**Exploring teaching and learning in real and virtual worlds**
*Studying children's development and learning*

My name's Dorothy Faulkner.

I'm the course team Chair for the Open University Psychology Course ED841 Understanding Children's Development and Learning.

We've aimed this course at people who want to gain a master's qualification in either education or in psychology, and the course contributes two of the Open University's master's awards, the master's in education and the master's in psychology. It also contributes to a new master's award, masters in childhood and youth.

The course looks at children's development and learning in cultural and education, and social contexts. We hope it's going to explain for students how theoretical and methodological frameworks contribute to understanding developmental psychology, and how psychological research can inform educational and clinical practice.

There are four blocks to the course, and each block is about 8-10 weeks-worth of study. The first block is Entering into the Social and Cultural Worlds in Infancy and Early Childhood, and the key thing for this block is how babies and young children actually shape their own development, and also peer interaction and play in the early years.

The second block: Understanding Children's Thinking and Learning, is about how children's learning and problem solving skills develop from the early years through to age round about ten to eleven, twelve, and it looks in detail at theories of learning and theories of problem solving, and introduces students to some new concepts of, about learning and development which they might not be familiar with. It also introduces them to the traditional theories, two very important traditional theories of development and learning, those of Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky.

The third block is called Explanation for Language and Literacy Difficulties, and here we look at what happens if children aren't making progress in school, and they aren't making progress with the literacy and language. These are key cornerstones of children's development, and this block looks in detail at some of the cognitive mechanisms that might go slightly awry in these children's development, explanations for why children have language and literacy difficulties, and what we can do about those in schools, and how schools can work with educational psychologists and clinical psychologists to help these children develop these very key skills.

The fourth block of the course is called Mediated Cognition and Educational Innovation, and this is really a very exciting block. We return to the work of the Russian psychologist, Lev Vygotsky, who has been tremendously influential in informing current educational theory and practice, and in this block we look at some of the recent large scale research studies that have taken place in the United Kingdom, looking at the importance of dialogue and language in the classroom, and by dialogue and language we mean something rather different from literacy, where we're looking at the ways in which children and teachers interact with each other, the way they speak to each other, the way they can develop learning dialogues and the type of language that supports these. And moving on from that we then go on to look at some of the very new digital technologies which are being introduced into schools and into education more generally, which are using virtual worlds, computer games, all of those sorts of things, and looking what the educational potential of these is for children's learning and development.

The students who are currently taking the course come from a vast range of backgrounds. We have all sorts of people taking the course, not just students here who are studying for a masters in psychology or a masters in education.  We have an accountant who's taking the course, we have somebody in Poland who's taking the course who's actually working in a childcare setting, we have a lot of people who are saying that they're studying the course because they want to understand their own children's development, and they also want to understand some of the new techniques and technologies that are going into schools, and how these are going to affect their own children's learning, so the course has been designed with a very broad audience in mind.