

UNIT- II: LEARNER AS A DEVELOPING INDIVIDUAL

(b) Heredity and Environment- meaning, laws of heredity and role of heredity and environment in development, Nature-nurture debate.

Definition OF Heredity

Heredity refers to the passing of traits or characteristics through genes from one generation (parent) to the other generation (offspring). Heredity is very evidently seen in sexual reproduction. This is because, in this process, the variation of inherited characteristics is high.

The variation occurs due to some errors in DNA copying. Variation is important because it contributes to the evolution and forms the basis of heredity. Variation is caused due to gene mutations, the interaction of genes with the environment, and various combinations of genetic material. Remember that variation can occur through the asexual reproduction process too. But, these variations are not very noticeable.

Meaning of Heredity:

Each individual has a different pattern of behaviors and personality. This difference is seen due to the influence of heredity and environment. Truly speaking heredity and environment play an important role in the development of the personality and other qualities in the individual.

No person can be born without heredity and genes cannot develop without proper environment. An individual's heredity is present since the moment of conception, and some environmental conditions also start influencing him from this very stage.

Each trait and response of an individual depends on his heredity and environment. Therefore, in order to know about the individual, it is necessary to understand his heredity and environment.

Every human being is born as a result of conception which takes place due to certain biological Factors and process. When two germ cells meet together an organism's life starts. In the ovary of the female an ovum or an egg cell is present. Ovum is a kind of female's egg cell. In the ovum 23 pairs of chromosomes are present in different shapes and sizes. In the male's sperm there are also present numerous germ cells.

In a germ cell there are 23 pairs of chromosomes as is the case with female's ovum. When a chromosome of female meets the chromosomes of male. Fertilization takes place and the life begins to take place. It is this cell or chromosomes which in the process of heredity an individual gets from his parents.

The child carries with himself several physiological and psychological peculiarities that are present in the parents. In fact it is the heredity that determines structure, complexion, structure of hair, height. Facial features nasal index etc. of the child. Thus different types of the genes help in the formation of a body.

According to geneticists, sex is also inherited. They say that there are two big chromosomes. They have named these chromosomes as 'X' and 'Y'. In the germ cells of the male there is one big 'X' chromosome-and a small 'Y' chromosome.

If the germ cell engaged in the formation of a creature an 'X' chromosome of the mother and the other 'X' chromosome of the father enter, then the child will be a female, and contrary to this, if in the germ cell an 'X' and a 'Y' chromosome enter, the child will be a male.

A study of chromosomes has revealed that genes of the 'X' chromosome are comparatively stronger than the genes of the 'Y' chromosome. An individual's heredity depends on the genes of his parents, that is, whatever one gives to his children is through the genes. The mechanism of heredity is explained below.

Mechanism of Heredity:

(i) Mating:

Mating is the 1st step for reproduction. The union of male sperm with female ovum the results is zygote.

(ii) Growth:

It involves repeated division of the fertilized cell or zygote.

(iii) Chromosomes:

Every woman and man receives 23 chromosomes from each parent or 46 in all.

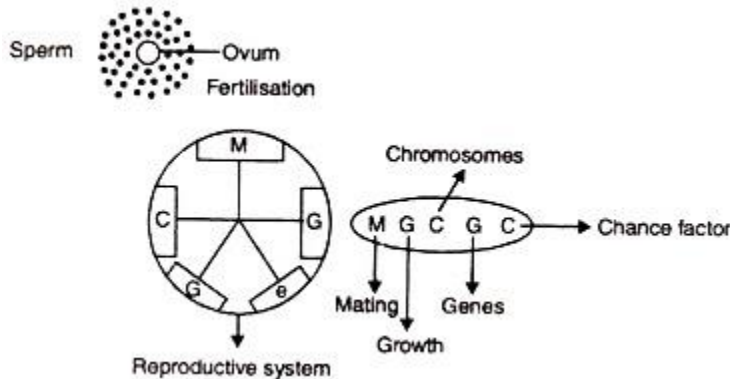
(iv) Genes:

Each chromosomes consists of small particles numbering 40 to 100 which are called genes.

(v) Chance factor:

Both ovum and sperm before fertilization contains 23 pairs of chromosomes each. At the time of conception, the genes in the chromosomes of the sperm, pair the genes of ovum and determines the potential characteristics and qualities of the offspring.

The result of the union of the genes is called heredity.



Meaning of Environment:

Environment is nothing but the sum total of the surroundings in which an individual has to live. Psychologically an individual's environment is related to all those stimuli which he faces from the moment of fertilization till death.

Environment is generally divided into two categories-natural and social. Natural environment refers to all those things and forces on and around the earth that influence a person.

Social environment we mean the environment which the person sees around himself on acquiring consciousness in the society, i.e., language, religion, custom, tradition, means of communication, means of luxury, family, school, social groups etc.

By human society we mean those institutions or organizations which human beings have established for their own protection and security. Psychologists like Freud, Havelock, Eills have accepted the fact that social environment is very much responsible for changing in human behaviour and its personality.

Educational Implications of Heredity and Environment:

The knowledge of heredity and environment has a great influence on human development. Human development is the product of both heredity and environment. The development pattern of the children is determined by both heredity and environment.

As per the developmental pattern of the children the educational pattern, methods and learning environment should be made by the teacher in the teaching-learning situation. So the knowledge of heredity and environment helps the teacher in various ways which are discussed hereunder.

- i. Knowledge of heredity and environment helps the teacher to know the varying needs and abilities of the children.
- ii. It helps to provide proper guidance to his children in the field of educational, vocational and personal.
- iii. It helps the teacher to classify the students as gifted, normal or slow learner and arrange different types of education for them.
- iv. It helps the teacher to provide better learning environment in the school.
- v. It helps the teacher to know the principle of individual differences and arrange the educational experience accordingly.
- vi. It helps the teacher to study the behaviour of the children under different situations.
- vii. It helps the teacher to organize various curricular and co- curricular programmes for the best benefit of the children.

So the knowledge of both heredity and environment is of utmost value to the teachers, administrators and educational planners. If it is realized, the system of education will be changed to a great extent.

Mendel's laws

The two experiments lead to the formulation of Mendel's laws known as laws of inheritance which are:

1. Law of Dominance
2. Law of Segregation
3. Law of Independent Assortment

Law of Dominance

This is also called Mendel's first law of inheritance. According to the law of dominance, hybrid offsprings will only inherit the dominant trait in the phenotype. The alleles that are suppressed are called as the recessive traits while the alleles that determine the trait are known as the dormant traits.

Law of Segregation

The law of segregation states that during the production of gametes, two copies of each hereditary factor segregate so that offspring acquire one factor from each parent. In other words, allele (alternative form of the gene) pairs segregate during the formation of gamete and re-unite randomly during fertilization. This is also known as Mendel's third law of inheritance.

Law of Independent Assortment

Also known as Mendel's second law of inheritance, the law of independent assortment states that a pair of trait segregates independently of another pair during gamete formation. As the individual **heredity** factors assort independently, different traits get equal opportunity to occur together.

Key Points on Mendel's Laws

- The law of inheritance was proposed by Gregor Mendel after conducting experiments on pea plants for seven years.
- The Mendel's laws of inheritance include law of dominance, law of segregation and law of independent assortment.
- The law of segregation states that every individual possesses two alleles and only one allele is passed on to the offspring.
- The law of independent assortment states that the inheritance of one pair of genes is independent of inheritance of another pair.

Which is the universally accepted law of inheritance?

Law of segregation is the universally accepted law of inheritance. It is the only law without any exceptions. It states that each trait consists of two alleles which segregate during the formation of gametes and one allele from each parent combines during fertilization.

Why is the law of segregation known as the law of purity of gametes?

The law of segregation is known as the law of purity of gametes because a gamete carries only a recessive or a dominant allele but not both the alleles.

Why was the pea plant used in Mendel's experiments?

Mendel picked pea plant in his experiments because the pea plant has different observable traits. It can be grown easily in large numbers and its reproduction can be manipulated. Also, pea has both male and female reproductive organs, so they can self-pollinate as well as cross-pollinate.

What was the main aim of Mendel's experiments?

The main aim of Mendel's experiments was:

- To determine whether the traits would always be recessive.
- Whether traits affect each other as they are inherited.
- Whether traits could be transformed by DNA.

NATURE –NURTURE DEBATE

The nature versus nurture debate is one of the oldest philosophical issues within psychology. So what exactly is it all about?

- **Nature refers to all of the genes and hereditary factors** that influence who we are—from our physical appearance to our personality characteristics.
- **Nurture refers to all the environmental variables** that impact who we are, including our early childhood experiences, how we were raised, our social relationships, and our surrounding culture.

The **nature vs. nurture** debate is the scientific, cultural, and philosophical debate about whether human culture, behavior, and personality are caused primarily by nature or nurture.

Nature is often defined in this debate as genetic or hormone-based behaviors, traits, and dispositions, while nurture is most commonly defined as environment, culture, and experience.

HISTORY OF THE NATURE VS. NURTURE DEBATE

The nature vs. nurture debate is an ongoing one. The modern debate often centers around the effect genes have on human disposition as opposed to the influences that early environment and development might have.

As culture changes, so have popular understandings of this debate. In the 1960s, for example, psychologists—and pop culture in general—were heavily influenced by the theories of behaviorism. This theory led to the widespread belief that human personality is primarily influenced by experience and training. It was during this time that researcher John Money attempted to demonstrate that gender was a product of early conditioning by raising a boy, whose circumcision was botched, as a girl. His experiment seemed successful in the beginning but ultimately was a failure.

In recent years, the nature side of the debate has gained more attention, with headlines trumpeting newly discovered genes for virtually every behavior. Evolutionary psychology and sociobiology are two branches of science that attempt to demonstrate the evolutionary roots of human behavior. Books authored by scientists in these fields are extremely popular. However, critics still emphasize the important role of early childhood environment, development, and cultural influences. Many have argued that sociobiology and evolutionary psychology are deterministic pseudosciences.

TWIN AND IDENTICAL TWIN STUDIES

Several studies done on twins separated shortly after birth reveal that genetics do play a significant role in the development of certain personality characteristics, sexual orientation, and religiosity. The bond between identical twins was also suggested to be genetic by these studies, as 80% of identical twins reported that they felt closer to their twin than they did to their closest friends, despite having just met their twin.

One study also suggested that genetics play a significant role in the development of personality: Environment had little effect on personality when twins were raised together, though it did have an effect when they were raised apart.

HOW NATURE AFFECTS MENTAL HEALTH

While nature, or genetics, has been proven to be an important factor in the development of some mental health conditions, such as schizophrenia, bipolar, and major depression, the development of mental illness is not entirely genetic. Nature, or genetics and disposition, has been proven to be an important factor in the development of some mental health conditions, such as schizophrenia, bipolar, and major depression. Bipolar, for example, is four to six times more likely to develop when there is a family history of the condition. However, although the importance of genetic factors cannot be denied, the development of mental illness is not entirely genetic. For example, identical twins share their genes, yet if one twin develops schizophrenia, research shows the other twin only has a 50% chance of also developing the condition. This indicates that nature, while it plays an important part, is not the only contributing factor.

Another area where researchers may place more emphasis on nature than on nurture is that of addictions. Research indicates that alcohol addiction, for example, can recur in families and that certain genes may influence how alcohol tastes and the way it affects the body.

HOW NURTURE AFFECTS MENTAL HEALTH

Certain genetic factors may create a predisposition for a particular illness, but the probability that a person develops that illness depends in part on environment (nurture). When a genetic variant indicates the possibility of developing a mental illness, this information can be used to direct positive (nurturing) behavior in such a way that the condition may not develop or may develop with less severity.

James Fallon, a neuroscientist who discovered that he had the brain of a psychopath, has stated that he believes growing up in a nurturing and loving environment helped him become a successful adult and may have been effective at preventing him from fully developing traits of psychopathy. Similarly, the basis for addiction is not thought to be entirely genetic by most

researchers. Environmental aspects, such as the habits of parents, friends, or a partner, might also be significant factors contributing to the development of an addiction. A genetic predisposition to alcohol addiction may be far more significant if one is routinely exposed to binge drinking or other forms of alcohol abuse and comes to view this as normal alcohol use.

Researchers at the University of Liverpool recently found that while a family history of mental health conditions was the second strongest predictor of mental illness, the strongest predictor was in fact life events and experiences, such as childhood bullying, abuse, or other trauma. This supports the idea that nurture plays significant role in the development of mental health issues.

NATURE VS. NURTURE IN THERAPY

In the mental health field, some therapeutic treatments and approaches may be nature-based or nurture-based, depending on which paradigm to which they adhere. For example, an extremely nature-based approach might seek to address mental health on a biological or genetic level, while a nurture-based approach could be more likely to address a person's learned beliefs and behaviors. Most approaches borrow from both nature and nurture-based philosophies, and many seek to address the interaction between nature and nurture.

For example, using medication to treat a mental health issue may be a primarily nature-based approach, while behavioral therapy, which stems from behaviorist psychology, addresses a person's upbringing and conditioning and takes a nurture-based point of view. Meanwhile, therapies based in cognitive psychology may be more likely to address the effects of both nature and nurture.

It is possible to find a therapist who takes a more nature or nurture-based approach to treatment. However, many therapists today consider multiple factors, including how the nature and nurture work together, during a session.

HOW NATURE AND NURTURE INTERACT

Many scientists eschew the nature vs. nurture debate by emphasizing "nature x nurture." In this schema, nature and nurture are inseparable. Some genes, for example, cannot be activated without certain environmental inputs. The development of vision is a prime example of this. People cannot develop normal sight without exposure to visual stimuli.

Similarly, some environmental inputs may be undermined by some genes. For example, some lifelong smokers may never experience smoking-related illnesses, and this may be due at least in part to their genes. Environmental toxins may alter the expression of some genes, and genes for many behaviors presumed to have a genetic basis have not been discovered.

Developmental systems theory, among other theories, presents an alternative to this debate that does not require scientists to advocate either for nature or nurture.

Human diversity

Human diversity, also called cultural **diversity**, addresses the variety of **human** societies and cultures and examines their similarities and differences. Taken literally, **human diversity** simply means the differences inherent among people. ... **Humans** are divided into different cultures means individual client differences that are associated with the client's cultural group, including race, ethnicity, national origin, religious affiliation, language, age, gender, gender identity, physical and mental capabilities, sexual orientation, marital status, or socioeconomic status.

Role of society in child development

For decades, the medical community has understood the important influence an individual's environment has on their health. This has led to many health promotion interventions which focus on improving health by improving the environment of a community. It has also led to increasing calls for future health promotion efforts to move beyond attempting to change individual behaviours and instead focus on creating healthy environments, which are conducive to health.

An individual's social environment, including the social relationships an individual makes within it, can also have a profound impact on the quality of parenting, which in turn affects a child's health development and future achievements. Inclusive social environments which provide support to parents have been shown to enhance parents' capacity to care for their children and in doing so promote better child health and development. They have also been shown to have a positive effect on the family system, and families who are well connected to networks of

supportive individuals are better able to cope with factors which may negatively influence their health.

What are social environments?

The social environment refers to an individual's physical surroundings, community resources and social relationships.

Physical environment

The physical surrounding of a social environment include housing, facilities for education, health care, employment and open space for recreation. The nature of physical surroundings (including their quality, e.g. the extent to which open spaces are clean and buildings maintained) can influence the quality of parenting and in turn affect the health and wellbeing of children within that environment.

Community resources

The availability of community resources refers to **community structures** (e.g. political governance) and **organisations, knowledge** and **support** within the community. The extent to which resources are available in the community influences the health of individuals living within it. Living in a socio-economically deprived, underdeveloped community, has a negative impact on child development.

Social relationships

Social relationships are the **interactions** between various **individuals** or **groups**. In every society, individuals develop relationships with other individuals to enable them to achieve their goals. These relationships may be entered into consciously or unconsciously (e.g. a friendly chat whilst waiting in a queue or a meeting with a child's teacher). The obligations, expectations, trust and norms of any relationship influence the extent to which these relationships enable an individual to develop "social capital". Social capital is a strong, supportive network of individuals who provides access to emotional and physical resources which an individual needs to fulfil their goals. The social relationships are collectively referred to as the social

network. Good social networks are associated with greater levels of social cohesion, informal care and enforcing healthy behaviours such as not smoking and safe sexual practices.

The importance of positive social environments and relationships for parents

A child's social environment is largely dictated by where their parents live and send them to school. In turn, the social environment largely determines who children form social relationships with and the quality of those social relationships, as many of the relationships children form are within their family or neighbourhood. As such, parents' decisions (or, on the contrary, lack of decision making power) about where to live, work and school can markedly affect the health and wellbeing of their children.

Physical surroundings

An individual's physical surroundings markedly influence their health. Environments characterised by poor physical surroundings (e.g. lack of open space, lack of facilities and litter) are associated with poor health outcomes. For example, social environments characterised by quality, affordable housing are associated with reduced poverty and increased residential stability, both of which affect a child's health and the social relationships which they form. Children who change neighbourhoods frequently because their parents are forced to move to find affordable housing may find it difficult to develop supportive social relationships and are more likely to be absent from or under-perform at school. Australian children who lived in cleaner neighbourhoods were assessed as having better social behaviours than those living in less clean environments.

The availability of good quality educational facilities within an environment is also important. For example, attending early childhood education is associated with improved childhood development and individuals living in socio-economically marginalised communities are less likely to have access to early childhood education facilities, and are thus less likely to attend and experience the benefits of early childhood education. Children who do not attend early childhood education have also been shown to be at greater risk of maltreatment during childhood.

The availability of job opportunities within a neighbourhood or community may also affect a child's development, by influencing their parents' work. Working locally means less travel time (and presumably, more time for family commitments) and associated stress. Work-related stress and time constraints have

been shown to have negative effects on individuals and spill over into the family and affect relationships within it, including the quality of parent-child relationships. Working locally can improve parenting, relationships between parents and children and ultimately child health and development. There is also evidence that the availability of housing and employment within a neighbourhood, affect levels of child maltreatment and children are less likely to be maltreated in communities where housing and employment are more readily available.

Community resources

Parents play a key role in educating their children. However, they also rely on resources within their community including teachers, doctors and other adults (e.g. community members, family, friends) to fulfil their parenting role. The degree of cohesion amongst members of the community (measured for example by the presence or absence of community organisations or community activism) influence the nature of these relationships. Communities characterised by high levels of cohesion, such as those with active community groups, provide good opportunities for individuals to become involved in and develop the resources in their community.

For example, an Australian study of children living in 257 neighbourhoods reported that a sense of belonging to the neighbourhood (having positive social relationships within the neighbourhood) was associated with more pro-social behaviour amongst children. An American study reported that children growing up in neighbourhoods characterised by impoverishment were more likely to experience maltreatment (negative social relationships) than those living in neighbourhoods without these characteristics.

The rules and norms which govern a community can also exert an influence. For example, many Australian communities now have laws which prevent adults smoking in the vicinity of children's recreational facilities, and these laws increase the capacity of communities to protect their children's health.

Factors relating to an individual's personal circumstances also influence the extent to which they are able to access resources within the community. For example, the length of time an individual has lived in a community influences the extent to which they engage with resources in the community, and residential stability increases an individual's sense of belonging to a community and access to resources. However, in Australia families are increasingly mobile, and this mobility may undermine the development of support networks within a

community. A parent's work situation may also influence their access to community resources. For example, parents who are working fulltime or working long distances away from their home community may find it difficult to get involved in community organisations.

The role of extended family members in providing support for parents is declining in Australia. This means that access to non-family resources which can provide such support is of increasing importance to families.

Social relationships

The social environment also influences the nature and quality of the social relationships in which parents and children engage, as the social environment largely determines who, how often and on what terms parents and children will interact socially. Developing and maintaining positive social relationships (e.g. characterised by trust, mutual satisfaction, respect, love and happiness) is fundamental to a good quality of life and psychological health. Individuals who have good relationships develop a sense of belonging and receive support from other members of their social network which helps them to function normally from day to day and also to cope with stress and difficult times. Social relationships also provide opportunities for generating new ideas, discussing issues and concerns, sharing good news and obtaining social, economic and emotional support. However, some social relationships involve negative emotions and behaviours (e.g. lack of trust, envy, jealousy, breaking promises and violence) which may undermine an individual's wellbeing and life quality.

Living in a good social environment increases the likelihood that a child will develop positive social relationships. Social behaviour and the ability to develop positive relationships with others were traditionally conceived as skills which would develop naturally. However, there is an increasing recognition that social behaviours are learned and that children must be taught pro-social behaviour. Children learn from their social environment, for example by mimicking (or challenging) the social behaviour of their peers, and thus what they see in their day to day environment is likely to influence their social behaviour. Social skills can also be actively taught, for example when a parent or teacher reinforces and encourages good behaviours, the probability of these behaviours occurring is enhanced. Teachers and parents may also actively encourage children to apply social skills learnt in one social setting (e.g. the classroom) to other settings (e.g. home or the playground).

Both the parent's and child's social relationships are increasingly recognised as a important factors influencing the quality of parenting, which in turn is an important contributor to the child's overall development. The children of parents who have strong and supportive social relationships are more likely to develop positive social relationships themselves and having positive and supportive social relationships and networks improves a child's development. In terms of parenting, social relationships of key importance include those between a child and their parents, but also a child and other adults (e.g. teachers, other children's parents) and other children (including their siblings). Parental involvement with the parents of other children creates trust and obligations, as well as community norms, which the parents set collectively for their children. This means that parents can collectively take responsibility for children's behaviour, for example by providing discipline if a child misbehaves.

Relationships between parents and children also affect a child's ability to develop social relationships in the community. One study reported that the children of parents who had difficulty disciplining their children and being affectionate towards them due to financial stress, received lower teacher ratings in terms of their social behaviour compared to children whose parents did not experience these difficulties.

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How do social environments and social relationships influence a child's development?

There is a considerable body of evidence demonstrating that an individual's social environment influences their health status, although the mechanisms by which it does so are not yet fully understood. A number of possible mechanisms have been put forward. For example, it has been hypothesised that children may imitate what they see in their environment, thus those who grow up in contexts characterised by high-quality education and child-care, access to a range of essential services and recreational facilities and social cohesion, experience better developmental outcomes than those who grow up in contexts characterised by a lack of resources and social antagonism.

Cognitive development and educational attainment

A child's social environment influences their cognitive development and educational attainment. Children who engage in good social relationships perform better academically than those who do not. Children living in social environments characterised by residential stability are less likely to be absent from school and perform better academically than those who do not. Those who live in poor quality neighbourhoods (e.g. low socio-economic status) are more likely to drop out of school before completion than those who do not.

Attending early childhood education, at which a child can develop social relationships with other children and teachers and in doing so, develop pro-social behaviour, has a particularly profound effect on future academic achievement. Children who attend preschool perform better academically and are less likely to repeat a grade. There is evidence that cognitive development is influenced by the social environment during early childhood even if a child subsequently moves to a different neighbourhood. For example, a child who lives in a disadvantaged neighbourhood during early childhood will experience reduced cognitive development and academic performance even if they move to a more affluent neighbourhood later in life. An intergenerational effect is also present, and children whose parents grew up in disadvantaged neighbourhoods also experience impaired cognitive development and educational attainment compared to those who did not, even if they grow up in a more affluent neighbourhood.

Risk-taking behaviour

Growing up in a positive social environment is associated with less risk taking behaviour. Children who grow up in positive environments are less likely to have accidents requiring treatment than those who do not. There is also a reduced risk of developing a substance use disorder amongst children who have positive social relationships compared to those who do not.

Emotional and psychological wellbeing

The sense of belonging which individuals experiences when they have good social relationships has a positive influence on their mental health. Children who have good social relationships have greater self esteem than those who do not and are less likely to experience mental health problems including depression and anxiety. There is also evidence that pro-social behaviour during childhood leads to better psychological health in adulthood.

The social environment may also influence a child's health by influencing the behaviour of their parents. For example, an Australian study reported that parents

living in communities where services were more accessible, were less likely to use hostile parenting techniques (which are expected to have negative psychological effects on their children) than those living in communities where resources were not available.

Motivation

Individuals living in social environments characterised by positive social relationships are more motivated than those who do not. For example, peer support has been found to be an important predictor of a child's motivation to pursue social goals, while teacher support increases a child's motivation for both social and academic goal pursuits. Parent support also influences children in terms of their level of interest in school and their pursuit of goals.

Physical health

A positive social environment also promotes improved physical health, including

- **A reduced risk of eating disorders** – children who engage in good social relationships are less likely to develop eating disorders than those who do not;
- **Increased likelihood of being immunised** – children living in positive social environments are more likely to be immunised than those who are not;
- **Reduced risk of teenage pregnancy** – young women living in poor quality neighbourhoods are more likely to experience teenage pregnancy than those who do not;
- **Sporting ability:** children with positive social relationships perform better at sports than those who do not.

Tips

There are many ways in which parents can get involved in their communities, and in doing so improve their social relationships, their parenting skills and their children's health and development.

Be physically, socially and mentally active

Being physically, socially and mentally active can improve an individual's social environment and relationships and cause them to feel more involved in their

community. For example, taking a walk or a bike ride provides opportunities for meeting or engaging other community members.

Join a club, team or community organisation

Belonging to a group, whether it is a sporting team, book club or other organisation, is a good way to meet new people and develop relationships and a sense of belonging. Groups which actively intervene in communities to improve the social environment, for example by having a clean up day or organising a local government petition, have been shown to be particularly effective in creating a sense of cohesion in the community.

Consciously encourage family rituals and routines

Routines such as eating meals together as a family or going to the park on Sundays provide opportunities for family members to develop social relationships amongst themselves. Family rituals also promote a sense of belonging. Bedtime routines are associated with better sleep patterns amongst children. Family routines may also make it easier for children to cope with stress such as parental separation or divorce.

Balance work and family life

Parents may experience improvements in their social environment by adjusting their work schedules, for example by freeing up time to participate in community activities or organisations. Australian employees have an obligation to grant parents flexible working arrangements in reasonable circumstances. Parents should therefore be aware of their entitlements as doing so may enable them more of their time to focus on their community and family commitments.

Encourage children to play with groups of children

Parents should also encourage their children to develop social relationships through play. Playing is one of the primary means by which children develop social skills and learn the abilities they need to form relationships with other children and adults. Playing promotes positive interactions between peers and reduces the likelihood of a child exhibiting aggressive behaviour. Cooperative (as opposed to competitive) games may be particularly useful for the development of pro-social behaviour as the success of the game is dependent on the group (not the individual) and children are encouraged to focus on the process of the game, rather than its outcome (the winner).

Develop parenting skill

Parents may also contribute to their children's health and development by improving their parenting skills. Parenting programs which teach parents to develop their children's emotional competence have reported positive results, and that the development of emotional competence in children improves their social behaviour. Children who are emotionally confident are more likely to interact with other children and displayed fewer negative emotions which might interrupt their social relationships.

Education isn't only about learning subjects such as math, English, and science. A more comprehensive definition of education addresses the emotions, personality, and character as well. Parents today are looking for schools that help their kids become healthy, balanced, and civic-minded adults. This is why character education is so important. It provides a holistic approach to learning and development. Let's explore how character education helps kids learn and develop crucial values.

Role of education in character building

What is Character Education?

The most basic definition of character education is an approach to education that incorporates values, ethics, emotional maturity and a sense of civics. To many, this sounds simple, straightforward and even self-evident. However, modern education has mostly developed in another direction, one that focuses entirely on students' academic and, to a lesser extent, physical development (e.g. physical education, sports). In the modern world, however, parents and educators increasingly recognize the need for a new yet traditional approach to education, one that emphasizes character as well as intellectual development.

Components of Character Education

There's no precise formula for a curriculum that incorporates character education. As with any approach to learning, there are different theories on how to instill positive values and character traits. This also differs according to culture and the age of the students. There are, however, certain general principles that character

education advocates agree upon. The 11 Principles of Character Education as outlined by Character.org provides a helpful summary of this idea.

- Educators promote core ethical and performance values to instill good character in students.
- A comprehensive definition of character, which includes thoughts, emotions, and actions.
- Educators use an intentional, proactive, and comprehensive approach to character development.
- To support this process, schools create caring and supportive communities.
- Educators encourage students to develop morally and provide opportunities to grow morally.
- Schools create a challenging academic environment to help students develop character.
- Educators foster self-motivation in students.
- Educators and all school staff are part of an ethical learning community and adhere to the same values that they teach.
- Schools foster leadership values.
- Schools engage parents and other members of the community as partners in character building efforts.
- Schools regularly assess their culture, their staff and their overall success at fostering character development.

As you can see from this list, character education involves a comprehensive approach that includes a robust academic curriculum, a dedicated staff, and a partnership with parents and the wider community. This is a more challenging approach to education than one that focuses primarily on academics. Building character is a more complicated and wider-reaching goal. It's an approach to education, however, with the potential to yield outstanding results. Rather than simply teaching students information, it seeks to help them develop into ethical, responsible citizens.

The Role of Educators in Character Building

There are several common objections to character education, based on some natural but misguided beliefs about the proper role of schools in developing character. People often assume that parents rather than educators are responsible

for fostering values in children. While parents certainly have an immense role to play in this regard, they can't carry this responsibility alone.

Children, once they reach school age, spend a great deal of time apart from their parents. It's true that children, by the time they start out in school, have already developed many personality traits. These are far from set in stone, however. As kids interact with their peer and teachers, they have many opportunities to learn valuable lessons.

It's true that children, by the time they start out in school, have already developed many personality traits. These are far from set in stone, however. As kids interact with their peer and teachers, they have many opportunities to learn valuable lessons. Educators who ignore character-building are overlooking a crucial opportunity to help students grow into responsible adults.

A child who spends six or more hours at school every day learns many lessons that have nothing to do with academics. He or she learns to play, share, socialize, and resolve conflicts. Too often, children learn these lessons haphazardly or according to the personal preferences of a teacher or staff member who is nearby. Character education systematizes these lessons, allowing students to develop a moral compass.

The goal of character education isn't to supplant parents' influence but to support it. Under this model, educators work closely with parents and the rest of the community as partners in character development.

Character Education: the Future of Education?

The principles of character education are certainly not new. In many ways, they are consistent with more traditional ideas about education. At the same time, modern educators who embrace this model aren't trying to recapture the past. They are, rather, seeking to create an environment that helps students face the challenges of living in a complex and fast-changing world.

Parents, as well as students, enjoy the benefits of character education. In a society where influences such as the media and internet constantly barrage children with messages, it's more important than ever to provide guidance and balance, both at home and in the classroom. It's unrealistic to expect parents on their own to watch and guide children all day long.

Many parents recognize the need to raise their children in a community that fosters important values. Traditional influences, such as neighbors, religious institutions, and local community organizations are harder to find today. People spend long hours working, move frequently, change jobs, and are increasingly fragmented in their own social circles. Schools provide one of the few stable influences on children's' lives. Character education is a model that provides students with core values along with academic instruction. This type of education is essential for raising the next generation.

Truancy is a serious problem in many communities in the United States. All states have laws governing compulsory education. Noncompliance results in penalties for the parent(s) or guardian of the truant student. The majority of the states require that students attend school until at least age 16. Those students who do not attend school regularly are often taking the first step toward a lifetime of problems. Most experts believe that truancy is a powerful and accurate predictor of involvement in crime and violence. The United States Department of Justice reports that 80 percent of those in prison were at one time truants. The percent of juvenile offenders who started as truants is even higher, approaching 95 percent. Truancy is different from school phobia, in which a child fails to attend school because of **anxiety**.

As of 2004, no national database existed to define the number children who are truant, partly because there is no uniform definition of truancy. Some districts consider children truant only if they miss a half or full day of school, while others consider missing a single scheduled class period as truancy. The Los Angeles School District has estimated that 10 percent of its students are absent each day and that only 5 percent return with written notes from home excusing the absence. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, schools reported 3,500 students, or 12 percent of all students, were absent on an average school day; 70 percent of those were unexcused. Milwaukee, Wisconsin, reported 4,000 unexcused absences on an average school day. Miami, Florida, reported that over 70 percent of 13- to 16-year-olds prosecuted for crimes were truant. The No Child Left Behind Act of the early 2000s requires school districts to report truancy, so national numbers were expected to become available. Boys and girls are equally likely to be truant. The average age of truant students is 15 years, but some children begin skipping school as young as 10.

Why children are truant

According to the United States Department of Education's 1996 *Manual to Combat Truancy*, skipping school is a cry for help and a signal that the child is in trouble. Psychiatrists consider truancy one of many symptoms of **oppositional defiant disorder** or the more serious diagnosis of **conduct disorder**, especially when truancy begins before age 13.

There are many reasons why children become truant. These include:

- lack of interest in education and alienation from school
- falling behind academically in school
- **fear** of violence on the way to school or at school
- alienation from authority
- lax parental supervision
- lack of parental support for education
- drug and alcohol abuse
- working long hours while attending school, resulting in chronic exhaustion
- lack of significant consequences for failure to attend school
- problems at home that require supervising younger children or helping dysfunctional adults

Truancy as a predictor of behavior

Truancy is a strong and reliable predictor of delinquent behavior, especially among males. Children who are habitual truants are more likely to engage in undesirable and antisocial behaviors such as gang membership, marijuana use, alcohol use, inhalant and hard drug use, high-risk sexual behavior, cigarette **smoking**, suicidal behaviors, theft, and vandalism. Truant girls are more likely to become pregnant and drop out of school. Most habitual truants eventually enter the juvenile court system. As adults, habitual truants have more employment and marital problems and are jailed far more often than nontruants.

Truancy is a gateway to serious violent and nonviolent crime. Law enforcement agencies have linked high rates of truancy to high rates of daytime burglary and vandalism. In addition, they have found habitual truants are more likely to belong to **gangs** and participate in violent crimes and assaults.

Combating truancy

Communities in which anti-truancy programs have been successful use a combination of incentives and sanctions to keep students in school. In the *Manual to Combat Truancy*, five key points are defined for minimizing truancy. The first

step is to involve parents in all aspects of truancy prevention. To stop truants, the school must be able to provide parents with notification of their child's absence on the day the absence occurs. Schools are advised to create an efficient attendance-tracking system and to communicate students' absences to parents immediately.

Second, schools must have firm policies on the consequences for truancy, and all students should be aware of the sanctions that will be imposed if they are absent without an excuse. Some states have found that linking truancy to the ability to obtain a driver's license effectively reduces unexcused absences. Others have invoked a daytime curfew, allowing police to question any young person not in school during school hours.

Third, parents must take responsibility for keeping their children in school. Most state laws impose fines or jail terms on parents of truants. School districts vary in how aggressive they are about holding parents accountable; however, more are becoming tougher. For example, in 2003, the Upper Darby School District in suburban Philadelphia had 14,000 students. This school system sends 10 to 12 parents to jail each year for their children's failures to attend school.

Alternately, some states are investigating ways to use incentives such as linking eligibility for public assistance to truancy as an effective way to capture parents' interest in keeping their children in school. Another positive incentive provides increased eligibility for services to families whose children attend school regularly. Many communities also offer effective parenting courses, **family** counseling, and mediation for returning the student to school.

Fourth, root causes of truancy must be addressed. The root causes of truancy are complex and varied and can include drug use, membership in a peer group of truants or gangs, lack of direction in education, poor academic performance, and violence at or near school. By analyzing the reasons students are truant, the school administration may be able to correct or improve the problem and reduce truancy. For example, if students stay away from school because of inadequate academic skills, special tutoring programs may be initiated. If students have concerns about violence near the school, the administration may request increased security from the police for the surrounding neighborhood. Local businesses can be enlisted to support school-to-work programs to help students make the transition to employment.

Finally, a close link between the school, law enforcement, juvenile court, family court officials, and social service agencies may lead to solutions for truancy. Some

communities have authorized the police to patrol neighborhoods where truant youth are likely to spend the school hours. Daytime curfews are also effective in some cities, where school age children can be questioned if they are on the streets during school hours.

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