

**TABLE 4.3 Comparing Theories of Child Development**

Theorist and Theory	Summation of Theory	Implications for Practice
Erik Erikson: Stages of Personal and Social Development	Through a hypothesis of four stages of psychological and social development in the lives of children, Erikson identifies how children might typically negotiate personal challenges and resolve them dependent on their age and stage of development.	Erikson's theory emphasizes the role of the sociocultural context on children's personal and social lives. Erikson provides useful observations of developmental patterns so teachers can anticipate and respond to children's needs appropriately.
Abraham Maslow: Self-Actualization Theory	Maslow identified a hierarchy of needs that motivate people's behavior and their ability to reach a hierarchy of personal goals. Maslow pointed out that if basic needs are not met, it is not possible for people to actualize personal satisfaction and succeed at a higher level of growth and learning.	The foundations for self-actualization of goals are laid early in life. Teachers may need to ensure that basic needs—food, water, shelter, safety, and security—are met to assist in helping children to develop a sense of community and belonging, self-esteem, and respect for others.
Jean Piaget: Cognitive Theory	According to Piaget, children learn by constructing their own understanding based on their direct experiences with people and objects. Piaget identified four age-related stages of cognitive development that describe how cognitive abilities change as children get older.	From birth, children are viewed as competent actors in constructing their own understanding. Teachers need to provide an enriching environment and hands-on materials for children to explore and investigate. Teachers facilitate children's engagement in projects.
Lev Vygotsky: Sociocultural Theory	Vygotsky described learning as the result of social interaction within a cultural context. He identified the zone of proximal development (ZPD)—the distance between the actual developmental level a child has achieved (their independent level of problem solving) and the level of potential development they could achieve with adult guidance or through collaboration with other children. The support teachers provide children is called scaffolding.	What children learn is determined by the needs of the culture in which they live. Children learn by solving problems collaboratively with the teacher's support or by working with peers, which is called co-construction or social construction of knowledge. Teachers use many strategies to scaffold learning—gradually providing less assistance as children become more capable of performing on their own. Play is essential for children's development of self-regulation.
B. F. Skinner: Behaviorism	Skinner developed the theory of operant conditioning that defines learning as a change in behavior that is controlled by the consequences that follow the behavior. Positive consequences strengthen the frequency of specific behaviors; unpleasant consequences decrease the frequency. Punishment temporarily stops a behavior but does not teach a new one.	Teachers use reinforcement to increase children's positive behavior and decrease their challenging behavior. They use shaping to teach a new, complex skill or behavior by rewarding each step—successive approximation—toward the desired goal.
Albert Bandura: Social Cognitive Theory	Bridging behaviorism and cognitive theory, Bandura demonstrated that people can learn more efficiently from observing the consequences of another person's behavior rather than having to directly experience them. Children learn by modeling the behavior of others. They also learn vicariously, whether the behavior of other people is rewarded or punished.	Teachers model and demonstrate the kinds of behaviors they want children to perform. They draw children's attention to other children's behavior and its positive consequences. Children are motivated to perform behavior that they see rewarded in other people.

on direct teaching of literacy and mathematics, and highly structured activities or lessons such as sports or ballet (Elkind, 2008; Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009).

Early childhood educators deeply value play. But to use play effectively in teaching children, and to advocate for its value, it is important to be clear about what types of play matter and why it is worth defending. In the sections that follow, we describe what play is, how it develops, and how it benefits children.