

Zone of Proximal Development

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Vygotsky ZPD

"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, p86).

Vygotsky views interaction with peers as an effective way of developing skills and strategies. He suggests that teachers use cooperative learning exercises where less competent children develop with help from more skilful peers - within the zone of proximal development.

Vygotsky believed that when a student is at the ZPD for a particular task, providing the appropriate assistance (**scaffolding**) will give the student enough of a "boost" to achieve the task. Once the student, with the benefit of scaffolding, masters the task, the scaffolding can then be removed and the student will then be able to complete the task again on his own.

Example of ZPD

Maria just entered college this semester and decided to take an introductory tennis course. Her class spends each week learning and practicing a different shot. Weeks go by and they learn how to properly serve and hit a backhand. During the week of learning the forehand, the instructor notices that Maria is very frustrated because she keeps hitting her forehand shots either into the net or far past the baseline.

He examines her preparation and swing. He notices that her stance is perfect, she prepares early, she turns her torso appropriately, and she hits the ball at precisely the right height. However, he notices that she is still gripping her racquet the same way she hits her backhand, so he goes over to her and shows her how to reposition her hand to hit a proper forehand, stressing that she should keep her index finger parallel to the racquet. He models a good forehand for her, and then assists her in changing her grip. With a little practice, Maria's forehand turns into a formidable weapon for her!

In this case, Maria was in the Zone of Proximal Development for successfully hitting a forehand shot. She was doing everything else correctly, but just needed a little coaching and scaffolding from a "**More Knowledgeable Other**" to help her succeed in this task. When that assistance was given, she became able to achieve her goal. Provided with appropriate support at the right moments, so too will students in our classrooms be able to achieve tasks that would otherwise be too difficult for them.

Current applications of Vygotsky's work

A contemporary application of Vygotsky's theories is "reciprocal teaching", used to improve students' ability to learn from text. In this method, teacher and students collaborate in learning and practicing four key skills: summarizing, questioning, clarifying, and predicting. The teacher's role in the process is reduced over time. Also, Vygotsky is relevant to instructional concepts such as "scaffolding" and "apprenticeship", in which a teacher or more advanced peer helps to structure or arrange a task so that a novice can work on it successfully.

Vygotsky's theories also feed into current interest in collaborative learning, suggesting that group members should have different levels of ability so more advanced peers can help less advanced members operate within their ZPD.

Vygotsky Downloads

[Vygotsky's Theory of Cognitive Development](#)

[Vygotsky and Piaget](#)