

THEORIES : VYGOTSKY'S THEORY OF COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

(Lecture Series-4), B.A. IInd (Honors)

(Paper-IVth Systems in Psychology)

By

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* Theories of Cognitive Psychology

There are three important cognitive theories. The three cognitive theories are:

1. Piaget's developmental theory (1936),
2. Lev Vygotsky's socio-cultural cognitive theory (1934), and
3. Atkinson and Shiffrin's information process theory (1968)

Here, we will discuss **Lev Vygotsky's socio-cultural cognitive theory** only, and rest of the theories will be discussed in next lecture series of cognitive theories.

* 2. Lev Vygotsky's socio-cultural cognitive theory (1934)

Lev Vygotsky, a Russian psychologist, developed a theory of cognitive development known as the Sociocultural Theory of Cognitive Development in the early twentieth century.

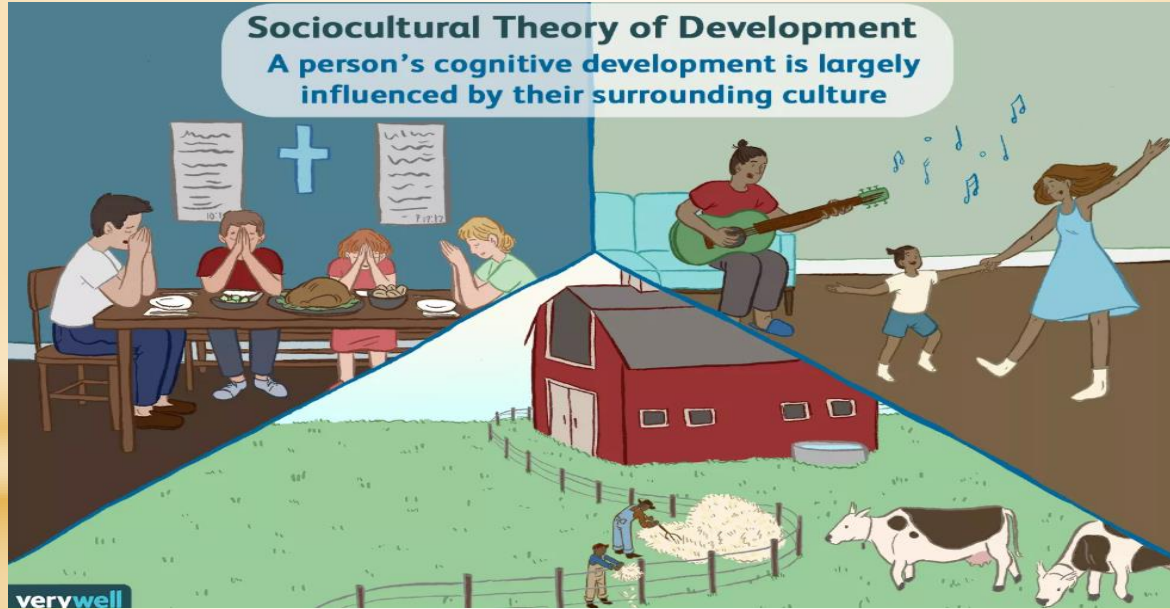
The main assertion of the Vygotsky theory is that the cognitive development of children is advanced through social interaction with other people, particularly those who are more skilled. In other words, Vygotsky believed that social learning comes before cognitive development, and that children construct knowledge actively. Sociocultural theory is an emerging theory in psychology that looks at the important contributions that society makes to individual development. This theory stresses the interaction between developing people and the culture in which they live. Sociocultural theory also suggests that human learning is largely a social process.



Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934)

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The major theme of Vygotsky's theoretical framework is that social interaction plays a fundamental role in the development of cognition.



* The Zone of Proximal Development

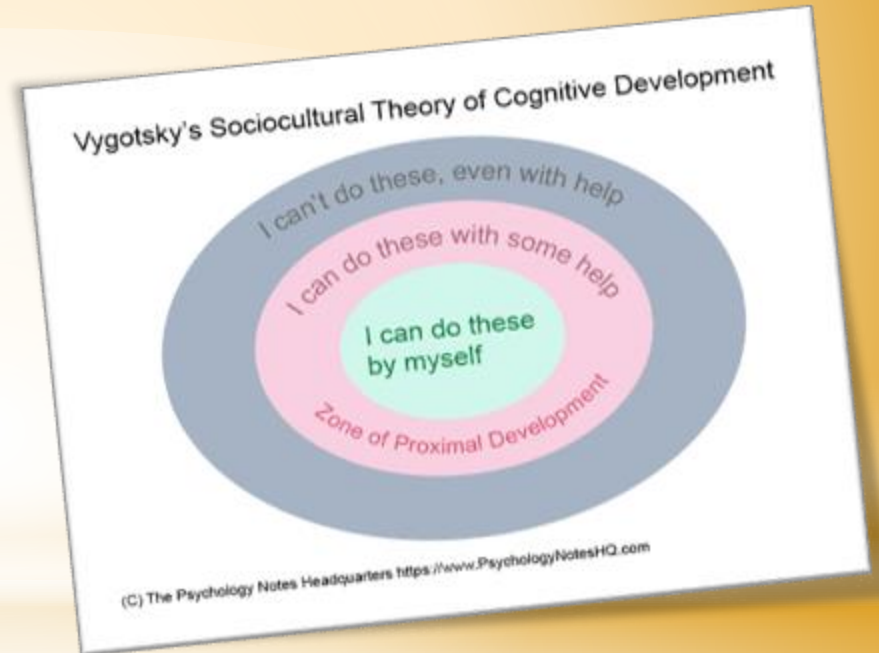
Vygotsky (1978) states: “Every function in the child’s cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological) and then inside the child (intrapsychological). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of concepts. All the higher functions originate as actual relationships between individuals.” (p57).

A second aspect of Vygotsky’s theory is the idea that the potential for cognitive development depends upon the “zone of proximal development” (ZPD): a level of development attained when children engage in social behavior. Full development of the ZPD depends upon full social interaction. The range of skill that can be developed with adult guidance or peer collaboration exceeds what can be attained alone.

Vygotsky’s theory was an attempt to explain consciousness as the end product of socialization. For example, in the learning of language, our first utterances with peers or adults are for the purpose of communication but once mastered they become internalized and allow “inner speech”.

* Conti...

Vygotsky is most recognized for his concept of **Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)** pertaining to the learning process of children. According to the Vygotsky theory, children who are in the zone of proximal development for a particular task can almost perform the task independently, but not quite there yet. They need some help in order to perform the task successfully.



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For example, a five-year-old child knows how to ride a tricycle. However, she can't ride a bicycle (with two wheels) without his grandfather holding onto the back of her bike. With his grandfather's help, this little girl learns to balance her bike. With some more practice, she can ride the bike on her own. In this scenario, we can say that the child is in the **zone of proximal development** for riding a bike.



* Conti...

The concept of Zone of Proximal Development underscores Vygotsky's conviction that social influences, particularly getting instructions from someone, are of immense importance on the cognitive development of children.

As children are given instructions or shown how to perform certain tasks, they organize the new information received in their existing mental schemas. They use this information as guides on how to perform these tasks and eventually learn to perform them independently.

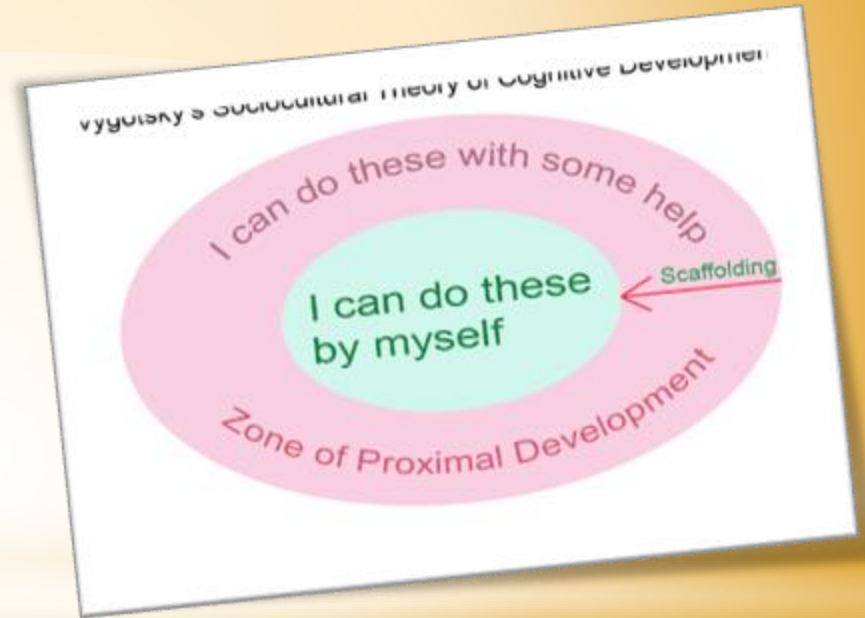
■ More Knowledgeable Other (MKO).

According to Vygotsky's theory of cognitive development, children learn through social interaction that include collaborative and cooperative dialogue with someone who is more skilled in tasks they're trying to learn. Vygotsky called these people with higher skill level the **More Knowledgeable Other (MKO)**. They could be teachers, parents, tutors and even peers. In our example of a five-year-old girl learning to ride a bike, her grandfather not only holds onto the back of the bike, but also verbally teaches the little girl how to balance her bike. From the little girl's point of view, her grandfather is a More Knowledgeable Other.

■ Scaffolding

Vygotsky's concept of **scaffolding** is closely related to the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development. Scaffolding refers to the temporary support given to a child by a More Knowledgeable Other that enables the child to perform a task until such time that the child can perform this task independently.

Scaffolding entails changing the quality and quantity of support provided to a child in the course of a teaching session. The MKO adjusts the level of guidance in order to fit the student's current level of performance.



* Conti...

For novel tasks, the MKO may utilize direct instruction. As the child gains more familiarity with the task and becomes more skilled at it, the MKO may then provide less guidance.

In the example of the five-year-old learning to ride a bike, her grandfather (MKO) may begin by holding onto the back of her bike the whole time that she is on the bike. As the little girl gains more experience, her grandfather may release his hold intermittently. Eventually the girl's grandfather only grabs the bike when he needs to correct her balance. When the girl finally masters the skill, her grandfather no longer needs to hold onto her bike anymore. In other words, the scaffolds can be removed.

* Conti...

A major contribution of Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory of cognitive development is the acknowledgement of the social component in both cognitive and psychosocial development. Due to his proffered ideas, research attention has been shifted from the individual onto larger interactional units such as parent and child, teacher and student, brother and sister, etc.



* Practical Applications for Vygotsky's Socio-cultural Theory

Socio-cultural theory has gained popularity in recent years, particularly in educational settings. Some examples of how this theory can be put into practice in the real world are:

- i. In the classroom
- ii. Socializing and play

* i. In the classroom

Understanding the levels of the zone of proximal development can be helpful for teachers. In classroom settings, teachers may first assess students to determine their current skill level. Once this has been ascertained, educators can then offer instruction that stretches the limits of each child's capabilities. At first, the student may need assistance from an adult or more knowledgeable peer, but eventually, their zone of proximal development will expand.

- Teachers can plan their instruction and lessons. For example, the teacher might organize the class into groups where less skilled children are paired with students who have a higher skill level.
- Hints, prompts, and direct instruction can be used to help kids improve their ability levels.
- Educators might also utilize the concept of scaffolding, where the teacher provides prompts to move the child progressively forward toward a goal.

* ij. Socializing and Play

Vygotsky's theory also stressed the importance of play in learning. Teachers and parents can utilize this knowledge by providing children plenty of opportunities for play experiences. Vygotsky believed that through playing and imagining, children were able to further stretch their conceptual abilities and knowledge of the world.

Types of play that can further learn include imaginary play, role-playing, games, and reenactments of real events. Such activities help foster the growth of abstract thought.

* Piaget vs. Vygotsky: Key Differences

First, Vygotsky placed a greater emphasis on how social factors influence development. While Piaget's theory stressed how a child's interactions and explorations influenced development, Vygotsky stressed the essential role that social interactions play in cognitive development.¹

Another important difference between the two theories was that while Piaget's theory suggests that development is largely universal, Vygotsky suggested that cognitive development can differ between different cultures. The course of development in Western culture, for example, might be different than it is in Eastern culture.

<https://www.instructionaldesign.org/theories/social-development/>

<https://www.psychologynoteshq.com/vygotsky-theory/>

Thank You