Overview of Child Development
Child Development

Definition:
- Change in the child that occurs over time. Changes follow an orderly pattern that moves toward greater complexity and enhances survival.

Periods of development:
- Prenatal period: from conception to birth
- Infancy and toddlerhood: birth to 2 years
- Early childhood: 2-6 years old
- Middle childhood: 6-11 years old
- Adolescence: 11-20 years old
Domains of Development

Development is described in three domains, but growth in one domain influences the other domains.

- **Physical Domain:**
  - body size, body proportions, appearance, brain development, motor development, perception capacities, physical health.

- **Cognitive Domain:**
  - thought processes and intellectual abilities including attention, memory, problem solving, imagination, creativity, academic and everyday knowledge, metacognition, and language.

- **Social/Emotional Domain:**
  - self-knowledge (gender identity, sexual identity, ethnic identity), moral reasoning, understanding and expression of emotions, self-regulation, temperament, understanding others, interpersonal skills, and friendships.
Theories

■ What is a theory?
  □ Orderly set of ideas which describe, explain, and predict behavior.

■ Why are theories important?
  □ To give meaning to what we observe.
  □ As a basis for action -- finding ways to improve the lives and education of children.
Origins of Child Development Theories
6th - 15th centuries
Medieval period

- Preformationism: children seen as little adults.
- Childhood is not a unique phase.
- Children were cared for until they could begin caring for themselves, around 7 years old.
- Children dressed as adults, worked at adult jobs, could be married, were made into kings, were imprisoned or hanged as adults.
16th Century
Reformation period

- Puritan religion influenced how children were viewed.
- Children are born evil, and must be civilized.
- A goal emerged to raise children effectively.
- Special books were designed for children.
17th Century
Age of Enlightenment

- John Locke believed in *tabula rasa* - children are blank slates when they are born.
- The environment and nurturing is how children develop.
- Children can be molded through instruction, examples and rewards.
- Forerunner of behaviorism, growth is determined by the environment.

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18th Century
Age of Reason

- Jean-Jacques Rousseau opined that children were noble savages, born with an innate sense of morality; the timing of growth should not be interfered with.
- Wrote the story of Emile, a fictional tale of a boy raised in nature who is allowed to choose what and how to learn.
- Rousseau used the idea of stages of development.
- Forerunner of maturationist beliefs, growth is determined by biology.
19th Century Industrial Revolution

- Charles Darwin looked at the variation within a species and the variations among species.
- Developed theories of natural selection and survival of the fittest.
- Forerunner of ethology, belief that behavior has a survival value.
- Darwin made parallels between human prenatal growth and other animals.
- Darwin authored one of the first baby biographies which initiated scientific child study.
20th Century

Theories about children's development expanded around the world.

- Childhood was seen as worthy of special attention.
- Finally laws were passed to protect children, laws to:
  - define parental responsibility
  - establish limits to child labor
  - mandate education
Psychoanalytical Theories

Beliefs focus on the formation of personality. According to this approach, children move through various stages, confronting conflicts between biological drives and social expectations. The child's success with negotiating each stage affects his success in coping with the following stage.
Sigmund Freud

**Psychosexual Theory**

- Was based on his therapy with troubled adults.
- He emphasized that a child's personality is formed by the ways which his parents managed his sexual and aggressive drives.
Erik Erikson

Psychosocial Theory

- Expanded on Freud's theories.
- Believed that development is life-long.
- Emphasized that at each stage, the child acquires attitudes and skills resulting from the successful negotiation of the psychological conflict.

Identified 8 stages:

- Basic trust vs mistrust (birth - 1 year)
- Autonomy vs shame and doubt (ages 1-3)
- Initiative vs guilt (ages 3-6)
- Industry vs inferiority (ages 6-11)
- Identity vs identity confusion (adolescence)
- Intimacy vs isolation (young adulthood)
- Generativity vs stagnation (middle adulthood)
- Integrity vs despair (the elderly)
Behavioral and Social Learning Theories

Beliefs that describe the importance of the environment and nurturing in the growth of a child.
Behaviorism

- Developed as a more scientific and observable way to study behavior
- Behaviorism became the dominant view from the 1920's to 1960's, allowing for the possibility of change and improvement for everyone.
John Watson

- Early 20th century, "Father of American Behaviorist theory."
- Based his work on Pavlov's experiments on the digestive system of dogs (dogs were trained to salivate by using a neutral stimulus.)
- Researched classical conditioning: an infant Albert was not fearful of a rat, but when a loud sound was made whenever Albert touched the rat, Albert grew afraid of the rat. Even when there was no noise made, Albert cried when he saw it, and later extended his fear to other white furry objects (bunnies, fur coat, dog, etc.).
- Argued that parents should use the power of conditioning to mold children.
B. F. Skinner

- Believed that children learn through the consequences of their actions.
- Proposed that children "operate" on their environment, and they will adjust their behavior to attract more reinforcements like praise and rewards and to avoid punishments.
- Believed that learning could be broken down into smaller tasks, and that offering immediate rewards for accomplishments would stimulate further learning.
Social Learning Theory

Albert Bandura

- Stressed how children learn by observation and imitation.
- Believed that children gradually become more selective in what they imitate.
Biological Theories

Belief that heredity and innate biological processes govern growth.
Maturationists: G. Stanley Hall and Arnold Gesell

- Believed there is a predetermined biological timetable
  - Children mature and grow when they're ready
  - Parents and teachers should be responsive to the child's cues.

- Hall and Gesell were proponents of the normative approach to child study: using age-related averages of children's growth and behaviors to define what is normal.
Ethology

- Examines how behavior is determined by a species' need for survival.
- Has its roots in Charles Darwin's research.
- Describes a "critical period" or "sensitive period," when a child is biologically prepared to learn, but also requires the support of influences and opportunities in the environment.
Konrad Lorenz

Known for his work on "imprinting": baby goslings will attach to their first guardian after hatching, and their survival depends on this attachment.
Attachment Theory

- John Bowlby applied these theories to his theory of attachment.
- Attachment between an infant and her caregiver can insure the infant’s survival.
Cognitive Theories

Beliefs that describe how children learn
Jean Piaget

Cognitive development theory

- Explains how children "construct" their understanding of the world through their active involvement and interactions.
- Studied his 3 children to focus not on what they knew but how they knew it.
- Described children's understanding as their "schemas." When they encounter something new, they either use assimilation or accommodation.
  - Assimilation is fitting the new information into a current schema.
Piaget’s Cognitive Development Stages

- **Sensori-motor**
  - Ages birth - 2: the infant uses his senses and motor abilities to understand the world

- **Preoperation**
  - Ages 2-7: the child uses metal representations of objects and is able to use symbolic thought and language

- **Concrete operations**
  - Ages 7-11; the child uses logical operations or principles when solving problems

- **Formal operations**
  - Ages 12 up; the use of logical operations in a systematic fashion and with the ability to use abstractions
Lev Vygotsky

Socio-Cultural Theory

- Knowledge is not individually constructed, but constructed within a social context, among people.
- Cultural values and customs dictate what is important to learn.
- Children learn from more expert members of the society.
- Vygotsky described the "zone of proximal development", where learning occurs. This zone is the difference between what the child can accomplish independently and the potential development which the child can achieve with the "scaffolding" of a more capable
Information Processing Theory

- Uses the model of the computer to describe how the brain works.
- Focuses on how information is perceived, how information is stored in memory, how memories are retrieved and then used to solve problems.
The belief that development can't be explained by a single concept, but rather by a complex system.
Urie Bronfenbrenner

Ecological Systems Theory

- Explains that the varied systems of the environment and the interrelationships among the systems shape a child's development.
- Proposes that both the environment and biology influence the child's development.
- Describes the ways in which environment affects the child and the ways in which the child influences the environment.
Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model

- The microsystem - activities and interactions in the child's immediate surroundings: parents, school, friends, etc.
- The mesosystem - relationships among the entities involved in the child's microsystem: parents' interactions with teachers, a school's interactions with the daycare provider
- The exosystem - social institutions which affect children indirectly: the parents' work settings and policies, extended family networks, mass media, community resources
- The macrosystem - broader cultural values, laws and governmental resources
- The chronosystem - changes which occur during a child's life, both personally, like the birth of a sibling and culturally, like the Iraqi war.