**Three Ages Project: Developmental Theory**

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I have neither giver nor received help on this work, nor am I aware of any infraction of the Honor Code.

**Introduction**

For this project, I chose two participants from my family and a close friend. The first participant, Emma, is my six-year-old cousin who lives nearby. I was not able to have a face-to-face interview due to the pandemic so we conducted our interview over Facetime instead, with the help of her mom/my aunt. The second interview was with my brother, Luke, who is ten years old. Thankfully, I was able to conduct this interview in person in our home. The third interview was with my good friend from school, Leah, who is nineteen years old. This interview was conducted over Facetime as well. I chose these participants because I know them, it was easy for me to set up a time to talk with them, and because they aren’t too close in age to each other. I took careful notes during each of the interviews and I made sure to have them clarify if there was any confusion about the question or if I wasn’t sure that I recorded their response correctly. It was definitely a lot easier to interview the older two because the youngest participant had a little trouble concentrating. The goal of this project is to interview three different people at different ages and stages of development and compare them. I developed three different sets of questions, one for each interviewee, and made them based on the expected level of maturity and understanding of the interviewee. The questions revolve around cognitive, social-emotional, and physical development and I aim to assess how the responses reflect the development of the participants. Although the scope of the questions is broad, most of the questions concern social-emotional development because I believe that aspect to be the most revealing of maturity. Conducting this research will help me in my career later on as a teacher, where this knowledge concerning development will be crucial in understanding children and how they think. My expectations were high for both of the younger kids because I know that they are very intelligent and I hoped that they would not have any difficulty in answering. I also expected vast differences between the responses of the age groups because all three of them are developmentally far apart.

**Participant One**

The youngest participant of the three is my six year old cousin, Emma. Emma had a little bit of a hard time focusing on the interview, but that’s to be expected because she is quite young. Her mom had to redirect her attention back to the interview quite often and she seemed to want to go back to playing in the basement. I know that Emma is advanced for her age and although I did have high expectations, everyone has their off days. I don’t believe she is normally as inattentive, but if she is that may lead to problems later on. Children who have more ability to maintain focused attention and persist even when faced with difficulties had higher math and reading achievement at age twenty-one and a greater change of college completion by age twenty-five (McClelland, Acock, Piccinin, Rhea, and Stallings, 2013). As she is only six, Emma is in early childhood. According to Piaget, children at this stage, the preoperational stage, learn to represent actions mentally rather than physically (Levine, Munsch, 2016). Most of the questions I asked Emma were aimed at gauging her cognitive development. One of the questions I asked was ‘What is your favorite story or book?’ Emma answered “I don’t know. I like the llama books.” Her mom clarified that she meant the ‘Llama Llama’ book series, such as “Llama Llama Misses Mama”. I asked her why but she just said “I like the llama and it’s funny”. My next question was whether or not she liked school. She replied “I don’t like it not being at school. It’s fun to see my friends and Mrs. Crisco is nice.” Emma also said that her favorite subject is art and she doesn’t like math because “I have to do it timed.” Emma seems to be doing well in school and she says that in the future she wants to “Be like an animal helper and protect them and I want to live in Australia.” Although she had some trouble paying attention, Emma is developmentally on track and she is only acting like a typical child at this age.

**Participant Two**

The second interview was conducted with my ten year old brother, Luke. This interview went very smoothly, as expected, and some of his answers were surprisingly introspective. Luke is very active and loves to play outside. I asked him what his favorite activities to do are and he replied “I normally go and play down by the creek and go on the trampoline. And I like to play baseball. I like pitching and batting in baseball.” According to Levine and Munsch “As children in middle childhood continue to develop their gross motor skills, organized activities play a greater role in many of their lives. As their fine motor skills develop, their handwriting improves and their drawing becomes more detailed and complex” (2016). Luke’s physical development is apparent, especially because when asked what he wants to study in college he said “Art because I like art and I’m good at it and it’s fun and it would be nice to be an art teacher. And I want to also study math. Because I want to be good at math.” Luke is recognizing things that he is good at, which is important for his self-esteem. Children at this age are learning what it takes to become an adult in their society. Erikson’s concept of Industry vs. Inferiority is apparent in children during middle childhood as they, hopefully, learn to become self-reliant (Munsch, Levine, 2016). Learned self-reliance is crucial for later stages of development because if children do not learn this they can have low self-esteem and experience learned-helplessness. Thankfully, Luke is on the right track developmentally in both cognitive and physical aspects. Socially, he says that his best friend is “Jackson because he’s on my baseball team and also in my class. He’s funny and interesting.” Luke’s friendship is built on common experiences, similar to early childhood, because he is still pretty young. However, middle childhood is the age in which solid friendships are formed and are made based on similar opinions. This concept of friendship being built on shared opinions and morals is how friendships are built throughout the rest of life, rather than just sharing common experiences.

**Participant Three**

 The last interview was with my friend from school, Leah, who is nineteen-years-old. Leah is in the last stage of child development, adolescence. She showed very positive signs of development in this stage, such as grasping abstract concepts, which is not surprising because of her age. When asked why she gets along with her friends she said “Because we have similar interests and senses of humor. Me and my friends have similar political ideologies and morals.” This exhibits an abstract concept, morals, which a child in either the second or third stage of Piaget’s development model would probably not grasp. Similar to this, she said her favorite book is “Lord of the Flies because it shows the reality of human nature if we arent constrained by laws and societal expectations.” My last participant, Luke, is in the stage where he is beginning to learn what society expects of adults and Leah is in the stage where she has fully grasped that concept. While Leah has developed a high self-esteem, saying that “I want to get a job in the biomedical ethics field and I would like to hold a position on either the city council or something similar”, which shows that she is high-achieving, she also knows her limitations. When asked what one of her weaknesses is she said “ I am sometimes too nice and can somewhat be a pushover.” Leah has already gone through the industry vs. inferiority stage and has clearly come through industrious and self-reliant. Her drive to accomplish difficult things is evidence of this and it was apparent through our conversation that she holds herself to a high standard. This industrious nature is developed in early childhood and a child’s parents are critical to this. Leah is about to leave the adolescent stage and enter into adulthood and she has definitely checked off all the boxes to do so.

**Recommendations and Discussion**

 I was surprised at how interesting it was to interview these three people. The differences between their development are striking and it has been made clear to me how crucial the early stages of development are in building children into successful adolescents and adults. All three of them appeared to be doing great socially, considering the circumstances of this pandemic. All of them expressed to a degree that they missed school and their friends. Emma said that she missed her friend Jasmine although she is “kinda annoying sometimes at lunch”. Physically, the older two excel. Luke loves to play baseball and being outdoors and Leah was an accomplished track athlete in highschool and she still runs often. Emma, being only six, hasn’t yet found what she wants to do, such as a sport or activity, but she said she liked to do ballet dancing. Hopefully she’ll want to commit to ballet dancing or another activity because these activities are what build self-confidence and help kids grow socially. Cognitively, all three of them are doing great. Emma, as mentioned earlier, had a little trouble concentrating but did great with her interview and seems to be doing fantastic with school. Luke has started to acknowledge his interests and how he may be different from his classmates concerning schoolwork. He said that in school they are “Comparing fractions and equivalent fractions. In writing, we’re doing like proper paragraphs and other stuff. In art we’re doing landscapes. My favorite subject is science. Because we normally do experiments. Some of the other kids don’t like math or science but I like it.” I know that Luke will continue to like it even if the other kids don’t because he has already developed a strong industrious nature. I don’t think that Luke will have any difficulties with any of the developmental aspects and that he is going to succeed in all that he tries. For Emma, she is very young still and hasn’t yet developed nearly as much as the other two. Being only six, she has a lot of time to figure out who she is and what she wants to do and that’s what childhood is all about. She has developed interests and ideas for the future, which is good for her age, and shows respect for others and nature, as shown by her desire to become a wildlife conservationist. I have no doubts that Leah will accomplish all that she sets out to do because she has already accomplished so much. Being high-achieving has always come naturally to her, she said, and she said that she was class-president in high-school and attended a special science school as well. Before making the decision to come to Longwood, she also was accepted into UVA, but made the decision based on the nursing program, which she is in. I think this decision was smart and shows maturity because a less mature person may have chosen the more prestigious school. The framework that I think best fits child development is Piaget’s cognitive developmental theory. Children go through different stages and are capable of different things at these stages. Whether it be physical, such as more refined motor skills and coordination, or cognitive, such as posessing the capability of abstract thought and reasoning. Where I disagree with Piaget’s theory of development though is in the clear separation between stages. Children develop at different paces and a child at the final years of one stage is not going to suddenly become able to do the things associated with the next stage. Although Piaget did not exactly mean that there is such a harsh separation between changes, he should have noted that development is more of a gradual process. A child may be capable of tasks that are far outside of their developmental stage for a little while, but then their growth may stall a little and they might be brought back down to the level of other children or even behind them a little.

**Conclusion**

 This project has helped me realize how developmentally different children can be even when they aren’t that far apart in age. Milestones come at different ages for different children and most children will reach them eventually. But some children don’t fit the same expectations that are in place for other children and this isn’t necessarily a bad thing. Children are very complex and unique and I’ve realized how I had fallen into this manner of thinking before. In elementary school there were plenty of kids who I thought were ‘weird’. However, they were just different than I was and were just at a different level cognitively or socially. This mode of thinking is prevalent as we reach adulthood. Many times we’re all too eager to label someone else as strange based on the little information we know about them, which is often not much. I have also realized that children are so much more thoughtful and intelligent than we often give them credit for. I interviewed three people that excel at some things, are mediocre at others, and probably struggle with things that I have no idea about.

**Citations**

Levine, L. E., & Munsch, J. (2016). Child development from infancy to adolescence: an active learning approach. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

McClelland, M. M., Acock, A. C., Piccinin, A., Rhea, S. A., & Stallings, M. C. (2013, April 1). Relations between Preschool Attention Span-Persistence and Age 25 Educational Outcomes. Retrieved April 25, 2020, from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/23543916>