Early Childhood Development: Nature Verses Nurture Theory

Introduction

The debate on which of the two, nurture and nature has the most effect on the early development of the child is never ending. Arguments have always been based on the fact that either the environment or genetics plays an important role in the early development of the child. So the question is, which is it? Is one more important than the other or are they both equally important for the development of the child. The argument has always been based on the fact that to what extent does the environment and inherited factors affect the behaviour of an individual. Debate also revolves around the fact that whether the development of the child's governed by a pattern the child has been born with or it is shaped through the experiences that the child encounters as he grows.

Discussion

Early childhood development is essential for the normal growth of any child. Essentially it can be defined as the time period between birth and the time the child begins to attend pre-school at around four years of age. The development period is the most critical part of any child's development. Studies have always been conducted to find out whether the child's environment i.e. nurture and the child's genetics i.e. nature are both equally influential in the development of the child or one of them is more influential than another (Watts, & Cockcroft, 2009).

Development include the physical development when the child is developing, he/she is able to overcome many obstacles over the years, first the child is unable to turn over by himself, later he crawls, walks and finally runs by him/herself. Development further involves the mental growth of the child, at birth the child cannot express himself but when he grows gradually he is able to mumble a few sounds so as to express different emotions, as the child grows older he /she is
able to speak clear and comprehensible sentences and can be able to tell stories. Most psychologists agree that the crucial periods of brain development also begin within the first years of the child’s development.

There are five specific developmental domains of children that relate to each other. They are known as the SPICE of life. They are: social development, physical development, intellectual development, creative development and emotional development (Richmond, 2009).

Social development can be defined as the ability to form attachment with those around, play with others, share and cooperate with them. With social development the child is able to form lasting relationships with those that they encounter in their life.

Physical development refers to the growth of fine and motor skills whereas intellectual development refers to the process were the child is able to make sense of the things that are around him/her. Creative development is on the other hand defined as the developing of special abilities and talents. Talents can be nurtured from hobbies. Emotional development refers to the development of self awareness and confidence and the ability to cope with the various feelings that the child experiences.

The early childhood development of the child is a crucial determinant of whom and how he/she will end up being in future. Events and situations that occur in the early childhood can affect the child for his/her lifetime. Children must therefore have stable, responsive, nurturing relationships and rich experiences early in their lifetime so as to have long term and life long benefits for learning behaviour and for the growth of both physical and mental health (Slentz, & Krogh, 2001).
There has always been debate on which of the two, nature or nurture theory affects the way the child develops and grows. Nurture theorists hold the opinion that children learn as they grow and in the process of growing they are able to develop their different personalities based on the lessons that life has to offer with regards to the environmental experiences that they encounter. It is believed that environmental factors play a critical role in enabling children to grow and fully realise their potential. It is through nurture that man is able to figure out who he is.

Nurture i.e. the environment has always played an important role in the personality and behaviour development of children. However this stand has over time been questioned after analysing situations such as a child grows up in a poor broken home where he is exposed to all manner of vices such as alcohol and drugs. Though the child grows up in this harsh environment he/ she is able to overcome the challenges and become a bright student in class as well as a reputable individual in the society. This means that nurture did not influence his development; he/ she probably had it in him to work hard so as to have a better life (Plomin, & Spinath, 2004).

Studies have produced evidence that supports that the environmental factors have an effect on a child IQ. IQ refers to the Intelligence quotient and it is a score that is derived from the tests that have been designed to test and assess the level of intelligence of an individual. Studies on adoptive siblings also tend to indicate that the siblings are no more similar in IQ than any other stranger. Siblings that are related have an IQ correlation of 0.6. In the study on heritability of IQ the relative importance of genetics and the environment for differences in IQ in siblings is studied. Though IQ is a polygenic trait it has been found out that certain gene disorders can affect the IQ of a child as he grows up to be adult (Penn, 2003).

Geneticists hold the notion that nature plays an important role in the development of the child. They state that children inherit lots of traits and looks from their parents and as a result the children will turn out to be a combination of the behaviour trait and personality of the parents. Supporters of nurture as influential for development state that the parent is in a position to control how his/her child will end up like in future. Parents are in a position to alter the behaviour, skills and personality of their children for their good. This is possible through different parenting techniques, home environment as well as interactions (Plomin, & Spinath, 2004).
Nature can be defined as the genetic material that controls an individual’s looks, temper, and abilities. The factors of nature cannot be altered as they are inherited from the parents. They include factors such as the colour of the eyes, the height, patience and an individual temperament. When a child is born the first sign of genes portrayed through emotions is when it cries minutes after birth. It has been established that children empathise and sympathise with each other and as a result they all tend to cry when one cries around them. This emotions are natural and the child ahs been born with them (Plomin, & Spinath, 2004).

It is also believed that brain and physical development are also inborn and man cannot alter/change their course of development. Physical development is determined by nature, in which the child first gains control of the head, neck, sits without support, crawls and gradually is able to get up and walk by himself. It is expected that by the time the child turns two years, he/she can climb and use basic utensils such as cups and spoons. This shows that the child has developed his hand eye coordination. By the time the child turns 2-2 and half years he/she can be able to jump, dance and play around. These physical developments occur concurrently with corresponding brain development (Westen, 2002).

Language is also affected by nature. It has been proven that a baby can recognise his/her native language once he/she is exposed to it. The language however has to spoken regularly and often around the child so that he/she can hear and learn them. The same can be said of the other languages that the child will be frequently exposed. The child has the ability to also learn the other languages that are beings spoken around him/her often. It is therefore apparent that language contrary to previous thoughts does is not taught but naturally acquired through exposure to the language (Richmond, 2009).

Nurture theory on the other hand states that genetics determine the personality of the child in future only and nothing else. Supporters of nurture theory claim that when children are born, they are a clean slate. However the environment where they are raised in, the experiences they encounter and the people that are around them influence and determine who they will end up being. The nurture theorists claim that as much as genetics determine the personality of an individual, environmental factors determine who an individual becomes in future. For example, they have been evidence that children from abusive families and those that have been abused
have a higher chance of turning out to be abusers themselves. Environment factors include style of parenting, exposure to early schooling, home exposure, eating modes and interaction with those around the children. It has therefore been stated that the way a parents nurtures a child determines how the child develops (Plomin, & Spinath, 2004).

For the brain to develop, stimulation is a key factor. It is anything that causes the brain to function via the senses. The brain to therefore develop it has to be stimulated to function and since the brain increase in size as the child grows it is important that he/she is stimulated to develop his/her brain at a young age. Stimulation can entail the playing with toys, talking to the child to enhance his/her listening skills, indicating to the child objects and people around to see whether the child recognises them. It will also help the child as he grows to make associations between speech and objects. They are able to associate objects to certain names. The vision of the child should also be stimulated so as to sharpen his/her sense of sight. Exposing babies to new people and environment enhances the interaction skills of the child when he grows up (Sigelman, & Rider, 2008).

It can therefore not been said with certainty that either nurture or nature best affects the early development of the child. Both arguments have a levelling ground. For example emotions are said to be pre-programmed but the circumstances that elicit this emotions are nurtured. So for one nature action to occur, a nurtured action has to have preceded it. More studies have also been done with reference to language. It has been said that due to lack of exposure (nurture), the children later in, life lose the ability to hear the phonetics of other languages other than their native language. They are born with the ability, nature, but due to nurture they lose it (Keating, 2010).

Studies have been done with reference to identical twins that have been raised in different set ups. Though the twins are genetically the same, (nature), it is their environmental factors (nurture) with regards to where they have been brought up that makes the difference between the two. Recent studies have indicated that twin that have been raise separately have more similarities than those that have been raised together. This phenomenon is explained by the fact that twins that have been raised together have the need to divide their territories and also compete to be different as compared to twins that have been raised separately as they grow up knowing they are a single unit (Richmond, 2009).
Conclusion

Both nature and nurture are both important in the growth and early development of the child. Factors related to nurture and nature are both intertwined in areas of development such as language development and emotional development. Physical development is pre-programmed and it is interrelated to mental development which develops through nature. Nurture plays an important role in the development of the brain as well. Nature and nurture cannot be separated from each other with relation to development of the child. Since it has been figured out that both nature and nurture play an important role in the development of an individual it is important for the parents to ensure that their children are raised in the best environment that they can manage so that the young minds of the children can be cultivated and curved towards achieving their highest potential.

Reference

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