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Culture, Identity and education (MX502165)

Critically evaluate the factors that affect the formation of identity in early childhood and adolescence.

Introduction

This essay will be discussing the factors that affect identity in early childhood and adolescence. There are many factors that affect childhood and adolescence identities which include culture, language, ethnicity, religion, Social media, sexuality and a variety of others. This essay will focus on gender, sexuality and race and discuss the implications on identities and identities formation. In addition, the essay will highlight the importance of identities and exploring different theories around them. However, this document will be evaluating how these factors influence identity formation.

The Cambridge Dictionary (2021) defined identity as a person or group qualities that make them different from others. According to Oyserman.D, Elmore. K et al (2012, p.69), identities are seen as traits and characteristics, social relations and social groups that define who one is. Identities make up one's self and Mcload (2008) noted that identity connects to identity formation. Identity formation is how someone thinks, evaluates and perceives themselves. Also, the awareness of oneself. In addition, identity formation begins to develop from birth and continues through to adolescence as they are more aware of their own identity. However, Shahram Heshmat PH.D (2014), noted that identity formation is finding oneself and making good choices that are consistent with their true self.

Main Body

Firstly, the essay will highlight the importance of identities and identity formation whilst discussing different theories. A positive sense of identity is important to the development of self-esteem and confidence for children to be able to build a foundation with others while going through to adolescence (Pamela A. Raburu, 2015). Smidt. Sandra (2013) stated the notion of self which includes self-worth, self-esteem, self-concept and self-awareness. All these concepts include their ideas and beliefs about who they are as individuals, being aware of who they are, how they behave and what they do. Mcload (2020) noted the fourth stage of Maslow's Hierarchy of needs indicates that having respect or reputation is important for children and adolescence and precedes real self-esteem and dignity.

According to Tobiasen. D.P and Mena J.G (1999), that It is crucial that the children feel worthy and capable in education to be able to be more optimistic and do well in school. By having a healthy sense of identity it shows that they have found their true self with their own values and beliefs. Roberts. B (2019) noted that we may shy away from ourselves as we understand so little about ourselves, instead of thinking about who we really are. However, this can mean that we do not understand our values enough and are doing things that are against our values and beliefs. Roberts. B (2019) stated that it is vital that we play to our strengths to be able to fulfil our potential in life. However, Identity formation is also vital in early childhood through to adolescence as children will be growing up developing uniqueness and their own personality and also think of how others see them. Although, Changing minds (2020), stated that Identity formation starts in early childhood where the infants start to realise that they are a separate being from their mother. According to Mcload, S. A.(2018), In Erikson's stage 5 of his theory which is identity vs role confusion occurs during adolescence from the age of 12 - 18 where they search for a sense of self and personal identity, through exploring personal values, beliefs and their goals. Anyhow, Shahram Heshmat PH.D (2014) noted that identities are normally obtained indirectly by parents, peers and role models, as they define themselves of how they think their parents see them and how they have been brought up.

Secondly, the essay will be discussing factors that impact on childhood and adolescence identities which include gender, sexuality and race.

Stonewall Youth (2015) described gender as a way they identify themselves and how they feel about their gender. Rafferty. J. (2018) stated that children normally develop gender identities in stages, which include :

- Children around the age of 2 starts to become conscious of the differences between boys and girls
- Children under 3 can easily label themselves as a boy or girl
- Children by the age of 4 have a stable sense of their gender identity.

While children start to develop, children will learn gender role behaviours for example trucks, cars, action men, the colour blue is for boys and barbie dolls, unicorns and colours such as pink are for girls. However, Rafferty. J.(2018), noted that it is natural for both genders to play as it is a normal part of gender development and exploration regardless of their future identity. By mixing with different genders, it gives them an opportunity to explore different gender roles, for example, a child arrives at school with a pink bag and pink nail varnish on since his parents were happy to encourage him to be who he wants to be as a person. This could be a phase which they will grow out of or whether they have not found their true gender identity. According to Stonewall Youth (2015), there are many children and adolescents who feel that their gender identity feels different from what they were assigned at birth. There are many terms or labels of genders, which is very personal about the individual's identity which includes:

- Trans/Transgender
- Transexual
- non-binary/genderqueer

Sexuality can play an important role in identity and a sense of self. The Australian Government (2019) noted that sexuality normally refers to someone's sexual orientation or preferences. Sexual orientation is who you are attracted to emotionally, physically and mentally. Some people are attracted to the same sex (homosexual), some are attracted to both genders (bisexual orientation) and some are attracted to the opposite (male and female). In short it is called LGBTQIW+. Sci. Reprod .J. (2015) noted that sexuality development starts as early as in intrauterine life following conception and continues through to infancy, childhood, adolescence and adulthood. However, the awareness of sexuality evolves during childhood, where the children start to identify themselves of who they are. As Angela Oswalt Morelli (no date) that sexuality does not only mean physical development, it also includes cognitive, emotional, social and more.

Race is another factor that could impact on childhood and adolescence identity and identity formation. Anderson. A and Douge .J (2020) stated that children learn about different racial bias from an early age, and learn from their parents how to deal and react to these differences.

- By the age of 6 month old the baby can notice differences with race
- By ages 2 - 4, children can internalize racial bias
- Many children will become set in their beliefs by the age of 12.

There are many views of children learning about race as Cole. K and Verwayne.D (2018) explained that some parents think that children should be shielding from learning about race and racial differences. Adults often worry that children are too early to introduce the topic as it could be harmful. However, Anderson. A and Douge J (2020) noted that it is important for children to learn about racial differences according to age and parents should be prepared to answer any questions that the child may have. Although some children will start to realise about theirs and others race, the conversations that they have with adults will help them to accept and respect everyone's differences and similarities.

Lastly, the essay will be explaining how these factors influence identity formation with childhood through to adolescence. As Stonewall Youth (2015) explained early on the essay about the different genders that exist, some children growing up will find it very difficult to understand and accept racial differences which could influence their behaviour and identity. Rafferty.J (2018) stated that when a child shows interests and abilities are different from what the society expects, they may get bullied as they thrive in different subjects than others. Villines.Z (2018,December 11) noted that getting bullied because of their race will impact their self-esteem, increase isolation, and make it difficult for them to assert their gender identity. This could lead them to harmful situations as children may become depressed and think suicidal thoughts. Unfortunately children growing up through to adulthood may find it harder to express themselves and to be comfortable to share about their gender identity. As Young minds (2021) noted, that many children are growing up feeling unsupported or worried that family and friends would not understand and cannot accept their gender identity. This could highly influence their adulthood as they feel that they cannot be themselves, shy away from people and the environment and feeling under pressure to conform with the sex they were born with. This could be overwhelming and extremely distressing in everyday life and carrying these emotions and decisions can be exhausting as it makes concentrating in school/work,engaging in conversation, sleep and eating habits very difficult (Young minds, 2021). However, there are people that are available to support children and young people who are going through difficult times such as GP'S, CAMHS and other organisations, who would help them to discover their gender identity. These organizations will help children and their families to understand each other and to feel loved and accepted ready for adulthood.

Sexuality can influence children's identity as they grow up as they are expected to be attracted to the opposite sex. However, some children experience challenges whilst coming to terms with their sexuality and sharing that element of their identity as some identify as homosexual, bysexual and transgender. This can be a distressing time for children/youngsters trying to understand their feelings and sharing their true identity with

others as some can be narrow minded regarding those who identify differently to others. Whilst there is a huge support and understanding from individuals and the LGBT+ societies within our communities, there is still stigma, judgement and isolation for individuals who identify differently. Morelli.A (no date) noted that teens begin to become concerned with other people's opinions and judgement of them. Children/youngsters may find it difficult to speak to someone about their sexuality as they hear many people are treated badly when they identify themselves to others. Young minds (2021) noted that this may make children/youngsters afraid to open up about their identity, which will impact on them emotionally and affect their mental health. Plug.E et al, 2011, p. 3) explained that people who identify their sexuality as homosexual, bisexual or even transgender tends to deal with discrimination and stigma, and this could affect their work as they find it difficult as they are being segregated by others and receiving a lower pay wage than heterosexuals. This could impact their identity by feeling worthless and excluded in their daily lives. McLeod (2019) stated that Freud's stressed that the first five years of their life is crucial to the formation of adult personality. Freud also stated that the ID must be controlled to satisfy social commands which could set conflicts between frustrated wishes and social norms.

Also, race can influence identity formation as Young minds (2021) stated, people get treated differently or unfairly because of their skin colour, ethnicity and race which can negatively affect their mental health and well-being. There are many children/youngsters that feel depressed, angry and hopeless, young minds (2021) noted that children/youngsters may avoid doing the same things as other people as they would not need to worry about how they look, dress and to communicate with others. It seems that they live in constant fear and anxiety as they are worried about what others think of them. However, they also have difficulties with racist bullying because of their skin colour, race and ethnicity. This does not only happen in school, but it can happen at home with parents, siblings, families, online or outside. Young minds (2021) stated that racist abuse can sometimes be obvious-verbal abuse about someone's looks, stereotypes about how someone behaves or physical violence. Bullying can be seen in many different ways, you may not see it but you are able to identify it. However, William

Cross has revised 5 stages of racial identity development where it helps to form a positive racial identity. The 5 stages are pre-encounter, encounter, immersion/emersion, internalization and internalization- commitment . These stages will support children/youngsters to be able to identify themselves and to understand the experiences of race.

In conclusion, the essay has discussed different factors that influence childhood and adolescence. The overall outcome suggested that all three factors influence their self-esteem, well - being, their mental health and also their confidence. Young minds (2021) expressed how important it is to get the correct support for children/adults going through difficult times within their life with families not supportive or understand what their child's going through. The essay also emphasises that everyone's identity is different and people should be supporting that as everyone should feel happy and proud in their bodies. Everyone should be treated equally no matter the race, sexuality or gender.

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