

COMPARE AND CONTRAST THE WORK AND IDEAS OF THREE EARLY YEARS EDUCATORS/ CURRICULAR APPROACHES.

Throughout educational history, various early years educational pioneers have had a significant influence on the way children are educated today. Prior to the 18th century children were regarded as, tiny replicas of adults and no provisions were made for their education. Fortunately, educational pioneers work and ideas, slowly changed attitudes over time, to recognise the importance of play in a child's development.

Friedrich Froebel, Maria Montessori and Rudolph Steiner, are all referred to as educational pioneers. Each one of them cared for children as much as they educated them, in addition, they all believed in integrated early year's provision.

Firstly, I will outline the main ideas of each educators work, ideas, and resources. I will then move on to compare and contrast their theories before concluding.

Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852) was born in Germany in 1782.

As an idealist, he believed that every child at birth possessed their full educational potential. In addition, an appropriate educational environment was necessary to encourage the child to grow and develop to their full potential.

The Education of Man (1826), written by Friedrich Froebel had a profound effect on the approach to early childhood education. Froebel urged educators to respect the sanctity of child development through this statement:

“We grant space and time to young plants and animals because we know that, in accordance with the laws that live in them, they will develop properly and grow well. Young animals and plants are given rest and arbitrary interference with their growth is avoided, because it is known that the opposite practice would disturb their pure unfolding and sound development; but the young human being is looked upon as a piece of wax or a lump of clay which man can mould into what he pleases,” (www. Geocities.com).

Froebel's deep connection with nature influenced him for his entire life, and was the basis of his theory. Through his observations of children, he learned how important it was for children to have real experiences, which involved them being physically active. These ideas lead him to being the founder of the first Kindergarten in 1840, He stated:

“My school shall be called Kindergarten – the garden of children,” (www.froebel.co.uk).

The children in attendance were aged between 3 years and 7 years. They were given the opportunity to learn through exploratory play, particularly with natural materials. He believed children can learn outdoors as well as indoors and they should be able to move around freely, to explore natural science in their natural world. In addition, he focussed on positive relationships between the children's home, their school and the wider community, and considered parents to be the main educators of their children.

Froebel, encouraged symbolic and imaginative play, he designed balls, wooden blocks, tiles, sticks and rings to demonstrate that children learn by playing. Known around the world as the Froebel, "**Gifts**," these objects were an important part of his Kindergarten.

A gift was an object for play, to help the child understand the concept of shape, size and dimension. Furthermore, he introduced activities which he called, "**occupations**." Occupations were items such as paint and clay, so children could be creative and make what they wished, encouraging free-flow play without adult intervention. For example, play dough, clay and building blocks are still used today to encourage learning.

Froebel's emphasis was that everything links and connects with everything else, no matter what the material or difference, and learning will occur through the differences in a non directed way

Maria Montessori (1870-1952) was born in Italy in 1870; she was the first woman in Italy to receive a medical degree. She worked in the fields of psychiatry, education and anthropology. She believed that each child is born with a unique potential to be revealed, rather than as a, "Blank slate" waiting to be written upon. She states:

"Scientific observation has established that education is not what the teacher gives; education is a natural process spontaneously carried out by the human individual, and is acquired not by listening to words but by experiences upon the environment. The task of the teacher becomes that of preparing a series of motives of cultural activity, spread over a specially prepared environment, and then refraining from obtrusive interference. Human teachers can only help the great work that is being done, as servants help the master. Doing so, they will be witnesses to the unfolding of the human soul and to the rising of a New Man who will not be a victim of events, but will have the clarity of vision to direct and shape the future of human society."
(www.montessori.edu.maria).

Maria Montessori developed a teaching programme that enabled, 'Defective' children to read and write. She believed, "Looking" becomes reading; "Touching" becomes writing.

She sought to teach skills not by having children repeatedly try it, but by developing exercises and specially devised pieces of equipment that encouraged children to develop certain skills. She called these, "Didactic" materials- didactic means, "Intended to instruct."

Montessori, encouraged independence and believed children learnt best on their own without interference from adults. She believed the adults role is to, "follow the child."

Today there are many Montessori schools, usually privately run. The Montessori approach is recognised in state education, but with a more flexible approach, by means of using Montessori equipment.

Rudolph Steiner (1861-1925) was born in Austria in 1861. Steiner believed in the spiritual world and reincarnation. To him, this meant that during the first 7 years of life the child is finding their way in the world, and the child's reincarnated soul needs protection and a carefully planned environment to develop in a rounded way.

Steiner saw the child as having three developmental stages which they pass through on their way to adult hood:

"0 - 7 years – the will: the spirit fuses with the body

7 – 14 years – the heart: feelings are important, that the emphasis moves to the heart.

14 years + the head: the period of thinking," (Hucker & Tassoni, 2000, p18).

In addition, he believed children have different temperaments, which affect's their attitude and behaviour; he classified these as, **Sanguine** – calm, **Choleric**- easily angered, **phlegmatic** – sluggish and finally **Melancholic** – irritable. The rule for adults was not to go against the temperament of the child.

Steiner was like Froebel in that he believed in the importance of the community and for this reason in Steiner schools the same teacher would be kept for a number of years. Furthermore, he encouraged the more able children to support the less able. For example today carpet time, stems from his ideas of circle time, where all children come together and are encouraged to join in with songs etc.

Similarly, Steiner thought that the symbolic behaviour of a child was important, but in a very different way to Froebel. He gave children wooden blocks with irregular shapes and dolls with no faces, these events would take place in a well designed community, unlike Froebel who encouraged free-flow play.

In contrast Montessori did not see the point of play. She did not encourage children to have ideas or be creative until they had worked through her learning system. Furthermore, unlike Froebel and Steiner, Montessori did not value the importance of relationships, feelings and the sense of belonging. Montessori stressed that children should work alone, so they become independent learners.

Steiner and Froebel both encouraged exploratory play with natural materials, and believed in learning through nature. However Steiner used a structured and well planned curriculum, whereas Froebel believed in non-directed learning. Similarly both educators focussed on the whole child and maintained that each stage of learning was due to prior experience.

In comparison, Montessori devised a very structured teaching programme as she believed she was making Froebel's work more scientifically rigorous in doing so. She encouraged dexterous activity and sensory learning. Like Froebel she developed her own range of equipment, which she called, "didactic" materials, which encouraged children to use their hands. Her method moved children through stages of simple exercises to complex exercises.

Similarly, Froebel's "Gifts" and "occupations" were intended to progressively unfold into activities that develop more complex skills of perception, manipulation and combination. The purpose of this method was similar to Montessori where the simplest activity was presented first and progression was made to the more diverse and complex activities.

In conclusion, the work and ideas of Froebel, Steiner and Montessori have all had a significant impact on education today. All three educators opened nurseries, kindergartens and schools which are still in practice today.

Froebel's ideas are reflected in today's approach to childcare for example the use of finger rhymes, which he invented. Education is often designed to be "Child centred" with the needs of the child being of paramount importance.

Montessori's methods can often be seen inside nurseries today, where the space has been divided into four main areas, practical life, sensorial, mathematical and language. In some instances children are also encouraged to work alone as a task set by the nursery.

Finally, Steiner schools tend to be privately run, and in particular his ideas have had a significant effect on the integration of special needs children into mainstream schools.

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