Theories of Development

Overview
Each theory of development presents a different view of the how and why of individual growth and change. No one theory explains everything. Each theory is useful, but by itself, incomplete.

Because there is no one all encompassing theory, we have to think of a child development theory as a giant puzzle. Each theory is a piece and adds to the overall picture.

The pieces of the puzzle include the theories of Piaget, (called cognitive theory) Freud and Erikson, (called psychoanalytical theory) Gesell (a maturationalist) Skinner (a behaviorist), and Vygotsky (who came up with a sociocultural theory). It takes all those theories and more to come to an understanding of children, what they need, how they think and feel, and how they develop.

We can sort out the theories into categories by thinking of the "whole child." The child exists in a context; he or she is made up of mind, body, and feelings. Each theory fits into one or two of those four categories representing different aspects of the "whole child." One reason we have so many theories is because we can't understand a child by looking at just one or two aspects. We have to look at the child in a holistic way. No one theory does it all.

When it comes to theories we can't think in terms of right and wrong, but rather what fits a particular aspect of a particular child in a particular situation at a particular time.

Questions To Consider
1. Why are there so many child development theories?
2. Why do some theories contradict other theories?
3. Into what four categories representing different aspects of the "whole child" can child development theories be sorted?
4. How does one determine which theory to use?

Vocabulary
Read these terms with their definitions before viewing the program.

Anal Stage  Sigmund Freud's second stage of development occurring during toddlerhood where the focus of the toddler is on gaining control over bodily processes. Toilet learning is a major task of this stage.
Assisted Performance  Growing out of Lev Vygotsky's theory, the idea of helping learners become a part of teaching because it results in greater achievement than when the learner is left to perform independently.
Behaviorism  The basic belief is that all behavior is learned or conditioned. Behavior that is reinforced is repeated; behavior that is not reinforced disappears. Behaviorists like B. F. Skinner, don't believe in the "unfolding" of ability, but rather see all abilities as learned. Behaviorism is also called "learning theory".
Basic Trust  The task to be accomplished in the first year of life according to Erikson. The task is to establish a sense of basic trust. Infants unable to accomplish the task feel a sense of mistrust. The name of Erick Erikson's first stage is "Trust Versus Mistrust."
Cognitive Theorists  Theorists who focus on the mind, studying how children learn to think and how they eventually become rational. Piaget and Vygotsky are examples of cognitive theorists.
Development  The unfolding over time of a orderly sequence of change that begins at conception and continues throughout life.
Oral Stage  Freud's first stage when the focus of the infant is on the mouth.
Maturationalism  A theory of development focusing on the passage of time and the unfolding of the child's capabilities. Includes a belief that development cannot be "pushed." Jean Piaget and Arnold Gesell are examples of maturationalists.

Psychoanalytic Theory  Conceived by Sigmund Freud, explains human behavior as the result of unconscious drives and motivation. Freud and his student Erik Erikson are examples of theorists who come from a psychoanalytic point of view.
Sensorimotor Stage  Piaget's first stage. lasting two years, in which children "think with their bodies." They learn by exploring and manipulating the environment, making use of their senses as well as their muscles.
Scaffolding  A process that provides support and assistance for learning.
Social Learning Theory  A branch of behaviorism that studies how children and adults learn through imitation and identification.
Sociocultural Theory  The name for Vygotsky's theory which is built around the idea that you can't study the child without taking into consideration the social and cultural context.
Stage of Autonomy  Named by Erikson, this stage is sometimes labeled by harried parents the "Terrible Twos." During this stage the child experiences a sense of his own power, which often comes out in contrariness. According to Erikson, the child who does not accomplish the task related to autonomy, feels shame and doubt. Erikson called the stage of the two year old, "Autonomy Versus Shame and Doubt."
Stage Theorists  A theorists who sees development occurring in steps that invariably fall in the same order. A child must move through one stage to get to the next. Piaget, Freud, Erikson, and Gesell are examples of stage theorists.
Symbolic Representation  Portrayal of a link in the mind between an object and an idea. Piaget looked for signs of more and more sophisticated symbolic representation to show how children move upward through stages of cognitive development.
Theory  A statement including hypotheses and/or general principles to provide an interpretation of behavior.
The "Whole Child" A concept of the child as being made up of parts that are inseparable from the whole. The components of the whole child are mind, body, feelings, and social context. Though theorists focus on one or more aspects of the child, the split from the whole is necessarily artificial.
**Instructional Objectives**

When you have successfully completed this module, you will be able to:

1. List the names of the six major theorists.
2. Link each theorist’s name to the name of a theory.
3. Link the characteristics of child development theories to the six major theorists.
4. Explain the concept of the “whole child”
5. Explain why we have so many contradictory theories.
6. Give the name of the first stage of two of the stage theories.
7. Explain why one can’t speak of right or wrong when it comes to child development theories.

**Self-Test**

After studying the objectives and watching the video, take the self-test to check your progress.

1. What are the names of the six major theorists in the video?
   a. ____________________________  
   b. ____________________________  
   c. ____________________________  
   d. ____________________________  
   e. ____________________________  
   f. ____________________________

2. Link the name of the theories to the theorists by writing the names of one or more of the six theorists in the blanks below.
   a. Cognitive theory________________________________________
   b. Psychoanalytic theory____________________________________
   c. Behaviorists theory_______________________________________
   d. Maturationalist theory____________________________________
   e. Sociocultural theory_______________________________________

3. Below is a list of statements, each of which describes some aspects of a particular theory. Associate the theorists with characteristics of their theories by filling in the blanks below with the appropriate name. Each name may be used more than once.
   a. Theorists who focus on the mind are called cognitive theorists. ____________________________ is a name that stands out from others.
   b. ____________________________ described stages of cognitive development—stages that occur in succession, always in the same order.
   c. ____________________________’s final stage of cognitive development occurs when adolescents can use logic to talk about ideas and propositions.
   d. ____________________________ believed less in teaching than putting children in a rich environment and letting them explore it.
   e. Exploration is an important part of ____________________________’s theory.
   f. Feelings are the major focus of people who follow the psychoanalytic theory of development. The big names here are ____________________________ and ____________________________.
   g. ____________________________ looks at Freud’s oral stage as the time babies develop a sense of basic trust. Infants come to see the world as a place where they get their needs met when someone consistently heeds their cries and feeds them.
h. ________________ is a maturationalist and stage theorist who was most meticulous in describing the milestone of physical development.

i. ________________ didn’t believe in “development unfolding in ages and stages.” He believed that behavior is learned through conditioning and reinforcement.

j. Though he focused on feelings in psychoanalytic tradition, ________________ also believed in the effect of culture on development.

k. Another theorist, ________________, also believed in the influence of social and cultural context on development.

l. Like Piaget, ________________ believed that children construct knowledge -- they don’t just take it in. This same theorist believed strongly in the power of language.

m. According to ________________, assisted performance is fine - even desired.

4. Which theorists characteristically focus on which part(s) of the “whole child?” Write the names of the six major theorists in the blanks below associating each with one or more aspects of the “whole child.”
   a. mind____________________________
   b. feelings____________________________
   c. body____________________________
   d. sociocultural context____________________________

5. Explain the concept of the “whole child.”

6. Explain why we have so many different and contradictory theories.

7. Give the name of the first stage of the following theories.
   a. Piaget’s cognitive theory _________________________
   b. Freud’s psychoanalytic theory _________________________

8. Explain why one can’t speak of right or wrong when it comes to child development theory.