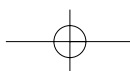
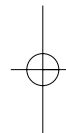
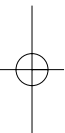
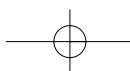
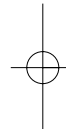
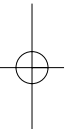
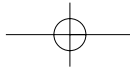
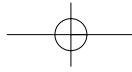


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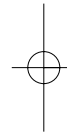
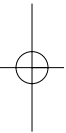




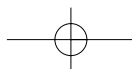
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## Understanding Theory and Methods

Margaret Harris



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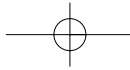
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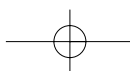
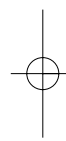
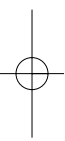
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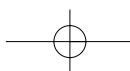
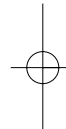
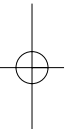
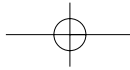
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## CONTENTS

List of Figures	ix
Preface	xi
Publisher's Acknowledgements	xiii
<b>1 The Nature of Development</b>	<b>1</b>
Transformational and variational change	2
A developmental systems perspective	3
The epigenetic landscape and beyond	4
Are there stages in development?	8
Linear and non-linear change	9
Information processing approaches	10
Training studies	14
Variation across tasks	15
Investigating developmental change	16
<b>2 Exploring Development</b>	<b>18</b>
Task simplification	18
Reliability and validity	20
Longitudinal designs and individual differences	23
The microgenetic method	24
Ethical issues in developmental psychology research	26
Evaluating research studies	27
<b>3 Observational Methods and Questionnaires</b>	<b>29</b>
Observing behaviour	29
Field observation	30
Observation in a controlled environment	31
<i>Paper 1 Assessing disruptive behaviour in young children</i>	31
Longitudinal observation in a controlled environment	51
<i>Paper 2 Effects of mother's postnatal depression</i>	
<i>on infant development</i>	51
<i>Paper 3 Predictors of Theory of Mind understanding</i>	66
Questionnaires	90
<i>Paper 4 Sex differences in reactions to outperforming friends</i>	91

<b>4 Experimental Research with Infants and Toddlers</b>	<b>113</b>
The habituation/dishabituation paradigm	114
<i>Paper 5 Infants' perceptions of four different languages</i>	114
Intermodal preferential looking	125
<i>Paper 6 Young children's ability to detect mispronunciations of words</i>	125
Visual fixations to targets	146
<i>Paper 7 Joint visual attention in mothers and infants</i>	147
<b>5 Experimental Studies of Older Children</b>	<b>179</b>
Cross sectional studies	179
<i>Paper 8 Children's understanding of other people's emotions</i>	180
<i>Paper 9 Preschoolers' understanding of number</i>	198
<i>Longitudinal studies</i>	224
<i>Paper 10 Longitudinal predictors of success in learning to read</i>	225
<b>6 Exploring A typical Development</b>	<b>250</b>
<i>Paper 11 Differences between children with good and poor reading comprehension</i>	251
<i>Paper 12 Understanding Theory of Mind tasks by deaf and hearing children</i>	272
<i>Paper 13 Face processing in children with Williams Syndrome</i>	294
References	332
Index	337



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## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1 *The epigenetic landscape (based on Waddington, 1957; from Harris & Butterworth, 2002: 38)*

Figure 1.2 *Probabilistic epigenesis; from Gottlieb, 2007: 2*

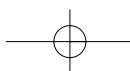
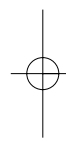
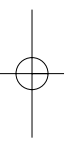
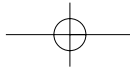
Figure 1.3 *Some examples of linear and non-linear forms of change; adapted from Elman et al., 1996: 176, 186, 191*

Figure 1.4 *Balance scale used by Siegler. Metal disks are placed on a peg on each side of the fulcrum. Children need to decide which side of the balance will go down, given the particular configuration of weights on pegs; from Siegler & Alibali, 2005: 349*

Figure 1.5 *Siegler's overlapping waves model of cognitive development; from Siegler & Alibali, 2005: 98.*

Figure 2.1 *Errors in the object search task. This 9-month-old infant looks for an object at its previous location even though the bulge under the cloth gives a strong clue to its real location; from Harris & Butterworth, 2002: 101, Figure 5.3.*

Figure 2.2 *Developmental change in infants' understanding of support events; from Baillargeon, 1999: 116, Figure 1.*



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## PREFACE

### Why I wrote this book and how you can get the most out of reading it

---

Having taught undergraduate and postgraduate students for many years, and supervised innumerable final year research projects and MSc dissertations, I know that many students are keen to do research in developmental psychology but often know little about how to do it. In part this is because traditional courses in psychology research design and statistics tend to devote little or no time to the practicalities of research involving children or to the complexities of analysing and interpreting developmental data. I could have attempted to remedy this situation by writing a textbook about developmental psychology research. Instead I have chosen to do something rather different although you might not realise this if you only look at the first two chapters of this book. These explain some of the underlying issues in developmental psychology such as the nature of developmental change and the kinds of theories that are used to explain how and why change occurs; and I also discuss different ways in which development can be studied.

The first two chapters are intended to set the scene for the major part of the book which has a quite different format, consisting of articles from developmental psychology journals. These articles have been carefully chosen to reflect widely differing approaches to the study of children's development. My reason for focusing on journal articles is that I think the best way to learn about developmental psychology research – apart from actually going out and doing it – is to read recent articles to see how researchers develop and test hypotheses, collect and analyse data and interpret their findings. This approach might sound daunting if you are a student because developmental psychology articles are often difficult to read unless you are already an experienced researcher. This is not because they are badly written but because the underlying theory, the methodology and the data analysis they report are complex. So what I have done in this book is to give you a helping hand.

Each of the 13 papers in the book has a commentary that explains issues you may find difficult to understand. The commentary will guide you

through the underlying theory, the hypotheses, the methodology, the statistical analysis and the interpretation of the data. I explain the background to each paper and help you to understand why researchers carried out each study in the way that they did. The points I make in the commentary have arisen from my experience of the kind of questions that my own students ask about journal articles.

This book does not teach you how to do statistics but it does show you how developmental psychologists use statistics in their research and, where I think it would be helpful, there are notes to guide you through the analysis and results section of a paper. However, I am assuming that you already know something about research design and that you are likely to have already carried out some experiments in practical classes, probably using other students as your participants. You do not need to have had any practical experience of research involving children but I am assuming that you are familiar with basic statistical tests such as *t*-tests, analysis of variance, correlation and regression.

Articles are grouped into chapters according to the age of the children being studied, or the type of methodology being used, or the kind of population that is being studied. You may well find that some chapters are more relevant to your particular interests than others and there is no need to read every article. However you will get the most out of this book if you read each article alongside my comments. Articles are reproduced in full with the exception of the abstract and references. We have omitted these so that my commentary can be interwoven more easily with the text.

You will also find a list of questions on Table 2.1 (p. ) that you can use as a general guide when reading the articles. These list the kinds of questions you should ask yourself as you read each paper. Remember, it is important to understand not only what researchers found but also how they went about their research and why they made the choices they did.

I hope you will come away from reading this book with two important things. The first is a better understanding of the kinds of hypotheses that are tested by developmental psychology researchers, the methods they use and the conclusions they draw about the nature of development. The second is that you have a framework for understanding new journal articles. If you feel confident to browse through the latest issue of a developmental psychology journal then I know that I have succeeded in my task.

Margaret Harris  
May 2007  
Oxford

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