Part 1

Introducing Child Development

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Chapter 1

Issues in Child Development

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Introduction

In this book you will learn more about children and their development from conception to the end of childhood at age 11 – which is the end of primary or elementary schooling in many countries and the beginning of adolescence. You will learn about the vast range of capabilities that very young children quickly acquire and how, in the course of just a few years, this impressive range of skills, knowledge and understanding is extended even further. Your understanding of children and their development will depend on getting a grasp of the most important issues in child development.

In this chapter we set out what we think are the most important issues to explore about children and their development. We begin by considering the nature of child development and how childhood is generally understood. We also offer reasons why the study of child development is essential for practitioners working with children in daycare, playgroups, nurseries, schools, families and other settings.

CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

By the time you have completed this chapter you should be able to answer the following questions:

- What is a study of child development?
- What are the fundamental issues and key terms?
- Why is knowledge of child development important?
- What are the key questions and fundamental issues of child development, and how do they relate to parenting, care situations and education?

Defining child development

To help you start refining your understanding of child development let’s consider two different views of a newborn child. The first is expressed by a friend of mine, Edd Hogan, a ‘first-time’ father holding his new daughter Niamh (pronounce Neeve), who is just a few minutes old.

. . . I felt a rush of emotion: happiness, joy, awe, and relief. She was all there: two arms, two legs, and she was beautiful. In those first few hours a great deal goes through your mind – what will she become? Will she like what we like? How will she get on in school? What will her voice sound like? The feelings of love towards her were, and are, remarkable. We want her to grow up to know what it is to be loved. We want the best for our baby and we will support her in making her own choices as she grows up. Of course, we want to steer her to do certain things, like playing a musical instrument. Most of all, we want her to have a care-free childhood surrounded by a loving family.

This is Niamh. She is just a few hours old.
Source: Edward and Ella Hogan
Compare Edd Hogan’s very personal account with that of Professor Robert Winston’s introduction to the BBC television series *The Human Body*. Lord Winston is one of Britain’s most respected medical academics and researcher of the human reproductive system. He said:

*I want you to meet Kirsty who was born just over two hours ago. Mix together some protein, a little sugar, quite a lot of fat and about 75% water with a selection of chemicals that you would find in any pharmacy and there we have it! Simple really and yet this tiny being is the most sophisticated and complicated living being on the planet. In the course of her lifetime (650,000 hours on average) she will achieve things that are amazing, fantastic and every bit miraculous.*


Both Professor Winston and Edd Hogan see and understand the enormous potential for growth, change and development in the two newborns Kirsty and Niamh. Robert and Edd may have contrasting ways of expressing their sense of awe and wonder but both are already looking forward to the almost incredible changes that will happen in the lives of these two young children. In identifying and making sense of these changes think about how you will begin to construct your own understanding of child development.

### What is child development?

The study of any kind of **human development** is mostly about the study of change (Côté *et al*., 2002; Fukuda and Ishihara, 1997; Waller *et al*., 1995) and in order to understand it, we need to study the changes that children undergo beginning in the womb, through the post-natal period and continuing throughout childhood. The study of change can and should be a scientific enterprise. You may all remember doing science experiments at school by applying processes to a current physical condition and then observing the effects – the changes that happen. One of the authors [M. H.] remembers gently heating iron sulphide with a strong acid and wafting the resulting malodorous gas (hydrogen sulphide – smelling of rotten eggs) towards the head teacher’s study. He had changed the physical state of iron sulphide and acid using heat. By observing the change that took place, he knew more about the nature of the sulphide, the acid, the chemical effects of heat and the resulting chemical compound. He was engaged in a scientific – if somewhat mischievous – enterprise. So much for chemical changes, but what does that tell us about changes we observe in children? Some research methods used in the study of child development are experimental and you can look ahead to Chapter 3 Research Methods to read examples of how experimental methods are used. That is not the whole picture though as experimental methods are not always relevant, and practitioners working with young children will be more familiar with observing children directly as a method to understand them and the progress they are making (more of this in Chapter 3).

Parents and teachers are not experimenters with children. The science that developmentalists bring to the observation of changes in children tends to be **naturalistic** rather than laboratory-based.
than experimental, but natural scientific observation is more than the plain act of looking at people. Scientific observers must perceive in order to add to their knowledge by into a framework of previous knowledge and ideas (Piaget, 1957). This idea needs a little explanation at this stage. Understanding something new does not grow out of nothing. We all have an idea – a schema the French psychologist Jean Piaget (see Chapter 2) would call it – of, say what a dog is, based on our observations and experiences of ‘dog’. The first time we see a fox we might perceive it to be a dog, in line with our current schema of ‘dog’. Our new experience, supported by somebody else with the language and understanding of ‘fox’ will lead us to adapt our understanding of ‘dog’ and to include in our range of knowledge a new schema of ‘fox’. Adapting and including new ideas (the term we use is ‘assimilating’) is an important process in the development of understanding.

While we are talking about the scientific and personal process of assimilating new observations and understandings, do not go any further until you have followed the nearby Connect and Extend feature about Victor, the ‘Wild Boy of Aveyron’. It is a fascinating story, one which marks the beginning point for the science of child development as this study was among the very first to attempt a scientific approach to understanding how children grow and flourish. By assimilating ideas from an enquiry into Victor, the ‘Wild Boy of Aveyron’ you can really develop your understanding of child development.

Reading Chapter 3 of this book will help you to understand how to best observe and study children’s behaviour and development. Recognised expert observers of child development (for example, Piaget, Bruner and Vygotsky in cognitive development and Freud, Erikson and Bowlby in emotional and social development) do not apply particular ‘treatments’ to generate the changes they wish to observe (unlike me making hydrogen sulphide or Jean Marc Itard in the nearby Connect and Extend that you have followed). Rather, by perceiving, identifying and making sense of the changes in children as they grow and develop, the expert theorists like those mentioned above, help parents, nurses and teachers to check that all is well and ‘going to plan’.

It is also the case that changes in children are neither random nor necessarily triggered by their environment, but follow a typical pattern of human development that has been identified by theorists such as those mentioned earlier. Chapter 2 will help you to understand the contribution of theorists to our understanding of the changes that occur to children during their childhood. So, what then is the difference between change and development? Is the study of child development only a descriptive catalogue of expected or typical changes? Below we will begin to sort out some of the common terms used when talking about children’s development and see how the two concepts of change and development are linked.

Terms of development

Teachers, early years practitioners and all professionals who work with children should be aware of complex processes and factors at work that influence the ways in which children such as Kirsty and Niamh (who we ‘met’ earlier) grow, think, learn new skills, acquire knowledge and interact with others. Remember from earlier that human is the pattern of change that all individuals undergo from conception through the span of life. The abundance and complexity of these changes is apparent even during the first few days of life. For example, think back to the photograph of Niamh at the beginning of the chapter. When that photograph was taken, any smile that newborn Niamh made was probably due to wind, yet it was just a few weeks later that I held her in front of me and she smiled at me in recognition and pleasure (I hope). Changes such as learning to smile enables very young children to display different aspects of personality, to tackle increasingly complicated tasks and to interact with their world and other people they encounter.

Schema

A set of ideas about the common feature of particular object, being or concept.
Development includes changes in human growth which are readily observable and measurable. These changes are fast-moving and enable children to support their own body weight, to move around in a variety of ways, to manipulate, and to build and destroy. Development is also about the process of maturation, or the biological developmental plan contained in our genes. This is the hereditary material that passes from parent to child that partly determines the physical ‘milestones’ that children achieve, such as learning to walk, and the psychological changes that allow them to think and interact with others. In addition, you should appreciate how growth and maturation differ from learning. Learning is the process through which a person’s experiences of their environment result in relatively permanent changes to how people feel, think and behave (Shaffer, 2006; Georghiades, 2004). It is generally accepted that developmental changes occur as a result of both maturation and learning and this duality is an important idea.

Figure 1.1 illustrates how child development is a result of change during the span of childhood due to growth by maturation and learning through experience. These changes all contribute to cognitive development, which is the key to learning. The issue that remains is to what extent are developmental changes, both physical and cognitive, due to heredity. For example, a person’s height once fully grown is largely a matter of heredity, but during the maturation process both the pace of growth and the final outcome is affected by diet. In the same way, the capacity for cognitive development is determined by growth due to maturation and (as shown in Figure 1.1) cognitive ability is determined by the outcomes of learning through experience. Next we consider the extent to which the typical pattern of developmental change that occurs overtime can be considered as stages linked to chronological age.

Stages of development

Child development is concerned with helping to understand the various processes that determine both the physical and psychological make-up of children. Our earlier definition of development emphasises the constant nature of change (growth and decline) throughout people’s lives, and corresponds with lifespan perspectives in psychology (Baltes, 1987). So, understanding of development could be neatly summarised as the systematic and scientific study of changes in human behaviours and mental activities.
over time’ (Bukatko & Daehler, 2001, p 4) and as a framework of convenience, you will find it commonly presented in terms of periods of time. This tends to give an impression of finite (distinctly separate) stages closely linked to chronological age and providing a very precise ordering of change. However, we encourage you to see development as more of a flow of constant change with notions of different stages serving only to provide a structure for observation and analysis. With this ‘health warning’ in mind, now study Figure 1.2, which shows commonly identified periods of development up to the emergence of adulthood.

Too strict an adherence to any conceptual framework of child development structured by age can be problematical. However, such structures as shown in Figure 1.2 can also be very helpful when commenting upon a child’s development, for example to refer to a certain age-related stages of development. Such as in the following comments: ‘I remember when Toby was just learning to walk, at about 14 months . . .’ (parent).
Similarly, there are advantages in commenting upon observed changes in children as they progress through school: ‘I’ve really noticed a big difference in Ellie’s language skills from when she was 6. Her stories have got much longer with much more involved plots’ (teaching assistant).

Reflect

Look at the developmental stages shown in Figure 1.2. Can you recall and record examples of comments you may have made or heard for each of the stages above. For example, when Malcolm’s wife Sue was expecting their first child he used to sing to his yet-unborn daughter. Sue reported that Rebecca moved around in a very excited way. Perhaps she was dancing or trying to get away. This is an example of the yet-unborn Rebecca continuously adjusting to life in her surrounding prenatal world. What personal examples can you think of?

Because of personal examples you may have recalled in the nearby Reflect feature, you may wish to adapt Figure 1.2 for yourself, preferring to see early childhood extending from ages 3 to 6 years and later childhood from 7 to 11 years. Your adaptation may correspond with the key stages prescribed in a national curriculum or with age phases represented in school age groupings. For example, compulsory schooling in Sweden and Denmark begins at the age of 7. In Norway ‘primary’ school is normally 6–13 years, 6–12 in Belgium and 5–11 in England and Wales (Woolfolk et al., 2008). It is worth noting at this point that the new Early Years Foundation Stage (DfES, 2006) becomes a statutory framework in September 2008 for all registered private, voluntary, independent and maintained early years settings. The framework is based on an understanding (which we hope you will come to share) of the holistic nature of child development, and talks about phases rather than stages, from birth to 5. This is an extension of the notion of early years education as a statutory right and means that in England we now see formal early childhood education as being from 0 to 5.

Connect and Extend


Domains of development

In addition to considering child development in specific periods of time, development can also be organised into broad areas or domains. A typical organisation is:

- **Physical development** – comprising changes in body size (growth) and proportions, the order and acquisition of motor skills, and perceptual and motor capacities.
- **Cognitive development** – thinking, intellect and intellectual processes that include attention, memory, knowledge, problem-solving and creativity. It also includes language and communication.
- **Social and emotional development** – the former includes understanding of ‘self’, relationships with others and sociability. The latter includes emotional expression, attachment, personality and temperament.

The later chapters of this book consider the domains of child development separately as some ‘deconstruction’ of ‘development’ enables a better analysis of each of the domains. Nevertheless you are encouraged to retain the idea of holistic development by looking for the many connections between the characteristics of each of the domains, and to transfer the holistic notion to their everyday interactions with children. Remember
the scientific approach taken by Jean-Marc Itard to transforming Victor, the ‘Wild Boy of Aveyron’? This was a holistic enquiry and the history of child development contains many examples where scientists have developed their theories and ideas by closely observing the whole development of children. It is to the history of child development that we now turn.

**SUMMARY 1**

Before moving on, let’s summarise on what we have learned so far:

- Child development is the study of changes in children over the timespan of childhood from conception to adulthood.
- It is a scientific study – usually naturalistic rather than experimental. Observations of children’s changing abilities and characteristics take place in natural settings such as homes and schools.
- Expert observers are systematic and precise, and build their perceptions into theories.
- Knowledge of these theories helps all who nurture children to check that all is well and ‘going to plan’.
- Child development is the study of changes due to both maturation (following the genetic plan) and learning (change due to experience).
- Such changes can be represented either in age-related phases or by referring to domains of development – physical, cognitive or social/emotional, all of which are strongly interconnected. In this book we stress a holistic interpretation of child development for the practical application of the ideas described.

**A history of child development**

The beginnings of child development

The study of child development has a comparatively short history, beginning 150 years ago or so. Despite its late acceptance as scientific enquiry (due, as we shall see, to a comparatively later interest in childhood as a distinct part of the human lifespan), the amount of study and scholarship has grown at pace for two reasons. Firstly, increase in scientific scholarship is in response to educators wishing to work in more enlightened ways with preschool and primary age children. Secondly, the depth of study acknowledges that parents, carers and childminders wish to bring a more informed approach to their parenting or child-caring practices. One reason for this comparatively recent interest has been the change in societal attitudes to the concept of childhood (Berk, 2006; Cole & Cole, 2006). A brief trawl through the history of childhood reveals very different earlier views of children from contemporary beliefs about childhood. How did we get to where we are today? What and where were the origins of this aspect of developmental psychology that we call child development?

To answer this question we should return to medieval Europe where, some writers assert, no concept of childhood (as we perceive it) was known before 1600. Philippe Aries in his influential and landmark book Centuries of childhood (1962) writes that the lack of precision in medieval society in counting such things as years of age accounted
for childhood being ill-defined, with no references to stages of development whatsoever. Children very much ‘belonged to adult society’ (p 125) and were encouraged to resemble ‘mini adults’ in their clothing and demeanour. Far from having the toys that characterise the pastimes and experiences of many children’s lives nowadays, children of 6 or 7-years-old would have been engaged in the adult world of work and adult pastimes. This view does not go unchallenged by other historians. For example, Linda Pollock in her book *Forgotten children: Parent–child relations from 1500–1900* (1983) rejects a simplistic depiction of childhood and family – the kind of stereotype she considers is offered by Aries – that the concept of childhood was almost absent, and children were cruelly treated. Instead Pollock provides a much more humane picture of childhood in the medieval period and what came after.

The ‘Age of Enlightenment’ was an eighteenth century movement in European philosophy which advocated reasoning and logic as the primary basis of intellectual authority rather than irrationality and superstition. The 1700s saw a shift away from these medieval values and attitudes and began an *epoch* where strong social influences, fuelled by the writings of philosophers, began to place a different emphasis upon children and child-rearing practices. Two such philosophers, John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, held strikingly contrasting ideas but both nevertheless, have had a lasting effect on shaping contemporary thinking about the development of children.

In *An essay concerning human understanding* (1690), John Locke proposed that no knowledge is innate and the mind of a child on entry into this world is as a *tabula rasa* or blank slate upon which experience writes. He proposed that environmental experiences mould the child and furthermore stressed the importance of early experience. He was not an advocate of harsh discipline, but believed that children’s behaviour should be properly managed by parents; who could be strict with their children when necessary. These beliefs are reflected in the behaviourist approaches of later psychologists.

In contrast, Jean-Jacques Rousseau stressed childhood as a time of innocence. He believed that children are born with a sense of right and wrong, and as active beings in possession of their own personalities and intellect. Rousseau encouraged educators to capitalise on the natural curiosity of the child but through exploration of the environment (reflected in the later writings of Piaget in the twentieth century). Rousseau’s views on child-rearing are set out in his famous *Emile* (1762) where he clearly expounds that the role of adults is to guide and respond to the natural instincts of children. Rousseau and Locke were both philosophers rather than scientists – using naturalistic methods of observation as earlier described. The observations of both Locke and Rousseau may appear to us now as unmethodical and disordered, and distanced from the next scientific era in the history of childhood development.

The origins of the scientific study of child development can be traced to the nineteenth century. Charles Darwin, keen to discover the roots of our existence as a species and stemming from his theory of evolution, began detailed records of his son’s first years of life in what became known as the ‘baby biographies’ (1877) and recorded startling
new information about the child’s early reflexes, later voluntary movements, his language and emotions. Similar work undertaken on his son by the German scientist Wilhelm Preyer provided further detailed information about sensory development, and the acquisition of language and motor skills. These accounts were among the earliest recorded systematic and scientific observations of children. This work provided the catalyst for further work in the United States, where one of the pioneers of American psychology, G. Stanley Hall, employed a questionnaire on preschool children and was able to collect data on the nature of children’s thinking by comparing responses by gender and ethnic origin (Hall, 1891).

Within ten years, Frenchman and psychologist Alfred Binet had developed the first standardised intelligence test which was a scale systematically measuring higher-order thinking skills, memory, language and problem-solving abilities, unique to each individual. The technique of mental testing was born using a measurement scale that took account of individual’s mental abilities. It was used (and more sophisticated versions continue to be used) by psychologists and other professionals involved in testing children’s rate of development in educational settings. So began the scientific method for the study of children.

**The scientific study of child development**

We have identified six factors that have influenced the scientific study of child development:

1. The more systematic study of human development by scientists such as Darwin, Preyer and Hall led to the twentieth century theorists and theories of child development – which is the subject of Chapter 2 (Haywood, 2004; Smith et al., 2003). This includes new scientific investigations of classroom behaviours in developing countries (Ackers & Hardman, 2001).

2. The establishment of universal public education in Western Europe during the early decades of the twentieth century led to a demand for knowledge of how children develop and for information on the best teaching methods (Søreide, 2006; Cardak, 2004). The demand for knowledge is replicated in the developing nations of the world and includes perspectives of children’s education as a political movement (Stasavage, 2005).

3. New knowledge from individuals and agencies with professional interests in children’s health contributed a greater understanding of physical growth patterns and nutrition and the effects on educational progress (Weisbrot et al., 2006; Knyazev et al., 2002; Blair et al., 2001; Mendez & Adair, 1999).

4. Research into children’s thinking abilities, fuelled in part by an emphasis on achievement (standards) and testing in schools (Topping & Trickey, 2007; Hendy & Whitebread, 2000; Williams & Ryan, 2000).

5. The emergence of an increased role for public care and social services heightened the interest in the social and emotional intelligence and the conditions that promote or adversely affect such development (D’Oosterlinck et al., 2006; Poulou, 2005; Lopes et al., 2004).

6. Lastly, a relatively new interest in parenting skills has arisen and can be readily seen in the plethora of books on this subject (for example, Effective parenting for the hard-to-manage child: A skills-based book by Georgia DeGangi and Anne Kendall, 2007) that now fill the shelves of popular booksellers and supermarkets (Wood, 2002; Secco et al., 2006). This includes the child-care skills of parents with intellectual impairment (McGaha, 2002).

Now, at the beginning of a new century, two facts are apparent. Firstly, knowledge of children’s growth and development has increased and is disseminated on
a much wider scale than in previous decades. Secondly, the **interdisciplinary** nature of the subject is very evident in modern child development textbooks, and in school and university courses. The study of child development in the twenty-first century is approached from various branches of learning: law, anthropology, education, paediatrics, and cognitive, social and neural-psychology – and this diversity of approach is far from being static! As new information comes to light, new paths of enquiry are called for and are being followed (Masson, 2006). For example, a comparatively new path of enquiry is the cross-cultural contexts of childhood.

**Cross-cultural contexts of childhood**

As well as reflecting on the historical and European perspectives on childhood there are many reasons why looking at other cultures can help further our understanding of child development. The point is well made by Barbara Rogoff, currently a Professor of Psychology at the UC Santa Cruz Foundation and one-time editor of *Human Development*, who writes:

*The process of looking across cultural traditions can help us become more aware of cultural regularities in our own as well as other people’s lives, no matter which communities are most familiar to us. Cultural research can help us understand cultural aspects of our own lives that we take for granted as natural, as well as those that surprise us.* (2003, pp 7–8).

Children’s development is affected in complex and profound ways by the culture in which they grow up. Compare growing up in a fishing village in Sardinia with growing up in an industrialised city in the Netherlands. At first glance the experiences of children in Sardinia and in Rotterdam may seem totally unconnected, almost discrete. What aspects of culture have the strongest influence on the development of children? How do different aspects of culture relate to each other? Who is more influential, teachers or peers?

To answer these questions we can turn to a helpful theoretical model developed on 1989 by Urie Bronfenbrenner – a renowned psychologist and a co-founder of the Head Start programme for disadvantaged pre-school children in the United States. Bronfenbrenner mapped the many interacting social contexts that affect development with his **bio-ecological model** of development (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000; Bronfenbrenner, 1989). The **bio** aspect of the model recognises that people bring their biological selves to the developmental process. The **ecological** part recognises that the social contexts in which we develop are ecosystems because they are in constant interaction and influence each other. The model is presented in Figure 1.3.

By referring to Figure 1.3 you can see that every child develops within a **microsystem** of his or her immediate relationships and activities. For a child, it might be the close family, friends or teachers and the activities of play and school. This is the child’s own ‘little world’. Within it relationships are reciprocal – they flow in both directions. The child’s behaviour affects the parent and the parent influences the child. Microsystems exist and interact within a **mesosystem**, which is slightly more distant from the child because they do not involve him or her directly but nevertheless they influence his/her life. It is the set of interactions and relationships among all the elements of the microsystem – the family members interacting with each other or with the teacher. Again, all relationships are reciprocal – the teacher influences the parents and the parents affect the teacher, and these interactions affect the child.

The mesosystem of interacting microsystems also interact with the **exosystem**, another layer which includes all the social settings that affect the child, even though the child is not a direct member of the system. Examples are the teachers’ relations with school managers; parents’ jobs; the community’s resources for health, employment, or...
recreation; or the family’s religious affiliation. The **macrosystem** is the larger society – its values, laws, conventions and traditions all of which influence the conditions and experiences of the child’s life. These systems help us to think about the many dynamic forces that interact to create the context for individual development. We asked earlier ‘Who is more influential, teachers or friends?’ Well, according to Bronfenbrenner’s model, teachers are part of the child’s mesosystem and friends are part of the microsystem. Therefore friends are closer to the child than teachers and certainly closer than local employers or national politicians. Perhaps one of the problems with Bronfenbrenner’s model is that it takes little account of different ecologies (interactions of people within their environment) that impact at different times during a lifespan. However, put simply, the earlier in life, the more influential homes and families will be.

Let us now return to a comparison of how cultural aspects can and do affect children’s development. Despite children from both Sardinia and Rotterdam sharing the same ‘macrosystem’ – in this case the European Union, their early life experiences of their microsystems – close families – are likely to be very different. Families as microsystems are the mini-societies for young children and each society will contain its own rituals and have particular expectations about how children will behave, how they should dress.

Perhaps we may have an over-simplified idea of the romantic, pastoral idyll of a childhood on the shores of the Mediterranean compared with children’s experience of a high-pressure, industrialised and technocratic world of a modern European city. On closer inspection, the cultural experiences of children from Sardinia and the Netherlands are likely to have a number of common features with regard to work, play, parenting and societal experiences. In her discussion of the four

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**Figure 1.3** Urie Brongenbrenner's biological model of human development
theories of child development, Prajna Das Gupta (a British psychologist) writes that ‘in every culture, there are customary ideas and expectations about the nature, capacities and proper behaviour of children’ (1994, p 11).

It would appear that both historical and cultural comparisons of childhood tell us much about adult views of children and childhood. In making a similar point to Prajna Das Gupta, Jerome Bruner and Helen Haste write, ‘it can never be the case that there is a “self” independent of one’s cultural-historical existence’ (1987, p 91). Associating the role of culture with children and families helps us avoid ethnocentrism and stereotyping and allow us to view development as fluid and adaptive. The Focus on Theory which follows provides an introduction to an international enquiry of childhood behaviour, the findings of which support a view that children’s views of self and adults view of childhood are cultural-centric.

The Six Cultures Project

An early, but nonetheless illuminating study which investigated childhood in different cultures was the Six Cultures Project (Whiting & Whiting, 1975). This historical study was the first systematic investigation of children’s behaviours in a range of different cultures around the world and provided detailed information on children’s social interaction, play and their relationships with adults. Taking place in six contrasting settings, the research team recorded behaviour of the Rajputh (India), Baco (Philippines), Mixtecans (Mexico), North Americans (USA), Gusii (Kenya) and the Hokan (Okinawa) cultures.

Findings of this study revealed that each culture had its own set of expectations and behaviour for its children. The Gusii of Nyasongo in Kenya, for example, emphasised early training for work in their agricultural society, with children of 7 assuming many adult responsibilities. In contrast, the Baco tribe in the Philippines believed that development was a slow process that cannot be hurried. In the Kahalapur district of India, the Rajputh viewed their children as passive beings in need of protection. Play was a major feature in the activities of children in all the cultures studied but the nature of play varied too. In Kenyan society at that time, children’s play was found to resemble adult activities. Children hunted and built huts, and play was seen to be a rehearsal for the later adult way of life. The North American children in the study also played and although this play also imitated adult activities, it was centred around the work of adults in the home and playing with toys.

A later study (Whiting & Edwards, 1988) revealed how the interactions of adults and children differed according to societal expectations and that these expectations varied according to the stages of development. Kahalapur mothers hand-fed children of 5 and bathed those as old as 11 years. In the extended family culture of
Kenya, children were taught to respect their elders and were discouraged from initiating interactions with adults. Childhood was a period for instructing children in skills appropriate for adult life but again this varied according to culture. In predominately agricultural societies, many important skills were taught by adults to children. In societies with more complex economies, being literate was seen as an important skill to be mastered early in life.

Mothers of children in the Orchard Town district in the United States, and who were at home all day with their children, provided early instruction in self-feeding, encouraged self-reliance by encouraging children to play. Mothers also postponed instruction to daughters in the skills of motherhood. This is in contrast to societies with less developed industry or technology where children are skilled in caring for younger siblings from an early age.

These two studies showed that there are goals for childhood that are universal, but that there are also stark cultural differences which relate to a society’s economy, social organisation and value systems. Data from both studies also showed that adults across all the cultures consciously changed their behaviour according to the age and gender of the children and many believed that age affected children’s capabilities to learn and perform skills in that society.

SUMMARY 2

Before moving on, let’s summarise what we have learned in the middle section of this chapter:

➜ In a brief history of child development we considered childhood as a distinct phase of development within the course of a lifespan development perspective.

➜ We explored the philosophical differences between considering the child as a tabula rasa (Locke) and as an active being already in possession of personality and intellect (Rousseau).

➜ The scientific study of child development can be traced back to Darwin (English evolutionary scientist), Preyer (German developmental scientist) and Hall (pioneer of American psychology).

➜ Six factors influencing scientific study of child development. The development of
  • systematic study;
  • universal public education;
  • new childhood agencies;
  • research into children’s thinking;
  • public care services;
  • parenting skills;

were identified and related to the growing demand for authentic information from educators, health and social agencies, testers of ability and parents.

➜ Children’s development is affected in complex and profound ways by the culture in which they grow up and the factors can be represented in Urie Bronfenbrenner’s bio-ecological model of development (1989).

➜ The findings of international enquiries of childhood behaviour support a view that children’s views of self and adults view of childhood are cultural-centric.
We have been concerned with trying to understand factors influencing the study of child development. Much of the argument has, by necessity, been theoretical in nature. Now we need to see these theoretical perspectives in the practical context of how professional work with children. In the final section of this chapter we will look at how to best work with children, how to achieve developmentally appropriate teaching and how to develop a framework for study by considering key questions, controversies and themes.

**Principles of child development**

**Why is the study of child development important?**

Many texts on child development articulate reasons why the study of child development is important. Some suggest to know more about children, to glean information about human nature, to learn more about the origins of certain developmental problems (e.g. Down’s syndrome, dyslexia, attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder, ADHD) or to gain further insight into adult behaviour. We understand these reasons to be important and relevant but we add one other important one: to appreciate that children develop holistically. Practitioners and educators need to work with children in ways that appreciate uniqueness. There are different rates and patterns of development but – and this is a very big ‘but’ – the study of child development tell us how to best work with children now, and is not an accurate predictor of individual future achievement.

In furthering our understanding of children and their development, it is wise to remember that children function as whole and complete human beings. In school and at home children bring all their complexities and experiences to each situation. Although it is often convenient to subdivide children’s development into various sections either by domain or by age stage, the holistic nature of child development means there is an equal need to stress the continuity of development, since it is the accumulation of experiences from every aspect of development that creates what the child is today (Schickedanz et al., 1993). Aspects or domains of development addressed separately (such as physical, intellectual, linguistic, social and emotional functioning) need to be treated and interpreted as making the expansive and interdisciplinary field of development more accessible to the reader. These aspects should not be considered discrete because each domain influences and is influenced by the others (Berk, 2006). By taking a holistic approach to studying child development, you can gain a more informed approach to optimising children’s development and learning, an important idea to which we now turn.

**Optimising children’s development and learning**

In any class of children there are apparent differences between children of the same chronological age, for example in their height, build, skills, energy and disposition to learning. Education practitioners have to work with both the apparent differences and the antecedents of difference among the pupils. For example, teachers have to plan for learning, to teach and assess effectively, to respond sensitively to individual needs and to teach in inclusive ways.
Effective teaching is predicated on an understanding of how a child’s physical, cognitive, linguistic, social and emotional development affects his or her learning. Good teachers, as well as having other attributes and skills, are experts in child development. Knowledge gained after reading this book will enable you to recognise this important link between development and learning, and how teachers plan and implement teaching episodes that are developmentally appropriate to the needs of the young people they teach. Here are some specific ways in which developmentally appropriate teaching is achieved. Effective teachers:

- have a greater understanding of general patterns of development in children from preschool to the end of primary school;
- recognise the extent and importance of development in the years preceding formal schooling (0–5);
- understand that early learning occurs through the integration of sensory, motor, perceptual and cognitive mechanisms;
- know that early learning is high speed, enduring and critical;
- can identify milestones in both fine and gross motor development;
- appreciate how learning is linked to perceptual development as a cognitive activity;
- relate processes of thinking, learning and problem-solving to intellectual development;
- understand that language organises, represents and expresses knowledge – language acquisition and cognitive development are profoundly linked;
- recognise how children’s feeling about themselves and towards their peers can affect their learning and achievement;
- know that adult’s responses affect children’s emotional development.

By recognising important connections, this deep understanding about child development can become integral in planning lessons, in making use of strategies for grouping children, differentiating work to more closely match ability, and setting appropriate individual targets in all areas of learning.

Adopting a framework to develop personal principles

To become expert in child development and to develop personal principles is to know, to understand and be able to apply what you have learned in your work with children. To help you focus on these learning objectives we present a framework for studying child development that identifies three major goals: to describe, to explain and to optimise development (Baltes et al., 1980). Since the audience for this book is all those working with children, whether in schools, in the home, extended families, care and play settings, an understanding of how to apply knowledge of children’s development in practice is very relevant and permeates throughout the text.

You should think of description (‘to describe’, the first of our three major goals) as specifying how individuals change over time by tracing the characteristics of development.
from in utero (before birth) through to the end of the primary school years – not forgetting to see child development as part of the full lifespan. Explanations will be offered as to why children grow and behave as they do in each of the domains of development outlined earlier (physical, cognitive, social and emotional), and we will include examples of development from life settings. Finally, we will help you to apply your new knowledge and understanding by considering a range of strategies to optimise the conditions that promote children’s development in informed ways. Look at Figure 1.4 to see how the framework suggested by Paul Baltes, Professor of Psychology at the Free University of Berlin, and his colleagues (1980), can be applied to developing principles of child development.

Applying principles of child development

Since the beginnings of education and other children’s services, policy makers and professional practitioners have attempted to apply new knowledge and understandings – perhaps created using appropriate frameworks as in Figure 1.4. However, applying principles of child development in political and state structures is not without controversy because the interpretation of knowledge is bound to differ, and we have to accept that there is no sure knowledge, sometimes no clear right and wrong, and often only a best guess at how we can use the information to ensure developmentally appropriate structures in children’s services.
An example follows in a feature called Controversy where we look at the differing (sometimes opposing) views about some structures and practices in children’s services. In the first Controversy that follows below we examine the difficult area of when is the best time for children to begin formal schooling. As described earlier in this chapter, school starting ages vary considerably across Europe and as a reminder, compulsory primary schooling in Sweden and Denmark begins at the age of 7, in Norway and Belgium at 6, and at 5 in England and Wales (Woolfolk et al., 2008). Do children in England and Wales start formal primary schooling at too early an age? Consider the arguments in the following Controversy feature.

### Controversy

**Do children start school too early?**

The statutory school starting age in England and Wales is 5 (the term after a child’s fifth birthday). Five years of age is comparatively young as many countries set the official age at 6 or 7 (Ball, 1994). In reality, since children may be admitted into Reception classes at the start of the year in which they become 5, it means that children in England and Wales can begin formal schooling at 4 years. This raises a number of questions linked to academic achievement and developmental readiness and begs the obvious question as to whether the starting age for English and Welsh children needs to be raised in line with other countries.

In a very useful paper (1989), Martin Woodhead – then Professor of Childhood Studies at the Open University, UK – explains the origins of early school starting age in England and Wales. He concludes that The 1870 Education Act was intended to protect children from domestic exploitation and to establish a school-leaving age
that provided employers with a suitable age for children to enter the workforce. In the twenty-first century these same pressures no longer remain, but are replaced by the increasing practice of children starting school at the beginning of the year in which they become 5. Woodhead also believes that falling birth rates and the drive to give ‘summer-borns’ – those born between April and August – the same amount of time in schools as their older peers have been influential in schools now favouring annual admission policies.

In 1998, Caroline Sharp – principal researcher officer for the British National Foundation for Education Research – cites two studies (Tymms et al., 1997; Sharp & Hutchinson, 1997) that present clear findings to support a case for pupils in England and Wales starting formal schooling later. Professor Peter Tymms and colleagues at Durham University (1997) examined progress in mathematics and reading assessments in a sample of over 1000 children and found that children who were older in the year group performed better in both. In another study of over 114 schools, Caroline Sharp and Dougal Hutchinson (1997) found that attainment was related to age and season of birth. Older children (autumn born) who completed a full year performed best and younger children (summer born) who also completed a full year did not perform as well as peers with one or two terms fewer in school. The authors suggest that the match between the developmental needs of younger 4-year-olds and the quality of provision in Reception classes is an important factor in the academic attainment of summer born children.

In 1998 Mills and Mills investigated teaching in Hungary, Switzerland and Belgium for Channel 4 UK Television, and found strong similarities in curriculum content and teaching approaches. Although emphasis is placed (alongside listening, attention, motor and memory skills) on oral language and numeracy, reading, writing and written maths are not part of the preschool curriculum. It is believed that some preschool children are not developmentally ready for such tasks. At age 6 on formal entry to primary school, reading, writing and numeracy skills develop rapidly. Mills and Mills suggest that the British practice of neglecting oral language and the introduction of abstract tasks – existing in thought alone – too early are contributing to underachievement. In another international study on reading literacy (Elley, 1992) found that the ten countries who began teaching reading at a mean average age of 6.3 years scored high, with Finland, Sweden, Norway and Iceland the highest. All these four countries began reading instruction at age 7.

Such a weight of evidence must surely fuel the debate for delaying the age children begin school and providing a curriculum that is developmentally appropriate for their needs? Do children in England and Wales begin formal primary school education too early?

Vote on the companion Website at www.pearsoned.co.uk/doherty

Key questions and themes in child development

Identifying the best age for beginning formal primary education is a key idea in child development, but it is not the only one. For over 150 years, those undertaking any kind of research into children’s development have been confronted with a number of key questions that continue to exercise the minds of researchers and practitioners. What are those fundamental questions that are at the very heart of the study of children? These might stem directly from your own interest in picking up this book. Perhaps you are a professional working with children, a trainee-teacher or an interested parent?
Perhaps some of your questions are similar to those below:

- What is the first memory we have?
- What does the world look like to a newborn baby?
- What makes us similar . . . but then different in other ways?
- How can children in the same family appear to be so different?
- Who is really responsible for the care and upbringing of our children?
- How does where we live influence our development?
- How do we learn language? How is it that some young children can speak several languages fluently but have never been formally taught any?
- How does growing up in the twenty-first century differ from growing up 100 years ago? What place do the new technologies have in the lives of children?
- Is one form of education superior to another and what of those children who are schooled at home?

These questions are typical of the puzzles of child development. Of course you may well disagree with one or more of these or you are now able to add to this list! Developmental psychologists combine many of these key questions, these recurring puzzles into themes that provide a connected context for the detail of their research. For the purposes of clarity and structure, we have identified five key themes of child development.

Is development a continuous process or one of stages?

Here we consider if development is smooth and progressive, or rather a series of discrete stages like plateaux of development with little changing during each stage, but with new behaviours marking a change of stage. The issue is whether development mirrors slow and steady changes over time, like a flower unfolding, or the defined stages of being that a caterpillar goes through to become a butterfly. In the next chapter you will read about theorists such as Albert Bandura whose social learning theory (1977) views development as a continuous process and Jean Piaget who advocates a discontinuous perspective and who proposes the existence of stages. In Piaget’s theory (1952a), children’s thinking between the ages of 7 and 11 years is deemed to be ‘concrete’ since they can understand that an object such as a lump of Plasticine remains the same mass even when moulded into a different shape. In adolescence, teenagers will be much more able to think in abstract ways for example about ‘objects’ not in the real and tangible world, such as in advanced mathematical or scientific problems.

Changes over time may appear very definitely stage-like in appearance particularly when comparing the thinking and behaviour of a 3-year-old to that of a 9-year-old, However, observing changes on a much smaller scale, perhaps weekly, would show a picture of development that is more continuous. Consider the following story in Box 1.1.
When answering the final question in Box 1.1, most psychologists take the view that development has both elements of continuity (gradual and unbroken) and discontinuity (separate stages marked by major changes). Indeed, psychologists Robert Sternberg and Lynn Okagaki (1989) have suggested that the attempt to characterise development as uniformly continuous or discontinuous is based on the false presupposition of an ‘either–or’ debate. They consider attempts at any such debate to be misleading and that the real question for developmental psychologists is to find out how these continuous and more discrete aspects arise in the course of development.

We consider this analysis to be accurate. Development should be considered as being largely continuous but having certain stages characterised by ‘milestone’ changes, due to developmental processes. For example one ‘milestone’ – starting to walk – requires a biological maturity of around 9–14 months where this new skill is clearly different from the child’s abilities in previous months. See the nearby Reflect for a personal example. In the months that follow, the walking skill slowly and steadily improves during the toddler stage. Findings on qualitative changes in children’s thinking and problem-solving abilities in mathematics (Rittle-Johnson & Siegler, 1998) support this combined viewpoint of milestone changes that characterise identifiable stages and steady improvement and development during each stage.

**Reflect**

Consider these two examples from the authors’ parenting experiences. Jonathan recalls that his two boys began to walk at quite different times. In contrast, Malcolm’s three children all walked for the first time within a few days of each of their first birthday and he remembers being amazed that nature’s clock was keeping such accurate time! Was there an inbuilt programme that decided the day of those first few steps, or did he and his wife happen to provide the right encouragement and circumstances? Was it heredity or environment?
What roles do heredity and training play?

Above all other themes in child development, the issue of ‘nature versus nurture’ has caused most debate! Nature, our genetic inheritance, refers to what is biologically bequeathed from our parents at the moment of conception. Nurture refers to training and education that influence our physical and psychological state after birth. These factors include and are evident in parenting, child-care practices and choices as to what type of schooling is best for children to flourish in. These are the powerful experiences of interacting with others who teach us skills, knowledge and help us to form understandings. For example, the question of whether children acquire language from being preprogrammed to do so (the brain being hard-wired for language acquisition), or as a result of learning it from parents, siblings and teachers fits into this theme of heredity versus environment. Think back to the earlier story of Victor, the Wild Boy of Aveyron (p 00). What is the significance of the observation that Victor managed to learn only a very basic vocabulary and found it very hard associate normally with other people?

Similarly, consider the situation described in Box 1.2.

Box 1.2

Maria and Helena

Maria, 9-years-old, and her sister Helena, who is 7, live in an apartment in the outskirts of Madrid. Their parents have tried to give both children similar experiences and share their time equally between them both. Friends of the family and teachers have commented that it is difficult to see both girls as sisters. Maria is average height for her age, if a little underweight. She enjoys playing with her friends and has a keen interest in swimming and ballet. Helena is tall for her age with dark hair, compared with Maria’s light auburn. She has few friends and prefers to spend her time reading at home. She feels awkward in the company of adults and has few close friends of her own. How can we account for these differences in the two girls?

How do we account for the differences between Maria and Helena? Have Maria and Helena made life choices (reading or ballet) that are a result of genetic differences between them, or were there subtle differences in their environment that pushed them in one direction or another? The influence of the environment on development has been described by Joachim Wohlwill (1973) using four different metaphors. Even after 30 or so years his descriptions remain relevant and helpful. Firstly, he compares the influence of environment on development as an amusement park where you choose your ride but once on this there is no getting off, just as we have some choice over what we want to experience in life, but have no control over its effect on us. Secondly, he compares the influence of environment to a hospital bed, where as patients we have no control over the environment and wait for factors and events outside our control to dictate what happens to us. Thirdly, he compared the influence of the environment to swimming in a race where the starting gun signals the start of the race and the pool is the environment that supports your behaviour. Finally, he compared the influence or the environment to a tennis match with its obvious interaction between players and constant change in circumstances.

The metaphor of the amusement park seems particularly useful as it more closely reflects the developing ability of children to make decisions based on their growing knowledge of themselves and of their formative experiences. For example, choosing the ‘Waltzers’ as a ride and not the ‘Helter-Skelter’ can have an important impact on a child’s physical as well as emotional well-being. Even if only temporarily. Similarly, choosing
Recall Joachim Wohlwill’s first metaphor of the amusement park. Choosing a particular ride (the Waltzers) can have a big impact on the chooser. Choosing certain friends and pastimes, such as Ben’s karate for example, either for the child when younger or allowing choice by the child when older, can have a substantial impact, particularly on emotional and social development. Sociocultural factors can affect children’s feelings about themselves and how they express themselves emotionally. Once again, any one group of friends or one set of activities over another can have a significant effect on what children achieve and become. So which is more influential, our family history (nature) or how we are brought up and the decisions we make (nurture).

Historically, theorists have taken opposing stances on this question of epigenesis — the interaction of nature and nurture. Those advocating the importance of heredity, such as developmental psychologist Arnold Gesell (1928), believed that genetic processes led naturally to the changes in growth through maturation. In contrast, behaviourists such as John Broadus Watson — sometimes called the father or founder of behaviourism (Cohen, 1979) — held that the training and appropriate education shaped the course of a child’s development (Watson, 1928). Rather like the argument between seeing development as stages or as continuous, the current view — an interactionist stance (Elman et al., 1996) — is one that accepts neither nature nor nurture as more or less influential on development. It is more common nowadays to talk of how nature and nurture interact, rather than to see one or the other as being more influential.

How important are individual differences and situational factors?

Because children grow up in such diverse environments, the social settings in which they live will clearly have effects upon some aspects of their development. The home, playgroup, nursery, school and local neighbourhood together form a child’s sociocultural context. The issue in this theme is to what extent do children’s sociocultural context determine who they are and the type of people they will become.

This theme is similar to the second theme, ‘nature versus nurture’, particularly with regard to the influence of hereditary factors but differs in that it is the influence of social factors that is in question, rather than the nature of care, education and encouragement a child receives. Every child experiences a unique combination of genetic and environmental influences. Do traits of personality, for example, remain unaltered in every situation or change according to the situation? Can we really expect the shy child who is normally reserved in class and who appears to be reluctant to answer aloud, to exhibit similar traits in the company of peers? In the example below, personality characteristics normally associated with aggression can find an outlet in a martial arts class.

Box 1.3 The Karate Kid

Ben is 10-years-old and the only child of loving parents who live with him. From an early age, his parents found Ben difficult to cope with. He seemed to have boundless energy and was constantly striving to challenge himself physically. He found relationships with his peers difficult, feeling a need to compete against them and show off his physical prowess. In the last three to four years, this has become worse and at school he was labelled as ‘aggressive’ dowing to his playground behaviour. He now wants to join a new karate class set up in the town but his parents believe this would not be right for him and would lead to increases in his aggressive behaviour. Is this the right decision? What would you advise?

Recall Joachim Wohlwill’s first metaphor of the amusement park. Choosing a particular ride (the Waltzers) can have a big impact on the chooser. Choosing certain friends and pastimes, such as Ben’s karate for example, either for the child when younger or allowing choice by the child when older, can have a substantial impact, particularly on emotional and social development. Sociocultural factors can affect children’s feelings about themselves and how they express themselves emotionally. Once again, any
The previous themes have illustrated the controversies surrounding them and the often contrasting views taken by writers. The theme of activity and passivity is not one that has the same division in the present day. As we have seen earlier in this chapter, some developmentalists viewed the child as a passive being who was shaped by the environment and by the influence of parents and other significant adults. Contemporary thinking on this issue (heavily influenced by Jean Piaget) views children as active seekers of information, shaping and eager to direct the course of their own development (Bugental & Goodnow, 1998). In this view, the child is perceived as an agent who is responsible for his or her own behaviour, has some degree of freedom of choice regarding actions and is capable of giving reasons for those choices. In the context of education and care, this view is illustrated in the story below.

Box 1.4 A scene at the nursery

Mr and Mrs Patel are taking their child for the first time to a local nursery for children aged 3–4 years. As they enter the building they are met by an atmosphere of calmness and activity. Children are busily engaged in drawing and mark-making, some pouring water into different sized containers, and three children are using small spades and trowels in a sand trough. At one table the children are sitting with jigsaws and others are building with large construction blocks on a carpeted area of the room.

Adult helpers facilitate and support this but do not lead or direct. Children are actively engaged in their work and play. They are choosing their activities, making their own decisions.
Box 1.4 shows that children are clearly not tabula rasa – blank slates upon which experience writes – like John Locke believed. (You might refer back to our brief history of child development earlier in the chapter (pp 00–00.) Instead of being passive recipients of their environment, children actively engage in their environments. They already possess character traits of curiosity and persistence from their biological inheritance; they also construct meaning about the world from their interactions with it. Inherited character traits encourage one child to be shy of others, while another is more extrovert; or to show a particular talent for music, sport or language or mathematics. Experience sustains or suppresses traits, characteristics and interests, usually as the experience of ‘success’ feeds the motivation to strive for more and the experience of failure can destroy confidence.

What is the relationship between the different areas of development?

As previously argued, separating the domains of development is for the convenience of study only. The holistic nature of development is a truer picture and strongly emphasised in this book. Development does not proceed in one area and pause while another area ‘takes over’. There is no stage-like development taking place in one area at a time. As we have already emphasised, individual differences due to biological inheritance and the effects of environment are mighty influences on a child’s development. Continuous and continuing development occurs for every child albeit at different paces in all domains, rather than happening in isolation.

Misunderstanding of this important point can lead to variance in the expectations of adults. For example, a tall 11-year-old whose physical appearance suggests certain advancement in physical maturity, may well display social, language or intellectual development that is much less advanced. Similarly, the physically smaller child of the same age may be much more advanced in other domains. It is important that the whole picture is taken into account as well as an awareness of individual differences. In understanding the interrelated nature of development it is important to appreciate how the areas of development do overlap. This synergy can be seen in the practical example of Monique.

**Synergy**

The combined effect or action of two or more (areas of development) that exceeds the sum of the individual (area).

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**Box 1.5** The synergy of development

Monique is 9-months-old. Over the past few months, her mother and father have helped to feed her and encouraged her to hold the plastic cup on her high chair and guide it to Monique’s lips. The cup sits in front of her as usual but one morning while waiting, she looks at it intently [perception] and moves a hand towards it. At first she knocks the cup but then grasps it firmly and raises it off the plastic tray [physical]. ‘Oooh’, she gurgles [language] as her mother rushes over smiling and saying, ‘What a clever girl. Well done Monique!’ Monique beams back at her [social] and gurgles again.

Source: © Pearson Education Ltd 2004 / Jules Selmes
Can you see how the different areas of development are linked in the example of Monique? Balance is the key to understanding the themes presented. You may have definite views on a particular theme and may take one side’s view while dismissing the other, or indeed you may choose to keep an open mind. As understanding of human development increases, contemporary views on these themes have tended to take a less radical stance. For example, as mentioned earlier, the sometimes over-rehearsed ‘nature versus nurture’ debate is now replaced by the debate of how nature and nurture work together (de Waal, 1999).

**SUMMARY 3**

We now summarise what you have learned in the final section of this chapter:

- The study of child development tell us how to best work with children now, and should not be considered as an accurate predictor of individual future achievement.
- Effective teaching begins with an understanding of how a child’s physical, cognitive, linguistic, social and emotional development affects his or her learning. Some specific ways were suggested by which developmentally appropriate teaching is achieved.
- A framework for the study of child development was suggested formed around controversies, key questions and themes.
- One example of a controversy was explored. ‘Do children start school too early?’ ‘What is the best age to begin formal schooling?’
- Key questions were posed and included ‘How do we learn language? How do we explain that some children learn language much more quickly than others?’
- Five major themes of child development were explored:
  - development as continuous or in stages;
  - the roles of heredity and training;
  - individual differences and situational factors;
  - children as active or passive in their own development; and
  - the relationship between different areas of development.

These included the historical ‘nature versus nurture’ argument.

**Conclusion**

In this opening chapter, you have been encouraged to appreciate the various domains of children’s development but also to adopt a holistic view, the sort exemplified by the Every child matters agenda. All those who work with children in England have now to ‘take on board’ Every child matters, a national initiative that asks profound questions of the children’s workforce; have we truly taken on the lessons learned during 150 years of study of child development?

What is Every child matters and why is it important? In 2003, the UK Government published a green paper called Every child matters. This was published alongside the formal response to the report into the death of Victoria Climbié, a young girl who was horrifically abused and tortured, and eventually killed by her great aunt and the man
with whom they lived. In response to these tragic events, the UK Government published *Every child matters: The next steps*, and passed the Children Act 2004.

*Every child matters: Change for children* (2004) is a new approach in England to the well-being of children and young people from birth to age 19. Its main implication is to see all members of the children’s workforce as members of a professional team working in and through extended school provision. An excellent child worker is one who can work well as a member of a team of teachers, social workers, police officers and health workers, and who can lead a team of counsellors, advanced skills teachers and learning support staff, to ensure the well-being of children. *Every Child Matters* defines the outcomes for children and therefore the rights of children to: be healthy; stay safe; enjoy and achieve; make a positive contribution; and achieve economic well-being. Together these outcomes for children define the end result of a ‘childhood journey’ successfully made.

We haven’t yet introduced the outcomes of *Every child matters* to Edd and Ella Hogan. However, we are sure the five rights and outcomes are what they would hope for their daughter, Niamh who we met for the first time at the beginning of this chapter. During the course of a childhood journey children are supported, encouraged, taught and cared for by parents such as Edd and Ella, and practitioners who must know about how best to ensure the rights of the children for whom they are responsible. The study of child development provides an excellent beginning to understanding those rights and ensuring the outcomes required by *Every child matters: Change for children*.

So far, key questions have been raised that encourage you to take a broad view of the themes and theories of child development, and to view these same themes and theories as highly relevant to what you do as a parent, carer or teacher. Remember from the beginning of this chapter that both Professor Winston and Edd Hogan saw and understood the enormous potential for growth, change and development in the two newborns, Kirsty and Niamh. In the next chapter we will begin to make sense of the almost incredible changes that will happen in the lives of these two young children. We will identifying important theoretical approaches in child development and start to interpret theories of childhood in relevant contexts. In identifying and making sense of theoretical approaches, and by exploring some of the controversial issues they raise, you will begin to construct your own understanding of child development.

### SUMMARY TABLE

**Understanding Child Development**

**Defining child development (pp 000–000)**

**What is child development? (pp 000–000)**

Child development is the study of changes in children over the timespan of childhood from conception to adulthood. It is the study of changes due to both maturation and learning, and these changes can be represented either in age-related phases or by referring to domains of development – physical, cognitive or social/emotional.

**Terms of development (pp 000–000)**

It is a scientific study – but not experimental as observations of children’s changing abilities and characteristics take place in natural settings such as homes and schools. Such observations are made by expert observers who are systematic and precise, and build their perceptions into theories. Knowledge of these theories helps those who nurture children to check that all is well and ‘going to plan’.

**Stages of development (pp 000–000)**

Child development is the study of changes due to both maturation (following the genetic plan) and learning (change due to experience). Such changes can be represented either in age-related phases or by referring to domains of development – physical, cognitive or social/emotional.
A history of child development
(pp 000–000)

The beginnings of child development
(pp 000–000)
During the ‘Age of Enlightenment’ a philosophical dichotomy developed between views of a child as a tabula rasa – a clean slate (Locke) – and children as active beings, already in possession of personality and intellect (Rousseau).

The scientific study of child development
(pp 000–000)
Factors influencing the scientific study of child development (traced back to Darwin, Preyer and Hall) were identified as new interests in: scientific methods of enquiry; teaching methods and standards of education in newly established universal public education systems; children’s health including social and emotional development; and parenting: These factors were related to the growing demand for authentic information from those responsible for the nurture of children.

Cross-cultural contexts of childhood
(pp 000–000)
Children’s development is affected in complex and profound ways by the culture in which they grow up and cultural influences can be represented in models of development such as that of Urie Bronfenbrenner (1989). The findings of international enquiries of childhood behaviour support a conclusion that children’s views of self and adults’ view of childhood are cultural-centric.

Principles of child development
(pp 000–000)

Why is the study of child development important? (pp 000–000)
A study of child development tells us how to best work with children now, but should not be considered as an accurate predictor of individual future achievement.

Optimising children’s development and learning
(pp 000–000)
Developmentally appropriate teaching begins with an understanding of how a child’s physical, cognitive, linguistic, social and emotional development affects his or her learning.

Adopting a framework to develop personal principles (pp 000–000)
A framework for the study of child development was suggested formed around controversies, for example, ‘Do children start school too early?’ and key questions including ‘How do we explain that some children learn language much more quickly than others?’

Key questions and themes in child development
(pp 000–000)
Some major and contrasting themes of child development to be explored are: continuous development versus stages of development; the influence of heredity – the ‘nature versus nurture’ argument, training and the sociocultural context; contrasting views of children as active and passive learners; and the potential synergy of these key themes.

Going further

A classic text that continues to be updated. Chapter 1 is very relevant in explaining development and the issues in child development.

Chapter 1 explains the principles of developmental psychology clearly.

Chapters 5 and 6 provide a most interesting read on childhood in different cultures and the history of childhood.