1. WHAT EXACTLY IS CHILD PSYCHOLOGY?

Compared with adults, children have a different outlook on life in many ways.

WELCOME!

Thank you for registering on the course.

We want to extend a big welcome to you!

This is Module 1 of the Certificate Course in Child Psychology.

If that sounds a lot, don't worry. Child psychology is a big subject; and we wanted it to be comprehensive.

Some of the modules may not be relevant to you. If so, just focus on the modules that interest you, and treat the remainder as a store of useful knowledge you can come back to whenever the need arises.

TIP: You can save your modules on to your computer and you might want to print them out. You may find it easier to read them on paper. You may also want to write notes or your answers to the exercises on the printouts. The choice is yours.

Exercises are included and these are best answered following on-line research.

WHAT YOU'LL ENCOUNTER ALONG THE WAY

There is a lot to learn about child psychology. So we've tried to make the course accessible by keeping each section short. There are no long paragraphs or wandering academic sentences.

Throughout the course, we'll be asking you to do Self-Assessment Exercises. They'll encourage you to explore the subject of creative writing.

You'll also come across Progress Tests. They will help you check that you've understood what we've been talking about.

There's also a Final Test at the end of the course. It's not obligatory. But if you take it and pass, you'll get a Certificate in Child Psychology.

Now, let's take a deep breath - and get started on the subject of Child Psychology!

INTRODUCTION

In this module you will learn about early theories and approaches in the field of child psychology. You will be introduced to some of the pioneers of the discipline and their theories.

Some of these theories have been hailed as insightful and others discredited, but all have played an important part in the evolution of the field of child psychology.

WHAT IS CHILD PSYCHOLOGY?

Child psychology is a collection of viewpoints and observation styles arising from many different theories, each of which contributed a line of thinking about how we describe developmental stages. It helps us to understand and deal with social and psychological problems while creating a rich picture of psychological development.

Child psychology does not offer concrete answers. It's not a way to pigeonhole people based on their upbringing and it is definitely not a tool to lay blame on the parents for every mistake a child (or adult) makes in society.

However, for anyone working with children it's essential to understand child psychology, and it is incredibly useful for parents.

Compared to adults, children have a different outlook on life in many ways. To understand how a child sees the world makes you more competent and more effective when it comes to responding to the many trials that a child encounters on the road to adulthood.

Being involved with children is a big responsibility, because our interactions have a lasting effect on their future.

As adults we can help children grow in knowledge and self confidence. With the insights we get from child psychology, they can begin to take

their place as citizens of the world, free from paralysing constraints that warp and stunt.

CHILD PSYCHOLOGY IN ITS INFANCY

It may surprise you to know that the field of child psychology was born out of **Charles Darwin's** Theory of Evolution. Darwin noted some undeniable similarities in the prenatal development of animal species and proposed that the best adapted ones survived.

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These tests were challenged on the basis that they did not account for ethnicity, gender, family background, and other factors. This led to the ever-present "nature-nurture" debate. Enter **James Mark Baldwin**, American early developmental theorist.

Baldwin saw development as a fabric woven from threads of heredity and environment. He believed that children continually adjust their view of the world while they learn through observation and mime and are influenced by their social surroundings. You will see Baldwin's influence on many modern theories, particularly the most recent ones.

EXERCISE 1.1

Check out your 'social surroundings'. What types of things do you see that might impact your ability to learn?

Do you see any heredity influences on your ability to learn? Write your thoughts below.

Suggested answers can be found at the end of the module

MODERN CHILD PSYCHOLOGY

In the early twentieth century, the **psychoanalytic perspective** was formed, identifying developmental stages in children. During these stages, children encounter conflicts between their biological needs and their social desires. Resolving these conflicts successfully is necessary for normal development. The way these conflicts are dealt with can influence a child's ability to interact and learn effectively.

Perhaps the best-known theorist in history is **Sigmund Freud**. Freud suggested there were three parts to the personality: The *id* is the largest part of the mind and represents the basic needs of the person, like sucking, sexual desire and safety; the *ego* is the moderator, finding effective ways for the id and superego to be satisfied; the *superego*, or conscience, is the understanding of the values of society.

Through his observations, he developed the **psychosexual theory**. He believed children first dealt with oral gratification, then anal, then genital. The balance of too much or too little gratification would lead to the personality of the child in adulthood.

VIDEO

Watch this video on Freud's psychosexual theory:

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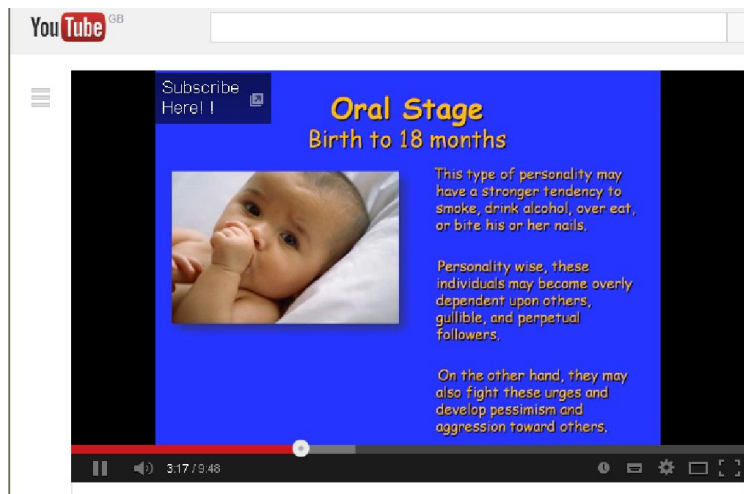
Freud focused on the development of sexuality as the basis of personality and any flaws exhibited. Freud's followers, referred to as neo-Freudians, took what was useful in his theories and tried to build on them.

Erik Erikson adapted Freud's theory to the **psychosocial theory** that involved eight stages of development. The main difference was that the ego wasn't just a mediator; it also facilitated development.

Many theorists now discount Freud's theories as being unproven or controversial, even possibly damaging. However, his work remains influential.

BEHAVIOURISM AND SOCIAL LEARNING

The subjective psychoanalytic perspective gained prominence over the years, but **John Watson** wanted to create a more objective and quantifiable science of child psychology. **Behaviourism and social learning** then took a different, more measurable approach.

Traditional behaviourism was influenced by Pavlov's **classical conditioning** work. Watson learned that children's behaviour could be manipulated using classical conditioning in a carefully controlled stimulus-response environment.

B.F. Skinner took this a step further, creating the **operant conditioning** theory. He believed the frequency of a child's behaviour could be increased or decreased using reinforcers or punishment respectively.

Soon, psychologists began to concern themselves with social behaviour and how (or if) it could be developed using conditioning tactics. A Canadian-born psychologist, **Albert Bandura**, developed an influential **social learning theory** that suggested children's development was strongly influenced by modelling. Through imitation or observational learning, children learn to use utensils, to clap their hands, even how to deal with anger.

As they mature, Bandura surmised, children begin to decide what to imitate and what skills to learn. Combining conditioning with modelling, psychologists found a powerful tool in behaviour modification, which could be used to deal with a variety of developmental problems.

A STEP FURTHER – THE COGNITIVE-DEVELOPMENT THEORY

VIDEO

Watch this video on Cognitive-Development Theory:

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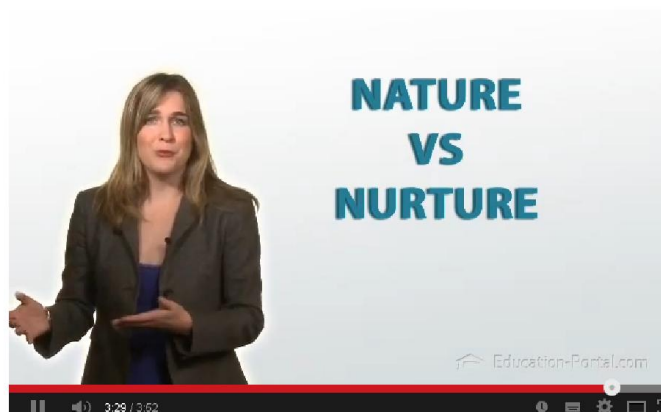
Jean Piaget's **cognitive-development theory** states that children actively develop their knowledge by exploring their world physically and

eventually, abstractly. Piaget believed children's development occurs through four stages:

1. **Sensorimotor:** infants learn to interact with their environment by using their senses to touch, taste, see, hear and smell.
2. **Preoperational:** preschoolers use symbols and language to relate their understanding of their environment, though they do not have the logic that should develop in the next two stages.
3. **Concrete operational:** children are capable of understanding logic and can organise objects into a hierarchy of classes.
4. **Formal operational:** pre-teens are now capable of abstract reasoning and a more complex understanding of cause and all its possible effects.

EXERCISE 1.3

How does Piaget's theory of cognitive development address what is considered a major limitation of the behaviourism theory?

Suggested answers can be found at the end of the module

NEW DIRECTIONS

In recent decades, new theories have developed that acknowledge context as a primary influence. The **information processing** perspective suggests that development is based on an input, processing (that is, encoding and transforming the input), and eventual output – the behavioural response.

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■ **Exosystem** – These are social settings not necessarily involving the child. These tend to play a role in the caregivers' lives. The effects of this interaction are translated to the child through the microsystem.

■ **Macrosystem** – This is the cultural values, the laws, and the resources of the greater environment.

■ **Ever-changing system** – Referred to as the chronosystem, this is the way that time and changes in life lead the child to redefining themselves to exist effectively in their changing environment.

EXERCISE 1.4

What trend is growing in popularity with regard to debate on the importance of nature vs. nurture?

Suggested answers can be found at the end of the module

REMINDER

Have you completed the following exercises?

- ☐ Exercise 1.1
- ☐ Exercise 1.2
- ☐ Exercise 1.3
- ☐ Exercise 1.4

Tick each box when you have completed the exercises.

SUMMARY

1. You now have an understanding of the historical development of the field of child psychology.
2. You have learned how theories have built on previous approaches to improve analysis.
3. You are able to identify the major theories/approaches: normative approach, psychoanalytic theory; behaviourism and social learning theory; and cognitive-development theory; ecological systems theory.
4. You understand the differences between the major theories/approaches.
5. You can see how the evolution of psychology has led to a belief that genetics and environment are interwoven influences on the development of the child.

You have finished module 1. Well done! There is a progress test here:

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If you'd like to do it later, go to module 2.

EXERCISE ANSWERS

EXERCISE 1.1

Check out your 'social surroundings'. What types of things do you see that might impact your ability to learn?

Do you see any heredity influences on your ability to learn? Write your thoughts below.

Some suggested **environmental influences** might include access to education, access to food and water, safe living environment, ability to speak the local language, mobility/transportation, etc.

Some **heredity influences** might include low/high likelihood of inheriting a learning disability (e.g., dyslexia), family history of propensity for understanding mechanics or mathematics, gender, height, etc.

EXERCISE 1.2

Using Freud's thinking, list two things the id is driven to acquire.

What would be the ego's initial reaction in the early stages of psychosexual development?

Then list what the superego would say. How does the ego respond once the superego is engaged?

The answer should involve: a demand, an unbridled reaction, a warning that the action is not socially acceptable, then, and a new reaction that is more socially acceptable. An example follows:

Id: I want the toy that child is playing with.
Ego response: Grab the toy from the child using it.
Superego: It is not acceptable to simply grab the toy.
Ego's new response: Ask the child if you may take a turn playing with the toy. (A socially acceptable way of getting the toy.)

EXERCISE 1.3

How does Piaget's theory of cognitive development address what is considered a major limitation of the behaviourism theory?

The answer should include comments about how more than direct modelling, reinforcement and punishment impact child development. How and what children choose to learn is important in a more complete approach to their development.

EXERCISE 1.4

What trend is growing in popularity with regard to debate on the importance of nature vs. nurture?

It is becoming more accepted that genetics (nature) and environment (nurture) are inextricably interwoven and that children interact with and influence their environment while simultaneously being shaped by the influence their environment has on them.