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University of Northern British Columbia

EDUC 633: Human Development

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INTRODUCTION

When I started my career, I had had some exposure to human development. It is covered briefly in most education degrees to help better understand the group of children we will be teaching. I as well had exposure during my undergraduate degree, but not to the extent of this course. This course covered theories on development, factors that affect development, key areas and creating the understanding between our typical and atypical students and how development impacts our teaching and learning.

WONDERINGS- AS AN EDUCATOR

As an educator, I often wonder what more we can do for children that come from underprivileged backgrounds—those facing socioeconomic hardship, unstable home lives, limited parental support, and sometimes learning disabilities. These challenges, through no fault of their own, can hinder their development and potential as students. This semester, we've explored how values like knowledge and education differ across individuals, yet foundational skills taught by parents and educators remain crucial for a child's growth—from early years through graduation. In schools and daycares, children learn far beyond the formal curriculum. This journal will reflect on early childhood development and my personal experiences in this area.

PRIOR EXPERIENCE WITH HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

We talked about throughout the semester that what is considered important knowledge varies among societies and cultures. This is important when we think about human development because the knowledge children are given in their formative years can help shape how they learn and grow once they are older. One aspect of development I think that currently being lost during

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those years was the notion of play. Play, pretend play, play with children your own age. It's all important. Play is a fundamental aspect of early childhood development, influencing cognitive, emotional, social, and physical growth.

When I started my Education Degree there was a daycare attached to the building, we had our classes in. I took a class titled 'Interpreting Play', which meant we studied and interacted with different types of play. This was a little out of my realm as I teach intermediate/secondary, but it was an elective course, and I did learn a lot. It turns out that the early childhood education center was running an experiment. Instead of having the kids inside, they were outside, playing and learning how to interact with one another. In the third chapter of "Child development and education in the twenty-first century" (2019) they discussed how important play is in those early developmental years. This is where children learn what is appropriate and what is not in terms of play and interaction with their peers. Though the observation occurred five years ago I still remember what the key take-aways from that observation were, which was highlighting the importance of interplay between structured routines, self-regulation, safety, and creativity, as well as the promotion of the overall well-being of the children. Structured routines, such as dressing appropriately for the weather, promoted independence of the children and a sense of belonging, while children's own instincts to safety risks demonstrated what they had learned thus far. Differences in boundary awareness helped emphasize the need for guided social learning- these children still need an adult to help them learn. Self-regulation was evident in children who adjusted their activities based on their needs, such as seeking solitary play for emotional balance. Messy play, particularly in muddy environments, supported sensory and motor skill development while encouraging creativity and problem-solving. Play is fundamental to early childhood development helping foster cognitive, emotional, social, and physical development. These

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observations align with what we have studied in human development this term, and more specifically children's development. This observation in particular helped highlight important aspects of a child's development that cannot be taught in a classroom but learned on the playground.

It is worth noting too that as society becomes more modern with toys and technology that many children no longer engage in peer play, as mentioned above, which is in turn impacting their developmental understanding of societal norms. Unlike my childhood spend outside, kids today stay inside, interacting through screens. The shift raises concerns about their development. During the observations I had at the ECE I initially questioned why children spent so much time outside instead of being inside and doing things such as reading. Upon my reflection, I realized how important outdoor play fosters crucial skills needed for child development. Skills such as conflict resolution and problem solving- a screen cannot teach this. Early childhood learning is vital and can shape and influence lifelong development.

WEEKLY READINGS

In "PROTOCOL: Early childhood education programs for improving the development and achievement of low-income children: a systematic review" (Besharov et al.,2020) it discussed the importance of early childhood development and how early childhood education plays a role in this. Through my experience in my education degree, I was able to see first-hand how important ECE is for school readiness and cognitive development. This is especially important for students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds. In my own practice, I often see children well below grade level and as an educator I am also aware there is only so much we can do in school to improve student literacy and other important skills- it must also be practiced

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and encouraged at home. But what happens for students from families with little to no education? How are these families to help their students? Early childhood education is one solution. This study emphasizes the importance of ECE to bridge the gap to academic readiness. In “Closing the gap in Academic Readiness and Achievement: The Role of Early Childcare” (2010) a similar study is conducted but in Quebec. They studied whether ECE impacted school readiness and academic achievement and found that access to formal childcare, for both socially advantaged and disadvantaged children, improved their achievement and school readiness when entering Kindergarten. This is important to consider for child development as children enter school, they all come from different backgrounds, some being prepared and some not. This should not be the fault of the child, but as we studied throughout the semester, we know a child’s background and family history with education greatly impacts their educational outcomes. “Childhood Development Outcomes between the Metropolitan Areas of Melbourne, Australia and Montreal, Canada” (Dea et al., 2019) suggests that while Melbourne generally has better early childhood development outcomes, the social policies and early education programs that Montreal has in place may contribute to reduced inequalities among certain subgroups, emphasizing the importance of effective early childhood interventions and policies. All three studies presented a similar theme of just how important early childhood education is and how access should be readily available for all families and children who wish to partake. In Geoggy et al., (2010) study a suggestion I would make is changing and implementing policy to ensure ECE is accessible for all families, especially those from low-income and disadvantaged backgrounds.

In our class text, “Child development and education in the twenty-first century” (2019), they talk about how children bring their own funds of knowledge from their experiences, knowledge and skills from their home. When I think about the global pandemic which occurred

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five years ago, I think about children who were pulled from school and homeschooled as their parents feared what was to come and how schools would operate among unprecedented times. I have no problem admitting that as a brand-new teacher I too had no idea how school would operate among the pandemic. I too at times felt fear, fear of the unknown which was Covid-19. There is absolutely no blame or shame placed on families who choose to pull their children from school, but I often wondered how equipped these parents were to pivot to homeschooling their children or to navigate that type of learning. Many times, throughout my first year I had to pivot to online learning, and it was hard. I had completed my Education Degree and in theory had the tools to succeed, but that did not always mean that I did. While I can recognize my failures, that does not mean others cannot as well. During the pandemic many families feared what was to come, which was valid. During this formative year children lost so much, including valuable education as well as socialization with their peers. Many families throughout the country turned to homeschooling and during our four weeks we started talking about knowledge children have, where it comes from and why they have certain knowledge vs. others. I would like to explore in the future of development how the Covid-19 pandemic impacted our students and how we can alleviate this.

My large question during this reading is what happens to children who come from underprivileged backgrounds? We already know that students from underprivileged backgrounds are disadvantaged but, in a review, completed by Tomul et al. (2011) it explores the relationship between family income, household size, and educational success. The study indicates that higher family income is correlated with academic achievement at all levels. To contrast this, larger households with more siblings tend to experience lower educational attainment, increased behavioral challenges, fewer opportunities, and a less supportive home environment, all of which

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negatively affect learning outcomes. Additionally, the study emphasizes that children from households with highly educated parents, who typically have a higher SES, are more likely to benefit from greater academic support and opportunities.

So, what happens when those academic supports are removed? Children receive support at school by trained professionals who understand what the child needs to be successful in their educational journey. I am personally not a parent; therefore, I cannot judge the decisions a parent(s) make for their children, but is this where children fell between the cracks of our system and fell behind to a point that is hard to come back from? In the year 2025, five years post-pandemic, we are seeing the effects of children who missed school, were homeschooled, pulled from school, etc. What we are seeing is irrevocable damage to their educational journey that we cannot get back from.

During our fifth week it was discussed how the potential of a child's development is greatly influenced by social and cultural context, as mentioned above. Values and beliefs shape what we consider important, and this concept aligns strongly with a Sociology course I took during my undergrad. We focused on the developing world and more specifically, education in the developing world and what that looked like in comparison to the Western world. We discussed and read about how what is considered important for development varies over cultures around the world. What is important in one part of the world may not be important in another. We studied how gender decided who was educated and who was not. Females were considered those who did not need to be educated, thus at a certain age they were removed from school, or they had never attended school all together. Societal contexts are incredibly important when we consider such a complex issue. Here in Canada, society believes both genders deserve to be

educated to their fullest extent, but due to gender roles, economic pressures and family expectations in the developing world this is not the case.

In “Child development and education in the twenty-first century” (2019) it is emphasized that “the learning environment must support children’s physical development, social relationships, and cognitive development.” This means that for children to thrive, their environment must be intentionally structured to nurture all aspects of their growth. A child’s development is not only influenced by what they are taught but also by the context in which they learn—this includes the emotional climate, physical surroundings, and the quality of relationships with peers and adults. Supportive environments can foster a sense of safety, belonging, and curiosity, which are all critical for healthy development. Factors such as access to resources, teacher responsiveness, peer interactions, and even the layout of a classroom can significantly impact a child’s ability to engage, learn, and grow. Therefore, creating inclusive, stimulating, and nurturing environments should be a central focus in any educational or caregiving setting. School is one of the key environments where children begin to understand their social position and develop a sense of identity in relation to others. However, not all educational systems prioritize the individual child’s development equally. For example, while India’s curriculum references learning through activity, exploration, and a "holistic" approach, the system often lacks a truly student-centered model. In contrast, Western education tends to emphasize differentiated instruction—adapting teaching and assessment based on individual student needs—which reflects a more personalized understanding of development. From my own perspective, one of the growing challenges in today’s learning environments is the role of technology. While it offers access to vast amounts of information, many students are not developmentally prepared to use it wisely. In my experience, students often rely on the internet

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or AI tools to provide quick answers, showing little interest in the learning process itself. This shift may hinder deeper understanding and critical thinking, as the focus becomes more about achieving high grades than genuinely engaging with content.

FINAL TAKEAWAY

An underlying theme of this course could be “human development is contingent on human interaction and how that develops and changes over time.” We need to consider the implications of socio-cultural influences when addressing disparities in education, which is what this course deepened my thinking upon. Children, regardless of their background or circumstances, should have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

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