

Beyond the Brain

An Agentive Activity Perspective on Mind, Development, and Learning

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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

ISBN 978-94-6351-102-5

Hardback US\$99.00/€90.00

ISBN 978-94-6351-103-2

SERIES: BOLD VISIONS IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH, VOLUME 57

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

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