Kozulin, A. (2024). *The Cultural Mind: The Sociocultural Theory of Learning.* **Cambridge University Press.**

Reviewed by Boris Gindis
Center for Cognitive-Developmental Assessment and Remediation
Sedona, Arizona, United States

Dr. Alex Kozulin, a globally recognized authority on Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and Feuerstein's mediated learning theory, embarked on a formidable mission to unite Vygotsky's theory of cultural/social contexts of learning and Feuerstein's theory of mediated learning. He applied his efforts to the realities of the 21st-century digital revolution in education. Through his original analysis and research, the author seamlessly connected the fundamental concepts of both theories—mediation, symbolic tools, leading activities, learning potential, and cognitive education—into a unified whole deeply rooted in the contemporary educational context.
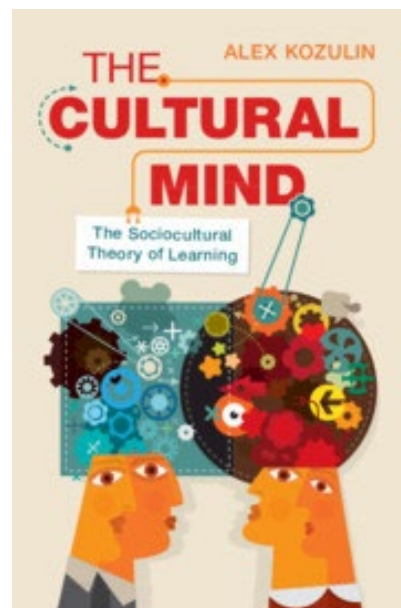
Although the author's approach can be viewed from various perspectives, it becomes evident that the concept of *mediation* is a pivotal idea in the theory of cultural mind. It underscores culture as the mediator between the objective world and human beings. In the book, culture as a mediator is further elucidated through three interconnected avenues: human mediators (educators, parents, therapists, and the like), symbolic tools (literacy), and leading activity (e.g., formal education of contemporary children in post-industrial society). In the recent past, likely in the life span of most of this book's readers, the source of knowledge was primarily teachers and parents tasked with transmitting information to the next generation. The digital revolution has dramatically altered this landscape. Now, a plethora of information of varying quality and content is accessible online and, in the near future, delivered by artificial intelligence. In this new paradigm, human mediation has become the primary function of education actors: the parents and teachers. Their role now is to attract and regulate attention, shape attitudes, select and evaluate available information, and perform appropriate cognitive operations (e.g., analysis and generalization). As the Kozulin concludes, the digital revolution has liberated educators from some of their traditional responsibilities and simultaneously

bestowed upon them a new, more demanding duty of fostering cognitive strategies for information retrieval, evaluation, and creative utilization.

Are contemporary educators ready for this new aspect of their work? Is our educational system as an institution prepared for developmentally oriented education where mediation is the primary function of their duty? Readers may ask themselves those questions.

As presented by Kozulin, mediation brings new vitality to assessing an individual's cognitive potential by introducing "dynamic assessment." Instead of checking what students can do on their own, dynamic assessment establishes what they can do with the structured mediating scaffold of an examiner, therefore determining what Vygotsky called the "zone of proximal development." It is amazing how the discovery vision formulated almost a century ago found its application in this era of incredible technological progress.

Mediation through symbolic tools—major agents of change in human behavior and cognition—is another valuable idea presented by the author. The acquisition and internalization of symbolic tools do not happen spontaneously—this is a matter of mediation. In Chapters 2 and 5, the author draws our attention to the paradox that today's children, even preschoolers, are proficient in using different symbols and icons on the screen but experience difficulty with simple tools such as tables and graphs.

In my view, the core section of the book is Chapter 3: "Leading Activity and Child Development." This is an alternative to a mechanistic view of development as a mandatory sequence of maturational stages. Instead, in the socio/cultural theory of learning, each developmental period is determined by a leading activity that is socio/culturally specific. Kozulin concentrated on the nature of leading activities for each developmental stage. Here, the reader encounters some limitations in the author's presentation. Specifically, while the concepts related to infancy and elementary school are well presented, seamlessly blending theoretical concepts and practical recommendations, applying the "leading activity" in adolescence and young adulthood is less developed. Thus, the author suggests that informal educational programs supplement formal schooling in promoting interpersonal communication. While the example of using amateur theater is valuable, it feels limited in scope and lacks broader, convincing recommendations. It is hoped that in the next editions of the book, this topic will receive more substantial consideration.

The book is generally filled with practical recommendations and accompanying examples, interspersed throughout the theoretical discussions and a treasure trove of insights. Despite a few minor exceptions, this practicality transforms the book into a potent instrument for real-world application.

I want to emphasize three aspects of the book. First, the author's clear intention to present both theoretical background and practical application as an inviting call to further elaboration and development. Second, due to its composition, novel ideas, and accessible and engaging writing style, this book will resonate equally with practitioners and academic scholars. Third, I see great potential in this book for educational remediation and special education and hope this direction will find its way into the book's second edition.

To conclude, this relatively small book—183 pages—summarizes one of the most perspective learning theories and its practical implementation, which will significantly impact future understanding of human learning. It is a powerful call for further investigation of this most promising human learning and development approach.

About the Reviewer

Boris Gindis, PhD, is a licensed psychologist, who specializes in the psychological issues of early childhood trauma and international adoption. He is a retired college professor, the author of 59 scientific articles and book chapters, the author of *Development Mediated by Trauma: The Dark Side of International Adoption* (Routledge, 2019), *Rehabilitation and Remediation of Internationally Adopted Children* (Cambridge University Press, 2021), *Developing a Foundation for Learning with Internationally Adopted Children* (Routledge/Focus, 2022 (with co-author Dr. Carol Lidz), and the co-editor and contributing author of *Vygotsky's Educational Theory in Cultural Context* (Cambridge University Press, 2003). Dr Gindis was the founder and chief psychologist at the Center for Cognitive-Developmental Assessment and Remediation (www.bgcenter.com 1989-2017) a private clinic with offices in in New York and Arizona, specializing in working with traumatized children of a-typical background: refugee, international adoptees, and immigrants.

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