

Human Development

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FOCUS QUESTIONS

1. How do learners differ in their stages of development?
2. What are five aspects of human development that should guide curriculum leaders?
3. What is the "problem of the match," and how does it influence curriculum leadership?
4. What are the salient characteristics of learners' cognitive, psychosocial, and moral development?

Human development throughout the life span is a significant basis of the curriculum. For decades, the study of child and adolescent development has been regarded as an important part of the knowledge base for K–12 education. Now, with the increasing significance of lifelong learning, curriculum leaders must also focus attention on human development during adulthood.

The generally accepted stages of human development include infancy, childhood, early adolescence, middle adolescence, late adolescence, and adulthood. The elementary school years correspond roughly to the stage known as childhood. Early, middle, and late adolescence correspond roughly to the middle school, high school, and community college levels of education.

Knowledge of human development enables curriculum leaders to design curricula that are shaped, in part, by the nature and needs of individual learners. Basing school curricula on what we know about human development is so important that James P. Comer, Professor of Child Psychology at the Yale University Child Study Center and founder of the School Development program, asserts that "[w]e will be able to create a successful system of education nationwide only when we base everything we do on what is known about how children and youths develop and learn" (2001, p. 30). Figure 3.1 presents five aspects of human development that should guide curriculum planning: the biological basis of individual differences, physical maturation, intellectual development and achievement, emotional growth and development, and social development. In "What Ever Happened to Kick the Can? Wellness in School and Community" in this chapter, Tom Burton reminds us that physical wellness is often overlooked in favor of curriculum goals that emphasize academic achievement.

The concept of stages of human development is a useful tool for understanding the needs of learners at various levels of education, but it cannot define the development of any one learner at a particular age. Each learner is innately unique, and this inborn individuality indicates the importance of providing many alternatives in educational programs. Nevertheless, humans as learners have much in common. This commonality among learners is evident among today's youth who frequently use the Internet and social networking to connect with their peers who are dealing with similar developmental challenges. As Stephanie M. Reich, Kaveri Subrahmanyam, and Guadalupe