

The Cognitive Approach – Vygotsky

Approach theorist

Cognitive:
Vygotsky

Key words:

- Scaffolding
- More Knowledgeable other (MKO)
- Zone of Proximal Development
- Zone of Actual development
- Peer tutorial

Key aspects of the approach or theory relating to children's development and behaviour

Vygotsky developed the social constructivism theory, where individuals are active participants in creating their own knowledge. Vygotsky believed that learning takes place primarily in social and cultural settings, rather than just within the individual.

The social constructivism theory suggests that students learn primarily through interactions with their peers, teachers, and parents. Vygotsky believed that children constructed their understanding and learning within a socio-cultural context and that children develop their understanding and cognitive development through language.

Vygotsky's theory is that as a child develops, they will need the support of a more knowledgeable other (MKO) to move on in their learning, which is a process known as scaffolding. The child is said to be in a 'zone of proximal development' and the scaffolding process will help them develop the skills and understanding required to move forwards. The child will then practice and consolidate that learning before more scaffolding is required.

Unlike Piaget, Vygotsky does not identify a series of stages, but a more gradual process of development. He also recognises that experience, language and, therefore, development will also vary according to the culture that the child is immersed in.

Application of the approach for childcare practitioners and educators in schools and settings

Vygotsky's theory highlights the social aspect of play, learning and development. It also emphasises the importance of both adult-led and child-initiated play. Adults need to observe children's play and development and know when to step in to scaffold the learning. Adults can work alongside the children to extend and challenge their learning.

Vygotsky also recognised the important role that our peers may also play in scaffolding learning. A group of children playing together will include a range of ages and abilities, and some children will be supporting the development of others, which is known as the peer tutor or peer tutorial. Like Piaget, Vygotsky's theory also promotes learning through stimulating and challenging play.

Observation is vitally important in scaffolding to determine the stage of learning the child is at, and activities should be provided that are slightly above the child's current abilities to scaffold and support learning.