**Personal Theory**

What are the most important factors in determining how a child turns out as an adult?

I believe that the most important factors are how a child was raised, including both the risk and protective factors which they would have had. I also believe that the experiences which they had growing up and how they responded or reacted to them have an influence, and a child’s genes also have an influence.

How do children’s minds grow and change over time?

Children’s minds are continuously developing throughout childhood and adolescence. The different experiences a child will have will help develop and shape their brain’s architecture through the formation and strengthening of certain synapses and the pruning or cell death of other synapses. As mentioned in Piaget’s Theory, these synaptic connections are formed through children living actively in their environment and constructing knowledge throughout their maturation and experiences. I also believe that a lot of how a child’s mind grows and changes is due to what they were subjected to growing up. For example those exposed to more opportunities for knowledge acquisition will likely be more developed in that aspect. All children’s minds follow a very general path of growth and change; however it is very specific to each child when and how this development occurs. Often their minds are referred to as sponges, soaking up the information which is presented to them. As they get older they begin to form their own ideas and opinions and I would say it follows a similar pattern to Bloom’s taxonomy (going up the pyramid). Their minds starting by remembering things, then understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating and finally creating (and by creating I mean creating more complex thoughts and ideas, rather than i.e. creating a drawing).

What is the role of teachers in helping children build a brain?

Teachers can help students by laying the foundation or helping to set the scaffolding for the child to build upon. Teachers being the facilitators of learning are able to guide and coax the child to actively take the responsibility to build upon their knowledge in more and more complex ways, creating those pathways and synapses in the brain to build it up, and leading to a higher performance level from the child. This view is supported by Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory.
How do children and/or adolescents come to a sense of who they are?

Through experiences in their life, how they feel these experiences have impacted them and how they responded to them. A child’s background and culture, as well as the social relationships that they maintain with family and peers will affect their view of themselves. Also through their personal views and outlooks on life and the encouragement of these by those who have influence over them. This process is something which is continuously developing over time.

What roles do “nature” and “nurture” play in human development?

One does not exist without the other. In human development, both play an equally important role in how a person may turn out as genes and environment continuously interact with each other. For example, some people may say personality is genetic (nature), yet others would argue that it is down to the interactions, experiences and environment the child is subjected to (nurture). I believe they are both intertwined together in probably every aspect of human development.

How, if at all, do people change in the way they experience and handle emotion over their school years?

As children grow older, generally they are able to learn to cope with regulating their emotion. A wider range of emotion seems to be more accepted to be displayed both in and outside the classrooms at a younger age. As a norm, as children mature they are better able to handle their emotion. The reactions given by teachers, peers and parents may also influence the way in which children experience and handle their emotion due to reinforcement behaviour. Modeling of good emotional regulation by adults and peers can also influence how a student handles their emotion as they grow older and more cognitively aware of the positive or negative consequences for the emotions they choose to display.

How do children learn to regulate their own behavior?

Children learn to regulate their own behaviour through developing self-control and through the reactions of others and the consequences to their behaviour – whether it is good or bad. Operant conditioning through reinforcement or punishment of behaviours also will help a child to learn how to control their behaviour through these experiences.

What is the influence of peer groups on children?

Huge – children often look to their peer groups for examples and for acceptance. Most children want to
“fit in” with their peer group so the opinions and actions of their peer group will influence a child’s behaviour, dress, actions, and sometimes even personality traits. Peer status is relatively stable in children and different status’ can lead to different outcomes in some cases (i.e. rejected status may lead to aggression, depression, school avoidance, and low academic achievement). Friendships cause students to become more like one another and deeper friendships can lead to better academic performance.

If children have challenges in their early lives (for example, alcoholism in the family, poverty, abuse or neglect, and the like) does this mean that they are going to have difficulties later? If so, what kind of difficulties and why? If not, why not?

It depends on how that child is able to deal with the issues and challenges. This is an example where we can see both sides of the story. It is also an area where we can see where nature vs. nurture comes into effect. For the most part, the difficulties which they could face could be inward, for example thinking that they can’t get out of the cycle, they will always be in poverty, or they are worthless because of neglect/abuse. This then can turn into a self-fulfilling prophecy. However another child who went through the exact same experience could end up successful and healthy because of inward choice they made to “break the cycle.” Here this is where I believe that protective factors play a significant role in whether children who have challenges in their early lives will go on to have difficulties later in life. As little as one significant protective factor can help to dissolve these difficulties in a child’s life and help them to thrive as adults.

Overall, EDPB503 Child and Youth Development has confirmed and built upon most of my beliefs on child and adolescent development, and given the pedagogical and developmental evidence for these.