1.1 Developmental Theories

Development

- **Systematic changes and continuities in the individual that occur between conception and death**
- **How we become who we are and how we change**

Goals of Developmental Psychology

1. **Describe** human development
    - Normal development
    - Individual differences
2. **Explain** developmental processes
3. **Optimise** development
    - Make a difference to people's live trajectories helping people reach milestones

The Nature of Change

- **Positive change:** Growth in competence or capacity
- **Negative change:** Loss of competence or capacity
- Pattern of development:
    - Early positive change → Stability →
      → Negative change to biological/physical development, but not to other developmental domains
- **Quantitative Change:** More or less of something
    - Increase in height, weight, vocabulary, speed of processing
    - Increase then decrease in visual acuity
- **Qualitative change:** Involves the **appearance of something new**
    - New behaviour
        - Sitting → Crawling → Walking
        - Crying → Vocalising → Words → 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 and sequence of development
    - Can't be too prescriptive with developmental norms, some come to same milestones in different ways
- Variability as uniqueness
    - Different styles, preferences, etc.

Developmental Processes

- **Maturation:** Biological unfolding of individual according to a plan contained in the genes
    - Nature
    - A lot of early development is maturational
        - But individual differences often emerge through differences in environment.
- **Learning:** Process which **experience** brings relatively permanent changes in thoughts, feelings, or behaviour
    - Nurture
    - Environmental influences = crucial, even with a biological plan development can be severely stunted.
- **Epigenetics:** Process through which experience and environment can influence gene expression
    - Influence can be passed on to the next generation
- **Interventions**
    - Make changes to the environment
    - **Interplay of nature vs. nurture**
    - Optimising development

Causes of Developmental Change

- Nature/nurture
- Stance determines approach to children
    - "Maturations": Child centred as approach is guided by child readiness
        - Piaget
    - "Nurture": Adult led, directive approach - Vygotsky
    - Eclectic position: Interactions between the two

- Social/Context focus: Culture of surrounding environments matching culture of immediate contexts
- Demands of Culture: How to flourish in a particular culture

Describing Development

- Normative descriptive approach: Careful systematic observations of children (Gesell/Brazelton)
  - Maturational theory
    - Genetic determinants that create a largely invariant (universal) sequence
    - Cycles "better'/"worse" phases
  - Provide descriptive age-norms: General frame of milestones

Developmental Theories

- Map knowledge by giving meaning/connections to knowledge
- Provide a framework to help organise thinking, make and test predictions

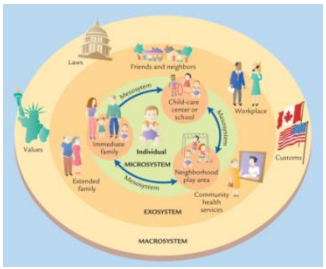
Baltes: A Lifespan Perspective

- Emphasised complexity of development
- **Development involves age-related change in <u>adaptive capacity</u>**
- **Seven Assumptions about Development**
  1. **Lifelong Process:** Early theorists didn't continue mapping beyond adolescence
  2. **Multidirectional**
  3. Involves **<u>both gains and losses</u>** at every age.
  4. Lifelong **plasticity:** Change in response to positive and negative experiences
     - Plasticity declines with age but it never completely goes away
  5. **Historically embedded** (cohort effects):
     - Same contexts from the same time but different to context of another time period
     - **Normative history-graded influences**
       - Common to people of a particular generation due to historical circumstance they experience
         - GFC, Great depression, World Wars, Babyboomers, 9/11
       - Major source of influence during adolescence and early adulthood
       - Time period = Great influence in every aspect of one's lives depending on exposure
  6. **Contextualism** as a paradigm (cultural effects) - **Contextual Influences**
     - Individuals respond to and act on contexts:
       - Historical, social, cultural, physical environment/contexts
     - **Normative age-graded influences:**
       - Biological & environmental influences similar for those in a particular age group & context
         - Biological:
           - Plays a role in adjustment & wellbeing
           - But have no voluntary control over
           - Puberty
           - Menopause
         - Social age-graded influences
           - Entry into school
           - Retirement
           - Big impact on development as people are expected to conform to those changes
       - Major source of influence in childhood
  7. Understanding development requires **multiple disciplines**
- **Non-normative life events:** Unusual occurrences that affect an individual but do not have a broader influence
  - Major accident, Death of a parent, Winning the lottery, Moving countries
  - Source of such influences increases across the lifespan
    - **Developmental pathways more varied.**
    - Easier to predict development when subject is younger

Age as an Explanatory Variable

- Lifespan definitions culturally and historically constrained
- Different age-grades/norms in different cultures, cohorts
- **Conceptualisations of Age**
  - **Chronological Age:** Number of years since birth
  - **Biological Age:** Age in terms of biological health
  - **Psychological Age:** An individual's adaptive capacities compared to others of same chronological age
  - **Social Age:** Social roles and expectations related to a person's age

Bronfenbrenner: Ecological Theory

- 

- Emphasises importance of context
- **Microsystem:** The Home
  - Marital conflict and discord, less interaction among family members
  - Mothers: Less positive & more negative interaction w/ children → Children: More negative behaviour
- **Mesosystem: Neighbourhood & Community**
  - Influence on mother of quality of local playgroup, childcare centre
- **Exosystem: The Workplace**
  - Employment, lack of job security
  - Families isolated from formal and informal social support systems
- **Macrosystem**
  - **Political and Cultural Values:** Society's attitudes toward violence, corporal punishment, gay marriage

Contextual-Systems Theories

- **Children, Families, Communities**
- **Positive legacy**
  - Systematic examination of the nature of biological and environmental influences on development
  - Complexity reflects complexity of development
  - Development can proceed along many paths depending on the intricate interplay of nature and nurture

2.1 Prenatal Development: Genetic and Environmental Influences

Individual Differences

- People vary in the way they express predetermined patterns of development
- Nature: Genes
  - Genetic determinism vs. genes as influences, predispositions, tendencies, etc.
  - Biology is not everything, but those who are especially good at something are biologically gifted.
- Nurture: Environment, experience
  - Though training is crucial to bringing talent to its final expression

Intellectual Background - History

- **Ancient Greeks**
  - Recognition of inter-generational similarities between children and parents
  - Pythagoras: Via male semen as a mechanism of transmission
  - Aristotle: Realised children were like their mothers as well
- **Darwin**
  - Genetic variation in a species (1859) where adaptation is key
  - Theory of natural selection, recognised adaptive characteristics and the ability to pass them on to offspring
  - Which was how they would survive and in turn shape variability
  - Wasn't aware of the existence of genes
- **Mendel**: The monk
  - Peas: Bred hybrids
  - Discovered " a basic unit of heredity" forgotten until
- **Watson, Crick & Franklin**
  - **DNA: Double helix**
- **Behavioural Genetics: (Turkheimer & Gottesman, 1991)**
  - Study of the contributions of nature and nurture to human and animal behaviour and behavioural diversity
- **Epigenetics:** Study of manipulating the expression of genetic potentials through encounters with the environment
  - **Gottlieb**
  - Changes in **gene expression** due to: