



Interview Transcripts – Child Development Primer

This document contains transcripts of the expert interviews in *Introduction to The Science of Early Child Development, Child Development Primer*. Transcripts are listed alphabetically by the name of the interviewee and the name of the video clip. Click on a name below to go to that person's interview transcripts:

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Ateah – milestones and safety (1:41)

I find as a nurse working with parents that it's very important that we give them information on expected milestones of children. It's really related to safety I think in preventing of accidents and injuries that children can, you know, unfortunately cause of their own development in learning, happen in to. We know that children, for example, at about age four months start to roll. Well if a parent isn't aware of this or isn't expecting it, we have infants fall off of change table for example, in that one day they're laying perfectly still -the next minute is the first time they roll over. And unfortunately if it's on a high surface, they can have a severe injury from falling.

We know that babies put everything in their mouths. We want to make sure there's nothing close by that they can put in their mouths that could cause harm.

When infants start to walk at about a year, that's when the home needs complete baby-proofing. Infants will, as soon as they start to walk, if there's a pool or a body of water they just seem to make a beeline towards it. That's why I think it's important that this information is included in prenatal education in particular because a new mom, new parents are so busy that isn't the time they're going to start reading about milestones in the first year or two.

They need to know it before it occurs. They need to be prepared in order to keep the environment safe and know what to watch for; know if their child is developing as expected so we want to ensure there's no developmental delays and also use that information to make their environment as safe as possible.

Durrant – understand children’s behaviour (1:15)

Each one of us has a theory of why people behave as they do. And so if our theory is that when my child reaches for that knife, it's because she is defying me; I've told her not to touch that knife, and she's defying my authority, then I'm very likely to respond with punishment and possibly quite harsh punishment because I take it personally.

If, though, I understand children's development, I understand that at that age, they don't understand danger, that they haven't had enough experience with injury to know about pain, necessarily, that they are curious, and they need to touch everything to understand it, to learn about it, that they just don't have the experience and the knowledge that we have to make those decisions about what to touch and what not to touch. So once they understand child development, they can come up with many more reasons why a child might reach for a knife. They understand that the range of motivations for that behavior is much broader than they might thought it was previously.

Katz – building a strong foundation (3:31)

Some time ago, I was asked to give a lecture, and the title they gave me was, Building a Good Foundation. I thought about it and thought about it. And then I talked to my husband who was a civil engineer; his whole career was designing buildings. And I said, when you design the foundation what are some of the principles that you use? And so the first one he said was, "You have to find out everything you can about the soil you're building on. Is it, how far do you have to go to get to the rock, is it sandy, slushy, slimy, wet?" and so on and so forth, he went on for about an hour. And then the second thing he said was you have to be very clear about what kind of structure you want to put on it. Is it going to be tall and thin or round or wide and so on and so forth. The third thing he said was, you have to also find out all about what forces will act on it, will there be hurricanes or tornados or earthquakes and so on and so forth, and finally he said, and I think it's very appropriate for us, if you don't get it right the first time, it can be very expensive to repair, and very dangerous.

So I've used that as a sort of analogy to frame my ideas about the early childhood as a foundation stage, and basically I think it means that you have to consider what goes in to a good foundation like, well, what experiences have the children had? What experiences have they not had that they should have had? Have they had opportunities to listen to stories and so on and so forth. So, if you're the teacher of young children, you'll want to take time as you get to know the to find out what they have had and what they haven't had.

The other question is for all of us as professionals to come together on various occasions to talk about what kind of structure we want to build. And we usually speak in very vague terms, we want children to be curious and to be confident and have high self-esteem and things like that. That's not very helpful. And so I've often given a lot of thought to what are the main aspects of development that we should think about when they're young.

The third part, as I mentioned, is what forces impact on the children and we, in most parts of the world today, have to think a lot about for example, what's the impact of constant television watching? Kids see it a lot. What impact does it have on their foundation building? And should we make adjustments or should we encourage parents to prevent children from spending so much time in that sort of passive role.

But also what kinds of experiences should be provided while they're in the preschool and early education years of school and I agree with the principle that the engineers talk about, and that's if you don't get it right in the beginning it can be very expensive, in fact, some parts of it can't be repaired.

Katz – communication (2:32)

I was visiting a class where the children, these were five year olds, the task of the morning was to cut pictures out of the advertising section of the Sunday paper. Cut them out, if they were objects that began with the letter 'T', and then to paste them on paper so this was a sort of way to study the alphabet or something silly. Anyway, two boys, quite bright little boys were working at the table and they were cutting out things and then they were pasting, and one boy grabbed the glue from the other boy. So the first boy said "Hey wait a minute I'm not done yet," and he sort of yelled and complained, and the teacher turned to him, turned to the two boys and said, "We don't do that in this school," and I said to her, "We just did". And so that's another one of my sort of major causes is don't speak phony to children.

A lot of teachers say to children "You need to turn around," they don't need to turn around, say "I want you to turn around", there's nothing wrong with that. They don't have to like it, just be straight, and honest.

Or another one is "You need to sit still." Well, most young children don't need to sit still, but you may want them to, and it's interesting. I hadn't thought about that until I was visiting, actually a school in Portugal, and the teacher would say things like that, and it was just, would say, "Please turn around" and there wasn't a problem, she just said it straight, but we tend to use a lot of phony talk with children.

And I'm not sure exactly why, we want to be nice I suppose, I don't, I don't know the exact thing, and I was, last December, I was working with teachers in China, and they have forty children in a class. Forty. One year-olds. Forty - two year olds in a class, forty – three year olds in a class, and I was trying to find out how many adults, usually one assistant. But it's a culture in which the adult authority is never questioned, never has been, by the adults or by the children, so the adults don't apologize, they wouldn't use phrases like 'We don't do that,' they would say, 'I don't want you to do that,' and then move on.

Keating – parenting (1:31)

One of the most rigorous and replicated findings in all of developmental psychology is that parental effects do matter and they matter to a very substantial degree and that standard findings have been replicated also within that literature that essentially it's a combination of warmth and responsiveness of the parental figures in the early years particularly mother who's typically the primary caretaker. When the mother is the primary caretaker it's that warmth and responsiveness. Whoever the primary caretaker is that's an important thing, and by warmth it's obviously means kind of general acceptance, a sense of love and affection, emotionally communicated affection as well as responsiveness to needs as they arise, so responsiveness that's time sensitive; the younger the child, the more time sensitive those responsiveness needs are.

So there's a warmth responsiveness dimension, higher being better, but then there's also a dimension that is in the area of expectations or demands; the sorts of things where parents place limits on their children that children get to understand that there are limits, because for many children, for most children, the absence of limits is a terrifying thing, so needing to have the structure of where the edges are in their behaviour, where the edges are in relationships, where the edges are in things that they do, is an equally important component to their felt security and to their ability to learn to function, to explore and to be comfortable in the world.

Kolb – play learning (2:42)

I would say the more different kinds of learning experiences you can have, one of which is play based, the better off your brain development's going to be and the better off you're going to be in the end. I think the schools need to pay attention to the fact that play is necessary.

I know there are schools that are going away from recess, going away from play periods because of perhaps litigation issues or worries about children being injured and so on, but what they're doing is they're changing brain development by not allowing kids to engage in these kinds of play.

Furthermore, the attention span of kids, especially boys, in the absence of having engaged in play is clearly reduced. Perhaps less so in girls, but nonetheless I think it's equally important that they've got to engage in play behaviours. Certainly when I was a child a very long time ago, going to school, we played at recess. There was a soccer ball and all the boys chased it around the field when it wasn't snowing. Then when it was snowing you did other things, running around the field. That was important. If you can't do that sort of thing and you're supposed to sit and be quiet, that's not engaging the brain in any way, it's turning the brain right off.

I think if play has a function, and I've suggested that it does, you've got to recognize and respect that function and say okay, how can we enhance this, how can we do it in a way that we don't have children getting injured, although I don't recall anybody getting injured on the playground when I was there, but perhaps some were.

I have this worry that what parents have done and what schools have done is they've overprotected kids to the point that they're interfering with normal cognitive and brain development because they're not allowing the kids to do the things the brain evolved to do a hundred thousand years ago. It's a sudden shift that may not be all that good. That's my gut feeling. Given the developmental changes that are going on in the brain and particularly in the frontal lobe, both during the infant period and then the pre-adolescent and adolescent periods, the importance of play, and normal play if you like, peer related play really comes to the forefront. This is going to have huge impact on frontal lobe development and the ability to do the kinds of executive functions that the frontal lobe is engaged in.

Now, I focused on the frontal lobe because that's where we see the changes most easily. Is it the only place, probably not, but it's one where they jump out and smack you in the nose and you go wow, those are big changes.