

Reaction paper:
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[Life](#), [Childhood](#)



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Development is a lifelong and dynamic process that follows highly definitive processes from conception to old age. Basic themes developed in childhood are transferred or modified through the development stages unto adulthood. The prenatal development as covered by Gregoire & Jungers is extremely crucial for child development specialists or counselors.

The developments that occur even before the birth of a child have profound influences on the health and well being of the individual as the process of growth and development continues. In the chapter, "Prenatal Development" the authors highlight physical, cognitive, emotional and social gains that is made.

According to the authors, physical and behavioral characteristics are influenced by genetics and the environment. Prenatal development is further subdivided into three distinct categories based on the duration and the associated developments in pregnancy.

For instance, between week one and week three marks ovum period, week four to eight marks the embryo period and week eight onwards marks the fetal period (Gregoire & Jungers 115).

During the ovum period, implantation of the fertilized egg occurs followed by the formation of the neural tube. Most organ systems begin forming in the embryonic period. Development of organ systems precedes both in a cephalocaudal and proximodistal direction.

During this period of development, the only risks to normal development are the teratogens. The understanding of the risks to prenatal development is

useful because it aids the mother in making decisions aimed at avoiding events, activities or nutrition that may negatively impact on the health and development of the fetus.

Some of the teratogens as listed by the author include any substance that may cause structural damage to the unborn such as drugs, environmental pollutants, alcohol, infectious diseases, diet and other factors related to psychological health like stress and anxiety. However, there are other factors that may also directly affect the physical development at the prenatal phase.

The prenatal phase of development is defined by some authors as the period between conception time and birth. In normal circumstances, this duration typically lasts 38 to 42 weeks. During this entire period rapid changes accompany the transformation of fertilized egg, to zygote and eventually to a baby.

It is only during this phase of development that systemic growth occurs so rapidly in the absence of any form of direct external influences. Any influence to the unborn is transmitted via the mother. Due to the rapidity of growth and development coupled to the vulnerability of the unborn to deleterious external influence, the prenatal phase demands strict medical management (Curtis & Newman 58).

The authors succeed in presenting a critical analysis of the prenatal stage of development; however the presentation is highly complex and extremely modeled for the sole benefit of counselors. The text may not be appropriate from child development specialists without an advanced level of professional or academic achievement.

During the prenatal stage of development, all activity takes place in the uterus. The behavior of the unborn can only be described through the experiences of the mother. Mothers possess an extraordinary sensitivity to the movement of the fetus.

Based on the descriptions of these movements, the behavior of babies is described as being active or passive. They are active when they are kicking or rolling while when they are quiet their behavior is described as being passive.

Fetal movements are more noticeable from the sixteenth week towards the twentieth week. By the seventh month of pregnancy, eyelids open. Taste and smell also develop. Studies have also established that grasp reflex also exists in utero.

Infancy

After the birth of an infant, the development domains necessarily expand from the biological aspects to other domains that had earlier on been less important. Thus, Gregoire & Jungers begins the analysis of the stage of infancy by looking into the physical, cognitive as well as the socioemotional domains that categorically characterize the changes and transitions that will occur during the entire life of an individual.

The first noticeable changes at infancy are the reflexes fundamental for survival and adaptation to the new environment. As development progresses, other some reflexes are maintained while a select number are discarded due to their non-importance in survival and adaptation.

Some of the survival reflexes that the author notes include; rooting, breathing, papillary, eye blink and sucking while the primitive reflexes may be observed as swimming, stepping, plantar, babinski, startling and palmar (p. 114).

Just like in prenatal development, motor and physical development proceed via the cephalocaudal and proximodistal patterns. Motor developments allow the infant to accomplish the raising of heads and chest followed by sitting, crawling, standing and eventually walking. Between eleven to fifteen months, many infants begin to walk unaided.

Fine tuning of motor skills allows them to perform tasks such as uncoordinated reaching and grasping using their palms. Later on coordinated reaching and grasping is observed as the infant learns to use thumb and the forefinger.

As these motor developments become more and more apparent other physical developments in seeing and hearing also becomes noticeable. It is at this time that sensitivity to sounds becomes evident. As such they can be soothed, distressed, or even alerted via the influence of varying frequency or rhythms of tones.

Through auditory developments, infants learn how to discriminate between non speech sounds and speech sounds and even begin to show preference for human voices and by extension, ton specific human voices. Moreover, attachment and temperament attributes begin to not only determine their bonding with closer carers but also how they behave and respond to the environment.

Gregoire & Jungers, posit that during infancy emotional development is externally affected by the nature of parent's responsiveness and that over a period of time self regulation among infants is internalized. It is also during the same time that gains in self awareness are achieved.

In a nutshell, infants learn of their own existence as distinct beings and as they begin to discover how to interact with their environment they realize that their actions possess predictable results. At the later stages, they gain knowledge of their own physical composites (p. 119).

According to Christiansen et al, infancy extends to toddler hood and is associated with cognitive, sensory and musculoskeletal development. Social and emotional gains are also made. By early infancy, differences in temperament and personality become manifest. These character attributes are modeled by genetic and environmental factors which directly influence early social development (Christiansen et al 49).

These first eighteen months after birth characterize the beginning of communication, the acquisition of walking skills and use of hands for grasping and reaching and the child's relationship with the social environment. With rapid physical growth, motor and sensory fine tuning, the impacts of cultural, social emotional and cognitive influences become integral in development.

Middle Childhood

By middle childhood, sense of identity as reflected through play activities, gender roles, and family relationships can be observed. Even though physical

growth can easily be measured, rapid development in social skills, linguistic skills and cognitive gains are even more compelling.

It is at this period that imaginary and physical play, self care activities, school and family chores and responsibilities emerge to demand the child's concentration (Christiansen et al 48). According to Gregoire & Jungers, this period ranges from six years to eleven years and is marked by great strides in cognitive development. It is also at this period that children are exposed to peer and other social sphere influences (124).

Children demonstrate an extensive knowledge of language. Gains and use of vocabulary, grammar as well as pragmatic skills are astounding. After mastering good grammar correcting of grammatical mistakes, these young learners then begin to communicate with regard to context. Code switching enables them to adapt their linguistic skills to the persons they are communicating with.

Gains on self concept can be observed when children start to make social comparisons and interpret their behaviors and abilities in relation to their social environment. During middle childhood children demonstrate very high esteem which later drops off to realistic levels.

This leveling off of self esteem is only possible after children succeed in incorporating feedback about their competency in relation to that of other peers or other individuals in the social environment.

On the emotional scale, self conscious emotions develop as children begin understanding the concept of personal responsibility. By learning to interpret

how others are feeling or thinking, they understand other people's perspectives. These developments are further buttressed by emotional self regulation which is linked to a variety of social functioning aspects.

Pre-schooling and schooling increases the importance of peer associations in middle childhood. Through peers they learn socially appropriate behaviors and emotions such as empathy, sympathy and shyness.

Since children only make friends with other children identical to them in terms of gender, race, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, achievement, popularity and social behavior, peer associations became incredibly important in modeling their behavior and cognitive gains.

The importance of middle childhood developments cannot be underrated as some researchers point out. Middle childhood activities can be used to predict adult work competence. Peer relations in middle childhood may be used to predict early adulthood involvements in romantic relationships(Huston & Ripke 25).

In a nutshell, middle childhood is characteristic of a stage where individuals continually refine motor skills, focus on academic and/or school related tasks while at the same time nurture peer relationships that would become very useful not only in adolescence but also in early adulthood.

Adolescence

According to Copher & Mortimer, adolescence marks the development period when individuals establish identities. This stage of development is often associated with significant emotional strain as individuals are forced to

model themselves into who they think they are and what they hope to become as they progress to adulthood.

Identities are basically grounded on relationships, roles, status and character traits. Character traits can either be classified as behavioral or psychological attributes. In the western world, adolescence as a stage is conceptualized as experimental, carefree and playful. As these adolescents mature into adulthood, the conceptualization changes to being independent, hardworking, responsible and productive.

It is important to note that the author restricts this classification to Western conceptualization since these definitions vary the world over with regard to the cultural, social and even legal context. These asynchronies attribute to identity conflicts and status inconsistencies among different social institutions(<http://family.jrank.org>).

Typically, adolescence occurs between the ages of 12 to 19 years. The period is characteristic of hormonal changes. The pituitary gland releases growth hormones which stimulate the release of a wide variety of other hormones by different glands in the body.

These hormones aid in body growth and sexual maturation. Key aspects of sexual maturation include the release of androgens and estrogens which trigger sexual maturation.

Physical changes in the body as manifest in the growth and maturation of reproductive organs and other secondary sexual features also signify sexual

maturation and finally, spermatarche in boys and menarche in girls are directly related to pubertal changes.

There are other physical developments that are not associated with sexual maturation but which can also be observed during adolescence. For instance, as opposed to childhood, a reversal of cephalocaudal growth occurs. Release of thyroxine by thyroid glands results in height and weight gains.

These developments can be measurably be seen as broadening of the boy's shoulders and girls hips, increase in the growth of legs, feet and hands. Boys increase muscles while girls accumulate more fat. Gains also occur with respect to the improvement in motor skills which vary between the sexes.

On the cognitive development front, adolescents develop the capacity to engage in abstract scientific thinking but this does not necessarily imply that such individuals find it much easier to plan and make everyday decisions. Peer associations lead to the formation of cliques. Peer affiliation, conformity and peer pressure also increases during this development phase (Gregoire & Jungers 130).

Adolescents are always in search of autonomy and their emotional development is characterized by the same. While early childhood is almost supremely influenced by the family, peer influences rival family influences in adolescence. Thus, even though parent-child relationships remain crucial, conflicts between adolescents and their parents are not unusual occurrences.

Huge gains in cognitive development imply that many adolescents can engage in operational thought hence they may often recognize multiple choices that are available to them. Some choices may not be optimal. Problems in decision making are attributable to this multiplicity of choices.

Since adolescents have to make decisions in a dynamic sociopolitical world with varying traditional expectations, economic upheavals and contemporary conditions, there are times when the decisions made may be grossly inappropriate. In fact, a majority of the changes related to sexual maturation and hormonal changes also reflect on physical and motional status of the adolescents.

In preparation for adulthood, adolescence marks the period of educational attainment while at the same time working to attain considerable financial health. However, for a majority of youth, adolescence which comes with increased risk taking creates several youth problem behaviors like substance abuse and delinquency.

Problems with the law may also arise due to engaging in legally prohibited activities likesmokingand drinking. Play in adolescence assumes a structured and formalized nature hence music, competitive sports, dances and a host of other group experiences. Social relationships are nurtured because of their importance. Productive pursuits like volunteer activities and work are taken up by some individuals and such pursuits may last a lifetime.