

Theories of Child Development

Theories of Child Development – Study Notes

1. Overview

- **Goal of developmental theories:** Explain *how* and *why* children change over time—physically, cognitively, emotionally, and socially.
 - **Key dimensions:**
 1. **Nature vs. Nurture** – innate biology vs. environmental influence.
 2. **Continuity vs. Stage?like change** – gradual growth vs. discrete phases.
 3. **Universal vs. Context?specific** – common patterns across cultures vs. culturally bound trajectories.
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2. Psycho?Biological Theories

Theorist	Core Idea	Main Stages / Concepts	Educational Implications
Sigmund Freud	Personality develops through psychosexual energy.	Oral ? Anal ? Phallic ? Latency ? Genital (each linked to an erogenous zone).	Emphasize safe, supportive environments; recognize conflicts that may surface during stage transitions.
Erik Erikson	Psychosocial crises shape identity across the lifespan.	8 stages (e.g., Trust vs. Mistrust, Autonomy vs. Shame, Initiative vs. Guilt, etc.).	Provide opportunities for mastery, encourage positive social interactions, scaffold autonomy.
Jean Piaget	Children construct knowledge through active interaction with the world.	Sensorimotor (0?2), Preoperational (2?7), Concrete?operational (7? 11), Formal?operational (11+).	Design hands?on activities, promote problem?solving, match tasks to cognitive level.
Lev Vygotsky	Development is socially mediated; language is a tool of thought.	Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD); Scaffolding; Internalization.	Use guided participation, peer collaboration, and “think?aloud” modeling.

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John Bowlby & Mary Ainsworth	Attachment bonds affect emotional regulation and later relationships.	Secure, Insecure?Avoidant, Insecure?Resistant, Disorganized attachment patterns.	Foster consistent, responsive caregiving; observe attachment cues in classroom settings.

3. Information?Processing & Cognitive?Neuroscience Approaches

Theory / Model	Central Tenets	Developmental Milestones	Classroom Strategies
Information?Processing (IP)	Mind as a computer: attention, memory, executive function develop over time.	• Working memory capacity ? • Faster processing speed • Improved metacognition	Teach explicit strategies (e.g., chunking, self?questioning), provide practice with increasing complexity.
Neuroconstructivism	Brain networks self?organize; experience shapes neural architecture.	Sensitive periods for language, vision, executive control.	Early enriched experiences, multimodal instruction, timely remediation.
Dynamic Systems Theory	Development emerges from interaction of multiple subsystems (motor, affective, environmental).	Non?linear leaps (e.g., “growth spurts” in language).	Offer varied contexts, allow self?pacing, monitor for sudden regressions or breakthroughs.

4. Socio?Cultural & Ecological Perspectives

Model	Main Components	How It Explains Development
Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory	Microsystem, Mesosystem, Exosystem, Macrosystem, Chronosystem.	Development is shaped by nested environments—from family to cultural values and historical time.