Vygotsky's

developmental and educational psychology

Peter E. Langford

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Vygotsky's Developmental and Educational Psychology

Lev Vygotsky (1896–1934) was one of the most significant and influential psychologists of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, true appreciation of his theories has been hindered by a lack of understanding of the background to his thought.

Vygotsky's Developmental and Educational Psychology aims to demonstrate how we can come to a new and original understanding of Vygotsky's theories through knowledge of their cultural, philosophical and historical context. Beginning with the main philosophical influences of Marxist and Hegelian thought, this book leads the reader through Vygotsky's life and the development of his thought. Central areas covered include:

- The child
- Motivation and cognition
- The relevance of Vygotsky's theories to current research in developmental psychology.

This comprehensive survey of Vygotsky's thought will prove an invaluable resource for those studying developmental psychology or education.

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Contents

List of figures vii
Acknowledgements ix

1 Introduction 1

PART I
The theory 9

2 Life and early work 11
3 Biological and historical development, 1928–31 27
4 The child, 1928–31 43
5 Biological and historical development, 1932–34 81
6 The child, 1932–34 89

PART II
Application and interpretation 121

7 Vygotsky and education 123
8 Interpretations 149

PART III
Origins 155

9 Vygotsky's sources 157
10 Method 165

PART IV
Prospects and problems 175

11 Supportive and neutral empirical findings 177

12 Empirical problems 205

13 Extensions and comparisons 223

PART V
Conclusions 243

14 Conclusions 245

References 253
Author index 289
Subject index 295

List of figures

4.1	The four levels	44
4.2	Formation of levels from functions, third period	46
4.3	Parallelogram of memory development	74
6.1	Formation of levels from functions, last period	90
6.2	Venn diagram for intersecting sets a and b	100
6.3	Spontaneous versus nonspontaneous development	115

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1 Introduction

> The reaction on labour and speech of the development of the brain and its attendant senses, of the increasing clarity of consciousness, power of abstraction and of conclusion, gave both labour and speech an ever-renewed impulse to further development. This development did not reach its conclusion when man finally became distinct from the ape, but on the whole made further powerful progress, its degree and direction varying among different peoples and at different times, and here and there even being interrupted by local or temporary regression.
>
> (Engels, 1896)

This book is about L. S. Vygotsky, who, with Pavlov, was the most famous and influential Russian, or, strictly, Byelorussian, psychologist of the twentieth century. His influence has also tended to increase in the last 25 years, even though he died in 1934. However, introducing him is notoriously difficult, because there are a number of conflicting views about what his message was, as well as about what its merits were. This introduction outlines my interpretation of Vygotsky. A review of some other approaches to him is given in Chapter 8.

It was central to Vygotsky's work that he began from principles that he found in Marx to build a form of Marxist psychology. Today, for many in the West and elsewhere, this may lead to the conclusion that he built on foundations of sand and the whole edifice is probably both unstable and undesirable. However, Vygotsky built on some of Marx's principles, not all of them. So, in thinking about Vygotsky's Marxism, we need to think of some modified and extended aspects of Marxism, not about classical Marxism as a whole. Some of these are also aspects that Marxism has in common with some versions of the liberal philosophy of history (see Chapter 14).

Vygotsky: an interpretation

Vygotsky's development went through several periods. During 1918–20, he was committed to what was then called reflexology, in the Soviet Union.

This was similar to Western behaviourism, in that it argued that all human behaviour can be reduced to conditioned reflexes, but differed in giving attention to the physiology of such reflexes, as well as to behaviour. For the entire period 1921–27, he was engaged in moving away from this outlook, which proved a difficult task. Nearly all those who had, like him, set out to build a Marxist psychology in the Soviet Union, in this period, were committed to reflexology (most significantly Bekhterev, 1921, 1926a, 1926b) or to halfway-house versions, lying between it and Vygotsky's last ideas. A good example of the latter was Kornilov, the head of the key Moscow Institute of Psychology from 1924 to 1930, under whom Vygotsky worked in that period. This atmosphere seems to have slowed his move away from reflexology.

Vygotsky became a Marxist, in a general sense, shortly after the end of the First World War, but it was not until after 1920 that he began to think that Marxists should develop a special kind of psychology. From around 1928, he adopted several ideas about the construction of a Marxist psychology that marked a radical break with his previous thinking on the topic. He took from Marx and Engels two main items: Their theory that the historical development of the individual is determined by their role in the historical development of production; and the challenge they posed to somehow connect the historical development of the individual with the development of the child (a challenge made explicit by Engels, 1886).

Vygotsky assumes that there are developmental tasks that exist in both the development of the species and individual development, but that these are met in different ways. For this reason we can talk about an underlying map of development that applies to both history and the individual. This is primarily a map of the individual as they exist inside a social system, not the asocial individual who appears, for instance, in Piaget's approach to cognitive development.

The states of the developing social system are determined by three dimensions. The first is the levels of activity, that is to say the use of tools and practice, the social relations of work, signs and consciousness and the self. Signs here means anything that can communicate meaning, such as gestures, speech or writing. The first two of these levels show little consciousness, while as we move from these to the last, consciousness increases. The next dimension is motivation; the third is the relation between the inner and the outer, the main example of which is the relation between the inner and outer selves. The primary dimensions of developmental advance are the first two.

Each of the levels of activity contains four steps, ranging from least to most developed. Tools and practice, for instance, develop from the use of tools based on the human body and designed by imagination, to the scientific construction of machines based on abstract scientific concepts, with two steps in between these extremes. The development of motivation contains five steps. Four correspond to the steps in the levels, but there is an additional first step in infancy, before the levels appear, which is the appearance of the distinction between means and goals. The dimension of inner versus

outer contains only two steps, as it only applies to the last two periods of development (after 7 years of age).

In both Vygotsky's last periods (1928–31) and (1932–34), the forces that push us across this developmental map, that is the dynamic model, differ, in some areas, in history and in the child. However, for introductory purposes we can concentrate on aspects that are similar. In the period 1928–31 he stresses long-term interactions between the levels, in both historical and child development. In its early stages, development is driven forward by the use of tools and practice. After this initial period, signs and self-consciousness become the main dynamic forces (Vygotsky, 1930k, 1931b). Finally, towards the end of the period he analyses, tools, practice and signs are synthesised in advanced concepts, ending the divorce between signs and practice (Vygotsky, 1931a, Ch. 3). Now it is such concepts that provide the dynamic impetus for development.

Vygotsky justifies this model on the grounds that it is required by two aspects of development: That it is social and that it is cognitive (Vygotsky, 1930k, pp. 40–44, 1931b, pp. 60–63). His justification for thinking that development is social is that fundamentally new psychological functions and forms of thought cannot emerge from natural, innate, functions after the first periods of development, because it is only those first periods that have primarily resulted from biological evolution. There are only two kinds of evolution: biological and social. Therefore, once biological development is over in its essentials, development after that must be mainly social, although minor biological aspects persist.

He then argues that after its earliest stage production was cognitive, that is it required relatively sophisticated concepts and problem solving. Even to reproduce such a system of production we need something that can transmit this sophistication to the new generation. This must involve signs: especially speech; but also other ways of transmitting meaning, such as diagrams. Forms of social influence other than the sign, that could transmit the results of cultural development to the child, especially imitation and learning through conditioning, are not candidates, because they do not transmit a cognitive approach to problems, which is needed for production after its initial period. As the central parts of culture after that time involve such higher forms of cognition, it is only signs, which can transmit meaning, that are able to do this.

Vygotsky did not invent this argument, which was advanced earlier in outline form by Durkheim (1912) and Levy-Bruhl (1910) and in much the same form that Vygotsky did by Mead (1909, 1910). However, none of these was later viewed as a 'real', i.e. specialist, psychologist, and so much of its later influence, within both developmental and general psychology, has been through Vygotsky. In this abbreviated form the argument contains some obvious weaknesses, that Vygotsky addressed and overcame (Chapters 5, 11). The most important rival argument can be found in Marx's later writings and assumed a particularly influential form at the hands of A. N. Leont'ev (1948,

1960, 1974). Leont'ev began his career working under Vygotsky's direction, but broke from him around 1928.

This alternative says that the transmission of practice through conditioning and imitation is followed by the child's becoming conscious of this practice and this renders it cognitive. Vygotsky's reply to this is outlined in Chapter 4.

Corresponding to the above shifts in the dynamic function of the levels, we find long-term shifts in motivation. In his penultimate period, in the early stages the child's goals are biological; next, the goals of the individual are socially determined by what other people think; finally these two things are synthesised in the interests of adolescence (Vygotsky, 1931a, Ch. 1).

These two dialectical sequences, formed by the levels and motivation, are interlinked. During development after infancy, the initial point for a cycle of development comes from a new form of social relations (Vygotsky, 1931a, Ch. 3). This leads to changes in motivation, which precipitate further changes in the levels, that is in signs, self-consciousness and practice (Vygotsky, 1931a, Ch. 1). The reason that motivation can play this dynamic role is that the cognitive attainments involved in moving between steps along the levels, such as the improvements in tools and practice just mentioned, depend on the child's achieving a certain motivational distance from situations. An infant will react immediately to what is around it and this prevents it from reflecting on what it experiences. To build machines using scientific concepts requires the capacity for considerable delay of gratification on the part of the machine's designer, in order to reap the rewards of its operation, once all the thought, planning and effort needed to make it are finished.

In the period 1932–34 this dynamic model changed, although many of the fundamentals remained. He now suggests that there are stages in development that encompass both the intellect and the personality. He now talks most about the dynamics of development within stages, rather than about long-term dynamics. The dynamics within stages are similar across all stages. Within each stage a cycle of developments moves from social relations, to stress on language and signs, to self-consciousness, then to changes in practice and the personality as a whole. Within this cycle some parts are dynamic and push the others along, while others are passive. The main dynamic forces are again signs and self-consciousness in the middle period of development (Vygotsky, 1932b, 1932d, 1933i, 1934c, Ch. 6). This sequence is similar to the one he had assumed operated on a short-term basis within the middle period of development in the earlier model.

The nature of motivation, like that of some of the levels, changes considerably from the earlier period, but its role in the dynamics of development changes little. Each cycle of development starts with a new kind of social relations. This leads immediately to changes in motivation (Vygotsky, 1933i, 1934f, 1934k), which in turn act to produce further changes in the levels. So motivation is still an additional dynamic force.

Although Vygotsky concentrates on stage dynamics in his last period, we

can piece together his late stance on longer term dynamics from scattered comments (see Chapters 5 and 6). It is similar to his earlier view, except that he now assumes the infant and the child below 7 years have both social relations and self-consciousness.

Next, we come to Vygotsky's theory of knowledge. In the West, this is often seen as the central point in theories of cognitive development, in large part because Piaget successfully urged this idea. The approach adopted here interprets Vygotsky as a dialectical realist.

The term 'realist', as used here, is short for the approach that philosophers often call moderate realism. According to moderate realism, our knowledge gradually approximates to reality through some mechanism that helps it to do so, such as feedback from direct practice. In a familiar version, if an idea works in practice it is retained, if not it is rejected; this results in the idea approximating more and more closely to reality. Vygotsky often explicitly says he was a moderate realist (Vygotsky, 1925a, Ch. 1, 1927d, Chs 1, 4, 1930a, 1930b, 1930h, 1931b, Chs 1, 2, 1931d, 1932c, 1934c, Ch. 2).

Although the antirealist philosophy of constructivism is currently more popular in Western developmental psychology than realism, realism remains popular among philosophers and in other areas of psychology. One of the common justifications for realism is that if we reject it, we reject any capacity to reflect on the foundations of society and to change them. We are climbing aboard a car with no windscreen and no steering wheel. This is not just a rhetorical flourish, as the widespread and fashionable philosophy of postmodernism says precisely this: There is no such thing as valid social understanding, as everything we think we know about society is relative, and expresses our own nature and interests, not what really is, even in an approximate way.

The term 'dialectical', as applied to Vygotsky in this context, does not just mean that he used dialectical thinking in his theory in a general way. That would be to state the obvious. It refers to a particular aspect of dialectical thinking that Vygotsky applied to the way in which knowledge develops. This is that one side of the child's thinking may predominate in the development of realistic knowledge at one point, a reverse side later on, while ultimately the two merge in a higher synthesis.

Vygotsky's theory of knowledge is most clearly expressed in his analysis of the connection between speech and thought. Thought, as he uses the term, means a system for knowing about the world that is closely connected to practice. In broad outline his view of the long-term development of speech and thought remained the same throughout the period from 1928 until 1934.

In most of the first two periods, or stages, of development, practice predominates; in most of the next three it is signs (1930k, 1931b, Ch. 6, 1934c, 1934e). To reiterate, signs here means anything that can communicate meaning, such as gestures, speech or writing. Towards the end of the fifth period of development, advanced abstract concepts predominate, which are formed

from the synthesis of practical thought and signs, including language (Vygotsky, 1931a, Ch. 3, 1933g). So the previous tendencies, emphasising first practice and then language and consciousness, are synthesised. This pattern of dialectical development, so called because it resembles a conversation, is taken from Hegel (especially Hegel, 1807, 1831).

We now need to know how the dialectic of practice and signs accomplishes the aim of knowing reality, thus being realist. For most of the first two periods, when practice is dominant, and towards the end of his five stages, when practice resumes at least an equal partnership with language, this is not a particular problem. For the most part he assumes that his readers are aware, that for many realist philosophers who stress practice, the feedback from practice corrects both the forms of thought and the particular uses made of them, bringing them into alignment with reality. This was, for instance, the view of Marx (1859, 1867, Ch, 7). At times he is more explicit (particularly in Vygotsky, 1931a, pp. 119–120), where he discusses Lenin's (1925) use of this idea favourably.

Vygotsky's view was that signs and language predominate in the acquisition of knowledge in the middle period of development. Their link with reality is mainly formed through the effect of sign use in providing the child with a means to overcome its one-sided perspectives on the world and adopt the view of a general observer, thus creating realistic knowledge (Vygotsky, 1931a, Ch. 3, 1931b, Ch. 6, 1934c, Ch. 7).

Finally, an ambiguous aspect of Vygotsky's views is the way he connects signs as the motor of development and signs as the origin of new forms of knowledge. Vygotsky, adopting what seems to be the most obvious stance, thinks that if something is most important in driving forward the knowledge system, it must be most important in the development of new forms of knowledge. So, first practice has these roles in infancy and part of early childhood, then we shift to signs and finally to advanced concepts. So, if a new kind of simple concept, meaning or advanced concept appears, it does so as a result of the action of whatever is pushing cognition forward at the time.

However, this is not the only picture we can form. The engine of development might be pushing something else forward, that is actually responsible for the development of new knowledge. So, the development of the child's speech might be powering the changes in its meanings, but it may be that this occurs through the intermediary of something else, such as the effects that speech has on the child's practice and use of tools, which in turn affect its understanding.

Although, particularly in the form suggested by A. N. Leont'ev (1982), this second interpretation of Vygotsky has been remarkably popular, it is both inherently unlikely and not what he actually says (see Chapter 8).

We should also consider one further issue. Gaining knowledge can mean not only the development of new forms of knowledge, but also the use of existing means to fill out the *content* of knowledge. However, whatever means are used to gather content must have previously emerged as new forms. In

other words, there can be no content without forms. On this level, Vygotsky thinks that the development of new forms of knowledge is the more fundamental problem. However, he only admits this in relation to the development of fundamental units of meaning, particularly those found in words. On the broader issue of the relation between the fundamental meanings and statements and rules formed from them, he generally thinks that development of the units of meaning is more fundamental. This can be confusing, because he and others often refer to this second tendency as the priority of content over form in development.

Conclusions

Vygotsky's project was based on accepting that Marx had already founded a Marxist psychology, by claiming that the development of human capacities and personality depend on the development of the productive forces and that the historical development of production takes roughly the form Marx outlined. Vygotsky proposed to complete this by, among other things:

- showing how the development of the child differs from the historical development of human characteristics
- stressing that previous investigators had often underestimated the role of signs in development

His attempts to work out the implications of these ideas and to rid himself of his earlier reflexology went through three broad stages: 1921–27, when he was still feeling his way; 1928–31, when he announced a preliminary version of his own theory; 1932–34, when he refined his earlier ideas considerably.

Part I

The theory

2 Life and early work

Vygotsky's life

Vygotsky was born into a Jewish family in 1896 and spent most of his early life in Gomel' in Byelorussia. He showed signs of considerable precocity while still at school and in his senior years took a leading role in a discussion group on philosophical, literary and other topics. He wrote a substantial and impressive study of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* during this period (Vygotsky, 1914). His favourite philosopher was then, as later, Hegel (Vygodskaya & Lifanova, 1996). After the First World War he worked at Gomel' Teachers' College from 1918 to 1920, at which time he wrote most of the book *Pedagogical psychology* (1926c). The outlook adopted is that of reflexology, particularly that of Bekhterev, which is to say that it proposes to explain all human behaviour in terms of conditioned reflexes, similar to those that Pavlov (1897) had established in dogs and Thorndike (1902, 1911) in cats and other animals.

In Pavlov's best known experiment he regularly rang a bell before dogs were fed; being fed produced salivation. After repeating this several times, the dogs salivated to the bell, even if no food were given, showing that salivation had become associated with the bell. An application of this to education is that if students regularly associate schoolwork with threats that produce fear, they will come to associate schoolwork with fear. Alternatively, if they associate schoolwork with rewards, such as praise or prizes, that produce pleasure, then they will associate schoolwork with pleasure.

This sudden change from Shakespeare and Hegel to reflexology was to be partly reversed by the mid-1920s, when his psychology once again came under literary and philosophical influences, although it had other important aspects (Vygotsky, 1925a, 1925b, 1926c). This reversal began in the period from 1921 to 1924, when Vygotsky undertook his doctoral thesis at Moscow University, on the psychology of art, while still partly based in Gomel'. Although Vygotsky had become a Marxist shortly after the end of the First World War, it was not until this period at Moscow University that he took the idea of creating a specifically Marxist psychology seriously. It was one of the aims of his thesis to contribute to this.

In 1924 he was very ill for much of the year, with the tuberculosis that would finally kill him. In the same year, Kornilov, one of the most noted Marxist psychologists in the Soviet Union at that time, was in the process of recreating the Institute of Psychology in Moscow. One of the main aims of this change was to create a focus for distinctively Marxist work in psychology, in opposition to both the idealist psychology of Chelpanov (1917, 1924, 1925, 1926) and his students and the reflexology of Bekhterev (1904, 1921, 1926a, 1926b) and Pavlov (1897, 1926), which both Kornilov and Vygotsky by this time saw as incompatible with Marxism. The official title of Kornilov's approach was 'reactology' (Kornilov, 1922, 1928), which was in contrast to the 'reflexology' of Bekhterev and Pavlov. The main difference was that, while the reflexologists assumed that stimulus and response are mainly joined by associations, reactologists made no particular assumptions about the nature of such connections. This meant they were free to assume the connections were highly complex, thus allowing them more room for the study of higher mental processes, such as thinking, than reflexology.

Vygotsky so impressed Kornilov with his papers at the Second All-Union Congress on Psychoneurology, in 1924, that he immediately invited him to take up a junior position at the Institute of Psychology (Vygotsky, 1925b, 1926a). Alexander Luria, who was to become one of Vygotsky's chief collaborators, relates that he first encountered Vygotsky at this conference and was impressed by one of his papers. At the end of the reading, he went to introduce himself to the speaker and was surprised to find that the sheets from which Vygotsky had apparently read the paper were blank. He had read the paper verbatim from memory and the sheets were just a prop (Wertsch, 1985).

Vygotsky had a near photographic memory, as well as being able to read at over 600 words a minute (Wertsch, 1985). He read so fast that he moved his eyes diagonally from the top left to the bottom right of the page, instead of moving along each line, so his eye movements would not slow his progress.

Vygotsky accepted the invitation from Kornilov and soon moved to Moscow. Once there, he initially had difficulty in finding lodgings and for a while slept on a camp bed in the basement of the Experimental Psychology Institute. This also housed the Institute's archives. Although not everyone's bedtime reading, in a short time he had read most of them.

In 1924 he also married Rosa Smekhova. Their marriage was by all accounts a happy one and Rosa is reported to have helped him to endure the stresses of the political pressures he was to face in the ensuing years (Vygodskaya & Lifanova, 1996). Although Vygotsky's habit of working an 18-hour day was the sort of thing that would nowadays be considered a recipe for disaster in marriage, she shared his ideals and was apparently willing to tolerate the sacrifice of his lack of attention in the cause. They had two children, one of whom, Gita Vygodskaya, became an educationalist and wrote an interesting biography of her father (Vygodskaya & Lifanova, 1996).

The fact that his daughter's name is Vygodskaya, and that of her father

Vygotsky, is not entirely due to the Russian feminine ending, which would produce Vygotskaya. In the early 1920s, before he became a well-known writer, Vygotsky changed his name from Vygodsky, his family name, to Vygotsky. It is possible that he did this to make his name sound less Jewish. It is perhaps not too fanciful to see in this a precursor of Vygotsky's lifelong tendency to alter words, if it would please people. In his writings, it is sometimes noticeable that he adopts the jargon favoured by currently fashionable theories, rather than terminology that would seem more natural.

The picture that Vygotsky's daughter draws of her father in the family is one of an almost perfect father, who could solve the problems of fatherhood with the same extraordinary facility and calm that he solved the problems of diagnosing children with difficulties and plumbed the theoretical problems of Marxist psychology. This may be to some extent the perception of a devoted daughter, but some of the other glimpses we have of Vygotsky the man tend in the same direction.

However, Galperin, who knew Vygotsky in the early 1930s, has given us a different picture (Haenen, 1996). This is of a man who was forever struggling to avoid a descent into insanity and whose abnormally calm and distanced external demeanour masked the struggles within. It is possible to relate this to the picture that Storr (1972) has drawn of a certain type of creative theorist who has an underlying uncertainty about the existence of the world, which is schizoid in nature. Their compulsive interest in theories about the world and its inhabitants stems from a desire to gain intellectual reassurance that the world exists to counterbalance their underlying intuitive uncertainty. Einstein is supposed to have been an example of this; and from Galperin's description, Vygotsky may have been another. The widespread view that Vygotsky was an unusually stable character may have come from the tendency for those who knew him to feel they had to conform to the image of Vygotsky the saint that grew up around him. It is hard to see why Galperin would invent his version, especially as his own views owed so much to Vygotsky and he shows no sign of personal animosity towards him.

However, if Vygotsky was defending against some inner fear, his willpower and capacity for distancing were equal to the task, as he survived almost incredible pressures in the next decade, while continuing to produce material that showed little of the strains he was under until the last months of his life.

In 1925 Vygotsky completed his doctoral thesis at the University of Moscow, entitled *The psychology of art* (1925a), and submitted it for examination. He was too sick to offer the normal oral defence of the thesis, which was waived. The thesis was not published for many years. When it was finally published in book form, in 1968, it created something of a sensation, went through a number of editions and was translated into many languages. One reason for this is that, of his book-length publications, it is the most readable, although the content is also undeniably significant.

There has been speculation as to why Vygotsky did not publish this book during his lifetime. One theory has been that he outgrew the ideas it advanced

(Joravsky, 1989). Another was that the years 1925–30 were a time of acute paper shortage, as of everything else (Joravsky, 1989). The Soviet economy was ravaged by war and civil war in the years 1914–21, then racked by the economic crises of 1923–25 and 1929–31. During the second economic crisis there was mass starvation. However, both these points need to seen within the context that Vygotsky published the substantial book *Pedagogical psychology* in 1926, which had been written several years previously and adopted a reflexological point of view, a viewpoint far more remote from his concerns in the mid-1920s than *The psychology of art*. Probably it was a combination of the difficulty in finding a publisher for a non-textbook, in the prevailing conditions, and that *The psychology of art* was no longer on Vygotsky's main line of march. From 1928 this was to be the perfection of his general theory of development and its practical implications.

In 1925 Vygotsky also began to organise the Laboratory of Psychology for Abnormal Childhood in Moscow, attached to the Institute of Psychology. This passed through a change of name and sponsor in 1929, but Vygotsky remained involved until his death. After Vygotsky recovered from his illness in 1925, he threw himself into an astounding decade of Herculean work and growing fame. In most years, he published over a dozen articles, sometimes many more, and usually one or more books as well. Soon after he arrived at the Institute, he was joined by Alexander Luria and Alexei N. Leont'ev, who to begin with were his loyal lieutenants and with Vygotsky made up the 'troika' of the Vygotsky school, as it now became. He became a celebrated lecturer, whose lectures attracted overflowing audiences. As already mentioned, he also expanded his interests to include what is now called 'abnormal' or 'clinical' psychology, but was then generally termed 'defectology' in the Soviet Union. He proved to have an unusual gift for the diagnosis of clinical cases and those with an interest would often come to Moscow to see him make diagnoses. When Vygotsky went on a trip, his students were so enthusiastic that some even wrote poems in honour of his travels.

In dealing with this period of his life, a certain misconception can creep in. This is that, as a number of Vygotsky interpreters have said or implied, Soviet Russia in the 1920s was a kind of cultural playground, in which intellectuals and artists could do their own thing, before the clampdown that Stalin instituted in 1929 (e.g. Daniels, 1993; Wertsch, 1985). Were this the case, some of Vygotsky's poses would seem capricious and even born of a personal desire to play with perspectives on his work.

The truth is, however, quite different. Soviet Russia in the 1920s was a safer place to say things that could be construed as unorthodox than Russia in, say, the 1930s; but it was still a dangerous place, in which saying or writing the wrong thing could earn dismissal from a post or exile. The decisive internal political struggle of the early 1920s was within the Central Committee of the Communist Party. This committee, at least nominally, controlled the party as a whole. It was between the majority and the Left Opposition and took place in 1923–24 (Carr, 1954; Oxley, 2001). One of the issues between them was

whether there could be minority factions within the Communist Party. A minority faction was defined as a distinct grouping, with distinct policies that did not coincide with those of the majority. The idea that there could be such factions was defeated by the majority, ably generalled by Stalin, who argued that factions led to splits. There should be only one party line, which all party members should abide by.

So, by 1924, the policy of a unified party line on political matters was reinforced. To back this up there were salutary expulsions of staff from the party newspaper *Pravda* and other institutions of those who had published material contrary to the party line. This was accompanied by the beginning of the application of Stalin's trademark tactics. These included smears against fellow party members, especially bringing against them past political affiliations, e.g. using the fact that Trotsky had been a Menshevik (i.e. a member of a socialist party opposed to the Bolsheviks); using the power of the central party apparatus to appoint party branch secretaries, thus making sure that the secretaries sent the right kind of delegates to conferences, especially those of the Central Committee; and the abuse of the Lenin levy. This last was a special wave of entry to the party in 1924, supposedly to commemorate Lenin's death in 1923. In fact, the accompanying purge of the party was used to disproportionately purge oppositionists and the levy took in mainly the young and uneducated, who were most likely to prove amenable to 'education'.

To fill out this picture, and to show the extent to which desperation ruled on all sides, it is worth mentioning Trotsky's tactics, prior to his joining and on behalf of the Left Opposition, in the struggle of 1923. These were in some ways almost as bad as those of the Stalinists. His paper on the party situation of 1923, which was instrumental in precipitating the crisis, was a call for youth to overthrow the now worn out and conservative old guard and take control with radical new policies. This was said to be necessary due to the situation in Russia at the time: The civil war was only recently over; the economy lay in ruins; starvation was rife; further foreign intervention threatened.

Whatever Trotsky's actual motives for this intervention, as far as the majority was concerned his combination of naivety and guile beggared belief. To think that the inexperience of youth would lead them out of the crisis, rather than into an even worse one, was incredible. To think that Trotsky lacked the ulterior motive of wishing to lead this new party of teenage communists by the nose was impossible. To imagine that the majority of the party, older and more experienced, should be put aside in favour of inexperienced youth, who lacked the years of painful struggle many had undergone, was more than either incredible or impossible: It deserved vigorous rejection.

After 1923 the party progressively increased its grip on areas of intellectual life that had thus far remained outside its influence. This was of direct concern for Vygotsky, who, although he became a Marxist shortly after the revolution of 1917, remained for his entire life outside the Communist Party. The

probable reason for this was that, like a number of other notable Soviet Marxist intellectuals, he wanted both to retain a degree of independence and to remain clear of the heavy weight of political work that fell on the party member. The intellectual of this kind who most resembled Vygotsky, both in status and outlook, was A. Deborin, an influential Soviet philosopher, who edited the party's chief theoretical organ, *Under the banner of Marxism*, from 1925 to 1930. He was also, like Vygotsky, preoccupied with the connection between Hegel and Marx (Deborin, 1909, 1923, 1929). Both men had their wings seriously clipped in the repression of 1930, although both found that by minor adaptation and, in the case of Deborin, public self-criticism, they escaped the worst effects of the repression. The difference between them was that, while suppression of some of Deborin's minor writings occurred in 1930, this was the extent of his suppression. The suppression of Vygotsky began later in 1935–36, but this included his major published work *Thinking and speech* (1934c) and prevented the publication of his many other unpublished late writings, most notably the articles eventually collected in *Problems of child development* (Vygotsky, 1960).

The first significant organisation to feel the grip of the party was Protekult, which was a state-funded organisation for the promotion of proletarian education and culture. Two of the leading Soviet intellectuals of the time, Bogdanov and Lunacharsky, were in the leadership of Protekult in the early 1920s. They were noted for their heterodox views, advocating a version of futurism in which the socialist future would involve a radical break with the culture and education of the past (Sochor, 1988). This was at variance with the views of orthodox Marxists such as Lenin (1921) and Trotsky (1924), who thought socialist culture should build on the progressive features of the past, not discard them. The organisation was already under heavy attack by the party leaders by 1925, for deviations from the party line, and in that year was substantially reduced, but allowed to continue in rump form until the early 1930s (Carr & Davies, 1969–78, Vol. 1). So, in the interval 1925–28 the sword of Damocles hanging over the educational and cultural system was clearly visible. It was also visibly descending.

It was not only those who opposed Stalin from the left who were frightened by the time the year 1925 arrived. Zinoviev had been Lenin's personal secretary and one of the highest profile leaders of the 1917 revolution. From 1923 to 1927 he was head of the Communist International. Kamenev was a long-standing member of the Central Committee and Politburo and a key figure in the party.

But by 1925 both Zinoviev and Kamenev, who were not Left Oppositionists, announced themselves heartily fed up with suppressing their real opinions (Serge, 1968, p. 154). By the start of 1927 Zinoviev and his followers only remained within the party by recanting their real views, so as to be ready to seize back control from the Stalinists when the inevitable crisis to which current policies were leading took place (Serge, 1968, p. 154; Trotsky, 1934). But this was to little avail, as, by the end of 1927, he had been expelled from

the party. Kamenev stayed on in much the same spirit during 1927, only to be expelled in the following year. Both men were allowed back into the party in 1929, following greater efforts to give lip service to Stalin and his policies, only to be expelled again in 1932, when they could hold their peace no more.

By 1928 things had gone so far that Trotsky and a number of other prominent party members had been exiled. In the same year a group of Vygotsky's followers, centred on A. N. Leont'ev, began moving from Moscow and the Institute of Psychology to Kharkhov in Ukraine, reasoning that they would be safer there than in the capital, where ideological sensitivities and deviations from the party line were likely to be more keenly felt and more severely dealt with (Joravsky, 1989). At the same time, Vygotsky's other chief lieutenant, Luria, took the extraordinary step of leaving his psychological research with Vygotsky in Moscow to enrol in a medical degree, apparently on the theory that medicine offered fewer ideological sensitivities than psychology (Graham, 1993). This was extraordinary, as Luria had already shown himself to be among the most promising of the younger generation of Soviet psychologists. He later back-pedalled from this extreme action by leading expeditions, planned by Vygotsky, to undertake psychological research in Soviet Central Asia in 1930–31 (Cole, 1996). These also, however, removed him from the eye of the storm.

These actions show the considerable fear that by 1928 already gripped those who might be in the firing line, although Vygotsky remained calmer and stayed on at the Institute of Psychology in Moscow. These events, ironically, took place at about the same time as the publication of Vygotsky (1928h), in which he announces his first version of his own theory of psychological development, inaugurating what I will call the third period of his development (1928–31). From this time until his final period, in which he revamped the earlier theory (1932–34), he continued working in Moscow, in the epicentre of a repression that assumed its full force in 1930.

In 1929 Stalin moved to decisively gain control of the Communist Party, by further purging the old guard and bringing in naive outsiders. He set 1930 as the year he would, among other things, take decisive ideological control of publications and cultural institutions that belonged to the state but that up to that time had not been fully controlled by it. Prior to that date, they had been under the immediate control of a mixture of party members and nonparty Marxists, such as Vygotsky and Deborin. As long as they stayed clear of controversy on current political issues, avoided banned opinions and advanced only theory of a reasonably orthodox kind, the nonparty Marxists were seen to be fulfilling a useful function. But for Stalin this was finally not enough. The nonaligned Marxists who studied, say, palaeontology or zoology comprised a dangerous reservoir of potential oppositionists. They could be Zinovievists or Trotskyites. They could also be wasting public funds on work with no immediate practical utility. So now there was, at least in theory, a party line in palaeontology, zoology and psychology.

This was thought to be useful in two ways. Anyone who refused to swallow

the party line in their discipline was obviously unreliable and so should be expelled from their position; unless they were important, in which case some more thoroughgoing solution, such as exile, should be sought. Further, it made theories at least apparently useful and thus of benefit to the nation.

Although this was the implied doctrine, it was applied quite capriciously. There was no actual party line in psychology until the theories of Pavlov were declared such from 1949–54 (Joravsky, 1961, 1989). As far as psychology was concerned, it was left to opportunist groups of, usually, young psychologists, to set their sights on the alleged failings of one or more established workers and tear them down. So the party line only existed as a negative doctrine of what was not Marxist. Even this was not written down and could be expanded and contracted by enterprising groups hoping to profit from the downfall of others.

Although Vygotsky was under investigation from 1930, the investigation was painfully slow and had not been completed at the time of his death. In addition, his minder at the Institute of Psychology, whom he was given in 1930 when the Institute was investigated, V. N. Kolbanoskii, soon realised he was in the presence of genius and changed sides, in large measure accounting for Vygotsky's relatively charmed life from 1930 to 1934.

The years 1927–31 saw the publication in serialised parts of two books by Vygotsky, designed for use as a correspondence course: *Pedology of the school age* (1928g) and *Pedology of the adolescent* (1931a). The second of these contains much valuable material on the theory he developed in the period 1928–31. After 1928, it soon became clear that the movement of the group led by A. N. Leont'ev to Karkhov involved a theoretical split with Vygotsky's approach, as well as just a retreat to the safety of the provinces, with most of those going siding with A. N. Leont'ev. One notable exception was Lydia Bozhovich, who was to rank among the most important Soviet researchers in the Vygotskyan tradition. In response, Vygotsky wrote one of his most important texts: *History of the development of higher mental functions* (1931b). We can see the gulf opening between Vygotsky and A. N. Leont'ev by comparing their comments on an experiment by A. N. Leont'ev (1931) on the mediation of attention. Leont'ev (1931) considers the mediating aids given to the children to assist attention in the experiment (coloured cards) to be nonlanguage like, which is the obvious stance; but Vygotsky (1931b, 1931g) describes them as language like, which is in accord with his own theory. In his work, A. N. Leont'ev was to stress learning from direct practical experience, while Vygotsky continued to stress the influence of signs.

Vygotsky's (1931b) book more or less fully defined his position at the time on the matters dealt with. Two of his most important previous books had gone unpublished, namely *The psychology of art* (1926c) and *The historical meaning of the crisis in psychology* (1927c). Like these, his programmatic statement of 1931 went long unpublished, first appearing in radically abridged form in 1960 and in its full form in 1984. It appears that the main reason Vygotsky declined to publish it was that he believed it would be used to prove

his ideological heterodoxy and thus to suppress his present and future work entirely (Joravsky, 1989).

In the years from 1928 to his death in 1934, Vygotsky was also under pressure from criticisms by his colleagues that his approach was nonMarxist. These were different from the kinds of criticism that young opportunists aimed at other psychologists (such as Kornilov), in that they were more measured and reasoned. In addition to A. N. Leont'ev, the most significant of the other critics was Sergei Rubinshtein (1934, 1935; Payne, 1968). After the Second World War, Leont'ev and Rubinshtein were to vie for control of Soviet psychology, gaining and losing it alternately.

A. N. Leont'ev and Rubinshtein agreed that Vygotsky put too much emphasis on language in the development of the child (A. N. Leont'ev, 1931, 1948; Rubinshtein, 1934, 1935, 1946, 1959). They thought that a Marxist psychology would stress the direct psychological effect of the use of tools in practice. They found this view in Marx's pronouncements on the subject (Marx, 1846a, 1859, Preface, 1867, Ch. 7, 1872, Afterword). Although Vygotsky agreed that tools are a significant element in development, they objected to his idea that throughout much of development dynamic psychological influence is exerted downwards from language and signs to practice.

Although Vygotsky had opposed Marx on this subject in the years before 1929, in that year there was a determination to bring intellectuals into line with party thinking. On many issues this thinking was less Marxist than Vygotsky. However, Vygotsky had chosen to amend Marx on a point where the politics of the hour decreed Marx had been right. The main reason was probably that in 1929–33 Stalin pursued an ultra-left political rhetoric and policy that glorified manual labour and decried the work of the mental worker. In the hysterical atmosphere that prevailed, theories like those of Rubinshtein and A. N. Leont'ev that praised manual labour and direct physical practice were more likely to be smiled on than one like Vygotsky's that praised words.

Vygotsky's leadership at the Psychological Institute in the 1920s was informal and Kornilov remained its titular head until 1930. It was no doubt for this reason that the main weight of repression in 1930 fell on Kornilov. It was his views rather than those of Vygotsky that were proscribed and he was removed from his post. However, although Vygotsky's minder, Kolbanoskii, soon developed an unanticipated attraction to Vygotsky's doctrines, this was not enough to prevent a gradual reduction in his activities there. Kolbanoskii, nonetheless, continued his support for Vygotsky beyond the grave by sponsoring the publication of one of his most important books, *Thinking and speech*, in 1934 (Joravsky, 1989). Without this rather selfless sponsorship, it is doubtful that this would have been published at all until the Khrushchev thaw of the 1950s.

Stalin's political and cultural policies in the period 1929–33 had lurched to the left, which had probably magnified distaste for Vygotsky's views, as Stalin's propaganda had involved the glorification of manual labour. There

was a further change in the line in 1933, following the accession of Hitler to power in Germany. Stalin realised, too late, that this had been materially assisted by the previous ultra-left policy, under which the large German Communist Party had, on Soviet insistence, refused to form an alliance with the German Social Democrats against Hitler. After this, in 1934, Vygotsky was regarded with more favour and was even offered another job, but his health would not sustain him for much longer (Joravsky, 1989).

Between 1930 and 1934 Vygotsky remained based in Moscow, travelling extensively to give lectures, writing furiously, working 20-hour days, smoking as much as ever and increasingly disturbed at the falling away of his erstwhile disciples. He met two fellow geniuses: Kurt Lewin, the famous German psychologist, who was by that time a refugee from Hitler; and the Russian film director Sergei Eisenstein, often considered the greatest, certainly the most influential, of all film directors. Vygotsky had long animated discussions with Lewin, the traces of which can be found in his writings from the period. To Eisenstein we owe a two-sentence description of Vygotsky, which ends: 'From under this strange haircut peered the eyes of one of the most brilliant psychologists of our time, who saw the world with celestial clarity.'

Vygotsky died of tuberculosis on 11 June 1934 at a sanatorium in Moscow. His last words were 'It is enough', presumably meaning, among other things, that his life's work in psychology had turned out to be enough. Despite the grim atmosphere around him and despite the fact that only part of his final theoretical contribution had been published or had any imminent prospect of being so, he could still think this. This was an example of that calm self-confidence he so often displayed: One day his work would be made known and understood because of its significance. Whatever the truth of Galperin's claim that underneath his calm and distance Vygotsky maintained only a tenuous grip on sanity, here, as on many previous occasions, it was the calm that prevailed.

From 1930 to 1936 an investigation of his writings was carried out, with a view to suppression if necessary. Finally, in 1935 and 1936, they were declared heterodox and the book *Thinking and speech*, his most significant publication, suppressed. This did not mean, as is sometimes said, that he became an unperson whose name could not be mentioned (e.g. Joravsky, 1989). Paragraph-length asides about him were quite common in the Soviet psychological literature of the 1930s and 1940s (e.g. Leont'ev, 1948; Rubinshtein, 1935, 1946). But his books were withdrawn from library shelves and there could be no new publications or republications. In addition, it was expected that references to him would condemn at least some of what had been condemned in him, even though commentators were at liberty to say positive things about his work. Such comments were often of a kind that most other psychologists would have been flattered to receive, paying tribute to the foundational role of Vygotsky in Soviet psychology. However, they then usually go on to say how grossly mistaken he was on key issues and how far Soviet psychology had travelled beyond him.

The nature of two of the charges that were brought against Vygotsky, resulting in the suppression of his writings until 1954, are illuminating (Graham, 1993). First, in 1935, it was decided that Vygotsky had defied party policy towards the peasantry by asserting their cultural level was lower than that of the cities. It seems strange that this policy, which began in the period 1929–33, should be so solicitous of the feelings of the peasantry, when that was a period when the peasants were being subjected to forced appropriation of their produce and forced collectivisation of their land, largely against their will. But political correctness in speech and writing is often, as in this case, accompanied by compulsion and worse in practice.

Second, in 1936 the Central Committee passed a decree banning 'pedology', because some of its practitioners asserted such things as that educational potential is limited by genetic potential (as Vygotsky did in Vygotsky, 1931d, 1931f, 1934e). Pedology was an international movement in the 1920s and 1930s that applied psychology to education.

The implication, in both cases, is that science should be replaced by politics and politics is not about the truth but about what it is politically expedient to say. In other words, Vygotsky was, in an all too real sense, a victim of political correctness.

That both the condemned propositions can be found in the works of Marx and Engels seems not to have deterred the inquisitors one whit. If we follow their line of reasoning, Marx's and Engels's *Communist manifesto* (1848) would have been suppressed, as it says that part of the progressive role of capitalism was to end 'rural idiocy'. Marx's *Critique of the Gotha programme* (1875) would have been dealt with likewise, as in Part 1, Section 3, it clearly says that people are mentally unequal due to natural inheritance. This provides an illustration of how far from orthodox Marxism and the writings of Marx the Soviet regime had progressed by the 1930s.

After the death of Stalin, in 1953, Vygotsky was no longer a banned author. However, this only led immediately to the republication of a relatively small selection of his works in 1956 and 1960, although this did include four of the most significant of the late works. *Thinking and speech* was republished as part of a 1956 volume called *Collected psychological studies*, which also included 'The problem of mental retardation' (1935e); the collection of articles *Problems of child development* appeared in 1960, with the collection *Mental development of children in the process of teaching* included in the same volume. This was followed by *The psychology of art* in 1968 and a number of papers in edited collections and journals. It was not, however, until the *Collected works* in Russian in 1982–84 that the full scope of his writings became apparent, even to the Russian public. It had been apparent somewhat earlier to the leading Soviet commentators, when the *Collected works* were begun around 1972, as most of them were on the editorial board or otherwise connected with the publication. Some, like D. B. Elkonin and L. Bozhovich, had accessed them even earlier (Bozhovich, 1968; Elkonin, 1971).

The publication of the *Collected works* and of the other works published