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## **UNIT 9 EDUCATIONAL TENETS OF SOME PIONEERS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION: PART-I**

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### **9.1 INTRODUCTION**

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The principles of ECCE, which seem so clear to us today, have evolved over a period of time. During different periods, progressive educators rebelled against the unimaginative and restrictive method of imparting education to young children and evolved their methods, in keeping with the development and the interests of the young child. It is the cumulative effort of these great thinkers that have provided us with the perspectives about ECE that we have today.

In this and the coming Unit, you will read about the views of some educationists who have made a significant contribution to the development of early childhood education. The list of educationists discussed in these Units includes Indian pioneers as well as those from other parts of the world. The views of these pioneers have been presented in this and the next Unit in the chronological order of their birth, starting from Comenius who was born during the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Some educationists discussed here are contemporaries (i.e. born around the same time). They have been discussed in chronological order of their major contribution to ECCE.

You will find that we have elaborated upon the views of some thinkers more than those of others. The reason is that these thinkers proposed specific approaches for providing learning experiences to young children, and set up early childhood education centres which grew over some time and sustained till now, flourishing in many countries across the world today.

In this Unit, you will read about Comenius, Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Froebel, Dewey, Tagore and Montessori. In the next Unit, you will read about Steiner, Mitchell, Badheka, Gandhi, Modak, Wagh, Malaguzzi and Weikart.

### Objectives

After studying this Unit, you should be able to:

- describe the views of Comenius, Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Froebel, Dewey, Tagore and Montessori with respect to learning and education during the early years; and
- explain how each thinker/educationist has contributed to the development of ECCE.

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## 9.2 JOHANN AMOS COMENIUS (1592-1670)

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Comenius was born in the Moravia province of Czechoslovakia. He was amongst the first to reflect the new scientific spirit of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. He objected to the method adopted for teaching in the schools of that period, calling the schools “*the terror of boys*” and “*slaughter houses of minds where a hatred of books is contracted, where ten or more years are spent in learning what might be acquired in one.*” He believed that punishment was sometimes necessary, but should not be associated with school work. He was of the view that “*If the teacher’s skill cannot make any impression, his blows will have no effect*”.

Comenius started a school in Hungary but left the country when there was a Spanish invasion. In Poland, he was made a bishop and also worked as a schoolmaster. It was there that he produced most of his educational writings. The educational ideas of Comenius are contained in the textbooks he wrote for children and his book on teaching methods titled ‘The Great Didactic’. This book discusses the aims of education, curriculum, textbooks, and method of teaching.

### 9.2.1 Comenius' View of the Child

Comenius believed that all children should be given an education, regardless of their class, gender or background. He proposed a system of schools covering the period from birth to maturity. Dividing the period of the child's growth into four distinct grades — infancy, childhood, boyhood and youth, he proposed six years of schooling for each grade. For infancy (the first six years in his classification), Comenius proposed that the mother's lap should serve as the first school.

### 9.2.2 Features of Learning and Education in the Early Years

Comenius advocated an education system that followed the natural order and children's natural inclinations. Comenius stated that in the early years, the emphasis should be on stimulating the senses of sight, hearing, smell, sound, and touch and developing the child's powers of observation. Learning must take place through the senses. Learning should not be reduced to mere memorization of facts, rather, it should be based on the actual perception of things. Only when an idea has been grasped by the senses, does true understanding occur.

Even for learning during the later years of school life, he placed great emphasis on the use of the senses. Children should not be burdened with matters that are unsuitable to their age, comprehension and present conditions. They should be encouraged to play games; play, he felt, was necessary for their all-round development. He emphasized shorter school hours, more play, sounder health, better bodily development, and less strain. He called upon the teachers to make school work interesting and to keep the children relaxed. He believed that the desire for learning cannot be forced; rather it has to be kindled.

Comenius believed that the children should be told "spiritual" and "secular" stories. He even wrote several books for children. He developed the **first picture book for children 'The World in Picture' which is famous for its pictures of birds and animals.** He wrote textbooks specially adapted to the needs of children, using pictures to arouse interest.

As mentioned earlier, his book 'The Great Didactic' discusses his educational principles. Some aspects that have been discussed in the book are:

- The fundamental nature of children
- The necessity to learn through the senses
- The need for adoption of teaching materials in accordance with the needs of children
- The individual differences among children
- The understanding of motives that stimulate children
- The positive discipline
- The relationship of school work to life.

It speaks of the greatness of Comenius that he spoke in the 17<sup>th</sup> century of the importance of play, stimulation of the senses, and interesting books for children — all of which are an integral part of good infant stimulation practices and preschool education today.

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### 9.3 JEAN JACQUES ROUSSEAU (1712–1798)

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Rousseau was Swiss by birth and lived in France. He was a philosopher and not an early childhood educator. He did not directly work with young children, but his ideas have influenced the field. He greatly influenced the modernization of educational thought and practice. Writing in context of the corrupt French society of his time, he stated that society hindered human beings from developing according to their nature. A few rich created misery for the masses which is not natural. **He introduced a movement in education which is called ‘Naturalism’.** He believed anything natural was good. Rousseau believed that all the ills of civilization were due to a departure from nature. “Return to nature” was his slogan. He wrote two books ‘Emile’ and ‘Social Contract’ which describe his educational philosophy.

#### 9.3.1 Rousseau’s View of the Child

During Rousseau’s time, children were viewed as ‘miniature adults’ — they were dressed in adult-like clothes and adult-like behaviour was expected of them. The oppressive educational philosophy of Rousseau’s days held that the children were born ‘wicked’ and that education must reform and socialize them. In addition, children were considered passive, their minds being a ‘blank slate’, learning only what was taught to them. In sharp contrast, Rousseau recognized childhood as distinct from adulthood and emphasized that children’s ways of thinking and learning are different from those of adults; and that children see the world differently than how adults view it. He believed children were innately pure and noble and needed to be protected from the evil influences of the society to maintain their goodness. Rousseau believed that children have a unique nature that needs to be nurtured and protected.

Rousseau believed that nature must be allowed to take its course in the development of children because nature has endowed them with an order of development that ensures their healthy growth. He felt that the intervention of parents and teachers distorts the natural succession of the changes in childhood. He said, “*The child that man raises is almost certain to be inferior to the child that nature raises*”.

#### 9.3.2 Features of Learning and Education in the Early Years

The basic idea of ‘naturalism’ is that the natural growth of children in a natural environment constitutes an adequate education. He believed that the primary aim of education should not just be vocational.

Rousseau emphasized that the child is an active being who actively participates in her own development by acting upon the environment. The child continuously organizes and interprets her experiences and attempts to

solve problems. She is not a passive recipient of the tutor's instruction, as was believed at that time. Rather, the child is a discoverer who explores the world and 'learns by doing'.

**Rousseau stressed the necessity of play for learning.** *He said: "Make games an education and education a game; teach less from the book and more from life."* **He emphasized the use of objects, pictures and illustrations in educating the child** and advocated less reliance on lectures for teaching. He propagated learning from the environment and emphasized that the child should be free to explore. He stated that good education is based on the stage of development of the child and not on adult-imposed criteria.

He advocated that the child should be free to act; harsh discipline and repression hamper development. It is important to stimulate the mind of the child with things she can understand. Learning, and not teaching, should be the goal. Adult tastes and ways should not be forced upon children. *"Let children be children"*, he said.

Rousseau's conception of freedom in education, growth and development, the value of motivation for learning; the importance of a child's active participation and discovery in the learning process, as well as recognition of childhood as a distinct stage of development are noteworthy in educational theory and practice.

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## **9.4 JOHN HEINRICH PESTALOZZI (1746-1827)**

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Pestalozzi was born in Zurich, Switzerland. He was deeply influenced by Rousseau's ideas and felt that everyone had a right to education to develop their moral and intellectual potential. He believed that children's learning should begin with concrete and sensory experiences. He started an orphanage at Burgdorf and Munchenbuch and was the founder of a popular school at Yverdon, where he worked with children. **He is considered to be the first to teach young children of preschool age.** He tried out his ideas at these institutions.

### **9.4.1 Pestalozzi's View of the Child**

Like Comenius, Pestalozzi believed in the right of children to be taught by good and caring teachers in a safe environment. He believed that children's learning should begin with concrete and sensory expressions. He stressed the importance of recognizing individual differences among children.

### **9.4.2 Features of Learning and Education in the Early Years**

According to Pestalozzi, the aim of education was the harmonious development of all the powers — moral, intellectual and physical. **He stated that education should be child-centred** and it should be seen from the developing mind of the child and not from the already developed mind of the adult. The child, and not the subject matter, should be the centre of the educational system. He believed that learning was more important than

achievement. Therefore, reaching an incorrect conclusion by one’s effort was preferable to memorizing the right answer from a book. He advocated that the child should be studied thoroughly and, thereafter, appropriate methods of education should be adopted.

He believed that the mother has an important role in children’s development in the earliest years, unlike Rousseau who believed parents were a hindrance in the child’s development. He wrote a manual for mothers titled ‘*How Gertrude Teaches her Children*’. He held that the task of educating the child inevitably began with the mother, who could use the early years to promote the all-round development of the child. Also, unlike Rousseau who believed in one-to-one tutoring, Pestalozzi believed in learning in groups at the school.

**Pestalozzi attached great importance** to the child’s self-activity and observation in the process of learning, stressing the need to provide the child with concrete experiences. The spontaneous activity of the child, he said, leads to learning and he denounced rote memorization as the basis of learning. Games and sensory experiences were an integral part of education in his view.

**He made great use of objects during his teaching** — he would put an object before the children and then ask them what they saw, encouraging the children to observe and express their observations in the correct language. Children learned about form, language, and numbers from these ‘object lessons’. He encouraged the children to prepare albums containing drawings, maps, mathematical problems, and natural objects. Pestalozzi developed various educational materials and set forth several exercises for preschoolers in his book “*How Gertrude Teaches Her Children*”. Some of these are, however, too hard for preschoolers.

Pestalozzi was the forerunner of modern progressive education and the kindergarten system. His schools, where teaching was based upon the child’s nature and the child’s spontaneous activity, have had an influence on the present-day preschool education which emphasizes play, the manipulation of objects and games.

### **Check Your Progress Exercise 1**

- 1) For each of the following educationists provide two points each regarding their ‘Views about children’ and ‘Features of learning and education for early years.’

	<b>Comenius</b>	<b>Rousseau</b>	<b>Pestalozzi</b>
View of Children			
Features of Learning & Education for Early Years			

2) State if the given statements are 'True' or 'False'.

a) Comenius emphasized that learning must take place through the senses.

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b) Rousseau believed that children were miniature adults.

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c) Pestalozzi stressed the importance of recognizing individual differences among children.

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3) Draw out a few similarities and differences between Rousseau and Pestalozzi.

Similarities	Differences

4) What was the contribution of Pestalozzi toward early childhood education?

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## 9.5 FRIEDRICH WILHELM AUGUST FROEBEL (1782-1852)

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**Froebel, the founder of the ‘kindergarten’ system**, was born in Prussia. Froebel came under the influence of German philosophers, and later, observed the methods of teaching at Pestalozzi’s school at Yverdon, which created his interest in children. He imbibed ideas about preschool education through the study of Pestalozzi’s book ‘How Gertrude Teaches Her Children’. He was influenced by the philosophy promoted by Comenius two hundred years earlier. Because his own childhood had been unhappy, he resolved that early education should be pleasant. He founded his first Kindergarten at Blankenburg in 1836 for children aged two to six.

In 1826, Froebel published his book ‘The Education of Man’. He wrote: “The true method consists in considering the mind of the child as a living whole in which all the parts work together to produce harmonious unity”.

Froebel’s other publications include:

- Education of Man
- Pedagogies of Kindergarten
- Education by Development
- Mother Play and Nursery Songs

### 9.5.1 Froebel’s View of the Child

**Froebel considered childhood as not merely a preparation for adulthood; rather, he stated it was a stage that had value in itself and possessed its creativeness.** He held that children are at different stages at different ages. He believed that childhood participates in the divine whole just as adulthood and, therefore, it can claim the same respect on the part of the educator. The adult has no right to feel superior and to interfere with the natural conditions of childhood; rather when dealing with children, the adult must combine guidance with the capacity of waiting and understanding.

### 9.5.2 Features of Learning and Education in the Early Years

Froebel emphasized the totality of educational endeavour. To realize the divine character of the universe and one’s part in it, human beings need their senses and emotions as well as reason. These all are windows of the soul. Education must be aimed at developing all these capacities.

**Like Rousseau and Pestalozzi, Froebel believed in the interrelatedness of nature and the child’s developing mind** and stated that education should harmonize with the child’s inner development. It should conform with the child’s nature and needs. Froebel believed that the growth of the child is directed by an inner force. Education, said Froebel, should provide for “*free self-activity and self-determination on the part of man — the being created for freedom, in the image of God*”. He regarded self-activity as the process by which the individual realizes one’s nature and builds up his world and, then unites and harmonizes the two.



### a) The Concept of Kindergarten

Froebel has made an important contribution to the theory and practice of early childhood education. He realized the paramount importance of childhood and the need to provide children with a carefully planned curriculum and specific materials. **He opened the first Kindergarten, an institution for children between ages four and six, at Blackenberg in 1837.** Kindergarten is a German word that means ‘children's garden’. Froebel found many similarities between a child and a plant. He believed that the process of growth and development of the plant and the child was the same: the plant grows from within, according to the seed that is within. In the same way, the child grows from within, unfolding her tendencies and impulses from within. Froebel conceived of the school as a garden, the teacher as the gardener, and the children as tender plants.

In the words of Froebel, the object of Kindergarten is *“to give the children employment in agreement with their whole nature, to strengthen their bodies, to exercise their senses, to engage their awakening mind and through their senses, to make them acquainted with nature and their fellow creatures. It is especially to guide the heart and the affections and to lead them to the original ground of all life — to unity with themselves”*.

### b) Curriculum and Educational Materials

Froebel stressed the need for the study of the child’s nature, impulses and instincts. To Froebel, the child was the sole source of educational principles and the teacher simply followed where the child led. The child develops herself through her creative activities. He held that the **chief means of education is the child’s activity**. *“Self-activity of the mind is the first law of this institution (i.e., kindergarten)”*. **An important component of kindergarten was creativity.** The child followed where her imagination led her.

**Froebel strongly stressed the importance of play, seeing it as the core of the learning process.** According to Froebel, *“Play is the purest, most spiritual activity of man at this stage ... It gives, joy, freedom, contentment, inner and outer rest, peace with the world. It holds the source of all that is good.”* The free and unfettered natural development of the child takes place through play. For Froebel, play is not merely an addition to instruction; it is the most important phase in the spontaneous development of the child because it allows the harmonious exercise of physical, emotional, and intellectual qualities. The play combines attention with relaxation, purpose with independence, and rule with freedom. Play for the child is as ethical as devotion to work is for the adult.

Froebel recognized that play needs to be organized and guided. He also realized that children needed to be presented with an orderly series of a phenomenon that would stimulate their minds and produce an inner organization and integration. Thus, his kindergarten included three elements:

- Play and use of play materials;
- Singing of play- songs; and
- Playing various educational games in the “play circle”.

### i) Play and Use of Play Materials

It is the play materials that made the kindergarten unique in its approach. These are of two types: geometrical patterns and the essential materials for activities such as drawing, painting, sewing, paper folding, clay play and colouring. The geometrical patterns are known as ‘gifts’ and the activities as ‘occupations’.

Froebel created ten gifts for children. These were made of wood, metal, yarn and cloth. The gifts allowed a great deal of free play and helped in all-round development. They helped in the development of the concepts of shape, form, size, colour and number.

These gifts were carefully graded. The order of the gifts was devised in such a way that it lead the child from the activities and thought of one stage to another. These gifts were to be an effective basis for education. He also devised specific ways in which children would play with these gifts, giving printed directions for use.

Gifts 1 to 6 are where children are given whole forms or three-dimensional objects. For instance Gift 1 consists of woollen crocheted balls attached to a string. Intended for very young children, these balls are soft and are of different colours. Through them, children learn about colour, weight, shape, etc. Gifts 3, 4, 5 and 6 are variations of the basic building blocks through which children become familiar with the shape forms of cubes, cuboids, etc. In fact, Froebel is credited with developing these blocks which are now standard material in early childhood centres.

Gifts 7 to 9 introduce children to two-dimensional shapes, lines and points.

Gift 10 helps children understand advanced special relations through the building of frameworks.

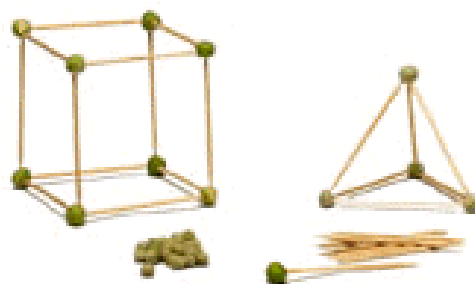
Some of the Froebel’s Gifts are shown in Fig 9.1.



*Froebel’s Gift 1*



*Froebel’s Gift 4*



*Froebel’s Gift 10*

Fig. 9.1: Froebel’s Gifts  
Source: <http://www.froebelgifts.com/>

## ii) Play-Songs

These are special games and songs which help in enhancing learning. Froebel saw an organic relationship between songs, gestures, and artwork. He regarded these as three co-ordinate forms of expression in the child. What is to be learned by the child is first expressed in a song, then, it is dramatized or expressed in gestures or movements, and lastly, illustrated through some constructive work with paper or clay. Froebel's play songs have been written, illustrated and printed.

## iii) Playing of Various Educational Games in the 'Play Circle'

The children play games by joining hands in a circle. Chairs in a kindergarten are arranged in a circle so that the teacher has equal access to all children.

Furthermore, kindergarten also included construction with materials, practice at various tasks, especially gardening, that served to build character; and nature study, which Froebel considered uplifting for the child.

## c) Role of the Educator

**The teacher in the kindergarten is not to remain passive.** Rather, she must carefully guide children's play with gifts and occupations. She is also required to demonstrate certain activities to children, sing songs and suggest ideas when children play with the gifts. Can you see the similarity in the role of the teacher in play-based learning you read in Unit 8 with the role of the teacher in Froebel's kindergarten? The teacher must also inculcate values like sympathy, humility, and cooperation. She has to avoid external restraint and bodily punishment. The child must be helped to realize that discipline depends upon one's love for order, goodwill and mutual understanding, and not on some outside authority. Froebel said that women should be trained for working with children at this stage.

In kindergarten, responsibility was shared by all, individual rights were respected and cooperation was practiced.

Froebel's contribution to preschool education has been kindergarten. Its modern descendent, the nursery school, is mostly Froebelian in spirit. The roots of play-based activity-based and experiential pedagogy, which is the hallmark of good early childhood education today, can be traced to Froebel. The role of the teacher in actively guiding children's play has been explicitly detailed by Froebel. He conceived the basic principles and designed the first materials (his gifts) of a kindergarten. Froebel's programme was centred around play and sensory awareness. Art activities, games, songs, block play, stories, crafts, finger plays were part of the curriculum. These are pillars of good early childhood education even today. Although few children today are presented with Froebel's original play gifts, the games and other educational equipment available in the market are closely based on his principles.

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## 9.6 JOHN DEWEY (1859-1952)

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Dewey was a world-renowned philosopher from the United States of America. During his many years as an academic professional, he introduced philosophies that applied to many fields, including the fields of psychology and education.

Dewey was an advocate of democracy and also developed his educational philosophy based on these principles. As you know, in a democracy, the citizens of a country or society are involved in making decisions about the country by electing representative leaders. **Dewey saw education as a key element of building a democratic society and also in bringing about positive changes in society.** He believed that through education, the child can achieve her potential and contribute to society.

Dewey believed that education was a social process that begins from the time of birth. He gave importance to hands-on experiences as a source of learning for children. In 1894, Dewey founded a Laboratory School at the University of Chicago, USA. This Laboratory School was an elementary-level school (including pre-primary classes) that followed Dewey's education philosophy.

Dewey wrote many books on education including — My Pedagogic Creed, The School and Society, The Child and the Curriculum, Democracy and Education, and Experience and Education.

### 9.6.1 Dewey's View of the Child

Dewey believed that children were innately good and valuable. He considered childhood to be an important part of life. He felt that education and life should be integrated.

Dewey believed that from the youngest age, the human mind can seek answers through self-initiated activity and trial-and-error inquiry. Thus, for children to truly learn, they should have real-world experience (actual experience) and then think over the experience. This means it is not enough that a child reads about plants in books. Rather, she should actually see plants in the garden, feel them and observe how they grow and later think about, reflect upon and analyze what they have seen. This direct experience would give the child a better understanding of plants.

### 9.6.2 Features of Learning and Education in the Early Years

**Dewey was one of the foremost proponents of progressive education in the world.** 'Progressive Education' is an approach to education that sees children as active and involved learners who should have a say in the experiences they have in the classroom. So, this approach takes into account what and how children want to learn. It respects the prior knowledge the child brings to the classroom, as new knowledge is built on previous learning. **This style of education relies on direct experiences (or hands-on learning) followed by reflection regarding the experience. Such an approach to education is called 'Experiential Learning'.** This approach emphasizes including methods such as nature walks, hands-on activities, and

project methods in the curriculum. This child-centred view was very different from the traditional system being followed in Dewey’s time, in which teachers completely determined what the child has learned. Thus, Dewey’s contribution to educational thinking was revolutionary for his time in his country.

You read earlier that Dewey believed that education played a key role in building society and that the child learns through experiences of interacting with society. This led Dewey to conclude that the **school too should function like a mini-society** where the child has experiences similar to the actual society. In this way, the child learns the various rules of society. Dewey wanted children in school to experience things similar to what they would in the real world. One way to do this was by including activities in the classroom based on real-life occupations like carpentry, sewing, cooking, and so on. Through these children can learn about the practical aspects of different occupations along with reading, writing, and mathematics.

**a) Role of the Educator**

Dewey recognized the teacher’s role as being crucial in the education of the child. The teacher according to Dewey is a guide and a facilitator, who needs to guide the child’s self-discovery.

He believed that the teachers need to keep the child in mind while performing the functions of helping children gain knowledge and manage the classroom.

He encouraged giving children the freedom to choose, however, he also cautioned that giving in-experienced children too much freedom can also be harmful. He felt that the aim of giving freedom is to teach children responsibility. Freedom should not be given just for the sake of it. Therefore, Dewey believed that the teacher should also play a major role in deciding what the child would learn. The teacher should listen to suggestions made by the children and then decide what can be included in the curriculum.

Teachers should not be oppressive. Rather, they should listen to the children, understand their needs, their psychology, and their context, and make it possible for them to get the right experiences through which they can learn. In other words, the teacher has to manage the learning environment of the child in such a way that children interact with it, with each other, and gain valuable experiences.

Dewey’s belief about the child as an active learner, his concept of progressive education, and experiential learning have had a lasting impact on education and are seen as they are as features of good quality education today.

**Check Your Progress Exercise 2**

- 1) What is the similarity between Rousseau, Pestalozzi and Froebel?

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2) What was Froebel’s contribution to preschool education?

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3) What was the influence of John Dewey’s philosophy on education?

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4) Write in brief about Experiential Learning as an approach in education.

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### 9.7 RABINDRANATH TAGORE (1861-1941)

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Tagore, popularly known as ‘Gurudev’, was a poet, an educationist, an artist, a social as well as a religious reformer.

**Tagore was a naturalist**, believing in immediate and direct contact with nature as a means of education. His ideas can be compared, to some extent, with those of Rousseau. He felt that the cares and miseries of the world, which are created by man, wear away one’s power to be happy. He wrote: *“The inexpensive power to be happy which, along with other children, I brought with me to this world was being worn away by friction with the brick-and-mortar arrangement of life.”* He did not like the lessening of contact with nature brought about as a result of modernization and industrialization and tried to bring back the balance.

Tagore started a Bengali school at Bolpur in West Bengal, in 1901, which was called *Shantiniketan*. It was here that he evolved his ideology of education and gave practical shape to his ideas. Later, this school grew into a world university called ‘Viswa Bharati’.

His books include ‘Shikshar Herpher’, ‘The Parrots’ Training’, and ‘Shiksha Samasya’.

### 9.7.1 Tagore's View of the Child

Tagore saw children as persons with their own rights and not as 'unfinished adults'. He, thus, believed that children should not be expected to behave like grown-up people.

He felt that children were more open-minded than adults and accepting of knowledge around them in an almost subconscious way. He said, "*The child, because it has no conscious object of life beyond living, can see all things around it, can hear every sound with a perfect freedom of attention, not having to exercise choice in the collection of information.*"

So that children can learn in this way, they need freedom – freedom to determine what they want to do not all the time, but for a major part of it. Freedom can also include a little 'naughtiness', which according to Tagore, was an expression of curiosity and development, and thus, is a desirable quality in children.

He said that "*Children with the freshness of their senses come directly to intimacy with this world. This is a great gift they have... and must never lose their power of immediate communication with it... We should have the gift to be natural with nature and human with human society.*" The suffering and misery of a child under a heartless educational system have been forcefully brought out in his educational writings.



Fig. 9.2: Children learning under the shade of a tree at Tagore's Shantiniketan

Source:

<http://incredibleindia.org/lang/en/travel/destinations/shantiniketan/shantiniketan-intro>

### 9.7.2 Features of Learning and Education in the Early Years

Tagore was convinced that in the early years the child should arrive at truth spontaneously, through the natural process, by coming in contact with things and persons. This would pave the way for the widest possible development of the child's interests. **Learning for the child**, he felt, is essentially **explorative, active, and full of joy.**



**The curriculum in his preschool was activity-centred rather than subject-centred. He believed in education through play and activity.** Art, for him, was the bridge between man and the world. **The cardinal principle in his educational theory is the freedom for creative self-expression** and so he stressed the creative aspects of learning, crafts, work and play. He felt that literature was the true vehicle of education and encouraged the reading of folk literature for its cultural significance and to grasp the psychology of people.

**Tagore emphasized the following three methods of teaching:**

- a) **Peripatetic Method:** A follower of the peripatetic method, Tagore was concerned with the association between body and mind, to establish a total rhythm and harmony in life. He believed that drama and histrionic arts should be an integral part of the preschool curriculum. This is because children need the opportunity to express themselves through bodily movements.
- b) **Activity Method:** Believing in learning by doing, he emphasized that children must learn through activities.
- c) **Learning through the Environment:** Tagore stressed teaching through the environment. To the preschooler, he said, teaching should be done when they are on 'nature walks' or 'on trek', *"If possible, I would recommend children to carry their notebooks and to go on writing while they are on trek"*, he said.

Tagore was against rigid discipline. He believed that the object of education was the freedom of the mind. He would give a break between two class periods and would change the place of the class from one tree to another. He felt that too many restrictions would make education joyless.

**The student-teacher relationship was the most significant aspect of his educational philosophy.** The primary function of the teacher, he believed, is to produce an atmosphere conducive to creative activity.

**Tagore's emphasis on teaching through the environment, learning by doing, education through self-activity are all considered qualities of good preschool education today.**

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## **9.8 MARIA MONTESSORI (1870-1952)**

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Maria Montessori was born in Italy. She was the first Italian woman to earn a medical degree. While working for her medical degree, Montessori became interested in children with intellectual disabilities and developed teaching materials and methods to facilitate their learning. She believed their problems were more educational than medical. She was proved right when many of them passed the regular school exams without difficulty. She then got an opportunity to work with children without disabilities from poor families with whom she tried out new materials and methods. In 1907, she created a school called '*Casa de Bambini*' which translates to 'Children's House' in English. She created a learning environment through her approach called the 'Montessori method' which was followed in the school.



Montessori visited India twice during her lifetime. She stayed here from 1939 to 1946 and then visited again in 1947. During her stay, she conducted multiple training courses in her method and had many Indian followers. Her stay in India is perhaps one of the reasons why the Montessori method is one of the most well-known international models of ECCE in India.

Montessori's publications include:

- The Discovery of the Child
- Education for a New World
- To Educate the Human Potential
- The Secret of Childhood
- The Child, Care and Education
- Reconstruction in Education
- The Absorbent Mind
- What You Should Know About the Child
- Child Training
- The Montessori Method

### 9.8.1 Montessori's Views about the Child

Though Montessori was not a human development theorist, she carefully studied children and their development and used this as the basis to develop the principles of her educational approach. Many of her observations about children and their development are part of standard child development theory today.

Montessori believed that the **way children learned was fundamentally different from that of adults**. She noticed that children had a great capacity to learn a lot very easily during the first few years of life. She called this capacity the '**absorbent mind**', comparing it to a sponge that soaks up liquid. She believed that all children have a fundamental intellectual structure that unfolds as the child develops. However, she also believed that **every child is unique** and there are individual differences in their pace of development. She strongly believed that collective methods of teaching crush the child's individuality. She treated each child as a separate individual and recommended that the teacher's strategy must be geared to each child's developmental level, interests and needs. She held that each child should be respected for her abilities, her pace and rhythm of learning. She also stated that there were specific periods which she called 'sensitive periods' when children were most receptive to certain kinds of stimuli and absorbed specific learning.

### 9.8.2 Features of Learning and Education in Early Years

Like Froebel, Montessori believed that education must help in the complete unfolding of the child's individuality. She stated that children would benefit if their environment provided appropriate experiences when they are most ready to learn from them. She gave the term '**prepared environment**' to explain how the environment must provide the right materials to match the child's stage of development.

Montessori believed that **the first six years of life are the most crucial period of a child's life** when the teacher can capitalize on the natural energy of children. Montessori asserted that during this age, **the very active senses are the gateways of knowledge as children explore the world through their senses**. Thus, training and development depend on the acquisition of knowledge throughout life. Her method emphasized learning based on hands-on experiences.

**She also attached importance to the motor and physical development as a part of the early education of children.** She believed that fostering motor development would facilitate other activities like writing and drawing.

She developed her own curriculum, learning activities and learning materials and made appropriate experiences available to children at times when they were almost ready to learn from them. The learning materials and experiences in a Montessori programme are carefully sequenced and presented to children keeping in mind their level of development. The sequence is from the simplest to the most difficult. If a learning task has a series of steps, the child is taught the precise order and the child has to use the material accordingly, whether the task is cleaning the table or using the number rods. The Montessori programme for the young child is of three years duration — from the age of 3 to 6.

#### a) Educational Materials

**Montessori developed her educational materials**, influenced by the materials developed by Edouard Seguin for the education of the intellectually disabled. The Montessori curriculum revolves around the use of these educational materials and apparatus. These are unique to her method and approach. The materials are designed on the philosophy of learning through the senses. The emphasis is on **encouraging the child to discover and understand concepts** by using these materials.

**Montessori's materials have certain characteristics:**

- i) **The materials are attractive:** They are usually made of natural materials like wood. Different materials have different colours and textures. The materials appeal to the hands and eyes, and the child is encouraged to touch and hold them.
- ii) **The materials are self-correcting:** Montessori's materials are designed in a way that ensures that the child correctly interacts with the material. There is only one correct way of arranging the material. For instance, while using Montessori's Cylindrical Blocks (Fig. 9.3), if the child puts the wooden knob in the wrong socket, it will not fit properly. This self-correcting nature of the materials ensures that the child keeps playing with the material and correcting herself till she finds the right socket for all the knobs. This aspect of Montessori's materials encourages problem-solving and independent behaviour.
- iii) **The materials are didactic:** Didactic materials are those materials that teach specific concepts to children directly. The child uses the material in her own way and since there is only one correct way of arranging the

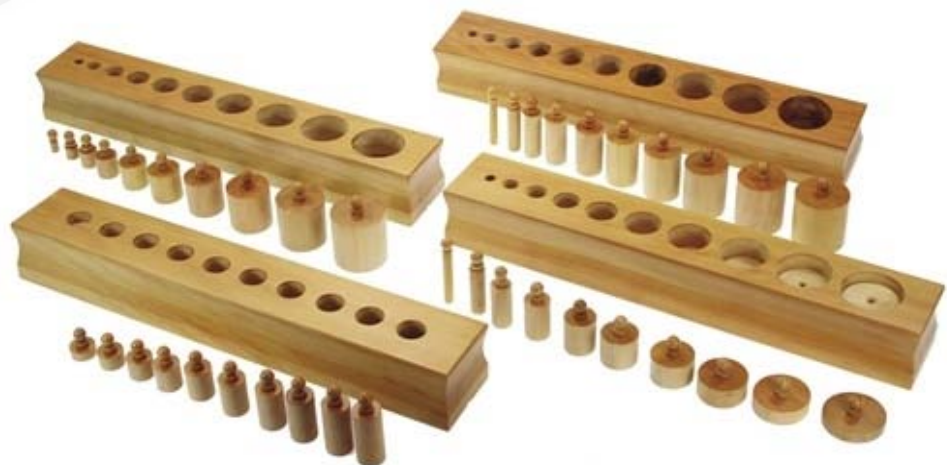
materials, the child continually gets feedback about her activity. In the process, the child learns concepts. For example, the Cylindrical Blocks (fig 9.3) allow perceiving size in different ways. Arranging cylindrical pieces of the same height but different diameters in an order of increasing width (diameter) helps children to understand the concept of relative thickness and width. Arranging cylindrical pieces of the same width but different heights develops the concept of relative height (taller than/ shorter than) and depth (deep/shallow). Cylindrical blocks which vary in width and height together draw the child's attention to two dimensions simultaneously – length and width (thickness).

Figures 9.3 to 9.6 show some Montessori materials.



**Fig. 9.3: Child playing with Montessori's Pink Tower. This material helps children understand the concept of 'bigger than' and 'smaller than'.**

Source: <https://sandycovemontessorijuniorschool.wordpress.com/>



**Fig. 9.4: Montessori's Cylindrical Blocks. The different types of Blocks help children in understanding concepts like big/small, tall/short and deep/shallow.**

Source: <http://www.alisonsmontessori.com/>



Fig. 9.5: Montessori's Spindle Box. This material helps children understand number concepts.

Source: <http://www.montessorimaterials.net/>



Fig. 9.6: Montessori's Dressing Frames. These frames help to develop practical skills of tying knots, fastening and unfastening hooks, buttons, zips, buckles, etc. which are related to dressing oneself.

Source: <http://www.amazon.com/FAC-Montessori-12-Dressing-Frames/dp/B007IS3710>

## b) Curriculum

Montessori believed that children should be exposed to reality and sensory-based curriculum rather than a fantasy-based curriculum as she felt that the latter tends to confuse children and hinders them in the process of adjusting themselves to the real world. So, while children would be exposed to art materials like crayons and paints in the Montessori classroom, the aim of using these materials would be the development of fine motor skills and not creative expression. Montessori's view on fantasy was also the reason why she did not approve of fairy tales for children.

Montessori's curriculum focuses on the development of three aspects through the use of her educational materials and activities:

- Development of the senses
- Development of conceptual abilities in the domains of language, mathematics and social studies
- Development of practical life skills.

Let us read a brief description of the activities and materials used in each of the areas:

### ***Sensorial Activities and Materials***

These help children to develop, broaden and refine the use of their senses. Children also develop concepts of size, colour, weight, texture, sound and smell when they use these materials. Some examples of sensorial activities/materials are — an activity where children sniff bottles having different smells to develop their sense of smell; the Pink Tower (Fig 10.2) which is a set of 10 cubes that children have to arrange from largest to smallest; arranging different shades of colours from lightest to darkest. Such activities and materials foster visual discrimination; and, the Fabric Box (which contains different types of fabrics like silk, cotton, linen and wool) helps children discriminate textures using their tactile sense.

### ***Practical Life Skills Activities/Materials***

Activities and materials in this curricular area enable children to learn habits and skills needed in everyday life. Many activities that children do under this curricular area are real work (and not pretend play) using actual tools and equipment. Some examples of practical life skills activities/materials are— polishing mirrors with a polishing cloth; using a broom to sweep the room; peeling fruits with a peeler; fastening and unfastening buttons, hooks, laces, etc. (Fig. 9.6); putting the articles in a room in order; setting a table; and, moving chairs quietly. These activities help students learn the value of cleanliness and order, dignity of labour, and self-help by attending to their needs themselves.

### ***Conceptual or Academic Activities/Materials***

These are academic materials that introduce children to reading, writing, mathematics and social studies in a concrete way. Some examples of conceptual activities/materials are — the map of a country in the form of a puzzle; Spindle Box to develop number concepts (Fig. 9.5); pictures of plants and animals that children identify and classify; an activity where children move their fingers over letters cut out of sandpaper using their finger, trace letters in cornmeal or use the movable alphabet to form words. There is a special emphasis in her teaching strategy on teaching reading and writing. Her educational apparatus provides for properly graded and correlated exercises that lead to reading and writing.

Montessori activities/materials in all these three areas are arranged in a series from easy to difficult, and are presented to the child depending on her requirement. In the first two years, the children work with practical life and sensory materials. In the third year, they are introduced to conceptual materials.

Social values are stressed in the classroom. Children serve lunch, eat together and later clean the plates. Many other activities are also performed cooperatively.

### c) Arrangement of the Learning Space

**The Montessori learning environment is calm, orderly, and aesthetically pleasing.** The importance of aesthetics or beauty is highlighted by including plants, flowers as well as simple and elegant materials/furnishings. There is plenty of open space in both the indoor and outdoor areas. All the materials used by the children are arranged on open shelves which can be easily accessed by them. The materials, equipment and furniture are all child-sized. The materials are stored in containers like baskets, trays or boxes which the children can carry by themselves when they want to use them. After the child is done with the activity, she keeps the container back in its place on the shelf.

The **classroom is divided into distinct learning spaces** or areas which contain materials for promoting specific skills, for example — the mathematics area, language area, area for sensory experiences, or an area promoting practical life skills. However, you may notice that some types of areas and materials which are commonly found in other ECCE models are not a part of the Montessori curriculum. Activities/areas which invite children to freely use their fantasy and imagination are absent from the Montessori classroom. There is no dramatic play area or creative art corner. This is because of Montessori's views on fantasy.

### d) The Learning Process and the Role of the Teacher

**The Montessori system is child-centered.** The child is free to choose the activity she desires. Yet, **there is a structure with freedom.** The educator structures the activities so that their performance leads to a certain development. She presents the options of materials/ activities to the child and gives instructions/ or demonstrations regarding how the materials should be used. After this presentation, the child is free to select what she wants to do. To aid the activity selection process, the teacher may also talk to the child to find out how ready she/he is to try an activity, or if the child would need help with it.

The child is free to proceed through the activity at her own pace. The activities are challenging as well as interesting. **Individualized teaching is the focal point of the Montessori Method,** i.e., the teaching strategy is evolved individually for each child, based on her needs and interests. This enables the child to progress at his or her own pace and promotes optimal development. The Montessori method emerged as an alternative to collective teaching. Montessori shifted the emphasis from teaching to learning. She believed that self-education is true education. It was important to help the child to learn rather than making her acquire information through formal studies.

In the Montessori classroom, one will find the children are busy working individually or in pairs/ small groups in a mostly quiet room. They work on individual mats or table tops as the educator (known as the 'directress' in the Montessori model) moves around in the room, observing them, commenting, or questioning wherever necessary. The educator rarely speaks to the class as a whole. Instead, she interacts individually with the children or in small

groups. The adults and children follow certain customs when speaking to each other. The children are spoken to in a respectful, low voice. Children must complete one task before beginning another. Most early childhood educators would describe the activities that children are engaged in, in Montessori classrooms as 'play'; however, Montessori called it 'work' – for her, the child's play was the child's work.

The Montessori classroom is traditionally a **multi-age classroom** for children aged 3 to 6 years of age. And while most activities in this classroom are done individually by children, collaboration amongst children is encouraged. Montessori believed that this would be beneficial for the younger children who would learn how to do activities by observing and imitating older children, and older children would also benefit from teaching younger children.

**Montessori replaced the word 'teacher' or 'educator' with the word 'directress'**, as she believed that the function of the teacher was to direct or facilitate and not to teach. The directress's role is to create a prepared environment for the child to interact. She rarely exerts direct control over the child. She observes the child and involves herself only when necessary. Montessori places great importance on respecting the child. The motto of the directress should be: *"I must diminish, to let you grow"*.

Montessori suggested that a teacher should care for the child as a gardener cares for plants so that the natural growth of the child is properly guided in the process of unfolding itself. The directress should have an intimate knowledge of the mind and character of each child. She should keep the physiological records of each child's development: the weight, height and other measurements. In the words of Montessori, *"The Directress should be partly doctor, partly scientist and completely religious. Like a doctor, she should avoid scolding or suppressing the patient in order to avoid worse situations. Like a scientist, she should wait patiently for the results... Like a religious lady, she should be there to serve the child."*

The directress should allow the child to grow according to his or her inner law. Her business is to provide a suitable environment. She should provide children with suitable opportunities to think for themselves. *"Virtues, and not words, are the main qualifications of the Directress"*. She must acquire moral alertness, patience, love and humility. She must banish anger, which prevents one from understanding the child. The soul of the child, which is pure and very sensitive, requires her most delicate care.

To become an educator in a traditional Montessori School, one has to go through a specialized Montessori training programme.

**Montessori did not believe in material rewards and punishments.** According to her, material rewards are unnatural incentives and punishment leads to forced efforts on the part of the child. Therefore, she believed, that the development that comes with their help will also be unnatural. Thus, in the Montessori classroom, teachers do not praise children for completing an activity. The satisfaction children experience after completing an activity is the reward.

Today, the Montessori method has spread across the world. There are numerous Montessori preschools, schools, as well as Montessori teacher training courses all over the world. While Montessori designed an education



methodology that focused on the child’s complete school education, it is in the field of ECCE/ preschool education where her model has flourished. Today, one finds Montessori schools that strictly follow the original techniques while others have adapted themselves and incorporated elements from other approaches as well. Also, many preschools following other curricular approaches and models have incorporated aspects of Montessori’s curriculum and materials in their programme.

**Check Your Progress Exercise 3**

1) What are the three methods of teaching emphasized by Rabindranath Tagore?

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2) Montessori’s curriculum focuses on which three aspects of development?

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3) According to Maria Montessori, what is the role of an educator in the classroom?

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**9.9 SUMMING UP**

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During different periods, progressive educators rebelled against the unimaginative and restrictive method of imparting education to young children and evolved their own methods, in keeping with the development and the interests of the young child.

- Johann Amos Comenius (1592-1670) advocated an education system that followed natural order and thus children’s natural inclinations. He emphasized the importance of play, stimulation of the senses, and interesting books for children — all of which are an integral part of good infant stimulation practices and preschool education today.
- Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1798) introduced a movement in education which is called ‘Naturalism’. Rousseau’s conception of freedom in



education, growth and development, the value of motivation for learning; the importance of a child's active participation and discovery in the learning process, as well as recognition of childhood as a distinct stage of development are noteworthy in educational theory and practice.

- John Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746-1827) stated that the aim of education was the harmonious development of all the powers — moral, intellectual and physical. He stressed upon modern progressive education and the kindergarten system where teaching was based on the child's nature and the child's spontaneous activity.
- Friedrich Wilhelm August Froebel (1782-1852) was the founder of the 'kindergarten' system and believed in the interrelatedness of nature and the child's developing mind and stated that education should harmonize with the child's inner development.
- John Dewey (1859- 1952) saw education as a key element in building a democratic society and also in bringing about positive changes in society. He is the foremost proponent of progressive education as an approach that is based on experiential learning.
- Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) was a naturalist, who believed in immediate and direct contact with nature as a means of education. The cardinal principle in his educational theory is the freedom for creative self-expression and he emphasized learning by doing and education through self-activity.
- Maria Montessori believed that the way children learned was fundamentally different from that of adults. She developed unique educational material designed on the philosophy of learning through the senses. Montessori's materials are attractive, self-correcting and didactic in nature.

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## 9.10 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READINGS

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## 9.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

### Check Your Progress Exercise 1

1)

	<b>Comenius</b>	<b>Rousseau</b>	<b>Pestalozzi</b>
View of Children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Child's growth period — infancy, childhood, boyhood and youth.</li> <li>- Proposed six years of schooling for each grade.</li> <li>- Proposed mother's lap should serve as the first school for the child.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Children have unique nature, different from adults, that needs to be nurtured and protected.</li> <li>- Children are active participants in their own development by exploring their environment.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Children should have the right to be taught by good and caring teachers in a safe environment.</li> <li>- Children's learning should begin with concrete and sensory expressions.</li> <li>- There are individual differences among children and should be recognized.</li> </ul>
Features of Learning & Education for Early Years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Education should follow the natural order and children's natural inclinations.</li> <li>- Education should encourage the sensory based-learning.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Education needs to be based on 'Naturalism' - learning from the natural environment</li> <li>- Play is necessary for Children's learning process</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Education should ensure a harmonious development of all the facets such as moral, intellectual and physical.</li> <li>- The child and not the subject/curriculum should be the focus of education.</li> </ul>

- 2) a) True  
b) False  
c) True

3)

<b>Similarities</b>	<b>Differences</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Education should be child-centred.</li> <li>- Learning is based on sensory experiences.</li> <li>- Emphasized child's play and self-activity.</li> <li>- Stressed upon the use of objects, and illustrations for teaching.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Rousseau believed that parents were a hindrance to a child's development whereas, Pestalozzi emphasized that the mother has an important role in children's development.</li> <li>- Rousseau emphasized one-to one tutoring whereas, Pestalozzi believed in group learning at school.</li> </ul>

- 4) Pestalozzi was the forerunner of modern progressive education and the kindergarten system. His schools, where teaching was based upon the child's nature and the child's spontaneous activity, have had an influence on the present-day preschool education which emphasizes play, the manipulation of objects and games.

### Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- 1) Like Rousseau and Pestalozzi, Froebel believed in the interrelatedness of nature and the child's developing mind and stated that education should harmonize with the child's inner development. It should conform with the child's nature and needs. Froebel believed that the growth of the child is directed by an inner force.
- 2) Froebel's contribution to preschool education has been kindergarten. Its modern descendent, the nursery school, is more nearly Froebelian in spirit. The roots of play-based activity-based experiential pedagogy, which is the hallmark of good early childhood education today can be traced to Froebel.
- 3) Dewey saw education as a key element of building a democratic society and also in bringing about positive changes in society. Dewey believed that education was a social process that begins from the time of birth. And thus concluded that 'the school too should function like a mini-society' where the child has experiences similar to the actual society.
- 4) Experiential Learning is an approach in education that relies on direct experiences (or hands-on learning) of children as a resource for their learning, followed by reflection regarding the experience. This approach emphasizes including methods such as nature walks, hands-on activities, and project method in the curriculum.

### Check Your Progress Exercise 3

- 1)
  - a) Peripatetic method: Expression through bodily movements (association between body and mind), to establish a total rhythm and harmony in life.
  - b) Activity method: Believing in learning by doing, he emphasized that children must learn through activities.
  - c) Learning through the environment: Tagore stressed teaching through the environment such as through nature walks, treks.
- 2) Montessori believed that children should be exposed to reality and a sensory-based curriculum rather than a fantasy-based. The curriculum developed by her focuses on the development of three aspects through the use of her educational materials and activities:
  - Development of the senses
  - Development of conceptual abilities in the domains of language, mathematics and social studies
  - Development of practical life skills
- 3) Maria Montessori believed that the function of the teacher was to direct or facilitate and not to teach and she addressed them as 'directress'. According to her, the directress's role is:
  - To create a prepared environment for the child to interact with.
  - To care for the child like a gardener who cares for plants, so that the natural growth of the child is properly guided in the process of unfolding itself.
  - To have an intimate knowledge of the mind and character of each child.