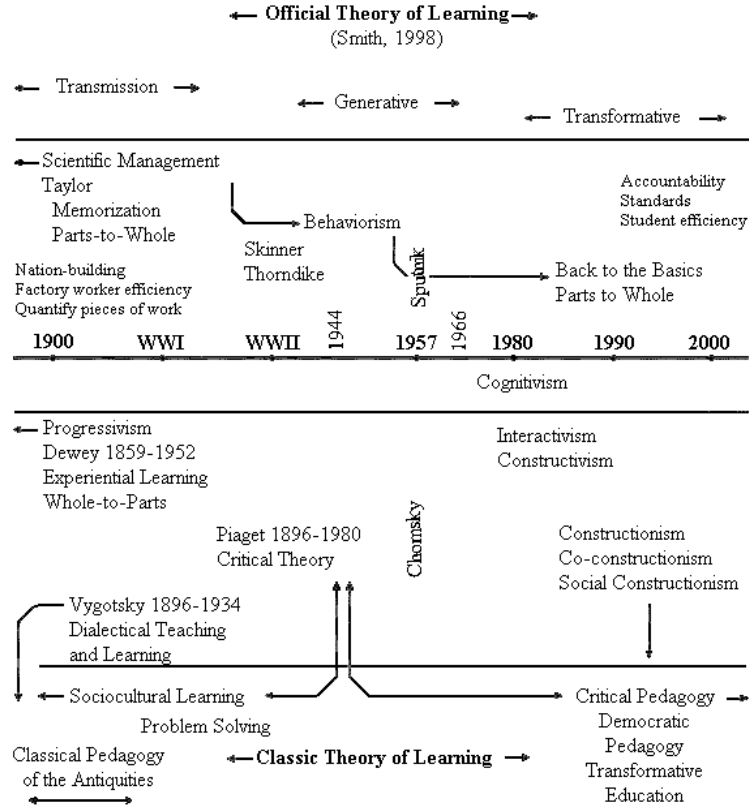


A Vision of Vygotsky Mumbo-Jumbo Theory

The following excerpt is taken from chapter four, The Zone of Proximal Development.

A vivid example of the ZPD recently happened with Joan and a classroom of adult students in the context of international education. As a way of preparing for a masters' comprehensive final, Joan spent two hours of class time reviewing the ebb and flow of the various theoretical perspectives throughout this century (Figure 1.1). With the test rapidly approaching, the students were focused, drawing their own time lines in preparation for the test, and asking many questions. At the end of this session, the whiteboard in the classroom was completely filled with a long red vertical line that ran the full length of the board. Obviously, it was a time line; dates, people, and ideas were rapidly scrawled above and below the vertical line. In fact, a quick, cursory glance could lead one to believe that it was *mumbo-jumbo*, a mess of scribbles, scrawls, and scratches. However, a closer look by anyone preparing for a master's final would show that the mess contained the big ideas of thought running through this century. At the end of class, Joan recreated in her class journal the exact time line that the students generated (Figure 4.7).



On the time line, the students had written *Vygotsky's life* (1896 to 1934); close to his name, they wrote the phrases *dialectical teaching and learning*, *sociocultural learning*, and *problem solving*. Near his name, and below the time line, they wrote the lifespans of *Dewey* (1859 to 1952) and *Piaget* (1896 to 1980). Below Dewey's name, they scrawled *experiential learning* and *whole-to-parts*. Above Piaget's name, they included the term *generative*. The time line included the simultaneous and conflicting notions of *Progressivism* and *Scientific Management* in the early years of the 1900s.

Above the time line, they wrote *Taylor* under *Scientific Management* with the words *memorization*, and *parts-to-whole*. Not far from Taylor's name, *Skinner*, *Thorndike*, and *Behaviorism* were followed by *Black Box theory*, *stimulus-response*, and *quantify-measure*. At the very top of the whiteboard, above *Behaviorism*, they wrote *Transmission*.

In the middle of the horizontal line, 1957 appeared, with *Sputnik* written above the line and with *Chomsky* written below. Both the years 1944 and 1966 were highlighted. Below the late 1970s and moving into the 1980s, the words *cognitivism*, *interactivism*, *constructivism*, *constructionism* (see Table 1. 1), *co-constructionism*, and *social constructionism* appeared, followed by arrows to *critical pedagogy*, *democratic pedagogy*, and *transformative education*.

Critical pedagogy had two arrows beside it, one moving to the right, as an implicated future, and another arrow to the left, pointing directly up to *Critical Theory of the 1940s*. Another arrow from *critical theory* went down to *sociocultural learning*. From *Vygotsky's* name, an arrow indicated the link to *classical pedagogy*.

However, the original questions asked at the beginning of this section were: What is the ZPD? And, who is the more capable peer? What does that time line on a whiteboard have to do with answering those two questions? The answers can be found in what happened next.

At the end of the review session on the time line, Joan grabbed a whiteboard eraser to clean the board. She rapidly drew the eraser across the entire length of the board, but the red marks stayed on the board. She did it again. Nothing. The red marks remained. Joan had obviously used a nonerasable marker for this lesson, not the erasable marker. The students began to chant, "Leave it there, leave it there," because this was the same room where they would soon take their test. However, this international education program leases this classroom from another school. The thought of ruining the whiteboards for a school with a limited budget sent tremors through, at least, Joan's spine.

"Who knows what to do?' Joan asked the class with panic rising in her voice.

"I know what to do," Chris, who teaches in Kuwait said, as she ran from the room. She soon returned with a bottle of alcohol and lots of wet paper towels. She began to wipe the whiteboard, which soon turned into a smeared bright hot pink, and not so white, board. Steve, who teaches in Turkey, watched what she was doing and went to help her. With continued perseverance and many more wet and then dry towels, the board eventually returned to an almost passable shade of white.

"Now, let's try to refocus our review and remember some of Vygotsky's ideas. Let's start with the ZPD," Joan said to the class at the end of this near-classroom-fiasco.

"Enough of this *mumbo-jumbo* theory," Steve suddenly blurted out. "Just tell us in real language what the ZPD is" More laughter and nervous energy filled the air.

"Okay, Steve," Joan began. "Chris is your more capable peer when it comes to cleaning permanent markers from the whiteboard. You had never learned this and were thoroughly enjoying the possibility that I might have ruined the whiteboard. Chris, as the more capable peer, knew that learners could solve problems beyond their actual developmental level if they receive guidance from a more advanced learner. Thus, Chris pulled us all through our actual developmental level in whiteboard cleaning. What you did in cooperation with Chris today, you can do alone tomorrow. In addition, if this should ever happen again, you could suddenly become the more capable peer in whiteboard cleaning for someone else. And, that is no *mumbo-jumbo* theory."

As Joan was speaking and finally getting the adult learners thinking about their comprehensive final again, the door of the classroom suddenly burst open, Harriet, from the Czech Republic, said, "Dr. Wink, I am sorry to bother you, but do you have anything to clean markers off a whiteboard? I just wrote all over Dr, Titone's whiteboard and can't get it off." A roar of laughter swept through the class again.

"Steve, you are now the more capable peer. Go help her," Joan said.

"And, no mumbo-jumbo theory either, Steve. Just pull her up through the zone to her next developmental level in whiteboard cleaning."