

School-Age Principles of Development and Learning

1. *All domains of development and learning: (i.e., physical, social-emotional and cognitive) are interconnected. Development and learning in one domain influences and is influenced by what is taking place in other domains.*

This supports the development of the whole child. For example, a growing body of research demonstrates the relationship between social-emotional factors and children's academic competence. They work in concert.

2. *Learning and development follow well-documented sequences, later abilities, skills and knowledge build on those already acquired.*

How children within a given age range typically develop and learn provides a framework to guide adults in designing learning experiences and environments. For example, in math, a concept of more and less, is developed before children can add and subtract. This is scaffolded learning—what has to come before to move ahead.

3. *From child-to-child development and learning takes place at varying rates and within each individual child rates vary across different areas of learning, chronological age and life experiences.*

Nowhere is this variation more evident than in school agers. Each child follows his or her individual pattern and timing. This also takes in variation in temperament, personality, and aptitudes as well as the family and social-cultural context. Multiple factors go into the creation of an individual child's development.

4. *Development and learning results from the continuous interaction between biological maturation and experience.*

Is it nature or nurture? The genetic makeup of a child may predict healthy growth, but life experiences may keep that potential from being reached. The child's experiences in the social and physical world impact the growing, changing child.

5. *Past experiences have profound effects on development and there are optimal periods for certain types of development and learning to occur.*

Experiences are cumulative. The social skills a child learns as a preschooler help to shape the child's ability to make friends and gain the confidence to achieve success in academic learning. Schools place great importance on third grade reading skill because research has shown that future academic success is highly dependent on a child's ability to read, comprehend and use information.

6. *Development moves from simple to more complex.*

Fine motor skills are a clear example, the ability to use a pencil or cut with scissors is difficult for a kindergartner, but an easy task for a fifth grader. Younger children tend to think more in the here and now, and not project or connect actions to future outcomes. Younger children tend to believe what they see, but older children question more and test authority. Children move from external controls to internal self-regulation as they mature.

7. *Children develop best with secure and consistent relationships with responsive adults and positive relationships with peers.*

The trusting relationship with responsive caring adults sets the stage for children in key areas of development such as empathy, cooperation, self-regulation, cultural socialization, language and communication skills, peer and personal identity. A high quality after school program provides the environment to foster a child's sense of competency and capacity. Interpersonal skills are developed that help a child connect with others, learn to be a member of a group and work cooperatively. Comfort is created so that children will try new experiences and attempt new skills.

8. *Development and learning occur within the context of multiple social and cultural factors. The child must be viewed within the sociocultural context of family, educational setting, community and within the broader society.*

All the social and cultural factors have a powerful influence on the developing child. This is very noteworthy within school age children as they begin to process and explore their ethical values within the context of their experiences, and what they have been taught. All of our children are experiencing greater diversity, greater access to people of different cultures, languages, lifestyles, and religions. Children need to learn to function in a global economy.

9. *Children actively seek to understand the world and learn in a variety of ways and through a variety of teaching strategies.*

Children create their understanding of the world over time through their own experiences as well as from teachers, family members, peers, older children, books and media. School-agers are much more interested and capable of understanding abstract ideas than previously thought. They are always observing, reflecting on what they see and hear, asking questions and formulating their ideas.

10. *Play is the vehicle for children to develop and learn.*

While play may look different for school-agers, it is no less important in the development of physical well-being, understanding of the world, ability to interact effectively and competently with others, express and control emotions, develop problem-solving and conflict resolution skills. Research clearly shows the links between play and the development of self-regulation, language ability, social skills and success in school. Play is the way children prepare for their adult roles. But equally important is that play gives our lives laughter, enjoyment, relaxation and both physical and mental well-being.

11. *Children development and learning is supported when they are challenged to achieve at a level just above their current mastery and provided many opportunities to practice newly acquired skills.*

There is a fine line between motivating and frustrating. Children need success to develop competence, failure is a part of learning, but needs to be tempered with success. When mistakes are perceived as integral to learning and as “ah ha” moments they support learning. With school-agers it is important to provide many opportunities to reinforce and strengthen mastery. Multiple exposures and ways to use knowledge or skill and apply it to new situations support children moving to the next level.

12. *A child’s disposition and approach to learning affects their development and learning outcomes.*

How a child “feels” about learning has as much to do with a child’s success as innate ability. Resiliency and persistence are seen as critical for the health and wellbeing of children.

Compiled by:



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