# Theories of Child Development

## Introduction

*Welcome to this article that its focus on theories of child development. There are many theories talking about how children grow and develop, but in this article we will focus on a few theories such as Jean Piaget and Brofenbrenner theories, Sigmund Freud and Erik Erikson theories, Albert Bandura, Pavlov and Skiner. Others still focus on moral development like the ones b**y Kohlberg, Bandura and Piaget.*

## Brofenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory

Urie Bronfenbrenner is generally regarded as one of the world's leading scholars in the field of developmental psychology. His Ecological Systems Theory holds that development reflects the influence of several environmental systems, and it identifies five environmental systems. Bronfenbrenner (1979) conceptualised the child’s environment as having different interconnected layers nested together with agents that influence the child’s development with varying degrees of directness. The systems model involving micro, meso, exo, macro and chronosystems are arranged in rings from those that have direct influence to the child to those whose influence are distant with indirect influence to the child (McGuckin & Minto, 2014).

The systems include:

* *Micro system*which refers to the setting in which the individual lives. These contexts include the person's family, peers, school, and neighborhood. It is in the micro system that the most direct interactions with social agents take place; with parents, peers, and teachers. The individual is not a passive recipient of experiences in these settings, but someone who helps to construct the settings.
* *Mesosystem* refers to the relationships between micro systems or connections between contexts. Examples are the relation of family experiences to school experiences, school experiences to church experiences, and family experiences to peer experiences. For example, children whose parents have rejected them may have difficulty developing positive relations with teachers.
* *Exosystem:* This involves links between a social setting in which the individual does not have an active role and the individual's immediate context. For example, a husband's or child's experience at home may be influenced by a mother's experiences at work. The mother might receive a promotion that requires more travel, which might increase conflict with the husband and change patterns of interaction with the child.
* *Macrosystem:* Describes the culture in which individuals live. Cultural contexts include developing and industrialized countries, socioeconomic status, poverty, and ethnicity.
* *Chronosystem:* This refers to the patterning of environmental events and transitions over the life course, as well as sociohistorical circumstances. For example, divorce is one transition. Researchers have found that the negative effects of divorce on children often peak in the first year after the divorce. By two years after the divorce, family interaction is less chaotic and more stable. As an example of sociohistorical circumstances, consider how the opportunities for women to pursue a career have increased during the last thirty years (Santrock, 2007).

Unlike Bronfenbrenner who described the ecological systems as nested within one another, Neal and Neal (2013) maintain that the ecological systems are networked where each system is defined in terms of the social relationships surrounding the child and the different levels relating to one another in an overlapping but non-nested way. They further argue that the family is a microsystem where the child has direct experiences and interactions with family members face to face. Mesosystem according to them, could involve the interaction between the parents and teachers about the child’s behaviour both at home and in school in relation to his/her education (Neal and Neal, 2013).

Exosystems involve settings that influence the child’s life but in which the child does not directly participate. For instance, a child may not be involved in making the education policies but these policies will influence the child’s school experiences. The macrosystems involves the broad cultural influences or ideologies that influence the child’s educational experiences. For instance, societies that emphasize on the importance of teachers being accountable on the standards of education in the community school, will have an implication on how children will perform in their education.

The person's own biology may be considered part of the microsystem; thus the theory has sometimes been referred to "Bio-Ecological Systems Theory." As per this theoretical construction, each system contains roles, norms and rules which may shape psychological development. For example, an inner city family faces many challenges which an affluent family in a gated community does not, and vice versa. The inner city family is more likely to experience environmental hardships, such as teratogens and crime. On the other hand the sheltered family is more likely to lack the nurturing support of extended family (Vander, Crandell, Crandell, 2007).

Since its publication in 1979, Bronfenbrenner's major statement of this theory, *The Ecology of Human Development*(Bronfenbrenner, 1979) has had widespread influence on the way psychologists and others approach the study of human beings and their environments. As a result of his groundbreaking work in human ecology, these environments from the family to economic and political structures have come to be viewed as part of the life course from childhood through adulthood.

There are many different theories related to human development. But the ecological theory emphasizes environmental factors as playing the major role to development. This theory does vary from culture to culture (Santrock, 2007).

## Erik Erikson’s Theory of Personality Development

According to Erickson our personality traits come in opposites. We think of ourselves as either optimistic or pessimistic, independent or dependent, emotional or unemotional, adventurous or cautious, leader or follower, aggressive or passive. Many of these are inborn temperamental traits, but other characteristics, such as feeling either competent or inferior, appear to be learned, based on the challenges and support we receive while growing up.The man who did a great deal to explore this concept is Erik Erikson. Although he was influenced by Freud, he believed that the ego exists from birth and that behavior is not totally defensive. Based in part on his study of Sioux Indians on a reservation, Erikson became aware of the massive influence of culture on behavior and placed more emphasis on the external world, such as depression and wars. He felt the course of development is determined by the interaction of the body (genetic biological programming), mind (psychological), and cultural (ethos) influences. Erickson organized life into eight stages of development that extend from birth to death. However in this sub-topic we will cover his theory up the childhood stage.

*Stage 1: Infancy Birth to 18 Months: Trust vs. Mistrust*

Erikson also referred to infancy as the oral sensory stage where the major emphasis is on the mother's positive and loving care for the child, with a big emphasis on visual contact and touch. If the child passes successfully through this period of life, he/she will learn to *trust* that life is basically okay and have basic confidence in the future. If he/she fails to experience trust and is constantly frustrated because his/her needs are not met, he/she may end up with a deep seated feeling of worthlessness and a *mistrust* of the world in general.Incidentally, many studies of suicides and suicide attempts point to the importance of the early years in developing the basic belief that the world is trustworthy and that every individual has a right to be here. Not surprisingly, the most significant relationship is with the maternal parent, or whoever is the most significant and constant caregiver.

*Stage 2: Early Childhood 18 Months to 3 Years: Autonomy vs. Shame*

During this stage children learn to master skills for themselves. Not only do they learn to walk, talk and feed themselves, they are learning finer motor development as well as the much appreciated toilet training. Here they have the opportunity to build self-esteem and *autonomy* as they gain more control over their bodies and acquire new skills, learning right from wrong. And one of the skills during the terrible two's is the ability to use the powerful word "NO!" that enables them develops the important skills of the will.It is also during this stage, that children can be very vulnerable. If they are shamed in the process of toilet training or in learning other important skills, they feel great *shame and doubt* of their capabilities and suffer low self-esteem as a result. The most significant relationships are with parents.

*Stage 3: Play Age 3 to 5 Years: Initiative vs. Guilt*

During this period children experience a desire to copy the adults around them and take *initiative* in creating play situations. They make up stories with objects, toy phones and miniature cars, playing out roles in a trial universe, experimenting with the blueprint for what they believe it means to be an adult. They also begin exploring the world by using the "*WHY* questions". While Erikson was influenced by Freud, he downplays biological sexuality in favor of the psychosocial features of conflict between the child and parents. Nevertheless, he said that at this stage children usually become involved in the classic "Oedipal struggle" and resolve this struggle through "social role identification." If they are frustrated over natural desires and goals, they may easily experience *guilt*. The most significant relationship is with the basic family.

*Stage 4: School Age: 6 to 12 Years: Industry vs. Inferiority*

During this stage, children are capable of learning, creating and accomplishing numerous new skills and knowledge, thus developing a sense of *industry*. This is also a very social stage of development and if they experience unresolved feelings of inadequacy and *inferiority* among their peers, they can have serious problems in terms of competence and self-esteem.As the world expands a bit, their most significant relationship is with the school and neighborhood. Parents are no longer the complete authorities they once were, although they are still important.

## Sigmund Freud’s Psychosexual Theory of Development

According to Sigmund Freud, personality is mostly established by the age of five. Early experiences play a large role in personality development and continue to influence behavior later in life. Freud's theory of psychosexual development is one of the best known, but also one of the most controversial. Freud believed that personality develops through a series of childhood stages during which the pleasure seeking energies of the id become focused on certain erogenous areas. This psychosexual energy, or libido, was described as the driving force behind behavior.If these psychosexual stages are completed successfully, the result is a healthy personality. If certain issues are not resolved at the appropriate stage, fixation can occur. A fixation is a persistent focus on an earlier psychosexual stage. Until this conflict is resolved, the individual will remain stuck in this stage. For example, a person who is fixated at the oral stage may be over dependent on others and may seek oral stimulation through smoking, drinking, or eating. Freud came up with five stages of development as outlined below.

*Stage 1: The Oral Stage*

During the oral stage, the infant's primary source of interaction occurs through the mouth, and therefore the rooting and sucking reflexesare especially important. The mouth is vital for eating, and the infant derives pleasure from oral stimulation through gratifying activities such as tasting and sucking. Because the infant is entirely dependent upon caregivers (who are responsible for feeding the child), the infant also develops a sense of trust and comfort through this oral stimulation. The primary conflict at this stage is the weaning process where the child must become less dependent upon caregivers. If fixation occurs at this stage, Freud believed the individual would have issues with dependency or aggression. Oral fixation can result in problems with drinking, eating, smoking or nail biting.

*Stage 2: The Anal Stage*

During the anal stage, Freud believed that the primary focus of the libido was on controlling bladder and bowel movements. The major conflict at this stage is toilet training.The child has to learn to control his or her bodily needs. Developing this control leads to a sense of accomplishment and independence. According to Freud, success at this stage is dependent upon the way in which parents approach toilet training. Parents who utilize praise and rewards for using the toilet at the appropriate time encourage positive outcomes and help children feel capable and productive. Freud also believed that positive experiences during this stage served as the basis for people to become competent, productive and creative adults.

However, not all parents provide the support and encouragement that children need during this stage. Some parents' instead punish, ridicule or shame a child for accidents. According to Freud, inappropriate parental responses can result in negative outcomes. If parents take an approach that is too lenient, Freud suggested that an anal expulsive personality could develop in which the individual has a messy, wasteful or destructive personality. If parents are too strict or begin toilet training too early, Freud believed that an anal retentive personality develops in which the individual is stringent, orderly, rigid and obsessive

*Stage 3: The Phallic Stage*

During the phallic stage, the primary focus of the libido is on the genitals. Children also discover the differences between males and females. Freud asserts that boys begin to view their fathers as a rival for the mother’s affections. The Oedipus complex describes these feelings of wanting to possess the mother and the desire to replace the father. However, the child also fears that he will be punished by the father for these feelings, a fear Freud termed castration anxiety. The term Electra complex has been used to describe a similar set of feelings experienced by young girls. Freud, however, believed that girls instead experience penis envy. Eventually, the child realizes the conflict and he/she begins to identify with the same sex parent as a means of vicariously possessing the other parent. For girls, however, Freud noted that penis envy was never fully resolved and that all women remain somehow fixated on this stage. Psychologists such as Karen Horney disputed this theory, calling it both inaccurate and demeaning to women. Instead, Horney proposed that men experience feelings of inferiority because they cannot give birth to children.

*Stage 4: The Latent Period*

During the latent period, the libido interests are suppressed. The development of the ego and superego contribute to this period of calm. The stage begins around the time that children enter into school and become more concerned with peer relationships, hobbies, and other interests. The latent period is a time of exploration in which the sexual energy is still present, but it is directed into other areas such as intellectual pursuits and social interactions. This stage is important in the development of social and communication skills and self-confidence.

*Stage 5: The Genital Stage*

During the final stage of psychosexual development, the individual develops a strong sexual interest in the opposite sex. Where in earlier stages the focus was solely on individual needs, interest in the welfare of others grows during this stage. If the other stages have been completed successfully, the individual should now be well-balanced, warm and caring. The goal of this stage is to establish a balance between the various life areas.

## The Structural Model of Personality: The Id, Ego and Superego

According to Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory of personality, personality is composed of three elements known as the id, the ego and the superego which work together to create complex human behaviors.

*The Id*

The id is the only component of personality that is present from birth. This aspect of personality is entirely unconscious and includes the instinctive and primitive behaviors. According to Freud, the id is the source of all psychic energy, making it the primary component of personality. The id is driven by the pleasure principle, which strives for immediate gratification of all desires, wants, and needs. If these needs are not satisfied immediately, the result is a state of anxiety or tension. For example, an increase in hunger or thirst should produce an immediate attempt to eat or drink. The id is very important early in life, because it ensures that an infant's needs are met. If the infant is hungry or uncomfortable, he or she will cry until the demands of the id are met. However, immediately satisfying these needs is not always realistic or even possible. If we were ruled entirely by the pleasure principle, we would find ourselves grabbing things we want out of other people's hands to satisfy our own cravings. This sort of behavior would be both disruptive and socially unacceptable. According to Freud, the id tries to resolve the tension created by the pleasure principle through the primary process, which involves forming a mental image of the desired object as a way of satisfying the need.

*The Ego*

The ego is the component of personality that is responsible for dealing with reality. According to Freud, the ego develops from the id and ensures that the impulses of the id can be expressed in a manner acceptable in the real world. The ego functions in both the conscious, preconscious, and unconscious mind. The ego operates based on the reality principle, which strives to satisfy the id's desires in realistic and socially appropriate ways. The reality principle weighs the costs and benefits of an action before deciding to act upon or abandon impulses. In many cases, the id's impulses can be satisfied through a process of delayed gratification. The ego will eventually allow the behavior, but only in the appropriate time and place. The ego also discharges tension created by unmet impulses through the secondary process, in which the ego tries to find an object in the real world that matches the mental image created by the id's primary process.

*The Superego*

The last component of personality to develop is the superego. The superego is the aspect of personality that holds all of our internalized moral standards and ideals that we acquire from both parents and society our sense of right and wrong. The superego provides guidelines for making judgments. According to Freud, the superego begins to emerge at around age five. There are two parts of the superego: The *ego ideal* which includes the rules and standards for good behaviors. These behaviors include those which are approved by parental and other authority figures. Obeying these rules leads to feelings of pride, value and accomplishment.The *conscience* that includes information about things that are viewed as bad by parents and society. These behaviors are often forbidden and lead to bad consequences, punishments or feelings of guilt and remorse.The superego acts to perfect and civilize our behavior. It works to suppress all unacceptable urges of the id and struggles to make the ego act upon idealistic standards rather that upon realistic principles. The superego is present in the conscious, preconscious and unconscious.

*The Interaction of the Id, Ego and Superego*

With so many competing forces, it is easy to see how conflict might arise between the id, ego and superego. Freud used the term ego strength to refer to the ego's ability to function despite these dueling forces. A person with good ego strength is able to effectively manage these pressures, while those with too much or too little ego strength can become too unyielding or too disrupting. According to Freud, the key to a healthy personality is a balance between the id, the ego, and the superego.

## Social Development Theory by Vygosky

The Vygosky argues that social interaction precedes development. Consciousness and cognition are the end products of socialization and social behavior. Vygotsky’s theory is one of the foundations of constructivism. It asserts three major themes:

*Social interaction plays a fundamental role in the process of cognitive development*. In contrast to Jean Piaget’s understanding of child development (in which development necessarily precedes learning), Vygotsky felt that social learning precedes development. He asserts that every function in the child’s cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological) and then inside the child (intrapsychological) (Vygotsky, 1978).

*The More Knowledgeable Other (MKO).* The MKO refers to anyone who has a better understanding or a higher ability level than the learner, with respect to a particular task, process, or concept. The MKO is normally thought of as being a teacher, coach, or older adult, but the MKO could also be peers, a younger person, or even computers.

*The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).* The ZPD is the distance between a student’s ability to perform a task under adult guidance and/or with peer collaboration and the student’s ability of solving the problem independently. According to Vygotsky, learning occur in this zone.

Vygotsky focused on the connections between people and the sociocultural context in which they act and interact in shared experiences (Crawford, 1996). According to him humans use tools that develop from a culture such as speech and writing, to mediate their social environments. Initially children develop these tools to serve solely as social functions, ways to communicate needs. Vygotsky believed that the internalization of these tools led to higher thinking skills.

Many schools have traditionally held a transmissionist or instructionist model in which a teacher or lecturer ‘transmits’ information to students. In contrast, Vygotsky’s theory promotes learning contexts in which students play an active role in learning. Roles of the teacher and student are therefore shifted, as a teacher should collaborate with his or her students in order to help facilitate meaning construction in students. Learning therefore becomes a reciprocal experience for the students and teacher.

## Social Learning Theory by Albert Bandura

The social learning theory by Bandura emphasizes the importance of observing and modeling the behaviors, attitudes, and emotional reactions of others. Bandura (1977) postulates that learning would be exceedingly laborious, not to mention hazardous, if people had to rely solely on the effects of their own actions to inform them what to do. Fortunately, most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling. From observing others one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action.

Social learning theory explains human behavior in terms of continuous reciprocal interaction between cognitive, behavioral, and environmental influences. The component processes underlying observational learning are: (1) Attention, including modeled events (distinctiveness, affective valence, complexity, prevalence, functional value) and observer characteristics (sensory capacities, arousal level, perceptual set, past reinforcement), (2) Retention, including symbolic coding, cognitive organization, symbolic rehearsal, motor rehearsal, (3) Motor Reproduction, including physical capabilities, self-observation of reproduction, accuracy of feedback, and (4) Motivation, including external, vicarious and self-reinforcement.

Because it encompasses attention, memory and motivation, social learning theory spans both cognitive and behavioral frameworks. Bandura’s work is related to the theories of Vygosky and Lave which also emphasize the central role of social learning.

*Principles of social learning*

1. The highest level of observational learning is achieved by first organizing and rehearsing the modeled behavior symbolically and then enacting it overtly. Coding modeled behavior into words, labels or images results in better retention than simply observing.

2. Individuals are more likely to adopt a modeled behavior if it results in outcomes they value.

3. Individuals are more likely to adopt a modeled behavior if the model is similar to the observer and has admired status and the behavior has functional value.

## Piaget’s Theory of Cognitive Development

## Key Concepts in Piaget’s Theory

*Schemas*- A schema according to Piaget describes both the mental and physical actions involved in understanding and knowing. Schemas are categories of knowledge that help us to interpret and understand the world.In his view, a schema includes both a category of knowledge and the process of obtaining that knowledge. As experiences happen, this new information is used to modify, add to, or change previously existing schemas.For example, a child may have a schema about a type of animal, such as a dog. If the child's sole experience has been with small dogs, a child might believe that all dogs are small, furry, and have four legs. Suppose then that the child encounters a very large dog. The child will take in this new information, modifying the previously existing schema to include this new information.

*Assimilation*- The process of taking in new information into our previously existing schema's is known as assimilation. The process is somehow subjective, because we tend to modify experience or information to fit in with our preexisting beliefs. In the example above, seeing a dog and labeling it "dog" is an example of assimilating the animal into the child's dog schema.

*Accommodation*- Another part of adaptation involves changing or altering our existing schemas in light of new information, a process known as accommodation. Accommodation involves altering existing schemas, or ideas, as a result of new information or new experiences. New schemas may also be developed during this process.

*Equilibration* - Piaget asserts that all children try to strike a balance between assimilation and accommodation, which is achieved through a mechanism Piaget called equilibration. As children progress through the stages of cognitive development, it is important to maintain a balance between applying previous knowledge (assimilation) and changing behavior to account for new knowledge (accommodation). Equilibration helps explain how children are able to move from one stage of thought into the next.

## Stages of Cognitive Development According to Piaget

## Stage 1: Sensorimotor Stage

The first stage of Piaget’s theory lasts from birth to approximately age two and is centered on the infant trying to make sense of the world. During the sensorimotor stage, an infant’s knowledge of the world is limited to their sensory perceptions and motor activities. Behaviors are limited to simple motor responses caused by sensory stimuli. Children utilize skills and abilities they were born with, such as looking, sucking, grasping, and listening, to learn more about the environment. The development of object permanence is one of the most important accomplishments at the sensorimotor stage of development. Object permanence is a child's understanding that objects continue to exist even though they cannot be seen or heard.

The sensorimotor stage can be divided into six separate sub stages that are characterized by the development of a new skill.

*Reflexes (0-1 month):*During this sub stage, the child understands the environment purely through inborn reflexes such as sucking and looking.

*Primary Circular Reactions (1-4 months):*This sub stage involves coordinating sensation and new schemas. For example, a child may suck his or her thumb by accident and then later intentionally repeat the action. These actions are repeated because the infant finds them pleasurable.

*Secondary Circular Reactions (4-8 months):*During this sub stage, the child becomes more focused on the world and begins to intentionally repeat an action in order to trigger a response in the environment. For example, a child will purposefully pick up a toy in order to put it in his or her mouth.

*Coordination of Reactions (8-12 months):*During this sub stage, the child starts to show clearly intentional actions. He/she may also combine schemas in order to achieve a desired effect. Children begin exploring the environment around them and will often imitate the observed behavior of others. The understanding of objects also begins during this time and children begin to recognize certain objects as having specific qualities. For example, a child might realize that a rattle will make a sound when shaken.

*Tertiary Circular Reactions (12-18 months):*At this sub-stage children begin a period of trial and error experimentation. For example, a child may try out different sounds or actions as a way of getting attention from a caregiver.

*Early Representational Thought (18-24 months):*Children begin to develop symbols to represent events or objects in the world in the final sensorimotor sub stage. During this time, children begin to move towards understanding the world through mental operations rather than purely through actions.

## Preoperational Stage

The preoperational stage occurs between ages two and six. Language development is one of the hallmarks of this period. Piaget noted that children in this stage do not yet understand concrete logic, cannot mentally manipulate information, and are unable to take the point of view of other people, which he termed egocentrism.Children also become increasingly adept at using symbols, as evidenced by the increase in playing and pretending. For example, a child is able to use an object to represent something else, such as pretending a broom is a horse. Role playing also becomes important during the preoperational stage. Children often play the roles of "mommy," "daddy," "doctor" and many others.

*Egocentrism:*Piaget used a number of creative and clever techniques to study the mental abilities of children. One of the famous techniques egocentrism involved using a three dimensional display of a mountain scene. Children are asked to choose a picture that showed the scene they had observed. Most children were able to do this with little difficulty. Next, children are asked to select a picture showing what someone else would have observed when looking at the mountain from a different viewpoint. Invariably, children almost always choose the scene showing their own view of the mountain scene. According to Piaget, children experience this difficulty because they are unable to take on another person's perspective.

*Conservation:*Another well-known experiment involves demonstrating a child's understanding of conservation. In one conservation experiment, equal amounts of liquid are poured into two identical containers. The liquid in one container is then poured into a different shaped cup, such as a tall and thin cup, or a short and wide cup. Children are then asked which cup holds the most liquid. Despite seeing that the liquid amounts were equal, children almost always choose the cup that appears fuller. Piaget conducted a number of similar experiments on conservation of number, length, mass, weight, volume, and quantity. He found that few children showed any understanding of conservation prior to the age of five.

## Concrete Operational Stage

The concrete operational stage begins around age seven and continues until approximately age eleven. During this time, children gain a better understanding of mental operations. Children begin thinking logically about concrete events, but have difficulty understanding abstract or hypothetical concepts.

*Logic:*Piaget noted that children in the concrete operational stage were fairly good at the use of inductive logic. Inductive logic involves going from a specific experience to a general principle. On the other hand, children at this age have difficulty using deductive logic, which involves using a general principle to determine the outcome of a specific event.

*Reversibility:*One of the most important developments in this stage is an understanding of reversibility, or awareness that actions can be reversed. An example of this is being able to reverse the order of relationships between mental categories. For example, a child might be able to recognize that his or her dog is a female, that a female is a dog, and that a dog is an animal.

## Formal Operational Stage

The formal operational stage begins at approximately age twelve and lasts into adulthood. During this time, people develop the ability to think about abstract concepts. Skills such as logical thought, deductive reasoning, and systematic planning also emerge during this stage.

*Logic:*Piaget asserted that deductive logic becomes important during the formal operational stage. Deductive logic requires the ability to use a general principle to determine a specific outcome. This type of thinking involves hypothetical situations and is often required in science and mathematics.

*Abstract Thought:*While children tend to think very concretely and specifically in earlier stages, the ability to think about abstract concepts emerges during the formal operational stage. Instead of relying solely on previous experiences, children begin to consider possible outcomes and consequences of actions. This type of thinking is important in long term planning.

*Problem Solving:*In earlier stages, children used trial and error to solve problems. During the formal operational stage, the ability to systematically solve a problem in a logical and methodical way emerges. Children at the formal operational stage of cognitive development are often able to quickly plan an organized approach to solving a problem.

While Piaget did not specifically apply his theory to education, many educational programs are built upon the belief that children should be taught at the level for which they are developmentally prepared.In addition to this, a number of instructional strategies have been derived from Piaget's work. These strategies include providing a supportive environment, utilizing social interactions and peer teaching, and helping children see fallacies and inconsistencies in their thinking (Driscoll, 1994).

## Kohlberg’ Theory of Moral Development

Moral development is a topic of interest in both psychology and education. Psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg modified and expanded upon Jean Piaget's work to form a theory that explained the development of moral reasoning. Piaget described a two stage process of moral development, while Kohlberg theory of moral development outlined six stages within three different levels. Kohlberg extended Piaget’s theory, proposing that moral development is a continual process that occurs throughout the lifespan.

*The Heinz Dilemma*

Kohlberg based his theory upon research and interviews with groups of young children. A series of moral dilemmas were presented to children, who were then interviewed to determine the reasoning behind their judgments of each scenario. The following is one example of the dilemmas Kohlberg presented.

*Heinz Steals the Drug*

In Europe, a woman was near death from a special kind of cancer. There was one drug that the doctors thought might save her. It was a form of radium that a druggist in the same town had recently discovered. The drug was expensive to make, but the druggist was charging ten times what the drug cost him to make. He paid $200 for the radium and charged $2,000 for a small dose of the drug. The sick woman's husband, Heinz, went to everyone he knew to borrow the money, but he could only get together about $ 1,000 which is half of what it cost. He told the druggist that his wife was dying and asked him to sell it cheaper or let him pay later. But the druggist said: "No, I discovered the drug and I am going to make money from it." So Heinz got desperate and broke into the man's store to steal the drug for his wife. Should the husband have done that? (Kohlberg, 1963)".Kohlberg was not interested so much in the answer to the question of whether Heinz was wrong or right, but in the reasoning for the participant’s decision. The responses were then classified into various stages of reasoning in his theory of moral development.

**Preconventional Morality**

At this level, morality was seen in two stages namely:

*Stage 1: Obedience and Punishment*  
The earliest stage of moral development is especially common in young children, but adults are also capable of expressing this type of reasoning. At this stage, children see rules as fixed and absolute. Obeying the rules is important because it is a means to avoid punishment.

*Stage 2: Individualism and Exchange*

At this stage of moral development, children account for individual points of view and judge actions based on how they serve individual needs. In the Heinz dilemma, children argued that the best course of action was the choice that best served Heinz’s needs. Reciprocity is possible, but only if it serves one's own interests.

**Conventional Morality**

At this level, morality is divided into two stages:

*Stage 3: Interpersonal Relationships*

Often referred to as the "good boy or good girl" orientation, this stage of moral development is focused on living up to social expectations and roles. There is an emphasis on conformity, being "nice," and consideration of how choices influence relationships.

*Stage 4: Maintaining Social Order*

At this stage of moral development, people begin to consider society as a whole when making judgments. The focus is on maintaining law and order by following the rules, doing one’s duty and respecting authority.

**Postconventional Morality**

In level three, morality is also seen in two stages namely:

*Stage 5: Social Contract and Individual Rights*

At this stage, people begin to account for the differing values, opinions and beliefs of other people. Rules of law are important for maintaining a society, but members of the society should agree upon these standards.

*Stage 6: Universal Principles*

Kolhberg’s final level of moral reasoning is based upon universal ethical principles and abstract reasoning. At this stage, people follow these internalized principles of justice, even if they conflict with laws and rules.

*Criticisms of Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development:*

Does moral reasoning necessarily lead to moral behavior? Kohlberg's theory is concerned with moral thinking, but there is a big difference between knowing what we ought to do versus our actual actions.Is justice the only aspect of moral reasoning we should consider? Critics have pointed out that Kohlberg's theory of moral development overemphasizes the concept as justice when making moral choices. Factors such as compassion, caring and other interpersonal feelings may play an important part in moral reasoning.Does Kohlberg's theory overemphasize Western philosophy? Individualistic cultures emphasize personal rights while collectivist cultures stress the importance of society and community. Eastern cultures may have different moral outlooks that Kohlberg's theory does not account for.

## Summary

In this article we have described the various theories of child development. These theories include the ecological system theory by Brofenbrenner, the psychosocial theory by Erik Erikson, the Psychosexual theory by Freud, the social development theory by Vygosky and the social learning theory by Bandura. We have also discussed the cognitive development theory by Piaget and the moral development theories by Kohlberg.These theories can be classified as theories for social development, cognitive development and for moral development in children.

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