

PSYC842: Current Theories in Cognitive Development

Course Details:

Term Offered: Fall 2026

Credit Weighting: 3.0 units

Delivery Mode: in person seminar

Learning Hours: 120 learning hours

Pre-Requisites: none

Xxxxxxx

Course Description:

From the Calendar: Students are exposed to current theory (and historical antecedents) within the field of cognitive developmental psychology. Topics will vary based on the expertise of the faculty instructor and thus may cover theory within evolutionary and comparative frameworks of cognitive development, epigenetic and systems approaches to cognitive development, developmental cognitive neuroscience methods, and developmental psychopathology. Seminar (2 hrs)

This year, the focus of the seminar is **socio-cultural theories of development**. We will explore early formulations of these theories, their contemporary relatives, and contemporary complementary views on development.

Course Learning Outcomes:

1. Critically evaluate and synthesize primary sources to gain conceptual knowledge of theory and experimental methodology in the field of cognitive development
2. Describe the evolution of contemporary theories in cognitive development from their origins
3. Combine critical reading skills and conceptual knowledge of theory and methodology to create a professional review of experimental findings in the field of cognitive development for a broad, yet academic, audience
4. Combine conceptual knowledge of theory and methodology to propose novel research in the field of cognitive development

Land Acknowledgement:

Queen's University is situated on the territory of the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabek. Ne Queen's University e'tho nón:we nikanónhsote tsi nón:we ne Haudenosaunee táhnon Anishinaabek tehatihsnonhsáhere ne onhwéntsya. Gimaakwe Gchi-gkinoomaagegamig atemagad Naadowe miinwaa Anishinaabe aking.

Required Materials and Costs

All readings are available through the library.

Assessments

Assessments	Learning Outcomes	Weight	Due
Participation	1, 2	25%	ongoing
Reading notes/Reflection papers	1, 2, 4	10%	ongoing
Final project	3, 4	65%	
Paper		40%	December 11 th
Pitch		15%	TBD
Outline		10%	November 25 th

Statement on Artificial Intelligence:

Students must submit their own work and cite the work that is not theirs. Generative AI writing tools such as ChatGPT are only permissible when explicitly noted in the assignment instructions. In these cases, be sure to cite the material that they generate. Any other use constitutes a Departure from Academic Integrity.

Participation (25%):

As a seminar, this graduate course is discussion, not lecture, based. Participation from all students is thus the key to an effective learning environment.

(10%) You will be responsible for facilitating two of the seminar's discussions. This involves introducing the readings and preparing questions to start off the discussion. You can, and should when appropriate, bring up issues from the reflection papers (see below). As a facilitator, your responsibility will be also to bring an object to demonstrate a key idea from the readings.

(10%) Your participation when you do not lead the discussion also matters. Your final discussion and participation grade will reflect the quality of your contribution to the discussion in class. Furthermore, as evaluation is an integral part of learning, you will be asked for an evaluation of every class meeting.

(5%) Discussant: you will be a discussant on one of your peer's project pitches. You will have their slides 24hrs ahead to prepare. As a discussant, you should provide constructive comments on the motivation, clarity, and rigour of the planned project.

Reading notes/Reflection papers (10%):

To prepare for class, everybody has to prepare with reading notes on the readings (start of term) or a short, up to 500 words long, "reflection paper" posted on the course's Discussion Board. The deadline

for posting these papers is Tuesday at noon. In your reflection papers you should identify one key idea in the reading and either offer a critique (i.e., examine the internal or external validity of the argument) or an extension (e.g., a test of the idea). As we are reading primarily theoretical papers, it is often a good idea to source empirical papers on the topics we are discussing. These papers will be graded check-, check, check+. The *eight* best papers will count toward your grade.

Final Project:

This project is an opportunity for you to develop an original idea based on your review of the literature on a topic related to our discussions and your interests. Depending on your interests and academic/professional goals, you can choose one of two formats:

- 1) A synthesis paper: propose a novel integration of the literature in an area
- 2) A grant proposal: identify a research question and propose a series of studies to address it
- 3) A policy brief: identify an issue of public policy interest and provide recommendations

No matter which format you choose, you should critically review and synthesize the literature, highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of the research and conclude with an original suggestion. The formats, however, differ in emphasis as well as intended audience and thus style and tone. The length of the paper is up to you but I would suggest 15 to 35 pages.

The paper (40%) is due on **Friday, December 11th 2026, at noon** and should be submitted at onQ. Please drop a paper copy in my mailbox if you can. **The deadline will not be moved to accommodate employment, travel/holiday plans or flight reservations.** A paper handed in after the due date will be penalized by 5% for each day it is late.

Pitch (15%): You should prepare a 10-minute presentation to pitch your topic to the class and get feedback on the scope and direction of your final project. In October, your pitch will not be graded. Even though your ideas may not be fully developed by at that time, you should have done significant research on your topic. The second time you present your proposal will be in November and it will be graded.

Paper outline (10%): due November 25th at noon at the latest. The outline needs to show the logical structure of your argument and your key evidence. If you choose not to submit it, the 10% will be folded into the final paper grade (for a total of 50%). No extensions.

I encourage you to start working on the paper as early as you can. It is usually easy to distinguish a 'last-minute' paper from one that was planned out well in advance of the due date. You are welcome to talk to me as early as possible about your ideas for the paper. You are free and encouraged to discuss your approach to this assignment with your fellow students as well. However, the work you turn in **MUST** be your own.

In addition, I encourage you to make the final paper project, as well as all other work in the course, as useful to your progress in the program as possible. Choose a topic related to your comprehensive exam, delve into methods that you use or plan to use in your research, or explore an intellectual path that may be relevant beyond your degree.

Accommodations for Disabilities

Queen's University is committed to working with students with disabilities to remove barriers to their academic goals. Queen's Student Accessibility Services (QSAS), students with disabilities, instructors, and faculty staff work together to provide and implement academic accommodations designed to allow students with disabilities equitable access to all course material (including in-class as well as exams). If you are a student currently experiencing barriers to your academics due to disability related reasons, and you would like to understand whether academic accommodations could support the removal of those barriers, please visit the [QSAS website](#) to learn more about academic accommodations or start the registration process with QSAS by clicking **Access Ventus** button at [Ventus: Accessibility Services](#)

VENTUS is an online portal that connects students, instructors, Queen's Student Accessibility Services, the Exam's Office and other support services in the process to request, assess, and implement academic accommodations.

You can learn more by visiting the [Ventus Visual Guide](#)

Should your accommodations apply to this course, please contact the instructor as early as possible to discuss their implementation.

Academic Consideration for Students in Extenuating Circumstances

Academic Consideration is a process for the University community to provide a compassionate response to assist students experiencing unforeseen, short-term extenuating circumstances that may impact or impede a student's ability to complete their academics. This may include but is not limited to any extenuating circumstance (illness, bereavement, traumatic event, injury, family emergency, etc.) which is short-lived, begins within the term, and will not last longer than 12 weeks – see the [Academic Consideration](#) webpage for details.

Each Faculty has developed a protocol to provide a consistent and equitable approach in dealing with requests for academic consideration for students facing extenuating circumstances. For more information, undergraduate students in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences should consult the guidelines and submit a request via the [Academic Consideration Request Portal](#). Students in other Faculties and Schools who are enrolled in this course should refer to the protocol for their home Faculty.

Students are encouraged to submit requests as soon as the need becomes apparent and to contact their instructor and/or course coordinator as soon as possible once academic consideration has been granted. Any delay in contact may limit the options available for academic consideration. While we encourage instructors to accommodate, each instructor has discretion in deciding whether or how to apply the Academic Consideration. For more information on the Academic Consideration process, what is and is not an extenuating circumstance, and to submit an Academic Consideration request, please see the Faculty of Arts and Science's [Academic Consideration](#) website.

For more information, please see the [Senate Policy on Academic Consideration for Students in Extenuating Circumstances](#).

NOTE: If you need to request academic consideration for this course, you will be required to provide the name and e-mail address of the instructor/coordinator. Please use the following contact information:

Instructor/Coordinator name: Stanka Fitneva

Instructor/Coordinator e-mail address: fitneva@queensu.ca

Queen's Policy Statement on Academic Integrity

Queen's University is dedicated to creating a scholarly community free to explore a range of ideas, to build and advance knowledge and to share the ideas and knowledge that emerge from a range of intellectual pursuits. Each core value of academic integrity, as defined in the [Senate Academic Integrity Policy](#), gives rise to and supports the next.

Honesty appears in presenting one's own academic work, whether in the context of an examination, written assignment, laboratory or seminar presentation. It is in researching one's own work for course assignments, acknowledging dependence on the ideas or words of another and in distinguishing one's own ideas and thoughts from other sources. It is also present in faithfully reporting laboratory results even when they do not conform to an original hypothesis. Further, honesty is present in truthfully communicating in written and/or oral exchanges with instructors, peers and other individuals (e.g. teaching assistants, proctors, university staff and/or university administrators).

Trust exists in an environment in which one's own ideas can be expressed without fear of ridicule or fear that someone else will take credit for them.

Fairness appears in the proper and full acknowledgement of the contributions of collaborators in group projects and in the full participation of partners in collaborative projects.

Respect, in a general sense, is part of an intellectual community that recognizes the participatory nature of the learning process and honours and respects a wide range of opinions and ideas. However, "respect" appears in a very particular sense when students attend class, pay attention, contribute to discussion and submit papers on time; instructors "show respect by taking students' ideas seriously, by recognizing them as individuals, helping them develop their ideas, providing full and honest feedback on their work, and valuing their perspectives and their goals" ("[The Fundamental Values of Academic Integrity](#)", 3rd Edition, p. 8).

Ultimately, responsibility is both personal and collective and engages students, administrators, faculty and staff in creating and maintaining a learning environment supported by and supporting academic integrity.

Courage differs from the preceding values by being more a quality or capacity of character – "the capacity to act in accordance with one's values despite fear" ("[The Fundamental Values of Academic Integrity](#)", 3rd edition, p. 10). Courage is displayed by students who make choices and integrous decisions that are followed by action, even in the face of peer pressure to cheat, copy another's material, provide their own work to others to facilitate cheating, or otherwise represent themselves dishonestly. Students also display courage by acknowledging prior wrongdoing and taking proactive measures to rectify any associated negative impact.

All of these values are not merely abstract but are expressed in and reinforced by the University's policies and practices.

Institutional Policies and Resources

You can find more information about Queen's policies and helpful resources at [Queen's Course Policies and Resources webpage](#), relating to:

- Academic Integrity
- Accessibility and Accommodations
- Technology Use
- Mental Health and Wellness

Schedule of Readings and Activities (subject to change):

	Date	Topic	Readings	Enrichment Activity	Due
1	Sept 9	Introduction			
2	Sept 16	What is cognitive development?	Bruner, J.S., Goodnow, J.J., & Austin, G. A. (1956). <i>A Study of Thinking</i>. Introduction. pp. 1-24. Wiley. Oakes, L. M., & Rakison, D. H. (2020). <i>Developmental cascades: Building the infant mind</i>. Oxford University Press. Introduction Background: Siegler, R. & Alibali, M. (2020). <i>Children's Thinking</i>, Chapter 4. Pearson. OR Miller, P. (2016). <i>Theories of Developmental Psychology</i>, Chapter 4. Worth.	2001: Space Odyssey	Reading notes (= Outline + Discussion questions)
3	Sept 23	To the roots	Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). Interaction between Learning and Development. In M. Cole, V. Jolm-Steiner, S. Scribner, & E. Souberman (Eds.), <i>Mind in Society: Development of Higher Psychological Processes</i> (pp. 79–91). Harvard University Press. https://doi-org.proxy.queensu.ca/10.2307/j.ctvjf9vz4.11 Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). Tool and Symbol in Child Development. In M. Cole, V. Jolm-Steiner, S. Scribner, & E. Souberman (Eds.), <i>Mind in Society: Development of Higher Psychological Processes</i> (pp. 19–30). Harvard University Press. https://doi-org.proxy.queensu.ca/10.2307/j.ctvjf9vz4.6 Vygotsky, L. S. (1962/1986). <i>Thought and language</i>. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. Chapter 7: Thought and Word / Inner speech		Reading notes

4	Sept 30		NO CLASS: DAY OF TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION		
5	Oct 7	Guided participation	Rogoff, B. (2003). <i>The Cultural Nature of Human Development</i>. Oxford. Chapters 2, 8 https://books-scholarsportal-info.proxy.queensu.ca/uri/ebooks/ebooks0/oxford/2009-11-30/2/0195131339 Csibra, G., & Gergely, G. (2009). Natural pedagogy. <i>Trends in Cognitive Sciences</i>, 13(4), 148–153. https://doi-org.proxy.queensu.ca/10.1016/j.tics.2009.01.005	Tobin, J., Wu, D., & Davidson, D. (1989). <i>Preschool in three cultures</i> . (video)	Reading notes
6			FALL TERM BREAK (Oct. 12 –18)		
7	Oct 21	The human connection	Beckes, L., & Coan, J.A. (2011). Social baseline theory: the role of social proximity in emotion and economy of action. <i>Social and Personality Psychology Compass</i>, 5, 976–988. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9004.2011.00400.x Saxbe, D. E., Beckes, L., Stoycos, S. A., & Coan, J. A. (2020). Social allostasis and social allostatic load: A new model for research in social dynamics, stress, and health. <i>Perspectives on Psychological Science</i>, 15(2), 469–482. https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691619876528 Butler, E. A. (2022). Coordination in interpersonal systems. <i>Cognition and Emotion</i>, 36(8), 1467–1478. https://doi.org/10.1080/02699931.2023.2168624 Hoehl, S., Bánki, A., Brzozowska, A., Carollo, A., Kistorz, K., Nguyen, T., Pletti, C., Reisner, S., Schäfer, V. T., Schaetz, C., & Tünste, M. R. (2025). A developmental framework of	Harry Harlow https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OrNBEhzjg8I	Reflection paper Final project plans topics (Pitch 1)

			interpersonal neural synchrony. <i>Developmental Review</i> , 78, 101234. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dr.2025.101234		
8	Oct 28	Language	Lupyan, G. and Bergen, B. (2016), How Language Programs the Mind. <i>Top Cogn Sci</i>, 8: 408-424. https://doi-org.proxy.queensu.ca/10.1111/tops.12155 Zhu, R., & Gopnik, A. (2023). Preschoolers and adults learn from novel metaphors. <i>Psychological Science</i>, 34(6), 696-704. https://doi.org/10.1177/09567976231165267	Orwell, G. (1949). 1984. Harper	Reflection paper
9	Nov 4	Social learning	Boyd, R., Richerson, P. J., & Henrich, J. (2011). The cultural niche: Why social learning is essential for human adaptation. <i>Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences</i>, 108(Supplement 2), 10918–10925. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1100290108	NPR – Semmelweis https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2015/01/12/375663920/the-doctor-who-championed-hand-washing-and-saved-women-s-lives	Reflection paper
10	Nov 11	Play	Doebel, S., & Lillard, A. S. (2023). How does play foster development? A new executive function perspective. <i>Developmental Review</i>, 67, 1–9. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dr.2022.101064 Lockman, J. J., & Tamis-LeMonda, C. S. (2021). Young children’s interactions with objects: Play as practice and practice as play. <i>Annual Review of Developmental Psychology</i>, 3, 165–186. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-devpsych-050720-102538	Museum of health care	Reflection paper Pitch 2
11	Nov 18	Distributed cognition	Clark, A., & Chalmers, D. (1998). The extended mind, <i>Analysis</i>, 58, 7–19. https://doi.org/10.1093/analys/58.1.7	Johnson, C. (1955). Harold	Reflection paper

			Goldberg, E., Magen, H. Cognitive offloading reduces internal memory processing in children. <i>Scientific Reports</i> , 16, 14914 (2026). https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-026-44574-6	and the Purple Crayon	
12	Nov 25	Social media	Brady, W. J., Jackson, J. C., Lindström, B., & Crockett, M. J. (2023). Algorithm-mediated social learning in online social networks. <i>Trends in Cognitive Sciences</i> , 27(10), 947–960. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2023.06.008	Adam Aleksic on Algospeak https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Fd2KzNsvvw	Reflection paper Final paper outline
13	Dec 2	AI	Bharadwaj, N., Dubé, A., Talwar, V., & Patitsas, E. (2023). Developing a theory of artificial minds (ToAM) to facilitate meaningful human–ai communication. In A. L. Guzman, R. McEwen, S. Jones (Eds.) <i>The Sage Handbook of Human-Machine Interaction</i> , 89-98. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781529782783.n12	Chiang, T. (2010). The lifecycle of software objects	Reflection paper