

Overview

Parent in New Hampshire:

Four year old Kaeli was sitting at the breakfast table, fully dressed in her endless pink. She was an extremely careful and aware little girl, always neat and precise in her actions. This particular morning, as she took her orange juice cup in her hand and raised it, her finger brushed by the butter plate and a little butter got onto her bent index finger. With her usual precision, she moved the glass towards her mouth, saw the butter on her finger, and continued turning her hand to lick the butter off. The juice, obeying the laws of physics, tumbled down her pink dress. Tears followed the river of juice.

Riley had always been an exceptionally cheerful, jolly, round little boy - "Smiley Riley" to those who knew him. One day when he was eight years old I noticed that he was concentrating very hard on what he was drawing. He seemed to be putting an unusual amount of time and focus into a very detailed picture. When he was done he brought it over to show me. On the top of the page was a paradisiacal scene, replete with palm trees and a big, brightly shining sun. There was a clear line dividing this from the lower 3/4ths of the drawing. A waterfall from the heaven above tumbled down the page. Below, all the people were knocked over, bleeding, and dead. All had battle gear or had been hit by coconuts falling from the "palms of paradise." As he showed it to me, Riley said, "They all fell into battle. Everyone is dying."



What makes both of these events stir a sense of awe and appreciation, rather than one of frustration over the dirty dress or fear of the violence and depression depicted in the picture? The answer is simple: an understanding of human development. When we realize that a four year old cannot not keep more than one thing in focus at a time, it is clear that when the butter comes into view, the juice can no longer be in the child's awareness. Knowing that the child herself will be mystified by the events that follow can open our hearts rather than close them. When we realize that an eight year old is waking up to an independent self that cannot help but feel like the clashing and clanging of battle, compassion overtakes worry. Understanding child development allows us to see the phenomenal workings of the human mind and heart and body in each child – we have the incomparable opportunity to actually witness another's growth.

Knowledge and understanding of human development make it possible to not only enjoy our children more deeply and to ride the times of worry and fretting more easily, but they also help us to guide the children more constructively no matter where in the process of growth they may be.

Underlying Principles:

The child grows through a series of distinct stages, like the metamorphosis of caterpillar to chrysalis and chrysalis into butterfly. In the course of child development, each stage happens in a set sequence and, on a blueprint level, each phase of this process lasts approximately seven years. Virtually all child development experts agree on this – after all, we are all looking at children. While each child is clearly a unique individual with his own gifts and challenges, and one who is growing at his own pace, we find there is a set sequence to these stages and there are certain developmental principles and themes common to each given stage. The feisty autonomy of the “terrible twos” – whether showing itself in tantrums or as bold independence – is one commonly recognized expression of a developmental principle. So whether any given expert focuses on cognitive development, emotional, or social, and so on, each theorist sees the child's development as moving sequentially through set phases.

From the Enki perspective, we see each child in each stage experience the world in a unique way, and each stage has its particular and characteristic traits and longings or quests.

The processes of child development are very practical, down to earth. They are what they are, not good or bad, just there, and, as always, paralleling the deep processes of nature – *never does nature say one thing and wisdom another*. The inner development of the child is paralleled by several different processes in nature, each giving us a different window into understanding this miraculous being before us.

When looking into the nourishment within the stages of child development, a plant's growth processes can help us see the child's process more clearly. The plant moves through setting out roots, through developing stalk and leaf, and finally into flowering, fruiting, and seeding. First the seed sets out a tap root. In a well-balanced soil, the roots will spread, firmly setting up a base for both structure and nourishment. As the roots spread, the stalk and leaves, so different from the root system, begin developing.

And once the root base is strong enough, stalk and leaf growth become the plant's focus. These are the communicators, transforming light into nourishment and distributing nourishment throughout the plant. Until the roots, and the stalk and leaf system are well established and able to function with a minimum of attention, the needed energy cannot go to making the fruit and seed. And any imbalances in nutrition or timing result in fruits of poor nutritional quality. Only when the root and shoot systems are properly nourished in the right time, can the plant synchronize into a full, healthy, vibrant bloom.

To look accurately at educating the growing child, it is helpful to look from the perspective of the same kind of natural order, the microcosm within the macrocosm. Like the plant, the human being has three very different aspects, each as unique and as important as the root, shoot, and flower systems are to the plant. In relation to development, human beings also have three very different capacities or divergent modes of experiencing, learning, and expressing. We describe these as the **capacities of body, speech, and mind**. Each capacity has its own strength, its own challenge, and its own gift to contribute to the development of a full human being, and, though each is critical throughout life, each has its time in the spotlight, just like the root, shoot, and flower systems of the plant.

Each of these capacities in the human being has a period in which it takes center stage, and times when it operates in the background, always as a crucial member of the team.

- 1) **In the realm of body**, we discover the ability to explore and interpret through movement. We also find the open, unbiased quality of being imprinted by all we meet. As Bessel van der Kolk, a leading psychologist today puts it, "The Body Keeps the Score." So whether we intend to take in the world around or not, the body is always being imprinted. Here we find the young child.
- 2) **In the realm of speech**, our focus shifts into relationship, and thus inevitably to communication: Often this capacity is referred to as "heart," and the realm of Speech does include the heart and its attendant flow of emotions. But it is the budding sense of other and the resultant drive to communicate that forms the container. Therefore, from this point on, we will use the term "speech" rather than "heart/speech." This capacity holds the artist in us all as learning comes to life through the senses, the imagination. Here we find the grade school child.
- 3) As we question, analyze, and wander down logical mazes, we train the powerful gifts of mind, **in the realm of mind**, we find the adolescent, awakening to new powers of thought. Here we use the term mind in a more limited way than it is sometimes used: we do not mean Big Mind, as in "Enlightened Mind." We see this Big Mind as the result of the integration of all three capacities. By the term "mind" in this context we are referring to the cognitive, analytical, reflective functions.

Body, Speech, and Mind are not only capacities within all of us, but also act as containers for certain periods of our development. **Each child comes into the world with his own unique constellation of gifts and challenges, his own character, and his own path to walk. But, whatever his make up and**

whatever his timetable, the child will grow and learn within the given container of his developmental stage, and he will move sequentially from one stage to the next.

This time the parallel with a different aspect of nature can deepen our understanding: living in the different worlds of water, land, and air. Suspended in the water, each child will still be himself. There will be the fearful and the overly bold. There will be the coordinated and the clumsy. There will be the quick and the slow, and so on. The water itself does not affect this. But during his time in the water the child is moved by and must move with the flow of the water itself. All the aspects of his being that are needed to work with this successfully will be activated. Someone could come along and give him perfect instructions for building a house on land, but they will not only be of no use to him in the water, they will pull his attention from the very things that need his focus if he is to survive – and thrive!

In the same vein, when the child is on land, he can move about quite freely but his vision is limited to that which is before him, and no matter how he flaps his wings, he will not take to the sky. Instructions on proper flapping will only pull him from the growth needed to be fully alive on earth.

Later, flying free, he can look back and reflect on the world under him in an entirely new way. So, too, the containers of body, speech, and mind determine our experience in the course of child development.

From the Enki perspective, each container or phase of the child's growth is a period of a particular kind of heightened awareness. Every child begins with heightened body awareness, proceeds to a heightened speech awareness, and finally comes to a heightened mind awareness. Within each stage, the child, like the plant, has a very specific task to accomplish. However the movement between stages is less like a plant and more like the process of metamorphosis in which the child's inner experience is as different as is the caterpillar and the butterfly. The child will undergo these changes regardless of what we do. We can have a profound effect on the health he will find in any given phase, but we cannot turn a caterpillar into a chrysalis, or chrysalis into butterfly by clever schemes or sheer will.

Within each stage, and between them, there are several "dynamics" that govern the learning process all along the way. All learning must adhere to these. This is detailed in the next section.

Certainly at any time the child can be pushed into faster skill learning. We can train a toddler to decode words on the page, but we cannot change the basic principles of his growth. And we find that we cannot push the child without harmful side-effects, any more than we can rip a chrysalis from its cover to make it fly.

Parent in Michigan:

*One thing I am learning over and over with Miriam is that if I wait until she is really ready, not just wanting to be ready, but really ready for the new learning, it is a magical moment when she does learn it. When I have allowed, or encouraged her to do things before it was really time, there is some satisfaction, some frustration, but usually not the real beauty and wonder of watching her *get* it, really, never that real inner delight.*

Only by perceiving and meeting the creature where he is, can we nourish the caterpillar properly and thus lay the ground for a vibrant, beautiful butterfly. The same is literally true for the child. Only with all three capacities well developed will the child be ready to bring them together and be free to choose whether and when to swim or walk or fly in adulthood.

All three awarenesses are part of the human experience at all times from birth to death. We all have bodies that function and move; we all can feel and communicate; we all, in some way, think – such is the nature of being human. However, there is a flavor or texture that underlies the quality of learning and growing in each phase, provided by the container for that phase. For example, the preschooler's ceaseless jumping from the furniture is quite different from the marathon runner hitting his stride. And the two year old's "logic" is clearly quite different from that of the fifteen year old. It is clear that these processes happen in all of us, but equally clear that they are radically different at different ages. This difference has far more to do with metamorphic changes in awareness than with any particular personality trait or with what a child has accumulated in either skills or information. Rather, the **quality of the child's experience in each phase is determined by the heightened awareness of that time.**

During the time that a given awareness is heightened, the awareness just behind takes a somewhat automatic, supportive position, and the awareness that lies ahead exists in an embryonic form – much as is true for the root, shoot, and seeding system of the plant. So too, when in the time of Heightened Speech Awareness, the understanding and expression of the Body Awareness will still need nourishment and activity to stay open, just as the plant's root system still has both its job to perform and its survival needs to be met. But, for the most part, just as the roots of a plant now focus on nourishing the stalk and leaf, the gifts of Body Awareness now lend their strength to the budding of Speech awareness.

For example, as the six year old heads into his time of Heightened Speech Awareness, his attention shifts from galloping through the woods like the knight's horse, to telling the story of the great battle and drawing the many adventures he had on that horse. He will also be unconsciously mapping out battle strategies, but not yet be deeply nourished by comparative theories on the strategies of conquest.

All three awarenesses are always part of us; however, we will only have automatic, open access to the full scope of each awareness in its own time. During the time of each Heightened Awareness, it is the job of the adults to nourish and strengthen the capacity most alive in the children; only then will the child be free to draw on each gift as needed in adulthood.

To truly learn as adults we must have access to all three types of awareness and be able to call on each as needed. Real learning begins with an open intake, free of judgment and expectation. This is the gift of body awareness. Then we must relate with or engage with the new in a flexible, imaginative manner both to find its relationship to our prior experience and also to adjust ourselves to what the new has brought. This is the gift of speech awareness. Finally, we have enough experience with and information about the new to step back and analyze, draw conclusions, and judge. This is the gift of mind. For real, open, and compassionate understanding to bloom in adulthood, all these capacities must learn as equals, and in the end, each is complete only in harmony with the others. It is only in working to realize and synchronize all three that we can possibly touch a full and present vitality and release the wisdom and compassion that flow from that.