

I believe to become a successful, well respected teacher in the community, a thorough understanding of how children develop and at which stage they develop skills is crucial. Cognitive development is the process of radically changing thought process' from birth through to maturation. In conjunction with cognitive theory, I believe that an understanding of sociocultural theory should be met in the reflection that children learn their thinking and behavioural patterns from surrounding social and cultural peers and knowledgeable members of society, such as teachers and parents.

Piaget's theory had 4 main stages of development, Sensorimotor 0-2 years, Preoperational 2-6 years, Concrete Operational 6-11 years and Formal operational 11-adult. During the sensorimotor stage a major gain that occurs is that an infant is aware that an object still exists, even when out of sight. Preoperational stage is when the imagination takes hold and language has a significant meaning of self-expression. With concrete operational stage come the ability to apply logic to be able to understand concepts such as numbers, classification and scientific theories. Last of all in Piaget's theory is the formal operation stage where ethics, politics and moral issues are discovered as adolescents and adults discover a theoretical approach to experience (Stassen Berger, 2006, p.47). Piaget also believed that 4 main factors influences the thought process of humans, which are maturation, activity, social transmission and equilibration. With all of these influences in mind, according to Piaget, thinking processes were changed and was referred to as a "scheme". A scheme is known as an organised system or grouping of awareness and experience.

Vygotsky's theory was based on cognitive developments socially, culturally and ethnically. According to (Stassen Berger, 2006) Vygotsky stated that each person was an "Apprentice in thinking" whether schooled or not. He stated that everyone was taught in some way by a skillful member of society, this is also referred to as "Guided Participation – the most effective technique used by skilled mentors to help novices learn." (Stassen Berger, 2006, p.50). Vygotsky believed that in each developing individual there is a "Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) – a zone surrounding the learner that includes all skills, knowledge and concepts that a person is close to acquiring but cannot yet master without help." (Stassen Berger, 2006, p.51). With Vygotsky's theory of ZPD, how and when a child develops their potential skills will depend on the ability of others to provide "scaffolding – temporary support provided to help a learner master the next task in a given learning process" for participation in learning (Stassen Berger, 2006, p259). A recent research article by Levykh claims that many researchers believe that ZPD should be extended to emotions and desires and popularity to extend the theory of ZPD support reflects that there is an overdue recognition that emotion plays a large part in human development.

Kutnik & Kington (2005) have recently undertaken a study that children's cognitive development is enhanced when working in pairs of pupils(p.521). They argue whether friendships or acquaintance relationships are most productive in a learning environment. Seventy two children were paired across various year levels and undertook science reasoning tasks (SRT), with pairs consisting of girls, boys and mixed, boys and girls pairs. The results were that girls worked best together with high SRT levels, while mixed groups worked mid range

together with mid SRT levels and boys were at the lowest level with low SRT levels. These results are indicative that friendship pairing was not the best way to enhance cognitive development.

An article by Bempechat (2004) states that homework tasks that teachers assign plays a critical role in motivation of children's achievements. Homework can assist in developing beliefs and achievements and can also teach children how to cope with difficulties such as mistakes and setbacks. Homework can also assist a teacher in recognising any areas that a student may be having difficulties. Critics argue that research on the affects of homework vary depending on the level of schooling. A benefit that can be developed from homework is the value of effort. This skill takes practice to master and can be learnt by a pupil from teachers and parents which is a good example of scaffolding.

In an article by McCullough Calabrese (2003) it is claimed that by using sociodramatic play in the classroom it assists children to develop social, emotional, physical and cognitive skills by creating make-believe adventures. This in particular relates to Piaget's preoperational stage and developing the imagination and creativity. Sociodramatic play also assists in developing self-esteem. "Sociodramatic play is where children take on different roles and participate in conversations." (McCullough Calabrese, 2003, p.607)

The Early Childhood Syllabus reflects extensive research of the Early Years Curriculum Guidelines (EYCG) with programs that assist in developing skills such as active learning, problems solving, communication and creativity. The EYCG is based on "capable young people that have been learning since birth" (Queensland Studies Authority, 2006). EYCG believe that children learn best through "participation in making decisions, discuss their learning and learn through multi-sensory participation." Prep teachers in particular need to be aware that when children first start school, they have come from a variety of backgrounds, socially and culturally. Main points that all teachers need to be aware of is children's prior experiences and to be able to understand children's learning. Teachers are also responsible for building partnerships with the children, parents and communities to promote development of children. The EYCG cover both cognitive development and sociocultural theory.

An ideal learning environment is not limited to the material room within a building; it is a learning system that includes experiences, conversations and activities that allow learners to generate a self-directed learning experience. An ideal learning environment is a collaboration of constructivist, humanist and behaviourist views of learning, which is comprised of elements including but not limited to learning preferences, goal setting, motivation, social cognition and attribution theory. As a teacher I will be primarily focusing on the learner as their skills, knowledge and attitudes set boundaries within their individual experiences.

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