

Lifespan  
development.  
influences of nature  
and nurture on a 4  
year old child assi...

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HS1005 Environmental Influences Throughout this assignment I will be discussing the development of a four year old child. With the support of relevant theories including the work of Jean Piaget and Erik Erikson, I will discuss the environmental influences that promote the physical, cognitive and psychosocial development of a four year old child. I will also review the importance of play in the child's development and propose an activity of play that would enhance the child's development. In the world of a four year old child there is a lot of changing.

For in the fourth year in most western societies this is the time they will most commonly begin attending kindergarten/preschool. Energetic and imaginative best describe the 4-year-old. Imagination suddenly becomes greater than life for the 4-year-old, who often confuses reality and "make-believe." Four-year-olds feel good about the things they can do, show self-confidence, and are willing to try new adventures (Lesia Oesterreich, 2010). Growth of the body and brain, sensory capacities, motor skills and health are all parts of physical development (Papalia, Olds, Feldman, 2010).

By the fourth year the child has attained greater control over the smaller muscles, improving drawing skills and abilities to tie shoelaces and fasten buttons. Their balance also improves, so they also are now better at running, hopping, skipping and throwing balls. According to child psychologist and theorist Erik Erikson, the four year old child is according to his theory, in the initiative versus guilt stage. This means the child is becoming more independent and confident in their abilities. This initiative is moderated by guilt as the child realises that their initiative may place them in conflict with others (Kail & Cavanaugh, 2004).

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All young children need help to establish patterns of good eating and exercise for their present well being and for the years ahead. Routines can be very affective in promoting physical development. Routines involve repetition. Repetition involves predictability. Predictability involves stability. Stability involves security. Kids crave routines because routines make kids feel safe and secure. On a very basic level routines reassure children that their needs will be met. Routines also provide opportunities for children to experience success in what they are doing, which then promotes self-control and self-esteem (Elkins, 2010).

Family households can influence how easily a child could take to routine. Parents could set routines for a variety of things; one example is brushing teeth after meals. “ Most four year olds can brush their own teeth and this self-help skill is important to a child’s independence” (LaHaye, 2008). This task can also meet Erikson’s theory of initiative versus guilt, as the child can physically perform this task with minimal assistance, meeting their need of taking on more responsibility independently.

With the child routinely brushing their teeth after every meal, eventually this becomes a habit; ensuring that dental hygiene is met now and in future years. Another positive influence for physical development is kindergym. Kindergym is a movement based program accredited by gymnastics Australia, designed specifically for children around four years old. Australia’s Kindergym program ensures children can experience a wide range of movement activities and be encouraged to think, create, construct and solve problems with their own bodies.

Kindergym kids learn to be stronger in body, motor skills, strength and coordination (YMCA Sydney, 2010). Kindergym promotes physical development, through fun activities such as balancing, jumping, throwing and climbing. This influence also supports Erikson's theory of initiative versus guilt as they are required to perform individually with minimal assistance from others. Psychosocial development has been described as the patterns of change in emotions, personality & social relationships (Papalia, Olds, Feldman, 2010).

In addition to physical development, kindergym can also greatly influence the four year old child's psychosocial development. The kindergym programs are exercised in group environments, with between 20 and 25 children per session. This means there are more children and less area of play. The four year old child must now learn to share and take turns to avoid confrontation and avoid the guilt associated within Erikson's initiative versus guilt stage. The child is now learning and building on the social competencies required in creating friendships and avoiding consequences and guilt associated with fighting.

Piaget's view of the child making sense of the world through their own investigation emphasised the importance of the environment rather than other people. Since then his views have been modified to take account of the importance of social contacts. We all need other people to help us learn and young children need adults and other children (Dowling, 2010). If children can learn to be at ease with others and start to develop a social responsibility for them, then clearly this will affect their personal well being,

but will also better prepare them to contribute in a larger social world (Dowling, 2010).

The presence of a sibling in a child's life can support psychosocial development. The competencies required in building friendships are learnt skills and the relationship the child builds with their sibling can offer countless opportunities to learn from one another the social skills needed to socialise and build friendships. Early sibling relationships can be fuelled by most commonly, competition for a parent's love or support for each other as a partnership or bond built through shared experience.

With the typical sibling relationship, most will be throughout the first few years fuelled by competition for their mothers love and attention. Petty bickering is usually the outcome of most quarrels, but the intervention by the mother who does not wish to witness her children fighting offers as a lesson in understanding another's feelings and emotions and finding compromise. In contrast, a relationship where love and support is offered to each other through a partnership gained through understanding and shared experience, offers the psychosocial competencies required for building and nurturing friendships (Kramer & Conger, 2009).

The balance of support and conflict offered in a four year old child's relationship with their sibling, provides a unique opportunity to develop social cognitive and behavioural competencies that are linked to managing conflict and anger on one hand and providing support and nurturance on the other (Kramer & Conger, 2009). Perhaps then the balance of support and conflict in the sibling relationship may exert a positive effect in promoting

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psychosocial competence outside of the home, where they will need to utilise these skills in preschool to build new friendships.

Cognitive development is the patterns of change in mental abilities, such as learning, attention, memory, language, thinking, reasoning and creativity (Papalia, Olds, Feldman, 2009). Though the child may often confuse fact with fiction their mental capabilities are quite profound. They can usually count to 20, can or will quickly learn to recite their ABC's and can differentiate between past, present and future. According to Jean Piaget the four year old child is in the pre operational stage. This is when the child learns to use language and to represent objects by images and words (Berger, 2010).

Preschoolers love rhymes and songs, and singing and listening to music is frequently practised in preschool classrooms in western societies. Not only do preschoolers enjoy them, but they help children learn about numbers, letters, and sounds (" ABC song", " This Old Man"). As children's brains are developing at their fastest when they are very young, with 80 percent of brain development occurring by age 3, and 90 percent by age 5, music helps with making connections in the brain (Lesia Oesterreich, 2010).

The brain's multi-sensory engagement during music practice and performance enhances the same communication skills needed for speaking and reading. Musicians sharpen a specialized neural system for processing sight and sound, music and speech, which means that early musical training, can help children develop literacy skills and reduce literacy disorders (Oxford University press, 2009). Another influence that can promote cognitive

development is regularly reading. Reading to children is one of the most effective paths to literacy....

Children who are read to from an early age learn that reading and writing in English move from left to right and top to bottom and that words are separated by spaces (Papalia, Olds, Feldman). If a parent routinely reads with the child every night and consistently like the teeth brushing routine discussed above. Not only are they learning to sit quietly and listen but they are if encouraged to follow the story visually, they can link what they are hearing with what they are seeing. Children learn many skills when you read aloud to them.

These include better vocabulary, listening skills and attention span (Barhyte, 2010). Jean Piaget believed that during the preoperational stage the child's imagination flourishes, and language becomes a significant means of self-expression and of influence from others (Berger, 2006). Reading stories without pictures can be a positive way for children to utilize their vivid imaginations and also to expand on their vocabulary. During Jean Piaget's preoperational stage, the crucial item is the development of the ability to represent or symbolize by means of imitation, play, signs and symbols.

This Piaget calls the semiotic function (Kitchener, 1986). With understanding of the semiotic function it is understood that the preoperational child learns much through the form of play. One game often played in kindergarten is 'duck, duck, goose'. In 'duck, duck, goose' a group of players sit in a circle and one child (the fox) walks around the outside of the circle, tapping each child in the circle on the head, calling them duck until finally choosing one to

be the goose. The goose then stands and tries to catch the fox, chasing them around the circle before the fox sits in the goose's original place.

If the goose does not catch the fox before he/she takes their seat, the goose is now the fox and the game starts again. There is a large amount the child can gain by playing games like this. As it is a group game, the child is interacting with other children and by adhering the rules; they are also required to take turns. This factor of the game helps to build on their psychosocial development. Physically the child is standing up as fast as they can are running around a large circle whilst avoiding tripping over others as they run to their place in the circle.

The physical movement required to catch the 'fox' provides physical development. Finally once the child is placed in the 'foxes' role, they are required to think about which children are ducks and who it is that they will select to be the 'goose'. This selection process requires the child to mentally plan who they will choose to be the goose and then how far it is they need to run before taking their place back in the goose's original seat. The thinking and planning displayed in the selection process are the factors that promote cognitive development in the game.

In conclusion to this paper I believe it is proven that it is others that greatly influence the four year old child. Though the child is stronger than ever before and is looking for greater independence, this age group still heavily relies on others for assistance and nurturing in many ways. I believe it is no longer solely the parent's responsibility to care for the four year old child.

Society is required to take on a larger role in caring for the children through

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improved preschool programs and local establishments like kindergym and even playgrounds in residential areas, which are provided by local city councils.

Without the support and acceptance that can be expressed by both family members and society a four year old child's physical, cognitive and psychosocial development can be greatly affected for both the present and future. Word Count: 1947 words. References Barhyte, D. M. (2010). Break out the funny bedtime stories: Reading activities with young children.

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