TEXT: **Influences on Development**

Most modern developmental psychologist agrees that essentially every facet of the child development is a product of some pattern of interaction of nature and nurture. (Rutter 2002). Further, most recognize that some aspects of development are continues and others are stagelike. Consequently, the discussion has become a bit more complex.

Maturation

Nature shapes development most clearly through genetic programing that may determine whole sequences of development. Developmentalist (Arnold Gesell 1880-1961) use the term maturation to describe genetically programmed sequential patterns of change, and this term is uniformly use today. Any maturational patterns are marked by three qualities: In children, maturation means **going through their development stages**. It is them being able to do tasks and things they could not do previously. So, it can be said with maturing there is an increase in competency and adaptability. Now maturation is a multi-faceted and automatic process.

It is universal, appearing in all children, across cultural and historical boundaries; it is sequential involving some patterns of unfolding skill or characteristic; and is resistant to environmental influence. Maturation development occurs regardless of practice or training. You don’t have to practice growing pubic hair; you
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didn’t have to taught how to walk. In fact, only extreme conditions, such as severe malnutrition, prevent those sequences from unfolding.

Timing of Experience

Research tells us that specific experiences interact with maturational patterns in intricate ways.

The impact of nurture can vary according to its timing. For example, the understanding of the interaction between nature and nurture has lasting higher or lower performance. For example, it is known that impact of day care on a child may differ according to its occurrence in the first year of a child’s life or the years right before school. The best-known example of a critical period in animal development is that young ducks will become imprinted on any moving object in their immediate environment at approximately 15h after hatching. If they do not experience a moving object during this critical period, they will fail to become imprinted at all.

The broader concept of a sensitive period in human development has supplanted the notion of critical periods. A sensitive period may last for months or even years and denotes the time in which the developing child is particularly responsive to certain forms of experience or particularly hindered by their absence. A good example is the fact that children in the period 6-18 months are particularly sensitive to caretaking and that this is the time when they must develop their core attachment to their parents. Other periods may be
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particularly important for intellectual or linguistic development, for example the period 12-30 months when language develops so rapidly.

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The ecology of development

Until recently, most research on child development concentrated on the child's immediate environment, which was the family throughout 10 years old, followed by the school and the peer group. Bronfenbrenner deplores this tunnel vision and argues forcefully that the child's immediate environment is influenced by broad social factors, such as cultural beliefs or the distribution of health care. Moreover, even the environment of the family is not unidimensional; each child inhabits a unique space which is defined by siblings, the age of their parents when they were born and a host of other 'ecological factors' which may be unique to them or their family. (Imagine the difference between the experiences of the first child born to a Pakistani family who later moved to Britain and her much younger sibling born 15 years later in a large city. It would be impossible to imagine that the 'family' influences on these two children were not vastly different.) An understanding of early learning and its environment will have to include the social institutions related to childcare as well as the family.

In order to understand how children move between stages, it's important to understand how children take in stimuli from the environment and use it to grow. Most theorists agree that there are periods in children's lives in which they become biologically mature enough to gain certain skills that they could not have easily picked up prior to that maturation. For example, research has shown that babies and toddlers' brains are more flexible with regard to learning to understand and use language than are older children's brains.
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Children are ready and open to develop certain things during specific stages; however, it doesn't just happen. Instead, they need proper environmental stimuli to develop these abilities. For example, babies can grow in length and weight in amazing amounts during the first year, but if they're not fed and nurtured enough during that time, they will not have the tools and building blocks to grow and will not grow and thrive. Therefore, it's so important for parents and caregivers to understand how their children are growing in all ways and channels and to know what stimuli, or stuff, they need to give their children to help them thrive.

From time-to-time children without any cognitive or physical problems at birth may not be able to develop certain milestones during the stage or time-period they are most receptive. There may be an injury, illness, caregiver neglect or abuse, or a shortage of needs such as food or medical care, that make it difficult for a child to absorb all the basic building blocks and stimulation they need to gain certain abilities at certain times in life. When this occurs, affected children will generally have a harder time gaining those abilities even if they later get special attention and resources designed to help them compensate. It's like children have a window of opportunity when they are ready to grow in certain ways if they have the right stuff and tools in their environment. When that window closes, it will never be as easy to grow in those ways again. Theorists disagree about how important it is for children to have that special stimulus at each growing stage in order to reach their milestones. Some theorists call these times critical periods, but other theorists call them sensitive periods.
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The difference between critical periods and sensitive periods is subtle. Theorists who believe in critical periods believe that children who do not get special stimulation during their window of receptivity are going to be "stuck" forever and never gain the abilities they should have gained in that period. However, other theorists believe that those very sensitive times in a child's life are just sensitive periods. They agree that children who do not get the right nurturing at the right times to jumpstart their developmental potential are going to have problems later in life, but they do not think that this inability to develop is permanent.

For example, infaney is the time when children first learn they can trust an adult or parent to take care of all their needs, keep them safe, and give them love. Some infants live in orphanages where there are far too many babies for the few nurses and staff members to take care of them. These children go through their first years with hardly any touch or affection that would teach them to trust and to show affection to caregivers. If these children are eventually adopted by a loving family later in their childhood, they often have trouble adjusting to having an affectionate, loving parent. There have been many cases in which children who start out in that kind of orphanage environment never gain the ability to show affection and emotion toward family or even the ability to show remorse or compassion toward other people, no matter how loving and nurturing their adoptive family was being in their middle childhood and on. Such a child's ability to trust and love would have essentially become "stuck" in infancy, even though the rest of their body continued to grow. The question of whether the critical period idea or the sensitive period idea is more correct boils down to whether this stuckness can be overcome, in full or in part, in the child's later life.
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Theorists who support sensitive periods believe that while it will be far more difficult for the child and the child’s teachers and caregivers to learn what was not learned during the window of opportunity, these children can still develop the missing capacities and skills later that they did not develop earlier. While some children do seem to get stuck permanently, there is evidence to support the sensitive period idea as well. Some children born in the same understaffed orphanages who are later adopted do go on to learn to love, to trust, and to show affection to their family and friends. In these situations, the families have to have extreme patience and perseverance as they nurture these older children because they are not going to be able to learn that trust and love as fast and as easily as infants.

However, it’s also important to remember that critical or sensitive periods can also affect children in other ways than just neglect or deprivation. For example, there is a critical or sensitive period for language acquisition that occurs during infancy. Children begin learning how to understand and create language from the time they’re born. They will absorb and copy the language they hear all around them during that critical or sensitive period early in life. However, for many different reasons, children, and adults, may leave their original home and move to a new country or region where people speak a different language. They will need to learn to understand and create the new language, even though they were not exposed to it during that early important period. However, while it will take more time and special tutoring, many children, and adults, can learn a new language proficiently later in life. (Different parts of the brain are used for sensitive period learning, vs. later learning, but both can get the job done)

Source: Boyd, Denise, G. & Bee, Helen The developing Child pages 12-13