

Summary this
perspective
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Summary

Lev Vygotsky's social-historical theory of human development is perhaps one of the most cited theories by educationists when it comes to issues of curricula development and formulation of new teaching approaches (Velenzuela et al, 2000).

The psychologist's views on human development have particularly been used by educators and other theorists to alter children's perceptions, thought-systems, expectations, and behavior. It is the object of this paper to demonstrate how Vygotsky's theory can be used to assist kindergarten students and others with special needs to cope with the learning process. It was the perception of Vygotsky that social interactions among young children lead to not only improved levels of cognition, but also to a total transformation of the children's thought-systems, attitudes, and behavior (Mahn, 1999). Consequently, the theory suggests that children's cognition, mindsets and world views are shaped by the particular social-historical environment in which they reside and by their continued interactions with adults.

The most essential notion of Vygotsky's theoretical perspective is that our minds, no matter our biological predispositions, are culturally mediated (Wertsch, 1985). This perspective insinuates that culture is the most basic determinant of individual development. Vygotsky also presupposed that a child's knowledge base is fundamentally expanded by exposing him or her to a multiplicity of cultures and social environments. The developmental progression of children, according to the psychologist, is entirely dependent

upon the adults as well as the cultural tools granted to them within the wider social context (Venezuela et al, 2000). Vygotsky came up with three approaches through which learning can take place, namely imitative learning, instructed learning, and collaborative learning (Wertsch, 1985). To briefly describe the processes, imitative learning takes place when the young child attempt to copy or imitate others, while instructed learning happens when a child develops the capacity to recall instructions or directions as given by the instructor and thereafter putting them into practice.

Finally, collaborative learning occurs when an assemblage of individuals join forces in the process of learning so as to understand each other in depth or accomplish a particular set objective (Venezuela, 2000). Vygotsky hatched the concept of zone of proximal development (ZPD) to demonstrate the difference between a person's level to independently solve problems and his or he ability to solve critical issues under the direction of adults or other competent peers, otherwise called the actual and potential levels of development (Wertsch, 1985).

Application

This theory is increasingly being used by educators in the school context to help kindergarten-age children and others with special needs to cope with requirements of the education system. The theory insinuates that children have the capacity to learn through social interaction. In this perspective, curricula and teaching strategies for kindergarten-age children and others with special needs should be explicitly designed to accentuate the interaction between the children on one hand and the learning tasks on the other (Venezuela et al, 2000). When the theory is utilized, the kindergarten

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children are most likely to derive meaning of the whole learning process by the virtue of active participation in the actual social-cultural context.

Vygotsky theory of human development is more receptive to the learning requirements of children with special needs since it presupposes that notions are socially mediated, and can only subsist in collectives rather than in persons.

As such, the learning process is centered on the socio-cultural, institutional, and historical facets rather than emphasizing individual cognitive capacities (Wertsch, 1985). With suitable assistance from the educator such as the employment of the scaffolding technique, kindergarten children can effectively complete learning tasks that could not have been accomplished if the children were on their own (Edwards, 2005). The scaffolding technique obliges educators to continually adjust their level of assistance in response to the student's level of understanding. In other words, educators must have the capacity to control the learning environment to make it possible for the children to learn through a step by step process. Studies have revealed that the technique not only lessens the frustrations levels evident in children within this age-category, but it also widens their knowledgebase and inculcate the skills necessary for self-regulating problem solving in the future (Valenzuela et al, 2000). The concept of ZPD can also be used by educators to uplift the learning capabilities of kindergarten-age children and others in need of special attention.

Indeed, the assessment criteria used by educators to grade the children must aptly consider what the young learners are able to achieve on their own and what they are able to achieve with the assistance of others

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(Valenzuela et al, 2000). In other words, two children may be initially endowed with similar levels of actual development but one may end up becoming more knowledgeable than the other due to the kind of interaction established and assistance offered. As such, both the curriculum and assessment techniques for kindergarten-age children and others with special needs must considerably focus on the children's level of actual development in relation to their potential level of development. It is important to note that this theory perceives each social interaction as a learning experience, and as such, kindergarten-age children should be exposed to individuals and ideas that function above their existing level of knowledge and understanding to open up their minds to new and more complicated ideas (Edwards, 005).

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