

Cultural-historical theory and research methodology: refocusing lens on development

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What is development as a subject matter of psychological and educational research?

What are current theoretical and methodological approaches to study development?

What does it mean to do a cultural-historical research in child development?

Approach based on the developmental theories (Piaget) looks on development through the principle of developmental milestones as universal stages (steps).

However it does not take into account

- every child is unique and therefore has an individual developmental trajectory.
- developmental milestones are not universal and depend on socio-cultural environment and diverse cultural backgrounds.

Why Vygotsky ?

From describing changes (empirical studies)
to
understanding development (sociogenetical studies)



Cultural-historical theory and methodology (Vygotsky) is aimed on researching development as social-cultural process how social becomes an individual. It provides strong and powerful analytical tools of studying the process of development in its complexity and dynamics.



GENETIC (cultural-social genesis)



GENETIC RESEARCH (theory + method)



GENETIC RESEARCH METHODOLOGY (principles)

1. GENETIC=GENESIS

In this context "genetic" refers to **the process of sociocultural development (genesis) of human mental functions** according to tradition developed by Vygotsky in his scientific school

Development **is not** just a simple change
Development **is not** an organic growth

Developmental **is** a **complex process** of **qualitative reorganisation** of certain system:

Metaphor: fruit and tree

- Sources
- Moving forces
- Main directions
- Specific features
- Results
- Law (laws)

What makes CHT unique is that every concept refers to a certain aspect/aspects of the complex process of development of the higher mental functions.

Therefore, cultural-historical provides a system of interconnected instruments for the theoretical analysis of the process of development in its wholeness and complexity.

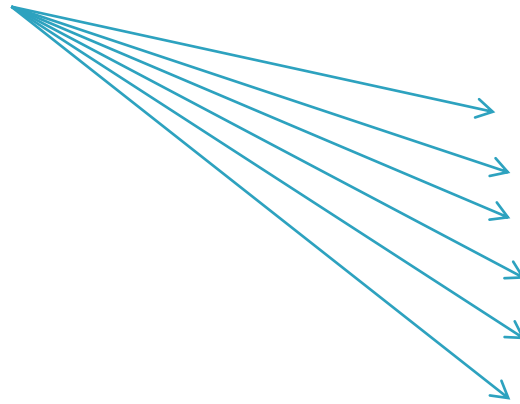
Concepts are analytical tools (lens) to investigate the process of development

CULTURAL–HISTORICAL THEORY

IS:

a system of theoretical concepts and principles related to

The process of genesis (origins and development) of HMF:



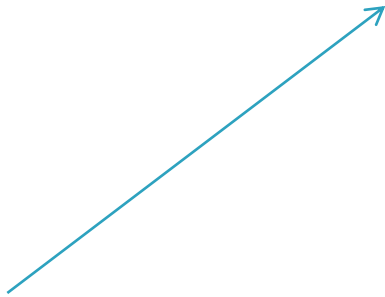
- sources
- character
- moving forces
- main directions
- specific features
- results

EXAMPLE:

- ZPD (zone of proximal development),
- social situation of development

The process of genesis (origins and development) of HMF

- sources
- character
- moving forces
- main directions
- specific features
 - results



theoretical tools (instruments)



cultural-historical theory

CREATING YOUR EXPERIMENTAL STRATEGY

STEP 1: Research question

To create a coherent strategy for the concrete experimental study, the researcher has to answer two questions: “What to study?” and “How to study?” The answer to the first question which sounds like “I am going to study development” is too general.

The answer to the “what” question should include two aspects:

- (1) **what exact psychological process of function** is he/she going to study in a course of experiment and
- (2) **which aspect(s) of the process of development** of this exact psychological function is the researcher going to analyse

CREATING YOUR EXPERIMENTAL STRATEGY

STEP 2: Selecting your theoretical tools (lenses)

To answer the “how” question means that the researcher, according to his/her answers to “what” questions, selects those theoretical concepts which reflect the selected aspects of development.

This creates the theoretical framework of the study.

Theory without an experiment is voluntary play of mind.

An experiment without a theory is a knife without a handle.

CREATING YOUR EXPERIMENTAL STRATEGY

STEP 3: Selecting your experimental tools (lenses)

The researcher selects those principles of the experimental-genetic method, which correspond the theoretical concepts/lenses and follow from them.

The process of genesis (origins and development) of HMF

- sources
- character
- moving forces
- main directions
- specific features
 - results

theoretical tools (instruments)

- concepts and principles



cultural-historical theory

experimental tools (instruments)

- requirements

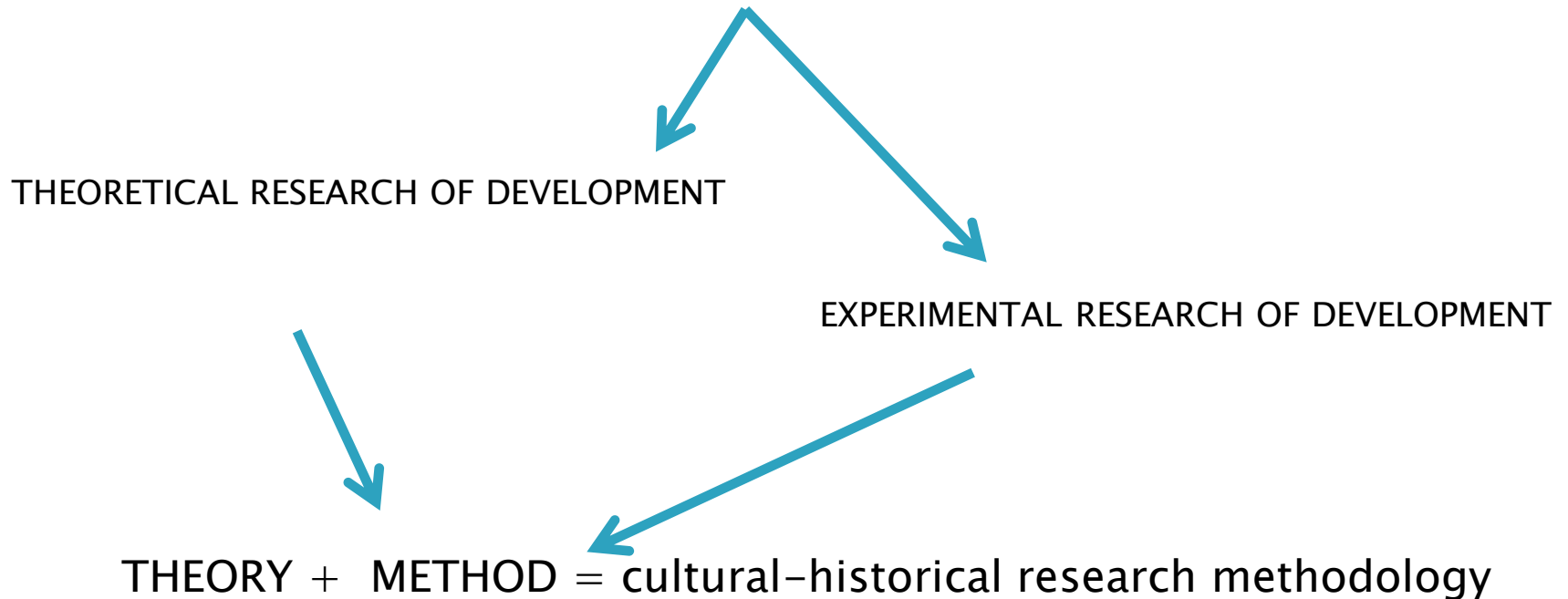


experimental-genetical method

Genetic research methodology

2. GENETIC REASEARCH (theory + method)

“To understand the mental function means to restore both theoretically and experimentally the whole process of its development in phylo- and ontogenesis” (Vygotsky & Luria, 1929/1992).



EXPERIMENTAL-GENETICAL METHOD:

The mental process itself, whether we speak of the development of speech or volition, is a process that undergoes certain changes before our eyes... The method we use may be called an experimental-genetic method in the sense that it **artificially elicits and creates a genetic process** of mental development. Due to this, we are able **experimentally, in the laboratory, to elicit a certain development...** (1997, Vol. 4, p. 68).

Veresov (2010, 2014):

There are five basic principles of cultural-historical research methodology:

- the principle of buds of development
- the principle of category/drama
- the principle of interaction of ideal and real forms
- the principle of developmental tools
- the principle of sustainable results

Each of them is connected with theoretical concepts of cultural-historical theory and therefore is a *research instrument for the experimental study of development*

Theoretical analysis and experimental analysis are “two sides of the coin” of genetic research methodology

I. The principle of “buds” mental development

At each age there are functions which are already matured (developed) and there are functions that are in a process of maturation.

So there is always a complex nexus of:

- (1) functions that have not yet developed but are in the process of development,
- (2) functions that will develop but are currently in an embryonic state and
- (3) developed functions.

Metaphorically, they could be defined as “buds”, “flowers” and “fruits” of development (Vygotsky 1935, p. 41).

So, the first question “What psychological process am I going to investigate in my experimental study?” should be followed by the question “Which stage of development is the process/function under study in?”

The experimental study should begin with revealing that **the function under study is on its “bud” (embryonic) stage and is not yet developed**. It does not make any sense to organise the process of development of certain functions in a psychological laboratory in a situation when this function is already developed, when the function under study is in the “fruit” stage.

On the other hand, it makes no sense to organise the development of a function which does not yet exist in child’s mind. **The principle of “buds of development” helps the researcher to avoid these extreme poles.**

II. Principle of Category (Collision, Dramatic Event)

The principle of category follows from the general law of cultural development of higher mental functions.

“Processes must be analyzed, and through analysis, the **true relation** that lies at the base of these processes, behind the external form of their manifestation, must be disclosed” (Vygotsky 1997, p. 70)

Yet, what does it mean to disclose the “true relation”, and what kind of relation is this “true relation”?

...every function in the cultural development of the child appears on the stage twice, in two planes, first, the social, then the psychological, first between the people as an **intermental category**, then within the child as a **intramental category**... Genetically, social relations, real relations of people, stand behind all the higher mental functions and their relations.
(Vygotsky 1997, p. 106)

Category = dramatical event, collision,
“small drama between people” (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 59)

The principle of category means that the concrete experimental study **should begin with the category (dramatic event, collision) the child experiences**. The experimenter has to construct/identify a category, i.e. intermental plane of higher mental function.

This collision should be artificially created or captured if it happens in her real life.

The dramatic event is the primary form in which the higher mental function appears as a social relation before it becomes an internal higher mental function.

THIS IS HOW SOCIAL BECOMES AN INDIVIDUAL: the task of a researcher is to identify and to describe the structure of this SOCIAL

III. The Principle of Interaction of Ideal and Real Forms

The social environment *is the source* for the appearance of all specific human properties of the personality gradually acquired by the child or the source of social development of the child which is concluded in *the process of actual interaction of «ideal» and present forms*.

(Vygotsky 1998, p. 203)

We have a child who has only just begun to speak and he pronounces single words... The child speaks in one word phrases, but his mother talks to him in language which is already grammatically and syntactically formed and which has a large vocabulary, even though it is being toned down for the child's benefit.

Let us agree to call this developed form, which is supposed to make its appearance at the end of the child's development, the final or ideal form ideal in the sense that it acts as a model for that which should be achieved at the end of the developmental period; and final in the sense that it represents what the child is supposed to attain at the end of his development. And let us call the child's form of speech the primary ... form. (Vygotsky 1994, p. 348)

WHAT ASPECT OF DEVELOPMENT IS REFLECTED BY THIS CONEPT?

There is no development if there is no interaction between the ideal and real forms.

This principle means that in the course of experimental study:

- both forms should be detected and presented
- the higher “ideal form” must be present in the beginning of the experiment
- tools and means of interaction between these forms should be specially created and involved in the experimental procedure

IV. Principle of Developmental Tools

“Mental development as a process is a “transition from direct, innate, natural forms and methods of behaviour to mediated, artificial mental functions” (Vygotsky 1998, p. 168).

The sign (or system of signs) originally exists as an external tool, and later it becomes a tool of internal mediating activity. What is important is that the sign (external tool of activity) should not be given by experimenter to the child directly.

The processes of active searching and finding a sign, as well as the transformation and the transition from direct connections to indirect (mediated) connections, were the focus of Vygotsky’s experimental studies of the origins of mediating activity.

So, the principle of developmental tools means that **during the experimental study of development the experimenter should have a set of tools (signs) that the child should discover, create and master in the course of experimental study.**

The design of the experimental settings should somehow lead the child to discovering the signs as external tools of solving problems and tasks given to the child.

On the other hand, the experimental study **should include special procedures supplying the process of transition from direct to mediated actions.**

V. Principle of Sustainable Results

Continuing Vygotsky's metaphor, we could say that the results are “fruits” of development.

However, these “fruits” are of very special nature.

The result of development is not just new functions that appeared as outcomes at the end. Results of development are not new higher mental functions only, they are “qualitative neoformations” (Vygotsky 1998, p. 189).

“Neoformation” is a result of reorganisation of whole system of functions, a new type of construction of child's consciousness and mental functions (Vygotsky 1998, p. 190).

The principle of sustainable results in relation to experimental investigation of the process of development means that the results of the experimental study must not simply be statistically valid changes but a new quality. **Therefore, an experimenter has to have enough supplementary means to investigate what type of changes happened during the experimental study to make sure that the changes reflect the new system (new structure) that appeared.**

Cultural-historical genetic research methodology overcomes the limits of “classical” experimental methods, especially in developmental psychology, since it is able (1) to reflect and to explain the dynamic character of the processes under study and (2) to investigate the processes in their wholeness and complexity from genetic, developmental perspective.

This methodology represents the system of interconnected theoretical and experimental research instruments/tools for refocusing the researcher’s lens on development by making visible processes that are ordinarily hidden beneath the surface, namely, changes in behaviour.

Principles of genetic research methodology do not only reflect the main aspects of the complex process of development; they refocus the researcher’s lens on development by asking the question “Which particular aspect/aspects of development are under study?”

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The screenshot shows a Vimeo video player interface. At the top left, there is a calendar widget for the month of January, with the 11th highlighted. The video player itself shows a man in a blue shirt and tie standing in a conference room, gesturing while speaking. Behind him is a large projection screen displaying a slide with bullet points. The video has a play button in the bottom left corner and a duration of 43:15 in the bottom right corner. Below the video player, the title "The intellectual and cultural history of cultural..." is partially visible. On the right side of the browser window, a vertical sidebar contains several icons and text elements, including "Thu", "We", "Tue", "Mo", "Sun", "Tot", "< Pr", "+ Se", "Nor", "Find", "Vii", "Sel", and "Pr".