

Elizabeth barlow: child development in the early years

Psychology, Child Development



Child Development in the Early Years Within this assignment I will discuss the importance of practitioners in the children's workforce having a good knowledge of infant and child development theory. I will demonstrate my knowledge of both infant and child developmental theory including historical theory and theories of development in the womb. I will discuss specific aspects and theories I consider to be important within infant and child development and I will highlight theories of child development I find to be of more importance than others referencing these to my practice.

I will also discuss how children, young people and their parents benefit from practitioners within the educational system having a good knowledge of infant and child development theory. Early childhood development is defined as, "a set of concepts, principles, and facts that explain, describe and account for the processes involved in change from immature to mature status and functioning" (Katz, 1996, p. 137). Experts such as Beer (2000) divide child development into three broad categories which are: physical development; cognitive development and social, emotional and behavioral development.

Physical development is how we refer to any change in the body, including how children grow, how they move, and also how they perceive their environment. Gross motor skills and fine motor skills would also come under physical development. Cognitive development pertains to the mental processes such as language, memory and problem solving that children use to acquire and use knowledge. Emotional and social development addresses

how children understand and manage their own feelings and also how they handle relationships with others.

Over the years there have been many different theorists, each of them with their own personal views on child development. However, we must also that remember that the development of a child does not start on the day upon which they are born but in fact, the process of development starts at conception. Before birth it is the responsibility of the mother to ensure off healthy environment for the fetus to grow, I. E. The womb. Barker (1990) says, " The womb may be more important than the home. Glaucoma (2006) suggests that poor nutrition during fetal development could lead to the child to expect a hostile environment in later life, thus affecting its ability to pop with a richer environment. Glaucoma believes that developmental factors within the womb do not cause disease, however they create a situation where the individual may become more (or less) sensitive to certain factors in their postnatal environment.

Ludwig & Currie (2010) on the other hand, suggest that developmental factors in the womb can lead to disease and they believe that maternal weight gain during pregnancy increases birth weight independently of genetic factors and that this subsequently increases the long-term risk of obesity-related disease in the offspring. I believe that it is of most importance for practitioners within the children's workforce to have a good knowledge to boot intent and child development theory.

Without a good understanding I believe that as a primary career, wrong decisions could be made which could in theory, jeopardize the development of a child in our care. Hand Peter Drizzle (1971) believed that the child was an 'incomplete organism' which developed in different directions in response to different stimuli. He believed that adulthood was the critical stage of life and that childhood was merely preparation for adulthood. His belief was that adults in this time should 'mould' their children to make them into better adults.

From experience, I believe that there are some parents that still look at the child in this way. Parents often try to 'mould' their children into becoming the person that they themselves aspired and consequently failed to be. Child A is an eleven year old girl and from the age of three she has been driven by her mother to dance. Child A is often tired at school as she attends ballet, tap, modern and jazz lessons on a nightly basis and she often complains that her feet and body ache.

Child A has recently disclosed to member of staff at my setting that she does not want to be a dancer as her mother so wishes and that her mother is forcing her to take these lessons as she herself aspired to be a professional dancer and did not fulfill her dream. Reflecting on the experience of Child A, my opinion is that I would disagree with the theories of Drizzle and would instead agree more with the theories of British Philosopher, John Locke. British philosopher John Locke (1689) insisted that the mind is a blank state at birth, in Latin; a tabular Rasa.

He believed that all knowledge is created by experience, and from this perspective, developmental change is the result of external and environmental factors acting on a child whose only relevant internal characteristic is the capacity to respond. In agreement with John Locke, Watson (1913) coined the term behaviorism. This term defines development in terms of behavior changes caused by environmental influences. Watson did not believe in an inborn developmental plan of any sort but instead he claimed that children, through the manipulation of the environment, can be trained to do anything.

One environmental influence that plays a huge part in the development of children today is the television. Not only can time spent watching television take away time from healthy activities such as playing outside with friends or reading, but it can also take time away from activities such as sports and arts and crafts which promote the development of team work and skillfulness. Recent studies into children's television programmer show that many programmer do not deliver appropriate material to children, are stereotypical, include violent solutions to problems and often portray bad behavior.

In addition to this, studies led by Dimmitt Christians (2004), a pediatric researcher at the Seattle Children's Hospital and Regional Medical Centre, have linked television viewing before the age of three to conditions such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADD). Their studies revealed that each hour of television watched per day aged between one and three, increases the risk of attention problems, such as ADD, by almost ten per cent

at age seven. The American Academy of Pediatrics urges parents not to allow children under the age of three to watch television.

They say that these early years are crucial in a child's development and that we must limit children's exposure to television during the formative years of brain development. Personally I am in agreement with the theories of television being unhealthy for children and would strive to ensure any child in my care was offered alternative interaction such as talking, singing, reading or listening to music. With hundreds of children's television programmes available twenty-four hours a day, in recent years, parents and carers have come to view the television as a convenience.

Some parents think that if their child is quiet whilst placed in front of the television, then this must mean that they are happy. However, studies by the American Academy of Pediatrics show that this is incorrect and that in fact the child's brain is being over-stimulated which again can lead to attention problems later on in life. Their studies showed that children who spend more than four hours per day in front of a television are more likely to be overweight than children who engage in more stimulating activities such as outdoor play, reading or drawing.

Their studies also show that children who grow up watching violent acts on television are more likely to develop aggressive behavior later on in life or alternatively develop a fear that the world is a bad place and that something bad will happen to them, thus hindering their social and emotional behavior. In addition to this, I believe that by leaving a child in front of a television for

hours on end each day prevents any sort of bond to be formed between the child and the primary care giver.

The positive effects of parent and child interaction and bonding have been proven, thus echoing the work of Bowl, who spoke of the attachment theory. Bowl (1969) said that in order to survive, attachment was vital. He said that without adults to feed them, care for them and protect them, infants are physically helpless and cannot survive. Due to this theory, he argues that that way in which human beings have evolved means that infants are born with an innate tendency to form an attachment to a caregiver which will consequently increase their chances of survival.

Bowl also believed that attachment is a reciprocal process and so it is also likely that adults are innately programmed to become attached to their infants. In short, Bowl believes that for a child to socially and emotionally develop, an infant must develop a relationship with at least one primary caregiver. Some people disagree with Bowl's theory that attachment is a reciprocal process due to the fact that some mothers do not seem to have the ability to bond with their children and some people question whether attachment is actually caused by the behavior of the primary caregiver or by another factor.

It is wondered why some children are attached to their mothers whereas others are not. Insinuator and Bell (1970) supposed that secure attachments were the result of mothers being sensitive to their children's needs, thus bringing me to the story of Child B. Child B is a 14 year old

female at my setting with a range of social, emotional and behavioral issues. Child B was taken into care at the age of three due to the fact that her mother was an alcoholic and a drug addict. Social services reports say that from birth to the age of three, Child B was badly neglected by her mother and no real relationship or bond was formed between them.

Child B has been excluded from her previous two secondary schools due to gross misconduct and inappropriate behavior. Child B finds it very difficult to concentrate, does not trust easily and is regularly rude to other pupils and members of staff. Due to this behavior, the possibility of Child B having needs such as ADD or SAD have been looked into, however following reviews and meetings with doctors, it has been discovered that Child B does not have any additional needs and has not received a statement to SEN.

In the case of Child B it is my belief that SEN has not been developed socially, emotionally or behaviorally in the best way possible and that this could be largely due to the fact that no attachment was made to her mother as a young child. Since then, the opportunity for Child B to bond and form a relationship with a primary caregiver has not arisen due to the fact that Child B has been regularly moved around within the care system. Reflecting on this case study of Child B, it backs up both my views and the work of Bowlby.

The study shows that without an attachment and trusting relationship with the primary caregiver, children can and will struggle to emotionally, socially and behaviorally develop in the best way possible. Widdows (1978) presents the social learning theory and says that societal expectations and moralities

play a major role in the development of children. Widgets suggests that children develop and experience society in zones, and the way in which these zones interrelate can affect the child's development.

Bandeau (1963) suggests that children learn behaviors and concepts through interaction with society, and that the behaviors they learn influence how they think and what they grow to believe. Bandeau believes that for children to develop successfully, they must firmly understand how their own society works, so that they may alter their behaviors to fit within that society.

Bandeau and Widgets both believe that behavior and thinking patterns are societal linked and are learned behaviors. In contrast with Watson, who did not believe in an inborn developmental plan of any sort, Wilson (Papilla et al. 2006, p. 5) believed that there is a biological basis for all behavior. Wilson work goes on to show that children who are delayed in physical development will also be delayed in their ability to develop emotionally and cognitively.

Child C is a three year old boy who lives at home with his only his mother. His mother works of an evening and Child C is looked after by a babysitter. The babysitter arrives after Child C has been put to bed and therefore there is not opportunity for play or interaction between the babysitter and Child C.

During the day when Child Co's mother has house work to do, she sits Child C in his high chair in front of the television to keep him entertained. Child Co's mother has done this since an early age and at the age of three, Child C is still not a confident walker and prefers to crawl rather than walk and often cries to be carried when he is out of the house. Child C attends nursery one

day a week and experiences social barriers due to the delays in his physical development.

Unfortunately, children such as Child C will experience a different social reality than children who have not experienced physical disability or delay in development. This is due to the fact that people react to and act fervently towards people with disabilities. Looking at how abnormal development is affected by physical development, it is clear that there is a link between different developmental areas and how they affect one another. For children who develop normally, this interplay is hardly recognizable, as each area develops successfully and does not require review.

Yet physical growth requires the body to recognize and utilize outside experiences to develop (I. E. Recognizing that climbing will help build muscle memory) and the emotional ability to feel safe about trying new things. Therefore, physical development relies on emotional and cognitive development to be successful. Emotional development relies on thinking to interpret situations and to recognize responses received from people, in addition to actually being able to interpret their responses and shape behaviors accordingly.

Emotional development relies on physical development to be able to shape those behaviors. Cognitive development relies on both physical and emotional development to shape thoughts about behaviors, and to carry out the thoughts. If at any point one of these areas is delayed or limited, both of the other areas will be similarly limited. In conclusion, I believe that it is

extremely important for practitioners in the children's workforce such as ourselves to have a good knowledge of infant and child development theory so that we can put these theories into practice in our settings.

We must ensure that as key workers and teaching assistants, we can put theories such as the Attachment theory into practice within our setting. This promotion of the attachment theory may be for us as practitioners helping to build relationships between the child and the mother, or, by us as professionals building our own trusting working relationship with the child thus allowing the child to settle and fully engage in learning.

We must remember that developing children need to be offered a safe and protected environment in which they are able to explore both their own feelings and actions. This environment must offer new and unique concepts whilst at all times maintaining familiarity and at the same time must be cognitively and physically stimulating. Finally, this environment must allow the child to see and be a part of society and experience societal moralities. It is my belief that without this, the child will be unable to successfully function later on in life in their own society.