



Montessori, Vygotsky and Piaget! OH MY!
How what THEY did influences what YOU do!

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There are lots of “masters” in the field of early education. Here are the ones we are looking at today:

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Meet A Master

Friedrich Froebel 1782-1852 (70)

- **Lived in Germany**
- **His mother died when he was only 1**
- **Grew up playing in gardens, fell in love with nature and natural environs**
- **Became a teacher in Frankfurt**

Believed:

- **Hands-on learning was best**
- **Children need to be active**
- **Active and direct observation is the best way to plan education**
- **Children needed to be engaged in self directed activities and the teacher was to serve as the guide**

Froebel is credited with inventing Kinder-garden at some point between 1837 and 1840. Lisa will give an overview of Froebel's "Gifts" on the overhead projector.

Goals for his Kindergarteners:

- 1. Physical activity**
- 2. Physical dexterity**
- 3. Sensory awareness**
- 4. Creative expression**
- 5. Exploration of ideas and concepts**
- 6. Singing**
- 7. Experience of being with others**
- 8. Satisfaction of the soul**

Meet A Master

Maria Montessori 1870 – 1952 (82)

- Montessori began her career as a medical student with a specialty in pediatrics
- She was the first woman to graduate from an Italian medical school
- She worked with children in asylums and realized that the children did not have problems – their environments did!
- Came to be called “teacher” by her peers
- Opened Casa Di Bambini to keep the children off the streets in the slums of Rome (at the request of the government)
- No materials for children so she made them
- Within 6 years of opening Casa Di Bambini in Rome there were over 100 schools in the USA following a “Montessori” philosophy
- Maria left Italy for political reasons in the 1930s and she lived out her days in India, England and Holland

Key Points:

- The notion of “child-sized” was nonexistent before Maria Montessori invented it
- Having the stuff does not make you “Montessori”
- Her ideas have influenced every preschool – Montessori or not
- Control and establish the environment
- The environment should be prepared, beautiful, orderly and shall have lots of opportunity to engage the senses
- Children need real tools and accessible equipment
- Children need free time to explore
- Teachers need to prepare the space and then step back and facilitate
- Don’t pull the children away when they are engaged
- OBERVE OBSERVE OBSERVE
- The teacher should always be learning right with the children. Is the space working? Not working? What can I do about it?

The children are now working as if I do not exist.

-Maria Montessori

Meet A Master

Lev Vygotsky 1896-1934 (38)

- Studied literature at University of Moscow
- Usually associated with cognitive and language development
- Through observations noticed that within a group of children at the same “level” there were some that learned with little help and some who needed more assistance
- Often hear his name when folks are talking about Constructivism

Primary Contributions and Beliefs

- The interaction between children and teachers and its vital role in advancing knowledge
- ZPD = the zone of proximal development. The difference between what a child can do on his/her own and what they can do with assistance (from either a peer or an adult)
- When this “assistance” is offered it is referred to as scaffolding
- Keen observation is at the core of effective and successful scaffolding. Scaffolding is NOT “pushing”
- Use props, real materials and loose parts
- Conversations and working together
- Observations are just as important as test scores
- Learning takes place when children play

Of note: Vygotsky is often lost in the shadow of Jean Piaget. Vygotsky died after a long battle with TB. It is often thought that had he lived longer his contributions would have rivaled those of Piaget.

Meet a Master

Jean Piaget

1896-1980 (84)

- Piaget had a PhD in biology & psychology
- Initially took a job standardizing a French version of a British IQ test and noticed consistent similarities in the wrong answers the children were giving at certain ages
- He wondered “what thought process are they using???”
- Piaget is the USA’s primary preschool influence

Key Points of his theories:

- Free Play
- Real experiences
- Children allowed to do things for themselves
- Children learn when curiosity is satisfied
- The teacher’s job is to nurture inquiry
- Play is important for learning
- Teachers need to provide problem solving challenges, not just give out information
- Curiosity and wonder are key ingredients to learning – cannot “make” them learn
- Children build knowledge through what they do and experience

Stages that influence our age group:

Sensorimotor 0-18 months

- Object permanence
- Separation anxiety

Preoperational thought 18 mos – 6 years

- Literal – ness
- Over generalizations

Meet A Master Reggio Emilia

Clarification: The theory often referred to simply as “*Reggio*” is not a person, but a place. It is a city in Italy which translates to Emily’s Village. What we have shorthanded to “reggio” is in actuality a community belief in regard to how caregiving occurs. The town, families and children are completely connected. The reason American educators sometimes find it “hard to be Reggio” is because we forget, ignore, or maybe didn’t know of this intense community connection. Reggio is not just a way of teaching, it is a way of thinking – a way of life. It is truly an inspiration for all educators.

Caution! As Americans we are often easily seduced by trappings that appear to be essential cornerstones of a “philosophy.” We must take care. You don’t “become reggio” by having an art room/workshop (atelier), a light table, a documentation board and by throwing your clocks away.

From the website: <http://zerosei.comune.re.it/inter/reggiochildren.htm>

Reggio Children is a mixed public-private company that the Municipality of Reggio Emilia, along with other interested subjects, decided to establish in 1994 to manage the pedagogical and cultural exchange initiatives that had already been taking place for many years between the municipal early childhood services and a large number of teachers and researchers from all over the world. This new experience was based on an idea originally proposed by Loris Malaguzzi and carried on by a committee of local citizens and educators. Reggio Children's aims and purposes are inspired by the philosophy and values of the educational project developed and practiced in the Municipal Infant-toddler Centers and Preschools of Reggio Emilia, in order to protect and communicate the wealth of knowledge developed within this experience.

Overheard at a conference: “We can’t be Reggio anymore because it violated a fire code...”

Principles:

- **Emergent Curriculum & Project Work**
- **Strong Use of the arts**
- **Collaboration**
- **Teacher as researcher**
- **Documentation**
- **The environment as the “Third teacher”**
- **Society school and Family**
- **Time not set by the clock**

Meet A Master

John Dewey

1859-1952 (93)

- **Started as a philosopher (Chicago based for the major part of his work)**
- **He is the American educator who influenced our field the most**
- **Became “friends” (ahem) with student Alice Chipman, who was interested in social problems and how they linked to education**
- **Dewey was interested and eventually they married**
- **Dewey was leading the “Progressive” educational movement while Piaget was in Switzerland and Montessori in Italy. They were all influencing the same time frame**

Key Points:

- **Children learn by doing. This was a RADICAL idea when he proposed it**
- **Children need real experiences**
- **Experiences should encourage both experimentation and independent thinking**
- **Education and life are interrelated – they cannot be separated**

Education should be:

- **Child centered**
- **Interactive**
- **Must involve the child’s social world to make it relevant**
- **Planned and based on interests and observations**
- **More than just “fun”**

Teachers should be able to articulate their intention and purpose.

Meet A Master

Rudolf Steiner (Waldorf) 1861-1925 (64)

Steiner was an Austrian philosopher and spiritual scientist who believed that we must awaken to our own inner nature and the spiritual realities of outer nature and the cosmos. He believed that the awareness of this relationship brings greater reverence for life.

Clarification: although this is the theoretical basis of his “method” it is not taught to the students.

So if his name is Steiner, why is the theory, style and philosophy referred to as “Waldorf”? Well now *that’s* an interesting story!

Key points of a Waldorf education:

- **Learning through doing**
- **De-emphasis on “academics” in the early grades**
- **No academic content in Kinder yet a cultivation of pre-academic skills**
- **Children often learn to read from their own writing**
- **Ideally the same group stays together for the first 8 years**
- **Traditional “frills” are central to a Waldorf style: music, art, gardening, crafts, etc.**
- **No text books until around class 5 or 6**
- **Children are taught to knit, play the recorder and a stringed instrument**
- **Waldorf strongly discourages electronic media**

**Waldorf schools often say they provide an education of
the HEART the HAND and the MIND**

Meet A Master Constructivism

Constructivism is a theory based on the teachings of many scholars including (surprise!) Vygotsky, Dewey, Jerome Bruner and Piaget!

Defined: Constructivism is a philosophy of learning founded on the premise that by reflecting on our EXPERIENCES we CONSTRUCT understanding. We generate rules (mental models) to make sense of our experiences. Therefore learning is nothing more than adjusting our mental models to accommodate new experiences.

As teachers we must:

- **Know what the children are wanting& needing to construct meaning about. (translated: observe!)**
- **Look at the whole picture of the child – not just parts. (translated: observe!)**
- **Know their individual “mental models.” What are they thinking? Why? How? (translated: observe!)**
- **Realize (believe) that the purpose of learning is to construct meaning NOT to memorize facts, gobble data, spit it back on a test and then forget about it.**

Current Hot Topics:

- **Eliminate standardized curriculum**
- **Eliminate grades and grading**
- **Eliminate standardized testing**
- **Emphasize hands-on problem solving**
- **Tailor teaching to the students styles and responses**
- **Rely on open ended questions and promote dialogue among students**