

Zone of Proximal Development

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The zone of proximal development (???? ??????????? ??????????), often abbreviated ZPD, is the difference between what a learner can do without help and what he or she can do with help. It is a concept developed by Soviet psychologist and social constructivist Lev Vygotsky (1896 - 1934).

Vygotsky stated that a child follows an adult's example and gradually develops the ability to do certain tasks without help. Vygotsky's often-quoted definition of zone of proximal development presents it as 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

Vygotsky and other educational professionals believed education's role was to give children experience that were within their zones of proximal development, thereby encouraging and advancing their individual learning.

Origins

The concept of the zone of proximal development was originally developed by Vygotsky to argue against the use of academic, knowledge-based tests as a means to gauge students' intelligence. Vygotsky argued that, rather than examining what a student knows to determine intelligence, it is better to examine his or her ability to solve problems independently and his or her ability to solve problems with an adult's help.

Development

The concept of ZPD has been expanded, modified, and changed into new concepts since Vygotsky's original conception.

The concept of scaffolding is closely related to the ZPD, although Vygotsky himself never mentioned the term; instead, scaffolding was developed by other sociocultural theorists applying Vygotsky's ZPD to educational contexts. Scaffolding is a process through which a teacher or more competent peer helps the student in his or her ZPD as necessary, and tapers off this aid as it becomes unnecessary, much as a scaffold is removed from a building during construction. "Scaffolding the way the adult guides the child's learning via focused questions and positive interactions." This concept has been further developed by Ann Brown, among others. Several instructional programs were developed on this interpretation of the ZPD, including reciprocal teaching and dynamic assessment.

While the ideas of Vygotsky's ZPD originally were used strictly for one's ability to solve problems, Tharp and Gallimore point out that it can be expanded to examining other domains of competence and skills. These specialized zones of development include cultural zones, individual zones, and

skill-oriented zones. Early-childhood-development researchers commonly believe that young children learn their native language and motor skills generally by being placed in the zone of proximal development.

Through their work with collaborative groups of adults, Tinsley and Lebak (2009) identified the "Zone of Reflective Capacity". This zone shares the theoretical attributes of the ZPD, but is a more specifically defined construct helpful in describing and understanding the way in which an adult's capacity for reflection can expand when he or she collaborates over an extended period with other adults who have similar goals. Tinsley and Lebak found that, as adults shared their feedback, analysis, and evaluation of one another's work during collaboration, their potential for critical reflection expanded. The zone of reflective capacity expanded as trust and mutual understanding among the peers grew.

The zone of reflective capacity is constructed through the interaction between participants engaged in a common activity and expands when it is mediated by positive interactions with other participants, exactly along the same lines as the ZPD, as Wells (1999) described.