

# Vygotsky's socio cultural learning applied to teaching

[Education](#), [Learning](#)



## Introduction

Who is Lev Vygotsky? Birth: Lev Vygotsky was born November 17, 1896

Death: He died June 11, 1934. Vygotsky's Early Life: Lev Vygotsky was born in Orsha, a city in the western region of the Russian Empire. He attended Moscow State University, where he graduated with a degree in law in 1917. He studied a range of topics while attending university, including sociology, linguistics, psychology and philosophy. However, his formal work in psychology did not begin until 1924 when he attended the Institute of Psychology in Moscow and began collaborating with Alexei Leontiev and Alexander Luria.

Vygotsky's Career: Lev Vygotsky was a prolific writer, publishing six books on psychology topics over a ten year period. His interests were quite diverse, but often centered on topics of child development and education. He also explored such topics as the psychology of art and language development. Lev Vygotsky is considered a seminal thinker in psychology, and much of his work is still being discovered and explored today. While he was a contemporary of Skinner, Pavlov and Piaget, his work never attained their level of eminence during his lifetime.

Part of this was because his work was often criticized by the Communist Party in Russia, and so his writings were largely inaccessible to the Western world. His premature death at age 38 also contributed to his obscurity. Despite this, his work has continued to grow in influence since his death, particularly in the fields of developmental and educational psychology. Children's learning and cognitive development is a result of social

interactions with more knowledgeable others and their culture. Children learn behavior and ways of thinking from interactions with others. Sociocultural theory is an emerging theory in psychology that looks at the important contributions that society makes to individual development. This theory stresses the interaction between developing people and the culture in which they live.

Vygotsky explained areas in how social processes form learning and thinking. The areas are:

- The Social Sources of Individual thinking
- The role of Cultural tools in Cognitive Development
- The role of Language in cognitive development We will also discuss how we can apply Vygotsky's theory to teaching through:
- Assisted learning - Scaffolding and Zone of Proximal Development.

## **The Social Sources of Individual thinking**

Vygotsky believed that the social source of individual thinking is their interactions with people who are more capable or advanced in their thinking.

He assumed that " every function in a child's cultural development appears twice. " First, it appears in an interpsychological way and then in an intrapsychological way. Interpsychological means on the social level - interaction with others. Intrapsychological means on the individual level or inside the child. Higher mental processes first come about through a co-constructed process between people during shared activities and then later on it is internalized by the learner.

For example, the solving of problems during class group discussions, a student may not know how to solve the problem before but after the group discussion and the help provided by all members of the group, he is able to solve the problem on his own. In other words, the steps of solving the problem have been grasped by the individual and he is now able to solve the problem on his own. This problem solving process has been adopted by the learner and now it has become part of the learner's cognitive development. So for Vygotsky, social interaction is not merely an influence on a person but also a staircase to higher mental processes.

Vygotsky unlike Piaget believed that the more knowledgeable others fosters the cognitive development of children because of the children's interactions with such people who are more advanced in thinking, experiences and behavior. These people can be their parents and their teachers.

## **Cultural Tools and Cognitive Development**

What are cultural tools? These consist of the real tools and the symbolic tools that allow people to communicate, solve problems, think and acquire new knowledge.

The real cultural tools can be the abacus which is commonly used by the Chinese, rulers, printing presses, scales for measuring weight and modern tools such as what we mainly use - computers, cell phones, calendars, clocks or wrist watchers and the internet to name a few. The symbolic tools can be numbers and the mathematical system. The Roman numerals are an example of a symbolic tool that is widely used today. Sign language and Braille system for the blind, maps, works of art, signs and codes and

language which is the most integral part of acquiring knowledge and learning which contributes greatly to cognitive development.

These tools are used by adults in a day to day basis and are taught to the young and passed down to younger generations. Today, people use modern technologies such as computers and the internet to find information that they need and they acquire new knowledge from such real tools. Vygotsky emphasized that these tools are what the young use to make sense of what is around them. He also believed that higher mental processes are accomplished through the help of language, signs and symbols. He concentrated mainly on language which is a common factor to all societies.

## **The Role of Language**

In the case of language acquisition, children learn to associate sound with meaning or actions. Talking is one of the earliest cognitive developments in a child - How a child associates the sound with an action or what something means. Another way is through private speech. Have you watched a child play with a toy and talk to himself at the same time? Studies have found that children who frequently talk to themselves at play or any other time learn challenging tasks more effectively than children who seldom use private speech.

Later on in life, private speech is no more said out loud but becomes silent. For example, when trying to fix something or when you are attempting a critical thinking question do you silently talk to yourself during the process? Or when you are in a bad situation some people mutter swears to themselves either out loud or in silence. These are just examples of private speech and

how it relates to cognitive development. Furthermore, communication with more knowledgeable others are done through language. Here is where the role of the teacher, parents and peers comes in.

They serve as guides and mentors in providing the support and information that the learner needs in intellectual development. All these guidance and support is communicated through language. But we have to be mindful that not all learning takes place through talking. In some cultures, observance of a skilled performance is sufficient enough to guide the learner. For example, mat weaving, dancing, and sewing involve more observance than relating myths and legends through speech. These are some ways according to Vygotsky, in which language helps in cognitive development and learning.

## **Implications of Vygotsky's theory to Teaching**

### **The Zone of Proximal Development**

This is an implication of Vygotsky's theory. Vygotsky believed that children's learning take place when they are working within this zone. What is this zone of proximal development? It is the level of development immediately above the present level of the learner. Tasks within this zone of proximal development are ones that a learner cannot tackle alone but only with temporary assistance from teachers and peers who are known to be more knowledgeable.

This zone describes tasks that a learner has not yet mastered but will master later on after all the assistance that will be provided. This is where the idea of scaffolding comes in to place. Scaffoldingurpages. com. au Scaffolding is the assistance provided by teachers, peers and parents to the learner. This is

just the support provided to the learner at early stages but as the learner is more capable the learner is left to tackle the problem or the task alone. For example, the teacher can give problems for the students to solve.

Before the students are able to solve the problems, the teacher will be assisting the students by showing them the steps that need to be taken in to consideration in solving the problem. Once that assistance is given, the teacher then leaves students to solve the problem on their own. Once a student gets the answer wrong the teacher then assists the student again. So here the teacher intervenes only when the need arises but does not solve the problems for them.

### **Application of Vygotsky's theory to Teaching**

Teachers should allow for group activities where more capable students are grouped together with the less capable ones. Apply scaffolding in teaching methods so that students learn to be responsible and not be spoon fed most of the time by the teacher. Reciprocal teaching - where the teacher starts up a discussion by asking questions on materials that require reading and then turn over the responsibility of the discussion to the students \* Teacher must prepare a lesson plan which includes activities that not only can be performed individually but which involves the help of others. Allow for activities where students interact with each other such as games, group work, class picnics and social nights etc. This will help develop their social skills and self-confidence

## Conclusion

In conclusion, Vygotsky's theory is widely practiced today. He believed that children learn through their interactions with more skillful people - this can be their peers, parents and teachers. He also believed that culture shapes the mind of people and their view towards what is around them.

Cultural tools help people make sense of the world in which they live. Language is one such tool in which contributes greatly to cognitive development. Providing the idea of scaffolding in teaching will help students to be responsible independent learners. Therefore, taking in to consideration Vygotsky's theory will help us as future teachers to be aware of what teaching methods that we should implement and how we should deal with students effectively in regards to their learning and task performance and also how to enhance their social skills.

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