

CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Concepts, Issues, and Readings



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REBECCA REYNOLDS

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A *Study Guide* has been developed to assist you in mastering concepts presented in this text. The *Study Guide* reinforces the learning of these concepts by presenting them in condensed and concise form. In addition, there are materials for self-study and self-evaluation. Answers to self-evaluation questions are included. This *Study Guide* is available from your local bookstore under the title, *Study Guide to Accompany Hanson and Reynolds' Child Development: Concepts, Issues, and Readings* prepared by Donalene M. Andreotti.

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Preface

Children represent both the celebration of all that is joyous in our world, and the greatest single challenge for parents, teachers, students, and others who work with children. This book, which grown out of the attempt to understand this paradox, represents one small step in the quest for understanding.

One of the primary emphases of this book is looking at children in appropriate contexts. Children exist within a family network, and cannot be studied without paying close attention to this most basic of all social support networks. Children also exist within a society, which directly impinges upon the activities and potential of every child within its boundaries. Children are also part of a historical context—a legacy so rich and important that the study of child development is not complete without its inclusion. Because children are mainly chronological-developmental beings, this book is also largely developmental in approach. Within the developmental framework, however, the instructor and student will find considerable latitude for a topical investigation of children.

We have included features in this book that will not only enhance the student's breadth of exposure, but will also keep the reader interested in the study of children. For example, specific issues are highlighted within each chapter, including such topics as the baby-tender of B. F. Skinner, test-tube babies, the impact of television on sex-role development, the "hurried child," and many other interesting subjects. Each chapter also has a specific reading attached to it. These readings come from magazines, professional journals, and scholarly books related to the field of child development. Some readings are academically oriented, others more practical. Each reading discusses a very different aspect of the study of children, ranging from our society's attitudes toward children to the ways children react to the death of a parent. Taken together, these readings add a dimension that is slightly different from the standard text material. Thought questions are included at the end of each chapter, along with a small number of suggested readings.

Trying to come up with acknowledgments and thanks for a work like this is a major task. There are many friends and colleagues who are instrumental in the preparation of a book. In this regard, special thanks go to Dr. Jim Roberts, who in his infinite wisdom decided to hire an aspiring young teacher. We also wish to acknowledge and thank Donalene Andreotti of El Camino College, Lois Klezmer of Miami Dade Community College South, Stephen Salzman of Los Angeles Valley College, Phyllis Seabolt of Western Michigan University, Irma Galejs of Iowa State University, Gaston Walker of Tarrant County Junior College South, Cecile Mielenz of Northwestern State University, and Sherrill Richarz of Washington State University for their invaluable academic assistance.

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Contents

UNIT I FOUNDATIONS OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT 1

- Chapter 1 The Study of Children: Evolution of a Culture 3**
Issue: The Economic Value of Children in America 13
Reading: The War Against Kids John von Hartz 25
- 2 Theories of Development: Physiological Beginnings 31**
Issue: Behaviorism Applied: The Case of the Baby Tender 44
Reading: Piaget in Action Millie Almy 55
- 3 Genetics, Heredity, and Prenatal Development 59**
Issue: Test Tube Babies 78
Reading: Healing Babies Before They're Born Edwin Keister, Jr. 82
- 4 Birthing and Neonatal Development 89**
Issue: The Cesarean Delivery 107
Reading: The Nursery's Two Cruellest Words: Spina Bifida John Grossmann 112
- 5 Social Implications 119**
Issue: Men in the Delivery Room 122
Reading: Approaches to Childbirth Mary C. Doyle 136

UNIT II INFANT DEVELOPMENT 143

- 6 Infancy: Physiological Development 145
Issue: Infant Physical Development: The Use of Norms 157
Reading: What Young Children Need Most In a Changing Society
David Elkind 169
- 7 Infancy: Perceptive Skills and Learning 175
Issue: Research with Young Children 183
Reading: Stimulation in the First Year of Life? A Perspective on Infant Development
Rose M. Bromwich 195
- 8 Infancy: Personality and Temperament 207
Issue: The Infant and the Father 214
Reading: Infant Day Care: Toward a More Human Environment
Arminta Lee Jacobson 228

UNIT III THE YOUNG CHILD 235

- 9 The Young Child: Motor Abilities and Physical Development 237
Issue: Hyperactivity in America 253
Reading: Early Warning: Signs of Childhood Disease
Peter Stoler 262
- 10 The Young Child: Cognition and Language Development 267
Issue: I.Q.: A Valid Social Measure? 282
Reading: Smart Kids Have Problems Too
Gene Maeroff 291
- 11 The Young Child: Socialization and Early Education 297
Issue: The Hidden Persuader: Television and Sex-Role Development 307

- Reading:* Prosocial Television and Children's
Behavior
Paul Mussen and Nancy
Eisenberg-Berg 318

12 The Young Child: Families and Their Impact 323

Issue: The Depletion of the Child's Family
Resources 335

Reading: Parents' Discipline of Children in Public
Places
Bruce W. Brown 341

UNIT IV THE MIDDLE YEARS 347

13 Middle Childhood: Issues in Cognition 349

Issue: Busing School Children to Achieve Racial
Integration 364

Reading: A Sense of Hope by Erika Duncan 367

14 Middle Childhood: Games and Social
Development 375

Issue: The Hurried Child 383

Reading: Old Games for Young Children: A Link to
Our Heritage
Ruth F. Bogdanoff and Elaine T.
Dolch 390

UNIT V ADOLESCENCE 399

15 Adolescence: A Period of Transitions 401

Issue: The Secular Trend 409

Reading: Epidemic: Teenage Pregnancy
John C. Kelly 419

16 Adolescence: Values and Egocentrism 423

Issue: Adolescents and the Schools: A
Crossroad 437

Reading: Children Who Will Not Break
Julius Segal and Herbert Yahraes 440

17	Adolescence: Social Realities	445
	Issue: Juvenile Delinquency	455
	Reading: Forecast for the 80's	
	Harold G. Shane	461

UNIT VI NEW DIRECTIONS 467

18	Children and Stress: A Contemporary Analysis	469
	Issue: Parents and Crisis: A Help or Hindrance?	485
	Reading: Helping Children Cope with Death	
	Erna Furman	489
	Epilogue Children and the Future	497
	Glossary	501
	References	513
	Index	533

UNIT I

FOUNDATIONS OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT



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The Sargeant Family, by an unknown artist.

1

The Study of Children: Evolution of a Culture

The study of children and childhood is an exciting one, combining biology, psychology, sociology, and anthropology. We approach the study of children from several distinct, though related, aspects: holistic development; idiosyncratic development; social-psychological development and psychobiological development.

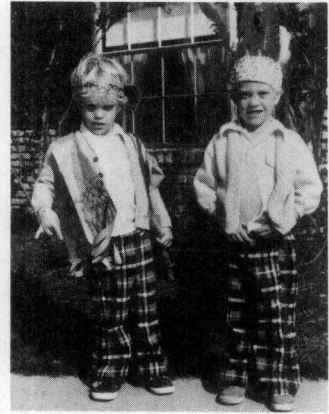
The term *holistic* implies a totality or wholeness: all of the organism. In much of the literature in child development there is a tendency to "slice up" the child into parts and to intensively study those respective parts. For example, those studying intellectual development find the things in the child's life that appear to be intellectual in nature, discover their development course, experiment with this development, and then flood the world with the information.

This may be very appropriate for some fields of study. It may allow us to feel like we have opened a window into the world of the unknown. However, through this piecemeal approach, we often lose the essence of the *contextual development* of children. Intellectual development does not stand separate from the whole child. It's quite possible that intellectual development may be a function of the child's temperament or perhaps his emotional feelings at the time; it is not just a separate dimension of the child's existence.

Children are very complex. The intellectual, social, emotional, and temperamental dimensions are interdependent; they interact with each other, they greatly influence the development of each other, and they develop their qualitative and quantitative aspects at different rates.

HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT

Context understanding:
looking at children in their
environment



How do you tell twins apart?

PHOTO BY TERRI WINTER.

In order to capture the essence of child development we need to remember this *reciprocal interaction* of the aspects of development, and to remember that each of these dimensions develops within the context of the *whole* child.

IDIOSYNCRATIC DEVELOPMENT

An idiosyncrasy is a behavior peculiar to the individual. By idiosyncratic development we mean that despite the fact that children develop basically the same, at the same rate and in the same sequence, the development of individual children can be and is different.

Some of the concerns of modern parents include questions like "Is my child developing normally?" "Will he walk on time?" "Will he talk on time?" and so on. Walking is a significant example. Many developmental charts indicate that the average time of walking is 11 months of age. This is a "nonexistent average" (Helms and Turner, 1975). The average age for walking is a misleading figure, because there is so much individual variation. Some children walk at 9 months, others at 14 months.

Another example of this is the appearance of the first teeth in the child's mouth. Parents agonize about when the first tooth is going to appear. In truth, the teeth will appear when they are ready, and not before. The timing of this appearance is different for each child.

Both of these examples point to the *idiosyncratic* nature of child development. Despite the fact that there are developmental norms for nearly every occurrence, most children will arrive at these developmental milestones at their own pace, and in their own time. If

Nonexistent average:
there is no average age for
many developmental stages
because children vary so
greatly

parents were somehow convinced of this fact, much of the early concern, particularly with the first child, would be lessened.

There is a *synergistic* interaction between the social environment of the family and the psychological realities of each individual within the family. This combination produces a unique environmental network that qualitatively affects interactions and the learning of behavior. Handel (1972) described this phenomenon as the "psychosocial interior of the family."

In the *nature-nurture* argument of the day, this is the nurture side. We become what we are taught and what we are exposed to. A large part of child development has to do with imitative learning: observation of the behaviors of a "model," imitation of that behavior, and an internalization of that modeled behavior.

SOCIAL- PSYCHOLOGICAL MATRIX

Nature-nurture:
the controversy over
biological determination vs.
environmental influences

Psychobiological development represents the nature side of the nature-nurture argument. The nurture argument has been a very strong one during the last few years. The psychobiological argument, however, is making a comeback of sorts. Briefly, this philosophy states that much of the behavior that we had assumed as being learned, was in fact, more a result of genetic influences and some sort of biological plan for humans. This argument has been reinforced by recent research that states, for example, that some basic aspects of temperament and personality may be a function of genetics and biology, with socialization coming in later to either enhance or detract from this biological reality.

One final conceptual idea has to do with the course of a child's development. If development proceeds similarly for all children in a smooth, orderly fashion, it is said to be *continuous*. If we assume, however, that development actually consists of a series of significant "transitions" that are all different from each other, then we are assuming that development is discontinuous.

An example of a continuous theory is that proposed by Arnold Gesell: all children develop in a similar fashion, and advanced development is based on acquired experience. Discontinuous development is exemplified by the fact that some behaviors occur in an early form and then disappear: walking, object concepts, etc. (Bower, 1974a).

PSYCHO- BIOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT

These factors interact in a dynamic fashion to produce the children we observe. To deny any of these dimensions is to take an unnecessarily narrow view of the world of the child.

THE CULTURE OF CHILDHOOD

Culture is learned through the process of socialization. The teachers in this process may be adults; they may be peers and /or siblings; they may even be television sets.

The culture of childhood is shared as children develop artifacts of their culture. This culture is transmitted through the games, the humor, and the activities of childhood. It may be transmitted through the hierarchy of a childhood group or gang, or through slang phrases. Children's games and language become a vehicle for the translation of the child's reality to the group situation. Within this setting, a great range of emotional and behavioral variation exists among children; in fact, children can and do thrive under conditions our culture would label inappropriate for humans in general (Goodman, 1970). Children share this process of development with each other and sometimes with significant adults. A culture of childhood may become so tight, so intact, that the participants may develop communication mechanisms and behavioral patterns that only they understand. Certain jokes, for example, are highly entertaining to children of a certain age for generation after generation. The jokes may be meaningless to smaller children or to adults.

Phenomena like these suggest that our understanding of children has been incomplete. We often do not understand that childhood is actually a culture, or subculture. Culture is defined as "... a set of ready made definitions of the situation which each participant retailers in his own idiomatic way" (Kluckhohn and Kelly, 1945, p. 91). There is a culture of childhood, which like all culture, is learned, shared, and transmitted.

Goodman (1970) has also suggested two basic misconceptions concerning the study of children. She is not convinced that age-stage progressions in child development are universal. For example, the American assumption that adolescence is a period of great stress and strain to all involved is not universal. In fact, adolescence may be quite the opposite, depending upon the cultural perspective. The "underestimation" phenomenon is the second major misconception. Goodman suggests that adults have great difficulty appreciating the quality of a child's perceptive abilities, cognitive

Underestimation phenomenon:

tendency of adults to not fully appreciate children's abilities