

# A Dynamic Approach to Developmental Disorders

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Before working with Jean Piaget, Annette Karmiloff-Smith was a conference interpreter who thought psychology was just about reaction time and questionnaires.

“Piaget made me discover that [psychology] was about everything from logic to epistemology, philosophy, science, and absolutely every topic seemed to come into psychology,” says Karmiloff-Smith. “I got really enthusiastic.”

Now Karmiloff-Smith is a professorial research fellow at the Developmental Neurocognition Lab at Birkbeck, University of London. She is an expert on developmental disorders, specifically Williams Syndrome — a rare genetic disorder characterized by moderate learning difficulties and a distinctive facial appearance.

Coming a long way since her early work with Piaget, Karmiloff-Smith has proposed a dynamic model for neurodevelopmental disorders. Using a static model (in which researchers look for parts of the brain that are damaged compared to a normal brain), she argues, is inappropriate for developmental disorders. Because deficits arise during development before children’s brains have formed specialized domains, Karmiloff-Smith has shown through her Williams Syndrome research that the impairments in these disorders can be linked to multiple domains.

At the APS 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention in Chicago, Karmiloff-Smith will be speaking will be speaking about how double dissociation can be demonstrated between two developmental syndromes. “I’ll unpick that” says Karmiloff-Smith “and show how the same data can be analyzed in a totally different way showing that [the disorders] have very common starting points, and that they diverge over time, and that it’s not a double dissociation but very low level impairments that give rise to changes over time.”

Annette Karmiloff-Smith (Birkbeck, University of London, United Kingdom) will be speaking as part of the theme program [Biological Beings in Social Context](#) at the at the [24th APS Annual Convention](#) in Chicago, Illinois, USA.

**Intro:**

**Question 1: How did you become interested in psychological science?**

**Question 2: How did working with Jean Piaget shape your current views of child development?**

**Question 3: Why is it important to study child development?**

**Question 4: What developmental disorders do you specialize in?**

**Question 5: What topics are you currently researching?**

**Question 6: What will you be speaking on at the 24<sup>th</sup> APS Annual Convention?**