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A Case Study of Child Development: A Student Teacher’s Perspective

Patsy DePew

Department of Educational Studies

Abstract

Education of a child is mostly understood as teaching practices in schools, but education is also the child’s complete development. The purpose of this case study was to examine the multiple factors that influence a developing child’s cognitive, social emotional, language and physical development. The study considered the ecological factors based on Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Theory (home, school and community) that contribute to the child’s learning and development (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2016). This case study used Bronfenbrenner’s theory to examine the contextual influences on a developing child through analyses of the child’s individual self within the microsystem of school, peers, family and community. This inquiry was a 15-week case study that was conducted at a local school in Fort Wayne Community Schools in which one child was observed in the school setting. During the fifteen weeks of the case study, I did six naturalistic observations of the child in the school setting, engaged in informal interviews with the child, teacher and other school staff and collected anecdotal field notes. As a student teacher intern and researcher, I also spent time working with the child one-on-one in the classroom and got to know him on a personal level. The observations were analyzed using concepts of child development research and theories of child development to learn about one child’s unique experience in the classroom. This case study demonstrated a real-life experience of a child and the influential factors of child development looking at cognitive, social emotional, language and physical development. The study considered the ecological factors based on Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Theory (home, school and community) that contribute to the child’s learning and development (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2016). This case study uses Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Theory to examine the contextual influences on a developing child through analyses of the child’s individual self within the microsystem of school, peers, family and community. This inquiry was a 15-week case study that was conducted at a local school in Fort Wayne Community Schools in which one child was observed in the school setting. During the fifteen weeks of the case study, I did six naturalistic observations of the child in the school setting, engaged in informal interviews with the child, teacher and other school staff and collected anecdotal field notes. As a student teacher intern and researcher, I also spent time working with the child one-on-one in the classroom and got to know him on a personal level. The observations were analyzed using concepts of child development research and theories of child development to learn about one child’s unique experience in the classroom. This case study demonstrated a real-life experience of a child and the influential factors of child development looking at cognitive, social emotional, language and physical development. Knowledge acquired during this study was understanding a child’s thought process of the world and learning, good relationships with peers, socialization, and the importance of active and competitive play in school for boys. This case study demonstrates the importance of not only teaching and mentoring students in the classroom but accommodating content based on each students’ needs.

The School Environment

This study took place at Young Early Childhood Center which is a preschool and kindergarten school within the Fort Wayne Community Schools. Young Early Childhood Center is a magnet school that focuses on early development from a Reggio Emilia philosophy that focuses on constructing knowledge from an exploratory and art based perspective. The school’s moto is “Where Discovery is a Fine Art.” Young Early Childhood Center is a diverse setting including children from white, black, Hispanic, Asian, multiracial, and other backgrounds.

The Child

The child of this study was Deshawn Williams [pseudonym]. Deshawn was part of Mr. Michael’s [pseudonym] kindergarten class at Young Early Childhood Center. He was a five-year-old African-American boy and he was the youngest of seven siblings. He was energetic, assertive, positive, and outgoing throughout the case study. He loved to show his athleticism at recess and loved being around his friends. Deshawn was also one of the highest achievers in class and loved getting attention in class.

Results

The following is an example of an observation of the child in a domain. These observation is analyzed by using child development theories and research.

Cognitive Development

Piaget’s theory on how children construct knowledge in the early elementary years, indicates that “people play a significant role in influencing physical phenomena,” such as clouds moving (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2016). Deshawn believed certain physical objects were alive because of people’s actions. Child naive ideas can emerge from beliefs based off of their developmental stage (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2016). Below, is an example that illustrates this phenomena with Deshawn’s conversation.

Researcher: “Are you alive?”
Deshawn: “Yes.”
Researcher: “Is a cloud alive? Why?”
Deshawn: “Yes because it’s up.”
Researcher: “Is a bicycle alive? Why?”
Deshawn: “Yes because we ride on it.”
Researcher: “Is a car alive? Why?”
Deshawn: “Yes because we ride it.”
Researcher: “Is a tree alive? Why?”
Deshawn: “Yes because we climb on one.”
Deshawn: “God because it’s His word.”
Researcher: “How does the sun move? Why?”
Deshawn: “God moves the sun. He is the sun.”
Researcher: “Why doesn’t the clouds come down? What keeps them up?”
Deshawn: “No, God don’t make the clouds fall down.”
Researcher: “What keeps the sun in the sky?”
Deshawn: “God.” (Field Notes, October 26, 2016).

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What I Learned as a Future Educator about Children

Each child has strengths, weaknesses, and different influential factors that make each child unique and distinctive individuals. Being knowledgeable and having evidence of the influential factors, could help current and future teachers understand and make accommodations in their classroom to make learning inclusive and engaging as possible. This experience has taught me from here and now on, my purpose in the classroom is to not only to teach and mentor my students but also assess and accommodate content taught in class, based on each student’s needs and be aware of implicit bias. Kindergarten is the foundation work for K-12 education. Lastly, teachers will always be students first.

Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Theory

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