Award for Distinguished Contributions to the International Advancement of Psychology 1995: Paul B. Baltes

The Committee on International Relations in Psychology confers the Awards for Distinguished Contributions to the International Advancement of Psychology to an individual(s) who has made sustained and enduring contributions to international cooperation and advancement of knowledge in psychology.

In accordance with established custom, the award winners have agreed to present addresses on some phase of their contributions to research in the international psychological field at the 1996 convention. Award addresses delivered in 1995 are published in the April 1996 American Psychologist.

Members of the 1995 Committee on International Relations in Psychology Awards were Lenore Walker, chair; Guillermo Bernal; Florence Kaslow; and Hagop Pambookian.

The winners since the establishment of the award are as follows:

1991  Otto Klineberg
1992  Henry David
1993  Çigdem Kagıtçibasi
1994  Frances M. Culbertson
      Harry C. Triandis
1995  Paul B. Baltes
      Wayne H. Holtzman

Paul B. Baltes

Citation

"For formative and distinguished scholarly and scientific contributions to an international body of theoretical and empirical research defining life-span development, for the generous, enthusiastic mentorship of young scientists from many different countries, and for the energetic promotion of international scientific cooperation and exchange.

Paul Baltes is an international psychologist. He has held key academic and administrative posts in both the U.S. and Germany. His research venue includes the former Czechoslovakia, Germany, Japan, Poland, Russia, and the United States. Baltes's extraordinary scholarly output addresses the history and theory of developmental psychology, the multidisciplinary study of age and aging, intelligence and personality, the psychology of wisdom, and developmental research methodology.

The professional development of young scientists is a passion that Paul has indulged at a truly international level. Fully half of the postdoctoral fellows who have trained and collaborated with Paul at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development and Education in Berlin have come from foreign shores, including the developing countries. Baltes's generativity toward
young colleagues earned him the Gerontological Society of America’s Distinguished Mentoring Award in 1990.

Baltes’s record of diligent and skillful promotion of psychology internationally includes a principal role in the creation of the International Society for the Study of Behavioral Development, which now brings together more than 1,000 scientists from 50 countries; the implementation and maintenance of an innovative program that allows senior, foreign behavioral scientists to work and study at the Max Planck Institute; and service on bodies committed to internationality in science, such as the U.S. Social Science Research Council, the Academia Europaea, or the German-American Academic Council initiated by President Clinton and Chancellor Kohl to promote international scientific cooperation.

In honoring Paul Baltes with the Distinguished Contributions to the International Advancement of Psychology Award, the American Psychological Association further sharpens its commitment to international cooperation at the very highest levels.”

Biography

Hallmark themes of Baltes’s career, in addition to the substantive territory of life-span psychology and aging, are international collaboration, interdisciplinarity, the training of young scientists, and science policy. Perhaps not surprisingly, therefore, his publication record is a testimony to his profile. In his more than 200 publications, 74 people appear as co-authors. More than ten times, we find the names of Margret Baltes, Reinhold Kliegl, Ulman Lindenberger, John Nesselroade, Warner Schaie, Ursula Staudinger, and Sherry Willis. True to Baltes’s transatlantic spirit, about half of these significant others are German, the other half American. And the same pattern applies to the remaining cohort of co-authors.

Baltes was born in 1939 in Saarlouis, Germany. From 1959 until 1967, he received his graduate and undergraduate education in Germany at the University of Saarbrücken (Saarland), a university located geographically and intellectually at the interface between France and Germany. Psychological study at the University of Saarbrücken at that time was very much oriented toward the developmental and epistemological theory of Jean Piaget. The head of the department was Ernst E. Boesch, a student of Piaget and Andre Rey. And in Boesch’s mentorship, because of his stature as Germany’s most noted cross-cultural psychologist, there were first seeds for internationality. The second mentor of Baltes in Saarbrücken was Guenther Reinert. From him, Baltes acquired his interest in administrative matters and science policy, as well as his lifelong curiosity about the structure of intellect and its development.

Baltes’s love story with the United States began when, after receiving his diploma degree in psychology (1963), and much due to the adventurous spirit of his wife, Margret Baltes, he crossed the Atlantic to spend an academic year at the University of Nebraska as a foreign exchange student in 1963–1964. There, K. Warner Schaie introduced him to the field of aging.

During his stay at Nebraska, Baltes participated in a proseminar, a "must" for all incoming graduate students. For Baltes, whose psychology education up to that point was very much Genevan cognitive structuralism and German action psychology, this proseminar in the American heartland of the Midwest, with its emphases on experimental, learning, and behaviorist psychology, was a second introduction to psychology. He credits this educational experience for his strong belief that there is too much cultural egocentrism and regionalism in psychology, especially in monolingual American psychology.

In 1964, to complete his graduate education, Baltes returned to Germany. From Schaie, he took with him the topic of his dissertation (cohort-sequential methods). At Saarbrücken, when teaching his first courses in developmental psychology, his interest in the life span emerged as he felt the need to combine his former Piagetian training in cognitive child development with
the more recently acquired interest in the study of aging. In this challenge lay the origins of Baltes's primary intellectual agenda: research and theory in life-span developmental psychology.

Since then, Baltes has worked toward coordinating and interpenetrating research and teaching on infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and old age in order to create a new and more integrative conception of human development (for an overview, see "Theoretical Propositions of Life-Span Developmental Psychology," published in Developmental Psychology, Baltes, 1987). In doing so, Baltes has not only articulated life-span theory (for instance, the distinction between age-graded, history-graded, and nonnormative influences and their interplay in the regulation of development), but also advanced new substantive topics such as research on testing the limits of the mind and the study of wisdom.

In 1967, after completing his dissertation on developmental methodology, Baltes made a second academic sojourn to the United States, this time for a lengthier period. From 1968 until 1980, he passed through the ranks of acade, beginning as assistant and associate (1970) professor of psychology at West Virginia University, moving in 1972 to Pennsylvania State University, where in 1974 he was made Full Professor of Human Development.

These years at West Virginia and Penn State University covered the window of time in which the field of life-span developmental psychology took hold and experienced its major growth spurt. At West Virginia University, where Schaie had moved as department head, Baltes joined in the effort to start doctoral training in life-span developmental psychology. In 1969, with Larry Goulet, Baltes initiated the still-ongoing West Virginia Conference on Life-Span Developmental Psychology. And at West Virginia, Baltes also began his lifetime collaboration with John Nesselroade on issues of developmental and longitudinal methodology.

In 1972, at the age of 33, Baltes was invited to become department head at Penn State's newly created College of Human Development with the charge to further develop a graduate program in human development and family studies. To this end, life-span psychology peers John Nesselroade, Richard Lerner, and Bill Loof, among others, were enticed to join. The result was an exciting graduate program and faculty in human development and family studies united in the vision to make interdisciplinarity come to fruition in research and teaching on lifespan development. During these years, Baltes also developed a close and continuing relationship with sociologist Bert Brim, who was a major player in the evolution of the life-span approach in sociology. Together, they started in 1978 the annual series Life-Span Development and Behavior.

In 1978–1979, Baltes spent a year as fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford, permitting him to ponder his future agenda and acquire new important colleagues in the life-span field (e.g., David Featherman, Matilda Riley, James Fries, Martin Seligman, and George Vaillant). In 1980, selecting from several options, the Balteses decided to try Germany once more; Margret Baltes as a professor of psychological gerontology with the Free University of Berlin, and Paul Baltes as a senior fellow and director at one of the Berlin Max Planck Institutes.

In Berlin, as director of the Center of Psychology at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development and Education, and in collaboration with a continuously changing staff of young research scientists and postdoctoral fellows (many of whom now hold professional appointments in various countries), Baltes found the opportunity to establish a long-term program of research in life-span developmental psychology with several interrelated emphases. Among them is an emphasis on positive aging and a life-span theory of the mechanics and pragmatics of intelligence. Within this framework, research is conducted to demonstrate the two faces of the aging mind: potential (plasticity) and its limits (for a summary, see -The Aging Mind: Potential and Limits" published in The Gerontologist, Baltes, 1993). As part of this program of research, Baltes and his colleagues developed and tested a psychological theory of
wisdom and, together with Margret Baltes, advanced a psychological model of successful aging called selective optimization with compensation. This model has since been extended to cover the entire life span (see Baltes & Baltes, 1990).

The Center at the Berlin Max Planck Institute, headed by Baltes, is not only international in the composition of its permanent scientific staff, it also operates an active international program. Each year, about half a dozen postdoctoral fellows and visiting scientists from abroad come to join the research group.

Baltes attributes a large share of his interest and commitment to internationality and interdisciplinarity to several in-between and non-university institutions, many of them located in the United States. Foremost among them are the Social Science Research Council, the MacArthur Foundation (where he is currently a member of Bert Brim’s Research Network on Successful Midlife Development), the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford, and the International Society for the Study of Behavioral Development for which he served as President from 1983–1987. In collaboration with these institutions and European ones (such as the European Science Foundation, the German–American Academic Council, and the Johann Jacobs Foundation), Baltes has been active in designing and implementing a large number of international research and training seminars, as well as other forms of international communication and collaboration.

In Baltes’s view, internationality in graduate research education typically comes too late and only after individual researchers have already established their careers. Thus, at, the time where internationality enters professional life, it is often an instrument of career consummation rather than a force in setting the foundation of one's own intellectual agenda. What Baltes argues for, is to establish internationality in academe at a much younger age than is the case for most.

Baltes has received many honors. Among them are honorary doctorates, elected membership to many academies (including the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the Swedish Royal Society, the Berlin–Brandenburg Academy, the Leopoldina, and the Academia Europaea), multiple research awards (such as the 1994 German Psychology Award, the 1987 Distinguished Research Contribution of APA’s Division 20, and the 1991 Kleemeier Award of the Gerontological Society of America), as well as the Mentorship Award of the Behavioral and Social Sciences Section of the Gerontological Society of America. This Mentorship Award, which typically owes much to the sponsorship of former students, is the one, Baltes says, he experienced with the greatest private joy.

Selected Bibliography


