

## Vygotsky's Social Development Theory

Social Development Theory, also known as Sociocultural Development Theory, is based on the work of Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934). Vygotsky's work was largely unknown to the West until the 1980's. He died at the age of 38, so his theories are incomplete - although some of his writings are still being translated from Russian.

There are five major components of Vygotsky's theory: 1) the role of social interaction, 2) the more knowledgeable other, 3) the zone of proximal development, 4) language, and 5) the impact of culture.

### **SOCIAL INTERACTION**

Vygotsky's theories stress the fundamental role that social interaction has in learning and cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1978). 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; first, between people (interpsychological) and then inside the child (intrapsychological)" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 57).

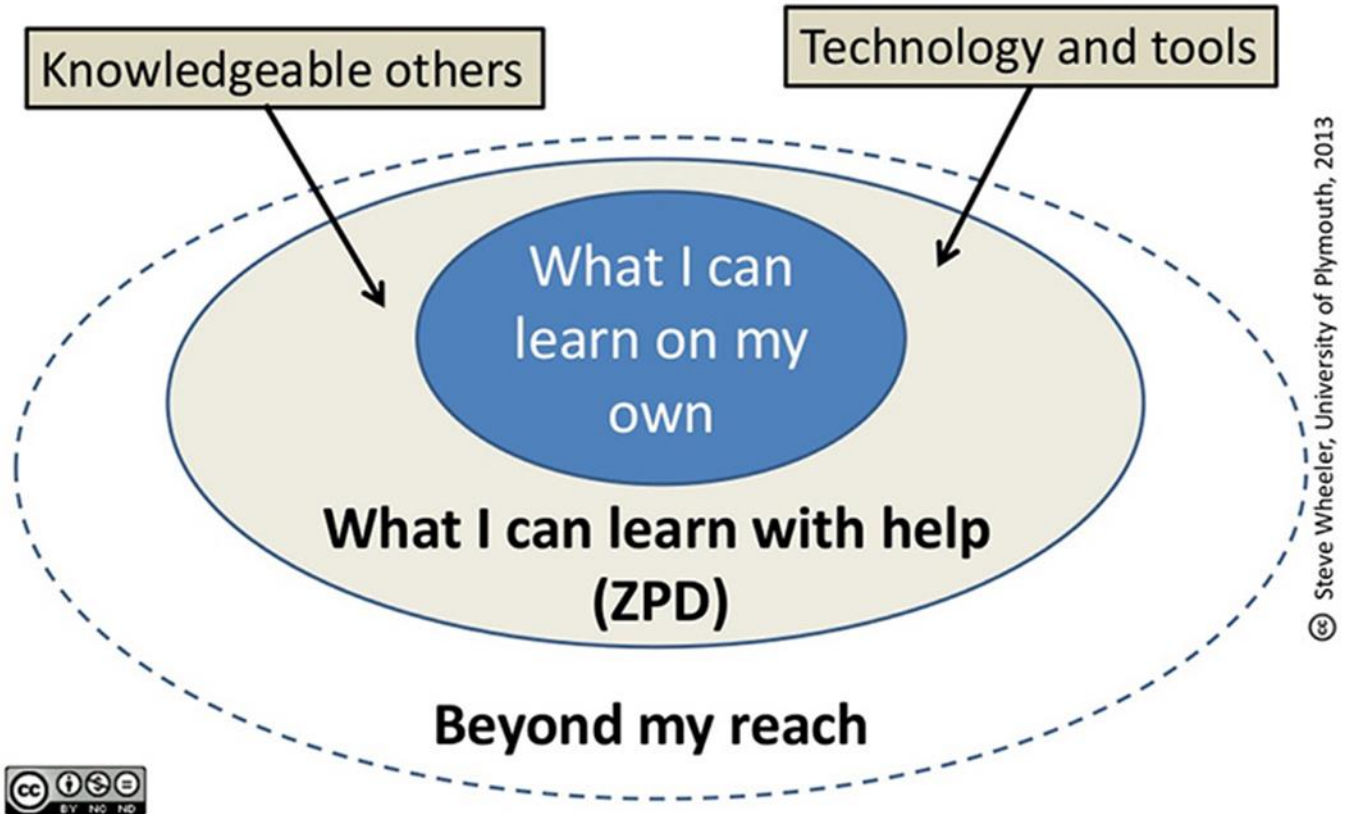
### **THE MORE KNOWLEDGEABLE OTHER (MKO)**

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 (ZPD)**

The ZPD is the distance between a student's ability to perform a task under adult guidance and/or with peer collaboration and the student's ability solving the problem independently. According to Vygotsky, learning occurred in this zone. An example of the ZPD would be of a young girl who is given her first jigsaw puzzle. By herself, she most likely will not be able to put the puzzle together. If her father sits with her and demonstrates some basic strategies, such as finding all the corner/edge pieces, and provides a couple of pieces for the child to put together herself and offers her encouragement when she does so, she is more likely to be successful. As the child becomes more competent, the father allows the child to work more independently. Vygotsky (1978) sees the Zone of Proximal Development as the area where the most sensitive instruction or guidance should be given - allowing the child to develop skills they will then use on their own.

# ZPD and scaffolding



## IMPACT OF CULTURE

Vygotsky emphasizes how culture affects cognitive development. For Vygotsky, the environment in which children grow up will influence how they think and what they think about. Hence Vygotsky assumes cognitive development varies across cultures. For example, young children biologically have limited memories. However, culture determines the type of memory strategies people develop. For example, in our culture, we learn note-taking to aid memory. In pre-literate societies, other strategies must have been developed, such as tying knots in a string to remember, carrying pebbles, or repeating the names of ancestors until large numbers could be recited. To Vygotsky, cognitive functions and development are affected by the beliefs, values, and tools of the culture a person develops in; they are socio-culturally determined. The tools of cognitive development and functioning vary from culture to culture, as the memory example demonstrates.

## LANGUAGE

Vygotsky emphasizes the role of language in cognitive development. Vygotsky believed that language develops from social interactions, for communication purposes. Vygotsky viewed language as man's greatest tool, a means for communicating with the outside world. For Vygotsky, cognitive development results from the internalization of language. According to Vygotsky (1962) language plays two critical roles in cognitive development: 1) it is the main way adults share information with children; and 2) language becomes a tool of intellectual development and learning.

For Vygotsky, thought and language are separate systems for infants and toddlers then merge at around three years of age, producing verbal thought (inner speech). Vygotsky (1987) differentiates between three forms of language: 1) social speech which is external communication used to talk to others (typical from the age of two); 2) private speech (typical from the age of three) which is directed to the self and supports intellectual development; and, 3) private speech which becomes softer and softer until it is silent inner speech with the purpose of self-regulate behavior (typical from the age of seven).

## REFERENCES

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Adapted from:

<https://www.learning-theories.com/vygotskys-social-learning-theory.html>

<https://www.simplypsychology.org/vygotsky.html>

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