The Study of Development

The ways development is viewed Academically
Defining Development

• The pattern of movement or change that begins at conception and continues through the human life span

• Differing views of Developmental beginnings
  • Original Sin - children were perceived as being basically bad, born into the world as evil beings.
  • Tabula Rasa - children are like a “blank tablet,” and acquire their characteristics through experience.
  • Innate Goodness - children are inherently good.
Perspectives of Development

• The Traditional Approach
  • Emphasizes extensive change from birth to adolescence, little or no change in adulthood, and decline in late old age.

• The Life-Span Approach
  • Emphasizes developmental change during adulthood as well as childhood.
Characteristics of Life-Span Perspective

• Development is lifelong
• Development is multidimensional
• Development is multidirectional
• Development is plastic
• Development is contextual
• Development is studied by a number of disciplines
• Development involves growth, maintenance, and regulation
Characteristics of Life-Span Perspective

• Development is lifelong
  • No age period dominates development

• Development is Multidimensional
  • There are biological dimensions
  • There are cognitive dimensions
  • There are socioemotional dimensions

• Development is Multidirectional
  • Some dimensions or components of a dimension increase in growth
  • Some dimensions or components of a dimension decrease in growth
Characteristics of Life-Span Perspective

• Development is Plastic
  • Plasticity involves the degree to which characteristics change or remain stable

• Development is Contextual
  • Normative age-graded influences
  • Normative history-graded influences
  • Nonnormative life events
The Study of Development

• Development is studied by a number of different professions
  • Psychologists
  • Sociologists
  • Anthropologists
  • Neuroscientists
  • Medical Researchers

• There are three main goals in development
  • Maintenance
  • Growth
  • Regulation
Studies of Development: Biologically

• Involve changes in the individual’s physical nature such as:
  • Height and weight gains
  • The development of the brain
  • Changes in motor skills
  • Cardiovascular decline
Studies of Development: Cognition

- Involve changes in the individual’s thought, intelligence, and language such as:
  - Watching a mobile swing above a crib
  - Creating a two-word sentence
  - Memorizing a poem
  - Imagining being a movie star
Studies of Development: Socioemotional

- Involve changes in the individual’s relationships with other people, changes in emotions, and changes in personality such as:
  - An infant smiling from her mother’s touch
  - A young boy hitting a playmate
  - A girl’s joy at her senior prom
  - The affection of an elderly couple
Developmental Issues: Nature vs. Nurture

• Involves the debate about whether development is primarily influenced by nature or nurture
  • Nature - An organism’s biological inheritance
    • Ex. People are born a certain way
  • Nurture - An organism’s environmental experiences
    • Ex. People are a product of their upbringing
Developmental Issues: The Continuity vs Discontinuity Issue

- This issue focuses on the extent to which development involves gradual, cumulative change or distinct stages
  - Continuity - Development results from a gradual process occurring over several weeks, months, and possibly years
  - Discontinuity - Development occurs through a sequence of stages in which change is qualitatively rather than quantitatively different
Developmental Issues: Stability vs. Change

• This issue involves the degree to which we become older renditions of our early experience or whether we develop into someone different from who we were at an earlier point in development.

• It considers the extent to which early experiences (especially in infancy) or later experiences are the key determinants of a person’s development.
Evaluating Developmental Issues

- Most life-span developmentalists recognize that extreme positions are unwise.
- The key to development is the interaction of nature and nurture rather than either factor alone.
- There still exists strong debate regarding how strongly development is influenced by each of the factors.
Sources

- York University Department of Psychology