

Supporting Wellbeing in Early Childhood

By

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‘People start to heal the moment they feel heard’.

Cheryl Richardson

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Abstract

Early childhood Education is the foundation of a child's life in the Education field. When a baby comes to this world, and starts his or her life growing with the family he or she understands the love and affection that receives from the family and that family is the root to every child's life and education. Supporting wellbeing in Early Childhood is a various endeavor enclose development of children. This is an overview of certain principles and strategies for encouraging Early childhood Wellbeing taking from different researched and best practices. Early childhood wellbeing is not just limited only for physical health but expands into emotional, social and cognitive extents. Creating children a nurturing and a safe environment is fundamental and at the same time following healthy diets and physical activities are important in physical wellbeing. In schools, creating continuous parental involvements ,socio-economic factors and cultural diversity helps in child's wellbeing. Recognizing early challenges such as disorders that affect wellbeing will ensure both educators and families on how certain disorders can be solved with time and by getting the help needed from specialists if needed. My research was conducted through a case study where I had the collaboration of the preschool 123stella Cesano Maderno. Overall Supporting wellbeing in early childhood education needs a holistic approach and a collaboration which reflect on unique needs of individual child. If the foundation appears to be healthy eventually the child can face a successful future ahead .

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Introduction

When we talk about a child's wellbeing, I think the more focus goes to child's mental health. Everything starts from family depending on whether the child is healthy or not and this obviously affects his wellbeing if the child is unhealthy. In my research I would like to talk about the different ways on how we can help in early childhood Mental health and why a positive early childhood experience is important and how mental health and wellbeing affects in the classroom and as a teacher how can you identify if the child is suffering from certain aspects and most importantly as a preschool teacher how to support wellbeing of a child which also helps the child to develop in his or her Mental health positively.

Early childhood Mental health

A child from birth up to the age of 6 is in the stage of early childhood and mental health is described as child's both emotional and social wellbeing. A child being 100% healthy mean a child should be able to manage with pressure or stress and every situation where as going to school , playing home without being unhappy , fearful or angry. Many mental disorders does not grow on their own, they activate by disturbing events and changes in the life of a child. When we talk about mental disorders of a child there are various terms such as Mental Illness, Diagnosis ,ACE, CAMHS and wellbeing. For children its hard to express their emotions because there confused on what they feel and why they feel it and that's why its important as a family to give the child from birth a positive environment to grow up to. Children's minds are very delicate so its important we treat those little minds with delicacy because as they grow they take the positive influence they had in the family to the world. If Mental disorders are left without treating , many disorders will reach into a negative impact in a child's development (World Health Organization ,2018b)

'Behavior is the language of trauma. Children will show you before they tell you that they are in distress'

Micere Keels

Apprehension in the Classroom

The concept of wellbeing is quite multiplex and express various aspects of classroom wellbeing as physical, cognitive, social, psychological and economic (Powell , Graham , Fitzgerald ,Thomas & White). In Early years

of the child, after family they start interacting with the school they attend to , with their significant teacher and peers so its important that the child feels secure and be comfortable with the environment as it is in the child's family. In these early stages of a child's life, the child go through main emotions and starts interacting with the enviornment to understand their society they live in. In the classroom , one of the main aspects that affect the child's mental health and wellbeing can be due to attachment. For children, attachment is very important , and after family getting use to new people and a new society and having to release a bit of their attachments can really give a hard time to the child. When a child starts his early stage in a nursery its important that both teachers and parents first focus on the child to ensure that he or she meets his needs and receive the right attention that will make him feel loved ,cared and valued.

Interactions between the child and the classroom

The early years of a child's life can help lay the foundations of wellbeing for their future (Falcounbridge et al, 2019)In Early Childhood Education its important that children experience their early stages in school positively. First when a child starts his or her nursery or preschool it's important that the teacher and the parents collaborate with each other for a positive development of the child. As a teacher, a child's first experience in a school can be very challenging because the child can go through many emotions at the same time and ill have no idea how to react or interact with teachers and peers so it's up to the teacher and her environment which can help the child feel secure and make her feel welcome to the new place. A teachers duty is to give space to each individual to be comfortable and respect their time because each child is different and has their own time range to interact. Obviously with time, one of the main thing a teacher should do is observe. Some children may have difficulty communicating, for example if they have additional needs or disabilities (Fuggle and Redfern, 2019) In early childhood education I think observing is fundamental and by observing it helps us to realise certain aspects on how we should react and if there's something that we should consider about then to take right actions towards the matter.

Understanding struggles

Some children and young people may try to hide how they are feeling or what they are doing (Theodosiou L. et al, 2020). They can feel that no one will understand them, minds can be messed up by thinking parents and teachers will not take them seriously, feel that no one is able to help and so on .Yes , there can be many behaviors that will be unpredicted according to their age and growth. Most of the common behaviors are attention-deficit/ hyperactivity disorder, anxiety and behavior disorders add some of the common behaviors that we see in children that struggle with these behaviors can be ,

- A child who is distracted or unfocused.
- Repeated behavior
- Tantrums or being aggressive
- Change of the appetite
- Concerns about separation
- Lack of communication

All these little behaviors fall into certain categories where children can get help from certain professionals and specialists. There are different treatments and specially by understanding that the child struggles with a certain disorder, the parents together with caregivers, doctors and therapists can work together to use resources to escort to child's success. A Child's mental health and wellbeing can be changed with overtime. It can be developed or it can breakdown.

How to support?

Promoting children and young people's wellbeing is a key part of keeping them safe, helping them develop and ensuring they have positive outcomes into adulthood (Public Health England, 2021).As adults and specially being a teacher I think everyone differs from each other when it comes to certain situations. We all have various ways and different needs when managing with stress .I think for children, it's the same because children can face different situations at home or school where can be stressful experiences.

I have research and gained Knowledge on Important concepts and strategies of Wellbeing in Early childhood education where we can support children in their wellbeing. A Nurturing environment - For Children , in School and home they should have a safe , clean and a friendly environment to feel secure and comfortable and making sure that child has adult-to-child attention provided.

1. **Reactive Caregiving** – Creating a strong bond with children is very important because children need to be responsive to their physical and emotional needs. Listening to children’s needs and having empathy is very important.
2. **Physical Activities and a Healthy diet** – Encouraging children in a routine is important for their physical development and educating them on healthy food choices too.
3. **Play-Based learning** – in early childhood education , play is the center in a child’s development and we should encourage children to be open-ended ,imaginative which stimulates creativity and develops in problem solving skills. Children to have access to materials (toys) that supports in various types of play and encourage to observe and participate in children’s play for facilitate learning occasions.
4. **Collaboration with families** – It’s important to have frequent communications with parents in order to be active in child’s progress, challenges and child’s achievements an always getting parents involved in decision-making when its regarding the child.
5. **Regularity in Routines** – Setting up a daily routine for children can reduce anxiety in children and consistency in teaching practices and assumptions helps children to feel secure.
6. **Professional development** – For educators it’s important to have ongoing training in early childhood education and updating themselves on most recent researches and best practices in child development.
7. **Observation** – Observing children regularly will help the educators to understand children’s growth, strengths ,progress and areas of development and use evaluations to support for child’s needs.
8. **Self – care** - Most of all, we should recognize the importance of wellbeing and by caring for oneself will enable for a better care for children.

I have chosen three students from my preschool to analyse their behaviors and how and what I did with my colleagues to support their wellbeing.

Case Study

Children with Behavior Problems			
	Child 1	Child 2	Child 3
Disorder	Hyperactive	Developmental delay	Anxiety
Age	5	4	4
Behavior	• Always having an active behavior (running , jumping) • Less eye contact with teachers.	• Puts everything in his mouth. • Unable to sit still • Use his hands to communicate a lot • Very anxious in situations	• Throws tantrums • Arguing with his peers • Curious • Continuous Stomach ache • restless
Family Background	Both the parents are present. Father is a constructor and mother is a housewife at the moment. Child 1 has a little sister two years younger than him and he is the only boy in the family. Grandparents from mothers side are present most of the afternoons to pick up the children from school	Both the Parents are present, Child 2 is a twin and he has another twin brother. Mother is a personal assistance of a famous family and travels a lot and father is a businessmen. Father brings children to school but everyday the pickups are done by their grandmother from father's side.	Both parents are present, Father is a hairdresser and mother is accountant and he's the only child in the family. As the school, mother is not always present to during drop off and pick up of the child, and grandparents do pick up in the afternoon and spends time at their house until parents come to pick up.

Research Data Collection Method

Having these three in one classroom was a challenge as a teacher specially with their young age. In school we had a specific routine where children had the freedom to move around freely but by being independent to choose what they want to do. The school was focused more on outdoor education and also followed the montessori pedagogy. In the morning after circle time children were given time to use certain activities proposed by teachers and children got the right to choose what they like, obviously each activity had a maximum number of children and if everyone wanted to participate they had to take turns in order to interact with the activity. In this way when these three specific children were un different activities, one teacher was aimed to observe their behavior, and collected their data in the observation sheet given by the school. Everyday, every hour and every different atmosphere was different when comparing their behavior.

After recording data on this several sheets, every week we had an 'Equip' which was a group discussion between the school board to discuss about various difficulties, about children and also planning activities and lessons ahead. We take this time as an opportunity to go through together about these three children and share our ideas how we can work with them in order to develop their disorders.

Next we schedule parent meetings , without the child to communicate regarding the child. Our school also provided us with a meeting paper where we get to write down the information we receive from parents so we know exactly what procedures we can take about the child in the future.

Interviews

One study found that, when the parents have a positive connection with the child's teacher, the teacher will eventually have a positive connection with their child (Chung et al.,2005). Its also challenging to build trust among teachers and parents, it can be difficult to many parents and teachers but by creating a trusting relationship it helps to play a huge role in communication (Vicker & Minke ,1995).

Child 1

At first, Parents, only mother was present in the interview, so she started by saying that she's having a hard time at home because the child is not listening. We wanted to know more about his routine at home

and the mother said that, he always argues with him , never listens , he does what he wants , he use bad words , he hurts his sister when she annoys him. He is scared of his father, but he doesn't see him all the time because most of the time he's at work and get less time to interact with children. Mother seems to take care of the household by her self and has been a little stressed lately finding jobs. When ever the mother is enable to control her children, she just let them do what they want and that has made the child feel that its useless to have a routine.

After this meeting we had several meetings together with the school board where I called 'Equip'. we took this problem at home where this mother also has a hard time and started evaluating how we can help this child.

Child 2

We always got the opportunity to hold the interviews online due to busy schedules of parents. Mother and father were both present and they explained us on the behavior of the Child 2 where he has a hard time staying in a routine. He gets frustrated easily , seeks attention a lot and sucks every single thing he find when he's confused. Parents had already worked together with the doctor and he was already doing therapy at the moment. Parents knew from birth, that he was a boy with developmental delay ad he was attending and doing exams every week to see his progress.

Child 3

During the interviews father was present most of the times. As he explained , when the child comes home, he's always tired , angry ,never listens and parents wanted to collaborate with the school to help the child overcome these difficulties.

All these three interviews had few things that are similar where as children doesn't listen and each family is quite busy with their working schedules .

We had several interviews with this child's parents to talk about his behavior. As a preschool, our first questions were,

- How are you both?
- How are you feeling right now?
- How's your child's behavior at home?

- What kind of relationship both emotionally and physically you share with your child?

Questions and Objectives

1. How can I help these students as a teacher to overcome difficulties?

As my experience and the knowledge gained by the course, a teacher should have a good practice which means the way she teaches or handles the classroom has an impact on children and bring a positive outcome as a teacher. Observing children's difficulties and focusing on what their interested is a must and by listening to them and their needs will help to understand what he's lacking and what kind of help he seeks and get the right help the children deserve by involving with the different specialists. because spending most of their time in a preschool, we can recognize issues that needs to be solved, and if certain behaviors are enable to be handled and if the. Child need more focused help such as therapy, as teachers, I think collaborating with parents and specialists gives a better intervention to solve or find a solution to the child's wellbeing.

2. Will Inclusive education help them to develop in certain aspects?

Yes, as my approach in the classroom with mix ages, race ,gender I think every child is different from one another and everyone has their own uniqueness. By inclusive education, children get to interact with children in different ways and everyone is accepted and treated In the same way. In wellbeing of children, as I have focused on three children, there are other children who gets along with these three children, who don't see their disorders because one of the most important aspects in teaching is letting children have their equal worth and giving the right to be included. As a teacher during lessons letting children share their own experiences gives the children the opportunity to learn about one another and by not labelling children with special needs will have a positive impact by enrolling in inclusive education.

3. Is Facilitating group discussion in school helpful for these situations?

I think, doing this research made me realise how important it is to share their ideas in order to come into a final solution. During teacher meetings with the school board, everyone has to accept that everyone differs from one another and when its about children and their wellbeing, a single teacher or the classroom teacher cannot decide for her student, it's a team work where everyone comes together to find a solution so I think during these meeting its important that every shares what they think and what they feel regarding these children and what can we do as a team to help these children over come their difficulties, and specially recognizing together when a child needs more help such as from a specialist. This way many opinions can help to achieve and have an impact on the problems that are being focused.

4. Will parents take the situations negatively without collaborating?

This is always a challenge when collaborating with parents. Approaching parents regarding children's wellbeing is a very delicate topic specially if its something serious. Everything depends the way how as a teacher you handle the situation and teachers approach towards the parents. Meeting are always challenging when you have parents that are hard to work with, but its always important to remember what's my purpose ,why am I here , what's my aim having this meeting and most importantly to have and continue with a positive impact in order for the family to collaborate.

Data Analysis , Results and finding

Having many discussions, interviews with colleagues, parents , and also students. We came to find out several information regarding the three children by working a lot with their disorders.

Child 1

Family is having a hard time to cooperate. Both mother and father argues at home which makes the child confuse when it comes to routines. As we studied about this child, we realise that this child need lots of attention from his parents, he wants the involvement in his daily activities and also in school work. He needs a proper routine where both mother and father agrees and where it continues in preschool for him to understand some rules and regulations are to be respected in both the environment. .His mind sees lots of negativity starting from home, so he needs compliments in little things and appreciated in different moment when he does something productive. This way it helps the child to calm him self down and helps to develop in certain aspects to overcome this disorder.

Child 2

Parents has been a great support to the school as well as to the child. As the parents have already found out his wellbeing, he was taken to an early intervention specialist for support he needs to acquire when he was a little boy . As Jean Piaget say ‘Play is the work of childhood.’ So as a teacher we realized that is important for him to provide a specific routine and a structure where the specialist follow too. Where as during transitions, if the child is having a hard time to cope, maybe using signals or specific songs to help him ease the frustration of change and taking the transition as a moment of play. In this way ,it helps the child to develop slowly by slowly into simple daily tasks to achieve little things.

Child 3

Parents had no clue on child’s situation, they were focused on saying that he seeks attention. Yes the child seeks attention because the family who suppose to give him the attention most lacks on giving attention. They realized that leaving school with grandparents also make him very anxious. He refuse most of the days and asks for his father and we focused on his situation by letting parents have a routine with him where he spends quality

time and together share his thoughts and talk about how he feels and feel supported. Sometimes communication between parents and children leads to depression to where he feels isolated.

"Even if we don't have the power to choose where we come from, we can still choose where we go from there."

Stephen Chbosky

Conclusion

In conclusion, supporting wellbeing in early childhood education is most important endeavor with wide-ranging insinuation for a lifelong development and success of children .This approach also gives knowledge to understand that early childhood is a critical period where physical, emotional , social and cognitive wellbeing are highly linkage. My research has taken many ways and helped me think critically in different aspects when it comes to wellbeing. The importance of creating safe and nurturing environment for children and importance of a proper nutrition and physical activities shows a great impact on the cognitive development. In addition , to continue with an inclusive approach its important to have parental involvements for child's positive wellbeing and Identifying early challenges will always be challenging when it has to be addressed and taking behavioral concerns and developmental delays effectively will help educators and families to ask the help child needs if it seeks. Overall, wellbeing in early childhood education is a combination responsibility that imply parents, educators , policymakers and society. Its important to continue everyone in professional development and welcome the evidence based practices and ensure that every child has the opportunity to reach their prospective healthy to a brighter Future.

Reccomendations

A book that is good for educators to have a positive impact on wellbeing of students and how to accept in a positive way.

Breaking Negative Thinking Patterns – Gitta Jacob, Hannie Genderen and Laura Seebauer

This book is great for young children specially for children with anxiety.

Ruby finds a Worry – Illustrated by Tom Percival

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