Fall 2016 Syllabus — 3 Credits, Prerequisite: PSYC 2301


Instructor: Dan Grangaard, Ed.D., Psychologist

Course Purpose Reflects Current Issues in Developmental Psychology
The course is a survey of the physical, cognitive, emotional, and social factors in human development from conception to death. There will be an emphasis on understanding people at various ages of development in order to be more patient with them and to interact with them more effectively. The course is especially well suited for individuals interested in pursuing careers in the helping, healthcare, and education professions, and anyone who would like to better understand people who are at a different stage in life than they are living. Specific learning objectives are included in this syllabus.

Course Requirements Promote Academic Success
Students are expected to meet the following course requirements:

1. Read the textbook. “A” students tend to read at a pace that follows the syllabus outline.

2. Regularly check announcements at Dr. Grangaard’s web site: http://www.austincc.edu/dgran/2314news.htm.

3. Attend class and pay attention – put away all mobile phones (85-90% of the test questions will come from class lectures, discussions, and film clips). Roll will be taken. If you don’t want to attend class, please drop the course and register for a distance learning class. If you are frequently absent (>25% of scheduled class meetings) and/or have missing scores, the instructor will withdraw you from the class. Absences on test days require you to take a make-up test in the Test Center. It is assumed that your absence was the result of unavoidable circumstances.

4. Successfully complete four (4) examinations.

5. Read a biography/autobiography or a book related to developmental psychology and write a book review. Details for writing the report are located under the section of the syllabus titled examinations and course grade.

Students with disabilities who believe that they may need accommodations in this class are encouraged to contact the Student Accessibility Services as soon as possible to better ensure that such accommodations are implemented in a timely fashion.
Contacting the Professor

### Rio Grande Campus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Office Hours: Annex Bldg., Room 150</th>
<th>Office Phone: 223-3131</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M-Th 10:30-11:00 am, TTh 1:00-1:30 pm</td>
<td>E-mail: <a href="mailto:dgran@austincc.edu">dgran@austincc.edu</a></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

or by appointment (512) 223-3131

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**Professor Has Extensive Professional Experience**

**Dan Grangaard, Ed.D.**, has 3 degrees from Baylor University, has been a professional psychologist since 1976, and has worked with all age groups. Dr. Grangaard was employed as a school psychologist for 9 years, 8 years with the Austin I.S.D. and 1 year with the Education Service Center, Region XII in Waco. He was Chief Psychologist, Director of Testing and Intern Training at the Minirth-Meier Tunnell & Wilson Clinic for 5 years. He led group therapy with adolescents and adults at Shoal Creek and Charter Hospitals for 7 years. For many years he was engaged in private practice in Austin. Dr. Grangaard currently teaches in the Psychology Department at ACC and works in Student Accessibility Services at the Rio Grande Campus. Dr. Grangaard has also taught at St. Edward’s University and at Baylor University. He has been a little league baseball coach, a youth worker at the YMCA, and a playground director. Dr. Grangaard was graduate assistant to the head of the early childhood program at Baylor where he supervised over 200 kindergarten student teachers. Oh yeah, he also has considerable experience as a parent and a grandparent.

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**Dr. Grangaard’s Teaching Philosophy**

- Have fun! If the professor is not enjoying class, then the students probably aren’t either
- Infuse lectures with real life examples of psychology in practice
- Involve students in live demonstrations to portray concepts introduced
- Maximize use of media to illustrate main points of discussion
- Provide an environment in which students will be free to share their opinions, personal experiences, and ideas*
- Facilitate student debates (pro & con) about almost any issue related to developmental psychology*
- Encourage student discernment in dealing with self-appointed experts
- Make the material relevant to student vocational and personal aspirations
- Evaluate the students’ ability to comprehend and apply the concepts taught rather than just assessing their knowledge
- Identify how psychology permeates virtually every aspect of our lives
- Ignite in the students an appreciation for research
- Facilitate group dynamics within the classroom

*Debates assume an environment of academic freedom. Input by students and faculty will likely reflect differing viewpoints. It is expected that faculty and students will respect the views of others when expressed in classroom discussions. An honorable goal of higher education is to develop postformal thought which recognizes that one’s own perspective is only one of many potentially valid
views and that life entails many inconsistencies. It also promotes dialectical thinking, which involves considering both sides of an idea simultaneously and then forging them into a synthesis of the original idea and its opposite.

Examinations and Course Grade

**Students should be prepared for regularly scheduled tests. Tests will be in the multiple-choice, true-false format. Tests taken in class will also have a bonus essay question. Bonus questions are not included in make-up exams taken in the test center. There are no provisions for retests or “extra credit.”** In order that tests may be scored quickly and accurately, tests will be taken with a #2 pencil on Scantron answer sheets, which must be provided by the student, and may be purchased in the campus store. Students with documented disabilities who require special test accommodations (i.e., extended time, a reader, etc.) should give Dr. Grangaard their accommodation letter at the beginning of the semester and far in advance of the first test.

Student behavior, including academic dishonesty, should reflect the policies outlined in the ACC Course Catalog. **Academic dishonesty will result in a failing grade on the assignment or test.** Factors associated with academic dishonesty are described in the ACC Course Catalog as:

“Students have the responsibility to submit coursework that is the result of their own thought, research, or self-expression. Students must do their own work and submit only their own work on examinations, reports, and projects, unless otherwise permitted by the instructor. Students are encouraged to contact their instructor about appropriate citation guidelines…Actions constituting violations of academic dishonesty include, but are not limited to, the following:

a. Plagiarism: Defined as taking another person’s intellectual work and using it as one’s own; for example, this includes quoting without giving proper credit to a source, expanding another person’s work without giving credit to that person, or submitting another person’s work under the pretense that it is one’s own.

b. Cheating: The use of unauthorized materials, information, or study aids; an act of deceit by which a student attempts to misrepresent academic skills or knowledge; or unauthorized copying or collaboration.

c. Fabrication: Intentional and unauthorized falsification or invention of any information or citation in an academic exercise.

d. Collusion: Knowingly helping another individual violate any provision of the Academic Dishonesty guidelines. Collusion includes assistance with assignments or tests that are not authorized by the instructor.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grading Key</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
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<td>C</td>
<td>70-79</td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>60-69</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>&lt;60</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Individual test scores and class statistics will normally be given to students the next class day. Items that a majority of students missed will be discussed in class. Students who do not perform well are encouraged to schedule an appointment to go over their individual tests with Dr. Grangaard during his campus office hours.

Grades will be based on the average of the student’s performance on four (4) tests and a book review. Students with a missing grade will have their final course grade dropped one letter grade for each missing score. A grade of **incomplete (I)** will only be granted to students presenting unusual personal circumstances. In such situations, the student should have already completed 3/5 of the course requirements.
**Case Example:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Test 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Test 2</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Test 3</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Test 4</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book Report</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Course Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>455/5 = 91 = A</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Book reviews over books related to developmental psychology should be **one, single-spaced, typewritten page**, and should include: a bibliographic entry (author, book title, year of publication, city of publication, and name of publisher), information about the author, a decision regarding what main points (thesis) the author had for writing the book, and evidence as to whether or not the author supported the thesis. Book reviews over biographies or autobiographies may be **two, single spaced, typewritten pages**, and include: a bibliographic entry, sections highlighting life/career accomplishments, life setbacks and challenges, lessons conveyed by the person’s testimony, your favorite snapshot of the person’s life, a brief ecological analysis based on Bronfenbrenner’s model, and an evaluation of the book.

**Students must have Dr. Grangaard approve their book title by the date of the first exam.** Everyone in the class must read a different book. Sample book reviews and sample book review grading forms are located at the end of the syllabus.

### Tentative Course Daily Outline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Chapter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tu</td>
<td>8/30</td>
<td>Discuss syllabus, meet cohorts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Th</td>
<td>9/1</td>
<td>Course introduction, study of human development</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tu</td>
<td>9/6</td>
<td>Theories of development + research methods to test theories</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Th</td>
<td>9/8</td>
<td>Theories continued + research methods to test theories</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Tu</td>
<td>9/13</td>
<td>Heredity + environment factors</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Th</td>
<td>9/15</td>
<td>Slides on prenatal development + birth</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tu</td>
<td>9/20</td>
<td><strong>TEST 1 + deadline for approval of book for report</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Th</td>
<td>9/22</td>
<td>First two years: biosocial development</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tu</td>
<td>9/27</td>
<td>First two years: cognitive development</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Th</td>
<td>9/29</td>
<td>First two years: psychosocial development</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tu</td>
<td>10/4</td>
<td>First two years: psychosocial development continued</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Th</td>
<td>10/6</td>
<td>Early childhood: biosocial development</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tu</td>
<td>10/11</td>
<td>Early childhood: cognitive development</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Th</td>
<td>10/13</td>
<td>Early childhood: psychosocial development</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tu</td>
<td>10/18</td>
<td><strong>TEST 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Th</td>
<td>10/20</td>
<td>Discipline</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Day</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Chapter</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tu</td>
<td>10/25</td>
<td>Middle childhood: biosocial development</td>
<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td>Th</td>
<td>10/27</td>
<td>Middle childhood: biosocial development continued</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Tu</td>
<td>11/1</td>
<td>Middle childhood: biosocial development continued</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Th</td>
<td>11/3</td>
<td>Middle childhood: cognitive development</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tu</td>
<td>11/8</td>
<td>Middle childhood: psychosocial development</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Th</td>
<td>11/10</td>
<td><strong>BOOK REPORT DUE</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Tu</td>
<td>11/15</td>
<td>Adolescence: biosocial development</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>Th</td>
<td>11/17</td>
<td>Adolescence: cognitive development</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tu</td>
<td>11/22</td>
<td>Adolescence: psychosocial development</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Th</td>
<td>11/24</td>
<td><strong>Thanksgiving, No Class!</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Tu</td>
<td>11/29</td>
<td><strong>TEST 3</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Th</td>
<td>12/1</td>
<td>Emerging adulthood: cognitive development</td>
<td>18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tu</td>
<td>12/6</td>
<td>Adulthood: biosocial + cognitive + psychosocial development</td>
<td>20, 21, 22</td>
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<td>Th</td>
<td>12/8</td>
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<td>23, 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tu</td>
<td>12/13</td>
<td>Death and Dying</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Th</td>
<td>12/15</td>
<td><strong>TEST 4</strong></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Important Date**

11/28  Last date to withdraw from course. Last day a student withdrawn by the professor may be reinstated.

**Specific Course Learning Objectives**

**PSYC 2314 Prerequisites:** The learning objectives for this course are based on ACC’s requirement that students enrolled will have successfully completed *Introduction to Psychology* (PSYC 2301).
Learning Objectives – Part 1

Introductory Objectives (Chapter 1)

- Identify students’ reasons for taking a lifespan development course and topics they particularly want to be emphasized.
- Identify and briefly describe Bronfenbrenner’s ecological categories of contextual influence.
- Explain and discuss the nature-nurture controversy.
- List the basic steps of the scientific method.
- Differentiate and provide examples of longitudinal, cross-sectional, and cross-sequential research methodology.
- Define and give examples of correlation (positive, negative, and zero).
- Outline the latest research on mirror neurons and their relationship to observational learning.

Theory Objectives (Chapter 2)

- Define developmental theory and explain how developmental theories are used to understand human behavior and development.
- Distinguish between grand and emergent theories.
- Discuss the major focus of psychoanalytic theory and explain Freud’s views.
- Present examples of Freudian theory in practice.
- Contrast Erikson’s theory of psychosocial development with Freud’s theory.
- Discuss the focus of cognitive theories and explain Piaget’s theory of cognitive development.
- Discuss the basic ideas of Vygotsky and evaluate the sociocultural perspective on development, especially as it relates to Bandura’s social learning theory.
- Explain the significance of scaffolding and the zone of proximal development in promoting cognitive growth.
- Outline the basic ideas of epigenetic systems theory.

Hereditry and Environment Objectives (Chapter 3)

- Describe the process of conception and the first few hours of development.
- Describe the process for mapping the karyotype.
- Identify the mechanisms of heredity and explain how sex is determined.
- Distinguish between monozygotic and dizygotic twins.
- Differentiate the genotype from phenotype.
- Identify environmental variables that affect genetic inheritance.
- Outline and give examples of the most common chromosomal abnormalities.
- Identify common genetic disorders.
- Describe situations in which couples may wish to seek genetic testing/counseling.
- Identify tests used in prenatal diagnosis and describe their purposes.
- Describe the Human Genome Project.
- Identify the value of stem cells.

Prenatal Development and Birth Objectives (Chapter 4)

- Describe significant developments that occur during the fertilization, zygotic, embryo, and fetal periods.
- Outline causes of infertility.
- Discuss rates and characteristics of ectopic pregnancy.
- Identify the most common causes of congenital malformations, define teratology, and discuss factors that determine if a teratogen will be harmful.
PSYC 2314 Syllabus

- Outline protective steps that may moderate the risk of teratogenic exposure.
- Describe the birth process and how the newborn's condition is assessed at birth.
- Discuss low birth-weight, preterm, and small for gestational age infants, and discuss the possible causes, challenges, and consequences of these conditions.
- Discuss the advantages of prepared childbirth for the baby and the family.
- Explain the concept of parent-infant bonding and the current view of most developmental psychologists on bonding in humans.
- Identify factors associated with postpartum depression.

Learning Objectives – Part 2

First 2 Years: Biosocial Development (Chapter 5)

- Describe overall growth during the first two years.
- Describe infant body proportions and compare to those of an adult.
- Identify risk factors and possible explanations for sudden infant death syndrome.
- Outline how the brain changes (matures) during infancy.
- Characterize the basic reflexes of the newborn and distinguish between fine and gross motor skills.
- Demonstrate how habituation is used in research on infant perception.
- Describe the extent and development of the infant's perceptual abilities (especially vision, hearing, taste, and smell).
- Discuss the role of sensory experience in brain development.
- Discuss the benefits and potential side-effects of immunization.
- Outline the benefits and challenges of breast-feeding.
- Discuss the nutritional needs of infants and results of malnutrition in the first years.

First 2 Years: Cognitive Development (Chapter 6)

- Identify and describe the six stages (Piaget) of sensorimotor intelligence.
- Review recent research findings regarding object permanence.
- Describe language development during infancy.
- Contrast the theories of Skinner and Chomsky regarding early language development.

First 2 Years: Psychosocial Development (Chapter 7)

- Identify eight facial expressions associated with corresponding internal feelings.
- Discuss Greenspan's ideas regarding psychological interventions possible during infancy and early childhood.
- Discuss the evolution of emotion including the effects of cognitive development during the first two years of life.
- Explain the origins and development of temperament as an interaction of nature and nurture.
- Outline the findings of the New York Longitudinal Study as it relates to temperament.
- Identify and discuss the stability of the Big 5 personality traits.

Early Childhood: Biosocial Development (Chapter 8)

- Outline normal physical growth from the ages of 2 to 6.
- Describe changes in eating habits during the preschool years.
- Discuss brain maturation during this developmental period.
- Discuss the significance of drawing during the play years.
- Outline the evolution of playground development and its relationship to “injury control.”
- Debate whether male-female distinctions in play patterns are gender differences or cultural influences.
Identify categories of child maltreatment and discuss factors that contribute to it.

**Early Childhood: Cognitive Development (Chapter 9)**

- Discuss the development of reading readiness skills via examination of the *Test of Early Reading Ability – Second Edition* (TERA-2).
- Review Piaget's characterization of the stage of preoperational thought.
- Review Piaget's principles of conservation.
- Contrast Vygotsky’s views on cognitive development with those of Piaget.
- Outline the sequence by which vocabulary and grammar develops.
- Debate the value of a preschool education (e.g., Montessori schools, Head Start) for a child vs. remaining home with a primary caretaker.

**Early Childhood: Psychosocial Development (Chapter 10)**

- Discuss the emergence of self from the perspective of various developmental theorists.
- Examine social awareness during the play years.
- Define and give examples of different types of play.
- Compare and contrast patterns of parenting and their effect on children.
- Discuss types of aggression in preschool children.
- Discuss the development of gender awareness.

**Learning Objectives – Part 3**

**Ideas for Effective Child Discipline**

- Review research on styles of parenting and that regarding biological inheritance of personality traits.
- Outline and give examples of basic prerequisites for discipline.
- Outline and give examples of effective discipline techniques.
- Discuss positive and negative reinforcement schedules.
- Discuss principles associated with use of flooding, modeling, reality therapy, time-out, and home token economies.

**Middle Childhood: Biosocial Development (Chapter 11)**

- Describe normal physical growth and development during middle childhood.
- Identify the major causes of childhood obesity.
- Discuss the problems of obese children in middle childhood and outline the best approaches for treating obesity.
- Describe the development of motor skills during the school years and discuss reasons for limited abilities in some areas.
- Discuss the symptoms and possible causes of learning disabilities.
- Outline the process for assessing a child for learning disabilities.
- Describe the symptoms and possible causes of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (AD/HD).
- Discuss the types of treatment available for ADHD and outline how stimulant and antidepressant medication work.
- Discuss potential accommodations for educating children with special needs.
Middle Childhood: Cognitive Development (Chapter 12)

- Discuss the information processing perspective on cognitive development during the school years, focusing on children’s advances in selective attention, memory skills, and processing capacity.
- Identify and discuss the logical operations of concrete operational thought (Piaget).
- Discuss the concept of metacognition.
- Describe language development during the school years.
- Debate the academic and social challenges facing children whose primary language is different from the standard language used at school.
- Debate the best approaches to bilingual education.
- Debate variations of schooling that have recently been promoted.

Middle Childhood: Psychosocial Development (Chapter 13)

- Discuss the importance of peer groups.
- Discuss the ways in which children’s friendship circles and social problem solving skills change during the school years.
- Identify groups of unpopular children and discuss the etiology of the peer group rejection and what can be done about it.
- Debate the modification of American family structure and the impact it has had on children (i.e., single parent homes, step-parent relations, blended families, the role of grandparents).
- Discuss use of the SPPI for assessing distress.
- Outline Kohlberg’s stage theory of moral development and discuss criticisms of it.

Adolescence: Biosocial Development (Chapter 14)

- Outline the biological events of puberty.
- Identify factors that influence the onset of puberty.
- Describe physical growth during adolescence in both males and females.
- Outline nutritional needs and problems of adolescents.
- Discuss the adolescent’s preoccupation with body image and the problems that sometimes arise.
- Discuss adjustment problems encountered by boys and girls who develop earlier or later than their peers.

Adolescence: Cognitive Development (Chapter 15)

- Discuss evidence of formal operational thinking during adolescence.
- Discuss adolescent egocentrism including fantasies and fables.
- Debate whether the typical secondary school meets the cognitive needs of adolescents.
- Discuss the impact of ego- and task-involvement learning on the typical adolescent and debate how schools can be organized to more effectively meet adolescents’ cognitive needs.
- Explain how adolescent thinking contributes to the high incidence of adolescent pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease.
- Debate sex education and whether or not high schools should have daycare centers.

Adolescence: Psychosocial Development (Chapter 16)

- Describe Erikson’s view of the development of identity during adolescence.
- Contrast the views of Erikson with those of other developmental theorists, especially Spranger and Hall.
- Discuss the problems of identity formation encountered by adolescents.
Learning Objectives – Part 4

Emerging Adulthood – Cognitive Development (Chapter 18)

- List and describe the stages of cognition proposed by K. Warner Schaie.
- Identify the main characteristics of postformal thought and tell how it differs from formal operational thought.
- Define dialectical thought and give examples of its usefulness.
- Outline the seven stages of faith described by James Fowler.
- Discuss the relationship between cognitive growth and higher education.
- Discuss how life events may trigger new patterns of thinking and result in cognitive growth.

Adulthood: Biosocial (Chapter 20)

- Identify typical physical changes that occur during middle adulthood.
- Describe the relationship between lifestyle factors and health.
- Discuss historical changes in the psychological impact of menopause.

Adulthood: Cognitive + Psychosocial Development (Chapters 21 + 22)

- Define, outline, and give examples of how expertise is a primary attribute during middle adulthood.
- Discuss the concept of the mid-life crisis and evaluate research evidence concerning its occurrence.
- Discuss the impact of gender, SES, vocation, and culture on the experience of the mid-life crisis.
- Discuss the relationship between middle-aged adults and the younger and older generations.
- Debate career related problems that may occur during mid-life, who is most likely to experience them, and how they can be prevented.
- Describe clusters of personality traits designated the “big five” and discuss reasons for their relative stability during adulthood.
- Discuss the impact of stressors on development during middle adulthood and ways of coping with stressors.

Late Adulthood: Biosocial Development (Chapter 23)

- Discuss factors that contribute to ageism in our society.
- Differentiate between optimal, normal, and impaired aging.
- Discuss theories of aging including the wear-and-tear and genetic approaches.
- Explain what the Hayflick limit is and how it supports the idea of a genetic clock.

Late Adulthood – Cognitive Development (Chapter 24)

- Summarize research findings regarding changes in the sensitivity of the sensory register and the capacity of working memory during late adulthood.
- Summarize research findings regarding changes in the older adult’s ability to access the knowledge base and to use control processes efficiently.
- Suggest factors, other than the aging process itself that might contribute to age-related declines in cognitive functioning.
- Define dementia and describe its stages.
- Identify the most common forms of dementia and discuss the differences between them.

**Death and Dying (Epilogue chapter)**

- Describe some cultural variations in how death is viewed and treated.
- Discuss the development of the field of thanatology.
- Outline the emotions associated with Kubler-Ross’s stages of dying.
- Discuss age-related differences in the conceptualization of death.
- Debate measures an individual and his or her family can take to ensure that the person dies a “good death.”
- Discuss the hospice environment.
- Describe the functions of mourning and list the stages of the mourning process.
- Discuss the ways in which the emotional impact of an unexpected death might differ from that of an expected death.

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**How To Evaluate A Self-help Book**

Following is an outstanding synopsis taken from a textbook by Carole Wade and Carol Tavris (1999) entitled *Invitation to Psychology*.

If you wander through the psychology section of your local bookstore (perhaps called “psychology and self-help” or “personal growth”), you will find rows of books promising to fix anything that ails you. They will tell you how to make money, how to use your mind to cure your body, how to recover from heartbreak, and how to find happiness in seven easy steps. They will keep you from becoming too independent, too dependent, or too codependent. They will help you find a relationship, fix a relationship, or end a relationship. People in the United States and Canada, countries with long historical traditions of self-improvement and do-it-yourself attitudes, consume self-help books like peanuts – by the handful. Which are helpful, which are harmful, and which are just innocuous?

Some self-help books, if they promise a specific program for the reader to follow, can be as effective as treatment administered by a therapist (Christensen & Jacobson, 1994). The problem is that many readers fail to follow through. Also, not all books are good ones – and the fact that a book has been written by a psychologist or a program that has been endorsed by the American Psychological Association is no guarantee of its merit.

After serving as chair of the APA’s Task Force on Self-Help Therapies, which investigated the proliferation and promises of self-help books and tapes, Gerald Rosen (1981) concluded, “Unfortunately, the involvement of psychologists in the development, assessment, and marketing of do-it-yourself treatment programs has often been less than responsible. Psychologists have published untested materials, advanced exaggerated claims, and accepted the use of misleading titles that encourage unrealistic expectations regarding outcome.” The situation remains the same today.

Rosen recognizes that self-help books and programs can be effective in helping people, however, and thus offers consumers some research-based criteria for evaluating a self-help book:

- **The authors should be qualified**, which means that they have conducted good research or
are thoroughly versed in the field. Personal testimonials by people who have survived
difficulties or tragedy can be helpful and inspirational, of course, but an author’s own
experience is not grounds for generalizing to everyone.

· The book should be based on sound scientific theory, not on the author’s hunches,
pseudoscientific theories, or armchair observations. This criterion rules out, among other
kinds of books, all weight-loss manuals based on crash diets or goofy nutritional advice
(“Eat popcorn and watermelon for a week”).

· The book should include evidence of the program’s effectiveness and not simply the
author’s unsupported assertions that it works. Many self-help books offer programs that
have not been tested for efficacy.

· The book should not promise the impossible. This lets out books that promise you perfect
sex, total love, or high self-esteem in 30 days. It also lets out books, programs, or tapes
that promote techniques whose effectiveness has been disconfirmed by psychological
research, such as “subliminal” tapes (Moore, 1995).

· The advice should be organized in a systematic program, step by step, not as a vague
prep talk to “take charge of your life” or “find love in your heart”; and the reader should be
told how to evaluate his or her progress.

Some books do not meet all these criteria. One is Changing for Good (Prochaska, Norcross, &
DiClemente, 1994), which describes the common ingredients of effective change that apply to
people in and out of therapy. But as long as people yearn for a magic bullet to cure their
problems – a pill, a book, a subliminal tape – quick fix solutions will find a ready audience.

Bibliography


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Sample Book Review (for a book related to developmental psychology)

Sample Book Review Grading Form

Sample Biography/Autobiography Book Review

Sample Biography/Autobiography Book Review Grading Form