

COMPETENCY 1.0 UNDERSTAND THE PROCESSES OF CHILD GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT (AGES BIRTH–8) AND THE INTEGRATED NATURE OF DEVELOPMENT ACROSS ALL DOMAINS**Skill 1.1 Physical growth and development, social-emotional development, cognitive development, language development, and aesthetic development**

The teacher of students in early childhood should have a broad knowledge and understanding of the phases of development that typically occur during this stage of life. The teacher must also be aware of how receptive children are to specific methods of instruction and learning during each period of development. A significant premise in the study of child development holds that all domains of development (physical, social, and academic) are integrated. Development in each dimension is influenced by the others, and developmental advances within the domains do not necessarily occur simultaneously or parallel to one another.

Physical Development

Children experience rapid growth from the time they are born until the age of 2. During this time, they learn how to sit up, crawl and walk as their bodies grow stronger and larger at a very fast pace. From the ages of 2 to 5 years, the physical development slows down, but children are still developing. At age 2, children can go up and down stairs and can run, gaining more agility, rather than just toddling around. At age 3, they can jump, run, climb and ride a tricycle. They can screw and unscrew lids, use silverware to feed themselves, use blocks to build simple structures, turn pages one at a time and draw strokes on paper.

By age 4, a child can probably ride a bike with training wheels, hop on one foot and throw a ball overhand. At this stage, the child can use scissors, draw circles and squares and write some upper case letters correctly. Most 5 years olds can skip and do somersaults. At this age, most children can dress and undress themselves, draw stick people and write some lower case as well as upper case letters.

Even though children are quite active when they enter school at age 5, they are still developing physically. At times, they may seem to be all hands and legs and may be prone to falling or tripping, especially on the playground. Between the ages of 5 and 8, they develop more control over their muscles and are able to write and draw with more skill. They seem to possess boundless energy and in class, especially physical education class, they want to be very active. It is important for the teacher to be aware of the physical stages of development and how changes to the child's physical attributes (which include internal developments, increased muscle capacity, improved coordination and other attributes as well as obvious growth) affect the child's ability to learn. Factors determined by the physical stage of development include: ability to sit and attend, the need for activity, the relationship between physical coordination and self-esteem, and the degree to which physical involvement in an activity (as opposed to being able to understand an abstract concept) affects learning and the child's sense of achievement.

Cognitive (Academic) Development

Children go through patterns of learning beginning with pre-operational thought processes and move to concrete operational thoughts. Eventually, they begin to acquire the intellectual ability to contemplate and solve problems independently, when they mature enough to manipulate objects symbolically. Students in early childhood can use symbols such as words and numbers to represent objects and relations, but they need concrete reference points. Successful acquisition of the skills taught in early childhood, through the fourth grade, will progressively prepare the student for more advanced problem solving and abstract thinking in the later grades. The content of curriculum for younger students must be relevant for their stage of development (accessible and comprised of acquirable skills), engaging, and meaningful to the students.

Social Development

Children progress through a variety of social stages beginning with an awareness of self and self-concern. They soon develop an awareness of peers but demonstrate a lack of concern for their presence. For a time, young children engage in "parallel" activities, playing alongside their peers without directly interacting with one another.

During the primary years, children develop an intense interest in peers. They establish productive, positive, social and working relationships with one another. This area of social growth will continue to increase in significance throughout the child's academic career. The foundation for the students' successful development in this area is established through the efforts of the classroom teacher to plan and develop positive peer group relationships and to provide opportunities and support for cooperative small group projects that not only develop cognitive ability but promote peer interaction. The ability to work and relate effectively with peers contributes greatly to the child's sense of competence. In order to develop this sense of competence, children need to be successful in acquiring the information base and social skill sets which promote cooperative effort to achieve academic and social objectives.

High expectations for student achievement, which are age-appropriate and focused, provide the foundation for a teacher's positive relationship with young students and are consistent with effective instructional strategies. It is equally important to determine what is appropriate for specific individuals in the classroom, and approach classroom groups and individual students with an understanding and respect for their emerging capabilities. Those who study childhood development recognize that young students grow and mature in common, recognizable patterns, but at different rates which cannot be effectively accelerated. This can result in variance in the academic performance of different children in the same classroom. With the establishment of inclusion as a standard in the classroom, it is necessary for all teachers to understand that variation in development among the student population is another aspect of diversity within the classroom. And this has implications for the ways in which instruction is planned and delivered and the ways in which students learn and are evaluated.

Language Development

In everyday language, we attach affective meanings to words unconsciously; we exercise more conscious control of informative connotations. In the process of language development, the student must come not only to grasp the definitions of words but also to become more conscious of the affective connotations and how his listeners process these connotations. Gaining this conscious control over language makes it possible to use language appropriately in various situations and to evaluate its uses in literature and other forms of communication.

The manipulation of language for a variety of purposes is the goal of language instruction. Advertisers and satirists are especially conscious of the effect word choice has on their audiences. By evoking the proper responses from readers/listeners, we can prompt them to take action.

The development of speaking and listening skills requires intensive attention to make sure that children acquire a good stock of words, learn to listen attentively, and to speak clearly and confidently. In many instances however, students with speech and listening disabilities will experience speaking and listening difficulties.

For more information on speech/language acquisition and delays, **SEE** Skill 8.1

Aesthetic Development

Aesthetic development refers to a sensory appreciation of things in the environment. Although it is closely associated with appreciation of art and music, young children can rarely judge whether art or music is good or bad, but they can tell you if they like or dislike something.

Aesthetic development also refers to the child's experience with music and the arts. By the time they come to school, children should be able to sing simple songs and recognize well-known children's stories. This development, however, does not occur in all homes.

Aesthetic development can be nurtured in the early childhood classroom by:

- Having children listen to music and stories for enjoyment
- Using personal movement to display feelings
- Performing simple plays and encouraging pretend play (drama)
- Creating images inspired by stories or personal experiences

Skill 1.2 Chronological age versus developmental age

Chronological age refers to the exact age of the child in years and months from the date of birth. This may be higher or lower than the developmental level of the child. Developmental level refers to the age at which children display traits, such as being able to socially interact with other children or be able to print or read. Some children may be right on target and others may lag behind in development, just as there are children who may be far ahead in their development and be able to do these things at an earlier age.

Students are tested before they enter school and during their school years to determine if there is a gap between chronological age and developmental level. Teachers then take the steps necessary to provide the supports the children need in order to narrow this gap. Some children may not take very long to catch up with their peers, but others may need extra help all the way through the school years. For children who are more advanced, supports should also be put in place to challenge them in ways that fit their developmental age. However, the chronological age of the child must be kept in mind when planning activities so as not to introduce topics to children beyond their years.

SEE Skill 1.1 for the various developmental levels.

Skill 1.3 Individual differences in development

Knowledge of age-appropriate expectations is fundamental to the teacher's positive relationship with students and effective instructional strategies. Equally important is the knowledge of what is individually appropriate for the specific children in a classroom. Developmentally oriented teachers approach classroom groups and individual students with a respect for their emerging capabilities. Developmentalists recognize that kids grow in common patterns, but at different rates which usually cannot be accelerated by adult pressure or input. Developmentally oriented teachers know that variance in the school performance of different children often results from differences in their general growth. With the establishment of inclusionary classes throughout the schools, it is vital for all teachers to know the characteristics of students' exceptionalities and their implications on learning.

The effective teacher takes care to select appropriate activities and classroom situations in which learning is optimized. The classroom teacher should manipulate instructional activities and classroom conditions in a manner that enhances group and individual learning opportunities. For example, the classroom teacher can organize group learning activities in which students are placed in a situation in which cooperation, sharing ideas, and discussion occurs. Cooperative learning activities can assist students in learning to collaborate and share personal and cultural ideas and values in a classroom learning environment.

If an educational program is child-centered, it will address the abilities and needs of the students because it will take its cues from students' interests, concerns, and questions. Making an educational program child-centered involves building on the natural curiosity children bring to school, and asking children what they want to learn.

Teachers help students to identify their own questions, puzzles, and goals, and then structure for them widening circles of experience and investigation of those topics. Teachers manage to infuse all the skills, knowledge, and concepts that society mandates into a child-driven curriculum. This does not mean passive teachers who respond only to students' explicit cues. Teachers also draw on their understanding of children's developmentally characteristic needs and enthusiasms to design experiences that lead children into areas they might not choose, but that they do enjoy and that engage them. Teachers also bring their own interests and enthusiasms into the classroom to share and to act as a motivational means of guiding children.

Skill 1.4 The effect of development in one domain on development in other domains

Child development does not occur in a vacuum. Each element of development impacts other elements of development. For example, as cognitive development progresses, social development often follows. The reason for this is that all areas of development are fairly inter-related. As babies, children develop at different rates. Some crawl, stand and walk quicker than others. When they come to school, some children can carry on a conversation or read a book, but they may have difficulty using scissors. As children develop physically, they develop the dexterity to demonstrate cognitive development, such as writing something on a piece of paper (in this case, this is cognitive development that only can be demonstrated by physical development), or, as they develop emotionally, they learn to be more sensitive to others and therefore enhance social development.

What does this mean for teachers? The concept of latent development is particularly important. While teachers may not see some aspects of development present in their students, other areas of development may give clues as to a child's current or near-future capabilities. For example, as students' linguistic development increases, observable ability may not be present (i.e., a student may know a word but cannot quite use it yet). As the student develops emotionally and socially, the ability to use more advanced words and sentence structures develops because the student will have a greater need to express him or herself.

In general, by understanding that developmental domains are not exclusive, teachers can identify current needs of students better, and they can plan for future instructional activities meant to assist students as they develop into adults.

