

Classroom Insights From Educational Psychology

A Developmental Approach to Educating Young Children



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languages! Just as important for her students' future development was the fact that many of their parents learned to be more comfortable and involved at school. Rationales and suggestions for creating developmentally appropriate (or learner-centered) relationships and classroom practices like these are presented in the remaining chapters of this book.

Questions to Ponder

1. Think about yourself as the child in the middle of the ecological model in Figure 1.1. How would you explain your own adjustment to school in the early grades (if you can recall) or later grades in terms of your skills and dispositions and multiple contextual influences (e.g., home, school, neighborhood)? How did experiences in these contexts influence you?
2. What are your beliefs about child development? Do you support more of the contemporary or traditional belief statements in Table 1.2 or some combination? Why? How do your beliefs relate to how you might implement activities in the classroom?

(Note that these questions are intended to promote self-reflection, not provide a valid assessment of beliefs.)

Practice Exercises

1. **Interviews.** Invite children ages 4 or 5 and ages 7 or 8 years to participate in an "interview" with you. Tell them this will help you learn more about how they think and feel. Ask a series of questions to reveal their understandings of self and others; samples are provided here. Compare responses of older and younger children. Do their responses reflect typical developmental changes noted in this chapter? (Note: Do not be concerned if the younger children reveal very little in words.)
 - a. Tell me about yourself. What are you like? What kind of person are you? What are you not like?

Sample probes: Can you tell me something about the way that you look? Feel? Think? What are you good at? Not so good at? What would your mom or dad say about you? What would your friends say? What would your teacher say? Do you agree with what _____ might say?

- b. Tell me about one of your friends. What is his/her name? What is he/she like? Sample probes: How is he/she different from you? The same as you? Can you tell me something about how he/she looks/feels/thinks different from you?
2. **Piagetian-Like Conservation Tasks.** Invite individual children ages 4 or 5 and ages 7 or 8 years to participate in a brief activity with you. To examine the child's understanding of conservation of mass, show two equal balls of playdough or clay and ask, "Do both balls have just as much clay/dough?" When the child agrees that they are the same, then roll one of the balls into a hot dog shape as he observes. Then ask, "Now do the balls have the same amount of dough or are they different? Why did you say that they were the same/different?" To examine the child's understanding of conservation of number, show two lines with the same number (5–7) of small objects, such as candies or pennies, equal in length. Ask if the lines are the same. When the child agrees that they are the same (some will move the objects a bit to line up), spread out one line in front of the child so that it looks longer than the other one. Then ask, "Now do the lines have the same number of candies/pennies or are they different? Why?" Compare older and younger children's responses and check to see if they correspond to typical changes in children's thinking described in this chapter.
 3. **Games.** Invite children of different ages to play a familiar board game with you. Before you begin, ask them to explain the rules to you (tell them you don't remember). Their explanations are likely to reveal something

about their abilities to take your perspective, think about several things simultaneously, and plan ahead. Then play the game, periodically asking questions about their strategies and observing their abilities to attend and regulate their behavior. Again, compare older and younger children's behaviors and consider whether they reflect typical developmental shifts.

Key Words

Ecological perspective

5 to 7 developmental shift

Self-regulation

Memory strategies

Self-reflection

Theories of mind

Learner-centered principles and practices

Developmentally appropriate practices (DAP)