

Vygotsky's Social Constructivists Theory of Learning

Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934) was a Russian psychologist. He is considered as the father of social constructivist theory. He followed the work of John Piaget – who is attributed as the roots of constructivism¹. While Piaget focused on stages of child development and individual construction of knowledge, Vygotsky identified the greater socio-cultural context.



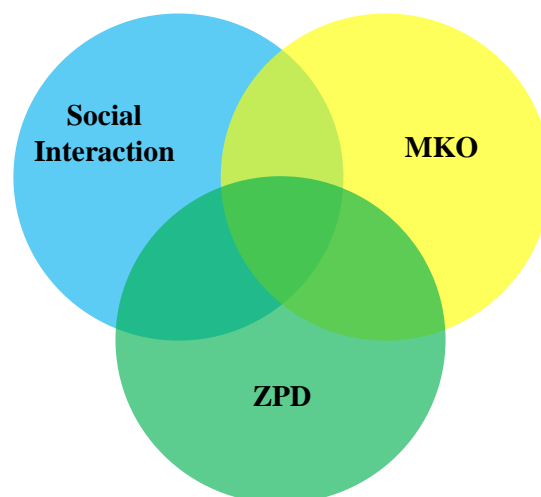
*“What a child can today with assistance, she will
be able to do by herself tomorrow”*

-Lev Vygotsky-

Vygotsky's approach

Social Development Theory argues that social interaction precedes development; consciousness and cognition are the end product of socialization and social behaviour.

It asserts three major themes regarding **social interaction**, **the more knowledgeable other (MKO)**, and the **zone of proximal development (ZPD)**.



Social Interaction

Social interaction plays a fundamental role in the process of cognitive development.

¹ Jones, M., & Araje, L. (2002). The Impact of Constructivism on Education: Language, Discourse, and Meaning. *American Communication Journal*, 5(3).

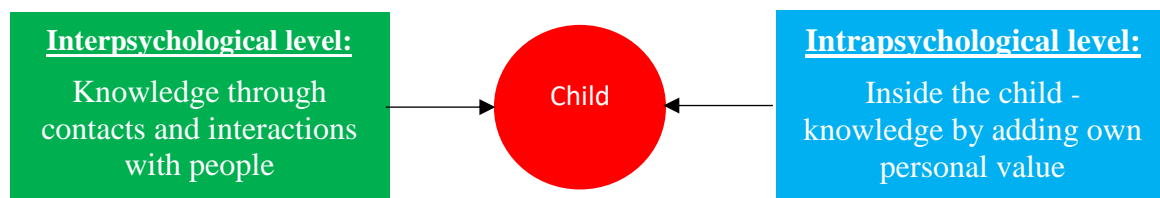
Vygotsky felt social learning precedes development. He states: “Every function in the child’s cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level.

Social Level is between people which is called as **interpsychological** and then individual level which is inside the child – called **intrapsychological**

In **interpsychological level**, child knowledge through contacts and interactions with people and then later the child assimilates and internalises this knowledge adding own personal value to it in **intrapsychological level**

The More Knowledgeable Other (MKO)

The MKO refers to anyone who has a better understanding or a higher ability level than the learner, with respect to a particular task, process, or concept. The MKO is normally thought of as being a teacher, coach, or older adult, but the MKO could also be peers, a younger person, or even computers.

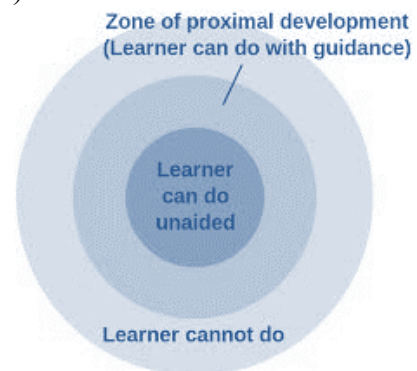


The Zone of Proximal Development

Vygotsky defines the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) as “the distance between the actual developmental level as 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”

In the ZPD, a teacher and a learner work together on a task that the learner could not perform independently because of the difficulty level. Also it reflects the idea of collective activity, where those who know more or are more skilled share that knowledge and skill to

accomplish a task with those who know less. A good deal of guided participation is required when working in the ZPD and learners bring their own understandings to social interactions and construct meanings by integrating those understandings with their experiences in the context.



Educational Applications of Social Constructivists Theory

Vygotsky emphasised that children and adults are both active agents in the process of child’s development. When applying to teaching it means that both the teacher and a student are seen as active agents in children’s learning. The teacher's intervention in children's learning is necessary, but it is the quality of the teacher-learner interaction, which is seen as crucial in that learning.

- **Reciprocal teaching:** It involves interactive dialogues between teacher and small group of students. At first, the teacher models the activities. After that teacher and students take turns being the teacher. During reading comprehension, if students learn to ask questions, then to determine their level of understanding, teacher can include a question-asking strategy in the instructional sequence. Since students gradually develop skills, reciprocal teaching comprises the principle of social interaction and ZPD of the Vygotskian perspective.
- **Peer collaboration:** The shared social interactions when peers work on tasks cooperatively serve an instructional function. This method is mainly used in learning mathematics, science, and language arts which attests to the recognized impact of the social environment during learning.
- **Apprenticeship Programs:** as they occur in cultural institutions like schools and agencies which helps in transforming learners' cognitive development. On the job, apprentices operate within a ZPD as mainly their works depend on tasks beyond their capabilities. Apprentices develop a shared understanding of important processes by working with experts and integrate this with their current understandings