

# CHAPTER 1

## GENERAL PEDAGOGY AND HISTORY OF PEDAGOGY

### DETERMINANTS OF OPPOSITION TO MODERN CULTURAL DIFFUSION IN THE THEORY OF L. VYGOTSKY

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#### Citation:

Sizov, V., Sheviakov, O., Slavskaya, Y., & Alforov, O. (2025). Determinants of Opposition to Modern Cultural Diffusion in the Theory of L. Vygotsky. *Pedagogy and Education Management Review*, 1(19), 4–16. <https://doi.org/10.36690/2733-2039-2025-1-4-16>

**Received: February 03, 2025**

**Approved: March 19, 2025**

**Published: March 30, 2025**



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**Abstract.** The article deals with the essence and meaning of the cultural-historical theory of L. Vygotsky, who revealed the social nature of formation of a personality's mental qualities. The main objective of the study is to analyze the trends of multiculturalism as a counterbalance to the process of cultural diffusion. The study highlights the elements of pedagogical technology, which should be based on a cultural and historical basis and, in turn, provides support for the formation of a general concept of education in society. The psychological features of understanding the patterns of the pedagogy development and the formation of methodological basis of the pedagogical science in the modern socio-cultural space are stated. According to L. Vygotsky's concept, the cultural development of a child involves a process in which biological characteristics (ability to remember and think) are transformed into social ones, and the social ones are transformed into psychological ones, modifying the mechanisms of cognitive processes of manifestation and development of memory and thinking. L. Vygotsky substantiates that with this development, the reflex mechanisms fade into the background, but the socio-cultural ones become a priority. The sources characterizing social relations and social interaction, which can become an internal higher mental function, are analyzed. In the act of experiencing, their dramatic collision is melted down and results in a change of the personality structure, becoming an act of development. The topic of social relations that form patterns and models of behaviour is actualized. The emphasis is made on the fact that social relations are not always reduced to collective ones, the sociality can serve as a source of personal experience. The concept of a sign is considered, where consciousness manipulates symbols and concepts. Thus, the cultural-historical theory of L. Vygotsky as an example of cultural relativism can be opposed to modern processes of cultural diffusion.

**Keywords:** cultural-historical theory, interpsychic, intrapsychic, cultural development, social environment, theory of sign.

**JEL Classification:** H10, I0, Y8

**Formulas:** 0; fig.0; tabl.1; bibl. 20

**Introduction.** The cultural-historical approach in psychological theory and practice has long attracted the interest of philosophers and sociologists, occasionally culturologists, but rarely educators. This limited engagement from the field of education is surprising, given that L. Vygotsky's theory directly addresses the development of thinking abilities—specifically, the processes of guided cognition and the internal mechanisms by which individuals assimilate social norms and rules. These mechanisms are fundamental to pedagogical activity and are inseparably connected to the educational process. It is worth noting that Vygotsky's ideas were actively applied in Soviet pedagogical science during the 1950s to 1970s. However, in the decades that followed, his theoretical contributions have seen little reconsideration or adaptation in light of contemporary educational realities.

**Literature review.** A growing diversity in the interpretation of L. Vygotsky's ideas has led to increasingly arbitrary readings of his theoretical legacy. As noted by prominent contemporary scholar M. Dafermos, a respected authority on Vygotsky's work, "Much has been written about Vygotsky's heritage and the diverse applications of his ideas across various disciplines. There are numerous interpretations of the theoretical foundations of the cultural-historical method and the potential uses of Vygotsky's theory. While many educators and psychologists acknowledge the strengths of Vygotsky's approach, in reality, their understanding of his work remains superficial" (Dafermos, 2016).

Dafermos further emphasizes that it would be a mistake to confine Vygotsky's theoretical contributions solely to the field of psychology. His ideas form a comprehensive system that finds application in numerous disciplines such as pedagogy, linguistics, anthropology, and beyond. In fact, Vygotsky's theory has served as a foundation for a range of pedagogical and epistemological frameworks—often divergent or even contradictory in nature. The existence of multiple "Vygotskian" schools in psychology, pedagogy, and philosophy only deepens the paradox of how Vygotsky's work is perceived within the global academic landscape (Dafermos, 2016).

Complementing this view, N. Veresov, another leading scholar in the field, particularly in the sociocultural interpretation of Vygotsky's legacy, highlights the unfinished nature of engaging with Vygotsky's ideas: "The problem, however, is that the difficult task of understanding L. S. Vygotsky's ideas cannot be considered complete. In short, I align myself with those who continue the demanding work of interpreting Vygotsky's positions not only within psychology but also in broader philosophical, cultural, and historical contexts" (Veresov, 2007).

This article does not aim to present ready-made pedagogical methods. Rather, it argues that such methods, in principle, should be derivable within the framework of Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory. For this to be realized, Vygotsky's legacy must not be restricted to psychology, linguistics, philosophy, or sociology alone. His psychological theory takes on its most practical significance when actively applied in educational practice. Accordingly, the study of the mechanisms through which this theoretical framework translates into pedagogical reality constitutes the central relevance of this research.

**Aim.** The purpose of this article is to analyze primary sources and explore contemporary interpretations of Vygotsky's theory not only from psychological and pedagogical perspectives but also within cultural and philosophical contexts, particularly in response to modern cultural diffusion. The study seeks to conceptually examine the core of Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory through the lens of pedagogical meaning. To achieve this aim, the following objectives must be addressed: to actualize the essential features of Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory in terms of pedagogical significance; and to evaluate the theory from the standpoint of pedagogical method theory and educational methodology.

**Methodology.** The main research methods include historical and comparative methods, methods of generalization and interpretation of the findings of different authors, retrospective and comparative analysis.

In the conditions of cultural diffusion, the trends of multiculturalism are actualized as a counterbalance to these processes. Therefore, the theory of L. Vygotsky acquires a special meaning and significance for modern pedagogy. As pointed out by D. Elkonin, following the position of L. Vygotsky, different generations of people cannot have the same childhood as different historical periods have their own content and patterns. The same opinion was expressed by a teacher P. P. Blonsky and psychologist A.N. Leontiev.

This means that there cannot be an universal pedagogy; in our opinion, only values can be universal, since they unite people into a single society, regardless of the specifics of education in different periods of the society functioning. Here the pedagogy acts as a technology for conveying these values. Values, in turn, have a cultural and historical nature, which gives them a socially sustainable character. There cannot be a unified society where each generation has its "own" values. This thesis implies the significance of the cultural-historical theory of L. Vygotsky, who revealed the social nature of a person's mental qualities formation from the standpoint of psychological patterns of their formation.

**Results.** From the perspective of M. Dafermos, "separating the cultural parameters of psychological processes from accounting the historical evolutionary perspective leads to a distortion of meaning and confusion" (Dafermos, 2016). This assertion is particularly relevant to the field of education, where understanding developmental processes through a cultural-historical lens is essential. A natural progression from this viewpoint is turning to the cultural-historical theory of L. Vygotsky, which provides a foundation for analyzing the development of pedagogy and shaping the methodological basis of pedagogical science within the contemporary socio-cultural context.

Vygotsky's theory laid the groundwork for a distinct school of thought that was later advanced by prominent psychologists such as A. Leontiev, A. Luria, A. Zaporozhets, and others. In Western academic discourse, particularly in psychology, Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory and Leontiev's activity theory were synthesized into what is now known as Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT). This approach has emerged as a significant framework for understanding human development within cultural and social contexts. One of Vygotsky's most influential proponents in the

United States was J. Bruner, who actively applied Vygotskian principles in educational practice.

The legacy of Vygotsky's contributions to psychological and pedagogical theory is also evident in the works of P. Zinchenko, P. Galperin, D. Elkonin, L. Bozhovich, among others. In recent decades, scholars such as M. Dafermos, N. Veresov, P. Keiler, and I. Bessarabova have continued to explore and reinterpret Vygotsky's ideas, though much of this modern research focuses more on theoretical interpretation than on practical applications of his methods.

Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory, in pedagogical terms, encompasses the core of his research. Its scope is so expansive that it eventually branched into various psychological directions, many of which now stand as independent schools of thought. The significance of his work lies not only in uncovering the developmental mechanisms of thought but also in proposing ways to influence and guide these processes. The task of managing the formation of higher mental functions, and steering their development, is inherently pedagogical. As such, a deep understanding of Vygotsky's theoretical contributions is of immense value to pedagogical science.

The essence of Vygotsky's theory is articulated in his work "The History of the Development of Higher Mental Functions," written between 1930 and 1931 (published posthumously in 1960). In this text, he posits that the roots of human mental development are embedded in historically evolved culture. Drawing upon Marxist thought, Vygotsky asserts that the material conditions of human life are products of socio-historical development. He furthers this idea by demonstrating how labor enables a person to experience life simultaneously on two levels: as an individual and as a social being. Through the synthesis of personal and social experiences, Vygotsky observes both the biological maturation of the individual and their cultural development—marked by the acquisition of behavioral and cognitive tools (Zashikhina, 2014, p. 42). Even in this general formulation, the pedagogical implications of Vygotsky's theory are evident and encourage a more nuanced engagement with his ideas.

The cultural-historical perspective began to gain traction in educational thought in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. One can trace this influence in the pedagogical principles of cultural congruity found in the classical German pedagogy of A. Diesterweg (1790–1866) and in the ideas of "nationhood in public education" promoted by K. Ushinsky (1823–1870). From this viewpoint, Vygotsky may not have introduced entirely new concepts to pedagogical science per se. However, whereas classical pedagogy often treated the cultural-historical dimension as an external context or tradition, Vygotsky's originality lies in revealing the internal psychological mechanisms through which culture shapes the development of thought. He shifted the focus to the internal formative factors that influence learning and cognition.

Vygotsky's distinctive contribution as a scholar was his identification of how social and cultural components shape the development of mental functions. He articulated the dual nature of these processes—external and internal—as both expressions of individual capability and reflections of collective cognition. In contrast, pedagogy in the 19th century was only beginning to consider psychology, notably in

the work of J. Herbart (1776–1841). By the 20th century, Vygotsky had made the integration of psychological insight into pedagogy indispensable. Since the 1930s, pedagogical science has benefited from a vast body of material rooted in Vygotsky's theoretical framework, and today his work continues to drive fresh inquiries into the mechanisms through which culture influences thinking and learning.

As for the term “cultural-historical theory,” Vygotsky himself used a range of designations for his conceptual framework, including “instrumental psychology,” “the concept of the historical development of higher mental functions,” and “the theory of higher mental functions.” Later Soviet psychologists referred to it variously as “the cultural-historical theory of the psyche” and “the theory of the development of higher mental functions.” According to P. Keiler's research, the label “cultural-historical theory” was not an authentic term coined by Vygotsky but was instead used pejoratively in the mid-1930s by his critics, aiming to marginalize the Vygotsky-Luria research group (Dafermos, 2016, p. 22). Nonetheless, the phrase has become the most widely accepted term to describe Vygotsky's framework, particularly when it is applied beyond the confines of psychology.

Given its broad interpretive potential, Vygotsky's theory is often subject to varying readings, which can at times veer into the realm of subjective interpretation. In this context, N. Veresov's remark is particularly salient: “It's about our attempts to represent as something new in general, something that is new exclusively for us.” This tendency underscores the need for precise articulation of Vygotsky's foundational ideas. Veresov highlights one of Vygotsky's central insights, which he termed the general genetic law of cultural development: “Every function in the child's cultural development appears on the scene twice, on two planes—first on the social, then on the psychological; first between people, as an interpsychic category, then within the child, as an intrapsychic category. This applies equally to voluntary attention, logical memory, the formation of concepts, and the development of will” (Veresov, 2007).

According to Vygotsky, the cultural development of a child involves the transformation of biological capacities—such as memory and thinking—into social processes, which are then internalized into psychological functions. Through this transformation, the fundamental mechanisms of cognition are reshaped. Vygotsky shows that reflex mechanisms become subordinate, while socio-cultural factors emerge as the primary drivers of development. This theoretical framework, while rooted in psychology, has far-reaching implications for pedagogy, especially in understanding and shaping the cognitive development of learners through cultural and social means.

L. Vygotsky defines “cultural development” as a product of the universal human experience. This raises an important question: how can Vygotsky's concept be interpreted objectively when considering the specific outcomes of cultural development within individual societies—outcomes that are both spiritual and material, cultural and historical? In such societies, patterns of social thinking and behavior, including unconscious elements (often referred to as the “cultural archetype” or mentality), are formed. However, this issue falls outside the scope of the current discussion and warrants a separate study. What is essential to understand is that for Vygotsky, the notions of “history” and “historical” were of fundamental significance,

as they relate closely to both the ontogenesis and phylogenesis of human consciousness. Ignoring the historical aspect of Vygotsky's theory indicates a fundamental misunderstanding of its core. The concepts of "cultural" and "historical" are interdependent and together form the foundation of his theoretical framework (Dafermos, 2016, p. 25).

It is worth noting that this theme has been interpreted and developed differently by various psychological schools. A particularly notable example is the reception of Vygotsky's theory in the United States. The first translations of his work into English appeared in the late 1920s. A renewed interest in his ideas emerged in the early 1960s, shaped by new social and academic contexts. This resurgence is closely associated with the American psychologist and educator Jerome Bruner. As Dafermos (2016) writes, "J. Bruner played a very important role in introducing Vygotsky's theory to the Western academic community." Bruner had been actively involved in educational reform in the United States, particularly in response to the launch of the Soviet satellite in 1957—a moment that triggered national reflection on the country's scientific and educational capacities. The realization of the Soviet Union's superiority in science and mathematics education prompted systemic changes, and Bruner was among the first to recognize the limitations of behaviorist and experiential learning models. Influenced by thinkers like Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky, he turned toward the study of mental development processes (Dafermos, 2016, p. 28).

M. Dafermos further notes that Vygotsky's theory found application not only in the United States, but also in China, Brazil, other Latin American countries, and, of course, in the Soviet Union. However, he adds that the analysis and application of Vygotsky's theory across different countries remains an open and ongoing area of research (Dafermos, 2016, p. 29).

When analyzing the cultural-historical theory of L. Vygotsky, certain observations made by N. Veresov are particularly insightful. Veresov argues that the focus of Vygotsky's theory is not simply the higher mental functions themselves, but their origin and development. According to Veresov, the social environment serves as the source for the development of higher mental functions, emerging through sociocultural processes. Nonetheless, Vygotsky was not the first to adopt a cultural-historical approach. As Veresov (2007) notes, even from a philosophical standpoint, there is little in Vygotsky's approach that is entirely novel or non-classical. For example, Wilhelm Wundt emphasized that higher psychological processes must be examined through historical analyses of socio-cultural phenomena such as language, folklore, and rituals. In fact, the term "higher mental functions" was introduced by Wundt, not Vygotsky. Thinkers such as G. H. Mead, J. Dewey, E. Durkheim, L. Lévy-Bruhl, and E. Cassirer—along with G. Shpet, whom Vygotsky knew well—also asserted that human consciousness is shaped by socio-cultural factors.

Vygotsky's theoretical legacy offers rich potential for application in two main scientific and pedagogical directions: as a teaching method and as a methodology. The term "method" here refers to scientifically grounded forms, techniques, and tools for instruction and learning, whereas "methodology" implies a broader applied framework encompassing educational goals, values, principles, and research strategies.

The first dimension—method—has already been developed significantly by Vygotsky's followers in the 1960s, including P. Zinchenko, P. Galperin, D. Elkonin, L. Bozhovich, and others. Their work remains relevant today because the biological and psychological mechanisms of cognition and assimilation remain largely unchanged, independent of shifting social conditions. What does evolve, however, are the sociocultural factors that shape external behavior—what Vygotsky termed *interpsychic mechanisms*. These may vary across historical stages and social environments, while the internal (*intrapsychic*) mechanisms remain relatively stable.

This constancy underscores the enduring relevance of Vygotsky's theory for developing teaching strategies. Importantly, his theory is not purely theoretical—it rests on empirical and experimental foundations. In an era when education prioritizes outcomes over processes, Vygotsky's framework becomes practically valuable, offering a sound basis for constructing pedagogical methods tailored to different goals and social contexts.

The second dimension—methodology—invites a more comprehensive view of Vygotsky's theory as a system of interconnected pedagogical and psychological concepts. Among the most critical of these are: 1) the "social situation of development," 2) the "zone of proximal development," and 3) the notion of the "sign." These concepts, firmly rooted in psychological theory, have yet to be fully embraced in educational practice, despite their profound relevance as pedagogical tools.

To explore the "social situation of development," we may refer to E. Volkova and colleagues, who describe it as one of Vygotsky's most heuristic contributions. They define it as the age-specific interaction between a child and the surrounding social reality. This relationship shapes the dynamics and content of personal development and mediates how external stimuli become internal experiences. These influences are not mechanically absorbed but are refracted through the child's emotional and subjective lens.

The structure of this concept includes two aspects: the objective (social position, norms, expectations) and the subjective (the child's experiences and perceptions). These aspects exist in a dynamic relationship, influencing and generating each other. For example, a teenager's experience within a peer group may simultaneously reflect and reshape that group's social expectations (Volkova, 2017). In essence, *interpsychic* processes are internalized as *intrapsychic* structures. While Durkheim viewed education as a product of cultural-historical influence, Vygotsky revealed the intricate psychological mechanisms underlying this transformation.

From a sociological standpoint, the process aligns with the theory of "socialization," understood as the internalization of societal norms across the lifespan. This suggests that the "social situation of development" could be categorized in terms of its immediacy—proximal (e.g., family) or distal (e.g., media)—allowing for classification from both psychological and sociological perspectives. Thus, the concept emerges as a complex, multifaceted phenomenon with profound implications across disciplines.

Given that education is a social institution, its effective operation depends on psychological principles. According to Vygotsky's general genetic law of cultural

development, every function in a child's development appears first between people (as an interpsychic process) and then within the individual (as an intrapsychic process). Accordingly, pedagogy represents the external, social side of interiorization, while psychology examines the internal, emotional mechanics of this transformation. Both aspects are deeply interdependent.

To the extent that pedagogy facilitates the interiorization of cultural content, psychology assesses the internal capacities of the child to absorb and integrate this content. Thus, development becomes a circular process: the interpsychic (social) transforms into the intrapsychic (personal-emotional) and then feeds back into the social sphere. This dialectical cycle is at the heart of Vygotsky's theory.

Another foundational element is the "zone of proximal development" (ZPD). Vygotsky defines it as the set of cognitive abilities that are not yet fully formed but are in the process of maturing. In *Thinking and Speech*, he emphasizes that learning and development are not parallel processes but are instead intricately interwoven. Effective learning anticipates development by engaging functions within the ZPD, thus activating and fostering growth. Outside this zone, the same educational inputs may be ineffective or even counterproductive (Zashikhina, 2014, p. 42).

As the child learns, so does he or she develop. In this sense, learning becomes the driver of development. Each new stage of instruction ushers in a new phase of cognitive growth. This underscores the importance of understanding developmental patterns—especially the transition from actual to potential functioning. The ZPD, therefore, is not merely a psychological construct but a crucial pedagogical concept.

Vygotsky's ideas have significantly shaped pedagogical methods, a path exemplified by Jerome Bruner in his work on educational reform in the United States. Bruner adapted Vygotsky's theory to the American educational context, and its influence remains visible in U.S. schools today. As I. Bessarabova notes in her study of Bruner's pedagogical activity, "The school should become a place for the practice of 'cultural community,'" reflecting Vygotsky's notion of the social situation of development. Education, in this view, should mirror the socio-cultural values of a given society (Bessarabova, 2011).

**Discussion.** Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory holds substantial value for pedagogy, particularly within the methodological foundations of educational science. It offers not only a framework for research practices but also a system of principles and approaches applicable to real-world educational processes. In pedagogical activity, the practical implementation of methods, tools, and technologies plays a central role. These methods, however, are deeply influenced by a range of contextual factors—such as the age of learners, their surrounding environment, social and cultural conditions, and the specific goals and objectives of the educational process. As a result, general pedagogical laws, when viewed through the lens of practice, cannot be universally applied to every new phase in societal development. At first glance, this may suggest an inherent limitation in pedagogical universality. However, this impression is misleading. Universality is possible—provided certain conditions exist that ensure the stability and resilience of educational processes in the face of social crises. One such condition, we argue, is offered by Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory, which serves



as a methodological foundation for both educational theory and practice, particularly in the design of teaching and upbringing processes.

Several key insights support this assertion. First, Vygotsky's theory uncovers the nature of the development of higher mental functions—such as memory, speech, and thinking—as an inherently structured and explainable phenomenon. These functions evolve through a universal mechanism of cognition and the internalization of knowledge. Second, Vygotsky emphasizes the cultural and historical dimension of human development. Social relations, initially formed within small groups, eventually shape entire societies. These relationships are expressed through concepts such as mentality, tradition, and cultural archetypes—phenomena that, in many cases, are not just parallel to, but identical with, the cultural foundations of a given society. In this context, we refer not to abstract culture, but to the historically developed social values that guide a society's functioning. These values must not be arbitrarily imposed but must instead emerge organically from cultural and historical development.

A compelling illustration of cultural-historical discourse in pedagogy can be found in the educational practices of Anton Makarenko in the 1920s–30s (Sizov, 2018). While Makarenko's writings contain no explicit references to Vygotsky, both educators worked during the same historical period and arrived at remarkably similar conclusions—Makarenko through intuitive pedagogical insight, and Vygotsky through scientific inquiry. Reflecting on his early teaching experiences at the Gorky Colony, Makarenko wrote, “We did not actually know our work: our working day was filled with mistakes, uncertain movements, and confused thoughts. Ahead was an endless fog, in which we could barely make out the fragmented outlines of future pedagogical life. Every step we took was so random that anything could be said about it” (Makarenko, 1987).

Makarenko's pedagogical intuition, particularly in his work with adolescents, was deeply rooted in cultural traditions. He advanced the idea of the children's collective as a cultural and historical instrument of personality development. Collectivism, in his framework, represented a historical form of social interaction. By constructing the “social situation of development” and identifying the “zone of proximal development” through the lens of collective values, Makarenko achieved remarkable educational results in a short period of time. This case exemplifies how cultural-historical discourse serves as a powerful approach to addressing educational challenges within a specific social context.

In this regard, the approach to executing pedagogical tasks becomes central. Pedagogy, as a social institution, naturally seeks to reproduce what may be termed the “inner cultural circle”—the family and other agents of informal and formal influence—as a foundational element of consciousness. Only after this internal cultural reproduction can it turn outward to engage with the broader “outer cultural circle,” that is, the shared cultural experience of the larger social group. As Vygotsky noted, “It determines wholly and completely those forms, and that path, following which a child acquires new and new properties of his personality, drawing them from the environment, as from the main source of his development, the path along which the social becomes individual” (Vygotsky, 1960).

I. Bessarabova reinforces this view by citing J. Bruner: “It is impossible to study the mental activity of a person,” Bruner writes, “outside of its cultural space, which determines the form and boundaries of the mind” (Bessarabova, 2011). This perspective shifts the focus from a general notion of culture to the particular culture of a given society—the social environment composed of traditions, habits, and norms in which the “inner cultural circle” operates. Although “social situations of development” tend to follow a common structure across cultures, the ways in which they are resolved vary significantly from one socio-cultural context to another. This variation highlights the diversity of socio-cultural relations across societies.

When we examine Vygotsky’s cultural-historical theory through the lens of pedagogical methodology, another critical aspect emerges: the formation of signs and concepts in children’s thinking. In *Thinking and Speech*, Vygotsky explores how children develop concepts and use signs as fundamental tools in cognitive processes. He asserts that cultural development involves mastering behavior through the use of signs—such as language, writing, and numerical systems—created over the course of human history. “There is every reason to assume,” he writes, “that cultural development consists in the assimilation of such methods of behavior, which are based on the use and consumption of signs... We are convinced of this not only by the study of the psychological development of primitive man, but also by direct and immediate observations of children” (Vygotsky, 2002).

In Vygotsky’s view, language is the key element in the system of signs that supports mental development. It serves as the primary instrument of logical thought, particularly during early childhood. A. Petrova, citing Vygotsky’s work, notes that delays in the development of logical thinking and concept formation are directly tied to insufficient mastery of language. “The replacement of one weak language with another also incomplete one,” she writes, “does not go unpunished for the psyche. This replacement lowers mental activity, especially where it is already underdeveloped” (Vygotsky, 2002). Vygotsky elaborates further, noting that a child learning Russian or English and a child acquiring the language of a primitive tribe will develop fundamentally different systems of thought. The development of a child’s personality is shaped by the socio-cultural environment and can be defined as exogenous—emerging from external influences—rather than purely endogenous. In short, the development of higher mental functions is a function of the child’s socio-cultural experience.

Consequently, thinking does not emerge in isolation. It is formed through a system of signs—concepts that have evolved within specific cultural communities over long periods of time. From a dialectical perspective, a system is characterized by stable, logically interrelated elements that together form a coherent whole. Social signs and symbols likewise form a system with a structured content based on recognizable patterns and essential elements. These elements do not arise randomly but have a historically and culturally grounded origin. It is no coincidence that Vygotsky’s work on the development of higher mental functions came to be known as the “cultural-historical theory.”

When discussing the system of signs and symbols, it is important to stress that the value of a system lies in its coherence—not in a mechanical aggregation of parts. If essential elements of the system are replaced arbitrarily, the system loses its integrity, and the development of higher mental functions may be disrupted. As a result, the process of concept internalization will lack the consistency required for systemic cognitive growth.

In today's context, numerous agents contribute to the formation of this system of signs and concepts—often with competing interests. This multiplicity can generate imbalances in the developmental system, making it difficult for individuals to independently discern the value orientations necessary for navigating society. For this reason, the pedagogical system must play a leading role in shaping the social and cultural values that inform the development of an individual's thinking (Table 1).

**Table 1. Core Concepts of L. Vygotsky's Cultural-Historical Theory**

Key Concepts	Description
Social Situation of Development	Refers to the context and conditions within a specific period of a child's life that drive significant psychological changes. It shapes the manner and trajectory through which new aspects of personality are acquired.
Zone of Proximal Development	Represents the range of tasks that a child cannot accomplish independently but can perform successfully with guidance from adults or more competent peers. This zone highlights the potential for cognitive growth through social interaction.
Sign	Considered a "psychological tool," the sign functions as a mediating element in the development of higher mental processes. It serves as the foundation upon which conscious thought is constructed.

*Sources: developed by authors*

**Conclusions.** In fulfilling the purpose of this article—namely, to explore the essence of L. Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory through the lens of pedagogical meanings—we have sought to generalize and clarify the theoretical material relevant to this topic. This endeavor has taken shape both as an explication of Vygotsky's theoretical framework and as an attempt to interpret his ideas from a scientific and pedagogical perspective, especially where they appear fragmented or applied in context-specific ways. Through addressing the research objectives, we have identified the pedagogical meanings of Vygotsky's theory in terms of two interconnected dimensions: *method* and *methodology*, both of which form the foundation of pedagogical structures, principles, and approaches to solving educational challenges.

Within the realm of pedagogical science, Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory may be operationalized either as a method or a constellation of methods within teaching practices. When approached as a methodology, it represents a foundational concept within the broader theoretical framework of education. Moreover, the relationship between method and methodology is dialectical—they are not static but rather dynamic and evolving, both internally and in their wider philosophical implications.

At its core, Vygotsky's theory embodies a form of cultural relativism that stands in contrast to the prevailing processes of cultural diffusion. These modern diffusion processes, which are often unilateral, tend to overlook the unique cultural and historical characteristics of a society, including its educational systems. This oversight contributes to cultural aberration, whereby the principle of cultural congruity—a

cornerstone of the cultural-historical approach—is compromised, thereby negatively influencing pedagogical forms and practices.

This degradation of the cultural-historical foundation leads to a rupture between education and pedagogy, or between theory and practice. The root of this disconnection lies in the erosion of internal socio-cultural linkages. As a result, the educational system loses its systemic integrity. Education, increasingly oriented toward globalizing forces and external influences, finds itself at odds with the internal logic of practical pedagogy, which—often by inertia—still attempts to preserve its socio-cultural foundations. This tension creates systemic contradictions. In societies heavily influenced by cultural diffusion, the practical value of education diminishes over time, a trend that may ultimately yield dire consequences.

While this situation might be described as a transitional phase from the "old" to the "new," such framing serves more as a rationalization than a meaningful explanation—particularly since the "new" paradigm has yet to be realized, while the "old" is already being lost. In contrast, Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory represents a return to the internal sources of pedagogical effectiveness: the innate mechanisms of learning and development that are embedded in the nature of human cognition. These mechanisms follow recognizable patterns and algorithms that guide the formation of mental activity in the individual.

Regardless of how one chooses to interpret Vygotsky's theory, its most vital component, in our view, is the centrality of the *social factor* in shaping human consciousness. Crucially, this social factor should not be understood as a vague or abstract phenomenon but rather as a concrete bearer of cultural meaning—deeply embedded in the specific context and content of a given culture.

**Author contributions.** The authors contributed equally.

**Disclosure statement.** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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