

# Vygotsky's theory - some evidence

You are learning how to...	In the context of...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interpret and comment on studies of children's development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Vygotsky's theory of cognitive development</li> </ul>

## Wood et al (1976)

Interactions between mothers and their children were observed as the children attempted a task that they could not do on their own. They had to use a set of blocks to build a model shown in a picture. Wood et al observed the types of interventions the mothers made. These were classified according to how specific they were e.g.

- General encouragement e.g. 'now you have a go.'
- Specific instructions e.g. 'get four big blocks.'
- Direct demonstration e.g. showing the child how to place one block on another.

No single intervention strategy was best for helping the child to progress. Rather, those mothers whose intervention was most effective were those who varied their strategy according to how the child was doing. When the child was doing well, they became less specific in their help. When the child started to struggle, they gave increasingly specific instructions until the child started to make progress again.

## Ruffman et al (1998)

Ruffman et al tested children from the UK and Japan on false belief tasks. These tasks test whether children understand that other people might have different beliefs from theirs. For example, in one FB task, children are shown a tube of Smarties. They are asked what is inside and usually say that there are Smarties inside. The researcher then opens the tube to show that there is something else inside (e.g. some paperclips). These are returned to the tube. The researcher then tells the child that shortly, someone else will come into the room. The child is asked what this new person will say if asked what is in the tube. If the child answers 'Smarties' then they understand that other people can have beliefs that are different from theirs. If, on the other hand, they say 'paperclips' they do not have this understanding.

Ruffman et al found that in both the UK and Japan, ability to solve FB tasks was related to age (as you might expect) and also to the size of a child's family. Children with more siblings were better at solving FB tasks.

## Bruner (1966)

Bruner used a Piagetian conservation of liquid quantity task. First they did the conventional task with the transformation taking place in front of them. As you might expect, almost all the 4 and 5 year olds said there was more liquid in the thinner beaker. The test was then repeated, but this time the beakers were screened, so the children could see the liquid being poured, but not the levels in the beakers. The children were asked to say whether which, if any of the beakers held the most liquid. This time, almost all the 5 year olds and about half the 4 year olds said that the amounts of liquid were the same after the transformation. The original test was then repeated, with the beakers visible. The 4 year olds went back to their original answer, but the 5 year olds stuck to their second, correct answer.