

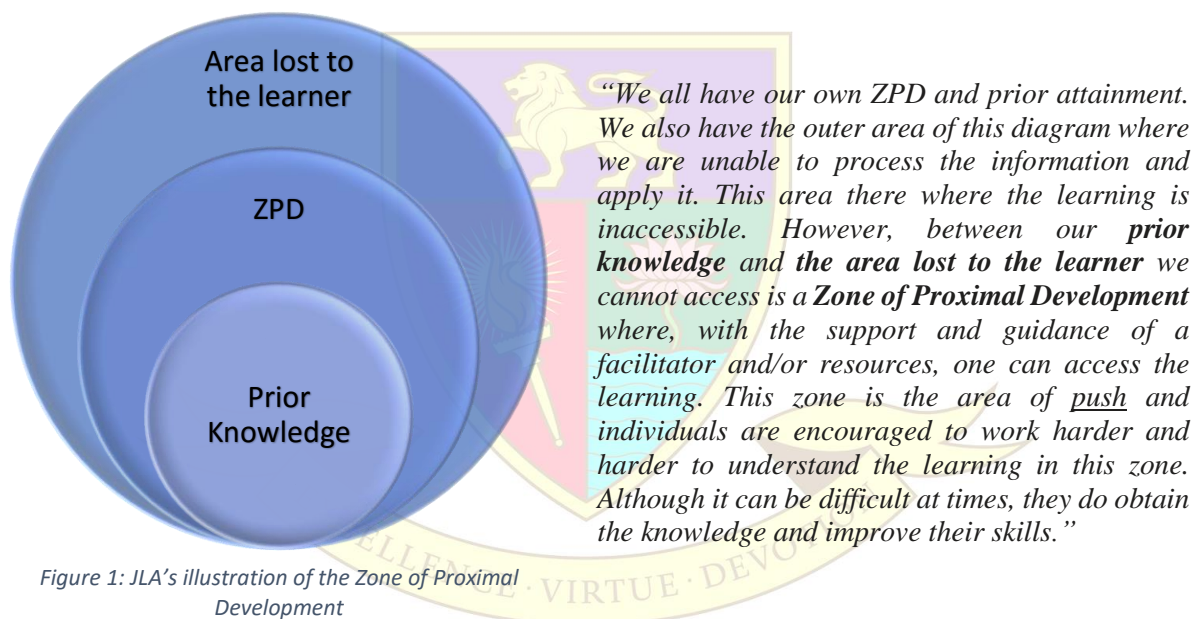
Zone of Proximal Development – Jay Laxhman, Head of Sanskrit

‘Flipped learning’ is an approach that has become more prominent in education in recent years. Between 2013 and 2017, the EEF completed an efficacy trial with KS2 pupils using an online programme.¹ The idea has said to stem from Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development, ZPD². When Jay revisited some of Vygotsky’s research, it inspired some thought provoking questions:

“Why are teachers in school?”

“What is the end goal?”

Overall, Jay believes that all pupils should make progress that is built upon prior to entering the schooling process. He provides his unique perspective of Vygotsky’s work below:



Hattie discusses the importance of the difficulty faced when processing the learning in ZPD with explanation of two systems of thinking³. By pushing pupils into the ZPD, they need to switch away from automaticity and immediacy towards a process that allows them to ‘stop, look, listen, and focus’⁴. The slower thinking system is required for more challenging situations to be considered more deeply and this can lead to a ‘hurt’ more if our cognitive resources are not expanded by its regular use.⁵

¹[https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/pdf/generate/?u=https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/pdf/project/?id=193&t=EEF%20Projects&e=193&s=EEF Flipped Learning](https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/pdf/generate/?u=https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/pdf/project/?id=193&t=EEF%20Projects&e=193&s=EEF%20Flipped%20Learning)

² Bruner, J. (1984). Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development: The hidden agenda

³ Hattie, J. & Yates, G. (2013). Understanding Learning: Lessons for learning, teaching and research – page 28

⁴ Stanovich, K. E. (1999). Who is rational? Studies of individual differences in reasoning. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum

⁵ Kahneman, D. (2011). Thinking fast, thinking slow. New York, NY: Farrar Straus Giroux.

Jay went on to explain how the Zone of Proximal Development can be applied to other aspects of life. He used the example of physical development at a gymnasium:

“An individual is clearly able to comfortably lift up two dumbbells of the weight of 8kg each. However, this does not help the muscles to rip and then bond to form larger stronger muscles, which is the purpose of the exercise.

“In the same gymnasium, a similar individual performing the same exercise is working hard with 20kg in each hand. This weight at present is not accessible for the individual.

“Therefore, ideal individual would be encouraged to focus on his posture, the movement and complete few reps with a 12kg weight.

The Zone of Proximal Development for this person could be between 10-14kg. This guidance, from a teacher or personal trainer, should assist in developing the individual.”

Lamov’s “Teach like a CHAMPION” blog⁶ often references the parallels between good coaching in sports and good practices as an educator. His focus on the similarities have led to simple, yet ground breaking revelations as to how clear instructions that move learners into the ZPD can accelerate progress.

Deliberate practice has also found its way into Jay’s example of how to use our knowledge of cognition to better our teaching and learning. The Confident Teacher⁷, a blog written by Quigley, as well as the CCT⁸ have referred this as a potential key part of becoming an expert in education. In the same way, through prior attainment and understanding, the individual is guided on a particular course to reach fluency. Jay reflected on this to further his understanding of the role of a teacher a potential aim:

“The teacher should be a guide that assists the individual to develop in their Zone of Proximal Development.”

Jay teachers Sanskrit IGCSE at Avanti House Secondary School and caters for a variety of pupils with various abilities. Some have knowledge from their primary schools if they were taught Sanskrit or have their home language (Hindi/Gujarati) to assist them. There are also some pupils from India which can help. However, there are some that have had no knowledge of the subject prior to their secondary learning. Sanskrit students have a keen interest for the subject through religiousness, curiosity, or just to attain a prestigious IGCSE grade.

Sanskrit holds its own as an ancient language alongside Greek and Latin and is known for its complex grammar. Cambridge International’s goal is that, *“Students develop an analytical approach to learning language and are better equipped to compare the structure of Sanskrit with those of other languages. The syllabus also encourages students to develop an appreciation of literature, in terms of content as well as philosophical, cultural, social and historical contexts.”*⁹

⁶ <https://teachlikeachampion.com/blog/Lamov.D>

⁷ <https://www.theconfidentteacher.com/2013/03/becoming-a-better-teacher-by-deliberate-practice/> Quigley. A

⁸ <https://impact.chartered.college/article/scaffolding-by-novice-expert-teachers-difference/> Shires. L

⁹ <https://www.cambridgeinternational.org/Images/336801-2019-2021-sanskrit.pdf> Sanskrit Syllabus 2019

The advice offered by Jay to support your progression as an educator to harness the potential of the Zone of Proximal Development are:

- Know your subject -
 - Have strong curriculum, pedagogical and subject knowledge
 - Understand which topics are more difficult
 - Proactively hunt for misconceptions
- Reflect –
 - Use your experience to build your knowledge misconceptions
 - Understand which topics may take more time or guidance
 - Take the time to think about the experience of individual learners and their progression
- Active Participation
 - Psychological Safety
 - Teaching Standards 1 and 7¹⁰

The three I's for effective curriculum design are also used to ensure that the provision for the pupils meets Jay's high expectations. He summarised how he uses them when strategizing his planning:

- Impact (previous)
 - Establish a Baseline
 - Check knowledge and skills
 - Reflect
- Intent
 - Know your pupils – SEND, different ways in processing learning
 - Create an effective learning pathway
- Implementation
 - Differentiate – grammar vs translation
 - One stop tuition – pupil led explanations
 - Extension activities
 - Continuous development of skill into fluency, not just knowledge acquisition
 - Ignite a passion for the subject
 - Pupils allowed to build upon their own individual learning pathways

"We are all individuals and so all of our ZPD will be different."

Target grades may help the teacher understand the pupil's ability but that is not the full picture. Jay has made large strides towards actualising his vision of a teacher that understands how much individual pupils can be stretched. He has provided the following table that he has constructed for when he is delivering IGCSE Sanskrit (Figure 2).

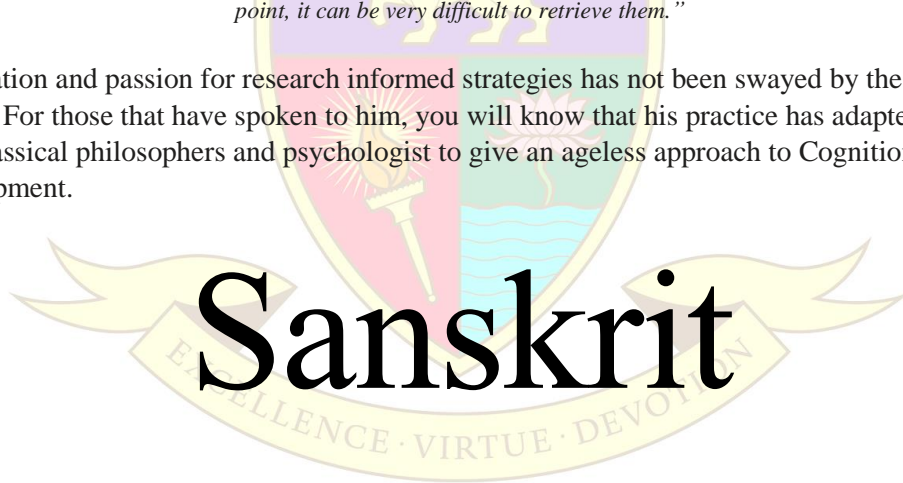
¹⁰https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/665522/Teachers_standard_information.pdf Teachers Standards

Zone \ Student	A	B	C
Prior knowledge	Pupil is able to read and write the script. They can translate a variety of vocabulary. They can decline various nouns in singular form.	Pupil is able to decline all gender nouns with various endings in all cases and understand verb conjugations. Can translate various texts including Mahabharata.	Pupil can reproduce all paradigms and translate a variety of texts including the Hitopadesa.
ZPD	Pupil declines all nouns and conjugates verbs in various tenses. Translates a variety of texts from Sanskrit to English.	Pupil translates Hitopadesa and translates a variety of texts from English to Sanskrit.	Pupil should read and write texts in Sandhi and translate unseen text.
Lost zone	Pupil translates Hitopadesa in sandhi.	Pupil translates unseen text in sandhi.	Pupil to translate Vedic texts.
Target grade	C	B	A*

Figure 2 – Example of planning table used to expose Zone of Proximal Development

“One can see the different between these students. The target grades, as well as knowing the pupils well, assist in identifying the ZPD. The learning for each in the ZPD is different but not drastically. Student C would not be able to apply their work in translating sentences through the process of Sandhi. They struggle in recognising the cases in the dual and plural. If they are written in Sandhi this may be too much for them. However, this does not mean the teacher should not push them. If they are pushed too far the student may lose motivation to continue. This is where many teachers lose their pupils and after this point, it can be very difficult to retrieve them.”

Jay’s dedication and passion for research informed strategies has not been swayed by the Coronavirus (Covid-19). For those that have spoken to him, you will know that his practice has adapted to embed the more classical philosophers and psychologist to give an ageless approach to Cognition, Precision and Development.



यद्यदाचरति श्रेष्ठस्तत्तदेवेतरो जनः ।
स यत्प्रमाणं कुरुते लोकस्तदनुवर्तते ॥ २१ ॥

*yad yad ācarati śreṣṭhas
tat tad evetaro janah
sa yat pramāṇam kurute
lokas tad anuvartate*

Whatever action a great man performs, common men follow. And whatever standards he sets by exemplary acts, all the world pursues.