

# Human development: perspectives and theories



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The evolutionary perspective argues that many human behavioural tendencies evolved through biological necessity to help our ancestors survive and reproduce. Psychological processes have evolved through the natural selection of biological traits that helped organisms adapt to their environment. Evolution biologically selects organisms that maximise their reproductive success.

The cognitive perspective was not considered as best fit because how we develop cognitively is only one part of the biological puzzle; other aspects include genetic, behaviours, adaption, etc.

The cognitive perspective places the greatest importance on the role of the individual in his or her own development.

Cognitive development suggests that individual go through stages of cognitive development to actively construct their own understanding of the world. Individuals use two processes which underlie our cognitive construction of the world: organisation and adaption. Individuals organise their experiences, separating important and less important ideas, connecting ideas to each other to adapt to new environmental demands. Vygotsky reasoned that children individually construct their knowledge. Information processing theory emphasises that individuals manipulate information, monitor it and strategise about it.

The learning perspective was not considered as best fit because this is only one aspect of the individual. Other developmental areas needing consideration would be thoughts, feelings and relationships.

The psychoanalytic perspective places the greatest importance on the role of parents or caregivers in the early development of children.

Psychosexual development is influenced by the caregiver's role in child development. Sucking the breast provides nourishment and a prime avenue for social nourishment, i. e. warmth and closeness with their caregivers. Children develop wishes and expectations based on their total dependence on their caregivers, including the role and rules of the parents about compliance and defiance. They identify with parents, imitating their behaviour and changing self concepts, trying to be more like their parents by adopting and internalising their motives, behaviours, beliefs and ideals.

The learning perspective was not considered as best fit because learning from caregivers is only one aspect, we also learn from peers, our environment, other cultures, etc.

The learning perspective places the greatest importance on the interaction of the environment and the individual in development.

An individual's tendency to produce behaviour depends on the behaviour's effect on the environment. An individual learns to operate on the environment to produce a consequence. Conditioning refers to learning in which an environmental stimulus provides a response in an individual. Experience shapes behaviours, we operate on the environment to produce a consequence either good or bad, and from these we learn to develop.

The contextual perspective was not considered as best fit because we also need to look at how we change, operate and adapt to the environment.

The contextual perspective places the greatest importance on the role of environmental systems in development.

Development happens within a context or environmental system, e. g. families, schools, etc. These environmental systems are influenced by historical economic, social and cultural factors. Changes in environmental systems produces changes on individuals and may have a biological or environmental impact on development. Family relationships, will impact on our mesosystem environment, e. g. schools, relationships.

Learning perspective was not considered as best fit because it is also important how we socially interact in our macro environment and the impact of cultural, economic and world contexts on us.

## Theories

Erikson's psychosocial theory. Behaviour: playing. In all 8 life stages we develop physically, cognitively and socially. Initiative is the capability to devise action projects, e. g. playing, and a confidence to do so even at the risk of making mistakes. Initiative flourishes when game playing is encouraged. Suppression of game playing may inhibit confidence development, replacing it with guilt. Parents play an important developmental role of balancing this: giving enough space and encouragement to foster purpose and confidence, and boundaries to protect against danger.

Skinner's operant conditioning theory means learning to operate on the environment to produce a consequence. Behaviour: wearing sun protection;

becomes associated with an environmental effect not getting sunburnt.

Reinforcement is a process by which the behaviour is more likely to occur.

Positive reinforcers (parental praise) make the behaviour more likely to

occur, rewarding environmental consequence. Negative reinforcers

(unpleasant sunburn) will strengthen the behaviour by its removal. Escape

learning is where the child getting sunburnt will eliminate the aversive state

by applying sunscreen or avoidance where the child avoids getting sunburnt

by not going out in the sun.

Piaget's cognitive development theory. Behaviour: drinking. Piaget argues

that children cognitively adapt to their environment through two interrelated

processes: assimilation and accommodation. Schemas are organised,

repeatedly exercised thoughts or behaviours, e. g. an infant's tendency to

suck anything that can fit in their mouth; objects can be assimilated, taken in

without modifying an existing schema (by sucking). Accommodation is the

modification of schemas at a behavioural level to fit reality. Accommodation

takes place when an existing schema is presented with a new one, e. g. an

infant's sucking schema must be modified when presented with a cup

(drinking schema). Sensorimotor involves sensory experiences (seeing the

cup) and motoric actions (drinking).

Bowlby's attachment theory. Behaviour: aggressiveness. Bowlby argues that

behaviours learned in early life and continued in later developmental stages

may be due to the type and nature of caregiver attachment; proposing

infants develop internal working models of attachment relationships that

form the basis of expectation in close relationships. A disorganised

attachment style will form a disorganised internal working model, making it

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difficult to form a coherent model of a child's relationship with their caregiver that makes sense and provides a feeling of security. Children with disorganised styles in infancy tend to be rated by teachers in early primary school as aggressive, impulsive or disruptive (Burton, 2009).

Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory. Behaviour: caring. Children's Microsystems include caregivers and schools. The more caring and nurturing these relationships are the more caring children grow. In the mesosystem, if the caregivers take an active role, e. g. showing interest and caring in their schooling, this will help ensure the child's overall growth. In the exosystem, including the parent's work, a balance between work and home life will show a caring attitude which the child will develop from. The macrosystem, including caring cultural values and respect, will also have a positive effect on the child's development as a caring individual.

### Short essay

This essay will discuss a behaviour selected from both Maori and Pakeha cultures during the adult infancy stage and how the different approaches may effect socio emotional development. This will involve examining the more salient points of Sachdev's research and the major theoretical perspectives to explain this development and likely outcomes. Sachdev (1997) notes that despite extensive research of Maori culture problems remain in efforts to integrate an understanding of developmental issues. Problems include defining culture, inappropriate comparisons and rapid change. Sachdev states some of the main differences during the adult-infant developmental stage. For Maori: close physical contact, marked indulgence

and permissiveness, providing a gratifying and non-threatening early environment where most demands are met and trust and dependence is fostered. For Pakeha: parents discipline their love, structure their care giving and foster independence, separateness and self differentiation.

Erikson may theorise on Sachdev's description of Maori adult-infancy interaction suggesting that if an infant is unfailingly indulged, or insulated from all/any feelings of surprise or normality, this may create a false sense of trust amounting to sensory distortion or failing to appreciate reality leading to maladaptions such as unrealistic expectations, spoilt or deluded. It could also be suggested that a too structured approach may be equally extreme leading to malignancy, e. g. neurotic, depressive or fearful. Erikson further states that irrespective of culture neglect and cruelty will destroy trust and foster mistrust. This will increase a person's resistance to risk exposure and exploration. Bowlby argues that infants develop internal working models of attachment with caregivers which influences the infant/child's subsequent responses to other people. Given Sachdev's descriptions this may suggest that Maori infants may adopt their attachment figures model developing as permissive, self gratifying, indulgent adults or that Pakeha infants may develop into individualist, self-centered, differentiated adults. Other cultural researchers believe that attachment theory is laden with Western values and meanings. Cross cultural studies showed three core hypotheses of attachment theory: caregiver sensitivity, competence and a service base that is culturally specific (Burton, 2009).

Piaget may suggest Maori infants in their development assimilate their traditional, cultural values and have to accommodate new values due to the

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impacts of urbanisation and modernisation, and their associated problems.

Accommodation may leave many Maori resentful of abandoning their traditional values to survive and compete in the Pakeha world. Other Maori may find accommodation difficult leading to overrepresentation in the legal and social welfare systems. Skinner may see Maori child development as not only learning to operate within their own environment but also the necessity to operate within the Pakeha value system to produce a consequence.

Difficulty adapting in this environment may again lead to consequences such as youth crime or antisocial behaviour.

Baumrind may describe the Pakeha parenting style as authoritative (the parents enforce standards but explain their views and encourage verbal give and take) and Maori Parenting style as indulgent (minimal controls imposed on their children). Children of indulgent parents rarely learn respect for others and may have difficulty controlling their behaviour. They may be domineering, egocentric or non compliant and have difficulties in peer relationships (Santrock, 2008). However Burton (2009) considers two qualifications in contrasting different cultural values: firstly good parenting is flexible and changes as children mature; secondly authoritative parenting style is rare or non-existent in many cultures.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory may reveal important insights into human development due to contextual influences such as modernisation and urbanisation for both Maori and Pakeha within New Zealand. Sachdev states the Maori ecological system has changed from their traditional support base to a Western/Pakeha based value system leaving many Maori children and their extended families geographically split. This problem is compounded by

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youth pregnancies, large families, broken homes and alcoholism in parents, factors that are disruptive for a child in an urban setting (Santrock, 2008).

In conclusion different theorists may describe both Maori and Pakeha socio emotional development from attachment, parenting and psychosocial perspectives. Maori theorists may suggest this is based on Western world views. Both developmental styles seem effective within their own environments however problems may occur as Bronfenbrenner suggests due to environmental changes. This may be indicative of difficulties in current cultural interactions in New Zealand today. Maori development depends on how they can operate and accommodate within this new environment. The same may be said for Pakeha development.