

## Foreword to the collection of topics from the proceedings of the International Symposium “Lev Vygotsky and Modern Childhood”

Last year saw the 120th anniversary of the birth of Lev Vygotsky. The event was widely celebrated by academic communities who rely upon his work in their research—the range of his interests and the fields of humanities that he contributed to is amazingly wide. General psychology, special needs education, issues in education, psychology of art, problems of consciousness, developmental psychology—it is hard to name a field in humanities that has not been influenced by Vygotsky’s ideas and insights at least in some way.

A major event—the International Congress for the 120th Anniversary of Lev Vygotsky—was held last November in Moscow. This incorporated a series of simultaneous academic events at various academic venues: the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE), Moscow State University, the Russian State University for the Humanities, Moscow State University of Psychology and Education (MSUPE), etc. This event can probably be described as unique: a number of Russian and foreign researchers in different Moscow academic institutions discussed the heritage of the maestro, who had passed away more than 80 years ago. It is particularly important to point out that the focus of scientific discourse in those discussions was not so much memorial (although memorial events were quite numerous) as it was insightful. The new reality calls for a scientific and empirical rethinking of Vygotsky’s heritage, which is the only way to preserve his life’s thoughts and resoundingly vibrant ideas.

Modern reality makes us view many things from a different perspective. Many theoretical patterns of the past are studied today as part of the history. The only way to save Vygotsky’s ideas for today’s science is to try to combine respect for his heritage with present-day topics and relevant research. The paramount question that researchers tried to answer in the course of the congress was, to what extent can the assumptions of cultural-historical theory become a tool for interpreting the new empirical data of today? It appears that what Vygotsky’s ideas need is not protective replications but a substantial revision as applied to the new findings.

We are happy to introduce the reader to a collection of articles representing the research issues discussed during the International Symposium “Lev Vygotsky and Modern Childhood”, which took

place on 15–16 November 2016 at the HSE Institute of Education and the MSUPE (as part of the Congress). These works give some insight into how powerful the opportunities for the development of Vygotsky's ideas on modern data can be.

The selection includes six articles. They all actualize to a greater or lesser extent Vygotsky's fundamental idea that environment is the source, not a condition, of development. This smart and, let's be honest, somewhat provocative statement needs to be reinterpreted, especially in the context of the rapid evolution of neuroscience. It has to do exactly with the construct of “development” as opposed to “maturation” and “growth”. This issue is discussed in the most detailed and scrupulous way in the first article called *Trajectories of Personality Development: A Reconstruction of Lev Vygotsky's Views*. In spite of the name, this is not only a “reconstruction of views” but in fact a positive psychology development program that draws on neoclassical cultural-historical psychology.

Four articles tackle the same problem of environment. With all the diversity of topics and focuses in these studies, they can be conventionally brought together under a common concept of “development environment”, which derives from Vygotsky's ideas of “social situation of development”. Special attention must be paid to the radical expansion of this concept: originally, it used to denote the age period and children's relations with the world around that were specific to that period; however, the most recent studies, in particular those included in this topic collection, approach the development environment as a huge number of relations that constitute development. Three articles are devoted to environments accessible to school students, i. e. the city as a whole and children's playgrounds. Environment is analyzed not only and not as much in the context of its physical characteristics but mostly as a condition for development, a place that offers opportunity for playing and interacting with strangers, and a “habitat” that generates options for activities—play, communication, etc.—which encourage development in the first place.

One of the main questions raised at the symposium was, to what extent can modern childhood be described using the constructs proposed over 80 years ago? In this regard, interesting findings are made in *Fifth-Graders Moving into Adulthood: The 1960s vs. the 2010s*, an article that presents a replication of a classical clinical study of younger adolescents conducted in the 1960s. The article identifies the age universals and the processes that are different today.

The evolution of the online environment “inhabited” by modern school students is a new trend that disturbs educators and psychologists. The novelty of this world, more familiar to children than their parents, begets a mythology of its own, which can be either distressing (What is going on there?) or comforting (The online world is accessible to all, so it will reduce the inequality of real-life interactions). We present the article *What's in My Profile?* which analyzes the environ-

ment of school students' personal profiles in the social networking service Vkontakte as a development environment. An integration of profile characteristics allows them to be considered as an environment of interests revealed in online interactions among adolescents. Hopefully, this article will promote an understanding of these new dimensions regarding the social situation of development.

Over 80 years have passed since Lev Vygotsky ended his mortal life, but his thoughts and perspective on development are still relevant and exciting—even more so now that new studies and facts emerge, the understanding of which requires another interpretational dimension of the psychologist's ideas.

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