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Social and Emotional Development in a Child

Introductory Child Development (ECE2000)

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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 social and emotional 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 assisting in social and emotional growth. In my observations, I witnessed different examples of emotional development and social interactions. To understand my observations and the topics they directly address, social and emotional development must be defined.

Social development and emotional development are intrinsically tied together as they both influence each other. Social development involves many inner workings of a child including self-concept and self-esteem. Self-concept is “Children’s beliefs about themselves” (University of Cincinnati, 2012, “Social Emotional Video 18”). Self-esteem is the value an individual places on his own beliefs about himself. Relating to these internal workings, “Emotional development refers to feelings within oneself in response to outside situations and experiences” (University of Cincinnati, 2012, “Social Emotional Video 17”). In addition, both self-concept and self-esteem are affected by a child’s temperament, “the natural style of interacting with or reacting to people, places, and things” (University of Cincinnati, 2012, “Social Emotional Video 17”). “Many researchers define social competence as a set of social, emotional, and cognitive skills and behaviors that assist children in successfully adapting to their environment,” meaning that to be socially competent, children must have those skills (University of Cincinnati, 2012, “Social Emotional Video 18”).

Due to the manner in which I observed, I still was not able to find out any more specific information about the child I watched. My description of him remains speculative and may be incorrect. To continue 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 was unable to gather any information on their family or background.

Jack appears to have incredibly good emotion regulation, with emotion regulation being “defined as the extrinsic and intrinsic process responsible for monitoring, evaluating, and modifying emotional reactions in order to accomplish one’s goals” (University of Cincinnati, 2012, “Social Emotional Video 17”). He only reacts in a negative emotional manner when he is interacting with his brother, such as covering his ears when he brother presented a project to the class. Jack displayed no such negative reaction when interacting with other students and handled any difficult situations relatively calmly. When a child bit Jack, he reacted by getting their teacher rather than by hurting the child or screaming and crying, showing that he modified his emotional reactions to stay calm and get an adult in a violent situation. This emotional regulation fits in perfectly with Jack’s overall peaceful temperament. With another definition of temperament being “Temperament serves as the foundation for each child’s personal style – their own way of approaching or reacting to the world”, Jack’s way of approaching the world is to tell people how he is feeling and work towards a solution rather than immediately attacking someone who has hurt him (University of Cincinnati, 2012, “Social Emotional Video 17”). My recommendation for his teachers would be to help Jack continue to develop his problem solving so that, eventually, he can solve his problems without needing assistance from an adult.

Jack’s main form of social interaction comes through mimicking the actions of the adults in the classroom. As “Infants and toddlers observe and imitate adults and peers in their environment when they are trying to figure out how to do something that they haven’t done before”, Jack mimics the teachers when learning how to use a screwdriver, how to dance to a new song, and how to sit in the group circle (University of Cincinnati, 2012, “Social Emotional Video 17”). The only peer I saw him imitate was his brother while they were both building an extensive train track. He rarely looks to other peers to figure something out, meaning that he is learning most of social interactions from his teachers rather than his peers. The only time he asked for help from a peer (to zip of his winter vest) was when all the adults were preoccupied with something else.

Jacks peer status, which “measures the extent to which a child is liked or accepted by a peer group,” appears to be high in the sense that all his peers seemed to accept his love of building train tracks as they would move out of the way so Jack could continue building and they shouted his name loudly when they played a group game of naming who was at school that day (University of Cincinnati, 2012, “Social Emotional Video 18”). While his peer status may be high, Jack does not appear to have many friends apart from his brother. “Friendship is a two-fold relationship that requires mutual selection between two specific children,” and Jack rarely interactions with other peers, besides his brother (University of Cincinnati, 2012, “Social Emotional Video 18”). One time he offered a toy to another classmate, but that interaction seemed more like an act to have the child move out of his playing area rather than an exchange between friends.

Despite his low number of friends, Jack has a very good handling of social interactions as he has mastered foundation skills, “those necessary for basic interaction with others such as maintaining eye contact, respecting personal space, and understanding gestures and facial expressions” (University of Cincinnati, 2012, “Social Emotional Video 18”). He covers his eyes when a peer sticks her tongue out at him, meaning he understands that sticking one’s tongue out is bad behavior. He also makes eye contact with his teachers, when they crouch down to speak to him. He attempts to stay out of others personal space while his playing and is able to negotiate peers out of his personal space by giving them toys, like the example above. Jack is excellent as socializing, so I can only assume that he does not have many friends because, for now, he does not want many friends and would prefer to play by himself or with his brother. My only recommendation for his teachers would be for them to try to encourage him to play with other children more, as currently he has no motivation to do so.

This assignment was certainly beneficial in utilizing my observations to make some constructive and useful realizations and connections to my further educational development. Having read read the chapters, watched the videos, and completed these three papers, I was excited to apply my observations with what I had read and seen and written previously. By observing and writing, I gathered a more concrete understanding of concepts addressed in readings and videos and was better able to understand their implications and connections. This assignment changed how I will work with children in my future career, as I now know that some children need more guidance on practicing their social skills than other children need. I now better understand the connections between emotional development and social development. I am planning on giving more attention to helping children better develop their social competency and stronger self-concepts. I truly feel that these collective observations have influenced the way I view observation in general and in how it applies to understanding students and creating developmentally appropriate practices.

References

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