

# INFANCY & CHILDHOOD

## NEWMAN & NEWMAN

865



# **INFANCY & CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT & ITS CONTEXTS**

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*To Sam and Abe*

# PREFACE

Psychological development results from a dynamic interaction between children and their physical and social environments. Children contribute to their own growth through the expression of their unique competences, through their energy and resilience, through their growing ability to conceptualize and interpret events, and through their predisposition to express inner states and outer conflicts in forms of play. Settings contribute to development because they provide varied resources, diverse opportunities for social interaction, and cultural expectations and patterns for behavior. Child psychologists are beginning to identify elements of the environment that make a difference for how children develop. We also demonstrate that children at different developmental levels conceptualize and use their environments in very different ways. We are beginning to sense that environments, as well as children, change and mature. These changes are often the result of influence by participants. Families, day care centers, schools, and neighborhoods are all sensitive to contributions that growing children can make to increase their vitality and responsiveness. The dynamic interplay between people and their environments produces the continuous chain reaction of human development.

This book considers the various contexts for development that children are likely to encounter as they grow from conception through middle childhood. Physical, cognitive, and socioemotional development are considered in the context of relevant environments including the uterus, the birth environment, the family, day care, the nursery school, the elementary school, and the neighborhood. Gains that children make in development are seen as a product of the cultural expectations, opportunities offered by the environment, and the inner potential of the child. The vast amount of diversity that characterizes children becomes comprehensible as we acknowledge the multitude of inherent differences along with the vast array of experiences.

In writing this book, we have drawn from the work of many people and we thank them all. The scientific understanding of children adds meaning to our sense of wonder. Jim Kelly provided sustained encouragement for many years for the interactionist view of child development. Bill Kessen encouraged us to complete this project while warning us how difficult it would be. A number of colleagues commented on parts of the manuscript and offered us their suggestions. We are grateful to Freda Rebelsky, Jacquelynne E. Parsons, Jean Poppei, Ruth L. Ault, Stewart Cohen, Donald L. Peters, Victoria Molfese, Larry Fenson, and Francis H. Palmer. The Swedish Information Service and the Russell Sage College Library Staff were very

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Psychology and the study of childhood are moving in fascinating and complex directions. We are in a period of history when the systematic study of childhood and the recognition of the impact of various social environments on development has the potential for enhancing the quality of life for adults and children alike.

Barbara M. Newman  
Philip R. Newman

*May, 1977*

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# **CHAPTER THEMES**

**Historical concepts of childhood**

**Psychological theories of child development**

**An ecological analysis of child development**

**Methods of research in the study of the child**

## **ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK**

This book is about development from conception through preadolescence. Development results from a continuous interaction between the personal capacities of children and the characteristics of their environments. Throughout the book, there is an attempt to keep both the child's competences and the social and environmental contexts of development in focus. This is no simple task. It is like trying to pat your head and rub your stomach at the same time. The only consolation is that it gets easier with practice. Our primary message is that in order to understand children's changing capacities, behaviors, and emotional responses, you must repeatedly ask questions about what the adults and other children in the environment expect of children, what resources are needed for growth to take place, and what consequences accompany growth at each phase of development.

The chapters are organized around the relevant environments that young children encounter. There is an attempt to follow a sequential pattern from the fetus and the uterine environment (Chapter 2) through the middle-school-aged child and the school setting (Chapter 11). Of course, children participate in the family at the same time as they attend school and play in the neighborhood. Our goal is to look at the individual settings in some detail in order to begin to assess the relevant impact of each.

In the remainder of this chapter we discuss the views of childhood that have been held at various periods in history. Each of these orientations has implications for the care of children and the kinds of settings children encounter. We also present the primary theories of development that guide current research. Finally, we consider some of the techniques of research that are used to study developmental change. Chapter 1 introduces many of the basic concepts of developmental psychology. The historical analysis emphasizes the importance of recognizing the specific cultural expectations about childhood that guide parents, teachers, and researchers as they interact with children. Throughout the book, we use examples from other cultures to illustrate the different ways children are treated and the different ways children experience specific phases of development.

Chapter 2 focuses on fetal development and the uterine environment. We begin with a discussion of the genetic information that guides the rate of growth, provides sources of individuality, and links each child to a specific genetic ancestry. Then, we consider the pattern of fetal growth, and the dependence of the fetus on the state of the mother. We must remember that a human being is a product of an extended period of biological evolution. The genetic system of each newly conceived fetus reflects the current state of a continuous process of adaptation.

Chapter 3 treats the events accompanying birth, the competences of the newborn, and the characteristics of the hospital setting. While the hospital stay is usually brief, it is a relevant context for establishing attitudes about childbearing and child care. Since the hospital is a setting through which almost every American parent and infant pass, it is important to understand what happens there during the neonatal period.

Chapter 4 provides a framework for conceptualizing the inner competences of the child. As children encounter various settings they use the resources of their intelligence, their temperament, their motivation, and their talent to respond to the challenges of life. In that chapter we discuss the sources of individuality and the strategies for adapting to environmental demands that bring uniqueness into the life story of each child.

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 emphasize the family context in the developmental process. Chapter 5 focuses on the family as an interrelated system. Imbedded in a specific culture, with access to particular resources, the family group is the primary agent of socialization during the early childhood years. In that chapter we point out the influence of children on their parents and siblings, as well as the impact of parents and siblings on each new child.

Chapter 6 describes the emergence of cognitive processes, including perception, thought and language. Chapter 7 treats socioemo-

tional processes including trust, sex-role development, and moral development. While cognition and emotion are discussed separately, we have made repeated attempts to point out ways in which they function together in the child's daily experiences.

Chapter 8 is about play. Special attention is given to television as a play companion. Here, the interaction between cognitive and socio-emotional competences becomes most obvious.

Chapters 9, 10, and 11 focus on settings outside the family that are designed to provide care and education for children. In Chapter 9, day-care settings from the United States, Russia, Sweden, Israel, and China are described and compared. Chapter 10 focuses on nursery-school-age children (three to four) and the variety of nursery school environments. In that chapter, the Head Start program and its impact on cognitive development are evaluated. Chapter 11 is about the early and middle school years, characteristics of the learning environment, and the process of adapting to school challenges. At the end of Chapter 11, some of the criticisms of the educational system of the United States are discussed.

Chapter 12 is about the neighborhood. In that chapter some of the consequences of growing up in various community settings are considered. At each phase of development, children have a more differentiated conceptualization of their environment. Neighborhoods themselves are in continuous flux, evolving new resources and losing old ones. Thus the study of the child's relation to the community provides an excellent source of questions about the dynamics of development.

The book is intended to be thought provoking and, at the same time, comprehensible. To aid the reader, we have included a brief outline of the main chapter themes at the opening of each chapter as well as a summary and more complete chapter outline at the end of each chapter. The glossary at the end of the text defines the basic concepts used in the chapters. While we have done what we can to make the book itself clear, we cannot do much about the complexity of reality. It is the variability of both children and settings that makes the study of development such a great source of fascination and delight.

## **HISTORICAL CONCEPTS OF CHILDHOOD**

The way a cultural group thinks about children determines the way adults interact with children, the kinds of environments that are developed for children, and the nature of the expectations that will exist for children's behavior. To understand fully the experiences and behaviors of children, one must understand the conception of childhood that is held by those who provide the children's care. Let us look



at six conceptualizations of childhood and the implications of each for child rearing and development.

## The Child As A Miniature Adult

From this point of view, children are seen as capable of the same behaviors as the adult members of the society. Age only serves to increase physical size and to provide the child with additional experience. The view of the child as a miniature adult tended to persist in cultures where children were not sent away from the home to be educated (Gillis, 1974). During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in England and France, for example, children participated in the total life of the adults. Children and adults slept together in close quarters, wore the same kinds of clothes, worked at the same chores, and even played the same games. A diary kept by the physician of King Louis XIII of France reports that the young dauphin enjoyed the same off-color stories and the same theater as did his adult companions (Plumb, 1974).

When Children are Viewed as Miniature Adults, Few Life Experiences are Specifically Designed for Them.

