

Children Temperament and Implications for Preschool Teachers

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Abstract

Temperament research in more complex aspects such as cognition, interaction with the context of the environment as well as changes and continuity over time across geographical and cultural boundaries has been explored. Temperament traditionally associated with biological factors inherited and plays an important role in children life. Temperament influences each response, especially during early childhood development and affects behavior, social relationships, personality, physical health, language ability and academic success. This article aims to offer early exposure on temperament and implications to the practice of preschool teachers. Discussions with behavioral responses diversity of children were initiated and followed up with definition on temperament from some researchers. Classification in temperament by the researchers was also discussed by focusing on three types of temperament namely extraversion/surgency, negative affective and effortful control. Temperamental assessment methods are also discussed. The discussion ended with the implications of the practice of preschool teachers. Knowledge and understanding of child's temperament help teachers to plan, offer and carry out more effective and meaningful teaching and learning activities for every child.

Keywords: Temperament, Children Development, Early Childhood Education, and Preschool Teachers

Introduction

Various behavioral conflicts emergence among children has attracted researchers in the west and east to explore this issue more deeply. Behavioral responses diversity of children likes irritable, fussy, easy crying, not active and difficult to adapt to the new known (Eisenberg et al., 2005). On the other hand, there are also active children who can smile and adaptable even in new situations. Most researchers agree that the differences in each response in the emotional and behavioral processes that seem and manifest at the beginning of

children development shaped by a biological process known as temperament (Rothbart, 2011; Grist & McCord, 2010). A particular behavioral profile that affects the differences in the child's response can be identified as temperament. Each child is born with their unique temperament (McClowry, 2003). At birth, the baby brings together temperament by prenatal experience influenced. This temperament continues evolving, influenced by environmental factors that make up the experience and getting more complex as the children's age increases.

What is Temperament?

In the first concept, temperament related to individual differences in terms of one's mood (Diamond, 1974). Although the term of temperament has long been used still there is no clear consensus on temperament definition and remain to be discussions by psychologists to this day. Generally, temperaments can be described as individual differences that are naturally rooted and affect the tendency of one's consistent behavior at all times (Bates, 1989). Temperament existence identified especially during social interaction context, in stressful situations and it was noticeable at the beginning of life (Goldsmith et al., 1987). Temperament cannot be confused with anger (temper) because it reacts to the environment either in positive or negative form (McClowry, 2003).

Temperament Classification

As mentioned earlier, temperament illustrates the differences in person behavioral reaction and generates several classifications by researchers. Thomas and Chess (1977) are among the earliest postulate classifications of temperament and are often become researcher's reference. They classified the temperament based on three forms of child reactions namely easy, difficult and slow to warm-up.

According to Thomas and Chess (1977) children who have this easy temperamental have an organized sleep pattern, good appetite, positive mood, resilient, fast and easy to adapt to new people, environments, and experiences. They also have social skills such as friendly, easy to collaborate and share (Buss, 1995). In other words, these children show positive emotions and behaviors. On the other hand, difficult children are more likely to have negative responses, often crying, difficult to figure sleep patterns, irritable, sensitive and moody. One of the reasons that can cause a child to have a difficult temperament is a risk before and during birth such as lack of oxygen (Miner & Clarke-Stewart, 2008). Whilst children who have slow to warm-up temperament need a certain time to adapt to new or different people, environments, and experiences. They take a longer time to shape sleep patterns than easy children (Rothbart & Bates, 2006). They show a lack of effort, shy, prefer alone and low endurance level. This type of children also has low activity level and tends to withdraw from new situations and avoid the public especially with unknown people.

Bates (1989) classifies the temperament into three aspects; emotional response, concentration and physical energy. The first group of emotional response is generally positive or negative. Children's from this temperament group respond to any new stimuli and respond differently to people known also those who are not known. The emotion displayed is closely related to internal stimuli such as hunger and boredom. The second group of concentration is referring to a person's ability to calm down. A person's ability to calm down is different, especially when under pressure, and when the focus was mixed up. Then the last group is physical energy. Physical energy and frequency doing activity are in line to self-ability.

Next, Rothbart, Ahadi, Hershey and Fisher (2001) have divided the temperament into 15 more specific dimensions; activity level, anger or disappointment, positive expectation,

concentration control, negative effect, ability to calm down, fear, love challenges, following intuition, self-control, less having fun, sensitive, sad, smiling, and shyness. Based on the 15 dimensions of the temperament, Putnam and Rothbart (2006) then classified the temperament into three forms of reaction namely extraversion/ surgency, negative affective and effortful control.

Extraversion/surgency

Children who are in extraversion/surgency are more sensitive or more active with environmental changes (Rothbart & Bates, 2006). They also have positive expectations, acting spontaneously, like adventurous, rugged, passionate and willing to strive. These children usually look happy and easy to laugh. At the age of 10 to 11, this child was at risk of experiencing external behavior problems if not given attention. This problem occurred because the children tendency on easy-going, friendly and always excited to do fun activities, adventurous and challenging (Rebecca L. Shiner, 2012). However, they are less likely to experience internal behavioral problems such as shyness and inferiority (Rothbart & Bates, 2006).

Negative Effect

Negative affect children are more impulsive. They are also found tend to get fear and anxiety emotion. In addition, they are often easy to feel angry, disappointed, sad and uncomfortable (Putnam & Stifter, 2005). They also take a long time to get back to normal and feel calm. The anger and disappointment children reactions are in a negative affect group could see and detected as early as two to three months. This diversity negative reaction existence causes children at risk in experiencing external and internal behavioral problems (Eisenberg et al., 2005). For example, anger response relates to external behavioral problems, while fear and worry associated with internal behavioral problems.

Effortful Control

Effortful control reflects children ability to prevent negative behavioral responses instead of providing a more dominant and right response (Rothbart & Bates, 2006; Rothbart et al., 2001). However, children with higher effortful control temperament will less adaptive skills (Rothbart & Bates, 2006; Rothbart et al., 2001). Child's ability to control his own behavior is an important skill and obtained during the development period. They need to give a right response to the situation and be free influenced by both parents (Maha Al-Hendawi & Evelyn, 2012; Olson, Sameroff, Kerr, Lopez, & Wellman, 2005; Kochanska, 1995).

Children who have a high level of effortful control temperament will control themselves to focus, not easy to shift the focus, sensitive to changes, and less to have fun. They also can control themselves in various situations and make plans before doing something. As a result, such children at the age of six to seven years tend to become more empathy and less in aggressive. They are also less likely to become trapped in external behavior problems at adolescent level (Zhou, Lengua, & Wang, 2009). In addition, Rothbart et al. (2001) argue that besides genetic factors, the child's self-control also depends on the extent to which executive-focused skills introduced during the early years of development. In conclusion, effortful control temperament reflects children ability to interact with themselves and then be shown in the form of behavior in the environment according to the rules or norms of society.

How do Teachers Recognize Children's Temperament?

Henderson and Wachs (2007) concluded that there are four methods to measure temperament:

- i. Structured or semi structured interviews with parents
- ii. Direct observation naturally (unstructured)
- iii. Laboratory observations in structured situations
- iv. Use of questionnaires

Parents are the most qualified person to serve as evaluator temperament. Henderson and Wachs (2007) view that temperament evaluation report by the parents has an advantage because of:

- i. Having the opportunity and experience together with the children in repetitive situations and in different contexts,
- ii. Having convenience or advantage to rate in total,
- iii. Involved and can get access to naturally the temperament patterns shown in real-time.

Implications of Preschool Teacher Practice

The temperament presence is usually easily detected and measured during early childhood. The question is, does knowing this child's temperament help teachers to improve children's socio-emotional development and then cut the risk of behavioral problems? This issue is still a debate between psychologists, medical practitioners, researchers or educators. However, the study proved that temperament may change due to environmental factors and experience (Blair & Diamond, 2008; Rothbart, & Bates, 2006). Hence, the role of preschool teachers is indispensable in the early stages of children development as this is the best time to give a variety of exposure and experience. At this time children are easier to receive positive and negative environmental influences (Nor Hashimah & Yahya, 2007).

One of the requirements for fulfilling the individual's unique demands is that teachers need to equip themselves with the knowledge of children development. Teachers' knowledge about children development is very important to offer a conducive and proper teaching and learning preparation for each child (Sofiah & Kamarul, 2016). To meet this need, teachers need to know and understand one of the differences in children, namely temperament. Temperament is a 'remarkable' factor that affects children's self-adjustment to school (Yoleri, 2014). This knowledge and understanding help teachers recognize, approach, understand, interpret, anticipate and prove the tendency of difference and the uniqueness of children behavior (Nor Hashimah & Yahya, 2007).

One of the methods which teachers can do is create a classroom environment that is compatible with children temperament. This effort is to support optimal development and meet positive educational outcomes (Kristal, 2005). This environment created by teachers through various approaches, strategies, and techniques can make children motivated and ready to learn. This is in line with the opinions expressed by Kerr et al. (2007) teachers need to do their best based on the knowledge and skills they have, so children will get the best from their teacher's actions. Teaching and learning based on a continuous process of interaction between pupils and teachers are important because effective teaching is not about teachers but all related to students (Berk & Trieber, 2009). Teachers need to communicate more as well as interact physically and emotionally with children (Shatar, Jasni, & Azali, 2006; Najib, 2000).

Additionally, by understanding the child's temperament, the teacher can plan and develop appropriate teaching and learning activities (Rohaty & Abu Bakar, 1989). Teachers can repeat the same activities more than once a year so that each child receive different benefits from its activities according to changing needs, developments and abilities throughout the year (Nor Hashimah & Yahya, 2007). This opportunity allows each child to explore, achieve success, gain experience and enjoy meaningful learning. In addition, teachers can also plan to give a suitable reinforcement to regulate behavior, motivating children and forming a positive self-concept, especially to difficult and slow type children temperament (Nor Hashimah & Yahya, 2007). When children have begun to show positive changes, support can be reduced gradually.

One of the challenges faced by preschool teachers is that when faced with children temperament like quick-tempered, easily disappointed, high levels of anxiety, high levels of activity and low self-control (Posner & Rothbart, 2007). In this situation, teachers can use an understanding of temperament. This understanding can avoid preschool teachers by not react negatively to children with behavioral adjustment problems. This knowledge also is an opportunity for teachers to expect and understand children (Nor Hashimah & Yahya, 2007). Teachers will interpret the behavior of children and try to understand the cause of the differences in behavioral responses of children. Thus teachers who have access to the temperament will react differently to consider one of the individual differences of children. Teachers need to provide support and behavioral education intensively (Rohaty & Abu Bakar, 1989). For example, teachers give exposure and experience to children to manage anger, disappointment, and worry. The support, education, experience, and exposure provided give an exclusive developmental environment for children in the process of conducive developing.

Identifying and understanding the child's temperament can become the guideline for the teacher to respond. 'Conflicts' between teachers and children can also be reduced. Teachers will give assignments, guidance, services, and attention which suitable to the kind of children's temperament. For example, children who fall into extraversion/surgency temperaments will give more challenging activity tasks than children with negative affect temperament. This is because the extraversion/surgency temperament children are motivated and easy to make an adjustment (Grist & McCord, 2010). Children who have slow or difficult temperament need words of encouragement and personal guidance from teachers. They need time and slow to adapt to the new person. Therefore, they need to receive repeated exposure (Norhashimah & Yahya, 2007).

Behavioral adjustment problems are not only a big challenge for children but also teachers. Studies have found that children with extraversion/surgency temperament are at risk of having external behavioral problems such as lack of self-control (Eisenberg et al., 2005). This is because they have less embarrassment that becomes barrier from doing the negative behavior. Identifying each child temperament helps the teacher to assist children facing the risk of behavior adjustment problems. Therefore teachers should proactive monitoring children behavior and conducting preventative and interventions from time to time.

Conclusion

Temperament can affect children's lives achievement and will continue carried into adulthood in a lifetime. Although temperament derived from biological factor, yet it is not a fate that cannot be changed (Rebecca, 2012). Temperament can change as a result of environmental factors such as the positive response from teachers. Teacher's commitment will affect

children temperament, next developing self-concept and forming positive behavioral adjustments among them. Teachers' knowledge, skills, and initiative have a positive impact on the needs of children's learning psychology such as providing a suitable learning environment, child-friendly development oriented and a sense of safety. Teachers can create opportunities and space towards the well-being and success of children through the commitment, support and positive response.

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