

Vygotsky's theory of cognitive development, including the zone of proximal development and scaffolding.

Like Piaget, Vygotsky claimed that infants are born with the basic abilities for intellectual development (as Piaget focuses on motor reflexes and sensory abilities).

Lev Vygotsky refers to 'elementary mental functions' –

- Attention
- Sensation
- Perception
- Memory

Eventually, through interaction within the sociocultural environment, these are developed into more sophisticated and effective mental processes/ strategies which he refers to as 'higher mental functions.'

Also, like Piaget, Vygotsky believes that young children are curious and actively involved in their own learning and the discovery and development of new understandings/ schema. However, Vygotsky placed more emphasis on social contributions to the process of development, whereas Piaget emphasised self-initiated discovery.

According to Vygotsky (1978), important learning by the child occurs through social interaction with a skilful tutor. The tutor may model behaviours and/ or provide verbal instructions for the child. Vygotsky refers to this as cooperative or collaborative dialogue. The child seeks to understand the actions or instructions provided by the tutor (often the parent or teacher) then internalises the information, using it to guide or regulate their own performance.

More Knowledgeable Other

'From a Vygotskian perspective, the teacher's role is mediating the child's learning activity as they share knowledge through social interaction' (Dixon-Krauss, 1996).

The more knowledgeable other (MKO) is somewhat self-explanatory; it refers to someone who has a better understanding or a higher ability level than the learner, with respect to a particular task, process, or concept. Although the implication is that the MKO is a teacher or an older adult, this is not necessarily the case. Many times, a child's peers or an adult's children may be the individuals with more knowledge or experience.

In fact, the MKO need not be a person at all. Some companies, to support employees in their learning process, are now using electronic performance support systems or artificial intelligence programmes.

Zone of Proximal Development

This is an important concept that relates to the difference between what a child can achieve independently and what a child can achieve with guidance and encouragement from a skilled partner.

Vygotsky (1978) sees the Zone of Proximal Development as the area where the most sensitive instruction or guidance should be given, allowing the child to develop skills they will then use on their own, which means developing higher mental functions.

Vygotsky also views interaction with peers as an effective way of developing skills and strategies. He suggests that teachers use cooperative learning exercises where less competent children develop with help from more skilful peers, within the zone of proximal development.

The ZPD has become synonymous in the literature with the term scaffolding. However, it is important to note that Vygotsky never used this term in his writing, and it was introduced by Wood et al (1976). Once the student, with the benefit of scaffolding, master's the task, the scaffolding can then be removed, and the student will then be able to complete the task again on his own.

Scaffolding is a key feature of effective teaching and can include modelling a skill, providing hints or cues, and adapting material or activity (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). In the classroom, scaffolding can be performed with just about any task.

