

CHILD DEVELOPMENT THEORY  
in the CLASSROOM

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### **Child Development Theory in the Classroom**

We are now becoming familiar with child development theories including, but not limited to, Bandura's social learning theory, Piaget's cognitive-developmental theory, and Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory, and how they influence the learning environment in the classroom. I have found Bandura's modeling techniques and Vygotsky's scaffolding process and the Zone of Proximal Development most relevant to my classroom teaching Chinese to 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade students. Socio-cultural theory focuses on how culture is delivered to the next generation using tools such as language, and social interactions. Knowledge is actively and socially acquired through interactions with others.

#### **Instructional Planning**

In my Chinese classrooms, my instructional planning is developed with the following considerations in mind:

1. The students must be set up to learn in an environment where they feel safe and valued, and psychologically secure.
2. Regardless of age, *play*, I believe, is an important vehicle for children's cognitive development.
3. Children learn best when they have the opportunities to practice newly acquired skills immediately, and when they experience a challenge just beyond their present mastery.
4. The students are invited to demonstrate different modes of learning and presenting in any way of their choice because everyone is uniquely equipped with any one or more of the multiple intelligences suggested by Howard Gardner (Bee & Boyd, 2004).



**Figure 1.** *Interview chart*

To reassure them that they can handle the assignment, I ask Johnny to be one of the interviewees. I pretend to be the student carrying on the interview with Johnny (who is now a cashier working at the local Chinese restaurant). After asking Johnny each question, I record his response on the chart. This process takes about 3 minutes, and along the way, there are laughs and giggles because of some silly mistakes that both of us make. Timely laughs and giggles are excellent nerve-breakers so now they are a lot more relaxed and are beginning to visualize themselves conducting the interview.

*Inherent in scaffolding instruction is Lev Vygotsky's idea of the Zone of Proximal Development. Vygotsky suggests that ZPD is "the area between what a learner cannot initially do by oneself but can be attained with the help of a 'more knowledgeable other' (MKO) adult or peer. The first step in instructional scaffolding is usually modeling. Lange (2002) cites Hogan and Pressley (1997) as defining modeling as, "teaching behavior that shows how one should feel, think or act within a given situation." There are three types of modeling. Think-aloud modeling gives auditory substance to the thought processes associated with a task. Talk-aloud modeling involves verbalizing the thought process or problem solving strategy while demonstrating the task. Performance modeling requires no verbal instruction. (Lange, 2002).*

After the students have a better understanding that the majority of the interview is about utilizing their prior knowledge, I then proceed to make an oral presentation, emphasizing the desirable presentation etiquettes. I explained to them that they are welcome to use any visual aid they want during the oral presentation. At this time, the students are getting excited about designing their presentation while enjoying the 'show' that I am putting on. I continue onward to sit on a 'hot' seat and ask them to fire up 5 questions, relevant to the oral presentation that I just give. I respond to the question,

again, in a culturally appropriate manner. To wrap up my MKO demonstration, I show a short video clip made by the students in the previous year.

Next, I choose a volunteer who is a typical average student and invite her/him to try out the interview, the presentation and the Q&A. Whenever he/she hesitates and stops, I try to offer a clue by either thinking-aloud, waving a picture, or gesturing a body language. By now, the students are confident and excited about the assignment. When the bell rings, they cannot wait to rush home to tell parents about the ‘cool’ homework they are going to do.

*If scaffolding is properly administered, it will act as an enabler, not as a disabler” (Benson, 1997).*

On the day of the presentation, some choose to write and illustrate a story book (in Chin-lish as a reasonable percentage is acceptable and encouraged for the first year students) and others design and show a PowerPoint. One creates a music video with footage taken from the interview.

### **Classroom set-up and Management**

Appropriate classroom setup and effective classroom management can be conducive to obtaining optimal learning. The application of the scaffolding technique includes both language and cultural visuals readily accessible in the surrounding walls that function as reminders. In my classroom, there are constant displays of the cultural artifacts, famous landmarks, words of wisdoms, and books in original text. Technology is also ubiquitous as I use PowerPoint and sometimes online video clips in the beginning of every new lesson to ‘explain’ new vocabulary and grammar in the target language (i.e. L2) as an immersion tool. Direction application of ZPD challenges the students by teaching L2 with L2 with adequate visual stimulants to both activate previous knowledge

and to deliver definition for the new knowledge. I use 50-50 rule for teacher fronted instructions and student-centered learning which provides a great amount of opportunities for the students to practice communicatively in pairs or groups. The highly active and brisk pace activities keep the students on their best behaviors so they enjoy more time to ‘play’ and be actively engaged.

### Assessment

Right from the beginning, students are shown rubrics (figure 2) and standards that define excellence in their final delivery of the completed assignment. Their performance is assessed based on the *National Standards of Foreign Language Education: preparing for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition*; embracing ACTFL’s 5 C’s and 3 communication modes. The highest point is reasonably attainable because it does not seek out perfection, but realistic efforts. Students become increasingly more confidence when they are capable to perform good control of the language use under the ZPD guideline.

	criteria				Points
	1	3	5	6	
<b>task completion</b>	audience cannot understand because there is no sequence of information	audience somewhat follow with effort because presenter jumps around	audience can generally follow because information is presented in logical sequence	audience can follow with ease	
<b>content knowledge</b>	presenter does not have grasp of information and unable to answer questions	presenter is uncomfortable with information and answers only rudimentary questions	presenter is at ease with content, but answers minimally	presenter demonstrates full knowledge with elaboration	

<b>language use</b>	insufficient, inappropriate vocabulary, with frequent errors that significantly obscure meaning	limited vocabulary/grammar with frequent errors in pronunciation that sometimes obscure meaning	mostly appropriate vocabulary and grammar structure with errors that do not generally obscure meaning	appropriate vocabulary, grammar	
<b>delivery</b>	labored pace and intonation, with frequent hesitation and repetition	inconsistent pace and intonation with hesitation and repetition that interfere with comprehension, error in pronunciation sometimes necessitate special listener effort	generally consistent pace and intonation, with intermittent hesitation and repetition, several pronunciation errors but do not necessitate special listener effort	smooth pace and intonation, with occasional hesitation and sporadic pronunciation error	
<b>other aids</b>	no aids of any sort	occasional aids that support presentation minimally	appropriate aids related to presentation	creative aids used to reinforce the presentation	

Total:

**Teacher's comment:**

Figure 2. Presentation Rubric

**References:**

ACTFL & others (2006). *National Standards for Foreign Language Education:*

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