Why Study Developmental Psychology?

Reason #1: Raising Children
- Knowledge of child development can help parents and teachers meet the challenges of rearing and educating children
  - For example, researchers have identified effective approaches that parents and other caregivers can successfully use in helping children manage anger and other negative emotions

Reason #2: Choosing Social Policies
- Knowledge of child development permits informed decisions about social-policy questions that affect children
  - For example, psychological research on children’s responses to leading interview questions can help courts obtain more accurate testimonies from preschool children

Reason #3: Understanding Human Nature
- Child-development research provides important insights into some of the most intriguing questions regarding human nature (such as the existence of innate concepts and the relationship between early and later experiences)
  - Recent investigations of development among children adopted from inadequate orphanages in Romania support the principle that the timing of experiences often influences their effects

Table 1.1: Approaches to Life Span Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Question</th>
<th>Learning Opportunities</th>
<th>Sample of Question/Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical development</td>
<td>Emphasizes size, shape, motor system, vision, audition, hearing, taste, smell, and taste attachment</td>
<td>What determines the size of a baby? (2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social and emotional development</td>
<td>Emphasizes social, emotional, and cognitive processes</td>
<td>How can we improve the well-being of children? (3)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cognitive development</td>
<td>Emphasizes basic thinking skills and problem-solving abilities</td>
<td>What are the differences between innate and learned behaviors? (4)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Personality development</td>
<td>Emphasizes the development of personality traits</td>
<td>How does early experience influence personality development? (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social development</td>
<td>Emphasizes the development of social relationships and skills</td>
<td>How do children learn to communicate with others? (6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Instructions in parentheses indicate to which the question is addressed.
Historical Foundations: Early Philosophers

- Provided enduring insights about critical issues in childrearing, even though their methods were unscientific
  - Both Plato and Aristotle believed that the long-term welfare of society depended on raising children properly, but they differed in their approaches

Historical Foundations: Plato vs. Aristotle

- Plato emphasized self-control and discipline
- Aristotle was concerned with fitting child rearing to the needs of the individual child
- Plato believed that children are born with innate knowledge
- Aristotle believed that knowledge comes from experience

Historical Foundations: Later Philosophers

- The English philosopher John Locke, like Aristotle, saw the child as a tabula rasa and advocated first instilling discipline, then gradually increasing the child’s freedom
- Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the French philosopher, argued that parents and society should give the child maximum freedom from the beginning

Historical Foundations: Research-Based Approach

- Emerged in the nineteenth century, in part as a result of two converging forces
  1. Social reform movements established a research conducted for the benefit of children; provided some of the earliest descriptions of the adverse effects that harsh environments can have on child development
  2. Charles Darwin’s (1809-1882) theory of evolution inspired research in child development in order to gain insights into the nature of the human species
Historical Foundations: Formal Field of Inquiry

- Child development emerged as a **formal field of inquiry** in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries
- In particular, Sigmund Freud and John Watson formulated influential theories of development during this period

Historical Foundations: Psychodynamic Approach

- Freud concluded that biological drives, especially sexual ones, exerted a crucial influence on development

Historical Foundations: Behavioral Approach

- Holds that the key to understanding development are observable behavior and environmental stimuli. If we know the stimuli, we can predict the behavior.

Flavors of behaviorism

- **Classical behaviorism**: Watson’s behaviorism
  - Objective study of behavior
  - No mental life, no internal states; thought is covert speech
- **Radical**: Skinner’s behaviorism
  - Considered radical since it expands behavioral principles to processes within the organism, in contrast to methodological behaviorism
  - Not mechanistic or reductionist; rather, hypothetical (mentalistic) internal states are not considered causes of behavior, phenomena must be observable at least to the individual experiencing them
Watson argued that children’s behavior arises largely from the rewards and punishments that follow particular behaviors. Although the research methods on which these theories were based were limited, the theories were better grounded in research and inspired more sophisticated thinking than their predecessors.

Give me a dozen healthy infants, well-formed, and my own specified world to bring them up in and I’ll guarantee to take any one at random and train him to become any type of specialist I might select—doctor, lawyer, artist, merchant-chief, and yes, even beggar-man and thief, regardless of his talents, penchants, tendencies, abilities… (Watson, 1925)

B.F. Skinner (1904-1990): Radical Behaviorism

Departed from methodological behaviorism most notably in accepting treatment of feelings, states of mind and introspection as existent and scientifically analyzable.

Bandura’s Bobo-Doll Study
Bandura's Bobo-Doll Study

Historical Landmarks: Cognitive Approach

- Piaget (1896-1980)
  - Father of “Cognitive Development”
  - Genetic epistemology: “…attempts to explain knowledge, and in particular scientific knowledge, on the basis of its history, its sociogenesis, and especially the psychological origins of the notions and operations upon which it is based”
  - Led to: Information Processing Theories
    - Thinking is both limited and flexible (focus is on the structural characteristics that determine limits and the processes that provide ability to flexibly adapt)

Historical Landmarks: Contextual Approach

- Urie Bronfenbrenner (1917-):
  Ecological Systems Theory (bioecological approach)
  - Microsystems (child)
  - Mesosystem (immediate surroundings)
  - Exosystem (extended surroundings)
  - Macrosystem (broader culture)

Historical Landmarks: Contextual Approach

- Vygotsky (1896-1934)
  - Sociocultural theory
  - Zone of Proximal Development
General Themes in Developmental Psychology

- Continuity/Discontinuity
- Critical and Sensitive Periods
- Lifespan/Period-Specific Focus
- Nature/Nurture