

The "zone of proximal development" named by psychologist Lev Vygotsky is defined as:

"the distance between the **actual developmental** level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of **potential development** as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers." (Vygotsky, 1978)

This is why Montessori works so well -- the guide observes the child and presents to the child work that the child is ready for but has not yet mastered. To master is the child's work through repetition of the exercise. The material -- the child -- and the guide (& more capable peers) are the teachers.

For some children reaching that zone is tricky to start, as evidenced by the child's capability, interest and desire to work. Some children are capable, but lack the interest and/or motivation or willingness to repeat the work. In this case, we often say, "we have to find the hook" to catch their interest. Maybe that means moving on to a different material, or dividing the work into smaller sections. Some people call this "scaffolding."

Montessori is wonderful for this as, for example, in mathematics we start with the most concrete (bead material for instance), and then move to the number cards



that correspond w/the material, and then the bead material is combined w/the cards. This is also done w/the teens and tens materials and so forth. In addition, the guide can adjust the presentations to fit the child's temperament.

You don't want to set the child up to fail, while at the same time presenting work that is **not yet mastered** and challenging for the child. Once in the

zone, the child will work to mastery. That in turn motivates the child to reach new levels of understanding, which leads to more presentations!