



Understanding Early Childhood - A look

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Abstract: In fact childhood is not a race to see how quickly a child can read, write and count. Childhood is a small window of time to learn and develop at the place which is right for each individual child. It is apt to note that Early childhood is usually defined as the time period from the age of two until the age of six or seven years. There are three simultaneous development stages: physical growth, cognitive growth and social emotional growth.

Key Words: Early Childhood, Physical, Cognitive and social emotional growth, toddlerhood, literacy skills,

Introduction

Early childhood is the beginning of life of a person, the first formative period. As we intend to study Early childhood care and education (ECCE) in this book, first let us have a thorough understanding of Early childhood. Elaborating the childhood, Rabindranath Tagore says— "every child comes with the message that God is not yet discouraged of man."

Early childhood is such a stage in human development, remarkably it includes toddlerhood and sometime afterwards, Play age is an unspecific designation approximately within the scope of Early childhood. Some age-related development periods and examples of defined intervals are: newborn (ages 0–5 weeks); infant (ages 5 weeks – 1 year); toddler (ages 1–3 years); preschooler (ages 3–5 years); school-aged child (ages 5–12 years); adolescent (ages 13–19).

Now we come to stages of Early childhood development.

1. Physical Growth and Development: In this first phase there is significant synaptic growth and myelination of neural fibers in the brain, especially within the frontal lobes. For example, between the ages 2 and 6, the

brain increases from 70% of its adult weight to 90%. In fact, the growth of the brain is followed by a surge in cognitive abilities. Around the age of five, children start speaking properly and master their hand to eye coordination.

It must be remembered that the physical development in children follows a pattern. The large muscles develop before the small muscles, the large muscles are used for walking and running and other physical activities, these are known as gross motor skills. Small muscles are used for fine motor skills such as picking up objects, writing, drawing, throwing and catching.

2. Cognitive Growth: Also termed the preoperational stage by Jean Piaget, this is the stage during which the child repeatedly asks "Why?", and is used to build relationships with the child. The child can't yet perform the abstract thinking operations. The child has to be able to see what is being talked about, because they do not understand the concepts of logic, betrayal, contemplation, etc. This means that they think literally: if a child is told that they have to go to bed because "night is falling", they will ask how can the night fall from the sky. They also see the human characteristics in every object, e.g. the cot "is bad" if



they accidentally hit it with their foot and it hurts. They also exhibit egocentrism; not to be confused with egoism; that being said, they do not comprehend that the other person has beliefs and the children at this age think that what they think, everybody thinks.

Further, there is also a matter of perceptive centration, which causes the children to primarily see what is visually most prominent on someone/something, e.g. if a man has long hair, the child will think he's a woman.

3. Social-Emotional Growth: The third simultaneous stage, this includes children understanding a sense of 'self', relationships with others and sociability. The emotional development includes expressions, attachment and personality. Children manifest fear of dark and monsters and around the age of three notice whether they are a boy or a girl and start acting that way.

Boys are usually more aggressive, whilst girls are more caring. However, aggression is manifested in two different ways: boys are more physically aggressive, while the girls are more socially aggressive (name-calling and ignoring). In this stage the individual differences become more prominent.

It is pertinent to note that between ages 2 and 3 years, young children stop using the awkward, wide-legged robot-like stance that is the hallmark of new walkers. As they develop a smoother gait, they also develop the ability to run, jump, and hop.

Children of this age can participate in throwing and catching games with larger balls. They can also push themselves around with their feet while sitting on a riding toy. The period of the most rapid

development of motor behaviors is between 2 and 6 years (also known as the preschool years). Skills that appear are basic locomotor, ball-handling, fine eye-hand coordination, walking leads to running, jumping, hopping, galloping, and skipping, climbing evolves from creeping.

Coming to fine motor skills, there are several developmental expectations for children to reach by the time they reach the age of two. Children are expected to be able to draw simple shapes such as circles, squares and triangles. They should also be able to cut out such shapes as these. By doing such activities as these develops the children's fine motor skills, by strengthening their fingers and developing their finger control.

Coming to education, i.e. learning infants and toddlers experience life more holistically than any other age group. Social, emotional, cognitive, language, and physical lessons are not learned separately by very young children. Adults who are most helpful to young children interact in ways that understand that the child is learning from the whole experience, not just that part of the experience to which the adult gives attention..

It is significant to note that the most information learned occurs between birth and the age of three, during this time humans develop more quickly and rapidly than they would at any other point in their life. Love, affection, encouragement and mental stimulation from the parents or guardians of these young children aid in development. At this time in life, the brain is growing rapidly and it is easier for information to be absorbed; parts of the brain can nearly double in a year.



During this stage, children need vital nutrients and personal interaction for their brain to grow properly. Children's brains will expand and become more developed in these Early years.

Although adults play a huge part in Early childhood development, the most important way children develop is interaction with other children. Children develop close relationships with the children they spend a large period of time with. Close relationships with peers develop strong social connections that can be transferred later in life, even children at an Early age have a preference of whom they want to interact with or form friendships with.

As is well said, children are like wet cement. Whatever falls on them makes an impression. In Early childhood education, we understand that teaching children involves celebrating the uniqueness of each child and preparing them for academic success beyond the preschool classroom. As creators of a standards-aligned daycare and preschool curriculum, we also know just how important these Early years can be to a child's lifelong learning abilities.

In fact, Early childhood education may look like fun and games (and it is!) but the skills learned through these "fun and games" as part of a daycare or preschool curriculum can help a child make a smoother transition to Kindergarten.

Basic Skills Taught in Early Childhood Education

- Early literacy skills, including knowing all the letters in the alphabet by sight and sound, vocabulary acquisition, phonological awareness, and print awareness, help prepare a toddler and

preschooler for the more rigorous reading instruction in elementary school.

- An elementary school classroom usually includes more students and involves more time sitting at a desk when compared to a preschool classroom. Children with strong inhibitory control abilities can sit quietly, stay focused on the task at hand, think before they act, and behave in other appropriate ways.

- In Kindergarten, a child's fine motor skills get a workout with writing letters and words, drawing shapes, using scissors, and even typing on a computer.

- Social and emotional skills help a child make friends, share, participate in classroom discussions, and like inhibitory control, can help a child experience fewer classroom behavior challenges.

- Children may spend up to 75 percent of classroom time learning through listening. While hearing is one of the five senses, learning how to actively listen takes practice and can also be a foundational skill for literacy and language development.

To sum up, it may be surmised that Early childhood is every important period in the lifespan of person. During this period physical, mental and social growth and development of a child takes place. As such very diligent ways and means must be followed for child care and development, so that a child can grow into person having sound body, mind and soul. During this period children must be taught how to think, not what to think.



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