

Mind the “5th E”!: Ecological Psychology in the Remaking of Developmental Research

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ABSTRACT

Psychology has long thrived on its paradoxes, framing the human experience through a spectrum of dualisms: mind and body, self and other, mind and matter, thought and world, subject and object, planning and execution, knowledge and experience—the list goes on. For decades, the gaps between these poles have fuelled some of the field’s most profound questions. Today, psychology seems to be finally “minding the gap,” as cognitive science embraces cognition as embodied, embedded, enacted, and extended (4E). Yet, the “5th E”—the ecological—remains notably overlooked, particularly in developmental research. This creates a provocative contrast, given that ecological psychology has been foundational to our understanding of development. The ecological perspective offers a powerful framework for studying cognition as a dynamic interplay between organisms and their environments, where each continuously shapes and redefines the other. Recently, calls have emerged to expand and pluralize the developmental ecological psychology agenda, equipping it to address broader and more complex challenges. In this talk, I will draw on recent theoretical and empirical advancements to show how the synergy between ecological and developmental psychology can provide concrete, far-reaching tools for analyzing the complexity of developmental dynamics in real-world contexts of action and interaction. Finally, I will argue that this alliance holds the potential to remake developmental research, transforming its questions, methods, and broader impact on the field.

Keywords: ecological psychology; developmental research; real-world contexts; dynamics of action and interaction.