

## *A right to development*

Attitudes to children have changed over time - particularly during recent decades. 191 countries are signatories to the UNCRC - "... parties shall ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and **development** of the child" - recognises development occurs and is of specific importance during childhood.

Child development is not just a subject for academic study. Understanding is important for all who come into contact with children. Global perspectives are important too. However, most work on studying child development has focused on and/or originated in Western societies.

## *Images of childhood*

Even within the same culture, individual's ideas on childhood vary due to gender, occupation, ethnicity, age, own experiences. Social expectations change over time - e.g. feeding babies to a timetable vs. feeding on demand.

## *Children and childhood*

There is a difference between 'children' - the young person and 'childhood' - a time of life.

## **James and Prout:**

"The immaturity of children is a biological fact but the ways in which that immaturity is understood is a fact of culture ... childhood is ... constructed and reconstructed both for and by children"

**Constructed & reconstructed** = variable and changing - e.g. changes in school leaving and voting ages in UK. The apparent conflict between the raising of one and lowering of the other => needs and capacity are not the only considerations affecting changes in policy.

## Book 1 Chapter 1 - Children & Development

**For & by** = powerful influence of others, but they also have agency over their own lives - e.g. through play / peer culture (**Kehily and Swann**) - they make their own choices insofar as circumstances allow. Children also shape the adults they are with - a symbiotic relationship. Children are therefore not passive but 'social actors' - they have their own beliefs and ideas.

## *Childhood as development*

Concept: "children are different from adults" has become a powerful framework for constructing childhood. Scientific approaches to child development have come largely from Western contexts but their influence is global.

## *Origins of child study in the West*

### *1 - Discovery*

**Ariès** argues up to end of C15 children were regarded as miniature adults - from studies of medieval pictures / diaries. Adults and children shared similar leisure and work activities. Children emerge as different only from C16 onwards. **Shahar** points out the limited sources used by **Ariès** to conclude this - poor children rarely painted or written about despite them being in the majority.

### *2 - The "useful child"*

Long tradition of children contributing - particularly in poor families. Industrialisation created new demands in C18/19. Social reformers questioned impact on development. Factory Act 1833 - the start of protection from exploitation. Childhood seen as a time for play & education for **all** children. Useful child image now very controversial - 'child labour' - **Cunningham**.

## *3- The school child*

School becomes central to the concept of a 'normal' childhood from end C19. No longer a privilege to attend (**Hendrick**). School => separation of life at home and adult work. Education starts to dominate - homework, after school activities, parental involvement, tests and examinations shape future prospects. Tools needed for selecting/sorting pupils.

*Conclusion - Social changes in industrial societies during C19/20 created the conditions for child development to become an important area of study.*

## *Evolution and the study of development*

Industrial revolution coincided with the development of the theory of evolution in biology (Origin of Species - **Darwin**). As well as challenging beliefs on creation and our relationship to other species, it raised questions on what immaturity in the young means - e.g. why is it such a long period; what's it for; how does development happen; is there a natural pattern to human development?

Recapitulation theory of development (chimpanzee stage ideas) discredited quickly - but evolutionary principles now widely accepted. Darwin kept an account of his own son's development - written in a dispassionate, scientific manner. **Hall** greatly influenced by Darwin - promoted rearing of children on scientific principles and offered early accounts of adolescence as a distinct stage. **Sully** established child psychology as a recognised subject at London Uni. late C19.

Evidence of "normal" or "typical" became a standard way to assess children in motor and intelligence - **Binet and Simon** - first intelligence test 1905. Developmental psychology established in C20. **Shaffer** - "a truly objective science" (1993). More recently, criticism from **Woodhead and Faulkner** and **Alderson and Morrow** that the purely scientific approach neglects to take into account that **children are active participants with their own perspectives**.

### What is development?

Developmental research aims to describe and explain the processes of growth and change.

Much emphasis has been on what is 'common' or 'typical' - universal patterns - identification of what is 'normal' development.

#### 1. What develops?

Physical development (0-20). Not regular - rapid growth in early years and around puberty, less rapid at other times.

Age v weight/height charts (**Berk**) suggest continuous change; motor development chart (**Shirley**) suggests stages of development occur.

Physical development has psychological consequences - e.g. a child who can sit up unaided experience the world differently to babies or toddlers - who can move to seek out new experiences.

Normative approaches have limitations - they don't predict:

- how a child achieves transitions between stages,
- the aids they use,
- cultural differences,
- impact of technology,
- how much support and encouragement they receive,
- how disability impacts development.

#### 2. How does development occur?

Major theories are:

**Nativist** - genetically encoded, natural process

**Environmentalist** - influence of learning & experience.

i.e. 'nature' vs. 'nurture' distinctions

While explanation of much motor development may be genetic; explanation of psychological, linguistic, emotional, social and intellectual development is less easy to explain this way.

Learning theories - some emphasis individual learning; others learning in a social/cultural context.

Developmental research has practical importance - to parents, social workers, policy makers ...

Development - natural or social & cultural?

**Goldblatt** - analogy 'is my desk natural'? => 'is my newborn a product of nature or nurture'?

Development of foetus shaped by mother's life. Evidence of unborn baby being able to learn. Children mature in the context of the society they grow up in. Children also impact their own development - they make choices - they are active agents in their own development.

Four major lines of argument have emerged:

#### Development as control and discipline - Hobbes

Based on the idea that children *naturally* have a tendency to dangerous impulses that need to be addressed through discipline & training. Support from Freud - infant driven by the id, regulated by the development of the super-ego (conscience).

#### Development as natural stages - Rousseau

Similar to Hobbes in that human nature is emphasised, but seen as a positive force - children are 'noble savages' corrupted by the influence of society. Proposed an 'age of nature' where children should be free to express themselves. **Froebel** - kindergarten movement draws inspiration from this - demonstrates strong links between pedagogical principles and developmental theory. Concept of natural stages has been very influential - e.g. impact on balance between play and teaching in childhood is cited by **Woodhead**.

#### Development as experience - Locke

Empiricist position - child is a blank slate written on by experience - *in contrast* to the rationalist views of **Plato** - knowledge is innate and revealed by discourse and logical deduction.

Recognises individual differences in temperament, intelligence, but rejects **Plato's** idea that ways of thinking / behaving are because of natural factors. Experience influences the child for good or ill. Adults have the responsibility to provide a good environment. Principle of association between old and new knowledge is key, along with imitation and repetition. Nurture, rather than a child's internal nature is seen as the main developmental force. Still seen today - e.g. debates on:

- erosion of parents' moral authority & teaching;
- failure of schools to equip children with necessary skills for life

#### Development as interaction - Kant

Attempts to reconcile the influence of both nature and nurture on development. Rejects both the rationalist notion of innate knowledge and empiricist notion of knowledge being only from the environment. Kant proposed:

- we are born with 'mental structures' that help us interpret what we receive through our senses - 'categories of understanding'
- interaction with the environment allows these structures to order and organise experience
- individuals are active - this is not passive reaction to stimuli (empiricism) or a passive biological programme (rationalism or nativism)
- development occurs because of a two way process between child and environment

Most contemporary theories recognise the child as an active agent; children affect their caregivers; they make their own choices. Modern research attempts to capture this two way complexity - so called 'transactional models' of development.

### **Child development & global childhoods**

Scientific study is rooted in Western concepts - and there is a tradition of cross-cultural research - but major imbalances remain. Which developmental processes are universal - which are cultural specific?

e.g. a basic assumption is the development of an autonomous sense of self - but **Geertz** points out this is a Western concept and is unusual in comparison with other cultures.

**Whiting and Whiting** - the Six Cultures Project: recorded systematic details on children's behaviour - work, play and social interaction.

Findings from adults in those cultures:

**Kenya** - importance of training in early life - for work. Weaned by age 2; by 6 or 7 assumed many adult responsibilities. Games were imitations of adult life - seen as preparation,

**Philippines** - maturation is slow, can't be hurried  
**India** - children are passive and very similar to each other. At 9 or 10, do many adult tasks

**USA** - children learn through play, school is a major influence on development, only acquire adult responsibilities when they leave school

(Mexico and Okinawa were the other two studied)

### **Conclusions**

- Development is a social & cultural process as well as a biological one - important as psychological theories need to acknowledge this as societies become more culturally diverse and connected
- There are a range of different and competing ideas and beliefs about children and how they develop
- Scientific knowledge of development has contributed to the way children are treated (**Schaffer**)
- There is however criticism of scientific development theories as reinforcing a particular power relationship - adults = developed, children = developing (**James et al**)
- Social attitudes have changed and continue to change towards children
- Little research has been done from the child's perspective of their own development