

Lev vygotsky

Psychology, Child Development



Theorist Paper: Vygotsky Leo Semyonovich Vygotsky was a Russian developmental psychologist, discovered by the Western world in the 1960s. An important thinker, he pioneered the idea that the intellectual development of children is a function of human communities, rather than of individuals. It is now thought that Vygotsky's contributions have been vital in furthering our understanding of child development, and that his ideas were not only ahead of his time but also ahead of ours. Vygotsky (1896-1934) was born on November 5, 1896, in the small town of Orsha in Byelorussia (Soviet Union). He began his professional career as a literary critic and public school teacher at several schools in the local city of Gomel near Chernobyl in the Ukraine. Later, his interests slowly changed from art to the psychology of art and didn't become interested in psychology until he reached the age of 28. According to Bringmann, Early, Luck, & Miller (1997); " a series of lectures at the Second Neuropsychological Congress in Leningrad in January of 1924 led to an invitation to become a research assistant at the Institute of Experimental Psychology of Moscow State University." There he began his brilliant but brief academic career, during which he held several professorships, wrote numerous articles and books, and advanced original theories in various sub disciplines of psychology. His writings covered many areas of psychology and related fields of Science, although he never had any formal training in psychology. Vygotsky's collaborators included Alexander Luria and Alexei Leontiev, who helped create the body of research now known as the Vygotskian approach. During his lifetime, Vygotsky was under pressure to adapt his theories to the prevailing political ideology in Russia. After his death from tuberculosis in 1934, his ideas were repudiated by the

government but his ideas were kept alive by his students and later revived. Vygotsky's pioneering work in developmental psychology has had a profound influence on school education in Russia, and interest in his theories continues to grow throughout the world. Let us begin with Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory. According to Berk (2005), "The Sociocultural Theory focuses on how culture- The values, beliefs, customs, and skills of a social group- is transmitted to the next generation." According to Vygotsky, social interaction- in particular, cooperative dialogues with more knowledgeable members of society- is necessary for children to acquire the ways of thinking and behaving that make up a communities culture. Vygotsky believed that as adults and more expert peers help children master culturally meaningful activities, the communication between them becomes part of children's thinking. As children internalize features of these dialogues, they can use the language within them to guide their own thought and behavior and to acquire new skills. Berk (2005) gave the example of a young child instructing herself while working a puzzle or tying her shoes has begun to implement on her own the supportive functions of adult-child interaction. Consequently, the child can be heard producing comments similar to those an adult used to help her master important tasks. Vygotsky's theory has been especially influential in the study of children's cognition. Vygotsky agreed with Piaget that children are active, constructive beings. But unlike Piaget, who emphasized children's independent efforts to make sense of their world, Vygotsky viewed cognitive development as a socially mediated process- as dependent on the assistance that adults and more-expert peers provide as children tackle new challenges. In Vygotsky's theory, children undergo

certain stage wise changes. Berk (2005) uses the example of how when children acquire language, their ability to participate in dialogues with others is greatly enhanced, and mastery of culturally valued competencies surges forward. When children enter school, they spend much time discussing language, literacy, and other academic concepts- experiences that encourage them to reflect on their own thinking. As a result, they gain dramatically in reasoning and problem solving. At the same time, Vygotsky stressed that dialogues with experts lead to continuous changes that vary greatly from culture to culture, each learning those tasks that are essential for success in that particular culture. Vygotsky believed that when children start to communicate with themselves in much the same way they converse with others, they greatly enhance the complexity of their thinking and their ability to control their own behavior. As children talk out loud to themselves, Vygotsky reasoned that they do this for self guidance. Because language helps children think about mental activities and behavior and select courses of action, Vygotsky viewed it as the foundation for all higher cognitive processes, including controlled attention, deliberate memorization and recall, categorization, planning, problem solving, and self-reflection. As children get older and find tasks easier, their self-directed speech is internalized as silent, inner speech- the verbal dialogues we carry on with ourselves while thinking and acting in everyday situations. According to Berk (2005), over the past three decades, almost all studies have supported Vygotsky's perspective. As a result, children's self-directed speech is now called private speech instead of Piaget's term, egocentric speech. This leads us to the theme of the " Zone of Proximal Development." This Vygotskian concept refers to a range of tasks

that a child cannot yet handle alone but can do with the help of more skilled partners. Vygotsky himself described it as " the distance between the actual development level determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978). In other words, a student can perform a task under adult guidance or with peer collaboration that could not be achieved alone. The Zone of Proximal Development bridges that gap between what is known and what can be known. Vygotsky claimed that learning occurred in this zone. Another interesting idea I have discovered while learning about Vygotsky is that he saw make-believe play as the best social environment for encouraging cognitive development in early childhood. As children create imaginary situations, they learn to follow internal ideas and social rules rather than their immediate impulses. According to Vygotsky, make-believe play is a unique, broadly influential zone of proximal development in which children try out a wide variety of challenging activities and acquire many abilities. It was also interesting to find out that Vygotsky was particularly interested in the problems of blind and deaf children and wrote about them at length. According to Bringmann, et al. (1997), " His central argument was that many of the problems that handicapped children face are the result of their social isolation, and that these could be overcome by successful social integration." He strongly supported the mainstreaming of handicapped children and adolescents into regular classrooms and into a normal work environment. Vygotsky believed the loss of hearing or sight is not the most serious handicap for children. Eyes and ears are " instruments of the mind" and can

be replaced by artificial instruments or other sensory systems. Bringmann, et al. (1997) uses the example of how fingers can replace the eyes when blind children learn to read Braille." Finally, in granting social experience a fundamental role in cognitive development, Vygotsky's theory helps us understand cultural variation in cognitive skills. It recognizes that children develop unique forms of thinking from engaging in activities that make up their culture's way of life. In addition, Vygotsky's ideas emphasize the very important role of teaching in children's progress. Parents' and Teachers' engagement with children results in remarkable advances in the complexity of children's thinking. Due to different factors, including those related to the particular political relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union, Vygotsky's work remained unknown in the Americas for decades. When the Cold War ended, the incredible wealth of Vygotsky's work began to be revealed. Nowadays, it is difficult to exclude Vygotsky from any serious discussion of learning processes. Through these main theories, I have been able to only skim the surface of these deep, complex, and far reaching ideas that Vygotsky accomplished in his very short life. Although Vygotsky's career was short, dying at the age of 37 due to tuberculosis, the effect he made on education was lasting and still survives to this day. References Berk, L. A. (2005). *Infants, Children, and Adolescents*. (5th ed.) Boston, Ma: Pearson Education, Inc. Bringmann, W. G., Early, C. E., Luck, H. E., & Miller, R. (Eds.) (1997.) *A Pictorial History of Psychology*. Carol Stream, IL: Quintessence Books. Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind and Society: The Development of higher mental Processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.