

Piaget and vygotsky
were both considered
constructivists
education essay



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Piaget and Vygotsky were both considered constructivists. Constructivism is a theory of teaching and learning based on the idea that cognition is developed through mental construction. This suggests that humans learn, constructing new knowledge by piecing together their past experiences. Another similarity between Piaget and Vygotsky is that they both believe societal influences establish the boundaries of cognitive growth.

The main ideas in Piaget's and Vygotsky's theories regarding intelligence differ. According to Piaget, intelligence was a product of action. He believed that children learn by interaction with their surrounding and that such learning's occur after development. Vygotsky however, believed that learning occurs before development can and that a child learns because of history and symbolism. Vygotsky also thought that children appreciate input from their surroundings as well as other people. Piaget on the other hand did not place any importance on the input of others.

Piaget and Vygotsky's theories regarding the stages of development have differing opinions as well. Piaget's theory of cognitive development is made up of four stages which mark the emergence of new intellectual abilities. The earliest stage is the sensorimotor stage, which occurs between birth and two years of age. During this stage babies and young children use their senses and motor skills to explore the world. Through physical activity and somewhat accidental motor reflexes intelligence is manifested. Toward the end of this stage children also acquire the concept of object permanence, meaning that they understand an object is there even if the child cannot see it.

The next stage in Piaget's theory is known as the preoperational stage. This occurs during ages two through seven. During this stage a child's language and concepts develop rapidly, however their thinking process is still rather primitive. In this stage characteristics such as centration occur, which leaves the child so focused on one aspect of a situation that they fail to see other important factors. Another characteristic is that children are egocentric. They believe that everyone thinks, or has the same needs and desires as they do.

The third stage in Piaget's theory is the concrete operational stage, occurring between the ages of seven and eleven. During this stage children begin to experience a drastic change in their thinking process. Their thoughts become less egocentric and more logical. " Reversibility, the ability to perform a mental operation and then reverse one's thinking to return to the starting point (Slavin, 2003, p. 33)" occurs during this stage. Children at this stage still have difficulty with abstract thought.

The last stage in Piaget's cognitive development theory is identified as the formal operational stage. It is during this stage in which a child begins to develop abstract and symbolic thoughts. It allows hypothetical situations to be addressed, and problem solving through experimentation. This development gives young adults the ability to reason their way through situations they have not yet experienced.

As discussed Piaget's theory has four specific stages, however Vygotsky believed that there are no set stages. The first aspect of Vygotsky's theory is a mechanism referred to as private speech, talking to oneself. Vygotsky found that it was important to turn shared knowledge into person knowledge.

He believed that children would integrate the speech of others into their problem solving process. Private speech is commonly seen amongst young children who talk to themselves openly and often. In adulthood private speech is also very important, although it become silent and internalized it is still a helpful problem solving tool.

Vygotsky's belief of the zone of proximal development is the second part of his cognitive theory. " A zone of proximal development is the level of development immediately above a person's present level (Slavin, 2003, p. 44)". The zone of proximal development consists of things a child cannot quite do alone, but could accomplish with help from a more experienced child or an adult. It includes tasks a child has not yet learned but is capable of learning. Vygotsky believed that to achieve maximum learning it was important to work with the zone of proximal development.

The final idea in Vygotsky's cognitive development theory is scaffolding. This includes using encouragement, clues, reminders and assistance in the form of suggestion to aid the child in independently learning. By learning to solve problems independently and without the help of others, the child gains the ability to self-regulate.

Both Piaget and Vygotsky's cognitive development theories have had an impact on education practices and classroom management. Piaget's theory is used in classrooms daily with the use of developmentally appropriate education. Another example of Piagetian theory being used in the classroom is through hands on activities. According to Piaget, young children (preoperational) learn through their actions and are not capable of abstract

thought, therefore providing a variety of physical activities for smaller children is essential to any classroom schedule.

Aspects of Vygotsky's cognitive theory are also found in many classroom settings. An example is a classroom which has the children divided into groups, or tables. This uses Vygotsky's ideas regarding use of the zone of proximal development as well as scaffolding. By placing children of varying developmental abilities together for group work, children have the ability to mentor and learn from each other through scaffolding, as well as work in their zone of proximal development.

It is clear that cognitive development theories play an important role in addressing the educational needs and learning methods of children of varying stages. Through the theories provided by Piaget and Vygotsky it is possible to create a better classroom experience for not only the student but the teacher as well. When a teacher uses methods to teach children developmentally appropriate material, it makes for a more enjoyable and conducive learning environment. Thanks to such psychologists as Piaget and Vygotsky, teachers today have the tools available to them to create such an environment.