Theories for Child Development: What are they and why should you care?

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Covering: Lifespan Developmental Theory, Psychoanalytic Theory, Erikson, Behavioral and Social Learning, Piaget, Info-processing, Evolution, Ecological Theory, Vygotsky, Dynamic Systems

Know: What is the theory? How is it similar and/or different from other theories? How can the theory be applied to child development? What are some strengths and weaknesses of the theories?

Piaget’s Cognitive Developmental Theory

- Children actively construct meaning about their worlds
- Piaget’s theory is stage-based, or discontinuous
- see Table 2.2 in text

Premise for his theory -

- Adaptation
- Assimilation
- Accommodation

- To adapt, children create cognitive ‘schemas’

- Goal: To reach ‘equilibrium’
Piaget's Cognitive Developmental Theory

- Stages (discontinuous)
  - Sensorimotor (birth-2yrs)
  - Preoperational (2-7yrs)
  - Concrete operational (7-11yrs)
  - Formal operational (11+yrs)

Piaget's Cognitive Developmental Theory

- **Uniqueness** - children are active learners, focuses on internal and external environments
- **Problems** -
  - Underestimated the age periods, may depend on task
  - Does not address cultural differences.

Ex: Thailand’s Moken Tribe escape the Tsunami

Class Activity: FOR POINTS

- In groups of 2-3
- Introduce yourselves! - name, major, hometown, etc.
- Take out piece of paper, place names on it
- Think of as many snow-related words you can think of in 1 minute.

- The Eskimo and Inuit have over 200 actual words for snow. Why?
Class Activity – For POINTS!

- Get in groups of 2-3 people
- Answer the following T/F questions:
  - History, Theory, and Research Strategies

The psychoanalytic perspective emphasizes understanding the unique developmental history of each child.

- According to Freud, the id reconciles the demands of the external world and the conscience.
- According to Erikson, the ability to resolve a basic psychosexual conflict at each stage of development determines an individual’s healthy or maladaptive outcome.
- John Watson believed that adults could mold children’s behaviors by carefully controlling stimulus-response associations.
Traditional behaviorism emphasizes the role of observational learning in development.

Both behaviorism and social learning theory have been criticized for underestimating children's contributions to their own development.

Information-Processing Theory

Focus on cognitive psychology
- Lab-based method for predicting how children process and learn information
- Create a flow chart
- Try to figure out what strategies children use to learn

Information-Processing Theory

Uniqueness:
- Children are active learners
- Continuous

Problems:
- Too much lab
- Too much focus on linear learning
Ethology & Evolution Theory
- Behaviors that are adaptive to promote survival of a species
- Imprinting in animals
- Sensitive period in humans
- Examples: language development

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory
- How cultural practices are transmitted
- Primary focus on social interaction between children and experts to transmit
  **Zone of Proximal Development**
  **Guided Participation**
Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory

**Uniqueness:**
- Focus on culture
- Focus on internal and external forces to promote child learning (socially mediated)
- Stress importance of adult influences
- Continuous and discontinuous

**Problem:**
- Not much focus on biology (nature)

Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner)

- Focus on contextual influences on child development from different ‘societal layers’
- Related to lifespan developmental theory
- NOT just infant and parents
- Change over time

Know the different levels and provide examples of each.

Ex: Role of fast food industry? Politics? Health Care System? Values?
**Ecological Systems Theory**

- **Uniqueness:**
  - Continuous and discontinuous
  - Considers culture
  - Considers wider levels of influence
  - Global
  - Internal and External Environment mutually interdependent
- **Problems:**
  - So broad, hard to study and verify
  - (ex: fast food, video games, etc.)

**Dynamic Systems Theory**

- Continuous and discontinuous...but see development as a web
- Different trajectories for different children
- AS development occurs, see how the web changes (genetic, social, cognitive, physical influences)

**Dynamic Systems**

- **Uniqueness:**
  - Continuous and discontinuous
  - Considers biological forces
  - Considers development AS change or transition is in progress (i.e. language)
  - Considers individual differences in development
- **Problems:**
  * Very abstract and hard to measure in humans
  * Have to capture change as it occurs naturally