

C8305 Development

20 credits

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Aims:

This core class is required for Graduate Basis for Registration by the British Psychological Society. Cognition reflects knowledge and what one does with it, and it has been a long held view that cognition develops throughout life. The overarching question this class seeks to pose is “How does thinking change over time?” More specific questions include: “Do children develop their skill uniformly, or do some skills develop at faster rates than others?”; “Is development relatively continuous, or do some skills develop at faster rates than others?” (Bjorkland, 2005, p.2).

The aims of the class are:

- i. to describe and explain the major changes in intellectual functioning from birth to adolescence.
- ii. to introduce and evaluate the central theoretical perspectives on cognitive development, showing how these have evolved from the initial work of Piaget and Vygotsky.
- iii. to begin to appreciate the interplay and mutual enhancement of the typical and atypical development literatures.

Content:

The course will start by outlining Piaget’s highly influential theory of cognitive development within the broader context of the history of developmental psychology. It will proceed to examine the empirical research that Piaget and his associates conducted to give the theory credence. The initial focus will be the cognitive development of infants, looking at emergent notions of the physical world and of symbolic representation. Moving to early childhood, the course will examine Piaget’s contentious notion of ‘egocentrism’, which will be considered with reference to work on children’s theories of mind. Theory of mind research will subsequently lead onto work into the developmental of Executive Functions. Next to be studied is research inspired by Piaget’s concept of ‘concrete operations’, a concept with important educational implications. The famous conservation studies will be considered and cross-cultural research will be included. Following this, language, communication and cognitive development will be examined, along with the formation of concepts and categories. For a more specific example, the history of language development will be covered and contrasted (e.g. Skinner’s, Chomsky’ and Bruner’s accounts). The final body of work to be considered relates to the development of cognitive and social processes across the lifespan. Specifically, we will examine the development of social aspects of cognition, and the development of memory across the lifespan from infants through to the elderly and how memory

performance varies as a function of age. Throughout the course, students will be encouraged to consider the various strengths and weaknesses of developmental theories. As the course concludes, the various theoretical threads will be drawn together, making for a comprehensive conceptualisation of what cognitive development involves.

Learning outcomes:

Cognitive skills

- i. Students will develop a critical approach to psychological theory and research findings in cognitive development – developing an appreciation of contested rather than fact-based knowledge.
- ii. Students will develop the ability to evaluate scientific papers in the area of cognitive development.
- iii. On completing the course students should have experience of presenting balanced arguments on a range of psychological research questions – within a developmental context - by employing evidence from a variety of sources, including their own research experience.

Knowledge and understanding

- iv. Students will demonstrate a detailed knowledge of different historical, as well more contemporary accounts of cognitive development. Hence, students will be able to locate cognitive development within wider historical, social and cross-cultural contexts.
- v. Students will begin to develop knowledge and skills required for conducting research involving children and, thus, demonstrate an awareness of relevant research methodologies and a familiarity with their relative strengths and weaknesses.

Practical skills

- vi. Students will be able to conduct and write-up an experiment based on practical work with children.

Place in course:

This class falls within the ‘Developmental’ area for purposes of BPS recognition. The class elaborates some of the concepts introduced in *C8105 Psychology 1a*, and provides a strong foundation for the Level 4 class *C8415 Social Development* and, more generally, for subsequent careers in the educational and child psychology fields.

Methods of teaching:

The course is taught by means of lectures, tutorials, and practicals. With the exception of the first lecture which introduces the course and the final lectures which offer a summary, the lectures take the major periods of child development in sequence, i.e. infancy, early childhood, middle childhood and lifespan. A detailed lecture programme will be available on the class Myplace site.

Teaching hours:

Up to three hours per week, over twelve weeks.

Assessment:

Students are required to complete a practical research component to and write the practical up as a formal report (30%). Students are also required to keep a “Research methods with children diary”, which should include reflective writings about the challenges and potential solutions to research children and more direct, experiential writings about dealing with children during the collection of project data. The research diaries will be submitted as part of the requirement for course fulfilment and will be read by teaching staff. The final examination (70%) is a two-hour paper in which students are required to answer two out of six questions.

The University and the Department require students to attend lectures, seminars, tutorials, and practicals regularly and to perform satisfactorily in the associated work. Students who fail to attend or who have not submitted the practical report by two weeks following the deadline may be excluded from the degree examination. Any student with coursework outstanding at the time of the examination will receive a Fail for the examination performance and will not be able to obtain a pass at the resit examination unless the outstanding work completed to a satisfactory standard has been submitted.

Feedback:

Students will receive detailed, written feedback on practical reports. Tutorials provide opportunities for one-to-one feedback on students' ideas and thoughts in relation to developmental psychological issues.

Feedback, however, comes in many forms and at various points: when a discussion post is responded to, this is feedback; when you email a member of staff and they reply, this is feedback; a response to a question before, after, or during a lecture, is feedback! If however, any feedback is unclear, given the opportunity staff will be happy to clarify it.

Employability:

This class provides students with a number of skills which are valued outside of the Undergraduate context. These include: the ability to present and interpret numerical information in a clear and concise manner; the ability to understand and translate research findings into plain English; an understanding of the ways that children develop across the course of childhood; and, an understanding of research ethics relating to children and young people (and hence, how to engage with children and their Guardians in an honest and respectful way).

The subject-specific and generic skills that are developed in this class are noted above. These skills will be of interest to employers within and outwith Psychology, as well as to recruiters for post-graduate courses, so where relevant they should be noted on personal statements/CVs etc. See the Personal Development and Employability page on Myplace for more information related to personal development and employability.

Reading: General texts can be helpful introductions and provide useful overviews, but to really understand the topics covered in this course all students are advised to read original journal articles:

The core class text is:

Mitchell, P. & Ziegler, F. (2013). *Fundamentals of Developmental Psychology*. Psychology Press. Second edition. (Digitised)

Other useful textbooks:

Slater, A. & Bremner, G. (2011). *An introduction to developmental psychology*. Second Edition. BPS Blackwell. (Digitised)

Leman, P., Bremner, A., Parke, R.D. & Gauvain, M. (2012). *Developmental Psychology*. McGraw-Hill. (Digitised)

Goswami, U. (1998). *Cognition in children*. Hove: Psychology Press.

Harris, M., & Butterworth, G. (2002). *Developmental psychology: A student's handbook*. Hove: Psychology Press.

Swartwood, M.O., & Trotter, K.H. (2004). *Observing children and adolescents: Student workbook*. Belmont: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning.

Carpendale, J., & Lewis, C. (2006). *How children develop social understanding*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Schaffer, H.R. (2006). *Key concepts in developmental psychology*. London: Sage.

Bjorklund, D.F. (2005). *Children's thinking: Cognitive development and individual differences (4th ed.)*. Belmont, CA.: Thomson Wadsworth

Suggested resources for the Practical Report and Research Diaries:

Field, A., & Hole, G. (2003). *How to design and report experiments*. London: Sage.

Greig, A., Taylor, J., & MacKay, T. (2007). *Doing research with children (2nd ed.)*. London: Sage.

Harris, M. (2008). *Exploring developmental psychology: Understanding theory and methods*. London: Sage.

Specific tutorial (all hosted on the class Myplace site):

Tutorial A-D groups:

Moore, M.K., & Meltzoff, A.N. (2004). Object permanence after a 24-hr delay and leaving the locale of disappearance: The role of memory, space, and identity. *Developmental Psychology*, 40, 606-620.

Tutorial E-H groups:

Kerr, S & Durkin, K. (2004). Understanding of thought bubbles as mental representations in children with Autism: Implications for Theory of Mind. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 34, 637-648.

Presentations

One of the key transferable skills that psychology students develop during their undergraduate degree is that of critical thinking. Very generally, this skill allows for

indepth analysis of a topic, question, problem, theory or application, in combination with a deep understanding and insightful observation. The presentation component has been designed to help foster these skills and, the hope is, that this developing skill will generalise from this specific requirement to how to think about issues in psychology, and aid in answering examination questions.

Key objectives:

- (1) To develop critical thinking skills through analysing a specific question or problem and choosing an appropriate published study that addresses the issue in an evidence based way
- (2) Simply presenting background information, method and results will be insufficient. How do these aspects of your chosen paper address the issue or problem in question? You will develop skills that encourage you to go beyond the data and provide speculation and insightful thought about how and why a paper's findings move a topic forward (e.g., is it a major advancement? A leap too far? An incremental advancement?).
- (3) To develop presentation skills in front of a small and supportive audience of peers, and in an environment that will have no repercussions for your degree (especially relevant for those who have had little opportunity to develop their presentation skills thus far).
- (4) To encourage team working. You will be expected to contribute equally to the development of the topic and presentation.

To help foster these skills lecturers will provide some guidance through outlining some question(s) and encouraging students to find a published article which addresses this question. Students will have to assess their article in terms of how and why it addresses the question under consideration.

This is a nonassessed requirement for Development. Presentations are expected to be Powerpoint led and 10 mins maximum. How you decide to divide up time within your group is up to you but we expect each and every one of you to contribute SOMETHING.

Students will work in groups of 3-4. These groups will be assigned by JS, so if you have an issue with your assigned tutorial grouping it is important that you make it known NOW.

These questions are designed to be relatively general, to encourage broader thinking (e.g., why is this issue important? Does it address a common issue across other areas of psychology? Does it describe real children's behaviour?), and there is not necessarily a right or wrong answer. We are interested in what you THINK!

Presentation questions

Jo's questions

1. Does ToM or Executive Dysfunction have any practical utility in accounting for real children with a diagnosis of a developmental disorder (e.g., autism, ADHD)?

2. Asperger's disorder: Genuine disorder or normal but unusual behaviour?
3. Is age a barrier to the accuracy of an eyewitness?

Simon's Q's for presentations

1. Can research on children's problem solving inform classroom educational practice?
2. Does what we know about infant cognitive ability tell us anything about how parents should interact with their babies and very young children?
3. Do our theories of cognitive development really tell us about development across all cultures?