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## The reception of Vygotsky in pedagogical literature for Norwegian teacher education

**ABSTRACT:** In this article, we study the reception of Vygotskian theory in pedagogical literature for Norwegian teacher education. The article analyzes three widely used textbooks for pre-service teachers in the five-year integrated master's degree program, looking at how Vygotsky's work is articulated and disseminated in the readings. Although Vygotsky's ideas are an important frame of reference for the pedagogical thinking in the textbooks, the findings indicate that Vygotsky's theory is presented in a fragmented way and is largely disconnected from the social and scientific context of its formation. The article argues that the tendency to interpret Vygotsky in a cultural and historical vacuum represents a concealed potential for making Vygotsky's ideas applicable in the current educational debate.

**KEYWORDS:** Vygotsky, reception of Vygotskian theory, socio-cultural theory, textbooks, teacher education

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Jak cytować: Faldet, A.-C., Skrefsrud, T.-A. (2020). The reception of Vygotsky in pedagogical literature for Norwegian teacher education. *Forum Oświatowe*, 32(2), 11–27. <https://doi.org/10.34862/fo.2020.2.0>

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How to cite: Faldet, A.-C., Skrefsrud, T.-A. (2020). The reception of Vygotsky in pedagogical literature for Norwegian teacher education. *Forum Oświatowe*, 32(2), 11–27. <https://doi.org/10.34862/fo.2020.2.0>

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## INTRODUCTION

According to Kozulin (2004), there is a certain mystery in the current popularity of Lev Vygotsky's theories among European and American educators at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Why does a theory developed in Moscow a few years after the Russian Revolution resonate with challenges faced by educators in different parts of the world today? One possible answer from Kozulin is that, in addition to several historical, political, and practical reasons for the late recognition of Vygotsky in the West, Vygotsky's ideas "[offer] us answers to the questions that only now we are finally ready to ask" (2004, p. 3). From Kozulin's perspective, Vygotsky speaks to us from the future. Vygotsky's ideas—although developed in another time, under other circumstances and in relation to other debates—capture current pedagogical and educational issues and provide answers that correspond with challenges and opportunities that educators face in contemporary European and American classrooms (see also Blanck, 1990).

In this article, we contribute to research on the reception of Vygotsky's ideas by presenting and critically discussing the introduction of Vygotsky's theory in pedagogical literature for Norwegian teacher education. In particular, we are interested in how and to what extent the authors provide a fundament for pre-service teachers to engage with Vygotskyan theory and to see his work in correspondence to current educational debates.

Our interest in the reception of Vygotsky is not based on a desire to uncover an "authentic" reading of his work in order to identify and label certain readings as "wrong" interpretations. As Said (1983) has emphasized, theories transform as they move into new environments. Being interpreted under the influence of different social situations and surroundings, theories are modified and reshaped in close relation to the problems and debates that are significant for the specific context. Rather, our interest in the reception of Vygotsky's theory stems from a general concern about the growing instrumentalization of educational practice and the role educational theory is given within such a paradigm. Influenced by what has grown to be a prominent idea in several countries around the world (that education should be or become

a standardized evidence-based practice), a common claim has been that education should be based on ‘what works’ within a standardized curriculum and across different contexts (OECD, 2007; Slavin, 2009). However, as Biesta (2010, 2013) and others have emphasized, an instrumentalist-oriented approach to education often (rather selectively) reduces theoretical reflections to illustrations and legitimations of certain practices without grasping the critical and innovative potential of theory for addressing practice in a reflexive and more in-depth way. Moreover, we see a potential conflict between Vygotsky’s socio-cultural approach to learning and the results of the standardization of education. On this basis, we are interested in the potential within Vygotsky’s theories for pre-service teachers to develop a critical awareness allowing them to interact and engage with challenges and opportunities in the contemporary classroom in a professional way. The research question is: How is Vygotsky’s theoretical approach to teaching and learning presented and interpreted in the three most frequently used pedagogical textbooks in Norwegian teacher education?

By analyzing textbooks, this article explores an important tool for providing support to teachers and supplementing students’ knowledge. The use of textbooks is often seen as a key to ensuring that institutions teach the National Curriculum to a high standard, helping the government to achieve the set goals and the objectives of education, as well as matching the education systems of those countries that top the international league tables (Oates, 2014, p. 2). Hence, pedagogical literature in the form of textbooks contributes to realizing the aims of the curriculum and supports effective teaching and learning, which makes it important to study. In this article, we are therefore interested in how Vygotsky’s theories are presented and interpreted in textbooks as an analytical lens through which to understand more of the pedagogical thinking that takes place in teacher education today.

### THE RECEPTION OF VYGOTSKIAN THEORY

The increasing interest in Vygotskian theory around the globe comes from his excellent scholarship and ability to create a creative dialogue between a number of different disciplines. His writings covered a wide range of areas and fields, such as pedagogy, psychology, linguistics, special education, and history. Developed in the 1920s and 1930s in the post-revolutionary Soviet Union, Vygotsky’s writing did not become widely known to the Western world until the first English translation of his work in 1965 (De León, 2012; van der Veer & Yasnitsky, 2011). Over the last two decades, international scholarship has benefited greatly from his substantive works. Hence, Vygotsky’s way of framing teaching and learning represents a major contribution to educational research that will have an impact on theory and praxis for years to come (Bruner, 1987; Dafermos, 2016; Lima, 1995).

Vygotsky developed his theories in contrast to a behaviorist model and later a cognitivist model, taking for granted that children are abstract individuals with pre-existent cognitive skills. In Vygotsky’s thinking, the child’s development and learning do not take place in isolation. Neither did he subscribe to the reductionist Soviet

Marxist thought that the person is primarily a product of history and a result of his or her cultural and social circumstances. Rather, for Vygotsky, “the heart of the matter is the interaction between man and his tools, particularly the symbolic tool of language” (Bruner, 1987, p. 2). It is through social interaction with a more able peer—the more knowledgeable other—that children’s cognitive development is advanced. Thus, Vygotsky’s way of framing education, learning, and teaching promotes the importance of context, interaction, and dialogue for students’ learning and development.

Vygotsky’s overarching thought is very well illustrated in his now-famous idea about the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which also draws parallels to a wide range of Vygotsky’s other thoughts including “inner speech.” As noted by Bruner (1987, p. 4), the concept of ZPD connects Vygotsky’s thinking to early Greek philosophy, more particularly to the Socratic dialogues scripted by Plato. In Plato’s work *Meno*, Socrates is involved in a number of dialogues demonstrating his method of questioning and recollection. In the dialogue with Meno’s young slave on geometry, Socrates demonstrates the ability of the human mind to recognize and develop new knowledge—in this case, through the interchange of ideas between an ignorant learner and an expert. While being questioned by Socrates, the young person’s previous knowledge of geometry is widened and restructured. During the conversation, Socrates activates and builds on the previous knowledge of the less-expert learner, illustrating the process of cognitive development through the scaffolding by a more experienced learner.

In a similar vein, for Vygotsky (1978), the ZPD concept illustrates what interaction and dialogue mean for cognitive development and learning. Unexperienced learners can do far better in understanding a matter when guided by a more skilled person than on their own. Moreover, as Bruner (1987, p. 4), inspired by Vygotsky, emphasized: “once a concept is explicated in dialogue, the learner is enabled to reflect on the dialogue.” For Vygotsky, this means that the unexperienced learner engages in an inner speech, using the distinctions, corrections, and nuances from the conversation to formulate his or her own concepts and meanings:

Inner speech is not the interior aspect of external speech—it is a function in itself. It still remains speech, i.e., thought connected with words. But while in external speech thought is embodied in words, in inner speech words die as they bring forth thought. Inner speech is to a large extent thinking in pure meanings (Vygotsky, 1962, p. 149).

From this, we see that social interaction plays a crucial role in developing cognition in Vygotsky’s thoughts. In line with Socrates’ dialogues, the social interaction is recapitulated *within* the learner in the form of inner speech. The learner seeks to understand the actions or instructions provided by the tutor (often the parent or teacher) and then internalizes the information by rethinking and reformulating it, hence developing his or her own concepts and meanings. As Vygotsky formulates it: “Every function in the child’s cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level, first, between people (interpsychological) and

then inside the child (intrapyschological)” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 57). According to Vygotsky, the process of learning and development of cognition is thus both individual achievement and a social one (see also Bruner, 1987, p. 4).

With this background, Vygotsky’s theory has often been framed as “socio-cultural,” which we maintain in this paper. Vygotsky and his colleagues, however, used the term “socio-historical” rather than “socio-cultural” (Wertsch, 1991), which raises a question about the link between “socio-cultural theory” and “cultural-historical psychology.” As emphasized by Dafermos (2016), the historical dimension was very important to Vygotsky as it refers to “the onto-genesis and phylogenesis of the human mind” (p. 29). To neglect the significance of “history” in the interpretation of Vygotskian theory, therefore, indicates a misunderstanding.

For Dafermos (2016), a creative reconstruction of Vygotsky’s theory is possible only on the basis of three interconnected aspects that have to be investigated in relation to each other. The first is to clarify the historical, social, and cultural context of the appearance and development of the theory. The second is to draw attention toward “the specific juncture in the history of science,” meaning to identify “the particular scientific context and links of cultural-historical theory with other theories” (Dafermos, 2016, p. 33). Finally, there is a need to elaborate on “the path of Vygotsky’s life and the development of his scientific program during his life” (Dafermos, 2016, p. 33). Hence, to understand the breadth and depth of Vygotsky’s thinking, it is important to be aware of the potential differences between the theory and the filters of later interpretations.

#### **VYGOTSKY IN LIGHT OF A CONTEMPORARY STANDARDIZATION OF EDUCATION**

Although Vygotsky’s innovative contributions are widely recognized within the field of education and have become part of mainstream pedagogical thinking, his attention toward the social and dialogical preconditions for development and learning differs markedly from the contemporary standardization of education, driven forward globally by politicians and educational reformers (see for example OECD, 2007; Slavin, 2009). As governments and educators in many countries seek to develop effective policies to improve the performance of their education systems, a variety of stakeholders, from federal and state legislators determining budgets, to researchers and politicians, have directed more attention to documenting practices that maximize student development and learning. In many countries, there has been a strong tendency to approach this educational challenge in terms of economic competition, which has informed what is considered to be the heart of education. The result has been a prevailing understanding emphasizing international comparisons and the assessment of educational outcomes through standardized tests (Kvernbekk, 2018). Hence, in contrast to Vygotsky’s socio-cultural approach to teaching and learning, attention is increasingly paid to an educational practice focusing merely on ‘what works’ within a standardized curriculum and across different contexts.

In recent years, however, a growing amount of research has critically questioned this way of framing education (Biesta, 2010, 2013; Kitchens, 2009). The argument has been that the aim to control, secure, and predict the outcome of the process of learning draws attention away from what learning is about. As Biesta (2013) has emphasized, education always involves questions about content, purpose, and relationships. But the contemporary and prevailing pedagogy makes it far more difficult to keep this in view. Instead, the “reduction of complexity takes place through such measures as putting students of similar age, ability or achievement together, exposing them to the same content through the use of staged curricula” (Biesta, 2010, p. 498). Moreover, this form of standardization toward qualification restricts the discussion of what is valuable in education. According to Biesta, however, good education knows that qualification is not the only thing that matters. Education is also about socialization and subjectification, which means that education must be concerned with a formation that involves a transition from an ego-centric and individual way of relating to the world to an other-centered approach, which Biesta (2013) frames as a grown-up way of being in the world.

A related critique has been raised by Kitchens (2009), who argued for a situated pedagogy that acknowledges the significance of context, place, identity, and lived experiences in pedagogical thinking. According to Kitchens, a situated pedagogy takes its starting point in students’ local knowledge and experiences, in contrast to “contemporary versions of curriculum- or test-centered education [...] that are not connected to the students’ lives” (Kitchens, 2009, p. 244). For Kitchens, however, a context-based situated pedagogy should not only connect the curriculum to the everyday lives of students, but also affect and perhaps even alter the students’ experiences. In this way, Kitchens’ thinking corresponds with both Biesta’s socio-cultural critique of standardization and Vygotsky’s idea that the development of conceptual meaning is both social and individual. According to Kitchens, a situated pedagogy should not only let the students “understand the landscape and the social and cultural processes that create it but also allows for the impact of individuals upon the terrain put before them” (Kitchens, 2009, p. 257).

As educational policies increasingly pay attention to standardized testing and the effective production of learning outcomes in a reduced number of subjects, the situated and contextual side of education is downplayed. Hence, the socio-cultural way of reflecting upon learning and teaching that Vygotsky developed in Moscow in the 1930s—and that forms the foundation for Biesta’s and Kitchens’ contemporary critical review of a prescriptive curriculum policy and a test-driven culture in school—seems to be challenged by a pedagogy that overlooks the significance of context and social interaction for learning and meaning-making. The interesting question is, therefore, how this tension affects the presentation of Vygotsky’s thinking in teacher education. If Kozulin (2004) is right that Vygotsky’s pedagogical approach to learning and teaching speaks to us from the future and thus may help educators to reflect critically upon current educational issues, how are the actuality and relevance of Vygotsky’s theories addressed in textbooks for teacher education?

## MATERIAL AND METHOD

The material for this study consists of the most frequently used textbooks in the compulsory 60-credit subject “Pedagogy and pupil-related skills” in the Norwegian five-year integrated master’s degree program in primary and lower secondary teacher education. Based on the reading lists from Norway’s 13 institutions offering the integrated teacher education program, three textbooks stand out as widely used: *Profesjonsrettet pedagogikk* (Professional-oriented pedagogy) (Postholm & Tiller, 2014), *Livet i skolen 1* (Life in the school 1) (Manger et al., 2013), and *Elevens verden* (The world of the student) (Imsen, 2020). In some of the programs, only one of the textbooks is used, while other programs recommend two of the textbooks for pre-service teachers and even suggest other supplementing literature. Nevertheless, together the three textbooks seem to be constitutive of the presentation of Vygotsky’s theories for pre-service teachers in the Norwegian integrated teacher education program.

Often, an analysis of documents—such as textbooks—aims to deconstruct the text, to examine dominance, concealed hierarchies, oppositions, inconsistencies, and contradictions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In our study, we also aim to deconstruct the texts, concentrating on revealing the dominant way of perceiving Vygotsky in the textbooks. Following Creswell and Poth (2018), the analysis may thus contribute to revealing hierarchies with regard to what sort of content is being presented, how the perspectives are being articulated, and in which context. In this way, the article applies a method of content analysis (White & Marsh, 2006), in the sense that it aims to determine the presence of Vygotsky’s concepts and ideas and to analyze the presence, meanings, and relationships of these concepts.

Being teacher educators ourselves, we have many years of experience with teaching pre-service teachers. We are also familiar with the textbooks from our own teaching and therefore have our own specific assumptions of how Vygotsky and other theoretical perspectives on learning and teaching are articulated in the textbooks, as well as the practical circumstances that affect the presentation of theoretical perspectives in teacher education. This includes limited lecture time combined with the many perspectives that need to be introduced, which often leads to rather short and basic presentations of different positions and ideas. Working analytically with the texts, we have aimed to remain aware of these presumptions while at the same time taking the texts seriously and provide a relevant reading. Various hermeneutical circles have therefore come into play: between the researchers and the theoretical perspectives of Vygotsky, between the researchers and the textbooks, and between the researchers, Vygotsky’s ideas, and their presentation in the textbooks.

Following a hermeneutical methodology (Kjørup, 1996), every reading of a text takes place on the interpreter’s terms at the same time as each text has its own meaning. Heidegger (1996) and Gadamer (2003) dissolve this paradox by stating that the interpreter is not situated outside the text trying to understand; rather, the interpreter is in a dialogue with the text. To be aware of this relationship makes it possible for the interpreter to raise questions to the text, and through the process of comparing

single elements with the whole, the interpreter is led through a progressively more adequate interpretation of the text. Hence, a hermeneutical approach to interpretation demonstrates the continuous interplay between the texts' meaning and our own presuppositions of the texts as researchers and teacher educators. It also implies that the interpretive process can never be ended in the sense that our interpretation concludes the meaning of the texts. Rather, the interpretation we make in this article is a suggested reading that, of course, should be discussed further.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The textbooks selected for analysis introduce a wide range of pedagogical topics. Our approach was to search for the characteristics of each textbook with regard to the reception of Vygotsky's ideas and how these ideas are made relevant in the contemporary educational debate. This means that we have selected parts for analysis that directly make use of the theories of Vygotsky but also paragraphs and sections that address the work of Vygotsky in a more indirect way—for example, how the textbooks engage with a socio-cultural perspective on learning and teaching. The results are presented and discussed in two sections. First, we introduce our reading of the three textbooks, drawing attention to which parts of Vygotsky's theories are presented and the context for the presentation. Second, we critically discuss the application of Vygotsky, focusing on what we identify as a fragmented reading of Vygotsky, in combination with a tendency to disconnect Vygotsky's thinking from the social and scientific context of its formation. As we will argue, the trend toward interpreting Vygotsky in a cultural and historical vacuum may create a lost opportunity for rethinking Vygotsky's ideas from the perspective of current educational problems arising around the globe.

### THE RECEPTION OF VYGOTSKY IN TEXTBOOKS

The textbooks give weight to different aspects in their presentation and use of Vygotsky's theories. Two of the textbooks have a similar approach as they (rather superficially) connect Vygotsky to other theories that are presented as parallels to Vygotsky's thinking, as well as using Vygotsky's work as a literary reference, underpinning the points made by the authors. One of the textbooks presents Vygotsky and his work in a more thorough way, giving an in-depth portrayal of Vygotsky's life and his ideas of language, cognitive development, and the role of play. From this perspective—although they differ with regard to breadth and depth in their presentations—all three textbooks can be said to acknowledge the influence of Vygotsky's work in the field of education and recognize the significance of his thinking for future teachers.

The first textbook, edited by Postholm and Tiller (2014), is an anthology including 16 chapters. The purpose of the book is to present the role of the teacher to pre-service teachers and to discuss "important themes and knowledge" that the authors believe are important to learn and reflect upon for future teachers (p. 14). The au-

thors emphasize the need for greater professionalization of teacher education and the subject of education, including strengthening the link between theory and practice and making research a central part of pre-service teachers' professional development.

Throughout the book, direct references to Vygotsky's work are scarce. The first time Vygotsky appears is in the introductory chapter, titled "The good teacher." Here, Vygotsky's (1962) idea that social interaction is recapitulated within the child in the form of inner speech is used to underline a point the authors make on tacit knowledge. For the authors, being a teacher means to become aware of the oft-hidden emotions, experiences, insights, and intuitions held by the child. Through a reflective process, the professional teacher should make use of this tacit knowledge and integrate it into their daily work with students' learning. Becoming aware of their own role in the process of teaching, the teacher can then help students to articulate embedded values, attitudes, and knowledge. Through their inner speech, the child—with support from the teacher as a more knowledgeable adult—develops their own concepts and meanings. In the text, the authors do not elaborate on Vygotsky's work on this issue, but make a direct connection to his work by referring to *Thought and Language* (Vygotsky, 1962) as a reference to the statement: "First when attitudes are described, they can be reflected upon and developed further" (Postholm & Tiller, 2014, p. 28).

Furthermore, Vygotsky's work is brought to attention in the chapter titled "Using theory in here-and-now situations" (Postholm & Tiller, 2014, p. 32). Vygotsky's work is not mentioned in the text, only in a footnote. The context for the reference to Vygotsky is a description of a development project by which teachers became aware of how far they were able to reach on their own with regard to providing quality in teaching and how pedagogical theory could help them develop their practice further. In the text, the teacher is seen as the child becoming aware of their actual development, while theory on teaching is equivalent to adult guidance or more capable peers, which may help the child—in this case, the teacher—to reach the level of potential development. In this way, the authors make use of Vygotsky's concept of ZPD to illustrate how theory may be used as part of teachers' professional development.

The third reference to Vygotsky is found in the chapter titled "The planning of teaching and working methods." The aim of the chapter is to shed light on some of the methods that teachers can use to enhance learning and understanding within the classroom. In a section on theory, the author presents "a dialogical aspect of learning," that is, the significance of students' interaction with the teacher and other students in the process of learning (p. 152). Here, Vygotsky's work is referred to in the same sentence as Bakhtin's work, as the Russian founders of "a dialogical thinking." Moreover, the authors draw a line between the thinking of Vygotsky and Lave and Wenger's work on legitimate peripheral participation (1991), claiming that they build on the same ideological foundation: that knowledge is constructed in the social interaction between individuals (Postholm & Tiller, 2014, p. 152).

Limited use of Vygotsky's work is also seen in the second textbook, *Life in School*, edited by Manger et al. (2013). The book is an anthology of 10 chapters with the purpose of giving "an introduction to key theories about learning and discussing the

pedagogical implications of the different theoretical approaches” (Manger et al., 2013, p. 9). Three theoretical approaches to learning are introduced: socio-cultural theory, behaviorism, and cognitivism.

Not surprisingly, Vygotsky is introduced as a significant figure within a socio-cultural perspective on learning. In comparison to Postholm and Tiller’s book (2014), the authors devote a sub-chapter to what they frame as Vygotsky’s “cultural-historical school” (Manger et al., 2013, p. 193) which is said to have its parallel in what we today call socio-cultural theory. Here, the life of Vygotsky is briefly mentioned, as well as his main idea that mental activity develops out of social activity, that every function in the child’s cultural development appears twice: first on the social level and later on the individual level, first between people (interpsychological) and then inside the child (intrapsychological) (Manger et al., 2013, p. 195). According to the authors, the interactions between the cognitive and social levels illustrate the concept of ZPD. However, the relations between these two ideas are not elaborated further.

Throughout the presentation, Vygotsky’s contribution to socio-cultural theory is portrayed in contrast to a behavioristic view on learning, emphasizing the historical status of Pavlov, the Nobel Prize-winning Soviet physiologist, whose discovery of classical conditioning heavily influenced the behaviorist movement. According to the authors, Vygotsky recognized that the brain should also be seen as a cultural organ, as children’s interaction with language, cultural tools, artifacts, and the social environment leads to cognitive changes and the development of new functional systems (see also Vasileva & Balyasnikova, 2019).

By contrasting Vygotsky’s work with behaviorism, the authors draw attention to the historical frame for Vygotsky’s thinking and place his theories in line with contemporary psychological and pedagogical debates of the 1930s. From this perspective, one could have expected the authors to emphasize the parallel to Piaget’s ideas of cognitive development, which for Vygotsky represented an incomplete way of framing cognition. According to Vygotsky, knowledge should not be seen as “out there” and to be possessed by the children’s cognitive skills. Rather, the construction of knowledge is a social process that forms the children’s cognition. Instead of linking Vygotsky and Piaget, however, the authors draw a line between the action-oriented theory of Dewey and Vygotsky’s way of framing social interaction, presenting Dewey’s work as a conceptual parallel to Vygotsky’s thinking (Manger et al., 2013, p. 197). The text presents the main similarities between pragmatism and Vygotskyian theory, emphasizing that both approaches acknowledge the significance of context and social interaction for learning. The differences, however, are not addressed, which makes it unclear how Vygotsky and Dewey’s thinking are interlinked on the conceptual level.

Unlike Postholm and Tiller’s (2014) presentation, the authors’ positioning of Vygotsky—both the dissonance and the thematic parallels with other ideas—are constructed with a limited number of references to Vygotsky’s own work. Rather, the authors make use of secondary literature to illustrate the theory, hence giving preference to contemporary interpretations of Vygotsky’s work over his own original contributions.

The third textbook, *The World of the Student* (Imsen, 2020), is the most frequently used in Norwegian teacher education and differs from the two others, both with regard to the breadth and depth that is given to the presentation of Vygotsky's work and to the form of the presentation. The first edition of the textbook was published in 1984, and since then, the book has been republished in five editions, the latest one in 2020. Rather surprisingly, the first edition makes no presentation of Vygotskian theory, only a brief mention of the relation between thought and language in Vygotsky's thinking. Beginning with the second edition, however, the author devotes an entire chapter to Vygotskian theory and discusses Vygotsky's work in relation to a socio-cultural perspective on learning (Imsen, 2020, p. 251). Moreover, Vygotsky is mentioned later in the book under the heading "Language, thinking and communication" (Imsen, 2020, p. 275), emphasizing the integrating function of language in Vygotskian theory.

The author starts by telling about the life of Vygotsky, presenting him as the "Mozart of psychology" (Imsen, 2020, p. 252). Furthermore, Vygotsky's thinking is related to the philosophy of Marxism, emphasizing that Vygotsky—in line with Marxist philosophy—does not see human beings as "generalized individuals," separated from the historical and social context. Instead, man's way of living forms his or her ways of thinking (Imsen, 2020, p. 253). Moreover, the author states that the Marxist idea that the good of society should be prioritized over the success of the individual, and that by working together one can reach further than working alone, is also an important foundation for Vygotsky's psychology (Imsen, 2020, p. 253).

The author continues by presenting Vygotsky's ideas about the general genetic law of cultural development (that a child's development, as a process embedded in culture, occurs on two levels: first the social, between individuals, and later the psychological, as thought is internalized by the child), his understanding of language, the theory of ZPD, and his view on the role of play in children's learning and development. In contrast to the other textbooks, the author also gives a critical interpretation of Vygotsky's contribution, asking if the interaction between adult and child may put restrictions on children's autonomy and ability to think and act for themselves. The chapter ends by presenting newer perspectives on socio-cultural thinking in the 2000s, drawing lines between Vygotsky, Wertsch, Lave and Wenger, and Bruner. The author makes no attempt to signalize any differences between the thinkers but presents Vygotsky as a pioneer, introducing "the cultural perspective as a dominant position in today's pedagogical psychology" (Imsen, 2020, p. 271). The presentation concludes by stating that very few scholars take Vygotsky seriously, as they fail to include the historical dimensions in the socio-cultural perspective on learning. According to the author, interpretations of Vygotsky in the Western world have not only overlooked the connection of Vygotsky's theory to Marxism, the context in which it was born but have also avoided any contextual considerations of Vygotskian theory at all.

## DISCUSSION

The legacy of Vygotsky has become a source of inspiration for scholars and educators around the globe, which can also be seen in the interest in Vygotsky's thinking shown in the Norwegian textbooks. From this analysis, we see that Vygotskian theory is considered an important contribution to pedagogical thinking for future teachers in Norway. In particular, attention is drawn toward his theory of a mutual relationship between thought and speech, meaning that mental activity develops out of social activity, framed as the process of internalization (Vygotsky, 1962, 1978). As Dafermos (2016) has indicated, the interest in this part of Vygotskian theory does not occur in a social vacuum but is often related to pedagogical reforms that aim to reduce and transform a traditional, individualist view on learning. This can also be said to be the case in Norway, as recent school reforms have emphasized the significance of interaction and cooperative learning as central to student development (see, for example, The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020). In addition, all three textbooks emphasize the concept of ZPD, which underlines the important role that teacher-student interaction plays in Norwegian school policies. In favor of learning theories such as behaviorism and cognitivism, pedagogies in Norwegian schools—at least on the policy level—should be built on a teacher-student relationship that is dependent on teachers' intuitive and emphatic sensitivity to students' horizons of understanding (see Baker & Wright, 2017).

However, in the study, we have found that ways of introducing Vygotsky's work differ with regard to breadth and depth in the presentations. Our analysis sees at least two interrelated challenges in the reception of Vygotsky's thinking in the textbooks. The first challenge has to do with the fragmentation of Vygotskian theory. By a fragmented reading, we mean an interpretation of Vygotsky that in a rather shallow way presents some of his ideas such as sign mediation, internalization, ZPD, etc., as separate from its original context. In particular, this is the case for Postholm and Tiller (2014), who only briefly mention Vygotsky's work, and rather superficially connect it to other theories that are presented as similar. As noted in the analysis, the textbook presents the work of Vygotsky on its own terms only to a limited extent, and mainly as a reference underpinning general pedagogical points made by the authors. When, for example, the concept of ZPD is presented in isolation from other concepts within Vygotsky's cultural-historical psychology, it could easily be misunderstood. When ZPD is understood solely as a psychological concept, without the link to its socio-historical foundation, ZPD could be seen as a way for the adult to control the student (see, for example, Lima, 1995), which is exactly the critique that Imsen (2020) raises against the concept. Moreover, in all the textbooks, we found a tendency to present the ideas of Vygotsky in contrast to other theories of learning, not as competing theories, but rather, as supplemental approaches to how pre-service teachers should understand children's development and learning. In this way, one could argue that the textbooks reflect a fragmented reading of Vygotsky, as they tend to overlook the deep structures of differences between the various theories of learning.

The second challenge is that the elaboration and application of Vygotsky's thinking are largely disconnected from the historical and social context of its formation. Again, this is most prominent in the case of Postholm and Tiller (2014), but can be said to be a common feature for all three textbooks. Both Manger et al. (2013) and Imsen (2020) start their introduction to Vygotskian theory by highlighting Vygotsky's life and development as a thinker. Imsen (2020) also relates Vygotsky's work to the historical need for developing new psychology based on the foundation of Marxism. According to Dafermos (2016), however, the attention toward Vygotsky's personal life is necessary, but not a sufficient condition for a deeper understanding of the theory. This means that a presentation of Vygotsky's life without providing a greater context for the theory is one step in the right direction but insufficient if the purpose is to reach a more profound understanding of Vygotsky and his theoretical contributions. On this basis, one can argue that the literature's tendency to present and interpret Vygotsky in a cultural and historical vacuum misses the opportunity for creative reconstruction of Vygotsky's theory for future teachers.

An objection, however, could be that the pedagogical textbooks only have a limited amount of space to introduce pre-service teachers to different theoretical perspectives and are therefore not able to go into historical and social details about the context for their formations. From this perspective, it is understandable that readings of Vygotskian theory may overlook the fact that the term "socio-cultural" was never used by Vygotsky or his colleagues but refers to the reception and incorporation of the theory in a North American setting (Kozulin, 2004). Moreover, it makes it possible to accept that the terms ZPD and "scaffolding" become synonyms in the textbooks, although it was Bruner who, in a North American context, used ZPD as a foundation for his theory of instructional scaffolding.

The problem, however, is that the diffusion of Vygotsky's work in the textbooks does not allow the readers to become aware of the implicit assumptions that often follow when Vygotsky's theory is adopted. Neither do they become aware of how these assumptions are related to specific social, historical, and cultural contexts.

Situating Vygotsky's theory in its social and historical context in relation to the actual debates and competing perspectives at the time will help pre-service teachers to better grasp how Vygotsky's creativity in science may be useful in today's educational debates. Although Vygotsky may have been the "Mozart of psychology" (Imsen, 2020, p. 252), he was not a solitary genius but interacted in creative dialogue with a number of other thinkers, such as Hegel, Marx, Piaget, Freud, and Spinoza. To understand more of how Vygotsky's theory developed, what the historical and social context for his thinking was like, and how the theory responded to specific problems and challenges may therefore help pre-service teachers see the contemporary horizon for his theory. Not least, a historical reading may prepare pre-service teachers to critically understand and address the world-wide tendency toward standardization in education, emphasizing international comparisons, assessment, and measurement, which dissonances with Vygotsky's understanding of human consciousness as capable of free and deliberate choice. To do so, it is not sufficient

to present Vygotskian theory in fragments or to hide the actual discourses and conflicts that gave birth to the theory by presenting Vygotsky as a supplemental theory to other theories of learning or reducing the theory to a context-less background for the authors' normative perceptions of education. Rather, there lies potential in revitalizing a context-sensitive reading, interpreting Vygotsky's contemporary contribution in light of its social, cultural, and historical context.

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS

Vygotsky's theory, in particular his socio-cultural approach to teaching and learning, has gained attention world-wide as a creative source of knowledge for education. At the same time, a socio-cultural understanding is challenged by a contemporary approach to education that overlooks the significance of context and social interaction for learning and meaning-making. Scholars warn against a global focus on standardization of education that may contribute to narrowing the curriculum and create a teaching and learning culture where creativity, exploration, and critical thinking are scarce. Against this background, the present study has explored the reception of Vygotsky's thinking in a selection of textbooks for pre-service teachers in Norwegian teacher education. The aim has been to critically discuss the conditions for pedagogical thinking that pre-service teachers are given through the dissemination of Vygotsky in the textbooks.

According to Dafermos (2016, p. 28), the Western world has transformed Vygotsky "into a 'chewing gum' for everybody, every day, and every occasion." By this, he means that many educators and psychologists praise the benefits of Vygotsky's theory, but actually, they know little about his work. The reception of Vygotsky in the Western world has thus tended to "accept only a few fragmented ideas, taken out of the specific context within which these ideas have developed" (Dafermos, 2016, p. 27). Such findings are confirmed by other scholars, such as Lima (1995, p. 490), who sees Vygotsky as "a victim being ahead his time" and for that reason claims that the diffusion of Vygotsky's work has been troublesome as scholars have interpreted and used parts of his ideas out of context.

The results from our study resemble these reported findings, indicating that Vygotskian theory is disseminated in a fragmented way, largely detached from its formative social, cultural, and historical context. In the textbooks, the reference to Vygotsky's work seems to be difficult to avoid because of its major influence on the field of education. Nevertheless, Vygotsky's ideas are largely treated in a surface way and reduced to a context-less perspective on teaching and learning and seen as a supplement to other learning theories. As we have argued, the potential impact of Vygotsky's substantive work is, therefore, reduced. Not least, it prevents pre-service teachers from critically addressing the return of a positivist paradigm that downplays the significance of pedagogical theory for critical thinking and a continuous examination of pedagogical praxis.

To be able to understand and grasp the scope and depth of Vygotsky's ideas, it is necessary to become aware of the differences between Vygotsky's theory and its receptions and interpretations. Future research should investigate the possibilities within teacher education for reflecting on current educational issues with and through the theories of Vygotsky.

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#### POSTRZEGANIE WYGOTSKIEGO W LITERATURZE PEDAGOGICZNEJ W NORWESKIM KSZTAŁCENIU NAUCZYCIELI

W artykule, analizujemy postrzeganie teorii Wygotskiego w literaturze pedagogicznej w norweskim kształceniu nauczycieli. Artykuł analizuje trzy szeroko stosowane podręczniki dla nauczycieli przedszkolnych w ramach pięcioletniego zintegrowanego programu studiów magisterskich pod kątem sposobu prezentacji i rozpowszechniania w literaturze prac Wygotskiego. Pomimo że idee Wygotskiego stanowią ważne ramy odniesienia dla myśli pedagogicznych w podręcznikach, badania wskazują, że teoria Wygotskiego jest przedstawiona tam w sposób fragmentaryczny i jest w znacznym stopniu oderwana od kontekstu społecznego i naukowego w którym powstawała. W artykule argumentowano, że tendencja do interpretowania teorii Wygotskiego w próżni kulturowej i historycznej stanowi ukryty potencjał zastosowania idei Wygotskiego w obecnej debacie edukacyjnej. W artykule argumentowano, że tendencja do interpretowania teorii Wygotskiego w próżni kulturowej i historycz-

nej stanowi ukryty potencjał do wykorzystania idei Wygotskiego w aktualnej debacie edukacyjnej.

**SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** Wygotski, postrzeganie teorii Wygotskiego, teoria socjokulturowa, podręczniki, kształcenie nauczycieli