

Theories of child development



Theories of Child Development Piaget and Vygotsky If you want to understand a child's cognitive development, you would certainly have to consider their cultural context. The concern with contextual context is no longer new and has been an integral part of developmental psychology for hundreds of years. In the past few years, a great deal of attention has been directed to the social context of children's development of cognitive skills (Baker 1994). Much of this attention stems from Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theories, especially his notion about the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which represents the difference between what a child can do with adult guidance and what he / she is able to do independently (Levine, 1993). According to Vygotsky, children's future independent performance is largely dependent upon the types of guidance provided by adult in the zone of proximal development.

Adults create the zone and mediate the process of learning by providing guidance that reflects cultural values. Piaget (1932) studies children's relationships with parents and with parents and with peers more than 70 years ago. He identified enduring forms, patterns, or structures inherent in social relationships that merit our attention despite the many changes in children's lives that have taken place since then.

In relationships that have constraint as their underlying form, one person has the right to dictate terms to the other, who is obligated to obey without question. The two persons in the relationship are not on equal footing, and the subordinate member is supposed to have unilateral respect for the authority-figure member. Many child-adult relationships (e. g., child- older child) have constraint as their underlying basis.

In relationships that have cooperation as their underlying form, neither person has the right to dictate terms to the other, nor is either person obligated to obey the other. Instead, the two persons are on equal footing, and each is free to agree or disagree with the other. This type of relationship is based upon and provokes mutual respect between partners. Many child-child relationships have cooperation as their underlying basis, and many child-adult relationships have elements of cooperation. According to Evans, (1973) Jean Piaget has made major theoretical work focused on developing a general theory of knowledge, how a child develops a knowledge of his or her world, and the role that biology plays in that development. To Piaget, intelligence is represented by how an organism interacts with environment through mental adaptation. This adaptation is controlled through mental organizations or structures that an individual uses to represent the world; it is driven by a biological impulse to obtain balance (homeostasis or equilibrium) between those mental organizations and the environment. Piaget believes that everyone passed through a sequence of four qualitatively distinct stages.

They are sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational and formal operational. Vygotsky, (1962) emphasizes that influences of cultural and social contexts in learning and supports a discovery model of learning. This type of model places the teacher in an active role while students' mental abilities develop naturally through various paths of discovery. It is encouraged that children have an interpersonal relationship with other peers since many children learn from modeling from their peers. Peer modeling helps a child develop self-esteem and confidence to achieve.

Through positive peer modeling students learn the effectiveness of behavior modification. Peer relation will allow to be a motivator to complete assignments and help a student develop skills for working in groups. Jones & Jones (1998) advises that peer relationships influence student's achievement in several ways.

1. Peer attitude towards achievement affect student's academic aspiration and school behavior. 2.

The quality of peer relationships and personal support in classroom affects the degree to which students' personal needs are met and subsequently their ability to productively involve in the learning process. 3. Peer relations can directly affect achievement through cooperative learning activities. 4.

At risk students are more likely to feel alienated from school and have low rates of participation in school as early as third grade. According to Vygotsky, children are not passive recipients of knowledge (Santrock 2001). They are actively involved in constructing knowledge through social interaction with others. Teachers are facilitators and need to provide many opportunities for learning, both with the teacher and with peers. (Santrock2001). In a Vygoyskyian classroom teaching and learning is a reciprocal process, and teachers can learn from their students just as their students learn from them (Hammond & Gibbson 2001).

I believe that both Piaget and Vygotsky provided educators with important views on cognitive development in the child. Piaget proposed that children progress through the stages of cognitive development through maturation, discovery methods and some social transmissions through assimilation and

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accommodation (Woolfolk, A., 2004). Vygotsky's theory stressed the importance of culture and language on one's cognitive development.

Regarding the two cognitive theories, I would be more apt to apply Vygotskian principles to a classroom. I believe that principles such as scaffolding, co-constructed knowledge, dialogue, and cultural tools are important components of a student's knowledge achievement.

By helping students within their zone of proximal development, we offer them useful learning strategies which they internalize and utilize later.

Piaget proposed many applicable educational strategies, such as discovery learning with emphasis on activity and play. However, Vygotsky incorporated the importance of social interactions and a co-constructed knowledge base to the theory of cognitive development.