

# Nurture in a Preschool Environment

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*Public archival edition · original coursework from 2016*

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Child Development 4

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## Abstract

After observing children play for an hour, many aspects of their development became easier to recognize, although I do not have much experience with children of ages three to five. Children began showing how social learning affects them in certain situations, as well as how children act when they are in a stage of development that is extremely crucial to them. The center that allowed me to observe is called [REDACTED CHILD CARE CENTER], located at [REDACTED ADDRESS]. The director of this center is [REDACTED DIRECTOR], with owners [REDACTED OWNER] and [REDACTED OWNER]. As expected, the center acts on child safety at all times.

I began searching for a child day care center 5 days prior to finding one that would allow me to come in and observe children interacting in a natural environment. After at least a dozen calls, I finally found a child day care center to observe. Thanks to [REDACTED DIRECTOR], the director of [REDACTED CHILD CARE CENTER], I was able to observe a group of children at 3:00 pm on the 26th of April, 2016. This center had about 25 toddlers (2-3 years old) and preschoolers (4-5 years old) playing in a large, open space after their nap time. This was my first time observing a group of children with slightly more insight after studying major theories from the following theorists: Sigmund Freud, Lev Vygotsky, Jean Piaget, and Erik Erikson.

As soon as I arrived I was greeted by the instructors in the facility. There was a total of six instructors at the time, and about 25 children. Four to five children for one instructor doesn't seem too difficult if the instructors have experience. The play area consisted of many play gyms, swings, trees, a gated area for the toddlers, and two water fountains within the toddler area and the preschooler area. The Classroom was large enough for all of them to nap, draw/write, and do other hands-on projects, which made up a total of three large rooms.

When my observation began, the students barely noticed me, as they continued to play among themselves. The first interaction I saw, included a two-year-old boy drinking from a drinking fountain. The toddler's instructor was helping the boy by pushing the button for him, as he couldn't reach the button. As Vygotsky believed, the child's zone of proximal development could be clearly seen. The zone of proximal development is an instance where a person has most of the skills necessary, yet still needs scaffolding, or "temporary sensitive support" to overcome their obstacles. (Berger, 2009). What surprised me the most was the fact that the instructors covered the water fountain with a large container. I would have never imagined any possible safety issues relating to the drinking fountain before the observation.

Within the toddler area, the playset was much smaller and surrounded by soft, small-grained sand. The slides were about two feet tall with a thick border at the end to prevent slipping outside the slide. One child, in particular, seemed uneasy of going down the slide. The instructor came to the end of the slide and signaled the child to slide down. The child immediately seemed more confident, and he slid down without issues. All the children around the instructor seemed very comfortable around her and securely attached, as their behavior suggested (Berger, 2009, P.206-207).

Whenever children needed to use the restroom, they would ask one of the instructors. In one instance, a four-year-old boy asked to use the restroom. The instructor replied, "You just went not too long ago. If you really need to go, you can wait five minutes." I didn't agree with the situation; However, there are many factors that could've caused the instructor to deny the child access to the restroom. A minute or two later, the same boy came up to the same instructor and informed her that he had wet himself. I wasn't surprised, although the instructor did seem surprised at the outcome. As Erikson suggests, children during this stage are attempting to complete many adult-like activities on their own, and failure to do so may lead to internalized feelings from the limits set. The child in this situation may feel ashamed and doubtful about their actions and abilities later on in life (Berger, 2009).

There are many simple tasks that children seem to forget when they get excited. For example, the children are reminded to wash their hands every time the children use the restroom. Some did not care at first, as they seemed too busy trying to catch up the few moments they missed. In another instance, fatigued children did not go straight to drink more water when they were clearly tired with sweat dripping. The instructors had to remind some children specifically by name, in order to have them drink water.

Children learn largely by social learning (Berger, 2009, P. 45). A four-year-old girl and a boy found ladybug next to their drinking fountain and proceeded to examine the bug eagerly. A few seconds after, three more children around the same age came in and joined in with the excitement. One of the instructors advised them not to harm the ladybug, then she held it, handling it carefully. One of the girls from the group held it on her hand, as they all took turns observing it. About three minutes later, the group disappeared as other games caught their attention while the girl that was holding the ladybug went around the playground to show it off. The children seemed to have learned how to handle a delicate creature by watching an adult show them. The children's social learning did not stop with the adults.

Most of the group scattered when three of the kids ran off to a race that a group of four-year-olds created. The children announced loudly that they were going to race to the fence and back. Within moments, there were about ten other children joining the race. As soon as they began running from one side of the playground to the other, three of the children that were observing the ladybug joined and ran with the rest of the group. Besides the social cues that they have learned throughout their development, the children's gross motor skills were being developed as they attempted to balance themselves with every stride (Berger, 2009, P. 232). Not all the children finished according to the general understanding. As soon as some hit the other end of the wall, they went to play elsewhere, while only half of the original group finished.

The instructors have a routine for the end of play time. They shake a tiny bell, which means that it's time to go back inside. Unsurprisingly, many of the children were reluctant, but they did manage to go back inside within three minutes. Around the same time, many of them were being picked up by their parents. As more left, the remaining started getting anxious. A few kept asking over and over about their parents, or why they couldn't go home yet. I can only imagine that this is probably an everyday occurrence.

The classroom had a huge emphasis on art and science. The children were growing seeds, which were taped to the windows. Some of the bags had tiny sprouts while others had yet to sprout. Hopefully, these

small observations help them want to learn more about everything in the long term. On the walls, many of the children's drawings were hung up as a display for all to see. While children drew these drawings, they were developing their fine motor skills further than before (Berger, 2009).

I found that it was easy to identify the types of attachment between children, yet the children who were insecure-avoidantly attached and securely attached stood out the most. For what the center was, it seemed like a nice center with many happy parents coming in and out without issues. As terms like "scaffolding" and the "zone of proximal development" became more apparent, the children's actions became easier to understand (Berger, 2009). Even though I understood how social learning affects everyone, it is much clearer when observed in children. The observation made me more aware of how much our development is affected during the first years of life. The children's future could end up disastrous or positive, depending on the type of care and understanding they receive at these primal ages.

## References

Berger, K. S. (2009). *Developing Person Through Childhood and Adolescence* (8th ed.). Worth Pub.

## Retrospective note (2026) - not part of the original paper

This assignment became a defining turning point in my academic development. At the time, I was pursuing developmental psychology and considering a possible path connected to early-childhood care. The process of locating a site, speaking candidly with someone there before the visit, and then observing the classroom environment gave me a much more concrete view of that work than coursework alone had provided.

I am intentionally not identifying the center or individuals in this public edition. The original paper contains both positive and critical observations, and I do not want a student paper from 2016 to function as a present-day assessment of the organization or as criticism of people who did not directly control the specific events I observed.

The paper is retained here because it documents an early point where abstract developmental theory met direct observation. In hindsight, that encounter mattered substantially to how I thought about my future direction. That retrospective significance is personal provenance, not evidence that the paper's developmental interpretations were correct.