Cristina Marie Romero

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Observations of Physical and Motor Development in a Child

Introductory Child Development (ECE2000)

Instructor Martha Patricia Perez-Enriquez

In the education field, the best way to learn about theories and development is through reading and observation. In this paper, I will use readings and personal observations of a child to discuss the physical and motor development of this child. Knowing how a child develops is beneficial to future early childhood education teachers as this knowledge helps them to create developmentally appropriate lessons that involve some physical attributes. In my observations, I witnessed different uses of large and small muscle movements and some slight development. To understand my observations and the topics they directly address, physical and motor development must be defined.

A child's physical development is his body's growth, the physical changes of his brain, changes in sleep and nutritional needs, and his health overall.  Example of physical changes to the brain would be the growth of more neuron connections and "the dramatic growth and later pruning of synapses in the visual, auditory, and prefrontal cortex" (Santrock, 2013, p. 139).  Some more specific physical developments would be the child growing in height, gaining weight, and taste preferences.  Motor development is a more specific category of physical development that involves large and small muscle activities (Santrock).  Motor development includes posture control, learning to walk and write, and developing a controlled grasp.  There are two general types of motor skills: gross motor skills and fine motor skills.  Gross motor skills involve using the large muscles, such as using leg muscles to walk.  Fine motor skills involve small muscles, such as using the muscles in one's hand to grasp a pencil and write.  Play can help children to develop their gross motor skills and fine motor skills by allowing them to use and practice with those skills (PBS.org, "By leaps and bounds").  As the child physically develops, so do his motor skills.

Due to the manner in which I observed, I was not able to find out any specific information about the child I watched. My description of him is speculative and, through further observations, may be found incorrect. To keep anonymity, I will refer to the child as Jack rather than by his real name. Jack is four-years-old and attends a preschool, at which I observe. He is Caucasian and male. Jack is of average build and height for a child his age and appears to have no physical disabilities. He is in class with his identical twin brother, but I do not know much else about their family or background.

Jack’s physical development appears to be correct for his age. In my first section of observations, the children were having naptime. Jack was lying on his cot, but constantly shifting and sitting up. A young teacher’s helper came over and sat him in her lap. She rocked him back and forth as soothing music played, something Santrock suggests on page 245. This action would calm him enough to rest by himself for about ten minutes before he would become restless again. For his overall health, Jack seems relatively healthy as he does not have trouble breathing after running across the room and shows no signs of illness or sickness. He can speak in full sentences and express himself through those using words; for example, he expressed his upset to the teacher by telling her another student was “sitting on the tracks” with which he was playing. He appears to of the right physical development for his age (Santrock, p. 236) as he is slim, has little baby fat in his face, and has fairly precise control over his limb movements.

Jack displayed some use of his gross motor skills. Jack is an active child, who likes to move positions frequently, but can also sit still for about twenty minutes when focused on a task. He moves around the classroom in speedy manner with long, jerky strides. In one instance, he hopped across the room, though his hops were a bit stilted and small and, in another instance, he trotted across the room, matching with video that mentioned “as [a child’s] balance grows, they become able to jump and hop” (University of Cincinnati, 2012, “Gross Motor Skill Development Preschool”). A few times, he would twirl in small circles very easily and walk backwards around the room. He crawled or scooted repeatedly around the train tracks he was assembling. When he wanted to place another piece on the track, he laid on the floor to do so. Overall, through is ways of moving around the room, he “(explored) moving [his] (body) in varying ways” (University of Cincinnati, “Gross Motor Skill Development Preschool”). When the children were seated on mats for a group activity, he shook when his name was called for part of a song they were singing along to. He mimicked the teacher’s motions for the songs, though his motions were more rapid and less fluid. I did not have the chance to observe him during recess yet, but the school does have low riding, big wheel tricycles, different sized balls, and different surfaces to climb on in its playground. I feel the school is well prepared to assist Jack is further developing and practicing his large motor skills. I would recommend, perhaps, more things in the classroom to help Jack practice his those skills, as the only time to practice these skills appears to be during recess.

Considering I did not observe during recess time, I saw more instances of Jack using his fine motor skills rather than his large motor skills addressed above. He rolled a small pumpkin on a counter and then picked up a plastic squash by its stem with one hand. When he assembled his train tracks, he picks up each piece with one hand and places it down precisely where he wants to attach it, matching with Santrock when he wrote, “By 4 years of age, children’s fine motor coordination…is more precise” (p. 242). When he moved around the room, he either snapped his fingers or clapped his hands; sometimes he did a combination of both while moving. He sat at a table and used screwdriver to drill in some small screws into a slot in a block; he was very focused on this activity and stayed at the table for about twenty minutes. He would often grab and clutch toys away from his brother. He helped set up the mats for group time and placed them fairly evenly apart. When he put on his jacket, he struggled to zip it up and had to ask a classmate to zip it for him, though he getting closer to being able to “fasten clothes, zip, and put on clothes with little assistance” (University of Cincinnati, 2012, “Fine Motor Skill Development During Preschool”). The classroom has plenty of toys and activities that help Jack practice his fine motor skills. As Jack gets older, the classroom will need to have more art supplies to allow him to make artistic drawings and more paper to help him develop his pencil grasp and writing. I would recommend more blocks of varying sizes and shapes to help him adapt to different grasps.

This assignment was certainly beneficial in utilizing my observations to make some constructive and useful to my further educational development. Having read the related chapters and watched the related videos before my observations, I was excited to observe things that matched with what I had read. By observing, I gather a more concrete understanding of concepts address in readings and videos and was better able to understand their implications. This assignment changed how I will work with children in my future career, as before my observations, I placed more importance on fine motor skills than gross motor skills in the classroom. I now realize that both gross and fine motor skills are beneficial to students and are necessary to their healthy and proper development. I am planning on giving equal focus to both motor skills in my future lesson plans and teacher-student interactions. I am looking forward to further observations to see more development with Jack and to better learn about other developmental concepts.

Works Cited

PBS.org (n.d.). By Leaps and Bounds: Physical Development. Retrieved from <http://www.pbs.org/wholechild/parents/dev.html>

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