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Developmental Psychology of School Age Youth Final Exam

### **New Look Question 2**

Child development is very complex with many different factors contributing to how a child develops. No one part of development (attachment, social interactions, environment, genetics, etc) outshines any other part of development or is more important than any other. In the article, Development as a dynamic system, Smith and Thelen write, “..development is better understood as the emergent product of many decentralized and local interactions that occur in real time” ( 343). Essentially, all parts of development are influenced by many different factors. That being said, I think that the development of relationships between parent and child are the foundation for many other aspects of a child’s development and essential to helping children succeed in school.

Research shows that parental relationships have profound effects on development throughout life, including the years a child spends in school. In school children are faced with many challenging situations; making friends, peer pressure, relationships with teachers and other school employees, as well as receiving an education. The relationship that a child has with a parent/s can greatly influence how a child handles each of these situations.

Without a doubt friends are a huge part of the school experience for children. A child’s first friend is his or her parents and that relationship often sets expectations for future friendships. If and how a child makes friends is influenced by the type of attachment a child has early in life. Attachment is defined as a deep-seated emotional tie that one individual forms with another, binding them together in space and enduring over time (Shaffer, 161). Research shows that children with secure attachments have “more effective peer relations in school”(Roseth, Module 3 Notes). Children with less secure or insecure attachments have a harder time establishing relationships, maintaining friendships or establishing quality friendships that are beneficial. Part of the reason children with insecure

attachments have a harder time establishing relationships is because secure attachment helps children learn about feelings and how to control and express them. Emotional control and expression is essential when trying to build friendships, children with insecure attachments may not develop these skills. In the article Making Friends and Getting Along With Peers it reads, “ Children who tend to feel things more intensely than others, especially anger, sad, or fearful emotions, but who can control them don’t have many problems with other children while those who cannot control those emotions end up doing things that get them disliked and rejected” (173). The same article also cites peer rejection as cause of many later problems “Rejected children are overrepresented among adults with psychiatric problems (Cowen et al, 1973), among children who do poorly at school (Coie et al., 1992; Ollendick et al, 1992; Wentzel and Asher, 1995), and among those who come into contact with the law (Kupersmidt and Coie, 1990)”(173). Quality friendships are important but essentially are based on quality child-parent relationships.

Peer pressure is without a doubt something all children will experience in school. How a child handles peer pressure can be tied back to the parent child relationship as well. Peer pressure can be good or bad. Examples of good peer pressure include getting homework done because peers have encouraged or helped you or joining a team in an effort to be close to friends. Bad peer pressure may include trying and using illegal drugs, partaking in risky behavior or disregarding school work because peers would rather you spend time with them. Early and continued parental attachment can influence peer pressure. In the article, The Legacy of Early Attachment, by Ross A. Thompson, it reads “..in a recent study, the mothers of securely attached preschoolers responded more elaborately, with more frequent reference to feelings and moral evaluatives, in their conversations with offspring—and both attachment and maternal discourse style predicted measures of children’s conscience development (Laible & Thompson, in press; see also Kockanska, 1995, for complementary findings)”(149). A child with a strong conscience development is less likely to partake in risky or illegal behaviors.

How a parent nurtures a child also can affect the influence of peer pressure. In the article Prosocial and Helping Behavior by Grusec, Davidov and Lunell it reads, “..warm parents increase their children’s self-esteem and thereby make them more inclined to assist others (Hoffman, 1970)”(462). The article continues to read, “..children may wish to please parents who are nurturing and loving by adopting their values”(462). A child with a strong conscience development and a child who is eager to please parents and who has adopted the values of the parents is less likely to fall to peer pressure out of the fear of upsetting his or her parents and also by having a strong grasp on the difference between right and wrong.

Children first learn and continue to look at how adults can either help them or hurt them by the relationship they have with their parents. A child learns early in life if he or she can depend on his or her parents. If the parents are there to meet the needs of the child the child comes to trust adults as people who help them and care for them. If a child experiences neglect or abuse they often come to believe that adults are not people you rely on. This experience with parents affects how children view teachers and other school employees. Children that view adults as helpful and caring are going to trust and look to teachers for help more than children who have experienced distrust and harm from adults.

Parents also play a key role in how children view rule following and discipline which are both important in a school setting. How a parent teaches rules and how a parent disciplines when rules are broken greatly influences the child development. In the article Impact of Parental Discipline Methods on the Child’s Internalization of Values: A Reconceptualization of Current Points of View Grusec and Goodnow discusses how a parents discipline affects children and their rule following choices in the future. Grusec and Goodnow suggest that parents who are flexible, discipline based on each individual situation and discipline their children based on that child’s personality will be more affective when disciplining and the discipline will help to decrease later instances that need discipline.

Boundaries and limit setting early in life prepare children for functioning in a setting that is highly structured and has consequences when those limits are crossed. Children need guidance early in life and thought out the teenage years learn about self regulation, impulse control and how to function within a group setting. If a child lacks a parent who has taught them these skills it will be harder for the child to function within a school setting, children that learn about boundaries and limits early in life will have a less difficult time with this and will have more time to focus on education.

Having effective friendships, being able to not fall under peer pressure and the ability to follow rules and function within boundaries are all key elements to school success and development. From the very beginning parents play a key role in the development of children and this continues on through the school years. Parents that are involved, caring, nurturing and who have provided and continue to provide children with strong values of right and wrong as well as a strong conscience help children be more successful in school because they have a better foundation on how to handle tough situations, a stronger drive to please, as well as a stable person to turn to when they are not sure of what to do. Without a doubt parents are a key factor in a child's success in school by laying the foundation for many other factors that help along the way.

## **Social Emotional Development of School Age Youth Final Question #2**

The life span theory defines development as the process of change associated with age which characterizes all human beings from conception to death (Schaffer, 6). The level of a person's development influences what they are capable of handling socially, emotionally and academically. If a person is put in a situation that developmentally they do not have the "tools" to deal with they may make an inappropriate choice or have experiences that could result in many negative effects. This is why the type of school a child attends is "developmentally important".

Schools have many different goals for their students; academics, learning to follow rules, becoming an active and positive member of a group, establishing relationships and learning to be a productive member of society. In order for children to achieve these goals they must be in an environment that fosters the development of these skills at a level the child is capable of. As children reach one developmental milestone the school must be prepared to present children with resources and experiences that build on that development. If a school does not take development into consideration, then development could be hindered. Children learn best when they are developmentally ready to learn and in an environment set up to foster specific developmental levels.

Early childhood is a crucial time when the type of school a child attends is developmentally important. A quality early childhood program incorporates much play into the day and into the learning process. Humans are one species that has prolonged immaturity (Bjorklund and Green, 46). In the article The Adaptive Nature of Cognitive Immaturity by Bjorklund and Green it reads "One of the most popular explanations for the adaptive function of prolonged immaturity is the extended period of time available for practicing adult roles and socialization (Bruner, 1972; Poirier & Smith, 1974; Washburn & Hamburg, 1965). Much of this practice and socialization is realized through play"(46). In the early years of life play plays a large role in cognition. Bjorklund and Green also write "Many writers believe that it is

primarily through play that children's cognition develops (e.g., Dansky, 1980; Piaget, 1962)"(46). If a child is in a school that has an early childhood program that does not believe in play or does not make time in the day for play due to time/money constraints children miss out on a very important developmental learning opportunity that could hinder future development of social skills, self-help skills and academics. Children that are afforded the opportunity to play have non-threatening time to practice and learn many skills that are crucial for future development.

The early years of school are not the only time when the type of school a child attends is developmentally important. Some research suggests that typical middle schools (middle school separate from elementary schools) are not developmentally appropriate for middle school students. This thought is based on a decrease in motivation from students when they enter middle school. In the article Negative Effects of traditional Middle Schools on Students' Motivation by Eccles et al., it reads, "...motivational and behavior declines could result from the fact that traditional middle grade schools are not providing appropriate educational environments for early adolescents" (554). The same article cited a study conducted by Simmons and colleagues that found that students leaving an elementary school to go to a traditional middle school had lower motivation and self-esteem than students not making the same transition. The study also found that there were many developmentally inappropriate practices that affected middle school students' development, "...the environmental changes often associated with transition to traditional middle grade schools are likely to be especially harmful since they emphasize competition, social comparison, and ability self-assessment at a time of heightened self-focus; they decrease decision making and choice time when the desire for autonomy is growing; they emphasize lower-level cognitive strategies at a time when the ability to use higher-level strategies is increasing; and they disrupt social networks and decrease the opportunity for close adult-child relationships to develop at a time when adolescents are especially concerned with peer relationships and may be in special need of close adult relationships outside of home" (560). The type of middle school an

adolescent attends will both embrace the developmental needs of the adolescents and help them build on these needs or it will present them with challenges that they are not ready to face. Putting adolescents in a situation they are not ready to face can negatively impact future development.

It is clear in the early years and in the middle school years that the type of school a child attends is developmentally important, but it is safe to say that all through out a child's education the type of school a child attends is developmentally important. To examine this we can look at the new views of the nature vs. nurture debate. No longer is it believed that it is either genes **OR** environment that influence development, but rather how nature and nurture influence each other. In Rethinking Nature and Nurture by Shonkoff and Phillips it reads, "It is not nature vs nurture, it is rather nature through nurture"(41).

The school a child attends is a huge part of their environment. Children often spend as much, if not more time at school than they do at home. The goals, expectations, philosophies, and cultural norms of the school are going to influence how a child develops. This is the number one reason why the type of school a child attends is developmentally important. Children that have genetic influences that predispose them to mental illness, risky behavior, or aggression may be able to overcome these obstacles if put in the right school environment, "...contrary to the common belief that highly heritable characteristics are impervious to environmental modification, interventions that alter the relevant environment—such as educational opportunities, therapeutic support or improved nutrition—can significantly alter the development of that characteristic"(Shonkoff and Phillips, 45). A school's environment will influence development of its student body. The school environment is developmentally important to all students.

To say that the type of school a child attends is not developmentally important would be absurd. If administrators and educators do not take development into consideration or do not think about how

their school influences development they are doing a true disservice to their students. Schools are not just a building where children go to learn reading, writing and math. Schools influence who children grow up to be and how they interact with the world outside of that school.