Class Activities and Chapter Exercises

# Chapter 1: Issues and Themes in Child Development

1. Improving Child Outcomes

**Concept Addressed:** Why people study children and some ways they use knowledge about children to promote positive development.

Frontiers of Innovation has made an inspiring video about why it is so important to improve child outcomes in our society, reflecting much of what is discussed in the book in Chapter 1. Use this video (link below) to stimulate either an in-class discussion or a personal assignment. For an in-class assignment, have the students listen closely to the video and try to catch what the challenges are that face healthy development (the rocks in the pathway around the 2-min mark). Then, have the students break into groups and think of ways that we, as individuals and as a society, can improve child outcomes in light of these challenges.

For a personal assignment, have students research local, state, or federal policy that has been created to assist in the healthy development of children within their community. This will be important in helping them see how research in child development may lead to a change in policy when it is seen that the current policy may not be conducive, or may even be harmful, to the development of children. Some examples of policies currently in action are No Child Left Behind and various parental leave programs. They may find it interesting to compare U.S. parental leave policy to that of another country, such as Sweden, which is considered far more allowing of both parents to provide a positive post-birth experience for the child.

*Building Adult Capabilities to Improve Child Outcomes: A Theory of Change*. Video can be found at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=urU-a_FsS5Y>

1. Nature *Through* Nurture

**Concept Addressed:** Basic themes related to how development occurs and different contexts that influence children’s lives.

Since you will be addressing the concept of nature *through* nurture, you may want your students to get ready for discussion on this by having them read the following article:

<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2009/07/090720163723.htm>

Then have them answer the following questions:

* What is developmental systems theory?
* What do nativists believe about the importance of nature and/or nurture?

These authors claim that imprinting is not an inborn genetically determined behavior, but is linked to prenatal experiences. How does this claim relate to the argument that we should no longer talk about nature and nurture as separate contributions to development?

1. Critically Evaluating Claims

**Concept Addressed:** Strategies and guidelines that will enable you to differentiate reliable information from other material you may encounter as you study child development.

Madsen, Van Abbema, Allen, and Schmidt (2006) provide ideas about how students can compare claims of manufacturers of toys and videos with the reality of their effectiveness in promoting infant development. The following would be one way to do this.

Show Baby Einstein DVDs to the class <http://www.youtube.com/user/babyeinstein?blend=1&ob=4#p/u/3/EOWWl18rYPI> and read the original claims made by the producers of this series <http://www.amazon.com/b/?ie=UTF8&node=504246>.

Then have students examine the research on the actual effects of watching this type of video. This is also a great opportunity to talk about the peer-review process and why it’s so important to critically evaluating claims made in the media.

Madsen, S. D., Van Abbema, D. L., Allen, C. C., & Schmidt, R. E. (2006). Questioning claims of baby genius. *Teaching of Psychology, 33*, 134–137.

Possible additional readings to have students review:

Courage, M. L., & Setliff, A. E. (2010). When babies watch television: Attention-getting, attention-holding, and the implications for learning from video material. *Developmental Review, 30*, 220–238.

The recent increase in the availability of infant-directed video material (e.g., Baby Einstein) and the corresponding increase in the amount of time that infants and toddlers spend viewing them have prompted concern among parents and professionals that these media might impede aspects of cognitive and social development. In contrast, supporters and producers of these media contend that, as has been shown with preschool children, age-appropriate videos with carefully selected educational content can provide an opportunity to support and enhance early learning. The scientific evidence for these opposing views is reviewed, evaluated, and interpreted in a developmental framework. (PsycINFO Database Record (c) 2010 APA, all rights reserved)

Zimmerman, F. J., Christakis, D. A., & Meltzoff, A. N. (2007). Associations between media viewing and language development in children under age 2 years. *The Journal of Pediatrics, 151*, 364–368.

To test the association of media exposure with languagedevelopmentin children under age 2 years. Study design: A total of 1,008 parents of children aged 2–24 months, identified by birth certificates, were surveyed by telephone in February 2006. Questions were asked about child and parent demographics, child–parent interactions, and child’s viewing of several content types of television and DVDs/videos. Parents were also asked to complete the short form of the MacArthur–Bates Communicative Development Inventory (CDI). The associations between normed CDI scores and media exposure were evaluated using multivariate regression, controlling for parent and child demographics and parent–child interactions. Results: Among infants (aged 8–16 months), each hour per day of viewing baby DVDs/videos was associated with a 16.99-point decrement in CDI score in a fully adjusted model (95% confidence interval = –26.20 to –7.77). Among toddlers (aged 17–24 months), there were no significant associations between any type of media exposure and CDI scores. Amount of parental viewing with the child was not significantly associated with CDI scores in either infants or toddlers. Conclusions: Further research is required to determine the reasons for an association between early viewing of baby DVDs/videos and poor languagedevelopment. (PsycINFO Database Record (c) 2010 APA, all rights reserved)