

Child Development - The Child from Seven to Ten

Children between the age of three and seven are not able, usually, to distinguish between objects they perceive and their ideas about them. At about seven children develop the ability to form images without any perception. In other words an inductive process occurs which is independent of any external factor.

For example, children conjure up images of situations without observing or having any direct experience of them. It will need continual stimuli of a rich and colorful nature if this type of inner imaginative activity is to grow and develop. Subjects and content thus need to be taught so that they relate to children's rich inner life where imagination and feeling are the main factors influencing their thinking.

This type of thinking is unlike that of adults and it follows that we should not treat children as miniature adults whose cognitive qualities have to be developed as quickly as possible. If we took just a little time to observe such children we would see that their thinking is pictorial, uncritical and unspecialised.

Adults think quite differently; for example, adults think cognitively - it is through rational thinking that we perceive the world not through any kind of pictorial representation. Adults also think critically; for example, in discussion we automatically weigh up what the other person is saying; we make judgements as to whether it is true or not; whether there is exaggeration or understatement.

Children naturally wish to believe what they are told. They expect adults to know the answers to their questions and they expect those answers to be true. Children give their teacher their confidence as a matter of course and in return they expect wisdom and authority. They do not want to relate to impersonal resources such as books and films for learning but would prefer to obtain knowledge from a living source - their teacher.

Good teachers will be authoritative, not autocratic or authoritarian, and will realize that children of this age feel and think at unity with the world. Their thinking is, therefore, unspecialised and teachers need to take this into account by teaching, wherever possible, from the whole to the parts.

Adults' thinking is far more compartmentalized and in many instances we find great difficulty in relating specialist knowledge in one area to other related areas. Children are very impressionable at this age and feel keenly about things. They will relate to what is good or bad in blunt terms. A sense of moral well-being will grow in experiencing what is good and a sense of moral discomfort in experiencing what is bad.

What children absorb and experience at this impressionable age will determine many of the ethical stances they will possess later in life. Towards the end of the stage children should have developed insights that distinguish finer shades of meaning.

If children are taught only through percepts and concepts they will end up looking at the world in a different way to children who have been taught by methods which balance the thinking and feeling life.

Between the age of nine and ten the unity and empathy that children feel for the world becomes fragmented. Up until this time children safeguarded their experiences of the outside world with their shield of imagination and fantasy. Now the shield has to be carefully dismantled so that they relate to the outside objective world in a different way.

Whereas before they continually contained the world within their own experience now they have to adjust as individuals to a world which is separate and which continually confronts them.

These adjustments do not occur easily and parents and teachers need to be aware of the sometimes quite traumatic changes that are occurring.