CHILD PSYCHOLOGY AND CHILDHOOD EDUCATION: A COGNITIVE-DEVELOPMENTAL VIEW

Lawrence Kohlberg with Rheta DeVries, Greta Fein, Daniel Hart, Rochelle Mayer, Gil Noam, John Snarey and James Wertsch
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In the Preface to Child Psychology and Childhood Education: A Cognitive-Developmental View, Lawrence Kohlberg describes the "paradigm shift" characteristic of child development and education during the past 20 years. Both fields have experienced a dramatically changed perspective as a result of American awareness of Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development. The shift to a Piagetian perspective has been evident in the domains of social and emotional development, as well as in that of cognitive development. It has, moreover, generated a great deal of developmental research and provided a theoretical rationale for a number of early education programs. In spite of the widespread popularity of this cognitive-developmental model among both child psychologists and educators, neither its relationship to other developmental theories nor its implications for educational practices have been fully explored.

Child Psychology and Childhood Education by Lawrence Kohlberg and his collaborators, is a seminal effort to review and integrate developmental theories and empirical findings in selected areas of child development research within the general framework of Piagetian constructivist theory as well as to illustrate the general philosophy of education inspired by this cognitive-developmental view. The primary focus of this ambitious attempt is on the child between the ages of 3 and 10. Geared toward graduate students and professionals in both child development and education, this book emphasizes the complementarity between the two disciplines. This emphasis reflects the contributor's belief "that the most basic psychological concepts and knowledge for the educator are those of child development . . . (and) that a developmental psychology useful to practice cannot be created without a conscious concern for education implications."

In the three chapters which make up Part 1, "A Theory of Early Education," the authors present the basic tenets of their cognitive-developmental view of education, including the claim that development is the aim of education. This section provides the reader with a thorough, though selective, discussion of historical and philosophical origins of the cognitive-developmental perspective as well as of two alternate models which have influenced contemporary education, the romantic-maturational theory and the cultural transmission theory.

Originating in the philosophy of Rousseau, the romantic-maturationist tradition is manifest in the developmental theories of Freud and Gessell as well as in the educational philosophy of A. S. Neill. Based on the assumption that development is essentially the "natural unfolding" of the child's "inner self," this approach is often elaborated in terms of biological metaphors of "healthy growth," which regard education as the "soil" in which development takes place. This view gives rise to what Kohlberg describes as a "bag of virtues" strategy in which educational objectives are child-centered and stated in terms of children's happiness and general psychological adjustment. While the romantic-maturationist has been the basis for criticisms of the educational status quo, such as rote memorization and neglecting social and emotional development, and for the creation of modern "free schools," it has never generated a truly scientific psychology of education.

The cultural transmission theory has its roots in the classical academic

tradition in Western culture. From this viewpoint, the basic objective of education is to transmit the knowledge and values accumulated in a particular culture to a new generation through formal schooling. The educational technology school of thought, which emphasizes teaching skills that are considered necessary for survival in a technological society, is a contemporary variation of this viewpoint. Underlying both these versions of the cultural transmission model is an environmental-learning psychological theory which sees development through the metaphor of a machine passively receiving "input" from the environment. The origins of this mechanistic approach, too, are traced to Locke and are manifest in the educational psychologies of Thorndike and Skinner as well as in society-centered, didactic educational strategies like the Bereiter-Engelmann preschool program. Unlike the romantic-maturationist tradition, the cultural transmission, or environmental learning, approach has spawned a systematic and scientific study of teaching and learning. Indeed, the educational psychology generated by this view has dominated American psychology since the turn of the century. In general, this perspective tends to be society-centered and to support the educational status quo by attempting to identify teaching techniques which effectively transmit the knowledge and values considered the standards in American public schools.

"Historically, (the cognitive-developmental theory set forth by Kohlberg) can be traced from its early philosophical formulation in America by John Dewey and James Mark Baldwin to its empirical elaboration in Switzerland by Jean Piaget and in Soviet Russia by Lev Vygotsky." Dewey's progressive school of education is founded on the assumption that development, progression through a universal series of sequential states, should be the ultimate aim of education. The developmental theory of Baldwin elaborated by both Piaget and Vygotsky complete this perspective by articulating well-defined developmental stages. Whereas the romantic-maturationist and cultural transmission traditions focus respectively on the natural unfolding of and environmental influences on development, the cognitive-developmental approach emphasizes the interaction between the child and his or her environment. "The central theme of this (model) is the assumption that the child actively constructs his or her own world, the meaning of his or her actions, and his or her very instruments of knowing. The child's constructions pass through sequential qualitative stages, each representing a coherent viewpoint on the world. Development through these stages and the stages themselves are the result of processes of interaction between the child and his or her social and physical environment." Within this framework, the focus of educational psychology is on generating novel, experimental teaching techniques which can stimulate development by creating conflicts which promote movement to higher stages.

Kohlberg's primary criticism of both the romantic-maturationist and cultural transmission approaches centers on the values inherent in the educational objectives they espouse. For example, the value of romantic-maturationist focus on fostering healthy adjustment in children has not been validated: Fundamentally, identification of the characteristics which indicate mental health among children has been problematic since there is disagreement among the "experts" concerning the desirability of particular traits at particular ages, plus there is little support for the idea that a happy, well-adjusted childhood insures happiness and adequate psychological adjustment later in life. Similarly, Kohlberg maintains that the reliance on standardized achievement tests as the index of educational outcomes characteristic of the cultural transmission view is unfounded since they have limited predictive validity. "Achievement tests also fail to predict success in later life; in fact, longitudinal studies indicate that school achievement predicts to nothing of value in later life." In effect, neither the "bag of virtues" nor achievement test scores meet his criteria for philosophically and empirically sound educational goals.

He contends that education objectives should focus on ends which are both universally valued for children and predictive of long-term valuable outcomes later in life. In other words, he maintains that the central problem in educational psychology is "defining some general ends of education whose validity is not related to the values and needs of each individual child or to the values of each subculture or society." He goes on to argue that these shortcomings of the romantic-maturationist and the cultural transmission traditions are the result to some extent of a crucial error in reasoning which he labels the "psychologist's fallacy." This is essentially the psychological version of the "naturalistic fallacy" which attempts to derive what **ought** to be (statements of fact). Skinner's statement "Good things are positive reinforcers" and Neill's belief that what children **do** want is what they **should** want are cited as examples of the "psychologist's fallacy."

In support of the cognitive-developmental perspective, Kohlberg argues that it adequately addresses these problems regarding values in education. This view focuses on progression through developmental stages. Higher level stages, such as formal operational thought and principled moral reasoning, are intrinsically more valuable than lower level stages, such as preoperational thought and preconventional moral reasoning. Therefore, the problems associated with either a child-centered or a society-centered value relativity and with the psychologist's fallacy are overcome. In addition, Kohlberg claims that the ethical liberalism characteristic of the progressive developmental approach transcends the injustices of arbitrarily imposing academic education on all and of segregating students into superior academic tracks and inferior vocational tracks. "The developmental rationale remains the only rationale for solving these injustices, and for providing the basis for truly democratic education process."

Kohlberg is careful to explain that establishing development as the aim of education is different from attempts to accelerate development. Even though progression through developmental stages seems to occur "naturally" as a result of interaction with environmental stimulation, attainment of the highest stages is neither universal nor inevitable. The prevention of stage-retardation which leads to eventual attainment of the highest stage during childhood, not stage-acceleration, should be the objective of education. In this same vein, encouraging "decalage of concrete reasoning to a new concept or phenomenon" is considered a worthwhile enterprise.

Most of the discussion of development presented in this first section addresses the cognitive and moral domains which have been more thoroughly explored within the cognitive-developmental framework. However, the second chapter, "The Young Child as a Philosopher," is an attempt to integrate cognitive stages with Freudian psychosexual stages and other aspects of socio-emotional development. In Part II, the authors elaborate their effort to formulate a comprehensive theory based on the developmental perspective. In this second section, they review specific theories and empirical findings concerning what they consider "Critical Areas of Child Development Research." A simple listing of the chapter titles illustrates the scope of this attempt:

Chapter 4 - Psychometric and Piagetian Measures of Intelligence: Their Nature and Educational Uses
Chapter 5 - Language and the Developmental of Thought
Chapter 6 - The Developmental Social-Self Theories of James Mark Baldwin, George Herbert Mead, and Lev Semenovich Vygotsky
Chapter 7 - The Development of Moral Judgment and Moral Action
Chapter 8 - Ego Development and Education: A Structural Perspective
Chapter 9 - Play and Constructive Work as Contributors to Development

As this list suggests, even a brief overview of each chapter is clearly beyond the scope of this review. Each discusses sophisticated theoretical concepts and complex research findings which do not lend themselves cursory summary statements.

The broad-based orientation to both child psychology and education reflected in Child Psychology and Childhood Education is quite impressive. Woven throughout are references to historical trends, logical and ethical concepts, plus sophisticated contemporary data analytic techniques, such as Guttman scaling of stage criteria and subtle biases potential in different factor analysis methods. Inclusion of the early modern pioneers in educational and developmental psychology, like Dewey, Baldwin, Mead, and Vygotsky, is particularly valuable for a generation whose academic education may have excluded the contributions of these great theorists.

Apart from pointing out that education can and should stimulate development through presenting genuine, but resolvable, conflicts which foster movement to higher states and describing an experimental program designed to encourage the applications. As they indicate, the tasks of fully integrating socio-emotional development into the basic cognitive-developmental model, conducting research to support such a comprehensive approach, and operationalizing developmental concepts in terms of viable educational objectives belong to a new generation of professionals in both child psychology and education.

Even though many readers may not concur with the position Kohlberg and his collaborators set forth, that development is the only logically and ethically justifiable aim of education in a democratic society, most will find their claims genuinely thought-provoking. This ambitious attempt to lend some coherence to current developmental theories and educational ideologies within the framework of a progressive, cognitive-developmental perspective serves as a catalyst for further serious thinking about the aims of education in contemporary society and developmental psychology's contribution toward accomplishing these objectives.

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