A Viewpoints-Based Survey of Developmental Literature

by
Mary Erickson[1]

1. Introduction

How do individuals change and learn through their lifetimes?

The expression, "human development," refers to the transitions, and changes that people go through as they grow older within a society, as they experience their world, and as they participate in formal and informal education. Many aspects of an individual develop through time. For example we develop physically from infancy, childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, maturity, to old age. Some of our physical development, such as growth and sexual change, is beyond our control (through biogenetics is pioneering even in these areas). We can affect other aspects of our physical development depending on what we know and do, for example, through exercise and nutrition.

In addition to physically, human beings develop in many other ways. Cognitive development refers to changes in one's thinking abilities. Moral development is the evolution of one's ability to make ethical decisions. Social development refers to our increasing capacity to relate to others. Each aspect of human development is impacted by our life circumstances, for example our natural environment, family, culture, education, personal experience, and life's work.

What are developmental theories and how can they be useful?

Every culture makes general distinctions among the "ages" of its members, such as infancy, childhood, adulthood, and maturity. The specific attributes, expectations, initiations, and celebrations associated with each "age" vary a good deal across cultures and through history. Baptism, puberty rites, voting, and the honoring of elders are some of the ways that cultures draw distinctions between "ages."

Only in the last 100 years or so, has there been an effort to establish theories of human development based on observations, interviews, and experiments with participants of various

---

ages (sometimes only boys and men). Because developmental researchers have tended to come from Europe and America, many traditional theories are built on unexamined European American assumptions about the kind of development that is most desirable. In recent years, some researchers have attempted to construct developmental theories drawing upon values held within diverse cultures.

Developmental theories vary in the nature of their conclusions. Some theories attempt to describe a sequence of stages, each of which replaces the previous stage. Others attempt to identify a sequence of achievements, or perspectives that individuals can attain through sustained effort and thus broaden their repertoire of options. Even though many developmental theories associate particular "stages", "levels", "understandings", etc. with certain ages, these are estimates, at best. Certainly the passage of years does not, itself, dictate any but the most biological of changes. Many factors, such as life experience and education, impact in crucial ways on if or when individuals gain knowledge or skills as they grow older.

Developmental theories can give us a basis upon which to predict the knowledge, abilities, and values of individuals or groups before we encounter them. They can provide us with a framework through which to make our own observations and draw our own conclusions about an individual's or group's developmental achievements. Developmental theories can help us plan the level at which, and sequence through which, we choose to introduce new information, skills, or values to others.

David Henry Feldman's Developmental Theory

Feldman (1985) presents five "major landmarks" on the "general developmental landscape" in his Universal to Unique Developmental Theory. He names these landmarks, "universal", "cultural", "discipline-base", " idiosyncratic", and "unique". These landmarks are points along a continuum as one moves from novice to expert within a domain of understanding. The five general levels of achievement presented in this survey are based loosely on Feldman's landmarks.

SURVEY LEVELS	FELDMAN TERMS
Universal	Universal
Cultural	Cultural
Discipline-Based	Discipline-Based
Specialist	Idiosyncratic
Paradigm-Shifter	Unique

Feldman's theory is especially valuable as a framework for planning instruction because it retains a place for universal development (which applies to all people, in all cultures, at all times) but also takes into account the powerful roles of culture and of formal education. This survey extends Feldman's description of cultural and domain-specific achievements to a more diverse range of cultures than does his theory. In addition to the individualistic achievements addressed by Feldman's theory, this survey also begins to address collectivist achievements valued by the many cultures around the world.

Erickson and Clover's Viewpoints for Art Understanding

This survey also draws upon five viewpoints for art understanding proposed by Erickson and Clover (2003). They argue that "Viewers can use each viewpoint anywhere on a continuum from naive to sophisticated. When viewers are able to approach artworks from two or more viewpoints, they can choose the approach they deem most appropriate for understanding different types of art. Clover and Erickson (1997 and 1998) built on distinctions identified by Parsons (1987) in formulating and refining these five viewpoints" (2003, n.p). In this survey, Erickson and Clover's five viewpoints are introduced in relation to general levels of achievement:

SURVEY LEVELS   ERICKSON & CLOVER VIEWPOINTS
Universal   Non-Reflective Viewpoint
Cultural   Beauty, Realism, and Skill Viewpoint
Discipline-Based   Expressions of Feeling & Ideas and Arworld Viewpoints
Specialist   Plural Artworld Viewpoint
Paradigm-Shifter

The five general levels of development provide a structure for introducing a wide variety of developmental theories and research findings including cognitive, social, ethical and others.

Structure of Chapters

Each chapter from 2-7 introduces a Feldman-based level of achievement from universal to unique (paradigm shifter). Each chapter describes art achievements (both art-making and art viewing) from the perspective of Erickson and Clover viewpoints associated with that level. Next, each chapter presents research studies that shed light on the level of achievement being addressed. Some chapters conclude with issues raised when considering that level of achievement.

Chapter 8 summarizes 10 prominent developmental theories cited regularly in the earlier chapters. The references provide sources readers can consult as they continue their reflection about and research into artistic development.