

### The Study of Child Development: Introduction

- Begins with observing children
- What traits are relatively stable over the course of child development and adolescence?
- Developmentalists are also interested in what traits tend to go together
- Ex: children who are above average in intelligence, usually are outgoing and well liked
- The impact of different styles of parenting is another central issue for developmentalists
- Everyone has ideas about what makes individuals turn out the way they do. Some think it's due to a person's genetic make-up. Others think it has to do with how one is treated at home
- Science based on **empirical evidence** - information obtained through systematic observations and expressions
- The study of child development uses scientific methods to describe and explain the ways in which people grow and change over time.
- The study of development is an interdisciplinary enterprise, one that draws not only from psychology, but also from education, sociology, anthropology, biology, and medicine
- Experts who study development (Regardless of training) are referred to as developmental scientists

### What Lies Ahead?

- **Prenatal period:** from conception to birth
- **Infancy:** from birth to about age two; term comes from Latin meaning "unable to speak"
- **Early childhood:** approx age two to six; used to be called the "pre-school years"
- **Middle childhood:** ages six to eleven
- **Adolescence:** ages eleven through twenty
  
- **These periods reflect major development**
- **Puberty\***, the period which young people reach sexual maturity and are capable of reproduction, marks the end of childhood and the beginning of adolescence
- The age boundaries for each period are only appropriate, some children begin speaking at eleven months, others at fourteen
- Puberty age varies as well! The average age of puberty in Europe and North America has been declining
- The age at which young people see themselves, and are recognized by others, as adults varies widely around the world
  
- **Physical Development:** entails changes in size, shape, outward appearance, and inner physical functioning; changes in physical capabilities (locomotion, perception, and sensation); and changes in the structure and function of the brain

- **Cognitive Development:** involves changes in intellectual abilities, including memory, thinking, reasoning, language, problem solving, and decision making
- **Socio-emotional Development:** covers changes in feelings and motivation, temperament and personality, and relationships with others
- Developmentalists are concerned with the **"whole person"** with how physical, cognitive, and social/ emotional development work together as individuals move along the path from conception to adolescence + beyond.

#### Why study Development?

- Developmental science covers the entire spectrum of human thinking, feeling, and behavior!

#### The Goals of Developmental Research: four related goals

1. To describe what people are like at different ages and how they change as a result of age ( Specific experience = entering daycare or starting school or puberty)
2. To explain what causes developmental change. Some explanations deal with universal developments just as language. We also seek to explain the origins of individual differences
3. To predict or forecast what an individual will be like at a later point in development based on past & present characteristics
4. To intervene, that is, to use this knowledge to enhance the quality of children's lives by giving parents, teachers, public policy makers, and other who influence children, advice.

#### Defining Development:

- On the simplest level, development is growth and change over time
- Physical development: body changes
- Cognitive development: acquiring the ability to use logic
- Social emotional development: developing an interest in romantic relationships
- Development is **MORE** than growth and change; development differs from simple growth and change in three main ways:
  1. Development makes an individual better adapted to the environment ( the development of language enables a child to become a more active participant in his or her world.
  2. Development proceeds from the relatively simple and global to the more "complex" and "specific" ( language development begins one word at a time and then children start putting two words together, resulting in a development)
  3. Development is relatively enduring. (Once a child begins to talk there is virtually no stopping them and without formal instruction, they become increasingly fluent in their native tongue)

- Thus development is relatively enduring growth and change that makes an individual better adapted to the environment, by enhancing the individual's ability to engage in, and experience more complex behavior, thinking, and emotions.

Basic Questions: four basic questions about the nature of development

1. Which aspects of development are universal, and which vary from one individual or group to another?
2. Which aspects of development are continuous and which are not?
3. Which aspects of development are more or less fixed (like marble) and difficult to change, and are which relatively malleable (like clay) and easy to change?
4. What makes development happen?

Guiding Principles:

- The study of child development, like a science, rests on the following set of shared principles about which all developmentalists (or almost all agree)
  1. Development results from the constant interplay of biology and the environment. The characteristics a child develops are the result of interaction between genetic and environmental characteristics over time.
  2. Development occurs in a multilayered context
  3. Development is a dynamic, reciprocal process
  4. Development is cumulative. Psychologists call the pathway that connects the past with the present and the future a **developmental trajectory**
  5. Development occurs throughout the lifespan
- Virtually all developmentalists agree that development involves constant interplay between biology and the environment, occurs in a multilayered context is cumulative, and continues throughout life.

Pg 19-34

The Scientific Study of Development

- "Trust yourself, you know more than you think you do" - Dr. Spock
- Today the study of child development (including the impact of different styles of parenting) is a science!
- Systematic research allows developmentalists to test elements of the different theories, to put their own ideas to the test, and to gather information that can be used to guide public policy and practice.