

Introduction to Developmental Psychology – Chapter 1

Developmental psychology – seeks to identify and explain the changes individuals undergo from the moment of conception, to death. Areas of investigation include;

- Physical growth (sensation, perception)
- Motor skills
- Mental/reasoning ability (cognition and learning)
- Emotional expression
- Patterns of social behaviour
- Personality

Most influential developmental theorists suggested that the most significant phases of growth occurred during the first 20 years of life.

Gerontology – the study of the old and the processes of aging. An area of increasing focus particularly those examining cognitive function.

OVERVIEW OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Prenatal	Conception to birth
Infancy	First 2 years
Childhood	Toddler (2-3 years) Preschool (3-6 years) Mid-childhood (6-12 years) The onset of puberty marks the end of this period.
Adolescence	12-20 years
Young adulthood	20-40 years
Middle age	40-65 years
Old age	Young (65-70 years) Middle (70-85 years) Old (85+)

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS^[EH1]

The way we treat children influences their development and instruction and appropriate models of behaviour are important. The distinction between the influence of environment (formal instruction) and the spontaneous emergence of many characteristics (apparently guided from within the child) represents one of the major points of divergence between different approaches to development. Locke – suggested experience is vital to development. Argued that, at birth, a child's mind is a **Tabula Rasa** – a 'blank slate' to be written on by life's experiences. People largely shaped by their environments – especially education.

DEVELOPMENTAL CONTROVERSIES

Nature/Nurture Debate – different emphasis on each, some (behaviourists) almost discount maturational factors. **Arnold Gesell** – emphasised maturational factors almost to the exclusion of environmental contribution. Stance we adopt on this affects the way we treat children. Modern developmental psychologists recognise both contribute to behavioural characteristics.

Continuity versus Discontinuity – controversy over whether development is a continuous, gradual process that proceeds by incremental quantitative change, or a process involving distinct steps in which qualitative differences in behaviour can be observed. **Jean Piaget** identified different ways of thinking that he associated with the different stages of development. These are due to maturation of cognitive processes that allow for new (more advanced) ways of thinking. As the child matures, new cognitive structures develop that allow the child to focus on many aspects at once.

Paths of development: Universal or culturally influenced? – many argued development is 'culture-free'. This is advocated by stage theorists who claim underlying processes are maturationally determined and independent of environmental influences. Challenges to this insist a child's development cannot be divorced from the cultural context in which it occurs.

APPROACHES TO DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY

Scope is extremely broad.

Normative-descriptive approach – involves the description of the normal or average status of people on specified characteristics at different age levels. Origins with Stanley Hall who tried to identify ‘normal’ characteristics of children. The ‘what happens when?’ approach. Also, pioneered by Gesell [EH2] who concentrated on mapping as carefully as possible, children’s characteristics at each age level on a wide range of parameters.

At the same time as Gesell, Alfred Binet used this approach to describe development of cognitive ability which resulted in the first intelligence test – the **Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale**. The study of individual differences in intelligence initiated great debate about the origins of these differences (nature/nurture) which persisted throughout the 20th century.

Freud’s Psychoanalytic Theory – a psychosexual theory of personality development in which three structures determine personality development. These become integrated during development.

id	An innate structure, the sole one of personality at birth, contains all the person’s psychic energy (libido). Functions unconsciously to obtain pleasure by directing the libido to the appropriate part of the body (mouth, anus, genitals) to obtain gratification in an innately programmed sequence (stages of development). Operates on pleasure principle .
ego	The arbitrator between instinctual demands and the realities of the outside world, with the role of appraising the external world and societal standards, and adapting to them. Operates on the reality principle .
superego	The moral agency of personality. The ego must balance the sexual and aggressive impulses of the id against the censure of the superego. An individual’s personality is determined by the strength of their superego and nature of dynamics between these three forces.

Because of emphasis on the unconscious processes and childhood experiences, direct empirical evidence is difficult to find.

Erikson’s Neo-Freudian Theory – built on Freudian psychoanalytic theory but focuses on the role of the outside world rather than on the instinctual urges of the id. Focused on the development of the healthy personality, formed through successful solution of a series of maturationally determined developmental crises. Stems from his concentration on the ego and hence, the significant influence of outside factors. Attributes a major role to societal (cultural) influences which influence the nature of the crises arising at each stage (although not the stage itself) and the success with which the child masters the stage.

Piaget’s [EH3] Cognitive Theory – stressing the child as an active participant in the developmental process. His background in biology reflected in his theory, where a central concept is the biological idea of **adaptation**. He proposed that just as organisms adapt to their environments at the physical level, so too thought adapts to the environment at a psychological level. Believe this is universal to people in all cultures.

Also recognised the vital importance of developing individuals interacting with their environment (active participant). It was an interactionist approach with both nature and nurture contributing to the developmental process.

Learning theories – J. B. Watson first to apply learning principles [EH4] to development. These principles were **Pavlovian classical conditioning** – an innocuous stimulus (rustle of bag) which is frequently associated with some biologically significant event (presence of food) comes to elicit some of the emotional reactions of the significant event (after conditioning, people will begin to salivate at the sound of the rustling bag). His main interest in child development was the study of conditioned emotions, particularly rage and fear.

B. F. Skinner was a behaviourist who had much greater influence on child development learning theories and practices. He viewed development as a continuous, incremental sequence of specific conditioned acts. Believed most human behaviours are learned through **operant conditioning** – a

response is strengthened by immediate reinforcement. The reinforcer acts retrospectively to strengthen the event that immediately preceded it.

Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory [EH5]— based on Skinnerian theory but with organismic variables (cognition) intervening between the stimulus and response. A major difference is the role Bandura attributes to observational learning (learning from models). There are several factors that determine whether we learn from a model:

- *Characteristics of the model*: more likely to model high-status individuals, competent ones and powerful people.