

The Vygotsky Reader

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Preface

Editing an annotated reader of a sample of Vygotsky's writings is a time-consuming and complicated endeavour and we now well understand why it had not been tried before. The basic problem we had to solve was that Vygotsky virtually never referred to authors in the way that has now become common usage in academic circles: by giving the exact source, date of publication, page number, etc. As a consequence, we spent our time in many libraries reading countless potentially relevant books written by Vygotsky's predecessors and contemporaries and looking for the passages his cryptic references might refer to. Each reference successfully located in this way should be seen against the background of many initial failures. However, the publications we were forced to read were often extremely valuable in their own right and we have often wondered how far psychology would develop if we stopped all new and experimental research for several years and instead reflected upon and elaborated the treasures found in psychological archives. Naturally, we have not been able to locate all of Vygotsky's references. In such cases we have admitted our defeat in the notes and we would be grateful to readers for any information that might help us fill in these annoying gaps. The references which we did find and the strictly explanatory notes which we added should enable the reader to understand Vygotsky's texts in themselves – as fascinating attempts to deal with the major psychologies and psychological questions of his time which have their relevance even today – and to see the embeddedness of his thinking in the work of his contemporaries and predecessors in accordance with the motto of this reader. All information in the text given in square brackets was supplied by the editors. All translations from the original Russian were made by Theresa Prout with the exception of chapter 3 which was translated by René van der Veer. All quotes from languages other than Russian were checked against the original sources. No attempts were made to modernize the texts to fit contemporary standards. The editors express their gratitude to Ellen Bakker who managed to unriddle some puzzling references and who compiled the subject index. For a detailed account of Vygotsky's life and work and an elaborate analysis of his basic ideas the reader is referred to the companion volume *Understanding Vygotsky* (Van der Veer and Valsiner, 1991).

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'One must look at science in a very mechanical and unhistorical manner not to understand the role of continuity and tradition at all, even during a revolution.'

Lev Vygotsky, *Istoricheskij smysl psikhologicheskogo krizisa*