

**3-year-old Veera Lipponen
(2001)**

**THE INCREDIBLE EARLY YEARS:
SUPPORTING YOUNG CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT**

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- Why are early years so important?
- What we know about learning and development in early years?
- How can educators support learning and development in early years?

WHY ARE EARLY YEARS SO
IMPORTANT?

A growing interest in early
years!

- **Economic rationale**

- ECE is a best economical investment in preventing risk of social exclusion/marginalization/alienation

(Carneiro et al., 2003; Heckman, 2006; Heckman & Masterov, 2004; see also Paananen, Lipponen & Kumpulainen, 2014; Paananen, Kumpulainen & Lipponen, 2014)

- **Educational rationale**

- High quality ECE has long-term effects/impact. It predicts later academic competence (Vandell, et al., 2010)
- Teacher influence persists in early grades. Starting in kindergarten, teachers can significantly affect students' reading and math scores in later grades (Konstantopoulos, 2011; Konstantopoulos & Chung, 2011) - **The best teachers for the smallest children**
- Childhood has absolute value

- **Societal rationale**
 - Equal opportunities for all
 - Children's well-being

- **Developmental (learning) rationale**
 - Core developmental changes and learning take place in early childhood (Bransford et al., 1999; Bruner, 1987; Meltzoff et al., 2009; Piaget, 1928; Vygotsky, 1978)
 - Early years are full of developmental and learning opportunities

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT LEARNING
AND DEVELOPMENT IN EARLY
YEARS?

- Three common arguments/perceptions concerning learning and development in early years:

- 1. Newborn's mind is a tabula rasa (blank slate) that needs to be filled with knowledge?

- 2. Young children know and can do little, but with age (maturation) and experience (of any kind) they become increasingly competent?

- 3. Young infants cannot speak, walk, use tools so they are born totally immature?

Wrong!

.....Because.....

We humans are
biologically wired
and...

- **What does it mean that we are biologically wired to learn?**

- **To be biologically wired to means that we have early predisposition to learn**
 - Infants have competencies that biologically predispose us to learn
 - Innate knowledge: Positive biases to learn types of information readily and early in life

- **What does it mean that we are culturally tuned to learn?**

- Human infants possess powerful implicit learning mechanisms that are affected by social interaction
- Three social skills (social understanding) are foundational to human development and are rare in other animals (Meltzoff et al. 2009):
 - Imitation
 - Shared attention/mind reading
 - Empathic understanding

- Children develop only in relationships to others
(Vygotsky, 1978)
- Primary interest in other people and their behavior
- The primary goal of humans is to be an accepted and valued part of society
- Learning is culturally mediated: We learn to master those skills, ideas, values that our culture mediates (Vygotsky, 1978)

HOW CAN EDUCATORS SUPPORT
LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT IN
EARLY YEARS?

- The re-conceptualization of the child and childhood
- Learning is strongly influenced by social interactions - educators in central role
- All higher cognitive function have social origin (Vygotsky, 1978)

- **Early years pedagogy?**
 - **Direct teaching or scaffolding learning and living together?**
 - **Academic skills and ABC's or something else?**

- **Direct teaching or scaffolding and living together?**
 - High quality interaction is regarded as crucial for effective pedagogy (Vygotsky,1978)
 - Responsive, reciprocal
 - View of the child: if children are the agents of their own learning (and life worlds) they should be treated like that (Lipponen, Kumpulainen & Paananen, 2014)
 - Understanding children's perspective and meaning making (Rintakorpi, Lipponen & Reunamo, 2014; Lipponen, Kumpulainen & Paananen, 2014)

- Breaking the traditional model of teaching - IRE
- initiation - reply - evaluation (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975)
- IRE appears to be universal/cross-cultural
pattern of classroom interaction

- No sense of speaking verbal or non-verbal interaction
- Social interaction entails always a use of multiple semiotic resources (language, tools, body) (Streeck, Goodwin & LeBaron, 2011)

- **Academic skills and ABC's or social skills or...?**
- Focusing too much on academic skills may inhibit child's development - neglecting the power of emotions and hands on activities as a developmental force

- During early years teachers should focus on supporting the development and learning of
 - **Social skills**

- **Social skills**

- Skills that help child to manage the everyday problem solving situations
- Skills to be able to observe and read others intentions, desires, emotions
- Skills to evaluate the consequences of one's own behavior and emotions
- Skills of making initiatives and responding to initiatives

- **With and through play and playful learning**

- **Play (make-believe) and playful learning**
 - Stimulates several abilities: fantasy, empathy, communication, symbolic thinking as well as collaboration and problem-solving, social skills, regulation of emotions, 'mind reading and taking perspective', negotiations and renegotiations (roles, rules, values, power), framing, controlling impulses, behaving in accordance with social expectations, control of fear

CONCLUSIONS

- Early years are the most important years in human life
- In early years, the focus should be on developing social skills
- Play and playful activities and high quality interaction should be the core of early years pedagogy

- ...one more thing...

- You are the most important people!

- <http://plchelsinki.fi/> (Kumpulainen, Lipponen, Sintonen, Mertanen & Sairanen, 2014)

