

Redirect Behavior

IMAGINE you are babysitting a three-year-old girl and a six-year-old boy. The two are doing a craft activity: cutting out pictures and gluing them onto a collage. After five minutes, the three-year-old girl starts smearing glue onto the table, and the six-year-old boy starts cutting his shirt. What would you do?



Objective:



Explain concepts related to redirecting behavior.

Key Terms:



ecological perspective
redirecting behavior
sociocultural perspective
stage theory
Vygotsky's scaffolding
Vygotsky's zone of proximal development

Supporting Childhood Development and Redirecting Behavior

BEHAVIORAL AND EMOTIONAL NEEDS OF CHILDREN

Infancy (from the Latin roots meaning “not speaking”) is birth to two years. Early childhood is two to five years of age. Middle childhood is 6 to 12 years of age. The theories of Erickson (1902 to 1994) and Vygotsky (1896 to 1934) talk about the emotional and behavioral needs of children.

Erickson's Stage of Psychosocial Development

Stage theory is a description of children's linear development that progresses through special periods of life.

- ◆ Stage 1 is Trust vs. Mistrust (birth to one year of age). A baby learns to trust the environment and his or her caregiver(s). Also, a baby makes connections between trust of the environment and his or her inner feelings of contentment and satisfaction.
- ◆ Stage 2 is Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt (one to three years of age). A toddler gains the desire to make choices and learns that self-control goes with making choices.
- ◆ Stage 3 is Initiative vs. Guilt (three to six years of age). A child develops task initiative. A child decides what he or she wants to achieve and is proactive in implementing the plan.
- ◆ Stage 4 is Industry vs. Inferiority (6 to 12 years of age). A child becomes absorbed in developing skills. In addition, a child masters the basics of using different technologies to become more productive.

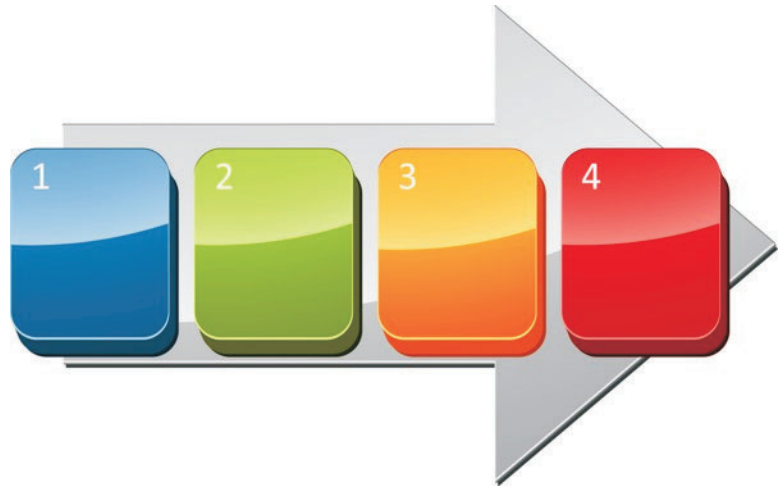


FIGURE 1. Linear stage development.

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory and Zone of Proximal Development

The **sociocultural perspective** is a view that suggests child development is affected by the surrounding culture and people. Meanwhile, **Vygotsky's zone of proximal development** is skills children learn with the help of nearby people, such as teachers and parents. Children are able to carry out skills with the help of mentors. Generally, children internalize the explanations of mentors and remember explanations to use independently in the future.

Vygotsky's scaffolding is cognitive problem-solving skills provided by teachers and parents to help children become more independent. Caregivers (e.g., parents) model problem-solving thought processes. Child store cognitive lessons to use independently in the future.

THE ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

The **ecological perspective** is a developmental framework for considering the individual child, his or her environment, and the interaction between child and environment. Within the ecological perspective, child development is a combination of the natural needs of children and the environmental influence on the child's natural needs. The environment can support

and help with meeting a child's natural needs, or the environment can neglect and suppress the development of a child's natural needs.

Natural Child Needs

You have already read about some of a child's natural developmental needs identified in Erickson's Developmental Theory. According to this theory, children have the need to trust, make choices, initiate tasks, become absorbed, and master skills.

Environmental Support of Children's Needs

Environmental support comes from a parent or teacher acting as a close mentor to assist with developing and practicing new skills. Typically, a parent or teacher provides cognitive mental scaffolding by talking about problem-solving thought processes.

Putting the Natural Needs Together with Environmental Support

The ecological perspective frames childhood development as an interaction between natural needs of children and the environment. Erickson and Vygotsky offer theories that describe natural developmental needs of children and environmental influences over childhood development. These theories are actors within the ecological perspective.

REDIRECTING BEHAVIOR

Redirecting behavior is helping children by providing alternative choices at times of inappropriate behavior, stress, or danger. It can be framed using the ecological perspective and Erickson and Vygotsky's theories. So a teacher or parent can provide positive environmental support to help meet childhood development needs through the act of redirecting behaviors.



BROADENING AWARENESS...

AMAZING ASPECTS:

Avoiding Tantrums Through Redirection

Tantrums are emotional outbursts by children (usually toddlers) that include crying, yelling, screaming, throwing things, and non-compliance with the parent or teacher. Children often throw tantrums because they feel frustrated. Sometimes an unmet need is the root of the frustration. For example, if a child needs to make choices and there is no choice given, he or she feels frustrated and may have a tantrum.

Tantrums can be avoided through redirecting a child by offering alternatives rather than telling the child to stop an activity. If the child is failing at a task that is too difficult, he or she may throw a tantrum. In this case, tantrums are avoidable by redirecting within an activity to a task that is not too difficult for the child.

Example of Redirecting Behavior

Charlie is three years old. One day you see Charlie eating Play-Doh. Rather than telling Charlie “no” and taking it from him, his behavior can be redirected by giving him alternatives to replace the inappropriate behavior. The ecological perspective would tell us that Charlie has some need, such as he is hungry or wants to explore different initiatives for playing with Play-Doh. The teacher is there to mentor Charlie by exploring different alternatives with him. Following are examples of possible redirection options.

- ◆ Offer Charlie something edible in case he is hungry. Say, “I see you are hungry, Charlie. Play-Doh is not food. Would you like some food to eat? Would you like to choose a snack?” By offering Charlie choices about what other snacks he might want to eat, the teacher is meeting Charlie’s developmental need to make choices (Erickson’s Stage 2: autonomy needs). By demonstrating that there are other ways of obtaining a snack rather than eating Play-Doh, the teacher is mentoring Charlie and helping him develop cognitive scaffolding (Vygotsky) for problem-solving skills in the future. Next time Charlie is tempted to eat Play-Doh, he might recall that the teacher has other available snacks.
- ◆ Show Charlie a few different ways of playing with the Play-Doh (e.g., rolling it flat, cutting it with a plastic knife, or using a cookie cutter on it). Say, “Can I show you some more fun ways of playing with the Play-Doh, Charlie?” Then demonstrate the options and ask Charlie which one he would like to try. When Charlie makes a choice, give verbal praise, such as “I like how you are rolling the Play-Doh, Charlie. You are good at rolling it.”
- ◆ By offering Charlie different ways of playing with Play-Doh and then letting him select a way, the teacher is meeting Charlie’s developmental need to initiate tasks (Erickson’s Stage 3: initiative needs). By offering Charlie a verbal explanation of different ways for playing with Play-Doh, the teacher is helping create cognitive scaffolding (Vygotsky) for future problem solving when Charlie begins wondering, “What should I do with this Play-Doh?”



FIGURE 2. Showing a child different ways of playing with Play-Doh can help redirect behavior.

Example of Redirecting by Offering Different Activity

Offering different activities involves facilitating a move from doing “activity A” to doing “activity B.” For example, six-year-old Rudy had been reading a book and was approached by

three-year-old Charlie. Rudy and Charlie have begun tugging on the book and screaming over which one of them should have the book. You allow them to resolve the conflict themselves for a moment. Then you notice the conflict is escalating, and someone might get hurt.

You see that the book is written for a six-year-old reader. As a result, you take a dinosaur to Charlie to see if he would like to play with it as a way of redirecting his attention. In this case, you know Rudy was reading the book, but Charlie is not yet able to read it. Keep in mind that the new activity must be more interesting for the child than the old activity.

Example of Redirecting Behavior within an Activity

Redirecting behavior within an activity involves helping the child focus on something within his or her capabilities if the activity has become too difficult or frustrating. For instance, Rudy is riding his bike and wants to run over a ramp and through some gravel. He has fallen off the bike and has become upset with the activity. As a result, you redirect Rudy's behavior by suggesting that he set up an obstacle course using plastic cones on a flat riding surface. This activity would allow Rudy to continue being absorbed with bike-riding skills (Erickson, Stage 4: Industry) while redirecting his attention from skills that may be too far outside of his reach. You would create an obstacle course that is challenging to Rudy that would be within his abilities with mentoring from the teacher (within Vygotsky's zone of proximal development).

Summary:



Erickson's stage theory says that children's development is linear and moves through different periods of life. For example, three-year-old children have the need to make choices, and six-year-old children need to become absorbed in mastering a task. Vygotsky's zone of proximal development says that children learn skills with the help of nearby people.

The ecological perspective emphasizes the child's natural developmental needs and help offered by the teachers and parents offering a supportive environment. The environment can support and help with meeting a child's natural needs, or the environment can neglect and suppress the development of a child's natural needs. Redirecting behavior is helping a child by providing choices at times of inappropriate behavior, stress, or danger. Types of redirecting behavior are changing to a different activity or adjusting the current activity.

Checking Your Knowledge:



1. What are the four stages of Erickson's stage theory?
2. What is the main point of Vygotsky's zone of proximal development?
3. What is the main point of the ecology perspective?
4. What is one example of redirecting to a different activity?
5. What is an example of redirecting within an activity?

Expanding Your Knowledge:



Erickson's stage theory is also known as psychosocial development theory. Do more research on this theory, and explore working with children of different ages. Start with this web resource, and look for areas where choice and redirection are incorporated into practice: http://www.ehow.com/how_7566430_apply-psychosocial-development-classroom.html.

Web Links:



Redirecting Children's Behavior

<http://www.hildercb.com/>

Temper Tantrums

<http://kidshealth.org/parent/emotions/behavior/tantrums.html>

Redirecting Behavior

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NKGCOSed9ug&feature=related>