Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky was born in Western Russia (Belorussia) in 1896. He graduated with a law degree at Moscow University. After graduation, he started teaching at various institutions. Vygotsky's first big research project was in 1925 with his Psychology of Art. A few years later, he pursued a career as a psychologist working with Alexander Luria and Alexei Leontiev. Together, they began the Vygotskian approach to psychology. Vygotsky had no formal training in psychology but it showed that he was fascinated by it. After his death of tuberculosis in 1934, his ideas were repudiated by the government; however, his ideas were kept alive by his students.

When the Cold War ended, Vygotsky's works were revealed. Vygotsky has written several articles and books on the subject of his theories and psychology, including Thought and Language (1934). His research in how children solve their problems that surpassed their level of development led Vygotsky to create the Zone of Proximal Development theory. That is one reason why Vygotsky's developmental psychology has influenced education profoundly in Russia.

Theory

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory: Vygotsky is best known for being an educational psychologist with a sociocultural theory. This theory suggests that social interaction leads to continuous step-by-step changes in children's thought and behavior that can vary greatly from culture to culture (Woolfolk, 1998). Basically Vygotsky's theory suggests that development depends on interaction with people and the tools that the culture provides to help form their own view of the world. There are three ways a cultural tool can be passed from one individual to another. The first one is imitative learning, where one person tries to imitate or copy another. The second way is by instructed learning which involves remembering the instructions of the teacher and then using these instructions to self-regulate. The final way that cultural tools are passed to others is through collaborative learning, which involves a group of
peers who strive to understand each other and work together to learn a specific skill (Tomasello, et al., 1993).

His theory combines the social environment and cognition. Children will acquire the ways of thinking and behaving that make up a culture by interacting with a more knowledgeable person. Vygotsky believed that social interaction will lead to ongoing changes in a child's thought and behavior. These thoughts and behaviors would vary between cultures (Berk, 1994).

4 Basic Principles Underlying The Vygotskian Framework

- Children construct their knowledge
- Development can not be separated from its social context
- Learning can lead development
- Language plays a central role in mental development

The second element in the sociocultural theory is the zone of proximal development (ZPD). Vygotsky believed that any pedagogy creates learning processes that lead to development and this sequence results in zones of proximal development. It's the concept that a child accomplishes a task that he/she cannot do alone, with the help from a more skilled person. Vygotsky also described the ZPD as the difference between the actual development level as determined by individual problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or collaboration with more knowledgeable peers. The result of this process is children become more socialized in the dominant culture and it induces cognitive development (Moll, 1994).

In order for the ZPD to be such a success, it must contain two features. The first is called subjectivity. This term describes the process of two individuals begin a task with different understanding and eventually arrive at a shared understanding. The second feature is scaffolding, which refers to a change in the social support over the course of a teaching session. If scaffolding is successful, a child's mastery level of performance can change, which means that it can increase a child's performance on a particular task.

The zone of proximal development has implications for assessment, especially concerning children with learning and behavior problems. In the book, Scaffolding Children's Learning, Berk and Winsler discuss Vygotsky's dissatisfaction with the ability and achievement tests as valid measures of children's capacity to learn. Two children can differ substantially in the ZPD's. One child may do his/her best on their own, while the other needs some assistance. Therefore, the ZPD is crucial for identifying each child's readiness to benefit from instruction.

Comparison of Vygotsky and Piaget: Vygotsky's ideas and theories are often compared to Jean Piaget, especially his cognitive-developmental theory. They had a conflict explaining that development concepts should not be taught until children are in the appropriate developmental stage. Opposing Vygotsky's zone of proximal development, Piaget believed that the most important source of cognition is the children themselves. But Vygotsky argued that the social environment could help the child's cognitive development. The social environment is an important factor which helps the child...
culturally adapt to new situations when needed. Both Vygotsky and Piaget had the common goal of finding out how children master ideas and then translate them into speech.

Piaget found that children act independently on the physical world to discover what it has to offer. Vygotsky, on the other hand, wrote in *Thought and Language* that human mental activity is the result of social learning. As children master tasks they will engage in cooperative dialogues with others, which led Vygotsky to believe that acquisition of language is the most influential moment in a child's life.

In conclusion, Piaget emphasized universal cognitive change and Vygotsky's theory leads us to expect highly variable development, depending on the child's cultural experiences to the environment. Piaget's theory emphasized the natural line, while Vygotsky favored the cultural line of development.

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**Time Line**

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