

**Impact
Factor
2.147**

ISSN 2349-638x

Reviewed International Journal



**AAYUSHI
INTERNATIONAL
INTERDISCIPLINARY
RESEARCH JOURNAL
(AIIRJ)**

Monthly Publish Journal

VOL-III

ISSUE-II

Feb.

2016

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CHIEF EDITOR – PRAMOD PRAKASHRAO TANDALE

Relevance of Lev Vygotsky's MKO, ZPD and Scaffolding Concepts in Contemporary Educational Context

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Abstract

Educational system of today is passing through a phase of turmoil and disarray because of certain crucial factors. The lack of pro-active concern of parents and teachers, scarcity of communication among parents-teachers-children and undersupplied support to the children is proving to be hugely detrimental for the overall development of child. Lev Vygotsky's ideas of More Knowledgeable Others (MKO), Zone of Proximal Development and Scaffolding are some of his most wonderful contributions which have unearthed some unexplored aspects of child's cognitive development. The main focus of Lev Vygotsky's concepts has been to enhance the development of child's cognition through social interaction and open communication with his/her parents-teachers-peer group. The role of more knowledgeable others (MKO) would always remain extremely significant in the realization of child's fullest potential. Similarly, concept of scaffolding would always remain relevant in helping students feel secure and confident in the initial phase of their learning. There is need to comprehensively analyze the application of these significant concepts in the educational arena so that the children could realize their potential and subsequently, do justice with it.

Key words: MKO, ZPD, Scaffolding, Social Interaction,

Introduction

Teaching is considered as one of the most satisfactory and rewarding careers in the world because teachers have the significant role of investing in the development of the next generation. It is challenging responsibility that requires the mastery over variety of skills to be successful. It is although strange that teaching seems to be easy job in the eyes of certain sections of society, but there must not be an iota of doubt that it is one of the most demanding careers that anyone choose to pursue. The reason behind teaching being a tricky assignment is that the child development is a complicated and dynamic process, and there are many theories about how this development occurs best. It is therefore, imperative for the teacher to have a strong grip on the applied aspect of these developmental theories in order to understand the child properly. The aspect of cognitive development is one of the basic prerequisite for the development of child's overall personality. In this regard, one of the primary psychologists who worked wonderfully well in the area of cognitive development was a man named Lev Vygotsky. Lev Vygotsky's theories stressed the fundamental role of social interaction in the development

of cognition as he strongly opined that community plays a central role in the process of "making meaning." Unlike Piaget's notion that children's development must necessarily precede their learning, Vygotsky argued that social learning tends to precede (i.e. come before) development. Understanding Vygotsky's theories of cognitive development can help educators to understand how children's brains develop, and this knowledge may help them in devising strategies for a child's cognitive development. The basic premises of Vygotsky theory are centered on the idea that social interaction and imaginative play are large contributors to the process of cognitive development in children. Social interactions help the child to both discover and create meaning from the things that they discover. In his view, some of the most important learning a child could experience was in the social interactions they had with a skilled tutor that is often an adult, such as a parent or teacher. The child will observe and imitate the behaviors of the tutor as well as follow the verbal instructions the tutor provides. The child tries to understand what they observe and the instructions they receive by copying and internalizing, while learning to apply them to their own lives. Vygotsky called this collaborative or cooperative dialogue. Vygotsky called the teacher or tutor in this role the "More Knowledgeable Other (MKO)". Now coming to the concept of MKO (More Knowledgeable Others), the MKO is someone or something who is supposed to have superior skill or understanding of a task, process or concept. This MKO could be a teacher, peer, a parent or another person. It can be said that MKO refers to someone who has a better understanding or a higher ability level than the learner, with respect to a particular task, process or concept. Although the implication is that the MKO is a teacher or an older adult, this is not necessarily the case. Many times, a child's peers or an adult's children may be the individuals with more knowledge or experience. The key to MKOs is that they must have (or be programmed with) more knowledge about the topic being learned than the learner does.

The concept of the More Knowledgeable Other is integrally related to the second important principle of Vygotsky's work, i.e. the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The zone of proximal development, often abbreviated as ZPD, is the difference between what a learner can do without help and what he/she can do with help from MKO. This is an important concept that relates to the difference between what a child can achieve autonomously and what a child can achieve with guidance and support from a skilled partner or MKO. According to Vygotsky, ZPD helps in determining a child's mental functions that have not yet matured but are in the process of maturation, functions that are currently in an embryonic state, but will mature tomorrow. Vygotsky sees the Zone of Proximal Development as the area where the most sensitive instruction or guidance should be given - allowing the child to develop skills they will then use on their own - developing higher mental functions. Vygotsky also views interface with peers as an effectual way of developing skills and strategies. He suggested that teachers should use cooperative learning exercises where less proficient children attained skill/knowledge with the assistance from more proficient peers - within the zone of proximal development. In this modern era where the communication gap among parents, children and teachers is increasing with each passing day, the emphasis on increasing social interaction can really do wonders for

the development of the child. There is a need for application of some confidence building measures among these three components so that suitable progress of child could take place. The MKO have to shed their inhibitions, typical overly corrective and rigid attitude towards their child, so that the child could find solace in their company instead of usual intimidation. The children can achieve wonderful results if there would be positive communication between him and the society.

As regarding concept of parental/Teacher support for the development of child, Lev Vygotsky proposed a distinctive concept of “scaffolding” which is quite meaningful and effective. According to Donato (1994), scaffolding is a concept that derives from cognitive psychology. It states that in a social interaction, a knowledgeable participant can create by means of speech and supportive conditions in which the student (novice) can participate in and extend current skills and knowledge to a high level of competence. In an educational context, however, scaffolding is an instructional structure whereby the teacher models the desired learning strategy or task; then gradually shifts responsibility to the students. Scaffolding is directly related to zone of proximal development in that it is the support mechanism that helps a learner successfully performs a task within his or her ZPD. As a matter of fact, scaffold is an external structure that provides support for the workers until the house itself is strong enough to support them. As the home gains stability, the scaffold becomes less necessary and is gradually removed. Scaffolding is applied similarly in the classroom and society. In the mechanism of Scaffolding, the teacher/MKO should provide clues about how to proceed through the problem. As the child becomes capable of solving the problem without support, the teacher/MKO steadily removes these clues. This process is referred to as fading. The scaffolding process helps the child to develop the skills necessary to communicate on their own. In the present scenario, where the instances of students’ suicide are increasing day by day because of their inability to cope with ever increasing competition, the application of Scaffolding concept may really prove to be a game changer in our society. According to a NCRB (National Crime record Bureau) report published in 2015, Youth (18 years and above- below 30 years) accounted for astonishingly 34.1 % out of the total suicides occurred in India in 2014. This data clearly shows that if the concept of Scaffolding is applied with precision for younger generation, the chances of the precious lives becoming directionless can be minimized. The application of Scaffolding concept by MKO may really prove to be a big relief for the younger population who is fast becoming disoriented and directionless due to lack of communication with the older ones.

The theory of Vygotsky rightly asserts that learning is a collaborative achievement and not an isolated individual’s effort, where the learner works unassisted and unmediated. The theory emphasizes that during instruction, awareness of the structure and function of language is developed by using it socially. Donato (2000) advocates that the theory adds greater clarity to the issue of modified interaction and the negotiation of meanings in classroom settings. Teachers and learners are given opportunities to mediate and assist each other in the creation of zones of proximal development in which each party learns and develops

(Donato 2000). The application of Vygotsky's marvelous philosophy can really do wonders for our educational system. The concepts of ZPD, MKO and scaffolding can really charge the children to achieve the best out of their environment. The parents and teachers have to act as guide and visionary for the child if they wish to mould the child according to sublime life ideals. Instead of becoming critical and fault finder, we need to pull our socks and shoulder the responsibility. The aspect of enhancing social interaction in the educational institutions should be given due importance, as according to Vygotsky, the amount of child's learning is directly proportional to the volume of social interaction that happens inside the classroom/family. There should also be focus on providing an environment that encourages the children to engage in imaginative play because, the role-playing they engage in, surely help them to develop language and thinking skills. There is no denying the fact that Vygotsky's instructional concepts such as "scaffolding" and "apprenticeship" are hugely effective in which the teacher or more advanced peer helps to structure or arrange a task so that a novice can work on it successfully. Lev Vygotsky has truly shown us how children's efforts to understand the world around them, working in concert with teachers' sensitive, responsive interactions, rouses their young minds to life.

Conclusion

The idea of MKO, ZPD and Scaffolding in relation to educational practices has provided a distinctive perspective for conceptualizing the relation between human learning and cognitive development. Diverse interpretations of these ideas have stimulating lot of research and reflection within the educational fraternity the world over. Lev Vygotsky's work had been centered on making social interaction as indispensable part of our classroom settings. As the educational system all around the world is putting high stakes on increasing communication inside the classrooms, Vygotsky's ideas looks more applicable and promising in contemporary context.

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