conceptions reveals the hitherto unrecognized power of environments to shape the course of human growth and—paradoxically—the power of human beings to adapt to, modify, and create the very environments that shape their development.

This orientation also has roots in personal experiences: emigrating from Russia as a child, I entered school not knowing a word of English. My classmates—mostly Irish, Italians, and blacks from poor families living in a neighborhood integrated by poverty—initiated me into the world of American childhood, quite different from that of my family. The effort to integrate these ‘two worlds of childhood’ is not difficult to detect in my research, teaching, and theory building. The effort was given new direction when a year later we moved to rural upstate New York to live on the grounds of a state institution for the then called ‘feebleminded,’ where my father was a neuropathologist. A superb diagnostician, he also had a PhD in zoology, and was a field naturalist at heart. The institution and its setting offered a rich biological and social terrain for his observant eye.

“It was in this third world of my childhood that my father took me on innumerable walks, through the wards, shops, and farmland—where he preferred to see and talk with his patients—and then beyond the barbed wire fence into the woods and hills that began at our doorstep. Wherever we went, he would point to the functional interdependence between living organisms and their surroundings.

“These early experiences may provide a key to an understanding of the nature and origin of the research paradigms developed and described in my recent work. These experiences may also explain why the paradigms are now being cited and applied in contemporary research. As investigators move beyond the laboratory and the testing room into the sequence of varied multiple settings that actually shape our lives, we need theoretical frameworks that permit the systematic analysis of these settings and their interrelations. It is gratifying to know that my effort to provide such a framework is proving useful to my colleagues.”