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# Early Childhood Education History & Theory

# This presentation should help you answer the following questions:

- What major historical figures shaped Early Childhood Education (ECE) today?
- What historical ideas have impacted present-day ECE practices?
- What are prominent theories regarding teaching and learning in ECE?
- How are teaching and learning theories impacting today's ECE practices?

# The Impact of History on Early Childhood Education

## How have historical figures impacted ECE today?

- Throughout history, the education of young children has been impacted by varied perspectives regarding teaching and learning.
- Many of the perspectives of prominent historical figures have significantly shaped ECE today.

# Martin Luther

## Martin Luther (1483-1546)

Martin Luther's perspective on the role of education in children's lives:



- The primary role of education is to teach children to read.
- The ability to read was considered essential in acquiring knowledge of the Bible.
- The family plays the most important role in educating children.
- Communities played a critical role in ensuring all children were educated, and therefore in providing parents with necessary supports.

# Martin Luther

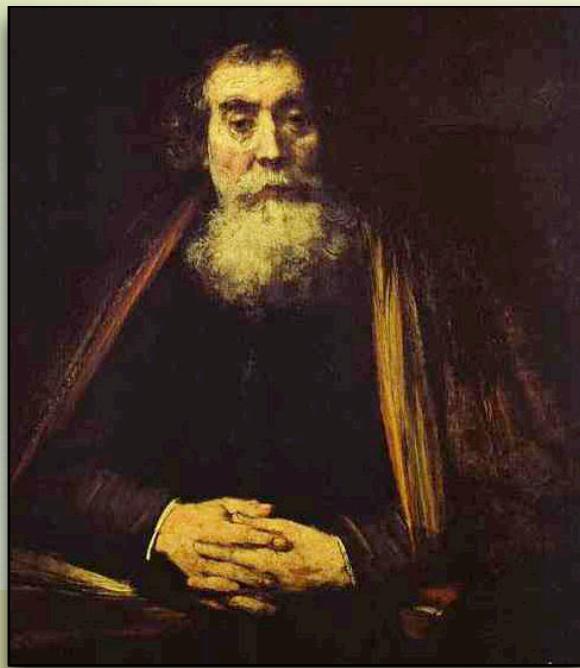
## Luther's impact on education today...

- Contributed to idea that ALL children need to be educated (today referred to as universal education).
- Contributed to view that learning to read is critical (today referred to as literacy).
- Shaped idea that parents are the child's first and most important teacher.
- Contributed to viewpoint that communities play a critical role in ECE.

# Comenius

## John Amos Comenius (1592-1670)

Comenius's perspective on the role of education in children's lives:



- Education should begin in early years to fulfill human's godlike image.
- Children have a timetable for growth and learning, and knowledge should be presented based on readiness.
- The senses provide children with the means of acquiring information, and therefore, all education should be sensory.
- Pictures in books provide opportunities to teach children the names and concepts of objects.

# Comenius

## Comenius's impact on education today...

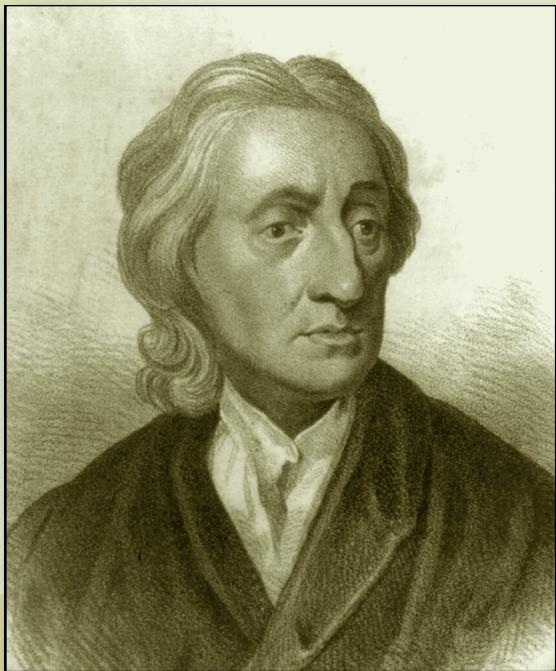
- Developed first picture book, providing a complement to the development of literacy.
- Emphasized sensory training, now considered a foundational practice within ECE.

# John Locke

## John Locke (1632-1704)

Locke's perspective of the role of education in children's lives:

- The environment determines children's development and ultimately, who the child will become.
- Children are “blank slates” (*tabula rasa*) that the environment fills with knowledge.
- The quality of the environment will impact the quality of children's learning and development.



# John Locke

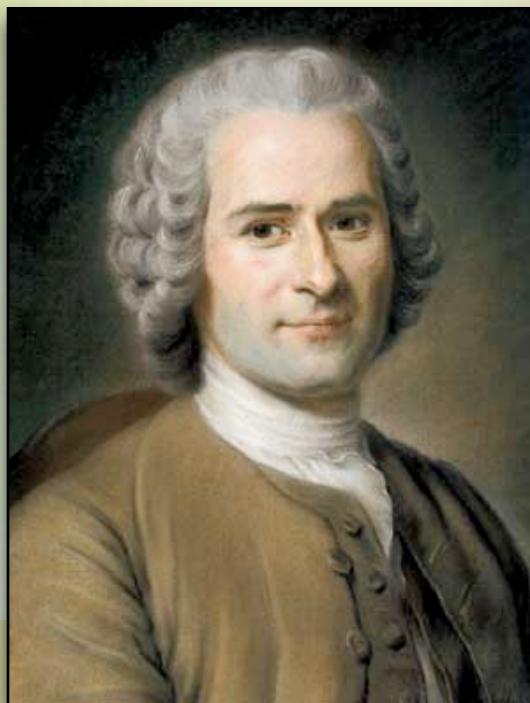
## Locke's impact on education today...

- Contributed to the idea that early education is a means for compensating for an impoverished environment.
- Emphasized the role of environmental activities and design in children's success in school.
- Contributed to view that a well-developed sensory environment is essential.

# Rousseau

## Jean-Jacques Rousseau(1712-1778)

Rousseau's perspective of the role of education in children's lives:



- Children should be encouraged to develop their own strengths, in an environment that lacks interference or restrictions (referred to as natural education).
- Education should support children's happiness, spontaneity, and inquisitiveness.
- Children's development occurs over time and in accordance with the child's own innate timetable (referred to as unfolding).

# Rousseau

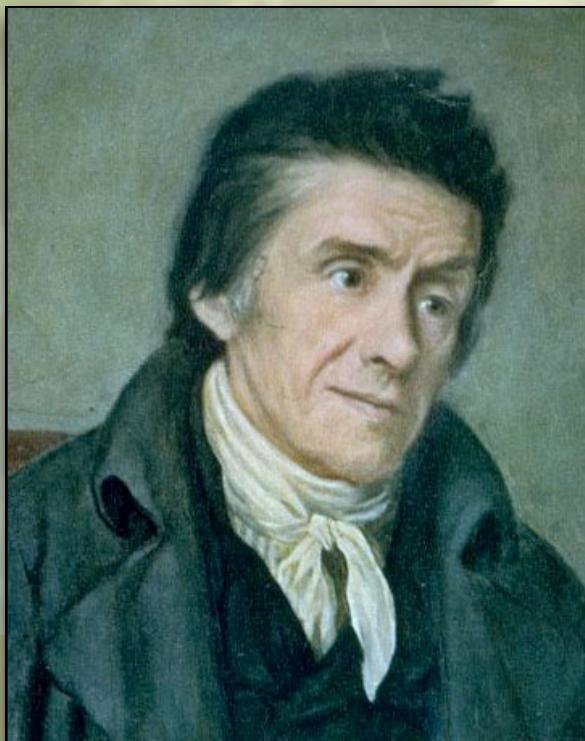
## Rousseau's impact on education today...

- Contributed to concept of readiness, where skills and knowledge are presented based on children's internal timetable.
- Supported present-day belief that children's social and emotional development is an important part of the ECE curriculum.
- Provided founding belief that the child should be the center of the educational curriculum and responsible for shaping their learning path.

# Pestalozzi

## Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746-1827)

Pestalozzi's perspective of the role of education in children's lives:



- Education should follow the child's nature, and mothers are children's most important teachers.
- Formal education within a school is needed for children to integrate knowledge of home life, vocational education, and reading and writing.
- All education is based on sensory impressions.
- Object lessons that focused on learning through manipulatives are a critical tool in ECE.
- The teacher's role is one that should focus on teaching children, not subjects.

# Pestalozzi

## Pestalozzi's impact on education today...

- Contributed to idea that the family is the child's first and most important educator.
- Shaped practices educating parents as well as teachers on how to best support children's development.
- Contributed to idea of children's development following a natural timetable, as well as the idea that the environment is an essential facet of the educational process.

# Robert Owen

## Robert Owen (1771-1858)

Owen's perspective of the role of education in children's lives:



- Children learn about themselves and the world through their environment.
- The best interests of society should shape children's education.
- Through controlling the circumstances and outcomes of childrearing, children's development is best supported.
- Infant schools for children ages birth to ten were needed educational institutions to control the environments children were exposed to.

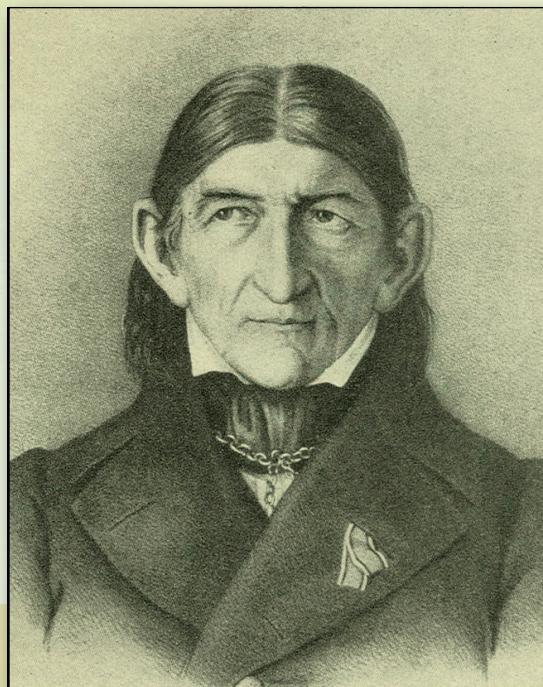
# Robert Owen

## Owen's impact on education today...

- Contributed to idea that environment plays a critical role in children's development.
- Shaped belief that early education is in the best interests of society.
- Contributed to view of early education as a progressive experience that can serve to overcome environment deficits in other areas of the child's life.

# Friedrich Wilhelm Froebel (1782-1852)

Froebel's perspective of the role of education in children's lives:



- Formal curriculum and methodology and necessary for teaching children.
- Designed teacher training programs emphasizing the need to observe children and develop activities based on readiness.
- Believed that children develop through play, and that guidance, direction, and the prepared environment were critical in supporting appropriate play experiences.
- Developed series of objects for children to explore with teacher guidance.

# Froebel Froebel's impact on education today...

- Contributed to idea that formal curriculum, methodology, and teacher training practices are necessary to support children's learning.
- Established idea that ECE is a formal process that occurs within organized setting.
- Developed first kindergarten.

# Montessori

## Maria Montessori (1870-1952)

Montessori's perspective on the role of education in children's lives:



- Viewed:
  - Teachers as social engineers
  - Education as a means to enhance children's futures.
  - Children as the best sources of knowledge
  - The learning environment as equal in importance to the learning itself.
- Believed children's senses should be educated first and then children's intellect.

# Montessori

## Montessori's impact on education today:

- Developed the Montessori Method, which is based on observing and supporting the development of children
- Established the first formal practices centered around inclusion;
- Contributed to the idea that the best education a child can receive is one that supports a lifelong love of learning.

# From Foundations to Theory

The ideas of historical figures have dramatically impacted ECE theory and practice.

## Questions central to all ECE theories:

- How do children learn?
- How should ECE be designed to best support children's learning?

# Piaget

## Jean Piaget (1896-1980)

### Theory of Learning: Key Points

- Children develop cognitively through logical and mathematic abilities.
- Knowledge is constructed through direct, active interaction with the environment.
- The physical environment, therefore, plays a critical role in children's development.
- Children's development proceeds through a series of predictable stages—although the rate of development may vary, the sequence does not.



# Piaget

## Piaget's Three Stages of Intellectual Development

The process of development from stage to stage is gradual and continual and results with maturation and experience.

# Piaget

## Stage One: Sensorimotor

(Birth to approximately 2 years old)

- Children use innate sensorimotor systems – sucking, grasping, gross-motor movements -- to build knowledge
- Begin to develop object permanancy
- See themselves as the center of the world
- Depend on concrete representations
- Use everyday objects to solve problems

# Piaget

## Stage Two: Preoperational

(approximately 2-7 years old)

### Representation:

- Begin to use symbols, e.g., language, drawings, make-believe play, to represent objects and events
- Language accelerates
- Knowledge based mainly on what they are able to see

# Piaget

## Stage Two: Preoperational (cont.)

(approximately 2-7 years old)

### Conservation:

- Not yet able to conserve, i.e., determine that the quantity of an object does not change simply because a transformation occurs in its physical appearance
- Not yet able to mentally reverse thought or action
- Believe and act as though everything happens for a reason

# Piaget

## Stage Two: Preoperational (cont.)

(approximately 2-7 years old)

### Egocentrism:

- Believe that everyone thinks as they think and acts for the same reasons they do
- Difficult to put themselves in another person's place
- Use "self talk," or egocentric speech to guide themselves

# Piaget

## Stage Three: Concrete Operations Stage

(approximately 7-12 years old)

- Begin to use mental images and symbols during the thinking process
- Begin to reverse thought processes
- Understand that changes in physical appearance do not necessarily change quality or quantity

# Piaget

## Stage Three: Concrete Operations Stage (cont.)

Important terms linked to the Concrete Operational stage of development:

- One-to-one correspondence: Serves as the basis for counting and matching. Children are able to match, for instance, one cookie with each classmate
- Classification according to characteristics: For example, a child could classify events as occurring before or after lunch
- Classification involving multiple properties: For example a child could classify objects on the basis of color and size or color and shape
- Class inclusive operations: For example, a child shown five apples, five oranges, and five lemons and asked whether there are more apples or fruit, is able to respond, “fruit”

# Piaget

## Piaget's impact on education today...

- The environment plays a critical role in children's knowledge acquisition.
- Children learn best through active experiences.
- Education should be targeted toward the child's readiness to acquire new knowledge.

# Vygotsky

# Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934)

## Sociocultural Theory: Key Points



- Social interaction provides the medium for mental, language, and social development.
- More experienced members of society guide children's knowledge acquisition.
- Children learn best through experiences that are targeted within, or just above, their range of capabilities (referred to as zone of proximal development).
- Teaching should focus on assisting children in the completion of tasks they cannot complete on their own (referred to as scaffolding).

# Vygotsky

## Important terms to remember:

### Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

- The range of tasks that are too difficult to master alone but can be learned with guidance and assistance.

Assistance in ZPD is called:

### Scaffolding

- The gradual process of providing various types of support, guidance, or direction during the course of an activity in order to help children complete tasks that they would not have been able to complete independently. Scaffolding builds on children's strengths, enabling them to grow cognitively and become independent learners.

For additional insight: "Voice from the Field: How to Scaffold Children's Learning (Morrison, 2007, p. 123-124).

# Vygotsky

## Vygotsky's impact on education today...

- Contributed to belief that the social environment is essential in children's learning.
- Provided rationale for placing children in environments that emphasize collaboration.
- Developed the role of the teacher is one of a guide, assisting children in acquiring knowledge just outside their present capabilities through scaffolding.
- Developed rationale for mixed-age groupings to support knowledge acquisition.

# Dewey John Dewey (1859-1952)



## Progressivism Theory: Key Points

- Education should be experiential and focused on the needs and interests of children, i.e., children's interests should be springboards for involvement, skills, and subject matter
- Schools should prepare students for the realities of today
- To promote an interest in solving problems, discovering new things, and figuring out how things work, teachers should provide children opportunities for inquiry and discovery
- Education should promote social consciousness, which is best taught/modeled through a democratically run classroom

For more insight: "Program in Action: How to Teach in a Child-Centered Program" (Morrison, 2007, pp. 100-101).

# Dewey

## Dewey's impact on education today...

- Provided the foundational thinking for child-centered curriculum and child-centered schools
- Provided the foundational thinking for integrating subjects, using thematic units, and encouraging problem-solving and critical thinking
- Provided foundational thinking for The Project Approach

# Important term to remember:

# Constructivism

Based on the thinking of Piaget, Vygotsky, and Dewey, constructivism emphasizes the active role of children in developing their understanding and learning.

- Children construct their own knowledge based on what they already know
- Children are active agents who problem solve and think for themselves
- Children's experiences with people, places, and things provide a framework for their construction of knowledge
- Children learn best through experiences and activities they initiate and find interesting
- Teaching and learning are child centered.

# Maslow

## Abraham Maslow (1908-1970)

### Self-Actualization Theory: Key Points

- Children must have basic needs met in order for learning to occur. These needs exist in a hierarchy that includes life essentials, safety and security, belonging and love, achievement and prestige, and aesthetic needs.
- Educational environments play an activist role in meeting children's basic needs.

# Maslow

## Maslow's impact on education today...

**Children need environments that support basic needs:**

- Nutritious foods are provided to children throughout the day.
- Social and emotional development is an essential part of the curriculum.
- Children need to have a sense of accomplishment.
- Children need to be in attractive and pleasant environments.

# Erik Erikson (1902-1994)



## Psychosocial Theory: Key Points

- Cognitive and social development are intertwined.
- Children's personalities and social skills are impacted by society.
- Parents and teachers play a critical role in supporting children's psychosocial development.
- Development proceeds in stages, and successful support of each stage will result in positive developmental outcomes.

# Erickson's States of Psychosocial Development

- I. Trust vs. mistrust: Children learn to trust or mistrust their environment and their caregivers
- II. Autonomy vs. shame and doubt: Given adequate opportunities children learn independence and competency; inadequate opportunities result in self-doubt, low achievement, and feelings of shame about their abilities
- III. Initiative vs. guilt: During preschool years children need opportunities to take initiative in order to have a sense of purpose and accomplishment. Children can feel guilty if they are discouraged or restricted from doing things on their own
- IV. Industry vs. inferiority: Children want to be productive and recognized for their productivity, which helps them develop a sense of self-worth. Feelings of inferiority result when children are belittled for their efforts or have few opportunities to be productive.

# Erikson Erikson's impact on education today...

- Social and emotional development is an important part of the curriculum.
- Parents and teachers shape social and emotional outcomes for children.
- Education should support children based on their psychosocial needs.

# Gardner Howard Gardner (1943-Current)

## Theory of Multiple Intelligences: Key Points



- Gardner has identified eight intelligences:
  - Visual/spatial
  - Verbal/linguistic
  - Mathematical/logical
  - Bodily/kinesthetic
  - Musical/rhythmic
  - Intrapersonal
  - Interpersonal
  - Naturalistic

For additional insight: “Gardner’s Eight Intelligences” (Morrison, 2007, p. 127, Figure 5.7)

Photograph of Howard Gardner used by permission of Jon Chase/Harvard News Office.

# Gardner Gardner's impact on education today...

- The awareness that children can be smart in many ways
- Education should focus on children's strengths and recognize varied types of intelligences
- Education should integrate various intelligences into design, learning experiences, and assessment

For additional insight: "Program in Action: New City School"  
(Morrison, 2007, p. 131)

# Bronfenbrenner

## Urie Bronfenbrenner (1917-2005)

### Ecological Theory: Key Points

- Children's development occurs within a complex system of relationships that includes child, family, and community.
- Development is bi-directional, in that the child impacts his/her environment, and is impacted by the environment.
- Attention to the child's context is necessary to support overall development.

# Bronfenbrenner

## Bronfenbrenner's impact on education today....

- The child's family is the first and most important teacher, and therefore is an essential partner in the educational process.
- Communities play an important role in children's education.
- To effectively support and educate children, attention to the context is critical.

Material for this PowerPoint has been adapted from Early Childhood Today, (10th ed.) by George S. Morrison.

**“Education is not a preparation for life;  
education is life itself.”**

*John Dewey*