

How psychological perspectives relate to child development and behaviour:

Biological – Cattell, Eysenck, Gesell

Theorist(s)

Key aspects of the approach or theory relating to children's development and behaviour

Application of the approach for childcare practitioners and educators in schools and settings

Cattell, Eysenck and Gesell

Key Words:

- **Physiological**
- **Temperament**
- **Personality**
- **Maturation**

Psychologists who believe in the biological approach have developed theories to explain how our personalities are inherited or influenced by physiological processes rather than our background, culture and environment.

Theorists such as Raymond Cattell have identified central personality traits such as loyalty, kindness and friendliness, and secondary personality traits which are not always present or obvious. Hans and Sybil Eysenck were personality theorists who focused on **temperament**, the personality differences we have that are inborn and based on genetics. They believed that personality is mostly influenced by biology and that people have two main personality dimensions: extroversion/introversion and neuroticism/stability.

Arnold Gesell was a clinical psychologist who researched and observed children's development and found patterns in development that all children follow in a similar sequence, although the rate at which children progress through the sequence differs. His theory was called the maturational development theory, and many other theories of human development are based on his work.

Cattell described six life stages: infancy, childhood, adolescence, maturity, middle age, and old age. He believed that a child's personality is mostly formed between birth and the age of six (infancy). At this stage, the child develops their basic social attitudes and sense of security or insecurity. As practitioners, this informs us that infancy is one of the most important formative stages for a child, and positive experiences both at home and in nursery or school will help the child in forming positive attitudes towards society and themselves. He states that between the ages of six and fourteen, children develop independence, moving from their family to relationships with peers. Gesell conducted research on normal patterns of behaviour, which has influenced our understanding and knowledge of the expected developmental milestones. Gesell believed that development was dependent on both internal factors (including genetics, personality, temperament and physical and mental growth) and external factors (including culture, background, environment, health conditions and social interactions). Gesell was the first theorist to notice that a child's stage of development might not always match their actual age. The biological approach helps practitioners have realistic expectations of a child's capabilities with regard to their stage of development. It also informs understanding of developmental delay and gives an informed perspective for effective and empathetic practice.