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AUTHOR Katz, Lilian G.
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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses current perspectives on the education of young children in terms of five interrelated issues rooted in a developmental perspective: (1) the complexities of predicting the long-term developmental outcomes of early experience; (2) how to interpret gender differences in the long-term effects of different approaches to early years curriculum; (3) the implications of recent research exploring the effects on children's motivation of different pedagogical practices; (4) the long-term consequences of early social difficulties for the long-term development of social competence; and (5) curriculum and pedagogical practices that address the first four issues. The paper concludes that for the sake of children's long-term development and their dispositions to learn, formal and rigorous academic instruction and exercises should be postponed until roughly the age of 6. The paper asserts, however, that early years curriculum must address the intellectual development of children and engage their minds in observing, drawing, and discussing events and phenomena around them worthy of close inspection. Contains 26 references. (EV)

Current Perspectives on Education in the Early Years: Challenges for the New Millennium.

Lilian G. Katz, Ph.D.
University of Illinois
USA

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Lilian G. Katz, Ph.D.
Professor Emerita & Director, ERIC/EECE
University of Illinois
Urbana-Champaign, IL
USA

Abstract

This paper discusses current perspectives on the education of young children in terms of five main issues: (1) the complexities of predicting the long-term developmental outcomes of early experience; (2) questions about how to interpret gender differences in the long-term effects of different early years curriculum approaches; (3) the implications of the results of recent research on the effects on motivation of different pedagogical practices; (4) the long term consequences of early social difficulties in the long term development of social competence; and (5) some curriculum and pedagogical practices that would address the first four issues.

Current Perspectives on Education in the Early Years: Challenges for the New Millennium.

Introduction

Before approaching the daunting topic assigned to me I wish to express my gratitude for the opportunity to participate in paying tribute to the memory of Rudolph Goodridge and to his contribution, dedication and service to education in this country that he cared about so deeply. I want also to share a few very fond recollections of my encounters with him over a several years.

My first meeting with Rudolph Goodridge was in 1981, shortly before I came for an extended stay as Visiting Professor at the UWI Cave Hill campus in 1983. At the time of our first meeting, my own scholarship was focused on issues in the training, education and professional development of teachers of young children. He took particular interest in the conceptualization the developmental stages of teachers (see Katz, 1995), and the work then in progress of formulating the six dilemmas of teacher education (See Katz & Raths, 1992). Mr. Goodridge willingly read drafts of papers and made helpful and penetrating comments and suggestions on all aspects of them. He didn't miss a thing! He was always willing to help me to understand education in Barbados and readily responded to my questions. In addition my husband and I enjoyed spending New Year's Day with his entire family

several years in a row. I still miss him and surely will continue to do so for a long time to come.

Over the period of twenty-five years working with colleagues and visiting Barbados I have developed a deep appreciation for the country's long history of taking the education of all its young seriously and the quality of education here, often under difficult conditions. I realize that in recent years many concerns and complaints have been voiced, and that dire warnings of impending economic and social disasters are forecast because of purported shortcomings of the schools and their teachers. In the US this pattern of public carping about education is called "school bashing." Perhaps you call is "school lashing!" In the US this constant criticism and complaining about the schools is an indoor sport! Everyone has once been a player and therefore knows all about how to play it! We have commentators - television "talking heads" - who make a good living bashing schools and teachers, even though overall, there have been recent improvements.

I am not sure whether the pattern is quite the same here and in other parts of the Caribbean; but our critics often imply that education used to be good, or certainly better - especially when they were pupils! I suggest that this is typically a manifestation of 'chronic nostalgia' or 'selective amnesia.' There have always been problems with education; they just might be different in nature and visibility. This often harsh criticism is typically offered by people who have never taught in schools. Indeed,

sometimes I can't help but think that perhaps their own schools were really quite poor because their criticisms of schooling show a remarkable lack of understanding and insight into how complex education in a contemporary democracy really is.

Of course education could and should be better than it is! It is difficult to imagine that there could ever be a time when such a wish would not be appropriate. But I want to add here that I know of no evidence that all this harsh public criticism of education and of teachers, league tables, punitive reforms, and other types of public humiliation of schools which are experiencing difficulties leads to their improvement or reduces the problems they face. On the contrary, all of this self-righteous public nagging about education in the US is demoralizing and exacerbates the already serious problem of trying to recruit our most able young people into the teaching profession. I hope criticism of education never reaches such a severe level in this part of the world.

On this occasion I have been asked to address the topic of education in the early years in terms of current perspectives and the challenges ahead in the new millennium. Many recent papers, conferences and presentations refer to the coming century or millennium in their title or theme. There are certainly plenty of current challenges. But it seems clear to me that we cannot anticipate the challenges of the future except in terms of what we know today. The great challenges ahead are most

likely to be caused by what we do not now know. By way of illustration let us imagine having asked Abraham Lincoln or any other thoughtful US citizen in the year 1860 to describe their vision of the typical American family one hundred years hence in 1960. They would very likely have said that America would be so well developed and prosperous that every family would own not just one horse but two! The internal combustion engine had not yet been invented in 1860! Thus we see that we can only make predictions on the basis of current knowledge and therefore we are at the mercy of our best guesses.

As to current perspectives, I offer the *caveat* that the perspectives shared herein are largely my own and not necessarily shared by all others in the field of early years education. Furthermore, they are based largely on experience and research in North America. Although I was born and spent my formative years in England and have worked with colleagues in this field in more than forty countries, I am well aware of the extent to which my perspectives are shaped and determined by the context in which most of my work is conducted. That having been said, I am always amazed by the similarities of issues - at least in my field - across countries. Nevertheless, I appreciate the likelihood that my remarks may not be fully relevant to the contexts, constraints, and traditions within which all of you live and work.

The discussion that follows offers my own current perspectives on the field in terms of five inter-related issues rooted in a developmental perspective on education in the early years. I begin with a discussion of the concept of development and the long-term consequences of early experience, then a brief look at longitudinal studies of the effects of various approaches to the curriculum in the early years. These issues are followed by a brief discussion of current perspectives on motivation, then a very brief summary of what is known about the long term development of social competence, and close with some implications for the curriculum and teaching methods in the early years.

1. The Concept of Development: Early Experience and Later School Functioning

One of the most important and problematic challenges to the field of early years education is to provide experiences to the young that we could confidently assume will contribute positively to their later functioning and, similarly, avoid those likely to have long term negative effects. These provisions include responding to young children so as to enhance their growth, development, and learning and to minimize those responses that may have long-term negative consequences. Meeting these challenges successfully requires some agreement concerning the very complex nature of development and what it implies about the relationships

between early experience and later competencies. Achieving agreement on the nature of development has become increasingly difficult as our awareness of the power of the cultural context in which it occurs deepens (Jessor, Colby, & Schweder, 1996). Surely the next century will further our awareness of the complex mix of individual characteristics, experience, and the larger context in the course of development. We are more cognizant than earlier of the extent to which children can 'cause' their own development. As Damon points out

> A child who has learned to greet others with hostility and suspicion will create a different sort of developmental pathway for himself than a child who has learned more positive and friendly modes of responding. … the child's behavior sustains itself across time and settings, because it has the capacity to at least partly shape the nature of those settings. (In this example, the hostile greeting provokes a hostile response, which further feeds the child's suspicious orientation. (Damon, 1996; p. 462)

As a noun, the term *development* refers to the end of a process of bringing something from latency to fulfillment (American Heritage Dictionary, 1993). As a verb, it means to "cause to become more complex or intricate; to cause gradually to acquire specific roles, functions, or forms, to grow by degrees into a more advanced or mature state." In biology, the term means "to progress from earlier to

later stages of a life cycle; to progress from earlier to later or from simpler to more complex states of evolution" (American Heritage Dictionary, 1993). In other words, development is a particular kind of change. Change for the better. Change from immature or simple capacities and behavior to more mature or complex ones.

Miller (1983) asserts that

> What is critical about developmental theory is that it focuses on change over time. Although developmental theories have non-developmental theoretical concepts…they diverge from non-developmental theories by emphasizing changes over time in these concepts (p. 5).

These definitions suggest that when we use the term child development we are referring to a set of principles, concepts, and facts that describe and account for the processes involved in change from immature to mature status and functioning[1]. In other words, we are referring to a particular kind of change: change that is dynamic rather than linear. Note that we do not offer teacher training courses on "child change," but on "child development." The point of this distinction is that when we discuss and study long term effects on development we are inevitably--even if only implicitly--concerned about a desired "end state" or

[1] For example, in language development we would describe and account for the processes involved in the change from "baby talk" to mature competent use of the mother-tongue when talking about language development. Presumably such processes can be described for the development of competence in the use of all mother-tongues.

ultimate mature state of some kind. Indeed, in a certain sense, all child rearing, all socialization of the young--of which education is a sub-category--is future oriented. Even a culture that teaches its children to worship ancestors, does so in anticipation of its children doing so in the future.

Surely all cultures, perhaps in many different ways, strive to behave so as to ensure that their young will have the feelings they themselves have and will believe what they themselves believe when those children are fully grown. In this sense, we are always making assumptions, mostly implicitly, about what future feelings, beliefs, and competencies are desirable, if not essential, for the ultimate wellbeing of our children. Conceptions of the ultimate "end state" of development, and assumptions about the processes involved in reaching it have undergone substantial revision and revisiting in the last several years and can be counted on to do just as much in the next millennium. As Damon (1989) points out

> …child development has been exposed to many jarring alternatives over the past twenty years. Anthropologists have challenged developmental universals and made us increasingly aware of cultural diversity...our old view was incomplete and perhaps therefore distorted...A new perspective can have a jarring effect on existing sensibilities, particularly when the new perspective carries with it alternative assumptions about the nature of things. This can be as unsettling as it is intellectually delightful (p. 2).

It remains reasonable, however, to assume that human development has at least two equally important dimensions: the normative and the dynamic dimensions. There are at least two equally important dimensions of development to be considered in selecting curriculum and teaching practices: the normative and dynamic dimensions, as follows:

(a) The *normative dimension* of development addresses the characteristics and capabilities of children that are typical or normal for their age group (e.g. the typical size of vocabulary of four-year-olds, the average age of first walking, of understanding numerical concepts, etc.).

Age norms provide useful starting points for curriculum planning. Knowledge of age-typical interests, activities and abilities can provide a basis for preliminary planning of a program of activities, and the selection of equipment and materials. For example, the norms of development provide a basis for assuming that most but not all two-year-olds need daytime naps, most four-year-olds understand calendar concepts very poorly, or that typically, most five-year-olds can begin to write their own names. However, it is important to keep in mind that the attributes that concern developmentalists are culture bound. Heine et al (1999) point out that early achievement of and autonomy so highly valued in the US is not seen in Japan, for example.

Age norms can also be useful for alerting teachers to individual children whose patterns of behavior and competencies depart noticeably from those of their age

group and who therefore warrant the kind of close observation necessary to ascertain whether special curriculum and teaching strategies might be recommended.

(b) The *dynamic dimension* of development deals with an individual child's progress from immaturity to maturity rather within age group comparisons. This dimension addresses changes over time within an individual and the long-term effects of early experience rather than the normality or typicality of behavior and abilities of a particular age group at one point in time. This dimension has three aspects:

i) *Sequence* refers to the order or stages of development through which an individual passes, e.g. in achieving mastery of first language.

Under this heading, the curriculum and teaching practices consider what developmental tasks and learning have to be completed before the next learning is most likely to occur. (For example, it is reasonable to assume that starting to learn a second language is most likely to be beneficial following mastery of one's first language.)

ii) *Delayed effects* refer to the potential positive and negative effects of early experience that are not manifested at the time of occurrence, but may influence later functioning (e.g., early infant-caregiver attachment may influence later parenting competence, a hypothesis that has been contentiously discussed among developmental psychologists for many years).

This particular aspect of the dynamic dimension of development takes up issues

concerning practices that are effective in the short term but may have delayed or "sleeper" effects that are deleterious in the long term (e.g., rewards and punishments, insecure early attachment of the infants to caregivers, etc.). Similarly, some practices that may not seem important to development during the early years may have positive delayed effects later. Whether positive or negative, delayed effects are those effects of experience that are not manifested until later in the course of development.

iii) *Cumulative effects* refer to experiences that may have no effects (either positive or negative) if they occur occasionally or rarely, but may have powerful effects if they occur frequently (e.g., the cumulative positive effects of frequent block play or cumulative negative effects of frequent and repeated - even if mild - criticism).

This formulation of the two dimensions of development, and the three sub-categories of the dynamic dimension in particular, suggest the principle that just because young children can do something does not necessarily mean that they should do it. The question of what young children should be doing and learning in their early years education must be decided on the basis of *what best serves their development in the long term* - to the extent we can know what that might be.

Four kinds of learning goals

Before I take up recent research that bears directly on this principle, it seems useful to note that all

curricula at every level of education, must take into account at least four categories of learning goals: (a) knowledge, (b) skills, (c) dispositions, and (d) feelings.

These are briefly defined as follows:

- *Knowledge* includes facts, information, understandings, constructions, concepts, stories, songs, legends, and the like.

- *Skills* are defined here as relatively small units of action that can be easily observed and inferred from behavior, including physical, social, verbal skills of various levels of specificity.

- *Dispositions* are habits of mind--not mindless habits--with motivational and affective qualities that propel the manifestation of relevant behavior, e.g. curiosity, cooperativeness, quarrelsomeness, etc (See Katz, 1995, for a fuller discussion of the problems of defining dispositions).

- *Feelings* are internal emotional states associated with most contexts and interactions (Katz, 1995).

I have listed knowledge and skills as the first and second of the four learning goals because educational programs and institutions are uniquely charged by their communities with the responsibility of helping children acquire worthwhile knowledge and useful skills. Of course, both knowledge and skills are also learned in many other contexts outside of official educational settings. Preschools and schools have the responsibility to help the young acquire knowledge and skills they judge worthwhile and that contribute to the development of competencies that will be essential for

ultimate effective participation in the community. No matter which curriculum, activities, and teaching strategies are employed to accomplish these first two learning goals - knowledge and skills - the other two goals: dispositions and feelings, are likely to be influenced by them, whether intentionally or by default.

It seems appropriate during the early years to be especially intentional and deliberate about strengthening desirable dispositions and feelings. Important dispositions to strengthen in the early years include the inborn dispositions to make sense of experience and to learn, and other intellectual dispositions such as to analyze, theorize, hypothesize, conjecture, etc. Among important social dispositions are those to form attachments, relationships and friendships, to be open to others who are different, to be empathetic, etc. Note that not all dispositions are desirable: some children develop the disposition to avoid peers who are unlike them. Important feelings to address during the early years are those of belonging, of competence, and self-confidence.

Deliberate and explicit attention to strengthening worthwhile dispositions in the early years is strongly recommended partly because undesirable ones may become more resistant to change with increasing age. At the same time, desirable ones, typically present at birth (e.g. the dispositions to be curious, to become attached to

caretakers) may be seriously weakened and even lost, if not purposefully strengthened. It may be that once the desirable dispositions are damaged or lost, they may be very difficult to re-instate or implant with increasing age. However, such a hypothesis is based my own current understanding of the nature of development and can only be inferred from the kinds of data currently available.

However, it is unlikely that dispositions or feelings can be learned from instruction, exhortation, or indoctrination. Aside from the important dispositions that can be assumed to be inborn (e.g. to be curious, to learn), others are likely to be learned from being around people who have them and in whose behavior the dispositions are reasonably visible. Furthermore, for dispositions to be strengthened, they must be manifested or expressed with some frequency. These dispositions must also be experienced as satisfying and effective rather than met with rejection or criticism. Thus a child who might ask a teacher for clarification of something just presented, and to whom the response is: "You should have been paying attention" - as sometimes happens to our children - is unlikely to have strengthened his disposition to raise questions and seek deeper understanding. Thus an appropriate curriculum and appropriate teaching methods provide contexts and opportunities for children to manifest desirable dispositions such as to cooperate, to resolve conflicts, to investigate, to hypothesize and make predictions, and to test their hypotheses and predictions.

Similarly, feelings are not learned from instruction or exhortation (Saarni, 1999). The capacities (or pre-dispositions) for some feelings, such as fear, anger, anxiety, and most likely joy as well, are probably in-born. But many feelings are learned from experience in the context of social relationships: feelings of belonging, of not belonging, of competence and incompetence, feelings of confidence high or low, and many other feelings of concern to families and educators are learned in the course of experiences provided in the educational setting.

In the matter of the first two learning goals, knowledge and skills, achieving agreement among all those who have a stake in early years education concerning precisely what knowledge and which skills those should be has always been extremely difficult. The bitter and often acrimonious squabbling over answers to the question of which early curriculum and pedagogical practices best serve children *in the long-term* and is likely to continue well into the next millennium.

It is my impression that in countries like Barbados in which critical life-determining examinations loom large over the thoughts of parents as well as educators, the curriculum and teaching practices are chosen more often with the exams in mind than in terms of their possible long-term deleterious effects. While I had not faced such pressures myself as a teacher of young children, I

experienced them from the bottom-up so-to-speak, as a child growing up in England during World War II! A persistent question that remains with me from that experience is: How can the potential long-term and perhaps subtle but damaging effects of being identified as early as ten years old as one who has fallen somewhat short of a national standard of competence best be dealt with? Observations of education in post-Eleven-plus England suggest that, as in all other educational decisions, discontinuation of the examination selection system yields a variety of errors - different from those created by continuing the exams, and that indeed, all educational decisions involve choices of errors. The question of which errors are preferred is not a matter of psychological or developmental research or theory alone: it involves a range of moral, political, and economic decisions. But there are no error-free decisions in these matters. I would hope that what we know about the long-term, dynamic and cumulative effects of early experience could be taken into account in the process of selecting which errors are preferred.

2. Longitudinal Studies and the Damaged Disposition Hypothesis

Recent research on the effects on children of a variety of academically oriented programs confirms the fact that young children <u>can</u> engage in formal lessons and academic

exercises designed to instruct them in basic skills such as phonics, counting, and handwriting, and they often do so quite willingly. But the extent to which they *should* do so must be evaluated in light of the potential *cumulative* effects these exercises may have on the development and strengthening of the dispositions to use that knowledge and those skills. I am suggesting here that it is useful to distinguish between having reading skills and having the disposition to be a reader, and that both of these outcomes must be considered in the processes of selecting curriculum and teaching methods. In this sense, we are obliged to take into account the potential cumulative effects of early experiences on long-term developmental consequences, no matter how benign they appear to be at the time that experience occurs.

In other words, I am suggesting that a strong academic or didactic approach in the early years may undermine the disposition to use the very knowledge and skills so intensely instructed. Indeed, there is reason to believe for example, that early instruction in phonics and mastery of arithmetic may be obtained at the risk of undermining the dispositions to use the learning so painfully acquired. Note here the important distinction between having reading skills and having the disposition to be a reader. I am suggesting that the disposition to be readers or similarly, to be ready users of mathematical concepts and skills often painfully acquired, may be damaged by premature instruction, given the amount of drill and practice usually

required for success in mastering these skills at an early age. This concern can be referred to as the *damaged disposition hypothesis* (Katz, 1985).

The damaged disposition hypothesis seems to be a reasonable interpretation of the results of several longitudinal studies (Karnes et al., 1983; Marcon, 1993,. 1994; Miller & Bizzell, 1983; Schweinhart et al., 1986a; see also Walberg, 1984; Consortium for Longitudinal Studies, 1983). As we look at the results of these studies, the early pressure on young children to perform academic tasks taught by formal direct instruction (e.g., practice in phonics, workbook exercises, drill sheets, etc.) appears quite harmless or even beneficial *at first*. Certainly many of the children *can* perform the tasks involved.

However, on the whole these studies suggest that while formal instructional teaching methods during the early years may appear to be beneficial in the *short term*, they show negative effects on academic, intellectual and social development in the *long term* (Schweinhart, 1997, Schweinhart and Weikart, 1997, Marcon, 1992, 1995). In particular, the long term follow-up studies of children in High/Scope's Perry Preschool Program, (see Schweinhart, 1997) and the follow-up studies of Marcon, (1995) indicate that *in the long term* children benefit greatly academically, intellectually, and socially from early childhood programs that provide opportunities for them to take initiative, and to be actively engaged in their own learning experiences. Marcon (1995) refers to the long-term

negative effects of early formal direct instructional programs as the "Fourth Grade Slump[2]." Marcon summarizes her findings as follows:

> the negative impact of overly academic early childhood programs on achievement and social development was clearly apparent by the fourth grade [about nine years old]. Children who had attended [Academically Directed] pre-kindergarten programs were scoring noticeably lower in fourth grade despite their adequate performance on third-grade standardized achievement tests. The [Academically directed] children were also developmentally behind their peers and displayed notably higher levels of maladaptive behavior (i.e. defiant behavior, anxiety, and distractibility) (Marcon, 1995, p. 19).

Furthermore, current perspectives on the early years as expressed by the constructivists' emphasis on young children's need to take an active role in their learning may be especially important in the case of boys. Marcon points out that

> In general, boys do not adjust as well as do girls to didactic early learning approaches. Boys show more stress behaviors in DIP [developmentally inappropriate practice] kindergartens. This is especially true for African American boys in lower socioeconomic status. Development and achievement of inner-city boys are fostered by kindergarten that emphasize socioemotional growth over academics and are hindered by overly academic, didactic

[2] Children are about nine to ten years old in the fourth grade.

> kindergarten experiences. (Marcon, 1999, p. 359).

Results from these longitudinal studies support the position outlined earlier that curriculum design for young children should be approached in a way that optimizes the *simultaneous* acquisition of knowledge, skills, *and* desirable dispositions - especially the dispositions to use the knowledge and skills learned. Again, it is clearly not very useful to have skills if the dispositions to use them are undermined in the process of acquiring them. On the other hand, having the disposition without the skills is also inconsistent with the goals of education. The challenge, then, is to help the learner with both the acquisition of skills and with desirable dispositions that invoke the application of those skills.

In sum I am suggesting that an appropriate curriculum for young children is one that addresses the acquisition of academic skills in such a way that the dispositions to use them are also strengthened. A robust disposition to be a reader can serve all of the intellectual goals of education throughout life.

3. Issues in the motivation to learn

While I have suggested that the disposition to learn is an in-born (or a pre-disposition) in all human beings - granted more intense in some than in others - research on its development has typically been cast in the language of

motivation. This is of course a very big topic that cannot be fully addressed here. But I take this opportunity to present a summary of significant research with important developmental implications children's motivation to study and to stay in school.

Effort, Mastery, and Challenge Seeking

Extensive research by Dweck and her colleagues (1986; 1987; Smiley & Dweck, 1994) suggests that the goals teachers set for their pupils have significant cumulative effects on children's dispositions to seek mastery, to strive for learning, to engage in sustained effort, persistence, and challenge seeking. Dweck asserts that school tasks can be set in terms of *performance goals* or *learning goals*. For example, when a teacher introduces an activity by saying something like, "Today I want to see how good you are at X" or "How many problems you can get right" or "How well you can do," she sets performance goals. If, on the other hand, she says something like "Today I want to see how far you can get on X" or "…how much you can find out about Y" or, "I would like you to try and find out how far and how fast these cars roll on different surfaces," she is setting learning goals. Performance goals include correct and incorrect, right and wrong ways to respond to the instruction or situation. In the case of learning goals, the intention is to explore and find out what might be possible. Children's reactions to consist experience of

these kinds of goals can be roughly summarized as shown in table 1 below.

[Place Table 1 About Here]

As can be seen in table 1, these two conditions provoke different kinds of responses that affect children's dispositions toward effort and mastery. First, for example, under the column "performance goals" children tend to become preoccupied with their own ability rather than the effort summoned by the task at hand under the "learning goals" condition. Dweck (1986) defines the mastery disposition that is captured under the "learning goals" column as adaptive, accompanied by "challenge seeking and high, effective persistence in the face of obstacles" (1986, p. 1040). She defines the maladaptive disposition (as reflected in under the "performance goals column) as helplessness, manifested by "challenge avoidance, low persistence in the face of difficulty" (1986, p. 1042),

Table 1. Effects of Performance versus Learning Goals on Children's Motivation toward Effort, Learning, & Mastery[3]

Performance Goals	Learning Goals
1. Ability Oriented	**1. Effort Oriented**

[3] Summary based on the research of Dweck and her colleagues.

2. Concerned about judgment of others	**2. Concerned and interested in own mastery**
3. Give up when faced with difficulty	**3. When faced with difficulty, vary their strategies**
4. Believe effort means low ability	**4. Believe that effort makes a difference**
5. Take comfort in others' failure	**5. Magnanimous towards peers**
6. Low recall of what is learned	**6. Slower learning, greater recall**
7. Poor performers distance selves from goals of school.	**7. Dispositions to learn and persist are strengthened.**

accompanied by negative affect, anxiety, and negative self-attribution with respect to ability as seen in the third comparison in the table. The evidence also indicates that adaptive and maladaptive dispositions are independent of actual intellectual ability (Dweck and Leggett, 1988). In tasks and assignments oriented toward performance goals, children who do not succeed tend to attribute their failure to their lack of ability. This kind of self-attribution

usually leads to anxiety, which may interfere with their performance, and ultimately to withholding effort. A few children even become overwhelmed by worry about goal attainment. However, during learning goal assignments children perceive obstacles and difficulties as cues to increase their effort, to analyze and vary their strategies, and thus to improve their work.

Second, under conditions of strong performance pressure - some of which may be experienced in the home as well as in the school - children focus on gaining favorable judgments of their ability or avoiding negative ones. This is in contrast to the effect of the learning goals condition in which children seek to increase their understanding or mastery of something new and are not distracted by the potential judgments of others. Similarly, the third contrast indicates that excessive performance pressure is more likely to lead to giving up than is the learning goals condition.

According to many studies, these two types of goals produce different effects on children's concerns as they address the tasks assigned. Although under the performance goals conditions children show concern about their ability, some high achieving children may worry lest this particular occasion might be the one on which they fail to measure up to their reputations as highly able. Other children tend to engage in defensive withdrawal from the task to avoid expected negative judgments of their ability. Performance goals "promote defensive strategies that can interfere with

challenge seeking" (Dweck, 1986, p. 1043). As Dweck's experiments revealed, children faced with learning goals chose challenging tasks regardless of whether they believed themselves to have high or low ability; they were also not unwilling to display their ignorance. Tending to think more about the required skills and the interest of the topic, they were less oriented internally toward their own ability and how they might look to others.

The fourth contrast indicates the development of distinct beliefs about the usefulness of effort. The fifth contrast indicates that excessive performance pressure tends to lead to a sense of relief at others' failures rather than a readiness to offer them support. Whereas under the learning goals condition children exhibit magnanimity toward peers in need of assistance - presumably a disposition we want all our children to have! The sixth contrast indicates that intense revision or test performance preparation is likely to lead to success, but short-lived mastery of the tasks to be performed. Whereas under the learning goals conditions, mastery seems to take more time, but also to be more enduring.

The final contrast is perhaps the most worrying of all for developmentalists concerned with the long-term consequences of cumulative experiences. According to one hypothesis about the possible outcome of extensive experience with performance goals is that children who see themselves as having moderate or low ability come to eschew the values of the school, to disavow grades, test scores,

and other indices of performance. This hypothesis is related to Dweck's assertion (1991) that in some cultures people acquire in the early years a strong belief that ability is a fixed entity: one either has ability or has not. Repeated and constant pressure to perform - and to perform well, of course - would be accompanied by repeated exposures to one's own inadequacies. A significant, even though small proportion of children who experience intense performance pressure are very likely to eventually distance themselves from the goals of the school, and perhaps from the larger society, especially if their performances rarely meet the standards of those who judge them. I do not intend to suggest that children should never be subjected to performance pressures. The issue is one of proportions, especially in the early years, and especially in terms of their potential cumulative effects. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to assume that an adaptive way of coping with these exposures of sub-standard performance might be to distance oneself from the institution that passes judgment and from all those identified with it, their methods as well as their symbols (See Gross, 1998).

As Dweck (1986) points out, "The more children focus on learning or progress, the greater the likelihood of maintaining effective strategies (or improving their strategies) under difficulty or failure" (1986, p. 1044).

The two different types of task goals also give rise to different sources of satisfaction. Children perceive the performance goals condition as an opportunity to

display their abilities and take pride in them if indeed they are able, or they experience embarrassment and shame when they fail. Children may come to the conclusion that effort indicates low ability. They may then attempt to disguise or deny that they have to apply real effort, fearing it will reveal that they actually have little ability. Children with a strong performance orientation derive satisfaction from outshining others; they often respond to the failure of others with a sense of relief; those who perceive themselves as able tend to welcome a competitive reward structure.

In the case of learning goals, children enjoy the effort involved in the tasks and gain satisfaction from the mastery achieved. Learning oriented children have also been found to be more magnanimous toward their peers in noncompetitive situations (Dweck, 1986; 1991). Research also indicates a greater retention and transfer of learning and more active attempts to apply what has been learned to novel problems.

This research suggests that young children's dispositions to learn can be threatened by excessive emphasis on skilled performance in academically oriented curricula. Dweck (1986) notes that emphasizing performance "may well create the very conditions that have been found to undermine intrinsic interest" (1986, p.1042). One of the many reasons I advocate including project work as part of the early childhood curriculum is that it emphasizes learning goals and provides a contexts that focus on what

individuals and groups can learn while exploring topics and investigating phenomena together. I do not wish to imply that performance goals are never appropriate. The issues are those of how early they are appropriate and how to find a desirable balance between performance pressure and more open invitations to learn.

It is difficult for me to know the extent to which this formulation of the effects of different instructional goals applies to young children in Barbados. Much depends on how the principal adults in the children's lives help children to interpret the "messages" they receive and experiences they have at school. The formulation presented here may be related to some extent to the powerful role of the peer culture in the US. Indeed, one of my concerns about the next century - at least in the US, is the extent to which parents seem to have abdicated much of their authority over their children, thereby creating a vacuum that is filled by the peer group. With the apparent Americanization of the world, I fear such a trend could spread to the Caribbean as well.

4. The Early Development of Social Competence

The topic of social development in young children is a very large one and has traditionally been given a central place on the agenda of educators of young children.

Social competence has several components. Among them are pro-social behaviors such as responsiveness to the

needs, feelings, wishes, and wellbeing of others. Children who frequently engage in such pro-social behaviors, e.g. helping, sharing, comforting others, etc., are likely to be experienced by their peers as satisfying play partners. Social cognition is also a component of social competence. It is defined as the way in which people *think* about social objects (other people, groups, themselves), social events and social relationships. Children express their social cognitive skills through role taking, perspective-taking, interpersonal understanding, empathy, etc. Social competence also includes emotion regulation, namely the ability to respond emotionally to others appropriately - with optimal rather than maximal or minimal intensity and with positive rather than negative feelings.

In terms of current perspectives there is a growing and convincing body of evidence that *social competence must be achieved by about six-years-old or the child is at risk for the rest of its life.* The risks are several. Among them are dropping out of school, delinquency of various kinds, mental health problems, employment, marital, and parenting difficulties (See Katz & McClellan, 1997). Most of us are aware, for example, that there are many who have sufficient technical, intellectual, cognitive, and academic skills and qualifications for good employment but who cannot sustain satisfactory employment due to social difficulties. Some are too difficult to get along with; they may be insufficiently cooperative, too self-centered,

insensitive to others, too shy, too passive, insufficiently assertive, excessively argumentative, and so forth.

It is also well established that even by age four, children establish reputations among their peers and that in order to overcome or change a negative reputation a child virtually has to move to a new school! Therefore, if we ignore or neglect children's early need for help with the development of their social competence when they are young, we and they pay for it later, one way or another.

Social competence in young children is often defined as the ability to initiate and maintain *reciprocal* or *mutual* relationships with others. These relationships are characterized by commitment that is strong enough to support the ability to continue to care, and respond to another person, even after conflict and disagreement. In fact, we know that children who mutual friends with each other fight more than children who are not friends. This is part because they spend more time together, and in part because they are committed enough to each other to argue and quarrel rather than just leave the situation and drop the relationship. This experience of having a friend, and arguing or fighting, but also continuing to be friends, i.e. to re-negotiate the relationship after a squabble, is an important ability for one's whole of life, including marriage. All of this does not mean that children have to be "social butterflies." They do not have to be liked by everybody. Anyway, nobody is! The issue is not the

quantity of interactions or relationships, but their *quality*. The important thing is that by at least the age of six a child shows the ability to really care about a few other children in reciprocal relationships. The mutuality is more important than the number of relationships or being popular. It is possible to be popular, but to have no friends. It is also possible to be unpopular, but to have one or two friends.

Furthermore we now have reason to suspect that those rejected by their peers early eventually find each other and form strong group bonds from which they enjoy a sense of identity and belonging, intimacy, loyalty, and trust they missed earlier and enjoy now, built on shared hostility toward the larger society. In such groups the feeling of being "in," of belonging to an "in-group," is strengthened by identifying a resented or hated "out group." Such groups do not want the social or political issues that inflame their shared passions solved or resolved because solutions would undermine the bases for group solidarity and belonging.

The role of social competence is also important because virtually all significant learning occurs in the context of social relationships. No human being can realize his or her potential -- even a small amount of it, not to speak of all of it -- except as a member of a stable group of other humans. A language cannot be learned except in the company of other human beings who speak it. In fact, social competence leads to multiple opportunities to use language,

and good use of language leads to making good social relationships. In this way, good relations with other children lead to social competence, and so the development of peer competence and verbal competence support each other in a recursive manner.

Achieving social competence involves many complex processes beginning at birth. The development of social competence involves addressing all four types of learning goals discussed earlier in this paper: knowledge, skills, dispositions, and feelings. Teachers of young children are in an ideal position to foster the development of all these components by providing contexts in which they can be expressed in meaningful ways. It should be noted that both appropriate and inappropriate social responses are learned through interaction with caregivers and peers. Maladaptive patterns of social responses may be intensified and strengthened during interaction unless the child is helped to alter them. Simply providing group interaction does not guarantee that all young children will acquire desirable peer interactive skills. Many children need adult help to master them.

Early social competence is unlikely to be learned or improved by instruction or exhortation, lectures, or threats. Rather, it is fostered with the assistance of very knowledgeable and skillful teachers who provide insight, guidance and suggestions in the course of a child's interaction with peers. Both adaptive and maladaptive social behaviors can also be learned through observation!

Fortunately, teachers now have a range of techniques available for fostering the development of social competence (See Katz & McClellan, 1997). A preschooler who is struggling with the development of social skills can be helped in a matter of weeks. If we wait until the child is ten- or twelve-years-old, we will need the whole state mental health agency, and it still may be too late. By those ages a child has accumulated years of first hand data that he or she is unlikable, and such internalized data are very difficult to overcome or to change.

5. Implications for the Curriculum in the Early Years

The brief sketch above of the probable relationships of various early experiences to later functioning suggests that the curriculum and teaching methods in the early years must provide ample and genuine opportunity for children to take an active role working in small groups together investigating events, phenomena and topics in their own environments worthy of understanding more fully (See Katz & Chard, 1989).

We refer to this curriculum strategy as the "Project Approach." It is an approach to teaching that incorporates "project work" i.e., investigations, as that *part* of the curriculum. In the course of project work young children have opportunity to acquire relevant and worthwhile knowledge, to apply the skills learned in other parts of the curriculum. They also have ample and genuine

opportunity to listen to each other's ideas and questions, to anticipate each other's wishes and reactions, to resolve arguments, to offer assistance to each other, and communicate their own suggestions and thoughts to their co-workers, and to coordinate their efforts with others. Furthermore, they often will have opportunity to learn to work with peers they do not especially like or prefer.

All of these experiences offer occasions to acquire and practice social competencies that are life skills - skills not included on tests or other conventional school reports. The project approach is not new to Western education in general or to Barbados in particular. In recent years it has been re-introduced with several workshops on the "project approach" here, and many Barbados early years teachers have been implementing the project approach again for about ten years. Indeed, I am aware of an extended in-depth investigation of West Indies cricket life that was conducted by preschoolers at Erdiston Nursery School and was impressive enough to merit a personal visit from Prime Minister Owen Arthur, a well-known cricket enthusiast!

As I have learned about their experiences and those of many other teachers of young children in many countries where I have been working, they confirm the developmental assumption that, while play is a natural way that young children learn, it is just as natural for them to learn through first-hand observation and investigations. Indeed, living with a young preschooler is precisely a source of

stress for the adults because their disposition to investigate everything around them is so powerful that they place themselves in constant jeopardy.

Incorporating projects into the curriculum is a way of strengthening and capitalizing on this in-born investigative disposition. It seems to me that many parents and some educators seriously under-estimate young children's intellectual abilities until they witness their absorption and involvement in investigating things around them. Many also under-estimate children's capacities to gain deep satisfaction from the hard work involved in these investigations.

Conclusion

If the perspectives I have shared here are on target they suggest that for the sake of children's *long-term development*, formal and rigorous academic instruction and exercises be postponed until roughly about the age of 6 years. But I must add here that just because a school or a teacher is not providing formal academic exercises in the early years does not mean that what is on offer is sufficiently mind-engaging. Young children should not be spending large proportions of time in "cute" arts and crafts, or in mindless productions of identical picture pasting thought up by adults. The curriculum in the early years must address the *intellectual* development of children and engage their lively minds in observing, drawing, and

discussing events and phenomena around them worthy of close inspection. I want the emphasize again that the intellect consists largely of dispositions - habits of mind - such as the disposition to make sense of experience, to theorize, hypothesize, analyze, synthesize, etc. that can only grow and develop through actual purposeful application.

I sometimes think that one of the greatest challenges for all of us is to reformulate the goals of education so that we make it clear to ourselves and our children that not all youngsters have to become rocket scientists, engineers, lawyers or doctors to be counted as successful. I believe many children in both our countries do get such a message from adults and society at large. Rather a more worthwhile goal, it seems to me, is to ensure that whatever children ultimately do with their lives is not predetermined at birth by their gender, race, ethnic group, nationality, first language or socioeconomic status into which they are born. That is a very difficult goal for all of us educators. It suggests that a major focus should be on helping the young learn as much as well as they can - *but especially about how to live a satisfying life.* Learning how to live a good life, satisfying life - among many other things - has a great deal to do with all the arts, in addition to the knowledge, skills, dispositions, and feelings a community agrees should be strengthened in all their children.

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