My Thinking About Human Learning and Development

Jennifer Mathis

University of British Columbia

 Human development is the process of physiological, cognitive, emotional, and social growth and maturation. It is the building of each person’s skills and abilities. Development is partly physiological, which includes changes in brain chemistry, connectivity, and complexity; physical strength and abilities; and sensory awareness and response. Cognitive, emotional, and social development occurs in response to our experiences and environment. People combine past and current experiences and observations to construct their understanding of the world and human relationships, as well as their ability to interact with others. They build a set of ways of responding to their environment, sometimes automatic and sometimes conscious. Genetic and environmental differences cause people to develop differently; changes occur at different ages and life stages, at different rates, and follow different paths.

 One important question regarding human development is how much development is influenced by personal factors, and how much it is influenced by the person’s environment. Environment, which includes family, community, cultural, and societal influences, has a significant impact on development; however, personal factors, such as motivation and self-regulation, or personal identity play an important role in determining how each person responds to their environment.

 Awareness of both environmental and personal influences on development is important to education. Educators need an awareness of where, developmentally, each student is at – their readiness and needs for learning, their own unique understanding of and connection to context, their ability to be conscious and aware of their thinking, their ability to communicate, their physical ability to interact with the learning environment, and how that student’s personal identity relates to their environment. Based on this, educators need to do what is possible to create an educational environment that supports multiple forms of learning and development for all students, with different starting points, in different directions, and at different rates.