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Beyond Barriers: Activity, Culture, Language, Personality (I)

In Memory of A.A. Leontiev

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Guest Editor's Introduction

This and the next issue of the *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology* are dedicated to the life and works of Aleksei Alekseevich Leontiev. This issue focuses on more general aspects of semiotics and activity theory, such as sign and activity, “units” and “levels” of activity, personality, culture, language, sense, and meaning. The next issue will be devoted to parts of his psycholinguistic theories. For many years, A.A. Leontiev was the leading psycholinguist in Russia, but his interests were also expansive and diverse, including areas such as cultural comparisons, advertising, semiotics, travel, poetry, foreign language methodologies, and so on. He was an extremely humble person, one who was willing to help many people all around the world. In almost all of his lectures he would mention the names of L.S. Vygotsky and A.N. Leontiev, often A.R. Luria, keeping their memories fresh and alive for his students. Aleksei Alekseevich wanted to build bridges between different areas of Russian psychology, and as well, his network of relations spanned the entire world. He was a true friend to those close to him, a wonderful father and husband, and he was loved by many of his students and followers. The first memorial conference in his honor (*Beyond the Barriers: Humanity, Text, Social Communication*) was held in Moscow on May 18–20, 2006. The second memorial conference (*Language in Action—Vygots-*

kian and Leontievan Legacy Today) was held at the University of Jyväskylä, Finland, June 8–10, 2006. It was organized by Rikka Alanen and Sari Pöyhönen. The work of Aleksei Alekseevich will be continued in Russia, in particular at Moscow State University, and with the new A.A. Leontiev International Institute of Reading; and his work and legacy will be remembered around the world. The following is a short biography of his life.

Aleksei Alekseevich Leontiev was born on January 14, 1936. His father, A.N. Leontiev, who died in 1979, worked with Vygotsky, and was head of the Department of Psychology, Moscow State University (MSU) for many years. As a child, Aleksei Alekseevich studied German, and later translated poems from German to Russian. He finished school in 1953, winning the coveted "Gold Medal." He wanted to study many subjects at university, such as history, organic chemistry, languages, and psychology. He entered the philological department of Romance and German Languages, finishing in 1958. At this point he started working at the Institute of Foreign Languages, Academy of Sciences of the USSR (AN SSSR). In 1963, he successfully defended his first dissertation. In 1968, he completed his Habilitation (second doctorate needed to be a professor) in psychology. In 1967, Aleksei Alekseevich started giving lectures on psycholinguistics for psychologists at Moscow State University. He worked in the Department of Foreign Languages at the V.I. Lenin Moscow State Pedagogical Institute, starting in 1968. In 1969, a group was formed to work on problems of psycholinguistics and theories of communication at the Institute of Foreign Languages, AN SSSR. During this time, Aleksei Alekseevich was on the staff at Moscow State University at the Scientific Methodological Center for Russian as a Foreign Language. In 1990, he served as an "expert adviser for foreign languages" with the Russian Ministry of Education, and in 1992, he became a member of the Russian Academy of Education. In 1994, he served as president of the L.N. Tolstoy Institute of Foreign Languages and Cultures. In 1997, Aleksei Alekseevich received the honor of membership in the Academy of Pedagogical and Social Sciences. He was also active in supporting curriculum changes in Russia, and from 1997 on he served as the scientific head of the

Note

1. L.I. Bozhovich, *Lichnosti i ee formirovanie v detstvom vozraste* [Personality and Its Formation in Childhood] (Moscow, 1968). Because it had a pink cover and was Bozhovich's best-known book, it was called the "pink Bozhovich."

References

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