

## THEORETICAL-METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON VYGOTSKY'S LEGACY: AN INTERVIEW WITH PROFESSOR NIKOLAI VERESOV (INTERVIEW WITH NIKOLAI VERESOV) – PART II

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## REFLEXÕES TEÓRICO-METODOLÓGICAS SOBRE O LEGADO DE VIGOTSKI: ENTREVISTA COM O PROFESSOR NIKOLAI VERESOV (ENTREVISTA COM NIKOLAI VERESOV) – PARTE II

## REFLEXIONES TEÓRICO-METODOLÓGICAS SOBRE EL LEGADO DE VYGOTSKY: UNA ENTREVISTA CON PROFESOR NIKOLAI VERESOV (ENTREVISTA COM NIKOLAI VERESOV) – PARTE II

### Interview

**Ana Caroline:** The concept of *perezhivanie* has received increasing attention among researchers of the Cultural-Historical field. In Brazil, we have been translating this word, in general, as 'vivência' (experiencing). Do you think that a correct/fair translation of this Russian word is possible? Why?

Professor Nikolai: I know it is not modest to start from yourself, but historically, (I mean, for me, this is particularly important) in Russian tradition – in the Soviet Union then later in Russia – people working with Vygotsky's legacy did not exclude *perezhivanie* from the list of concepts. For Russian followers of Vygotsky, *perezhivanie* remained as one of the key concepts in Vygotsky's theory. An example is the book of *Fedor Vasilyuk*, '*Psychology of Perezhivanie*'. It was published in Russia in 1984, but there is an edition available in English since 1991... So, this is the fact that indicates that for Russian followers of Vygotsky, *perezhivanie* was always not in focus. Still, at the same time, not in the deep periphery of their studies...it was one of the concepts discussed, but not for the researchers who follow Leontiev. In Leontiev's theory, there is no place for the concept of *perezhivanie*; Leontiev did not say anything about *perezhivanie*, and as I said before, Leontiev was very critical to take *perezhivanie* as a unit of consciousness analysis. Leontiev was critical and rejected the idea of *perezhivanie* as the unit of consciousness. So, he suggested activity as a unity of consciousness and personality – but this is another story.

So, for Vygotskyans, pure Vygotskyans, *perezhivanie* was one of the concepts on the agenda. If you look, for example, at the work of Lidiya Bozhovich, you could see her

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original contribution to the advancing of the concept of *perezhivanie*. But this remains mostly unknown in the West, in American books, because American tradition started from *Mind and society*, the small green book of 1978. In that book, there is nothing about *perezhivanie*, but because this book is still considered the main source of Vygotsky's writing (despite Vygotsky did not write this book!). Therefore, the concept of *perezhivanie* remained unknown among Western researchers. Moreover, the chapter of Vygotsky about *perezhivanie* was translated only in 1994. Still, *perezhivanie* was translated as 'experiencing', so our colleagues – English speaking researchers simply did not get the point about *perezhivanie* in Vygotsky. And therefore, there was no debate, no discussions, nothing about *perezhivanie* in Vygotskyans Western literature.

When I started many years ago, in the late '90s, one of the questions that surprised me was why there is nothing about *perezhivanie* in English. Now I'm speaking about the '80s and '90s, the last ten years of the previous century, not now: you could not find anything about *perezhivanie*. But you might say "hey Nikolai, sorry, sorry, sorry, but *Collected works of Vygotsky* was published in the '80s and '90s, and in that collected volumes there are chapters where Vygotsky speaks about *perezhivanie*". You might say even "oh Nikolai sorry, sorry, sorry, what about *The Vygotsky's reader*, the book published in 1994? There is a chapter about *perezhivanie* there!" And my answer is, "The book called *The Vygotsky's reader* includes one of the lectures from Lectures of Pedology, which is called '*The problem of environment*', and in it, Vygotsky speaks a lot about *perezhivanie*". This is absolutely correct, but the problem is that in *The collected works* and the *Vygotsky reader*, *perezhivanie* was translated as an 'experience' or 'experiencing'. But what the *experience* means? 'Experience' means, for example... 'work experience': when you are applying for a job, the requirement is that the employer needs someone having 'work experience' – it is like something in your past. But, in Russian, this word is 'opyt'. So, if you have any experience in the past in Russian means, you have 'opyt'. But Vygotsky did not mean opyt; he meant *perezhivanie*. And that is why even being translated, this term, this concept, did not attract the attention of the researchers because this was just an 'experience', a 'live through' or something... so, that was like a pre-history of this issue.

So, one of my questions was, 'Why?' 'What is the reason?' Because if you look at Vygotsky's theory, you see *perezhivanie* has an essential place in the whole theoretical system – without *perezhivanie*, you cannot wholly understand the Vygotsky says that *perezhivanie* MAKES from Social Situation a Development Social Situation. Furthermore, without *perezhivanie*, you can hardly understand the drama concept ... so you see the 'theoretical location' of this concept within the system of other concepts. Without the *perezhivanie* concept, the whole of Vygotsky's theoretical construction has a big hole. For example, you might have a list of concepts of HCT and try to find how they are interconnected and interrelated as a system. The point is that it is impossible if there is no *perezhivanie* concept in this list. *Perezhivanie*, as Vygotsky said, is the concept that allows us to understand the place and the role of the social environment, the influence of the environment on the course of development of the child. It is a theoretical tool for analysis, and if you do not have this tool, you can hardly make this analysis. You will never understand the role of the social environment in a child's development completely. Or your analysis will remain vague and superficial.

So, having this in mind, I came to the ISCAR (International Society of Cultural-historical Activity Research) Congress in Aarhus (Denmark) in 1998. It was the first ISCAR congress I attended, and the Society title was ISCRAT (International Society for Cultural-

historical and Activity Theory), not ISCAR. I made a presentation, just one oral presentation in one of many parallel sections. My presentation was about the general genetic law of development, the concept of drama and *perezhivanie*. I was very naïve and expected to explain the importance of drama in human development, and that *perezhivanie* is an important concept. But only five people came to the session. I do not even know why they came; maybe to listen to somebody else.

So, it was a disappointment for me, but it was the first time the concept of *perezhivanie* was formally introduced to the ISCAR community – but only five people came [laughs]. So, I decided to continue my work with *perezhivanie* and child development.

I repeated my attempt to bring *perezhivanie* to the schedule of ISCAR and Western Vygotskyans at San Diego ISCAR Congress (2008 probably), and again I wanted to present *perezhivanie* and drama and the dialects of development. But, unfortunately, the same history happened... only three or four people attended the presentation. There was no feedback, nothing followed. An empty voice in a desert...

But the historical fact is this: I was probably the first who introduced the concept of *perezhivanie* to the ISCAR and Vygotskian community. But as you see, nobody was interested.

And then, I decided to write a paper about *perezhivanie* explaining why *perezhivanie* is important and how it helps to understand Vygotsky's theory. So, I wrote the paper and sent it to one of the journals (I do not want to tell you which journal it was), but this is a very, very respected journal, one of the top journals in the community... and the paper was rejected. The reviewer said, "We disagree in the interpretation of a category drama as a collision and *perezhivanie* and so on...", so the paper was rejected. Ok, the paper was rejected... but there was the manuscript, a rejected manuscript. My colleagues from Brazil wrote me a letter saying, "Dear Nikolai, we are now discovering the concept of *perezhivanie*. Do you know something about? Because you know Vygotsky and maybe you know something about what *perezhivanie* is?" I replied, "Yes, I have a paper, a rejected paper about *perezhivanie*". So, I have sent to my Brazilian colleagues this unpublished manuscript. And... as you know, it is now known across all Brazil as Nikolai Veresov's unpublished manuscript on *perezhivanie*. By the way, this is one of the most quoted papers of mine [laughs] – which is still an unpublished manuscript, and I cannot even include this in the list of my publications. But I do not care. This is not important. What really is essential is that only recently, in the last ten years – you are right – and especially in the last five years, the interest in the *perezhivanie* concept is just increasing dramatically. There is a lot of publications about *perezhivanie*.

The good thing is that international researchers are trying to take a few steps to understand what is *perezhivanie* and how to interpret this concept, translate it correctly, and the content of the concept...what is this – *perezhivanie*? – and why *perezhivanie* is so essential? So, this is very good because it opens a new door to Vygotsky and helps us understand the relationship between *perezhivanie* and other concepts. So, this is a way of changing the list of concepts into the system of concepts – that is good.

But what is bad also is that... Vygotsky is becoming very popular. Due to his popularity, some people use Historical-Cultural Theory as a new label just to publish something about *perezhivanie* because it is a fashion topic. It is much easier to be accepted a publication in the journal if there is something about *perezhivanie*. Unfortunately, researchers are using *perezhivanie* as a label – not all of them, but some -

without even a deep understanding of what it is. And this is not good because the same story happened to the concept of ZPD, which was received, applied, and people played with this concept as a toy without a deep understanding of the original meaning of ZPD in Vygotsky's texts. What we have is a million of repetitions of incorrect interpretations of ZPD based on the wrong translations.

Unfortunately, after the publication of Seth Chaiklin's great paper on ZPD in 2003, the situation has not changed, even now, at the beginning of this century. In his paper, Chaiklin stated that "we cannot understand what ZPD means without understanding what the development means in Vygotsky's theory". I agree entirely, and I should add to this, "we have to understand this concept within the system of other concepts". People are repeating and repeating things that have nothing to do with Vygotsky's ZPD. But I am afraid that with *perezhivanie*, we have the same story. People will use *perezhivanie* without understanding, like children playing with a new toy because the child is getting bored of the old toy, and now there is a new toy to play with...

Of course, I am very radical, and maybe I am impolite and incorrect. Maybe I am disadvantaging researchers, but I am telling the real story. What I am saying is only my humble opinion. I can be absolutely wrong, I will be happy if I am wrong, but here I am answering your question.

So... what makes me happy is that we have several interesting publications recently trying to get into what *perezhivanie* really is and how we can use *perezhivanie* as a concept within one system and how it helps us to build our research programs. I do not want to make a kind of self-advert, but one of the latest publications was the book '*Perezhivanie, Emotions and Subjectivity*', which I published as editors together with my colleagues Marilyn Fleer and Fernando Gonzales Rey in 2017.

Besides, there is a special edition of the journal *Mind, Culture and Activity* about *perezhivanie*, and we have contributed with the paper about *perezhivanie* and research in early childhood. In addition, there were several symposiums on *perezhivanie*, and a chapter in the special edition of the *International Research in Early Childhood Education*, in 2016... And of course, in the ISCAR Congress in Sydney, 2014, there were two symposiums about *perezhivanie* and three in the ISCAR Congress in Quebec in 2017... so, you know, it just comes, and this really makes me happy.

Your question about the translation and "vivência". For several years there were discussions about how to translate *perezhivanie* - *experience, experiencing, living through, emotional relation*, and so on. I remember one discussion in an Internet forum where serious academics presented their points of view on *perezhivanie*. For me, it was fun reading. For example, somebody said that *perezhivanie* consists of two parts '*pere*', which in Russian means 'over', and '*zhivanie*', which means 'to live'. What a profound knowledge! I am Russian, and I can tell you that there is no word '*zhivanie*' in Russian. And '*pere*' might mean many things, such as 'cross' – *perekrestok* is a crossroad, and also 're' as 'redoing something' – *perepisat* is to rewrite, and the word which you probably know – *perestroika* is just a reconstruction. It was fun reading for me to read this academic discussion, but many people take it seriously and even translate *perezhivanie* as 'adventure'. We, in Russia, have a proverb, "You can even call me a pot, just don't put me in the oven" - with *perezhivanie*, because of the discussions I said about and translations like 'adventure' we have the situation – they do not only call this a pot but put it to the

oven. This is why I am glad that now in publications, my colleagues use simply '*perezhivanie*' without any translation. At least nobody calls it a pot anymore.

The problem is not to find the correct word in translation. Sometimes it is not possible... The problem is to find the correct understanding. And here is the problem. If you cannot translate, you can at least explain...so, and that is what I am doing in the last five years, publishing papers and chapters about *perezhivanie* - and there is only one task that I am trying to solve: I am not trying to explain my understanding of *perezhivanie*, I am trying to explain what Vygotsky means by *perezhivanie*... I just want to take from his original texts available in English and from texts not available in English to reconstruct the original meaning of Vygotsky about *perezhivanie*.

If you look at my papers, you can see there are not too many Nikolai's interpretations - we have a lot of interpretations without mine. So, the problem is not on correct translating but correct understanding. My task is just to give the voice to Vygotsky because in this choir of voices, Vygotsky's voice disappeared... you can hardly hear his individual words, and I wanted his voice just to do a solo, not that choir when everybody sings his or her individual song in dissonance with Vygotsky, not in harmony. So that was my humble task.

I called *perezhivanie* of a mystified concept because many people understand it differently. There is no common understanding; there is no consensus; there is no agreement and clear understanding. But for Vygotsky, it was not a mystified concept... there was nothing about mystics in that concept. In some sense, my task is to demystify *perezhivanie*. So, you can call it the 'demystification' of *perezhivanie*. Last year, in April 2019, I was in Campinas. My colleague from Unicamp, Ana Luiza Smolka, organized a remarkable two-hour lecture to professors and students. The title was '*Demystifying Perezhivanie*'.

So, the first problem is the Russian word *perezhivanie*. It has not two meanings but two ways of using. It is used in colloquial language, related to emotional experience, or related to negative things, like crisis and something like that... or, as related to a positive thing. There might be negative *perezhivanie* and positive *perezhivanie*. But not in a scientific term. It is just an everyday, colloquial language.

On the other hand, in psychology, scientific psychology, the term *perezhivanie* (psychical *perezhivanie*) was widely used even before Vygotsky. If you take psychological books of that time, or even a textbook, you can find this – Dewey in America and Russian 'gurus' of the psychology of that time: Chepanov, Kornilov and others. *Perezhivanie* was just a common unified term for any psychological phenomenon. The perception was a sort of *perezhivanie*; memory was a sort of *perezhivanie*, volition... sensation is *perezhivanie*... everything which now we call psychological process or psychological phenomenon was *perezhivanie* – it was just an 'umbrella-term'.

Before the Historical-Cultural Theory appeared in the early stages of his work, Vygotsky also used this word *perezhivanie* in many places following the existing tradition. Thus, we have evidence that Vygotsky understood *perezhivanie* in this way before 1928 (the year when the first research of HCT started).

Thus, in 1927, in the *Psychological dictionary*, written by Vygotsky and Varshava as a material for students, if you open this dictionary on the letter P, you will find a definition of *perezhivanie*. Vygotsky says that *perezhivanie* is a common term/name of all

psychological processes. There is a *perezhivanie* process and a *perezhivanie* content (How we experience something and What we are experiencing). This dictionary reflects the common everyday use of this word in Russian psychology – not only in Russian psychology, in Western psychology as well. It is evidence that Vygotsky used the term *perezhivanie* in that traditional way and there is no difference between Vygotsky and any other psychologists using it. *Perezhivanie* is just a label for any kind of sensation, perception, memory, thinking... whatever.

The problem is that Vygotsky gave a different interpretation of *perezhivanie* in the HCT. From 1928 when he started to develop the HCT as a development theory of higher psychological functions, he improved the traditional understanding of *perezhivanie*. How? He connected *perezhivanie* with the process of child development. He explained *perezhivanie* differently; he introduced a new meaning of the term *perezhivanie*.

But when people simply use the quotations from Vygotsky and say, “Look, this is what Vygotsky says about *perezhivanie!*”, I always respond to this, “Hold on, in different periods of his work, he understood *perezhivanie* differently!” The first step is to identify if this quotation is from Vygotsky’s works of the Historical-Cultural Theory or before it. For example, in *Psychology of art*, you can find three or four interesting phrases where Vygotsky speaks about *perezhivanie*. But, as you know, *Psychology of art* was one of the books of the early Vygotsky, Vygotsky before Historical-Cultural Theory appeared. *Psychology of Art* was mostly written before 1925 and the subtitle of this book was: An analysis of esthetic reaction. Unfortunately, this subtitle that reflects this book clearly was omitted in Russian and English editions of this book (and probably in Portuguese, too). *Perezhivanie* in that book was understood very traditionally - as an aesthetic reaction, aesthetic feelings, emotions, complex emotions, etc. I am surprised how easily some Vygotskian researchers miss this point entirely and try to convince me that the *Psychology of Art* is the book that belongs to HCT. This is a mistake. This book reflects the early stage of Vygotsky’s work before the HCT was created.

The cultural-historical concept of *perezhivanie* is different. First, let us look at Vygotsky’s theory: what is *perezhivanie* as a part of Vygotsky’s theory? *Perezhivanie*, in Vygotsky’s theory, has two primary meanings. My Ph.D. students called them P1 and P2.

P1 is *perezhivanie* as a psychological phenomenon. We can observe it in children or adults. As a psychological phenomenon, we can observe it; we can take a picture of it, make videos... we can analyze it as a phenomenological reality. It is easy to understand – for example, if we say something to a group of several children, it does not mean they all understand what we say in the same way. Or when you approach a child (baby or toddler) with a smile on your face expecting her to react positively...but the baby begins to cry. Why?

Why, really? I should say that here we see the difference between physiology and psychology. In physiology, there is a basic fundamental model, ‘stimulus-response’ (S-R). Stimulus generates a response. The reaction is the response to the stimulus. But children might react differently to the same stimulus, and here the psychology begins. There is something between stimulus and reaction which changes the stimulus, like a magic ‘prism’ within the child, which refracts the stimulus subjectively. And here, we see the difference between the physiological principle of reflection and the psychological principle of refraction. Humans do not only reflect; they refract. Vygotsky introduced this new principle,

and this is a fundamental achievement in psychology! Child's *perezhivanie* is a sort of 'prism' through which the stimulus is refracted, so this is what P1 is.

This means that *perezhivanie* cannot be reduced to emotional reactions. Yes, we can see emotions on the baby's face when she cries when we approach the baby. But this is what exists on the surface. Vygotsky says that *perezhivanie* (P1) is how the child perceives, interprets, understands, consciously aware and emotionally responds to a certain event in his life. You see – P 1 is a very complex phenomenon that includes many psychological functions at the same time – perception, thinking, and even memory, imagination and will. But when we observe this phenomenon, we can only see the emotional expressions in children's behavior or their faces. Vygotsky says, "there is much more below these external manifestations. There is a complexity of various psychological processes – they all together are what we can call *perezhivanie* and the principle of refraction". In another statement, Vygotsky says, "*perezhivanie* is an integral internal attitude of a person to a certain event", and unfortunately, this was translated as "external relation to a certain event". Sad, this translation still misleads researchers.

Why is it so important? For researchers, it is so important because if I understand what *perezhivanie* really is, when I see how the children are emotionally responding, I understand, 'Ah, this is the top of the iceberg'; behind that, in child's mind, there is much more. For me, the child's emotional reaction is not *perezhivanie*. It is just an indication, a visible part of this complex psychological unity of different processes. So, it's a sort of hint for me. And as a researcher, I now have access to many profound levels, the layers of a child's mind, to discover what is under the surface, his internal attitude to a certain event. And it gives a direction to go deeper in my study. If, for me, *perezhivanie* is an emotional response only, I am, as a researcher, just collecting emotional responses without seeing the whole phenomenology, which is, of course, hidden. That is why Vygotsky's understanding of *perezhivanie* is so essential. And the second point of why it is so important is that in *perezhivanie*, it is impossible to separate emotions from thinking, thinking from memory, is a kind of... kind of melting pot, you know? Once melted, you cannot separate. So, this is very important: P1, as you see, even P1 gives researchers glasses, specific glasses, understanding and seeing much more than without these glasses... this is about P1, which is why even P1 gives us lots of interesting opportunities to do research. This is what I am trying to explain in my publications about *perezhivanie* as P1.

The second meaning of *perezhivanie* is *perezhivanie* as a theoretical concept (P2). The word is the same - *perezhivanie* - but the meaning of this word is different. P2 is not a phenomenon; it is not the process we can observe; P2 is a purely, entirely theoretical concept.

In this meaning, *perezhivanie* is a theoretical abstraction, a theoretical concept. To understand this, I can give an example from physics. Let us take the mass (M) concept from physics. On the one hand, the mass of any physical body is its physical characteristic and can be measured and calculated (for example, in grams or kilograms – this is the body's weight, as we call this in our everyday speech). On the other hand, M is the theoretical concept, the part of the Newtonian theory of mechanics. You cannot measure the concept of the mass in grams or kilograms – it is not the empirical thing, but with this concept (and other concepts, such as speed), Newton explained gravity. Albert Einstein,

as you know, made a big step forward, and in his theory of relativity, the  $M$  concept was a part of the famous  $E=mc^2$ , which explains the equivalence of mass ( $M$ ) and energy.

Do you remember that the first definition of *perezhivanie* is how the child realizes, interprets, gets aware of and emotionally reacts to a certain event, which we have discussed? That was about P1. That is a phenomenon. Concerning P2, Vygotsky says something very different: Vygotsky says, “*perezhivanie* as a concept allows us to understand the place and role of social environment and the influence of social environment on the course of the child development”. You see here that he does not speak about the influence of the environment on the child but about the influence of the environment on the child’s development. Not everything which influences you and I automatically influences my or your development. Not everything refracted through the prism of *perezhivanie* is influencing my or your development! So, in the same way, as in Newtonian physics, the concept of  $M$  is the concept that is a theoretical tool to understand the laws of gravity. In Vygotsky’s theory, the *perezhivanie* concept is a theoretical tool to understand the child’s development as a process.

Using this concept allows us, researchers, to understand the place and role of the environment in influencing child development.

In other words, my answers to your questions: this interview might influence you a lot. You might be impressed and happy, or depressed and unhappy after the interview. But (and I hope on this) it can influence you in such a way that you begin to think differently. You begin to re-think your understanding... so it might affect your development, your way of thinking. So, P1 and P2 are different.

That is why P2 as a theoretical concept is so important, and that is why Vygotsky has developed this concept. He gave us an example of how to use *perezhivanie* as a concept to analyze the process of development. His famous example from the *Problem of environment* with the three children and the alcoholic mother. This is an example of these three children’s development using the *perezhivanie* concept to explain why being in the same social situation had different developmental outcomes.

However, in the same lecture, Vygotsky gives us three more examples of using the *perezhivanie* concept as a theoretical analytical tool. It is interesting to note that the literature on *perezhivanie* does not consider these three more examples.

In all these four examples, Vygotsky does not give a lot of details involving how long these situations have been happening, the age of these children, the environment and the situation... In the first example, he only says that ‘three children were in a terrible situation’ because his task was not to give details. His task was to give an example: how we can use the *perezhivanie* concept to analyze how the same situation of the alcoholic mother affected three children differently and how this affected their development in three different ways. Just as an example of analysis. And the answer was that the same situation, three children being in the same social situation, because of the difference of ages, their perception, understanding, awareness, and emotional reaction differed. Therefore, they had three different *perezhivanie*, they were involved in three different social situations of development, and they had three different development outcomes. So, here we see how the concepts are connected – *perezhivanie*, social environment, social situation, and social situation of development.



And that is why Vygotsky comes with the metaphor of prism, saying that *perezhivanie* is a sort of prism that refracts a certain event in a child's environment. It refracts differently, individually. And doing this creates the social situation of development – through this, it affects the child's development, not the child, but the child's development. And therefore, the trajectory of these three children and their development trajectories originated in the same social environment, and this environment affected them differently. I see here that Vygotsky provided us with an example of the theoretical analysis - it was just an illustration of how *perezhivanie* might work for practical studies of children and adults in a certain situation. It was just a kind of matrix given to us. But tell me: who actually is using this matrix? Do we have any publication which applies this matrix of analysis, this logic of analysis? I do not know any publication which uses the same logic in analyzing experimental data. But we have many publications about child's *perezhivanie* without a clear distinction between P1 and P2 and defining *perezhivanie* as children's emotional reactions. Sadly, contemporary Vygotskyans do not learn Vygotsky's lessons.

And that is why I try to explain this to the audience of researchers. This is the place of the *perezhivanie* concept. Do you see? Just summarizing my answer: there is a pre-history about that, there is a very interesting original meaning of Vygotsky about that distinguishing between P1 and P2 and how the understanding of P1 might enrich our research, makes us more accurate to analyze our data; we see how *perezhivanie* as P2 together with other concepts might create a model of studying the real-life situations or create a special experimental design for studying the role of environment in the development of children – how environment influences development, and to think about 'what do we mean by social factors which influences it', for example.

We all are in a certain environment all the time. But there is something which is refracted and something which is not. And only those factors which are refracted throughout *perezhivanie* might influence our development – or might not. What does it actually mean? If you put the child into the best social environment, there is no guarantee that the child will develop. The development is socially constructed, this is true, but this does not mean that the social environment automatically generates the development! According to Vygotsky, the social environment is a source of development, so for this, my task as a researcher is just to create a social environment for the child, support for the environment and that is it. Different children in the same environment refract different aspects of this environment, and therefore their development trajectories are different. In other words, the social environment is the source, yes! But this has nothing to do with social determinism. The social environment does not automatically determine the development entirely. If you put somebody under the water, this somebody will be wet; but this does not mean that the child will develop if you put the child into the social environment. No! that is why Vygotsky says the social environment is the *source* of development. What does that mean? It means that the river, for example, is the source of water only when somebody comes and starts to drink from this river. The social environment begins to play as a source of development when the child begins to interact within this or that environment actively. Vygotsky says that the child begins to 'scoop' (*cherpat* in Russian) from the environment during this.

And therefore, it is not correct to state that everything depends on the social environment... and the social environment is the magic key. The *perezhivanie* concept shows us that Vygotsky was not a social determinist.

Unfortunately, this idea is still not accepted by many scholars who think they work in Vygotsky's tradition. I can give you an example: I see many papers discussing the matter of 'creating conditions'. I see lots of publications, books, dissertations about creating conditions for a child's development, creating conditions, conditions, conditions... conditions. It sounds like shaman spells. Shamans cast magic spells repeating the same words so many times, expecting that if they say the word 'rain' one hundred times, the rain will come because of this.

The scientific approach does not work like this. What does it mean 'to create conditions for development'? You can create the best ever conditions for the child, but this does not mean you have created the source of development. Conditions themselves do not work automatically! That is why some people grow in very bad conditions in real life, but they are fantastic people; on the other hand, some people are growing in very good conditions, and they are not really developed. So, the concept of *perezhivanie*, if we understand it correctly, guides us, researchers, to create and analyze the child's social environment as a working source of development, which is the development social situation, but not as a simple complex set of 'developmental conditions'. So, this is a few *perezhivanie*. I think it is enough, is a very long answer, sorry.

**Ana Caroline: In a recent article, you have systematized the historical-cultural concepts into a specie of matrix, furnishing us an analytical path to the experimental/practical field – which, as Vygotsky teaches us in his texts about the Crisis of psychology, is not the neglected, but the angular rock of Psychology. Thinking about psychology as a science, could you share your thoughts about the importance of Historical-Cultural Psychology to psychology development in general?**

Professor Nikolai: That is an interesting question. So, again, we start from reality. And the reality is not optimistic, looking not good. Yes, we are proud that there is an international community of researchers doing Vygotsky's start and continuing this tradition in Russia, Scandinavia, Europe, North America, Canada, Latino America... everywhere. It looks perfect, in general. But suppose you look closely, comparing to mainstream psychology.... In that case, you know what mainstream psychology is: behaviorism, humanistic psychology, psychoanalysis, positive psychology... comparing to them, we see a small and marginalized group of researchers. Maybe 500, maybe 1000. But comparing to American Psychologic Association, for example, when they have a congress, the APA congress, you know how many people come... several thousands of people are coming. If you look at the ISCAR Congress, you'll find 350-400. There is nothing bad, just the reality, and the minority might be right; the majority might be wrong. But this is the reality. This is the reality that reflects the state of arts in this field. And you might ask, "why we Vygotskyans having such a legacy, such a great theory which helps us to do great research to understand things that other theories probably might not understand as profound as we can do... why Vygotskyan academic community is marginalized?" There are many, many reasons for that. I do not want to discuss all the reasons; otherwise, it will be again a 50-minute lecture. I will just give you several examples: we can just play a bit of this issue.

So, the play is: can you imagine one of the professors doing something in the mainstream psychology sitting here with us? And we are trying to convince him that HCT,

HC approach, HC tradition is very good, very deep, helps us understand development on a profound level, etc.... just to convince him. Can we do this? Just to kind of entertain our readers.

So, he might say, “Hey guys, you are doing Historical-Cultural research, I am very skeptical about HCT and I have at least three reasons for my skepticism. First, I tried to get into understanding what Historical-Cultural Psychology is? I started to read some Vygotskian key-books. I do not want to tell you the names, but you know all the names. But all of sudden I found that they have no agreement among them! My first wonder is, I could not understand why are there so many terminologies? Several say HCT, others say Socio-Cultural Theory, and others say Socio Cultural-Historical approach; still another Cultural-Historical Activity Theory... and when I read my question is. are they talking about the same theory or not? If it is called socio-cultural theory in one book, but in another book, it is called Historical-Cultural Theory, my question is, is this the same theory? Or are they different theories? If they are different theories, how are they related? If it is the same theory, why so different? It brings a mess! How can I get interested in HCT? How can I trust this theory if Vygotskyans themselves have no agreement among them about the correct name of the theory? It seems there is no Vygotsky’s theory, but only its contemporary interpretations.”

Second: this professor could ask, “Carol, Nikolai, I love you, I appreciate you, and I respect you a lot. But I have no idea. I tried to understand... what is the subject-matter of HCT? What is this theory about? I’ve read many books of Vygotskyans, they are discussing, they are publishing... For example, *Cambridge companion to Vygotsky; introduction to Vygotsky; Essential Vygotsky*... but when I read, I see that there is nothing about what is the subject-matter of HCT. What is this theory about?!?!

Somebody speaks that HCT is about knowledge construction. Still, if it is about knowledge construction, I do not need this theory. There are lots of interesting researchers about knowledge construction which has nothing to do with HCT... why should I change this? Someone says this theory is about ZPD. Ok, I look at ZPD on Internet, and I see that ZPD is the difference between what the child can do individually and what the child can do in cooperation with others. What great news! Everybody knows that children can do things independently, and they can do other things collaboratively. What is actually new here? Is this what HCT suggests? Every parent knows this; every teacher knows this... why do you need to raise this as a flag? Come on, guys! Ok, other Vygotskyans say ZPD is about learning. But we have a lot of learning theories! Bandura’s social learning is very clear, very good, a working theory...tell me why I should use HCT? What does this theory give to me comparing to Bandura’s theory?”

So, the professor might say to us, “Carol and Nikolai, your try to convince me to use the theory which has no clear name, which has no clear subject-matter, introducing some things that everybody knows... – do you really think that you can convince me”?

Of course, we can answer this professor that Vygotsky’s theory’s name is “Historical-Cultural Theory” (and this is the name Vygotsky himself used). Moreover, we can say to this professor that HCT has clear subject-matter, which is the process of development of higher psychological functions (and this is how Vygotsky himself identified this). But this does not help to convince him...

For example, this professor might ask, “Tell me, how HCT understands higher psychological functions? This is the term which comes from 19 Century, from Wilhelm

Wundt. What is the difference in understanding higher psychological functions in Wundt's theory and Vygotsky's theory?" He might continue and say something like, "When I read Vygotskyans, I see they say that higher psychological functions are the continuation and the transformation of the elementary lower psychological functions. Come on! It contradicts the contemporary research in neuropsychology! There are thousands of researches showing that higher functions cannot develop and become higher psychological functions. But Vygotskyans are still repeating all these ideas that higher psychological functions are built on elementary functions and that the elementary functions transform into higher psychological functions. That is absolutely outdated! So, Vygotsky's theory is wrong as it does not correspond to contemporary research, and after that, you Carol and Nikolai are trying to convince me to use that?! No, I do not want!"

In other words, what I want to say by this imaginary discussion with this professor is that there is Vygotsky, and there are Vygotskyans. What we cannot find in the texts of Vygotskyans, we can find in Vygotsky's texts. For example, Vygotsky clearly stated that higher psychological functions are not the results of the development of the lower functions, and even more, he explained why!

You can ask then why Vygotskian still repeats the opposite? I do not know. Their representation of HCT is probably based on the picture that appeared in the late 70s when only several original Vygotsky's works were published in a very unsystematic way.

At the same time, the common opinion was that Vygotsky did not create the wholistic theory, the systematic theory and HCT does not exist as a theory, but as several interesting ideas.

However, now we have a different situation. I call this "a new reality with Vygotsky's legacy". The last 30 years were when more and more Vygotsky's texts, unknown previously even for Russian researchers, are published. This helps to see that HCT was a theory, a wholistic theory, although Vygotsky had no time to publish it in a separate book. Thus, there is a possibility now to reconstruct HCT in its completeness as a wholistic theory. And here I come to answer your question. HCT contributes to general psychology, to the psychology world, in several directions.

Firstly, it is the theory that takes the process of development as the subject-matter. In other words, HCT is about the process of psychological development, the development of higher psychological functions. Yes, there are other theories of psychological development, for example, the theory of Piaget. But the difference is that HCT understands psychological development as a *complex dialectical process* that follows the dialectical understanding of development from the great German philosopher G. Hegel. Therefore, HCT is not to *describe* the development, but to *explain* the development and understand the development to change the social and educational practices!

Secondly, for this task, psychology needs a special type of theory (as Vygotsky said, "intermediary theory") which, on one side, includes psychological concepts, laws and principles, and to remain the psychological theory, but at the same time can discover the universal dialectics of development, dialectical laws of development and explain how they manifest themselves concerning psychological development. And HCT is this type of theory.

Thirdly, HCT is the theory, the system of theoretical concepts, laws and principles which are interrelated and create a theoretical system. This is what Vygotsky did, and this is about what his contribution is.

Fourthly: like any other scientific theory, HCT is based on the objectively existing laws that define the nature of the theory's subject-matter. Like laws of physics (Newton and Einstein) and laws of biological evolution (Darwin), which exist objectively, Vygotsky discovered objectively existing psychological laws – they are the laws of higher psychological functions development. He introduced the solution to the most fundamental problem of psychology. What is this problem? From a psychological perspective, we all are different – in our thinking, emotions, subjective characteristics, memory, imagination, etc. All psychological processes are subjective. But science cannot be subjective! So, does this mean that psychology is impossible as a scientific discipline? Vygotsky's answer was a sort of a revolution – yes, our psychological processes are subjective. Still, instead of finding similarities or differences between them (what is extremely popular in contemporary psychology), we need to change the focus. Our consciousness is absolutely subjective, but every psychological function we have is a result of the development process. And this process of development has objective laws; it goes according to the objective laws. And if we understand these laws, we then can explain why we have our subjective system of psychological functions. HCT discovered several objective laws of psychological development – they are universal laws, work with all and every higher psychological function, with all human beings, in all cultural backgrounds. They worked centuries ago and will work in the future. I can give you an example. All leaves on a tree are different. You cannot find two equal leaves on the tree. In this sense, every leaf is unique. But they all are unique products, the results of the objective botanic laws according to which the whole tree grows. This is just an illustration, so please do not take this directly.

And finally, one more contribution is the introducing of a new fundamental principle to psychology. Traditional psychology is based on the principle of reflection (known as S-R). HCT introduces the principle of refraction (related to *perezhivanie*) – everything in psychical life is not reflected but refracted through the prism of *perezhivanie*.

You might ask, “what about cultural tools and mediation, or about the social construction of mind?”. The things that are considered the main contribution of Vygotsky and HCT. My answer is this, “these ideas were known long before Vygotsky!”. This is not what makes HCT unique. What makes it unique is that these ideas were reconceptualized within the Historical-Cultural Theory. To understand them, we need to relate them to what I have discussed earlier as four main contributions of HCT. Taking without these relations, they are doomed to remain superficial and weak.

What I tried to do in the paper you are speaking about in your question is my first attempt to present HCT systematically. I am trying to do this. You and my colleagues are also at the beginning of the process... we are trying to return, re-incarnate, re-build, and bring life back to the original Vygotsky's profound ideas, which were lost, misunderstood, and misinterpreted in many cases.

So, summarizing: the Historical-Cultural Theory and Methodology has considerable potential. But the problem is that the deepness of this approach was lost. Nobody did it specially. There are no evil people who are just doing this. There are many many reasons for that. Historical reasons, academic, even political reasons. I don't want to say that

somebody is guilty about that. But the problem is that nobody is guilty, but we all are victims. And to explore this potential, to show how using HCT and methodology, we can change the system, social practice, change the educational systems, do high-quality research, understand the process of child and adult development deeper and better than other theories. We cannot do this without a reincarnation, without coming back to the roots and a practical understanding that was lost, misunderstood... that was misinterpreted. Of course, HCT needs improvement. But I cannot improve things that are misunderstood. It is the wrong way of improving. I can improve things that I understand correctly. Then I can improve. If I do not understand, my improvements will lead to nothing. I can then only improve my misunderstanding. HCT is not a dead theory. It is not hidden somewhere in the history of psychology. It was just a victim of misreading, misunderstanding, misinterpretation... and now, at the moment, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we have all available sources, all Vygotsky's key-works are now available. We do not need to follow very narrow interpretations based on the minimal number of resources created in the 70s.

Now we have much more publications, resources, sources of Vygotsky. And we can reconstruct the whole theory. Now we can do this. And we have so many challenges in life: we have societal changes, we have cultural diversity, we have many problems, tensions, conflicts on the political and social-economical, cultural, educational things. And HCT, HC research might contribute to resolving these problems, making practical outcomes to support people in difficult life situations, in crisis, in many things. For example, people who have developmental delays, children, special needs, a lot of things... and because of this, the emphasis on culture is now becoming on the agenda. Now we understand more and more how important cultural diversity is! And the only theory that responds to cultural diversity, explaining the historical-cultural development in its importance, is the Historical-Cultural Theory. It is a requirement of life. Life requires this! How strong, how powerful it might be to help us – not only to do our research but also to contribute to society's changes in the future. So, the time for HCT is coming now! (laughs) Vygotsky was so much ahead of his time. He predicted all these problems! Almost 100 years ago... but now the time is coming, and I hope the Vygotskyans will understand that now the time is coming, and the first thing we should do is just to come back to the roots to understand what this theory is about. This is the task.

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