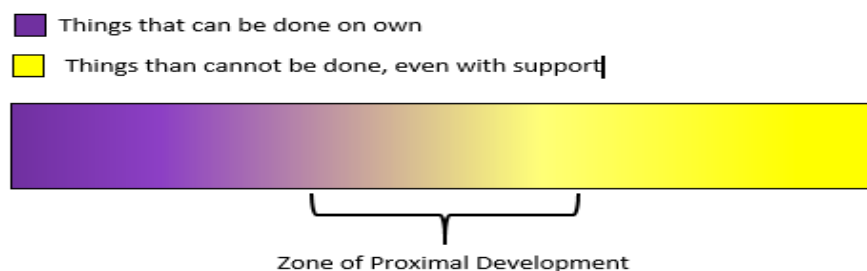**MINNESOTA STATE UNIVERSITY**
MANKATO

Learning Theories: Socio-Constructivism
- Overview
- Implications for the Classroom
- Teaching Strategies using this Learning Theory
- Technology Tools that support this Learning Theory

Overview

Lev Vygotsky is considered the father of social-constructivist learning theory. Although his theory is very similar to the cognitivist and constructivist learning theories, it differentiates itself by being much more open to an active and involved instructor (Hodson & Hodson, 1998). Both the culture and the environment that a person is in determine the types of cognitive tools they will be able to use for development. Different types and qualities of cultural tools determine how quickly learning will occur and whether or not there will be learning patterns. Peers, teachers, and other persons with a higher knowledge of a topic or construct represent the cultural tools. Today, some cultures include electronic forms of information access as additional cultural learning tools (Squires, 1999). Without the use of these tools, you cannot learn concepts or ideas that are difficult to grasp.

One of Vygotsky's most well-known concepts is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which argues that people with more advanced knowledge can help other people master a concept that they would not understand on their own. By definition, Vygotsky's ZPD emphasizes that at its very core, learning is a socially mediated activity. Thinking and problem-solving skills can have placed in three categories. One category can be performed independently by the child. Another category involves skills that cannot be performed even with help. Between these two extremes are skills the child can perform with help from others (Cleborne, Johnson, & Willis, 1997). Those skills are in the ZPD. If a child uses these cognitive processes with help of others, such as teachers, parents, and fellow students, they will develop skills that can be independently practices. As Vygotsky (1987) puts it, "What the child is able to do in collaboration today he will be able to do independently tomorrow."

Things that can be done on own
Things than cannot be done, even with support

Zone of Proximal Development

A study done by Duffy et al. (1986) showed that the zone of proximal development not only applies to learning new concepts from subject experts, but learning new ways to problem-solve, as well. In the

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study, elementary school teachers talked aloud about their thought process when trying to figure out a word they did not know it a sentence. Essentially, their students received a verbal description of what thoughts go on when looking at the context of a sentence to determine a word meaning. This contrasts simply telling children, "look at the context to figure it out".

The key point of social constructivism is that the locus of knowledge does not lie solely within the individual. Instead, learning and comprehension are inherently social, and collaboration is needed to create deeper understanding for both the individual and the group.

Implications for the Classroom

★ **Don't overestimate how much students have learned from your lectures only.** The effectiveness of lecture-style lessons can be enhanced in many ways via socio-constructivism (Cowan, 2003):
   ○ After a lecture is completed, a rehearsal of the learning will better solidify the concepts in the students' minds. Plan the lecture so that it ends a couple of minutes before the scheduled end of class; use of the next few minutes to "rehearse", or playback in summary, what has been covered. For example, have students draw a concept map or write a short summary of what they believe to be the central ideas that were covered. Then, encourage them to compare their material with what the other students around them have recorded.
   ○ Arrange for 2-way feedback where students can assess the material to find what is unclear to them, and teachers can be notified of areas where there is a lack of understanding.
   ○ Encouraging deeper thinking by asking the whole class questions which call for critical thinking and full understanding of a concept. The answers to these questions should not be immediately apparent. Have groups of students collaborate to discuss and formulate answers based on the combinations of their thought processes. and devoting time for learners to be seeking answers which will
   ○ Since the level of attention drops off rapidly in lecture-style teaching, introduce a short period of activity to break up the periods of teaching talking and students listening.

Teaching Strategies that support this Learning Theory
● Problem-based Learning
● Case-based Learning
● Flipped Instruction
● Blended Learning

Technology Tools that support this Learning Theory

1. OneDrive
2. Poll Everywhere

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