



WHY DOES VYGOTSKY STILL MATTER IN TODAY'S CLASSROOM?

What New Research Says About Constructivism and Differentiated Learning

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WHAT RESEARCH FOUND

Differentiated learning is often viewed as a modern teaching strategy, but this review argues that many of its principles are rooted in **Lev Vygotsky's constructivist learning theory**. The authors explain that differentiated learning adapts teaching to students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles, while Vygotsky's theory emphasises that students actively construct knowledge through social interaction and meaningful learning experiences. Rather than passively receiving information, learners develop understanding by connecting new ideas to their existing knowledge with appropriate guidance from teachers and peers.

The review identifies several strong connections between Vygotsky's theory and differentiated instruction. One of the most important is the **Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)**, which represents the difference between what students can do independently and what they can achieve with support. Teachers help learners progress by providing **scaffolding**—temporary guidance that gradually decreases as students become more capable. Differentiated learning applies this principle by offering different levels of support according to individual learning needs.

The authors also emphasise that differentiated learning is not individualised instruction for every student. Instead, it creates flexible learning experiences that recognise differences while keeping students actively involved in constructing knowledge. Teachers become facilitators who encourage exploration, discussion, creativity, and collaboration rather than simply delivering information. By combining differentiated instruction with constructivist principles, classrooms become places where students learn through participation, inquiry, and meaningful social interaction.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Teachers often wonder how much support they should provide during learning. This review suggests that the most effective teaching occurs when support is **carefully matched to students' current abilities**. As learners become more confident, teachers gradually reduce assistance, helping students become increasingly independent.



CLASSROOM REALITY

Teachers Want	Students Often Experience
Independent learners	Either too much or too little support
Active participation	Listening more than exploring
Deep understanding	Memorising information
Student confidence	Fear of making mistakes

TRY TOMORROW

During your next lesson:

1. Identify one task that some students may find challenging.
 2. Provide prompts, guiding questions, or worked examples before expecting independent work.
 3. Pair students strategically so they can learn from one another.
 4. Gradually remove support as students demonstrate understanding.
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CAUTION

Scaffolding should be **temporary**. If teachers continue providing the same level of assistance after students are ready to work independently, learning and confidence may be limited.

ONE KEY TAKEAWAY

Students learn best when teachers provide the right support at the right time—and gradually step back as learners become more capable.

Keywords: Vygotsky, constructivism, differentiated learning, scaffolding, zone of proximal development, active learning

Reference:

Wibowo, S., Wangid, M. N., & Firdaus, F. M. (2025). *The relevance of Vygotsky's constructivism learning theory with the differentiated learning primary schools*. *Journal of Education and Learning (EduLearn)*, 19(1), 431–440.