Chapter 1 Class Notes

Child Development and Data Gathering

I. Contemporary Theories
   a. Long-standing debate in the field has centered on the issue of whether heredity or environment is responsible for children’s development
      i. Commonly referred to as the nature vs. nurture controversy
   b. Maturational theory
      i. Focuses on a biological or nature approach to human development
      ii. Explains all behavior in terms of genetics and biological changes that occur as an individual ages
      iii. Arnold Gesell believed that all development is governed primarily by internal forces of biologic and genetic origin
         1. Was one of the first to describe children’s achievements according to age and to explain his findings in ways that parents could understand and find useful
      iv. Few scientists would disagree that genetics exert a strong influence on human development and, in some cases, even a limiting effect
         1. Child’s height, eye color, shoe size, etc. are the direct result of genes inherited from his or her biological parents
         2. Chromosomal abnormalities that cause Down syndrome or fetal alcohol syndrome are also likely to result in a range of lifelong learning and physical disabilities
         3. New research is also looking at possible links between genetics and:
            a. Personality traits such as:
               i. Shyness
               ii. Aggressiveness
            b. Predispositions to certain mental health problems
   v. Most experts do not accept the fact that it is solely responsible for all human behavior
   vi. Gesell’s observations have been translated into norms or benchmarks that have proven useful for assessing and monitoring the range of children’s developmental skills and abilities
      1. Scientists have updated his original standards (which were based on observations of middle-class Caucasian children) to more accurately reflect today’s population diversity
   c. Psychoanalytic and psychosocial theory
      i. Implies that much of human behavior is governed by unconscious processes, some of which are present at birth, and others that develop over time
ii. Sigmund Freud is the acknowledged originator of psychoanalytic theory
   1. Believed that children’s behavior is a reflection of their inner thoughts and conflicts and that these vary according to stages
   2. The way in which these emotional problems are resolved gradually forms the child’s basic personality, especially during the first five year of life

iii. Psychosocial theory is based on the work of Erik Erikson
   1. Expanded on Freud’s ideas about personality development
   2. Believed that each developmental stage is characterized by certain conflicts which must be resolved
      a. Once a successful resolution has been achieved, a person is then motivated to undertake the next challenge
   3. Acknowledges the influence of environment and social interaction
      a. Erikson coined the term “ego identity” to describe a person’s conscious awareness of self (who I am in relation to others) and the lifelong changes that occur as a result of social interactions

iv. Erikson was the first to describe development across the life span by introducing his eight universal stages of human development
   1. First four stages address the early years, and the last four cover the span from adolescence to the later years
      a. Trust vs. mistrust (0-12 months)
         i. Establishing a sense of trust with caregivers
      b. Autonomy vs. shame and doubt (1-3 years)
         i. Learning to gain control over some behaviors (e.g., eating, toileting, sleeping) and developing a sense of autonomy or independence
      c. Initiative vs. guilt (3-5 years)
         i. Using social interaction to gain control over a person’s everyday world
      d. Industry vs. inferiority (5-12 years)
         i. Developing a sense of competence and pride through successful accomplishments
      e. Identity vs. confusion (12-20 years)
         i. Learning about self in relationship to others
      f. Intimacy vs. isolation (early adulthood)
         i. Exploring and forming intimate relationships
      g. Generativity vs. stagnation (middle adulthood)
i. Focusing on family, career, and contributing to society

h. Integrity vs. despair (old age)
   i. Reflecting back on one’s life and formulating a sense of satisfaction or dissatisfaction

v. Although the psychoanalytic and psychosocial theories are not as popular as they once were, they continue to foster research in areas such as:
   1. Caregiver consistency
   2. Attachment
   3. Morality
   4. Sibling relationships

d. Cognitive-developmental theory
   i. Attributed to Jean Piaget, who theorized that children construct knowledge and form ideas through active exploration of their environment
      1. Term “constructivism” is often used today in reference to this style of learning
   ii. Piaget believed that children progress through four major stages of intellectual development, beginning in infancy and continuing into the late teens
      1. Sensorimotor (birth-2 years)
         a. Reflexive behavior gives way to intentional behavior
         b. Children use their senses to discover the world around them
      2. Preoperational (2-7 years)
         a. Children begin thinking in symbols about things in their immediate environment
      3. Concrete operational (7-11 years)
         a. Children now are in the process of developing internal schemes for understanding their immediate world
            i. They are learning to:
               1. Think logically
               2. Anticipate outcomes
               3. Classify objects
               4. Problem-solve
            ii. These emerging schema lead to understanding such things as basic math and spatial concepts
      4. Formal operational (11-15 years)
         a. Child develops complex thinking skills related not only to objects and experiences, but also to
abstract thoughts and ideas and the ability to solve problems

iii. Piaget’s ideas are evident today in many early childhood programs where developmentally appropriate learning centers and discovery learning are practiced

iv. Lev Vygotsky
   1. Agreed with Piaget’s notion that development follows a unique pattern, but believed that social and cultural environments played an active and influential role in shaping the learning process
      a. As children begin to internalize social rules and cultural expectations and development self-control, the nature of these directives gradually changes
      b. Adults stop telling children what to do and instead shift to encouraging and assisting their active involvement in learning new skills
      c. Vygotsky referred to this as the Zone of Proximal Development

2. Considered children’s acquisition of speech and language an important step
   a. Believed that young children spend significant time learning new words and thinking about their meaning and use
   b. Observed that some children hold conversations with themselves as a way of thinking out loud
      i. Referred to this stage as “self-talk” or inner speech
      ii. Suggested that the process gave children an opportunity to rehearse the meaning of words and their use as communication tools

v. Marie Montessori
   1. Trained as a pediatrician, and later became interested in educating children who were considered unteachable
      a. Was convinced that all children had potential but that traditional instructional methods might not always be effective
      b. Her observations led to her belief that children learned best through a process of self-directed exploration
      c. Designed sensory-based materials that were self-correcting and required limited adult intervention
      d. Also developed educational programs based on a philosophy that emphasized children’s natural curiosity and self-directed involvement in learning experiences
vi. Cognitive-developmental theorists have enhanced our understanding of how children learn and construct meaning

1. Have also made us aware that children differ in their learning styles and that instructional approaches must be individualized to address each child’s unique developmental needs

2. Application of these findings is evident in the National Association for the Education of Young Children’s (NAEYC) position statement on Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) and those of other early childhood organizations

3. Knowledge of cognitive-developmental theory has also influenced the concept and delivery of early intervention services

4. Researchers continue to study children’s cognitive development as it relates to:
   a. Curriculum
   b. Instructional methods
   c. Family involvement
   d. Influence of culture and social interactions

e. Behaviorism and social learning theory

i. In its modern form, stems from the work of B.F. Skinner and John B. Watson, who formulated a nurture or environmental approach to learning

   1. Argued that development, for the most part, involves a series of learned behaviors based on an individual’s positive and negative interactions with their environment
      a. Reinforcing a behavior typically causes it to be repeated

   2. Skinner also explained how the association between two events results in learning (stimulus-response)

ii. Albert Bandura modified some of these earlier ideas when he formulated his own theory of social learning

   1. Viewed behavior as a combination of environmental influences (nature) and cognitive abilities (nurture)
   2. Believed that children learned both positive and negative behaviors through observation and imitation
   3. Did not agree that reinforcers were necessary to motivate or change behavior

iii. Behavioral theory principles are employed by families and teachers on a daily basis

   1. Expect children to comply with requests and then reward or punish accordingly
   2. Model behavior that children are likely to imitate
   3. Provide encouragement and reinforce or increase the child’s efforts
iv. Behavioral procedures are also used to address serious developmental problems, such as:
   1. Aggression
   2. Feeding disorders
   3. Anger management
   4. Obesity
   
f. Bioecological theory
   i. Little dispute today that environment exerts a direct influence on children’s development
   ii. Noted psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner alleged that environment shaped a person’s development
      1. Proposed an ecological model that describes environment as being multi-layered, from the settings in which a person lives, to relationships within these groups, experiences in other social settings, and the shared beliefs and values of one’s culture
      2. Recently modified his original ideas to include the influence of biological factors, and offers several unique perspectives on human developments
         a. Recognizes environment as having multiple and often complex layers versus being treated as a single entity
         b. Acknowledges that a person’s behavior is not determined by any one layer alone but rather by interactions that take place on a combination of levels
         c. Recognizes the interactive nature of environment—that environment not only affects an individual, but that a person’s behavior, age, and interactions are continually changing the nature of that environment
   iii. Bioecological theory has had a significant impact on early childhood practice
      1. Has raised awareness of diversity issues, which has led to the development of anti-bias curriculums, assessment procedures, play materials and teacher education programs that reflect sensitivity and respect for individual differences

II. Essential Needs
   a. All children have essential physical and psychological needs that must be met if infants and children are to survive, thrive, and develop to their best potential
      i. Developmental psychologists have long considered the early years as the most critical in the entire life span because never again will the child grow so rapidly or change so dramatically, and never again
1. Data obtained from brain research has documented their assumptions
   ii. During these very early years, children learn all of the many behaviors that characterize the human species
   iii. Never again will the child be so totally dependent on parents, caregivers, and teachers to satisfy the basic needs of life and to provide opportunities for learning
b. Essential needs can be separated into physical, psychological, and learning needs
   i. Must be understood that they are mutually interrelated and interdependent
   ii. Meeting a child’s physical needs while neglecting psychological needs may lead to developmental problems
      1. Opposite also is true
         a. A child who is physically neglected may experience difficulty in learning and getting along with others
         b. Addressing children’s essential needs in all areas improves their chances of developing to their full potential
   iii. Addressing children’s essential needs in all areas improves their chances of developing to their full potential
c. Physical needs
   i. Adequate shelter and protection from harm: violence, neglect, and preventable accidents
   ii. Sufficient food that is nutritious and appropriate to the child’s age
   iii. Clothing and shoes suitable to the climate and season
   iv. Access to preventive health and dental care
      1. Treatment of physical and mental conditions as needed
      2. Immunizations as prescribed for childhood illnesses
   v. Personal hygiene: hand washing, brushing teeth, and bathing
   vi. Rest and activity, in balance; space for indoor and outdoor play
d. Psychological needs
   i. Affection and consistency
      1. Nurturing families and teachers who can be depended on to “be there” for the child
   ii. Security and trust
      1. Familiar surroundings with parents and teachers who respond reliably to the needs of the infant and child
   iii. Reciprocal exchanges
      1. Beginning in earliest infancy give-and-take interactions that promote responsiveness in the child
   iv. Appropriate adult expectations as to what the child can and cannot do at each level of development
v. Acceptance and positive attitudes toward whatever cultural,
   ethnic, language, or developmental differences characterize the
   child and family

e. Learning needs
i. Play as an essential component of early learning
   1. Infants and young children need unlimited opportunities
      to engage in play in all of its many forms with freedom to
      explore and experiment, with necessary limits clearly
      stated and consistently maintained
ii. Access to developmentally appropriate experiences and play
    materials
iii. An appropriate “match” between a child’s skill levels and the
    materials and experiences available so the child is challenged
    but not excessively frustrated
iv. Errors and delays in achieving a skill are treated as important
    steps in the learning process, never as reasons for criticizing or
    ridiculing a child
v. Adults who demonstrate in their everyday lives the appropriate
   behaviors expected of the child, especially in language, social
   interactions, or ways of handling stress
   1. Adults serve as important models of behavior for children
   2. Children learn far more from what adults do than from
      what they say
vi. Providing children with a literacy-rich environment and including
    them in an active language “community” where they can learn to
    communicate through sounds, gestures, signs, and eventually
    words and sentences (either spoken, signed, or written)
f. The need for respect and self-esteem
i. A supportive environment in which the child's efforts are
   encouraged and approved
   1. “Thank you for picking up your crayons without being
      asked!”
ii. Respect for accomplishments whether small or large, for errors
    as well as successes
   1. “Look at that! You laced your shoes all by yourself” (no
      mention of the eyelet that was missed)
iii. Recognition that accomplishment, the “I can do it” attitude, is the
    major and most essential component of a child’s self-esteem
   1. “You’re really getting good at pouring the juice!”
iv. Sincere attention to what the child is doing well; using
    descriptive praise to help the child learn to recognize and
    respect his or her own accomplishments
   1. “You got your shoes on the right feet all by yourself!”
v. Awareness of the effort and concentration that go into acquiring
   basic developmental skills; providing positive responses to each
small step as a child works toward mastery of a complex skill, such as self-feeding with a spoon
1. “Right! Just a little applesauce on the spoon so it stays on.”
g. Only when children’s basic needs are satisfied can we expect them to be ready and able to learn
   i. Researchers continue to demonstrate the critical nature of this relationship
   ii. These findings have prompted support for numerous programs that assist families in meeting children’s needs for:
      1. Nutritious food
      2. Health care (physical and oral)
      3. Safe and nurturing homes
      4. Learning opportunities
iii. Examples include:
       1. Head Start
       2. School Breakfast
       3. Parents as Teachers
       4. State Children’s Health Insurance Program (SCHIP)
iv. Early childhood educators also understand this critical connection and devote considerable time and attention to making sure children’s needs are being met

III. Data Gathering
a. What we know about children stems from first hand observation
   i. Recorded observations provide the foundation for what we know about:
      1. Child development
      2. Effective teaching
      3. Curriculum models
      4. Significance of parent-child relationships
   ii. Early childhood educators recognize the importance of gathering information about children’s behavior and development
      1. Despite increasing pressures for standardized testing, documentation and accountability issues in schools, teachers understand the value of observing young children in their naturalistic settings
         a. Referred to as authentic assessment
         b. Considered the most effective and developmentally appropriate method for evaluating young children
      2. Performance-based information about children’s developmental progress is collected in the context of everyday settings and activities
         a. Samples of children’s products, family input and teacher observations are collected continuously
and systematically to document evidence of learning
b. This information provides an ongoing, well-rounded picture of the child and reduces the bias that results when only one evaluation source is used

3. Authentic assessment also helps teachers understand children’s skills, abilities, and special needs against a background of environmental factors that help shape their development
   a. Results of authentic assessment can be used to design learning goals, interventions and responsive environments that effectively meet children’s individual needs

b. Teachers as classroom observers
   i. Regularly scheduled observations and assessments of children’s developmental progress are benchmarks of high quality early childhood programs
      1. Watching and recording what children actually do in the classroom and during outdoor play gives teachers insight into their progress, strengths and limitations
      2. Information acquired through observational methods can also be helpful for identifying children who may have special talents and/or learning needs
      3. Teachers can also use this information to design activities, instruction, and environments that are appropriate and effective for promoting learning
   ii. The ability to conduct and interpret meaningful observations requires that teachers be familiar with children’s development and know what expectations are appropriate
      1. Must understand that family, culture and linguistic differences may account for variations in what children know and are able to do
      2. With time and practice, teachers can become proficient at:
         a. Identifying specific behaviors for observation
         b. Knowing what to look for
         c. Recording observations in an objective manner
         d. Using the results to meet children’s individual needs

c. Families as observers
   i. Families should always be welcomed in their child’s classroom, whether as scheduled observers or on a drop-in basis
      1. They have a right to see and question everything that occurs in the classroom and outside play area
2. When family members arrange for a scheduled observation, they can be given a clipboard and paper on which to make notes about whatever is of interest or concern.

3. Teachers should arrange a follow-up meeting to:
   a. Learn the family’s thoughts about the program
   b. Point out the child’s positive qualities
   c. Share mutual concerns about the child’s progress

ii. Observations made by family members at home or at school are invaluable
   1. They know and understand their child better than anyone else and see him or her behaving in almost every imaginable circumstance
   2. Families are aware of the child’s likes and dislikes, joys and anxieties, positive and negative qualities
   3. Most importantly, they often have particular goals and objectives they want their child to achieve and they care deeply about their child’s well-being

IV. Observation Methods
   a. Anecdotal notes
      i. Several times each day, the teacher takes a minute or less to write down a few relevant words about what they see happening
         1. Notes can be recorded on a small notebook or pad carried in a pocket
         2. Teacher makes entries that are brief, dated phrases about discrete behaviors observed for a given child
         3. Useful for tracking development in one or more domains or to gather information about a specific concern
      ii. Over time, these notes yield a running record, or composite picture, of the child’s progress
         1. May reveal a need for special guidance or changes in instructional strategies
            a. If so, continued note-taking helps the teacher determine if the child is actually benefiting from a planned intervention
      iii. When anecdotal notes are filed chronologically by developmental domains, they also become valuable for:
         1. Placing a child
         2. Writing progress reports
         3. Preparing for family conferences
   b. Time or event sampling
      i. Enable a teacher to collect behavioral data on one or more children simultaneously during a given time frame or activity
         1. Simple score sheet can be developed for recording purposes with children’s names listed along one axis,
and the times and behavioral codes/categories identified across the other

2. New sheet is dated and used for recording each day’s observation

ii. Sampling approach is often used to obtain information about children’s language development
   1. Observer writes down every utterance a child makes, exactly as the child says it
   2. One purpose of the samplings which are usually recorded for 10 to 15 minutes at a time over a month-long period or so, is to track the child’s speech and language progress
   3. Another purpose is to see if the child’s language “works”
      a. Is the child communicating effectively?
      b. Does the child get what he or she needs and wants by using language?
   4. No other behavior (except communicative gestures or facial grimaces) are recorded, although brief notations might be made
   5. Language samples are invaluable in planning individualized programs
      a. Also effective for recalling quips or insightful statements that the child has made

c. Frequency and duration counts
   i. Used to help teachers determine how often a specific behavior actually occurs (frequency) or how long it continues (duration)
      1. Counts are easily made while teachers perform their other responsibilities
      2. One form of frequency count simply requires the teacher to make a tally mark every time the child engages in the specified behavior
         a. Count may reveal that a two-year-old who was said to cry or hit “all the time” was actually doing so only once or twice per morning and some mornings not at all
         b. For behaviors that occur at a high rate, teachers sometimes use a golf stroke or hand held counter
   ii. Frequency counts give teachers objective information that can help them to decide whether a “problem” is really a problem
   iii. Duration count measures the amount of time a child remains on task or engages in particular behavior
      1. Helpful for deciding if actions are needed to increase or decrease a specific behavior

d. Checklists and rating scales
   i. Checklists permit a teacher or other observer to quickly record the occurrence of certain skills or behaviors
1. Often constructed by teachers to reflect program objectives
2. The lists, whether teacher-made or commercial, can be simple or detailed, depending on need

ii. Rating scales are usually designed to target specific behaviors
   1. Provide an efficient method for recording teacher observations and later retrieving information in a meaningful way

e. Portfolios
   i. Representative examples of a child’s work (drawings, photographs of block structures that have been built, notes describing manipulative activities completed, and audiotapes of conversations and language samples) offer another effective method for tracking children’s developmental progress
      1. Teachers select materials that reflect a child’s learning across all developmental domains and assemble them in an individual portfolio for each child
      2. Information obtained from teacher and family observations should also be included in this collection to add insight and meaning
   ii. Materials in a child’s portfolio should be reviewed periodically to monitor changing interests, mastery of specific skills, and need for additional instruction
      1. Teachers can also use these items when preparing for parent conferences and for sharing with families to illustrate the points being discussed
      2. Children’s portfolios also often reveal important information about the effectiveness of a curriculum or current teaching methods and can be beneficial for program improvement

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