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Theories of Human Development

Course Guidebook

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Malcolm W. Watson received his B.A. in Psychology from the University of Utah in 1967. After living in Berlin, Germany, then serving in the Medical Service Corps of the Army in Vietnam, he pursued his graduate education in Developmental Psychology at the University of Denver. He received his Ph.D. in 1977.

Dr. Watson has been on the faculty at Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts, since receiving his Ph.D. He has been Chair of the Psychology Department and is currently a Professor of Psychology and Chair of the Social Science School Council at Brandeis. He has also taught at Boston College and been a member of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Network for the study of transitions in early child development.

Dr. Watson received the first Michael Laban Walzer Award for Excellence in Teaching at Brandeis. He has taught courses on research methods, developmental psychology, theories of development, and the development of play, art, and creativity. His research has been in four areas: the development of symbolic play in children, the development of drawing and art in children, children's understanding of family roles and conflicts, and the causes of aggression and violence in children and adolescents. He has published numerous articles in journals and books and has edited several books. Dr. Watson's research has been funded by the National Institute of Mental Health and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.

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Theories of Human Development

Scope:

This 24-lecture course provides an introduction to six highly influential theories of human development and the theorists who developed each theory. It is difficult to comprehend human nature without understanding our origins and the processes that guide our development from conception to maturity. Thus, the study of human development is a valuable tool, not only for understanding children and helping them to develop optimally but also for understanding ourselves as adults. The key to gaining insights into the phenomena of human development is to organize facts and data into coherent, scientific theories. Without such theories, scientists, including developmental psychologists and other students of human development, would make little progress in devising meaningful studies that further our understanding or in applying what we know in a way to benefit others. These lectures compare the historical and philosophical backgrounds from which each theorist emerged and the domains of development that each theory can explain. By examining the important points of each of the theories, the lectures help the student to compare them and see how they differ, where they converge, and how they complement one another to explain universal patterns of human development, individual differences, and abnormal development. Real-life examples and findings of major scientific studies are used to clarify the main points of the theories. In the end, the student will be prepared to judge which theories are valid and how each theory is valuable in giving us understanding of children and developmental processes.

The first lecture provides an introductory background for the study of the six theories and discusses the value of scientific theories generally. Lecture Two begins a discussion of the history that set the stage for the systematic study of child development. It covers the early history of conceptions of children before any scientific study of them existed. Lecture Three compares two major worldviews of human nature and development, as seen in the thinking of two influential philosophers, Locke and Rousseau. Lecture Four concludes the history of child study and the ways in which the major theories emerged.

The subsequent lectures discuss each of the six theories in turn. Lectures Five through Seven discuss Freud's psychodynamic theory as it applies to child development, particularly to personality development. These lectures

provide insight into the roles of the unconscious, competing drives, and the ways in which a person develops the ability to adapt to various demands from within and from the environment. Lectures Eight through Eleven discuss Erikson's Psycho-social theory and how it developed from Freud's influence to become the first theory to describe development across the entire life span. Lectures Twelve through Fifteen discuss the theory of infant attachment, as developed jointly by Bowlby and Ainsworth, and how this theory explains both early attachments and the development of close relationships throughout the life span. Lectures Sixteen and Seventeen discuss Bandura's social learning theory and his related self-efficacy theory and provide examples of how his theory explains the crucial role of imitation in our learning and socialization. Lectures Eighteen through Twenty-One describe the most influential theory of development that has yet emerged, Piaget's cognitive-developmental theory. The universal processes of development and the stages that Piaget theorized are explained. Lectures Twenty-Two and Twenty-Three describe the last major theory, Vygotsky's cognitive-mediation theory. Vygotsky's theory has emerged as a prominent one today, especially in influencing educational practices. The integrated cognitive and social focus of the theory is described. Lecture Twenty-Four provides a conclusion to the course by discussing how the various theories may be compared and integrated.