

**EDC151 Child Development for Educators**

**Assessment 2: Case Study**

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**SP3 2017 November, 2017**

### Case Study 3 Response

Bonnie is a Queensland year one student (age six) who fails at classroom tasks requiring use of fine motor skills. Her teacher believes there is nothing she can do to improve Bonnie's fine motor abilities. As a result, Bonnie is excluded from all activities requiring the use of fine motor skills.

Recognising development delays within students and addressing the problem promptly is an important responsibility for a teacher. (O'Donnell, et al., 2016). In the case study involving Bonnie, her teacher has identified there is a delay in the development of her fine motor skills. Activities involving the coordination of smaller muscles, such as fingers and hands, are classed as fine motor skills. These skills are important for a student to develop as approximately sixty percent of classroom tasks involve the use of fine motor skills. (Parenthub, 2016). Separating Bonnie from her classmates and excusing her from the activities is not addressing her development. (Teaching Students with Disabilities n.d.). Children's fine motor skills improve dramatically when increasingly provided with fine motor skills orientated tasks. (Fingergym, n.d.).

Piaget's cognitive development theory also argues that a child's knowledge is obtained by their views and interactions within their surrounding environment. (McLeod, 2010). Within this environment a student's interactions with teachers and peers are of high importance. When separated from her classmates Bonnie's opportunity of social interaction and peer based learning is diminished. (Teaching Students with Disabilities n.d.).

Being secluded from her peers may also have a negative effect on the Bonnie's self-esteem as she could view her delayed development as a failure. (Pandy, 2012). Low self-esteem can lead to a lack of motivation, anxiety, depression, poor social skills, loneliness, disliking for school and behavioural issues. (Pandy, 2012). Failure to address the lack of development in Bonnie's fine motor skills may also result in the delay of her reading and writing abilities as

well as the ability to undertake self-care tasks such as hair brushing, tying shoes or self-dressing. (O'Donnell, et al., 2016).

Her teacher could also examine the development level of Bonnie's gross motor skills as this has a direct impact on the fine motor skills development. (Fingergym, n.d.). Gross motor skills involve larger core muscles. Most children will begin developing gross motor skills from infancy. Examples of gross motor skill use is an infant sitting unassisted, crawling or rolling. (Kid Sense n.d.). If a child has strong muscle development of their shoulders and upper arms they will easier develop fine motor skills such a self-feeding and using scissors. It would benefit all students in Bonnie's year one class to partake in gross motor skills activities prior to tasks requiring the use of fine motor skills. Gross motor skills such as running, or dancing have been shown to awaken the larger muscles. Once invigorated these larger muscles can provide better support to the smaller muscles needed for fine motor tasks. (Fingergym, n.d.).

Currently, while other students are completing their fine motor skills tasks such as puzzles and art, Bonnie plays with blocks and dress-ups. When using play in the classroom it is important to recognise play based tasks should be focused and educational rather than aimless and undirected. (Danforth, 2011). In Bonnie's case her teacher is preoccupied with other students completing the set classroom activity so it is unlikely she is partaking in guided, education based play. Bonnie's teacher should be providing her with a strong foundation to thrive academically and independently, along with the opportunity to develop her fine motor skills at her own pace. (Parenthub, 2016)

Play based learning supports a child's imagination, decision and problem making skills while assisting their intellectual development. (Fingergym, n.d.). By getting to know Bonnie's interests as well as her classmates, the teacher could use this information to create tasks where students use their fingers in fun, interesting ways. (Parenthub, 2016). For example, if a student prefers the outdoors they would benefit from outside play learning where fine motor skills can be developed by playing with stones, chalk drawings or water play. The teacher could also set up multiple activity stations with different activities that promote fine motor

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skill development. This would not only assist Bonnie, but encourage all students to try different activities. (Kennedy & Barblett, 2012).

When all students actively participate within a classroom it allows for the teacher to create a mutually supportive environment. Students who have delayed development or learning disabilities should be nurtured and included by their teacher and peers rather than excluded from certain tasks. (Teaching Students with Disabilities, n.d.). A teacher should create a classroom that is a safe environment for all children where they are free from ridicule and exclusion. In doing so students feel comfortable engaging in learning activities. (Pandy, 2012).

## Case Study 4 Response

Ms Nancy encourages her kindergarten class (Queensland, age four) to use their pencils to copy sentences from storybooks on to paper. She disregards the children's complaints about this task as she believes it is an appropriate task for educational development.

At the age of four to five years most children will not have developed their fine motor skills to be able to hold a pencil correctly. They may display frustration when attempting writing tasks and find it difficult to write their name or letters of the alphabet. (Kid Sense n.d.). At this stage of fine motor skills development Ms Nancy is giving her students a task that is beyond their ability which is resulting in a lack of motivation and discontentment. (Pandy, 2012).

While it is important to keep tasks development appropriate, providing some challenging tasks can be an effective tool in keeping children motivated to learn. (Fingergym, n.d.). Such tasks should be developmentally appropriate practice (DAP). DAP incorporates research on the development process of a child and effective techniques for nurturing development to create an ideal educational setting for children. (NAEYC, n.d.). When planning challenging classroom activities, a teacher should consider Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (ZPD). Students within the ZPD show signs of being able to complete a task, however they require guidance to do so. Vygotsky argues that within the ZPD students show optimal learning potential. (O'Donnell, et al., 2016). For example, the children in Ms Nancy's class are familiar with story books, she could show the children how to hold their pencil correctly and trace over the letters of the stories they enjoy reading while providing continued support and guidance as the children complete the task. This is a strategy called scaffolding. When using scaffolding a teacher provides support and instruction to students to extend on their existing knowledge or ability of a task. Usually this task could not be accomplished without guidance. The teacher's support is slowly reduced as the student begins to master the task. (O'Donnell, et al., 2016).

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As a teacher it is important to acknowledge that students within a classroom will be at different levels of development and lesson plans should reflect this diversity. (O'Donnell, et al., 2016). Providing multiple learning systems within a classroom will benefit all children, especially those with delayed development. (Teaching Students with Disabilities n.d.). These learning systems should cater for different learning styles such as visual, auditory, verbal and physical. (O'Donnell, et al., 2016). If Ms Nancy recognises students are showing difficulty holding a pencil she could give tasks such as drawing pictures or painting. Alternative small tasks will aid in improving a child's fine motor skills while giving them increased confidence before advancing to the next level. (Teaching Students with Disabilities n.d.). This confidence will lead to an increase in student motivation, and provide them with a positive foundation to become confident writers throughout their education. (Cremin & Myhill, 2012).

Motivation is key to encouraging children's learning potential. A key motivation killer is when a teacher limits learning within the classroom. (NAEYC, n.d.). In the case of Ms Nancy, her students are becoming unmotivated due the repetition of one task. As Ms Nancy's students are only four to five years of age they would benefit greatly from play based learning. (O'Donnell, et al., 2016).

Play is an effective way to keep children engaged in tasks that increase their brain development. (O'Donnell, et al., 2016). As discussed earlier, a teacher should familiarise themselves with their student's abilities and interests. Using this information, the teacher can tailor lesson plans involving play that will trigger their student's interests. (Kennedy & Barblett, 2012). The inclusion of indoor and outdoor activities, movement, creativity and adult interaction lead to an increase in a child's social development as well as brain development. Play is said to relieve stress in children as well as create positive self-actualisation. (Kennedy & Barblett, 2012).

By implementing play based learning within her classroom Ms Nancy will increase the mental and physical wellbeing of her students while providing them with variety that will increase their cognitive development. (Kennedy & Barblett, 2012). A teacher's goal should

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be to create a supportive learning environment that encourages strong learning in students of all development levels. (Valerio, 2012).

## Case Study 6 Response

Mr Jones, a year five teacher, is preparing for a new class that has a gifted student, a student with high functioning autism and two students with high anxiety. He is uncertain as to what level of support he and the students will be provided with.

Students with different learning needs can feel that school is not a safe place where they 'fit in'. This can be due to intolerance and rejection from their peers. (Pandy, 2012). Therefore, the teacher plays a vital role in creating a supportive and safe learning environment for these students. In doing so a student with different learning needs will feel empowered and show enjoyment for learning. (Valerio, 2012).

A gifted child processes a higher level of learning ability than peers of the same age. (O'Donnell, et al., 2016). When supporting gifted children, it is important teachers understand these students desire additional learning beyond what the curriculum offers. Their attention requires captivation and ability challenged. (Fraser-Seeto, 2013). Teachers should monitor gifted children's behaviour and academic motivation levels. Sixty percent of gifted children are affected by underachievement. As a result, a gifted child may show signs of discontentment, low self-esteem and/or learning difficulties. (O'Donnell, et al., 2016).

One way of encouraging a gifted child to feel a sense of value and increase academic confidence is to assign them the role of class mentor. The student becomes an assistant to the teacher and supports their peers. (Pomortseva, 2014). This will also increase the student's social development. Another way to encourage gifted student development is a buddy system with a student of an older grade. For example, the gifted student in Mr Jones grade five class could buddy up with a grade six student for certain lessons. The gifted student may feel more confident when working with another student who is at a similar intellectual level.

Autism Spectrum Australia defines Autism as "a lifelong developmental condition that affects, among other things, the way an individual relates to his or her environment and their

interaction with other people.” This can cause difficulty in language, cognitive processing and social withdrawal. (O’Donnell, et al., 2016). Students with high functioning Autism would benefit from a similar buddy system discussed earlier for gifted students. In many instances autistic children have well developed reading skills and would be able to become a ‘buddy’ themselves by reading to students with poor reading ability. (Seach, Preston & Lloyd, 2002). Recognising and utilising a child’s strengths will lead to positive learning development. In the case of being a buddy this will improve the child’s social development.

Often children with Autism will also be prone to high levels of anxiety. (Attwood, 2015). When creating a plan for children with high anxiety Mr Jones could include the child with Autism. In cases of anxiety and autism it is important teachers make an accurate assessment to create a strategy for behaviour and anxiety management. (Seach, et al., 2002). This can be achieved by meeting with the student’s parents to determine triggers, expected behaviour, how long the behaviour will last and calming techniques.

Some other options Mr Jones may wish to consider to minimise anxiety are as follows; an individual table where the child can work alone without distractions, written instructions, short breaks between tasks, creating an emergency ‘calm down box’ with soft toys or lego/puzzles and a quiet area where the children can go to self sooth. (Seach, et al., 2002; Premiexpress, 2015).

It is also important to consider other children in the class who do not have special learning needs. To create classroom unification and understanding a teacher can encourage all students to reflect on times when they have felt worried or nervous. From here the students and teacher can brainstorm ways to help themselves feel better. Mr Jones could even teach relaxation techniques to his class. (Mental (Health Association NSW, n.d.). Research has found that when a child’s feelings are recognised and validated they feel supported and as a result calmer. (Health Association NSW, n.d.).

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These techniques will lead to a student's self-efficacy (belief in their own academic capabilities). As a student's self-efficacy confidence increases their anxiety levels decrease. (O'Donnell, et al., 2016). Mr Jones has a diverse classroom. When creating lesson plans he needs to focus on student strengths and weaknesses to create a safe and supportive learning environment. (O'Donnell, et al., 2016).

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