

Cognitive Development Theories Program Transcript

NARRATOR: Developmental psychology has a variety of classical and contemporary theories. Dr. Nina Bennett describes some of these theories and their importance in the study of lifespan development.

NINA BENNETT: Cognition, of course, is a theory that was proposed by Jean Piaget. And he talked about how we make sense of our world and we develop schemes. One of the first stages of cognitive development is the sensorimotor stage, and if you break those two words up, you have "senses" and "motor." And so we make sense of our world by moving through our environment and using our senses to develop those schemes. So the more motorized we are, the more we can navigate our environment, the more we can make sense of our world, the more schemes that we can develop. If we have limited motor development, that means we're limited in the space, in the environment, in the area that we can move through, and so that's gonna impact our cognitive development. The second stage is the preoperational stage, the third stage is the concrete operational stage, and then the final stage is the formal operational stage. And you'll notice when you look at Piaget's theory, it begins at birth, his stages, and they end at adolescence. So basically what that says is that our sense of development, when we talk about cognitive development, pretty much is in place by the time we reach adolescence, and then what happens after that as we grow into adulthood is, we simply build on those first four stages. The other thing about Piaget is that he said that those stages work in order. You have to go from one stage to the next stage to the next stage. So you can't necessarily skip a stage. The other thing is that those stages have some variation in them, and so even though the first stage is from birth to two years, a child may move into the second stage maybe at 15 months or 18 months. But what he did say is that development ends; it's done by the time we reach adolescence. Vygotsky is one of my favorite theorists, and the reason why I like Vygotsky so much is because unlike the other theorists, he includes the sociocultural aspect. He includes the impact of culture on cognitive development. One of the things that Vygotsky talked about is that he said that learning takes place in collaboration with other people, that no man is an island unto himself and that children learn better when they are teamed up with other children who have more skills than they do. And so he introduced the concept of scaffolding. And so scaffolding is a teaching strategy that teachers can use to see where a child is and where they need to go. And so I can build on the information that you have. I don't have to repeat the information that you already know. I can assess what you do know and then build on that so that you can go further, and so with Vygotsky, the interesting thing about him is that he looked at the individual as an interactive person in terms of their environment, that their environment has an impact on their cognitive ability, and when we team children up with other children, they tend to want to do as well as that other child that they have been teamed up with. And who better to teach a child how to do something than another child? It's not as intimidating. They want

to learn a little bit more. And so Vygotsky left us with so much that we can draw upon to help us better understand cognitive development.

Information Processing Theories

NINA BENNETT: When you think about information processing, think about a computer. You have your hard drive, and you have the soft drive. And so when researchers develop information processing, it's just what it says: how we process information. We have our mental hardware, and we have our mental software. We have the hardware, our brain, which is what we're born with. It's already pre-wired. But then what we do is, we add information to that that enables us to do the things that we do, that enable us, for example, to go to school and learn our ABCs, that enable us to do a speech, or that enables me to sit here in front of you and to explain to you about human development. That was because of experiences that I've had, and so that adds to the hardware. Now, if the hardware is damaged, in other words, if there's some brain delay, if there's some damage to the brain, it may not work as we would like for it. So that means that the software that I use is going to have to be a little bit different, because the hardware, the hardwiring, has been damaged to some extent.

Developmental Theories

NINA BENNETT: Erik Erikson provided us with eight stages of socioemotional development. The wonderful thing about Erikson is that his stages went all the way to older life, went in to the 60s. And what he said was that at each one of these stages, we experience a crisis or crises and that crises has to be resolved in order for us to move on to the next stage. When we look at the first three stages of socioemotional development, we're looking at children from birth right up to maybe about preschool, and the first three stages: the first stage is trust versus mistrust, the second stage is autonomy versus shame and doubt, and this third stage is initiative versus guilt. And so those three stages are very, very important because they lay the foundation for how we will interact with other people later on in life. Let's look at the first stage. It's trust versus mistrust. This is from birth to about two years. How does the primary caregiver build trust in that infant? It's by meeting their needs. It's by responding to their cries. And remember, he said that--Erikson said that there is a crises. So it's trust versus mistrust. And so I'm at this crossroad. I'm either going to learn to trust the adults in my life, or if I don't resolve that crisis, I'm going to have mistrust of adults in my life. How does this translate to later life? I'm untrusting of adults. The second stage is autonomy versus shame and doubt. Autonomy is about independence. Now you have a toddler who's two years old who's saying, "I can do it. Let me do it. Mine, mine. This is mine." And so do we encourage autonomy, and how do we do that? We encourage autonomy, for example, by allowing them to pick out their clothes that they want to wear. The other way is, when they bring home their scribble from school, we have no idea what it is. It just looks like some scribble on a page, but we want to encourage autonomy, so what do we say? "Oh, my!

Look at that. Tell me what that is. That's a horse? Oh, wow. That is a beautiful horse." Or we can encourage shame and doubt. "That's a horrible picture. I'm not gonna put that on my refrigerator." And then the third stage is initiative versus guilt. Do I want my child to be a self-starter? Do I want them to be motivated to do things on their own, or do I want them to--do I want to cause them to feel guilty about doing things? And so those first three stages are very, very important, and they translate to the interactions that we will have later in life.