Zone of Proximal Development

Originator of the theory:
Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky
1896-1934

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Abstract

The interpretation of the term, ‘Zone of Proximal Development’ (ZPD) could be illustrated in a deeper context based on the authentic complexities of association between development and learning. An ordinary characterisation of the Zone of Proximal Development might not be as important as a seminal comprehension of the theoretical strategy could be in order to comprehend the ‘just right’ meaning of the term. An wider and clear view of the Zone of Proximal Development could be portrayed if the gist of Vygotsky’s theoretical creations, where the general notion of development is depicted, are minutely considered. Vygotsky has a strong position in support of a special kind of learning that is closely and largely related to a developmental function where the development transmits from the social level to the individual level; from the inter-psychological (people) level to the intra-psychological (individual) level. For a clear clarification about the Zone of Proximal Development, it is better to differentiate the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (its theoretical interconnection with other concepts) from the definition of the Zone of Proximal Development (its interconnection between learning and development). Also, there must be a vivid illustration of other psychologists’ notions about Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development as there are some great criticisms against Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development.

The aim of this study is to sketch the definition of Vygotsky’s (1896-1934) view of the Zone of Proximal Development with a special focus on evaluating the relation between social and individual dissimilarity in current learning capability (an already achieved level) and probability (the achievable level with the help of others).

The objectives of this research are to make this definition of this term more vivid to the educationists and researchers by providing some more additional but completely related areas to the Zone of Proximal Development, e.g. authentic instances, fundamental beliefs about it, real essence, scaffolding, mediation, psychological tools, operation of this term in educational settings, ways of evaluating this term, comments of others educational psychologists about it, and appropriate sourcing.

Finally, the goal of this research study is to ensure that more than one objective has been achieved through measurable and observable results that entirely serve the purpose of the aim of this research.

Keywords:

Zone of Proximal Development, ZPD, Vygotsky, learning, developmental level and scaffolding.
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1: Introduction:

The Zone of Proximal Development is typically noted as ZPD which signifies the difference between two learning zones. These are the current level of the children and the probable level they can reach if they are guided by their superiors, more adroit peers or educators. These learning zones determine the difference between children’s present state where they can’t adroitly complete a specific task on their own and the state where they can accomplish that particular task dexterously with the assistance of their tutors, parents, elders, more skilled peers or guides. Hence, the term “proximal” illustrates the artistry that a disciple is “adjacent” to gaining.

The two learning zones in children’s Zone of Proximal Development are the Lower Limit Zone and the Upper Limit Zone. Children in the lower limit zone within their Zone of Proximal Development try to analyse and solve problems without any help, rather by themselves. On the other hand, children in the upper limit zone within their Zone of Proximal Development become additionally accountable for completing a task more proficiently once they are assisted by an adroit mentor. This responsibility of performing a task accurately happens in a systematic way. At first, children are directed by their educators either orally or shown the way how to execute a specific task, then they coordinate these newly received data with their ongoing cognitive schemas in order to perform that particular task independently. The Zone of Proximal Development is exemplified 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, 1978, p. 86). This clarifies that there are either no or can not such elements like “zone of real development” and “zone of achievable development” which is an average and widely spread misjudgement of the Zone of Proximal Development (Valsiner, 2000), and in this context there is no sense of it. “Proximal” refers to ‘near’, ‘close’ ‘aside’ which is the minimal and adjacent difference between two stages of development. Consequently, “the zone of proximal development defines those functions that have not yet matured but are in the process of maturation, functions that will mature tomorrow but are currently in an embryonic state. These functions could be termed the "buds" or "flowers" of development rather than the "fruits" of development. The actual developmental level characterises mental development retrospectively, while the zone of proximal development characterises mental development prospectively” (Vygotsky, 1978, p.86, originally Vygotsky, 1935, p. 42).

Though Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky (Yasnitsky, 2018), a Soviet psychologist and constructivist originated the concept of Zone of Proximal Development, he could not fully developed this idea because of his immature death at his thirty seven. This Zone of Proximal Development is under Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory of Learning (McLeod, 2018, Aug 05) that focuses on the impact of social interactions in learning and other related stuff. He deeply focused on this idea during the last ten years of his life. According to Vygotsky, a gradually developing level of ability instinctively generates in a child’s mind from the time he starts following what an adult does.
He believes that children’s personal learning such as aptitude and approach are encouraged and advanced within their zone of proximal development if the educators give children opportunities to gain experiences through learning from their surroundings, observing and finally by practicing and experiencing that learning or task in the practical fields. He believes that children can learn a new skills more firmly by following adults and more dexterous peers; occasionally other children, and standardised evaluations (Popham, 1999) are not that much advantageous in order to assess learners’ independent and under-guidance brilliance to judge the level of their problem-solving capabilities.

Vygotsky’s emphatic focus on the Zone of Proximal Development illustrates his strong belief about the social impact on children’s learning confirming that social interaction and instruction have a titanic importance on children’s cognitive development.

2: Zone of Proximal Development in images:

![Figure one: Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development (Williams, 2017, June 09)](image-url-1)

![Figure two: My Philosophy of Education: Zone of Proximal Development & Scaffolding (Schell, n.d.)](image-url-2)
Both of the above pictures (Figure 1 and figure 2) illustrate Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development very typically and meaningfully. There are two learning zones in both pictures where there is a common learning zone in between. The gap between what a learner can not do even if guided and what they can do independently is the zone of proximal development. The right zone of both pictures determine a specific level of children where they as learners are not able to do a specific task on their own as they are not adroit enough in this level to flourish their potential because of their incapability to think independently. Though they can look at learning tools, they can not observe those tools with an experimental view because of their deficiency in visualisation. The function accomplished here is like “Teacher does and children watch”. Children at this learning zone can not solve any problem not only on their own but also with the help of others. This is depicted in the picture noted below:

![Zone of Proximal Development](image)

Figure three: Social Development Theory by Vygotsky (Group: Mockingjay, 2017)

The common zone of these diagrams depicts the zone of proximal development. Here, children are guided by their teachers, parents or more capable peers. The two types of functions accomplished in this learning zone are “Teacher does; children help and then children do; teacher helps”. Children can perform a specific task adroitly under the guidance of More Knowledgable Others (MKO) (McLeod, 2018, Aug 05) as according to Vygotsky, in this learning zone children follow what an adult does and thus, they gradually develop their capabilities to solve a specific problem without the support from others. He believed that the zone of proximal development happens here through the role of educators who share their learning experience with the children in order to advance and encourage children’s individual competencies.

Finally, the other learning zone, the left zone in the above figure 1, figure 2 and the central zone in figure 3, is the independent problem solving zone where children are able to dexterously perform a task on their own.
3: Example of Zone of Proximal Development:

The following images portray the meaning of the Zone of Proximal Development:

![Figure four](image1.png)  ![Figure five](image2.png)

**Figure four**  **Figure five**

![Figure six](image3.png)

**Figure six**

Figure 4: Zone of Proximal Development (2016, January 29)
Figure 5: How to Create Retrieval Practice Activities for Elementary Students (Karpicke et al., 2014)
Figure 6: Children’s swim program (n.d.)

According to Tom Sherrington, “One of the challenges we face as teachers is knowing how much help to give. There are so many examples of structured support across a range of learning experiences: arm-bands in swimming, stabilisers on a bicycle… the vocabulary crib-sheet in language learning. They are all designed to provide support in the early phases of learning, with the explicit goal of removing them later on. The question is when. My feeling is that, too often, we leave the support structure in place for too long and students develop a dependency; an over-reliance on the support and a mutually reinforcing fear of failure” (Sherrington, 2015).

The descriptions of the above figures are noted below:

**Figure 4:** In this image the Zone of Proximal Development happens during the time a father helps her daughter learn how to ride a bicycle.
Here the father instructs her daughter how to hold the bike, showing her the strategies the bike functions, how to handle it, how to correctly position the hands on the steering wheel based on the methods to scan the roadmap, etc. The daughter as a learner gradually improves and consequently the father as an instructor tapers off his instruction step by step until she is adroit enough to drive on her own.

**Figure 5:** In this figure children are becoming independently capable to complete a task with the assistance of their tutor. A child can function a normal multiplication while collaborating with a teacher, but this very child gets perplexed to accomplish that task individually. Children as learners can widen their knowledge and eventually perform the multiplication alone by being guided by their tutors to use related tools and methods and soon later by being asked by that tutor why they (children) were using those apparatus and mechanism.

**Figure 6:** In this picture a baby is learning how to swim with the help of its guide. ‘At first, the child was left alone to work on its own to swim based on a bookish instruction how to move around the hands and legs and how to float on water’ (Piaget’s discovery learning) but the baby failed. It could not swim, rather drowned into the water. On the contrary, ‘in the similar situation this very baby was allowed to swim with the help of its guide. The guide was helping the baby in different stages of teaching how to swim and gradually tapers off her help’ (Zone of Proximal Development) as soon as the baby learns how to swim on its own.

**4: Primary thought about Zone of Proximal Development:**

Vygotsky noted that there are some mental and physical drawbacks across children’s developmental process, and this limitations may allow them to concentrate on some specific approaches before they closely think about other concepts. Vygotsky classified and systematised this theory in his seminal work (Vygotsky, 1934/1962). According to him, there are three types of complexities at any certain developmental level. These are:

(A) Particular difficulties that a child can overcome without assistance,

(B) Particular difficulties that a child can solve with assistance, and

(C) Particular difficulties that a child is, almost all the time, unable to overcome at this particular developmental level (Vygotsky, 1962).

Most of the psychological education related to children’s cognitive development focuses on the second type of complexities; the hindrances that are related to children’s developmental competencies and could be overcome with a little assistance. According to Vygotsky, these kinds of problems that fall into this division are categorised as the problems within the Zone of Proximal Development.

**5: Actual origin of Zone of Proximal Development:**

There are some similarities and dissimilarities (Pass, 2004; DeVries, 1997) between Vygotsky’s Socio-Cultural Theory and Jean Piaget’s Theory of Cognitive Development.
The following image determines both researchers’ both concepts:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th><strong>Vygotsky’s sociocultural view</strong></th>
<th><strong>Piaget’s cognitive developmental view</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Learning is...</strong></td>
<td>social</td>
<td>solitary (children as a “lone scientist”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Development is driven by...</strong></td>
<td>input from others and MKO’s</td>
<td>conflict between stages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Context</strong></td>
<td>Development is different depending on social and cultural context</td>
<td>Development is universal and stages are same regardless of context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Knowledge</strong></td>
<td>Children work with others to build knowledge</td>
<td>Children acquire knowledge through their own explorations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stages?</strong></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Link (learning/development)</strong></td>
<td>Learning precedes development</td>
<td>Development precedes learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Role of language</strong></td>
<td>Language drives thought</td>
<td>Thought drives language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Speech</strong></td>
<td>Social speech becomes inner speech (social processes \rightarrow psychological processes)</td>
<td>Egocentric speech becomes social speech</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure seven: Evaluating and comparing two theories of cognitive development (Eddy, 2010)

Jean Piaget’s Theory of Cognitive Development (McLeod, 2018, June 06) categorises children as solitary learners. Vygotsky neither fully agreed nor fully disagreed with Piaget’s concept, rather he further developed Piaget’s concept of treating children as solitary learners. After a deeply research about the influence of institutional guidance on children, Vygotsky found that children can spontaneously comprehend any language-related-theory, but they can not naturally deal with Mathematics and Writing as they face some difficulties, and consequently, they need to go through these concepts in schools for better understanding. In this perspective, Piaget believed that there was a distinct difference between teaching and development. According to him, a developmental process is very instinctive within children’s world, and they become familiar with and move forward to this developmental stages by their own endeavour. He focused on the concept of individualistic and self-governing thinking saying that if children are allowed to work on their own, it will greatly flourish their comprehensive and working capabilities. Piaget emphasised on the commonly practised and typical teacher-centred instruction in educational institutions.

On the contrary, Vygotsky also felt the importance of instinctive developmental process as advised by Piaget, but he did not fully rely on this method. Consequently, he was not the proponent of leaving children alone to explore everything on their own as he believed that children in this way would not be able to dexterously move forward for long.
According to him, not only children’s development would be greatly hampered but also they would not be able to expand their existing knowledge adequately if they can not properly collaborate with the More Knowledge Others (MKO) (McLeod, 2018, Aug 05). He focused on the importance of cultural experiences and tools (most importantly language) transmitted from the former generations. He also emphasised on the “not too easy and not to difficult” curriculum to be followed by the teachers in schools not to pull the children along.

Finally, Vygotsky’s argued against the contemporary methods of measuring children’s comprehensive and inventive capabilities. He believed that knowledge-based and academic tests are not adequate means to evaluate children’s intelligence. Focusing on the importance of the difference between examining children’s competencies to independently solve problems and their capabilities to solve problems with the help of others, Vygotsky ignored the method to gauge a child’s prevailing knowledge in order to determine their intelligence. His response to the question “Whether the standard of the development of two children are same or not if their performance are same in an examination” was “No”.

There are some criticism against Vygotsky’s addressing the level of age of learners. According to some critics, like Chaiklin (2003), human beings of all ages could be treated as learners throughout their whole life though they gradually come across their developmental stages in course of time and the zone of proximal development could be applicable for them at any level of their age. On the contrary, Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development deals with only children. Unfortunately, Vygotsky’s untimely death created a great hindrance for his research about the zone of proximal development, and consequently he left many queries unanswered about this research.

6: Tom Senninger’s Learning Zone Model and ZPD:

The following picture illustrates the Learning Zone Model originated by Tom Senninger.

![Senninger’s Learning Zone Model](Watling, 2016, February 26)
Tom Senninger, a German pedagogue, researched about the Zone of Proximal Development and established a Learning Zone Model (Wright, 2016, May 18) that illustrates how learning situations are created. He readdressed the three zones as the panic zone (in this zone children can not perform a task independently on their own, even with assistance), the learning zone (in this zone children can perform a specific task with the assistance by their superiors or educators) and the comfort zone (in this stage children can independently perform that task without any assistance).

These three zones are meaningfully described below:

**6.1: Panic zone:**

The following figure depicts the Panic Zone:

![Panic Zone Diagram](https://example.com/panic-zone-diagram.png)

Figure nine: Panic Zone (Chan, 2014, June 1)

Senninger compared this Panic Zone with a specific zone of Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development where children are so anxious and hesitated that they can not complete a task by their own. They are so tensed at this level that they are not able to accomplish a particular task even if they are guided by their educators. Children are uncomfortable and discouraged at this level when they try to complete a task which is either far beyond their capabilities or they are highly stressed.

Finally, in this Panic Zone learning is impossible; no matter whether the children are assisted or not. The reason is at this level the learning cycle of a child’s brain is blocked by a motor sense of anxiety. Children’s level of assessing any activity is very poor at this level as any leaning function related to negative feelings is retained in an area of the human memory that can only be assessed in an identical situations. Children’s experience in this zone is very agonising and their feelings of inquisitiveness is ceased by a demand of their getting out the Panic Zone.
6.2: Learning Zone:

The following figure depicts the Learning Zone:

![Learning Zone Diagram](image)

Figure ten: Comfort Zone (Chan, 2014, June 1)

Senninger’s this Learning Zone could be compared with Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development. As children need assistance to get rid of the Panic Zone in order to learn something and perform a task independently, they are assisted by their superiors and educators. Children’s development occurs in this level when they choose activities to perform with the help of others. The educators and guide taper off their help as children gradually learns how to perform independently. Children’s expertise and knowledge that are not available in the Panic Zone, are available in the Learning Zone as in this zone those skills are neither out of reach to panic nor adjacent enough to feel too easy.

6.3: Comfort Zone:

The following picture depicts Senninger’s Comfort Zone:

![Comfort Zone Diagram](image)

Figure eleven: Comfort Zone (Chan, 2014, June 1)
According to Shaman and Al. (2010), Vygotsky believed that every child as a learner has an individual comfort zone. Comfort zone is the place for already-achieved artistry and expertise. Neither any progress is made nor any competence is built here as this zone consists of the skills that children have already experimented. According to Senninger, this zone is comparable with the zone just after the Zone of Proximal Development, and this is a stable zone. Here, children are unchallenged. They have nothing to perform new by their own and consequently, they have nothing to learn. Children can perform a task independently without any assistance. As this zone is a lifeless zone, educators need to motivate children to come out of this zone in order to know the unknown. By knowing the unknown the comfort zone gradually turns into the learning zone which is the borderline of children’s abilities.

7: Zone of Proximal Development and Scaffolding:

![Figure twelve](image1.png)
![Figure thirteen](image2.png)

Figure twelve: The Power of a Skillfully Scaffolded Lesson – An Interview with Chris Depew (Vadnais, 2015, February 22)

Figure thirteen: TILE-SIG Feature: The “Digitally Enhanced” Zone of Proximal Development (Morsink, 2013, September 20)

The above figures (figure twelve and figure thirteen) clearly depicts how and where the Zone of Proximal Development and Scaffolding occur. According to some developmental psychologists like Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976), learning in Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development is accomplished through a developmental process called scaffolding though this term was never used by Vygotsky himself. In a scaffolding process, educators or more dexterous peers support children to learn while they are in their Zone of Proximal Development and this support is gradually tapered off or fully withdrawn once that very assistance becomes unnecessary. The child then becomes adroit enough to independently perform that task on their own.
According to Wood et al. (1976, p. 90) scaffolding as a developmental process "that enables a child or novice to solve a task or achieve a goal that would be beyond his unassisted efforts." They also suggest that any scaffolding proceeds with the adult's "controlling those elements of the task that are initially beyond the learner's capability, thus permitting him to concentrate upon and complete only those elements that are within his range of competence" (p. 90).

In this perspective Vygotsky’s thought was, children are fond of not only following adults but also imitating them and this is their best way of learning while they are in their Zone of Proximal Development. Educators, more capable peers and parents can scaffold children by advancing them a bit above their grade from their problem-solving capabilities with assistance to the independent problem-solving skills.

An example of scaffolding is learning to drive. Parents, relatives and driving instructors instruct and guide driving students along the way by showing them the mechanics of how the car operates, the correct handling of the steering wheel, the technical know-how of scanning the roadway, etc. As the student progresses gradually, less and less guideline is needed until they are prepared to drive on their own.

8: Application of the Zone of Proximal Development in educational settings:

Educators research about the educational aspects within children’s Zone of Proximal Development with a view to scaffolding children into a broader expertise. Scaffolding within children’s Zone of Proximal Development in a classroom settings is necessary not only to decrease and remove learners’ anxieties but also the broaden their knowledge about completing a particular task. The following figure sketches the mind map of the Zone of Proximal Development:

Figure fourteen: Mind Map for Zone of Proximal Development (Syafiza, 2017, December 16)
The following measures could be followed in order to meaningfully scaffold children:

1. There must be a productive combination between the help of More Knowledgable Others (MKO) and the needs of the children.
2. It needs to be confirmed that the learners have due interest in the task which is neither too simple nor too hard.
3. Identifying effective solutions to the learners’ tasks is mandatory.
4. Finding out the reasons of learners’ frustration and controlling that frustration is also important.
5. To assess children’s current knowledge and experience on the academic content is conducive.
6. There must be an appropriate relation between learners’ current knowledge, their potential and learning contents.
7. In order to get the best intermittent feedback from the learners the assigned task needs to be broken into small, controllable and more convenient tasks with probabilities.
8. Prompts, modelling, adapting learning materials and verbal cues can broaden children’s knowledge and comprehensive faculties.
9. Interacting with peers is one of the best strategies for scaffolding.
10. Collaborative or cooperative learning is also highly recommended in order to successfully scaffold learners.
11. ‘Reciprocal teaching’, where children learn from texts for developing their capabilities, is one of the most effective applications of Vygotsky’s theories. In this methods an effective collaboration between teachers and students comes into effect through summarising, questioning, clarifying and predicting. The role of the teachers is tapered off in course of time.

9: Ways of measuring learner’s ZPD:

There are some ways to measure a learner’s Zone of Proximal Development. Among those Mediation, Psychological Tools and Scaffolding are notable. These three techniques are described below:

9.1: Mediation: “A hallmark of human consciousness is that it is associated with the use of tools, especially ‘psychological tools’ or ‘signs’. Instead of acting in a direct, unmediated way in the social and physical world, our contact with the world is indirect or mediated by signs. This means that understanding the emergence and the definition of higher mental processes must be grounded in the notion of mediation” (Kozulin, 2002).

9.2: Psychological Tools: “Psychological tools are the symbolic cultural artifacts, signs, symbols, texts, formulae, and most fundamentally, language that enables us to master psychological functions like memory, perception, and attention in ways appropriate to our cultures” (Kozulin, 2002) Example: A More Knowledgable Other (MKO) models and think aloud a method for learning (models metacognition while reading text).
**9.3: Scaffolding:** An instructional structure derived from cognitive psychology that move students progressively towards stronger cognisance from their individual levels to their independent levels. The following figure shows how a learner learns through scaffolding within the the Zone of Proximal Development.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Direct instruction</th>
<th>Modelling</th>
<th>Guided practice</th>
<th>Independent practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I do</td>
<td>I do</td>
<td>I help</td>
<td>I watch</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>You watch</td>
<td>You help</td>
<td>You do</td>
<td>You do</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Feuertein’s theory (Williams and Burden, 1997), mediation is closely related to Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory. Mediation refers to the significance of more adroit people in learners’ learning and lives illustrating the importance of the social interaction between two or more people with different standard of artistry and expertise. In Vygotskian theory, tools are regarded as mediators, and language is addressed as one of the most important tools that assist learners to move successfully through their ZPD as a symbol of great importance to sociocultural theory.

Kozulin (2002) classifies mediators into two classes: symbolic and human. Human mediators deal with the types of adult’s involvement that augments learner’s performance. The symbolic mediation is the external process through symbols or tools in social context, and learners utilise this mediation to govern mental strategy after internalisation (UK Essays, 2013).

A learner uses the mediation of language to perform a task independently and in a better way with the help of more adroit peers or educators. Here, the learning process commences as an inter-cognitive activity and ends as an intra-cognitive activity (UK Essays, 2013).

**9.4: Imitation:** The role of imitation is very important in order to assess learners’ Zone of Proximal Development. Classical Psychology says that the best way to assess a child’s level of cognitive development is to assess his level of individual functional capabilities rather than imitation based functions. Vygotsky, who defined ‘imitation’ not as copying but as a process of emulation (more specialised and concrete than copying) considering a part of learning, stated that there is a close relation between learning and imitation and these two processes are fairly mechanical (Vygotsky, 1978). According to Chaiklin (2003), the developmental stages of a maturing psychological function are vividly noted through an effective emulation that accelerates the development of learning to a higher stage.

Vygotsky refers imitation to such a state where children collaborate with More Knowledgeable Others (M KO) for assistance in order to accomplish a task that children would not be able to complete alone as during the second attempt (the individual effort by children without other’s help) the maturing cognitive skills would be absence (Chaiklin, 2003).
To Vygotsky, imitation is more than lifeless functions of copying, rather he generated a theoretical view of imitation where the purpose of following something is to presume some symbols of visible solutions to a problem which is under the process of solution (Vygotsky, 1978, p.210). It is also noted in this thought that the level of imitating should be compatible with the level of a child's developmental level. He stated that a child can successfully imitate a teacher's instruction to solve a problem only if that problem is quite related to the child’s studying level. On the contrary, if the teacher’s instruction focuses on the higher level than the child’s studying level, there is either no scope or little scope for the child to successfully imitate that instruction. There are some reasons behind this. Vygotsky (1978) believed that a successful imitation by a child is not a matter of an incessant repetition and training which is a standardised but fruitless and emotionless function of habits (p.188), rather it is a spontaneous but conscious and intelligent process from a child’s inner side that is purely human as a solution to a problem (p.188). Also, for an effective imitation, children should be guided properly in order to move forward from an already known level to a new level (p.187). It means, a child must have already generated some specific skills in order to productively comprehend and emulate a new task (Norton & Ambrosio, 2008).

Now, it is vivid that a fruitful imitation can establish a theoretical approval of the strategy to assess a child’s Zone of Proximal Development. Vygotsky stated that a child as a learner can not successfully imitate an instruction that is immature, rather he can effectively imitate a maturing process that builds up his Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1998, p.202).

10: Critical Assessment:

According to Didau (2013, January 13), most probably, there is a ‘Goldilocks Effect’ (Curry, 2012, December 22) behind the use of the Zone of Proximal Development by most people. It means that the difficulties faced by children must be ‘perfectly accurate’ according to their levels. The work that needs to be done by the children must be neither too easy nor too intricate. If the work is too simple, there will be no learning as there will be less scope to go to the deeper level of learning. On the contrary, if the work is too laborious, it will be unattainable to the children and they will be disappointed. Consequently, the challenge that children deal with must be ‘just accurate’ for them.

Vygotsky’s theory was not as much intensely criticised as Piaget’s theory was. One of the main reasons behind this could be, it took a bit longer time than expected to translate Vygotskian work from the Russian language. The another reason is, there are less hypotheses to test in Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory and it makes not only difficult but sometimes, also impossible for the educational analysts to create authentic refutations.

There is a great criticism against the universality of Vygotsky’s work. It is assumed that Vygotsky’s work is applicable in all cultures. Rogoff (1990) stands against this idea confirming that the Zone of Proximal Development is mainly synonymous with scaffolding which is largely based on verbal instruction. Consequently, Vygotsky’s theory might not be authentically applicable for learning in all cultures as in some cases practice and observation could be best method of learning.
There are also some more serious critiques against Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development.

Wertsch (1984) told, “if this theoretical construct was not elaborated further, then there was a risk that “it will be used loosely and indiscriminately, thereby becoming so amorphous that it loses all explanatory power” (p. 7).

Mercer and Fisher (1992) believed, “there is a danger that the term is used as little more than a fashionable alternative to Piagetian terminology or the concept of IQ for describing individual differences in attainment or potential” (p. 342).

Based on the context of research about the negotiated nature of teaching and learning, Palinscar (1998, p.370) suggests “ZPD is probably one of the most used and least understood constructs to appear in contemporary educational literature”. Openly, there works a common sense aspect appeal here. It says that a novice can advance further if guided by a more knowledgeable person, and an apprentice might be able to reproduce a strategy individually and independently if his/her experience of working is collaborated with an expert. But, Chaiklin (Daniels, 2001) mentions three rarely articulated assumptions which stand against Vygotskyan concept:

1. The generality assumption: There is a ZPD for learning every different kinds of topic.
2. The assistance assumption: Learning is dependent on assistance from an expert.
3. The potential assumption: Teaching in the ZPD will result in easy or effortless learning.

11: Conclusion:

Vygotsky’s scientific legacy was deeply flourished with the creation of the Zone of Proximal Development which, at first, was viewed within a narrow context though later on, was widened to illustrate the concrete association between learning and development. Vygotsky has a vast contribution to the world of cognitive psychology, but among these contributions the Zone of Proximal Development is the most noted contribution to the educational psychology. Clarification of cognitive development as a means of analysing the ‘function of development’ provided research methods in learning and developmental psychology with innovative possibilities which in some meaning rejuvenate the authentic and original approach of Vygotsky. It is matter of great sorrow that Vygotsky’s profound attempt to research about children’s cognitive world was badly hindered by his untimely death though now a days some theorists and educationists are researching about Vygotsky’s contribution to the world of developmental psychology.
12: Reference:


