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Research Nuggets

Topic Human Development Theory

Unit Influence of Culture

Psychosocial theory “examines the developmental issues that arise at different points during the life span.” (Evans, 2011)

Introduction

Although there are several human development theories, we focus specifically on Erikson’s psychosocial theory of development. Psychosocial theory represents the biological influences of development (“psycho”) and the social parts of development (“social”). According to Erikson (1959/1994, 1968), development occurs through age-specific, sequential stages across an individual’s lifetime. Within each stage, particular issues must be addressed. Important issues include defining who one is, how to relate to others, career direction, and one’s belief systems. The vulnerability and complexities that arise from each stage may be very challenging as individuals move to new stages. Psychosocial theory recognizes the social context in which students are developing and the role of parents, culture, peers, and schools.

Illustrations and Examples

In *Student Services: A Handbook for the Profession*, Nancy J. Evans illustrates the utility of psychosocial development theory through the example of two students, Jillian and Elicia. Jillian is a 19-year-old white sophomore at a private college trying to make decisions about her career and who she is as a person. Elicia is a 35-year-old African American student in her second year at an urban community college. She is a single parent pursuing school to improve her life, increase opportunities for her family, and make an impact on the community. Although both are sophomores, these two students face extremely different challenges and are at different psychosocial developmental stages. Jillian is focused on entering adulthood and defining who she is, whereas Elicia is at the stage of acquiring skills and developing a sense of accomplishment and future direction.

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Successful Research-based Strategies

For adolescents:

- Determine how your words and actions (micro and macro) interact with and impact student identity.
- Be aware of how your words and actions can help students struggling with social interactions and grappling with moral decisions, such as bullying.
- Utilize peer interactions as a significant influence of adolescent behavior to achieve positive outcomes.
- Become knowledgeable about human development and developing values.

For adults:

- Determine how your words and actions (micro and macro) impact students' ability to build meaningful relationships in your class versus feeling isolated.
- Consider student behavior based on her or his stage of development versus your own and modify your expectations to align with developing values.
- Set goals and benchmarks to include more diverse adults in the education community.

References and Bibliography

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NAPE is an alliance of federal and state agencies, local school districts, colleges, universities, businesses, and corporate foundations working to ensure that every student can realize his or her potential in high-wage, high-skill, high-demand careers.



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