



## **Exploring babies' and young children's development and learning**

### *Entering social and cultural worlds*

My name's Dorothy Faulkner. I'm a Senior Lecturer in Developmental Psychology, the Centre of Childhood Development and Learning at the Open University. I'm the course team Chair of the course ED841 Understanding Children's Development and Learning.

The first block of the course is called Entry into the Social and Cultural Worlds in Infancy and Early Childhood. The key things for this block are how babies and young children actually actively shape their own development, and looking in detail about the interaction between babies and their mothers and fathers, and other people in their environment.

The first of the key interviews is with Rudolph Shaffer. Rudolph Shaffer was one of the foremost British developmental psychologists, and his career spanned five decades. He came to this country in the 1940's as a young man and he trained with another key figure in British psychology, John Bowlby at the Tavistock Institute in London. He received his clinical training there and it was during the time that he worked with John Bowlby that he began a lifelong study and interest in children's attachment, and the implications of separation from a key attachment figure for children's development.

One of Rudolph's most influential books was *Making Decisions About Children* and this book really set the stage for helping people understand how academic research on developmental psychology could feed into policy and the decisions that we make about children and how to organise their everyday lives.

He has some very interesting and wise things to say about the importance of understanding babies and children's social and emotional development, and how you cannot understand children's learning and how their learning and thinking develops without understanding the impact of the social and emotional aspects of learning and thinking.

Another of the key interviews for the course is with Michael Cole. Michael Cole is currently Director of the Laboratory of Comparative Human Cognition at the University of California, San Diego. In the sixties he carried out some very influential studies looking at children's learning and development in a variety of countries around the world, and what he came to realise, and this was a very, very important realisation, was that there are universals in children's thinking which children all over the world show, but that children who are schooled, as he would say, acquire particular ways of thinking and talking through being exposed to literacy. So children who are being schooled under western-type schooling systems are exposed to a whole new way of thinking which is driven by the fact that they are using language in particular ways for thinking, and so it appears that children think in different ways in different parts of the world, but really it's not that they think in different ways, it's whether they're exposed to schooling or not. So that's why he's important for this particular course, and that led him on to a very deep study of the theories of Vygotsky which are also very important in the course, and he has taken Vygotsky's theories into the 21st century, and used them to develop educational programmes for children which draw on those theories and which also draw on new technology.

Michael Cole has set up a very influential after schools programme for children in California called Fifth Dimension programme, and Fifth Dimension programme draws on the theories of Vygotsky and puts those into educational practice so children working in the Fifth Dimension are learning in a very different way from the way in which they learn in more conventional school environments. They're encouraged to be much more independent, take charge of their own learning, their learning is scaffolded by expert learners from the university, and they

are also using a lot of the new technologies to develop their thinking skills and to develop their learning.

Another important person that you will hear in these interviews is Alison Garton. We have an interview with Alison Garton in this course because we wanted her to explain the position that she'd taken in her book which is a core text for the course. Basically her position is that we can understand the development of children's thinking and learning through looking at how they solve problems so she's carried out a lot of research over the years looking at problem solving in children of all ages, and particularly she's looked at what happens when children solve problems, not just by themselves but also collaborative problem solving, and collaborative problem solving and working in groups or working in pairs in schools is what children are asked to do nowadays, and so we thought her book and her research would be very interesting and very important for the students to read.

In Alison's interview we asked her to explain why she is trying to do an interesting thing which is to bring two very influential theories of psychology together. The two theories that she tries to bring together are the developmental theory of Jean Piaget and the learning theory of Vygotsky, and in her interview you'll hear Alison explain why she thinks these two theories should be brought together and how they complement each other. You'll also hear her explain about how these theories can explain children's learning and development and, in particular, what they can bring to our understanding of how children learn when they're learning together collaboratively with their peers.

Another key theme from the course that Alison picks up in her interview is to do with empathy and intersubjectivity, and also metacognition, and going back to the interview by Rudolph Schaffer, who looked at the social and emotional aspects of children's development, empathy and intersubjectivity are part of what we understand by the social and the emotional aspects, and basically it's those psychological processes that allow us to interact successfully with other people, and children of course need to interact with each other successfully if they're going to learn together.

If you engage with this album we hope you'll want to find out more about children's development, more about how they think, how they learn, and also that you will come to the realisation that the things that we take for granted about children in our own environment and our own countries are not necessarily the case for children all over the world. We hope that you will reflect back on your own childhood, and your own development, and your own learning experiences at school, and perhaps think about them in a different light, and think about how the things that happened to you as a child, the educational experiences that you had, the friends that you made, how these impacted on who you are today as an adult.