Psy235 Developmental Psychology Lecture Notes

Week 1 – Introduction

- Overview of developmental theories: What is developmental psych about?
    - Systematic changes and continuities in the individual that occur between conception and death. How we become who we are – and how we change.
    - Developmental psych's seek to:
        1. Describe human development: normal development and individual differences (so inside what is normal, looking at the range of normal and also looking at individual variations)
        2. To explain development
        3. To optimise development – to make a difference to people's life trajectories.
- Developmental Psychology and Social Engagement
    - Developmental theory can influence policy oriented action
    - Evidence based theoretically grounded interventions can make a difference
    - Problems that confront our society are intergenerational
    - Developmentalists are very engaged with trying to take their work out into the real world and make sure that it is relevant and ultimately applicable
- How do Developmental Psych's Make a Difference?
    - Influence on education practices, bullying in schools, early childhood, childcare
    - Influence on children in the legal system – the family court, criminal matters
    - Influence on social policies – children in detention, aged care and positive ageing
    - Influence social initiatives in underprivileged communities, support for families with multiple risk factors
    - Interventions – mental health problems, adolescent mental health, dementia
- Explaining Development: The Nature of Change
    - Positive change: growth in competence or capacity
    - Negative change: loss of competence of capacity
    - Pattern of early positive change, followed by stability, and then later negative change applies to biological/physical development, but not clearly to other developmental domains
    - Quantitative change: more or less of something, increases in height, weight, vocabulary, speed of processing, increase then decrease in visual acuity
    - Qualitative change: involves the appearance of something new, new behaviour like sitting → crawling → walking or crying → vocalising → sentences. Reorganisation of thought and action (e.g. being able to mentally manipulate representations)
    - Normative change – universals: general changes in behaviour across ages that virtually all children share; developmental milestones: walking, first words

- Individual differences: variability in when and how universal developmental milestones are achieved (differences in rate of development, differences in sequence of development). Variability as uniqueness (different styles, preferences, etc.)
- Developmental Processes
    - Maturation: the biological unfolding of the individual according to a plan contained in the genes – nature
    - Learning: the process through which experience brings about relatively permanent changes in thoughts, feelings, or behaviour – nurture
    - Epigenetics: the process through which experience and environment can influence gene expression
    - Studying these processes allows for the development and suggestion Interventions: make changes to the environment (interplay of nature vs nurture); optimising development
- What Causes Developmental Change?
    - Nature vs nurture
    - Example: child having problems at school
    - Your stance in the NVN debate determines your approach to children and the situation in which they are in and how the situation may or should be handled. However, being an eclectic person, one would accept interactions between the two like looking at how the culture of the school matches the culture of the family and how this may have resulted in the child's difficulties
- Goals
    1. To Describe
        - Normative-descriptive approach
        - Careful systematic observations of children (Gesell/Brazelton)
        - Maturational theory – genetic determinants
        - Largely invariant (universal) sequence
        - Cycles of "better"/" worse" phases
        - Provide descriptive age-norms
- Thinking About Theories
    - Focus: what does the theory seek to explain?
    - Assumptions: what are the fundamental assumptions underpinning the theory?
    - Predictions: what does the theory predict?
    - Clinical applications: how is the theory useful in the real world?
- Developmental Theories
    - Map our knowledge
    - Give meaning/connections to knowledge
    - Provide a framework to help us organise our thinking, make and test predictions
- Age as an Explanatory Variable?
    - Lifespan definitions culturally and historically constrained
    - Different age-grades/norms in different cultures, cohorts (physical/biological age, psychological age, social age)
    - Neugarten – The Social Clock

- Bronfenbrenner: Ecological Theory
  - Really took note of context
  - Shows us that a baby is in a familial environment and every subsequent and further out environment is influenced by those that are inner and outer like the resources of a neighbourhood influencing childhood and the socioeconomic environment that the child exists within
  - Examples: Microsystem
  - Microsystem: The Home: e.g. marital conflict and discord are high – less interaction among family members – mothers – less positive and more negative interaction with children – more negative behaviour
  - Mesosystem: neighbourhood: community: e.g. influence on mother of quality of local playgroup, childcare centre
  - Exosystem: the workplace: higher unemployment, lack of job security, families isolated from formal and informal support systems
  - Macrosystem: society's attitudes towards violence, corporal punishment, gay marriage, children
- Contextual-Systems Theories
- Children, Families, Communities
  - Positive Legacy: systematic examination of the nature of biological and environmental influences of development. Complexity reflects complexity of development. Development can proceed along many paths depending on the intricate interplay of nature and nurture.