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Vygotsky Scaffolding: What It Is and How to Use It

Vygotsky scaffolding and the related concept of the zone of proximal development are teaching methods that can help students learn much more information much more quickly than they would with traditional instruction.

However, Vygotsky scaffolding is only effective if you know how to properly implement it; otherwise it can actually hinder a student's learning. Read this guide to learn what scaffolding and the zone of proximal development are, what the scaffolding psychology is, if studies have found these teaching methods to be effective, and how you can use these methods in the classroom to promote learning .

Instructional scaffolding, also known as "Vygotsky scaffolding" or just "scaffolding," is **a teaching method that helps students learn more by working with a teacher or a more advanced student to achieve their learning goals.**

The theory behind instructional scaffolding is that, compared to learning independently, students learn more when collaborating with others who have a wider range of skills and knowledge than the student currently does. These instructors or peers are the "scaffolding" who help the student expand her learning boundaries and learn more than she would be able to on her own.

Vygotsky scaffolding is part of the education concept "zone of proximal development" or ZPD. The ZPD is the set of skills or knowledge a student can't do on her own but can do with the help or guidance of someone else. It's the skill level just above where the student currently is.

ZPD is often depicted as a series of concentric circles. The smallest circle is the set of skills a student can learn on her own, without any help. **Next is the ZPD, or skills a student wouldn't be able to do on her own, but can do with a teacher or peer helping her.** Beyond that are skills the student can't do yet, even with help.

For example, say there is a kindergartner who is learning how to read and write. He knows all the letters of the alphabet, but he can't yet read or write words. No matter how much guidance he was given, he could never read a novel on his own at this point, but with a teacher's help, he can learn how to read and write short words like "at," "boy" and "dog" because this skill is within is ZPD. It would have taken him much longer to learn this skill on his own, but it's still simple enough that he can understand it if he has someone to explain it to him. **The student's ZPD is reading and writing short words, and the teacher who helps him learn them is the scaffolding.**

Proponents of ZPD and instructional scaffolding believe they are highly effective ways to maximize a student's learning. Scaffolding can be used to help a person of any age learn something new, but in the classroom it is **most often used with younger students (preschool and elementary school)** since they are learning new skills and concepts they haven't been exposed to before most frequently.

Over the past several decades, numerous studies have been conducted to study the effectiveness of using ZPD and scaffolding as teaching methods. **Overall, research has shown that these methods can often help students learn more than they would compared to traditional teaching** methods, but they require the instructor to have a good grasp of the student's ZPD so they can adapt the teaching method to them.

Children whose mothers gave them guidance were significantly more successful than those who completed the task on their own.