Chapter 1
A Developmental Perspective on Educating Infants and Toddlers

Introduction:

- What do people who work with young children need to know and what do they need to be able to do? Current research has helped early childhood specialists to clearly define a clear body of knowledge, as well as standards for quality in both teacher preparation and in programming for young children. Scientific evidence through the latest brain research clearly brings to light the importance of the “disposition” part of the equation in creating quality care and education for all young children, but most importantly in the care of infants and toddlers.

- Educators must come to understand quickly that the needs of the infants and toddlers are best met when partnerships are formed to support the clear, open exchange of ideas. Viewing infants, toddlers and family members as competent, capable, and caring assists in promoting optimal development and learning for everyone involved.

- How teachers use and apply the developmental theories depends not only on their understanding of those theories and associated research but also on their personal beliefs and dispositions.

Taking a Developmental Perspective:

- The philosophy of this textbook follows a Developmental Perspective, which states that teachers and other adults must be consciously aware of how a child is progressing in each area in order to create environments that assist with the development of all the skills that any human has ever developed.

- The child and the people around the child affect each other and this dynamic interaction is sometimes deliberate and controlled and sometimes unconscious behavior. Teachers must learn to be mindful of all of their interactions.

Four Major Developmental Areas

- Area I – Physical: height, weight, general motor coordination, visual and auditory acuity and so on.
- Area II – Emotional: feelings, self-perception, perception of others, related to self, confidence, security, and so on.
- Area III – Social: interactions with peers, elders, and youngsters, both one to one and in a group.
- Area IV – Cognitive: reasoning, problem solving, concept formation, abstraction, imagination, creativity, and so on.

Once you understand the normative patterns or milestones, you can more easily recognize and honor the unique patterns that each child demonstrates.

The part-whole relationships

Patterns of development are usually discussed in each of four major Developmental Areas and then the integration of these four factors is discussed in terms of child behaviors and the interactions between children, family and caregivers. Magda Gerber has established an approach and structure for child care that emphasizes that interaction between child and caregiver.10

Principles of Caregiving are:

1. Involve children in activities and things that concern them.
2. Invest in quality time with each child.
3. Learn the unique ways each child communicates with you and teach him or her the way you communicate.
4. Invest in time and energy necessary with each child to build a total person.
5. Respect infants and toddlers as worthy people.
6. Model specific behaviors before you teach them.
7. Always be honest with children about your feelings.
8. View problems as learning opportunities and allow children to solve their own problems where possible.
10. Be concerned about the quality of development each child has at each stage.

Using a Developmental Profile:
- The four major developmental areas have been put into a developmental profile. The developmental profile is a graphic picture of a child’s developmental compared to age expectancies in four major developmental areas. Assessment of each child in your care compared to age norms or expectations is necessary for you to promote optimal development. To use the Developmental Profile, teachers evaluate each child in all the skill behaviors of the age range in order to establish an average age level for each of the four developmental areas on the profile. Development is an continuing process wherein people grow in the same direction at different rates.

Past Theories and Views
- John Locke, British philosopher- Children are born tabula rosa or blank slate. Children are molded and formed by early experiences with the adults around them.
- Jean-Jacques Rousseau- Viewed young children as noble savages who are naturally born with a sense of right and wrong and an innate ability for orderly, healthy growth. His theory was the first child-centered approach and it started the idea of stages of child development and maturation.
- Stanley Hall and Arnold Gesell- advanced the evolutionary theory that child development is genetically determined and happens automatically. Hall and Gesell are considered founders of the child study movement because of their normative approach of observing large numbers of children to establish average or normal expectations.
- Sigmund Freud- Psychoanalytic theory of personality development. Freud explained that infants and toddlers are unique individuals, whose earliest experiences and relationships form foundation for self-concept, self-esteem, and personality, and are the basis for why we experience life as adults the way we do.
- Erik Erikson- Psychosocial theory of child development. He predicted several stages of development, including the development of trust, autonomy, identity, and intimacy.
- John Watson- The father of Behaviorism. Influenced by Pavlov and the responses animals had to environmental stimuli. He taught an 11month old child to fear a white rat. He used these experiments in classical conditioning to promote the idea that the environment is the primary factor determining growth and development.
- B.F. Skinner- Expanded on Watson to include operant conditioning theory. He demonstrated that child behaviors can be increased and decreased by applying positive reinforcers like rewards, and negative reinforcers like punishment.
- Albert Bandura- became a proponent of social learning theories which included social influences such as modeling, imitation, and observational learning.
Jean Piaget-Cognitive development theory. His theory predicts that children construct knowledge and awareness through manipulation and exploration of the environment, and that cognitive development occurs through observable stages.

Attachment theories- It was once believed that nature, or the basic genetic makeup of a child, played a dominant role in determining both short and long term cognitive developmental outcomes, but new research demonstrates the importance of the nurture, or environmental impacts on children. The quality and consistency of early care will affect how a child develops, learns, and copes with and handles life. Obviously, the more quality interactions you have with children in your care, the more opportunities for positive development occur.

Ethnology – Baby’s attachment behaviors are innate and that they mature at various times during the first two years of life. The ethological purpose of these behaviors is to keep the infant close to mother, who keeps the child out of harm’s way. The quality of attachment is determined by both the infant and the caregiver’s responses.

Ecological Systems Theory by Urie Bronfenbrenner

2. Mesosystem-Next level of influence and includes school, day care, neighborhood, and local culture, and community.
3. Exosystem- Includes influences with which the child is not directly involved that affect development and care such as parent education, parent workplace, and health and social services.
4. Macrosystem-Consists of values, laws, resources, and customs of the general culture in which a child is raised.

Current trends in Development and Education

Current trends considered in this section reflect the research being completed concerning brain development, attachment theory, and sociocultural theory. All of these trends are discussed within the framework of the Ecological System of Urie Bronfenbrenner: using the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. The recommendation to respect children is also expressed by other authorities in child development such as Magna Gerber, who feels that one of the most important aspects of relating to infants is an adult’s respect for the child as an individual.

1. Microsystem is the closest system to the child. It contains the child, the immediate nuclear family, and others directly relating to the child. By 2005, 42% of U.S. infants and 53% of toddlers were cared for regularly-at least once a week-by someone other than their parents. These children have widespread cultural differences, family structures, and parenting styles.
2. Mesosystem includes childcare settings. Many young children spend more waking hours with child-development specialists than they do with their primary families which are of great concern to many child care experts, they are no longer concerned as long as best practices are adopted by child care programs.

Family grouping for infants and toddlers involves having a small number of children of different ages in the same classroom.
Continuity of care is having the same teacher work with the same children for a three year period.

Primary caregiving system is a method where one teacher in the room is responsible for half of the children and the other teacher is primarily responsible for the rest.

Partnering with families-The transition between home and school should be smooth and continuous. Families are experts on their children and teachers are experts at school. Recognizing, supporting, and utilizing this can significantly improve your effectiveness as a caregiver and educator.

Violence- Teaching children to become more emotionally intelligent instead of merely cognitively intelligent is one of the most important trends in child development and care today; a trend that will become even more important as people live closer together.

3. Exosystem refers to social settings that do not contain the child but still directly affect the child’s development, such as community health services and other public agencies. This structure manifests itself in the work of grassroots groups and professional organizations who lobby and advocate for quality child care services.

4. Macrosystem is the most general level of the ecological systems theory. The child is ultimately affected by decisions made at this level because the macrosystem consists of the laws, customs, and general policies of the government.

Valuing Cultural Diversity:
Child care settings are increasingly becoming more and more diverse and we cannot ignore these differences, but rather need to embrace and value them. It is important for the early childhood educator to accept the challenge to develop a cross-cultural curriculum that involves both parents and children, because many young families are just exploring their own cultural backgrounds.

1. The knowledge and understanding that caregivers use with families is drawn primarily from two sources: educational knowledge base and personal experiences as family members and educators.

2. Create a method or sequence of events for getting to know each family or develop scripts.

3. Transactional theories, such as Bronfenbrenner’s, view care from the perspective of how the child interacts with and affects the environment. Children are not passive recipients but instead active participants involved in their environment.