CHAPTER

Theory and South African developmental psychology research and literature

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In this chapter we shall examine the theoretical assumptions that drive developmental psychology research and literature in South Africa.

The basic underlying models utilised in developmental research may be described as (a) mechanistic; (b) organismic; (c) contextual and (d) social constructionist. A description of the fundamental premises of each of these will be followed by examples of research that utilise the particular approach. In the discussion, some of the controversies that plague developmental psychology research will be highlighted.

??.1 Introduction

The questions that form the basis for this chapter are:

- What are the theoretical frameworks utilised by South African researchers and authors in developmental psychology?
- How are these theories put to work to highlight issues in people's lives in the South African context?
- What are some of the criticisms that could be levelled at the theories used?

These questions are important in the light of the dominance of Euro-American research in our textbooks and many developmental psychology courses.

It must be made clear from the outset, however, that this chapter is not intended as a comprehensive review of developmental psychology research and literature in South Africa, for two reasons. Firstly, putting boundaries around what counts as developmental psychology, and what does not, proves to be difficult. For example, collecting research on children only is not satisfactory, given the life-span developmental theories. Focussing on work that specifically studies individual development is also not adequate, given the emphasis on the meso-, exo- and chrono-systems of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) approach. Asking the questions 'Which studies concerning children, adolescents, adults, and the aged are relevant, and which not?' and 'Which studies on the family, the school, race, class, cultural issues etc. are relevant and which not?' becomes a tedious, and perhaps not very useful task.

Secondly, researchers in South Africa, contrary to popular belief, are relatively prolific. Collating and summarising all the research in developmental psychology (whatever the boundaries decided upon) exceeds our current scope. In this chapter, therefore, we shall take a broad view of the field in the last fifteen years, discussing the main theoretical trends and illustrating each with examples of research or theoretical writing.

In structuring this chapter I have utilised Overton and Reese's (1973, cited in Widdershoven 1997) distinction between **mechanistic** and **organismic** models of development as well as Lerner's (1986) and Widdershoven's (1997) extension of this to the **contextual** and **narrative** models respectively.

In 1973, Overton and Reese identified two basic metaphors or models that underlay developmental psychology theorising of the time. What they meant by this is that all the theories of human development could broadly be divided into two categories in terms of their underlying philosophical assumptions about the nature of development and the nature of the developing person. These two categories they called mechanistic and organismic (more detail concerning what is meant by each of these is supplied in the relevant sections below). In response to further developments in the field, Lerner (1986) introduced a further category, the contextual model. At a later stage, Widdershoven (1997) discusses a narrative approach to developmental psychology. Although Widdershoven (1997) introduces an important new element to the broad understanding of the basic models underlying developmental theorising, his use of the word 'narrative' is underinclusive. Narrative theory is just one approach within many broadly identified with the **social constructionist** movement in psychology. Thus, for the fourth model we shall propose a social constructionist model.

A number of controversies have plagued work in developmental psychology from its inception. These are usually posed in the form of dualisms: nature versus nurture; continuity versus discontinuity; universality versus relativism; activity versus passivity; risk versus resilience. The questions evolving from these controversies essentially are: To what extent is human development owing to biological/hereditary forces or to environmental and social influences? Is human development an additive process that occurs gradually and continuously, or are there a series of abrupt changes in which the person is elevated to a new and more advanced level of functioning? To what extent do developmental sequences apply to all 'normal' people in all cultures, and to what extent do specific cultural or sub-cultural factors affect development? Are children active in determining the outcome of their development or are they passive recipients of environmental and genetic influences? Are all children exposed to difficult circumstances vulnerable or at risk for developing problems or do some cope well without being negatively affected? These controversies have been debated in the literature for some time now. Many times, however, a researcher may merely assume one or the other position. In this chapter we shall delineate how some of these controversies have been taken up in the South African literature.

??.2 Mechanistic approaches

In mechanistic approaches human development is seen as a collection of elements, each of which can be causally explained (much like the working of a machine). Events are seen as causally related to prior events and under the same set of circumstances, equal causes will have equal effects. Humans are seen as passive in that they develop as a result of outside influences. Development is continuous, with change happening gradually as new elements (such as new behaviour patterns) are added or subtracted. Behaviourism, with its emphasis on learning theory, represents the most striking example of a mechanistic approach.

Morojele's (1997) discussion of adolescent use and abuse of alcohol provides an example of a mechanistic approach. He discusses Ajzen's theory of planned behaviour, which is based on a rational decision-making model of behaviour referred to as the theory of reasoned action. He modifies an illustrating diagram from Ajzen & Madden (1986, cited in Morojele 1997), which is reproduced below. Each box represents a discrete, identifiable attribute or the interaction of two attributes (outcome beliefs, intention to perform the behaviour etc.). The arrows are indicative of causal (one-way) relationships between these discrete elements.

FIGURE 1 HERE

Similarly, Panday, Reddy, Ruiter, Bergstrom and de Vries (2007) use an extension of the Theory of Planned Behaviour, the I-Change Model, to investigate factors relating to smoking amongst young people of different 'ethnic' groups. Non-smoking was found to be related to a positive attitude to non-smoking, social influences supportive of non-smoking, good levels of self-efficacy, intention not to smoke, and low levels of depressive mood and risk behaviour.

The mechanistic model can lend itself to treating socio-political issues merely as **variables** that should be measured in terms of their impact on the individual's development. It is possible, within this model, for the complexities of these issues to be glossed over. Race, class, gender, ethnicity and so forth may become homogenised and **essentialised** through being measured as a variable.

Some South African authors using this model have, however, attempted to grapple with contextual and political issues. For example, Panday et al. (2007, 208), in justifying their use of ethnicity as a variable, state that 'the history of *Apartheid* in SA (sic) means that poverty and inequality continue to exhibit strong spatial and racial biases … Consequently ethnicity has become a proxy for social, economic, spatial and cultural differences when these factors are difficult to estimate'. They found that the strength of the 'determinants' of smoking differed amongst ethnic groups. This led them to call for further research to understand the influence of differing social, economic and cultural contexts on smoking onset, but also to acknowledge the political difficulties potentially associated with their research. They

conceded that 'the history of racial segregation and discrimination in SA makes recommendations for ethnic-specific school-based programmes undesirable' (Panday et al 2007, 215). As we shall see throughout this chapter, how contextual issues are conceptualised and theorised in Developmental Psychology is something that needs to be carefully considered.

??.3 Organismic approaches

In organismic approaches the processes of human development are viewed as an organised whole. In other words, development is seen as a totality rather than as a collection of parts. Instead of causal explanations, theorising centres around the final goal or the function of development (much like the systems of a living organism). The principles **epigenesis** and **equifinality** apply. Epigenesis refers to the irreducibility of later forms from earlier ones. In other words, new characteristics emerge at higher levels, making development discontinuous in nature. Equifinality means that goals may be reached along different lines. In other words, although tendencies may be described, predictions may not be made (compare this to the mechanistic model). Organismic models see the individual as active in the process of development, with change occurring because of the unfolding of internal forces. Examples of theories fitting into the organismic model are Freud's psychoanalytic theory of development, Piaget's cognitive-developmental theory, and Kohlberg's theory of moral development. In each it is assumed that, given reasonably optimal conditions, human beings will progress through invariant, discontinuous stages of development as directed by forces lying within them.

Turning to South African research, Broom and Doctor's (1994) analysis of children's reading difficulties illustrates some of central premises of the organismic approach well. They assert that 'When children are learning to read, competence at one developmental stage depends on transmission of information from a previous stage, so impaired development of a previous stage will affect development of subsequent skills.' (1994, 219). Development thus proceeds through the unfolding of series of **invariant stages**. Each stage requires the mastery of particular skills (be they emotional, cognitive or social). Failure to do so has implications for development at a later stage.

This type of stage theorising has a number of implications. The first is that it allows for the development of tools to measure the appropriateness of a particular individual's development as calibrated against the **norms** of others in the same developmental stage. For example, Herbst and Huysamen (2000) report on their development and **validation** of a set of developmental scales for what they call 'environmentally disadvantaged' pre-school children. The purpose of the scales is to assess these children's 'mastery of selected cognitive and motor developmental tasks' (Herbst and Huysamen 2000,19).

The development and use of norm-based tests has been a highly controversial issue in South African Psychology. A full discussion is not possible here but, in summary, various questions have been posed. For example, is it possible for tests to be **culture-free** or, alternatively, **culture-**

fair? Should tests that have been standardised on one population group be used on other groups? Do these tests really measure what they purport to measure? Are there not too many dangers inherent in the use of tests (e.g. as in maintaining purported distinctions between races)?

These debates are important because the second implication of stage-like theorising, which is linked to the first, is that it allows for particular children to be categorised as developmentally delayed, thereby necessitating intervention programmes. Broom and Doctor (1994), for example, recommend in cases of developmental dyslexia (as assessed by the above-mentioned tests) an intervention programme aimed at the development of orthographic reading skills. Amod, Cockcroft and Soellaart (2007, 123), in reporting on a study of the use of the Griffiths Mental Developmental Scales for infants amongst Black South Africans state that 'The early identification of delay in infancy and early childhood improves the possibility of intervention'.

One of the potential difficulties with organismic models is that, because of the emphasis on internal factors, researchers may ignore the political, social, gendered and cultural context within which development is taking place. This has certainly been the case in some earlier South African research (see, for example, Ackerman 1990). However, this type of de-contextualisation is not necessarily a feature of research that utilises organismic frames. For example, Swartz (2007, 361), using psychoanalytic theory, argues that the Oedipal stage is pivotal in terms of children's awareness of 'racial differences and their effects on class, privilege and custom'. She emphasizes the variability of developmental pathways (recall the principle of equifinality discussed above) and 'their construction in powerful social, economic and political contexts'.

Organismic models that take context into account inevitably bump up against the universalism versus relativism debate. For example, Tudin, Straker and Mendolsohn (1994) investigate the relationship between Kohlberg's stages of moral development and exposure to political and social complexity amongst a group of South African university students. They accept Kohlberg's assertion that there are universal principles that guide moral reasoning and that there are basic, invariant developmental stages in moral reasoning, although their research revolves around the influence of social context on the development of this moral reasoning. Ferns and Thom (2001, 38), on the other hand, present their findings in a study on the moral development of white and black teenagers as 'evidence against cultural universality in Kohlberg's theory'. They argue that the influence of norms and values, parenting styles and historical and political effects mitigate against a stage-like progression and identical endpoints of morality.

??.4 Contextual theories and research
In these approaches, human development is theorised in relation to or transaction with the environment or context. Thus, development is seen as a dynamic interplay between person and environment. These models allow for 'both/and' rather than 'either/or' thinking. For example, the individual can be seen as both active in his/her developmental processes, as well as being

influenced by the environment. How well theories manage to explain the 'both/and' of various developmental controversies differs, however, as we shall see later with the individual versus society debate. In contextual models, the embeddedness of various systems (the family, the school, ideological frameworks etc.) is emphasised with change at one level promoting change at another level.

It appears that a contextual approach is currently the most popular in developmental psychology research in South Africa. Speculations as to why this should be the case could include: 1) the unique social and political space that South Africa occupies, 2) the self-inspection that psychology in South Africa underwent in terms of its contextual relevance in the mid- to late- 1980s (see, for example, Dawes (1986) and Gilbert (1989) amongst others), and 3) the development of a relatively (although certainly not dominant) South African Critical Psychology (cf. Hook, Mkhize, Kiguwa, Collins, Burman & Parker 2004).

We shall now discuss approaches that fall under the broad banner of contextual models. The first is a **positivist** approach. In many respects positivism may be classed as mechanistic as it isolates various elements and explores the relationship between them. However, the research I discuss here all has one key feature, and that is a commitment to understanding the influence of contextual issues on children's responses. Other approaches discussed include a developmental-contextual approach, cultural psychology, a public health perspective, and a political approach.

??.4.1 Positivist approaches
Much research in South Africa that attempts to understand the relation between individual children and the environment is premised on positivist principles. In positivism relevant **variables** are identified and **operationalised**, controls are set up to obviate the influence of **extraneous variables**, quantitative data is collected, and statistical tests of **probability** are run. In this way it is hoped to gain insight into the influence of the environment on the child. Importantly, though, the child and the social context are treated as two distinct realities, **ontologically** separate while affecting each other (Dawes & Donald, 1994).

One of the aims of positivism is to build up a cumulative knowledge base that is objective and based on universal truths. A key concept here is **generalisability**, which means that results in one situation will hold true in another. Barbarin and Richter (2001) and Aase, Meyer and Sagvolden (2006) provide examples of studies that investigate generalisable developmental processes or properties.

Barbarin and Richter (2001) test the cross-national generalisability of the relationship between community violence, poverty and psychological difficulties in children. They find that, as in the United States, community danger in South Africa is linked to a variety of psychological problems, including anxiety, depression, aggression, opposition and low affability in children, but that socio-economic status is not related to behavioural and

emotional adjustment. Aase, Meyer and Sagvolden (2006) argue for the dynamic developmental theory of **Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder** (ADHD), in which it is postulated that ADHD is a neurobiological disorder caused by dysfunctional dopamine systems. They support their argument through the replication of findings amongst children in Norway with children in the Limpopo province of South Africa. The key difference between these two studies is that Barbarin and Richter (2001) analyse generalisable relationships between social and individual characteristics (i.e. a contextual approach) whereas Aase, Meyer and Sagvolden (2006) argue for the generalisability of internal, biological characteristics.

Positivist research allows for comparative work. This is different to the notion of generalisability discussed above. Researchers conducting comparative research are not necessarily interested in establishing universal laws or truths. They may rather want to provide an in-depth description of two groups identified as different in some ways and as similar in others. A good example of this is Liddell's (1996) research on the interpretations of six pictures by 80 South African and 80 British children in their second and third year of schooling. Liddell (1996) starts her paper by exploring how pictures may: 1) provide a bridge into literacy for children, 2) enrich the meaning of texts, 3) provide contextual information in text, and 4) assist children in retaining information. She reviews the literature from developed countries in which it is shown that children follow a predictable developmental sequence in their picture interpretation skills. But then she asks the question whether the same patterns 'manifest themselves in children from homes where literacy skills amongst parents are poorly developed, where picture books do not exist, where teacher:child ratios mean that one teacher assists 40 to 50 children in the classroom, and where children at school are exposed to – at most – four illustrated readers in a year' (Liddell 1996, 356). This question is important as it provides the framework within which the comparative research is located. Here Liddell (1996) invokes structural-contextual issues, not to explain the differences noted, but to frame her question. Her results show differences in the way rural South African and rural British children interpret pictures, as well as different patterns of change as the two groups progress in school. She discusses this in the light of the possible different functions of literacy in the two communities.

One of the greatest achievements of positivist research is the development of statistical models that allow for prediction. Liddell, Lycett and Gordon (1997) utilise such a model to predict children's early school achievement in rural South African schools. They found that if children master basic elements of the curriculum and behave in ways that allow them to survive crowded and under-resourced rural classrooms, they will do well in Grade 2. Mathews, Aarø, Flisher, Mukoma, Wubs and Schaalma (2008) use structural equation modelling to predict transition to first sexual intercourse. Factors include being male, being older, coming from a lower socio-economic status, intentions to have sexual intercourse, poor self-efficacy in negotiating delayed sex, intimate partner violence. However, the variables and models used in making these predictions are not quick or cheap to measure, thereby putting

into question the usefulness of utilising this type of research in wide-spread programmes.

One of the potential difficulties with positivist research is that too little critical analysis of how terms are **operationalised** is entered into by researchers. For example, Cherian and Malehase (2000) investigate the relationship between parental control and children's scholastic achievement. They state that an 'objective estimate' of parental control was obtained via a questionnaire. The questionnaire items, we are informed, measured 'parental order and control of children, parental supervision of daily activities of children, parental involvement in proper control and supervision of school tasks, parental time spent on children's school work, and parental communication with their children' (2000, 666). The actual items of the questionnaire are not provided so we are not able to judge exactly what questions elicited responses in these various areas. Nevertheless, there is no indication that the choice of words such as 'proper control and supervision', 'parental order', 'parental involvement' is political, and implies the valuing of particular parental activities over others. Instead these practices take on the aspect of naturalness - correct and good parental actions. This point is taken up by Rose (1989), who points out that scientific and professional descriptions of good parental practices gain their power by appearing to be universally valid and natural.

??.4.2 Developmental-contextual perspectives
Developmental-contextual approaches take an overtly both-and perspective. In other words, researchers attempt to include both individual and social factors into their theorising, rather than one or the other. For example, in his discussion on special educational needs, Donald (1994, 151) calls for 'ecologically sensitive research that clarifies the interactional relationship between various disabilities and their socially and structurally determined contexts'.

Stead (1996) utilises a developmental-contextual model to analyse career development in black adolescents in South Africa. This perspective emphasises the dynamic interaction between an individual and proximal (e.g. family, peers) and distal (e.g. economic, sociocultural) contexts. He discusses career development in black adolescents in relation to education, the family, the economy, culture (see later discussion under cultural perspectives) and identity development. Stead (1996, 272) states that the developmental-contextual approach 'overcomes (a) an inordinate focus on either the individual or the individual's environment and (b) an emphasis on a unidirectional relationship between the self and context'. However, his analysis does not make it clear how this is done. Indeed, his discussion devolves in discussing either the environment (the family, education etc.) or the individual (identity development) without theorising exactly *how* one relates to the other. Merely saying that individual development is influenced by context is insufficient. This point is important as theorising exactly what the inter-relationship is between the individual and society is one of the crucial aspects of a contextual approach. It is on this level that we may start

differentiating between adequate and inadequate contextual (and other) analyses of development.

This point is clearly illustrated in two papers about related issues - child neglect and child abuse and their respective effects in terms of child development. In the first, Du Preez, Naudé and Pretorius (2004) research the influence of neglect on language development. They found that the neglected children in their sample had delays in terms of verbal development. They postulate that this is owing to a lack of interaction and communication between the parents or caregivers and children. However, exactly how this external event leads to the internal one is left untheorised. What are the cognitive, emotional, social and neurological processes involved in moving from the one to the other?

This kind of careful theorising is evident in a paper by Panzer and Viljoen (2004). They argue that child neglect and abuse leaves children with an experience of 'fright without solution' (Panzer and Viljoen 2004, 11). The child's efforts to elicit help are met with abuse and in order to cope, disassociation of explicit from implicit processing is required. The detail of their theorising, which draws on psychoneurology, is relatively complex. Importantly in this context, however, they engage in careful analysis of *how* an external event such as abuse may be detrimental to the neural networks of individuals.

Another important aspect in contextual theorising is the acknowledgement of historical effects. Finchilescu and Dawes' (1998) paper on South African teenagers' socio-political orientations following the rapid social change of the early to mid-1990s is an excellent example of the importance of taking **cohort** effects into account. Their work was partially informed by a generational approach to the study of the influence of political context on human development. From a generational perspective, particular age brackets will share a political consciousness, which is shaped by exposure to particular events occurring during the sensitive developmental period of youth. Thus, Finchilescu and Dawes (1998) talk of the Resistance cohort, the Negotiation cohort and the Democracy cohort, referring to people who entered adolescence prior to 1990, during the time of the political negotiations, and after the elections of 1994 respectively. Each of these generational cohorts contains sub-generational units based on the racial groups defined by apartheid. This approach clearly links contextual issues to historical effects, effects that are obviously more clearly seen in times of rapid change, but which should always feature in our thinking about developmental psychology.

??.4.3 Cultural approaches
That there are diverse cultures in South Africa is a probably truism that few people would dispute. This is reflected in developmental psychology research where culture features relatively strongly. However, the way in which culture is conceptualised and the uses to which it is put differs markedly. In the first place, there is **cross-cultural research** in which culture is viewed as a variable that can be separated from other variables, and that can be used in explanation of observed differences or similarities. Secondly, 'culture' is used

as a broadly defining, static and over-arching feature of human existence. Thirdly, there are those studies that locate themselves within the cultural psychology tradition. Cultural psychology utilises a dynamic conceptualisation of culture as social practices and traditions that permeate, transform, and regulate human behaviour. Cultural psychology thus studies the meaning of the cultural worlds we inhabit, their historicity and the interpersonal maintenance of the practices on which they are premised.

Examples of cross-cultural research are the papers by Akande (1999), and Meyer, Eilertsen, Sundet and Sagvolden (2004). Akande (1999, 171) conducted a 'cross-cultural assessment of self-esteem among youth in the twenty-first century South Africa'. He hypothesised that perceptions of the self differs from one cultural context to another. He thus compared the **means** obtained on the Self-Description-Questionnaire-1 by South African, Australian, Kenyan, Nigerian, Nepalese and Zimbabwean children. Meyer et al. (2004) investigated whether the Disruptive Behaviour Disorders rating scale measures the same constructs in South African as in Western cultures. They administered the scale to South African children and compared the results with those found for children in the United States of America and Europe.

In both of these studies, thus, culture is seen as a variable. An instrument to measure some characteristic or trait is administered and the results of the various 'cultures' under scrutiny are compared. The difficulty, even from a positivist perspective, is to separate out culture as a variable from other variables such as socio-economic status, household size, location (e.g. urban, rural), and means of subsistence.

The second sense in which culture is used (i.e. as a static, **essentialist** feature of human existence) is evidenced in Stead (1996), who discusses career development in black adolescents (see earlier discussion). In this paper, Stead seems to see culture as a possession, something that defines groups of people in definitive sense. Note the following passage:

> Whites are generally considered to identify with a Western lifestyle that emphasizes independence, individuality, self-actualization, and competitiveness. In this respect they tend to differ from Blacks, who follow a traditional African lifestyle that emphasizes cooperation; Blacks tend to be community oriented and be dependent on the wishes of significant others when making decisions (Stead, 1996, p. 272).

Thus, 'whites' equal 'western' and 'blacks' equal 'traditional', with all the attendant characteristics. The use of the qualifying words 'generally' and 'tend' does not detract from this equation, as there is no indication of any of these cultural characteristics as dynamic and fluid.

It is this static and essentialist view of culture that cultural psychology has attempted to counter, while still maintaining the explanatory power that may be gained by considering cultural issues in developmental psychology. Gilbert, Van Vlaenderen & Nkwinti (1995), for example, locate their research within cultural psychology. They study the role of local knowledge in the process of socialisation in rural families. They define local knowledge as 'the

presuppositions used to interpret immediate experience borne out of action in the local environment' (p. 229). This conceptualisation illustrates the dynamic nature of a cultural psychology perspective, in that local knowledge is a product of day-to-day actions and hence is constantly being constructed and re-constructed while still having a historicity. Contrast this to the notion of 'traditional knowledge', which has the connotation of stasis and preservation.

This theorising of socialisation as a dynamic process allows for a dialectical understanding of the active versus passive debate. Utilising a combination of the Vygotskian zone of proximal development (the space between what a child can do on their own and what they can do with the help of a more knowledgeable member of the culture) and Geertz's view of culture as a set of control mechanisms used for governing behaviour, Gilbert, Van Vlaenderen and Nkwinti (1995) indicate that socialisation is both a conservative and a creative process. In other words, it simultaneously structures children's lives so that they internalise the available cultural rules and instructions *and* allows the space for children to construct their own meaning.

It is when 'culture' is invoked that issues of universality and relativism tend to be raised. Some authors attempt to tread the middle ground, indicating the relative importance of both universalism and relativism. For example, Magwaza (1997), in her discussion of child sexual abuse, attempts to integrate a cultural relativist perspective (i.e. recognising and theorising about cultural differences in the understanding and practices of sexuality) while at the same time maintaining moral universalism (i.e. there are particular benchmarks against which we can judge particular actions such as sexual abuse as reprehensible). Richter (2002), in her discussion of infant care, identifies 'near universals' in the care and regulation of infants, as proposed by Bradley and Caldwell (1995, cited in Richter, 2002), these being sustenance, stimulation, support, structure and surveillance. Nevertheless, concludes Richter (2002, 129), there is much cultural variation in these practices:

> Across all cultures is a perception of infants as being vulnerable to hazards that can endanger the infant's life and jeopardise his or her development. These hazards take many forms and there is no question that they are culturally, socially, and economically framed and expressed.

This assertion is in line with Dawes and Donald's (1994) suggestion of a distinction between developmental processes that could be shown to have universal relevance, and the content and norms of behaviour that may be culturally specific.

Theorising relativism versus universalism in an integrative manner that avoids the potential dangers of an 'either/or' position requires a dynamic and historicised view of culture, and an understanding that difference and diversity are intricately linked to socio-political power relations. There is a very real danger that attempts at understanding cultural variation may 'hide an implicit evolutionism which claims Western culture as top of a pyramid [and in which] westerners (and Western psychologists) know, and understand the "real" phenomena' (Swartz and Rohleder 2008, 543).

??.4.4 Public health approach

Most Euro-American textbooks of developmental psychology assume a certain basic level of health and hygiene in children. Where issues of physical health are dealt with, concerns include such factors as exposure to parental smoke, birth defects, cancer and heart disease (e.g. Santrock 2007). The health issues that face North American and European children and that affect their development are very different to those facing the majority of children in South Africa. For example, in South Africa the under five-year old mortality rate is 72,1 per 1000 live births, whereas in the United States it is 7. While 10,3% of South African children under the age of 10 are underweight and 21,6% experience stunting, only 2% of American children under the age of 5 are underweight and 1% experience stunting (Dawes, Bray and van der Merwe 2007; Unicef, n.d.). HIV/Aids obviously forms one of the major health issues for South African children, with an estimated 5,6% of children between 2and 14 years old being infected with HIV, and an estimated 1 100 000 being orphaned as a result of HIV (Dawes, Bray and van der Merwe 2007).

Given the above, there is a strong public health focus in many South African writers' work in developmental psychology. This acknowledges the fact that general health issues and children's development are strongly interconnected. For example, Richter (2004) provides a thorough review of the psychosocial impact of HIV/Aids on children's development and adjustment.

Public health shifts the definition of health away, firstly, from an individual focus and, secondly, from something attended to by medical practitioners in clinics and hospitals. Instead, public health 'targets all points where matter, energy, and information are exchanged between people and their human, social, and physical environments, for it is through this exchange that individual and group health status is determined' (Butchart & Kruger, 2001, p. 215). Duncan (1997), for example, illustrates how the causes of malnutrition, a condition linked to poor developmental outcomes, should be located not in individuals' shortcomings (e.g. parental ignorance concerning nutrition), but rather in broader social processes. Combating malnutrition will, according to Duncan (1997), require broad-ranging interventions, including employment generation programmes and projects aimed at making diversified nutrition and basic health facilities available to all.

Much of the public health debate is framed within the human rights discourse. Authors draw on documents such as the United Nations Declaration of Children's Rights (Duncan, 1997), and the World Health Organisation and South African government documents on disability rights (Van Niekerk, 1997). Strong arguments for the recognition of the rights and aspirations of groups marginalised by developmental psychology and government policy decisions (such as children with mental handicap – Parekh & Jackson, 1997) are made. In an edited collection, entitled 'Monitoring child well-being' and containing chapters on a wide range of issues relating to children, a strong rights-based approach is taken (Dawes, Bray and van der Merwe 2007). The editors explain that there are three stages of measurement required in this approach. Firstly, the specification of rights and what the state and others are duty

bound to deliver; secondly, provision through policy and programmes to deliver these rights; and thirdly, the measurement of child outcomes in relation to a minimum standards, models of cause and effect, and the opinions of children and their carers and service providers (Bray and Dawes 2007). Thus a rights-based approach is intricately linked to advocacy for delivery of services and interventions, and the evaluation of these services.

The risk versus resilience debate has, mostly, been framed within a public health discourse. On the risk side of the debate, factors that put children at risk for the development of particular problems are analysed. This is frequently done with the aim of prevention (one of the fundamental purposes of primary health care). The rationale is that if we can identify risk factors, then we can, perhaps, do something to prevent them. Van der Merwe and Dawes (2007) take this approach. They review the risk factors for the development of violent and antisocial behaviour, as well as the developmental pathways along which violent and antisocial behaviour may manifest itself. Arguing that interventions need to based on theoretical and **empirical** evidence, the authors review the common characteristics of effective violence-prevention and treatment interventions.

A strictly risk approach was questioned in the mid-80s (Rutter, 1985). Since then, the idea of resilience in the face of adversity has become popular. The key reasoning here is that some children, despite difficult circumstances, manage to cope well and do not develop any problems. For example, Henderson (2006, 303) argues that 'too narrow a focus on the vulnerabilities of AIDS orphans obscures the ways in which they share similar circumstances with other poor children, as well as the strengths they bring to bear on their circumstances'.

The resilience thesis has gained a fair amount of credence in South Africa in the light of the poor socio-economic conditions and the political violence that characterises many South African children's young lives. Instead of seeing children as victims of their circumstances (i.e. at risk for the development of a range of psycho-social and physical disorders), the resilience hypothesis allows researchers to emphasise positive aspects of children's environments as well as the children's agency in developing coping mechanisms.

In a similar fashion to the risk approach, researchers have attempted to tease out the factors that lead to resilience. For example, Kritzas and Grobler (2005) studied the relationship between resilience amongst teenagers and the parenting styles they experienced. They used scales that measure sense of coherence and coping strategies as indicators of resilience, and found that authoritative parenting (as opposed to permissive or authoritarian parenting) contributed the most to resilience amongst teenagers. Focussing more specifically, Van Rensburg and Barnard (2005) found that close family ties, an internal locus of control, a positive self-concept, a supportive environment, and positive personality characteristics were associated with resilience to child sexual molestation.

Again the issue of interventions arises in the resilience literature. Kritzas and Grobler (2005, 1) belief that their findings have 'distinct and far-reaching implications for envisaged interventions', while Cook and du Toit (2005) describe the Circles of Care: Community Capacity Building project, an intervention that is aimed at supporting 'child and community resilience'.

The issue of resilience has, however, been critiqued by some researchers. Duncan (1997) points out that the resilience argument has one serious defect and that is that it could lead to complacency on the part of those in power in ensuring conditions that promote the optimal development of children.

??.4.5 Socio-political issues

The status of Developmental Psychology in Africa and South Africa has been a disputed matter. Some time ago, Liddell and Kvalsig (1990) asked whether, firstly, Developmental Psychology can claim to be neutral in the research that it conducts and, secondly, whether our research has no impact in the real world. They argued that South African developmental psychology was used and, at times, abused in the real world. Later, Nsamenang and Dawes (1998) argued that Africa has had a number of alien influences imposed upon it, and that scholars in Developmental Psychology should engage in a 'liberatory project' in which they 'enter a critical dialogue with external knowledge systems, in constructing an understanding of child psychological development on the continent' (Nsamenang and Dawes 1998, 73). More recently, Nsamenang (2006, 293) accuses theories of development and intelligence of mirroring 'mainstream Euro-American ethnocentrism'.

Given these sorts of concerns, a number of researchers engage directly with socio-political issues. Stevens and Lockhat (1997) argue that a combination of Erikson's psychosocial theory of adolescent development and Bulhan's analysis of identity development within oppressed social groups may be used to analyse the impact of apartheid-capitalism as well as post-apartheid politics on black adolescent identity development. Owing to a combination of apartheid-capitalism and the dominance of 'western' ideologies in post-apartheid South Africa, the authors see black adolescents as having few 'healthy options' (1997, 253) for identity development.

Richards, Pillay, Mazodze and Govere (2005) embark on a similar project in investigating the impact of colonial culture on identity formation. They collected iographies (stories that focus directly on experiences that impact on identity development) as data. Interestingly, they did not initially intend to study colonialism, but found that this emphasis emerged in the data presented by the participants. They discuss a number of themes related to colonialism and identity formation, formulate these in terms of Bulhan's analysis of identity development, and conclude that colonial culture and apartheid had a damaging effect on their participants' identity formation.

While these sorts of papers are important, there are also potential dangers. For example, Stevens and Lockhat's (1997) conclusion rests on an uncritical usage of Erikson's theory. They indicate that Erikson's concept of adolescence as a psychosocial moratorium (a period in which society allows

adolescents to experiment with various identities) does not apply to the majority of black adolescents. Furthermore, in choosing between capitulation and assimilation into the dominant (white) culture versus radicalisation, the authors see black adolescents as experiencing what Erikson called identity foreclosure. Instead of problematising the theoretical concepts of psychosocial moratorium and identity foreclosure as linked to particular socio-historical circumstances, the authors accept their legitimacy and utilise them to suggest that there are 'potentially negative psychological consequences' (1997, 252) and a 'long-term impact' (1997, 253) associated with the lack of a psychosocial moratorium and with identity foreclosure. The net result is the (probably unintended) pathologisation of black adolescents. Aware of this potential, the authors spend some time discussing the debate on risk versus resilience in South Africa, stating that adolescents should not merely be seen as victims. However, their own theorising allows for little more, and merely asserting resilience does not do the trick.

??.5 Social constructionist analyses

Social constructionism is a fairly diverse field and not easily summarised in a few short sentences. Nevertheless, there are some basic commonalities. Burr (1995) summarises some of the basic premises as follows:

- A critical stance is taken regarding taken-for-granted knowledge. Social constructionists question the assumptions made in psychology and indicate how these are frequently used to serve particular dominant interests.
- There is an emphasis on the social and historical specificity of human characteristics and interactions. This links up with the above point as it highlights that there is nothing fundamental or necessary in the way that we view things, but rather that our knowledge of the world is socially and historically constructed.
- Knowledge is viewed as constructed in interactions between people. Social action and knowledge are intricately linked.
- Binary logic (male/female; active/passive; nature/nurture etc. – see the above discussion) is rejected and a focus on multiple layers of difference employed.

Social constructionist work contributes in two ways to the critique of mainstream developmental psychology. In the first place, the basic assumptions underlying theorising and research in developmental psychology itself are questioned. Secondly, the nature of the child, the adolescent, the mother, and the family (mostly) spoken about in developmental psychology is called into question.

Examples of the first contribution are to be found Parekh and Jackson (1997) and Shefer (1997). Parekh and Jackson (1997, 41) argue that 'children with mental handicap are subjected to, constrained and marginalised by psychological developmentalist talk'. They question the assumption that mental handicap means the same thing for one group as for another, as well as the prioritisation of the cognitive and intellectual as hallmarks of childhood development. Shefer (1997) discusses how developmental psychology's approach to gender ignores the social, historical and political context of

gendered identity development and presents development from a male perspective. She uses a social constructionist perspective to analyse how gender (as a social construction) has an impact on our development from the moment we are identified as male or female.

Bozalek (1997) provides an example of the second contribution. She shows how textbooks assume a particular family form (the nuclear family with two, heterosexual parents) as universal, an assumption she highlights as erroneous given the lived realities of many South African children and adolescents. Furthermore, the functional systems perspective of families dominating textbooks disregards power relations that exist within families. This allows for wife and child abuse to be seen as symptoms of family pathology rather than as part of differential power relations based on discourses surrounding gender and child relations within the family.

Social constructionism is not just about critique, however. An increasingly popular social constructionist approach in areas such as therapy is narrative theory. Narrative psychology emphasises the central role of language and meaning making in the formation and structuring of self, identity and the other (Crossley, 2000). Laubscher and Klinger (1997) utilise a narrative approach to explain the development of self-definition or what is more commonly called personality. They contend that 'all people are story-tellers and create a particular story about themselves that defines who they are, that captures their essential and evolving self' (1997, 67). They explore how the personal myth begins in infancy when infants learn about narrative tone – the qualitative mood or feeling of stories. This tone may permeate the entire life cycle. Through the use of narrative tone, imagery, theme, mythic characters, and the contextual ideological setting, we create and re-create our self-defining myth. Laubscher and Klinger (1997) claim that a narrative approach to development simultaneously acknowledges individuality and social factors, thereby overcoming the individual/society divide characteristic of more traditional theories (see above discussion).

Mkhize and Frizelle (2000) utilise a narrative approach to explicate cultural and historical issues in career development work. They argue that every culture develops an indigenous psychology, which they define as the shared understanding of what it means to be human. The primary vehicles of this indigenous psychology, they argue, are narrative or cultural tales, passed on from generation to generation through language, myths, fairy tales, histories and stories. To develop into a competent member of a society requires developing an appreciation for and knowledge of the multiple and complex range of meanings developed by that society over time. This does not imply narrative determinism, as individuals enter into dialogue with the multiplicity of voices and perspectives available in context.

As mentioned earlier, the 'activity versus passivity' debate is one of the controversies that inhabits Developmental Psychology. Parkes (2002), using a social constructionist approach, attempts to overcome what she sees as the overemphasis in psychological literature on the negative effects on children of exposure to violence. She concludes from her ethnographic research that

'children draw creatively on local discourses about punishment and authority, loyalty and friendship … they construct rules, which are fluid, dynamic, adjustable, and help them to make sense of the social world around them' (2002, 69). Parkes (2002) believes that this kind of research that does not view children as passive victims of violence, but as active social agents may be useful in the kinds of interventions that are made with respect to community violence.

??.6 Conclusion

From the above it is clear that a range of theoretical approaches and models have informed developmental psychology research in South Africa. Two important questions are: Why is it important to take stock of our theoretical orientations? Why is it vital that a forum for the discussion of theory in developmental psychology remains open when there are clearly pressing issues facing children and adolescents (as well as parents, adults and the elderly) in South Africa? I hope that the answers to these questions are at least partially provided in this chapter. But to summarise, the basic philosophical and theoretical assumptions that we make have implications in terms of 1) how we view the nature of the developing person; 2) what factors we consider in our research and how we conceptualise their linkages; 3) the questions we ask in conducting our research; 4) how we undertake our research; 5) the usages we envisage for our research; and finally 6) how interventions in the lives of children, adolescents, and parents proceed. This latter point is made very strongly in a book edited by Donald, Dawes and Louw (2000), in which they discuss various community-based programmes that have attempted to address adversity in children's lives.

As noted earlier, the amount of research that is being conducted in South Africa in the field of Developmental Psychology is, contrary to our perceptions, relatively large. Many interesting articles have not been featured in the limited space provided for this chapter. Perhaps we are not there yet, but we imagine a time when the Developmental Psychology texts to which our students are exposed can be written off the basis of research and scholarship produced within South Africa, when the theories and principles we package for students are ones with which South African researchers have engaged, utilised in their research or critiqued, when the conclusions we reach about people's development are based on local empirical work, and when we are more likely to draw on African theorising (e.g. Nsamaneng, 2006) and to turn to the lessons learnt within our own context (see Clacherty and Donald's (2007) discussion of the ethical challenges of child participation in research within southern Africa) than from those generated in a context vastly different from our own.

??.7 Further readings

There are four excellent South African books of relevance to Developmental Psychology. The first two provide reviews of research done in a variety of areas relating to developmental psychology, the third addresses interventions with children, and the fourth takes a public health approach to child development. The Human Sciences Research Council has a very active Child, Youth, Family and Social Development Unit. Many useful publications,

mostly with free download, are available from this unit. The approach is generally a public health one.

Dawes, A. and Donald, D. (eds) (1994). *Childhood and adversity: psychological perspectives from South African research* (pp. 177-199). Cape Town: David Philip.

De la Rey, C., Duncan, N., Shefer, T. & Van Niekerk, A. (eds) (1997). *Contemporary issues in human development: a South African focus* (pp. 7-24). Johannesburg: International Thomson Publishing.

Donald, D., Dawes, A. & Louw, J. (eds) (2000). *Addressing childhood adversity.* Cape Town: David Philip.

Dawes, A., Bray, R. and van der Merwe, A. (2007). *Monitoring child well-being: A Couth African rights-based approach.* Cape Town: HSRC Press.

??.8 Critical thinking questions

1). Which of the above-mentioned models provides the most promising approach to studying developmental psychology in South Africa? What criteria are you using in forming an answer to the above question?

2). Do you think that South African developmental psychologists should take an overtly political stance in their work, or do you think that there is a place for scientific neutrality and objectivity? Is there a middle ground? Do you think there is a way of integrating the two stances, and if so, how?

3). Do you think that 'culture' should be included in our thinking about developmental psychology? If so, how should it be conceptualised?

4). Imagine yourself as a researcher in developmental psychology in South Africa. What would your research priorities be? What sort of approach would you want to take in investigating the issue? What do you think should be done with the results of your research (i.e. how should they be utilised)?

??.9 Chapter glossary

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder: a disorder which is characterised by attentional problems, impulsivity and hyperactivity.

Cohort: a number of people possessing common characteristics, in particular being born in a particular year.

Contextual: an approach to the study of psychology that posits that behaviour must be studied in relation to the context within which it occurs; interpreting behaviour outside the context is misleading.

Cross-cultural research: an experimental method in which different cultures are evaluated and compared on different cultural dimensions.

Culture-fair test: a test designed to include a range of elements so that it is fair to all the cultural groups undertaking the test. In other words, individuals in the various cultures have an equal chance of scoring according to their ability or disposition.

Culture-free test: a test designed to be free from cultural bias. Language or other skills specific to a particular culture are eliminated.

Empirical: based on the collection, analysis and evaluation of data.

Epigenesis: during development new characteristics emerge at various stages, making development discontinuous in nature.

Equifinality: goals may be reached along different lines.

Essentialist: viewing phenomena (such as culture) as having an absolute reality, existence or essence.

Extraneous variables: variables that interfere with (i.e. are not central to) the main relationships being studied.

Generalisability: the ability to judge whether something is applicable to an entire class or category of people, events or phenomena.

Intrapsychic: of something assumed to arise or take place within the mind (a psychoanalytic term).

Invariant stages: developmental stages that follow one another; people progress through the stages in predictable order (i.e. stages are not skipped).

Mean: a measure of central tendency referring to the average, or the sum of the scores divided by the number of scores.

Mechanistic: a philosophical approach to studying humans that maintains that all phenomena may be understood in terms of cause and effect, and that basic universal laws may be established.

Narrative: emphasises the central role of language and meaning making in the formation and structuring of self, identity and the other.

Norms: statistically speaking, any measure of central tendency that is representative of a group and which may be used as a basis for comparison of individual cases.

Ontology: metaphysical inquiry concerned with the question of existence.

Operationalise: give definition to variables and procedures utilised in research

Organismic: theoretical approaches that emphasise the need to approach people as a total entity with a multitude of inter-related processes.

Positivist: an approach to science that argues that it is not possible to go beyond the objective world, and that only those questions that can be answered from the application of scientific method are valid.

Probability: the calculation of the likelihood of an event occurring using proportional frequency.

Social constructionist: theoretical approaches that highlight the role of language in constructing reality.

Validation: The process of determining the correctness of a proposition or conclusion.

Variables: a property that changes or varies over time or from particular categories of people to others.

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FIGURE 1
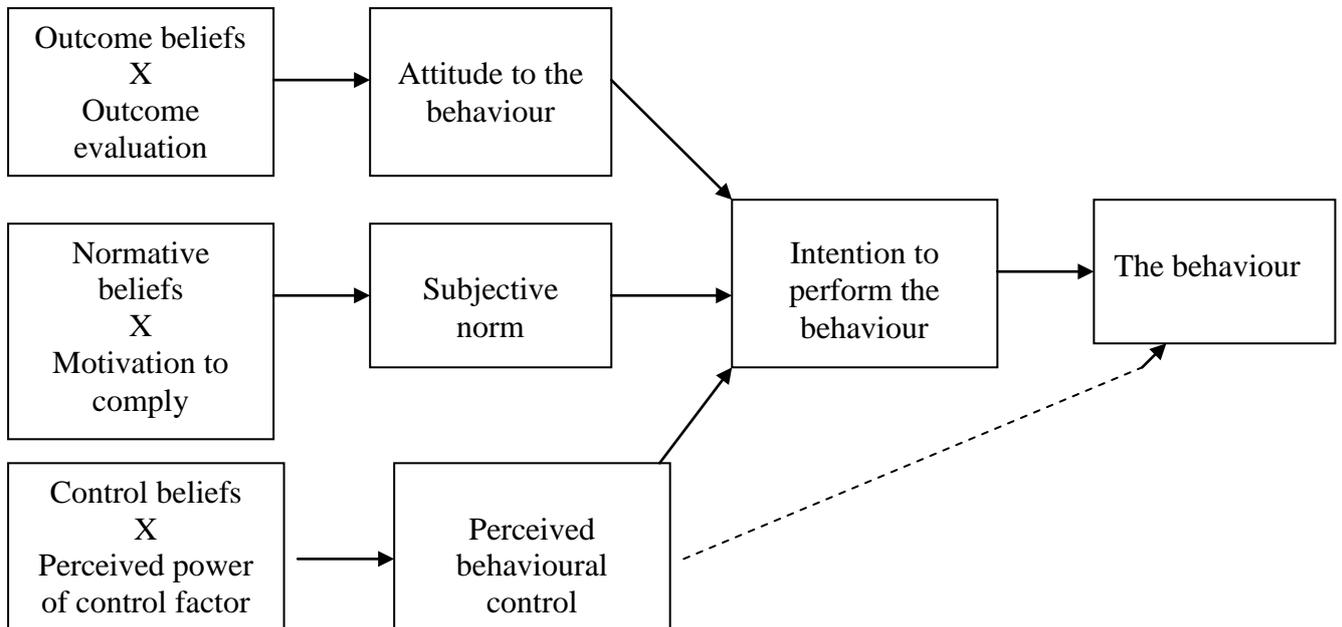
Source: Modified from Ajzen & Madden (1986) by Morojele (1997, p. 223)