



CULTURAL-HISTORICAL ACTIVITY THEORY (CHAT)

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The background of the slide is a historical map. The left side shows North America, including Hudson Bay, James Bay, and the Gulf of St. Lawrence. The right side shows Europe, including the North Sea, Bay of Biscay, and the Mediterranean Sea. A white box with a double-line border is centered on the map, containing the title and definition. A compass rose is located below the text box.

DEFINITION

Cultural-historical activity theory is an interactional framework, or methodology, that examines the relationship between human thought and actions.





CORE IDEAS



ONE

Humans learn by doing and communicate with their behaviors.

TWO

Humans use tools to learn and to communicate.

THREE

Humans use their communities to create meaning – and meaning is critical to all learning, communication, and behavior.

HISTORY

- Considered part of the cultural-historical school of Russian psychology
- Based on Karl Marx's (1906) theory known as dialectical materialism, which states that contradictions between human ideals and real-world conditions lead to cultural and societal transformation
- L. S. Vygotsky's "Mind in Society" (1978) and A. N. Leontiev's "Activity and Consciousness" (1977) were both published posthumously but are considered CHAT's pioneer publications
- The name of the theory was not coined until 1996 in Michael Cole's "Cultural Psychology"



FIRST GENERATION (VYGOTSKY, 1930s)



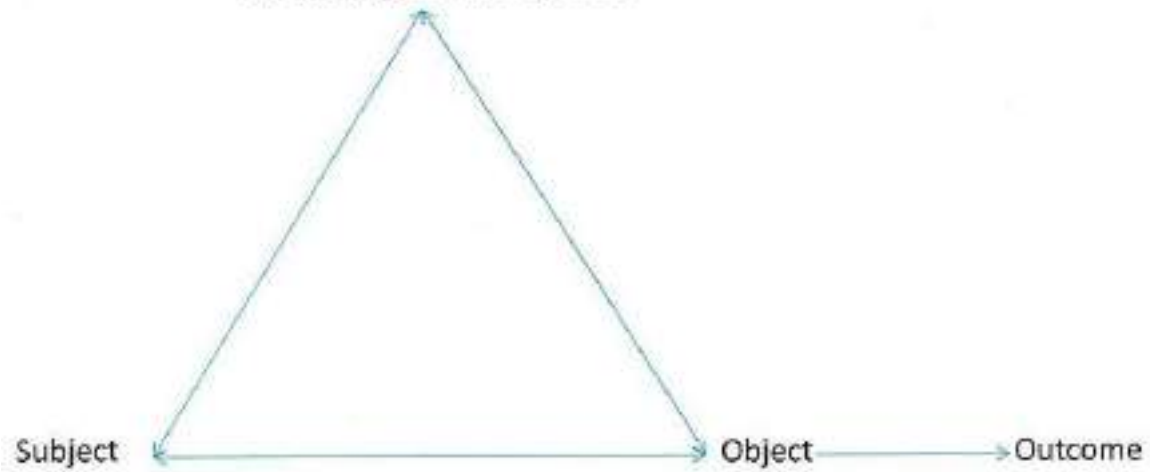
The mind is not a simple stimulus-response machine, but a three-directional network of subject-object-tools, which leads to an outcome or response.

In other words, the human mind is not exposed to the outside world directly, but through a cultural and historical lens, a concept which Vygotsky refers to as tool mediation.

- ❖ **Subject:** Individual or community
- ❖ **Object:** A cultural entity; objectives
- ❖ **Tools:** Physical objects, beliefs, or perceptions

First Generation – Vygotsky

Mediating Artefacts (Tools)



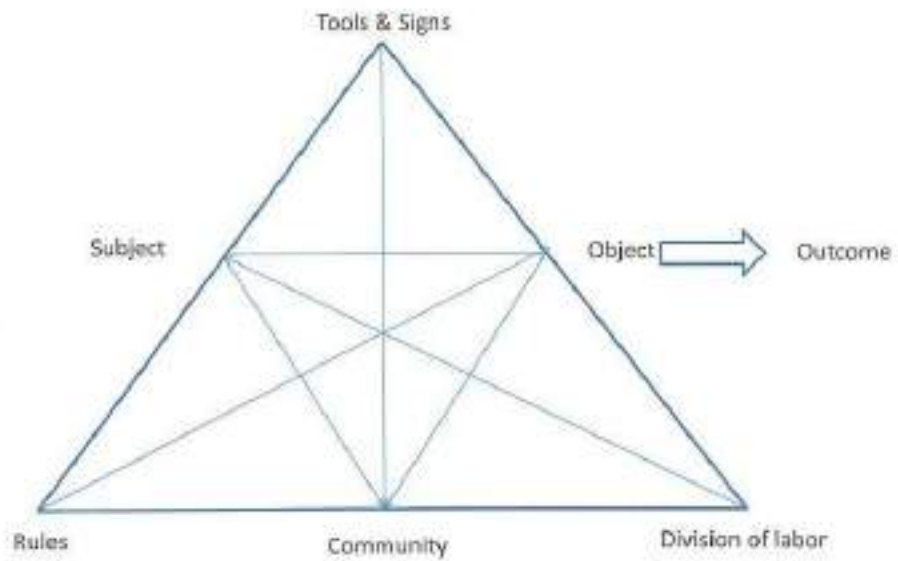
SECOND GENERATION (LEONTIEV AND COLE, 1970s - EARLY 1980s)



Leontiev and Cole added three more elements of interaction to Vygotsky's diagram: community, rules, and division of labor.

This resulted in a more complex six-way interactional framework, which leads to a certain outcome or behavior.

Second Generation - Leontiev



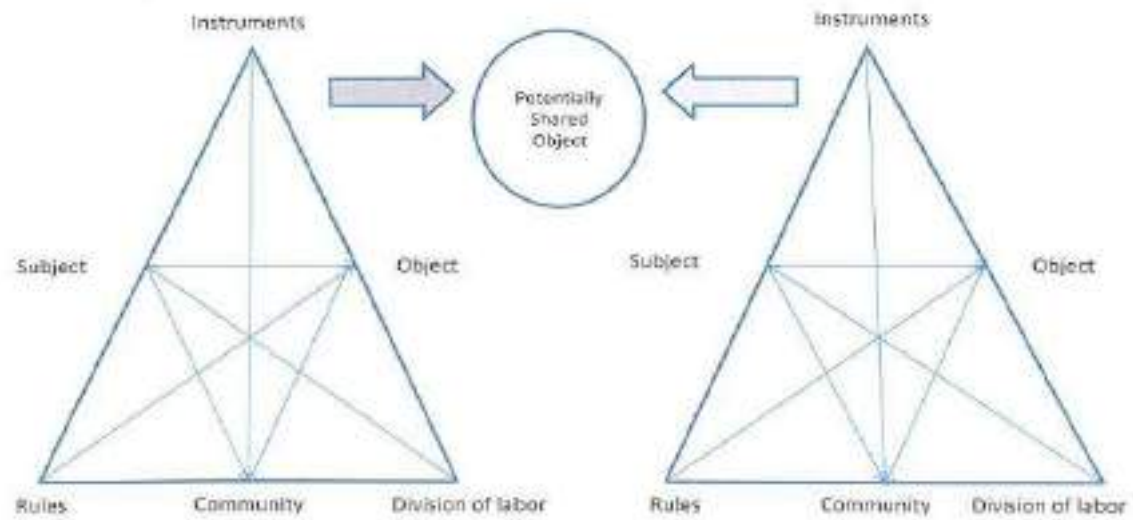
THIRD GENERATION (ENGESTROM, 1980s - PRESENT)



Engestrom stressed the importance of understanding dialogues and perspectives in multiple cultures (i.e. activity systems) to discover potentially shared objects instead of analyzing an isolated culture.

This is the model of CHAT used today.

Third Generation CHAT



FIVE KEY PRINCIPLES OF MODERN CHAT



- 1. Analysis:** At least two activity systems are needed
- 2. Multi-voicedness:** All systems used must have their views and interests represented
- 3. Historicity:** Cultural activity and human behavior is only understood through their respective cultural histories
- 4. Contradiction:** Contradictions between culture and history are the key to implementing change and developing a society
- 5. Transformation:** Individuals going against established structures invite the possibility for cultural transformation



HOW IS CHAT USED TODAY?

Six research articles that use
CHAT as a methodology show
that modern studies are largely
pedagogical in nature.



ANALYZING THE GROWTH OF A PRE-SERVICE SCIENCE TEACHER COMMUNITY THROUGH THE LENS OF CULTURAL HISTORICAL ACTIVITY THEORY (HWANG, 2018)



Summary:

- Transition in science teachers' pre-service development from basic laboratory work to critical research

Method:

- Two groups over a three-year period; one group (non-PST) was given standard development education while the other (PST) was allowed greater autonomy as the study went on

Results:

- PST group had empirically higher rates of:
 - Discussion quality
 - Leadership skills
 - Reflection and evaluation
 - Overall teaching competence
- Study concluded that the communities created within the PST group allowed for stronger individual motivation to learn

EXAMINING ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS INSTRUCTION THROUGH CULTURAL HISTORICAL ACTIVITY THEORY (BARRETT-TATUM, 2018)



Summary:

- Examination of limited teacher autonomy in rigid standards-based primary school education

Method:

- Two teachers studied over one year; teachers, students, and administration were interviewed, and classrooms were observed
- Focus was on literacy teaching activities

Results:

- One teacher (whose background was in ELA) focused on collaborative efforts with students, while the other (whose background was in curriculum assessment) maintained focus on assessment requirements
- CHAT can be used to analyze policy implementation on multiple levels of the education system at once



RE-SHAPING THE FACULTY: EMERGENCE AND DEVELOPMENT OF 'PERMANENT-CONTINGENT' ROLES THROUGH THE LENS OF CULTURAL-HISTORICAL ACTIVITY THEORY (OLEKSANDR, 2016)



Summary:

- Examination of integrating non-tenured university employees into university culture

Method:

- Used archeological ethnography to study documents and artifacts for the purpose of finding contradictions between university's history and interviews with relevant administration and persons

Results:

- CHAT can be used as a framework for studying how higher education institutions function as a work environment
- Concluded that the non-tenured faculty did not face significant conflict during their time at the university due to a lack of professional growth, and so did not elicit changes upon the university culture



AN EXAMINATION OF THE POTENTIAL OF CULTURAL-HISTORICAL ACTIVITY THEORY (CHAT)
FOR EXPLAINING TRANSITIONS IN NATIONAL EDUCATION SYSTEMS (VAN DER WALT, 2018)



Summary:

- Studying how the fall of communism and Apartheid in South Africa may have influenced its education systems

Method:

- Interpretivist and constructivist approach; defining post-Apartheid and post-communism countries, including their respective education systems, as activity systems within the CHAT framework

Results:

- Concludes that the individual (subject) living within such communities is both a product of the radical external forces and an active agent who integrates and appropriates culture for future actions

UNDERSTANDING SYNCHRONOUS COMPUTER-MEDIATED CLASSROOM DISCUSSION THROUGH CULTURAL-HISTORICAL ACTIVITY THEORY (PARK, 2015)



Summary:

- Comparison of graduate students' discourse practices supplemented with computer mediation

Method:

- Groups of students participate in discussions separately over one semester; one group without computers, one group with non-supplementary computers (basic discussion board), and one with supplementary computers (actively updating white board and instant messaging)

Results:

- The group with supplementary computers demonstrated greater interactivity, more shared tools, and the creation of sub-communities within the group
- The tool has a dual result of means, which influences the outside world (i.e. outcome), and meaning, which influences the human mind (i.e. subject); thus, any technology used in the classroom must consider both its effectiveness as a teaching tool upon the student and its impact on the academic environment itself

IDENTIFYING PEDAGOGICAL INNOVATION IN CULTURAL MINORITY CLASSROOMS: A CULTURAL HISTORICAL ACTIVITY THEORY AND APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY PERSPECTIVE IN THE PHILIPPINES AND NEW ZEALAND (ABELLA, 2016)



Summary:

- Analyzing an assets-based instead of deficits-based approach to educating cultural minority groups

Method:

- Comparative approach of nine total teachers in five schools in the Philippines and New Zealand

Results:

- Findings show that two activity systems emerge in classrooms: the social support system and the structural school system
 - The social support system promoted pedagogical innovation, while the structural school system hindered it
- Encouraging student creation of new objects and artifacts (tools) also resulted in positive student disposition and self-evaluations

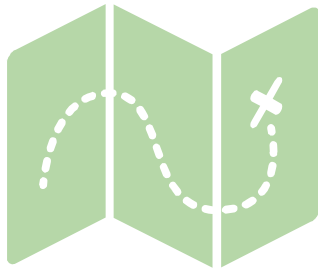
STRENGTHS

- Real-world and multifaceted complexities reflected in analyses using CHAT
- Deconstructing human activities through cultural and historical backgrounds useful for understanding community and intra-community developments



WEAKNESSES

- Ignores human cognition in favor of observable human activities
- Potentially problematic to insinuate that societies can only “evolve” through interactions with conflicting beliefs
- Most modern research using CHAT does not effectively differentiate between social and cultural contexts and processes



CONCLUSION

The rise of a fourth generation?

The Internet has made possible peer-to-peer and cooperative cultural interactions and development despite enormous physical distances. Consequently, many contradictions occur every day and thus transform cultures and societies. Any future developments in CHAT must reflect these advances in modern technology and communication.

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