Beyond the Brain

An Agentive Activity Perspective on Mind, Development, and Learning

Igor M. Arievitch
College of Staten Island, The City University of New York, USA

The book outlines a fundamental alternative to the rising wave of aggressive biological reductionism and brainism in contemporary psychology and education. It offers steps to achieving a daunting and elusive goal: constructing a coherently non-reductionist account of the mind. The main obstacle to such a construction is identified as the centuries-old contemplative fallacy that leads to entrenched dualisms and shackles major theoretical frameworks. The alternative agentive activity perspective overcomes this fallacy by advancing the core principles of the cultural-historical activity theory. This innovative perspective charts a consistently non-mentalist and non-individualist view of psychological processes without discarding the individual mind. A vast body of research and theories, from Piaget and Dewey to sociocultural and embodied cognition approaches are critically engaged, with a special focus on Piotr Galperin’s contribution. The notion of the embodied agent’s object-directed activity serves as a pivotal point for re-conceptualizing the mind and its role in behavior. In a radical departure from both the traditional mentalist and biologically reductionist frameworks, psychological processes are understood as taking place “beyond the brain” — as constituted by the agent’s activities in the world. From this standpoint, many of Vygotsky’s key insights, including semiotic mediation, internalization, and cognitive tools are given a fresh scrutiny and substantially revised. The agentive activity perspective opens ways to offer a bold vision for education: developmental teaching and learning built on the premise that real knowledge is not “information storage and retrieval” and that education is not about “knowledge transmission” but instead it is about developing students’ minds.

Paperback US$43.00/€39.00
Hardback US$99.00/€90.00

SERIES: BOLD VISIONS IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH, VOLUME 57

P.T.O. FOR TABLE OF CONTENTS AND HOW TO ORDER

SensePublishers
For Wisdom and Awareness
www.sensepublishers.com
Peter de Liefde – peter.deliefde@sensepublishers.com
Michel Lokhorst – michel.lokhorst@sensepublishers.com
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements

Chapter 1: Introduction
The Goals and Starting Points of the Book
The Structure and Main Topics of the Book

Chapter 2: The Mind Is Not in the Brain
A New Wave of Brainism in Psychology and Education
Recent Criticism of Brainism
Summary of Arguments against Brainism and “Mindless Neuroscience”

Chapter 3: The Mind Is the Form of the Individual’s Activity: The Emergence of the Active Agent
Historical Context of Research on Non-Automaticity
James’s Concept of the “Efficacy of Consciousness”
Dewey’s Notion of Coordination of Self-Guided Activity
An Activity-Based Approach to Mind
Background of Galperin’s Work
The Concept of Orienting Activity
The New Type of Causality
The Mind Is the Embodied Agent’s Activity, Not the Brain Functioning
Comparison to Other Recent Attempts to Introduce an Agentive Approach to Mind

Chapter 4: The Developmental Trajectory of Cultural Mediation (I): From Joint Activity to Semiotic Mediation
Approaches to Semiotic Mediation
Vygotsky on Semiotic Mediation
Taking a Broader View on Mediation: Pre-History of Semiotic Mediation
From Earlier Forms of Cultural Mediation to Semiotic Mediation: The “Magic of Signs”

Chapter 5: The Developmental Trajectory of Cultural Mediation (II): From Semiotically Mediated Activity to Psychological Process
The Internalization Controversy
An Activity-Based Approach to Internalization
Focusing on External Activity
Mental Processes as Activities
Mental Processes Are the Agent’s External Actions
Demystifying the Process of Mediation by Cognitive Tools
Reframing the Mediation Research
Cognitive Tools Are Directed toward External Objects, Not “Inward”
Broadening the Non-Mentalist Framework
Neo-Piagetian Theorizing of Mental Processes and Internalization
The Human Agent: Adapting Organism or Inherently Social Actor?
“Internal” Processes as Acting with Social Meanings
Summary and Conclusions

Chapter 6: The Quality of Cognitive Tools and Development of the Mind
Development and Learning: The Relevance of Culturally Evolved Cognitive Tools
The Role of Learning in Cognitive Development
Types of Learning
Types of Learning and Cognitive Development
Implications for Developmental Studies
Developmental Teaching and Learning
An Illustration: Bloom’s Taxonomy from the DTL Perspective

Chapter 7: Conclusion: Overcoming the Contemplative Fallacy by Adopting the Agentive Activity Perspective

References
About the Author