

# Vygotskys assumptions and interactions between learning and culture education ess...

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In this essay I will be discussing Lev S. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of learning. Sociocultural theory focuses on how culture, which is our beliefs, customs, values and skills, are transmitted from generation to generation (Kozulin, Gindis, Ageyev & Miller, 2003). Furthermore, this will include Vygotsky's assumptions about learning and the relationship between learning and culture. This essay will present the implications of this theory in relation to the South African multi-cultural context in education. Early theories of teaching and learning focused on the individual learner and were influenced directly by findings in the field of psychology. This draws on work done by theorist L. S. Vygotsky, which aims are to find unified ways of understanding issues of cognition, language, human development, culture, teaching and learning. According to this approach, learning is explained as an activity requiring the construction of knowledge, not the passive reception of new information (Garcia, 2002). Vygotsky viewed cognitive development as a socially mediated activity in which children progressively gain new ways of thinking and behaving through cooperative dialogues with more educated members of society (Shaffer & Kipp, 2010). Moreover, the difference between what a learner can do independently and what can be done with the help of a more experienced or knowledgeable teacher is called the zone of proximal development (Couchenour & Chrisman, 2011). It is within the zone that teaching becomes extremely important. All teachers know that when presenting something too far beyond a child grasp or too familiar, we will lose their interest. The concept of the ZPD shows the importance of engaging a child in that critical space of possible development. Through mediation, the child learns to adapt present

meanings to new meanings that fit what is more widely understood and accepted. Teaching and learning cannot just be about teachers giving information and answers to learners, but the process has to involve an intended effort to challenge and help learners to organise and understand information in increasingly more effective ways. Vygotsky's theory assumes the need for children to engage with others who can help develop their full potential (Kozulin, Gindis, Ageyev & Miller, 2003). The importance of sociocultural theory for education is the proposition that learning and social interaction are connected. In this view, knowledge is not a given set of fixed ideas that are passed from a teacher to learner, but rather knowledge is created in the interaction between teacher and learner. Vygotsky states that knowledge constantly evolves as a result of social interaction. What is being taught, what is learned and how it is learned cannot be separated from its social context. Therefore, knowledge cannot be taught as it is static and unchanging. In addition, learning and teaching develops out of constant social interaction between teacher and learner (Garcia, 2002). I believe that learners bring their own skills, knowledge, values and understandings from their particular social context to the teaching and learning situation.

Language in all its forms is an especially important tool in teaching and learning. It is the way people interact and transmit knowledge. As children grow, their capability to use language and receive more knowledge of social situations increases their thinking skills. Language is a tool of thought; therefore I think children learn more complex thinking skill with the help of teachers in order to develop and refine their use of language. I encourage learners to engage in discussions, debates, reflections and diverse activities.

Vygotsky claims that human knowledge is derived from culture. This means that what we know comes from our families and society. For example, the holidays we celebrate and the way we celebrate them represent knowledge based on culture. Culturally diverse learners face the challenge of either accommodating their existing schema or constructing new schema. When the educational focus is on changing culturally diverse learners to a mainstream culture rather than building on what they already know, the learners are obligated to change in order to meet the needs of the classroom (Marshall, 2002). South Africa is exceptionally rich in its diversity of many cultural forms, for example, different forms of music, dance, drama, storytelling and arts. If used in teaching, these forms can help learners share their cultures and learn to respect one another. Instead of experiencing embarrassment, anxiety and discomfort. Teachers must understand cultural diversity in children and acknowledge these differences in the classroom. For example, teachers whose perceptions of learners are grounded in racial stereotypes, these learners must bear a burden that is unjust and immoral. Each teacher must support, value, respect and analyse their own beliefs systems in order to recognise a family value of cultures and traditions (Couchenour & Chrisman, 2011). For example, classrooms or school celebrations may be based on the assumptions that come from the experiences or knowledge of the majority. Such events may cause some learners to feel excluded or devalued; therefore these learners must decide whether they want to co-operate with teachers or rebel. Vygotsky's theory emphasises how people differ in their understandings of the world according to their social contexts. Therefore, we must realise that in any one class of

learners there is a wide range of individual differences and diversity. The most important implication from this is that, although it is tempting to teach a whole class of learners as if they are all the same, it's necessary to recognise their differences and diversity. Teachers need to acquire knowledge of various cultural groups and the way in which the experiences and cultural backgrounds can affect their perceptions of and approachability to teachers and many other aspects of schooling (Marshall, 2002). The problem with this theory and practices is that it has been taught as if it has equal relevance for all people under all social conditions. In South Africa our social context, for example our ways of life, socio-economic condition, cultural values and practices have different meanings and applications to theories. In other words, some of the assumptions about teaching and education that have been taken to be universally true from the perspective of one social context need to be questioned from our perspective of South African social context. It may not be the basic theory that needs to be questioned, but the way it is interpreted, by using South African examples to illustrate and explain the practical applications that are appropriate. I believe that Vygotsky's theory is relevant in our multi-cultural social context of South Africa because his theory moves through different levels of challenges in the way I view education. Conclusion Effective teaching and learning cannot be one-way process. Both teacher and learner must actively explore and adapt to their social environment. Moreover, in culturally diverse school environments, teachers can reduce prejudice by encouraging learners from diverse backgrounds to work cooperatively on tasks that are of mutual interest and benefit to all learners' involved. South African schools must be

developed to accommodate diversity and provide a supporting teaching and learning environment for all. Learners' differences must be respected and discrimination eliminated, in order for learning to occur and active participation of all learners to be encouraged and supported at all educational levels.