

Psychological approaches to child development



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Learning theory comes from the Cognitive, Behaviourist and Social approaches in the field of psychology. Each of these approaches has assumptions that can be used to how it applies its approach to understanding human behaviour. The basic assumptions of the Behaviourist approaches are firstly classical conditioning this is learning through the process of association between a particular stimulus and response. Classical conditioning involves conditioned reflexes: all animals have this reflexive behaviour which is not a conscious control but is a response to a specific stimuli for example a kneejerk reflex will only jerk if is tapped in the correct place while your lower leg is freely swinging this reflex is controlled by the spinal cord and not by the brain this is a straightforward response to the stimuli another example is the production of saliva in response to food when hungry. This was studied in great detail by Pavlov, (1911). Pavlov had been studying the digestive process in dogs, in order to do this he placed dogs in harnesses and set a tube up inside their cheek, he did this so he could measure the rate and production of saliva. He observed that the dogs would start to salivate not only when they were given food but when they first caught sight of the food pail. Pavlov set up many studies to investigate whether or not a dog could learn to associate salivation with another response " the ringing of a bell", Pavlov found that after associating the sound of the bell with the presentation of food the dogs would salivate when they heard the bell. The reflex of salivation had become conditioned. Pavlov found there to be a tendency to generalise the learning to other stimuli if a different bell was rang the dogs would still salivate and the more similar the sound of bell was to the original one the stronger the response this is known as the generalisation gradient. Although Pavlov studied dogs it became

apparent that it was also a form of human learning. (Hayes&Orell, 1996)
(Pearce, 1987)

Menzies (1937) showed how completely unconscious response could be conditioned response to the sound of a buzzer, the response was vasoconstriction which is the process of blood vessels withdrawing from the surface of the skin in the cold. Menzies got his participants to immerse their hands in a bucket of ice cold water when the buzzer was sounded this would cause vasoconstriction in their hands after a while vasoconstriction would take place when the buzzer sounded even though their hands were not immersed in the water meaning their reflex had been conditioned. This study is important as it illustrates that classical conditioning is nothing to do with our conscious decisions. (Hayes&Orell, 1996)

In 1920 Watson and Rayner performed a conditioning experiment on a little boy who became known as little Albert; He was given a white rat and it was observed that Albert was playful with the rodent he had no fear of it and was even comfortable picking it up. The next time the rat was given to Albert he reacted in the same way but then the psychologists made a loud sound it was so sudden it made little Albert cry they did this on numerous occasions and so finally the mere sight of the rat would make Little Albert cry next they introduced a white rabbit and a Santa Claus mask which also made him cry, Little Albert had been conditioned to cry at the sight of the white rat but during the process had made a connection that anything white and furry would make a loud noise. This experiment gives us an insight into the human mind however this experiment would be unethical in today's standards.
(Hayes&Orell, 1996)(Pearce , 1987)

Traditionally, psychologists believed that responses that can be classically conditioned are involuntary responses for example: heart rate changes, gastric motility, sweating, eye blinks and sexual arousal. This is in contrast to operant conditioning, in which voluntary responses are molded through their rewarding and punishing consequence Pavlov's studies demonstrated how animals and humans can acquire new behaviors beyond the rather limited repertoire of their innate reflexes. (Davey, G 1981)

Pavlov believed that the conditioned response could explain all kinds of learning. For many years, learning theorists believed that virtually any perceivable neutral stimulus could become a Conditioned Stimulus and that just about any response could be conditioned this view of classical conditioning has been modified as a variety of research studies have identified limitations to animals' and humans' adaptability through classical conditioning .(Davey 1981)

Stimulus generalization allows you to respond to similarities between environmental stimuli, while stimulus discrimination allows you to respond differently to stimuli that have some features in common with other stimuli. You generalize first, and then, through additional experience, you learn which stimuli are functionally similar and which stimuli require different responses. (Hayes, 1994)(McFarland, 1999)

Another type of learning is Operant Conditioning which involves learning to repeat or totally stop certain behaviours, although is more complex than classical conditioning it is still a simple form of learning. In 1911 Thorndike argued that some responses were learned not simply because they are

associated with a stimulus response but because they had unpleasant consequences. This was known as the law of effect which is the investigation of different types of learning it is now known as operant conditioning the psychologist responsible for developing it was Skinner. Like Pavlov, Skinner investigated learning by using animals he did this because he wanted to study simple forms of learning whereas human learning is generally complicated. By using a Skinner box which is a device that contained simple elements that were needed for learning a response, he would place a hungry animal either a rat or a pigeon into the box and observe their behaviour the box would contain three things a lever a food delivery chute and a light, as the animal began to move around the box it would eventually press the lever and food would be delivered meaning that the behaviour was being rewarded and would have an affect in reinforcing that behaviour which in turn would make it happen again. (Hayes&Orell, 1996) (Blackwell& Skinner, 1951)

Skinner introduced the term operant or operant response to distinguish the responses in operant conditioning from those in classical conditioning. In classical conditioning the conditioned response does not affect whether or when the stimulus occurs.

Supernanny uses positive reinforcement and rewards and this is most effective in producing good behaviour. Positive rein forcers are events that strengthen a response if they are experienced after that response occurs. They are roughly equivalent to rewards. For children, positive rein forcers can include food, smiles, money, or other desirable outcomes. The presentation of positive re-enforcers after a response is called positive

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reinforcement. The process of strengthening behavior by following it with the removal of an aversive stimulus is called negative reinforcement and other desirable outcomes. Negative reinforcers are stimuli such as pain, threats, or a disapproving frown that strengthen a response if they are removed after the response occurs. Whether it takes the form of presenting something pleasant or removing something aversive, reinforcement always increases the likelihood of the behavior that precedes it. (supernanny.com).

Developmental psychologists are interested in how parent's impact upon a child's development, furthermore sourcing actual cause and effect links between the actions of parents and children's development can be very difficult. Baumrind (1967) conducted a study on more than 100 preschool age children using naturalistic observation and parental interviews she was able to identify four important dimensions of parenting which are disciplinary strategies, warmth and nurturance, communication and expectations of maturity and control. Baumrind (1967) stated that the majority of parents display one of four parenting styles which are: Authoritarian parenting which is where the parent controls, shapes and evaluates the attitude and behaviour of a child using strict rules established by the parents they believe in keeping the child in their place. They also do not encourage verbal give and take, believing that the child should accept their word for what is right. Next is the Authoritative parent they attempt to direct the child's activities but in a rational, issue-oriented manner. They encourage verbal give and take and share with the child the reasoning. This type of parenting can result in children being obedient but lack happiness and self esteem. The authoritative parent affirms the child's present qualities, but also sets

standards for future conduct. These parents want their children to be assertive as well as socially responsible. This type of parenting can result in children being happy capable and successful. Permissive parents have very few demands to make on their children the parent consults with the child about decisions and gives explanations as to why they have to be implemented. They avoid control and use reason and manipulation not to overt power but to accomplish mature behaviour permissive parents are nurturing and commutative and are more than a friend than a parent to their children. This parenting style can result in children having low happiness and self esteem but also have problems with authority and sometimes can do poor at school. Finally the uninvolved parent has few demands and has very low responsiveness and communication with their child even though these parents may fulfil their child's basic needs they are more likely to be detached from their child's life in extreme cases this can lead to reject r neglect of their children. This parenting style lacks lowest in all life domains and children lack in self esteem and are less competent. (Baumrind, 1967)

The BBC news reported on a study " Tough Love is good for children" It states a balance of warmth and discipline improved social skills more that an authoritarian or disengaged upbringing. It says children aged five with " Tough Love " parents were twice as likely to show good character capabilities. However according to the report qualities such as application, self regulation and empathy were more likely to be developed in children whose parents were of the " Tough Love " category, it found that these qualities make a vital contribution to life chances and opportunity. The building character data came from more than 9000 households in the United

Kingdom, it found that children from the richest backgrounds were twice as likely to develop key characteristics, additionally children whose parents were married were also twice as likely to show such traits than children from lone parent or step-families., it added that when parental style and confidence were tailored in the difference in child character development between richer and poorer families disappeared. They recommended that the government's sure start programme should be refocused for the use as a tool in early intervention and urge for more information and support for families and children with disengaged or low income parents. This report concluded that it indicated that parenting was the most important influence. (BBC News)

One could argue that no matter what parenting style is given throughout childhood it reflects on a child's decision making attitude and behaviour, and has a great impact on a child's development. After learning about parenting styles on child development it is apparent that all parents should simply use the authoritative parenting style after all it is more likely to produce happy confident and capable children.

The theories that Freud studied stressed the importance of childhood experiences, according to Freud child development is described as a series of " psychosexual stages" Freud outlined these stages as oral, anal, phallic, latency period, and genital. Each stage involves the satisfaction of a libidinal desire and can later play a role in adult personality. Erickson developed Freud's theories on development throughout human lifespan. Erikson believed that each stage of development is focused on overcoming a conflict. Theorist Jean Piaget suggested that children think differently than <https://assignbuster.com/psychological-approaches-to-child-development/>

adults. Piaget's stage theory describes the cognitive development of children. Cognitive development involves changes in cognitive process and abilities. In Piaget's view, early cognitive development involves processes based upon actions and later progresses into changes in mental operations. Piaget's focus on qualitative development had an important impact on education, although he did not specifically apply his theory to education but has been used in that children should be taught at the level for which they are developmentally prepared. A criticism of Piaget is his research methods in he used his own three children for his experiments, other children in Piaget's small research sample were all from well-educated professionals of high socio-economic status. Because of this unrepresentative sample, it is difficult to generalise his findings to a larger population and research has shown that Piaget's argument that all children will automatically move to the next stage of development as they mature. Some data found shows that environmental factors may play a role in the development of formal operations. (About.com)

Social learning theory occurs within social context and is observational learning, imitation and modelling meaning people observe learning behaviour of others. Behaviourists say that learning has to be represented by a permanent change in behaviour; in contrast social learning theorists say that because people can learn through observation alone. Social learning theory has become increasingly cognitive in its interpretation of human learning. Awareness and expectations of reinforcements or punishments have a major effect on behaviours that people display. There is also a transition between behaviourist learning theories and cognitive learning

theories. The environment reinforces and punishes modelling. Much behaviour can be learned through modelling: Aggression can be learned through models. Much research indicates that children become more aggressive when they observed aggressive or violent models. Moral thinking and moral behaviour are influenced by observation and modelling, including moral judgments regarding right and wrong.

Bandura (1961) designed a study which he named the Bobo Doll experiment, His study used three groups of children the first being the control group which did not include an adult. The other two groups included adult actors with one group being exposed to an adult displaying verbal and physical aggressive behaviour to an inflatable doll and the other witnessing a passive adult, Bandura (1961) found that the group of children who were exposed to the adult showing aggression were more likely to demonstrate the same behaviour when left alone in a room to play than those whose groups had a passive adult or no adult at all, The three groups were also divided equally between boys and girls and the results also showed that boys were three times more likely to imitate the physical aggressive behaviour than girls, although it was discovered that the level of imitative verbal aggression was about the same for males and females in the group, Bandura (1961) demonstrates that children have a tendency to imitate the behaviour of an adult role model so are acting in the same manner that an adult does. (Shuttleworth, 2008)

However there are extreme examples that show that a human child will imitate the behaviour of whatever it comes into contact with the most,

exposure to a model behaving aggressively results in observational learning and aggressive behaviour.

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