

# Learning theories in practice essay

[Technology](#), [Development](#)



## **Abstract**

Research into how individuals learn and the different stages of learning has been the focus of studies by various scholars. Based on the research that has been conducted so far, there are several theories that have been advanced. Notable among these theories are the theories that have been advanced by Piaget and Lev Vygotsky. They both concur on the role of the surrounding environment on the learner but differ on the effect. In spite of the differences that are evident in their theories they have been instrumental in shaping the teaching styles that are applied all over the world. According to Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, he proposes that social interaction has a vital role in the enhancement of cognitive abilities. He theorized that learning is a participative process comprising of social or cultural interactions. The learner does not acquire knowledge in isolation. He or she is strongly influenced by social interactions that occur in different environments. This theory formed the basis upon which the scaffolding technique of teaching would later be developed. The scaffolding technique involves offering the learner support before withdrawing it gradually in order to allow the learner to implement the concept on their own. It integrates the learner in the process and equips him with the necessary skills. The scaffolding technique also has its disadvantages. It may result in the learner having an over dependence on the person offering them support such as the teacher. The learner could therefore fail to develop the necessary skills such as the ability to take initiative. The scaffolding technique is time consuming and can lead to exhaustion of the teacher as he or she attempts to give each student personalized attention.

## 1. 0 Introduction

Learning is a necessity regardless of the age or sex of a person and it is association event that is predisposed by socialization and technology. It occurs in all environments and is a lifelong process. This has therefore one of the areas that has sparked great interest among researchers. Notable theories have been advanced as to how learning takes place and the factors that come into play in the process. Among the theories advanced are: Piaget's learning theory and Vygotsky learning theory. Both of the theories' support the idea that student's take an active role in the gaining of knowledge. Each of these theories has been critiqued by various scholars over the years in addition to being the basis for teaching styles. One of the styles that have been developed from Vygotsky's learning theory.

The scaffolding technique provides the learner support before gradually decreasing it in order to let the learner execute the concept on their own. It is a learner friendly process aimed at equipping him with the necessary skills. There are several demerits of the scaffolding technique. The learner could become over dependent on the person offering them support such as the teacher or a colleague. The learner could therefore fail to develop necessary skills such as the ability to take initiative or implement a concept without the help of some one. The scaffolding technique is time consuming thus the teacher could end up being exhausted as he or she attempts to give each student personalized attention.

The paper analyzes the scenario presented and the issues that arise as a result of Mrs. Khan's intervention in Tim's situation. It examines the merits

and demerits of what Mrs. Khan did and suggests what can be done to remedy Tim's situation.

## **2.0 Issues brought out in the scenario and Tim's needs**

There are several issues that are brought forth in this situation. The learner (Tim) has poor communication skills. He flunks his tests but does not share his problem and concern with either his parents or his teacher. This can be attributed to how he has been socialized. According to Vygotsky, thinking comes from the social level to the individual level. Therefore depending on the social aspects that the learner is exposed to they learn how to interact with people and how to express themselves. In the scenario presented, the learner Tim responds to the decline in his grades by panicking which makes his performance even worse. He is unable to come up with a way to improve his grades on his own showing that he has been socialized be dependent as a solution to his problems.

Tim is deeply affected by his dismal performance in Mathematics. It actually begins to shape his perception of the subject since he starts to dislike the subject. Piaget who did several experiments in relation to learning pointed out that each individual has their perception of reality hence they form notions based on this perception. Tim's perception of his dismal performance was that it was through bad luck which impaired his ability to prepare adequately for subsequent tests. He therefore found it easy to dislike the subject, a notion that was motivated by his past failure in the subject. It is therefore clear that Tim has issues with self-confidence (which can be seen by how his interaction with Susan helped him actually see that he can do it).

Tim also easily gives up, and seeks for an excuse to fail other than address the core reason of his failure. He also seems to be banking on luck more than hard work as he prepares for his tests. His worries about what his parents also seem to be affecting him. Tim's needs are therefore based on these issues.

Based on the issues that Tim has in reference to failing Mathematics, it is evident that he is at the advanced beginner stage of learning. He is aware of his knowledge of the subject but he also acknowledges that he lacks the knowledge on some aspects of the subject. He also exhibits a lack of the ability to make proper judgment as to how he can get past his problems with the subject. Being an advanced beginner presents several challenges for the teacher.

After conducting his learning experiments, Piaget came to the conclusion that “ learning is social only that the individual himself and by himself takes over some of the surrounding world's knowledge”. For this reason, Tim has failed to take charge of his environment and therefore play his role in learning and using this knowledge to pass his test. He has allowed his previous failures and to some extent past successes which are a part of his environment to determine how to learn and how to assimilate the current knowledge.

The teacher needs to make the student get past his perception of the subject as hard and therefore begin the process of helping him get better grades. This is supported by the fact that both Piaget and Lev Vygotsky agree on the learners though pattern as having an impact on their learning abilities.

According to Piaget, the perception that an individual has is as a result of “deeply intimate, personal and autistic mental states.” From this argument it can be deduced that unless the notions or perceptions that the learner has are changed, assimilation of new knowledge remains a challenge for the teacher.

Lev Vygotsky had a different argument regarding the same matter. He postulated that the individual’s thinking is springs from the social level and builds up to the individual level. For this reason, the teacher also faces the challenge of shaping the learners social environment and in turn affect the perception on Mathematics. He went to state that as a learner was continually exposed to different cultural and social experiences, he acquired the experiences and therefore began to “appropriate” them. The teacher therefore faces the challenge of making these social and cultural experiences relevant hence resulting in the learner appropriating knowledge necessary for him to pass the test.

### **3.0 The Teacher’s Response and Merits and demerits of the technique used by the teacher**

The teacher comes to Tim’s aid by using the scaffolding technique. This technique involves the interaction of the learner with more knowledgeable person who person it. It is based on Lev Vygotsky socio-cultural theory. He came up with a theory on the zone of proximal development (ZPD) which he defined as “the distance between what children can do by themselves and the next learning level that they can be helped to achieve through competent assistance”.

He defined scaffolding instruction as the teachers and others offering a learner support until the learner become competent on their own. The scaffolds are often available to the learner for a short duration of time. The aim of the educator when using the scaffolding teaching strategy is for the learner to gradually become an independent and self-regulating learner who is capable of solving problems. According to Vygotsky the external scaffolds provided by the educator can be withdrawn because the learner has developed "...more sophisticated cognitive systems, related to fields of learning such as mathematics or language, the system of knowledge itself becomes part of the scaffold or social support for the new learning."

In this scenario, Mrs. Khan offers Tim support until he is able to see that he needs to improve his grades and act upon that realization. She offers to help Tim after school and also reminds him that he used to get good grades hence he can do it again. It is therefore evident that Mrs. Khan has specific short term goals. These goals are: to help Tim get the good grades as he used to and also change his perception that Math is hard.

The teacher (Mrs. Khan) aids in shaping the perception of Tim towards Mathematics. She refuses to accept that Mathematics is hard as Tim voices it as one of the reasons for his poor performance. In doing this, she makes the task ahead seem manageable. She eases the frustration that Tim has been experiencing as a result of the past failures by offering a supportive smile and voicing her belief in Tim's capability.

According to Vygotsky, isolation is a deterrent to learning. He goes on to assert that learning is heavily reliant on social interactions that occur in

different contexts. If the learner interacts with individuals who have demonstrated greater abilities than them, the environment has a significant impact on their thought pattern and interpretation of the situations. A learner therefore develops his or her intellect through internalizing concepts based his or her own interpretation of an activity that occurs in a social setting. The main idea behind ZPD is that the learner after jointly completing the task with the teacher or somebody with that individual skill, the learner will then be able to complete the task on their own. Susan also forms a critical aspect of the scaffold teaching strategy. She offers to how Tim how she studies for her Mathematics quizzes. This helps Tim in acquiring a different approach when studying for his quizzes based on his observation of Susan's studying methods.

For this reason, the communication that occurs with more knowledgeable or capable others (parents, teachers, peers, others) aids the learner in conceptualizing and understanding a subject. The communication aids the learner to speak out which eventually steers cognitive abilities of the individual. The repetitive experiences eventually help the learner internalize and therefore spring into action to change their situation. It is this process that helps Tim to pass his quiz eventually. The repeated interaction with Susan shapes his perception of mathematics hence he no longer views it as a difficult subject. In being socialized with a more capable individual, he is able to harness his cognitive abilities and transform his lethargic approach to a better approach.



In the scaffolding technique, the learner is actively engaged. He or she is not passively fed with new information. For instance, in the scenario presented, Tim is actively involved in changing his grades. He takes clearly directed steps towards changing his grades from poor to good results. This is in further alignment with Vygotsky who advocated for the individual to be consciously engaged in the learning experience. It should therefore not be mere exchange of information from the teacher to learner. It encompasses regular practice by the learner, discussion and activities that spur the learner to make full use of their learning potential.

The approach used by Mrs. Khan is highly individualized. She offers to help out Tim with the sums after school. This gives Tim an opportunity to get a clear understanding as what areas he needs to put more effort into. This is important for the learner as it reduces the frustration that they have been experiencing in a larger classroom setting. For Tim, he was initially nervous and panic stricken. He lacked a specific time table hence he ended up being inadequately prepared for his quizzes. However once Mrs. Khan intervened and confronted him about his performance, he improved tremendously.

Scaffolding also spurs the learner to want to learn even more. It provides motivation for the learner as is evident in Tim who began to work harder towards achieving better results once he had the support of Mrs. Khan and Susan. He becomes more disciplined in conducting his personal studies thus he was able to tremendously improve his performance in Mathematics. He put in the extra hours and was keen in understanding the new terms that he had heard in class that day.

There are also several demerits of the approach that was used by Mrs. Khan. To begin with, the method is time consuming as it requires that each individual receives personal attention from the teacher. This can particularly be a challenge to the teacher if he or she has to supervise a large number of students. In addition to that, the teacher may end up neglecting the other students altogether as a result of committing too much time to the students who require special attention.

The method can also result in the segregation of the class into groups. This is because some students will receive more attention from the teacher hence those who feel ignored could form their own clique. They may resort to bullying those who they deem as the teacher's favorites to taunt them because of their weakness.

Scaffolding also stifles the student to some extent since they are constantly receiving attention from the teacher and those who are supporting them. This is detrimental to the learner because part of the knowledge acquired in subjects is attributed to making errors. The learner can also develop excessive dependency on the teacher or the other people who are supporting them in their learning endeavors. They could end up exercising little or no initiative on their own accord.

#### **4. 0 Recommendations**

According to Vygotsky, isolation is a deterrent to the learning process. The teacher can encourage Tim to keep up with the group meetings with Susan in spite the fact that he has shown a remarkable improvement in his grades. This would be important in helping Tim to sustain the grades that he has

acquired so far and also encourage the discovery of other areas of weakness that he can improve on.

Tim could also aid other students in his class who are weak in different aspects of Mathematics such as algebra. In so doing, he would sharpen his skills in algebra and also act as a support system and an example to another student who is in need of a change of attitude and their studying habits. This is an extension of Vygotsky's assertion that learning is a result of socialization in different environments that influence the learner's thinking and habits. An extension of the influence that Susan has had on him sets an example for the students to help each other out. This would prevent the formation of cliques of students who have exceptional abilities in algebra by encouraging interaction among the students. It also lessens the work load that the teacher has since she cannot necessarily be in a position to give personalized attention to each student.

In conclusion offering support to the student is vital since it makes it possible for the student to identify specific areas of weakness and work on improving them. It however could result in segregation of other students due to formation of cliques of students. This can be avoided by encouraging interaction of between the students who are performing well and those who are not.

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