

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of human learning describes learning as a social process and the origination of human intelligence in society or culture. The major theme of Vygotsky's theoretical framework is that social interaction plays a fundamental role in the development of cognition. Vygotsky believed everything is learned on two levels.

First, through interaction with others, and then integrated into the individual's mental structure.

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). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of concepts. All the higher functions originate as actual relationships between individuals. (Vygotsky, 1978, p.57)

A second aspect of Vygotsky's theory is the idea that the potential for cognitive development is limited to a **"zone of proximal development"** (ZPD). This "zone" is the area of exploration for which the student is cognitively prepared, but requires help and social interaction to fully develop (Briner, 1999). A teacher or more experienced peer is able to provide the learner with "scaffolding" to support the student's evolving understanding of knowledge domains or development of complex skills. Collaborative learning, discourse, modelling, and scaffolding are strategies for supporting the intellectual knowledge and skills of learners and facilitating intentional learning.

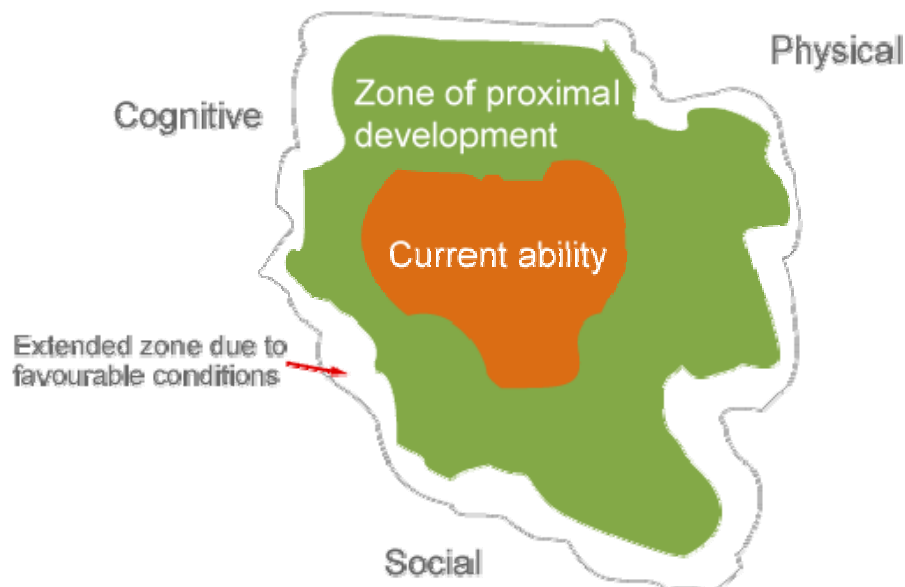


Figure 1¹: Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development

*"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."*²

¹ <http://www.parentcentredparenting.com/>

² L.S. Vygotsky: Mind in Society: Development of Higher Psychological Processes, p. 86