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UNIT SYNOPSIS

Development and learning are about growth and change. The domains of development and learning encountered in Unit 3 give students opportunities to understand how biological, cognitive, and environmental factors—studied in Units 1 and 2—come together to influence growth throughout the lifespan. While the most noticeable and dramatic growth and development stage occurs from birth to roughly 18 years of age, people continue to grow and develop throughout their lives. Though some aspects of an individual person, such as personality or eye color, remain relatively stable throughout life, other aspects, such as memory retention or sensory acuity, can fluctuate with age. People experience formal and informal learning throughout a significant portion of their lives. Classical conditioning and operant conditioning are two fundamental forms of learning that have been studied extensively for over 100 years. The advent of computers in the mid-20th century brought about new theories and methods for examining learning, and today, artificial intelligence models continue to unlock ways we can better understand how people learn.

Building on their knowledge from Units 1 and 2, students will apply perspectives and concepts related to physiological and cognitive functions to understand how behavior and mental processes change over the course of a lifetime, which includes discussion of stage theories of development (1.A). With opportunities to explore the many experimental studies used to refine development and learning theories in Unit 3, students will likely encounter the two approaches developmental psychologists typically use in their research—cross-sectional and longitudinal research designs—and how these designs help control variables such as time and maturation.

Identifying the types of research designs used by developmental psychologists can help students refine their knowledge of research methodology and how to control for confounding variables (2.B). Experiments in development and learning may yield both qualitative and quantitative data from work with populations such as infants, small children, or non-human animals. When the data is quantitative, students will learn how researchers calculate measures of central tendency—such as mean, median, and mode—as well as interpret the meaning of those statistics within the experimental scenario (3.B).

Additionally, in their overarching investigation of any experiment on learning or development, students will want to evaluate whether that experiment followed appropriate ethical procedures, such as parental permission and consent as well as steps to protect participants from harm (2.D).

In alignment with Texas Education Code Section 28.0043(a), effective September 1, 2025, instruction may not be provided on the topics of sexual orientation or gender identity for students in grades Pre-Kindergarten through 12. Accordingly, this unit plan and our instructional materials do not include instruction or references to sexual orientation or gender identity ([see Texas Education Code, Chapter 28: Courses of Study; Advancement, p. 39](#)).

Additionally, we have confirmed with the College Board that no instruction or activities related to gender or sexuality are necessary for the AP Psychology course, nor do any such terms or definitions appear on the AP Psychology Exam.

ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS AND CONTENT STANDARDS

Below are the standards **taught** and **assessed** in this unit.

Topic, Enduring Understanding, Learning Objectives (*Students will be able to...*)

3.1 Themes and Methods in Developmental Psychology

- **3.1.A:** Explain how enduring themes inform developmental psychology.
- **3.1.B:** Describe ways cross sectional and longitudinal research design methods used in developmental psychology inform understanding about behavior and mental processes.

3.2 Physical Development Across the Lifespan

- **3.2.A:** Explain how physical development before birth applies to behavior and mental processes.
- **3.2.B:** Explain how physical development in infancy and childhood apply to behavior and mental processes.
- **3.2.C:** Explain how physical development in adolescence applies to behavior and mental processes.
- **3.2.D:** Explain how physical development in adulthood applies to behavior and mental processes.

~~3.3 Gender and Sexual Orientation~~

- ~~**3.3.A:** Describe how sex and gender influence socialization and other aspects of development.~~

3.4 Cognitive Development Across the Lifespan

- **3.4.A:** Explain how theories of cognitive development apply to behavior and mental processes.

3.5 Communication and Language Development

- **3.5.A:** Explain how key components of language and communication apply to behavior and mental processes.
- **3.5.B:** Explain how language develops in humans.

3.6 Social-Emotional Development Across the Lifespan

- **3.6.A:** Explain how social development relates to behavior and mental processes.

3.7 Social-Emotional Development Across the Lifespan

- **3.7.A:** Explain how classical conditioning applies to behavior and mental processes.

3.8 Social-Emotional Development Across the Lifespan

- **3.8.A:** Explain how operant conditioning applies to behavior and mental processes.

3.9 Social-Emotional Development Across the Lifespan

- **3.9.A:** Explain how social learning applies to behavior and mental processes.
- **3.9.B:** Explain how cognitive factors in learning apply to behavior and mental processes.

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