Reflective Narrative One: Foundations of Child Development

Students will demonstrate knowledge of the theoretical and empirical foundations of the discipline.

When rereading this objective, the theorists that are extremely influential within child development are Lev Vygotsky and Erik Erikson from their research on children and their development. They have been influential because of their knowledge and understanding of how children develop, starting from infancy into adulthood. Lev Vygotsky is one theorist who researched the zone of proximal development. Erik Erikson discusses eight development tasks that infants all the way to adults go through at certain times in their lives. I have been able to demonstrate my knowledge in many different situations from my internships, to my job, and other experiences working with children.

Zone of proximal development is based on the idea of acknowledging what children can do with or without help. It is important to allow children to explore and experiment on their own because that is the basis of their learning. Children learn best by doing and being exposed to new situations so they can explore and figure it out on their own. On the other hand, helping children is important as well, but remembering that it should be minimal. Helping them by questioning them and giving suggestions that they can choose from is helping them have an opinion in what they want or need; it becomes their idea. As an educator, helping children is allowing them to learn on their own but guiding them while they are exploring. Another idea of helping a child is to ensure their safety. That is important when observing and working with children. While observing, there were many situations where a child would ask for help and the teacher would acknowledge what he or she wanted, and would guide them to be as independent as possible. Although they were still helping guide that child, they were not micromanaging his or her every move. In my internship at the Associated Student Child Development Lab (ASCDL), I had many situations where I tried to give as minimal help as possible. A child that I spent a lot of time with would get frustrated when completing puzzles, and I would always remind her to look at the colors to help her match the pieces together, as well as make sure all of the outer layer of the puzzle was completed. I would remind her once and she would be able to do the puzzle repeatedly.

Erik Erikson is a theorist who has been discussed in each child development course due to his research on the stages and associated psycho-social tasks that infants and children go through. It is important to remember that even though they are stages, they are steps, as well to progress forward. There are eight different stages: the stages that I have observed are *trust versus mistrust, autonomy versus shame and doubt, and initiative versus guilt*. These observations were from my experiences working with infants to preschoolers. Working with preschoolers is where the evidence for my experience and knowledge comes from. Initiative versus guilt, which is the third stage of Erikson’s theory, has played a major role in my studies of working with children. This idea coincides with the Lev Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development, because they are both focused on striving for the child to become independent. Children need to be encouraged to think for themselves and do things on their own, which helps guide children towards taking the initiative in new situations. When I interned at a preschool for my Developmentally Appropriate Curriculum for Children course. I engaged a group of children in an activity and acknowledged prosocial behavior by saying, “I liked how they were all working together,” by encouraging the children to keep trying. It is important to encourage and motivate children so they do not end up feeling the guilty based on Erikson’s third stage.

As a Child Development major I have learned many theories and continue to learn new information. It is important to understand that when working with children, a teacher or educator should never stop learning. Learning new concepts and ideas and teaching strategies will not only better your teaching, but will better the children and their development as well. Observing children and family behavior has really changed how I think about the dynamics between the two. Although I know about attachments and positive interactions, being able to observe and correlate the information that I am learning to the things that I am observing and researching makes the learning process fun and interesting. My idea of the dynamics has broadened since majoring in Child Development, because of how beneficial positive relationships are between children and their parents or with other adults. To continue to grow in the area of Foundations of Child Development, I will continue to research and read recent scholarly articles to stay up to date with new and improved strategies as well as information to incorporate into my practice.

In my Child Development Practicum course there was an abundant amount of notes written especially when it came to child interactions, whether it was with other children or with adults. I discussed previously certain observations I have seen when an adult helped a child in certain situations. I completed an Evidence Table for my DRDP and that reflects information mentioned earlier regarding Lev Vygotsky’s concept of the zone of proximal development. Many of the notes written showed the progress of the child being able to do things on her own with minimal help. Although this evidence table would work for both theories, another assignment that would reflect Erikson’s stage of Initiative versus Guilt was my curriculum response reflection from my Developmentally Appropriate Curriculum for Children course. Both of these documents can be used for either theories since the idea behind both theories is the idea of children being independent and needing minimal help in situations.

The first document that I chose wass my Evidence Table from Child Development Practicum. This is a resource that relates Vygotsky’s concept of the zone of proximal development to personal experiences that I encountered. I worked with this child for the entire semester and wrote objective notes throughout those few months. The example describes how the child thought and acted in different situations, which is a good reference to recall her receiving help or not receiving help in certain circumstances whether it was putting her jacket on, finishing a puzzle, writing her name, drawing, etc. The second document that I chose was one of my Curriculum Response Papers from my Developmentally Appropriate Curriculum for Children course. This described the situation when I implemented curriculum with a group of children and how based on their ideas, the curriculum continued. I provided the material, and once my activity was done they continued playing and thinking of new ideas with the same materials. I encouraged them and engaged with them when they asked me to play. This was a great example of Erik Erikson’s theory specifically stage three. The children took the initiative and continued to engage with one another based on their ideas, which I encouraged and supported.