August 22: Theories of Child Development

Theories of Child Development

Themes in Child-Development Research

Small group discussion: raising a smart, socially adept, physically and emotionally healthy child

Class discussion: closer look at contextual influences
1.2 Theories of Child Development

The Biological Perspective
The Psychodynamic Perspective
The Learning Perspective
The Cognitive-Developmental Perspective
The Contextual Perspective
1.2 The Biological Perspective

- Development is determined primarily by biological forces (gene actions, brain dev.)
- In maturational theory, development reflects the natural unfolding of a pre-arranged biological plan (Arnold Gesell)
- In ethological theory, many behaviors are viewed as adaptive because they have survival value (Konrad Lorenz)
1.2 The Psychodynamic Perspective

- Development is determined by how a child resolves conflicts at different ages
- Freud’s components to personality -- id, ego, and superego
- During psychosexual development, different parts of the body are the focus of pleasure (in infancy it is the mouth)
1.2 The Psychodynamic Perspective

• Erikson’s stages of psychosocial development are defined by a unique challenge (e.g., trust vs. mistrust in infancy)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Psychosocial Stage</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Challenge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basic trust versus mistrust</td>
<td>Birth to 1 year</td>
<td>To develop a sense that the world is safe, a “good place”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy versus shame and doubt</td>
<td>1 to 3 years</td>
<td>To realize that one is an independent person who can make decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiative versus guilt</td>
<td>3 to 6 years</td>
<td>To develop a willingness to try new things and to handle failure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry versus inferiority</td>
<td>6 years to adolescence</td>
<td>To learn basic skills and to work with others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity versus identity confusion</td>
<td>Adolescence</td>
<td>To develop a lasting, integrated sense of self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intimacy versus isolation</td>
<td>Young adulthood</td>
<td>To commit to another in a loving relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generativity versus stagnation</td>
<td>Middle adulthood</td>
<td>To contribute to younger people, through child rearing, child care, or other productive work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrity versus despair</td>
<td>Late life</td>
<td>To view one’s life as satisfactory and worth living</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 1-2
1.2 The Learning Perspective

- B.F. Skinner studied operant conditioning ( reinforcement and punishment)

- Positive reinforcement – increase the likelihood of repeating a behavior by giving a reward (a pleasant stimulus)

- Negative reinforcement – increase likelihood of repeating a behavior through withdrawal of an unpleasant stimulus

- Punishment – decrease likelihood of repeating a behavior by either introducing an unpleasant stimulus or withdrawing a pleasant stimulus
B.F. Skinner’s operant conditioning

• In the short clip Skinner talks about how more complex behavior can be shaped from simpler behavior by reinforcing components of the complex behavior.
1.2 The Learning Perspective

- Other learning theorists suggested that children can learn by observing others (imitation or observational learning).
- According to Bandura’s social cognitive theory, children’s sense of self-efficacy (belief in their own capabilities) influences their behavior.
Observational learning – Bandura’s Bobo doll study of aggression
1.2 The Cognitive-Developmental Perspective

- Development reflects children’s efforts to understand the world (create & test theories)
- Jean Piaget developed a four-stage sequence that characterizes children’s changing understanding of the world
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Approximate Age</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sensorimotor</td>
<td>Birth to 2 years</td>
<td>Infant’s knowledge of the world is based on senses and motor skills. By the end of the period, infant uses mental representations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preoperational thought</td>
<td>2 to 6 years</td>
<td>Child learns how to use symbols such as words and numbers to represent aspects of the world, but relates to the world only through his or her perspective.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concrete operational thought</td>
<td>7 to 11 years</td>
<td>Child understands and applies logical operations to experiences, provided they are focused on the here and now.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal operational thought</td>
<td>Adolescence and beyond</td>
<td>Adolescent or adult thinks abstractly, speculates on hypothetical situations, and reasons deductively about what may be possible.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TABLE 1-3**
Piaget’s sensorimotor stage
1.2 The Cognitive-Developmental Perspective

- According to information-processing theory, development consists of increased efficiency in processing information due to improvements in memory, attention or problem solving strategies.
1.2 The Contextual Perspective

- Development is determined by both immediate and more distant environments, which typically influence each other.
- Lev Vygotsky believed that adults convey to children the beliefs, customs, and skills of their culture & historical period.
1.2 The Contextual Perspective

- Urie Bronfenbrenner believes that the developing child is embedded in a series of complex and interactive systems of environmental influence.
Bronfenbrenner’s Theory
1.3 Themes in Child-Development Research

Early development is related to later development but not perfectly

Development is always jointly influenced by heredity and environment

Children influence their own development

Development in different domains is connected
1.3 Early Development is Related to Later Development…

• Known as the *continuity-discontinuity* issue
• The continuous view: Children stay on the same path throughout development
• The discontinuous view: Children can change paths at any point in development
• Development is not completely rigid, nor completely flexible
1.3 Development is Jointly Influenced by Heredity and Environment

- Known as the *nature-nurture* issue
- Current view: Nature and nurture interact with each other to influence development

* I will have more to say about this next Wednesday
1.3 Children Influence Their Own Development

- Known as the *active-passive child* issue
- Children were once viewed as passive recipients of their environments
- Today’s view: Children interpret their experiences and often influence the experiences that they have
1.3 Development in Different Domains is Connected

- Development in different domains of children’s lives is always connected
- Cognitive development affects social development and vice versa