The Culturalization of Developmental Trajectories

A. Bame Nsamenang

in Bridging Cultural and Developmental Approaches to Psychology: New Syntheses in Theory, Research, and Policy

Scientific psychology is a European–Western export onto the rest of the globe. This chapter contributes to the emerging “movement” to curb such imposition. It sketches the development of Africa's young citizens to introduce developmental knowledge about a significant part of the world—Afric—that is underrepresented in developmental science. It highlights how Africa's theocentric worldview primes pronatalist values, inserts childrearing into extended families, and fosters individuation by connecting a unique personal identity to that of the shared social person. It further exposes the nature of Africa's developmental ecology, sociogenic developmental trajectory, and principles and processes that ordain it, and what Africentric policy research should focus on. The main lesson is that the ideas, issues, and practices that shape development in Africa diverge from those of the Euro-west that drive contemporary developmental science. As such, they are poised to enrich theorization and extend the discipline's methods and knowledge base.

Neoconstructivism

Scott Johnson

Arguments over the developmental origins of human knowledge are ancient, founded in the writings of Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Hume, and Kant. They have also persisted long enough to become a core area of inquiry in cognitive and developmental science. Empirical contributions to these debates, however, appeared only in the last century, when
Jean Piaget offered the first viable theory of knowledge acquisition that centered on the great themes discussed by Kant: object, space, time, and causality. The essence of Piaget's theory is constructivism: the building of concepts from simpler perceptual and cognitive precursors. In particular, from experience gained through manual behaviors and observation. The constructivist view was disputed by a generation of researchers dedicated to the idea of the “competent infant,” endowed with knowledge (say, of permanent objects) that emerged prior to facile manual behaviors. Taking this possibility further, it has been proposed that many fundamental cognitive mechanisms—reasoning, event prediction, decision-making, hypothesis testing, and deduction—operate independently of all experience and are, in this sense, innate. The competent-infant view has an intuitive appeal, attested to by its widespread popularity, and it enjoys a kind of parsimony: it avoids the supposed philosophical pitfall posed by having to account for novel forms of knowledge in inductive learners. But this view leaves unaddressed a vital challenge: to understand the mechanisms by which new knowledge arises. This challenge has now been met. The neoconstructivist approach is rooted in Piaget's constructivist emphasis on developmental mechanisms.

Competence Motivation in Head Start
Heather L. Rouse and John W. Fantuzzo

in Academic Motivation and the Culture of School in Childhood and Adolescence
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Gaps for minority and low-income students' achievements have shown minute changes over the past two decades which have resulted in mandated improvements for public education. A major federal legislation is the No Child Left Behind policy. However, early childhood educators and researchers disapproved of NCLB legislation due to its restricted emphasis on reading achievement. Developmental science argues that school readiness is a multidimensional concept that includes diverse cognitive, social, and physical skills sets related to academic success. A developmental-ecological model provides a useful theoretical framework in which to examine early childhood research. This chapter illustrates research taken from a brief longitudinal study of the relationships between competence motivation, socioemotional adjustment, and early literacy and mathematics abilities at kindergarten and first grade levels.
In the past few decades, sources of inspiration in the multidisciplinary field of cognitive science have widened. In addition to ongoing vital work in cognitive and affective neuroscience, important new work is being conducted at the intersection of psychology and the biological sciences in general. This book offers an overview of the cross-disciplinary integration of evolutionary and developmental approaches to cognition in light of these new contributions from the life sciences. This research has explored many cognitive abilities in a wide range of organisms and developmental stages, and results have revealed the nature and origin of many instances of the cognitive life of organisms. Each section of the book deals with a key domain of cognition: spatial cognition; the relationships among attention, perception, and learning; representations of numbers and economic values; and social cognition. Chapters discuss each topic from the perspectives of psychology and neuroscience, brain theory and modeling, evolutionary theory, ecology, genetics, and developmental science.

Introduction

M.D. Rutherford and Valerie A. Kuhlmeier

The focus of this book is on the detection and interpretation of intentional social entities. While Fritz Heider is often considered one of the major influences on social psychology his emphasis on the perception of intentional action may have had even greater influence within the field of developmental psychology. Heider was interested in causal attribution, and schooled in the non-social causal attribution that was of interest in his time. He made a novel advance by bringing the logic of causal attribution into the social domain. The present volume has an empirical emphasis on vision science, developmental science, and neuroscience owing to a recent upswing in research in these areas coupled with technological advances. Theoretical frameworks and methodological
paradigms that cut across these areas are: Developmental Science, Evolutionary Psychology, Neuroscience, and Clinical Approaches. The goal was a collection of chapters that told a coherent story about three aspects of social perception: the perception of biological motion, the perception of animacy, and the attributions of intentionality.

Epilogue
Aletha C. Huston

in Societal Contexts of Child Development: Pathways of Influence and Implications for Practice and Policy

Building on the framework of Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model of human development, this chapter summarizes previous chapters and testifies to the “village” needed to raise a child by providing new understanding of children’s and families’ transactions with the social, physical, and cultural environments in which they live. The reviewed chapters provide perspectives on the social and cultural assumptions that affect scholars’ research questions, as well as policy makers’ and practitioners’ actions. They confirm the premises that (a) policy is critical to basic science, offering unique opportunities to understand developmental processes, and (b) developmental science offers important tools for policy and practice that may be exploited more extensively as our understanding of knowledge use expands.

Tools for Communicating
Bruno G. Bara

in Cognitive Pragmatics: The Mental Processes of Communication

This chapter examines the basis of cognitive pragmatics, first by outlining certain fundamental methodological aspects. It considers instruments used to validate theories and how a theory may be falsified to determine whether it can withstand all criticisms. The chapter explores developmental cognitive science and the key points of this methodology, namely formalization, construction, and neural correlation, and also discusses shared belief and communicative intention, primitives that
are essential to the theory of cognitive pragmatics. It then looks at conversational and behavioral cooperation in communication, along with mental states, attention, and intentionality. The chapter also discusses the differences among deliberate and conscious communication acts; intentional, nondeliberate, and conscious communication acts; intentional, deliberate, and unconscious communication acts; intentional, nondeliberate, and unconscious communication acts; and unintentionally communicative actions and modes of being.

Introduction

Henry M. Wellman

in Making Minds: How Theory of Mind Develops

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Building on The Child’s Theory of Mind (Wellman, 1990), this book provides a comprehensive sequel. Since 1990, the importance of theory of mind has become widely accepted and its nature widely researched. However, the accumulating findings include gaps and contradictions reflecting current divides about how to characterize foundational human cognition and in particular theory of mind—is it massively domain specific or domain general; does it manifest naïve theories, conceptual modules, or a learned social expertise? This introduction outlines the issues and the approach taken up in the rest of the book. The chapter argues that data and theories are more telling and commensurate than often thought, yield a number of clear conclusions, and indeed have achieved some uncelebrated consensus amid the disputes and unknowns. The chapter outlines the disputes and its constructivist, theory-theory approach to tackling them to reveal how we develop an everyday understanding of our mental lives.