How to Apply Erikson's Theory in Instruction

Rachel Kolar - Updated June 28, 2018

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According to Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, each individual's psyche is shaped through a series of conflicts called developmental crises. Three of these crises occur during childhood and adolescence, which means that teachers who believe in Erikson's theory should focus on these crises to ensure that students develop healthy, fully realized identities. According to Erikson, the key crisis for children between the ages of three and six is "initiative vs. guilt." From six to twelve, the crisis is "industry vs. inferiority," and for teenagers, "identity vs. role confusion."

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Initiative vs. Guilt

Give children the opportunity to make choices and act upon those choices. Because the crisis of initiative vs. guilt determines whether a child learns to plan activities on her own or comes to associate self-directed behavior with punishment, she must have the opportunity to make decisions. Provide a portion of the day when children can choose their own activities. Have a classroom library where children can pick their own books during reading time. This allows children the opportunity to learn how to make decisions for themselves.

Break instruction and activities down into small steps. This makes it easier for children to succeed and encourages them to take risks. Without this framework, children may become frustrated by activities and sense that they are doomed to complete them poorly.

Ensure that any competitive games or activities have well-balanced teams. If children consistently lose at math games, they may believe they are bad at math. Conversely, even a struggling student may feel confident in her mathematical abilities if her team performs well overall.

Accept mistakes that result from students attempting activities on their own. If a student damages something or makes a serious error, show him how to fix, clean or redo it instead of simply punishing him. This will make students feel more confident in their abilities to attempt activities on their own.

Industry vs. Inferiority

Allow students the opportunity to set realistic goals. Have them create academic and personal goals for each quarter and revisit those goals every few weeks to monitor their own progress. Break down each assignment into parts so the students can learn how to set time management goals. For instance, instead of collecting all parts of a project at once, collect a brainstorming worksheet on a certain date, a rough draft two weeks later and a final draft the next week. If a child successfully navigates the crisis of industry vs. inferiority, he will enter adolescence with a sense that hard work and perseverance will pay off. If not, he will feel that he is a helpless observer of his life.

Assign jobs to the students. Let them stack chairs, feed class pets, hand out and collect papers, take attendance sheets to the office and so on. Rotate these jobs regularly so all students have a chance to participate. This will give the students a sense of accomplishment.

Teach children study skills. Explain how to budget time and keep notebooks, binders and folders organized. If students fail at these organizational skills, their grades will suffer and they may feel that they are stupid or doomed to failure.

Provide regular feedback to students, particularly those who seem discouraged. Praise them for what they are doing right and give constructive criticism of what they are doing wrong. If your school has a program such as Student of the Month, choose students who have academic or behavioral issues but are making strong efforts at improvement as well as high achievers. This will show them that their efforts are paying off even if they are not making straight A's.

Identity vs. Role Confusion

Provide a variety of positive role models for students. Adolescence is a time of discovering one's own identity. A teenager who successfully navigates the crisis of identity vs. role confusion will be able to answer the question, "Who am I?" with confidence. Provide a series of role models to give students a potential identity model. Teach students about women and minorities who succeeded at a variety of careers, so all students have a role model to whom they can relate. Mention individuals who made lesser-known contributions to your academic discipline. A budding poet may feel more kinship with Eavan Boland than Emily Dickinson.

Provide models of exemplary work so students know what an excellent project looks like and can compare their own work to the model. This will show them how to incorporate academic success into their identities, essentially providing role models for their work instead of their career goals.

Provide opportunities for students to bring their own interests into projects and assessments, as they may feel these interests are vital parts of their identities. Allow students to choose between a variety of final projects -- skits, essays, art projects, music compositions, etc. -- so they can either choose a project that appeals to their interests or explore new aspects of their identities.

Criticize behaviors rather than making personal condemnations of the students themselves. Students are "trying on" roles at this point, and negative feedback for a behavior may encourage them to drop it and try another.

Explain the long-term consequences of misbehavior or poor performance so students will know how it affects themselves and others. This may encourage them to adopt a more responsible identity.

Encourage and support student interests. Attend school plays, concerts and games to affirm students' identities as actors, musicians and athletes.

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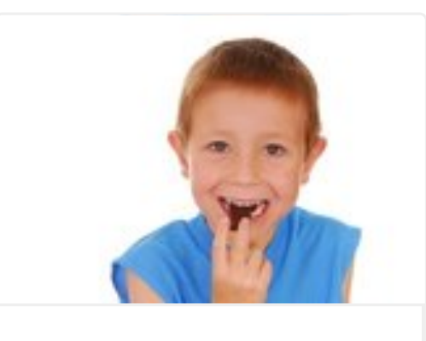
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About the Author

A resident of the Baltimore area, Rachel Kolar has been writing since 2001. Her educational research was featured at the Maryland State Department of Education Professional Schools Development Conference in 2008. Kolar holds a Bachelor of Arts in English from Kenyon College and a Master of Arts in teaching from the College of Notre Dame of Maryland.

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Behavior Interventions for Middle School Students in the Classroom

Kate Taylor

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In the middle school classroom, students' emotions can run very high, making their behavior outrageous and hard to deal with. Teachers can use different intervention strategies to maintain a positive and educational learning environment in which students can feel comfortable. Intervention strategies do not have to involve punishment -- they can also involve motivation and teaching.

Pinpoint the Behavior

Before teachers can intervene in student behavior, they must first understand what the behavior is, how the behavior is affecting the students, the teacher and the aggressive child, and what is causing the behavior. Educators should communicate with students in their classroom to find out how the behavior is making them feel so that they can explain the student with the behavior problem how he is making others feel. Sometimes explaining the consequences of an action will make a student realize the seriousness of his behavior.

Educational Punishment

Behavior interventions should be an educational experience for the students, instead of just a simple punishment. The punishment will be a much more successful intervention strategy if the student is educated about why she is being punished, how her actions make others feel and how her actions could affect her even after she finishes school and begins her life in the workplace. Teachers could give examples of what would happen if the behavior continued in the workplace or could express their hurt feelings in an emotional way to the students.

Behavior Contracts

Behavior contracts are an extremely effective intervention method because they place students in control of their destiny in the classroom. Educators could spend one of the first days of class developing a behavior contract, using the students' ideas and adding their own. By allowing students to express their opinions of what behavior should be expected in the classroom, students will be more likely to take responsibility for their behavior because they had a part in creating the rules.

Mystery Motivator

Behavior interventions do not always have to involve discipline. In fact, an effective intervention strategy is the Mystery Motivator, which involves motivating and inspiring students to change their behavior. The Mystery Motivator activity involves telling students that if they modify their behavior to conform to your standards for good behavior, they will earn the chance to win a mystery surprise. These surprises could include a gift certificate, movie tickets or simply a candy bar.

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About the Author

Kate Taylor is a professional writer based in Lafayette, Ind. She has served as an online copywriter in areas such as pet care, education and landscaping. Taylor is working toward her M.B.A. at Loyola University Chicago.

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