

Teacher Education Institute (TEI)

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Child Development - The Child from Three to Seven

By the time children have reached three they possess the means to move freely and independently. Mothers still acts as mediators between toddlers and the outside world but their relationship with the world starts to take on a different form. One indication of this form is the way children show their delight in reacting to the many different objects that form their immediate physical environment.

The strength of the way children feel towards their environment is indicated by the context of stories. A story does not have to contain more than a list of objects to bring pleasure. There does not need to be any development of plot nor do the characters have to do anything other than to carry out the simplest of actions; the farmer feeding the chickens; the sailor rowing his boat.

All these things indicate that children possess an empathy with the world based on instinct or inner drive.

Children also delight in their very existence. Most parents have seen their offspring running around completely absorbed in the delight of the immediate experience, immune to any danger that could exist. In part, this type of behavior indicates the seeds of what should grow into fruition when children reach adulthood i.e. the ability to explore and discover according to individual will.

As children reach the end of the first stage the feeling side of their nature begins to assert itself. Whereas with the toddler the affective side of their nature is inextricable interwoven with their organic needs, they now reveal and demonstrate their emotions to all who will listen or look.

The imagination comes more and more into play and children need an environment which encourages this growth. Memory will develop from experience; it would be quite wrong at this age, therefore, to attempt to develop the memory through any kind of intellectual training.

Children will seek what information they require; they will ask question after question sometimes not even waiting for an answer. To many answers they will demonstrate clearly their likes and dislikes and will give reasons which clearly arise out of their feelings.

Some of their reasons will be illogical to adults and may well delight and entertain because of this. Speech is another area where children, on some occasions, will become completely absorbed resulting in continual babble; quite unlike that of adults where it is used almost solely as a means of communication.

Stories are another area which not only entertain but bring security. Woe betide the parent who alters the content of a story that has already been told to their children; their offspring will be quite adamant that it is only the first story that is the true one.

Children are not seeking cognitively satisfying answers but want to understand the world through their direct experience of it. Much is achieved through their imitative powers and they retain ideas or image through this. It would be quite wrong, therefore, to emphasize the development of cognition; this will only cause imbalance.

This stage can be called the age of imitation and it is the task of parent or teacher to provide an environment where this faculty can develop. In this way the basis is laid for the development of their imagination and feeling life; faculties which the educational process needs to concentrate on in the next stage.