Three Ages Project

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

There is an immense amount of change in the way children think, speak, act, and interact with the world around them between Early Childhood, Later Childhood, and Adolescence. To discover more about the way children grow and develop over time, I interviewed three children with a set list of questions that involve physical, cognitive, and social-emotional development to learn more about the specific changes that occur during the three stages of development. I first interviewed Violet, who is four years old and the youngest out of the three children interviewed. Violet’s mom is a friend of my family, and gave me permission to interview her daughter. For the second interview, I received a video from my professor of her sister asking the questions to her daughter Alexa, who is ten years old. Lastly, I asked my questions to my cousin Katrina, who is eighteen years old. Before the separate interviews, I expected to see a difference not only in areas that involved their knowledge, but in the way they view themselves and those around them, and how they respond emotionally to people and different situations present in their lives. This information will be extremely useful since I plan to be a teacher in the future and gives me insight on the way children respond and think differently depending on their age and personal experiences. For the first interview with four-year-old Violet, it took much longer to get through the set of questions with her compared to the other two participants. She would sometimes get distracted, or if a particular question excited her or involved something she enjoyed, she would go off on a tangent or tell me a story related to it. The first questions involved age and a word she would use to describe her age. Violet simply spelled her name, displaying egocentrism that is present in young children, seeing her age as something more unique and personal to her, rather than using a word that would be universal to other people who are in the same stage of life. I then proceeded to ask Violet how tall she was, and rather than giving me a number or specific height, she simply stood up and said “I am this tall”. Though this was a question involving her physical development, it also involves her cognitive development, because Violet has not yet learned that her height can be described in numerical form. She answered with similar confusion when asked about her bedtime. Even though Violet is currently in preschool, she associates her bedtime with when her parents ask her to go to bed, or when it is dark outside, rather than answering with a specific numerical time. Proceeding with Violet’s interview, the questions that followed revealed more about her self esteem and the way she views herself, and her own likes and interests. When asked what her favorite thing about herself was, she said she can climb trees very well. Rather than responding with a physical or personality trait, she chose to talk about this “talent” of hers which I found interesting. Children in the Early childhood stage seem to be less focused on the physical appearance of themselves and others, but more with what they are able to do well. This is shown even more when Violet was asked what she is good at, where she answered that she is good at turning on the TV and exercising. I then began asking her questions about her friends and how she makes them, her family, and how she deals with her emotions. Even though she has just started preschool, she refers to her grandmother and sister as her close friends rather than children at school, since these are the two people she has spent most of her time with. With many of the questions I asked involving Violet’s role model, her favorite memory, her best friend, and what she enjoys doing, and who she talks to when she is sad, almost all of her answers involved her grandmother. Her grandmother is the one who provides childcare for Violet and her sisters during the day, which is why Violet seems to be more attached and focused on her rather than her parents, who she only mentions when asked to describe her family. This is the person she is most familiar with, and she associates her grandmother with her favorite activities and fondest memories. We then began to talk about Violet’s emotions and what things make her happy, sad, scared, angry, or what things are hard in her life. She explains to me that her sister and her are funny and they often make each other laugh, but sometimes she gets angry at her sister when she takes things that belong to her. When getting into the more “difficult” things to discuss, such as her fear, sadness, and struggles, Violet stated that large animals such as sharks or bears really scare her, and when she is sad, it is usually because something she wanted to eat or have is all gone. She proceeds to tell me that the hardest thing she had to do was work and putting away her lunch box by herself at school. It is clear that she sees her hardships as things that she prefers not to do, or things that do not involve play or fun. The last three questions were asked to reveal what a child her age may want or think is most important at this time in their life. I asked Violet to tell me one wish she wants to come true, what advice she would give to someone younger than her, the most important thing she has learned, and any question she would ask that she could receive the answer to. She first tells me she wishes for a turtle, because this is a pet she has always wanted. She then proceeds to say that if she would give advice to someone younger than her, such as her little sister, it would be to not use sharp things when you are young. When discussing the most important thing she has learned, she quickly answers by saying “do not forget Jesus is on your side.” With the last question, where Violet had the chance to ask me a question, she took it as more of a joke or a way to ask me something she thought I may not know, though it was something she already knew the answer to. She asked, “what looks like a horse but has a horn”, and laughed a bit before telling me the answer was a unicorn. After looking at all of Violet’s responses together, it is very clear that family has the most impact on what she believes, what things she prioritizes, and what she enjoys to do. At this stage in her life, the majority of her time being alive has been spent with her grandmother and parents, and therefore, the majority of her knowledge comes from what she has been taught in the home, thus establishing a feeling of importance with the things that are significant in the lives of those she is closest with. She determines right and wrong based off of their rules, and from that, she decides what is “good” or “bad”. This further influence what she is afraid of or advice she would give to someone younger than her. She is less shaped by her peers or social media since she has yet to be greatly exposed to those things, and finds her identity in family and the things she enjoys, as well as the things she is good at. For the second interview with ten-year-old Alexa, she was more comfortable with the interview since the questions were asked by her mother, someone she trusts, rather than someone she did not know at all. She first begins by describing her age as “old”, which is more universal and maybe somewhat relatable to other people her age, and when asked how tall she is, she states that she is four feet and nine inches tall. This contrasts from the way Violet answered, where she simply described her age by spelling her own name and could not give an exact number for her height. Alexa then proceeds to say her favorite thing about herself is her personality, focusing more on her personal attributes and the way she acts rather than naming a talent like Violet. Alexa describes more of her talents when asked what her strengths are, where she says she is good at softball and drawing, as well as stating her desire to spread kindness and help others when asked about her ideal future career as an FBI agent. She puts emphasis on kindness and lovingness many times throughout her interview. She describes her friends and family as kind people rather than discussing their physical attributes, and shares that she uses her kindness as a way to make new friends. Alexa states that she makes most of her friends at school, and it seems most of her social interaction occurs there as well. She met her best friend at school, and her favorite memory was when she met this close friend of hers on the playground. Many of her answers involve school and the important role it plays in her life, considering at this time in her life, the majority of her time is spent in the classroom. When asked about her bedtime she says she goes to bed at nine so she is well rested, she says her role models are her teachers, and says she would advise someone younger than her to work hard in school and receive high grades. This further displays the way one is heavily influenced by who and what they are surrounded by. It seems that Alexa is surrounded by encouraging friends and a healthy learning environment, considering she seems to enjoy school for the most part, is confident within herself, and receives the same kind of care and encouragement she gives to her friends. Her clear desire to give and care for others is further established in her final questions when asked what she would wish for, the most important lesson she’s learned, and one question she would like the answer to. She said she would wish for money, but further explains she would use it to help her family and friends, and that the most important lesson she has learned is that it is better to give than to receive. Though she seemed somewhat confused by the question about a particular question she would ask someone, she says she would ask them what their name ones. All these answers are very telling of her personality and how important relationship is to Alexa. She talks little about material things, and more about the people she has created close relationships with and how those people make her feel about herself. She finds identity in the way she impacts others in a positive way. For the last interview, the same questions were asked to eighteen-year-old Katrina, and she begins by describing her age as “chaotic”. She says her favorite thing about herself is her hair, but then further goes into her talents in English and German when asked about her strengths. She says she wishes to be an English and German teacher when she graduates college, and hopes to set a good example for students she teaches and encounters during her career. Though she is passionate about this career path she is working towards, she explains that school causes her a lot of stress. When asked about her sleep time, she explains she does not rest much at all due to the stress and work load that college brings. This pressure to achieve seems to carry over into other parts of her life as well. When asked about her family life, she speaks highly of them, and refers to her mother as her role model due to her strength. She further explains her biggest fear is of failure or letting her parents down, since they have supported her achieving her dreams both emotionally and financially. She says the hardest thing she had to do was quit her job she worked during her first semester of college, because it became too much to balance between all she had to do for her classes, and that she felt this disappointed her parents. This guilt resorts in her not sharing her feelings of sadness with her friends or family. Though college seems to induce negative feelings in Katrina’s life, she finds joy in music. She talks about how she is always writing down song lyrics and playing music for her friends, even if they do not appreciate it in the same way that she does. She says her favorite memory was when she saw her favorite band in concert, and states that music often makes her emotional because of her deep connection with the lyrics because of its meaning to her. Amongst all of her stress, music seems to be the thing that helps her. Even when discussing people in her life, she seems ultimately focused on the way music makes her feel, and how it connects her to others. When comparing all three of the interviews, there are many clear differences between them, but each of them still share similarities. The biggest commonality seen throughout is the impact other people have on each of their lives and their self-esteem. Violet is extremely dependent on her family for support, and she follows their example and rules they have set for her. Alexa looks to her friends and peers for validation and encouragement, and wishes to return that same kind of care. Similarly, Katrina strives to meet her family’s expectations in order to please them, and chose her career choice specifically to impact others in a positive way. When viewing Erik Erikson’s 8 stages of Psychosocial Development, each of these three participants reflect the obstacles or changes that exist for most people their age. Violet’s behavior represents the “initiative vs. guilt” stage where children “experience the desire to copy the adults around them” and are “experimenting with the blueprint of what it means to be an adult” (David, 2014). With her shift from living at home to attending preschool and learning how to interact with people outside her family, she personally is beginning to feel a new sense of purpose and growth. She is faced with new tasks involving such as doing school work and cleaning up after herself, and finds these to be more “adult like” responsibilities. She is now beginning to gain a feeling of independence, as well as discovering how to create and get along with others her own age. Erik Erikson states that “success in this stage leads to a sense of purpose, while failure results in a sense of guilt” (Cherry, 2019). This essentially means that rather than the child wanting to take action and assert themselves while making their own decisions, they will instead fear independence, or feel like they are making a mistake when trying something new. It is clear that Violet is comfortable taking initiative. Though it is normal for children to be scared or frustrating to try new things, it becomes concerning when they avoid all new activity due to the fear of failure. Violet expresses some concern with new activities in her life, but for the most part is interested in trying new things. Her family seems to encourage social interaction and good communication with her, giving her a desire to step out and take on new responsibilities. Alexa has been in school for a number of years, and has already gotten acclimated to her schools’ environment. She is now in a stage known as “industry vs. inferiority” where one’s peers play a pivotal role in their self-esteem and identity (McLeod, 2018). With a nurturing school and home environment, children during this stage gain a feeling of self-worth within their own personal strengths and abilities. Alexa has a good level of confidence in her abilities, and I believe this is due to her positive home and school life. She says she has kind and encouraging friends, as well as caring family members, allowing her to be reassured that she is important to those around her. Alexa stated that her family is there for her when she feels sad or upset about something, and that she feels comfortable discussing her emotions with them. It is extremely important for children to grow up with people who encourage them to talk about how they are feelings, creating healthy communication between the parents and their child. If Alexa did not receive positive reinforcement from family and teachers, and was a student who found more difficulty in completing and understanding his school work, she might begin to feel inferior and give up entirely. Though intelligence is part of academic accomplishment, the way families and educators support their children throughout their time in school, and even after, is crucial to a child’s success. Though Alexa did not mention much about the grades she is receiving in school, she puts emphasis on the importance of doing well on school assignments, and states she has a good support system at home, as well as teachers who inspire her. If she was having a difficult time in school, it would be much easier for her to overcome learning obstacles because of those around her who desire for her to flourish. The coping and dealing with emotions are the pieces of Katrina’s interview that stood out the most to me as well, though in contrast with Alexa, Katrina seems to have more difficulty when it comes to discussing the issues she is facing in her life. She is in the stage of “identity vs. role confusion” where “the conflict is centered on developing personal identity” (Cherry, 2019). She seems to find her identity in music and school, but now that college has become more of a negative experience for her, she feels negatively about herself. Katrina is at a stage in her life where there is pressure to succeed, and since she does not feel successful, she feels that everyone important in her life is disappointed in her. This kind of guilt causes her to suppress her emotions rather than talking about them, harboring more of her self-doubt and insecurity. When Erik Erikson explains the result of not creating a positive feeling of self-worth and value during this time can affect the rest of their adult life. If someone at this stage has not had the freedom to express and discover themselves, it results in disappointment with their lives, and later can cause problems when creating new relationships. Katrina seems to feel lost right now, and looks to others for validation and affirmation. Though it is completely normal to want to please others, it becomes unhealthy when one becomes almost entirely dependent on others for happiness and reassurance. Though Katrina has expressed that her family is extremely close, it seems there is pressure on her to achieve and sometimes her mental health is overlooked. She is focused on gaining their approval, so much so that she feels she can not share when she is struggling, because it might be seen as weakness or failure. Some of Katrina’s coping mechanisms are concerning, and I would recommend that she seek counseling, or another way she can comfortably express her thoughts and feelings. Since she has such an attachment to music, maybe this is an outlet she could use to healthily express herself, as well as something that could help build her self-confidence. If she does not necessarily feel comfortable talking about her emotions, she can write and make music. Even if she does not share what she creates, having an activity to turn negative thoughts into something more positive, or something she can be proud of, would allow her to release some of those feelings and give her a sense of purpose. There are many people who use music as a form of therapy, whether it is listening to it or creating it. Asking each of these three people just a series of simple questions revealed so much about their development and who they are as people. It is imperative for anyone coming in contact with children, or people in general in their career path to take the time to learn about the way humans develop. Analyzing these responses and researching more of Erik Erikson’s stages of Psychosocial Development allowed me to not only uncover the root of negative and positive behaviors, but gives insight on how these problems can be solved, and how positive outcomes can continue to occur as a child continues to grow and develop into an adult. Though some may argue that real learning begins when a person enters adulthood, the way children are raised from the moment they come into the world affects their views and behaviors they have for the rest of their lives. It is crucial to work alongside children in any stage of their life to ensure their success as an adult.

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