

Developmental Theories: General Development

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Outline

- Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model of Human Development
- Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory of Development
- Developmental Niche Theory

Urie Bronfenbrenner

- Russian-born American developmental psychologist
- His research helped form the American Head Start program
- Argued that poverty is the single greatest threat to child development

Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model of Human Development

- **Bio:** Living Organism
- **Ecological:** Relation of living organisms to one another

Microsystem

- **Microsystem:** Influences that the child is directly exposed to
 - **Relationships:** Parents, siblings/cousins, teachers, religious leaders, neighbors
 - Family: Most influential and durable influence on child
 - **Physical environment:** Geography, books, toys
 - **Activities:** Schooling, religious activities, extra activities (e.g., music lessons)

Microsystem

- Most of the child's behavior is learned in the microsystem.
- The microsystem consists of bi-directional influences
 - Parents actively shape the development of the child
 - Children actively shape their environment
 - Personal attributes influence responses from other people
 - Children actively select and avoid specific environments

Mesosystem

- **Mesosystem:** Interconnections between the microsystems
 - Examples
 - Interactions between the family and teachers
 - Relationship between the child's peers and the family
 - Relationships between the family and community

Exosystem

- **Exosystem:** Systems that a child does not participate in but indirectly affect a child's development
 - Examples
 - Parent's workplace
 - Governing board of the school
- Impacts a child's development by influencing structures in the child's microsystem

Macrosystem

- **Macrosystem:** Cultural context
 - Provides the values, beliefs, customs, and laws of the culture in which a child grows up
 - Influences how parents, teachers, and others raise a child
 - May be conscious or unconscious
 - Influences the societal values, legislation, and financial resources provided by a society to help families function
 - Influences the interactions of all other layers

Ecological Systems Theory

- Properties of the four layers of relationships
 - Each layer of the environment is complex
 - Each layer has an effect on a child's development
 - Conflict within any layer ripples throughout other layers
- As a child develops, interaction within environments becomes more complex
 - Complexity is the result of the maturation of a child's physical and cognitive structures

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory of Development

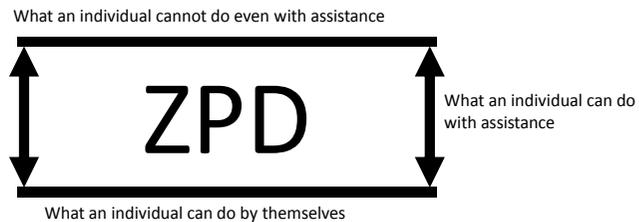
- Russian Renaissance man
- Began studying psychology at age 28 and died of tuberculosis at age 38
- Under pressure to create a theory of education in line with Marxism
- Russian government suppressed his ideas
- Not widely published until after the Cold War ended

Vygotsky's Principles of Development

- Development is studied by examining the process of change
 - Zone of Proximal Development
- Cognitive development cannot be separated from the culture
 - Socio-cultural Theory of Development
- Thinking is transformed through the use of tools
 - Psychological Tools

Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

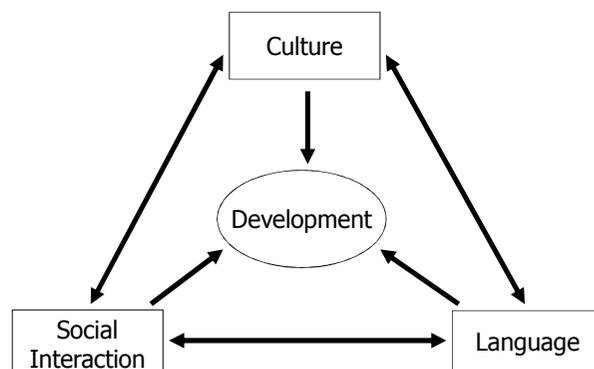
ZPD: Range of tasks that an individual can not do alone but can accomplish when assisted by a more skilled partner



Scaffolding

- **Scaffolding:** Assistance by a more skilled person that allows an individual to complete a task they cannot do independently
- Types of Scaffolding
 - Modeling
 - Questions
 - Adapting materials

Sociocultural Theory of Development



Sociocultural Theory of Development

- **Culture:** Attitudes, values, customs, and behavioral patterns that characterize a social group
- Culture influences:
 - What is thought about
 - Skills to be acquired
 - How to acquire information
 - The tools and symbols available to facilitate development and thinking
 - When a person is allowed to participate in an activity
 - Who is allowed to participate in an activity

Sociocultural Theory of Development

- Language is necessary for abstract thinking
 - Language symbols provide freedom from the immediate perceptual, concrete context
- Roles of Language
 - Provide cognitive tool to think about problems
 - Allow to regulate and reflect on thinking
 - Enables social interaction

Language

- **Private speech:** Use of language to plan and direct behavior, particularly in difficult tasks
 - Also called self-directed speech

Sociocultural Theory of Development

- Social Interactions
 - Complex thinking has its roots in social interactions
 - Learning new skills results from guidance by a more skilled person who structures the learning process
 - ZPD

Psychological Tools

- **Tool:** Something that can be used in the service of something else
 - **Technical Tools:** Change and control objects
 - **Psychological Tools:** Change thought and control behavior
 - Language system
 - Number system
 - Writing system
- According to Vygotsky, **language** is the most important psychological tool

Developmental Niche

- **Niche:** A place or activity for which a person is best fitted
- **Developmental niche:** Framework for understanding how various aspects of a culture guide a child's developmental process
 - Focus on the child as the unit of analysis within his/her sociocultural context

Developmental Niche Principles

- All development takes place in a specific cultural context
- The household is the focal point for development as the center of early childhood development
 - Parents and other caretakers influence development of children through socialization practices that reflect their beliefs

Developmental Niche

- Three subsystems surround the developing child and promote, nurture, and constrain her/his development
 - Physical and social settings of a child's everyday life
 - Culturally regarded customs of child care and child rearing
 - Psychology of the caretakers

Physical and Social Settings

- How, where, and with whom children spend their days
- Size and composition of household
- Daily routines of the family

- Example: Dengue fever that is transmitted by mosquito
- “Malays often kept a jar of water in front of the house, where all who entered would wash their feet in order to prevent contamination of the house by evil spirits which, it was believed, could attach themselves to the soles of the feet outside. Many Malays also kept potted plants in their houses, one of which, the “money tree” had its roots constantly immersed in water, thus creating a permanent breeding site for mosquitoes. Another significant feature of the social and physical environment in relation to dengue transmission in the Malay community was the observance of congregational prayer at a community mosque at dawn and dusk, times that corresponded to the feeding times of the Aedes mosquito. The mosques had receptacles in front for washing hands and feet before entering, where millions of mosquitoes could breed; from these receptacles, the mosquitoes had ready access to multiple blood sources at the same time, thus maximizing opportunities for disease transmission” (Harkness & Super, 1994, p. 219).

Customs of Child Care

- **Customs:** Culturally influenced behavior so commonly used by members of the community that it does not require rationalization and often not given conscious thought
 - “Natural” or “Reasonable” child care practices
- Cultural norms, practices, and institutions

“The infant's niche in Kokwet [Kenya] was shaped by several customs that together guaranteed that the infant would be in close proximity to a caretaker at all times. During the day, the infant would be held or carried on the caretaker's back, using cloths tied around her body to support the baby's back and neck but allowing the baby to interact with the surrounding environment...At night, the baby would sleep in skin-to-skin contact with the mother, as well as in close proximity to other young children in the family. Nursing was customarily on demand and the breast was used to soothe as well as to satisfy the baby's hunger...Several lines of experimental evidence suggest that one consequence of the increased physical contact and stimulation resulting from these customs is the promotion of normal growth and development, including body size, attentional processes, and the emergence of neuromuscular competences...Super has suggested that culturally directed methods of handling and stimulating infants, as well as customs of deliberate teaching, are critical factors behind the so-called precocity of early development in many African infants” (Harkness & Super, 1994, p. 230).

- A baby begins to fuss. Why is the baby fussing? What should you do?
 - American mother: The baby is bored and needs attention or a toy.
 - Dutch mother: The baby is tired and needs to sleep.
 - Nigerian mother: The baby is hungry and needs to eat.

Psychology of the Caretakers

- **Parent Ethnotheories:** Beliefs, values, and practices of parents and other child caretakers regarding the proper way to raise a child
 - Provision of affection and warmth
 - Timetables for feeding
 - Timetables for development

“Today’s American middle class culture emphasizes the importance of training babies to sleep through the night at an early age: books are written on the subject, and a great deal of informal communication among parents centers on this topic. In this context, babies who are temperamentally disposed to establish regular schedules for sleeping are perceived by parents as ‘easy’, whereas those who sleep at irregular intervals are ‘difficult’, especially if this disposition is combined with other temperamental qualities such as intensity and negative mood. In contrast, New’s research on mothers and infants in Italy has shown a different focus of parental concern: eating, rather than sleeping, was what mothers worried about, and infants or toddlers who were irregular or fussy in their eating patterns were the ones who were considered difficult. These differences in parental psychologies are expressed in different focuses of care: whereas American middle class parents devote a good deal of attention to establishing a regular pattern of sleep for infants, Italian mothers show their concern with eating by feeding the toddler themselves well into the second year of life, and may even resort to the use of nutritional injections for the child who seems to be eating inadequately...Thus, while the Italian mothers studied by New spent a great deal of time in feeding their young children (as well as in cooking for the entire family), the American parents we have studied have elaborate bed-time routines for their children and well-thought-out strategies for dealing with the child who doesn’t want to go to bed on time or who wakes up in the middle of the night” (Harkness & Super, 1994, p. 221-222).

Changes in the Developmental Niche

- There is mutual adaptation between the child and caretaking environment
- Many cultural practices that influence the growing child are positive or protective ones
- A change to any of the three subsystems can have unintended side-effects on development, either positively or negatively

“The birth of the next child [in Kokwet, Kenya] was an important element in the Kipsigis cultural definition of infancy and because the infant’s niche there did not accommodate more than one infant at a time, the length of the birth interval following each child was a central determinant of the child’s caretaking environment. Traditional practices in Kipsigis were oriented explicitly to prolonging the birth interval through breastfeeding and sexual abstinence. Among the older women in Kokwet the average birth interval was 31 months. A child born at the beginning of this interval, thus, would be weaned at about 2 years (when the child’s mother realized she was pregnant again), and would ‘graduate’ to childhood status at about age 2. In contrast, corresponding birth intervals for the younger mothers averaged 26 months, moving the whole process of weaning and other changes in the child’s physical and social settings to a younger age for the child. The trend toward shorter birth intervals observed in Kokwet was related to a decrease in breast feeding and the shortening of the postpartum period of sexual abstinence...

“...The decrease in breastfeeding was associated with increased use of bottles, related in turn to the sale of infant formula and a public image of bottles as 'modern'. The shortening of the period of sexual abstinence may be related to changing norms of marital relationships, and certainly appears related to decreasing rates of polygamy... The shortening of infancy as a culturally recognized developmental stage with its corresponding niche was not well adapted in Kokwet to the biologically based developmental needs of children. Although a particular child might undergo this transition at an earlier than optimal age due to being followed by a younger sibling born after a short interval, parental ethnotheories regarding infancy and early childhood were not altered” (Harkness & Super, 1994, p. 223).

Interventions based on the Developmental Niche

- Intervention requires understanding each individual within the culture to identify the aspects of the environment available and effective for intervention
- Effective intervention, particularly in early childhood, requires familiarity with caregivers' concepts of the child.
 - Many cultural beliefs about the nature of the child are unexamined assumptions about what is 'normal'
 - The interventions may have different assumptions about child development than the caregivers, resulting in an ineffective or even harmful intervention
- Successful interventions require a reexamination of cultural belief systems in the institutions and programs that serve families as well as in the families themselves, so that beliefs and practices throughout the child's developmental niche can support and enhance each other

Education and the Developmental Niche

- When beliefs about the child expressed in schools conflict with those held by parents, there is confusion, disengagement, failure, or the development of antisocial behavior.
- “Successful interventions with families, thus, need to incorporate a reexamination of cultural belief systems and their customary expression in the institutions that serve those families, as well as in the families themselves, so that beliefs and practices throughout the child's developmental niche can support and enhance each other” (Harkness & Super, 1993, p. 130)

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