APRIL 2026

ISSUE NO. 3 (17)

EXPLORING ENGLISH THROUGH PSYCHOLOGY

PSYCHLINGO

Akademia Pedagogiki Specjalnej
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LETTER

Dear Readers,

In the past, we have addressed the issues concerning children. However, as you may know, this topic can never be fully exhausted. When discussing children, one must consider areas such as education, parenting, emotional and social development, biological development, and psychological well-being, among others. As we become more educated, we can, as individuals and as a society, help create an environment where children will flourish. We aim to expand our endeavour to provide you with accessible knowledge in this area. And we will continue to do so. Our goal is to make this complex field more understandable and relevant to everyday educational practice.

This time, we are focusing on young children in preschool and the early years of primary school. In today's world, one faces not only the challenge of choosing a school but also the challenge of choosing an educational model and the ways in which one school raises children. How to do it? We give you a glimpse into those issues. We touch on unschooling, emotional development, grading, and more. These decisions often have a long-lasting impact on a child's development and future learning journey.

Of course, it is not enough! Nevertheless, it might shed a bit of light on these issues. Last but not least, I would like to thank the whole team for the work and energy that they have poured into this issue. We hope you enjoy it.

Jan Jolkki

Editor-in-Chief

Inequalities in Early Childhood Education

BY MAJA ZAKURZEWSKA

Early childhood is often imagined as a time of equal beginnings, where every child starts from the same point. In reality, inequality is present long before formal schooling ever begins. While some children grow up in environments rich with educational resources, guided by trained educators and structured learning, others experience overcrowded settings, limited support, or no access to early education at all. These differences are not random; they are a reflection of societal and economic inequalities into which children are born.

Research on early childhood education shows that the imbalance is deeply tied to cost, access, and quality. High-quality early childhood education, which supports cognitive, socioemotional, and physical development, often isn't accessible to those who need it most. As a result, inequalities are not only reproduced but reinforced from the very start of a child's life.

Recent events have made the disparities more visible. As reported by the Stefan Batory Foundation, The COVID-19 pandemic did not create inequalities in education but significantly intensified existing ones, exposing the uneven access to resources and support that already existed.

The Cost Barrier

One of the most significant factors contributing to inequality in early childhood education is cost. Access to high-quality programmes is often dependent on a family's financial resources, making early education less accessible to children from lower-income backgrounds.

From a psychological perspective, these differences in access translate directly into differences in early developmental environments. High-quality early education settings tend to provide

consistent cognitive stimulation, responsive adult–child interactions, and structured opportunities for learning, all of which play a crucial role in supporting children's long-term cognitive and socioemotional development.

Differences in Quality

The quality of early childhood education is inconsistent across settings and often varies significantly by cost. Higher-cost programmes are more likely to employ qualified staff, maintain lower child-to-adult ratios, and provide environments in which children can flourish. Children from more affluent families usually get better-quality care early in life, giving them greater access to the cognitive stimulation and emotional support that underpin healthy development. In contrast, lower-cost options may struggle to offer the same level of individual attention or stability, which can affect the quality of adult-child interactions. From a psychological perspective, these interactions are critical because they shape early attachment patterns, emotional regulation, and a child's sense of security in learning environments.

Results of Inequalities in Early Childhood Education

The effects of unequal early childhood education extend beyond the immediate environment, shaping children's developmental trajectories over time. Children from higher-income backgrounds, who are more likely to experience high-quality early education, often enter formal schooling with stronger language skills, better attention regulation, and more advanced social competencies. In contrast, those from lower-income backgrounds may begin school at a disadvantage, with fewer opportunities to develop these foundational skills.

These differences can become even greater in places where access to healthcare is limited or depends on a family's financial situation. In such contexts, children from lower-income families may face difficulties in getting early diagnoses for developmental conditions such as autism or attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Without early identification and support, they may not receive the help they need, which can further widen gaps in both educational progress and overall development.

Childhood to Adulthood

The inequalities people are met with when they're young children do not simply disappear as they grow older. Individuals who have access to high-quality early education are more likely to achieve stronger academic outcomes, pursue further education, and secure stable employment. Conversely, those with limited access to quality early education may continue to face challenges in learning, confidence, and social interaction. From a psychological perspective, early differences in cognitive and socioemotional development can shape self-esteem, influence how individuals manage stress, and affect overall well-being. Over time, these factors contribute to wider patterns of social inequality, demonstrating how early disadvantages can have long-term consequences for life opportunities.

From a mental health perspective, these early inequalities can also have lasting effects. Difficulties during childhood may contribute to lower self-esteem, particularly when individuals face repeated academic or social challenges. Exposure to less stable or under-resourced environments can also increase stress levels, which in turn may affect emotional regulation and raise vulnerability to anxiety in later life.

In conclusion, inequalities in early childhood education are unlikely to disappear completely, even in systems where education is free. Differences in family resources and expectations mean that quality gaps will likely persist, as some children will always have access to more enriched and supportive early learning environments than others. That said, this doesn't mean the situation can't be improved. Better access to early diagnosis, along with policies that make high-quality early education more widely available regardless of background, could make a real difference. Supporting children earlier is key to reducing how much these early disadvantages carry through into later life.

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Glossary

affluent – rich; having a lot of money
disparity – lack of equality or similarity
enriched – improved or made better
flourish – to grow or develop successfully
persist – to keep going, even when it's hard
pursue – to try to achieve something (a goal, career, dream)
resources – things that can be used to help achieve a goal (like money, time, or tools)
setting – the place or situation where something happens
structured – organised in a clear way
trajectory – the path or direction of development
underpin – to support or form the basis of something
vulnerability – weakness or being easily harmed

Building Emotional Intelligence in Early Childhood Education

BY ZUZANNA WŁODKOWSKA

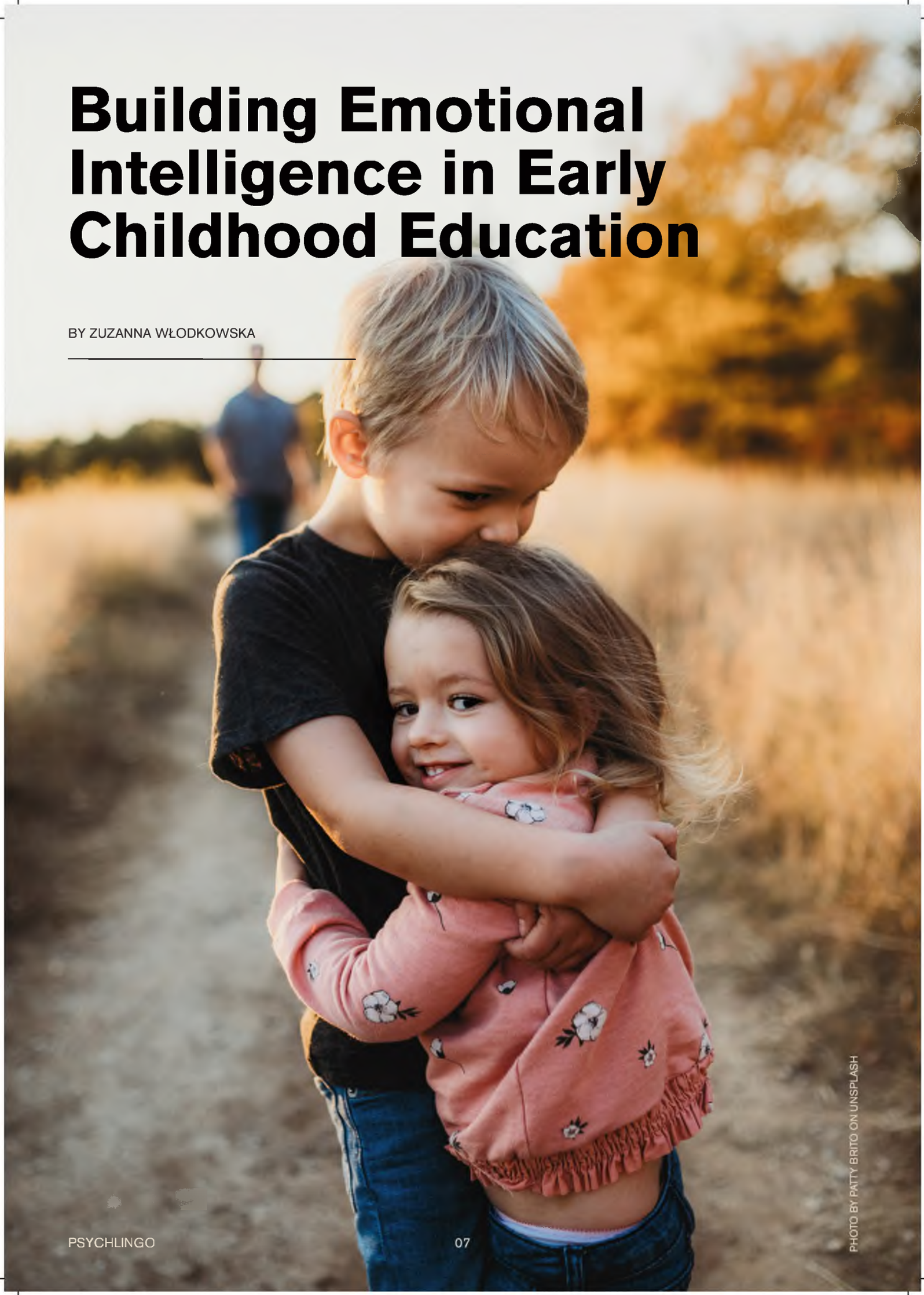

PHOTO BY PATTY BRITO ON UNSPLASH

Early childhood education plays a crucial role in shaping not only a child's cognitive abilities but also their emotional and social development. In recent years, increasing attention has been given to the importance of emotional intelligence (EI) in early schooling. Emotional intelligence, defined as the ability to recognise, understand, manage, and express emotions effectively, has proven to be a key predictor of academic success, mental health, and interpersonal relationships. This article explores how educators can intentionally cultivate emotional intelligence in early primary classrooms and why it is essential in modern education.

The Importance of Emotional Intelligence in Early Years

Children entering early primary education (typically ages 5–9) are at a developmental stage where they begin to navigate complex social settings. They learn to cooperate, resolve conflicts, and develop a sense of self. Emotional intelligence supports these processes by helping children regulate their emotions, empathise with others, and make responsible decisions.

Research shows that students with higher emotional intelligence tend to perform better academically, not necessarily because of higher IQ, but due to improved focus, resilience, and motivation. They are also less likely to exhibit behavioural problems and more likely to build positive relationships with peers and teachers.

The Role of Teachers in Developing Emotional Intelligence

Teachers in early education settings are not only instructors but also emotional role models. Their responses to children's emotions, classroom management strategies, and communication styles significantly influence how children learn to handle their own feelings.

Effective strategies include:

- modelling emotional awareness: teachers who verbalise their emotions ("I feel frustrated when…") help children understand emotional vocabulary and expression;
- creating a safe environment: a classroom where children feel secure encourages them to express emotions without fear of judgment;
- encouraging reflection: asking questions like "How did that make you feel?" promotes self-awareness;
- teaching conflict resolution: guiding students through disagreements helps them develop empathy and problem-solving skills.

Practical activities to foster emotional intelligence include integrating emotional learning into daily routines, a practice that does not require a separate curriculum. Instead, it can be embedded into existing activities:

- storytelling and discussion – reading stories and discussing characters' emotions enhances empathy and perspective-taking;
- role-playing – simulating social situations allows children to practice emotional responses;
- emotion charts – visual aids help younger children identify and communicate their feelings;
- mindfulness exercises – simple breathing or relaxation techniques improve emotional regulation.

Challenges and Considerations

Despite its benefits, implementing emotional intelligence education can present challenges. Teachers may feel unprepared or lack training in the psychological aspects of development. Additionally, standardised curricula often prioritise academic outcomes over social-emotional learning. This can make it harder for schools to fully include emotional intelligence as a consistent part of everyday teaching. As a result, students may not receive regular or structured opportunities to develop these skills over time.

Cultural differences also shape how emotions are expressed and interpreted, requiring educators to adopt a culturally sensitive approach. Collaboration with parents is equally important, as emotional development continues beyond the classroom.

Conclusions

Emotional intelligence is not an optional addition to early childhood education – it is a fundamental component of holistic development. By nurturing emotional skills alongside academic competencies, educators equip children with tools that extend far beyond the classroom. As education systems evolve to meet the demands of the 21st century, integrating emotional intelligence into early schooling should be seen as both a priority and a necessity.

Investing in emotional development at an early stage creates a strong foundation for resilient, empathetic, and successful individuals. Ultimately, the goal of education is not only to inform but also to transform – and emotional intelligence is at the heart of that transformation.

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Glossary

cultivate – to grow or develop something (like plants or skills)
embed – to put something firmly and deeply into something else
exhibit – to show a particular quality, emotion, or ability
extend – to continue or have an effect beyond a particular place or situation
evolve – to develop gradually or change over time
foster – to encourage the development of something
holistic – focused on the overall development of the whole person, not just individual skills or aspects.
nurture – to care for and help something grow or develop
predictor – something or someone that helps guess what will happen in the future
resilience – the ability to recover quickly from difficulties
resolve – to find a satisfactory way of dealing with a problem or difficulty
ultimately – finally, in the end

Is Unschooling a Good Alternative to Early Childhood Education?

BY ALICJA CAPAŁA

We can probably all agree that education in the early s of life is crucial to a child's development. Some parents want to guarantee the best possible education for their children (this may be understood in many ways), and they often explore different learning styles.

Unschooling, especially the radical form, was trending on TikTok about a year ago. Radical unschooling can be defined as an approach with no imposed structure, no curriculum, and minimal adult direction, often extending beyond education into a broader lifestyle based on the child's complete autonomy.

There were unschooled people who were talking about its ups and downs. Others were young mothers, who explained why they had pulled their kids out of institutions or why they never enrolled them in formal education (some of their beliefs and their vision of an alternative approach to education were quite shocking or unusual). All of this led to the creation of commentary videos that explained what unschooling is and how, depending on the parents' approach, it may bring certain advantages but also pose risks to a child's educational development.

What exactly is unschooling?

Unschooling is a form of informal education, contrary to the more commonly known homeschooling. While pure unschooling is difficult to implement legally in Poland, elements of it can be incorporated into homeschooling, as children still need to meet national curriculum requirements.

There is no curriculum that parents need to follow when they choose to unschool their children. The idea behind this way of teaching is that children choose what to learn and when. In this model, the parents' responsibility is to provide all necessary resources for learning rather than direct instruction. They may offer books related to the topic that is currently in the child's line of interest; they can also visit museums or other educational places

(where their children can freely explore the "subjects" themselves); or they can support learning through everyday experiences. They can also explain certain topics, especially in early childhood, but they are not traditional teachers.

Child development and psychological perspective

From a psychological perspective, early childhood is a critical period for cognitive, emotional, and social development. Children not only acquire knowledge but also develop key skills such as attention, self-regulation, problem-solving, and social interaction.

According to constructivist theories of learning, children actively build knowledge through experience and interaction with their environment. This aligns with aspects of unschooling, where learning is driven by curiosity rather than passive instruction.

However, theories such as Lev Vygotsky's concept of the zone of proximal development highlight the importance of guidance from more knowledgeable others. Children learn most effectively when they are supported in tasks slightly beyond their current abilities. In a completely unstructured environment, this guided support may be limited, potentially affecting the development of more complex skills.

Additionally, structured environments help children develop executive functions, such as planning, persistence, and self-discipline. Social interactions with peers are also essential for learning cooperation, communication, and understanding social norms. Without regular contact with other children, these competencies may develop more slowly.

Can your child be unschooled?

An important aspect of unschooling is determining for which children (and parents) it can be a good alternative to early childhood education in institutions. This approach may work best for families where at least one parent can dedicate significant time to supporting the child daily, as learning does not follow a fixed schedule. Another key factor is the child's characteristics, such as strong intellectual curiosity, independence, and intrinsic motivation to learn. At the same time, parents must show a high level of commitment, awareness, and resources (including time and financial stability). Without these conditions, unschooling may be difficult to implement effectively.

Unschooling offers significant freedom in learning, but its effectiveness depends largely on how well it is understood and implemented by parents.

Advantages and Disadvantages

One of the main advantages of unschooling is that children can learn at their own pace, without the pressure of standardised expectations or grades. This allows them to explore their interests deeply and develop intrinsic motivation. Children who have a strong need to pursue knowledge beyond the standard curriculum may particularly thrive in such an environment. Additionally, this approach can foster creativity, independence, and a sense of autonomy, as the child has real influence over their own learning process. In contrast, unschooling, especially in its radical form, can lead to serious challenges. Without proper understanding and it may become a form of educational neglect rather than an alternative method. A lack of structure can lead to knowledge gaps, particularly in basic academic skills. Limited interactions with peers may contribute to difficulties in developing social competencies and adapting to social norms later in life. Furthermore, the effectiveness of this model depends heavily on parents' competencies, which creates a risk of inconsistency and uneven educational outcomes. Children who later transition back into institutional education may also experience difficulties adjusting to its structure and expectations.

Unschooling is neither inherently good nor bad-it is a highly demanding alternative that can work well only under specific conditions. While it supports autonomy and individualised learning, it also requires a deeper understanding of child development and a high level of parental involvement. Without these, a child's educational and social development may be negatively affected.

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Glossary

implement – to carry out or apply something
incorporate – to include or add something as part of a whole
inherently – according to or because of the basic nature of somebody or something
intrinsic – coming from within
persistent – continuing despite difficulties
pose – to present or create (a problem, question, or challenge)
thrive – to grow, develop, or be successful
zone of proximal development – the difference between what a learner can do independently and what they can do with help

School Admission: Key for Self-Esteem Development

BY AGATA STUGIENT

PHOTO BY ARYA BEIKZADEH ON UNSPLASH

A childlike wonder

How many of you looked back at old photos, randomly found while going through your stuff (trying to clean the mess gathered there for years), with nostalgia and a quick, sharp pain in your heart? It hits us right where it hurts the most: the realisation that we are no longer part of the world so carefree and pure that children naturally belong to.

With adolescence inevitably comes a time when we all need to leave the pink-coloured-glasses view of the world in favour of a new one, maybe blander but, one could say, more realistic (although aren't we all living in our own realities, some being more black-and-white, others more colourful?). Even though we might miss the excitement and childlike wonder, there are a few things we probably aren't looking to get back. Full dependence on others may be freeing in a way (giving that the responsibility is not on our backs), but it can only be a danger to one's individuality (if enforced in an unhealthy way) and makes a person completely vulnerable to the actions of others.

The impact we as adults have, no less than peers, when a small kid enters the classroom, is incomparable. That's why it's so important for us, as we create an environment in which the new generation will grow up, to understand how young minds develop. In this article, we're going to discuss how the world a child lives in shapes their self-perception and determines whether it's positive or negative.

First day at school: what goes beyond what the eye can see

A child entering a new environment, such as school, is more than just a change in physical surroundings. They're met with a new set

of expectations, rules and people in authority whom they should follow. It's a lot to take in for a small human, who doesn't have the same number of skills, cognitive abilities or emotional relaxation techniques as a grown-up does.

Even as adults, we sometimes struggle with change, which more often than not heavily disrupts our typical daily routines. As much as kids are natural explorers of the world, who look for stimulation and interaction with others, even the most energetic ones can get easily overwhelmed in new situations.

But it's not really about the characteristics of a new place, but more about the process of adaptation and the natural course of development. Around the age of 7, a life-changing transformation begins. It's a moment when children start to build a more accurate self-image. They notice feedback from others, such as their parents, teachers, and newly made classmates.

From the widely prevalent egocentrism in early childhood to a broader point of view that includes a range of perspectives rather than just relying on one (which is their own). In the process of building their self-image, they absorb a lot of information from the external environment, which we'll discuss in this article.

Development of a child's self-esteem: what goes into that?

To fully understand what's happening in a young person's psyche, we must first briefly discuss Erik Erikson's theory, which includes eight stages of psychosocial development. Basically, it's about the interaction between an individual and their environment, which in consequence shapes how that person functions in day-to-day life.

During the early school years, kids enter the fourth stage, marked by a conflict between industry and inferiority. The author of this model claims that successfully overcoming this crisis leads to creating a sense of competence in a child's mind. However, if not worked through properly, an adult later in life will struggle with feelings of unworthiness and inferiority.

So how does it work in practice? Feeling competent is just one of the necessary attributes for a young person to build healthy self-esteem. They acquire that (feeling of competence) mostly through comparisons with peers, the number of perceived successes and failures, and feedback from authority figures (parents, teachers).

If a child's attempts to achieve something (e.g., good grades) usually go well, we can expect them to develop a sense of self-efficacy. Those kids, in reference to the theory of attribution, will assume that their successes are the result of their own work.

On the other hand, they will link failures to some external factors. This way of thinking encourages children to take inspired actions and, if necessary, deal with obstacles on the way.

However, if they don't acquire that sense of competence during their developmental years (e.g., more failures than successes, comparisons with classmates), it will probably go the other way, discouraging them from facing challenges (learned helplessness). It (the feeling of competence) also correlates positively with effective self-regulation skills.

Development of a child's self-esteem: importance of positive feedback and social expectations

This was just one of the elements that go into the process of building a child's self-esteem, though. It's more than a sense of self-efficacy. In fact, according to developmental psychology, children build their self-image based on overheard statements from authority figures (e.g., "you're intelligent"; "you're lazy").

It's a result of going from egocentrism to a more accurate view of the world. Kids at this age notice not only physical but also characterological differences between themselves and others. That allows them to achieve another milestone in their cognitive development: separating their public persona from their private self (the individual character of their psyche).

Prior to that, they tend to see themselves as one with the world and others. That results in internalising feedback (directed towards them) from the outside world and assigning it to oneself.

Additionally, as they notice differences between themselves and others, they begin to understand the social expectations placed on them by authority figures. They make initial evaluations to help them decide which characterological traits are desirable and which aren't. Knowledge and awareness allow them to create two new cognitive concepts within themselves: the Real Self (who I am based on feedback and comparison) and the Ideal Self (who I would want to be).

PHOTO BY JAKUB KLUCKY ON UNSPLASH

That is the key to determining whether kids will have a high or low level of self-acceptance (how much they like themselves, a subjective feeling). A big discrepancy between those two concepts is likely to lower self-esteem, while a small one boosts it.

Development of a child's self-esteem: "popularity" and a sense of belonging

The last thing I wanted to mention is the undeniable influence a sense of belonging among classmates has on kids. During the early school years, they learn how to interact with their peers and form lasting friendships.

They develop the skills necessary for conflict resolution and expressing their emotions in a healthy way, which doesn't put their relationships with others at risk. That could also be a good predictor of whether a child will be "popular" or "not popular" in their social group at school.

Kids who easily make new friends and at the same time know how to navigate conflicts and difficult emotions are usually liked by most of their peers. On the contrary, those who might struggle a little more with those skills sometimes get rejected by their classmates.

A situation like that can be especially detrimental to their newly developing self-esteem. More than that, it can follow them into adulthood, creating a sense of isolation and loneliness.

A big role of the environment

As we can see, it is crucial for a child to live in an environment that encourages taking action despite obstacles, while also providing acceptance and positive feedback. Even though we cannot directly influence how this young person interacts with their peers (and therefore, whether they're "popular" or not), we can use our authority (as models) to help them build the necessary skills for successful social interactions. We can also emphasise their strengths and acknowledge their successes. All of those actions support the development of healthy self-esteem in children, which will follow them into adulthood. My intention in this article is to emphasise the importance of our role in creating a supportive environment and also draw your attention to the responsibility that, for sure, in a big way, lies on our shoulders.

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Glossary

bland – lacking strong taste, character, or interest
discrepancy – a difference between two things that should be the same
egocentrism – inability to see a situation from another person's perspective
enforce – to make people obey a rule or make something happen
inferiority – feeling or state of being less good than others
inevitably – in a way that cannot be avoided
learned helplessness – belief that you cannot change a bad situation after repeated failure
self-efficacy – belief in your ability to succeed at a task

PHOTO BY MIKHAIL NILOV ON PEXELS

Let's Talk about Playing: The Role of Play in the Cognitive Development of Children

BY GABRIELA GAWŁOWSKA

For the purpose of this article, for a moment, you can forget about the university setting and your exhausting adult life. Payments, responsibilities, and sleep deprivation become blurry. For a moment, you can go back to your childhood, when your days were mainly focused on eating, sleeping, and playing, and your imagination was your biggest weapon, which you wielded to bring your ideas to life. Do you remember when you first reached the building blocks to attempt to construct the tallest tower that would be as tall as Burj Khalifa? Or pull out your doll collection to be the director of the drama that could rival the award-winning series your grandmother loved watching every day? Those good ol' days when you played hide and seek or "tag, you're it!" were moments that are probably among the most memorable ones. We think about all the fun things we did, how time flew by, and how much it strengthened our bonds with our friends at the time.

From an adult perspective, we can view play as part of socialising and learning. Instinctively, we feel that it was necessary, and we wouldn't be who we are right now without it. In this article, we'll examine play more deeply through the lenses of psychology and adulthood.

Starting from the basics...

From a psychological perspective, playing is the state of mind one has when absorbed in an activity that provides enjoyment and a sense of time suspended. And play is self-motivated, so you want to do it again and again (S. Brown, 2010, p. 60). This activity is taken from real life, but lacks realism. Because play is self-directed, the rules and rhythm of the play depend solely on the players and are limited only by their imagination. It's what children do during their everyday routines, when no one is looking, and they're given the freedom to act however they want.

It's an essential part of their development. Playing is a tool given to children by their natural instincts. It's a tool they wield with great responsibility, bringing their wondrous imagination to life. It allows them to discover the world with their whole bodies, on their own terms and at their own pace. Through it, they developed the necessary cognitive skills, learnt new information, practised social skills, self-regulation, conflict resolution, problem-solving, and cooperation. They also continue to discover themselves – their interests, skills, strong traits, their weaknesses and relationships.

It's a way for children to experience everyday situations in a safe environment. Parents do their best to teach their child everything they know. However, there are some things children can only learn on their own. And through play, they can discover the world of values and meanings on their own. They can test certain situations, boundaries, and morality, and learn what suits them best and what's best to avoid in the future. What's interesting is that it can also be an outlet for matters the child isn't able to process. From a psychoanalytic perspective, because some matters are overwhelming for a child of a certain age to understand, their complexity makes it hard to process feelings or contexts they aren't yet capable of understanding. Play offers them an activity in an environment they can control. So, the child can replay these situations and experience them again. It's anxiety-reducing and a way to deal with the overwhelming feelings they might be experiencing by giving the child the ability to control the situation.

Playing in the context of age, learned skills, and the support the adult can give the child

From our own experience, if we dig deep enough into our memories, we can recall different kinds of games we have played and how they've changed with age. In 1929, American sociologist Mildred Parten decided to research this topic further as part of her work to complete her doctoral dissertation. She observed and studied periods in children when they had to deal with social situations without external factors, such as traditions or customs. She conducted one-minute observations during free play at the nursery school near her. She observed children from ages 2 to 4 and 11 months. As a result, she has categorised the types of play into six categories:

The unoccupied play is stated to start from birth until the baby is 3 months old. play isn't necessary in the way we typically think of it. It's mostly a child observing their surroundings and doing random gestures, like waving their hands. It's occurring instinctively, so there's no need for parental guidance. The child is playing with their body to test what each movement would result in. It's their way to train motor skills and interact with the sensory aspects of play (feeling their limbs, seeing or hearing). The adult can support the baby with "tummy time," a playpen, or an environment where they can wiggle around and explore with a bit of freedom, without parental supervision at all times.

The next stage is a solitary play. It's most common between 3 months and 2 years. At this stage of development, the child plays alone. It looks like they're absorbed in their own little world, doing things alone, without looking for potential playmates. It's absolutely healthy, and parents shouldn't be concerned if their child prefers to play alone at this age, even when surrounded by peers. Solitary play helps children build focus, become more independent, and encourages their imagination through experimentation. During later years, the children might be building structures from blocks, drawing and painting, completing puzzles, and playing with their dolls. It's the time when children begin to develop focus, imagination, and problem-solving skills. In this development stage, it's important to be tolerant when things get noisy and messy; they're figuring out how things work. Fitting the different-shaped boxes into their proper places can be challenging. But it's necessary to let them figure it out on their own!

Onlooker play is what its name suggests: a behaviour in which children begin to watch other children play. This stage of development is seen from the age of 2 to 3. The children won't be joining their peers in their play, but they'll be watching them closely. They can also react to it by laughing, clapping, or asking questions. For children, it's important to observe their surroundings and learn from them. For example, other children are building a castle from blocks, and a child in the onlooker stage can be seen observing their actions closely or asking questions, such as, "What are we making?" That way, they can gather information about the group dynamics and how other children are acting. It's a way they learn when it's a good time to join and if they feel ready to do so. So, it's advised not to assume they're shy or not social enough. For an adult, it's important to remember that when the child feels confident enough, they'll eventually try to join the group, especially when they figure out the "rules" of the group by observing them. However, you can model their behaviour by pointing at the other kids playing together and sharing toys. It can send positive reinforcement to children that this behaviour is okay, and that's a way to play, too.

The fourth stage is called parallel play. It's observed in children aged from 2 to 3 years and 6 months. It's an occurrence in which a child alters their play to match the activity of their peers. For example, the child sees that their peers are building a castle, so they start building a tower themselves. Or they can start sharing crayons, but they're not playing together yet. They're not playing together yet, but they're learning socialising skills by mimicking others. So, what is it for? It's a way for children to learn about being comfortable with each other. By being sort of a copycat, they learn to adapt new ideas, find new ways, and be inspired by others. They are being more attuned to other actions, emotions, and states. So, as a parent, bringing your child to playgroups earlier is more than okay. The child can be near their peers – observe and imitate them.

Associative play is the fifth stage, observed around 3 to 4 years of age. It's characterised by children still playing with their own toys, but sharing toys with each other increases, and they might join each other on their adventures. Two children can be building separate towers while sharing blocks and chatting. The child can be seen starting to engage with their peers. It's an important aspect, because it's the first time the child needs to use a wide set of skills they've learned so far – empathy, language and communication skills, and tolerance. They show interest in learning more about their peers and playing with them. Adults can provide toys that can be played with by multiple children and continue modelling positive behaviour (for example, sharing or talking to each other by initiating dialogue). For example, "Lena, your drawing is beautiful. Can you tell Maya what it is?" and start teaching conflict-solving skills.

The last stage is when the children start playing in groups. It can be seen from age 4 to 5. They combine skills they've learned during the previous stages of play. During this stage, there are more group plays that involve agreeing on a set of rules, assigning individual roles, using conflict resolution skills, regularly communicating, and longer, more structured play sessions. They use communication to share their own ideas for play, to cooperate with other children, and to think together about problems.

Children engage with each other. They play games such as role-playing (for example, playing family/"the house", stranded on an island or running a shop) or doing art projects together. There are many social interactions and forms of communication. Due to the nature of the games, the children will need a lot of open space and freedom to explore, resolve conflicts and use their imagination. It's worth recognising good behaviour and using positive reinforcement to model it further. Additionally, if the child is being left out, an adult can gently nudge others by pointing out that it seems their friend is not participating and suggesting they consider sharing or taking turns.

Why is it necessary for these categories to exist? It's one of many ways to evaluate whether a child's development is appropriate for the child's age. It also helps parents better understand their children. For recognising what the age-appropriate playing styles are for the stage their child is currently at, when it's probably a good time to consult a specialist if the inconsistency is noted, and what's recommended for the parent to do at each stage (for example, not being worried when the child is choosing to play by themselves at the age of two). It's also worth noting that these age intervals are only guidelines. When reading about the stages, we should remember that each child is unique and their needs differ.

What about toys...?

If you're a parent or a teacher and you might be wondering what to do to support your child's development while playing, it's best to follow your child's lead. The child knows what they need to express and what they need to play out in that moment. As was mentioned before in this article, children often play with their toys. Children grow quickly, so adults might wonder, "Do I need to buy a different toy each time?" "What toy should I choose to best fit my child?"

Toys should be as neutral and universal as possible. They should be chosen so they can serve the child at different developmental stages and inspire future adventures during play. They should be practical, so the child can use them in their self-directed games. That's why the plaything should be multi-useful for a child, so it can substitute for or complement their abilities. It can also be used to engage their peers in play together. When choosing a toy, it's worth engaging the child in the decision. The carer might want to give the child different tools, like art supplies or blocks.

What happens when children have limited opportunities to play?

If the child can't engage in play properly – learn boundaries, risks, themselves – it's bound to have unfortunate consequences for the child in the future. Bob Hughes has written that if a child can't fully experience play, they might be suffering from a play deficit and damage. He described two situations: play deprivation and play bias. Play deprivation is the result of either "a chronic lack of sensory interaction with the world" or "a neurotic, erratic interaction". Examples of such behaviours are too many extracurricular activities that are more adult-oriented, more screen time, fewer opportunities to spend time outdoors and not enough stimulating environments or situations.

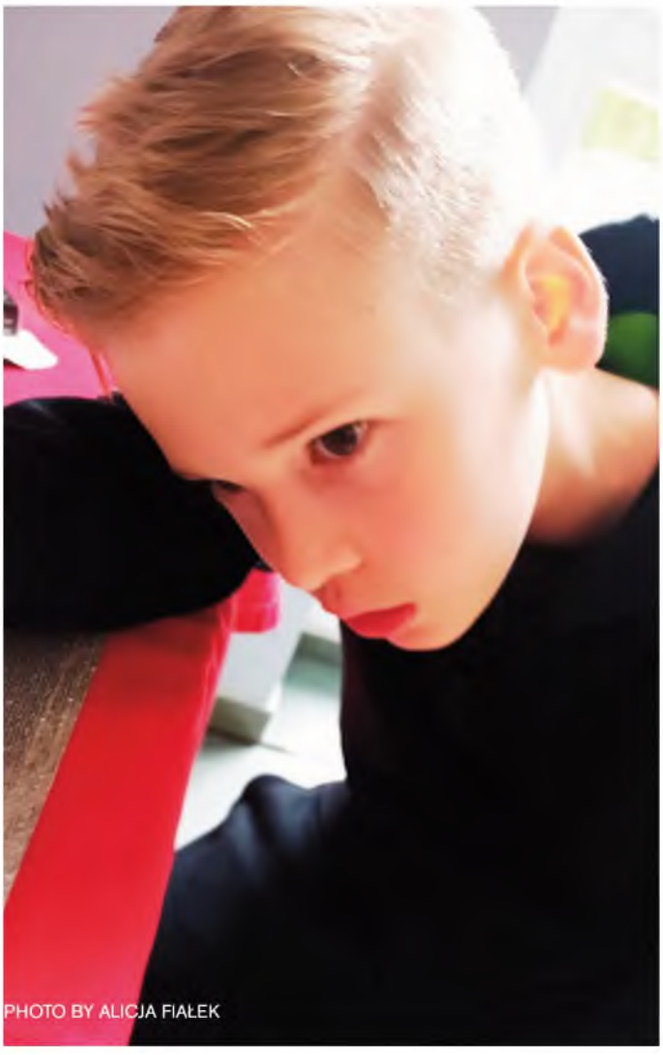

PHOTO BY ALICJA FIAŁEK

Play bias refers to "a loading of play in one area of experience or another, having the effect of excluding the child from some parts of the total play experience" (F. Brown, 2024). In this case, it's things like parents leading their children towards more "safer" play rather than rough-and-tumble play, suggesting gender-stereotypical games/activities (for example, buying a girl dolls when the child is interested in cars), and not giving the child space for spontaneity.

Currently, our culture is safety-obsessed, and as a result, parents are constantly supervising their children. It's been noted that children's opportunities to play by themselves and with their peers are decreasing. Instead of learning to take risks (which helps develop their courage and self-assurance) and to compromise when there's a disagreement, the children are constrained by their parents, who intervene. The adults think they're helping, when in fact, by telling their children what to do and doing things for them, they fail to give the child a chance to learn on their own. Which, as has been proven, is the best way to learn.

If the child's needs are constrained or not met when it comes to play, they may experience difficulties such as a hard time regulating their emotions, a psychological crisis and being less independent. Such actions can limit a child's creative thinking, problem-solving ability, social skills, and confidence. When children feel they're not in control or can't make meaningful differences in their surroundings, they might feel hopeless and believe their actions are meaningless. This can be the cause of increased anxiety, depression, and suicidality.

Conclusions

Play is a big part of a child's overall development, like cognitive, social and emotional development. Instinctively, the children go from stage to stage as they learn and grow. There are different types of play - each helps the child to learn new skills. As a carer, it's worth encouraging your child to play and explore at their own pace. You don't need to always lead or be there, as the child sometimes needs to do their activities alone. The more they grow, the more inclined they'll be to join more socially oriented activities with their peers. Each child is unique, and they can go from stage to stage at different times. It's worth looking into if you feel something is wrong, but it's okay if some stages stretch a little longer. For example, a child might be in the onlooker stage for a little longer because they need more time to learn and process the behaviour of the group around them. Parents' worries about their child's safety are valid; however, limiting their child's space for development is just as harmful. Children have the right to experience, play, and have fun!

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Glossary

alter – to change something
attuned – well adjusted or sensitive to someone or something
constrain – to limit or restrict something
erratic – unpredictable; not regular or steady
inclined – likely or willing to do something
bound to – very likely or certain to happen
neurotic – overly anxious or emotionally unstable
nudge – to gently push or encourage someone to do something
outlet – a way to express or release something (like emotions or energy)
parallel – happening at the same time or similar in nature
positive reinforcement – rewarding a behaviour to make it more likely to happen again
rough-and-tumble – energetic, physical play involving a lot of movement or wrestling
solitary – alone; without companions
valid – based on truth, good reasons and evidence
wield – to hold and use something (like a tool, weapon, or power)


PSYCHLINGO

The A–E of Grading: How We Measure Students

BY MAGDA WITKOWSKA

We are constantly rated and rating others. How well are we performing in school? At work? Does the product we have bought meet our requirements? Should we give it three stars? Four? Maybe five? We love to judge, but do we love to be judged? Is it natural to grade everything, or has it been instilled into us by systems we are forced into? Let's talk about the beginning – the first years of our education. It is one of the most crucial periods of our development, a time when we create important bonds and learn social norms. It is also the time when each and every child is introduced to the concept of grades. Of course, if their parents had not forestalled our beloved system. But the time before they first cross the threshold of a school building is the last time when they cannot be judged by numbers or letters. Blissful times.

The first question is: where and when did it all start? A long time ago, in the 18th century, education was very different. The crucial distinction between then and now is that education was not available to everyone, which made it much easier to talk with students and let them learn at their own pace. But then, in the late 18th century, something awful happened. More and more people were able to study! Universities were crowded with people hungry for knowledge and hungry to know how well they were performing. This led to an important shift. From an individual approach to faster and simpler ratings. In the 19th century, it was already standardised. And so, the downfall of education began, and all thanks to these awful students.

Now we have to think: are grades only bad? Or perhaps they serve a good purpose? Well, marks for children are mostly harmful. A certain teacher, Pernille Ripp, asked her students, "What does a bad grade really mean to you?", and the responses were: "It means that I failed", "That I am not good for anything" or "I did not try hard enough". No one said, "That is an objective sign of how much of this material I have mastered", or "That means that I need to work on this material more". No. Because grades are not about the material. They are about us. We are "five", "A", "E", or

"one", we are either worthy or worthless, we are the grade – that is how much we are worth, and we learn that from the beginning. Only some teachers try to explain to children that their grades do not matter, and even fewer parents do so. Because grades are mostly for the system and parents. The educational system needs them to say whether we deserve to go to this or that college or a scholarship. And parents? They mostly do not know or care what happens in school, and they do not have to, because grades tell them everything. Why bother to talk to teachers? Your kid gets four – they need to study more. Your kid gets three – they need private lessons and probably less computer time. Your kid gets two – you should call an exorcist. Your kids get one – it is too late to even try. Simple, fast, accessible from home. Perfect, is it not?

In addition, the bad influence of grades works both ways. How? Well, it is not only unpleasant to receive a bad grade, but also undesirable to receive a good one. Why? Because it sets a standard, the child is able to work for a good grade, and now they have to always get good grades. So, from the first good grade forever, children are expected to keep performing well. From the first good grade, they will constantly stress about all the exams and feel worthless if they get a "B". And even if a child never, in their entire life, gets a bad grade, they will always think of themselves as rateable, and of grades as something that determines their worth.

Even worse, grades can harm a student's performance and make them get worse grades than they are able to achieve with their skills. Pretty ironic. Systems that should help give children objective feedback are making that feedback biased by all the stress, comparisons, and pressure. It is also not objective for another reason – the evaluators. Who said that a teacher is objective? Who said they don't play favourites, giving good grades for smiles and compliments and bad grades to those who don't fit their standards of a good student? The only objective thing in rating students is the objective fact that it is not objective at all.

Despite everything above, let's think of some good reasons for a rating system in education. Firstly, it provides the student with simple information about their level of understanding of the topic; they can also see their learning journey, progress, strengths, and weaknesses. Grades can also motivate students to learn. Everyone has had a thing or two they thought would be completely useless in the future and did not want to learn (and it isn't always as useless in life as it seems; in most cases, it may feel that way, but at least these situations train our brains to learn). The next advantage is that it can serve as information for the next stages of education. We have to decide somehow who should go to which school. It is not fair, but it is better than nothing, or worse, a system where the ones with money study in prestigious places and the rest are punished for being born in poorer families. Let's not forget that it is still a way to give feedback to students, parents, and even teachers, who can learn from their students' grades. It forces teachers to care, at some level, about their students. But to be clear, the cons are still stronger; it is just not the worst system we could have.

We should not give grades because they harm students' self-worth. We should have grades, because how else can we say objectively who is better (apart from the fact that it is not objective at all). How do we get out of this impasse? There might be a better way, and it is called "formative assessment." It is a type of evaluation that focuses on helping students in their learning process and providing useful feedback. The teacher treats students individually, seeing them as human beings rather than just entries in a gradebook. Many studies have shown that this form of rating has a positive influence on young people. Who would have thought that? Treating students with respect, telling them what they should work on, and adapting to their pace is beneficial, right? No way! Unfortunately, there is a catch. Unlike numbers or letters, formative assessment requires effort, a lot of it. Not every teacher is capable of carrying it out, and not every school allows teachers to stop giving grades (after all, every school is, in the end, part of a larger system and must bend to the rules). Unfortunately, the best answer is that we need to change the system. It is hard, but also possible. There have been many small changes in the past that improved education, so at least we can hope.

I. E. Finklestein once said in 1913, "When we remember how very great stress is laid by teachers and pupils alike upon these marks as real measures or indicators of attainment, we can but be astonished at the blind faith that has been felt in the reliability of the marking system. School administrators have been using with confidence an absolutely uncalibrated instrument." Not much has changed to this day. We can still be astonished and still hope that everything will change for the better. There have been many shifts, and for sure, many will come, so let's wait and see. The important thing now is…how would you rate this article? Just kidding – do not.

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Glossary

attainment – the act of achieving something
blissful – extremely happy or full of joy
downfall – the fall or failure of a person, group, or system
forestall – to prevent something from happening by acting first

INTERVIEW WITH AN EXPERT

BY JAN WOLICKI

Agnieszka Siedler, PhD – Psychologist, specialising in the diagnosis of neurodiversity, advising and supporting neurodivergent people and their families, and providing training for specialists. Assistant professor at the Maria Grzegorzewska University in Warsaw.

Jan Wolicki: How would you say that, based on your experience, the understanding of autism spectrum disorder and its diagnosis has changed?

Agnieszka Siedler: Over the last twenty years, a lot has changed in our approach to diagnosis and the overall spectrum. For example, we now have the tools in Poland that we call the "Golden Standard" – ADOS-2 and ADI-R. At first, we tended to put a bit too much faith in them; now, we are more aware of their limits. In the meantime, Asperger's Syndrome has disappeared, which also reflects a change in approach. A spectrum as a construct better reflects heterogeneity than two rigid, artificial categories. It shifts our thinking towards profiles rather than labels.

For me, the most important change is the shift from thinking solely in terms of a deficit model to complementing it with a neurodevelopmental difference model. Only a decade or so ago, in Polish practice, autism was predominantly understood as a set of deficits and shortcomings that needed to be corrected or compensated for. Today, we increasingly understand that it is a different way of processing information, including sensory and social information, and that many behaviours previously treated as "symptoms to be extinguished" have a deep self-regulatory meaning for the child. The goals have changed here, too, as diagnosis no longer only qualifies someone to begin intervention but also supports the process of self-understanding and the formation of one's identity. It doesn't mean that children with a diagnosis don't need our support. The aim of this support should not be to rigidly adapt them to neurotypical standards, but rather to, for example, improve their quality of life.

For a long time, in the clinical psychologist's mind, there was one stereotypical perspective of the autistic child: most often a boy with communication difficulties and cognitive problems. Now we know that the spectrum is a spectrum because it contains very different profiles. That is why we now more often diagnose girls, teens and adults. Also, awareness of symptom masking is increasing. What happens in the clinic doesn't always reflect a child's day-to-day functioning, as some children learn to hide certain behaviours as early as preschool.

So diagnosticians' perspectives are changing; we don't only consider what we see; we try to see how a person experiences the world. Although many changes have occurred, there are still many stereotypes which I hear at work, such as: children with ASD don't hug, they are not empathetic, don't express emotion, and so on.

AGNIESZKA SIEDLER, PHD

JW: What challenges do diagnosticians face when assessing preschool and early primary school children?

AS: Preschool and early primary school years have their own distinctive characteristics, and children suspected of being on the spectrum are a highly diverse group. I would say the challenge lies in being ready for everything and in understanding the child's perspective, a child who is often only able to describe it to a limited extent. How to properly interpret their behaviours, that something is anxiety rather than defiance, or a communication difficulty rather than shyness.

Also, what often happens is that the parent sees and presents us with a perspective entirely different from the specialist's. On top of that, the teacher may see the child differently, and the child may describe the situation differently again. These discrepancies are a very important diagnostic signal, but it is easy to become lost in them.

There are more challenges like making sure not to overlook what is important, and not to overinterpret behaviours that are typical of

development, to be empathetic but not overempathetic, to give the child the space they need, while still maintaining contact with them, and to respond calmly when a child gets slime in our hair. To accept that some of the things we have planned won't turn out as we would like. Flexibility and openness are qualities we need quite a lot of.

JW: What tools do you consider the most appropriate, and why those in particular?

AS: Despite appearances, we don't have that many tools. At least not as many as we would like. Moreover, in the diagnosis of ASD, the basis is professional knowledge and experience, not the tools. Not everything can be put on a scale and standardised, and every tool sometimes fails. In diagnostics, we always combine tools – we never rely on just one.

ADOS-2 remains the foundation, but we, as specialists, tend to trust it too much and treat it like an oracle, even though its results often depend on the diagnostician's skills. We also have the structured interview, ADI-R, which is only now gaining popularity and, in my opinion, is not sufficiently appreciated. It is very labour-intensive, but it can provide us with a lot of information and is highly precise. I am a big supporter of the thorough developmental interview, which helps us understand many aspects of a child's functioning and provides the most information for differential diagnosis.

JW: What do they lack the most?

AS: For sure, a precise assessment of masking. Teenagers and young women often slip through the cracks of traditional tools because they mask strongly. We also lack tools that would assess a child's behaviour more precisely and multidimensionally.

JW: And when it comes to ASD, what allows us to determine that it is the spectrum? What differentiates it from other developmental disorders?

AS: For one, autism spectrum disorder is primarily a characteristic functioning profile. We need a set of distinct traits, not just individual behaviours. We won't find one thing which determines it is the spectrum.

It is a difficult question, even if it doesn't sound like one. In order to determine that it is ASD, one must know very well what autistic spectrum disorder is. One must separate effect from cause and know that a child on the autism spectrum may have an aversion to something, may react to stress at home, and may spend too much time on screens. The role of a diagnostician is to see all the layers. What lies beneath and what is on the surface, how a given behaviour comes about, and to consider all possible explanations, not just the most obvious ones.

Differences are often qualitative. Children can communicate very little or too much, but it's the quality of the communication that matters the most. It's the same with social interactions — we have children who are entirely outside the group and children who love their peers. What we observe is the quality of social interactions, not their quantity. What is also important in differential diagnosis is knowledge of things, for example, that in an autistic child, anxiety disorders may develop, but in a child with anxiety, autism spectrum disorder will not suddenly develop. ASD can be hidden beneath anxiety, depression, trauma, eating disorders, and attention difficulties. It is not an either/or situation. Sometimes the question is what came first.

Another thing is the developmental trajectory, which can tell us a great deal. In the case of ASD, we have to see a developmental pattern. Many disorders have characteristic patterns or specific onsets. ASD has always been there. If someone says they have had depression since childhood, it is actually quite unlikely; we should look for something developmental, such as autism.

JW: What is most often overlooked in the process of observation and diagnosis in preschool and early primary school children?

AS: We tend to accept the explanations that seem more understandable from our perspective, meaning we favour interpretations that are closer to us. As a result, part of the perspective is often missed – namely, the neurodivergent one. Additionally, we aim to structure the diagnostic process, and in such structured situations, children with ASD can sometimes perform very well. We tend to overlook free play and small talk. Also, sensory experiences are often overlooked. We see a child screaming or running away, but we do not consider that they may be discharging several hours of sensory overload. We also overlook various difficulties that can coexist with an autistic profile. Strong compensation and masking are also frequently missed. And finally, we overlook the family context. A parent describing their neurodivergent child is often neurodivergent themselves, but may not yet be aware of it.

JW: How can the school environment play a role in the diagnostic process?

AS: The school or preschool environment is a very important source of information. Often, it is the first place to notice the need for diagnosis. We pay attention to many aspects of a child's functioning in this context, distinguishing between familiar and unfamiliar situations, structured and unstructured activities, and planned and unplanned situations. We also look at whether there are differences between how the child functions at school and after. Some children can cope throughout the day, but when they

get home, they are so exhausted that they become irritable and have outbursts of anger. If a child does not cause problems in preschool or school and performs well, they often receive a diagnosis later, when demands exceed their capacities and compensatory coping strategies. Often, children end up at a diagnostician's because of peer difficulties. We see a group of children whose school experiences have been genuinely traumatic due to bullying.

JW: How does a psychologist assess a child's social functioning? And what characteristics indicate that a neurodivergent child is functioning adequately in social contexts?

AS: There is no single pattern of a child who functions adequately socially, but there are certain features and behaviours that we should be able to observe. For example, reciprocity: whether and how the child builds a shared field of attention, how they respond to another person's initiative, and whether they do so in a way appropriate to their age, including the quality of reciprocal social exchange. Even young children should be able to make eye contact and shift their gaze between a person and an object, and back again. Or, for example, the quality of conversation — not only answering questions or asking them, not only talking about a topic of interest, but also being able to engage in casual interaction.

JW: There is a lot of discussion about difficulties in diagnosing girls. What are the main challenges in these early years, specifically in relation to girls?

AS: That's true. Girls can hide quite well, and this can begin as early as preschool. Girls on the spectrum often learn a lot by observing peers and mimicking their behaviours, such as smiling and playing, facial expressions, and gestures. Sometimes a girl follows another girl, copies what she does in play, and adapts to her. Alternatively, the girl finds her own way to join in the play, for example, by always being an animal character. Additionally, there is a different profile of interest. We tend to associate ASD with trains, dinosaurs, or space. Girls are more likely to be fascinated by animals, books, fictional characters, and sometimes specific people. Therefore, the content of their interests is less typical of the spectrum and more socially acceptable.

Besides, they more often struggle with internalised rather than externalised difficulties. They are more likely to experience anxiety and somatic symptoms. Their difficulties are experienced more internally and expressed less outwardly.

It is worth noting that we have different social expectations of girls and boys. And we expect girls to conform to social norms from a young age, so they may begin hiding or compensating for their difficulties much earlier. As a result, the average age of diagnosis differs between girls and boys – girls are often diagnosed later.

JW: What would we need to better support children with ASD at this early stage?

AS: We still need more highly trained clinicians to adequately understand the different presentations of the spectrum in both boys and girls. We also need faster diagnoses and better access to them, in particular in small towns. We need more support for parents: guidance and psychoeducation. A parent's well-being, knowledge and skills also have a direct impact on a child's life. Unfortunately, parents are often overlooked in this whole process.

We need to aim for the child not to behave exactly like other children, but enable them to function in society while remaining true to themselves.

JW: That's quite the thought. Thank you for the interview!

Glossary

ADI-R – a structured interview with parents or caregivers to learn about a child's development and check for signs of autism.

ADOS-2 – a standardised assessment tool that helps clinicians evaluate whether someone shows behaviours consistent with ASD

differential diagnosis – the process of distinguishing one condition from others with similar symptoms

discrepancy – a difference between two things that should be the same

neurodivergent – describing a person whose neurological development or functioning differs from what is considered typical (e.g. autistic, ADHD, dyslexic)

neurodiversity – the idea that differences in how people's brains function and process information are a natural part of human variation

symptom masking – consciously or unconsciously hiding or compensating for traits or behaviours associated with a condition

PHOTO BY SUKI LEE ON PEXELS

When Learning Feels Like Play

BY KATARZYNA BRALCZYK

Kids in preschool and early primary school don't have the attention spans of adults, so if we want to teach them something, we usually have to do it through a game.

When I was a young child, my primary school teacher tried to teach us more complex maths, and he would do it with the help of chestnuts. It might not seem like anything big, but for us, it wasn't just mathematics, not anymore. It was a funny game with the side effect of learning some numbers and calculations. We could maintain our attention for longer.

Games can't be just educational. They also have to be fun. If you introduce one, you can't forget about the other one. Both are important. My favourite time at nursery or primary school was when the teacher let us play by ourselves. But I also loved working in groups on some drawing projects. It was a wonderful time for children, and they learnt many motor skills. Both made me happy, even if one was a little more difficult and, from time to time, boring.

Another amazing way for children to learn and play at the same time is to make their own books/comics. Kids have to be creative and use imagination; they have to write and draw. It's quite hard to make your own story make sense, but when you do it, it's one of the most satisfying feelings you can experience. If they want their story to be good, they have to dedicate some of their playtime to it, and it teaches them consistency and responsibility.

I remember loving to make my own books and comics as a little kid. I gave my characters names and stories; they had their own personalities and ambitions. It was so fun, and it taught me so much. This was probably when I began to develop an interest in writing and reading, which has stayed with me to this day.

The most fun activities and educational games are usually group tasks. Kids get to know each other and learn how to work in pairs or teams. By playing catch or football, children learn empathy, develop their motor skills, strengthen friendships and still have great fun.

Of course, children can't play all the time. Sometimes they have to sit and listen without adding anything fun or game-like, such as chestnuts, to learn maths. Their attention span might be a little short right now, but it will grow over time, and by listening quietly they are training to improve it. It's really important to let them have breaks from sitting still. Kids are still kids, and they do not want to be quiet all the time. They will have many opportunities to listen to dull lectures as they grow older, so we don't have to rush it.

In summary, kids learn best through play and fun activities, but as they grow into adults, we also teach them how to behave in dull, less stimulating situations. The key is to maintain balance.

Glossary

attention span – the amount of time a person can focus on something without getting distracted

consistency – doing something regularly in the same way over time

strengthen – to make something stronger or better

STORY
A Day in Bullerby

BY ZOFIA STANKIEWICZ

It was a day like any other. Tom was sitting in class. The teacher was talking about the latest book they had read, *The Six Bullerby Children.*

'The Bullerby Village was described as a bit desolate, and the characters had to go far to get to school or the shop,' the teacher said. 'But the children still found ways to have fun and weren't bothered by it. I wonder, how many of you would like to live with them in the village?' she asked.

Several hands shot up. Tom did too. He had enjoyed reading this book, and now, sitting in a classroom, he couldn't help but think about how much fun he would have if he lived with the book's characters.

Surprisingly, as if someone had cast a spell, he found himself not in a classroom anymore but on a grassy field. He looked around and saw three houses standing side by side. He didn't even have time to question how he had gotten there before he heard his name called from behind.

'Tom, come here!' When he turned around, he saw six children waving to him.

Tom got up and joined them as if it were the most normal thing in the world. And it seemed like it was, at least for the other children, as they didn't even question the presence of a seventh child in their group.

They spent the day running around the fields. They played games that Lasse suggested and joked with each other. At some point, they sat on the grass, and while Lisa was tending her lamb, Pontus, they talked about the assignments they needed to do for school.

'Lisa, have you finished decorating your new room already?' Anna asked at some point.

The girl smiled and nodded.

'Oh, please, can we see it?' Britta pleaded.

Tom frowned. Something wasn't exactly right. Lisa did get a new room as a birthday gift, but that was long before she had Pontus. So why were they talking about some new room when the lamb was running happily around them?

'Tom? Tom!' someone called, but it wasn't any of the six children. He blinked and was no longer in Bullerby. He was back in the classroom, and judging by his friends talking, eating their lunches, and running around, it was break time. The one calling his name was his deskmate.

'Did you fall asleep during class again?' he inquired.

'I guess I did', Tom answered.

When he sneaked a peek at his friend's notebook, he saw notes he had taken during the class. They were about school from the book, Lisa's birthday and Pontus. He sighed, knowing he had a lot of notes to write down.

REVIEWS

BY JAN WOLICKI

Winnie the Pooh

I suppose most of us remember the beautiful movie given to us by Stephen Anderson and Don Hall when they had the genius idea to bring A. A. Milne's stories onto the big screen. Now, some of you may think it's just a childish animation. Well, it is a movie for children, I don't deny that. But it is also something more. We often forget what the role of such movies is. They often tell a tale, in this case, a tale of friendship.

Winnie the Pooh has a fantastic tendency to normalise things that often lead to exclusion in the early years, such as pretending to know everything (Owl), having difficulty controlling anger (Rabbit), being very energetic (Tigger), and so on. And the protagonist is a beautiful example of an honest, optimistic, and helpful companion to everyone. Children tend to identify with the characters in their favourite animations or stories. Imagine if those were the ones from *Winnie the Pooh*.

And not only can children benefit from it. I recommend watching *Winnie the Pooh* to everyone at every age, every few years. It tends to refresh our perspective and can even be therapeutic! So make a big pot of tea, take a few spoons of honey, refresh your memory of our dear Pooh, and while you're at it, invite your children and maybe even the whole family to join you.

Instead of Education: Ways to Help People Do Things Better

John Holt gives us an interesting perspective on education. You have read a bit about unschooling in this issue, and he is considered one of its early pioneers. He wonders what happens to children when they are in preschool. They are curious, they ask every possible question, and they learn as fast as one can possibly imagine. Of course, this is partly due to their biological development. But by the time they are in school, they are bored and tired of learning. Why is that?

He argues that the reason may be the pressure and coercive practices present in both schools and children's homes. They cannot experience the wonders of learning and exploration if we adults do not take them seriously and instead impose our expectations and point of view, which often has nothing to do with the child's perspective. School often does the same. It imposes expectations and then judges students, giving them grades on how well they meet those expectations. This can be devastating.

I wouldn't say that what he proposes is ideal. But his perspective gives us something to reflect on. I know it may sound a bit dark, but more and more schools today are changing and looking at children from a different perspective. So perhaps you would like to learn more about that perspective? If so, go ahead and dive into his writing.

WISE & WITTY

Proverbs

- *Little pitchers have big ears*
Children like to listen to adult conversations and can understand a lot of what they hear.

- *It takes a village to raise a child*
Raising children requires a communal effort.

- *Like father, like son*
Children often look and act similar to their parents.

- All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy
Without time off from work, a person becomes boring.

- *Spare the rod and spoil the child*
Discipline is necessary.

- *Children and fools tell the truth*
Children, like fools, often speak bluntly and don't think about social rules or consequences.

- *As the twig is bent, so grows the tree*
A grown person will act the way he or she was taught to act as a child.

- *Little children, little troubles; big children, big troubles*
Problems grow as children grow.

- *What is bred in the bone will not come out of the flesh*
Some traits you are born with or learn very early are hard to change.

Idioms

- *Like a kid in a candy store*
To be extremely happy and excited.

- *Throw the baby out with the bathwater*
Get rid of something valuable along with something undesirable.

- *Child's play*
Something that is very easy to do.

- *The apple doesn't fall far from the tree*
Children are similar to their parents.

- *Bundle of energy*
Someone who is exceptionally energetic, productive, or hyperactive.

Just to make you smile a little

- What do kids play when they can't play with a phone?
- Bored games.

- Why did the kid throw a clock out the window?
- Because he wanted to see time fly.

- Why are fish so smart?
- Because they live in schools.

EXERCISES

Exercise 1.
Complete each sentence with the correct idiom or proverb.

1.
A: "How was Jake at the toy store?"
B: "He was _____ – he wanted to see and touch everything!"

2.
A: "Let's improve the system, but keep what works."
B: "Right, we don't want to _____."

3.
A: "Your son is amazing at football."
B: "Well, _____. I used to play professionally."

4.
A: "We need to make sure kids understand why rules matter."
B: "Absolutely, _____."

5.
A: "Be careful what you say in front of the children"
B: "I know – _____."
A: "They pick up so much without even realising it!"

6.
A: "Raising children isn't easy, is it?"
B: "No, _____."

7.
A: "She's very honest, sometimes too honest."
B: "As they say, _____."
A: "Exactly, she doesn't sugarcoat anything."

8.
A: "I thought kids were easy to handle when they were toddlers, but teenagers are a different story."
B: "True, _____."

Exercise 2.
In each sentence, choose the correct word from the options written in italics.

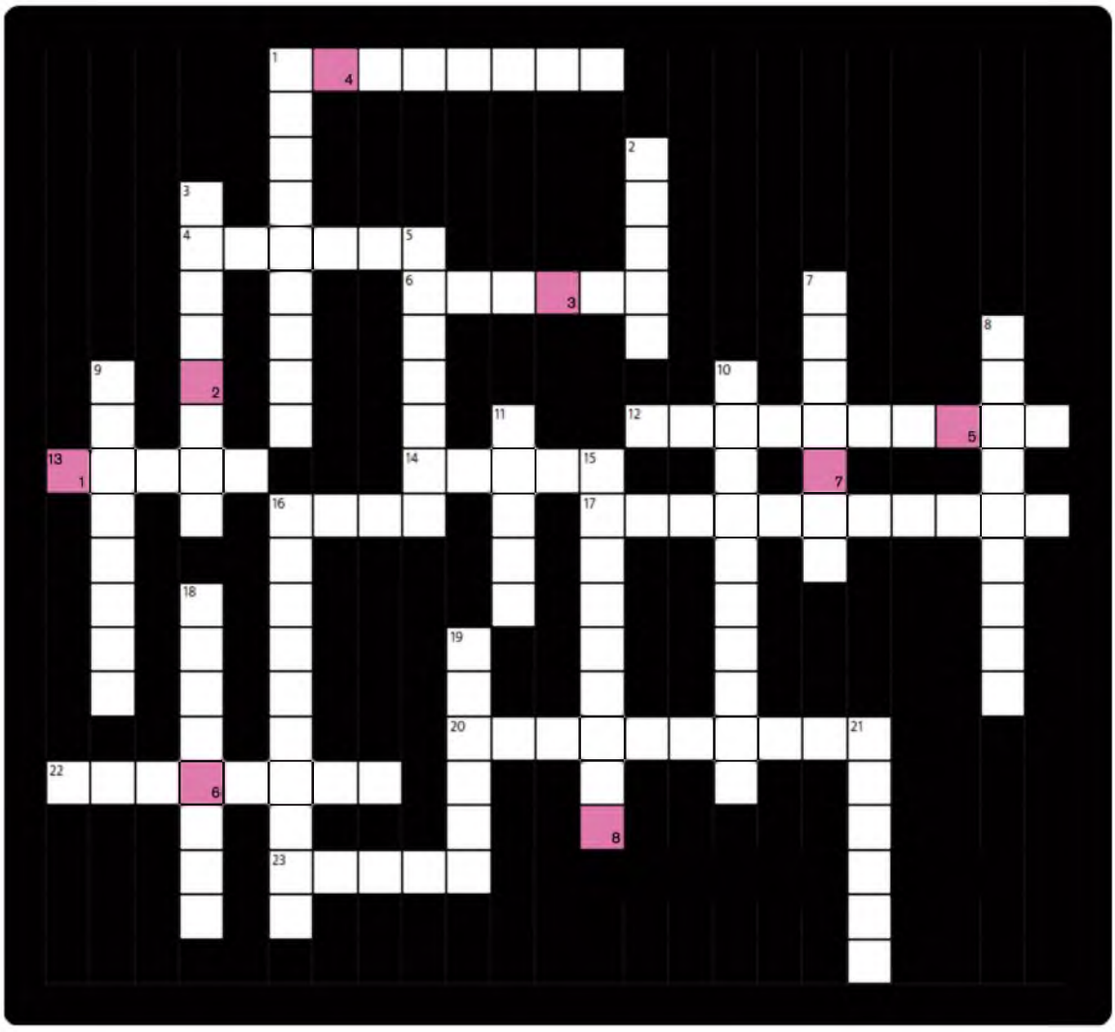
1. Teachers who want to *enforce* / *undermine* / *foster* students' confidence often give tasks that build success step by step.
2. Daily reading can *strengthen* / *forestall* / *extend* a child's attention span and help them focus for longer periods in class.
3. In a(n) *bland* / *enriched* / *affluent* community, students often have access to better learning opportunities and support.
4. With the right support, children can *forestall* / *cultivate* / *enforce* their skills and grow academically and socially.
5. Teachers aim to *resolve* / *enforce* / *enrich* students' knowledge by adding new ideas that connect to what they already know.
6. Some learners experience *attainment* / *inferiority* / *resilience* when they believe they are less capable than others in class.
7. A student's learning *setting* / *resource* / *trajectory* can change over time depending on support, practice, and motivation.
8. Students are encouraged to *embed* / *pursue* / *exhibit* their goals by planning and working steadily towards them.
9. Difficult questions in class can *extend* / *flourish* / *pose* deeper thinking and discussion among students.
10. Regular support can prevent *self-efficacy* / *learned helplessness* / *consistency*, where students believe they cannot improve even after trying.
11. Students who *undermine* / *exhibit* / *evolve* positive learning habits are more likely to succeed in the long term.
12. Long-term success often depends on consistency and the ability to *undermine* / *resolve* / *thrive* even when challenges are present.

Key

Exercise 1
1. like a kid in a candy store
2. throw the baby out with the bathwater
3. the apple doesn't fall far from the tree
4. spare the rod and spoil the child
5. little pitchers have big ears
6. it takes a village to raise a child
7. children and fools tell the truth
8. little children, little troubles; big children, big troubles

Exercise 2
1. foster; 2. extend; 3. affluent; 4. cultivate; 5. enrich; 6. inferiority; 7. trajectory; 8. pursue; 9. pose; 10. learned helplessness; 11. exhibit; 12. thrive

Crossword Puzzle



HIDDEN SOLUTION

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

DOWN

1. prevent something from happening by acting first
2. to put something firmly and deeply into something else
3. rich; having a lot of money
5. to find a satisfactory way of dealing with a problem or difficulty
7. to show a particular quality, emotion, or ability
8. to limit or restrict something
9. alone; without companions
10. to make something stronger or better
11. to change something
15. lack of equality or similarity
16. continuing despite difficulties
18. to support or form the basis of something
19. to try to achieve something (a goal, career, dream)
21. improve or make better

ACROSS

1. to grow or develop successfully
4. to encourage the development of something
6. to develop gradually or change over time
12. the act of achieving something
13. lacking strong taste, character, or interest
14. based on truth, good reasons and evidence
16. to present or create (a problem, question, or challenge)
17. feeling or state of being less good than others
20. the ability to recover quickly from difficulties
22. overly anxious or emotionally unstable
23. to gently push or encourage someone to do something

SOLUTION: Bullerby

PODCAST

Improving Early Reading in Preschool Children

You will listen to a recording about a reading programme for young children.

Exercise 1.
Decide whether each statement is *True* or *False* based only on the information from the recording.

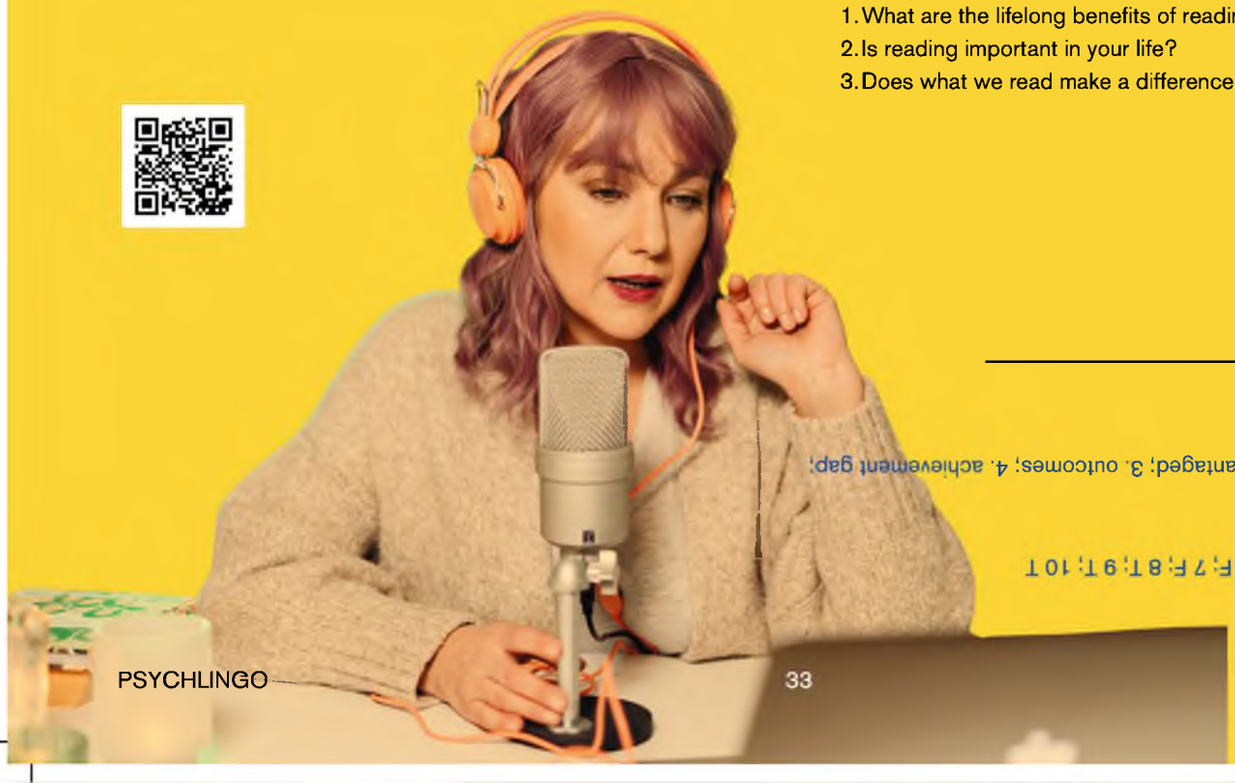
1. The study mentioned was published in the Journal of Child Development.
2. Researchers found that simply reading to children significantly improves their reading ability.
3. Eye-tracking studies showed that children focus mainly on pictures rather than printed words.
4. McGinty, Piasta, and Laura Justice designed a study with preschool teachers using books over one year.
5. Both groups of teachers used cards with questions to draw children's attention to print.
6. Preschool teachers were asked to read the same books five times a week.
7. The method focused on children repeating words after the teacher.
8. The children in the study were followed for two years after the programme.
9. The results revealed that children who focused on print had better literacy outcomes.
10. The study is part of a wider research effort that has been building over the past 15 to 20 years.

Exercise 2.
Fill in the gaps using the words from the recording.
minute, *outcomes*, *incremental*, *achievement gap*, *adjustment*, *disadvantaged*

1. Reading is a(n) _____ process. Children first recognise letters, then words, and later how text is read from left to right.
2. Children from _____ backgrounds may need additional support in early education.
3. Researchers are concerned with the long-term _____ of early reading programs.
4. The intervention aimed to reduce the _____ between strong and weak readers.
5. Preschool teachers were trained to make _____ changes in how they interact with children.
6. A small _____ in teacher behaviour can influence children's attention to print.

Self-Reflection
Think carefully about the questions below. There are no right or wrong answers.

1. What are the lifelong benefits of reading?
2. Is reading important in your life?
3. Does what we read make a difference, or not?



Key

Exercise 1
1 T; 2 F; 3 T; 4 T; 5 F; 6 F; 7 F; 8 T; 9 T; 10 T

Exercise 2
1. incremental; 2. disadvantaged; 3. outcomes; 4. achievement gap; 5. minute; 6. adjustment

LAST BUT NOT LEAST

KIDS DON'T ALWAYS MAKE YOU HAPPIER. HERE'S WHY PEOPLE HAVE THEM ANYWAY. | PAUL BLOOM

LINGUISTIC TIDBIT

The word *pupil* in modern Polish means a person who is favoured by someone, singled out, and liked. It is also increasingly used to refer to a pampered pet. By contrast, in English – as can be confirmed in leading British and American dictionaries (*Oxford*, *Cambridge*, *Webster*) – *pupil* primarily means "a child or young person in school or in the care of a tutor or instructor".

Terminology referring to people and their relationships functioning on our continent often goes back to the earliest history of the Indo-European languages. Let us focus on Latin, where *pupillus* (feminine *pupilla*) means "orphan child, ward, minor", a diminutive of *pupus* "boy" (feminine *pupa* "girl"), probably related to *puer* "child".

Where does the second meaning of the word –"centre of the eye, orifice of the iris" – come from? To explain this, it is helpful to refer to *Mały słownik gwar polskich* (Small Dictionary of Polish Dialects), prepared at the Institute of the Polish Language of the Polish Academy of Sciences (2nd ed., Kraków 2010). There we read that in some regions of Poland, *lalka* or *laleczka* ("doll") means "the pupil of the eye". When we speak with someone face to face, eye to eye, we can see in the pupil of our interlocutor a tiny doll, which is nothing more than a small mirror reflection of our own figure.

In many standard varieties of European languages, words derived directly from the Latin *pupilla* mean precisely "the pupil (of the eye)". This is also the case in English. *Pupil* in the sense of the eye "comes directly from Latin *pupilla*, originally 'little girl-doll', a diminutive of *pupa* 'girl; doll'".

BT

CHILDREN HAVE THE RIGHT TO EXPERIENCE, PLAY, AND HAVE FUN

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COMING IN THE NEXT ISSUE: OLD AGE