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Psychology Study Material: Human Development and Development Continuous or Discontinuous

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Human Development

Biological sense: progressive change in size, shape, and function, of the body during the life span; the genetic potentials are translated into functioning adult systems



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- Psychological sense: the ways by which physical, cognitive and psychosocial characteristics change over life span; such development is complex, systematic, and age- related
- Developmental changes can be quantitative and easy to measure such as height and weight and the expansion of vocabulary
- Developmental changes can be qualitative i.e.. , changes in kinds that are more complex and involve “leaps” in functioning. these distinguish a crawling baby from a walking child, a nonverbal child from a talking child.

self- absorbed adolescent from a mature adult Psychological changes include the growth of:

- Learning
- Cognition
- Intelligence
- Emotional maturity
- Creativity
- Sociability
- Morality ... and much more

These small leaps are based upon small series of steps that we continue to take throughout our life span Issues of Interest to Developmental Psychologists.

Is Development Continuous or Discontinuous?

- Some psychologists believed that human functioning does not undergo fundamental changes but instead changes gradually in its efficiency and working capacity; initially a child spoke a few words but gradually these words become longer and more complicated, increasing the child’s ability to remember and use them in sentences.
- Other psychologists maintain that changes in development reflect psychological processes that mediate human functioning. These are qualitatively unique stages, in which the evolution of one stage may depend on the traits of the preceding stages. e. g. Roger Brown, psychologist, maintains that in the process of language acquisition, a child progresses systematically in five steps or stages. Each stage has its own set of rules and skills from which a higher level of language acquisition takes place. Jean Piaget maintained that cognitive development occurs in a series of steps in which the child acquires and uses unique sets of cognitive processes that allow the child to think in identifiable ways.

Is Development General or Specific?

- Many aspects of functioning show simultaneous changes; a co-occurrence of change in different situations.
- Changes occur in specific areas of functioning that do not occur in other level of functioning.
- Development may remain isolated in specific domains. e. g. Video game mastery in young boys

Is Development Stable or Changing?

- In some respects, development is stable and stays there for very long, whereas in some ways it keeps moving.
- Temporal aspect: degree of stability or change across the lifespan
- Situational aspect: degree of stability or change across a wide variety of experiences. e. g. Aggressive behaviour in children.

Human's Active or Passive Beings?

Psychologists maintain that humans are active recipients as well as participants in their course of development. Man seeks to understand the strategies that he can adopt in order to influence development Jean Piaget emphasized the active participation of the child in acquiring cognitive skills_____ acquisition of knowledge and ability to use it effectively. Some philosophers believed that humans are passive beings whose development is entirely dependent on the environmental stimuli/forces. These conditions may be internal i.e.. food, water, companionship etc or external i.e.. previously experienced reward or punishment. These psychologists tend to view differences in the patterns of development in which an individual is exposed to different environmental situations.

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