



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)
January 2012**

Psychology B

PSYB3

(Specification 2185)

Unit 3: Child Development and Applied Options

Report on the Examination

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Unit 3: (PSYB3) Child Development and Applied Options

General

Many students seemed extremely well prepared for the examination, presenting knowledgeable and carefully reasoned responses. It was especially heartening to see how well students coped with questions that could not have been anticipated and thus could not have been pre-planned and practised beforehand. Question 21 was a case in point. Here students could take extremely different and equally valid routes to answering the question, with the result that more able students could really shine, both in terms of knowledge demonstrated and in terms of their ability to select and organise material.

Sadly, many responses to the 12-mark questions were seriously marred by poor communication; it was not unusual to see whole pages of writing without any punctuation or paragraphing. On careful reading sentences often did not make sense, although interspersed with relevant psychological terminology as they often were, such answers at first gave the impression of being quite well-informed. Whilst examiners will work hard to extract meaning from work that is often less lucid than it might be, if what is written truly does not make sense it is difficult to justify credit. Students should be mindful of the need to communicate their ideas clearly and should be encouraged to use exam time to read and check their responses carefully.

Performance on the experimental design questions in the child development section varied enormously and it was evident that some students had been taken by surprise here. In particular, a considerable number were quite unable to identify the dependent variable. At the other extreme, there were whole schools and colleges where the vast majority of students gained full marks on these questions.

This session more than in previous sessions it was noted that students may have been fabricating studies. Some references to evidence were vague in the extreme, or such detail as was presented was sufficiently implausible to arouse doubt that the study could ever have been conducted, this despite attempts to validate the reference with the inclusion a named (but unknown) researcher.

Section A Child Development

Topic: Social Development

Some students failed to gain full marks for question 01 because they omitted to outline the experimental design. The dependent variable was often incorrectly identified or, in some cases, students merely copied the last line of the stem. Confusion between privation and deprivation was apparent in the less successful answers to question 03, the Harlow study forming the basis for most of the incorrect answers. Students who used an inappropriate study in question 03 could nevertheless gain marks in question 04 so were not doubly penalised. Unfortunately, explanations in question 04 were often incomplete with many limitations only briefly stated. Some splendid answers to question 05 were seen, with thorough, detailed descriptions and well-argued evaluations at the top of the range. Sadly there were also some very limited evaluations, with assertions that were completely unsupported or unexplained. For example, it was often stated that Ainsworth's Strange Situation research was 'unreliable'. Quite frequently there was inappropriate justification based on supposition, for example, 'because Ainsworth worked alone she fitted the observations to her theory'.

Topic: Cognitive Development

Some students failed to gain full marks for question 06 because they omitted to outline the experimental design. The dependent variable was sometimes incorrectly identified, most usually as either 'age of child' or 'arrangement of beads'. Most students could identify conservation correctly in question 08, although a small number confused this with class inclusion. The instruction to 'briefly discuss' one other difference in question 09 yielded some very poor answers. In fact, the modal mark for this question was 1 because most students failed to provide any discussion. Question 10 yielded some varied and interesting responses. The majority of students recognised this as the Vygotskian position to cognitive development, but various approaches and theories were used to construct some quite valid and innovative responses. Certainly this more open-ended question style discriminated well between those who had practised pre-learned answers and the better students who could select and organise relevant material in examination conditions. Some of these answers were a real joy to read.

Topic: Moral Development

Some students failed to gain full marks for question 11 because they omitted to outline the experimental design. The dependent variable was frequently incorrectly identified as 'boys and girls' or, in some cases, students copied the last line of the stem. Most students could choose an appropriate theory, Kohlberg, Gilligan or Freud, for question 13. These were often thoroughly described, but the instruction to 'briefly discuss' was sometimes missed, thereby limiting access to marks. Answers to question 14 tended to accrue good marks if students recognised the need to discuss 'ways in which ...psychologists have investigated moral development' rather than theory. Any such ways would have formed the basis of a valid answer, not only those specified on the specification ie moral comparisons and moral dilemmas. Sadly, a good number of responses focussed on theory alone and therefore scored very few marks, even then these tended to achieve credit almost incidentally through reference to Heinz or Henry and the cups.

Section B Applied Options

Topic: Cognition and Law

Most students performed very well on questions 15 and 16, but answers to question 17 varied considerably. Outlines of a study were often extremely vague or so muddled that it was difficult to recognise which study was being described. Very few students seemed to have realised that some evaluation was also required in question 17 as commentary was scant, even in cases where a relevant study had been quite clearly described. Most students coped reasonably well with question 18, although a significant number failed to confine their answer to **post**-event influences on eye-witness reliability. Discussion of pre-existing factors such as stereotypes or of event circumstances such as weapon focus were rarely creditworthy, unless the student was able to make a case for such factors having some post-event influence. It was surprisingly rare to see any discussion of the effects of post-event discussion, even in the better answers.

Topic: Schizophrenia and Mood Disorders

There were some very detailed answers to questions 19 and 20, with many full-mark responses. In some of the less well-organised answers to question 20 it was difficult to see exactly which two ways were being outlined; students offered multiple cognitive concepts with applications that could not be unambiguously linked to any of the concepts or sometimes no application at all. Students offering Seligman did not always remember to focus on the cognitive aspect. As noted in the general comments, question 21 elicited some excellent responses from thoughtful and intelligent students who could select information and organise their material logically. It was refreshing to see such varied and yet quite legitimate answers to the same question, even within a single school or college where students who had been taught together were presumably all able to draw upon the same material. Less confident students opted to discuss therapy and followed this with a discussion of care options. The more assured students were able to integrate their material and consider therapy and care simultaneously in vigorous discussion.

Topic: Stress and Stress Management

Answers to question 22 tended to gain at least two marks, although some outlines were insufficiently clear, particularly where students offered rationalisation and projection. There was also a tendency to outline in the same terms, for example, 'rationalisation is where you rationalise events'. If students simply named four defence mechanisms they could access a maximum of one mark. It is therefore important for students to realise that naming is not enough if an outline is required by the question. Answers to question 23 varied, as some students appeared not to have noticed the instruction to evaluate. Many simply outlined what was meant by the term and gave examples for illustration. The multiple requirements of question 24 evidently caused difficulties for some who focussed much more on one concept than the other. It was also apparent in some answers that students would rather discuss the effects of Type A personality than locus of control and hardiness. Where it did appear, discussion tended to focus on evidence rather than on the concepts, with same evaluation points repeated several times but in relation to different studies. Such a strategy made for a fairly limited discussion since the focus of the answer shifted significantly from the question asked.

Topic: Substance Abuse

Most students gained two marks for question 25, although a fair number did refer to substances that were not stimulants such as heroin. Question 26 did not always yield answers that had been anticipated and responses referring to more long-term and very general risks, such as tolerance, also had to be given credit. There were some low-scoring, largely anecdotal answers to question 27. Evidently this is an area where students could usefully be encouraged to demonstrate their knowledge of psychology by making explicit reference to social psychological concepts such as conformity, normative influence etc in their responses. In question 28 it was quite rare to see clear descriptions of what is meant by a fear-arousal appeal, usually this was only implicit in examples. Although most students offered one other technique as part of their answer, most usually social inoculation, it was less common to see this alternative used as part of the evaluation. There was also a tendency to wander onto discussion of treatment rather than prevention which limited marks in many cases.

Topic: Forensic Psychology

Eysenck is clearly not a favoured area for some students, with the result that answers to question 30 were sometimes poorly done. Some students confused Eysenck with other theorists altogether, most usually with either Lombroso or Sheldon, and occasionally students wrote about organised and disorganised types, as in offender profiling. Responses to question 31 tended to be of a better standard, although the reference to 'other' in the question was sometimes apparently missed, with the result that incapacitation was offered as an answer, gaining no credit. Some quite brief responses to question 32 were seen, although it is difficult to know whether this was as a consequence of the narrow focus of the question or due to the fact that this was for most students their last question. Descriptions tended to be quite strong with many clearly identifying Novaco's three stages. Evaluations were generally weaker, with listed evaluation points and evidence was often missing or so vague as to be unworthy of credit.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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