Child Development

Vygotsky
AGENDA

• Student presentations
• Vygotsky:
  – his theory
  – Language and thought
  – Social interactions and culture
  – Zone of Proximal Development
  – Scaffolding and guided participation
Vygotsky (1896 –1934)

“What children can do with the assistance of others might be in some sense even more indicative of their mental development than what they can do alone.”

“Through others, we become ourselves.”

Quotes from: [http://userwww.service.emory.edu/~rpuscas/](http://userwww.service.emory.edu/~rpuscas/)

Image from: [www.massey.ac.nz](http://www.massey.ac.nz)
Vygotsky: his theory

• Like Piaget, Vygotsky believed that children actively construct their knowledge (ie. they learn by doing, they are active in the learning process)
• Unlike Piaget however, Vygotsky did NOT define this learning into distinct stages
• Vygotsky instead, focused on the importance of culture and social interactions in guiding a child’s cognitive development
• Thus: Vygotsky’s theory is defined as a socio-cultural theory
Vygotsky: 4 basic principles

There are 4 basic principles that form the base of Vygotsky’s framework:
1. Language plays a central role in mental development
2. Development cannot be separated from its social context
3. Learning can lead development
4. Children construct their knowledge
1. Language plays a central role in mental development
1. Language plays a central role in mental development

Vygotsky: Language and Thought

- Children use speech for:
  - Social communication
  - To help solve problems
  - To self-regulate

- When language was used by children to self-regulate their own behaviour, he called it ‘private speech’

- Vygotsky considered private speech an important tool of thought for children

**NOTE:** this is significantly different from Piaget who considered private speech egocentric and immature
Vygotsky: How does Private Speech work?

• In the beginning, language and thought develop independent of each other and later merge together
• All mental functions begin with external/social origins (recall from CPP: parents and others help infant to regulate)
• Private speech originates in ‘social speech’: speech directed to others (ie. in communication with others)
• Social speech: often regulated or directed by a more capable person
• The transition from external to internal speech takes place between 3 – 7 years
• **Private speech**: involves talking to oneself
• E.g. think of children who talk to themselves as they explore/play in their environment
• Why? When do you think it usually happens?
How does Private Speech work? cont’d


• Vygotsky noticed private speech was most common among preschoolers when tasks became too hard and they didn’t know how to proceed;

• Thus, he hypothesized that children use private speech to organize (plan, direct, or evaluate) their own behaviors

• Vygotsky believed private speech changed with age, becoming softer or just a whisper

• After a while, the self-talk becomes so natural to children that they can act without verbalizing. (ie. private speech became inner speech or ‘inner thoughts’ and then verbal thinking or ‘own thoughts’)
Private Speech = Socially Competent

• Vygotsky believed children who use a lot of private speech are more socially competent than those who don’t use it as much
• Vygotsky believed private speech represented an early transition in becoming more socially communicative and that development of private or inner speech is a process of internalizing social interactions
• Think back to how private speech started: as social speech, an interpersonal process, between the child and adult, which ultimately becomes internalized within the child

From: Developmental Psychology, Hook, Watts, Cockcroft, 2004
Private Speech = Socially Competent cont’d

• Vygotsky believed this pattern, the development from interpersonal/social to personal, occurs in all aspects of the child’s cognitive development:

• each higher mental function appears twice in the course of child development: first on a social level, shared or carried out with other people – (intersubjective) - and then internalized and used independently - intrasubjective

• Vygotsky believed ‘all higher functions originate as actual relations between human individuals’

From: *Developmental Psychology*, Hook, Watts, Cockcroft, 2004
Vygotsky and Private Speech: some research

- To date, recent research seems to support Vygotsky’s view that private speech has a positive role in children’s development
- E.g. Children who use private speech are more attentive and improve their performance more than children who do not use private speech

PT: Vygotsky strongly believed that language plays a critical role in cognitive development
2. Development cannot be separated from its social context
2. Development cannot be separated from its social context

**Vygotsky believed:**

- Child’s development → child’s social and cultural activities
- Social interactions with more skilled adults and peers aid in child’s cognitive development
- Through social interactions, children learn how to use psychological tools to help them adapt and be successful in their culture

**Note:** consider cultural context in which children grow up in and the importance of providing an inclusive environment

**Note:** also consider simple acts (e.g. reading a book/oral storytelling) and the message that children learn (e.g. reading/oral storytelling is important)
3. Learning can lead development

Image from: www.fhjh.tp.edu.tw
3. Learning can lead development

Zone of proximal development:

- The range of tasks that are too hard for a child to master alone BUT can learn with guided assistance with an adult or a more skilled peer
- Through ZPD, the child becomes more socialized in the dominant culture and induces cognitive development
ZONE OF PROXIMAL DEVELOPMENT

Upper limit: Level of skill child could reach with support

Cognitive skills in process of maturing, can be accomplished only with support of more skilled peer or adult

Lower limit: Level of skill child can reach independently

Note: social and cultural context
4. Children Construct their knowledge

• Like Piaget, Vygotsky believed that children actively construct their knowledge (ie. they learn by doing, they are active in the learning process)

• E.g. private speech, zone of proximal development, child is actively involved in the construction of their knowledge
So, what is scaffolding??

Image from: www.smallgrouppastors.wordpress.com
What is scaffolding?

• Closely linked to ZPD
• In cognitive development, scaffolding refers to the changing level of support provided by ‘more skilled person’
• Scaffolding – adult continually adjusts the level of help in response to the child’s level of performance
• E.g. in the beginning, a child may require more direct instruction but as the child gains more knowledge and becomes more competent, less guidance is provided
• Scaffolding produces immediate results, but also instills the skills necessary for independent problem solving in the future
• Requires: your observational skills, your knowledge of child development
Vygotsky applied: Teaching Strategies

1. Assess the child’s ZPD
2. Use the child’s ZPD in teaching
3. Use more-skilled peers as teachers
4. Monitor and encourage children’s use of private speech
5. Place instruction in a meaningful context
6. Transform the classroom with Vygotskian ideas

See p. 287 – 288 of textbook
A note about Assessment

• Assessment methods must take into account the zone of proximal development.
• What children can do on their own is their level of actual development and what they can do with help is their level of potential development.
• Two children might have the same level of actual development, but given the appropriate help from an adult, one might be able to solve many more problems than the other.
• Assessment methods must target both the level of actual development and the level of potential development.
• Assessment also requires your observational skills!
IN CLASS WORK

• Recall the 2 articles
• What are some strategies used to scaffold child/children’s learning that you noticed in the articles?