

# Theories to Guide Children Development and Their Impact on Early Childhood Education

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## Abstract

*The mind of a child is complex. A number of developmental theories help educators understand this complexity in order to better deal with it and guide the child's development. Many theorists have been influential to the child development and education fields. The various theorists in child development have come up with ideas and innovative ways to work with and understand the development process of children. The developmental theories of the past and also the emerging theories encompass cognitive, social, physical, and other aspects of human development which are represented as stages or focus on a specific area (Woolfolk & Perry, 2012). This article describes the theories of development and its greatest impact on early childhood development education. This article also discusses such as theories, and theoretical concepts. It focuses on six theories which are behavioral child development theories, Psycho-social theory, Piaget's cognitive developmental theory, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological systems theory, and Kohlberg's moral development theory. The article concludes with some recommendations for parents and educators.*

**Keywords:** *Theoretical Concept, Development, Cognitive, Child, Sociocultural, Moral, Theories.*

## Introduction

The mind of a child is complex. A number of developmental theories help us understand this complexity in order to better deal with it and guide the child's development. First, as a scholar, I tend to believe in the behaviorist approach—the idea that we are all a product of our environment. For example, consider twins: one is raised in an environment that rewards education, is a member of the Boy Scouts, and has all his basic needs provided by two loving and supportive parents. In contrast, his brother is raised by a single mom who can barely provide for him, in a poor neighborhood that is, to a large extent, governed by a gang ethos and codes. Clearly, this is the first agent one looks at in criminology and how a criminal is created by his or her environment.

### *Behavioral Child Development Theories*

Skinner (1938) is a well-known 20th century authority on behaviorist psychology. Skinner (1938) advanced the concept of operant conditioning, where the individual's response is elicited by a series of social stimuli. He conducted several clinical experiments with animals to prove his theory of stimulus and response: the response is determined by the stimulus. If you can control the stimulus, you can control the response. His method entails the provision of a stimulus, rewarding the desired response, and ignoring the wrong response. Through training and time, the unwanted response is eliminated and only the desired response occurs for that particular stimulus, motivated by the concept of “reinforcement” (O'Donohue & Ferguson, 2001). Conversely, punishment is negative reinforcement aimed at deterring the occurrence of undesired responses. The final goal is to construct a habitual behavior (O'Donohue & Ferguson, 2001); hence, the term rehabilitation.

In her dissertation, Hinson (2005) conducted an experiment with college students who were always tardy; using food as both positive and negative reinforcement, she attempted to modify the students' behavior. Hinson informed those particular students that during the first ten minutes of the class, food would be available, but after ten minutes, the food would be removed. Although her experiment showed partial

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success, the experiment by itself is a Skinnerian box, done in a controlled environment (class) to alter student behavior.

The strength of this model is clear in its application in various models used to modify the behavior of children and students. Behaviorism is the more explicit theory that we see in everyday life by way of education and training. Following the behaviorist approach, parents or caregivers can educate children to replace negative behaviors with positive ones. In doing so, parents or caregivers may continue to encourage and reinforce positive behaviors. Thus, Murphy and Barnes-Holmes (2009) suggested that behaviorism helps the child elicit additional similar responses. In a larger sense, society sustains itself and its values through the behaviorist model of conditioning. Charlesworth and Hartup (1967) suggested that social interactions are also a type of conditioning in which people are not only being conditioned but they also participate in the conditioning of others. This theory is also used in the legal system, with prison being the Skinnerian box that alters the behavior of criminals.

Evidence of the behaviorist theory can be seen in attempts to create or choose the right environment and subsequently creating the most optimal circumstances that allow a child to thrive; however, to rely on behaviorism is to accept the fact that the mind is a passive agent. The child is an active member of his society. He or she influences it as well as being influenced by it. One should not ignore cognition in this case. Bandura (1997), for example, was a behaviorist psychologist who added a cognitive focus to behaviorism. Bandura (1997) regarded reinforcement in terms of expectancy—an expectation of reward in the future, which is useful in observational learning processes. This expectation motivates the reoccurrence of similar positive behaviors and determines the outcome of a child's behavior. However, in Bandura's (1997) model, there is no need for conditioning or a series of trials and errors; instead, observation leads to the same social learning, second hand reinforcement, via imitating a model of behavior. Therefore, at times, showing how is more effective than conditioning, which is the point that stresses cognition in the behaviorist approach.

To conceptualize these theoretical stances, when a child performs a certain behavior and the other says, "Thank you," he or she will be more likely to repeat that behavior. S/he learns to associate the reinforcer, thank you, with the behavior. When the child performs an action we do not like, we may use a negative reinforcer by saying "No," or "That's not nice," to decrease the probability of the occurrence of the undesirable action. Therefore, in order to shape a child's behavior, a parent or a caregiver should first create the motivation in the child to perform certain actions via the use of a reward or reinforcer. Then, they can correct each behavior, one at a time. Once a particular behavior is corrected and is a habit, the caregiver may gradually stop rewarding this behavior and move on to the next issue.

The reinforcer or reward could be abstract, like saying "Good job," tangible, such as giving an extra privilege, or it could be both abstract and tangible, as in saying "Nice work! Here is a candy for you." The caregiver should occasionally change the reinforcer lest it loses its desired effect. To select the most effective reinforcer, the caregiver may observe the child during his or her playtime to determine the most appropriate treat and start using it. Children may not be capable of waiting for long periods before reaping their reward; they need immediate rewards to obtain a specific desired action. To both teach them patience, avoid over-using the reinforcer, and produce as many desired responses as possible, the "Token Economy" technique is desirable. If a child performs a certain activity as he or she is supposed to, the child gets some kind of token; when the child has collected enough tokens, the he or she can buy himself or herself some extra privilege. Although this method teaches a child to have relatively long-term hope, it is not a completely abstract hope. It is somewhat tangible because with each token a child receives, s/he gets closer to the ultimate reward for which he or she is hoping. This works exactly the same way grades or marks work in the academic system.

The reinforcement method should be accompanied by modeling. As previously stated, children learn by watching how people behave (Bandura, 1997). With the help of others, the caregiver can model a behavior performed in a certain situation. By watching that behavior, a child develops the competence, and maybe the motivation, to perform it. For example, if a child watches someone get rewarded for a particular behavior, the child would think that s/he might be rewarded for that same behavior.

Finally, negative behaviors can be regarded of mal-adoptive behaviors produced by, or learned from, specific situations. Consequently, to change these behaviors, the parent or caregiver needs to create a new series of contingencies of reinforcement. Specifically, the caregiver needs to establish a new environment for a specific child because s/he can shape the child's behavior when he or she changes the environment that controls it. Clearly, if all behaviors are learned, what I need to do, as a parent, is to focus on the specific problem behavior and change the environmental contingencies that control this behavior.

### *Erikson's Psycho-Social Theory*

A boy who never got to know his father, identity is a central issue for Erikson. Erikson saw development as found on the individual's going through problems or crises. Growth occurs when the individuals successfully resolve these problems. (Erikson, 1979). Through this development through crises individual develops his or her character, identity, and a strong sense of self. Those crises are inevitable in a person lives in a culture or a society. At every crisis individual develops mastery over, the individual's identity develops. Erikson presented 8 stages; a person moves to one stage to another by overcoming the crises it presents. These crises must present itself with emotional and reaction that keeps worrying the individual and necessitate its resolutions in order for the individuals to feel peace again. These crises require developing social skills and obligations. And each stage requires successfully and unsuccessfully copying. Person has to deals with each stag to move to the next.

Although Erikson (1979) described stages of development based on Freud's sexual connotations, his stages quickly took on a social focus reflective of the ego psychologists.

His first full description of his eight stages was published in his most influential book, *Childhood and Society*. (The more complete second edition came out in 1963.)

In Erikson's view, human development is primarily driven by a strong need for the individual to deal with certain problems that occur at different times in his or her life and require the individual to gain mastery in solving the problems or resolving the issues.

Most important in this theory, the individual continually seeks to understand who he or she is and to develop a coherent identity, or sense of self.

The series of events or issues that one encounters in life constitutes a series of crises that requires the individual to gain mastery over problems and further develop a coherent sense of identity. Thus, each stage is, in fact, a type of identity crisis for the individual. (As noted above, one can see Erikson's personal experiences in these stages.)

- For Erikson, a crisis occurs when the issues or problems faced create an acute emotional reaction that needs to be dealt with and resolved for the person to feel at peace or comfortable once again.
- The crises are brought about in large part by the emerging skills and opportunities open to the person and the social relationships and obligations that the person is exposed to (such as from parents, peers, school, and career choices).
- Erikson framed each of his stages in terms of what was accomplished or mastered if an individual successful resolved the crisis and what occurred if the individual did not successfully resolve the crisis. For example, the first stage is one of gaining a sense of trust, if the child is successful in dealing with the crisis at this stage, versus developing a sense of mistrust, if one is unsuccessful in dealing with the crisis. The last stage is one of gaining a sense of ego integrity versus developing a sense of despair.
- Erikson's sequence of stages is hierarchical and cumulative in that the resolution of one crisis and mastery of a given level of identity make possible the next level of problems and issues. In other words, it would be extremely difficult for someone to resolve the crisis at stage 3 if she had not already resolved the crises at stages 1 and 2.

Erikson's first five "psycho-social" stages paralleled Freud's original psycho-sexual stages; however, Erikson thought that development did not end in adolescence. He described three additional stages that occur from young adulthood to old age. These adult stages are some of the most revolutionary aspects of his theory.

Erikson's (1979) eight stages are:

- Trust versus mistrust
- Autonomy versus shame and doubt
- Initiative versus guilt
- Industry versus inferiority
- Identity versus role confusion
- Intimacy versus isolation
- Generativity versus stagnation
- Ego integrity versus despair

Because Erikson focused on the influences of the environment and of social relationships, it seemed to follow that further development would occur even after a child had reached reproductive maturity at adolescence. Erikson was the first developmental theorist to seriously consider development beyond adolescence. After his theory and in part because of it, looking at development from a life-span perspective became the rule rather than the exception.

One revolutionary aspect of Erikson's theory was that he thought that if a crisis were not completely resolved when it first emerged, a person could return to the issues surrounding that crisis and deal with them later on. For Freud and others, what went on in childhood, in many ways, had an irreversible influence on one's development, but for Erikson, the entire life span was available for a person to work out issues and develop successfully. There need be no irreversible or permanent failure of development.

### *Early Stages*

Erikson's (1979) first four stages, which provide the foundation of development for the child.

As you will recall, Erikson (1979) described each stage in terms of a major crisis that had to be met. However, infants and young children are not conscious of each crisis. They simply are motivated by their emotions and needs to develop a particular type of identity and competence at each stage.

In Erikson's (1979) view, the foundation for all development is having a sense of connectedness with other people, which begins with a trust in others. With this sense of connectedness as a foundation, a child can then branch out to develop a sense of independence. These two developments—connectedness and independence—are clearly illustrated in the first four stages.

Erikson (1979) called the first stage development of a sense of trust versus mistrust.

A newborn needs to rely on others to survive.

- As the infant experiences greater periods of consciousness, he may have feelings of insecurity and a lack of predictability and control over his world. Therefore, he must develop a sense that there is someone that he can trust and rely on.
- The infant's parents are typically the people he will first depend on for his survival and to give him security and comfort.
- When his parents (or parent substitutes) consistently meet his needs, he will develop a sense of security and trust that his needs will be met and someone will take care of him.

In addition, a baby comes into the world with no understanding of causal relations.

- Therefore, to be able to develop any mastery over the environment, the baby needs to learn about means-end relations—what events predict what results and how one can use the knowledge of means and ends to influence what will happen.
- Predictability and control are necessary for anyone to be able to adapt successfully in the world.
- When parents and others consistently deal with an infant, the infant also learns about the consistent and stable nature of his world. This is also part of the sense of trust—trust in the orderliness of the world.
- To understand this development, consider what happens when a baby is hungry and cries. What is the message he is learning? If his mother feeds him every time he is hungry, he learns to trust his mother to meet his needs and take care of him, and he learns that his world is predictable and controllable. His crying brings food.
- Even when his parents do not meet his every need every time, the child can learn to trust the world and to trust them, just as long as they are consistent and he can figure out under what conditions they will meet his needs.

It makes sense, then, that the beginning of trust brings with it the child's sense of agency or control of the world and that this sense of agency is tied to his connectedness to other people who are significant in his life.

If the child does not have this consistent care and predictability in his world, he will find it difficult to emerge from infancy with a sense of trust of others and the world around him and may instead develop a strong sense of mistrusting others and the world.

- One can think of cases involving child abuse, neglect, or abandonment; cases of war and deprivation; or cases of constantly changing caretakers in which the child cannot develop a foundation of trust.
- In these cases, the child would have a view of a capricious world that is hard to predict and people who cannot be relied on. Thus, the foundation for subsequent development would not be in place.
- As Erikson saw it, one cannot overstress the extremely important foundation laid down in the first stage.
- Erikson called the second stage development of a sense of autonomy versus shame and doubt.

After the child has developed a sense of trust, she will have confidence to try out actions and learn about her world.

- Now, the child attempts to learn self-control and master many tasks independent of her parents.
- If, in stage 1, the child's identity was tied to an attachment to another person (usually the parent), now her identity includes being separate from the other person (the parent). Thus, the child practices autonomy but on the secure foundation of still having the parent there for her and having a basic sense that the world is predictable and, therefore, controllable.
- An example of this development is when a child who had her parents feed her and take care of her needs now wants to do things for herself—to hold the spoon and cup and feed herself, to wash herself, to climb stairs on her own, to get into things on her own.
- Although this stage originally corresponded to Freud's anal stage, toilet training is just one of the many areas in which a child attempts to gain some self-control and mastery on her own.

How can this development go awry?

- First, if the child does not have a secure sense of trust, she is less likely to take the chances necessary to try out independent actions.
- The major roadblock to development during this stage occurs when the child attempts these autonomous behaviors and is criticized, put down, or punished for her attempts. If her parents punish her every time she tries to do something on her own, such as feeding herself or trying to wash herself, she will likely develop a sense of doubt in her abilities.
- Parents may also shame a child for doing things wrong, such as having toileting accidents, and make the child feel ashamed of herself and what she can accomplish.
- The development of a basic sense of shame and doubt in oneself during this stage would inhibit the child's further development of independence in the next stage.

Erikson called the third stage development of a sense of initiative versus guilt.

This stage is a continuation of the autonomy and independence begun in stage 2 and continues to develop based on the foundation of trust to support it.

- If the child has been successful at developing autonomous skills, he will now attempt to master ever more extensive skills and actions.
- He will explore new ways to do things and to manipulate people to get what he wants. He will learn what it takes to influence others.
- He will attempt to form new relationships with new people and will attempt to meet his desires directly, not always waiting to be taken care of by his parents or waiting for them to tell him what to do.

Examples of this development are:

- Children explore new role and gender relationships.
- A child may try to influence others by doing something kind for them but something that in the adult's perception is transparent as being a bribe.
- A child may use materials to do a project, sometimes in a harmful way, without asking.

Compare the social and real-life problem-solving focus that Erikson's stage 3 takes versus the original focus in Freud's stage 3—the phallic stage with its attendant Oedipus complex.

- Erikson subscribed to the existence of an Oedipal conflict, but in his reworking of the stage, the desires, including the sexual desires of the child, involve attempts at mastery and development of self-confidence well beyond the sexual conflicts involving just the child and his parents.
- Essentially, the child's identity now includes being a self-starter and dealing with desires that are separate from his parents and often tied to peer relationships, as well.

What can go awry at this stage? A child may be chastised for his drives and feelings or constantly criticized for acting independently and without permission. The child may be made to feel not only ashamed and doubtful of his abilities but also guilty for what he wants and is feeling. Criticisms of the child often now enter the realm of morality. A child is not only incompetent but also bad.

Erikson called the fourth stage development of a sense of industry versus inferiority.

Although this stage was originally based on Freud's latency stage, there is not much that is latent about it.

- By industry, Erikson meant that the child adds to her independence by attempting to master many skills and domains of knowledge. She is industrious.

- The stage coincides with a child's entry into elementary school in which the focus is on mastery in academic domains. The child learns facts, learns to systematically classify her world, and learns academic skills of reading, writing, and math. In addition, the child learns the skills and rules of sports, the ability to make things, the ability to play a musical instrument, and so forth.
- Although mastery is a core of all of Erikson's stages, mastery is surely the focus of this particular stage.
- 4. At this stage, the child's developing sense of identity includes not only what she can do but how she fits in and belongs: her membership in peer groups, in clubs, on teams.

Examples of this stage are:

- A child may become passionate or obsessed with learning about dinosaurs, cloud formations and how to predict the weather, the classification of insects or sea creatures, or ancient Egypt. The list goes on and on.
- In the social realm, a child may need to master the fears and homesickness of sleeping over at a friend's house or going on a camping trip. The child may focus on heroes and world records and what he or she wants to do—be a scientist, be a dancer—and whom he or she likes.
- For any true sense of mastery and competence to develop, one must actually achieve something, which means that there is also a chance of failure in all these tasks and attempts at mastery.
- When a child constantly experiences failure in her attempts, she may develop a sense of inferiority.
- In addition, social comparison abounds, in which children compare themselves to peers to determine how they are doing. Thus, children also become adept at realistically assessing their competence and incompetence without adults telling them how they are doing.
- Nevertheless, when adults, whether parents, teachers, or others, constantly belittle a child or criticize her accomplishments, she likely will develop a strong sense of inferiority.

There may be an adaptive reason for young children's tendency to overestimate their competence. It allows them to try anything.

After the initial foundation of trust is laid during infancy, the individual during childhood develops various facets of independence. We will discuss the pivotal stage of independent identity development and the renewed development of connectedness.

### Identity and Intimacy

We discussed Erikson's stages of development through childhood. Those stages contributed significant insights and shifts in focus not seen in Freud's original stages, but it was with the two stages of adolescence and young adulthood that Erikson revolutionized thinking about development by placing pivotal factors of development after childhood and at the dawn of adulthood.

- Just as the first stage laid a foundation for trust and connectedness on which autonomy and independence were then developed, so does Stage 5 lay a new foundation of independence on which a new level of connectedness and trust develop. The same issues are still with us throughout our lives and are met repeatedly but at different levels.
- The development of intimacy in Stage 6 is only the beginning of the development of ever more complex types of connectedness.

Erikson called the fifth stage development of a sense of identity versus role confusion.

Erikson coined the term identity crisis to represent what people felt when they went through this stage of development. Of course, by now, the student should realize that for Erikson, all stages involve a crisis;

nevertheless, the term identity crisis has caught on in our popular terminology. Indeed, the term mid-life crisis, which came along later, probably owed its creation to the fact that people now think in terms of recurring identity crises.

How does this crisis come about?

- In part because of the physical and hormonal changes brought about by puberty, the young adolescent finds himself in a revolution within his own body. These changes lead to awkwardness, as well as the dawning of new desires and possibilities.
- These changes and accompanying confusions lead to disequilibrium in the person regarding his physical and social competence and his secure sense of self. Who he thought he was may not be who he is any longer.
- This confusion is exacerbated by the varying rates of development seen in his peers and the varying changes in interests and mastery levels seen in those around him. It is also exacerbated by the fact that most adolescents switch schools during this same time. Middle schools and high schools have different policies and focuses than the elementary schools that children are used to.

#### *Identity through Life Span Using Erikson Theory*

Through these stages, a person moves from one stage to the next by overcoming the crisis presented at each stage. Each crisis must result in an acute emotional reaction, and will continue to worry the individual until it can be resolved. Crises are normally turning points in an individual's life (e.g., entering school as a child, moving from elementary to middle school, from middle school to high school, etc.); all of these crises require one to develop social skills and obligations, and one copes with each stage successfully or unsuccessfully. Every stage needs to be dealt with fully before a person can move on to the next. Erikson (1979) believed that the psychology of the individual was shaped by nurture, and that the individual, or rather the child, must pass through various stages of development with a crisis at each stage. How the child deals with those crises determines the child's ability to deal with the next stage.

In childhood, an infant's identity is closely linked to his or her attachment to its parents. If a parent consistently meets a child's needs, the child will develop a sense of trust and security. In contrast, if the child's needs are not met, they will develop a sense of mistrust. The sense of trust in children develops to allow them to become autonomous. The sense of having a secure base provides them with the freedom to explore the world around them, to take initiative, try new things, and form new relationships. All of this leads to a sense of industriousness, especially in school when learning about new things, for example, a child may become fascinated with dinosaurs, insects, or other new information about things of interest (Erikson, 1979).

Since the adolescent years bring mental uncertainty combined with physical revolution, and it is a period during which individuals redefine themselves, Erikson (1979) focused primarily on the issue of identity during adolescence rather than during childhood. During this stage, adolescents start to develop a sense of identity, and become different people from what they were in the childhood period; they are no longer children and this is apparent from the physical and mental changes they are going through. In Erikson's (1979) view, this stage can be a period of confusion for individuals who have comfortably and satisfactorily overcome the childhood stages, and now have to start over. More importantly, adolescence involves changing schools after spending seven or eight years in one school, and with that comes the responsibility of dealing with new relationships, new teachers, new systems, and new obligations and expectations. This is also the time when individuals start to think about career paths. All of these factors require individuals to competently deal with the crisis and establish a new identity in order to define themselves at yet another level. This process often results in adolescents being nonconformist with authority figures such as parents, but conformist with peers. According to Erikson (1979), kids primarily understand themselves through the looking glass, by seeing themselves reflected in others. Although many adolescents in this stage end up agreeing with the values of their parents, from whom they initially wanted independence, they will have a



chance to question these values and make decisions accordingly. By the end of the process, they should have developed a satisfying sense of self, otherwise they will suffer role confusion and, as a result, continue to struggle with the issues of adolescence as they move into adulthood.

Intimacy is the sixth stage, the stage when a person connects with someone else they freely chose, and began an intimate relationship involving trust and mutual disclosure. To become vulnerable by exposing so much of oneself to another person, one has to be secure in one's own identity and be able to open up and compromise with another person. Inability to do this leaves a person isolated and unable to connect (Erikson, 1979).

Identity redefinition continues into the later stages of life. In the state of generativity, individuals, having found an intimate long-term relationship with another person and an established career, assume a role of responsibility toward the next generation of people. Part of the parental role is in providing nutrition and educating the future generation to be functional members of society; it is society's responsibility to take care of its young (seen in the individual level), thereby ensuring the future continuity of society. This is not just a parental role; it is an obligation shared by all members of society at this stage of adulthood for the good of society as a whole. A healthy way to cope with this stage is for individuals to feel that they are contributing members of society, doing work that benefits those around them, and preserving society and the environment for those who will come after them. An important part of that is not only finding a life partner but also working out what one wants to do. Bandura (1997) saw this as a person's sense of self, and referred to it as a sense of self-efficacy, which causes one to have a deep sense of satisfaction in what one can do effectively. Clearly, if people feel that they are capable of causing something good to happen, that affects their self-confidence in a positive way, and that feeling becomes an internal motivator to do more. However, anyone who does not achieve a positive sense of self will live for his or her own pleasure; this is a selfish existence, which will ultimately prevent that person from developing further and continuing to reshape his or her identity or engage in self-redefinition.

The last stage is the stage where the person's portrait of self or identity is complete. One can look back on one's life and see it as a narrative or autobiography from which to draw conclusions about oneself. Erikson (1979) referred to this stage as ego integrity. Old age is associated with a decline in energy and influence, and a thinning briefcase of responsibilities and ambitions. A person at this stage has to readjust and come to an acceptance that the end is imminent; one has to feel satisfied with the life lived and embrace it with all its ups and downs. It is important for people to affirm the life they have lived and be content in the knowledge that, given a chance, they would live it over again. If one cannot unify all aspects of one's identity and sense of self at this stage of life, there is a risk of falling into the abyss of despair and depression (Erikson, 1979).

The implications of Erikson's (1979) stage theory are that character and personal identity are not fixed and essential but developed by experience. The self, one's personal identity, is the constellation of memories that is present in consciousness. To illustrate, Locke (1690) gave an example: Suppose we have a peasant and a prince who go to sleep. The peasant is in the field and the prince is in his castle. Suppose that magically all the memories of the peasant's consciousness are transferred to that of the prince, and vice versa. The next morning, both the peasant and the prince are the same men, but not the same people. Therefore, by changing the content of the mind (the soul, in religious terms), you change the person. The true identity of the person depends on the arrangement of experiences that constitutes the reservoir of memories by which we know who we are, and by which others come to know who we are, except that from Erikson's (1979) perspective these are not just memories, they are life experiences, so to speak.

### *Skinner vs Erikson' Theories*

Both Skinner and Erikson saw culture and environment are the source of the development, nurture rather than nature or biologically development. However, Skinner's focus was on the culture's conditioning for the individual whereas Erikson saw the culture and social or environment circumstances are present the crises to the individual's development. The strength of Erikson's theory is that it became the source of the idea of life span development. It started the study of adult development and aging. It impacted the study

of the personality as continuous process of the development, human being is constantly changing. The weakness of Erikson's theory is in its being descriptive of what is happening in most people's lives and lack of explanation of the process of how and why it is happening. It is similar to Skinner's idea that he ignored the mental process. Practical of the theory Behaviorism is the more explicit theory that we see in our daily life in the way of education and training.

### *Piaget's Cognitive Developmental Theory Vs Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory*

According to Berger (1994), Piaget recognizes four stages of cognitive development. In the sensory motor stage, from birth to 2 years of age, the child senses the world and understands that its actions change the objects of the external world being acting upon. In this stage the child has no perception of hidden things and will always consider an object to be new if it has been hidden and revealed. In the operational stages (2–4 and 4–7 years old, where language becomes available to the child as a medium for exploring the external world) the child can think in terms of images. If an object goes behind one side of a blanket, the child expects the same image to come out from the other end, if something else appears the child will show an expression of surprise. In this stage the child lacks the concept of conservation. However, the child will master this during the stage of concrete operations (7–13 years old) as the child starts understanding logical operations but does not yet think in abstraction, the process the child will master in adolescence. This latter stage Piaget called formal operation, where the individual becomes a young cognizer, and fully understands the concepts of analogy and metaphor.

According to Berk (2008), Piaget's Stage Theory of cognitive development rejects the idea that cognitive development is a continuous affair involving a gradual accumulation of the same kinds of skills, rather it emphasizes distinctly the significant qualitative changes of how thoughts are organized and how the external world is understood. It holds that at a key moment of development a certain cognitive skill appears in the infant's dealing with the external world. The concept of schema is the focal point of this theory. It is the unit of knowledge. The schema is the building block upon which further knowledge is systematically erected. It comes about as a result of the infant's actual experiences with external world. Through these experiences the child develops its own schema. For example, the sucking schema is a natural ability the child is born with, and the child continues mouthing or sucking any object found in the environment. Objects that do not comply with or gratify this behavior (through trial and error) cannot be absorbed into the existing schema and this will give rise to a new cognitive basis that the infant must possess for knowledge to proceed. In this case the infant assimilates new experiences into existing cognitive schema in a generalizational process. Any objects that gratify the sucking behavior or schema can be assimilated. If the behavior cannot be assimilated then the infant will engage another cognitive process, the accommodation, to accommodate the environmental challenges that resisted assimilation. Therefore, the child learns that the cup is not something to eat or bang, but something that contains water to drink.

Vygotsky and Piaget focused on different aspects of development. While one emphasized the importance of social interaction as a developing factor, the other saw environmental exploration as important. Biological development is the primary developmental element. In other words, Vygotsky saw the individual, like Piaget, as a cognitive apparatus. Cognitive development, in both theories, is a result of interacting with the external world. Piaget saw this system as primarily dependant on interaction with the world its objects. Vygotsky focused on nurture more than nature, and Piaget more on nature than nurture. For example, Piaget held that a child's mental faculty passes through stages in development, and the child cannot learn a skill if it is above its cognitive ability, which is determined by age. On the other hand, Vygotsky saw development as a continuous process, not determined biologically but rather by training and interacting with others, through enforcement and encouragement, and adult assistance. Through scaffolding, the child attempts to learn a skill even if it is, in Piaget's view, above the child's mental capability at a certain age. Accordingly, Vygotsky believes in guidance and more teacher interaction, while Piaget sees little need for teachers, assuming the child is capable of discovering the world alone.

Vogotsky's sociocultural theory which focused on cultural influence in child development. Vogotsky looked at how the values, cultural beliefs and customs are passed among individuals of the same culture

or society, from the older generation to the younger generation. This passing of culture is clear in language development. Vogotsky believed that the development in children being continuous and discontinuous depended on their cultural influences. Vogotsky focused on the role of nurture in development.

#### *Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory*

Bronfenbrenner's approach in Ecological system theory saw the child developing affected by many levels of environment. Bronfenbrenner recognized the environment as a major factor of child development. His theory divided environment's influence on the child growth into four levels: Microsystem, which includes the child and his or her physical environment; Mesosystem is the level of relationships in the environment, to include the immediate family and neighbors as well as school, which influence the child directly. Exosystem, the social settings beyond the direct influence on the child, and Macrosystem refers to the whole social, values, customs and beliefs which constitute the child social identity or rather national identity. The implication that Bronfenbrenner's theory holds is the importance of nurture which result in not just individual differences, individual identity but also cultural identity. Bronfenbrenner focused more on nurture as a developing factor than biology. (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). The implication that Bronfenbrenner's theory is that nurture is important because it results in individual differences and individual identity.

#### *Kohlberg's Moral Development Theory*

Like Piaget, Kohlberg held that moral reasoning is influenced in a large extent by cognitive development. Kohlberg's model is consistence to the level of maturation of the individual. (Kohlberg, Turiel,1971). So, the moral responsibilities or obligations are consistent with the individual level of cognitive development. Therefore, we see the child's moral actions depend in a greater extent in physical reward or physical punishment. In the second stage, in adolescence, the individual has already copied the social norms and starts to act accordingly. In the third level, in adulthood, a person becomes in addition to the two previous levels a principled individual. He or she can start justifying for certain rules and follow them. Briefly put, Kohlberg's theory is acceptable in the sense that the human mind cannot grasp and responsible (which entails understanding) all the values which forms a social identity in an early age. Gilligan's theory was an expansion to Kohlberg's theory. However, Gilligan saw that male and female have different perspectives about morality in " different voice". Women think in term caring and compassion and men think in term of justice and rights.

Kohlberg's moral development theory that maturation is necessary to understanding and able to justify the individual's sense of justice or moral to know the meaning of the individual and social sense of moral and where they can work hand in hand without contradiction or conflict. (Kohlberg, 1984). Moreover, Kohlberg's theory saw the sense of justice as a crucial aspect of moral choices; however, he ignored basic human feelings and sense of sympathy as important factors that create moral balance and influence the understanding of justice. And, Kohlberg levels of moral development follow the cognitive development of the individual throughout life. Briefly put, Kohlberg's theory is acceptable in the sense that the human mind cannot grasp and responsible (which entails understanding) all the values which forms a social identity in an early age.

## **Conclusion**

#### *Recommendations*

The child naturally reorganizes his or her behavior according to the environmental and social changes. Growth is not only constant following the genetics but also influenced by the child surroundings. Following the behaviorist approach, parents or caregivers can educate children to replace negative behaviors with positive ones. In doing so, parents or caregivers may continue to encourage and reinforce positive behaviors, thus helping the child elicit additional similar responses. Accordingly, educators should give a child a chance for experiment, for exploring the world by themselves. At the same time they should offer guidance and support for their students. In my assessment, one should use both Vygotsky and Piaget's

theories since they both offer two complementary theories like the concept of nature and nurture are two aspects of development complementing each other. Therefore, educators should use both aspects of instruction and provide skill complying with the level of maturation. This way the child progress gradually and without frustration. Moreover, Kohlberg's theory may not be applied to other cultures since it applied to Western cultures, Kohlberg's theory organized and structured and broken down to stages which make it easy to understand. Addition to that, I see parenting styles could impact their children's choice to make a moral decision. Parents are role model for their children. Children see what their parent do they imitate them immediately. In addition to that, it is important that parent to set example to their children to imitate. For example, talk to their children about what is right and wrong or bad or good. It is important point for educators and other professionals working with children, "research-based or evidence-based" practices are consistently emphasized in both instruction and intervention. It is important that what professionals do with children has a research base to show that it is useful and effective, so that professionals emphasize children's natural abilities and help them meet their full potential.

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