

COLECTION OF THEORETICAL CONCEPTS

THE NO LACES CLUB



This document includes the main theoretical concepts addressed in the book "Happy Parties". For each of the concepts, an outline is followed that includes definition, characteristics, how it is reflected in the story and bibliography.

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1: DEVELOPMENT OF AUTONOMY BY AGE: DRESSING, HYGIENE, AND FEEDING

Concept

Autonomy can be defined as “freedom from external control or influence; independence”. In early childhood, this refers to a child's ability to act on their own and perform tasks independently without adult assistance.

Parents naturally feel the need to protect their children from harm or pain. However, allowing children to develop autonomy enables them to tackle and resolve life's problems by learning to cope with failure and assuming responsibility for their actions. Children therefore develop self-confidence, self-esteem, self-motivation, sense of responsibility, critical thinking and feel more comfortable in making their own informed choices. Beyond that, they also learn family values, social norms and essential skills along the way to survive through to adulthood.

As children naturally learn to become autonomous, they become more independent through new skills. As they grow, parents will recognize their efforts at home through simple examples such as putting on their shoes, washing their hands, eating, and dressing themselves.

To encourage autonomy in children, you can:

- Offer choices;
- Create opportunities for autonomy;
- Give them tasks;
- Respect their opinions;
- Label and validate their feelings;
- Let them work through challenges.

Age	Autonomy Development
From 1 to 3 y.o.	• Storing and organising their own toys in the appropriate places; • Learning to use cutlery and to tie shoelaces; • Choosing their own clothes.
From 3 to 5 y.o.	• Taking care of own hygiene, such as brushing teeth; • Changing clothes without help; • Packing the backpack and school supplies; • Being aware when crossing the streets; • Practicing outdoor activities such as sports and other games.
From 5 to 7 y.o.	• Make their own bed; • Spend time with family members other than parents; • Helping with tasks in the house; • Showering without help; • Learning to manage small amounts of money, such as a lunch allowance.

How to observe in the story

The development of autonomy and its relevance to children's growth is evident in Sasha, who demonstrates a greater sense of independence by putting on her jacket, learning new skills, and taking initiatives. She exhibited more confidence in her day-to-day life and in her relationships with other children, even taking on a more mature role and helping others. In contrast, Alex shows limited capacity for autonomy, appearing shy and fearful.

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2: DEVELOPMENT OF WRITING BY AGE

Concept

There are four stages that kids go through when learning to write: preliterate, emergent, transitional, and fluent. A child's ability to write is dependent on their ability to master a wide variety of literacy skills including recognising letters, interpreting sounds, and print awareness, such as the spacing of words. This process also includes the development of graphomotor skills, which are a set of necessary movements that the hand must make in order to be able to write.

1. Preliterate stage: Scribbling is good (0 to 2 years)

In the first stage of writing development, any scribbling or drawing a child does can be considered writing. Scribbling and drawing allow children to express their ideas, while also learning how to hold and grip a pencil or crayon properly, enhancing psychomotor development.

2. Emergent stage: Letters appear in writing (2 to 4 years)

Children in this stage are taking the big step from scribble writing to appreciating that the "scribbles" grown-ups use for writing are symbols called letters. As their skills develop, they often start recognising patterns and incorporating letter-like forms into their drawings. This might include lines, dots, and curves. In addition, they begin to understand that sounds are assigned to letters.

3. Transitional stage: Letters start to become words (4 to 7 years)

When children start to realise that words are made up of sounds, and that letters represent these sounds, they stop using random letters in their writing. Instead, they start trying to match the sounds they hear in a word to letters they know. This cognitive leap often happens between the ages of 4 and 7. A child might spell "My cat is happy" as "mi kat z hpe." This type of spelling is called "invented spelling." Evidence shows that this effort to match individual sounds in words demonstrates that a child's writing and reading skills are getting stronger.

4. Fluent stage: Spelling starts to have meaning (5 to 6 years)

In this stage (which usually happens between ages 5 and 6), children begin to use "dictionary" spelling rather than "invented" spelling. The spelling may not be accurate, but children are now aware that different spellings can have different meanings. They'll even begin to memorise some words, especially tricky but common words (like "was," "and," "the"), so that they can spell them correctly.

How to observe in the story

In the story, the development of writing is observed when Sasha shares her small pencils with Alex to use during class. The pencils were smaller than what Alex was used to, so she had to grip them differently. Sasha argued that smaller pencils helped her grip better, and the two-color ones helped her practice hand movements, which relates to learning and improving the physical skills necessary for writing.

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3: DIFFICULTIES IN IDEATION AND PLANNING (VISUAL SUPPORTS, SEQUENCES)

Concept

Planning and sequencing involve planning and ordering new muscle (motor) actions (known as praxis). It involves first generating an idea of what (ideation), figuring out how you are going to do it (motor planning), and then doing or carrying out what you wanted to do (execution). Planning and sequencing are important to enable a child to perform many everyday tasks, such as walking, running, playing on a playground, and playing sports. Planning and sequencing skills are also required for everyday self-care tasks, such as dressing and eating, and impact a child's ability to organise themselves and learn new routines. Poor planning and sequencing can also influence skills required to achieve in an academic setting, such as writing, drawing, and cutting; in addition, it can impact their self-esteem. Visual cues can help children develop their planning and sequencing skills while learning new tasks and routines.

How to observe in the story

Visual support to improve ideation and planning, as well as sequencing, can be observed in Sasha's shoelaces: one color for the right foot and another for the left, so she does not mix them up while putting them on. Additionally, her two-color pencils helped her practice hand movements.

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4: FINE MOTOR DIFFICULTIES (FINE MANIPULATIVE TASKS, WRITING)

Concept

Fine motor difficulties refer to the detailed movements of the hand needed to manipulate, control, and use objects, produce legible, neat handwriting, and dress independently. A child with poor fine motor skills will often be the slowest to get changed, need the most help at school with handwriting and cutting, and find everyday tasks hard or take longer than expected to complete tasks involving small movements. Efficient fine motor skills require a number of independent skills to occur simultaneously to appropriately manipulate the object or perform the task.

Some examples of how fine motor skills can affect a child's life at home and in school are:

- Difficulty tying shoelaces
- Unable to do up buttons/zips
- Scribbly drawing
- Poor handwriting
- Takes a long time to pick up small objects
- Cannot/finds it very hard too manipulate objects in hand
- Difficulty using both hands at the same time
- Difficulty cutting
- Messy work

How to observe in the story

Fine motor difficulties in the story are observed mainly in two situations: 1) Alex had difficulties tying her shoelaces, and Sasha also struggled with the same task. 2) Alex discovered that writing with smaller pencils was much easier because they were easier to grip.

References:

<https://www.otforkids.co.uk/problems-we-help/fine-motor-difficulties.php>

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5: SELF-ESTEEM, INDICATORS OF LOW SELF-ESTEEM

Concept

The foundation of a child's self-esteem begins to take shape early in life and evolves daily. It originates from the ability to embrace one's identity, acknowledging imperfections, and actively choosing self-appreciation. Positive words and successful interactions contribute significantly to a child's growing self-esteem.

Fostering a child's belief in their capability to navigate life competently is crucial. Children who develop a positive self-perception exhibit confidence when tackling new challenges and taking pride in their accomplishments. Furthermore, healthy self-esteem equips children to handle mistakes resiliently, encouraging them to persevere through setbacks and learn from failures. This robust self-image positively influences a child's performance in various aspects of life, including academic pursuits, relationships at home, and interactions with friends.

Conversely, children with low self-esteem often grapple with uncertainty, hesitating to engage with others due to a fear of non-acceptance. A tendency to give up easily or avoid trying altogether may also manifest in these children, hindering their potential achievements.

According to Newman from the Child Development and Family Centre, parents and educators can follow five fundamental steps to nurture a child's self-esteem:

- Listen and Acknowledge: Pay attention to your child's thoughts and emotions, validating their feelings.
- Promote Success, Minimise Failure: Create environments that facilitate success rather than setting up situations for failure. Establish clear, reasonable expectations, offer appropriate assistance, provide incentives, and eliminate obstacles.
- Grant Reasonable Control: Allow your child to feel a sense of control over their life within reasonable bounds.
- Affirm Love and Capability: Reinforce the notion that your child is both lovable and capable.
- Model Positivity: Demonstrate a positive self-image, reflecting confidence and self-assurance to your child.

How to observe in the story

In “The Slip-On Club,” our two protagonists, Alex and Sasha, show different indicators of their self-esteem: Alex has low self-esteem issues, while Sasha feels more confident and demonstrates a good sense of self-worth.

Before learning new adaptive strategies, Alex grapples with challenging situations that put her as the butt of jokes, affecting her self-esteem. Alex struggles with various challenges, such as tripping on the stairs, enduring unwanted nicknames, and feeling nervous in those situations. Additionally, she finds it difficult to tie her shoelaces, often falls due to tangled laces, and has trouble retrieving her pencil from its case. Furthermore, tasks like participating in play and changing back into regular clothes after school are especially arduous for her.

Being picked last for the football team during break also weighs heavily on Alex's mind. In general, these difficulties contribute to a pervasive sense of incapacity and inadequacy, further influencing Alex's self-esteem.

On the other hand, the ease with which Sasha manages her daily routines reinforces her self-esteem and helps her build a stronger sense of self. The proper care she has received plays a significant role in this. Fortunately, her friendship with Alex serves as a model, helping Alex adapt and solve her difficulties. Additionally, for Sasha, meeting Alex provides a good opportunity to consolidate her self-esteem and experience a friendly relationship.

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<https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/self-esteem.html>

6: LANGUAGE/POSITIVE DYNAMICS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Concept

Creating a positive foundation for early learning begins with adults fostering a supportive social and emotional atmosphere rooted in caring and responsive relationships. Until children feel secure and trust their caregivers to meet their needs, they cannot fully engage in exploration, learning, and the joy of discovery. Developing a personalised connection with children, understanding their cues, preferences, strengths, and areas requiring support contributes significantly to fostering a sense of safety for them.

Language should also be positive and supportive, as it conveys a sense of reality and possibility. It should be encouraging rather than devaluing, by emphasising what is lacking. Positive dynamics and interactions can be found not only in caregiver-child relationships but also among peers.

Positive dynamics can foster a sense of belonging, mutual respect, and shared purpose among peers. They can also enhance the quality and effectiveness of peer support by creating a safe, supportive, and constructive environment for learning, sharing, and growing.

How to observe in the story

In this charming story, the collaboration between Sasha and Alex comes to light. Through the events described, the theme of mutual support and learning from peers emerges as the main leitmotif. Encouragement and collaboration are important themes in the narrative.

Examples of this collaboration can be seen when Sasha plays with all her friends during recess, cheers on the team, and gives instructions to help them play better. Sasha also shows particular interest in supporting Alex, such as when Alex falls down; Sasha asks if everything is okay and helps her stand up. Additionally, Sasha gives Alex one of her pencils, which is smaller and easier to grip. She is also quite caring when she says to Alex while she's playing, "You're doing great, Alex! Keep it up." This kind of language is very positive and constructive for their relationship and for Alex's need to be recognised.

On one hand, the good job that Sasha's parents and/or carers are doing with her can be appreciated. They create a positive early learning environment where Sasha is provided with useful tips to feel more secure and to approach situations outside the family context with responsiveness (e.g., tricks to cope better with difficulties and new experiences).

All the new knowledge and tricks shared by Sasha with Alex were, in turn, transferred to Alex's family, helping her put them into practice. The intervention of her carers seems crucial for consolidating these new strategies and for making Alex feel safe.

At the end of the story, after acquiring a lot of knowledge, Alex and Sasha decide to help classmates who find some things challenging, just as they did, and they create the Slip-On Club.

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7: DRESSING CHALLENGES

Concept

Dressing can often be a challenging activity for children. Even though it appears to be an ordinary habit, it involves some important abilities, primarily the development of proprioception.

Proprioception refers to the subconscious awareness of one's body position, conveying information about the alignment of body parts, their interrelation, and their positioning in relation to both other individuals and surrounding objects. It serves as a means of communication regarding the required muscular force for movements, enabling us to control the intensity of our actions.

During the proprioception process, the brain utilises this information to strategise and execute movements effectively, fostering coordination throughout the body. In instances where some children do not adequately receive or process sensory input from their muscles, joints, tendons, ligaments, or connective tissue, a deficiency in feedback concerning movement and body positioning arises. This deficiency manifests as poor body awareness and body schema, leading to challenges in accurately gauging the intensity of movements. Consequently, compromised motor planning abilities may emerge, resulting in deficits in both fine and gross motor skills.

For the reasons described above, it is apparent that dressing is not an obvious task to execute, but a challenging goal that can be achieved with some alternative strategies.

How to observe in the story

In “The Slip-On Club,” Alex and Sasha find some activities very challenging. Dressing up, for example, is particularly difficult for Alex, while Sasha implements good practices and strategies to manage it.

Sasha, as clarified at the end of the story, wears loose clothes that make dressing easier. She also wears fun knee pads to protect her from her frequent falls and uses shoelaces of different colours to distinguish between left and right. The same strategy applies to her socks.

Alex often trips over her shoelaces and falls; she doesn't feel capable of dressing herself, and, in general, simple tasks seem very hard for her. Like Sasha, Alex suffers from low responsiveness, which causes difficulty in planning and sequencing movements, directly impacting activities like dressing and coordinating her actions.

Finally, adopting Sasha's tricks and strategies allows Alex to feel more capable and helps her achieve good results.

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8: HYPORESPONSIVE PROFILE

Concept

Hyporesponsiveness is characterised by delayed, absent, or more attenuated responses to stimuli than expected (e.g., a child requires multiple or intense auditory cues to elicit an orienting response). Poor sensory responsiveness is the first observable measure of hyporesponsiveness, especially in the use of touch.

A hyporesponsive profile often involves sensory and motor problems. Proprioception, which is responsible for orientation and movement, plays a crucial role in this. Its impact is directly connected to motor execution and the quality and finesse of movements.

A lack of sensory processing (caused by hyporesponsiveness) – the ability to organise information from different sensory systems in order to respond appropriately – hinders the ability to cope with the demands of the environment. This can significantly slow daily learning.

How to observe in the story

In "The Slip-On Club," the main characters, Alex and Sasha, grapple with sensory and motor skill challenges. However, Sasha, with her experience and acquired skills, proves instrumental in helping Alex navigate these difficulties. Alex, in particular, encounters various hurdles in her daily routines and struggles with proprioception.

One recurring incident involves Alex tripping on the stairs due to her tangled shoelaces, which becomes a ritual throughout the narrative. Another challenge arises when she attempts to extract a pencil from her case: due to her poor sensory responsiveness, the action often results in pencils flying away and causing embarrassment. The most daunting part of her day occurs when she struggles to put on her regular clothes after school, appearing awkward in the process. Even giving high-fives to Sasha poses a challenge for Alex.

Sasha, on the other hand, handles these daily challenges with a more relaxed and cheerful demeanour despite facing similar difficulties. Intrigued by Sasha's behaviours, Alex seeks clarification on her habits.

Sasha's approach to dressing involves wearing loose clothes for better mobility. Due to her frequent falls, her grandmother added fun patches to decorate her clothes. To improve pencil handling affected by sensory processing disorder, Sasha keeps only a few small pencils in her case, using two-colour pens to enhance hand movement practice and reduce the number of utensils carried. She imparts additional tricks to Alex, such as marking socks to identify the correct orientation and maintaining a notebook with drawings of challenging tasks or things to remember, like brushing teeth.

In a short span, Alex shares these newfound tricks with her parents and puts them into practice. One crucial adjustment involves adopting suitable and highly elastic shoelaces, significantly improving her comfort and mobility in shoes.

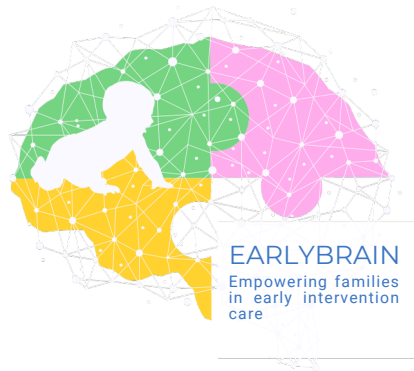
These shared tricks not only benefit Alex but also positively impact motor execution, refining the quality and finesse of movements, and facilitating the learning of new behaviours in children.

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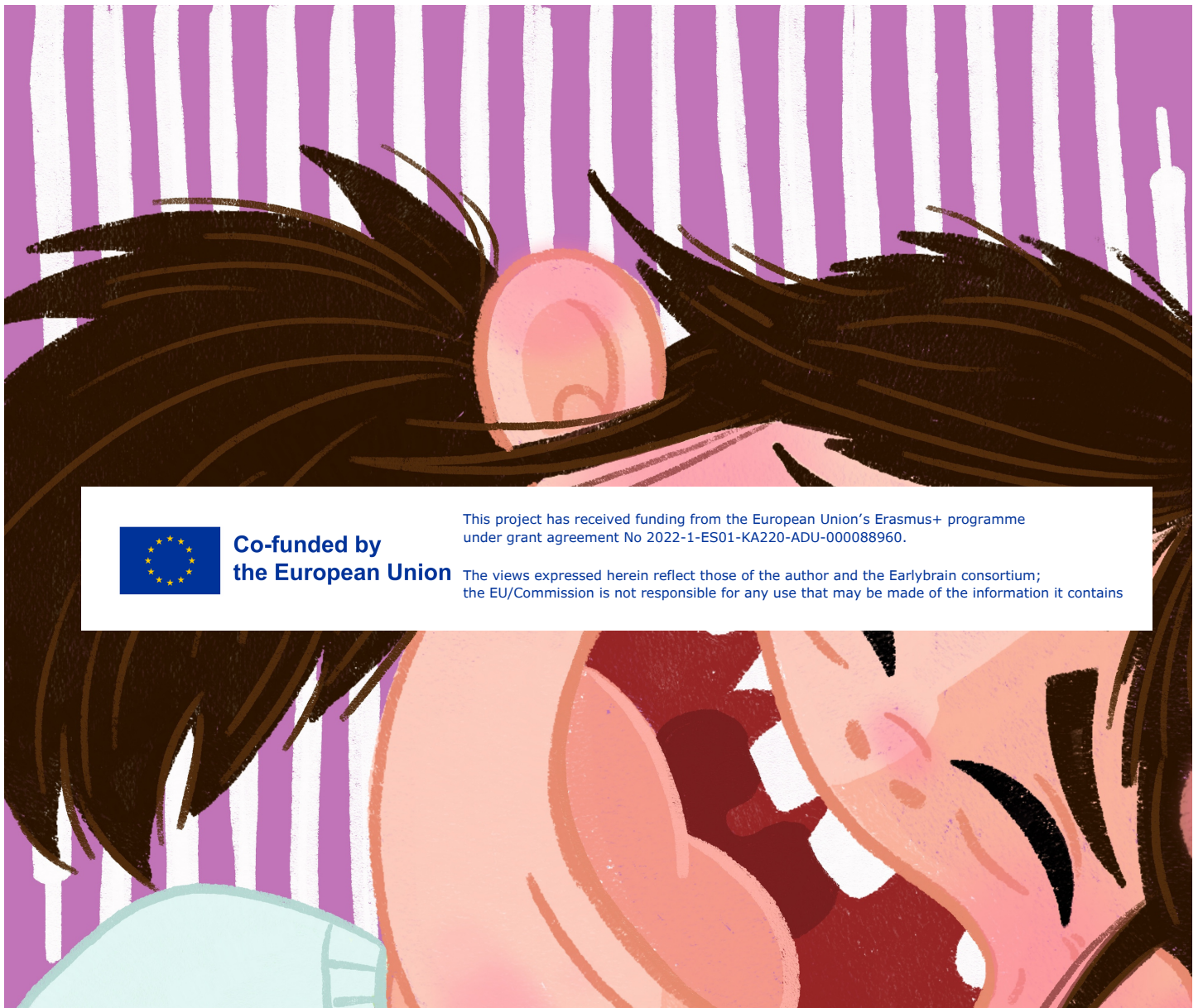
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EARLYBRAIN
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