# 9

# Situating child development

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**The aims of this chapter are to:**

- Assist students in approaching and critically reflecting on the substantial literature on child development
- Discuss the paradoxical nature of development as a concept
- Detail illustrative key areas of and theoretical perspectives on child development
- Outline some social and interpersonal origins of the self
- Emphasise the key role of language in development
- Illustrate concepts with a case example and provide brief activities to assist students in deepening their engagement with core issues.

The study of child and adolescent development represents a core area of concern not only within psychology, health and the social sciences, but also more generally within all disciplines that take human beings as their focus. Thus, conceptualisations of the subject may, for instance, be equally found in the humanities, English, drama, and the various creative arts. Beyond this, each and every one of us will have implicit, if not explicit, ideas (constituting a 'folk psychology') on what makes us, and those around us, the way we are. The present chapter, rooted in both psychological and interdisciplinary perspectives, provides a critical overview of the above noted key topics and themes within the literature on child development and points readers to further sources of information.

## Conceptualising development

When initially considering development as a concept, it is common to begin with a discussion and definition of the term. Before moving on to consider specimen views on this from the literature, complete the activity opposite.

*Activity*

Think back about the course of your own life. List some of the ways you have changed over time. Try to cluster items on your list into meaningful categories. Draw a timeline (or series of timelines) marking key points within these changes. Note factors that appear to have either prompted or inhibited such changes. Discuss your results with others and note the areas of similarity and difference between your individual findings.

Unsurprisingly, the literature offers a wide range of ideas on the essence of development. Rutter and Rutter (1992: 64), for example, define human development as 'systematic, organized, intra-individual change that is clearly associated with generally expectable age-related progressions and which is carried forward in some way that has implications for a person's pattern or level of functioning at some later time'. While Harris (2008: 1) argues that 'change in a positive direction, that is towards greater accuracy and better organisation, is regarded as being "development"' and that 'developmental change' is 'change that can be seen as part of the process by which, over time, children move from a less mature to a more mature way of thinking and behaving where greater maturity is seen as being more adult-like'. Such definitions can be seen to incorporate individually focused normative conceptions of development, involving relatively linear notions of what constitutes progress.

Challenges to such modernist normativity have been widespread in academic and wider socio-cultural domains, particularly since the Second World War. Widespread disenchantment with previously hegemonic discourses, such as the benignity of western civilisation, social stratification, and scientific progress, was fostered by the industrial-scale slaughter and horrific genocide of World War Two, a war fought between some of the most supposedly civilised nations in the world. Such catalytic experiences contributed to the growing influence of post-modernism and more general scepticism towards mainstream scientific, socio-political and cultural claims (Giddens, 2009). In such a context, concepts of development and progress need to be themselves critically questioned. When the horizons of developmental psychology expanded from a concentration on child and adolescent development to consider adulthood and life-span perspectives (e.g. Erikson, 1950) some of the challenges became more evident. Here, issues of symbolic as well as tangible losses within adult life (such as the failure to achieve personal ambitions, the death of parents or friends, and the prospect of one's own death) can appear somewhat paradoxical when situated within the concept of development. Yet, the incorporation of such features arguably considerably enriches the concept of development.

This may be approached through considering Schaffer's (2006: 6) description of life-span development as 'the process of change associated with age which characterizes all human beings from conception to death'. Here, the deceptively simple

notion of change over time avoids overt value judgements and at the same time allows for variegated patterns of change and scope for consideration of *decline* within the life course. Such conceptualisations encourage consideration of non-uniform and domain specific change within individuals, such that the rate and processes of change within one area may occur relatively independently of change in other areas. Similarly, as considerable diversity is possible within the phenomena that constitute a life course, this type of definition opens up the way to situate experiences of adversity, decline, loss, and death centrally within the discipline. Thus, experiences such as illness, disability, physical aging, the loss of vigour and beauty, career setbacks, the loss of family members and friends through death or other causes, and the prospect of one's own death may be situated with the fabric of development. Such events clearly may alter the direction of a life course, as it is both objectively and subjectively experienced and unfolds. The essential issue here is that the fallout of such events on a life course is often complex and multi-directional.

To illustrate this further, apparent setbacks, for example, may often entail various levels of suffering and can constrain psychosocial functioning. However, when viewed from a longer-term perspective, such experiences can also contribute to the creation of other life opportunities, while their cognitive and emotional processing can enrich mental life, for instance through the fostering of insight and empathy. This is not to sentimentalise, romanticise or otherwise recommend suffering or the experience of adversity in itself. Rather, it is to highlight the complexity of development. This area has been briefly reviewed by Schaffer (2006), building on Baltes' (Baltes, 1987; Smith and Baltes, 1999) concepts of multidimensionality and multidirectionality, as well as his delineation of age-graded, history-graded, and non-normative influences on the life course (Baltes et al., 1998). These concepts highlight some of the ways in which humans *typically* develop along a range of dimensions within particular social domains (e.g. the changes in cognitive, social and emotional functioning when a child commences in primary school in England). Such contextualised views of development can contribute importantly to an understanding of developmental statistical norms: what developmentally might be averagely expectable within a certain timeframe and context. Normative profiles are useful benchmarks against which individuals may be gauged and their development judged. It is important, however, to recall that such normative views are statistical compilations of developmental data derived from a sample of individuals, that there is often significant variation within such samples, and that the individuals and phenomena considered are historically and culturally situated. Thus, for example, history-graded (e.g. the experience of the Second World War or the introduction of computers or the internet) and non-normative influences (e.g. the use of reproductive technologies, divorce, family breakdown or emigration) should alert us to some situating factors that are likely to modify development for particular cohorts, groups or individuals.

It is useful at this point to highlight that within this formative flux of life events, developmental change has typically multi-factorial origins and its processes and outcomes are usually complex, essentially involving simultaneous gains *and*

losses. Consider, for example, a child learning to walk, taking her/his first steps. This might be regarded as a clear-cut achievement, giving satisfaction to the child as well as her/his caregivers, and measurable against normative developmental milestones (e.g. Illingworth, 1987). All this would be entirely appropriate. At the same time, however, there is the loss of the child-in-arms, of that intimacy of body contact and greater dependency of the former developmental stage for both infant and caregiver. Such losses can be emotionally painful and entail having to face a degree of mourning for the states that are relinquished. This represents one of the essential costs of developmental change, the experience of which can itself promote further (typically social and emotional) growth.

## Theoretical perspectives

Developmental psychology is a 'site of contest' and as such its data exist within competing theoretical frameworks (e.g. psychoanalytic, behavioural, cognitive, constructivist, maturational, and so on). These differing perspectives offer alternative ways of ordering and synthesising observations, each in accord with the fundamental tenets of the framework employed. Such approaches should permit predictions about the future course of development and at the same time contribute to the testing of the models themselves (see also Feyerabend, 1975; Kuhn, 1962; Popper, 1963). Three prominent models: psychoanalysis, behaviourism and cognitivism will be briefly noted here in order to highlight examples of these features. In approaching developmental change from the perspective of a particular psychological model, students should deepen their understanding of that model, assessing its history, strengths and limitations (see Miller (2002) for a good critical review).

We shall begin with psychoanalysis, which in the contemporary context is fragmented and covers a diverse series of competing schools, such as ego-psychologists, Kleinians, object-relations theorists, Self-psychologists, Lacanians, and Intersubjectivists. Psychoanalytically influenced models (e.g. Erikson, 1950; Freud, 1965; Klein, 1993; Rayner et al., 2005; Vaillant, 2003) are likely to emphasise the roles of emotion, subjectivity, symbolisation, and unconscious conflicts, among other elements. Developmental change within one or other of these schools may be variously tracked through a series of psycho-sexual stages and interpersonal relations, prompted variously by drives rooted in instincts (particularly love and aggression) or desire, all mixed in with the constant ebb and flow of the individual's fantasy life. This dynamic day-to-day narrative flux for example, contributes incrementally to the formation and structuring of the personality, influences social encounters, and fosters or inhibits curiosity, creativity and intentional action.

Among the classical psychoanalytic efforts to chart developmental change, Anna Freud's (Freud, 1965; Neubauer, 1984) concept of developmental lines, Mahler et al.'s (2000) views on symbiosis and individuation, and Erikson's (1959, 1963; Eagle, 1997) concept of ego identity (being shaped by socio-cultural

forces), as well as his extension of developmental stages across the life-span, may be taken as illustrative of significant work in this area. Probably the most notable contribution to conceptualising development from a psychoanalytically informed perspective over the last 50 years, however, has been Bowlby's (1951, 1969, 1973, 1980, 1988; Holmes, 1993) attachment theory. Given both its importance and social dominance, this will be discussed separately below.

From a very different perspective, behaviourism (e.g. Pavlov, 1928; Skinner, 1948, 1953, 1971, 1974; Watson, 1930) typically stresses externally observable patterns of behaviour, with an understanding of the association (or adjustment) between each element of behaviour in the pattern being sought in environmental stimuli rather than in internal (subjective) mental states. Behaviourism thus sought to deconstruct behavioural sequences and experimentally discover the functional links that determined or 'conditioned' these, with the partial aim of being able to predict and regulate actions through various types of encouragement ('positive and negative reinforcement') or inhibition ('punishment'). The central element of study thus is the 'stimulus-response' (or S-R).

The initial work of Pavlov (1928) introduced what came to be known as *classical conditioning*, in which he famously showed how a dog's (unconditioned) salivation to food, when paired several times with a previously neutral stimulus (e.g. a certain noise, such as a ringing bell), resulted in the salivation appearing when the hitherto neutral stimulus was presented alone. The response was thus said to have been *conditioned*. Following Pavlov's lead, Thorndike (1911) attempted to state laws of behaviour, the best known of which is the *law of effect* which can be summarised as, 'the greater the satisfaction or discomfort, the greater the strengthening or weakening of the bond' (Thorndike, 1911: 244).

Thorndike's ideas in turn influenced Skinner's (1938) development of *operant conditioning*. In this, Skinner argued that initially random elements of behaviour (what he at times termed 'operants') may be increasingly *shaped* into intentional or goal-directed behaviour by the subsequent pattern of reinforcement. Classical and operant conditioning thus differed from each other in their temporal focus: the former emphasising the antecedents to the particular behaviour being examined, while the latter considers the subsequent patterns of reinforcement. Some of these principles are applied today in behaviour management regimes in schools. Initially based on experiments using animals, behaviourism claimed the same principles applied equally to humans and that development occurred through the shaping of behaviour by reinforcement (e.g. Beck et al., 2009; Harris, 1979; Watson, 1928; Watson and Rayner, 1920).

The third theoretical perspective, cognitivism, arose in part out of dissatisfaction with the severe restrictions of behaviourism, particularly its lack of engagement with higher mental mechanisms and processes. The roots of cognitivism may be discerned in several related areas such as Gestalt psychology. The development of computers during and after the Second World War began to be seen to offer an interesting alternative model of human thought, with Turing's (1950) ideas on artificial intelligence being influential. Relatedly, Broadbent's (1958) information

processing model offered a means of conceptualising the mental steps involved in cognitive tasks. The final significant spur to the cognitive revolution came from linguistics, particularly the work of Noam Chomsky. Chomsky's (1959) critique of the behavioural account of language development argued that innate mechanisms, such as 'universal grammar', are essential for language acquisition.

Selectively building on such foundations, cognitively oriented psychologists (e.g. Flavell et al., 2002; Piaget, 1970, 1985; Siegler, 1998) have sought to outline the nature and development of a wide range of mental phenomena. The most prominent exponent of this group is Jean Piaget and his core theories, though criticised, should be familiar to students. Piaget (1970) proposed a stage theory of cognitive development, with the developing child and young person progressing through each successive stage in a set order, this movement entailing qualitative changes in the individual's cognitive structures and hence in the individual's knowledge of their experiential world ('genetic epistemology'). The four stages or periods: Sensorimotor (roughly birth to 2 years), Preoperational (2 to 7 years), Concrete operational (7 to 11 years), and Formal operational (11 to 15 years) are marked by distinct structural changes. The attainment of each of these successive stages allows the individual to revise previous cognitive *schemes* (or schema) so that they more closely represent reality. However, in his later work Piaget (1985) de-emphasised this step-like stage model, smoothing out the radical shifts between stages, and placing more emphasis on mechanisms of cognitive change (Miller, 2002). Development, for Piaget, was promoted by interaction between four principal innate and experiential factors: (1) physical maturation; (2) experience with the physical environment; (3) social experience; and (4) equilibration. The last was seen as the central catalysing process of development. Essentially, equilibration involves the resolution of the cognitive uncertainty or disequilibrium that arises when perceived reality fails to fit neatly with existing preconceptions, ideas or schemas, through modification and development of the schema. Such adaptations to perceived reality underscore the emphasis Piaget placed on rationality and on the child and young person actively problem-solving, constructing and reconstructing their cognitive architecture (see also Harris and Butterworth, 2002; Parke and Gauvin, 2009; Schaffer, 2006).

Clearly, some of these perspectives attempt to offer overarching models of child and adult development that comment on multiple areas of development, while others are more modest in their scope. The above sketches provide only outlines of elements within these specimen perspectives and they are here intended to emphasise the differing conceptual lenses developmental commentators *actively re-construct* their data through. Students should thus note the theoretical stance and its underlying assumptions, strengths and shortcomings, when studying developmental literature. Similarly, when considering questions relating to development that may arise in your own fieldwork or other settings, consider what theoretical position you are closest to adhering to. While it may be implicit or only tentatively explicit, you will have one!

*Activity*

Considering either your own results from the first activity above or the case study of Jane D (see p. 147), how might these different models frame some of these life-events? What aspects would be either stressed or minimised? Does one model appear to provide a 'better' account of the reported developmental data?

## Historical and cultural contexts

Just as understandings of development exist within various psychological frameworks, both of these occur in turn within wider historical, philosophical, political and socio-cultural contexts. Traditionally, few developmental theorists paid much attention to these, despite sometimes suggesting that their theories could be applied universally. One notable exception to this trend was the Russian psychologist Vygotsky (1978), whose socio-cultural approach emphasised the essential interconnectedness of the individual with their social context, history and culture: the minimum meaningful unit of analysis from this perspective for developmental study is 'an individual participating in some cultural practice' (Miller, 2002: 373). Winnicott expressed a somewhat similar idea within the domestic British context when he declared that 'there is no such thing as a baby' (1952: 99), emphasising that *infants* only exist as part of an environment-individual context. Vygotsky, however, went further in arguing that individuals of all ages are thus embedded and that the mind is itself given shape though ongoing social (interpersonal or 'intermental') interactions which are then appropriated or internalised by the developing child or young person to form part of their own ('intramental') mental architecture, their own ways of thinking, feeling, and problem-solving. Mind, from this perspective, thus partly reflects and recapitulates the individual's culture and social experience, with the developing mastery of tools being a key way in which such development of mind is fostered. Physical tools, for example a penknife, a watch, a doll, or a computer, require the development of skills in their use and in the exploitation of their function, with different tools having differing cultural and historical resonances. Similarly, psychological tools (with *language* being the most significant of these) have similar profound cultural heritages and are used to transform *elementary* into *higher* mental functions. A developing capacity to use language, Vygotsky argued, frees the child from being dependently reactive to the environment, allowing intramental representation of absent objects (e.g. from history, future worlds, or the imagination). Thinking itself is thus transformed with the child's accession to language (see also Daniels et al., 2007; Miller, 2002; Smidt, 2008).

*Activity*

Reflect back on the first activity. Indentify key physical tools that you were taught to use and/or were given. What significance did this object have for you, your family, and the wider society? How did you learn about the object and master its use? What figures in your family or wider community assisted you in this process? In what ways has this object contributed to your development and identity? Share the history of the item you have chosen with those in your work group.

The socio-cultural approach offers one way in which lives can be situated within a wider matrix of influences that each contribute to a richer understanding of developmental change. Another approach to such important contextualising is ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2005). Intellectually influenced in his development of this theory by Vygotsky's ideas, Bronfenbrenner depicts people as living within multiple circles of influence: he thus systematises the interrelations of multiple aspects of development within a dynamic series of domains. These domains constitute a series of systems and sub-systems, organised as a nesting structure, one inside the other (rather like a series of Russian dolls), each exerting an influence on each other and on the individual. Most immediately, an individual actively exists on a day-to-day basis within a series of *microsystems*, such as their own biology, the family, school, childminders, and so on. Each of these microsystems itself incorporates differing subsystems (such as the family, including sibling, marital couple, and extended family subsystems). Beyond the microsystem is the *mesosystem*, which consists of *points of connection* between various microsystems within each of which the child or young person exists (e.g. the family and the school). Beyond this is the *exosystem*, which incorporates linked settings, one or more of which does not typically include the child or young person in question (e.g. a parent's workplace and the family). Surrounding this is the *macrosystem*, or wider politico-cultural context, which itself is constructed out of a matrix of the preceding three systems. This offers a 'blueprint' or structure for cultural reproduction, shaping lower level events. Finally, *time* as a central dimension within development is represented by the *chronosystem*, which highlights the specific historical factors that impact on an individual's life course.

This approach to contextualising development is useful in highlighting both proximal and more remote factors that contribute to shaping the trajectory of an individual's life or that of a larger group. While Bronfenbrenner emphasises sociological influences in his model, the general conceptual framework can be readily extended to incorporate biological and psychological factors. These could, for example, be represented as sub-systems nesting within the microsystem and would thus yield a bio-psychosocial developmental context.

Alongside such contextualising efforts coexists the related need for critique, deconstruction and reflective practice. Feminist approaches (e.g. Gilligan, 1982)

offer a vital perspective in this context and provide a useful antidote to the sometimes essentialising binary discourses of traditional psychology, which at times concentrated on white male experience as though that was representative of the norm. Similarly, issues of ethnicity and diversity within developmental studies have been increasingly highlighted, though much work remains to be done in these areas (see also Baraitser, 2009; Burman, 2008; Jagger, 2008; Miller, 2002).

## Observing development

Gathering information on children and young people's development takes many forms and students should familiarise themselves with the principal modalities (see Parke and Gauvin, 2009; Slater and Bremner, 2003; Sugarman, 2001). Common to all methods will be some element of observation. Systematic observation of infants and young children has a long history (Dixon and Lerner, 1992). In popular culture Wordsworth's observations would lead him to declare that 'The child is the father of the man' (Wordsworth, 1802; Kavka, 1984), while more scientifically Darwin's (1877) 'Biographical sketch of an infant' influenced many and is a notable early example of an observational study.

Let us consider an observation classic, the case of one 18-month-old boy as reported in the literature:

> This good little boy, however, had an occasional disturbing habit of taking any small objects he could get hold of and throwing them away from him into a corner, under the bed, and so on, so that hunting for his toys and picking them up was often quite a business. As he did this he gave vent to a loud, long-drawn-out 'o-o-o-o,' accompanied by an expression of interest and satisfaction. (Freud, 1920/1955: 14–15)

What is going on here? Is there a pattern or purpose within this infant's behaviour? If so, what does this relate to? Does it suggest anything about this infant's particular developmental struggles and what role does the environment play in these?

This particular case was actually observed by Freud and discussed in his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920/1955). Freud hypothesised that infant behaviour (e.g. play and vocalisations) can be seen as a mental developmental process spurred on by separation and loss. Considering this particular infant, who was in fact Freud's grandson, he wrote that:

> I eventually realized that it was a game and that the only use he made of any of his toys was to play 'gone' with them. One day I made an observation which confirmed my view. The child had a wooden reel with a piece of string tied around it. It never occurred to him to pull it along the floor behind him, for instance, and play at its being a carriage. What he did was to hold the reel by the string and very skilfully throw it over the edge of his curtained cot, so that it disappeared into it, at the same time uttering his expressive 'o-o-o-o.' He then pulled the reel again

by the string and hailed its reappearance with a joyful 'da' [there]. This, then, was the complete game: disappearance and return. As a rule one only witnessed its first act, which was repeated untiringly as a game in itself, though there is no doubt that the greater pleasure was attached to the second act. The interpretation of the game then became obvious. It was related to the child's great cultural achievement – the instinctual renunciation (that is, the renunciation of instinctual satisfaction) which he had made in allowing his mother to go away without protesting. (Freud, 1920/1955: 14–15)

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*Activity*

What do you think of Freud's hypothesis, his interpretation of the sequence of observed behaviour and the strength of his evidence? Discuss the observation with your group and identify any methodological weaknesses. How might these be addressed?

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Freud's observation of the 'fort-da' game and his willingness to explore its potential meaning, particularly in the light of patterns of continuity and discontinuity, offers a useful approach to this framing behaviour. His argument is that his grandson's play and accompanying vocalisations constituted a form of symbolic activity. This was not only related to language development (as itself a means of representing that which is not present), but also was a form of psychological mastery of loss and the recreation in play of a particularly valued and missed relationship, namely that with his mother whose everyday comings and goings inevitably gave rise to powerful feelings. Similar developmental processes may be discerned in other infant and childhood activities, with perhaps the 'peek-a-boo' game being one of the most familiar examples. Here, the game occupies a more explicitly social context. The manipulation of absence and presence, as well as the delight in the reappearance phase, of what is a stylised activity involving reciprocal roles, repeats the essentials of Freud's 'fort-da' game. Hide-and-seek might be regarded as a variant of the same exploratory dynamic for older children.

Unsurprisingly, modern observational methods have developed considerably since 1920 and are varied and often sophisticated. Systematic observation, recording, and theoretical interpretation of the results are central. In considering both pre-existing case material and in attempting to conduct your own observations, students should give careful consideration to the methods used, including their theoretical alignment with the specific orientation of the piece of work.

## Communication and symbolisation

Most developmental texts discuss language development, quite correctly, at length. It is a central theme, linking diverse areas of development together.

Building on the earlier discussion of the socio-cultural approach, I shall here simply underline the psychosocial matrix of language development, drawing theoretically also on structuralism and psychoanalytic ideas (Lacan, 2007), in order to situate development within a broader context.

Communication is a base that permits one person to relate to another (Newson, 1982), a base on which the human infant can acquire the language and modes of thought of their speech community (Vygotsky, 1978). As an active process, the infant over time absorbs the surrounding language through a continuing process of dynamic interaction, of reciprocity and progression, between the infant and her interlocutors. The pre-existing speech community and culture here represent the symbolic order (Lacan, 2007), through which meaning is conveyed using not only spoken and written language, but also other forms of sign systems, gesture, mime, and non-verbal means of communication. The child enters into the symbolic order at various points in time. Prior to birth and indeed prior to conception, the child may be thought about, discussed and debated, often in emotionally charged terms. This 'possible child' is here constituted of the desires, wishes, fears and fantasies of an indeterminate number of people, in one or more speech communities, and who are individually involved in possibly numerous discourses. These people will include not only the potential biological parents, a particular woman and man, but also their friends, relatives, colleagues, and health and social care staff, among others. Such discourses are further complicated with the advent of assisted reproductive technologies (e.g. IVF, egg or embryo donation, surrogacy, and donor insemination). Nevertheless, within such discourses a gap is created into which the actual child will enter as it (sexual and gender identity having yet to be instantiated) assumes a role within the world. Where the child thus begins and ends is in this context a somewhat arbitrary issue.

Meaning and its ownership within such contexts are essentially distributed and paternity rights are closely related to the response of the audience or particular speech community via the symbolic order. The construction of discourse and its meaning can thus be regarded as a shared responsibility, emerging out of reciprocal relations. Part of the infant's task is to appropriate language from the discourses and various communicative modes that exist as a surrounding sea of shared social meanings. This is development, though the western-centric individualist bias should be noted. How might language development, which as Vygotsky (1978) emphasised goes hand-in-hand with acculturation, be manifest in other cultures, say in China or India, where there is less emphasis on the monadic individual and more on the family or group identity (Miller, 2002)?

## Attachment theory

This has become perhaps the dominant theoretical framework for considering an individual's development of a sense of self, emotional security, esteem, and the foundations for these in interpersonal relationships. Beginning with the pioneering

work of John Bowlby (1951, 1969, 1973, 1980, 1988; Holmes, 1993), who linked key ideas from psychoanalysis and ethnology, as well as Darwinian evolutionary theory, in constructing this model, attachment theory has become a dominant model within many child and social care settings.

Essentially, the theory is a scientific way of considering the importance of love, or what Bowlby would refer to as 'affectional bonds', in human development. Love relations promote the seeking of proximity; you want to be close to the person you love. From an evolutionary perspective, being close to another held survival value. Concentrating initially on early development (up to about age 3), Bowlby suggested that infant 'attachment behaviour', such as crying or smiling, encouraged care-giving behaviour by key adults, stereotypically the mother. A limited hierarchy of such attachment figures – people with whom the infant felt safe, secure, confident, and loved – could also contribute to their care, on a temporary or adjunctive basis. Through proximity, regularity, confidence and love, the infant could begin to develop internal working models of such interactions (analogous to Vygotsky and Piaget's varying emphases on processes of internalisation). These models contributed to the infant's developing capacity for prediction of others responsiveness (self-confidence) and to their own analogous capacity to self-regulate their emotional states and behaviour. Burgeoning research using the attachment paradigm has modified and extended its utility to cover, for instance, relationships throughout the life cycle, cross-cultural applications and social policy implications, while at the same time offering robust critiques of the theory (see also Burman, 2008; Parke and Gauvin, 2009; Miller, 2002; Rutter, 2008).

## Conclusions

Conceptualising development is challenging. For students, some difficulties emanate from the 'usual suspects': definitions, competing explanatory models, fragmentation of the topic, and a vast literature. Further problems come from the at times non-linear and paradoxical nature of developmental change within which losses are as central an experience as are gains. Indeed, the very activity of studying the subject is itself a form of developmental activity, which almost unavoidably breeds a degree of resistance. As a student, one is inevitably reflecting on one's own life course and that of others close to us. Such challenges however also enrich the topic, imbuing it with *personal* significance as well as future *utility* as an aid to on-going relational development at work and in the home.

Contextualising development within an overarching cultural, historical and socio-political matrix allows richer complex perspectives to emerge. Combinations of inter and intra-personal influences contribute to shaping development in multiple ways, which – in combination with the open nature of the system – gives the discipline a real vitality.

It is important to emphasise the need for a critical approach to the subject, particularly given its applied nature within child, educational, health and social

care, and other human settings. Normative developmental benchmarks can be helpful at times, though their utility is dependent on students and practitioners being able to not lose sight of the individual or the wider context. Development in this sense is not a checklist. Rather, it is a dynamic process involving – among many other things – love and the search for meaning. Students are encouraged to follow up these ideas through the recommended reading list below.

## Further reading


Burman, E. (2008) *Deconstructing Developmental Psychology*. Hove: Routledge.

Miller, P. H. (2002) *Theories of Developmental Psychology*. New York: Worth.

Parke, R. D. and Gauvin, M. (2009) *Child Psychology: A Contemporary Viewpoint*. Boston: McGraw Hill.

Schaffer, H. R. (2006) *Key Concepts in Developmental Psychology*. London: Sage.

Slater, A. and Bremner, G. (eds) (2003) *An Introduction to Developmental Psychology*. Oxford: Blackwell.


## Appendix

### Case study: Jane D

Jane was aged 7 when her parents divorced. They had been married for 10 years. Her mother was white British, worked in a canteen, and had mild learning difficulties, while her father was a Turkish immigrant who worked in a moderately paid technical role. When they had initially met they had formed a caring relationship, seldom argued, and any problems that arose were attributed as coming from outside sources. As time went on, some disillusionment and frustration crept into the relationship, though they both avoided talking about this as neither wanted to cause distress or upset.

Following Jane's birth, Mrs D took Jane to sleep in the parents' bed and Mr D went to sleep in the spare room, a situation that soon became the norm. The divide between the parents increased from this point onwards such that Mrs D and Jane returned to live with her family and Mrs D subsequently sought a divorce. Maintaining she and Jane were afraid of Mr D, alleging that he was now stalking them and treating Jane cruelly, Mrs D opposed access by Mr D to Jane. A court granted an order for access at a Contact Centre and directed that an independent social work report be prepared.

An assessment suggested that Jane was a bright, lively and neatly turned out girl. Her most recent school report suggested her general educational and social development was satisfactory, though it did note she lacked self-confidence in working independently. The family doctor noted Jane had been brought to the surgery nine

times over the previous year with sore throats or colds. On one such visit Jane's mother claimed Mr D had stamped on Jane's hand in an attempt to get her to say where she was then living, although no injury was evident to the GP.

At the Contact Centre, Jane greeted her father warmly and they engaged together in both quiet table-top activities and more strenuous play. Jane clearly enjoyed such contact and appeared appreciative of the efforts her father had gone to in bringing some toys and food. Jane appeared to find being observed by a previously unknown independent social worker disconcerting and at times responded by hiding her face in her father's clothes and crawling under furniture while her sometimes strenuous play perhaps also offered her some sense of security. By the end of the two hours contact her wariness and anxiety had diminished somewhat. Separating from Mr D and returning to her mother was difficult for Jane. She sought to extend the contact and then, Centre staff having intervened to escort Jane back to her mother, she ran back to her father. It took some 20 minutes before the separation was accomplished. Both parents, and particularly Mrs D, seemed to find it difficult to establish effective boundaries with Jane in this situation.

One week later Jane was observed on two consecutive days with her mother in her home by the same social worker. Jane and her mother worked together baking a tray of jam tarts, Jane taking the lead and accepting direction from Mrs D. Jane showed marked anxiety again about seeing the social worker on the first day. Asked by her to draw a picture of her family, Jane began by drawing herself, then her maternal grandparents and finally two small figures representing her mother and father. She also suggested that her father should not be included in the picture as he 'doesn't live with us'. Jane said she felt closest to her maternal grandmother, as she was 'kind' and a 'nurse'. She said the same about her mother, whom she said she felt next closest to. When asked about her father, Jane ran away to Mrs D. Mrs D seemed unable to encourage her to speak further to the social worker, particularly when Jane would cry and protest. Jane appeared very concerned about the observer speaking not only with her, but also with her mother. She thus told her mother not to say anything and attempted to push the social worker out of the room. Mrs D feebly reproved Jane, though without any visible effect. On the second day Jane was protesting loudly and crying that she did not want to see the social worker even prior to her arrival home, this continuing once inside the house. She ran into her own bedroom and cried and shouted there in continuing protest for about 20 minutes, at the end of which time she fell asleep.

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*Activity*

Imagine you had been asked to independently comment on Jane's development. Using the information available here what hypotheses might you make about her cognitive, personality, social and emotional development? What other types of

*(Cont'd)*

evidence would you want to obtain to clarify your ideas further? How might you describe Jane's attachment status with her mother and also with her father? Discuss alternative theoretical formulations of this case. Consider the social: micro-, meso- and macro-systems within which Jane exists. What impact do these have on Jane and does Jane have on them? What predictions might you make about Jane's future development? What recommendations would you make regarding Jane's future custody, care and other possible professional involvement? Present your conclusions to your group or class, who might adopt the roles within a multi-disciplinary team meeting. Be prepared to defend your decisions.