

PERSPECTIVES, POLICIES, AND PRACTICES OF EARLY CHILDHOOD SPECIAL EDUCATION

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Do not copy, post, or distribute



iStock.com/kali9

1

FOUNDATIONS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD SPECIAL EDUCATION

LEARNING OBJECTIVES**EI/ECSE PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS****THE ORIGINS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD SPECIAL EDUCATION**

- Early Contributors
- Pioneers in Early Childhood Education
- Influential Leaders of the Twentieth Century

THE DEVELOPMENT OF SPECIAL EDUCATION: HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES ON CHILDREN WITH DELAYS AND DISABILITIES

- People and Ideas
- The Establishment of Institutions
- Special Education in Public Schools

COMPENSATORY EDUCATION PROGRAMS

- Representative Compensatory Programs
- Research Activities

SUMMARY**KEY TERMS****CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING****REFLECTION AND APPLICATION****LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

After reading this chapter, you will be able to

- 1.1 Describe the theories and philosophies of historical figures and their contributions to the development of the fields of general early childhood education and early intervention/early childhood special education (EI/ECSE).
- 1.2 Discuss the evolution of educational opportunities for children with delays and disabilities.
- 1.3 Explain the concept of compensatory education.

EI/ECSE Professional Standards

The content of this chapter aligns with the following EI/ECSE Standard:

Standard 1. Child Development and Early Learning

Candidates understand the impact of different theories and philosophies of early learning and development on assessment, curriculum, instruction, and intervention decisions. Candidates apply knowledge of normative developmental sequences and variations, individual differences within and across the range of abilities, including developmental delays and disabilities, and other direct and indirect contextual features that support or constrain children's development and learning. These contextual factors as well as social, cultural, and linguistic diversity are considered when

facilitating meaningful learning experiences and individualizing intervention and instruction across contexts.

Authors' Note: As you read this chapter and other chapters, you will find information related to EI/ECSE Standard 1, Child Development and Learning. Appendix A contains a complete list of the EI/ECSE Standards and accompanying components.

Early childhood, as described in this text, refers to the period from birth through age eight. In educational terms, this includes **early intervention**, **early childhood special education**, and early primary special education. The individuals who require these services represent an especially heterogeneous group of young children. The children vary in their chronological age and cultural, linguistic, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds, as well as in the types and severity of their delays and disabilities. Thus, early childhood special education professionals encounter young children with a wide range of physical, cognitive, communication, health, and social abilities, strengths, and needs (Allen & Cowdery, 2022; Cook et al., 2020; Kilgo, 2006).

As emphasized in EI/ECSE Standard 1, the need for ECSE professionals to consider children's social, cultural, and linguistic diversity is of critical importance when facilitating meaningful learning experiences and individualizing intervention and instruction across contexts (Guralnick, 2017; Shonkoff & Richter, 2013). Therefore, this textbook is designed to help practitioners provide appropriate and effective early intervention/education programs for infants and young children with delays and disabilities and their families who are receiving early intervention and early childhood special education services in a variety of settings.

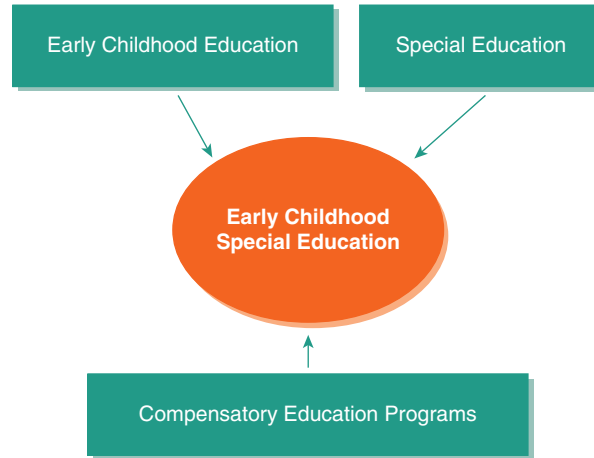
THE ORIGINS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD SPECIAL EDUCATION

In the past five decades, there has been a significant increase in awareness, services, and opportunities for young children with delays and disabilities. EI/ECSE Standard 1 stresses the importance of professionals understanding the influence of various theories and philosophies on the field (Odom, 2016). Also important to consider is the impact of legislative initiatives, litigation, public policy, and the efforts of advocacy groups, which have helped to focus attention on young children with delays and disabilities and their families. As a field of study, early childhood special education is relatively young but has rapidly emerged and has been influenced by different theories and philosophies of early learning and development (Dunst, 2007; Peterson, 1987).

The foundation for appropriate learning experiences for young children with delays and disabilities is built on three related fields. The origins of early childhood special education can be traced to trends and developments in general early childhood education, special education for school-age students, and compensatory programs such as Head Start (Hanson & Lynch, 1995; Peterson, 1987). In each of their unique ways, all these movements have played imperative roles in the evolution of early childhood special education. Therefore, it is vital to consider the field of early intervention and early childhood special education as a hybrid field built upon the evolving recommended practices of general early childhood and special education, plus the research evidence from empirical investigations documenting the success of compensatory education programs (Peterson, 1987). Figure 1.1 shows this threefold foundation of the field.

General early childhood education has an extensive history rich with tradition. It is important to remember that the value of children and their education reflects the social, political, and economic conditions of particular time periods (Harkness et al., 2013). The efforts of past religious leaders, reformers, educational theorists, and philosopher helped to shape contemporary thinking about the education of young children. The work of these individuals also has introduced many of the concepts and practices used with young children with developmental delays and disabilities and those children

FIGURE 1.1 ■ The Foundations of Early Childhood Special Education



at risk for future delays and disabilities. What follows is a description of the influence of important early contributors to general early childhood education.

Early Contributors

Although he was an important historical religious leader, Martin Luther (1483–1546) also is remembered for advocating for the importance of literacy and widespread, mandatory education. He was a resolved believer in publicly supported schools for all children, including girls. Luther’s legacy includes his visionary idea that family participation is a critical component of a child’s education.

Another early religious leader and educational theorist was Jan Ámos Comenius (a.k.a. Komenský; 1592–1670). He was a firm believer in universal education, which ideally should begin in the early years due to the plasticity or malleability of the child’s behavior. In *The Great Didactic* (1657), Comenius summarizes his view that young children are capable of easily being molded and shaped. Schooling in the first six years of life must begin at home at the mother’s knee (“School of the Mother’s Knee”) and progress throughout an individual’s lifetime. Comenius also advocated that all children, including those with delays and disabilities, should receive an education (Gargiulo & Černá, 1992).



Comenius believed that young children learn best by being actively involved in the learning process.

Petr Bonek / Alamy Stock Photo

Many modern-day practices, as well as the contributions of later theorists such as Montessori and Piaget, can be found in Comenius’s early ideas about children’s learning and development. As an example, Comenius realized the importance of a child’s preparedness for an activity. He also emphasized that children learn best through active involvement in the learning process. Additionally, Comenius placed great weight on sensory experiences and the utilization of concrete examples.

John Locke (1632–1704) was a seventeenth-century English philosopher and physician who also influenced thinking about young children. The concept that children are born very much like a blank slate (*tabula rasa*) is attributed to Locke. All that children learn, therefore, is a direct product of experiences, activities, and sensations rather than intrinsic characteristics. Locke was a firm advocate of an environmental point of view. What a child becomes is a consequence or result of the type and quality of experiences to which they are exposed.

Locke’s belief in the dominance of the environment is echoed in the behavioral theories of B. F. Skinner and other modern theorists as well as today’s compensatory education programs directed at remedying the concerns of a disadvantaged environment. Early learning and

school experiences for children at risk, such as the popular Head Start program, is a prime example. Because Locke also emphasized the importance of sensory experiences, his theorizing influenced Montessori's view on the significance of sensory training in early education.

One social theorist and philosopher who had a substantial influence on education was Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778). Through his writings—in particular, *Emile* (1762)—Rousseau explained his views on child-rearing and education. His ideas, which were radical for his time, included a natural approach to the education of young children. Rousseau urged a *laissez-faire* approach, one void of limitations and interference, which would allow the natural unfolding of a child's abilities. Childhood was viewed as a distinct and special time during which children grew or “flowered” according to innate timetables. Rousseau stressed the significance of early education. He also believed that schools should be based on the interests of the child (Graves et al., 1996).

Educational historians typically esteem Rousseau as the dividing line between the past and present periods of education. He significantly influenced future reformers and thinkers such as Pestalozzi, Fröbel, and Montessori, all of whom have contributed to modern early childhood practices.

Pioneers in Early Childhood Education

Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746–1827), a Swiss educator, is credited with establishing early childhood education as a distinct discipline. Like Rousseau, Pestalozzi believed in the value of education through nature and following the child's natural development. He also promoted developing school experiences focused on the interests of the student. Pestalozzi understood, however, that learning does not occur simply through a child's initiative and experimental behavior; adult guidance is essential. Teachers, therefore, need to create “object” lessons to balance the child's self-guided experiences. Due to Pestalozzi's belief in the importance of sensory experiences, instructional lessons amalgamated manipulative activities like counting, measuring, feeling, and touching concrete objects (Lawton, 1988).

Three additional ideas differentiate Pestalozzi's contributions to the field of early childhood education. First, Pestalozzi stressed the education of the whole child; second, he was a firm believer in involving parents in a child's early education; and, finally, he saw the value of multiage grouping whereby older students could assist in teaching younger learners.

Social reformer and entrepreneur Robert Owen (1771–1858) is recognized for launching an infant school in 1816. Influenced by the theorizing of Rousseau and Pestalozzi, Owen was worried about the living and working conditions of the children and their parents who worked in textile mills. As the manager of a mill in New Lanark, Scotland, Owen was able to introduce his reform ideas. Very young children were forbidden from working at all, and the working hours of older children were restricted. Perhaps more significant, however, was the formation of a school for children between the ages of three and ten. He believed early education was critical to the development of a child's character and behavior. The early years were the most opportune time to influence a young child's development. By controlling and manipulating environmental conditions, Owen, like other Utopians, sought to build a better society. Education was seen as a medium for social change.



According to Rousseau, children develop according to innate timetables.

Heritage Images / Contributor via Getty Images



Owen believed that early education was crucial to the development of a child's character and behavior.

Hulton Archive / Freelance Photographer via Getty Images

Owen's infant school was noted for its emphasis on the development of basic academics as well as creative experiences such as dance and music. This pioneer of early childhood education did not believe in forcing children to learn and was opposed to punishment, emphasizing shared respect between teacher and child. His ideas were enormously popular, and more than fifty infant schools were established by the late 1820s throughout Scotland, Ireland, and England. Several schools flourished in urban areas of the United States, yet their influence had lessened by the mid-1830s.

Owen's infant schools served as a harbinger of kindergartens. They were also seen as a way of immunizing children living in poverty from the harms of nineteenth-century urban living. This social reformer was idealistic; he recognized the vital relationship between education and societal developments. Owen trusted, as did other reformers of that time, that poverty could be forever eradicated by instructing and socializing young children from poor families.



Fröbel is considered to be the “father of the kindergarten.”

Bildagentur-online / Contributor via Getty Images

Graves and his colleagues (1996) describe Friedrich Wilhelm Fröbel¹ (1782–1852) as the one individual who perhaps had the highest impact on the field of early childhood education. A student of Pestalozzi and a teacher in one of his schools, Fröbel was a strong advocate for the education of young children. He translated his beliefs into a system for teaching young children in addition to developing a curriculum, complete with methodology. His efforts earned him the well-deserved title “Father of the Kindergarten.”

Also encouraged by the writings of Rousseau and Comenius, Fröbel conceived an educational theory (“Law of Universal Unity”) partly based on their thoughts as well as his personal experiences and religious views. His fundamental idea was principally religious in nature and emphasized a unity of all living things—a oneness of humans, nature, and God. His concept of unity led Fröbel to advocate that education should be based on collaboration rather than competition. Like Comenius and Pestalozzi, he also considered progress as a process of unfolding. Children’s learning should, therefore, follow this natural development. The role of the teacher (and parent) was to identify this process and provide activities to help the child learn whenever they were ready (Morrison, 2012).

Fröbel used the garden to symbolize early childhood education. Like a flower blooming from a bud, children would grow naturally according to their own laws of development. A kindergarten education, therefore, should follow the nature of the child’s development. Play, a child’s natural activity, was the foundation of learning (Spodek et al., 1991).

Fröbel founded the first kindergarten (German for “children’s garden”) in 1837 near Blankenburg, Germany. This early program enrolled young children between the ages of one and seven. Structured play was an important component of the curriculum. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Fröbel saw the educational value and benefit of play. Play is the work of the child. Because he believed that education was knowledge being transmitted by symbols, Fröbel developed a set of materials and activities that would aid the children in their play activities as well as teach the concept of unity among nature, God, and humankind. Education was to begin with the concrete and move to the abstract.

Fröbel presented his students with “gifts” and “occupations” rich in symbolism. In his curriculum, **gifts** were manipulative activities to assist in learning color, shape, size, counting, and other educational tasks. Wooden blocks, cylinders, and cubes; balls of colored yarn; geometric shapes; and natural objects, such as beans and pebbles, are all examples of some of the learning tools used.

Occupations were arts-and-crafts-type activities designed to develop eye–hand coordination and fine motor skills. Illustrations of these activities include bead-stringing, embroidering, paper folding,

¹ Information on Friedrich Fröbel, John Dewey, Maria Montessori, and Jean Piaget is adapted from *Young Children: An Introduction to Early Childhood* by S. Graves, R. Gargiulo, and L. Sluder, St. Paul, MN: West, 1996.

cutting with scissors, and weaving. Fröbel's curriculum also used games, songs, dance, rhymes, and finger play. Other components of his curriculum were nature study, language, and arithmetic in addition to developing the habits of cleanliness, courtesy, and punctuality.

According to Fröbel, teachers were to be designers of activities and experiences utilizing the child's innate curiosity. They were also responsible for directing and guiding their students toward becoming contributing members of society (Morrison, 2012). This role of the teacher as a facilitator of children's learning would later be echoed in the work of Montessori and Piaget.

Influential Leaders of the Twentieth Century

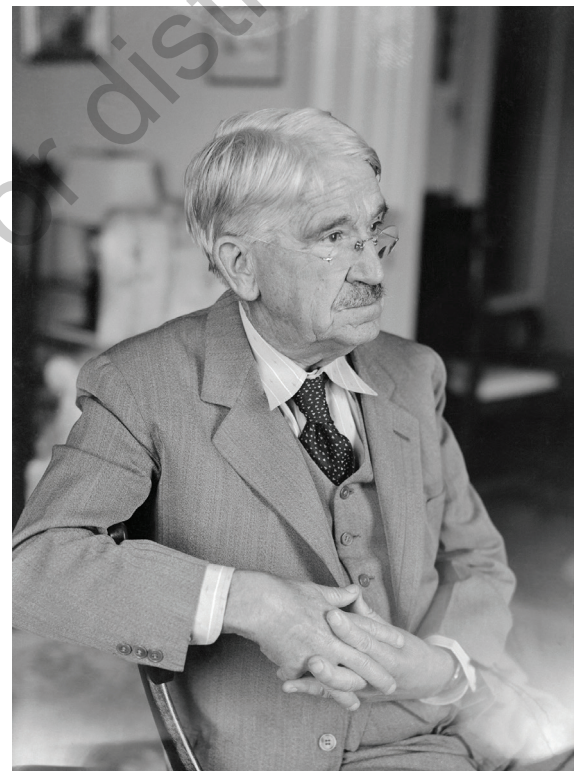
The educational ideas espoused by John Dewey, Maria Montessori, and Jean Piaget, along with his contemporary, Russian theorist Lev Vygotsky, have significantly influenced the field of general early childhood education. Many of the practices that are common in today's classrooms originated with the work of these four individuals.

John Dewey

The influence of John Dewey (1859–1952) can be traced to the early days of the twentieth century when conflicting points of view about young children and kindergarten experiences began to transpire. Some individuals professed a strong allegiance to Fröbel's principles and practices. Other professionals, known as Progressives, saw little value in adhering to Fröbel's symbolism. Instead, they embraced the developing child study movement with its focus on empirical study. Because of the work of G. Stanley Hall, the father of the child study movement, formal observations and a scientific basis for understanding young children replaced speculation, philosophic idealism, and religious and social values as the means for guiding the education of young children. Observations of young children led to new ideas about kindergarten practices and what should be considered of educational value for children.

Dewey, a student of Hall, was one of the first Americans to significantly impact educational theory as well as practice. He is generally regarded as the founder of a school of thought known as **Progressivism**. This approach with its emphasis on the child and their interests, was counter to the then prevalent theme of teacher-directed, subject-oriented curriculum. According to Dewey, learning flowed from the interests of the child instead of from activities chosen by the instructor. Dewey, who taught at both the University of Chicago and Teachers College, Columbia University, coined the terms *child-centered curriculum* and *child-centered schools* (Morrison et al., 2022). Consistent with Dewey's beliefs, the purpose of schools was to prepare the student for the realities of today's world, not just to prepare for the future. In his famous work, *My Pedagogic Creed*, this philosopher emphasized that learning occurs through real-life experiences and that education is best described as a process for living. He also stressed the concept of social responsibility. Basic to his philosophy was the idea that children should be equipped to function effectively as citizens in a democratic society.

Traditionally, children learned predetermined subject matter via rote memory under the strict guidance of the teacher, who was in complete control of the learning environment. In Dewey's classroom, however, children were socially active, engaged in physical activities, and discovering how objects worked. They were continually afforded opportunities for inquiry, discovery, and experimentation. Daily living activities such as carpentry and cooking could also be found in a Dewey-designed classroom (Morrison et al., 2022).



Dewey founded a school of thought known as Progressivism.

Bettmann / Contributor via Getty Images

Dewey (1916) advocated for the child's interaction with the total environment. He believed that intellectual skills emerged from a child's own activity and play. He further rejected Fröbel's approach to symbolic education.

Some have unfairly criticized Dewey as only responding to the whims of the child; this was a false accusation. Dewey did not abandon the teaching of subject matter or basic skills. He was merely opposed to imposing knowledge on children. Instead, he favored using the child's interests as the origin of subject matter instruction. Thus, curriculum could not be fixed or established in advance. According to Dewey, educators are to guide learning activities, observe and monitor, and offer encouragement and assistance as needed. They are not to control their students.

Although Dewey's impact has lessened, his contributions to early childhood education in America and other countries are still evident. Many so-called traditional early childhood classrooms today have their philosophical roots in Dewey's progressive education movement.

Maria Montessori

In examining the roots of modern early childhood special education, the work of Maria Montessori (1870–1952) stands out. Her contributions to the field of general early childhood education are significant. A feminist, she became the first female to earn a medical degree in Italy. (Montessori also held a PhD in anthropology.) She began working as a physician in a psychiatric clinic at the University of Rome. It was in this hospital setting that she came into frequent contact with “idiot children,” or individuals with intellectual disability. At the turn of the century, intellectual disability was, unfortunately, often viewed as indistinguishable from mental illness. A careful observation of these children led her to conclude that educational intervention would be a more effective strategy than medical treatment. She began to develop her theories for working with these children. In doing so, she was following an historical tradition upon which the early foundation of special education is built—the physician turned educator. Dr. Montessori was influenced by the writings of Pestalozzi, Rousseau, and Fröbel and the work of Édouard Séguin, a French physician who pioneered an effective educational approach for children with intellectual disability. She concluded that intelligence is not static or fixed but can be influenced by the child's experiences. Montessori developed an innovative, activity-based sensory education model involving teaching, or **didactic materials**. She was eminently successful.

Montessori believed that children learn best by direct sensory experience. She was further convinced that children have a natural tendency to explore and understand their world. Like Fröbel, she envisioned child development as a process of unfolding; however, environmental influences also have a critical role. Education in the early years is crucial to the child's later development. Montessori also thought children progress through **sensitive periods**, or stages of development early in life when they are able, due to their curiosity, to learn particular skills or behaviors more easily. This concept is very similar to the idea of a child's readiness for an activity.

To promote the children's learning, Montessori constructed an orderly or **prepared environment** with specially designed tasks and materials. Much like Fröbel's gifts, these materials included items such as wooden rods, cylinders, and cubes of varying sizes; sets of sandpaper tablets arranged according to the degree of smoothness; and musical bells of different pitches (see Table 1.1). Dr. Montessori's program also emphasized three growth periods—practical life experiences, sensory education, and academic education. Each of these components was considered to be essential in developing the child's independence, responsibility, self-reliance, and productivity.



Montessori believed that children learn best by direct sensory experiences.

Pictorial Press Ltd / Alamy Stock Photo



Montessori classrooms are characterized by their attractive learning materials and equipment.

iStock.com/CorbalanStudio

TABLE 1.1 ■ Examples of Montessori's Sensory Materials

Material	Purpose	How It Is Used by Children
Wooden cylinders	Visual discrimination (Size)	Ten wooden cylinders varying in diameter, height, or variations of both dimensions. Child removes cylinders from wooden holder, mixes them up, and replaces in correct location.
Pink tower	Visual discrimination (Dimension)	Ten wooden cubes painted pink. Child is required to build a tower. Each cube is successively smaller, varying from ten to one centimeter. Repeats activity.
Green rods	Visual discrimination (Length)	Ten wooden pieces identical in size and color but varying in length. After scattering rods, child arranges them according to gradations in length—largest to smallest.
Material swatches	Sense of feel	Matches identical pieces of brightly colored fabric (e.g., fine vs. coarse linen, cottons, and woollens). Initially performs task without blindfold.
Sound cylinders	Auditory discrimination	Double set of cylinders containing natural materials such as pebbles or rice. Child shakes cylinder and matches first according to similarity of sound and then according to loudness.
Tonal bells	Auditory discrimination	Two sets of eight metal bells, alike in appearance but varying in tone. Child strikes the bells with a wooden hammer and matches the bells on the basis of their sound; first according to corresponding sounds and then according to the musical scale.

Source: Adapted from R. Orem (Ed.), *A Montessori Handbook: Dr. Montessori's Own Handbook* (New York, NY: Putnam's Sons, 1966).

Practical life experiences focused on personal hygiene, self-care, physical education, and responsibility for the environment. Examples of this last activity include tasks such as sweeping, dusting, or raking leaves while utilizing child-size equipment. Sensory education was very important in Montessori's education scheme. She designed a wide variety of teaching materials aimed at developing the children's various senses. Her didactic materials are noteworthy for two reasons. They were self-correcting—that is, there was only one correct way to use them. Thus, the materials could be used independently by the children to help them become self-motivated students. The sensory training equipment was also graded in difficulty—from easiest to the most challenging and from concrete to abstract. Her sensory training materials and procedures reflected her educational belief that cognitive ability results from sensory development. The final stage, academic instruction, introduced the child to reading, writing, and arithmetic in the sensitive period, ages two to six. Various concrete and sensory teaching materials were used in the lessons of this last stage (Montessori, 1965).

Montessori's classrooms were distinguished by their attractive and child-size materials and equipment. The furniture was movable, and the beautifully crafted materials were very attractive—appealing to the child's senses. Teaching materials were displayed on low shelves in an organized manner to encourage the children's independent use. Children worked at their own pace, selecting learning materials of their choice; however, they had to complete one assignment before starting another. Dr. Montessori fully believed in allowing children to do things for themselves. She was convinced that children are capable of teaching themselves through interaction with a carefully planned learning environment. She identified this concept as **auto-education**.

Teachers in Montessori classrooms are facilitators and observers of children's activities. By using skillfully crafted lessons, the teacher (or *directress* in Montessori terminology) slowly and carefully demonstrates concepts to the children. Ideas are presented to the children in small, sequential steps and build on previous experiences that form the basis for the next level of skill development. Teachers foster the development of independence in young children. A Montessori-designed classroom typically is focused on individual children's activities rather than group work.

Many of Montessori's beliefs and concepts are directly applicable to young children with disabilities, including the following:

- *The use of mixed-age groupings.* The mixed-age groupings found within a Montessori classroom are conducive to a successful inclusion experience. Mixed-age groupings necessitate a wide range of materials within each classroom to meet the individual needs of children rather than the average need of the group.
- *Individualization within the context of a supportive classroom community.* The individualized curriculum in Montessori classrooms is compatible with the individualization required for children with disabilities. Work in a Montessori classroom is introduced to children according to individual readiness rather than chronological age.
- *An emphasis on functionality within the Montessori environment.* Real objects are used rather than toy replications whenever possible (e.g., children cut bread with a real knife, sweep up crumbs on the floor with a real broom, and dry wet tables with cloths.) In a Montessori classroom, the goal is to prepare children for life. Special education also focuses on the development of functional skills.
- *The development of independence and the ability to make choices.* Montessori classrooms help all children make choices and become independent learners in various ways; for example, children may choose any material for which they have had a lesson given by the teacher. This development of independence is especially appropriate for children with delays and disabilities.
- *The development of organized work patterns in children.* One objective of the practical life area and the beginning point for every young child is the development of organized work habits. Children with delays and disabilities who need to learn to be organized in their work habits and their use of time often benefit from this emphasis.
- *The classic Montessori demonstration.* Demonstrations themselves have value for learners who experience disabilities. A demonstration uses a minimum of language selected specifically for its relevance to the activity and emphasizes an orderly progression from the beginning to the end of the task.
- *An emphasis on repetition.* Children with delays and disabilities typically require lots of practice and make progress in small increments.
- *Materials with a built-in control of error.* Materials that have a built-in control of error benefit all children. Because errors are obvious, children notice and correct them without the help of a teacher.

- *Academic materials that provide a concrete representation of the abstract.* Montessori classrooms offer a wide range of concrete materials that children can learn from as a regular part of the curriculum. For children with disabilities, the use of concrete materials is critical to promote real learning.
- *Sensory materials that develop and organize incoming sensory perceptions.* Sensory materials can develop and refine each sense in isolation. A child who cannot see will benefit enormously from materials that train and refine the sense of touch, hearing, and smell, for example. (Morrison, 2009, p. 148; North American Montessori Center, 2016)

Jean Piaget

Jean Piaget (1896–1980) is one of the major contributors to the understanding of how children think. He is considered by many to be the premiere expert on the development of knowledge in children and young adults.

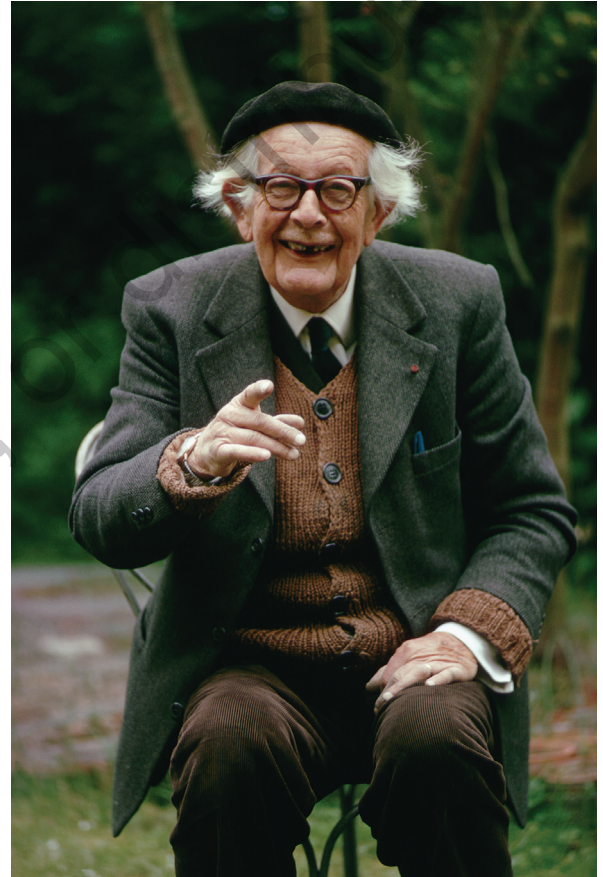
Piaget studied in Paris, where he had the opportunity to work with Théodore Simon, who in conjunction with Alfred Binet was constructing the first test for assessing children’s intelligence. While standardizing the children’s responses to test questions, Piaget became extremely interested in the incorrect answers given by the children. His careful observations led him to notice that they gave similar wrong answers. He also discovered that the children made different types of errors at different ages. This paved the way for Piaget to investigate the thinking process that led to incorrect responses.

According to Piaget’s (1963, 1970) point of view, children’s mode of thinking is qualitatively and fundamentally different from that of adults. He also believed that children’s thought processes are modified as they grow and mature. Because Piaget’s ideas about intellectual development are complex, only his basic concepts will be presented.

First, it is important to understand Piaget’s (1963, 1970) view of intelligence. He was concerned with *how* knowledge is acquired. Piaget avoids stating a precise definition of intelligence; instead, he attempts to describe it in general terms. Piaget speaks of intelligence as an instance of biological adaptation. He also looks at intelligence as a balance or equilibrium between an individual’s cognitive structures and the environment. His focus is on what people *do* as they interact with their environment. Knowledge of reality must be discovered and constructed—it results from a child’s actions within, and reactions to, their world. It is also important to note that Piaget is not concerned with individual differences in intelligence (Ginsburg & Opper, 1969).

Piaget’s (1970) theory rests on the contributions of maturational and environmental influences. Maturation establishes a sequence of cognitive stages controlled by heredity. The environment contributes to the child’s experiences, which dictate how the child develops. Thinking is a process of interaction between the child and the environment. An individual’s capacity to learn, according to Piaget, is derived from experiences. He viewed children as active learners and initiators of learning (Cook et al., 2020). Children are self-motivated in the construction of their own knowledge, which occurs through activity.

One consequence of interaction with the environment is that the person soon develops organizing structures or **schema**. These schema, or mental concepts, become a basis from which later cognitive structures are established. Piaget developed three concepts that he believed individuals use to organize their personal experiences into a blueprint for thinking. He referred to these adaptive processes as assimilation, accommodation, and equilibration.



Piaget is widely recognized for his ideas on the development of the intellect.

Patrick Grehan/Corbis Historical/Getty Images

Assimilation occurs when the child is able to integrate new experiences and information into existing schemes—that is, what the child already knows. Children will view new situations in light of previous experiences in their world. As an illustration, when a toddler first encounters a pony, they will most likely call it a dog or similar animal, something the toddler is already familiar with.

Accommodation is Piaget’s second process, which involves modifying existing cognitive structures so that new data can be utilized effectively. Current thought patterns and behaviors are changed to fit new situations. Accommodation involves a change in understanding. For example, two-year-old Victoria visits Santa Claus at the mall. Later that day, she is shopping with her mother and sees an elderly gentleman with a long white beard whom she calls Santa Claus. Victoria’s mother corrects her daughter’s mistake by saying that the man is old. When Victoria next meets a man with a white beard, she asks, “Are you Santa Claus, or are you just old?” Victoria has demonstrated accommodation—she changed her knowledge base.

Assimilation and accommodation are involved in the final process of equilibration. Here an attempt is made to achieve a balance or equilibrium between assimilation and accommodation. Piaget believed that all activity involves both processes. The interaction between assimilation and accommodation leads to adaptation, a process of adjusting to new situations. **Equilibration** is the tendency to reach a balance, which accounts for the formation of knowledge. Intellectual growth, according to Piaget, is achieved through the interplay of these three processes.

Four stages of cognitive development were identified by Piaget. He believed that children pass through these stages in an orderly, sequential fashion. Each stage is a prerequisite for the next one. The ages identified in Table 1.2 are only rough estimates of when a child enters each stage. Children progress at their own rate, which is influenced by their experiences and existing cognitive structures, in addition to their maturation.

TABLE 1.2 ■ Piaget’s Stages of Cognitive Development

Approximate Age	Stage	Distinguishing Characteristics
Birth to 1.5–2 years of age	Sensorimotor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge constructed through sensory perception and motor activity • Thought limited to action schemes • Beginning to develop object permanence
2–7 years of age	Preoperational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emergence of language, symbolic thinking • Intuitive rather than logical schemes • Egocentric in thought and action
7–11 years of age	Concrete operations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beginning of logical, systematic thinking; limited, however, to concrete operations • Diminished egocentrism • Understands reversibility and laws of conversation
12 years of age to adulthood	Formal operations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abstract and logical thought present • Capable of solving hypothetical problems • Deductive thinking and scientific reasoning is possible • Evidences concern about social issues, political causes

Lev Vygotsky

Russian psychologist Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky (1896–1934) was a contemporary of Piaget and another influential contributor to present understanding of how children learn and develop.

A brilliant young man (he was literate in eight languages), Vygotsky entered Moscow University in 1914, where he studied law, one of the few vocations open to a Jew in tsarist Russia. Upon graduation in 1917, he returned to the city of Gomel, where he had spent most of his youth, and taught in several local institutions. The massive changes brought about by the Russian Revolution provided Vygotsky with the opportunity to teach at Gomel's Teacher's College. It was here that he became attracted to the fields of psychology and education, where his lack of formal training as a psychologist proved to be a distinct advantage. It allowed Vygotsky to view the field of psychology as an outsider, someone with fresh perspectives and creative ideas about child development (Berk & Winsler, 1995). A visionary thinker, Vygotsky significantly shaped contemporary theories and beliefs about children's language, play, cognition, and social development.

In his book, *Mind in Society*, Vygotsky (1978) argue that people—children in particular—are the products of their social and cultural environments. Children's development is significantly influenced by their social and cultural worlds and the individuals they encounter such as parents, teachers, and peers. Social experiences were very important to Vygotsky because he believed that higher-order cognitive processes, such as language and cognition, necessitate social interaction. What begins in a social context is eventually internalized psychologically. In his writings, Vygotsky emphasized the link between the social and psychological worlds of the young child. Learning and development occur via social interaction and engagement.

Learning awakens a variety of developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in collaboration with his peers. Once these processes are internalized, they become part of the child's independent developmental achievement. (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 90)

Vygotsky (1978, 1986) believed that social interaction not only fosters intellectual development but also is vital to the development of social competence. Vygotsky's emphasis on the reciprocity of social relationships, however, is contrary to the theorizing of Piaget. Recall that Piaget saw children as active yet solitary and independent discoverers of knowledge.

Perhaps the best-known Vygotskian concept is the **zone of proximal development (ZPD)**. Simply described, it is a hypothetical region defined by Vygotsky (1978) as “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (p. 86). The ZPD exists between what a child can presently accomplish independently and what the child is capable of doing within a supportive environment. Support is typically viewed as coming from more mature thinkers like adults and competent peers, although, according to Hills (1992), it may be derived from materials and equipment. The ZPD is actually created, Tudge (1992) writes, through social interaction. It is the arena or “magic middle” (Berger, 2020) in which learning and cognitive development occur. Figure 1.2 portrays Vygotsky's concept of ZPD.

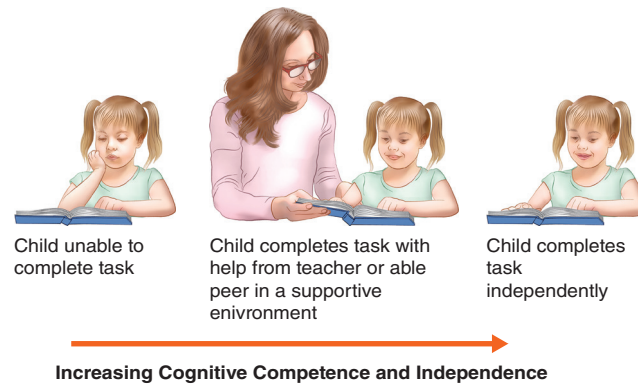
Scaffolding is an idea related to Vygotsky's notion of a ZPD. It refers to the assistance given to a child by adults and peers that allows the individual to function independently and construct new concepts. Social interaction and collaboration with others typically provide infants and young children with opportunities for scaffolding. One of the primary goals of scaffolding is to keep children working on tasks that are in their ZPD. This goal is generally obtained by providing the minimum amount of assistance necessary and then further reducing this support as the child's own competence grows (Berk & Winsler, 1995). Within this context, the teacher's or caregiver's role is one of promoting and facilitating children's learning.

As can be seen, collaboration and social interaction are key tenets in Vygotsky's sociocultural approach to understanding children's learning and development. For Vygotsky, learning leads to



Vygotsky emphasized the importance of social interaction.

Heritage Images / Hulton Archive/Getty Images

FIGURE 1.2 ■ Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development

development rather than following it. Learning is not itself development; rather, structured learning experiences play a major role giving impetus to developmental processes that would be difficult to separate from learning (Tudge, 1992). According to Vygotsky, development and learning are neither identical nor separate processes; instead, they are interrelated and integrative functions. This perspective sees developmental change as arising from a child's active engagement in a social environment with a mature partner. Growth occurs, therefore, within this ZPD. His approach to education could accurately be described as one of assisted discovery, also known as guided practice or assisted performance (Berk & Winsler, 1995).

Vygotsky also spoke on the issue of children with delays and disabilities. In fact, he enjoyed the title "Father of Soviet Defectology," which loosely translates to mean special education. Vygotsky (1993) emphasized that the principles that govern the learning and development of children without disabilities also apply to children with delays and disabilities. He was firmly convinced that the optimal development of young children with disabilities rested on fully integrating them into their social environment while ensuring that instruction occurs within their ZPD (Berk & Winsler, 1995). Children with learning difficulties should be educated, according to Vygotsky, in the same fashion as their peers without disabilities.

One of the major difficulties encountered by children with delays and disabilities is how their limitations impact their interaction with, and participation in, their social environment and not the disability itself. A child's disability often results in restricted interactions with adults and peers, and this contributes to the creation of a secondary—yet more debilitating—social deficit. Potentially more harmful than the primary disability, Vygotsky believed that these cultural limitations are more amenable to intervention than the original disorder is.

Several contemporary practices in early childhood special education can be traced to Vygotsky's theory. His conceptualizations suggest that young children with delays and disabilities should be included as much as possible in environments designed for typically developing learners. As an early advocate of the concept of inclusion, Vygotsky believed that a segregated placement results in a different social climate, thus restricting children's interactions and collaborative opportunities and thereby limiting cognitive development. Furthermore, educators should focus on children's strengths and abilities rather than their needs. What a child can do (with or without assistance) is more important than what they cannot do. Finally, a child's learning (social) environment should be rich with opportunities for scaffolding, which is seen as assisting in development of higher-order cognitive processes.

Vygotsky's contributions to children's learning and development were not limited to children with disabilities. Many well-known instructional strategies are grounded in his theories. Teachers who engage in cooperative learning activities, peer tutoring, guided practice, and reciprocal teaching and incorporate mixed-age groupings or a whole-language approach can thank Vygotsky.

A Concluding Thought

This brief examination of the historical roots of general early childhood education offers two conclusions. First, efforts on behalf of young children were and are frequently constrained by the political and social realities of the times. Second, much of what is often considered new or innovative has

been written about and tried before. Present services for young children with disabilities have been influenced significantly by the history of education for young children. As an illustration, many contemporary programs for young children with delays and disabilities emphasize parent involvement, a child-centered curriculum, and interventions based on practical applications of child development theory. These programs also recognize that early experiences impact later social, emotional, and intellectual competency (Meisels & Shonkoff, 2000).

Table 1.3 presents a brief summary of the contributions of key individuals to the development of the field of early childhood education. Attention will now be given to the contributions emerging from the second parent field—special education.

TABLE 1.3 ■ Key Contributors to the Development of Early Childhood Education	
Sixteenth Century	
Martin Luther	Strong believer in publicly supported schools. Advocate of universal, compulsory education.
Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century	
Jan Ámos Comenius (Komenský)	Advanced the notion of lifelong education, beginning in the early years. Realized the importance of a child's readiness for an activity. Stressed student's active participation in the learning process.
John Locke	Believed that children are similar to a blank tablet (<i>tabula rasa</i>). Environmental influences strongly impact a child's development. Sensory training is a critical aspect of learning.
Jean-Jacques Rousseau	Emphasized the importance of early education, which should be natural and allow for the unfolding of a child's abilities. School should focus on the interests of children.
Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi	Advocated education through nature and following the child's natural development. Early champion of the whole child and involving parents in the education process. Promoter of sensory education.
Nineteenth Century	
Robert Owen	Theorized that the early years were important in developing a child's character and behavior. Linked social change and education. His infant school served as a forerunner of kindergartens.
Friedrich Wilhelm Fröbel	Established the first kindergarten. Believed in the educational value and benefit of play. Considered development as a natural process of unfolding that provides the foundation for children's learning.
Twentieth Century	
John Dewey	Founder of the school of thought known as Progressivism. Argued that learning flows from the interests of the child rather than from activities chosen by the teacher. Coined the phrases child-centered curriculum and child-centered schools. Viewed education as a process for living; stressed social responsibility.
Maria Montessori	Believed that children learn best by direct sensory experience; was also convinced that there are sensitive periods for learning. Designed learning materials that were self-correcting, were graded in difficulty, and allowed for independent use. Classroom experiences were individualized to meet the needs of each child.

(Continued)

TABLE 1.3 ■ Key Contributors to the Development of Early Childhood Education (Continued)

Jean Piaget	<p>Developed a stage theory of cognitive development.</p> <p>Cognitive growth emerges from a child's interaction with and adaptation to their physical environment.</p> <p>Children are self-motivated in the construction of their own knowledge, which occurs through activity and discovery.</p>
Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky	<p>Russian psychologist who theorized that children's development is significantly influenced by their social and cultural environments and the child's interactions with individuals therein. Saw learning and development as interrelated and integrative functions. Originator of the concept of a zone of proximal development (ZPD).</p>

THE DEVELOPMENT OF SPECIAL EDUCATION: HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES ON CHILDREN WITH DELAYS AND DISABILITIES

The history of special education provides a second point of departure for examining the evolution of early childhood special education. Society has chosen to deal with such individuals in a variety of ways. Often, programs and practices for individuals with delays and disabilities reflect the prevailing social climate, in addition to people's ideas and attitudes about disability. A change in attitude is often a precursor to a change in the delivery of services. The foundation of societal attitude in the United States can be traced to the efforts and philosophies of various Europeans. The attention will now turn to the historical contributions of these individuals with vision and courage.

People and Ideas

Current educational theories, principles, and practices are the product of pioneering thinkers, advocates, and humanitarians. These dedicated reformers were catalysts for change. Historians typically trace the roots of special education to the late 1700s and early 1800s. This is where the following brief examination of early leaders in the field begins.

One of the earliest documented attempts at providing special education involved the efforts of Jean Marc Gaspard Itard (1775–1838) to educate Victor, the so-called wild boy of Aveyron. A French physician and expert on hearing impairment, Itard endeavored in 1799 to “civilize” and teach Victor through a sensory training program and what today would be known as operant procedures. Because this adolescent failed to fully develop language after years of instruction and only mastered basic social and self-help skills, Itard considered his efforts a failure. Yet Itard demonstrated that learning is possible even for an individual described by other professionals as a hopeless and incurable idiot. The title “Father of Special Education” is bestowed on Itard because of his groundbreaking work more than two hundred years ago.

Another important pioneer was Itard's student, Édouard Séguin (1812–1880), who designed instructional programs for children his contemporaries thought to be incapable of learning. He believed in the importance of sensorimotor activities as an aid to learning. Séguin's methodology was based on a comprehensive assessment of a young child's strengths and needs coupled with an intervention plan of sensorimotor exercises prescribed to remediate specific disabilities. Séguin also emphasized the critical importance of early education. He is considered one of the first early interventionists. His theorizing also provided the foundation for Montessori's later work with the urban poor and children with intellectual disability.

The work of Itard, Séguin, and other innovators of their time helped to establish a foundation for much of the work done in special education today. Table 1.4 summarizes the work of European and American pioneers whose ideas have significantly influenced special education in the United States.

TABLE 1.4 ■ Pioneering Contributors to the Development of Special Education

Contributors	Their Ideas
Jacob Rodrigues Pêreire (1715–1780)	Introduced the idea that persons who were deaf could be taught to communicate. Developed an early form of sign language. Provided inspiration and encouragement for the work of Itard and Séguin.
Philippe Pinel (1745–1826)	A reform-minded French physician who was concerned with the humanitarian treatment of individuals with mental illness. Strongly influenced the later work of Itard.
Jean Marc Gaspard Itard (1775–1838)	A French doctor who secured lasting fame due to his systematic efforts to educate an adolescent thought to be severely intellectually disabled. Recognized the importance of sensory stimulation.
Thomas Gallaudet (1787–1851)	Taught children with hearing impairments to communicate via a system of manual signs and symbols. Established the first institution for individuals with deafness in the United States.
Samuel Gridley Howe (1801–1876)	An American physician and educator accorded international fame due to his success in teaching individuals with visual and hearing impairments. Founded the first residential facility for the blind and was instrumental in inaugurating institutional care for children with intellectual disability.
Dorothea Lynde Dix (1802–1887)	A contemporary of Howe, Dix was one of the first Americans to champion better and more humane treatment of people with mental illness. Instigated the establishment of several institutions for individuals with mental disorders.
Louis Braille (1809–1852)	A French educator, who himself was blind, who developed a tactile system of reading and writing for people who were blind. His system, based on a code of six embossed dots, is still used today. Today this standardized code is known as Unified English Braille.
Édouard Séguin (1812–1880)	A student of Itard, Séguin was a French physician responsible for developing teaching methods for children with intellectual disability. His training program emphasized sensorimotor activities. After immigrating to the United States, he helped found the organization that was a forerunner of the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities.
Francis Galton (1822–1911)	Scientist concerned with individual differences. As a result of studying eminent persons, he believed that genius is solely the result of heredity. Those with superior abilities are born, not made.
Alfred Binet (1857–1911)	A French psychologist, Binet authored the first developmental assessment scale capable of quantifying intelligence. Also originated the concept of mental age with his colleague Théodore Simon.
Lewis Terman (1877–1956)	An American educator and psychologist who revised Binet's original assessment instrument. The result was the publication of the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scales. Terman developed the notion of intelligence quotient (IQ). Also famous for lifelong study of gifted individuals. Credited as being the grandfather of gifted education.

The Establishment of Institutions

Taking their cues from the Europeans, other American reformers such as Boston physician and humanitarian Samuel Gridley Howe (1801–1876) spearheaded the establishment of residential programs. A successful teacher of students who were both deaf and blind, Howe was instrumental in establishing the New England Asylum for the Blind (later the Perkins School) in the early 1830s. Almost two decades later, he played a major role in founding an experimental residential school for children with intellectual disability, the Massachusetts School for Idiotic and Feeble-minded Youth. This facility was the first institution in the United States for individuals with intellectual disability. Now known as the Fernald Developmental Center in honor of its third superintendent, the center closed its doors in November 2014.

Residential schools for children with disabilities received additional impetus due to the untiring and vigorous efforts of social activist Dorothea Lynde Dix (1802–1887). A retired teacher, Dix was very influential in helping to establish several state institutions for people believed to be mentally ill, a group of individuals she felt to be grossly underserved and largely mistreated.

By the conclusion of the nineteenth century, residential institutions for persons with disabilities were a well-established part of the American social fabric. Initially established to offer training and some form of education in a protective lifelong environment, these institutions gradually deteriorated, for a variety of reasons, in the early decades of the twentieth century. The mission of the institutions changed from training to one of custodial care and isolation. The early optimism of special education was replaced by prejudice, unproven scientific views, and fear that helped to convert institutions into gloomy warehouses for the forgotten and neglected (Gargiulo & Bouck, 2021).

Special Education in Public Schools

It was not until the latter part of the nineteenth century that special education began to appear in the public schools. In fact, in 1898, Alexander Graham Bell (1847–1922), a teacher of children who were deaf, advocated that public schools begin serving individuals with disabilities. Services for students with disabilities began slowly and served only a small minority of those who needed them. The first public school class was organized in Boston in 1869 to serve children who were deaf. Children with intellectual disability first attended public schools about three decades later when a class was established in Providence, Rhode Island. The Chicago public schools inaugurated a class for children with physical impairments in 1899, quickly followed by one for children who were blind in 1900 (Gargiulo & Bouck, 2021). By the mid-1920s, well over half of the largest cities in America provided some type of special education services. The establishment of these programs was seen as an indication of the progressive status of the school district. Still, these earliest ventures mainly served children with mild disabilities; individuals with severe or multiple impairments were either kept at home or sent to institutions.



Institutions at one time were common across the United States.

iStock.com/BDphoto

Meisels and Shonkoff (2000) assert that the economic depression of the 1930s and the ensuing world war led to the decline of further expansion of special education programs in public schools; instead, greater reliance was placed on institutionalization. The residential facilities, however, were already overcrowded and provided educationally limited experiences. The postwar years saw an increase in the recognition of the needs of Americans with disabilities. Impetus for the shift of societal attitude resulted from two related factors—the large number of people deemed unfit for military service and the large number of war veterans who returned home with disabilities.

With the Second World War behind the nation, the stage was set for the rapid expansion of special education. This growth has been described as a virtual explosion of services occurring at both the state and federal levels. Litigation at all levels, legislative activities, increased fiscal resources, and federal leadership,

in addition to social and political activism and advocacy, are some of the factors that helped fuel the movement and revitalize special education (Gargiulo & Bouck, 2021). Significant benefits for children with disabilities resulted from these efforts. For example, in 1948, approximately 12 percent of children with disabilities were receiving an education appropriate for their needs (Ballard et al., 1982), yet from 1947 to 1972, the number of students enrolled in special education programs increased an astonishing 716 percent as compared to an 82 percent increase in total public school enrollment (Dunn, 1973).

The last decades of the twentieth century also witnessed a flurry of activity on behalf of children with delays and disabilities. Evidence of this trend includes the 1975 landmark legislation PL 94–142; the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA; originally known as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act); and its 1986 amendments, PL 99–457; together they constitute one of the most comprehensive statutes affecting infants, toddlers, and preschoolers with delays and disabilities and their families. The growth of services for preschoolers with delays and disabilities, programs for infants and toddlers, the transition initiative, and calls for inclusion of students with disabilities (discussed in Chapter 4) are additional indications of a changing attitude and expansion of opportunities for children and youth with disabilities.

COMPENSATORY EDUCATION PROGRAMS

The **compensatory education** movement of the 1960s also played a major role in the development of early childhood special education. As the name implies, this effort was designed to compensate for or ameliorate the environmental conditions and early learning experiences of children living in poverty. Such children were thought to be disadvantaged or “culturally deprived” (a popular term in the 1960s). The goal of compensatory education programs was to assist these children “by providing educational and environmental experiences that might better prepare them for the school experience” (Gearhart et al., 1993, p. 385). The compensatory education movement had its foundation in the idealism and heightened social consciousness that typified America more than five decades ago. It was also aided by the convergence of three distinct social issues: President Kennedy’s interest in the field of intellectual disability, President Johnson’s declaration of a War on Poverty, and the emerging civil rights movement (Meisels & Shonkoff, 2000).

In addition to sociological reasons, the compensatory education movement was aided by solid theoretical arguments. The cogent and persuasive writings of J. McVicker Hunt (1961) and fellow scholar Benjamin Bloom (1964) raised serious questions about the assumption of fixed or static intelligence. The malleability of intelligence and the importance of the early years for intellectual development were recognized by scientists and policymakers alike. Thus, the powerful contribution of early and enriched experiences on later development laid the cornerstone for programs like Head Start. It also set the stage for the concept of early intervention. It was thought that the deleterious effects of poverty could be remediated by early and intensive programming. The emphasis of preschool programs shifted from custodial caregiving to programming for specific developmental gains (Thurman & Widerstrom, 1990).

Representative Compensatory Programs

Project Head Start

Project Head Start came into existence as a result of the 1964 Economic Opportunity Act. Federally sponsored, Head Start was a critical component of a larger national agenda referred to as the War on Poverty. As the first nationwide compensatory education program, Head Start was conceived as an early intervention effort aimed at reducing the potential for school failure in disadvantaged young children from low socioeconomic communities. Initiated in the summer of 1965 as an eight-week pilot program, Project Head Start served approximately 560,000 four- and five-year-olds in more than 2,500 communities. In 2019, more than 873,000 preschoolers from low-income families received services. Since its inception more than five decades ago, Head Start has served more than 37 million children and their families (Head Start Program Facts, 2019).

According to Zigler and Valentine (1979), the first volley on the War on Poverty was constructed around three fundamental ideas:

1. Compensatory experiences initiated in the preschool years would result in successful adjustment to school and enhanced academic performance.
2. Early intellectual growth and development is directly dependent upon the quality of care and type of experiences to which young children are exposed.
3. Socioeconomically impoverished environments include biological, environmental, and other risk factors, which can adversely affect chances of school success and impede intellectual growth.

Head Start was envisioned to be a comprehensive, multidimensional intervention effort aimed at the very roots of poverty in communities across America. It represented a coordinated federal effort at comprehensive intervention in the lives of young children (Zigler & Valentine, 1979). Head Start was unique in its emphasis on the total development of the young child and on strengthening the family unit, as well as in its comprehensive nature of the services provided. The goals of the Head Start effort included increasing the child's physical, social, and emotional development; developing the child's intellectual skills and readiness for school; and improving the health of the child by providing medical, dental, social, and psychological services. Head Start was also unusual not only in its intent—to bring about a change for the child, their family, and the community—but also for its use of a multidisciplinary intervention model wherein the importance of seeing the whole child was recognized (Brain, 1979).

Parents played an unprecedented role in the Head Start program. Parents' involvement and their meaningful participation were considered vitally important. They had a key voice in the local decision-making process in addition to opportunities for employment in the program or for volunteering their expertise. The inclusion of training programs for low-income adults and the establishment of a career development ladder for employees and volunteers also distinguished the Head Start program.

It is important to remember that Head Start was not specifically directed at children with disabilities, although many of the young children served would today be identified as an at-risk population. The enactment of PL 92-424 in 1972 did require, however, that the project reserve no less than 10 percent of its enrollment for children with disabilities.

Fortunately, thanks to changes in federal regulations regarding Head Start, this program is now able to play a larger role in the lives of young children with disabilities. In January 1993, new rules for providing services to preschoolers with disabilities enrolled in Head Start were published in the *Federal Register*. Some of the many changes guiding Head Start agencies are the following requirements:

- A model designed to locate and serve young children with disabilities and their parents
- The development of an individualized education program (IEP) for each child determined to be disabled
- Quicker screening of children suspected of needing special education services
- Revised evaluation procedures for determining who might be eligible for special education and related services
- The establishment of a disability services coordinator who would be responsible for overseeing the delivery of services to preschoolers with disabilities (Head Start Program Final Rule, 1993)

These goals are to be met through a detailed and comprehensive disabilities service plan, which outlines the strategies for meeting the needs of children with delays and disabilities and their families. Among the several provisions are standards that call for the assurance that young children with disabilities will be included in the full range of activities and services provided to other children; a component that addresses the transitioning from infant and toddler programs into Head Start, as well as exiting

Head Start to the next placement; and a provision stipulating that eligible children will be provided a special education with related services designed to meet their unique needs. Recent statistics indicate that 13 percent of individuals, or approximately 113,500 children, enrolled in Head Start have an identified disability (Head Start Program Facts, 2019). By way of comparison, only 10.4 percent of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers were served via IDEA during the 2019–2020 school year (U.S. Department of Education, 2022).

In December 2007, Head Start was reauthorized through 2012 via the enactment of PL 110–134, the Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007 (also simply called the Head Start Act). The legislation was designed to help greater numbers of children from low-income families and those whose families are unhomed begin kindergarten ready to succeed. Emphasis was also placed on ensuring that educators working in Head Start programs are well prepared with at least 50 percent of these teachers possessing a baccalaureate degree in early childhood education or related area by 2013. Yearly professional development activities are also required of all full-time Head Start teachers. Additionally, individuals providing direct services to children and families in Early Head Start programs were mandated to possess a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential by 2010. Lastly, Head Start programs are to incorporate research-based early childhood curricula that support children's emerging literacy skills and vocabulary development.

One consequence of the passage of PL 110–134 in 2007 was the development of new Head Start performance guidelines that define standards and minimum requirements for Head Start programs. Almost ten years in the making, these standards represent the first revision since the original standards were promulgated in 1975. These revisions, published on September 1, 2016, affect both Head Start and Early Head Start programs. The goal of these efforts is to promote effective teaching and learning via a comprehensive and rigorous curriculum that is developmentally appropriate and aids in school readiness. Some of the other provisions call for the phase-in of all-day, year-round schooling in an effort to better prepare children for kindergarten. Additionally, individualized professional development activities aimed at improving teacher skills and competencies were set forth while the new rules also strengthen Head Start's commitment to children with disabilities, children in foster care, families experiencing homelessness, and bilingual children. Finally, these new guidelines retain parents' role as key decision makers in program governance (Administration for Children and Families, 2017).

Head Start is considered to be a visionary program model. The framers of the project had the foresight to insist on comprehensive services, meaningful parent involvement, and a multidisciplinary approach to intervention. Many of these aspects can be found in contemporary programs and legislation. Head Start also served as a forerunner of other compensatory initiatives, which will now be examined.

Project Follow-Through

Project Follow-Through was developed in 1967 in response to controversy surrounding the effectiveness of the Head Start efforts. Some educational research data suggested that the cognitive gains of the Head Start experiment were not maintained once the children enrolled in elementary school (Cicerelli et al., 1969). Professionals quickly realized that a short-term intervention program was ineffective in inoculating young children against the deleterious effects of poverty. Follow-Through was introduced in an effort to continue the gains developed in Head Start. A new model was designed, which extended the Head Start concept to include children enrolled in kindergarten through the third grade. Like its predecessor, Project Follow-Through was comprehensive in its scope of services while maintaining the Head Start emphasis on creating change in the home and community. Unfortunately, a congressional funding crisis precipitated a retooling of the project's original goals and objectives. According to Peterson's (1987) analysis, the focus shifted from a service operation very much like Head Start to an educational experiment dedicated to assessing the effectiveness of various approaches aimed at increasing the educational attainment of young disadvantaged and at-risk children. Rather than offering a single model of early childhood education for low-income children, Project Follow-Through studied a variety of approaches and strategies, realizing that a singular model would not meet the needs of all children. Local public schools were free to adopt the program model that they believed best met the unique needs of their communities.

Home Start

In 1972, another program variation, **Home Start**, was created. Simply stated, this program took the education component typically found in Head Start centers into a child's home. The focus of Home Start was low-income parents and their preschool-aged children. Efforts were aimed at providing educational stimulation to the children in addition to developing and enhancing the parenting skills of adults. This task was accomplished through the utilization of home visitors who were skilled and trained residents of the community.

Early Head Start

Early Head Start emerged from a growing recognition among service providers, researchers, policy-makers, and politicians of the need to extend the Head Start model downward to the birth-to-three age group. This awareness of the need for comprehensive, intensive, and year-round services for very young children resulted in Early Head Start (Halpern, 2000; Meisels & Shonkoff, 2000). The 1994 reauthorization of Head Start (PL 103–252) created Early Head Start, a program focusing on low-income families with infants and toddlers as well as on women who are pregnant. The mission of this program, which began in 1995, is to

- promote healthy pregnancy outcomes;
- enhance children's physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development;
- enable parents to be better caregivers and teachers to their children; and
- help parents meet their goals, including economic independence.



Head Start was the first nationwide compensatory education program.

Chicago Tribune/Tribune News Service/Getty Images

Early Head Start incorporates a “four corner strategy,” which embodies child, family, community, and staff development. Services provided through this program include high-quality early education and care both in and out of the home; home visits; child care; parent education; comprehensive health services including services before, during, and after pregnancy; nutrition information; and peer support groups for parents. Early Head Start recently served more than 216,000 infants and toddlers (65 percent of the children are either one or two years old). Slightly more than 200,000 families also received a wide range of health, educational, and social services. Additionally, approximately 15,000 pregnant women were served by Early Head Start programs (Office of Head Start, 2019).

Research Activities

In addition to involvement and action by the federal government, individual scientists and researchers have been concerned about the damaging consequences of poverty on young children and their families. Two representative intervention projects are the Carolina Abecedarian Project and the Perry Preschool Project. Both of these programs focus on improving the cognitive skills of young children, thereby increasing their chances for later scholastic success.

The Carolina Abecedarian Project attempted to modify environmental forces impinging upon the intellectual development of young children living in poverty. Designed in 1972 as a longitudinal experiment, Craig Ramey and his colleagues (Ramey & Campbell, 1977, 1984; Ramey & Smith, 1977) found that children enrolled in a center-based preschool intervention program who were exposed to intensive and stimulating early learning experiences achieved higher IQ scores when compared to matched age-mates who did not participate in the project. A follow-up of participants found that, at age twelve and fifteen, children exposed to early intervention continued to outperform control subjects on standardized measures of intellectual development and academic achievement. Additionally, these individuals had significantly fewer grade retentions and special education placements (Campbell & Ramey, 1994, 1995). As young adults, these individuals scored higher on measures of intellectual and academic achievement and were more likely to attend a four-year college (Campbell et al., 2002). The Carolina program clearly demonstrates, as noted earlier, the plasticity of intelligence and the positive effects of early environmental intervention.

The second illustration is the Perry Preschool Project in Ypsilanti, Michigan. This program is one of the best examples of the long-term educational benefit of early childhood experiences. The Perry Preschool Project was designed as a longitudinal study to measure the effects of a quality preschool education on children living in poverty. Based on the work of Jean Piaget, it strongly emphasized cognitive development. More than 120 disadvantaged children were followed from age three until late adolescence. The results of the investigation can be summarized as follows:

Results to age 19 indicate long-lasting beneficial effects of preschool education in improving cognitive performance during early childhood; in improving scholastic placement and achievement during the school years; in decreasing delinquency and crime, the use of welfare assistance, and the incidence of teenage pregnancy; and in increasing high school graduation rates and the frequency of enrollment in postsecondary programs and employment. (Berrueta-Clement et al., 1984, p. 1)

Additional longitudinal follow-up (Schweinhart et al., 1993; Schweinhart et al., 2005) demonstrated that, in comparison to a control group, individuals in their mid-twenties and at age forty who participated in this project as preschoolers had higher incomes, were more likely to own a home, had significantly fewer arrests, and had less involvement with community social service agencies.

Likewise, other investigators (Bakken et al., 2017; Campbell et al., 2012; Reynolds & Temple, 2005; Temple & Reynolds, 2007) also report long-term positive outcomes for children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds who participated in high-quality early education intervention programs.

Despite the methodological difficulties inherent in conducting early intervention research in a scientifically rigorous fashion, this research evidence unequivocally illustrates that early intervention generates positive academic outcomes and significantly improves the quality of participants' later lives. Most early childhood special educators fully agree with Guralnick's (2005) observation that "the early years may well constitute a unique window of opportunity to alter children's developmental trajectories" (p. 314).

A Concluding Thought

It is safe to conclude that, generally speaking, compensatory education programs do benefit young children who are at risk of not succeeding in school. The optimism exhibited by the early supporters of various intervention initiatives has been tempered, however, by a host of political, financial, and other factors. Reality has reminded educators, policymakers, and researchers that there are no quick

or magical solutions to complex social problems like poverty. Yet it is important not to be overly pessimistic; education does remain an important vehicle for successfully altering the outcomes of young children and their families.

SUMMARY

Although early childhood special education is a relatively young field, the forces that have helped to shape its identity have a rich and distinguished history. Drawing upon the work of early educational theorists and writers such as Piaget, Vygotsky, Montessori, Dewey, and others, early childhood special education has evolved into a distinct field with its own identity and theoretical underpinnings. Yet it is interesting to note that many of the current practices in early childhood special education (e.g., individualized instruction, family-centered services) and the values to which the field of early childhood special education subscribes are not especially contemporary. Perhaps there is truth to the maxim that “The past is prologue.” Three distinct fields—general early childhood education, special education, and compensatory education—have contributed, in their own ways, to the emergence of a wide array of programs and services for young children with delays and disabilities and their families. Professionals representing multiple disciplines recognize how extremely important the early years of a child’s life are for later social, emotional, and cognitive growth and development (Dunst, 2007; Harkness et al., 2013).

Today the field of early childhood special education is perhaps best conceptualized as a synthesis of various theories, principles, and practices that have evolved from each of its parent fields (Peterson, 1987). Early childhood special education is a field that continues to evolve and is in a strong position to successfully build on the accomplishments and achievements of the past.

KEY TERMS

Accommodation	Occupations
Assimilation	Prepared environment
Auto-education	Progressivism
Compensatory education	Project Follow-Through
Didactic materials	Project Head Start
Early Head Start	Scaffolding
Early intervention	Schema
Early childhood special education	Sensitive periods
Equilibration	Tabula rasa
Gifts	Zone of proximal development (ZPD)
Home Start	

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. Various religious leaders, philosophers, and educational theorists played major roles in the development of early childhood education. List five of them and their contributions found in contemporary early childhood programs.
2. Describe the “gifts” and “occupations” of Fröbel’s children’s garden.
3. Explain Dewey’s ideas about educating young children.
4. Identify the major elements of Montessori’s approach to teaching young children.
5. How did Piaget believe intelligence develops?
6. Describe Vygotsky’s concept of zone of proximal development (ZPD).
7. Why would Vygotsky be considered an early advocate of integration?

8. What role did Europeans play in the development of special education in the United States?
9. Describe the three parent fields that have influenced the field of early childhood special education.
10. Define the term *compensatory education*.
11. What is the purpose of Project Head Start and Early Head Start?
12. List five significant events that have helped to shape the field of early childhood special education.

REFLECTION AND APPLICATION

1. What evidence do you see of Dewey, Piaget, and Vygotsky in today's early childhood education settings? What are the strengths of each philosophy? Compare and contrast the three philosophies.
2. In what ways do you see contemporary educators building on the work of earlier philosophers? How does each of the philosophers mentioned in this chapter describe curriculum? What are their fundamental ideas about how children learn?
3. What influence does the environment have on infants, toddlers, and young children in today's society? What did Dewey say about the environment and its impact on teaching and learning? What did Piaget and Vygotsky say about the environment and early childhood learning?
4. How has the development of compensatory programs such as Head Start helped to strengthen today's young children and families experiencing poverty? In what ways can early childhood special education programs make compensatory programs available to their children and families? Provide examples.

Do not copy, post, or distribute