Aims and Objectives

➢ To introduce students to a range of research and theories which have been and are relevant to contemporary work in social and developmental psychology.

➢ To develop:
  o an understanding of central debates within the disciplines.
  o the capacity for critical analysis of those theories and the evaluation of the evidence used to test them.
  o oral and written communication skills through discussion in supervision and essay writing.
  o skills in the use of on-line resources e.g. bibliographies & data bases.

Course overview

This paper builds on the foundation established in the first year and prepares students for advanced work in psychology in Part II. Along with PBS4 it provides the breadth required of any Psychology degree which is recognised by the British Psychological Society. The course content is divided into a number of discrete topics, but students should pay attention to the points of connection both within and between the social and developmental parts of the paper with respect to both theoretical and methodological issues.

The Michaelmas lectures begin with an introduction to the main concerns of Social Psychology and the methodological challenges it faces. A constant challenge has been how to balance the analysis of the individual with the analysis of the social world that individual inhabits. In particular, understanding the role of the individual in creating that social world while at the same time being shaped by it.

The Lent lectures on Developmental Psychology begin with an introduction to models of development. The focus then turns to social and emotional development covering topics related to emotion, self-regulation, family, siblings, and peer-relationships. The term concludes with a more cognitive focus examining the child’s executive functioning and number concepts, and executive functioning.

Workload

The paper is taught by means of lectures and supervisions. There are no practicals.

It should occupy one quarter of a student’s time across the course of the academic year. In practice, this means that a diligent student who attends the lectures and takes the recommended 6-8 supervisions will spend 170-180 hours in private study across the eighteen weeks of the Michaelmas and Lent Full Terms preparing for those lectures and supervisions and consolidating learning afterwards. How this time is spread across the year is a matter of personal learning style. Students should seek the advice of their Directors of Studies if they run into difficulties planning their time. Given the organisation of the lectures, students should focus on social topics in the Michaelmas and developmental ones in the Lent.
### Lectures – all at 12.00-13.00

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Lecturer</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M1</td>
<td>Oct 09</td>
<td>Introduction to Social Psychology</td>
<td>David Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M2</td>
<td>Oct 11</td>
<td>Attitudes I</td>
<td>David Good</td>
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<tr>
<td>M3</td>
<td>Oct 16</td>
<td>Attitudes II</td>
<td>David Good</td>
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<tr>
<td>M4</td>
<td>Oct 18</td>
<td>Attitudes III</td>
<td>David Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M5</td>
<td>Oct 23</td>
<td>Social Representations I</td>
<td>Juliet Foster</td>
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<tr>
<td>M6</td>
<td>Oct 25</td>
<td>Social Representations II</td>
<td>Juliet Foster</td>
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<tr>
<td>M7</td>
<td>Oct 30</td>
<td>Social Representations III</td>
<td>Juliet Foster</td>
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<tr>
<td>M8</td>
<td>Nov 01</td>
<td>Persons &amp; Situations I</td>
<td>Jason Renfrew</td>
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<tr>
<td>M9</td>
<td>Nov 06</td>
<td>Persons &amp; Situations II</td>
<td>Jason Renfrew</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M10</td>
<td>Nov 08</td>
<td>Persons &amp; Situations III</td>
<td>Jason Renfrew</td>
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<tr>
<td>M11</td>
<td>Nov 13</td>
<td>Social Norms I</td>
<td>Sander van der Linden</td>
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<tr>
<td>M12</td>
<td>Nov 15</td>
<td>Social Norms II</td>
<td>Sander van der Linden</td>
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<td>M13</td>
<td>Nov 20</td>
<td>Social Norms III</td>
<td>Sander van der Linden</td>
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<td>M14</td>
<td>Nov 22</td>
<td>Interaction &amp; Identity I</td>
<td>David Good</td>
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<tr>
<td>M15</td>
<td>Nov 27</td>
<td>Interaction &amp; Identity II</td>
<td>David Good</td>
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<td>M16</td>
<td>Nov 29</td>
<td>Interaction &amp; Identity III</td>
<td>David Good</td>
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<td>L1</td>
<td>Jan 22</td>
<td>Models of development</td>
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<td>L2</td>
<td>Jan 24</td>
<td>Piaget and constructivism I</td>
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<td>L3</td>
<td>Jan 29</td>
<td>Piaget and constructivism II</td>
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<tr>
<td>L4</td>
<td>Jan 31</td>
<td>Language development</td>
<td>tbc</td>
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<tr>
<td>L5</td>
<td>Feb 05</td>
<td>Family influences on development I</td>
<td>Susan Golombok</td>
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<tr>
<td>L6</td>
<td>Feb 07</td>
<td>Family influences on development II</td>
<td>Susan Golombok</td>
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<tr>
<td>L7</td>
<td>Feb 12</td>
<td>Sibling and peer relationships I</td>
<td>Claire Hughes</td>
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<tr>
<td>L8</td>
<td>Feb 14</td>
<td>Risk and resilience</td>
<td>Claire Hughes</td>
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<td>L9</td>
<td>Feb 19</td>
<td>Emotional regulation</td>
<td>Claire Hughes</td>
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<td>L10</td>
<td>Feb 21</td>
<td>Social influences on theory of mind I</td>
<td>Claire Hughes</td>
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<tr>
<td>L11</td>
<td>Feb 26</td>
<td>Social Influences on theory of mind II</td>
<td>Claire Hughes</td>
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<tr>
<td>L12</td>
<td>Feb 28</td>
<td>Developmental Social Neuroscience</td>
<td>Sarah Lloyd Fox</td>
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<td>L13</td>
<td>Mar 05</td>
<td>Developmental Social Neuroscience</td>
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<td>L14</td>
<td>Mar 07</td>
<td>Educational neuroscience</td>
<td>Lincoln Colling</td>
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<td>L15</td>
<td>Mar 12</td>
<td>Number concepts</td>
<td>Lincoln Colling</td>
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<td>L16</td>
<td>Mar 14</td>
<td>Developmental dyscalculia</td>
<td>Lincoln Colling</td>
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### Contact details

**Michaelmas:** David Good [dg25@cam.ac.uk](mailto:dg25@cam.ac.uk) Juliet Foster, [jlf1000@cam.ac.uk](mailto:jlf1000@cam.ac.uk) Jason Rentfrow, [pjr39@cam.ac.uk](mailto:pjr39@cam.ac.uk) Sander van der Linden [sv395@cam.ac.uk](mailto:sv395@cam.ac.uk)

**Lent:** Susan Golombok [seg42@cam.ac.uk](mailto:seg42@cam.ac.uk) Claire Hughes [ch288@cam.ac.uk](mailto:ch288@cam.ac.uk) Sarah LLoyd Fox [s.fox@bbk.ac.uk](mailto:s.fox@bbk.ac.uk) Lincoln Colling [ljc65@cam.ac.uk](mailto:ljc65@cam.ac.uk)
Supervisions

Students should cover 6-8 topics from across the paper bearing in mind the need to answers questions on both social and developmental psychology in the examination. They should discuss with their Directors of Studies and their Supervisors which topics will provide a balance between broad coverage and a focus on their personal interests. Students should attend all lectures and not just those related to their chosen supervision topics as there are numerous points of connection between the different areas covered. It is also important to remember that the lectures as a set provide background material for many topics in Part II B.

Readings

Each lecturer on the course provides readings relevant to the particular topics that he or she covers. These are presented below. Individual lecturers and supervisors may well provide additional more specialised references in the light of specific matters raised in their lectures. The lists provided are intended as a resource for you and your supervisor. There is absolutely no expectation that you will read everything. With the help of your supervisor, the substance of the lectures and your own interests you should focus on a subset that is relevant to you.

Mode of assessment

The paper is examined by one three-hour unseen examination. Section A of the exam will cover social psychology and section B will cover developmental psychology. Students will be required to answer three questions including at least one question from each section.
Social Psychology

Introduction (M1)

Social Psychology might be thought of as a very tractable subject. We are all social agents, and to navigate our social world we need to have at least some understanding of it. Yet nothing could be further from the truth. Allport’s proposal that it is the study of “how the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of individuals are influenced by the actual, imagined, or implied presence of others” requires only a brief reflection to reveal what a can of worms must lie within. This lecture will offer a broad overview of the subject and the diversity of theories and methods to be found therein. There are many important connections to other parts of psychology and other disciplines, but also many disputes over the “right way” to do enquiry in this area. The readings contain both an overview of the field and a number of chapters which are relevant to this part of the paper.

Readings


Attitudes (M2, M3 & M4)

Attitudes have often been described as the cornerstone of psychology, and with good reason. In one way or another they reflect the fundamentals of an individual’s perspective on the world. They constitute a key element in how they explain that world to themselves, and their own behaviour to other people. However, moving beyond their manifestation in everyday discourse, and their impoverished presence in a questionnaire, to either an understanding of underlying psychological processes or a prediction of intention and action has always been difficult. The Theory of Planned Behaviour offers an important attempt to draw these different threads together, and allow an understanding of how an individual’s attitudes play a role in their social life. That social life can, of course, lead to a change in ones attitudes, and understanding the process of change is important if we are to properly understand the place of attitudes in social psychology. The link between attitudes and behaviour and the possibility of changing both is increasingly recognised as fundamental to the resolution of many problems which face contemporary society.

Readings


Questions

1. Under what conditions can we make reasonable predictions about what someone will do given a knowledge of their attitudes?

2. “Ultimately, the Theory of Planned Behaviour demonstrates that attitudes are only a small factor in the prediction of a person’s behaviour”. Discuss.

3. What leads to attitude change? Are there processes in this which can be exploited by those who wish to change our opinion of an idea or a product?

4. What is an attitude? In what way are attitudes fundamental to social psychology?

Social Representations & Sociocultural Approaches (M5, M6 & M7)

These three lectures will consider the diversity of social psychology, in particular focusing on approaches that are often termed ‘sociocultural’ in their focus, using the theory of social representations as an example.

The first lecture will examine the development of social psychology. This is an important issue, since much of sociocultural social psychology is founded on the principle that social psychology has ‘lost its way’, and is now insufficiently differentiated from any other branch of social psychology. We will consider the origins of the discipline, and the possible reasons why a social social psychology failed to flourish. For some, this represents a ‘crisis’ in social psychology.

The second and third lectures will move on to consider one possible response to this so-called crisis - social representations theory. First developed by Serge Moscovici in the 1960s, this constructionist theory is now widely used by social psychologists in many countries to try to understand how people make sense of the world around them, and the implications of this meaning-making. The first lecture will focus on the theory itself, and the second on the way researchers have attempted to use the theory methodologically. We will also consider how influential the theory has been in the development of social psychology.

Readings

Lecture One


**Lectures Two and Three**


Questions

1. What concerns about social psychology are sociocultural approaches trying to address?
2. What is social representation?
3. How can we study social representations?

Persons & Situations (M8, M9 & M10)

There is considerable empirical evidence that social behaviour is not determined solely by personality traits or environmental factors, but by interactions of the two. However, that was not the position taken by previous generations of social psychologists. This lecture series will start with a brief historical overview of theory and research concerned with person-environment interactions, beginning with the person-situation debate. We will then cover more contemporary research that has investigated the ways in which psychological traits and various features of the social and physical environment influence behaviour and psychological well-being.

Readings


Questions
1. Discuss the claim “Once individuals are in their chosen situation, their words and actions are genuine reflections of their personalities”.
2. Why are people motivated to seek out particular situations and avoid others?
3. How do social roles and norms influence psychological development?

Social Norms (M11, M12 & M13)

Humans navigate the social world by paying close attention to the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of others. The goal of these lectures is to critically outline how people perceive and are influenced by social normative processes. In particular, we will discuss how people (mis)perceive and internalize social norms and how norms interact with - but are distinct from - other social-psychological constructs, such as attitudes, identity, and personality. We will explore where social norms come from, how they evolve and spread in populations, and ultimately, under what conditions they can influence human behavior in stable and predictable ways. A special focus is placed on
understanding how norms influence prosocial behaviour, altruism, and cooperation in real-world social dilemmas.

Readings


Questions

1. In what ways are social norms related to, yet distinct from, attitudes and personality?
2. Under what conditions are social norms likely to exert a powerful influence on human social behavior? Discuss at least three conditions that can help facilitate social change.
3. Discuss several ways in which normative processes can both undermine and promote human cooperation in real-world social dilemma situations.

Selfhood & Social Identity (M14, M15 & M16)

The sense of being a person both separate from and embedded in a social world has been a topic of interest for social psychologists since the earliest days of the subject. Despite that long interest, and its resonances with other disciplines from philosophy and theology to neuroscience, the phenomena has remained quite inscrutable. The first lecture in this set of three will provide an overview of the range of positions which have been offered so as to place the second and third lectures in context.

The second and third lectures will focus on contemporary accounts of how an individual’s sense of their social identity is built through their understanding of the groups with which they identify, and how in turn those groups are understood by their relationship to other groups. These intergroup facets of social identity are arguably reinforced by the manner in which social experiences are perceived interpreted and remembered, and their meaning felt.

This in turn can lead to important social consequences including ethnic prejudice and violence. There are interesting developmental questions raised by this work and also ways in which the insights it offers can be applied to inhibit the pathway from identity and values to violence.

In a world where the potential for membership of multiple groups is facilitated by the organisation of society and new communication technologies, there are numerous questions raised about the coherence of a single sense of self. There has been a
concern with this issue ever since the late 19th century and it has been studied under a number of headings although is now typically referred to as Dissociative Identity Disorder. This part of the course will conclude with a brief examination of this issue.

Readings


**Questions**

1. Why does our conception of others play such an important role in our conception of ourselves?
2. Is hostility to outgroups an inevitable consequence of selfhood?
3. If a person belongs to many groups, do they have multiple selves?
4. How is our social identity formed?
Developmental Psychology

Models of development (L1)

At first glance, babies seem to have very limited capacities to take in information, evaluate it, and respond effectively, and their understanding of the world in which they live appears primitive at best. With incredible rapidity, however, unique personalities, powerful social relationships, and fascinating cognitive and communicative skills become apparent, as children undergo the fastest and most dramatic changes to occur at any stage in the lifespan. Exactly how developmental change can be explained has fascinated developmental psychologists for more than a century, and we assess our current understanding this term, beginning with an examination of the developmental processes that appear to underlie development.

Readings


Questions

1) What exactly develops in developmental psychology?

2) Compare linear, transactional, and contextual organisational theories of development.

3) In 1958, Anastasi wrote a paper called ‘Heredity, environment, and the question ‘how’’. How much better is our understanding of development in 20015 than it was in 1958?

Piaget and constructivism (L2 & L3)

The nature-nurture debate constitutes one of the enduring controversies shaping developmental psychology. Another involves the ways in which people are characterized – either as passive recipients of external influence or as active participants in their own development and transformation and the extent to which behaviour and behavioural development are context dependent.
Readings


Questions

1. William James once described the new-born world as one of ‘booming, buzzing confusion.’ How might a constructivist respond?
2. The Piagetian and information-processing views of cognitive development are as different as chalk and cheese. Discuss.
3. What is cognitive development the development of?
4. ‘Theory of mind’ has become the prism through which development has been studied most profitably. Discuss.

Language development (L4)

Infants typically say their first words at about 10 months, and put together their first two-word sentence at about 18 months. By their fifth birthday, they have a vocabulary of over 5,000 words and can convey remarkably complex information. How do they do it?

Readings


Questions

1. Learning to use grammar and learning communication are two entirely different processes. Discuss.
2. Can we learn about language development by studying the acquisition of second languages?

Family influences on development (L5 & L6)

Two lectures will explore family influences on development. The first lecture will examine family influences on development in traditional families focusing on four inter-related components; the quality of parent-child relationships with particular attention to attachment theory and parenting styles; the psychological wellbeing of parents; the psychological characteristics of the child; and the wider social environment of the family. The second lecture will examine family influences on development in non-traditional families focusing on families with single parents, cohabiting parents, and stepparents, as well as new family forms such as families with same-sex parents and families created by assisted reproductive technologies. The relative contribution of family structure and family processes for development will be explored.

Readings


Questions

1. Do psychologists place too much emphasis on the importance of children's attachment relationships with their parents?
2. Do children benefit from growing up in a traditional family?

Sibling Relationships (L7)

Most of us grow up with brothers and sisters, and there are striking individual differences in the quality of sibling relationships. Yet it is only in the last 20 years that this topic has received systematic investigation. The first of this pair of lectures provides an overview of the different theoretical approaches to investigating sibling relationships before exploring the various factors that help explain contrasts in the nature of
children’s sibling relationships: from child factors (e.g., age, gender-composition, temperament) to family factors (e.g., differential parenting, marital conflict) and wider societal factors (e.g., socio-economic status, ethnic background). The second lecture is focused on the consequences of variation in sibling relationship quality. This relationship is often emotionally charged, and parents frequently compare siblings with each other. Siblings may therefore directly foster both aggression and low self-esteem. Indirect paths via negative parent-child relationships have also been documented. In general, however, sibling relationships are very supportive, and may foster children’s imaginative play, co-operative skills, emotion and theory of mind understanding.

Readings


Questions

1. Compare and contrast at least two different theoretical approaches to understanding sibling relationships.

2. Explain how siblings can help or hinder children’s social or cognitive development.

3. From peas in a pod to chalk and cheese: Why do sibling relationships show such striking variability?

Risk and Resilience (L8)

The goals of this lecture are to outline how and why theoretical models of risk and resilience have been refined over time and to give some concrete examples of how these theoretical shifts have informed our understanding of child development. In particular, this lecture aims to highlight the complex and dynamic interplay between different domains and levels of risk and protective factors. As a link with the previous lectures on sibling relationships, this lecture uses variability in children’s reactions to becoming a sibling to explore the processes that underpin resilience in the face of this early major life event.
Readings


Questions

1. How have ideas about risk and resilience changed since Bowlby’s work and why?
2. Why should resilience in childhood be characterized as ‘ordinary magic’ (Masten, 2001)?
3. What can research on the transition to siblinghood teach us about the factors that underpin children’s early resilience?

Emotional Regulation (L9)

Research interest in emotion regulation has grown rapidly in a number of different disciplines, as our understanding of the interplay between biology, cognition, behavior and culture has increased. At a cognitive level, this topic overlaps with the topics of theory of mind and executive function. At a behavioural level, emotion regulation is key to successful social interactions. At a functional level, emotional regulation is central to accounts of individual differences in resilience. Thus this lecture, like the previous lecture, illustrates the interplay between different themes in this paper.

Readings


Questions

1) How have research ideas about emotion regulation changed over the past three decades and why?

2) How should we explain the variability that is seen in infant reactions to the still face paradigm?

**Social Influences on Theory of Mind (L10 & L11)**

In this lecture we consider the range of social influences on individual differences in children’s performance on tests of theory of mind. Alongside cognitive correlates (e.g., executive function and language), accelerated development of false-belief comprehension is reported for securely attached children, children from large families and children from families characterised by high levels of feeling-state talk. Evidence from hearing impaired children and twins also highlight the importance of conversations for theory-of-mind development. Finally, cultural contrasts in the ages at which children acquire a theory of mind point to significant social influences on this key cognitive skill.

**Readings**


Questions

1. How do families help and hinder the development of young children’s theory of mind?
2. To what extent are social influences on theory of mind similar or contrasting for typical and atypical groups?

Developmental Social Neuroscience (L12 & L13)

To follow

Educational Neuroscience (L14)

Non-invasive brain imaging methods are increasingly used in psychological and developmental research often with the intention of informing educational practice. However, a non-trivial connection has to be built between basic brain data and potential educational applications. Most importantly, a critical knowledge of methodology is absolutely necessary so that the goodness of studies could be judged and the studies’ added value (relative to purely behavioural research) could be evaluated. First, the lecture will review critical strengths and weaknesses of mainstream brain imaging methods. Second, some concrete examples will illustrate how neuroscience methods can provide otherwise difficult to access knowledge about cognitive development in primary school children. In addition, some typical interpretation problems will be pointed out.

Readings


**Questions**

1. Is there a best non-invasive method for studying brain function in children?
2. In what areas do you think neuroscience research can inform educational practice?
3. Illustrate some major dangers in (mis)interpreting brain imaging data.

**Numerical Development (L15)**

Mathematical skills are increasingly important if individuals are to thrive in today's technologically-oriented society. However, evidence suggests that many adults in developed societies possess quite immature mathematical abilities. A 2011 Department for Business, Innovation and Skills survey in the United Kingdom found that 49% of the adult population could only attain standards comparable to 11 year-old children in mathematics (whereas 14.9% achieved such standards in literacy). Furthermore, 23.7% of adults reached only the standards typical for 9 year-old children (compared to 7.1% for literacy). As may be expected from these figures, research on mathematical learning problems lags well behind research on literacy problems, and takes longer to affect educational instruction. Crucially, the significance of early years in grounding mathematical development is increasingly recognized. The lecture will outline major conflicting theories of the development of mathematical abilities and will discuss recent evidence from large scale studies focusing on the UK context.

**Readings**


Questions

1. Evaluate critically the measurement of the so called ‘number sense’.
2. How various cognitive abilities are thought to be linked to mathematical development/achievement of children?

**Developmental dyscalculia (L16)**

We define developmental dyscalculia as persistently weak mathematical performance of developmental origin, related to the weakness of some kind(s) of cognitive function(s) and/or representation(s); appearing when concurrent motivation to study mathematics and access to appropriate mathematics education is normal. The causes of developmental dyscalculia are poorly understood. Hence, it is not surprising that there is no generally agreed upon functional definition of developmental dyscalculia. In fact, conditions which may or may not be equivalent to DD are labelled by many different names in developmental research. We will critically review some conflicting definitions and theories of developmental dyscalculia and related empirical data.

**Readings**

* De Smedt B, Noel MP, Gilmore C, Ansari D (2013), How do symbolic and non-symbolic numerical magnitude processing skills relate to individual differences in children’s mathematical skills? A review of evidence from brain and behaviour. *Trends in Neuroscience and Education.* 2, 48-55


**Questions**

1. Detail some major theories of developmental dyscalculia.
2. How does the interplay of non-symbolic and symbolic magnitude representations relate to the question of the definition of dyscalculia?
3. Do you think dyscalculia can be traced back to a single factor, or is a heterogenous umbrella term?