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SECOND EDITION  
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THEORIES  
SIMPLIFIED**  
BOB BATES

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to apply  
them to  
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B 1/I 1 Mohan Cooperative Industrial Area  
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3 Church Street  
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Production editor: Nicola Carrier  
Copyeditor: Christine Bitten  
Proofreader: Tom Bedford  
Indexer: Cathy Heath  
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At SAGE we take sustainability seriously. Most of our products are printed in the UK using responsibly sourced papers and boards. When we print overseas we ensure sustainable papers are used as measured by the PREPS grading system. We undertake an annual audit to monitor our sustainability.

This book is dedicated to my wife, who has been a tower of strength and never moaned once when I disappeared at 5:00am to grab a McDonald's latte and four hours' worth of their electricity to work on a chapter in the book.

I would also like to thank the staff at New Cross Hospital in Wolverhampton and Heartlands Hospital in Birmingham for the excellent care and attention they have shown my wife.



# PRAISE FOR BOB'S WORK

'*Learning Theories Simplified* is a wonderful book. It is an excellent example of sparking motivation to learn the subject. Even though I've always been interested in how people think and learn, reading his book makes me excited about continuing reading it.'

Valeriy Kozmenko - Associate Professor: Department of Internal Medicine, University of South Dakota

'I have a bookshelf of management and coaching books. Bob's first book has pride of place. I look forward to the next one.'

Jo Morgan - Managing Director: Charlie's Training Academy

'I'm fascinated by how Bob is able to reduce complicated theory into so few words and make its understanding and application easy to follow.'

Gary Bird - CEO: Manor Farm Community College

'Bob's humour and fascinating insights into life and learning is what makes this book work so well.'

Trevor Cox - Managing Director: Phoenix Training

'Before I read the chapter in the book on Vygotsky, I never knew what the Zone of Proximal Development was. Bob makes it seem so simple to understand.'

Summiah Habib - Student on the Diploma in Education & Training

'I wish that I'd had this book when I did my degree in Educational Studies.'

Joy Cotterill - Higher Level Teaching Assistant & Community Cohesion Leader: Crockett's Community Primary School

'Both of the 'Special Needs and Disabilities' books and the original *Learning Theories Simplified* book are life savers throughout my studies and I'm excited to continue reading your work! I'd personally like to thank you for being such a big help during my first two years of university, and I know I will religiously rely on your books throughout my teaching career!'

Kelsey Banks BA (Hons) - Primary Education Student at Wolverhampton University





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# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bob Bates was a Senior Executive in the Civil Service for 20 years. During this time, he also worked as a staff trainer and coach and mentor to people with disabilities. He then set up his own management and training consultancy (The Arundel Group), which celebrates its 25th anniversary next year. His work as a management consultant covered a number of local and central government projects as well as working as a trainer with major UK private sector companies.



In the late 1990s Bob started a lecturing career, during which time he gained two masters degrees in management and education and a PhD in education. He has taught over 1000 teachers and trainers on graduate and post-graduate programmes at two universities. He currently manages and teaches on City & Guild Teaching Award, Certificate and Diploma courses in a community college.

The first edition of *Learning Theories Simplified* was Bob's third book. His first book, *The Little Book of BIG Management Theories*, written with Jim McGrath, was on WHSmiths' non-fiction bestsellers list for nearly a year, is being translated into 15 languages, including Japanese and Arabic, and was chosen by the Chartered Management Institute as the CMI's Practical Management Book of the Year for 2014. His second book, *The Little Book of BIG Coaching Theories*, published in February 2015, was also a bestseller and has been translated into German and Thai. His fourth book, *A Quick Guide to Special Needs and Disabilities*, was published by SAGE in 2016 and his fifth book, *Educational Leadership Simplified* co-written with Andy Bailey, was published by SAGE in 2018.

Bob shares his time these days between writing, working voluntarily for a charity that promotes health and education in the Gambia, researching into offender learning and homelessness and teaching Adult Education Teachers.

Bob can be contacted through his website [bobbates.co.uk](http://bobbates.co.uk) (here you get an option to pick *Research* or *Bad Bob Bates* - please choose the former) or email [saddlers9899@aol.com](mailto:saddlers9899@aol.com).





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I am indebted to all of these people.



# NEW TO THIS EDITION

This edition of *Learning Theories Simplified* offers an additional 30 theories, mostly related to early childhood theory and developmental strategies. There are also entries relating to working with learners with additional needs and examples of teaching and learning approaches from schools around the world and, by popular demand, more diagrams and some challenges, which Bob calls *Critical Perspectives*, where he invites you to critique: (a) what the theorist has to say about the subject, (b) his understanding of their work or (c) the appropriateness of any actions he may have taken in the case studies.



# HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This book will:

- help you understand how people learn and your role in the process
- develop your skills as a teacher/trainer/coach/mentor
- enable you to apply learning theory to practice
- support you to manage key aspects of programme design, delivery and evaluation.

This book is easy to use but effective. It is written for busy people who are more interested in solutions to problems and the application of a theory rather than a critical analysis of the theory.

The book is divided into four parts:

- **Part 1** covers **classical learning theory** from the early educational philosophers through to the behaviourist, cognitivist, humanist and neuroscientists of the twentieth century.
- **Part 2** looks at more **contemporary thinking** on learning and teaching and covers the work of some of the most cited and respected current educational thinkers on issues related to the personal qualities of teachers and learners.
- **Part 3** looks at **early childhood and developmental strategies**. Although the emphasis here is on working with younger children, some of the ideas can be adapted and adopted for working with all ages. This part also looks at some approaches that you can undertake when working with learners with additional needs and examples of different teaching and learning approaches from schools around the world.
- **Part 4** looks at the theories and models underpinning **curriculum development, lesson planning, delivery, assessment and evaluation**. This part is for teacher/trainers who are involved in developing, delivering and evaluating programmes of study.

Each part is broken down into a number of theories and models from well-known thinkers in that field. Each model or theory will be explained in less than 500 words (many with accompanying diagrams) and then a *How to Use It* section, again in less than 500 words, where the theories are made practical for ease of application with key points for action in the classroom.

I've used a number of different approaches in the *How to Use It* entries:

- **Do it steps:** offering you a simple step-by-step approach, often using acronyms or mnemonics, which you can follow in order to apply the theory or model.
- **Reflection points and challenges:** encouraging reflection on real-life case studies or problems in order to develop your understanding of how to apply the theory or model. There's even the odd trip to the cinema.
- **Analogies and metaphors:** taking you out of the real world for just a moment and getting you to relate the theory to something which has no obvious bearing on the theory or model but from which understanding and meaning can be drawn.
- **Tips for the classroom:** three tips from each entry for you to try out in the classroom.
- **Critical perspectives:** this is where I encourage you to think about the entry. The challenge is for you to consolidate your learning by critiquing: (a) what the theorist has to say about the subject, (b) my understanding of their work or (c) the appropriateness of any actions I may have taken.
- **Further reading:** books or articles I've drawn the source material from.

With regard to your answers to any of the critical perspectives, please feel free to drop me an email if you want to give me feedback or if you want me to comment on your thoughts on the subject.

The one thing that I've learned over the years is that everyone has their own idiosyncratic preferences when it comes to learning. What I do hope is that there is something for everyone in the *How to Use It* entries.

# INTRODUCTION

'People learn to hate but you can teach them to love'

Nelson Mandela

This book is written for teachers, trainers and managers of any individuals or groups who want to understand more about how people think and learn and more importantly how to use this understanding to get the best out of people. I've tried not to suggest that any one branch of theory is better than the rest or that any one theorist within a particular branch should be read to the exclusion of others. The decision on this is down to you and the context in which you are working with learners. I don't claim for one minute that, by reading Theory 32, you will know all you need to know about the work of Leon Festinger to be considered an expert on *cognitive dissonance*. What I do promise you is that you will know how *cognitive dissonance* works and how to apply it in practice.

This book doesn't attempt to trivialise great theory by its brevity but it does recognise that teachers, trainers and managers, and the people they are working with, are very busy and may not have the time to devote to reading Carl Rogers' *On Becoming a Person* or Robert Dilts' *Strategies of Genius*. Don't get me wrong, these are great books and if you want detailed academic perspectives on theories such as Cognitivism or Humanism go out and buy them. What I am offering is a basic insight into theories and models and, what's very often missing in academic works, how you can apply them in practice.

Throughout the book, I refer to:

- the organisation as being any work place, education or training institution
- learning as being any developmental process being undertaken by the individual (for example, teaching, training, coaching or mentoring)
- learners as being anyone benefiting from the developmental process
- the *teacher* as being anyone supporting the learner (this could be in their role as a teacher or as a trainer, mentor or coach)
- the classroom as being any environment where learning takes place
- a session as an event covering a learning experience.

If you see the term *teacher* and your role is as a *trainer*, *coach* or a *mentor*, then I don't think it's too great a leap of faith to recognise that the theories and models apply equally to you.





**PART 1**  
**CLASSICAL LEARNING**  
**THEORIES**





# INTRODUCTION TO PART 1

Theories relating to understanding how people learn date as far back as 500 BC and the Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle. Plato argued that truth and knowledge were within (it was natural) and that people had an intrinsic desire to do what they did, whereas Aristotle's view was that it is something that is taught (it happened as a result of nurturing). The nature vs nurture debate is one of the oldest issues in human development that focuses on the relative contributions of genetic inheritance and environmental conditioning.

For many years this was a philosophical debate with well-known thinkers such as Rene Descartes suggesting that certain things are inherent in people, or that they simply occur naturally (the nativists' viewpoint), arguing the toss with others such as John Locke who believed in the principle of *tabula rasa*, which suggests the mind begins as a blank state and that everything we become is determined by our experiences (the empiricists' viewpoint). Towards the end of the nineteenth century the debate was taken up by a new breed of theorists who developed the discipline of psychology.

For most of the early part of the twentieth century behavioural psychologists suggested that humans were simply advanced mammals that reacted to stimuli. *Behaviourism* remained the basis of teaching and learning until it was challenged in the period between the two world wars by psychologists who argued that thinking and learning was a developmental cognitive process in which individuals create, rather than receive, knowledge. This gave rise to the movement known as *Cognitivism*. After the Second World War, a third branch of theory came into force with the belief that learners were individuals whose learning should not be separate from life itself and who should be given the opportunity to determine for themselves the nature of their own learning. This became known as *Humanism*.

The new millennium, and the growing interest in neuroscience, provided a fresh insight into how people process information. Although theories around what role the brain plays in the learning process are still mostly speculative, there does appear to be common consent that the mind was set up to process external stimuli, to draw connections with other stimuli and to make sense of what was happening.

Part 1 will give you an insight into some of the key theories that were developed from the early philosophers through to more modern-day philosophical viewpoints and variations within the psychological approaches of the twentieth century, culminating with the development of neuroscience and brain processing theory.





# SECTION 1.1: EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY

Knowing where to start and end in this section was probably the hardest part of writing this book. It seems almost sacrilegious not to include Confucius or Siddhartha Gautama (the Buddha) in any discourse on philosophy, or even to fail to acknowledge Thales of Miletus as the founding father of philosophy. The budget for this section was to be nine entries. I couldn't drop the contributions of any of the three great Greek philosophers (Socrates, Plato and Aristotle); wanted to continue the debate through the renaissance and age of reason (Descartes and Locke); into the age of revolution (Rousseau); and, finally, throw in writers with a more modern socio-philosophical perspective (Sartre, Nietzsche, Dewey and Freire).

So, with apologies to Pythagoras, Hobbes, Kant, Russell and dozens of others, I set about trying to condense the ideas of some of the truly great thinkers into less than 500 words. My first problem was with the theoretical contributions of the Greek philosophers. This was difficult on two fronts: Socrates, who is accredited as the founder of western philosophy and was the teacher of Plato, wrote very little about his ideas, established no school of learning and held no particular theories of his own. Much of what we know about Socrates came from the writings of Plato. Although Plato and Aristotle wrote more about their ideas, my second problem was that again, there was no discernible theoretical model to use as the basis for discussion. In each of the first three contributions therefore, I have tried to encapsulate the key message of each of the philosophers and show how they can be applied to teaching.

Things got a little bit easier some 2000 years down the road when clearer theoretical models began to emerge with the work of Descartes, Locke and, a bit later, Rousseau. Descartes and Locke continued the nature/nurture debate that Plato and Aristotle started about whether truth and knowledge are found within us (rationalism) or are something we acquire (empiricism). Rousseau's work is peppered with social commentary; a theme that Dewey, Sartre and Nietzsche picked up on and Freire so vigorously pursued in the latter part of the twentieth century.

Someone once claimed that philosophy is not just the preserve of brilliant but eccentric thinkers, it's what everyone does when they're not busy doing important things. The ideas that are used in this section are probably a bit more than that; they're less about finding answers to the issues you face in the classroom and more about the process of trying to find these answers. There are some great processes to follow in this section - give them a try and don't be confused if some processes contradict others; that's the fun of philosophy!



**S**ocrates is often considered to be one of the founders of western philosophy. He developed the *Socratic* or *dialectical* method of philosophy which is based on persistent questioning and the belief that the life which is unexamined is not worth living.

Here is a summary of some of the key questions and answers that Socrates posed related to teaching and learning:

- **What is knowledge?** He categorised knowledge into the trivial and the important. Trivial knowledge doesn't provide the possessor with any useful expertise or wisdom. Important knowledge relates to ethics and morals and can be defined by how best to live one's life.
- **Why do we need to learn?** Although he believed that goodness and truth, and ethical and moral instincts were inherent in everyone, they could only be bought to the surface through learning.
- **How do we learn?** He described learning as the search for truth. Learning would only occur as the result of questioning and interpreting the wisdom of others and when one comes to recognise their own ignorance and faults.
- **Who do we learn from?** He didn't believe that any one person, or any one particular school of thought, had the wisdom or legitimate authority to teach things. He did however argue that individuals are not self-sufficient and that other people were necessary to share the experience and wisdom from which learning could flourish.
- **Where do we learn?** He questioned the established idea that learning could only take place in educational establishments and advocated that learning should take place wherever and whenever people met.
- **When do we learn?** He argued that this happened whenever two or more people engaged in meaningful dialogue and when one person was willing to see their own faults, weaknesses and negative tendencies.

The Socratic method of teaching is based on the teacher asking leading questions and guiding the learner to discovery. Its cornerstone was the dialogue between the teacher and the learner that used critical inquiry to challenge preconceived thoughts and established doctrines.

### How to use it

If you follow the principle of the unexamined life being worthless, then you must be honest in how you examine what you've done. Admitting failure and learning from errors is as important as reflecting on your successes in making you a good teacher.

Michael Jordan, arguably one of the greatest basketball players of all time, admitted that, throughout a career spanning 15 years, he had missed more than 9000 shots at the basket; lost nearly 300 games; and missed important game-winning shots on 26 occasions. He admits to having failed time and time again; which is why he feels he was a success.



## THE UNEXAMINED LIFE IS WORTHLESS

To be prepared to fully reflect on what you have done, look at the reflective practice models covered in theories 125-127. There's something there for everyone in terms of the scope and scale of reflection and some great models to use.

If you want to follow the doctrines of Socrates:

- Never be afraid of making mistakes. OK, giving out wrong information to learners will have to be corrected as soon as possible but mistakes are always forgivable if you learn from them.
- Be aware of the boundaries that you are working to. Although you may not have the licence to challenge your learners' ethics and morals, if they are preventing learning from taking place it may come into your jurisdiction and you may have to do something about it.
- Try to avoid giving out too many answers. Concentrate on guiding learners to discover more about the subject by asking them challenging questions. A good rule of thumb here is to ask four times as many questions as you give answers.
- Encourage members of the class to engage in meaningful dialogue, unhindered by your presence, whenever possible. Get them to summarise their discussions with the rest of the group. In this way the sharing of wisdom and experiences will be more widespread.

Socrates believed that unless people examined their lives and gained the wisdom that accrued from this, they would continue to make mistakes.

### In the classroom

- Accept that mistakes will happen.
- Treat all mistakes as a learning opportunity.
- Encourage learners to constantly question what they, and you, are saying or doing.

### Critical Perspective

Socrates coined the phrase that the unexamined life is not worth living. What do you think about his assertion that admitting failure and learning from errors is as important as reflecting on your successes in making you a good teacher?

### For more on Socrates's ideas, read:

Navia, L.E. (2007) *Socrates: A Life Examined*. New York: Prometheus Books.

Plato (1997) *The Trial and Death of Socrates: Four Dialogues*. New York: Classic Books International.

**P**lato was a student of Socrates. His early writings were strongly influenced by those of his mentor and focused on the search for definitions of moral values such as virtue and justice. In *The Republic*, he described everything that our senses perceive in the material world as limited to mere shadows of reality and that the real truth lies within. He uses the *allegory of the cave* to explain this idea.

There are four phases to the allegory which can be summarised as follows:

- Imagine you are **imprisoned** in a cave. You are shackled to a wall and can only see the shadows of objects, illuminated by a fire, cast on the wall opposite. These shadows are the only things that you have ever seen and all that you have ever thought about. They represent your current reality.
- Suppose that you are **released from the shackles** and allowed to roam freely around the cave. You now begin to see things as they really are and begin to understand the origins of some of the shadows. You begin to question your beliefs about what is real.
- Eventually, you are **allowed out of the cave** where you start to see the fullness of reality. You realise the errors in your beliefs.
- You **re-enter the cave** and try to convince your former inmates that what they accept as the truth is only an illusion. Your arguments are only met with ridicule and rejection by others less enlightened than you. You either succumb to ridicule and go back to your original beliefs about reality or persevere with the truth.

The allegory highlights Plato's belief in the separation of two distinct worlds, one of appearance and one of reality, and his belief that truth and knowledge was to be found within someone. His disagreements with his student Aristotle sparked the *nature vs nurture* debate that still resonates with modern-day thinkers (see Theory 4).

### How to use it

Stop me if you've heard this one before:

A forest fire is raging on a deserted island, killing all of the animals in its wake. The only remaining survivors are a scorpion and a frog. The frog asks the scorpion if he knows the way to the sea. The scorpion tells the frog that he will show him the way there if he will give him a lift. The frog asks the scorpion why he should trust him not to sting him. The scorpion replies that if he did that they would both die and that if they worked as a team they would both be saved. The frog agrees and tells the scorpion to jump on his back. The scorpion does so and immediately stings the frog. When the frog asks the scorpion why he had condemned them both to certain death, the scorpion simply replied that, 'it was in his nature to do so'.

If you want to follow the doctrines of Plato:

- Start by believing that truth and knowledge is to be found within and that it is in a learner's nature to behave in the manner that they do.

## SHADOWS OF REALITY

- Accept that, if the territory represents reality, the map is merely a representation of that reality.
- Acknowledge that learners respond according to their individual maps and although they may act in ways that you find unhelpful or unacceptable, you must respect that it is their map.
- Appreciate that your learner's behaviour is created specifically with regard to the context and the reality currently being experienced. Change is necessary when the context and reality change.
- You may not be able to change a learner's ingrained behaviour, or even have the license to do this, but you can get them to reflect on the appropriateness of their actions.

### In the classroom

- Accept that some behavioural traits are ingrained and will be difficult to modify.
- Recognise that you may not have license to change some aspects of a learner's behaviour.
- If it's questionable, get your learners to reflect on the appropriateness of their behaviour.

### Critical Perspective

What do you think that Plato meant by his belief in the separation of two distinct worlds: one of appearance and one of reality?

### For more on Plato's ideas, read:

Plato (1970) *The Republic: The Dialogues of Plato* (B. Jowett, trans./ed.). London: Sphere Books.

Plato (1997) *The Trial and Death of Socrates: Four Dialogues*. New York: Classic Books International.

**A**lthough Aristotle was a student of Plato's, he disagreed with Plato's assertion that truth and knowledge was to be found within someone. He argued that people needed to use the wisdom of others to look for truth and knowledge in the world outside.

Here is a summary of Aristotle's theories on learning and the belief that knowledge and skills are achieved by:

- examining the knowledge and expertise of those considered to be wise
- interpreting the statements of others
- undertaking self-examination based on this interpretation
- developing self-belief as a result of self-examination.

Aristotle's method of teaching is based on the teacher guiding the learner to reach their potential through the wisdom of others. Its cornerstone was the dialogue between the teacher and the learner that emphasised what the learner was capable of doing. This became the principle on which the concept of the *self-fulfilling prophecy* was based.

The self-fulfilling prophecy was a term introduced by Merton in the 1960s. It was based on Aristotle's belief that, if you have high expectations of a learner and they are aware of this, they will perform at a level that matches these expectations. Conversely, if you have low expectations of a learner and they are aware of this, their performance will suffer.

### How to use it

How can you turn a coward into a hero, a dullard into a genius or an emotional vacuum into a great lover? That's exactly the challenge facing the Wizard in Frank Baum's immortal story of the *Wizard of Oz*. He gave the cowardly lion a medal for courage, the scatterbrain scarecrow a diploma and the tin man a ticking clock (well Christian Barnard hadn't perfected his techniques for heart transplants at this stage). You need to watch the movie to see what happens.

Never underestimate the effect that you have on others. You, like the wizard in the story, exert enormous power over their lives and, through your attitude towards them, can turn them into successes or failures. Tell them they are doomed to fail and they may begin to accept failure as an inevitable consequence. Tell them they have the potential for greatness and watch them grow. Here are some tips about how you can be the wizard.

- Give them a few tasks that are relatively easy to complete. Acknowledge their achievement of the task. A simple 'well done' or nod of approval will do, but celebrating the achievement with others will have a great impact on their self-belief.
- Reward effort as well as achievement. Make sure learners see the connection between effort and success.

## THE SELF-FULFILLING PROPHECY

- Get the learners in your class to share what they have learned with others. Develop a rapport within the class whereby learners acknowledge the efforts and successes of others. Simple nods of appreciation or a round of applause may be appropriate.
- Teach learners how to handle the failures that inevitably they will experience from time to time. Support them to learn from mistakes as well as successes.

Here's a little ditty that I once learned that sums up what this entry is all about. I promise you that in a year's time, you'll still be singing it:

*I'm off to be the wizard, the wonderful Wizard of Oz.*

*I'm off to be the wizard, 'cos of all of the wonderful things I does.*

### In the classroom

- Don't keep spoon-feeding learners with information: get them to look for the answers themselves.
- Allow learners to have a few quick early successes as this will encourage them to want to know more.
- Make learners aware that you have high expectations of them.

### Critical Perspective

Aristotle believed that if you have high or low expectations of a learner and make them aware of your feelings towards them they will act in accordance with your feelings. This became known as the self-fulfilling prophecy. What experiences do you have of the self-fulfilling prophecy in action?

### For more on Aristotle and the self-fulfilling prophecy, read:

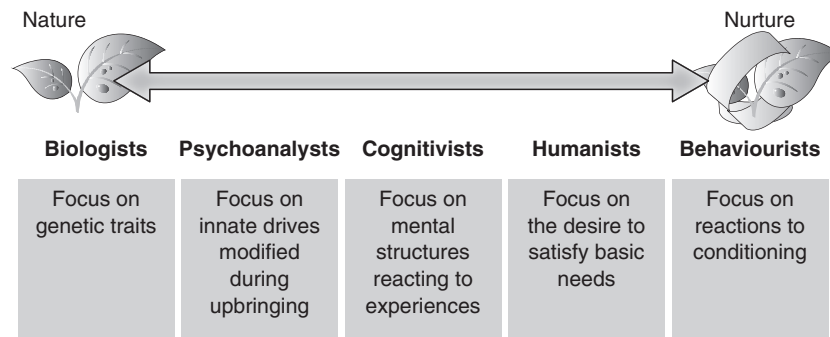
Merton, R.K. (1968) *Social Theory and Social Structure*. New York: Free Press.  
Winch, C. and Gingell, J. (2005) *Key Concepts in the Philosophy of Education*. Abingdon: Routledge.

**T**his debate occurred as a result of Plato arguing that truth and knowledge were within (i.e. it was natural), whereas his student, Aristotle, claimed that they are something we are taught (i.e. it happened as a result of nurturing). The nature versus nurture debate is one of the oldest issues in human development, which discusses the relative merits of genetic inheritance and environmental conditioning.

Descartes revived Plato's rationalist concept of innate knowledge and argued that truth and knowledge existed within human beings prior to experience. He was sceptical of the philosophical ideas of many of his predecessors and his desire for some certainty in life led him towards his own powers of rationalisation for the answer. He developed a system of *Cartesian doubt* as a way of reaching his ultimate conclusion of 'I think, therefore I am' or in its Latin form '*cogito ergo sum*'.

Locke revived Aristotle's empiricist view with the concept that a child's mind is a blank tablet (*tabula rasa*) that can be filled with knowledge that comes directly or indirectly from experience of the world. He separated these experiences into two categories: ideas of sensation - seeing, hearing and feeling; and ideas of reflection - thinking, questioning and believing.

If Descartes and Locke can be accused of re-igniting the nature-nurture debate, then the impact this had on how education theorists viewed teaching and learning has been significant. This can be summarised as:



Both sides in the debate have compelling arguments that make it difficult to decide whether a person's development is governed by their DNA or influenced by their upbringing.

### How to use it

The stage musical *Blood Brothers* has been a great West End and Broadway hit. It is based on the classic story of twins, separated at birth, who meet in childhood and become friends oblivious of the fact that they are brothers. Their mother, unable to afford to bring up both

## THE NATURE-NURTURE DEBATE

sons, gave up one of the twins to her employer, a wealthy woman unable to have children of her own. The story explores the effects that the differences in lifestyles, values and morals of the two families have on the boys as they grow into young men. So, is the tragic end to the story a consequence of genetic traits or conditioning?

Few people these days would take such an extreme position in this debate as to argue for one side at the absolute exclusion of the other side. There are just too many facts on both sides of the argument which would deter an all-or-nothing view.

- If you are at the extreme end of the Nature scale, the likelihood is that you will believe in the virtue of neuroscience and the belief that the genetic structure of the brain is mostly responsible for an individual's ability or motivation to learn. You will be influenced here by the theorists in Section 1.5.
- As you start to move towards the centre of the scale, you begin to accept the cognitivist's view in Section 1.3 that the genetic structure of the brain is capable of being modified in response to reactions to experiences and the environment.
- Moving from the centre towards the end of the Nurture scale, you are likely to favour the ideas of the humanist theorists in Section 1.4 and the significance they attach to society's influence on an individual's capacity to think and learn.
- At the extreme end of the Nurture scale, the likelihood is that you will believe in the arguments of the behaviourists in Section 1.2 who suggest that all behaviour can be modified through conditioning.

There is no neat and simple way of resolving this debate. The more you read on the subject, the more confusing it gets. The best advice I can give is to go with what feels right for you.

### In the classroom

- Accept what your default position is on this issue.
- Adapt and adopt this position to suit whatever circumstances you are teaching in.
- Reflect on what happened and revise your default position accordingly.

### Critical Perspective

Where do you stand on the nature vs nurture debate?

### For more on the nature-nurture debate, read:

Descartes, R. (1966) *Philosophical Writings* (G. Anscombe and P. Geach, trans./eds). London: Nelson.

Locke, J. (1961) *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. London: Dent.

**R**ousseau presented his theories on education in the story of his relationship, as tutor, with Emile. Rousseau's *Emile* was a landmark contribution to education theory but needs to be understood in the context in which it was written. This was during a time when society was built on people who enjoyed dominating others for personal gain and people who either passively accepted this domination and a life of servitude or resented those that wielded power over them and revolted. As Emile's tutor, Rousseau was faced with the dichotomy of not wanting to have an overt position of power over Emile but covertly exerting influence over his education.

Rousseau's theory of education was based on the belief in the inherent goodness of human beings and the effect of society in corrupting them. He argued that bringing up children in harmony with nature and its laws would facilitate learning and preserve their goodness.

His thinking is based on three key principles.

- People should be able to learn what they want to learn.
- They should be able to do this when they want to.
- Teaching should be based on discovery, enriched with the covert guidance of the teacher.

Rousseau's focus on nature, on the need to develop opportunities for new experiences and reflection and on the dynamic provided by each individual's development remains the cornerstone of modern pedagogical thinking.

### How to use it

I'm not going to set out a series of steps here as I think you need to reflect on whether you feel the treatment of Emile was ethical or not. Your answer to this will help you decide how to use the theory. I am going to suggest that you watch Lewis Gilbert's film based on Willy Russell's play, *Educating Rita*, to give you some food for thought on this.

In the film, Rita, played by Julie Walters, wants to better herself by studying literature. Her tutor, Frank, played by Michael Caine, describes his teaching ability as 'appalling, but good enough for appalling students'. Issues of power and influence are common themes throughout the film as both Rita and Frank struggle to cope with personal and professional difficulties. The essence of the film is about Frank's attempts to teach Rita to value her own insights while still being able to pass the exams. Does he succeed? Watch the film to find out.

Here are some questions you might want to now ask yourself:

- Does Rita succeed or fail? You may need to reconcile your thoughts on what constitutes success and failure. Stepping out on to the Centre Court at Wimbledon (in my dreams) players see an inscribed saying from Kipling that equates success and failure as both being 'imposters'. What do you think he means by this?



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- Does the end result justify the actions that Frank takes? You will certainly have to spend some time thinking this one through. Machiavelli claims that the 'ends always justify the means'. Do you agree?
- Have you ever played out the role of Rita as a learner? If so, how do you feel about it now?
- Have you ever played out the role of Frank as a teacher? If so, how do you feel about it now?

It's possible that, as a result of answering some of the above questions, you consider aspects of Rousseau's teaching to be unethical, but there are some compelling ideas in Rousseau's work around the freedom to learn (see Theory 91) and the use of discovery learning (see Theory 23) that are worth considering.

### In the classroom

- Allow learners the opportunity to learn what they want to providing this doesn't conflict with the planned learning outcomes.
- Don't spoon-feed them the answers; make them think about them.
- Support them to learn through discovering key facts.

### Critical Perspective

Work through the four questions listed above and then determine whether or not you agree with Rousseau's belief in the inherent goodness of people and that it is society that corrupts them.

### For more on Rousseau's ideas, read:

Rousseau, J.J. (1911) *Emile or Education* (B. Foxley, trans.). London: Dent.  
Rousseau, J.J. (1913) *The Social Contract* (B. Foxley, trans.). London: Dent.

**N**ietzsche was a nineteenth-century German philosopher, composer and student of the history of language. His work has exerted a profound influence on Western philosophy, primarily because of his attack on the concept of essential truth. Truth, according to Nietzsche, is a matter of perspective, not fundamental reality. This understanding of truth and morality has come to be known as *perspectivism*.

Nietzsche explains that the term 'perspective' comes from the language of vision and that we literally see things from and with a particular perspective. Our eyes are located at a particular point in the distance, from which some things are visible and others are not. A scene looks different from different perspectives. For example, from high up we can see further and things look smaller, from below things become obscured and we cannot see very far. Nietzsche describes this as 'foreground evaluations'; we take what is near to us (in the foreground) as the standard by which we learn from and interpret the world.

Perspectivism is therefore a theory that is based on:

- **Knowledge:** Learning about a subject is inevitably partial and limited by the individual perspective from which it is studied.
- **Judgements:** Assessments of truth and value depend on how someone sees it through their own individual viewpoint.
- **Interpretation:** It is left to the individual to interpret what they see, think and feel, in view of what they intuitively know is right and good.

Nietzsche believed that education should consist mainly of clearing away 'the weeds and rubbish and vermin' that he felt attacked and obscured the real groundwork for the development of the person. He argued that this kind of education cannot be formalised within institutions which are obsessed with progressing students through a system of tests, grades and qualifications.

Nietzsche produced a considerable amount of ideas dealing with subjects like morality, racism, atheism and consciousness. He was known for his erratic and controversial outbursts such as claiming that 'God is dead' and the emergence of 'over-man' (incorrectly translated as 'superman') which the Nazis hijacked to support the things that Nietzsche was most violently opposed to, notably anti-Semitism, racism and nationalism.

### How to use it

Nietzsche believed that the focus in learning needed to shift from the teacher to the students, and that the classroom should no longer be a place where the teacher pours knowledge into passive students (who wait like empty vessels to be filled), but that the students are urged to be actively involved in their own process of learning (like fires waiting to be rekindled).

If you want to follow the philosophical ideas of Nietzsche, accept that:

## PERSPECTIVISM

- What the student currently believes, whether correct or incorrect, is important.
- Despite having the same learning experience, each student will base their learning on the understanding and meaning that is personal to them.
- Understanding or constructing a meaning is an active and continuous process.
- Learning may involve the student making some conceptual changes in how they think about a subject.
- When students construct a new meaning, they may not believe it but may give it provisional acceptance or even rejection.
- Learning is an active, not a passive, process and depends on the student taking responsibility to learn.
- Discovery is facilitated by providing the necessary resources.
- Learners construct their knowledge through a process of active enquiry.

The main activity in the classroom should therefore be around solving problems. Students should feel free to use inquiry methods to ask questions, investigate a topic, discuss their findings freely with others and use a variety of resources to find solutions and answers. As students explore the topic and view it from different perspectives, the teacher should encourage them to draw new conclusions, and, as their exploration continues, revisit those conclusions.

### In the classroom

- Support collaboration in classwork, not competition.
- Create situations where the students feel safe questioning and reflecting on their own experiences.
- Encourage students to face up to the challenges they will encounter in life.

### Critical Perspective

Nietzsche argued that achieving a true education is a process fraught with what he described as the 'three dangers': isolation, crippling doubt, and the pain of confronting one's limitations. He claimed that most people lack the fortitude and vigour to truly face and conquer these dangers. Do you agree with him?

### For more on Nietzsche's ideas, read:

Cate, C. (2005) *Friedrich Nietzsche*. Woodstock, NY: The Overlook Press.  
Deleuze, G. (2006) *Nietzsche and Philosophy*. London: Athlone Press.

**A**lthough Dewey was primarily a behavioural psychologist, his application of the philosophy of pragmatism, underpinned by his concern for interaction, experience and reflection, had a profound impact on educational thinking and practice. Dewey's basic belief was that traditional education was too concerned with the delivery of pre-ordained knowledge and not focused enough on the learner's actual learning experiences. He emphasised the importance of experience and education in his ground breaking book of that title, first published in 1938.

The main principles covered in the book can be summarised as:

- The task of teachers should not be to communicate knowledge and skills to learners but to use their learners' experiences as a teaching tool.
- The challenge for experience-based education is to provide learners with quality experiences that will result in growth and creativity.
- Continuity and interaction are essential to discriminate between experiences that are worthwhile and those that can be discounted.
- Although control is necessary to establish order in the classroom, it should be based on what he describes as the moving spirit within the class and not on the desire or will of one individual.
- An education system that restricts learners' freedom of thought and movement will inhibit their intellectual and moral development.
- It is the teacher's responsibility to provide guidance to the learner in their use of observation and judgement and to select experiences that have the promise and potential to exercise the learner's intelligence.
- The danger of failure lies in the possible misunderstanding of what constitutes experience and experiential education.

Dewey began a movement that others, such as Kolb (see Theory 47), developed into the notion of experiential learning, which to this day remains the cornerstone of many educational approaches and learning programmes.

### How to use it

Dewey's ideas on progressive education are still as progressive now as they were when he wrote them in the 20s and 30s. Sad to think, I was only 1 year old when Dewey died in 1952. As a senior citizen, I'm now able to get into the cinema at reduced rates. I'm not that old as to have seen the original version of *Goodbye Mr. Chips* at the cinema. It is however one of the most endearing films I've ever seen.

*Goodbye Mr. Chips* is the story of a history teacher in a traditional nineteenth-century English boarding school reflecting on his career as a teacher. He was looked on as a very private, stuffy disciplinarian who is constantly passed over for promotion. After 20 years in the job, and in his mid-40s, he marries Kathy who opens his eyes to the fun to be had in life and teaching, and makes him see the potential that he has, that he never recognised in

## PRAGMATISM

himself. Chips goes on to experience many personal triumphs and tragedies over the years but the one constant is the love and admiration his pupils and colleagues have for him.

The significance of Dewey's ideas for modern-day teachers are:

- Having a passion for an education system that offers equality of opportunity for everyone is at the heart of what every teacher should be striving for.
- Learners should be provided with quality experiences that engage them and build on their existing experiences. The teacher's role is to help the learner assess the value of the experience.
- Each past or present experience should be viewed from the perspective of how it can shape future actions. This can be done through a cyclical process of action; reflection on what happened; having a theory about what might happen if things were done differently; experimenting with the new theory; and revising the course of action based on the experiments.
- Thinking and reflection should be the cornerstone of teaching practice. Encouraging learners to share these thoughts will allow the teacher to get to know the learner better and benefit the overall learning experience of the class.

Coincidentally, *Goodbye Mr. Chips* was made the year after Dewey's *Experience and Education* was first published in 1938.

### In the classroom

- Allow learners to share their experiences with others in the class.
- Encourage them to reflect on their experiences.
- Get them to think about what might happen if they did things differently.

### Critical Perspective

What do you think of Dewey's basic belief that traditional education was too concerned with the delivery of pre-ordained knowledge and not focused enough on capitalising on the learner's actual learning experiences?

### For more on Dewey's ideas, read:

Dewey, J. (1963) *Experience and Education*. New York: Collier Books.

Dewey, J. (1966) *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education*. New York: Free Press.

**S**artre was a twentieth-century French philosopher, novelist and political activist. He was one of the key figures in developing the concept of existentialism, a philosophy that emphasises individual existence, freedom and choice. In this respect he advocated the principle that *existence precedes essence*, which reversed the traditional philosophical view that the essence (the nature) of a thing is more fundamental and immutable than its existence (the mere fact of its being).

Here is a summary of some of the key questions and answers that Sartre posed related to education:

- **What are the goals of education?** He argues that the purpose of education is to help the learner to come to terms with their individuality in order to be able to emerge as the unique person they are.
- **What is knowledge?** He claims that knowledge comes from experience and reflection.
- **What knowledge and skills are worthwhile learning?** He stresses the importance of knowledge of the self as a unique individual combined with the skills to work through problems and conflict.
- **What are the limits of human potential?** He believes that limits are what we choose to create for ourselves and that in this respect we may be influenced by others. Given freedom of choice and action, therefore, human potential may be limitless.
- **What is a mistake?** He asserts that mistakes are made when an individual attributes blame to fate or determinism rather than individual will and the capacity to act on that will.
- **What is learning?** He describes learning as the state of being able to define oneself as having freedom of choice and will and the capacity to deal with others who limit this freedom.
- **What is the role of the teacher?** He claims that the teacher should support the learner to overcome resistance (self-imposed or by others) and provide them with the tools to attain personal freedom.
- **What is the purpose of the curriculum?** He argues that this should be designed to enable the learner to experience as much of the world as possible.

Sartre uses the analogy of cutting paper to explain the reverse of the existentialist principle and that in this instance *essence precedes existence*. In his analogy, scissors (or to be more precise, paper knives) were designed to address a problem of creating a convenient and accurate method of cutting paper. In this respect, their essence preceded their existence. Sartre explains that whereas the reverse of his principle relates to inanimate inventions like scissors it does not apply to people.

### How to use it

If you follow the philosophy that all human beings possess the same capacity to learn and are guided by the same basic values then you risk missing what Sartre claims is the most fundamental aspect of existence, and that is the freedom to choose.

## EXISTENTIALISM

If you want to follow the philosophical ideas of Sartre, help students to:

- Take responsibility for their own lives and their own decisions.
- Understand their role and responsibilities vis-à-vis themselves and others.
- Be able to engage in meaningful dialogue with their peers and deal effectively with any confrontation that occurs.
- Be able to deal with life's difficulties, tensions and ambiguities.
- Be able to unleash their own creativity and self-expression.
- Overcome difficulties in choosing what to study and how to study.
- Accept responsibility for making mistakes.

Sartre's philosophy of linking freedom with learning and responsibility has been labelled as pessimistic. He refutes this, claiming it to be the most optimistic philosophy possible, because within it we are able to choose how we learn and how we behave towards others as a result of that learning. The main activity in the classroom should therefore be around debate and discussion, where students should have the confidence to express themselves freely on a range of subjects.

### In the classroom

- Encourage learners to interact with each other and be respectful of others' ideas.
- Foster an environment where creativity is allowed to flourish.
- Allow learners to have a say in what and how they are taught.

### Critical Perspective

The very nature of philosophical debate is that there are often paradoxes that accompany even the soundest of arguments. Where do you think the paradoxes are in Sartre's theory?

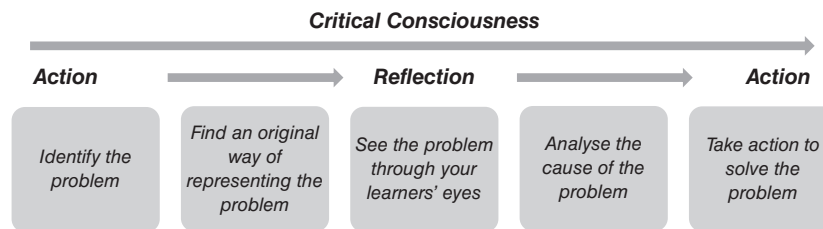
### For more on Sartre's ideas, read:

Sartre, J.P. (2001) *The Age of Reason*. London: Penguin Publishing Ltd.

Sartre, J.P. (2007) *Existentialism and Humanism*. London: Methuen Publishing Ltd.

**F**reire was a Brazilian educator who began a national literacy programme for peasants and slum dwellers in the 1950s and 1960s. Freire's basic belief was that the function of education was to build on the language, experience and skills of the learner rather than imposing on them the culture of the teacher. Throughout his writings he uses politically motivated phrases such as 'dialogue liberates – monologue oppresses'.

The concept of *critical consciousness*, the cornerstone of Freire's ideas, is that the richest learning begins with action, is then shaped by reflection, which gives rise to further action. His methodology is shown in the following five-step model:



Each step can be summarised as follows:

- **Identify the problem:** This is where teachers and learners engage in dialogue and research to establish the nature of the problem that needs to be answered.
- **Find an original way of representing the problem:** Get learners to use role playing, drawings, metaphors and analogies to do this and then compare what they have produced to see if there is a common theme to the problem.
- **See the problem through your learners' eyes:** Ask learners to describe the situation as seen in the representation and make the link between themselves and the problem.
- **Analyse the cause of the problem:** Get everyone concerned to discuss what is happening and what can be done to address the root cause of the problem.
- **Take action to solve the problem:** Produce a plan of action to identify what needs to be done in both the short term and long term to prevent the problem from reoccurring.

Throughout his work, Freire emphasises the importance of teaching based on dialogue rather than monologue. In this respect he argues that the teacher must allow the learners to talk freely and express themselves so that they feel they are an important part of the learning process.

### How to use it

Jane Elliot taught a class of all white nine-year-olds. The day after Martin Luther King was shot she wanted to show them how it felt to be discriminated against. She divided her class



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into blue-eyed and non-blue-eyed children. She told them that the blue-eyed children were brighter and better than the others. The blue-eyed children started acting in an arrogant manner, deriding the others who became confused and withdrawn. She reversed the process the following day and found that the non-blue-eyed children became arrogant. By using role play to experience first-hand what effect prejudice had on people, she hoped to teach children the importance of tolerance. Many former pupils later confessed that this had a profound effect on their thoughts about segregation.

Here are some tips if you want to apply Freirian methodologies:

- Don't be afraid to get to know more about your learners and the issues they face on an ongoing basis.
- Use whatever approaches you can to get the learner to expand on these issues. Role playing, metaphors, analogies and drawings are tools you can use here. The important thing is to get a rich picture of the learner's current situation.
- As the picture becomes richer, and root causes of issues become clearer, start thinking about how to resolve these. Mind-maps or problem trees will help you and the learner come to terms with how to address the issues.
- You can now work with the learner to develop an appropriate plan of action to achieve the desired learning outcome. This may include quick wins and long-term planning.

### In the classroom

- Take an interest in your learners' lives outside of the classroom.
- Don't be afraid to use different approaches to get learners to open up on issues that may be affecting their learning.
- Long-term learning plans are important but don't underestimate the value of a few quick wins in building up your learner's confidence.

### Critical Perspective

What do you think of Jane Elliott's approach in how she taught her class about what it felt like to be discriminated against because of physical characteristics? Is it something that you would feel comfortable in doing?

### For more on Freire's ideas, read:

Freire, P. (1972) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. London: Penguin.  
For more on Elliott's research, visit her website at [www.janeelliott.com](http://www.janeelliott.com).

