

Health, well-being and stages of development of children and adolescents

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Abstract

This paper highlights the importance of timing of intervention in educating children towards well-being. The first stages of life have a fundamental importance for a later healthy development. The timing of the intervention of promoting good health is an important investment for the future of the individual and the society in which he is part. The positioning of children towards a positive early life has shown that it contributes to the growth of later school success. Early childhood is the time when the foundation for a good intellectual and emotional development is further underway. Children pass through different stages of development, which require the accomplishment of some tasks. They are often helped by parents, teachers, and peer relationship to accomplish them. In adolescence, they faces a number of problems, concerned with physical change, anxiety about heterosexual relationships, fear of being rejected in a peer group, conflict with parents, choice of different systems values, orientation towards a professional field or another. Relationships between adults and children play a fundamental role in the development of personality and schooling skills in pre-school, elementary, primary and secondary schools. School is the place where the skills to socialize and develop psychologically, gained since childhood, are highlighted.

Keywords: well-being, development stages, children, adolescents, education.

Introduction

The first stages of life have a fundamental importance for a later healthy development. Given this fact, many researchers of well-being emphasize the timing of the intervention of promoting good health as an important investment for the future of the individual and the society in which he is part. According to Ben-Arieh and Goerge (2006), children well-being is also assessed as a factor indicating the health level and the future of a society. They even suggest that well-being indicators are an important strategy for monitoring the success of a society. The positioning of children towards a positive early life has shown that it contributes to the growth of later school success. But if we talk about the well-being of children and adolescents then we need to look at it from the birth and the first months of the children's life. According to Brazelton & Greenspan (2000), researchers of children's basic needs, their education begins in the first months of life and continues during their growth. So we can not claim to start educating children at preschool and at school. Early childhood is the time when the foundation for a good intellectual and emotional development is further underway. Even at a later age we may have such a development but will need a greater investment and the chances to succeed are smaller. Faith, sympathy and compassion are the feelings that children develop from early childhood if they are educated with care and love. The interaction they show with other children helps

in the normal development of the central nervous system. With care and education parents give to a child, they determine the features of the child's personality, such as the ability to establish relationships with others, confidence and intimacy, sympathy, and logical and critical thinking.

Nowadays the presence of parents during their childhood is very limited, as a result of long working hours. So we have more and more children who spend their time watching TV or playing computer for hours. This not only makes children less creative but isolates them and makes them less social. Poverty, violence, abuses, and lack of family warmth plays a key role in shaping antisocial models for children and adolescents who look at people around them as objects rather than as human beings. John Bowlby, has described some neglected children in early childhood, who have turned into highly antisocial (1944). For a better development, children need imaginative games, different discussions, debates, and orientation talks primarily with their parents. All this implies the passage of a considerable time with the child by interacting with early childhood and pre-school age (Brazelton & Greenspan, 2000). The beginning of the first grade marks for the child a new and delicate stage in his life. It is a passage that requires support and security from parents and teachers to help assume the obligations that arise in this period, respecting schedules and rules, caring for school supplies and books, and performing tasks. *"Entrance to primary school coincides with the completion of the growing process of the child,"* explains Simonetta Gentile (Gentile), a development psychologist. Expectations towards the child increase both by the teachers and parents. The child should now fit into a new reality that is based on rules and tasks. To help him live a good school life, the family plays a key role in collaborating with him to settle in the classroom in order to cross the first obstacles, integrate with friends, and so on.

When a child starts school, interaction with parents must reach higher levels of creativity and logic. The time spent in front of the TV or computer should be too small because these objects do not equip the child with basic skills. *"If we replace the human factor for technology, we will be transformed into inhuman populations."* To nurture good children, factors such as interaction and establishing relationships are extremely important. Moreover, they also promote the development of the human brain, because children also learn a lot from games with one another (Brazelton & Greenspan, 2000).

Elementary school is where children need to behave according to the rules and respect their peers, and these two aspects reveal for the first time the skills they have learned or they haven't during early childhood (Leger & Lawrence, 2006). Often, the parents of these children who are hyperactive, oblivious, anxious, and aggressive do not accept this, they even deny this behavior of their child for various reasons, such as their level of education and family culture (Durlak, 1995).

Children between seven and eleven years, according to the cognitive development stages of Piaget, are in the phase of concrete operations. At this stage of their development they are aware of the logical stability of the physical world, they know the concept of conservation understand that the elements can be changed and transformed, but again retain much of their initial characteristics. They recognize the concept of classification according to a single feature of the object and can create a series by organizing objects from the largest to smaller ones and vice versa. All these skills show that the child has

finally developed a complete and very logical system of thinking.

At the age of six, the child begins to put on some behavior, relationships, and emotions that are actually rooted in him in the first months of his life through the relationship he has experienced with his closest relatives, mainly with his mother. Relationships between adults and children play a fundamental role in the development of personality and schooling skills in pre-school, elementary and primary and secondary schools. School is the place where the skills to socialize and develop psychologically, gained since childhood, are highlighted (Pianta, 2001). From the studies conducted on the various relationships that bind children to others, four attachment styles originate in the first months of childhood life. Securely attached children, develop a positive feeling of self and others. They are curious and do not hesitate, have a low level of anxiety, have high faith in themselves, easily socialize with others. The positive model of a safe child leads to a high self-esteem and a high appreciation for others, which is considered a positive type. At school, they are usually distinguished as very good, willing and motivated learners, and learning is not a problem for them.

Children who have developed an unsatisfactory, anxious, ambivalent attachment style have a negative self-confidence and positive feelings for others. The negative feeling that the child has for himself leads to a low self-esteem and is dependent on the judgment that others have about him. The positive model for others leads to constant search for friends and attention. At school, these children are usually uncomfortable, difficult to care for, with great integration difficulties and may question teachers' educational skills. For these children, it is the family that determines and directs their adaptation to school.

Separated children, according to the model, have positive feelings for themselves and negative feelings for others. The positivity of isolated children leads them to high faith in themselves, regardless of the judgments of others, even though they think they are considered arrogant, cunning, critical, serious, and reserved. Negative thoughts they have for others makes him seem that he does not appreciate others, and sometimes it makes them be cynical and critical. These children, coming from families with close affinity and low support to one another, can live in school with anxiety and barriers. They are usually silent children, a bit social, but very smart and make you appreciate them with the gift they have.

Disturbed, secluded children are another type, who at an early age have elaborated a disorganized proximity to adults. They are characterized by negativity for themselves and for others. This negativity that the child has for himself makes him have low self-esteem and many doubts about himself and others. Negative feeling about others prevents them from asking for help, avoiding conflicts, and having difficulty in believing others (Ainsworth & Bell, 1970).

Children in elementary school tend to be environmentally friendly with both peers and teachers if the latter are approachable and show concern for them. If the opposite happens and the teachers behave with authority and are superficial, they cause the children who have missed or have had the affection of the adult, to emphasize aggression or to shut themselves (Steele, Steele, & Croftb, 2008).

At the age of ten to eleven, children pass from elementary to the 9th grade and their teaching duties change and increase. This period coincides with the introduction into a new phase of life, adolescence. Different scholars express differently about its

duration and the tasks to develop, but the latter also depend on the culture and place where a teenager grows. Each social class of each group influences with its specifics different development tasks. According to Havighurst, some of the development tasks that adolescents face are:

- establishing new and mature relationships with peers of the same sex;
- the division of female-male gender roles;
- accepting their own body and putting it into function;
- creating emotional independence from parents and other adults;
- the achievement of security caused by economic independence;
- orientation and preparation towards an employment or occupation;
- developing the intellectual competences and knowledge necessary for achieving civic abilities;
- etc.

These features are listed for white middle-class teenagers of the 1950s (Havighurst, 1953). John Coleman, has proposed an explanatory model for the various ways in which development tasks can be solved by achieving satisfactory results. According to this model, at different times of adolescence, every individual faces a number of problems, for example: concern for physical change, anxiety about heterosexual relationships, fear of being rejected in a peer group, conflict with parents, choice of different systems values, orientation towards a professional field or another. All of these tasks can not be borne by adolescents in a short period of time because they will not be able to handle it. The most difficult, according to Coleman, is for those teenagers who, in addition to these "normal" problems, must face more serious problems as a result of the situation in which they live, such as taking over the economic responsibilities of the family very early, they should survive in extreme conditions (as in the case of street children or children living in war conditions), drop out of school in order to work, often with the idea of earning a greater freedom, or experiencing a disability that makes them feel different and rejected by their peers (Coleman & Dendry, 1997). Many of these problems are easily identified by teachers at school, of course if they are attentive and prone to take care for the students, not only in the cognitive but also affective and emotional aspects. Teachers are the right interferers in the crises that affect the children and their preparation in this area is both practical and necessary. The experience of a term with children gives them a useful reference overview in identifying unusual behaviors. Their daily contact with the same children gives them the opportunity to notice changes in each child's behavior. These factors increase the chances of success in preventing and coping with school crises. With proper preparation, teachers can become one of the main resources for crisis prevention and intervention in them, at school. Emotional problems in the family and difficult relationships with parents and other authoritarian figures are two additional risk factors suggested by the literature on mental health.

Since maturity is reached at the age of 18 and a number of legal rights are obtained, such as the right to vote, this should be the age when adolescence ends. But the facts do not show the same thing. For many individuals, the period of preparation for life as an adult is extended even after reaching maturity until he reaches financial independence from the family, and it lasts several years after the twenties. Usually, full maturity occurs

when the individual breaks off from the family tree to live on his own. In this aspect, what is called 'prolonged adolescence' is distinguished. The researchers have agreed on labeling "youth" a phase of life between adolescence and mature age in its fullest sense. Adolescence is divided into three stages of development:

- pre- adolescence (11- 14 years old);
- adolescence (15- 18 years old);
- late adolescence (19 and after).

The first phase is characterized by marked psycho-physical changes, the second phase is characterized by the identification of the conflict that the young people make at different levels, and the third stage from the consolidation of sexual identity and gender and social roles (Palmonari, 2001). By adolescence, the child is able to reason about abstract and hypothetical problems that involve coordinating many factors simultaneously. According to the Piazza they are in the phase of formal or abstract operations, which helps them to be able to cope with the 9th and middle school subjects. Teenagers are characterized by focusing on their ideas even though they do not deny that other people may have different ideas and thoughts (Woolfolk, 2011). Hall describes adolescence as a "new birth", as it is characterized by a total renewal in all aspects of personality. Children, according to him, are drawn from the outside world and its phenomena, while adolescents are oriented above all to develop an inner world that is accomplished through elaborate introspection and self-exploration. For children, the phenomena of the physical world have a value or interest in how they are verified, while for the adolescent these phenomena are nothing more than the symbol of a manifestation of the mood and the feelings, enthusiasm, sadness, closure in itself, sweetness, living their everyday life. For the child the reality has more or less close spatial and temporal limits, while for the adolescent these boundaries are opened, to that extend that at some moments and according to some perceptions, they go to infinity. While the children learn from objects, adolescents start to argue based on verbal sayings. They thus achieve hypothetical-deductive reasoning and understand the idea of relativity. In addition, they learn to reflect their thoughts critically. Thus, the teenager over time is enabled to use abstract thinking and reflects the family, school, social and political world as it is, but also as it may be if some elements and conditions change. During adolescence, a good part of their energy is spent on the burst of their physical growth, leaving less energy to spend on school issues such as (attendance, study, relationship with teachers and peers). If it is taken in consideration changing of the classroom from elementary school is a source of stress, because it involves the need to be oriented to an unfamiliar environment, it can be agreed with the theory of accumulation of stressful events, according to which in early adolescence there may be few motivations for good school performance and acceptance of its regulations. As a result, a possible drop in school productivity should not be dramatized (Hall, 1904).

The school is undoubtedly one of the extra-family institutions that society has entrusted to one of the most important tasks for preparing young people for social life. Adolescence is known as the specific phase of human existence, because this is the age when channeling the ideas and features of the socialization of the individual. The school is undoubtedly an essential environment for youth socialization, an

environment where one learns to interact with others, benefiting most of the elements that enable a teenager to become the true protagonist in the cultural context where he was born. Especially, from the fact that they attended school derives its social role that is unanimously known to those in adolescence: the role of the student. Among the development tasks that adolescents have to face, those in relation to school seem to be closely related to personal experiences of success and failure, a factor that greatly influences self-confidence and self-concept. Many difficult school situations provoke anxiety, tension, and fear. Fear caused by the difficulties they should face, whether real or imaginative, can address affected individuals, to dismiss them in extracurricular activities where they are more inclined, such as sports discipline, music, popularity among peers, the ability show themselves up to the opposite sex peers ... Personal achievements in these choices allow them to maintain a high level of self-esteem and to have a good opinion of themselves. The worst situation is that of individuals who are locked in fear of school difficulties and find no alternatives to dismiss their energies. Those who think that investing in something has no meaning, become completely discouraged, sometimes go to apathy and depression (Palmonari, 2001).

Different authors support the idea that it is important for students to feel close to school and to have meaningful relationships with others in the school environment. These relationships begin with the teacher. When these relationships are not resolved, the opportunity to create problems increases. At school, during their expressive homework, students show their feelings, their emotional state, their concerns, and all these are very visible signals to teachers about how students feel about who they are at certain moments, so they may interfere with prior consultation with their specialists or colleagues to help students with a concern. In this way, the school plays an important role in identifying and preventing conflicts or deviant behaviors that may arise during or after school. *"Teachers should help students see situations as challenges rather than threats"* (Damiani, 2006).

The texts that deal with attachment theory give it the merits of explaining and regulating the psychological development and relationships of the individual, but also of its impact on other areas such as learning, understanding, and co-operation. This connection is made because the progress of these areas is too closely related to the idea of self and confidence in personal abilities. According to Bowlby (1977) and the assertions of other researchers, it is noticed that securely attached children for the support and acceptance of their parents seem to be able to find positive and constructive solutions when faced with particularly stressful and problematic situations. Affective relationships will enable them to successfully cope with social, cognitive and affective situations that are largely highlighted and developed in school. School environments, as a socializing place for children, give them the opportunity to expand social relationships with peers and point out new needs that they need to face. The essence of the attachment theory lies in the concept of identifying processes that generate security. In this respect, the teacher is of particular importance as it can help in promoting these identification processes. Coleman in her study of the sense of loss notes that fourth-grade children are able to describe their feelings and believes that schools should offer their students more than the knowledge they teach. They should provide health lessons that will prove essential to their lives. Except the role we already know, the teacher can become a listener and supporter of students' needs,

feelings, and to offer them the possibility to feel closer and find answers to what they want to know. Schools thus become a conversational environment where students can talk freely about their concerns and find a way out for them (Coleman K. , 2009). According to St. Leger (2006), it is important to identify some factors that need to be considered to evaluate the interventions of quality health promotion programs in schools. Time, the appropriate period is a very important factor along with intensity of intervention and a well-formulated theoretical program. School experience is of particular importance in structuring the competences that are put into use in public life. Climate in the classroom and in the same school environment has an impact on performance, attitudes and behavior, not only in the school system but also in other institutions (Migani, 2004).

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