

Vygotsky Vantage

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Special points of interest:

- Vygotsky's Scientific View of Education
- Dewey & Vygotsky?
- How Might Development Look?
- ZPD Defined
- Vygotsky's Formula for Human Behavior

Interesting article by Richard S. Prawat comparing Dewey and Vygotsky is available at

http://www.era.net/uploadedFiles/Journals_and_Publications/Journals/Educational_Researcher/3105/3105_Prawat.pdf

Vygotsky's Scientific View of Education

We have seen that the individual's own experience is the only teacher capable of forming new reactions in the individual.

Only those relations are real for an individual that are given to him in his personal experience. This is why the student's personal experience becomes the fundamental basis of pedagogical work.

Strictly speaking, and from the scientific point of view, there is no other way of

teaching. It is impossible to exert a direct influence on, to produce changes in, another individual, one can only teach oneself, i.e., alter one's innate reactions, through one's own experience.

In this sense, education, in every country and in every epoch, has always been social in nature, indeed, by its very ideology it could hardly exist as antisocial in any way. (Vygotsky, 1997, p. 47)

Least of all should we think of the educational process as one-sided, and ascribe all activity without exception to the environment, making nothing of the activity of the student himself, of the activity of the teacher, and of everything that must come into contact with education. On the contrary, in education there is nothing passive or inactive. (V, 97, p. 52)

Dewey and Vygotsky?

Any similarities between the American philosopher and educator, John Dewey and Russian educational psychologist, Lev Vygotsky?

From <http://mingo.info-science.uiowa.edu/~stevens/critped/terms.htm>

Dewey rejected the practice of rote learning and instead argued that educators need to engage students in meaningful and relevant activities that allow them to actively apply the concepts they are attempting to learn. In *Democracy and Education*

Dewey writes, "Education is not an affair of 'telling' and being told, but an active and constructive process."

For Dewey, education must be grounded in experience and active inquiry. He encouraged educators to implement real-world practical work-shops as well as provide students opportunities to reflect upon their experiences and to express their thoughts.

Vygotsky noted

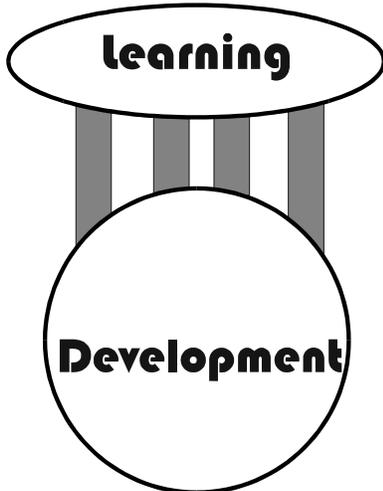
"Thus is the educational process an active one on three levels: the student is active, the teacher is active, and the environment created between them is an active one" (Vygotsky, 1997, p. 54)

"Vygotsky criticized traditional approaches to the study of the relationship between the child and the environment in psychological theory, noting that the two are generally represented as interacting forces with characteristics that can be defined in conceptual isolation from one another"

(Minick, 1997, p. 124)

What Might Development Look Like?

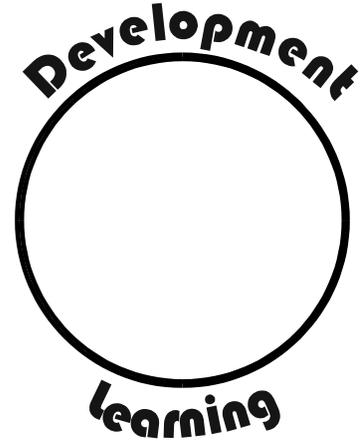
PIAGET



For Piaget, development and learning appear as separate systems in which cognition influences language development, as a natural part of the maturation process. Learning then involves the mastery of skills attained due to that particular level of development ...: Vygotsky's Critique: this assumes that learning forms a superstructure over development, leaving the latter essentially unaltered

 Thordike's reflex theory showed development as being reflexive; learning was a natural reaction which followed development

REFLEX THEORY

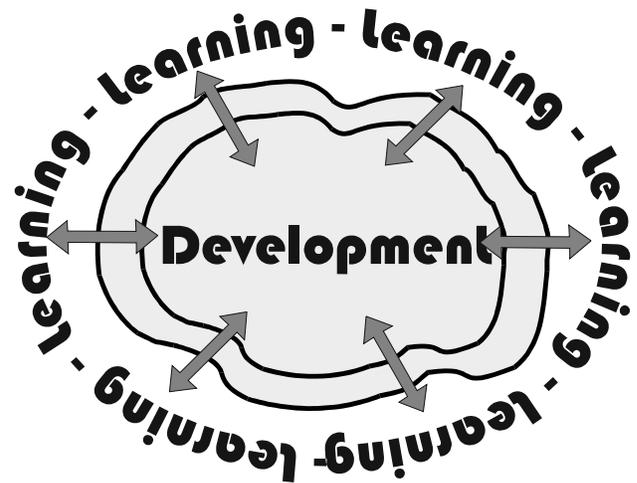


GESTALT SCHOOL



In the Gestalt view, maturation makes possible the process of learning. In turn, learning pushes development forward, but development was the primary function

VYGOTSKY



Vygotsky's theory shows learning and development as a reciprocal process. His view included the concept of children as active participants in the developmental process in which language has a direct affect on cognition. Learning and development are interrelated processes, which begin from the first day of a child's life...learning leads development

More About Development

As Zebroski (1994) reveals, "... Vygotsky argues that Piaget overemphasizes the intellectual, the biological, the evenness and universality of developmental *stages*, the evolutionary character of development, the centrality of the individual, and the essential independence of thought and language" (p. 195). Knowing that Vygotsky came from a different philosophical orientation, it is not surprising that he viewed development in a very different way. Zebroski (1994) makes visible for us the contrast when he states that: "... development itself is in development and is uneven and jerky and context-specific..." (p. 195). ... Zebroski (1994) described the contrasting theories of development by narrowing them into three categories. The first category, he called step theory where development takes place slowly in a continuous and incremental process that takes the form of a straight line which slants upwards and forward. The second category, he called stage theory where development occurs at distinct, critical points. In this case, development occurs as a leap from stage to stage in a rapid process from level to level. It is progressive; like the step theory, but it is required that we master one process before leaping to the next one. The movement is progressive, not regressive, at any point.

In the third category, which is obviously the most revealing of Vygotskian theory, Zebrowski likens development to a tidal wave. In this metaphor, development is both progressive and regressive. However, when the movement is progressive, the wave becomes deeper and higher as it moves forward, exemplifying the cumulative effect of increased development. By looking at the tidal wave, past experiences continually transform themselves as the foundation for the next wave of development. The new wave is qualitatively different from the previous one, yet is connected experientially, which provides an overall continuity to this model. Just as in a tidal wave, development, according to Vygotsky, is a forward and backward movement that is ultimately progressive. The backward movement, while at first appears to be regressive, is actually a period of risk-taking when we are making sense of our world. As Zebroski (1994) wrote, this "... apparent *failure*, and backward development, which nonetheless often foreshadow the reorganization and restructuring of experience and prepare for the developmental leap that follows" (p. 162). Similarly, Newman and Holzman (1993) define this period as one of revolution, which prepares us for the next wave of development. Vygotsky saw the solutions to critical problems arrived at in one level of development then become the source of the next problem to be solved.

In the case of Zebroski's depiction of Vygotsky's theory of learning and development as a tidal wave, the backward and forward movement of the wave may seem to be opposite and distinct motions. The reality is that these seemingly opposite motions are exactly what make the new whole, which is qualitatively changed. The metaphor signifies the unity of movement as in an actual wave in which the water turns back into itself. Not only is development itself developmental as in the previous quote, but it is also contextually related to our experience with others. As Zebroski (1994) stated, "... Vygotsky contends that the development of the intellect is importantly tied to the development of emotions, that it is the community that leads individual development (which dialectically reconstructs the community) ..." (p. 195). (Adapted from A Vision of Vygotsky, Wink & Putney, 2002, pp. 89-91)

Vygotsky's Formula for Human Behavior:

...consciousness must be considered as consisting in the most complex forms or organization of our behavior...as a kind of doubling experience, that makes it possible to predict in advance the results of labor and to direct one's own reactions to this end...Thus, the entire formula of human behavior...assumes the following form:

- (1) inherited reactions + (2) inherited reactions x individual experience (conditional reactions) + (3) historical experience + (4) social experience + (5) doubled experience (consciousness)

(Vygotsky, 1997, p. 33)

*...development,
according to
Vygotsky, is a
forward and
backward
movement that is
ultimately
progressive*

Vygotsky was simultaneously immersed in the practical concerns of the clinician, the teacher, and the teacher educator. His 'laboratory' was spread across the Soviet Union in the hospitals, public schools, and universities of a society in transition."

(Zebroski, 1994, p. 154)

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Vygotsky believed that "pedagogy should be oriented not on the past, but on the next day of a child's development" (Shepel, 1995, p. 429).

Zone of Proximal Development

Zone of Proximal Development: 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 (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86).

- the zone makes possible performance before competence (Cazden, 1981)
- theory of intellectual development which acknowledged that children undergo quite profound changes in their understanding by engaging in joint activity and conversation with other people (Edwards & Mercer, 1987, p. 19)
- a zoped is a dialogue between the child and his future; it is not a dialogue between the child and an adult's past (Griffen & Cole, 1984, p. 62).
- transformation of an interpersonal process to an intrapersonal one (John-Steiner & Souberman, 1978, p. 131)
- a true advance in the child's reasoning, focus on the collaborative forms of thinking in which the child's everyday concepts come into contact with the scientific concepts introduced by adults (Kozulin, 1990, p. 170)
- it is a key theoretical construct, capturing as it does the individual within the concrete social situation of learning and development (Moll, 1990, p. 4).
- identifying the social dynamics of change (Moll, 1990, p. 5)
- the proper unit of study for understanding uniquely human activity, most especially learning and development and their relationship and, thereby, virtually all 'mental' activities (Newman & Holzman, 1993, p. 65)
- is not a place at all; it is an activity, an historical unity, the essential socialness of human beings expressed as revolutionary activity (Newman & Holzman, 1993, p. 79)
- the contrast between assisted performance and unassisted performance (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988, p. 30)
- interdependence of the process of child development and the socially provided resources for that development (Valsiner, 1988, p. 145)
- defines those functions that have not yet matured ... buds or flowers of development. Characterizes mental development prospectively (Vygotsky, 1978, pp. 86-87)
- the dynamic region of sensitivity in which the transition from interpsychological to intrapsychological functioning can be made (Wertsch, 1985, p. 67)
- a possible transition, not a fixed state of consciousness (Shepel, 1995, p. 429)

The zone of proximal development was a construct developed through Vygotsky's (1978; 1986) work with children who would be categorized in our school system as "learning disabled." He theorized that these children would undergo the same processes as others, but required more assistance at times with particular activities. He also believed that in assessing children on what they have already come to understand, as signaled by their display of concepts reproduced on a test, we missed the most crucial part of learning. Rather, the focus should be on the concepts that are forming as children interact with others. In other words, assessment should be done on an ongoing basis by measuring what the child is just beginning to learn when still performing an activity with assistance, compared with what the child does when accomplishing the task alone.

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4 Major Ideas from Vygotsky's Theory of Learning and Development

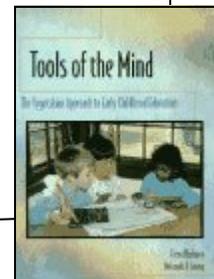
Children construct knowledge.

Learning can lead development.

Development cannot be separated from its social context.

Language plays a central role in mental development.

*All four ideas are interconnected and build on each other.



Tools of the Mind : The Vygotskian Approach to Early Childhood Education (2nd Edition) (Paperback) by [Elena Bodrova](#), [Deborah Leong](#) (2006), Prentice Hall.