

DISCOVERING VYGOTSKY: NEW PAGES IN CHT

ОТКРЫВАЯ ВЬГОТСКОГО: НОВЫЕ СТРАНИЦЫ В КУЛЬТУРНО-ИСТОРИЧЕСКОЙ ПСИХОЛОГИИ

Foreword to the Publication

Cultural-Historical Psychology is continuing its publication of the transcripts of L.S. Vygotsky's lectures on child psychology at the Academy of Communist Education in 1928 (the first two lectures were published in the previous issue). In addition to the results of Vygotsky's own research, these lectures also provide an overview of the concepts and experiments by Titchener, Lewin, Piaget and other famous psychologists. The complex theoretical material is presented in an accessible form, taking into account the modest level of training of many listeners. The Academy admitted mostly communists and member of Komsomol who had a secondary school diploma and work experience in public education.

We can trace the evolution of Vygotsky's views by comparing the surviving transcripts of his lectures from different years, using the "method of genetic sections" that he himself used to present the child's path of development. The 1928 lectures differ markedly from Vygotsky's last lectures, given in 1933–34 at the Leningrad Pedagogical Institute (the Academy of Communist Education will soon merge with it).

Lecture 3 focuses on the characteristics of psychological reactions versus conditional reflexes. Over time, this topic will completely withdraw from Vygotsky's lecture courses. In Lecture 4, he relies on Claparède's "law of awareness", which will be critically re-examined in Chapter 6 of *Thinking and Speech*. Finally, in Vygotsky's last lectures on school age, we read that Claparède's concept has brought "much theoretical harm and confusion" (*Lectures on Pedology*. Izhevsk, 2001, p. 277).

Such discrepancies seem to reinforce the hypothesis that a methodological rupture in Vygotsky's work took place in the early 1930s. But behind these significant changes one should not lose sight of the "genome" of his theory — the principle that sets the direction of its development and persists throughout Vygotsky's path in science. It is very difficult to discern this principle in Vygotsky's books and articles; it was openly formulated only in notes to himself: "*The central problem of all psychology: Freedom*" (*Vygotsky's Notebooks. A Selection*. Spronger, 2018, p. 210)¹.

In the lectures published here, the words "freedom" or "free" are not used. The idea of freedom appears here in the specific psychological guise of "voluntary attention," "deliberate action," "reaction of choice" (a free will action). And it is noteworthy that the expression "psychological function" is not used in these lectures; instead, Vygotsky is always talking about "psychological reactions." He seeks to present to his listeners the "genotypic" difference between these higher reactions, or "cultural operations," and lower-order reactions that are determined by the "situation" and the structure of the body. The cultural action has a "second plane," where an "instruction" of behaviour is worked out with the help of words and other signs. Here Vygotsky clearly missing the notion "ideal" that captures the nature of this "second plane" by means of which a person masters his or her behaviour, i.e., behaves, rather than reacts to external stimuli, including the social ones.

In his lectures of 1934, Vygotsky would clarify the concept of a higher psychological function. The volitional moment constitutes only one side of it, the other side is formed by the rational moment, the "intellect." As a result, the "new formation" of higher psychological functions shifts to the beginning of school age, when the intellect starts to dominate the "system of consciousness" (while the functioning of the intellect itself becomes conscious and volitional only years later). Freedom is the synthesis of will and reason in human activity.

An equally important line of the development of Vygotsky's views will be an in-depth study of the "affective life." This topic is only mentioned in passing in Lecture 4: the "primitive structure" of behaviour and children's speech is characterised (with a reference to Stern) by the lack of differentiation and the dominance of affects. And in the "hard choice" experiment, the conflict of affects is deliberately created: "the pleasant and the unpleasant are combined." In 1931 Vygotsky's turn to the problem of the relationship between the affect and the intellect will lead to discord with Aleksei Leontiev — "the confrontation of two lines for the future", as Leontiev describes it in his memoirs.

Thus, the lecture cycle of 1928 gives us with an opportunity to observe the process of formation of the cultural-historical theory at one of its focal points — when the "instrumental" and "experimental-genetic" method begins to work at full power, and we can already see the shoots of a new, "meaningful" concept of child consciousness development created by Vygotsky in the last years of his life.

V.T. Kudryavtsev,
A.D. Maidansky

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¹ An attempt to develop this principle is presented in the article: Kudryavtsev V.T. Culture as Self-Perception, *Cultural-Historical Psychology*, 2016. Vol. 12, no. 3, pp. 113–128 (in Russian).