentals of defectology</i>). Cascavel: PR, Edunioeste, 2019.	Spanish	Does not specify the name of the translators
Vygotsky, L.S.	<i>Psychology, education and development: writings by L.S. Vigotski</i> . São Paulo: Expressão Popular, 2021.	Russian	Zoia Prestes and Elizabeth Tunes
Vygotsky, L.S.	Problems of defectology (Volume <i>I</i>). São Paulo: Expressão Popular, 2021.	Russian	Zoia Prestes and Elizabeth Tunes
Vygotsky, L.S.	<i>History of the development of higher mental functions</i> . São Paulo: WMF Martins Fontes Publishing House, 2021.	English	Solange Castro Afeche
Vygotsky, L.S.	<i>Liev S. Vigotski: writings on art</i> . Bauru: Mireveja, 2022.	Russian	Priscila Marques
Vygotsky, L.S.	<i>Veresk — 100-year commemorative edition</i> . S o Carlos: Pedro & João Editores, 2023.	Russian	Zoia Prestes; Elizabeth Tunes; Jader J. M. Lopes and Marta Chaves
Vygotsky, L.S.	<i>Psychology, human development and Marxism</i> . São Paulo, Hogrefe, 2023.	Russian	Priscila Marques

² It is not clear who translated it (Fernando Limongeli Gurgueira or the group formed by Luiz Mena Barreto, Martha Kohl de Oliveira, Miriam M. M. de Andrade and Regina Heloisa Maciel).

Author/authors	Title, city, publisher, date	Translated from	Translator
Vygotsky, L.S.	<i>The essentials of Vygotsky</i> . Petrópolis: RJ, Vozes, 2024.	Russian	Priscila Marques.
Vygotsky, L.S.	<i>Imagination — selected texts</i> . Campinas: Mercado de Letras, 2025.	Russian	Priscila Marques
Vygotsky, L.S.	The meaning of crisis in <i>psychology</i> . São Paulo: Lavrapalavra, 2025.	Russian	Zoia Prestes and Elizabeth Tunes
Vygotsky, L.S. and Luria, A.R.	<i>Studies in the history of behavior: the ape, the primitive and the child</i> . Porto Alegre: Artes Médicas, 1996.	English	Lólio Lourenço de Oliveira
Vygotsky, L.S.; Luria, A.R. and Leontiev, A.N.	Language, development and <i>learning</i> . São Paulo: Ícone, EDUSP, 1988. ³	Not informed	Maria da Penha Villalobos

Source: prepared by the authors.

Table 1 shows that between 1979 and 1989, **five** works by L.S. Vygotsky — and his main collaborators — were translated into Portuguese; between 1990 and 1999, **seven**; from 2000 to 2010, **eight**; and from 2011 to 2025, **fifteen**. In other words, there was a slight increase from one decade to the next. Although the increase is not huge, it is significant if we look at the density of translated works: there has indeed been a notable increase in the size and importance of works translated into Portuguese in Brazil. These data therefore seem to point to the fact that the beginning of the 21st century is perhaps the period of dissemination and assimilation of cultural-historical theory in Brazil.

Approximately a century after Vygotsky's birth, we are beginning to learn more about and assimilate the cultural-historical psychology he created. That's a long time, and it certainly had the contribution of the censorship imposed on the author in the Soviet Union itself, coupled with our own weaknesses.

How did this process of disseminating his ideas take place in Brazil? That's what we'll see next, by examining the groups registered with the DGP-CNPq. First, however, it is interesting to note that, as far as we have been able to investigate, the first Brazilian studies based on Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory did not take place in the field of psychology, but in the area of chemistry teaching. These were four papers published by an interdisciplinary research group working at the Federal University of São Carlos, in the interior of the state of São Paulo (Tolentino *et al*, 1986; Silva *et al*, 1986; Rocha-Filho *et al*, 1988; Tunes *et al*, 1989).

It is known that L.S. Vigotski's work was silenced in the Soviet Union for more than 20 years and, when it began to be published again, it suffered from cuts and interference from publishers. Although the book *Michlenie i retch* [Thought and Speech] (Vygotsky, 1934), for example, was first published in its entirety at the end of 1934, six months after Vygotsky's death, this was not the case when the same book was published in the collection *Izbrannie psirologuitjeskie issledovania* [Selected Psychological Investigations] (Vygotsky, 1956), in 1956, 22 years later. In this volume, edited by A.N. Leontiev and A.R. Luria, the text of the aforementioned book came out with cuts and was thus republished in the

2nd Volume of *Sobranie sotchineni* [Collected works] (Vygotsky, 1982), in the early 1980s, without making the necessary corrections, 26 years later. What's more, Vygotsky's important and fundamental book was only published again uncut and according to the original archive in the early 2000s.

However, while in the Soviet Union the book suffered occasional edits and cuts, in the West it arrived in 1962 in a shattered edition, reduced to 168 pages, published by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (Prestes, 2012) and it was this version that proliferated around the world, also landing in Brazil in 1987, in an English version, under the title *Thought and Language* (Vigotski, 2005). In the fact sheet for the 2005 edition, you can see how the transliteration of the author's surname changes: if in the first edition it is Vygotsky, then Vygotski appears and, in the most recent edition, Vigotski. We believe that this book was not written by Vygotsky and, for this reason, we have not included it in Table 1.

Unfortunately, it was this edition (whether in English or Portuguese) that initiated studies of Vygotsky's thought in Brazil, as well as another book which, in our opinion, is also impossible to consider as belonging to the thinker's pen and, for this reason, we have also left out of Table 1. We are referring to the book *Mind in Society: the development of higher psychological processes* (Vygotsky, 1984) which, here in Brazil, came out under the title *A formação social da mente: o desenvolvimento dos processos psicológicos superiores* (*The social formation of the mind: the development of higher psychological processes*) (Vygotsky, 1999), a collection of texts adulterated by the organizers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and which, despite numerous academic works published in Brazil indicating the absurdities committed by this edition with Vygotsky's work, continues to circulate and still “underpins” monographs, dissertations and theses in our country.

We carried out a survey to see how many research groups are active in Brazil working with cultural-historical theory, specifically in the areas of education and psychology. The survey was carried out through a series of searches on the DGP-CNPq's parameterized consultation page⁴, between June 1 and 10, 2025.

Before we go on to detail our procedure, there are some very important considerations that directly im-

³ On these works, see Prestes (2012, p. 147–161).

pact any study produced with data extracted from the DGP- CNPq: the most important is that, although it is our main reference for obtaining this information, the platform has instabilities, not only because of frequent periods of downtime, but we also found significant discrepancies in the display of results when equivalent input specifications were used in the search options when carried out at a different time, even when running on the same version of the platform. In other words, the platform displays divergent search results depending on when the search is carried out, so that, for example, a particular group located using certain search criteria is no longer found weeks later using the same parameters, even though it is still active. These instabilities had already been identified by other researchers, such as Asbahr and Oliveira (2021) and Carvalho, Silvino and Souza (2022). In addition to these instabilities, we found other problems with the platform, such as: (A) the names of the group leaders could change between those that appeared in the search and those that appeared in the group's mirror; (B) eventually, the search returned some groups, in smaller numbers, that did not have the keyword searched for anywhere in their mirror; and (C) the opposite of the previous item also occurred, i.e. research groups that contained the keyword in their mirror did not appear in the search. The procedures adopted to remedy this last problem will be discussed below.

In order to collect information on the DGP-CNPq, we used the following specifications: in the "Consult – Current base" section, we considered the current census, entering the keywords – which will be discussed in the next paragraph – in the "Search term" field and selecting the "Groups" option in the "Consult by" field – since the platform also offers the option of searching by names of researchers, leaders, lines of research, among others. In the "Apply the search to the fields" section, we selected the options "Group name", "Research line name", "Research line keyword" (these three were already selected by default) and "Group repercussions", with all the others unchecked. In our tests, checking the "Certified" and/or "Not up to date" options in the "Status" field did not show any differences in the results displayed, so we opted to keep the platform's default options. Furthermore, no additional filters were used.

The keywords used to carry out this procedure were: (1) Vigotski; (2) Vygotski; (3) Vygotsky; (4) Vigotsky; (5) Leontiev; (6) Luria; (7) Historical-cultural; (8) Socio-historical; (9) Socio-historical; (10) Activity theory; (11) Socio-cultural; (12) Sociocultural; (13) Socio-interactionism; (14) Socio-interactionist; (14) Socio-constructivism; (15) Socio-constructivist; (16) Soviet psychology; (17) Psychology and Marxism; and (18) Marxist psychology. The keywords, with the exception of "Activity theory" and "Marxist psychology", had the "All words" option selected in their searches, while the "Exact search" field was selected in the two exceptions mentioned.

In all the searches, we checked whether the group in question actually worked with the chosen theoretical

framework and, to this end, we organized the results for each keyword into five groupings: (a) "Search", which represented the exact number of results for each keyword without any filtering by area or theme; (b) "Outside the parameters", which included groups from areas of knowledge not covered by the study, i.e. research groups that appeared in the results, but which are not in the area of Education or Psychology; (c) "Excluded", which are the results within the areas researched which, for some reason, appeared as a result in the search although, on their respective pages, they are listed as excluded on the platform; (d) "Withdrawn from the search", which are the groups for which, after verification, not enough evidence was found to affirm that they carry out studies based on cultural-historical theory; and finally, (e) "Selected", which are the groups that met the criteria, i.e. presented evidence that they use the theoretical framework in question in their research output. In this way, the sum of the results of groupings "b", "c", "d" and "e" is exactly the amount of "a". Except for the excluded groups incorporated into item "c", the other situations encountered – groups certified by the institution, not being filled in or not updated in the last 12 months – were considered in the others.

When there were doubts as to whether certain groups actually used cultural- historical theory, we searched for the keywords "Cultural-historical", "Vygotsky" and its variations ("Vygotsky", "Vygotski", "Vigotsky"), "Activity theory", "Socio-historical" – in order to cover the possibilities "Socio-historical" and "Socio-historical" – in the following places, respectively: (I) Text present in "Repercussions of the group"; (II) Name given to the lines of research of the group evaluated; (III) Search in the Lattes of the group leader; (IV) Search in the Lattes of the deputy leader, if there is one. The keywords "Historical-cultural" or "Socio-historical" necessarily had to be associated with a noun such as "Theory", "(theoretical) reference", "Perspective", "Psychology" etc. If they were associated with nouns such as "context", "subject", "diversity" or any other term not analogous to those already mentioned, this search was disregarded and the order listed above was continued. If there were any doubts and/or exclusive use of broader terms, such as "socio-historical", "socio- interactionism", "socio-constructivism" – which do not necessarily indicate a link with cultural-historical theory, as they could be linked to authors from other theoretical frameworks -, it was also checked whether Vygotsky or any of his closest collaborators (Aleksei Leontiev, Aleksandr Luria, Daniil Elkonin, among others) had appeared as a bibliographical reference in at least 2 texts among the articles in scientific journals published recently by the group leader (and vice-leader, respectively).

Based on the criteria listed above, we arrived at the following results:

Some research groups were displayed under more than one keyword, so the final number does not correspond to the simple sum of the "Selected" column in Table 1. The total number of research groups we obtained from this methodological procedure was 138, of which 103 were in the field of Education and 35 in Psy-

Table 2

Incidence by category of each keyword

Key words	Search	Outside the parameters	Excluded	Removed from search	Selected
Vygotsky	25	4	-	-	21
Vygotski	3	1	1	-	1
Vygotsky	15	4	-	1	10
Vygotsky	2	-	-	-	2
Leontiev	13	3	-	1	9
Luria	17	12	1	-	4
Historical-cultural	148	25	2	15	106
Socio-historical	70	43	-	10	17
Socio-historical	52	28	-	17	7
Activity theory	24	6	-	2	16
Socio-cultural	31	25	-	5	1
Sociocultural	116	74	-	36	6
Socio-interactionism	1	1	-	-	-
Socio-interactionist	1	1	-	-	-
Socio-constructivism	2	1	-	1	-
Socio-constructivist	-	-	-	-	-
Soviet psychology	-	-	-	-	-
Psychology and Marxism	6	1	-	-	4
Marxist psychology	2	-	-	1	1

Source: prepared by the authors.

chology. However, as we mentioned earlier, we found that the platform has a problem: certain groups are not displayed as a result, even though they contain a keyword in their mirror according to the selected criteria. To alleviate this problem, we compared our data with the inventory of Brazilian research groups in cultural-historical theory, made by Asbahr and Oliveira (2021), with data obtained in 2018, and searched DGP-CNPq directly for the names of the missing research groups, in order to confirm which of them were still active or not, following the same selection criteria adopted for the previous groups, especially the delimitations of area of knowledge, given that the aforementioned inventory does not restrict them. With this strategy, we found 16 groups that should have been displayed in the previous searches – due to the problems with the platform itself already mentioned – of which 11 are from Education and 5 from Psychology, totaling 154 groups, of which 114 are from the Education sphere (74,03%) and 40 from the Psychology sphere (25,97%).

Results

As previously mentioned, in order to present an overview of Brazilian research groups that study or establish a dialogue with authors of cultural-historical theory, a survey was carried out on the CNPq platform, more specifically, in the Directory of Research Groups. It is important to note that the data obtained in the previous section does not correspond exactly to reality, as not all groups are registered on the platform. There are higher education institutions, especially private ones, which do not require their researchers to register. Therefore, the

scenario we present corresponds to what we found on the CNPq Platform and we emphasize that we are certain that the number of groups studying or carrying out research related to cultural-historical theory in Brazil could be much higher.

The survey showed that of the total of 154 groups found according to the descriptors chosen, 140 groups (90,9%) are in public educational institutions and 14 (9,1%) in private institutions. This data shows the importance that public educational institutions attach to recording activities carried out by groups of their researchers.

Another significant finding is the greater presence of groups in the field of Education. Of the total of 154 groups identified on the Platform, according to the search keywords and eliminating the groups that show no evidence of working with the theory, it was found that 114 (74%) are concentrated in the field of Education and 40 (26%) in the field of Psychology. This data provokes a reflection related mainly to Vygotsky's intellectual production, since it is known that, although he joined the tasks of the field of education after the Russian Socialist Revolution of 1917, his studies concentrated on investigations into the development of human psychological processes, revolutionizing the field of psychology, which was steeped in a biological and deterministic view. From the survey data we can see that, in Brazil, his studies are much more present in research linked to the field of education.

Another important fact revealed by the survey is the regional location of these groups. Brazil is divided into 26 states and the Federal District, where the country's capital is located. When analyzing the data from the survey, it can be seen that of the total (154), most

research groups are in the Southeast (65/42,21%) and South (27/17,53%) regions, with the state of São Paulo concentrating the majority (38/24,68%), followed by Minas Gerais (17/11,04%). There is a certain coherence in this data, as the Southeast has historically been the main center of economic and social development in Brazil, attracting greater investment in education, research and culture.

Выготский's surname has been spelled in different ways since his works landed in Brazil. From the survey data, it can be seen that the transliteration most used by the groups is Vygotski (21), although the English transliteration (Vygotsky) still appears with some occurrence (10).

It is worth highlighting a fact identified by the survey, which shows changes in the name of the theory developed by Vygotsky. It is still possible to see that there are groups that use the names socio-historical (17) and socio-cultural (7), but the vast majority name the theory correctly – cultural-historical (107). In addition, the survey shows that the terms socio-interactionism, socio-interactionist, socio-constructivism and socio-constructivist do not appear among the research groups.

Conclusions

Although the arrival of Vygotsky's works in Brazil took place almost 40 years ago, the dissemination of his thought unfortunately took place based on translations and editions that mutilated his writings and thus misrepresented important ideas from his studies and theoretical-methodological investigations. The survey presented in this text does not go into this issue in depth, nor does it discuss the bibliographical references used in the intellectual production of the research groups registered with DGP-CNPq. We have restricted ourselves to some more general aspects of the current scenario, even though we know, as has been pointed out, that it does not correspond exactly to reality.

We believe that the information presented and analyzed here meets the objectives we set for this article. A future article will probably be able to present more detailed data and analyze the state of the art regarding the works of Vygotsky and his collaborators that serve as the basis for the scientific elaborations of the aforementioned groups listed in the DGP-CNPq.

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All the authors participated in the analysis of the data obtained.

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