

# Cultural-Historical Psychology: How Culture Shapes the Mind

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Cultural-historical psychology (also called the school of Vygotsky, sociocultural psychology, socio-historical psychology, activity theory, cultural psychology, cultural historical activity theory, and social development theory) is a theory of psychology founded by Lev Vygotsky at the end of the 1920s and developed by his students and followers in Eastern Europe and worldwide.

Cultural-historical psychology emerged as a response to Cartesian dualism between mind and body in psychology of that time as a deliberate attempt to establish a new paradigm in psychological research that would overcome the narrow objectivism of behaviourism (Watson) and subjectivism of introspective psychology of Wundt, James, and others. It focuses on human development to make genetic claims about the function of mind in activity. These claims could be part of, or a basis for, a return to the unity of human sciences.

Vygotsky and his associates postulate in principle non-adaptive character and the mechanisms of higher psychical (mental) functions development. Defining the main goal of psychological inquiry as an objective study of human consciousness, the members of Vygotsky's school investigate the role of cultural mediation and such cultural mediators as word, sign (Vygotsky), symbol, myth (Losev, V. Zinchenko) in the development of human higher psychical functions, development of personality and its "top-most" phenomenology.

A basic distinguishing feature of cultural-historical psychology is that "the species-specific characteristic of human beings is their need and ability to inhabit an environment transformed by the activity of prior members of their species. Such transformations and the mechanism of the transfer of these transformations from one generation to the next are the result of the ability/proclivity of human beings to create and use artifacts - aspects of the material world that are taken up into human action as modes of coordinating with the physical and social environment." (Cole 1995, p. 190) In this way, research has been done into the effects of literacy (Cole & Scribner) and mathematics (Saxe) outside of traditional schooling to understand how cognition develops embedded in a given place and time.