

On the Relationship Between “Teaching” and “Nurturing” in Infants’ Early Development

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Abstract: Ages 0–3 are a critical period for infants’ psychological development. An imbalance between “teaching” and “nurturing” has become a common phenomenon in the field of infants’ early development, which has seriously affected the all-round healthy development of infants’ psychological development. From the disciplinary perspective of child psychological development and guided by vocational education, this paper systematically analyzes the core relationship between “teaching” and “nurturing” as symbiotic, complementary and dialectically unified. It explains the synergistic mechanism of the two in infants’ psychological development, analyzes their core manifestations and negative impacts, and then puts forward practical optimization paths, so as to lay a solid foundation for getting rid of the dilemma of educational imbalance and promoting the high-quality development of infants.

Keywords: Infants; Early development; “Teaching and nurturing”; Relationship

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1. Introduction

Infants’ early development is crucial to the cultivation of national human capital. The formation of cognition, emotion and social abilities of infants aged 0–3 requires the coordinated efforts of “teaching” and “nurturing”. At present, China’s childcare service system is imperfect, family parenting concepts are biased, the professionalism of childcare institutions is insufficient, and the separation of “teaching” and “nurturing” exists in the process of vocational preschool education talent training, leading to a prominent imbalance in early childhood education^[1]. It is of great theoretical and practical significance to deeply discuss the relationship between “teaching” and “nurturing” in the early development of infants, clarify the action mechanism and imbalance hazards between the two, explore scientific optimization paths, standardize early childhood education practice, ensure the healthy development of infants’ psychological development, improve the early education system, and improve the quality of vocational education talent training.

2. Core relationship between “teaching” and “nurturing”: Symbiosis, complementarity and dialectical unity

2.1. Nurturing is the premise and foundation of teaching

“Nurturing” is based on meeting the physiological needs of infants and centered on emotional response, which provides dual psychological and material support for the effective implementation of “teaching”. Establishing a sense of security is the core of infants’ psychological development aged 0–3. Scientific parenting, based on responsive care and stable companionship, builds secure attachment and provides psychological support for cognitive education and emotional counseling ^[2]. At the same time, reasonable daily care and the cultivation of living habits can ensure the stable brain development and physical and mental state of infants, which is the physiological foundation for “teaching”. Teaching divorced from nurturing will be difficult to implement due to the lack of emotional and physical support, and it may even violate the laws of infants’ psychological development.

2.2. Teaching is the extension and sublimation of nurturing

“Teaching” takes “nurturing” as the core. “Nurturing” focuses on the basic needs of infants’ survival and safety, solving the core problem of “surviving and growing well”. “Teaching” focuses on the laws of infants’ psychological development, taps their development potential, and realizes the connotation improvement of “nurturing”. Scientific “teaching”, guided by individual education, combines the psychological development goals such as cognition, emotion and sociality with daily care, transforming “nurturing” from simple physical care into a comprehensive behavior that comprehensively promotes the all-round physical and mental development of infants, realizing the transformation from “survival-oriented nurturing” to “development-oriented nurturing” and highlighting the core values of infants’ early development.

2.3. Teaching and nurturing interpenetrate and maintain dynamic balance

“Teaching” and “nurturing” do not exist independently, but penetrate each other and dynamically adapt to the characteristics of infants’ psychological development stages. From 0 to 1 year old, “nurturing” is emphasized. Nurturing details such as touch and verbal interaction can be integrated into “teaching”, focusing on sensory stimulation and emotional connection. From 1 to 2 years old, the two are equally important. Cognitive education is integrated into daily care, and habit formation is strengthened in game guidance. At the stage of 2–3 years old, the proportion of “teaching” is appropriately increased, but still based on “nurturing”. The core of the dynamic balance between the two is to fit the psychological development rhythm of infants, avoid one-sided bias towards a single dimension, and ensure the integrity and continuity of psychological development ^[3].

3. Synergistic mechanism of “teaching” and “nurturing” in infants’ psychological development

3.1. Emotional connection mechanism: Nurturing lays the foundation, teaching empowers

In the coordination of teaching and nurturing, emotional connection is the core mechanism for its synergistic effect in infants’ psychological development. “Nurturing” can respond to infants’ physiological and emotional needs in a timely manner, provide stable companionship, build secure attachment, and consolidate the foundation of children’s emotional development ^[4]. Based on emotional connection, “teaching” strengthens infants’ positive emotional experience through positive interaction and emotional counseling, helps them establish preliminary emotional regulation ability, and reduces negative emotions such as anxiety and

loneliness. The two complement each other, which can not only ensure infants' psychological security, but also promote the development of their emotional cognition and expression ability, laying a foundation for their future psychological development.

3.2. Cognitive development mechanism: Nurturing sets the foundation, teaching performs

"Nurturing" builds a basic foundation for children's cognitive development. By providing a safe and rich living environment, sensory stimulation and life experience, infants can obtain initial cognitive experience. "Teaching" systematically and rationally organizes scattered perceptual experience through targeted education guidance according to the psychological development characteristics, such as infants' perception, memory, and thinking ability, so as to promote the improvement of cognitive abilities such as language, thinking, and fine motor skills. The two complement each other to achieve the cognitive development path of "experience accumulation—guidance and sublimation", which conforms to the intuitive and specific characteristics of cognitive development of infants aged 0–3 and can promote the stable development of cognitive level ^[5].

3.3. Social development mechanism: Nurturing sets examples, teaching provides guidance

In the process of "nurturing", parents' interpersonal relationship patterns and emotional expression behaviors provide infants with intuitive social models and affect the formation of their social cognition. "Teaching" refers to guiding infants to interact with peers and parents, learning social rules such as sharing and cooperation, helping them understand others' emotions, adjusting their own behaviors, and gradually improving their interpersonal skills. Through these two ways, infants can accumulate social experience through imitation, standardize social behaviors through guidance, and gradually establish social cognition, laying a psychological foundation for future social adaptability ^[6].

4. Practical paths to optimize the relationship between "teaching" and "nurturing" in infants' early development

4.1. Based on the laws of infants' psychological development, anchor the core principle of "nurturing as the foundation and teaching following nurturing"

For early infants, their psychological development has certain characteristics of stages, sequence and individual differences. Especially for infants in the critical period of 0–3 years old, the satisfaction of various psychological needs (such as forming attachment, regulating emotions, etc.) must be based on scientific parenting. "Nurturing" is the premise to ensure infants' psychological security and build a healthy psychological background. "Teaching" must follow the laws of psychological development, penetrate smoothly relying on nurturing scenarios, and cannot be promoted blindly by deviating from the essence of "nurturing" ^[7]. Its core logic is "nurturing" as the foundation and "teaching" as the extension. Teaching without "nurturing" as the foundation violates the natural laws of infants' psychological development, while nurturing without "teaching" misses the critical period of psychological education. Only by anchoring this principle can the two be organically combined.

In the specific implementation process, it is necessary to accurately grasp the critical period of psychological development of infants aged 0–3 and formulate personalized learning plans according to different temperament types. For example, in the daily nurturing processes such as feeding, coaxing to sleep and dressing, gentle physical touch, coherent language comfort and stable eye contact can be used to

meet the baby's security and emotional needs, so as to strengthen the attachment relationship. Moreover, in the process of feeding, guide the baby to pay attention to the color and sound of tableware; when dressing, explain the material, color and dressing sequence of clothes, so as to improve the baby's sensory perception and language comprehension ability. For easy babies, simple interactive games can be added in the process of care; for difficult babies, optimize the rhythm of nurturing in teaching and nurturing, reduce environmental stimulation, and gently guide them to soothe their emotions, so as to ensure that all nurturing behaviors can be connected with education content and achieve the goal of "teaching in nurturing, teaching without exceeding boundaries".

4.2. Build a practical mode of "nurturing first, education supplementary", strengthen the pertinence of "teaching" and the scientificity of "nurturing"

In the early "teaching" and "nurturing" of infants, the mode of "nurturing first, education supplementary" should be followed. Scientific nurturing focuses on the cultivation of infants' physical health and psychological security, which is the premise of their psychological development; "precise education" is based on children's psychological development level and carried out in the form of games and life, which helps to improve children's psychological ability. This model can effectively change the wrong concepts, such as "valuing teaching over nurturing" and "valuing nurturing over teaching", make "nurturing" more scientific, "teaching" more targeted, and better conform to the characteristics and needs of children's psychological development ^[8].

In the specific implementation process, it is necessary to standardize the nurturing process, optimize the rhythm of diet, sleep and activities combined with the psychological development characteristics of infants, avoid excessive intervention or laissez-faire, develop good living habits and improve psychological security. Moreover, pay attention to the baby's emotional changes, respond in a timely manner, guide the baby to express their emotions through simple actions and language, and prevent emotional backlog. At the same time, educational activities should be carried out according to the child's psychological development level. Infants aged 1–2 years old are mainly through perception and language education, and their hands-on and cognitive abilities can be cultivated through games such as building blocks, reading picture books together and singing nursery rhymes. Infants aged 2–3 years old need to focus on social and ideological education, guide peers to interact in collective protection scenarios, and cultivate the ability to share and cooperate through role-playing and situational games. In addition, an education evaluation mechanism should be established to dynamically adjust the education content and intensity according to the feedback of children's psychological development, so as to ensure that "teaching" is not advanced or disconnected.

4.3. Rely on the family-campus collaboration mechanism, promote the unified concept and synchronized behavior of "teaching" and "nurturing"

The family is the main place for infants' "nurturing", and schools (nursing institutions and early education institutions) are the main places for "teaching". The unity of concepts and behaviors between the two is the key to optimizing the relationship between "teaching" and "nurturing". From the perspective of children's psychological development, a stable growth environment can reduce psychological conflicts and promote sustainable psychological development. The core of home-school cooperation is to convey the concept of "integration of nurturing and teaching", connect "family nurturing" and "campus education", realize the resonance of family "nurturing" and campus "teaching", form an educational joint force, and ensure the all-round development of children's psychological development ^[9].

In the specific implementation process, schools need to establish a home-school contact platform, use parent classes, parenting salons, online sharing and other ways to impart infants' psychological development knowledge to parents, correct the wrong concepts of "valuing knowledge over emotion" and "valuing physiology over psychology", and guide parents to incorporate education methods into family nurturing. Regularly provide feedback on the psychological development status of children in school, and provide targeted guidance according to the nurturing characteristics of different families, such as guiding doting families to establish a sense of rules and guiding neglectful families to strengthen emotional response. Families should actively cooperate with the school's education education, synchronously implement the maintenance and education requirements conveyed by the school, continue the school's education content and rhythm at home, and take the initiative to feedback the children's family performance to the school, forming a collaborative mechanism of "campus guidance, family implementation, two-way feedback" to ensure that the concepts of "teaching" and "nurturing" are consistent and behaviors are consistent.

4.4. Focus on the pain points of infants' psychological development, optimize the personalized adaptation strategy of "teaching" and "nurturing"

In infancy, psychological pain points such as insecure attachment, poor emotional regulation ability and inattention are all related to the insufficient fit between "teaching" and "nurturing". The personalized adaptation of "teaching" and "nurturing" requires respecting the individual differences of infants, abandoning the stereotyped parenting model, accurately connecting "teaching" and "nurturing" with the psychological needs of infants, and then preventing and intervening in children's mental diseases ^[10].

In the specific implementation process, it is necessary to accurately identify infants' psychological pain points and their causes through observation and evaluation. For infants with insecure attachment, fixed caregivers should be provided, a certain life rhythm should be maintained, one-to-one companionship and parent-child interactive games should be used to strengthen children's emotional connection, and picture book reading and emotional counseling can also be used to help children build self-confidence and reduce separation anxiety. For infants with poor emotional regulation ability, guide them to recognize and express their emotions in the process of nurturing, teach them simple adjustment methods, and improve their emotional empathy and regulation ability through emotional picture books and role-playing in education activities. For infants with inattention, create a quiet and simple environment in the process of nurturing to avoid external interference; in the education process, short and interesting games can be designed, such as listening to instructions to do actions, finding differences, etc., to gradually extend the attention duration. In addition, a dynamic evaluation mechanism should be established to adjust the adjustment strategies in a timely manner to ensure that "teaching" and "nurturing" conform to the changing laws of infants' psychological development.

5. Conclusion

To sum up, "teaching" and "nurturing" are the core supports for infants' early development. They are symbiotic, complementary and dialectically unified, and their synergistic effect directly affects the quality of infants' psychological development. The research on the relationship between "teaching" and "nurturing" in infants' early development can not only enrich the theories of infants' psychological development and early education, but also guide educational practice in families, childcare institutions and the training of vocational and technical personnel. In the future, further empirical research should be carried out to explore localized

adaptation models and combine them with cutting-edge technologies to optimize personalized education strategies.

Disclosure statement

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