



## Some important theorists

Having spent a little time thinking about what child development is, why we need to study it, and having looked at one or two critical issues, it is time to introduce you to some of the people who have been influential in the study of child development. These theorists, through the models that they have built and the ideas that they have investigated, have contributed a great deal to our understanding of how babies and young children grow. You will be meeting their ideas as you work through this module. At this stage I will offer just a brief introduction to each one of them.

**Jean Piaget** (1896-1980) was a Swiss biologist who became interested in the development of his own children, and because of this decided to investigate how we acquire knowledge. He was not specifically interested in child development as a whole, and did not directly apply his findings to the field of education. A lot of his work was done during the 1920s and 1930s, but was not translated into English until the 1960s.

**Jerome Bruner** is an American psychologist who is also interested in child development. He maintains that language and the social setting in which learning takes place are both important, and also asserts that a person (child or adult) can be taught anything as long as the ideas are presented in a way that is intellectually comprehensible to the learner.

**Lev Vygotsky** was a Russian psychologist, born in the same year as Piaget, who was interested in the development and transmission of human culture. He wrote first in the 1930s, his work being translated into English by Bruner in the 1960s. All of the work that he did was based purely upon theory; he did no experimental or observational work, but his ideas have become very influential.

**John Bowlby**, a British psychiatrist, built a theory of emotional development through his own research on children and adolescents, and also used animal studies to support his model. His work had a strong influence on childcare practices especially during the 1950s and 1960s, but is still sometimes considered important now.

**Margaret Donaldson** has worked with other psychologists in Great Britain from the 1970s, repeating some of Piaget's experimental work and producing findings that contradicted his. Her work emphasises the importance of the child being able to make sense of situations, both in terms of their context and also regarding the language that is used.

**Sigmund Freud (1856-1939)** was born in the Czech Republic, but his family soon moved to Vienna. He became a doctor there and, through his interest in the mind and the development of personality, formulated a theory of personality which has remained influential ever since.

**Erik Erikson** developed a theory of psychosocial development which centres around the idea that development occurs as a result of resolving conflict. The conflicts that Erikson identified relate to a person's relationships with other members of her/his society.