

Big Brothers Big Sisters
Abbotsford Mission Ridge Meadows
Mentor Learning Series

6



Adolescent Development and Peer Socialization

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In this module, learners will develop a greater understanding of human development and group socialization theories and research, particularly as it relates to children and youth.



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Introduction

**"Ultimately, it is not so much what we do,
but rather who we are to young people that counts."**

Dr. Gordon Neufeld, Fort Nelson School District, Professional Development Day, October 2004

NOTE: For clarity, please note in this information the terms children and adolescent are often interchangeable terms, referring to the growth and development of young people in general. Also, though the word teacher appears frequently, the reader is encouraged to think of the term teacher, not just as a classroom, school teacher, but also to consider the term teacher in the context of a mentor, coach, a parent, a grandparent, music teacher, a spiritual leader, etc. Essentially the word teacher in the information provided below is to be considered to be an individual in a young person's life who is intentionally supporting the learning and development of another.

Some introductory, some many say, *cautionary* thoughts...

The intention of this module is to provide introductory information to create greater understanding, generate dialogue and self-reflection, in the pursuit of building healthy, positive relationships, grounded in mutual respect and care, with young people. There are many theories and a seemingly unending quantity of research on human development. Answering questions such as: *How is it that I am the way I am, and You are the way you are?* is as complex a task as is uncovering the uniqueness of each individual. Stephen Pinker (2002) in The Blank Slate, asserts that there is not just one theory, but a whole spectrum of realities which give birth to a child, and a whole spectrum of environmental conditions and circumstances that may influence the development of a child. What follows is by no means the answer; in fact it may create more questions than it may answer for many readers. To that end you are encouraged to seek out further information to expand your learning. This is a broad overview of some of the more well known topics and interrelated influences which have and continue to inform human development from childhood through adolescence.

The Development of Self

In his paper, Self-Concept from middle childhood through adolescence Rosenberg (1986) explains that self concept development "...is inextricably interwoven with cognitive development, and must take account of ontogenetic processes" (p. 108). Rosenberg provides five developmental tendencies associated with advancing age as they relate primarily to self-concept between middle childhood and adolescence. He explains that as human development occurs, an individual's self concept tends to move from the concrete to the abstract, from the outward physical/authority controlled view to an inward psychological or internal meaning making as an individual's locus of control. Thus, older children are more able to articulate and examine feelings in relation to values, beliefs and attitudes as they gradually acquire an expanded repertoire of language and cognitive ability equipping them to identify personality qualities; "adolescents are more likely to describe themselves in terms of what Livesly and Bromly call "orientation" (expectations, wishes, fears, self-reproaches)" (Greenberg, 1999, p. 111). As adolescents develop they become more conscious of their thoughts and as they grapple with their thoughts they "...discover what they believe or value" (Greenberg, p.112). Using conflict as a learning opportunity can



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illuminate the distinctions within the relationship between one's behaviour and one's values in a specific time and place. It is in the listening of others, for example as a story of conflict is shared, that adolescents in particular (and children to some extent) gain insight into what they value allowing them to move to a greater realization of living by their own values.

Another particularly interesting aspect of self-concept development is that younger children are more likely to distinguish themselves by their interpersonal linkages, and adolescents are more likely to distinguish themselves by their interpersonal feelings, thus the adolescent would be more likely to *relate*, or see the world from another's perspective. Or said another way, who is in the *room* in relation to them is likely more important to younger children than adolescents, who would be more concerned with their feelings toward particular individuals in the *room*. Being able to consider another's view or experience, understanding the impact of one's actions or behaviour is only possible with this more mature ability.

The value of engaging in processes that are intended to generate understanding, is not lost on children because role taking for children is essential in developing their ability to "become aware of themselves as having interpersonal effects, and conceptualize themselves accordingly" (Greenberg, p. 113). On the other hand, adolescents "are more likely to focus on the nature of the interaction and, especially, the interpersonal feelings involved...Adolescents strive to enter the minds of others to discover what others are thinking and feelings" (Greenberg, p. 114). As adolescents reach greater maturity, they are able to engage in 'mutual perspective taking' and "seeing matters from others' viewpoints and recognizing that they are seeing matters from ours effects an important change in the self-concept" (Greenberg, p. 114). Moving from a black and white concrete view to a grey – abstract view is a key development movement for increased self-conceptualization to occur.

Children's' worlds are centered on external authority, unlike adolescents who's concept differentiates and as self-knowledge and cognitive ability mature, are more able to handle complexity and link the specific to the general. Adolescents are more able to make "more autonomous judgments resting on logic and the sifting and evaluation of evidence" (Greenberg, p. 118). For example, a child would be inclined to focus on the facts of a conversation - the tangible evidence and be less able to change their perspective when hearing the impact (feelings) their behaviour has had on another individual, than an adolescent. Though a child would be moved by the demonstrated emotions of another, it would be that a child would be inclined to replace a broken window and not be able to understand the value of an apology with expressions of understanding the personal violation and fear the other felt. A mature adolescent would be able to comprehend and do both. It is though role-taking and social interaction that "the individual discovers an inner psychological world, conceptualizes the self in terms of interpersonal relationships, rests conclusions about the self on logical and evidential foundations, and anchors knowledge about the self within the self" (Greenberg, p. 119). But, consideration must be given to the age of the individual in relation to levels of positive self-esteem where research has shown that likely the most tenuous time for children in relation to their sense of inner resiliency is between the age of 12 and 14. This is a time of significant instability and "if different people expect different things or if it is unclear what to expect – then self concept variability is fostered by inconsistent reflected appraisals" (Greenberg, p. 128). Being aware of these general distinctions will allow a parent, teacher, mentor or coach to align expectations and achieve greater positive outcomes.

Nature and Nurture

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It is imperative that we routinely examine and uncover our biases and assumptions particularly when we are in helping roles and are intentionally engaging in building relationships. And we must be precautious when reviewing research literature, to ensure we are not adopting conclusions which are weakly supported or those which simply serve to support our current belief or practice. For example, Judith Harris author of *The Nurture Assumption* (1999) provides some insight into this phenomenon humans tend toward of hanging onto 'old' beliefs despite new and relevant findings which contradict these, saying: "Data that conflict with the nurture assumption are ignored; ambiguous data are interpreted as confirmation of the nurture assumption" (p. 49).

The nurture theory is certainly dominant in many parent's beliefs. However, Harris (1999) puts forth a substantial argument that the environment has no more than a 50% impact factor and that genes and the effects of the effects of one's genes determine at least 50% of how children develop. Yet, still many believe that the environment – the nurture aspect - (parental beliefs, values, behavior influences, economic status, education level of parents, quality of schooling, single vs. two parent family homes, etc.) children are raised in, is what predominately shapes who they are. Harris concludes that the results of behavioural genetic research clearly indicates that, "...overall, heredity accounts for roughly 50 percent of the variation in the samples of people that have been tested, environmental influences for the other 50 percent" (Harris, 1999, p. 23). Furthermore, environmental influences do not influence each child the same, instead Harris asserts that the research shows "... almost all similarities between adult siblings can be attributed to their shared genes. Growing up in the same home does not make siblings alike..." (Harris, p. 37).

If "[A]bout half of the variation in impulsiveness can be attributed to people's genes, the other half to their experiences" (Harris, 1999, p.23), then how can we address this in the context of individuals being responsible for their behaviour. Harris also reports, "...many of the results reported by socialization researchers can be due to genetic transmission of traits from parents to children. When parents have trouble managing their own lives or getting along with others, their children are subject to a kind of double jeopardy, because they are at risk of inheriting disadvantageous genes and also having a lousy family life. If such children do not turn out well, their problems are usually attributed to their lousy home life, but the true cause could be their disadvantageous genes. In most cases its impossible to tell" (p. 49). Humans do not develop in isolation; they develop within the context of their biology and their surroundings – environments of relationships - much of which, unwittingly and not, is constituted by other humans. And it is wise to be mindful of Harris's (1998) comment: "[B]iology is not destiny; the fact that heredity plays a role in determining people's characteristics doesn't mean that they can't be changed" (p. 324).

Parent and Child Relationships

H.R. Schaffer's (1999) explanation of the evolution of the field of human development from the parent – child relationship as a unidirectional concept to one of a bidirectional concept, with the implications of child effects and the dyadic parent child relationship, illuminates the complexities involved in researching and evaluating parent child relationships. Noting that if we are to understand the value of parent child relationships in the context of human development we must note the nature of child effects, link this with the development of internal working models based on attachment theory, and focus on the complexity of the dyad - the parent – child relationship - because it is not possible to separate the two as "...parents provide both genes and environment" (p. 275). Further to this, Schaffer draws attention to the changing

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parenting in relation to child development, despite relatively fixed characteristics saying; “what is salient at one age may not be so at another; the changing meaning of particular attributes with development produces different effects on parents at different ages” (p. 277). And that the child is not best studied as an individual but develops within interactive relationships, and parents are more likely to be positively influential when they engage with their child in mutual construction with a “history of reciprocal interaction” (p. 283). These are important considerations when one is working with children and adolescents in any context.

This latter reference of Schaffer’s (1999) is embedded in an article by Susan Lollis, on *Conceptualizing the Influence of the Past and the Future in Present Parent-Child Relationships*. Lollis contends that present day parent-child relationships are a direct result of the past (the history of the relationship) and it is this shared history that forms the future of the relationship. This is predicated on the belief that there is considered to be a reciprocity and mutuality in terms of parent child relationships due to the expected enduring nature of such a relationship. This history is equally formed then by the degree of security or attachment a child formed to their mother, which then led to the development of the child’s internal working model, which informs their ability to exhibit pro-social behaviours and develop future relationships. Essentially a child’s development is informed by their genome in the context of early parent child relationships because “ [P]arents in interaction with their children react not merely to what the child is doing in the present but also to a great extent to the accumulation of how the child has interacted in the past” (p. 74). The past informs the present, and thus the future.

To that end, *Love at Goon Park* by Blum(2002), talks about love as the requisite force - which likely underpins attachment theory and parent child relationships as ‘the’ potentially important vehicles to human development. Blum provides insight into Harry Harlow’s work on the nature of love, not as simple affection, but as a critical ingredient that requires people pay attention and continue an active commitment even when they are fed up, worn out and too tired. “If one returns to the idea of the right parent, it may simply be a mother or father who doesn’t give up on the child”, and that may well be what is the key to human development, such as the presence of a mother or father or a caring connected adult who remains committed to accompanying the child (p. 289).

Attachment Theory

In the moral development and attachment theory, literature and research there is evidence that if we pay attention to young people who are acting out by developing positive relationships, providing safe spaces and environments where they can develop attachments, we can positively generate their ability to learn and develop a positive self concept. If we are proactive in getting curious about noticing, and being willing to engage vs. disengage, if we gently reach for those whom we resist, if we listen with intent to understand, they, regardless of age, like an infant, will tell us what they need and we will be able to respond appropriately.

Relationships – social networks - are critical to the quality of human development and life, and attachment theory supports this particularly as it relates to the quality of the interdependent infant-caregiver relationship. For an infant, the degree of consistent responsiveness an infant experiences in relation to their primary caregiver provides them with a secure base; a requirement for engaging in exploring the world and learning. (Watson, 2003) The degree of secure attachment an infant experiences with their mother or primary caregiver has shown long term impact on children’s and adolescent’s confidence levels, ability to forge positive friendships, resolve conflict peacefully, and engage



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in learning. Children with behaviours indicative of insecure attachment, or as Ainsworth termed it "insecure anxious or ambivalent attachment relationship" (Watson, p. 271) – routinely engage in antisocial behaviours, often drawing the ire of their caregivers and teachers.

Even though there has been substantial research conducted by and large this has been with younger children and infants, and the long term consequences of insecure attachment seem to me to be inconclusive. "With few exceptions, however, it is unlikely that insecure attachment is either a necessary or a sufficient cause of a later disorder, and in some cases it may in fact be an effect of the disorder itself (Cicchetti et al., 1995) (Greenberg, 1999, p. 484)." Bowlby and Ainsworth's originating theories and research (Greenberg, 1999, Crain, 2005, Watson, 2003), Blum's (2002) descriptions of Howarth's work with primates and cloth mothers, isolate monkeys and monkey communities, certainly has sparked a great deal of ongoing research in this topic area. There is ample evidence of the positive affect strong infant-caregiver relationships have on children which do allow for children to develop much more capable prosocial behaviours. The research also says that under certain circumstances with the requisite support, the negative impact of insecure attachment bonds - children with avoidant, ambivalent or disorganized attachments - can be overcome and children can thrive. However, insecure attachment between an infant and its mother is not a sufficient stand alone reason for maladaptive behavioral outputs by individuals. Greenberg (1999) calls for further research to determine, if there is a positive relationship "between attachment relations and later adolescence delinquency and adult criminality (p. 488)", depression, anxiety disorders, aggression and/or conduct disorder.

The cure or correction of insecure attachment is the least likely action an individual experiencing insecure attachment will seek out or receive; because their *natural* demeanor is to protect themselves by disengaging, hurting others and avoiding building relationships. However, as the teacher can be viewed as the primary caregiver particularly in an elementary school, this is the perfect place and relationship for children to learn to "...regulate their emotions and their behaviour...[because]...The capacity for empathy and the disposition to be cooperative and prosocial emerge out of our children's experiences of collaboration with their caregivers (Watson, 2003, p. 280)." The implications of attachment theory are centered in the arena of discipline and "...building trusting, supportive, collaborative relationships with children should be at the heart of our approach to discipline and teaching (Watson, p. 280)." Traditional discipline, the application of discipline codes which seek to change behaviour through shame and punishment, only serve to add further injury and to cement negative world views and personal beliefs. Promoting caring, trusting relationships between teachers and young people which seek to establish positive relationships as a core commitment, allow young people to own their behaviour, and witness a secure place where they can develop more prosocial behaviours. Thus, attachment theory and research supports establishing and promoting positive relationships as a healthy way to achieve both cognitive and healthy emotional human development. Practices, ways of being, which proactively support values and such as respect, equality, voluntary participation, repairment of harm, responsibility, accountability – all are a means to developing prosocial behaviours. All of which are most achievable in the context of positive relationships.



Moral Development

“Moral development: that is, how children come to have certain mature notions of right and wrong, and how these notions affect their behaviour”

Bloom, 2002, p. 79

Wayne Northey (2002), in his review of *No Future Without Forgiveness* by Desmond Milo Tutu, provides some interesting reflections on the relevance of moral development in relation to generating positive relationships and community.

My humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in yours.' We belong in a bundle of life. We say, 'A person is a human because I belong. I participate, I share.' Harmony, friendliness, community are great goods. Social harmony is for us the summum bonum - the greatest good. . . To forgive is not just to be altruistic. It is the best form of self-interest. What dehumanizes you inexorably dehumanizes me. It gives people resilience, enabling them to survive and merge still human despite all efforts to dehumanize them (p. 31). One such universal law is that we are bound together in what the Bible calls 'the bundle of life.' Our humanity is caught up in that of all others. We are humans because we belong. We are made for community, for togetherness, for family, to exist in a delicate network of interdependence. Truly 'it is not good for man to be alone,' [Genesis 2:18] for no one can be human alone. We are sisters and brothers of one another whether we like it or not and each one of us is a precious individual (pp. 196 & 197).

Lawrence Kohlberg's initial development of his moral stages theory was discovered by posing a series of moral dilemmas to a group of various aged boys. Their responses seemed to arrange themselves into a six stage model, which Kohlberg then loosely attached to Piaget's cognitive staged maturation model. The integration of a social component of learning, and the influence of peer conditions – is reminiscent of Vygotsky's theory of social cultural influences and Judith Harris's theories of development, in relation to the influence of peers. Kohlberg's research found that; “How well children learn to adopt others' roles depends to a great extent on the conditions of their social environment” (Thomas, 2005, p. 435). And even though an individual may cognitively achieve a stage five or six level of moral thought, the use of such levels was related to the individual's desire or will to act in particular ways depending on the social circumstances. This is also reflected in Harris's findings with adolescents, who contends that it is primarily peer influence or peer groupings which dictate the level of moral engagement.

One of the central critics of Kohlberg's theory was Carol Gilligan, who challenged the bias inherent within Kohlberg's male only research subjects. Carol Gilligan's theory of moral development – expanded from Kohlberg's - is moral development as an integration of laws and rules, caring and compassion. Gilligan put forward the theory that males and female diverge in about stage three, where women focus more on “interpersonal relationships and the ethics of compassion and care” and men focus more on a formal justice model that “revolves around rules, rights, and abstract principles” (Crain, 2005, p. 168). This distinction provides an explanation for how it is that females and males routinely achieve different moral development stages, regardless of other factors. Essentially because females were relationship and interdependent focused, they would not typically go beyond Kohlberg's stage three; males on the other hand would routinely achieve a stage four or five level. But there are arguments made that because Gilligan's theory was not substantiated by empirical data it is less credible in some arenas. Gilligan and Kohlberg do agree that moral development occurs when an individual is faced with a moral dilemma; such that it encourages a state of disequilibrium which requires the individual to wrestle with the misfit in



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their current cognitive schemes and thus development occurs. (Thomas, 2005) Gilligan's model also reveals a struggle experienced by individuals to "reconcile justice (equal rights and fairness) with compassion and caring (empathizing with another's plight)" (Thomas, p. 449).

Kohlberg's work is based on moral thought, which does not absolutely translate to moral behaviour nor does an individual's moral thought mature regularly – it slips and slides based on social settings, cultural circumstances, biases and stereotypes, etc.; "...research has indicated rather modest links between moral thought and moral action" (Crain, 2005, p. 166). In terms of learning opportunities, initiating and posing moral dilemmas, and engaging young people in reflecting on moral dilemmas is critical to developing higher levels of moral thinking. In Child Development: Educating and Working with Children and Adolescents, authors McDevitt and Ormond (2004) provide additional numerous suggestions for engaging students in developing their moral thoughts largely by way of adults providing positive role modeling and clear behaviour expectations with explanations. Moshe Blatt's research on how to best accomplish an increase in moral thought also indicates that role taking, presenting moral dilemma stories as discussion topics were effective. The Kohlberg-Blatt method of presenting a view which contains opposing information "induces cognitive conflict" resulting in an individual experiencing a need to reequilibrate and in the process of that they "form a more advanced and comprehensive position" (Crain, p. 170). The results of Blatt's research indicated that there were positive changes in groups engaged in this method with Socratic underpinnings, and these positive outcomes were believed to be a result of the curiosity aroused in students which when information was provided which did not fit with their "existing cognitive structures...they were 'motivated to revise their thinking'" (Crain, p. 171).

Cognition Development/Neo Piagetian Perspective

Our world and our cognitive development occur as a result of the acquisition and use of language. Piaget argued that cognitive development happens as a result of realizing more of one's potential through the individual acquisition and application of knowledge by way of "internal maturational processes, rather than environmental contexts or events" (Birney et al., 2005, p. 334). Piaget's theory concerns itself with the belief that intellectual development, knowledge acquisition happens through the individual building of schemas, which one learns through the completion of tasks and it is derived primarily from stage like maturation. Therefore, if a child fails at a learning task it is most normally due to the fact that the task is not aligned with the relevant development stage. Vygotsky on the other hand asserted that cognitive development happens initially through the acquisition of verbal language and this language enables children to socially interact and develop knowledge thus enhancing their cognitive abilities. Following outward expression, children internalize language allowing them to develop self regulation abilities and from that vantage point they are more inclined to engage in learning the surrounding cultural learning mechanisms of reading, writing and arithmetic. (Case, 1999)

Vygotsky and Piaget both agree that there is increased competency of cognitive development as children age into adolescence but what causes these stages to occur or to be delayed they disagree. Piaget views cognition from a developmentally staged perspective whereas Vygotsky believes that cognition is a result primarily of the interaction between the individual and the social environment made up of 'word' which results in delivering a different *how* perspective. Vygotsky theorizes that our verbal language constructs our world and from that vantage point cognitive development is engaged.

Integrating the early empiricist and rationalist traditions, opened up room for a neo-Piagetian theory, where although there are some differences essentially these theorists all agreed to view cognitive development as a result of the integration of Piaget's contentions that: "...children construct their own understanding of the world and that reflexive abstraction plays an important role in this process",



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development is a “general process in which changes that cannot be tied to any form of specific external stimulation play an important role...misleading tasks provide a particularly important window on children's conceptual understanding” and children's intellectual capacity must be viewed broadly (Case, p. 44). Likely the most relevant findings in several research findings by neo-Piagetian theorists, is that children's ability to process information increases with age, and increases in children's acquisition of knowledge can occur when tasks are modified, relative to their current level of understanding new concepts.(Case)

Neo-Piagetian theorist Noam Chomsky put forward the notion that it was the existing and the continuous creation of new and then different connections within the mind which allowed for cognitive development to occur. In research undertaken by Chi with respect to classification and class inclusion, Chi's theory is that cognitive growth is relative to the size of the acquisition of one's knowledge network which is a result of an “accumulation of a vast amount of specific experience” (Case, p.49).

The relevance of understanding cognitive development assists both teachers and learners in determining how we learn and that in turn would inform the choice of what concept or knowledge is next needed to be presented. The development of critical thinking ability, through the pruning that occurs within the context of, for instance, the Adaptive Control of Thought framework, where links are strengthened and weakened based on higher levels of efficiency, strategy adaptivity clearly illustrates that cognition is organic – our ability to “accommodate new information and new attributes...is ongoing and continues into adulthood (Birney et al., p. 342).

Though Piaget and Vygotsky fundamentally disagreed on the core cause of cognitive development, both were looking to determine how learning occurs, and simply took different approaches to determining an answer(s). Case (1999) summarizes the development of the various theories of cognitive development have served to inform each other; essentially saying that there is relevance to hanging cognitive development on a framework which supports domain specific structural learning, systems which allow for meaning making to incorporate distinctive conceptual and/or symbolic content with equal attention paid to children's physical and/or social experience as one way to understand developmental change.

Vygotsky referred to the interplay of moments of transformation as informing cognitive development and vice versa, citing this engagement of “higher psychological functions” was embedded within the “...ideas found in the writings of Marx and Engels: that development is a gradual quantitative progression leading up to a qualitative leap” (Glassman, 1994, p. 198). Piaget believed that cognition developed more linearly, sequentially, inductively and primarily as a result of the individual's recognition of an emerging contradiction whereas Vygotsky maintained that learning occurred deductively, and as a result of individuals being pulled “forward into development” by their social environment - either way – the end result is to recognize the symbiotic nature that exists between spontaneous concepts as they are transformed into scientific concepts, which only occur when there is enough foundation to carry the transformation through to a ‘new’ concept or new understanding which occurs when a critical mass is obtained (Glassman, p. 204).

Further research by Chapman suggests that we are best served if we integrate the predominant theories of Piaget and Vygotsky. Theorizing that there is an interconnected relationship with regards to the development of an individual's intelligence, occurring through “reciprocal interactions between the developing child and objects and...between the developing child and other individuals. Thus the progression of reasoning through equilibrations occurs on the physical level and the social level” (Glassman, p. 210). Taking in, becoming aware of new information in relation to existing knowledge requires us to reequilibrate, stimulating transformation for new paradigms to be entertained. Thus transformation informs and supports cognitive development.



Intelligence as Engagement

It was originally believed that intelligence is stagnant, but new theories such as neo-Piagetian approaches and Sternberg's (1999) theory of three types of intelligence, indicate that increases in intelligence continue to be present, in context, through adulthood and intelligence is integrative. Even more interesting is the shift from theorizing intelligence as what one knows to how one knows; the questions one asks are more relevant markers than how much knowledge one has, with respect to measuring intelligence and intellectual ability.

One of the most untapped ways in which learning and intelligence is engaged and evolves is in the listening of others. It is often through discourse and dialogue with others that new avenues of thinking, making sense of information and new thoughts are discovered. Cooperative learning activities engage the three aspects of intelligence development Sternberg (1999) refers to as, analytical, creative and practical. Integrating learning activities and topics which allow for maximizing these three intelligences will afford participants with the most positive, integrative and relevant opportunities to improve their overall intelligence. Sternberg's (1999) intelligence research in third world countries revealed the discrepancies to achieving successful intelligence based on context. Having a base knowledge, learning ways to analyze, evaluate, and then synthesize to higher levels of thinking, allows one to 'think outside the box' (be creative) and being able to see the practicalities or impracticalities of a theory to real life, are of equal importance, in terms of moving forward in developing critical thinking skills. This allows the individual to stretch past what they know to then think of and pose the unanswered questions and consider them. Knowledge, facts and how to's are increasingly more accessible in our current and future world, and make the learning of copious amount of information redundant. Increasing our ability as to how to think is the value of education, and allow us to move to; 'If that is so, what then does this mean about this?'; which requires a level of inquiry and mental wrestling not often supported.

Behavioural and Social Learning Theory

As research based psychologists Watson and Skinner focused on observing human and non human behaviours as a way to understand, predict and shape human development. Their work led to the development of many existing behaviour modification practices and behaviour intervention plans in use today to address problematic behaviour in young people. These strategies include controlling future behaviour through positive reinforcers, negative reinforcers and punishment consequences in response to a child's response to a specific stimulus. (Crain, 2005) In their quest for psychology to become viewed as a science Watson and Skinner's earlier work is limited to the *outer* child. They believed that it was only through what could be seen that hypothesis's of human behaviour could be proven. They believed that there is no 'internal activity' which informs a child's behaviour. This 'outer' observational position does not detract from the legitimacy of their work, but rather, it has important applications in limited settings and it has served to inform further critical explorations.

The underlying premise of Skinner's work is that human's have an innate drive to survive. (Thomas, 2005) He believed that *survival* occurred as a nonstaged model of growth where through "specific conditioned acts" children developed in sequential small steps within some age approximations and individual hereditary traits (Thomas, p. 164). Skinner and Watson viewed children as passive toward their own development, which is a belief evident with educators and psychologists who refer to children as 'empty vessels' and 'blank slates'. Since Skinner, behaviourist research has expanded and branched off, from viewing human development as strictly a stimulus response belief to include cognitive activity and



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context. The outgrowth of this work led to the development of radical behaviourism which added an environmental component and the internal contributions of children to their development; as equal factors contributing to a child's ability to increase their self-management or self-regulation and motivation.

Moving from an outwardly observant perspective to an internal view Bandura conceived of making sense of behaviour and human development through social learning or social cognition theory saying that; "Most courses of action are initially shaped in thought" and it is from this internal 'world' that a child determines their behaviour (Thomas, 2005, p. 149). Humans develop in many ways including through bidirectional relationships and experiences from which they draw on to inform their present and future behaviour, all of which serves to inform motivation, self regulation and self efficacy. Bandura's research led him to conclude that children learn through modeling, one-trial learning, and incidental learning all of which happen within their environment. (Thomas, 2005) Therefore children survive because of the strength of their biological composition and because they are able to learn and align their behaviour to the sociocultural norms of their environment. This ever expanding learning builds an internal generalized repertoire of knowledge which allows children to gradually attain higher levels of expertise in predicting the future consequences of their actions, serving as motivation, and increasing self efficacy and self regulation.

Bandura found that essentially even though a person may understand that some negative consequences may be encountered if she/he engaged in deviant or problematic behaviour, their actions are chosen based on what will fit within the group norms of the group they value the most at that time. Regardless of parenting, rules, past behaviour or personal knowledge, children and adolescents will consciously choose antisocial behaviours if it will allow them to be identified with the group they most value at that moment in time; and likely the only way to bring about change in those contexts is to change the environment. Human beings need to feel safe, and belonging is one aspect of safety that is an overriding powerful need adolescents in particular seek out.

Simply applying a stimulus response equation does not internalize new behaviours. Watson, Skinner and Bandura found this to be true in non human and human subject experiments. Determining the level of effectiveness through the consequence of punishment as a way to shape or encourage prosocial behaviour in children, and to stop behaviour which is considered aggressive and intolerable, has not always met with long term, generalizing effectiveness. And any approach to changing or shaping young people's behaviour must in some degree relate to the circumstances and age or developmental stage of the child. There are benefits to be realized from all fields of study, particularly integrating a cognitive and behavioural approach and no one shoe fits all.

Metacognition, Motivation and Self Regulation

Young people's experiences and their affirmative engagement in academic and social learning largely rests on the positive relationship between and degree of intrinsic motivation, self regulation and metacognition they possess. The development of the theory of motivation has moved in theory from a behaviourist approach, (essentially training based on conditioning and where rewards and punishment = motivation); a social cognition or social learning theory approach (a focus of learning through observation, past experiences, desire for positive consequences, gender appropriate and a high degrees of self efficacy); to a trait perspective theory (based on one's needs for affiliation and/or approval which serves to inform a person's need for achievement or achievement motivation) and finally has come to rest more recently in the development of motivation from a cognitive theory perspective (that motivation



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is a function of individual interests, goals, and curiosity). There is a significant but subtle distinction in the extremes of these theories where, behaviourist theory says that children operate from a past success/failure paradigm, as opposed to the more present and prevalent cognitive theory which says that children operate on future consequences. As such cognitive theory is grounded in a stronger belief in children's innate intellectual abilities to decipher the past from the present and translate this into behaviour aligned with their desired expectations. Cognitive theory of motivation says that children have a significant capacity to make choices that propel them toward developing healthy degrees of intrinsic motivation and self regulation, and therefore metacognition given supporting circumstances.

A positive capacity for self regulation is a critical ability to foster in children and adolescents allowing them to develop "...a high efficacy of learning and attribute outcomes to factors they can control" and from there they can make self-determinations of the most positive problem solving strategy to choose (Perry, Phillips & Hutchinson, 2006, p.3). Essentially the greater the level of intrinsic motivation a child experiences, the higher the level of self regulation a child develops, the greater their ability to engage in *mastery* (McDevitt & Ormond) which in turn leads to higher levels of ability to evaluate one's own thinking and learning = metacognition. (Perry, Simpkins, McDowell, Kim, Killian, Dennis, Flyr, Wild & Rah, 2002). "Metacognition enables us to be successful learners, and has been associated with intelligence (e.g., Borkowski, Carr, & Pressley, 1987; Sternberg, 1984, 1986a, 1986b). Metacognition refers to higher order thinking which involves active control over the cognitive processes engaged in learning. Activities such as planning how to approach a given learning task, monitoring comprehension, and evaluating progress toward the completion of a task are metacognitive in nature (Livingstone, 1997, p.1)". Metacognition is dependant on a high degree of self regulation and intrinsic motivation; all of which are essential to academic and social success.

'Scaffolding' of children's learning and development is one of the concepts that appears regularly in the learning and human development literature. Neuman and Roskos (1997) in their research and discussion of literacy achievement provide insight into the impact of the type of teacher-student engagement and the environment as conditions which generally improve children's cognition. Referring to Lave and Wenger (1991) findings that "mental activity cannot be considered an individual activity, but one that stretches over persons, activities and settings" and Perkins (1993) research that learning is a "cognitive partnership or what has described as *person-plus-surround*" Neuman & Roskos contend that learning is best achieved in relationship with others (p.3). Perry et al (2006) in the intermediary release (at the two year mark) of their ongoing four year research on self regulated learning have found that creating self regulated learning classrooms requires "very sophisticated learning strategies", strong mentoring relationships for teachers, and significant investment on behalf of the teachers and mentors (p. 7). They conclude that, "...teachers who are highly effective in this regard scaffold students' learning processes and foster forms of disciplined inquiry"(Perry et al., 2006, p.7).

Achieving high levels of self regulation, intrinsic motivation and metacognition are key ingredients of successful learners, both academically and socially. The necessary development of intrinsic motivation and self regulation requires support for children to be curious, be challenged cognitively with inconsistencies, to have their personal interests evoked, for children to experience and see value in their activities, to have a real opportunity to experience a level of competence, some control and choice over their work and lives (McDevitt and Ormond).



Group Socialization

Group socialization is all about relationships – inter and intra; social responsibility is also all about relationships – to our self and with others within the context of our world. And as Harris so succinctly says, regardless of the context “relationships are important” (1998, p. 310). As presented earlier, Harris (2000) and Vandell (2000) present copious amounts of research clearly illustrating that who we *show up* as at any point or place, includes our biology and our traits which predict specific behaviours; just as parents’ biology and their traits which influence children’s behaviours; just as who children hang out influences them to adapt and change who they are being in the moment. It would seem imperative then, that parents, mentors, coaches, and teachers work with these complexities of development inherent within of our humanness.

Group socialization theory, as proposed by Harris (1998, 2000) and further defined by Vandell (2000) is predicated on the belief that “children’s experiences with groups of peers are the environmental factor responsible for personality and socialization into the culture at large. Dyadic relationships with parents, siblings, friends, teachers, and mentors are viewed as having minimal effects on psychological characteristics or functioning in adulthood” (p. 2). Vandell challenges Harris’s argument and this theory that presupposes parents have limited influence on their children’s adult personality, saying Harris presentation of the research is limited and is oversimplified; “...parenting is part of a complex developmental system that includes children’s own capacities and proclivities, multiple social relationships (with parents, siblings, friends, peer cliques, teachers, and neighbors), and multiple development contexts (homes, schools, and neighborhoods). Within complex developmental systems, it is very unlikely that any single factor will account for huge, or even substantial, amounts of variation” (2000, p. 5). Parke et al. (2002) in providing their critique of group socialization theory and research argue that who influences is the wrong question to begin with, and that newer research (than Harris presents) clearly demonstrates that “the expression of heritable traits depends strongly on experience, including specific parental behaviours, as well as predispositions and age-related factors (Collins et al., 2000, p. 228)” (p.167).

Children and adolescents in particular typically align themselves with their current peer group behaviours. Often it is a lack of knowledge that underlies a parent’s comment (when faced with what appears to be at-odds behaviour from their child) ‘this is not my child’ and are flabbergasted at the distinct differences between at-home behaviours and away-from-home behaviours. Yet, it is the realization of the power of group socialization which drives parents to want to pick their children’s friends, pick their teachers, pick their schools, pick their activities – knowing that group socialization theory says - who you hang around with is who you will become. But Harris (2000) says that regardless of how parents act and teach, children’s behavior is contextually driven, and she states that there are only “transitory effects of the home environments” (p. 9) which a child will only draw on under specific circumstances – typically when the child is in a new situation and has no other behavioral reference point. This theory might explain some of the differences between grade 8 students newly beginning high school, and a year later in grade 9 these same students appearing to have changed considerably, when what they have done (a year later) is align themselves with group norms and behaviours they are now familiar with. Harris (1998) contends that parent influences are more likely to be about situating their children in positive living and peer environments which can result in less delinquent behaviour and higher academic success because of the surrounding peer group, even though genetic traits which link to different behaviours would indicate otherwise.



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Vandell (2000) provides additional research that supports the ability of children to move past context and to generalize behaviour – saying that children “are actively involved in constructing the meaning of their experiences. Expectations developed in one context inform (or bias) expectations in other situations” (p. 7). Vandell draws in research which states that children “construct models for processing social cues and to guide reactions to conclude and ambiguous social dilemmas at school and elsewhere (Bandura, 1989; Dodge, 1986)” (p. 7). This links to attachment theory of how infants create models of interaction based on their lived experience in relation to their primary caregivers, which they then draw on to assist them in relating to others.

Different from Harris’s contributions to the discussion, Parke et al. (2002) provides insight and research that strongly integrates the continued role of parental influence through childhood and adolescence by virtue of parent’s child rearing practices and parental management. That there is a moving away from parents as development occurs does not preclude continued familial influence; Parke et al. state that the reality is that there is an “interplay across pathways” – just as biology does not predict all of destiny its impossible to separate out environmental influences and parental behavioural hereditary influences (p.166). Adopting Harris’s theory exclusively may lead many parents to abdicate their role and provide environments with so much autonomy for adolescents that they will be left solely to peers – as if orphaned. Parke et al. clearly points out that this abdication of parental influence would be wholly inaccurate, citing research which clearly proves that “even when selection effects are controlled, much of what appears to be peer influence is actually the end result of familial influence at an earlier point in the child’s development” (Parke et al., p. 169). There are many influences or moderators that impact both family and peer systems. Parke et al. discuss these moderators of development as social class, poverty, job loss, culture differences in family and peer influence, marital conflict, and strength of sibling connection. Ultimately parents have the obligation and responsibility to make choices which may make a significant difference in their children’s lives; just as providing specific learning environments and social expectations in schools may influence, just as peer groupings may influence; no one of these operate in isolation – all have influence; but none are necessarily the only predictor of who a child will become. Young people want to belong, and that requires fitting in or aligning themselves with their peers, and in doing so they will adopt and adapt to behaviours which are the group norm – for good and bad.

Some concluding thoughts...

Affective relationships are what unlocks and sometimes uncorks an individual’s genetic personality traits, and serve as touch points from the initial formation of infant – caregiver relationships to the continued need and value inherent in supporting children to have multiple relationships in all different contexts. “Perceived support from the teacher predicted interest in school and classes. Peer support predicted social goals. Familial support predicted mastery orientation” (Vandell, 2000, p. 13). Teachers, coaches, mentors and parents need to work together; in supporting the individual human development within the realization that as young people develop their worlds expand to include more relationships, correspondingly as the influence of the world and others increases - who they are and how they behave is dependant to some extent on who they are hangin’ out with at the time.

We are not each sole purveyors of independent individualistic worlds, we live in a *world of relationship* all of which is contextual. Alan Alda (2005) in Never Have Your Dog Stuffed, stated: “Listening is being willing to be influenced” – a key ingredient to any relationship is the capacity we allow ourselves to offer and afford others to listen and be heard. Human beings regardless of age or stage, develop by virtue of the influence we allow ourselves to be open to - in the context of what we are born with, regardless of our age or stage (p. 93). As mentors, teachers, parents – adults in a young person’s world – we have the privilege and the responsibility to contribute to young people and in doing so we will realize a mutuality of contribution - because human development happens over a life span.

Activities

Activity 1 -- The Learning Teaching Opportunity – Making Magic

The learning teaching opportunity – Making Magic

Think of a time when a young person asked you a question about their world, they wanted to know the meaning of something in their world, they had aspirations to understand. Knowing that if you put their learning and your teaching into their context, you could accomplish the magic of learning, how would you go achieving this? What in the research material and theories provided in information material supports your 'way'?

Activity 2 -- Uncovering Our Own Human Development Beliefs

What do you believe?

How can you support young people to develop healthy relationships with their peers?

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When you notice that a young person is hanging out with a group of individuals engaged in unhealthy behaviours – what can you do and how can you engage the young person to raise their awareness and learning...how can you support this person to build healthy relationships with others?

What might the positive and negative consequences be of your actions? How can you maximize the positive outcomes and minimize the negative outcomes of your actions?

Activity 3 -- Cultivating a Context of Connection

Being intentional and defining the quality of relationship you want to have with another is critical in building and nurturing healthy relationships. The information provided earlier indicates that young people’s resiliency and ability to learn and develop, is strongly influenced based on the engagement and strength of attachment a child has to a caring adult. Mentor relationships are more often than not about being part of a young person’s *village of attachment*. Mentoring is really about being in the business of attachment = creating positive healthy relationships which support the development and growth of a young person.

Imagine the young person you mentor is now graduating from Big Brothers Big Sisters, and you are reminiscing on the remarkable, 5 year mentor relationship you have had with this person. Looking back



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on those 5 years, what are the specific qualities of that relationship you are imagining you are both taking away with you?

What had to happen, how did you need to be and what did you need to do to achieve this remarkable, healthy nurturing mutual relationship?

What did the young person have to do and how did they need to be to have that happen?

Final Reflections

1. Punishment and consequences delivered to another without input from all involved or opportunities for resolutions which allow for growth and development, is a major source of wounding, which increases feelings of separation, and often excess feelings of shame and remorse are experienced by the person being punished leaving individuals feeling unsafe and unsupported. Repeated punishment can lead to a "hardening of the heart?", disengagement, increased violence and *tuning out*. How can you encourage young people to be accountable for their behaviour in ways which increase connection and safety, and allow for positive human development?

2. Reflect on a time when you hurt another person, and yet you learned a valuable lesson. What happened, to allow you to learn from this event?

3. What do we need to do, and how do we be to support others to learn from their mistakes?



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4. How do you keep people safe and connected, what do you do, how do you need to be, when you need to have a difficult conversation with another person?

5. How do we encourage ourselves to learn from our mistakes?

Taking It Back: Working with Your Little

The information provided in this module can be used to form discussions between Bigs and Littles, as can the individual activities in this module be shared between Bigs and Little's to foster healthy positive relationships.

1. As a Mentor, support your Little to participate in the following activity:

Imagine he or she is now graduating from Big Brothers Big Sisters, and the two of you are reminiscing on the remarkable, 5 year mentor relationship you have developed together. Looking back on those 5 years, what are the specific qualities of that relationship you are each imagining you are taking away with you?

What had to happen, how did you each need to be and what did you each need to do to achieve this remarkable, healthy nurturing mutual relationship?

When you have both completed this activity, make time to share your answers to this activity (activity #3 in this module).

2. Talk about and create a moral dilemma with your Little. Then exchange roles, enhancing learning and exploration.

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