

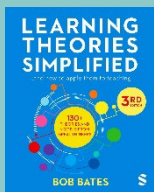
# 20

**learning theorists  
every education  
student  
must know**

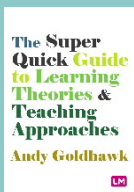
 **Sage**

A good grasp of learning theories is essential for your education course and this pack will help you get started.

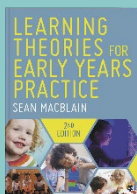
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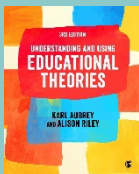
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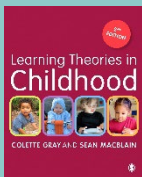
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# #1

## ALBERT BANDURA

### Social learning theory

1925 – present



**BORN IN:** Canada

**KEY IDEA:** Motivation as a key factor in development and learning

Bandura believes that social factors are central to the learning and development of the individual and, in the 1970s, he introduced his social learning theory. In doing so, he moved significantly from some of his contemporaries who espoused a more purely behaviourist approach. For Bandura, learning does not always involve changes in behaviour and children could, for example, observe others without their observations necessarily leading to a change in their own behaviour. Unlike the early behaviourists, he suggests that motivation plays a significant role in the link between children observing behaviours and subsequent changes in their own behaviour. Bandura sees motivation, therefore, as a key factor in the development and learning of young children.

# #2

## BENJAMIN BLOOM



Learning  
through taxonomies

1913 – 1999

**BORN IN:** USA

**KEY IDEA:** Learning as 3 domains, with an emphasis on mastery

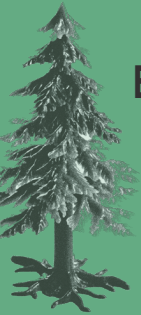
Bloom's major theories mostly resulted from witnessing the widespread use of rote learning – learning which he considered was just the attaining of knowledge and only retained long enough to pass examinations. Along with developing 3 domains of learning; cognitive, affective and psycho-motor, he also focused on enhancing 'mastery' in learning rather than rote learning just to pass examinations. Within this notion, Bloom argued, the vast majority of students could learn the fundamentals of skills and knowledge if they were allowed enough time to do so. Bloom, therefore, thought privilege and social class played a large part in deciding which children did well at school, questioning the mainstream idea that some learners were superior to others.

# #3

## URIE BRONFENBRENNER

### The ecology of human development

1917 – 2005



**BORN IN:** Russia

**KEY IDEA:** The child's own biology as a key factor in development

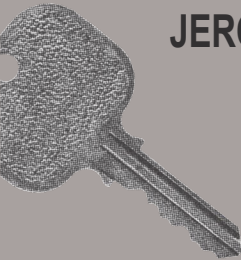
Bronfenbrenner's theory has at its core the view that a child's own biology is a key factor influencing their development. His theory, therefore, can be best understood as the interrelationship of children with the environments in which they live. Bronfenbrenner firmly believed that the developing child should be studied within their own natural environment, undertaking tasks which were familiar to them amongst people they were comfortable with, suggesting that it is through these interactions that the true nature of the child can be revealed.

# #4

## JEROME BRUNER

An evolution of  
learning theories

1915 – 2016



**BORN IN:** USA

**KEY IDEA:** The child as an active problem-solver

Jerome Bruner argued against the traditional view that children should learn facts and systems and was in favour of children constructing knowledge in a scientific manner. In so doing, if the child comprehended the fundamental process in a particular curriculum area, the child could then progress to think in a holistic way about newly introduced topics. He argued for a 'spiral curriculum' where themes were initially presented to learners and then revisited later on in the programme to reinforce understanding and give added vigour. The child in Bruner's eyes was an active problem-solver with his or her own ways of understanding the world.

# #5

## GUY CLAXTON

### Learning power

1947 – present



**BORN IN:** UK

**KEY IDEA:** A need for educational change in the complex modern world

Guy Claxton is a major contemporary thinker in education who argues that the traditional concept of education, which is still the focus of government policy for schools, is unfit for preparing students for the challenges and complexities of the twenty-first century. There are two central aspects of Claxton's ideas. Firstly, there is a need for educational change, as the world is a changing environment where students will have to cope with uncertainties, the complexities of developing technology and complicated infrastructures. Secondly, cognitive science suggests that most students have the faculty to become better learners if the conditions for learning are appropriately supportive and encouraging.

# #6

## JOHN DEWEY

### A democratic notion of learning

1859 – 1952

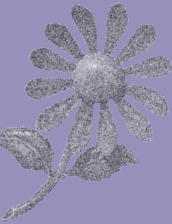


**BORN IN:** USA

**KEY IDEA:** The learner as an active participant

Dewey's basic belief was that traditional education was too concerned with the delivery of pre-ordained knowledge and not focused enough on the learner's actual learning experiences. For Dewey, however, experiences have no attached value in themselves. Rather, it is what each individual draws from the experience that is important, and no two individuals will encounter an experience in exactly the same way. For Dewey, the learner is seen as central to the educational process, an active participant in a socially interactive environment which celebrates experimentation and which encourages learners to make their own sense of the world.





# #7

## CAROL DWECK

### Mindsets

1946 – present

**BORN IN:** USA

**KEY IDEA:** Two extreme mindsets impacting learner motivation

Carol Dweck has developed a theory of learner motivation based on the learner's own beliefs about their ability to accomplish tasks, achieve goals and function successfully in life. She suggests that people have two extremes of belief about themselves - people who believe their ability is fixed and there is very little they can do to improve it, and people who believe their ability is enhanced by learning. She argues that about 20% of learners are in the middle of these extremes and that the rest are equally divided between the two extremes. She categorises the extremes into fixed mindsets (intelligence is static) and growth mindsets (intelligence can be developed). Dweck argues growth mindset learners are motivated by an inner desire to improve rather than by external stimuli.

# #8



## PAULO FRIERE

### Oppression, freedom and critical approaches to education

1921 – 1997

**BORN IN:** Brazil

**KEY IDEA:** Education's role being to free people from oppression

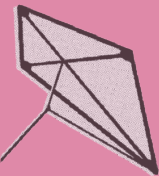
Freire was first recognised as an adult educator due to his radical and successful adult literacy programmes in his native Brazil, which stemmed from Freire's deep conviction that education played a significant role in freeing people from oppression. His thoughts on critical education have since been applied, beyond the confines of adult literacy, to all sectors of informal and formal education. He possessed an unusual blend of Marxist ideology and a Christian ethos, which, together with a strong sense of social justice, clarity of intellectual thought and personal humility made him one of the most important educational theorists of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

# #9

## FRIEDRICH FROEBEL

### The birth of kindergarten

1782 – 1852



**BORN IN:** Germany

**KEY IDEA:** Play as central to the education of children

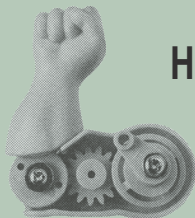
Froebel, it can be suggested, liberated the notion of play, viewing it as central to the education of children and their future development. He believed passionately in the importance of children expressing themselves through their own individual play as well as through play with others. Unlike many educators and thinkers of his time, Froebel held the view that individuals were born creative and, through their industry and active belief in God, developed as good members of society. In this way, he argued, they came to better understand the world in which they lived. In 1837, he opened a school for very young children, which he renamed, after some time, 'kindergarten'.

# #10

## HENRY GIROUX

### Critical Pedagogy

1943 – present



**BORN IN:** USA

**KEY IDEA:** Educators should be politically active

Henry Giroux can be considered one of the most notable present-day thinkers and writers on education. His central themes call for an emphasis in an education which embraces the community, and focuses on democracy, fairness and social justice. For these themes to be realised he contends that teachers and others concerned with education should be politically active. It is only through democratic processes and the advance of a critical and progressive pedagogy that neoliberalism and what Giroux considers a society driven by class structures can be challenged. For Giroux, schools ought to be centres of cultural creativity and transformation but not reproduction. They should be the focus for critical and participatory democracy which welcomes diversity and a range of different cultural and social alliances.

# #11

## JOHN HATTIE

### The rope model

1950 – present



**BORN IN:** New Zealand

**KEY IDEA:** Self-concept impacting learner motivation

Hattie believes that how learners see themselves, and what they perceive as most important in terms of their learning and their desired outcomes, will have a significant effect on their motivation to learn and subsequent behaviour in class. In the rope model, Hattie argues that there is no single strand underlying an individual's self-concept but rather many overlapping concepts of self. The strength of the rope lies not in any single strand but in the combination of many overlapping strands. He claims that when any of the strands become weak, the learner will start to experience such a sense of helplessness that they feel they can't cope with the learning; the result being that they disengage with learning activities.

# #12



## bell hooks

### Education as the practice of freedom

1952 – present

**BORN IN:** USA

**KEY IDEA:** Democratic education is being weakened by capitalism

bell hooks' significant contributions to education are embedded in her convictions of the inequality that is still evident where matters of race, gender and social class are concerned. hooks feels that democratic education in the United States has been weakened because of capitalism's influence, whereby student's view education being solely a means to material success. This materialistic notion of education values the gathering of information. Whereas the democratic model of education values the process of attaining knowledge and critical thinking. She laments that progressive university lecturers who strive for a democratic education are often ostracised or urged to leave academia.

# #13



## JOHN LOCKE

### Empirical thinking

1632 – 1704

**BORN IN:** England

**KEY IDEA:** Individuals born as a blank slate, with knowledge acquired through experience

Locke believed that our knowledge of the world comes about through 'sensory experience'. This view lies very much at the heart of what we now know as the 'sciences', at the root of which lies the concept of 'empirical thinking' whereby we observe, acquire and quantify data. Locke strongly believed that individuals should use their own reason to explore what is true and what is not and that when individuals are born they begin life as a 'blank slate' upon which is written their life experiences gained through the senses. This was, Locke believed, the very essence of learning, with the purpose of education as that of instilling within individuals a strong sense of virtue.



# #14

## MARIA MONTESSORI

### The Montessori method

1870 – 1952

**BORN IN:** Italy

**KEY IDEA:** Allowing some freedom in learning increases concentration and motivation

From her work as a clinical paediatrician, Maria Montessori developed a unique approach to teaching originating from her work with special needs children. Relying on careful observations of the children in her care, she identified where learning potential lay and maximised this in terms of the materials and experiences she provided. Through allowing children a sense of freedom in their education and the opportunity to select their own learning experiences, within the boundaries of respect for the materials and one another, Montessori observed that children could sustain interest in an activity for significant periods of time and would frequently repeat experiences until mastery was achieved.



# #15

## JEAN PIAGET

### Understanding the mind of the child

1896 – 1980



**BORN IN:** Switzerland

**KEY IDEA:** Children as constructors of their own knowledge

Piaget was one of the first theorists to study how children think and learn. While his contemporaries saw learning as either intrinsic, from the child, or extrinsic, from the environment, he believed that neither fully expressed learning. He saw children as constructors of their own knowledge, taking information from the people and objects in their environment and making meaning from them. Piaget was of the opinion that children's own curiosity would drive their learning, and that the most effective way of enabling learning was to provide an environment which promoted curiosity and challenge and allowed children to control their own learning.



# #16

## JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU

### Developmental education

1712 – 1778

**BORN IN:** Switzerland

**KEY IDEA:** Human beings born 'good' but susceptible to corruption by society

Rousseau believed that individuals inherit much of what would contribute to their potential make-up and that all human beings are born 'good'. Whilst he believed that individuals inherit the propensity to be good, he also saw the societies within which individuals grow up as being agents of potential perversion. Rousseau saw education as the means by which the natural make-up of individuals could be developed to not only improve them but also to improve society. He argued that bringing up children in harmony with nature and its laws would facilitate learning and preserve their goodness.



# #17

## DONALD SCHÖN

### Reflection and learning

1930 – 1997

**BORN IN:** USA

**KEY IDEA:** Skilled practitioners should critically self-reflect

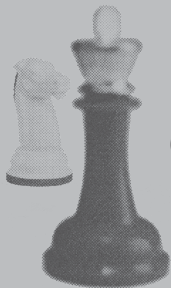
Schön's theories centre on his desire to support organisations in managing learning and change, particularly through the vehicle of self-reflection. His ideas have encouraged practitioners to critically reflect on their own work as a means of developing and improving their practice. He believed that skilled practitioners are reflective practitioners who use their experience as a basis for assessing existing theories and their observations to develop new theories. In Schön's view it is the practitioner's ability to deal with unexpected or unexplained phenomena which truly reveals their ability to think on their feet and reflect-in-action.

# #18

## B.F. SKINNER

### Operant conditioning

1904 – 1990



**BORN IN:** USA

**KEY IDEA:** Behaviour being determined by consequences

Skinner defined his own branch of behaviourism 'operant conditioning'. This theory supposed that behaviour is determined by consequences, such as positive and negative reinforcers, and the application of these will increase the possibility of a behaviour occurring again. His theories became popular as a means of modifying behaviours for those suffering from phobias or addiction or in schools and clinics. Although his experimental work was undertaken with animals Skinner saw no reason why this should not be applied to human behaviour too, and had a keen interest in how human behaviour could be modified.



# #19

## RUDOLF STEINER

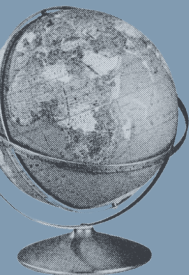
### The Steiner school

1861 – 1925

**BORN IN:** Croatia

**KEY IDEA:** Education must respond to the changing needs of the child

There are currently over 1,000 Steiner schools and over 2,000 early years establishments across the world and though the original philosophy remains constant, many have evolved in different ways. Steiner believed that the function of education was to respond to the changing needs of children, and not only their physical needs but, more importantly, their cognitive and emotional needs. Of a child's education and up to age 7, there is significant emphasis placed upon play, art and drawing, upon the natural world of the child, and upon links between art and science. The belief is that children, when older, will be more mature and will acquire formal literacy and numeracy more easily and with less potential stress.



# #20

## LEV VYGOTSKY

Cultural–historical  
social activity theory

1896 – 1934

**BORN IN:** Russia

**KEY IDEA:** Children making sense of their own learning

Vygotsky argued for a radical idea of learning, in which children thought for themselves. This idea of learning was opposite to the rote-learning model practised at the time. He believed in a developmental and dynamic process where children make sense of what they learn. Vygotsky's ideas are firmly situated in social constructivism, which stresses the significance of both culture and environment in the way in which we understand the world around us. His notions centred on the belief that a child's own social and cultural background would shape their cognitive development and allow them to adjust and grow.