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Knowing Your Potential

Originally proposed by theorist Lev Vygotsky, the Zone of Proximal Development (or ZPD) is a component of the Social Cognitive Theory. It is described as the gap between the actual level of development and the potential development of a learner. Simply put, it is the gap between what he has mastered and what he can still learn when an educational support is around.

The Zone Of Proximal Development is a key area in the Education field as it explains how an educator can contribute in improving the actual development level of a student as he aims to achieving his potential development.

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Quiz: Psychology 101 Part 2

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Basic Concepts of ZPD

The main notion of Vygotskian ZPD is that a student must be tested according to his ability to solve problems independently as compared to his ability to solve them with assistance of the educator; he is, therefore, not to be tested based on standardized tests in order to determine his intelligence. This means that ZPD is a means of cognitive growth for the learner, and that social interaction plays a major role in developing the cognitive ability of the student. With the presence of the proficient persons like parents and teachers, the learner is able to develop his cognitive ability. In the absence of their assistance, the child's cognitive ability shall be tested

to determine whether he has achieved his potential development through social interaction.

The Four-Stage Model

The four-stage Model proposed by Tharp and Gallimore provides us a clearer insight on the zone of proximal development. The first stage includes the learner with the assistance of the so-called “more capable others”, which include his parents, teachers, experts, coaches, peers and others who have a mastery on the subject being learned on. Capacity begins in the first stage. The second stage indicates that the learner assists himself towards learning. This may involve inner motivation and determination. By the end of the second stage, the learner’s capacity is developed. The third stage involves internalization, automatization and “fossilization” , in which the learner feels a sense of mastery of the subject. Just when the learner feels he has mastered the subject, in the fourth stage there may be a “de-automatization” in which he would regress back to the previous stages. This recursion to prior stages is necessary in order for the learner’s cognitive ability to be further enhanced and solidified.

Where is the ZPD?

Recognizing the state of the learner within the zone of proximal development can be easily done by “most capable others” when they know how to ask the right questions and are able to assess the learning style of the student. Asking the right questions means that the teachers, coaches and parents must know the immediate needs of the learner, as well as his developmental status.

Application of ZPD

The classroom is perhaps the best place where the knowledge of ZPD can be applied. In this setting, the teacher or mentor is not only tasked to teach her lessons but is also responsible for coming up with ways on stimulating the classroom into an interactive social environment. The co-students of the learner can serve as the most capable others as other students may contribute to the development of the cognitive ability of the learner.

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