1. Introduction

The field of Educational Psychology (EP) was founded by several pioneers in psychology just before the start of the twentieth century. One of those pioneers was William James (1842-1910).Soon after launching the first psychology textbook, Principles of Psychology (1890), he gave a series of lectures called Talks to Teachers (James, 1899) in which he discussed the applications of psychology to educating children. James argued that laboratory psychology experiments often cannot tell us how to effectively teach children. He argued for the importance of observing teaching and learning in classrooms for improving education. One of his recommendations was to start lessons at a point just beyond the child’s level of knowledge and understanding in order to stretch the child’s mind.

A second major figure in shaping the field of EP was John Dewey (1859-1952), who became a driving force in the practical application of psychology. Dewey established the first major educational psychology laboratory in the United States, at the university of Chicago in 1894 and among his revolutionary writings were ‘The School and the Society’(1899) and ‘The Child and the Curriculum’(1902). In his view, John Dewey tried to clarify the relationship between the school and society and described what, according to him, an ideal school should look like. He proposed that school as an institution should not be viewed as a "small version" of society, but should be considered as a simplification of the existing social life. Furthermore, Dewey called for knowledge to all members of the society ,i.e., education was no longer exclusive to any social class or ethnic group and it became the necessity for social development.

Two other contributors in the field of EP were the American Jerome Seymour Bruner (1915-2016), and the Russian Psychologist Lev Semenovich Vygotsky (1896-1934).Bruner and his colleagues developed the concept of Scaffolding which is a process in which support is provided to an individual so that he or she can complete a task that could not be completed independently. The support is smoothly removed when the individual starts to show understanding and mastery of the task at hand. The concept of scaffolding was based on Lev Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Vygotsky described the ZPD as the distance between the actual developmental level where independent problem solving occurs and the potential developmental level where problem solving can occur with the guidance of an adult or more knowledgeable peer. Key to the ZPD is social interaction and collaborative problem solving. Thus, the ZPD bridges the gap between what an individual can learn and do independently and what he or she can learn and do with support. The scaffolding process in education bears similarities with the traditional definition of scaffolding, which is a temporary framework that supports workers and materials until a building is constructed or repaired to stand on its own. When scaffolding is used in instruction, learners receive support as needed and then the support is gradually removed as they achieve independence in task mastery.

Of course there are other psychologists who have challenged the field of EP and have had their words in the shaping of the different learning theories: John Braodus Watson (1878-1958) the founder of Behaviourism; Ivan Pavlov (1849-1936) with his classical conditioning; Edward Thorndike (1874-1949) and his puzzle boxes resulting in the Law of Effect theory; and Burrhus Frederic Skinner (1904-1990) the developer of Operant Conditioning; Benjamin Bloom (1913-1999) with his taxonomy of levels of learning domains; Howard Gardner (1943) and his Multiple Intelligences theory; and the Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget (1896-1980) with his cognitive development theory. Needless to say that not all of these psychologists are going to be detailed in this handout as this is only a one semester course and time constraints will certainly not permit it, still students might do their own knowledge expansion about the above mentioned concepts and Psychologists by referring to the further readings section which will be proposed by the end of the course.