



CORPUS PUBLISHERS

Current Research in Psychology and Behavioral Science (CRPBS)

ISSN: 2833-0986

Volume 4, Issue 4, 2023

Article Information

Received date : 19 July, 2023

Published date: 01 August, 2023

*Corresponding author

Olivia N Saracho, University of Maryland,
2111 Benjamin, USA

Key Words

Early Childhood; Education; Social
Darwinism; Children function

DOI: 10.54026/CRPBS/1098

Distributed under: Creative Commons
CC-BY 4.0

Review Article

Theorists in Early Childhood Education

Olivia N Saracho*

University of Maryland, USA

Abstract

Early childhood education theorists have influenced the development of the children's appropriate education to prepare them to succeed in present society and avoid poverty. For instance, Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi and Friedrich Wilhelm August Fröbel supported romantic idealisms of childhood as an innocent and pure era of life and intended to rebuild the educational structure to offer a thought-provoking setting for unrestricted play and discovery. Although theorists had a mixture of beliefs and political inclinations, they agreed that old education traditions that were contingent on repetitive learning, drill plus practice, and an academic focused curriculum needed to be reformed. They contested that such curriculum was inappropriate for most of the children and advocated that education should be more hands-on and assist children to function successfully in society. They recommended the initiation of project learning to prepare them for their roles in life.

Theorists in Early Childhood Education

Early childhood education theorists have influenced the development of the children's appropriate education to prepare them to succeed in present society and avoid poverty. For instance, the English philosopher Herbert Spencer considered social Darwinism could be used to provide a proper education that can assist children to develop and succeed in the present society. Susan Isaacs, Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, and Friedrich Wilhelm August Fröbel used Spencer's concepts to reinforce romantic principles of childhood as a virtuous and natural period of life and planned to restructure education and propose a stimulating environment that would offer children the opportunity to engage in spontaneous play and exploration. Regardless of the range of views and political partialities, educational theorists agreed to reform outdated educational practices that were based on repetitious learning, such as drill plus practice, to provide an academic driven program. Educational theorists argued that such program was inappropriate for most of the children. They encouraged educators to use more hands-on approach in project learning that could be implemented in early childhood settings to help children function in adult life and be effective in society.

Early Childhood Programs

In numerous current settings, early childhood educators were coerced into implementing limited, skill-based curricular methods and additional standards and assessments of accountability. Instead, child development scholars pursued holistic learning and play to cultivate the young children's inquisitiveness. Early childhood education programs were initiated based on the philosophy of theorists. Philosophers (e.g., John Amos Comenius, John Locke, Jean Jacques Rousseau) provided the theoretical essentials for an effective and high quality early childhood education. Their philosophy (e.g., that of Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, Friedrich Fröbel, Maria Montessori, Susan Isaacs) was used to create the children's educational programs. Their approaches varied but had the same foundation: the practice of early childhood curriculum programs should be adapted based on each child's individual maturing needs, capabilities, and interests [1]. The instructional methods in early childhood education have slowly changed. Many have resurfaced using materials that resemble the original materials. Hence, present early childhood curriculum programs seem to be related to previous early childhood theorists [2]. The following sections provide some examples of theorists and their educational theories:

Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi: Education and social justice

Both Germany and the United States launched ground-breaking educational procedures to teach children the merits of citizenship. These procedures derived from a new insight that children were active and creative; thus, instruction should concentrate on the children's natural inquisitiveness and initiative. Considering that early childhood was a critical stage in the children's development, Friedrich Fröbel and Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi insisted that this is the time to begin instructing children [3]. Pestalozzi is known for his educational theory in the (1) advancement of the contemporary school, its curriculum, and instructional approaches; (2) acceptance of the children's developmental differences; (3) importance of appropriately preparing teachers; (4) changing how different disciplines are taught; (5) emphasizing spontaneity, creativity and independence in learning; (6) including the children's family's 'funds of knowledge'; and (7) concentrating on the children's complete development including their intellectual, real-world, and moral development.

Friedrich Wilhelm August Fröbel and the kindergarten

One of Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi's pupils was the German pedagogue, Friedrich Wilhelm August Fröbel, who thought that children have individual needs and capabilities. Fröbel founded the kindergarten, which was an educational program that offered children play experiences for them to learn self-awareness and obtain social abilities. His method extremely altered views in early childhood education, which had an impact on various educational trends in the United States and Europe [4]. Fröbel's kindergarten affected (1) young children's education in Germany and the United States, (2) the way it extended to the international level of education, and (3) how German kindergarten teachers moved to other countries when it was prohibited in Germany. Between 1851 and 1914, kindergarten was more successful in the United States than in Germany. During the year 1900 the majority of the German school government department prevented the integration of kindergarten programs into their public school practices; but after the American schools accepted it, several of them integrated kindergarten classes into their school systems.



Friedrich Fröbel's zealous concepts and method to early childhood education and care stimulated cohorts of educators to embrace imaginative advanced teachings and the straightforwardness of early childhood education. In Scotland and New Zealand, an innovative period in Fröbelian education is associated with the ideas of groundbreaking critical pedagogy [5] and teacher involvement [6]. May and Navrotzki [7] feel that "historical perspectives can offer a valuable framework for interrogating current debates and...historical narratives might usefully inform policies and practices in the twenty-first-century early childhood settings and contexts" (p. iii), which is the basis for the trends that shifted throughout the eras. The history confirms the practice and legacy of Fröbel's work. Historians speculate that these predominant trends will endure. For example, concerns in science education might conceivably have Fröbelian antecedents. His work in science strongly formed his educational thinking.

Maria Montessori's educational method

Maria Montessori's philosophy shifted from conventional Italian education and adopted one that was comparable to Fröbel's education. Both thought that children developed as a method and their educational program would consist of a self-activity that included concepts of self-discipline, independence, and self-direction. However, Montessori's philosophy on sensory education was of little value in Fröbel's philosophy (Spodek & Saracho 1994).

The Montessori method developed a mathematics curriculum for children whose ages ranged from three- to 12 years-old. A distinguishing feature in her program was the integration of many manipulatives and educational practices into her mathematics curriculum. Studies that compare the mathematics achievement and learning of Montessori students with those in conventional programs showed that Montessori programs were more efficient than conventional or other programs [8]. Basargekar and Lillard [9] reviewed these studies and reported that mathematics programs are more effective when (1) they abide by the main principles of Montessori education, (2) the students have a lengthy submersion in a Montessori program, and (3) the program's evaluations are more conceptual in nature. Basargekar and Lillard [9] suggested that the Montessori method should be included in all educational programs. Tiryaki, et al. [10] supported this conclusion. The results of their research showed that children would profit in an education program that implemented the Montessori method. They recommended that policy makers expand the use of Montessori education programs in an acceptable setting where teachers were completely knowledgeable about the Montessori method as well as have the preparation to implement it successfully.

Susan Isaacs intellectual model

The Montessori approach [11] inspired other educators, like Susan Isaacs, who may have been considered the greatest dominant child psychologist of her era. Throughout the initial half of the twentieth century, Susan Isaacs had an important effect in the early childhood education field, which was reviewed in Adrian Wooldridge's [12] book: Susan Isaacs cultivated a remarkably wide range of institutional connections and intellectual interests. She acted as a point of contact between such disparate groups as academic psychologists, clinical psychoanalysts, progressive educationalists, and prospective teachers. She was a highly effective populariser of Freud; and she did more than anyone else of her generation to introduce educational psychologists to the work of Jean Piaget and Melanie Klein. (p. 132)

As a forerunner of child-centered education, Susan Isaacs is considered to be at the same level as Fröbel and Dewey. According to Jody Hall [13], "the life, work and legacy of Isaacs serve as a witness to the value of the curiosity of children" (p. 250). In addition, the community valued her work. From 1929 until 1936 she contributed to the magazine *The Nursery World*, as 'agony aunt' Ursula Wise [14,15]. Susan Isaacs' theory stressed the importance of nursery schools, the value of play, the suitable preparation of the learning environment, and the encouraging role of the practitioner [16]. Her research on children's intellectual and social development showed how children reconstructed their formations of the world and unraveled their greatest personal social relationships. She established the Malting House School in Cambridge, an experimental educational establishment which she administered from 1924 to 1929 [12]. To identify the status of Susan Isaacs' practice and research in the twenty-first century in early childhood education, Murray [16] reviewed two studies that were carried out almost a century apart. Both studies theorized young children's constructions of knowledge: (1) Isaacs' Malting House School study [17,18] and (2) Building knowledge in early childhood education: Young children are researchers [19].

Murray [16] focused on discovery, reasoning and thought, values and three main fields that reported Isaacs' practice and research: pedagogy, philosophy, and psychology. Murray [16] determined that both studies indicated that Isaacs' work supported a strong legacy to the field of early childhood education, which can help the discipline presently and in the future. For instance, Susan Isaacs's impact can be detected in the "child-sensitive" schools of Reggio Emilia. Firlík [20] observed that various of Susan Isaacs' theoretical constructs were associated practices in Reggio Emilia. Also, the originator of Reggio Emilia, Loris Malaguzzi, expressed how extraordinary English scholars, like Susan Isaacs, had significantly inspired him [21].

Reggio Emilia approach

Educationalists and researchers studied what creates early educational quality and determined that the Reggio Emilia method, which focused on early childhood learning and was named after the town where it was created in Italy. Reggio Emilia, a pedagogical approach, was first established in Italy after World War II ended in Europe. It differed from previous methods and had an impact in early childhood education throughout the world. Young children's curiosity, activity, and creativity were encouraged. The teachers and classroom materials reinforced the children's inquiry abilities, which were used in all situations. The founder, Loris Malaguzzi, explored practices that were used throughout the world. He started the Reggio Emilia method grounded on the principle that each child is unique and communicates her/his interests in several unique modes. His belief had a hands-on effect, generating a co-learning environment where teachers and children were partners in learning. The classrooms were open with different areas and many available materials to stimulate their curiosity [22]. According to Rock [23], the Reggio Emilia approach is based on the following set of principles:

- Children must have some say over what they learn; additionally, the senses play a big role in the learning process.
- Children engage with their senses to help them learn and fully process something.
- Children are encouraged to interact with other children and explore the world through material items and relationships.
- Children should be encouraged to always express themselves and be given infinite means and opportunities to do so.

Officially, different from Montessori, these schools are not certified, although when schools identify themselves as Reggio Emilia, they are held responsible to abide by its principles when setting up the environments and curriculum [22].

Summary: Merging Philosophical and Child Development Insights

Early childhood education has been based on theories emerging from educational, philosophical and child development research outcomes. Although worldwide and regional perspectives contribute to forming theories that support high-quality early childhood education, it is essential that the curricula and pedagogy be based on research evidence-based to strengthen the field. Early childhood education has made a shift in the twentieth century. Theoretical and social-political selections of philosophers in early childhood education have transformed the children's education. The practices in early childhood education have changed throughout the years. Many were developed, then totally vanished. Some resurfaced several times in comparable ways --- occasionally with modernistic representations that appear to imply they were essentially new. Frequently it appeared that practices "swing back and forth like a pendulum" [2]: as current practices began and early childhood professionals reacted by generating substitute methods. Therefore, present early childhood education principles appear to be linked to those early childhood theorists who developed theories and influenced the field.

At present, large numbers of children are enrolled in various programs (e.g., preschools, child care centers, nursery schools, kindergartens, primary schools) that have been around for centuries. Knowing the history of early childhood education and its theories help individuals to understand its current development. Nevertheless, early childhood education programs appeared to be efficient, advantageous, and of high-quality that have a firm effect on the children's education and development [2]



References

1. Spodek B, Saracho ON (1994) *Right from the start: Teaching children ages three to eight*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
2. Spodek B, Saracho ON (2003) "On the shoulders of giants": Exploring the traditions of early childhood education. *Early Childhood Education Journal* 31(1): 3-10.
3. Allen AT (2017) *The transatlantic kindergarten: Education and women's movements in Germany and the United States*. Oxford University Press, USA, pp. 1-304.
4. Elsworth S (2017) Friedrich Fröbel and the kindergarten movement.
5. McLaren P (2010) Revolutionary critical pedagogy. *Inter Actions: UCLA Journal of Education and Information Studies* 7: 1-11.
6. Sachs J (2003b) *The activist teaching profession*. Open University Press, USA.
7. May H, Navrotzki K (2016) Preface. In: May H, Navrotzki K, Prochner L (Eds.), *Kindergarten narratives on Froebelian education: Transnational investigations*. Bloomsbury Publishing, UK, pp. 1-5.
8. Lillard A (2012) Preschool children's development in classic Montessori, supplemented Montessori, and conventional programs. *Journal of School Psychology* 50(3): 379-401.
9. Basargekar A, Lillard AS (2021) Math achievement outcomes associated with Montessori education. *Early Child Development and Care* 191(7-8): 1207-1218.
10. Tiryaki AY, Findik E, Sultanoglu SC, Beker E, Biçakçi MY, et al. (2021) A study on the effect of Montessori Education on self-regulation skills in pre-schoolers. *Early Child Development and Care* 191(7-8): 1219-1229.
11. Montessori M (1912) *The Montessori method*. Willian Heinemann Publishers, UK.
12. Wooldridge A (1994) Susan Isaacs and the psychology of child development. In *measuring the mind: Education and psychology in England 1860-c.1990*. Cambridge University Press, USA, pp. 111-135.
13. Hall J (2002) From Susan Isaacs to Lillian Weber and Deborah Meier. In: Sadovnik AR, Semel SF, (Eds.), *Founding mothers and others: Women educational leaders during the progressive era*. USA, pp. 237-252.
14. Willan J (2009) Revisiting Susan Isaacs – A modern educator for the twenty-first century. *International Journal of Early Years Education* 17(2): 151-165.
15. Willan J (2011) Susan Isaacs (1885-1948): Her life, work and legacy. *Gender and Education* 23(2): 201-210.
16. Murray J (2021) How do children build knowledge in early childhood education? Susan Isaacs, Susan Isaacs, 'Young Children Are Researchers' and what happens next. *Early Child Development and Care* 191(7-8): 1230-1246.
17. Isaacs S (1930) *Intellectual growth in young children*. Routledge and Sons Publishers, UK.
18. Isaacs S (1933) *Social development in young children*. Routledge and Sons Publishers, UK.
19. Murray J (2017) *Building knowledge in early childhood education: Young children are researchers*. 1st (edn.), Routledge Publishers, UK, pp. 1-196.
20. Firlirk RJ (1994b) *Reggio Emilia, Italy preschools: The synergies of theory and practice*. ERIC Number: ED382313.
21. Firlirk RJ (1994a) *Promoting development through constructing appropriate environments: Preschools in Reggio Emilia, Italy*. Day Care & Early Education 22(1): 12-20.
22. Flavin B (2020) *What is Reggio Emilia? Your guide to this child-driven approach*. Rasmussen University, USA.
23. Rock A (2020) *The Reggio Emilia preschool philosophy*.