

Introduction to Developmental Psychology

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WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, we'll discuss some of the theories pertaining to another area of study in the field of psychology, that of developmental psychology.

The specific areas of focus include:

1. Developmental Psychology
2. Six Dimensions
 - a. Biological
 - b. Environmental
 - c. Social
 - d. Linguistic
 - e. Emotional
 - f. Cognitive

1. Developmental Psychology

Developmental psychology is the study of how a person changes both psychologically and physically over the course of his or her life from birth to death.

This area of psychology studies the lifelong process of these changes, covering the whole spectrum of ages from infancy and prenatal to childhood, on to adolescence, then to early adulthood, and finally to old age.

Thus, the goal of developmental psychology is to identify those stages of psychological development, the trends that are occurring within those stages, and the underlying causes for those trends.



TERM TO KNOW

Developmental Psychology

Examines lifespan psychology and the progress of changes and abilities; identifies trends in psychological development and causes

2. Six Dimensions

Developmental psychology has six different dimensions. As you learn them, you'll be able to see some of the important trends and figures that you'll be hearing more about over the course of this area of study.

2a. Biological

The biological dimension of developmental psychology focuses on how internal physical and chemical processes, such as heredity and genes, can influence human development over time.

2b. Environmental

On the opposite side of the biological, there is the environmental dimension, which looks at external forces, and how they can influence human development.

In terms of these external forces, the focus is particularly on important figures, such as parents, and the different attachment styles that people develop to individuals within their lives.

2c. Social

In that same vein, another major area of study in developmental psychology is the social dimension of development.

There are two major figures to note in this area, the first being Erik Erikson. **Erikson's psychosocial theory** of development states that how people develop their personalities in different stages of their lives depends on the experiences that they have with others.

Erikson identified each of these different stages by a corresponding conflict that people would be having. The conflicts either help people develop certain psychological qualities, or not develop those qualities.

The other important figure in social development is Lev Vygotsky, who was a Russian psychologist.

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of learning and development states that there's a link between linguistic and cognitive development that occurs over time.

Vygotsky said that learning was essentially a social process, meaning that people learn with the help of others through speaking and communicating; over time, people internalize those different processes. In other words, we take what we say and what we do together--the social aspects--and create cognitive development as a result of that.

Vygotsky also said that there are certain social and cultural differences in development over different groups of people, and over time.



TERMS TO KNOW

Erikson's Psychosocial Theory

Proposes that individuals go through eight stages of social development during which they must resolve a psychosocial conflict

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory

Cognitive development is based on social and cultural processes; our cognitive abilities are shaped by our interactions with others

2d. Linguistic

Another of the developmental dimensions is linguistic development, which is the development of language. This area tends to focus its study on younger children.

2e. Emotional

Emotional development focuses on how different emotions occur, particularly within younger children.

2f. Cognitive

Finally, there is the dimension of cognitive development. An important figure to remember in this area is Jean Piaget. **Piaget's theory of cognitive development** states that there are four distinct phases that young children go through when they're developing intellect and cognition at a young age.

These are set stages that each person experiences; at each stage, a person acquires certain mental skills and ways of thinking to help him or her develop into a full-fledged cognitive adult.



TERM TO KNOW

Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development

Intellectual development is shaped by both a biological component and environmental experiences.

Throughout the four stages, the mistakes we make teach us about the world and change our mental abilities--how we encode, store, and use information.}}



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that **developmental psychology** is an area of psychology studying both the psychological and physical changes that people experience over the course of their lives.

You now understand that there are **six dimensions** of developmental psychology: **biological**, **environmental**, **social**, **linguistic**, **emotional**, and **cognitive**. We will be reviewing and learning more about these areas during our study of the developmental cycle.

Good luck!

Source: This work is adapted from Sophia author Erick Taggart.



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