

Theoretical approaches to development

Key theorists

Behaviourist theory

Burrhus Frederic Skinner (1904–1990)

- Defined learning as a relatively permanent change in behaviour that occurs through experience.
- Stated that Children learn by repeatedly being exposed to learning situations:
i.e. their learning is ***conditioned***.

Socio-cultural theory

Lev Vygotsky (1896–1934)

- Emphasised the importance of social interactions in the process of children's learning.
- Defined the ***zone of proximal development*** as the difference between what children can do by themselves and what they can do with help.
- Stated that cognitive growth comes from interaction with parents, teachers and peers, within a cultural context.

Social learning theory

Albert Bandura (born 1925)

- Studied children's behaviour and found that children imitated the aggressive behaviour they observed.
- Bandura called this ***observational learning*** and argued that children learn how to behave and interact by observing the behaviour of others.

Constructivist theory

Jean Piaget (1896–1980)

- Developed a **constructivist** approach to children's cognitive development.
- Children learn actively and build up (**construct**) knowledge and understanding based on their experiences of the world around them.

Summary of theories

Theory and major theorists	Main principles
Behaviourist theory (Skinner)	Children's learning can be conditioned
Social learning theory (Bandura)	Children learn from observing others
Constructivist theory (Piaget)	Children learn actively by constructing their knowledge
Socio-cultural theory (Vygotsky)	Children learn by interaction with others