

Social Development Theory

General

Social development theory was introduced in 1920s and 1930s by [Lev Vygotsky](#). This theory, sometimes also called cultural-history theory gives a **framework for cognitive development** in children and argues that the **key role in cognition development** lies in **social interactions**. In his own words,

- *"every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological) and then inside the child (intrapsychological). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of concepts. All the higher functions originate as actual relationships between individuals"*¹⁾.

What is social development theory?

Vygotsky's initial ideas on education and learning were influenced by [Ivan Pavlov](#) and behaviorist stimulus-response learning, yet these ideas later changed resulting in his social development theory. theory addresses three main themes²⁾:

- **Social interaction** - which according to Vygotsky together with language and culture plays a **crucial role in the process of cognitive development**. Opposed to later [Jean Piaget's stage theory of cognitive development](#) where development precedes learning, Vygotsky believed that learning precedes development. Social interaction means that a more competent member of the culture will *externalize* learned processes which will then be *internalized* and thereby learned by a less competent member.
- **The More Knowledgeable Other (MKO)** - a term that addresses a **person** (typically teacher or instructor, but others as well) or a machine that, when compared to the learner, has **more knowledge and skills related to a particular task**, process or concept. This person can help a child to learn new concepts and tasks, but only as long as those tasks and concepts don't exceed the zone of proximal development.
- **The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)** - a term to describe the **zone between** learners ability to **complete a task with guidance** or collaboration and ability to **solve it alone**. The ZPD is where learning occurs. Motivation for introduction of ZPD lies in observation that children could often accomplish tasks with the help of others that they could not accomplish alone. The **zone of proximal development** is the difference **between a child's current level of development and his or her potential level of development**, where full cognitive development is achieved through social interaction. According to Vygotsky, two children may be at 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. This kind of performance was to Vygotsky much more important than poerformance of a child alone, like the one measured by intelligence tests.

What is the practical meaning of social development theory?

First implication of Vygotsky's theory comes from the emphasized **importance of social interaction**. In accordance with that, **interaction** between learners should be **encouraged** during the educational process, since it **will enhance learning**. Another effective form of teaching should be **scaffolding** - providing learner with **help** when and as much **as needed**.

Finally, a teacher should try to encourage externalization:

- *"the teacher, working with the school child on a given question, explains, informs, inquires, corrects, and forces the child himself to explain."³⁾*

Criticisms

Keywords and most important names

Bibliography

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[Social Development Theory \(Vygotsky\) at Learning Theories.](#)

[LPR @TCD - Constructivism: Constructivist Theory And Social Development Theory.](#)

[TIP: Theories. Social Development Theory \(L. Vygotsky\).](#)

[Funderstanding - Lev Vygotsky and Social Cognition.](#)

Read more

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²⁾

Social Development Theory (Vygotsky) at Learning Theories.

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