

Programme : B. A

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Ecological Systems Theory

Urie Bronfenbrenner Ecological system theory

Urie bronfenbrenner was a Russian born American developmental psychologist who most is known for his ecological systems theory of child development. Ecological theory is socio-Cultural view of Development. It consists of five environmental systems ranging from the fine grained inputs of direct interactions with social agents to the broad-based inputs of culture.

The theory was published in 1979, this theory states that there are many different levels of environmental influences that can affect a child's development, starting from people and institutions immediately surrounding the individual to nation-wide cultural forces. Urie bronfenbrenner eventually renamed his theory the bio ecological model in order to recognize the importance of biological processes in development, The theory helps us to understand why we act the way we do in different circumstances or environments.

Ecological systems theory views the person as developing within a complex system of relationships affected by multiple levels of the surrounding environment. Since the child's biological dispositions join with environmental forces to mold development, Bronfenbrenner recently characterized his perspective as, *bioecological model*.

Bronfenbrenner envisions the environment as a series of nested structures that includes but extends beyond the home, school, neighborhood, and workplace settings in

which people spend their everyday lives. Each layer of the environment is viewed as having a powerful impact on development.

A) The Microsystem. The innermost level of the environment is the microsystem, which consists of activities and interaction patterns in the person's immediate surroundings. Bronfenbrenner emphasizes that to understand development at this level, we must keep in mind that all relationships are *bidirectional*. For example, adults affect children's behavior but children's biologically and socially influenced characteristics - their physical attributes, personalities, and capacities-also affect adults' behavior. When these bidirectional interactions occur often over time, they have an enduring impact on development. At the same time, other individuals in the microsystem affect the quality of any two person relationship. If they are supportive, then interaction is enhanced. For example, when parents encourage one another in their child-rearing roles, each engages in more effective parenting. In contrast, marital conflict-is associated with inconsistent discipline and hostile reactions toward children. In response, children typically become hostile, and both parent and child adjustment suffers.

B) The Mesosystem. The second level of Bronfenbrenner's model, the mesosystem, encompasses connections between microsystems. For example, a child's academic progress depends not just on activities that take place in classrooms. It is also promoted by parent involvement in school life and by the extent to which academic learning is carried over into the home. Among adults, how well a person functions as spouse and parent at home is affected by relationships in the workplace, and vice versa.

C) The Exosystem. The exosystem refers to social settings that do not contain the developing person but nevertheless affect experiences in immediate settings. These can be formal organizations, such as the board of directors in the individual's workplace or health and welfare services in the community. For example, flexible work schedules, paid maternity and paternity leave and sick leave for parents whose children are ill are ways that work settings can help parents' rear children and, indirectly, enhance the

development of both adult and child. Exosystem supports can also be informal, such as social networks-friends and extended-family members who provide advice, companionship, and even financial assistance.

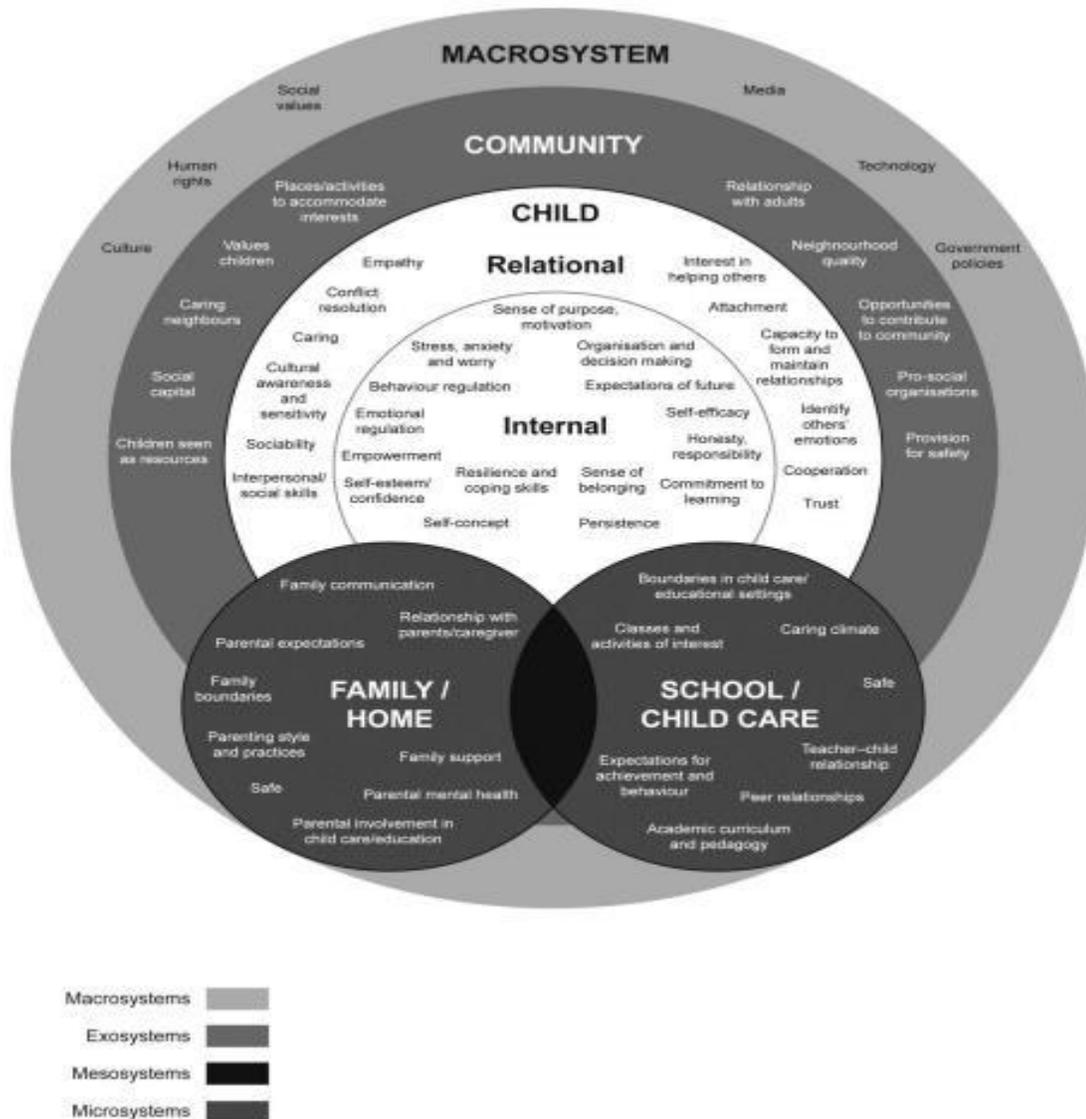
Research confirms the negative impact of a breakdown in exosystem activities.

D) The Macrosystem. The outermost level of Bronfenbrenner's model, the macrosystem, is not a specific context. Instead, it consists of cultural values, laws, customs, and resources. The priority that the macrosystem gives to the needs of children and adults affects the support they receive at inner levels of the environment. For example, in countries that require high quality standards for child care and workplace benefits for employed parents, children are more likely to have favorable experiences in their immediate settings. And when the government provides a generous pension plan for retirees, it supports the well-being of the elderly.

E) A Dynamic, Ever-Changing System. According to Bronfenbrenner, the environment is not a static force that affects people in a uniform way. Instead, it is dynamic and ever changing. Whenever individuals add or let go of roles or settings in their lives, the breadth of their micro systems changes. These shifts in contexts, or ecological transitions, as Bronfenbrenner calls them, take place throughout life and are often important turning points in development. Starting school, entering the workforce, marrying, becoming a parent, getting divorced, moving, and retiring are examples.

Bronfenbrenner refers to the temporal dimension of his model as the chrono system (the prefix *chrono* means "time"). Changes in life events can be imposed externally. Alternatively, they can arise from within the person, since individuals select, modify, and create many of their own settings and experiences. How they do so depend on their age; their physical, intellectual, and personality characteristics; and their environmental opportunities. Therefore, in ecological systems theory, development is neither controlled by environmental circumstances nor driven by inner dispositions.

Instead, people are products and producers of their environments, so both people and their environments form a network of interdependent effects.



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An Eclectic Theoretical Orientation: Putting It Together: Developmental Theories

Developmental theories provide a set of guiding principles and concepts that describe and explain human development. Some developmental theories focus on the formation of a particular quality, such as Piaget's theory of cognitive development. Other developmental theories focus on growth that happens throughout the lifespan, such as Erikson's theory of psychosocial development. It would be natural to wonder which of the perspectives provides the most accurate account of human development, but clearly, each perspective is based on its own premises and focuses on different aspects of development. Many lifespan developmentalists use an eclectic approach, drawing on several perspectives at the same time because the same developmental phenomenon can be looked at from a number of perspectives.

Some important reasons to know why eclectic approach is Important are

- No single theory can explain all of development
- Life span development is complex
- Every theory has contributed to our understanding
- Eclectic orientation selects from each theory whatever is considered its best features
- A mistake to rely on only one theory

In the table below, we'll review some of the major theories that you learned about in this module. Recall that three key issues considered in human development examine if development is continuous or discontinuous, if it is the same for everyone or distinct for individuals (one course of development or many), and if development is more influenced

by nature or by nurture. The table below reviews how each of these major theories approaches each of these issues.

Theory	Major ideas	Continuous or discontinuous development?	One course of development or many?	More influenced by nature or nurture?	Major Theorist(s)
Psychosexual theory	Behavior is motivated by inner forces, memories, and conflicts that are generally beyond people’s awareness and control. Emphasizes the unconscious, defense mechanisms, and influences of the id, ego, and superego.	Discontinuous; there are distinct stages of development	One course; stages are universal for everyone	Both; natural impulses combined with early childhood experiences impact development	Sigmund Freud
Psychosocial theory	A person negotiates biological and sociocultural influences as they move through eight stages, each characterized by a psychosocial crisis: trust vs. mistrust, autonomy vs. shame/doubt, initiative vs. guilt, industry vs. inferiority, identity vs. role confusion, intimacy vs. isolation, generativity vs. stagnation, ego integrity vs. despair.	Discontinuous; there are distinct stages of development	One course; stages are universal for everyone	Both; natural impulses combined with sociocultural experiences impact development	Erik Erikson
Classical conditioning	Learning by the association of a response with a stimulus; a person comes to respond in a particular way to a neutral stimulus that normally does not bring about that type of response.	Continuous; learning is ongoing without distinct stages	Many courses; learned behaviors vary by person	Mostly nurture; behavior is conditioned	Ivan Pavlov, John Watson
Operant conditioning	Learning that occurs when a voluntary response is strengthened or weakened by its association with positive or negative consequences. Rewards and punishments can strengthen or discourage behaviors.	Continuous; learning is ongoing without distinct stages	Many courses; learned behaviors vary by person	Mostly nurture; behavior is conditioned	B.F. Skinner

Social cognitive theory (social learning theory)	Learning occurs in a social context; considering the relationship between the environment and a person's behavior. Learning can occur through observation.	Continuous; learning is gradual and ongoing without distinct stages	Many courses; learned behaviors vary by person	Mostly nurture; behavior is observed and learned	Albert Bandura
Piaget's theory of cognitive development	A theory about how people come to gradually acquire, construct, and use knowledge and information. It describes cognitive development through four distinct stages: sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete, and formal.	Discontinuous; there are distinct stages of development	One course; stages are universal for everyone	Both; natural impulses combined with experiences that challenge the existing schemas	Jean Piaget
Information processing	A theory that seeks to identify the ways individuals take in, use, and store information (sometimes compared to a computer). It is based on the idea that humans process the information they receive, rather than merely respond to stimuli.	Continuous; cognitive development is gradual and ongoing without distinct stages	One course; the model applies to everyone	Both; natural cognitive development combined with experiences of processing information in new and different ways	Richard Atkinson, Richard Shiffrin
Humanistic theories	Theories that emphasize an individual's inherent drive towards self-actualization and contend that people have a natural capacity to make decisions about their lives and control their own behavior. Key terms and concepts include unconditional positive regard, striving for "the good life," and the hierarchy of needs.	Continuous; development is ongoing without distinct stages and can be multidirectional depending on environmental circumstances	Mostly one course; Maslow's hierarchy of needs is universally applied, but there is an individual course for self-actualization	Mostly nurture; development is influenced by environmental circumstances and social interactions	Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow
Sociocultural theory	Vygotsky's theory that emphasizes how cognitive development	Both, but mostly continuous as an individual learns and	Many courses;	Both; development is	Lev Vygotsky

	proceeds as a result of social interactions between members of a culture. Key terms and concepts include the zone of proximal development and scaffolding.	progresses	there are variations between individuals and cultures	influenced by biological preparation and social experiences	
Bioecological systems model	Urie Bronfenbrenner's theory stressing the importance of studying a child in the context of multiple environments, or ecological systems. It is organized into five levels of external influence: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem.	Both; the influence of each system can be continuous or discontinuous depending on the system in question	Many courses; the interaction of people and the environment varies	Both; a person's biological potential and the environment interact to impact development	Urie Bronfenbrenner, Stephen Ceci
Evolutionary psychology theory	A theory that seeks to identify behavior that is a result of our genetic inheritance from our ancestors.	Continuous; current behaviors have been shaped over multiple generations based on successful survival and reproduction	Both; behavioral genetics show similarities across the species, but our unique family history also plays a role in development	Both; our genetic history and biological impulses interact with life experiences to produce individual development and development across the history and future of the species	Charles Darwin, David Buss, Konrad Lorenz, Robert Sapolsky

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