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Section C

Social and Emotional Development

Then and Now: Historical Perspective

- Vygotsky led us to focus on role of society in learning
- Learning theorists, such as Skinner, swung far from Piaget and Vygotsky, stating that all of our learning is an outcome only of environmental stimulation
- The post–World War II era—time of the stage theorists
  - Stages in social and emotional development

The First Six Months

- **6 to 10 weeks:** reflexive smile becomes voluntary expression of happiness at the sight of the human face—social smile
- **2 months:** babies show excitement on seeing other infants
- **4 months:** temperament emerges
- **6 months:** the infant smiles at familiar people, a preference that strengthens the parent-child bond
- **5 to 7 months:** babies begin to match emotion of the voice with emotion of facial expressions
- **6 to 9 months:** babies try to get the attention of other babies through smiling and babbling

By the End of the First Year …

- **10 months:** separation anxiety starts
- **12 months:** social referencing—children use familiar caregiver's emotional reaction to gauge emotional response in unfamiliar situations
- **12 to 18 months:** social referencing is strong, leading to reading another's emotions, or perspective taking

Language Emerges

- **4 to 8 months:** babbling takes on a communication role
- **18 months:** children use instrumental speech to convey an idea (e.g., “Daddy home”)
- **Two to three years:** children develop imagination and imaginary friends and engage in pretend play
- **By 3 years:** toddlers start to use words to comment on and influence a peer’s behavior, such as “let’s play,” and they comprehend causal relationships

Source: Bartsch and Wellman. (1995).

Theory of Mind

- Theory of mind is the evolution of perspective-taking skills—the study of the child's ability to anticipate and read another's beliefs and ideas
- First theorists in the 1980s
- Based on Piaget's idea of egocentrism and Vygotsky's social learning theory
- Classic study: chimpanzees' perspective-taking skills (Pramack and Woodruff, 1978)

Toddlers and Perspective Taking

- **18 months:** Toddlers realize that others' emotions are different from their own. This is the first stage in which children separate their own emotions from others and identify their own feelings.

- The Broccoli-Cracker Study on perspective taking. (Grononsky, 1997)

False Beliefs Tasks—Theory of Mind (TOM)

- Three-year-olds: more sophisticated perspective taking, mediated by language

- False belief task
  - Younger preschooler: focus fixed on their own beliefs
  - Older child: understanding of differentiating their beliefs from others; cognitive flexibility required

Source: Perner and Wimmer. (1982).

Play as a Tool

- Reading another's ideas and feelings takes the preschooler beyond parallel play into direct interaction with others. This allows the child to understand that sharing and taking turns will result in consistent positive play.

- Imaginary play becomes more advanced. Adults tend to judge children as more mature when they engage in dramatic imaginary play.

Early to Middle Childhood: The Mind Is Interpretative

- Children's knowledge becomes firmer about each person having a different interpretation of the same event, but the interpretation is black and white

- Middle childhood (around 4th to 5th grade): Children develop insight. They can explain their understanding that people's interpretation of an ambiguous event may be influenced by their pre-existing biases or expectations. They can show altruism—performing an act that benefits someone other than themselves.

Egocentric to Other-Directed: Selman

- Young child: egocentric
  - Define perspectives of others which meet their needs

- Adolescence: sociocentric (other-directed)
  - Realize that different people can react differently to the same situation
  - Solve problems from a third-party perspective
  - Understand different cultural or social values result in different social perception

Source: Selman. (1982).

Holly's Dilemma

- Holly is an 8-year-old girl who likes to climb trees. She is the best tree climber in the neighborhood. One day while climbing a tree, she falls off the bottom branch but does not hurt herself. Her father sees her fall and is upset. He asks her to promise not to climb trees anymore, and Holly promises.

  Later that day, Holly and her friends meet Sean. Sean's kitten is caught in a tree. Something has to be done right away or the kitten may fall. Holly is the only one who climbs trees well enough to reach the kitten and get it down, but she remembers her promise to her father.

Early to Late Childhood

- **3 to 6 years:** undifferentiated perspective taking
  - Children recognize that the self and others can have different thoughts and feelings, but they frequently confuse the two

- **5 to 7/9 years:** social-informational perspective taking
  - Children understand that different perspectives may result because people have access to different information

Mid to Late childhood

- **7 to 12 years:** self-reflective perspective taking
  - Children can "step in another person's shoes" and view their own thoughts, feelings, and behavior from the other person's perspective. They also recognize that others can do the same.

- Children who are skilled perspective takers are considered more mature and are sought-after playmates because they consider the needs of peers, know how to negotiate from all points of view, and can solve social conflicts

Understanding Social-Informational Perspective Taking

This cartoon was removed because JHSPH OpenCourseWare was not able to secure permission for its use.

Adolescence to Adult

- **10 to 15 years:** third-party perspective taking
  - Children can step outside a two-person situation and imagine how the self and other are viewed from the point of view of a third, impartial party

- **14 years to adult:** societal perspective taking
  - Individuals understand that third-party perspective taking can be influenced by one or more systems of larger societal values

Emotional Competence

- Accurately interpret social cues
- Self secure—can focus on others' needs
- Can devise and enact considerate problem-solving strategies
- Are self-reflective in their perspective taking—they can step into the other's shoes to view their behavior from the other's perspective
- Respond empathically to other's distress
- Look for constructive solutions to social conflicts

Competence Breeds Competence

- Correlation between emotional understanding and social competence (Denham et al., 2003)

- Emotional competence of preschoolers is measured by the following:
  - Expressiveness
  - Self-regulation
  - Knowledge

- High scores in preschool —> high ratings in kindergarten

Can Social/Emotional (SE) Competence Be Trained?

- Children learn through ...
  - Copying role models
  - Direct training by parents and teachers
  - Experiences with peers

Parent Style and SE Competence

- Laissez faire
  - All behavior is reinforced
  - Few limits or rules
- Authoritarian
  - Rigid rule set
  - Narrowly defined perspective
  - Criticism preferred to praise
- Authoritative
  - Rules are predictable but adapt to situation
  - Children are taught cognitive flexibility
  - Autonomy

Outcomes of Parenting Styles

- Children who are socially skilled have parents who are feelings oriented, warmer, and more likely to reason and explain to encourage compliance

- Children who are aggressive and have poor self-regulation with peers correlate with having parents who are rejecting, who use power-assertive, inconsistent discipline, are permissive and indulgent, and don't provide proper supervision

Source: Rubin et. al. (1995).

Cultural Differences

- **West European-American Culture:** Child and adult worlds are distinct. Adults assume the role of social skills trainer.

- **Korean American:** parents emphasize task persistence and learning through play, with less time spent in make-believe play

- **Efe of the Republic of Congo and Maya of Guatemala:** Children participate in adult work from a young age. Socio-dramatic play is scarce.