

GOLDEN PAGES

Lev Vygotsky

125th anniversary



Born: Nov 17, 1896 in Orsha, Russian Empire

Died: June 11, 1934 (at age 37) in Moscow, USSR

Nationality: Russian

Fields: Psychology

Famous For: Founder of cultural-historical psychology

Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934) was a Belorussian psychologist. He led what came to be known as the Vygotsky Circle and founded a theory of development generally known as cultural-historical psychology. Vygotsky suggested a theory relating to children's higher cognitive functions, believing that practical action in the social environment facilitated the emergence of reasoning skills.

He initially believed that reasoning development was related to the child's surrounding culture, but later changed his views. His work was controversial in the early Soviet Union and fell out of favor in the West, only to be reconsidered in the 21st century.

Childhood and Early Years

Vygotsky was born into a middle-class family in Orsha, a town in what was then the Russian Empire. He studied in the nearby town of Gomel before moving to Moscow in 1913 to enroll at the State University, something aided by the quota of three percent Jewish students that the university maintained.

He studied law, but he also attended unofficial lectures in the arts, a subject in which he was initially more interested. After graduating in 1917, Vygotsky went back to Gomel, remaining there after the revolution that fall. Almost nothing is known of his life for two years, until Communist forces captured the town in 1919. For several years, Vygotsky was a Bolshevik representative.

Vygotsky's Early Career

He traveled to Leningrad in 1924 for the All-Russian Psychoneurological Congress, shortly afterward accepting the invitation of a fellowship at Moscow's Psychological Institute. By now, he was married and he wrote a dissertation on the psychology of art in 1925 – although it was not published for 40 years. Later that year he visited London, which was the only time he traveled overseas. Shortly afterward, he fell ill with

tuberculosis and was expected to die. Although he survived, he remained in poor health for a year and a half thereafter, being granted his scholarly degree in absentia as a result.

Later Career

Upon leaving the hospital, Vygotsky undertook both methodological and theoretical work on psychology, but never got beyond writing a manuscript for a book before his work was stopped in 1927. This book was almost lost until 1982, when it was published with a number of editorial interferences and presented as a major work.

In it, Vygotsky supported the idea of a general theory of psychology, bringing together naturalist and Marxist strands of opinion. Nevertheless, he was critical of those who thought that a Marxist psychology could be found simply by reading the works of Karl Marx. Instead, he said that the way forward was to develop a methodology in tune with the spirit of Marxism.

Toward the end of the 1920s, Vygotsky's research concentrated on logical memory and higher cognitive functions, in particular their early development. At this time, he attracted a number of students who would go on to be significant figures in their own right, such as Alexei Leontiev.

Later Years and Death

Vygotsky taught these students that one should approach their subject in three ways: instrumental, developmental, and cultural-historical. However, by the early 1930s, he had fallen into personal crisis thanks to intense self-criticism, and he never quite pulled himself out of this decline. He was only beginning to sketch out a new theory of consciousness when on June 11, 1934, he passed away at the age of 37 when a recurrence of his tuberculosis brought about his death in Moscow.

Facts about Lev Vygotsky

Facts about Lev Vygotsky 1: developmental psychology

The theory of Vygotsky was focused more on the development psychology. The practical activity in the social environment will contribute the higher cognitive function in the children because they begin to see reasoning.

Facts about Lev Vygotsky 2: the development of reasoning

The signs and symbols were considered as media for the development of reasoning on children.

Facts about Lev Vygotsky 3: the development of children

The major source of development for children in term of cognitive, language, physical, social and emotion was from play.

Facts about Lev Vygotsky 4: Vygotsky in Soviet Union

In Soviet Union, the ideas of Vygotsky were considered as controversial. However, people began to notice his zone of proximal development, which became a key element of developmental and educational psychology.

Facts about Lev Vygotsky 5: The top psychologist

Vygotsky took the 83th place in the list of top psychologist in 20th century published in 2002 by A Review of General Psychology study.

Facts about Lev Vygotsky 6: The Russian psychologist

In the list 100 list of the top psychologist, there were only three Russian psychologists. Vygotsky took the last or third spot of the Russian psychologists.

Facts about Lev Vygotsky 7: The birthplace

The birthplace of Vygotsky was located in Orsha town, Belarus. It was the former region in Russian Empire. He received the private and public education in Gomel, Belarus where he was raised there. His father worked as a banker.

Facts about Lev Vygotsky 8: the family background

Vygotsky was from the middle class Jewish family. Moscow University accepted Vygotsky because he won a Jewish lottery.

Facts about Lev Vygotsky 9: the interest of Vygotsky

Vygotsky agreed to attend the Medical School in Moscow University because of his parents. Actually he was interested with social sciences and humanities.

Facts about Lev Vygotsky 10: law school

He transferred to law school after the first semester of attending the Medical School. He became a staff scientist at the Psychological Institute at the early years of his career. In 1925, he finished his dissertation with the title “The Psychology of Art”.