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Introduction to Cultural-Historical Theory: System of Concepts and Methodology

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Challenges in understanding CHT:

- **Decontextualisation of Vygotsky's works.**

- **Quick evolution of Vygotsky's ideas.**

- **Complexity of Vygotsky's language.**

- **Difficulties of translation.**

System of concepts: development

- CHT studies the development of consciousness (higher mental functions).

- The key word here is development: in contrast to traditional psychological schools, CHT focuses not on the matured products of human psyche, but on the very process of their formation (that is, genesis).

System of concepts: development

- Development can not be reduced to a number of quantitative changes. It represents a complex, dialectical process of reorganization of the existing system of functions and relations.

- The result of development is NOT emergence of a new function, or new functions, but emergence of a qualitatively different system of functions and relations.
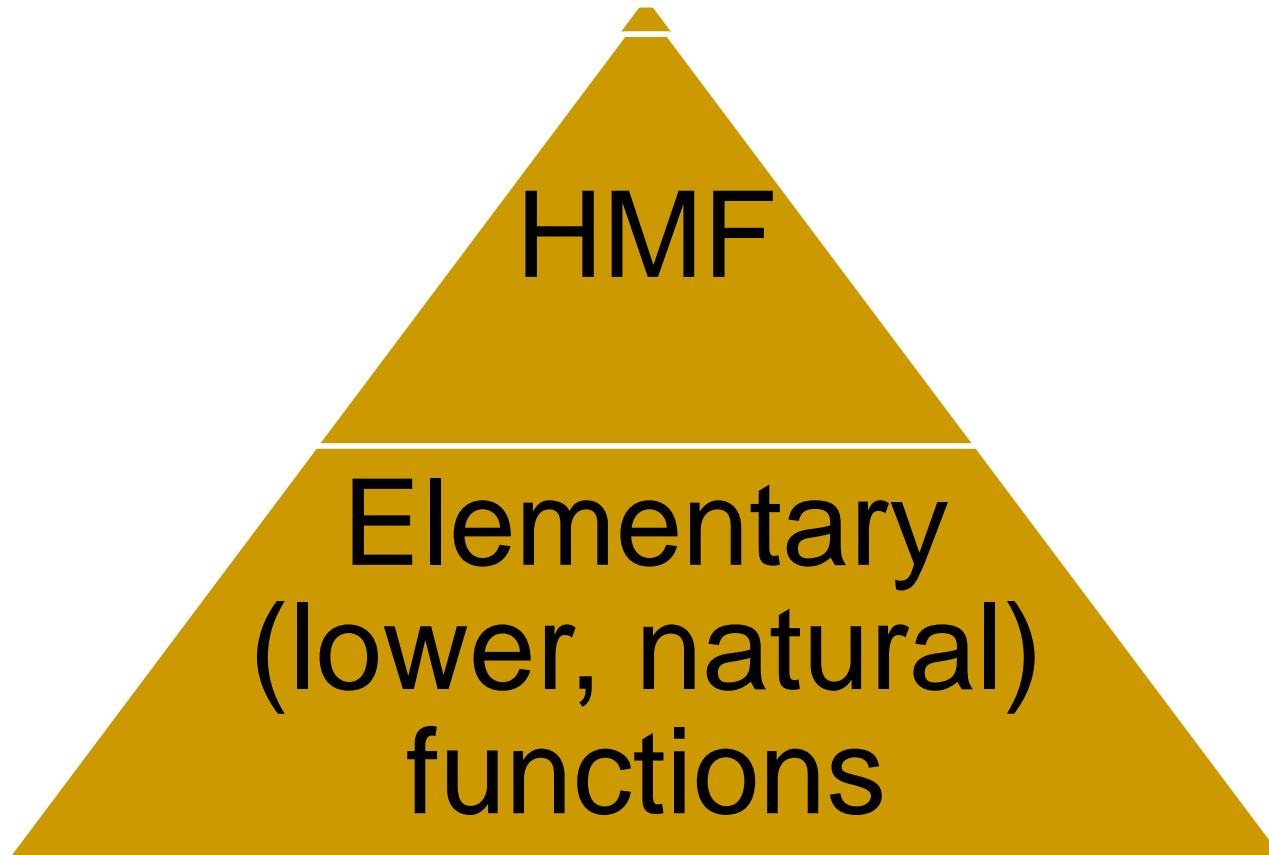
CHT: Theory of development

- CHT represents a system of concepts and principles, which explain main aspects of the process of development, such as:

- • nature of development;

- • sources of development;

- • moving forces of development;

- • specific features of development;

- • results of development etc.

System of concepts: higher mental functions

System of concepts: HMF

- Higher mental functions are not built up as a second story over elementary processes, but are new psychological systems that include a complex merging of elementary functions that will be included in the new system, and themselves begin to act according to new laws; each higher mental function is, thus, a unit of a higher order determined basically by a unique combination of a series of more elementary functions in the new whole [Vygotsky L.S. 1999. p. 43].

General genetic law of development

«…Всякая функция в культурном развитии ребенка появляется **на сцену** дважды, в двух планах, сперва социальном, потом — психологическом, сперва между людьми как **категория** интерпсихическая, затем внутри ребенка как **категория** интрапсихическая. (*Выготский Л.С.* Собрание сочинений: В 6 т. Т. 3. М.: Педагогика, 1983. С. 145.)

"…every function in the child's…development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first between people (interpsychological), and then inside the child (intrapsychological)… (*Vygotsky L.S.* Mind in society: the development of higher psychological processes / M. Cole, V. John-Steiner, S. Scribner & E. Souberman, Eds. & Translators. Harvard University Press, 1978. P. 57.)

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"...every function in the cultural development of the child comes onto **the stage** twice - first in the social relations between people, and then within the person's intra-psychological self-organisation system. (Valsiner J. Culture and Human Development. Sage Publishers, 2000, p. 40)

General genetic law of development

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"…every function in the child's cultural development appears **on the stage** twice, that is, on two planes - first on the social plane and then on the psychological plane; first among people as an inter-psychological **category** and then within the child as an intra-psychological **category**." (trans. By O. Rubtsova)

General genetic law of development

Unlike J. Piaget, who suggested the metaphor of ladder to illustrate his idea about stages of development, while using the word "stage" L.S. Vygotsky had in mind a dramaturgical notion. His idea was that the stage has two planes – personal and social. When these two planes collide – as the result of discrepancies between personal understanding and social situations, they can both change drastically

Yaroshevsky, M. (1993) L.S. Vygodsky: in search for the new psychology. St.-Petersburg. Publishing House of International Foundation for History of Science. [p. 104—105].

System of concepts: drama

In Russian pre-revolutionary theatre's vocabulary the word category meant **"dramatic event, collision of characters on the stage"**. Vygotsky had to use the word "category" to emphasize the character of the social relation, which becomes the individual function. The social relation he means is not an ordinary social relation between the two individuals. This is a social relation that appears as a category, i.e. as **emotionally colored and experiencing collision, the contradiction between the two people, the dramatical event, drama between two individuals.** Being emotionally and mentally experienced as social drama (on the social plane) it later becomes the individual intra-psychological category.

(Veresov N, 2004, pp. 13-30).

System of concepts: drama

From here comes, that one of the central principles of our work is experimental unfolding of higher mental process into the drama, which happened between the people. (Vygotsky, 1983, p.145).

System of concepts: pereghivanije

The social becomes the individual, but the dialectical character of this becoming is that only those components of the social environment that are refracted by the perezhivanie of the individual, achieve developmental significance.

The perezhivanie of an individual is a kind of psychological prism, which determines the role and influence of the environment on development.

In other words, the environment influences the process of development of the individual through the individual's perezhivanie of the environment. No particular social factors in themselves define the development, only factors refracted through the child's perezhivanie.

Social environment as a source of development defines individual development; perezhivanie determines this process.

System of concepts:
" Real" vs "ideal" forms

The development of the child, representing the "real" (present) form takes place in the course of interactions with the adult (or an elder child), representing the "ideal" (already developed) form. These interactions are characterized by the presence of cultural means, mediating the process of interaction (signs).

System of concepts:
social situation of development

Vygotsky contrasted the concept of SSD, which identifies social environment as the **source of development**, to understanding social environment as **a factor of development**, typical for behaviorism. Vygotsky was against regarding environment "as something external to the child, as a background for development, as a number of objectively existing conditions that by the very fact of their existence influence the child". (L.S. Vygotsky, 2000, p.903).

In CHT the environment and the child are not opposed to each other – they are regarded as a **dialectical entity**, where the child is perceived as a unity with his relations with the social environment. The unit of analysis of this complex integrity is pereghivanie (a subjective aspect of SSD)

System of concepts: Zone of proximal development

- The interactions of the real and ideal forms create the ZPD, which represents "the distance between the level of the child's actual development, identified by the tasks that the child can solve on their own, and the level of possible development, identified by the tasks, that the child can solve with the help of adult and in collaboration with elder children"

System of concepts: Zone of proximal development

- ZPD is the field of possibilities that the child discovers in the process of collaboration with the adult.

- "ZPD – is the logical consequence of the General genetic law of development of higher mental functions, which emerge in joint activity in collaboration with other people and gradually become internal psychological processes of the child. When a psychic process is shaped in joint activity, it is in the ZPD*;* afterwards it becomes the form of the child's actual development" (Obuchova L.F.., 1998, p. 184).

CHT: fundamentals

- Development is a dialectical process of reorganization of the existing system of functions and relations (NOT A NUMBER OF QUANTITAVE CHANGES!!!!)

- Social environment is the source of development (NOT A FACTOR!!!!).

- Every HMF emerges as a social relation (NOT JUST IN SOCIAL RELATIONS!!!!)

- In the process of interaction of the real and ideal forms this relation is interiorized (NOT EVERY SOCIAL RELATION, BUT ONLY THE ONE, EMERGING AS A DRAMA).

CHT: Methodology

- **The method we use can be named an experimental-genetic method in the sense that it artificially causes and creates genetic process of mental development... The task of the experiment consists in fusing each stiffened and hardened psychological form, to transform it into a moving, current stream of the separate moments replacing each other... The task of such an analysis is to present experimentally the higher form of behavior not as a thing, but as a process, to take it in movement, going not from the whole to the parts, but from the process to its separate moments "(Vygotsky, 1983, p. 641)**

- **From here comes, that one of the central principles of our work is experimental unfolding of higher mental process into the drama, which happened between the people (p.145).**

CHT: Methodology

- **We have to artificially create the genetic process of mental development**

- **We have to present the studied higher form as a drama between the people**

- **We have to present the HMF not as a thing, but as a process.**

Principles of EGM (by N.N. Veresov)

- **Principle of buds**
- **Principle of category (drama, conflict)**
- **Principle of the interaction of the real and ideal forms**
- **Principle of developmental tools**
- **Principle of sustainable qualitative changes as an outcome of the experiment.**

Principles of EGM (by N.N. Veresov)

- The principle of «buds of development» means that at the beginning the experimental study we should detect the function (or functions) which are in their «bud» (embryonic) stages, and are not yet developed.

- «Functions that have not yet matured but are in the process of maturation, functions that will mature tomorrow but are currently in an embryonic state. These functions could be termed the «buds» or «flowers» of development rather than the «fruits» of development» [Vygotsky L. S. 1997, p. 226].

Principles of EGM (by N.N. Veresov)

- The principle of category (collision, dramatic event) means that the experiment should begin with the category (dramatic event, collision) the child should experience. This collision should be artificially created. The dramatic event is the form in which the higher mental function appears first as a social relation before it becomes an internal higher mental function

Principles of EGM (by N.N. Veresov)

- The principle of interaction of real (natural) and ideal (cultural) forms means that in the course of experimental study both forms should be detected. It also means that the higher «ideal form» must be present in the beginning of the experiment. And, finally, tools and means of interaction between these forms should be specially created and involved in the experimental procedure.

Principles of EGM (by N.N. Veresov)

- The principle of developmental tools. The principle of developmental tools means that during the experiment, cultural tools (signs or system of signs) should not be given to the child directly; they have to be discovered (found) by the child (in cooperation with an adult or more competent peer). The experimenter should have a set of tools that the child is able to find and master in the course of experimental study.

Principles of EGM (by N.N. Veresov)

- The principle of sustainable qualitative changes as an outcome of the experiment means that the results of the experimental study must not simply be statistically valid changes, but a new quality of the structure and the construction of child's consciousness as a result of its reorganization. These new qualitative levels of organization should be experimentally detected and described.

Principles of EGM (by N.N. Veresov)

- These five principles are significant aspects of the genetic cultural-historical methodology for organizing, designing and conducting the experimental study of the process of development in different settings and activity systems. It is easy to see that they strictly flow from the theoretical requirements, concepts and principles of cultural-historical theory.

Principles of ARM (by V.V. Rubtsov)

- 1. Spotting a fragment of the learning activity and a typical problem (challenge) of its organization and development.

- 2. Fixating and representing the fragment of the learning activity in special sign-symbolic schemes and models with the aim of its transformation and analysis "as it is".

- 3. Modeling means and ways of organizing learning activity with the aim of creating new forms of joint work and spotting the "step of development" in the learning activity that marks the transition to a new, more efficient form.

Principles of ARM (by V.V. Rubtsov)

- 4. Grounding the means and ways of changing the learning activity and defining the stages of constructing its new form.

- 5. Defining the roles and possible positions of the participants, who develop the learning activity in teamwork.

- 6. Control and assessment of the students' educational results, achieved in the process of development of the learning activity.

- 7. Assessment of the development of the researchers/teachers' professional achievements.

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