

The history of interactionist theory education essay

[Education](#)



As a matter of fact, the nature/nurture debate has dominated the thoughts of researchers for a long time as people have been trying to find out the origin of intelligence. Bee (2004) believed that this question could possibly be among the oldest theories debated in psychology. The nurture view holds that human mind was born without any knowledge. This view is supported by empiricists, and one of the major tenants of empiricists is John Locke, a seventeenth English philosopher, who thought that humans are born with an empty mind, without any knowledge, and that they have to learn everything from experience. (Baird, 2008). In the 19th century, Hermann von Helmholtz " believed that the raw data of sensation were perpetually subject to judgements based on experience." (Gigerenzer, 1987) His research was " that there is a simple inverse relationship between distance and retinal image size." (Gleitman, 1999). He concluded that it is through experience which we gain the ability to understand our visual perceptions. Empiricism was adopted by educationalists. Jean Piaget, a Swiss psychologist examined physical knowledge in infancy using some experiments, and concluded that the notion of physical law of motion does not exist in children under eighteen months of age. (McLeod, 2009). Further, John B. Watson and B. F. Skinner, came with behaviourism to argue that a child can be made into any kind of person, regardless of their heredity. However other researchers questioned those findings and came with a different view : Innativism. Innativists claimed that a child was born with innate abilities which are actualised in context. This view was influenced by Plato, a Greek philosopher who thought that ' Children begin life with knowledge already present within them,; they do not learn anything new but merely recollect knowledge that has

previously lain dormant'. Nativism was later adopted by Immanuel Kant, a German philosopher of the 18th centry. Kant talked in terms of innate categories, mainly space, time and causality, that human beings are born with, and argued that those categories enable people to understand their senses. (Rohlif, 2010) In other words, knowledge of these concepts is innate. Charles Darwin was also among those who offered evidence of inherited knowledge with his " universality thesis" where, after some cross-cultural studies, he came to conclude that some facial expressions are universal to all people. Darwin finally explained that all people are born with an innate understanding of these facial expressions. (Gleitman, 1999)One of the domains in which this debate has found implications in education is language acquisition. Despite the existence of several theories of language development, this essay limits only to three of them that have a close link with the nature/nurture debate. According to behaviourist theory, language is viewed as a kind of verbal behaviour, and based on this view they argue that children learn language by imitating people, reinforcing what they have imitated, making analogy, and structured input. This is called linguistic empiricism, also referred to as the " nurture" or " external" perspective. For empiricists, language is entirely learned. In this context, language and grammar become features of the organism's environment, and a cultural invention. This is based on behaviourism, developed by the John B. Watson in 1923. On the other hand, there is linguistic nativism, according to which language and its basics are innate. This is the " nature" or " internal" perspective. In this context, language and grammar are devices every human being is born with. They are universals that all humans share, as

language is in the genes. This is the theory advocated by the American linguist Noam Chomsky who argued for a universal grammar wired in every child brain. This position was also adopted by Jerry Fodor (1983) who studied the relationship between language and mind and viewed language as a modular process with implications for a theory of language acquisition, seen as genetically predetermined. The third interesting theory is called interactionist theory, which considers language development as having both a biological and a social aspect. According to this theory, language is developed through a child's desire to convey his or her thoughts and feelings. The foundation of this view of language acquisition was laid by Vygotsky, a psychologist and social constructivist. Vygotsky (1962, 1978) proposed a model of collaborative learning arguing that "social interaction plays an important role in the learning process and that "children are born with a powerful brain that matures slowly and predisposes them to acquire new understandings that they are motivated to share with others" (Shaffer, et al., 2002: 362). This theory was later adopted by Jerome Bruner who founded a model of language development in the context of adult-child interaction. In education, it can be argued that both nature and nurture are responsible for the way people learn new knowledge. For that reason, the position advocated by Robert Plomin would help to put both empiricism and nativism together for the good of children. Actually, the American Psychologist, Robert Plomin convincingly showed that through genetic factors, one can notice a clear link between the environment and person outcomes such as intelligence (Plomin, et al., 2005). Nowadays, it is agreed that the interaction of nurture and nature cannot be denied in a child's development.

(Bee, 2004) In practical terms, it means that aspects such as the innate ability of the child and the environmental factors should be taken into account. This is what McDevitt and Ormrod (2004: 7) had to say: " Nurture affects children's development through multiple channels-physically through nutrition and activity; intellectually through informal experiences and formal instruction; socially through adult role models and peer relationships". At this point, one can share Ganly (2007) position and argue that it is difficult to make a distinction between those two views, and go a step further to show the effect they have on a child performance in education. The nature aspect is important as it helps to determine inherited possible disabilities such as reading disability, so making teachers proactive and prepare an intervention at early stages. Educators have therefore to make sure the inner nature of a child is respected, that a child feels wanted and put in a supportive environment to learn. There should be a balance between class time between acquisition activities and learning exercises, and education becomes To conclude, one can assert that both nature and nurture view as originated from nativism and empiricism play a role in someone's education. For this reason educators should have enough information on a child to make sure that not only they become able to explain some problems affecting the child in a school environment, but also they will become able cater for a child's needs as a complete individual who have innate dispositions and influence of social environment.