The DVD was developed with the aim of providing a basic conceptual understanding of Lev Vygotsky’s theory of Learning and Development. It draws on examples from three different classrooms to demonstrate the four key ideas of Vygotsky’s theory. The DVD authors emphasise that this only the skeleton of the theory, but understanding these key ideas enables an easier read of Vygotsky’s work. The DVD also demonstrates similarities between Vygotsky’s and Piaget’s work. The four ideas are presented separately for the purposes of this DVD, but are acknowledged as being interconnected.

Vygotsky’s theory of Learning and Development is built up on four major ideas:

1. **Children construct knowledge**
   Vygostky was influenced by Jean Piaget’s work, but differed from Piaget with regard to his view on how children’s knowledge is constructed. Unlike Piaget, who believed that children’s knowledge is constructed through interactions with physical objects, Vygostky believed that a child’s knowledge is co-constructed through interaction with another human being. Learning is an active creation of a unique representation of new information. Both Vygotsky and Piaget espoused constructivism, stating that qualitative changes do occur in children’s thought and that this cannot simply be explained using a behaviourist model.

2. **Learning can lead development**
   There are certain maturational prerequisites for learning to take place. For example, a child needs to master the language of numbers before she can master the logic of counting. Vygotsky’s belief in the complex relationship between learning and development differed from Piaget’s. He believed that learning
impacts development. Children develop strategies that they use to further develop their intellectual capacities. Vygotsky coined a very important concept called the ‘Zone of Proximal Development’:

- This zone lies between the independent level of performance of a child, which is the best she can do when completing tasks alone, and the assisted level of performance of a child, which is the best the child can do when completing tasks with help from, for example, a teacher. Vygotsky believed that teachers should focus on the zone of proximal development.

- The Zone of Proximal Development has three important implications for early childhood development: It influences decisions around who and in what way adults should intervene to enable the child to develop the next step in their understanding; it influences how assessments are viewed, suggesting that assessments should be tailored to each child’s unique developmental level; and it influences what is seen as developmentally appropriate. Vygotsky stated that the most valuable teaching aims at the highest level of a child’s developmental level, not the lowest.

3. Development cannot be separated from its social context
   The content and processes of thinking are determined by our culture, and culture is based on the development of mental tools. Vygotsky believed that there is a similar structure of mind in all human beings. This structure consists of a taught higher level and an innate lower level of mental functioning. The lower level consists of reactive attention, associative memory and sensory-motor thought. The higher level consists of focused attention, selective memory and symbolic thought.

4. Language plays a central role in mental development
   Language is a mental tool that is used for thinking. Vygotsky believed it is the main vehicle of passing down higher levels of functioning. Children make use of language to transform their experiences into internal processes that reflect their understanding.

Vygotsky’s work reminds us of the processes necessary for children to regulate their own internal and external behaviour. The aim of Vygotsky’s work was to develop independent self-regulating individuals, who are able to work collaboratively with others. This DVD provides a conceptually clear introduction to Vygotsky’s theory of Language and Development. It can be used as a useful tool for teaching and equipping novice therapists and educators with a structure
whilst they are developing interventions that are developmentally tailored to the children they interact with.

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By: Elena Bodrova and Deborah Leong  
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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE:

Candice Combrinck is currently completing her final year of the Master’s Degree in Clinical Psychology at Unisa. Her research interests include developmental psychology and child psychotherapy, African epistemology, forensic work, family therapy and group therapy.