

Developmental theories essay

[Technology](#), [Development](#)



Developmental theories are attempts by psychologists to understand how humans develop from childhood through adolescence to adulthood. Most of the theories were advanced after extensive studies were conducted on the human development cycle. This was a clear contrast from what used to happen before these theories were advanced; children were considered as smaller adults and their development was never of great concern (Crain, 2010). The existence of several theories in this particular area of human psychology indicates that there are different approaches and accepted interpretations on the influences on a person's development. The theories are however inter-related in a few aspects such as that most of them argue that human development occurs in stages or phases that are mainly reliant on the age of a person. When applied interactively, the theories offer valuable insight on the development of humans in terms of cognition, emotion and their physical aspect. This paper shall focus on the developmental theories, their similarities and differences.

The theories on human development were advanced by theorists such as Freud, Piaget, Vygotsky, Gestalt and Erikson. However since analyzing all the theories in the paper would reduce the effectiveness of noting their differences and inter-relation, the paper shall mainly focus on the theories by Piaget, Freud and Vygotsky.

Jean Piaget's Theory

According to Piaget, how a person understands something is based on their understanding and interpretation of events in the world. Piaget believes that there are four stages through which a person goes through during development of their cognition. The sensor motor level extends up to when a

child is two years from the time they are born. At this stage, a child understands that they are independent of their environment. This understanding is founded on the child learning that objects and people continue to exist even when not in the child's sight. Before a child fully completes this stage they normally feel that things have been lost or people have gone for good when they are not in their sight. The second level in cognitive development is referred to as the preoperational level and this is where the child begins to acquire language skills. This level is also characterized by personification of things by the child. At this stage it is common to see a child having a conversation with their toys based on the assumption that they also have hearing abilities. This stage happens in a child's second year up to their 7th year. My 7 year old son has been going through this stage and it has been interesting to see him personalize some of his things such as the toy fire- fighters I bring him; he believes they can hear him as he commands them on how to put mock fires. The third stage according to Piaget is the concrete stage. At this level a person can manipulate their acquired knowledge to create awareness and understanding. The last stage suggested by Piaget was the formal operations level where a person is able to understand things they can't see or have never even seen.

Sigmund Freud

The psychoanalysis theory was developed by Freud though other psychological theorists have added on it. Its main focus is on the study of how humans behave and function psychologically. Its 3 main integral components are a methodology for treating psychological illnesses, a

methodology for investigating the mind and how a person thinks, and a theory system on human behavior.

The theory system involves several theories which differ on many points but all of them are centered on how strong our unconscious elements influence the way we think. Freud noted that at certain points in person's early development, the behavior of children is oriented around particular parts of the body; during breastfeeding the child's behavior is concentrated on the mouth, on the anus during training on toilet usage, the latter later shifts to the genitals. The theorist believed that at infancy humans are polymorphously perverse; this means that they excite themselves sexually from any body part (Meggitt, 2006). Later these changes due to influences brought about by socialization. According to the theory, there are 5 stages through which a child goes through in their development; oral, latency, phallic, anal and genital.

The oral stage is the first one and it extends from birth up to when a child is 2 years old. At this stage, the child derives their pleasure from activities involving the mouth. This is mainly because this is the stage the child is being nursed and fed by the care givers. The Id is dominant here as the super ego and ego have not yet fully developed. This translates to the child not possessing a sense of self and hence all the child's actions are centered on the pleasure principle.

The 2nd stage is the anal stage where the child's activities are mainly concentrated on the anus. This stage extends to the 3rd year from the 15th month. It is important to note that the formation of the ego is still continuing

at this stage. The excitement of the child around the anus is believed to come from the toilet training they are getting. The Id conflict that arises at this stage is also of significant influence to the child.

The 3rd stage, phallic stage, goes to 5 years from 3 years. The child derives pleasure from activities involving their genitals. It should be understood that though the focus is on the genitals it is not in a sexual way since the child is still immature sexually. This age is also characterized by a child's increased interest in their bodies, those of their parents and their friends. The oedipal conflict is also existent at this stage as a child becomes attracted to parents of the opposite sex.

The latency stage is where the habits acquired in the latter stages are solidified. The Id drives are inaccessible to the ego at this stage as they have already been repressed at the phallic stage. The drives are hence said to be hidden or latent; hence the name. Children at this stage may however experience some conflicts if the oedipal conflict has not been resolved.

The final stage is the genital stage, which starts at puberty up to when development stops at around 18 years. The main task at this level is the child's detachment from their parents or guardians. The individual also gets to early childhood residues at this stage. The ego uses secondary processes and hence love relationships may be formed at this stage. Families are also developed when children get to this stage and also the child gets to accept the responsibilities that come with adulthood.

Vygotsky

Vygotsky believed that children acquire knowledge through interacting with the culture around them. According to the theorist, learning is optimum when students are allowed to learn in their ZPD (Driscoll, 1994). For a student to get to this ZPD, Vygotsky believed that they needed guidance by an adult or more experienced person who is commonly referred to as the MKO. This theory can be applied in class by teachers by pairing weak students with stronger students academically. The stronger students will help the weaker ones attain their ZPD. This theory can also be applied in my profession, fire fighting, by pairing up inexperienced fire fighters with the experienced ones so that the rookies may get to learn techniques involved in the profession.

This theory focuses on the interconnection between people and the socio-cultural context in which they interact in. Vygotsky argued that people utilized tools that were developed from culture for mediation in their social environments. Some of these tools were writing and speech. At the initial stages these tools were developed to communicate the person's needs though their internalization led to improved cognitive skills.

Similarities between the Theories

Piaget's theory was similar to Vygotsky's in that they both used constructivism approach in their works. This approach considers that cognition comes from mental construction. This means that people learn new things by putting together information they already have with new

information. This approach was however different to what Freud used in his works as he used a behaviorist approach to advance his argument.

Both Piaget and Vygotsky believed that the learning process is affected by the attitudes of the students and also the context in which new information is taught. Vygotsky's theory was also similar to that of Piaget in that both theorists believed that cognitive growth boundaries are set by influences of the society. Freud on the other part believed that learning was influenced by other factors such as age and what was being taught.

Though Piaget and Freud had differences in their theories they both shared the belief that a person's development is influenced by what stage of life they are at the moment. They also showed that this development was visible on the activities they are required to do at the various stages.

Differences between the Theories

According to Vygotsky, Piaget had advanced a quantifiable technique that was to revolutionize study of cognition in children. However, Vygotsky believed that there were flaws in Piaget's theory and hence the former sought to rectify them. Vygotsky emphasized on egocentrism in his studies in a move seen as an attempt to cater for the flaws that were in Piaget's work. The interpretation Vygotsky had of Piaget's work, egocentric speech represented the preoperational stage of development. Sigmund's work was different from Piaget's in that it used a qualitative approach to understanding human development. Most of the stages involved in Freud's theory are not quantifiable and as such may be missed at times or influenced by other factors leading to wrong interpretation.

Under normal conditions, social speech is developed in children after they acquire egocentric speech. Logic came about in later developmental stages according to Piaget. From this, the theorist states that egocentric thought connects inner speech and logic. Egocentric speech has no future at the schools level and decreases as it does not fulfill any objective. Piaget believed that it decreased as egocentrism disappeared; Vygotsky pointed out some of what he believed were Piaget's methodological assumptions that were erroneous. He had greatly overlooked the role of activity in the child with regard to the thought process; the second error of Piaget's work according to Vygotsky was that he had combined philosophy and psychology though he avoided theorizing (Tharpe and Gallimore, 1988).

According to Piaget and Freud, students acquire new knowledge through interactions with the environment. Vygotsky believed that learning took place before development due to symbolism and history (Meggitt, 2006). Piaget and Freud had combined learning with development while Vygotsky had viewed the two as separate processes. Piaget argued that cognitive development was brought about by interactions with the environment while Freud believed this was brought about by a person's psyche: id, super ego and ego.

It should be noted that the theories by Freud were mainly concerned with mental orders as compared to the others which dealt with normal functioning.

Interaction of Cognitive, Physical and Emotional Development in a Child's overall Development

A child's cognitive, physical and emotional development stages are all inter-related and sometimes dependent on each other. This is because the growth of a child does not happen cognitively alone but also emotionally and physically. According to Piaget, cognitive development occurs at various ages in life and impacts on how a person relates to others; emotional development. Also in the case of young girls, it is their physical development of breasts that at times leads them to shy off from speaking in public. This shying off is a stage in their emotional development and hence showing the relationship between cognition and emotion in development.

Also at such stages as the anal stage, a child mainly bases their activities around their anus; they draw some emotional satisfaction from this part of the body. This emotional satisfaction comes about because the child is becoming aware of their physical development a process aided by cognitive development through toilet lessons offered by the guardians. In Freud's theories, it is argued that children are born polymorphously perverse which means that they can get sexual excitement- a form of emotion- from any part of their body though this changes later as the child's cognitive development on the issue of sex is shaped in a particular way by societal influences.

Importance of the Knowledge on Developmental Theories in helping Children achieve their potential

Knowledge on the stages that children undergo during their development helps in understanding the problems they experience at different stages of

their development. This helps the parent, teacher or guardian facilitate solving of this problem so that the pursuance of the child's goals cannot be affected.

This knowledge also helps in understanding what knowledge requirements children have at different stages of development. Hence the relevant person can provide this information and avoid the child getting wrong information from elsewhere. For example the knowledge would help a parent with a child in the genital stage of Freud's theory understand that their child requires sex knowledge; however, the parent would be well advised to seek another person to give this knowledge as their child is at a stage where they are seeking to be independent from the parent (Crain, 2010).

Conclusion

As can be seen above, the developmental theories are inter-related though there also are differences in some of their approaches to human development. The 3 theories used in this paper have shown this inter-relation and differences. Knowledge on these theories is important not only to people studying psychologists but to all those interacting with children as they help them understand how the children think; hence helping the children achieve their potential

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