

Educational Theories and Theorists

#	Name	Lifespan	Country of Origin	Profession	Theory / Philosophy	Description
1	Socrates	470–399 BCE	Greece	Philosopher	Socratic Method	Learning occurs through questioning and dialogue, fostering critical thinking.
2	Plato	427–347 BCE	Greece	Philosopher	Idealism / The Republic	Education should cultivate virtue and reason, developing philosopher-kings.
3	Aristotle	384–322 BCE	Greece	Philosopher, Scientist	Empiricism	Knowledge comes from observation and experience; systematic inquiry is key.
4	Jean-Jacques Rousseau	1712–1778	Switzerland	Philosopher, Writer	Naturalism in Education	Children learn best through natural experiences and should be free to explore and develop according to their own instincts, rather than being forced into rigid structures.
5	Immanuel Kant	1724–1804	Germany	Philosopher	Rationalism / Enlightenment Education	Education should cultivate autonomy, critical thinking, and moral reasoning. Kant argued that true education enables individuals to act according to rational moral principles rather than mere instinct or authority. He saw education as essential for human dignity and moral progress.

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6	Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi	1746–1827	Switzerland	Educator, Reformer	Holistic Education	Education should focus on the development of the whole child—head (intellect), heart (emotion), and hands (practical skills)—in a nurturing environment.
7	Karl Marx	1818–1883	Germany	Philosopher, Economist, Sociologist	Marxist Educational Theory	Education is a tool for shaping social consciousness and should challenge class structures. Marx argued that traditional education often reinforces social inequalities, and he advocated for a system that empowers the working class and promotes critical awareness of power structures.
8	Herbert Spencer	1820–1903	United Kingdom	Philosopher, Sociologist	Social Darwinism in Education	Education should follow the principles of evolution, focusing on survival skills, adaptability, and preparing individuals for competition in society.

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9	Thomas Edison	1847–1931	United States	Inventor, Entrepreneur	Pragmatic & Applied Learning	Championed hands-on, practical education , particularly in science and technology. He believed traditional schooling was ineffective for many learners and promoted experiential learning, creativity, and problem-solving. His work in inventions inspired STEM-based education models and innovation-driven learning.
10	Ivan Pavlov	1849-1936	Russia	Soviet experimental neurologist and physiologist		Learning occurs through associations between stimuli and responses. This theory, demonstrated with Pavlov's dogs, is foundational in behavioural psychology and habit formation.
11	John Dewey	1859–1952	United States	Philosopher, Psychologist, Educator	Experiential Learning	Education should be hands-on, interactive, and connected to real-world experiences. Learning is most effective when students engage in problem-solving and reflection.

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12	Maria Montessori	1870–1952	Italy	Physician, Educator	Montessori Method	Education should be child-centred, allowing students to learn at their own pace in a carefully prepared environment that encourages independence, hands-on learning, and self-discovery.
13	Edward Thorndike	1874–1949	United States	Psychologist, Educator	Connectionism	Learning occurs through the formation of stimulus-response associations. His "Law of Effect" states that behaviours followed by positive outcomes are more likely to be repeated.
14	Lev Vygotsky	1896–1934	Russia	Psychologist, Educator	Sociocultural Theory	Learning is deeply influenced by social interactions and culture. The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) explains that learners benefit most from tasks slightly beyond their current abilities, guided by a more knowledgeable person.

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15	Jean Piaget	1896–1980	Switzerland	Psychologist, Biologist	Constructivism	Learning is an active process where individuals build knowledge based on experiences. Piaget outlined four stages of cognitive development: sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational, and formal operational.
16	B.F. Skinner	1904–1990	United States	Psychologist, Behaviourist	Behaviourism	Learning is shaped by reinforcement (rewards) and punishment. Skinner's operant conditioning theory emphasizes structured environments where behaviour is systematically reinforced.
17	Carl Rogers	1902–1987	United States	Psychologist, Educator	Humanistic Learning Theory	Learning should be student-centred, emphasizing personal growth, self-direction, and intrinsic motivation rather than external rewards.

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18	Erik Erikson	1902–1994	Germany / U.S.	Psychologist, Psychoanalyst	Psychosocial Development	Human development occurs in eight stages, each involving a key social-emotional conflicts: Trust vs. Mistrust. Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt. Initiative vs. Guilt. Industry vs. Inferiority. Identity vs. Confusion. Intimacy vs. Isolation. Generativity vs. Stagnation. Integrity vs. Despair. Education should support identity formation and emotional growth.
19	Jerome Bruner	1915–2016	United States	Psychologist, Educator	Discovery Learning / Scaffolding / Spiral Curriculum	Learning is most effective when students actively discover concepts on their own, with teachers providing scaffolding to support learning at different developmental stages.

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20	Urie Bronfenbrenner	1917–2005	Russia / U.S.	Psychologist, Developmental Theorist	Ecological Systems Theory	Learning and development are influenced by multiple environmental systems: microsystem (family, school), mesosystem (interactions between environments), exosystem (external influences), macrosystem (cultural and societal norms), and chronosystem (historical changes over time). Education should consider these layers to support holistic child development.
21	Paulo Freire	1921–1997	Brazil	Educator, Philosopher	Critical Pedagogy	Education should be a tool for social justice and empowerment. Through dialogue and critical thinking, learners can challenge oppression and transform society.
22	Benjamin Bloom	1913–1999	United States	Psychologist, Educator	Bloom's Taxonomy	Learning occurs in a hierarchy of cognitive skills: remembering, understanding, applying, analysing, evaluating, and creating. This framework helps structure learning objectives and assessments.

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23	Robert Gagné	1916–2002	United States	Educational Psychologist	Conditions of Learning	There are different types of learning (e.g., verbal, problem-solving, motor skills), each requiring specific instructional strategies. He proposed the "Nine Events of Instruction" to guide lesson planning; Gain attention of the students. Inform students of the objectives. Stimulate recall of prior learning. Present the content. Provide learning guidance. Elicit performance (practice) Provide feedback. Assess performance
25	David Ausubel	1918–2008	United States	Psychologist, Educator	Meaningful Learning Theory	Learning occurs when new information is connected to prior knowledge.
26	Loris Malaguzzi	1920–1994	Italy	Educator	Reggio Emilia Approach	The fundamental principles of the Reggio philosophy are centred upon the image of the child, the hundred languages of children, the role of the teacher, reciprocal relationships, a pedagogy of listening, and the environment as third teacher

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27	Julius Nyerere	1922–1999	Tanzania	Educator, Politician, Philosopher	Education for Self-Reliance	Promoted education as a tool for liberation, self-sufficiency, and national development.
28	John Holt	1923–1985	United States	Educator, Author	Unschooling / Self-Directed Learning	Learning should be student-led, free from traditional school constraints. Children learn best when pursuing their own interests.
29	Albert Bandura	1925–2021	Canada / U.S.	Psychologist, Educator	Social Learning Theory	Learning occurs through observation, imitation, and modelling. People learn not just from direct experiences but also by watching others.
30	Ivan Illich	1926–2002	Austria / Mexico	Philosopher, Educator	Deschooling Society	Advocated for self-directed learning outside formal institutions.
31	Nel Noddings	1929–2022	United States	Educator, Philosopher	Ethics of Care	Education should emphasize relationships, empathy, and caring for others as essential components of a meaningful learning experience.
32	Ali Mazrui	1933–2014	Kenya	Political Scientist, Educator	Indigenous Knowledge & Globalization	Advocated for balancing African traditional knowledge with modern global education.

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33	James E. Marcia	1937-present	United States	Clinical and Developmental Psychologist, Educator	Identity Status Theory	Expanded on Erikson's psychosocial development theory by identifying four identity statuses: Identity Diffusion, Foreclosure, Moratorium, and Identity Achievement, which describe how individuals explore and commit to their sense of self.
34	Steve Biko	1946–1977	South Africa	Activist, Philosopher	Black Consciousness	Argued for education that empowers African identity and challenges colonial oppression.
35	Richard Mayer	1947–present	United States	Psychologist, Cognitive Scientist	Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning	Learning is most effective when visual and verbal materials are integrated.
36	David Kolb	1939–present	United States	Educational Theorist	Experiential Learning Cycle	Learning follows four stages: experience, reflection, conceptualization, and experimentation.

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37	Maxine Greene	1917–2014	United States	Educator, Philosopher	Aesthetic Education	Education should incorporate the arts and encourage creativity, imagination, and personal expression as fundamental to learning.
38	Jean Lave & Étienne Wenger	20th–21st c.	United States / France	Anthropologists, Educators	Situated Learning & Communities of Practice	Learning happens best in authentic social contexts.
39	Punya Mishra & Matthew Koehler	20th–21st c.	India / U.S.	Educational Technologists	TPACK Framework	Effective teaching balances Technological, Pedagogical, and Content Knowledge.
40	Peter Honey & Alan Mumford	20th–21st c.	United Kingdom	Psychologists, Educators	Learning Styles Model	Identified four learning styles: Activist, Theorist, Pragmatist, Reflector.
41	Peter Hargreaves	20th–21st c.	United Kingdom	Educational Researcher	Educational Change & Leadership	Advocates for adaptable curriculum models.
42	Neil Fleming	20th–21st c.	New Zealand	Educational Researcher	VARK Model	Identified four learning preferences: Visual, Auditory, Reading/Writing, and Kinesthetic.

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43	Howard Gardner	1943–present	United States	Psychologist, Educator	Multiple Intelligences Theory	Intelligence is not a single ability but consists of different types, including linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, musical, bodily-kinaesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic intelligence.
44	Carol Dweck	1946–present	United States	Psychologist, Researcher	Growth Mindset	Intelligence and abilities are not fixed but can develop through effort and perseverance. A growth mindset fosters motivation, resilience, and a love of learning.