

LEV VYGOTSKY – SOCIOCULTURAL THEORY OF LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

Vygotsky was also the first to examine how our social interactions influence our cognitive growth. He was convinced that learning occurred through interactions with others in our communities: peers, adults, teachers, and other mentors. Vygotsky sought to understand how people learn in a social environment and created a unique theory on social learning. He determined that teachers have the ability to control many factors in an educational setting, including tasks, behaviours, and responses. As a result, he encouraged more interactive activities to promote cognitive growth, such as productive discussions, constructive feedback, and collaboration with others. Vygotsky also stated that culture was a primary determinant of knowledge acquisition. He argued that children learn from the beliefs and attitudes modelled by their culture.

Vygotsky had a ground-breaking theory that language was the basis of learning. His points included the argument that language supports other activities such as reading and writing. In addition, he claimed that logic, reasoning, and reflective thinking were all possible as a result of language. This led to the development of *instructional strategies* to support growth in literacy as well as a reassessment of the classroom setup. Teachers were to encourage leadership in the classroom, collaborative learning, and thoughtful discussions. With the exception of independent tasks, which were also included, the goal was to create purposeful, meaningful exchanges between students. The role of the teacher was to facilitate learning by directing the dialogue and confirming contributions in an effort to further motivate the students. The primary role of the teacher in the educational context is to act as a facilitator for learning. Guided exchanges, comprehensive discussions, and the creation of an engaging community are valuable strategies for cognitive and linguistic development. Many educators have incorporated Vygotsky's ideas of social connection and small group learning in the classroom in an effort to see more growth.

Vygotsky maintained that the social world is not only the interactions between peers and their teacher but also consisted of outside influences within the community. Prior knowledge, such as learned behaviours at home, impact learning in the classroom environment. As such, Vygotsky outlined three main concepts related to cognitive development: (i) culture is significant in learning, (ii) language is the root of culture, and (iii) individuals learn and develop within their role in the community. Culture can be defined as the morals, values, and beliefs of its community members, which are held in place with systems and establishments. Acceptable attitudes and conduct are communicated by the use of language. Culture is shaped over time as the result of specific events, whose messages are then conveyed to its members. Vygotsky explained that culture consistently affects cognitive development by affecting human behavior. He wanted others to realize that there is a complex relationship between culture and human development. It is a cycle; at the same time that the culture is influencing an individual, that individual is in turn creating culture.

Vygotsky used the stages of childhood development to further explain the relationship between culture and learning. As a baby, you display elementary functions designed for your survival: crying, a sense of your mother's scent, and familiar voices. These displays gradually fade out as a result of external stimuli: imitating, consequences, and conditioning by others. It is

replaced with problem-solving skills such as reflection, bargaining, and reasoning. This higher-level thinking is influenced by cultural factors. The values and beliefs of a community, including models of acceptable behaviour, create pressure for others to adopt the preferred attitudes and protocol of that society. Etiquette is communicated orally and by example.

Language is the basis of Vygotsky's ideas on social interaction. The development of speech occurs in three stages: external, egocentric, and inner speech. External or social speech occurs from birth until the age of three. Babies use language to communicate their feelings, express their emotions, and share simple words. They use language to state their needs and also respond to their parent's speech. You can begin to see the social influence on behaviour as early as this stage based on the reactions to their demands. Even though babies use language to control their needs, the people around them express approval or disapproval based on their behaviour. This leads to cognitive development within the individual. The next stage, egocentric speech, occurs between the ages of three and seven. As they begin to rationalize internally their actions or behaviour, children begin to talk to themselves. This inner speech helps them control their reasoning and organize their thoughts. They continue to interpret meaning from the reactions of others, further integrating the cultural beliefs into their own cognitive development. Without language, Vygotsky believed that we would be limited to a more primitive function. Language is ultimately the tool by which we communicate the desired behaviours and therefore enable the development of a society and its culture.

Similar to inner speech is the idea of internalization. Internalization should not be confused with introjection, which involves minimal participation from the individual themselves. It is the conditioning put forth by others, for example, the consequences or reactions toward a behaviour. Internalization is where the cognitive development of an individual is influenced by society as they adopt the morals and ethics of a community for themselves. They begin to view their culture's beliefs as their own. Internalization should not be confused with socialization, where individuals develop attitudes due to a need to belong to a community and not the actual obligation to do so. In Vygotsky's theory, internalization was important to social development. We can observe key skills develop on the social level then again within an individual as they internalize cultural influences. External influences are adopted as intrapersonal characteristics throughout the internalization process.

It is important to note that the education system influences the thoughts and belief systems of the children within. One's teachers and peers directly affect cognitive development by the language they use and the interpretations they offer of cultural events. While Piaget believed that a child builds a unique view of the world, Vygotsky suggested that others within a child's social circle influence their perspectives, values, and attitudes. Individuals are actively engaging within their learning environments, continuously analyzing the reactions of others and modifying their responses as they adopt or reject accepted standards as their own. Both learning and culture are depended on the other: individuals are constantly determining what is acceptable in society, and the environment is continuously confirming what would be considered appropriate behaviour. Vygotsky states that it is the combination of cultural influences and genetics that create one's personality.

Secondly, Vygotsky specified that the conclusions should be made based on the behaviour of a student in a social setting. He did not place emphasis on intelligence itself. Instead, Vygotsky proposed the idea of the zone of proximal development, which distinguishes between what a child is able to accomplish independently and what they achieve under close guidance from a teacher. He maintained that learning occurred in the presence of tasks specific to the child's current ability under the supervision of a more competent person. In order to capitalize on this growth, Vygotsky encouraged testing based on the social context. He disagreed with the notion of independent intelligence assessments, preferring to focus on the potential of each student within the learning environment. The zone of proximal development is affected by the unique attributes of each individual, including personality, self-regulation, and previous knowledge. As the zone of proximal development cannot be clearly defined, it is challenging to explain the link between social interaction and learning. It does, however, support the argument for a more student-centered education system as well as the many factors that can influence potential outcomes.