Module 3: How Young Children Grow and Learn

Section A: Theories of Child Development and Developmentally Appropriate Practice

Introduction

In this section we will begin by exploring some basics principles of child development and learning about five theories that influence the field of early care and education programs. Early care and education theorists are the people who develop ideas and beliefs about how children grow and learn. Theorists use a variety of methods in developing their ideas including observations of children. Early care and education theories may include ideas about education, social development, health, physical development, and language development.

Early childhood caregivers and teachers look to the various theories to provide the foundations for working with young children. As an early care and education professional you will use the theories in your work with children.   After you have gained experience and learned more about early education, you will use the theories to form your own philosophy of early childhood education.

Learning Objectives

After completing this section you will be able to:

✓   Describe the 12 Principles of Child Development

✓   Define Developmentally Appropriate Practice

✓   Explain the 12 DAP Teaching Strategies to implement

✓   Explain the core idea of each of the theorists discussed in the orientation

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Basic Concepts of Child Development

In working with young children it is important that you understand how children learn and develop. The National Association for the Education on Young Children (NAEYC) has created 12 Principles of Child Development and Learning. As you review these principles determine how you will incorporate this information into your teaching strategies.

1.   All areas of development and learning are important.

2.   Learning and development follow sequences.

3.   Development and learning proceed at varying rates.

4. Development and learning result from an interaction of maturation and experience.

5. Early experiences have profound effects on development and learning.

6. Development proceeds toward greater complexity, self-regulation, and symbolic or representational capacities.

7. Children develop best when they have secure relationships.

8. Development and learning occur in and are influenced by multiple social and cultural contexts.

9. Children learn in a variety of ways.

10. Play is an important vehicle for developing self-regulation and promoting language, cognition, and social competence.

11. Development and learning advance when children are challenged.

12. Children's experiences shape their motivation and approaches to learning.

Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP)

You will hear the term Developmentally Appropriate and Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) used throughout the early learning field. DAP is an approach to teaching grounded both in the research on how young children develop and learn and in what is known about effective early education. Its framework is designed to promote young children's optimal learning and development. It is important that you understand what that means. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has developed the guidelines for developmentally appropriate practice. They have created a book that lists the appropriate and inappropriate practice for all age groups. There are three considerations that are used when discussing DAP.

1. **Knowing about child development and learning.** Knowing what is typical at each age and stage of early development is crucial. This knowledge, based on research, helps us decide which experiences are best for children's learning and development. Developmental stages will be discussed at length in the next section of the orientation.

   - Infants and toddlers have specific needs depending on the age of the child. Young infants (0 to 9 months) seek **security**. Mobile infants (8 to 18 months) are eager to **explore**. Toddlers (16 to 36 months) are working on their **identity**; they want to know who they are and who's in charge.

   - Preschoolers show astonishing gains in cognitive and language skills.   They will take greater interest in feelings, express their emotions and empathize with others when they can experience new materials, roles, ideas, and activities especially in pretend play. Five- and 6-year-olds make great intellectual leaps. They go through a major shift, allowing them to develop more personal responsibility, self-direction, and logical thinking.

   - Best practices in first, second, and third grades involve balancing children's need for focused instruction with their need to build on what they already know. Primary grade children benefit from concrete hands-on experiences. They need to see and make connections,

especially across subjects. An integrated curriculum not only fosters connections between concepts and areas of learning but also makes learning fun.

2. **Knowing what is individually appropriate.** What we learn about specific children helps us teach and care for each child as an individual. By continually observing children's play and interaction with the physical environment and others, we learn about each child's interests, abilities, and developmental progress.

3. **Knowing what is culturally important.** We must make an effort to get to know the children's families and learn about the values, expectations, and factors that shape their lives at home and in their communities. This background information helps us provide meaningful, relevant, and respectful learning experiences for each child and family.

Effective DAP Teaching Strategies assist you in meeting the needs of the children in your program.

1. **Acknowledge what children do or say**. Let children know that we have noticed by giving positive attention, sometimes through comments, sometimes through just sitting nearby and observing. ("Thanks for your help, Kavi." "You found another way to show 5.")

2. **Encourage persistence** and effort rather than just praising and evaluating what the child has done. ("You're thinking of lots of words to describe the dog in the story. Let's keep going!")

3. **Give specific feedback** rather than general comments. ("The beanbag didn't get all the way to the hoop, James, so you might try throwing it harder.")

4. **Model attitudes**, ways of approaching problems, and behavior toward others, showing children rather than just telling them ("Hmm, that didn't work and I need to think about why." "I'm sorry, Ben, I missed part of what you said. Please tell me again.")

5. **Demonstrate** the correct way to do something. This usually involves a procedure that needs to be done in a certain way (such as using a wire whisk or writing the letter P).

6. **Create or add challenge** so that a task goes a bit beyond what the children can already do. For example, you lay out a collection of chips, count them together and then ask a small group of children to tell you how many are left after they see you removing some of the chips. The children count the remaining chips to help come up with the answer. To add a challenge, you could hide the chips after you remove some, and the children will have to use a strategy other than counting the remaining chips to come up with the answer. To reduce challenge, you could simplify the task by guiding the children to touch each chip once as they count the remaining chips.

7. **Ask questions** that provoke children's thinking. ("If you couldn't talk to your partner, how else could you let him know what to do?")

8. **Give assistance** (such as a cue or hint) to help children work on the edge of their current competence ("Can you think of a word that rhymes with your name, Matt? How about bat . . . Matt/bat? What else rhymes with Matt and bat?")

9. **Provide information**, directly giving children facts, verbal labels, and other information. ("This one that looks like a big mouse with a short tail is called a vole.")

10. **Give directions** for children's action or behavior. ("Touch each block only once as you count them." "You want to move that icon over here? Okay, click on it and hold down, then drag it to wherever you want.")

Guiding Your Learning

As you read this section on early care and education theorists think about children you have observed. Ask yourself the following questions:

What have I observed in children's behaviors or interactions that verify the theory?

How do I include this theory in my interactions with children?

Ask Your Center Director

This section contains information on five theorists who have influenced the field of early care and education. There are many theorists who have contributed to the practice of early care and education. Your center's philosophy and program may be based on a different theory or approach to early childhood education. Ask your Center Director about the center's philosophy and specific theories used in creating programs for young children.

Theorists

Erikson (1902-1994)

Erik Erickson's theory of social-emotional development is based on how people learn to interact with others based on their personal experiences. Erikson focused his attention on the young child and the way relationships with other people influence each child's personality and behavior. Erikson's theory of the young child's social and emotional development offers early care and education teachers information on proper ways to nurture and guide young children. As an early care and education practitioner you may work with children during the first four (4) social - emotional stages as defined by Erikson.

Erikson's First Four Stages of Social-Emotional Development

Stage	Approximate Age	Description
Basic trust vs. basic mistrust An infant needs consistent caregivers who provide for their basic needs in a nurturing and caring environment.	Birth to 12-18months	Infants need loving and trusting relationships with parents and other caregivers to develop a sense of trust. Infants who do not receive consistent and nurturing care nurturing care are at risk for developing a sense of mistrust of others.
Autonomy vs. Shame/Doubt Toddlers need caring adults who provide a supervised, safe, environment that provides the child with opportunities to learn new physical skills.	18 months to 3 years	During this stage the child becomes more independent, learning to walk, run, climb, build, draw and talk. Toilet learning is a key skill for this stage. Children who are supported and supervised by adults as they develop new skills and independence feel responsible and capable. Children who receive negative messages from parents and caregivers may begin to doubt their abilities and lose self-confidence.
Initiative vs. Guilt Preschool children need a safe environment that encourages making choices.	3 to 6 years	At this age children become more independent, assertive and take more initiative. Teachers and other adults need to provide an environment that supports the child's efforts but also helps guide their activities to prevent "unhappy" endings that may create feelings of guilt.
Industry vs. Inferiority School age children need an environment with encouraging adults that provides opportunities to develop and create their own ideas	6 to 12 years	School age children are learning to develop more complex social and academic skills. Children who experience success discover that being productive is satisfying. On the other hand, children who fail in school or other settings may begin to feel inferior and inadequate. Adult guidance that deemphasizes mistakes and focuses on problem solving helps focus the child on accomplishments.

Why is this important?

Erickson's theory helps ECE teachers identify the types of teacher –child interactions required for healthy social and emotional development. Erickson's theory helps people who work with young children understand the importance of providing specific types of interactions and environments to ensure positive social- emotional development for young children.

Applying Your Knowledge

Work with your Director to observe the classroom where you will be working.

Reflect on Erickson's theory as your observe the teachers and children.

Why are Erikson's stages of social and emotional development important for an early care and education teacher?

How will you apply your knowledge in working with children in your age group? Share your thoughts with your Center Director or mentor.

Montessori

Maria Montessori (1870-1952) was the first Italian female doctor, a feminist, and a children's advocate. Her experiences with young children are defined by her beliefs that all children have the ability to grow and develop in orderly environments that offer opportunities for children to become independent and critical thinkers. Montessori emphasized the importance of a carefully "prepared environment" as a primary role of the teacher in guiding young children. Montessori implemented her theory of development through specific teaching techniques and materials based on her belief that learning is cumulative. In a Montessori program you will observe;

1. Children moving independently between the specific activities teachers have planned for them based on their abilities.

2. Teachers observing and directing individual learning activities for each child.

3. Classrooms are formed with multi-age grouping allowing for different developmental stages.

4. Children spend 3 years in a group with the same teacher.

5. Children spend most of their day in individual activities with few large group times.

6. A Montessori classroom is well organized with defined areas for different types of learning.

7. Furniture and equipment are child-sized.

8. Specific equipment is available to children that are to be used with a precise method of teaching to meet developmental objectives.

9. Real materials as opposed to toys are used in the classroom whenever possible.

10. Each area contains open shelves with the materials organized and labeled.

11. Materials are developed for children to use independently.

12. Practical life is a part of the Montessori Method in which children learn life skills such as serving or preparing food, dressing skills, and gardening.

Why is Montessori Important to early care and education teaching?

Many of Montessori's concepts on educating young children may be found in many types of early care and education programs. Although Montessori is a specific method of teaching that requires certification, you may have thought "We do that in our program." Montessori was a pioneer in early childhood education introducing today's common concepts of early care and education that have been embraced by the early learning field.

Applying Your Knowledge

Compare the ideas and materials listed here and the classroom you will be working in, what do you see that is similar to Montessori's approach?

Piaget

Jean Piaget (1896 -1980) was a theorist who studied the cognitive development of young children. Piaget made major contributions in understanding how children learn. Piaget's theory is based on his belief that children do not learn and understand information that is "presented" to them by another person. Instead Piaget believed that individuals learn by creating new knowledge through active experiences. Piaget's theory is the foundation for the concept of child centered learning.

Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development Stages

Formal Operational (12 years – adult)   Stage 4 The adolescent can reason in more abstract ways. Thoughts are more idealistic, logical and systematic**.**
Concrete Operational (7-12 years) Stage 3 The child can reason logically about concrete objects and events and classify objects.
Preoperational (2-6 years)   Stage 2 The child uses symbols (words and pictures) to represent objects but does not reason logically. Child can pretend and is very egocentric.
Sensorimotor (0-2 years)   Stage 1 The infant explores through direct sensory and motor contact. Putting objects into their mouth. Separation anxiety and object permanence develop during this stage.

Major Contributions of Piaget:

- Children learn through actively exploring their environment through their senses, vision, hearing, and touch.

- Until the time between the ages of 8-12 months of age the infant does not understand that objects exist even if they cannot be seen.   You may observe this characteristic in infants who experience separation anxiety. When they are unable to see their parent they do not understand they will return.

- Young children from 3 to 7 years of age may be egocentric which means they only see things from their point of view and do not understand that other people may have different ideas.

- Teachers need to provide concrete, hands-on materials that enable young children to learn through exploration and active learning.

- Children from 7 to 11 years of age are able to make rational judgments about concrete and observable events. Teachers need to provide opportunities to ask questions and have the children explain the information back.

Applying Your Knowledge

How does this information affect your work with young children?

Piaget provides information on specific stages of cognitive development that can assist you in planning activities and your classroom environment. The concept that young children learn through doing is one of Piaget's major contributions to early care and development. Observe the children engaged in activities in your classroom. List some of the activities that involve concrete, hands-on experiences or active learning.

Vygotsky

Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934) was a Russian psychologist who believed that children's learning is influenced by their society and culture. Vygotsky believed that other people play an important role in children's learning. Vygotsky's theory stated that children learn through their interactions with other people in their environment including parents, teachers and peers.

Two important parts of Vygotsky's theory are:

The Zone of Proximal Development is a term used to describe the difference between what a child can do without help and what a child can do with help. Teachers influence a young child's learning by encouraging them to try new activities that are more difficult. Teachers, parents, other adults or an older child can guide and support the child in completing the activity.

Scaffolding is the word that is used to describe the process of guiding and supporting the child in learning a new activity or skill. The child may need more guidance the first time the puzzle is assembled but each time he assembles the puzzle he/she needs less assistance until they are able to complete the puzzle without help.

Applying Your Knowledge

How does this information affect your work with young children?

Vygotsky's theory provides teachers with guidance on interactions with children who are learning new skills. It is important to remember that when first attempting a task, children need more help than after completing the task several times. As the child gains more experience the teacher can slowly withdraw support by observing the child. The words "I can do it myself" are a common way children let you know they no longer need assistance. As you interact with the children in your classroom, be aware of the times that you use guided learning/scaffolding. What are some of the daily situations where you use guided learning? Are there additional situations that you can use guided learning in your work with young children?

Reggio Emilia Approach

The Reggio Emilia Approach is a progressive model of early care and education practice and curriculum. Reggio Emilia is a town in Northern Italy that established the preschool programs in 1963 under the leadership of Professor Loris Malaguzzi.

What is the Reggio Emilia approach to early care and education?

- The Reggio Approach views each child as an individual and structures programs to meet the needs of each child.

- Reggio teachers develop the curriculum's general goals, activities, projects, and create the environment. The children's interests influence the curriculum and classroom projects. The projects include class discussions, investigations, field trips, the use of actual materials and guest speakers. The children's work on projects is documented and displayed in the classrooms and the school through drawings, photos, and other visible signs of the children's work.

- Reggio Emilia ECE programs view the classroom environment as a teacher and puts high focus on natural materials. The classroom is designed as a warm and inviting environment for children and adults. In a Reggio inspired classroom you might see live plants and homey touches, such as baskets for storage of classroom materials that support the home-school connection. Children's art work and documentation of projects is displayed on the walls of the center.

- Reggio Emilia approach includes extensive parent participation in the program.

Applying Your Knowledge

The Reggio Approach has gained popularity in the United States and many programs use the project approach in curriculum development and Reggio-inspired classroom design, materials, documentation of children's work and equipment.

As a person working in early care and education you can use the information discussed in this section to assist you in developing your teaching practices.

Check Your Understanding

✓ What are the 12 Principles of Child Development?

✓ Define Developmentally Appropriate Practice?

✓ What is the easiest of the 12 DAP Teaching Strategies to implement?

✓ What is the most difficult of the 12 DAP Teaching Strategies to Implement?

✓ What theorist discussed in this section best reflects your beliefs on how children learn and develop?

Resources

Child Development and DAP http://www.naeyc.org/positionstatements/dap

Resources for Erikson

Child Development Info http://childdevelopmentinfo.com/child-development/erickson.shtml

Resources on Piaget

Piaget Stages of Cognitive Development: http://children.webmd.com/piaget-stages-of-development

Resources on Montessori

Montessori Today   http://www.montessori.edu/news.html

Resources on Reggio Emilia

http://www.education.com/reference/article/Ref_Reggio_Emilia/

References
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Trawick-Smith, J. (2008). *Early childhood development: A multicultural perspective* (Fifth ed.). New York, New York: Pearson.

Gonzales-Mena and Eyler (2009). *Infant, toddler and caregivers: A curriculum of respectful, responsive, relationships based care and education*. (8th ed.). McGraw-Hill.

Module 3- Section A Worksheet

Reviewing the 12 Principles of Child Development, were there any concepts that were new to you?

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Create a definition for Developmentally Appropriate Practice.

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Which of the 10 DAP Teaching Strategies will be the easiest for you to implement and why?

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Which of the 10 DAP Teaching Strategies will be the most difficult for you to implement and why?

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Which of the theorists discussed in this section best reflects your beliefs on how children develop and why?

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