The Development of Three Ages

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 For this project I interviewed four children, Roman, Lucas, Colton, and Kaylie. Roman and Lucas are two-year-old twins that are currently two weeks away from their third birthday. Colton is a nine-year-old currently in fourth grade. Kaylie is a fifteen-year-old currently in her sophomore year of high school. I grew up around this family as their mother and my mother are best friends. I messaged their mom before I went home for spring break to ask if I could come and ask their children questions. I was able to talk to four out of the five children because Lucy, their twelve-year-old, was at a Girl Scouts meeting. I came over after all the children ate dinner because a full stomach means less irritable toddlers. I asked Colton his questions first at the kitchen island with his parents and siblings where it felt comfortable and relaxed. I asked Kaylie her questions at the table, where Colton added in his own humor as well. Lucas and Roman were the ones that I was more nervous about asking questions to. Luckily, their dad decided to give whoever was answering my questions got to ride on his shoulders. The boys focused well on my questions because they knew that if they did then they would get to play a silly game afterwards. To keep accurate records of the answers from each child, I decided to record my interview. It let me ask questions more freely because I was not constrained to the space that I was in. I know have verbatim answers to the questions I asked.

 The purpose of this project is to understand and apply of childhood development at each stage of life. Interviewing different ages will provide a large pool of data that can help compare and contrast the priorities, interests, relationships, and views. While preparing my interview I wanted to be able to see the difference of ideas and interests from children raised in the same family, home, and town. Each child was raised in my hometown with married parents. I focused on creating questions that were appropriate to ask each age group as well as some that were specific to each child. As I knew this family personally, I wanted to see how the children view the way their parents have raised them. I asked each participant to share what they wanted to be when they grew up, what their favorite show or book is, what makes them happy, as well as what their room looks like.

 Roman and Lucas represent the early childhood stage, or preschool stage. During this time, they are rapidly changing and growing. They have begun to find their own identities, personalities, friendships, and begin to learn right from wrong. This learning right from wrong is exemplified in Erik Erikson’s stages of psychosocial development in the initiative v. guilt stage (Levine, 2018). With identical twins it is very common to see not only physical resemblances, but also in personality and interests. Even in the question of “What is your full name”, Luke started mixing up his middle name with Ryan’s. While both look identical, with their chubby cheeks and messy hair, I have seen them fight over what to play or what to watch. They prefer different shows. Roman told me that he likes Mickey Mouse and then doubled back and said Charlie Brown. I later realized that I was wearing a Charlie Brown sweater that may have influenced them. Lucas told me that he prefers Snoopy. When I asked why they like their shows, they both said, “it’s funny!” and laughed. The two made me laugh throughout the whole interview, maybe because when each one sat on their dad’s shoulders, they tried giving him a mohawk. In early childhood the ability to do things on their own is growing. I decided to ask Roman and Lucas what they wish they could do all on their own. I expected something like going outside without a big sibling, instead Lucas said he wished that he could sleep all by himself and Roman simply said “ghost!”. They have been learning basics, such as the alphabet and how to count. Other things that slip by such as their address, full name, and what to do if someone is hurt. I asked all my participants “How do you help?” and left is purposefully open ended to see how each one would interpret the question. Roman said he helps clean up and vacuum. For Christmas, the twins received a real vacuum and cleaning set that is toddler friendly. Lucas told me he would call for his mommy and daddy. When I heard this, I began to think of Erikson’s stage of trust v. mistrust. Lucas would turn to his parents if someone needed help. He trusts them enough to have them help others and does not fear if he makes a mistake to ask them for help. To add on my favorite answer the twins gave me, I asked every participant “What do you want to be when you grow up?”. Lucas told me that he wants to “smell flowers” and Roman told me that he wants to be a “ghost”. These two are developing their own identity and preferences, as well as their own humor.

 I first interviewed Colton, not out of preference but because he volunteered. Colton may be nine, but he is tall which makes me feel like he is much older. He speaks with little to no regard with volume and fills the room and he never stops moving. I can hear the beginning of his voice deepening, especially because I have grown up around him. At his stage his cognitive and social skills are much further along than Lucas or Roman’s. His output vocabulary is also much more advanced. I asked him how he helps others and he told me, “I take my baby brothers outside while my mom was cleaning”, referring to Roman and Lucas. I found it interesting how he does not talk about others outside of his family when I asked. I asked what his favorite school subject was, and he told me math because he is the best at it. Yet when I asked him what his least favorite was, he got up and showed through his body language his disliking for Virginia studies and history in general. I am beginning to see logic as to why he likes math, but when asked for a reasoning with disliking history all he said was “because it sucks”. I began to ask more “why” questions with Colton and later on his sister Kaylie. I was curious to see who his friends were, because they lived only five houses away from the local elementary school that all of the children have gone to or are going to go to. Instead, Colton told me that is best friend is Joey, who is his cousin. Colton’s reasoning is because Joey is funny. At this age, boys typically make friends based on interests and not emotions and gossip. I had previously known that Colton and Joey play video games, such as Fortnite, online together. His reasoning for friends is not that they share deep thoughts, or emotions, but because they are fun. Colton told me that when he grew up, he wanted to be a turtle, no actually that was a joke answer. He actually wants to be a CGI actor and director. This actually shocked his parents and they found interest in this as well. He does not have extremely concrete ideas of what he wants to do as an adult although he did say he would like to go to college. Which I do not believe is the only option or route he could take, but in fourth grade there is usually not too much talk about alternate career paths. Colton is growing up into a boisterous and funny person. He is learning rational thinking and bonding with his friends based on interests.

 My final interview was with fifteen-year-old Kaylie. Growing up she was very shy and was not like Colton personality wise. She was relaxed and willing to answer any questions which I believe to be a part of our personal relationships as well as her laidback and easy-going temperament. Nothing seems to bother her, not even the two screaming toddlers and Colton trying to answer her questions for her. I asked lightly what her favorite subject was, and she told me; “Science, because I like knowing how things work.” When asked her least favorite, I got told once again, history. Colton chimed in with the same hatred for history as he did before. In our county, during sophomore year, the counselors start asking students what they want to do, who they want to be, and all these daunting questions. I asked Kaylie the same questions, do you want to go to college? What do you want to be when you grow up? She told me that college is a goal, and that she wants to do “something medical field”. She is currently enrolled in the STAT program, which is the Stafford Academy for Technology in which students choose either engineering or biomedical sciences. Knowing that she was in the biomedical program I was unsurprised to hear something medical. I was more surprised to know that she was uncertain about exactly what though. Although quiet, she is confident with herself. I asked what type of parenting her parents practiced with no expectations of getting the response of “authoritative”. Instead she told me “They say yes to a lot of things, I just have to ask”. As a child of authoritative parents, she is well balanced. She also has developed more reasoning and rationalizing abilities than Colton. I asked who her best friend was, and she told me Jolie, her cousin. When describing why, Kaylie came to a loss of words, “She’s funny, but saying funny doesn’t do her justice. She’s sarcastic”. Although Kaylie shows a friendship similar to Colton’s, I believe that the friendship is deeper than funny. She was physically searching with her eyes the words to describe Jolie. She wanted to go deeper but could not put it into words. Kaylie is beginning to think much more critically and advanced than Colton. She is beginning to plan her life and wants to get married, something I believe that her parents modeled for her. If I had asked a child of divorce at the same age the answer may have been entirely different. Kaylie seems much more confident in herself than I was at that age and is a bright student.

I was interested in seeing the differences and similarities between siblings all raised in the same family, home, and schools. They are socio-economically secure, and often are not left wanting. They have had an extreme sense of stability throughout their lives. There was never a divorce, never a move, nothing that could cause the children to lose trust in their home. Lucas and Roman remind me much of when Colton was almost three. They are loud and goofy. Their language is developing rapidly, being able to produce more language every day. They still have a higher rate of comprehension but after hearing them talk to each other, I know that they are not just simply repeating what they hear. They are creating their own ideas and sentences. The two have secure attachments to their parents. They may cry when Mom or Dad leaves, but they understand that their parents are not leaving forever. They show excitement when I come over because it usually means that I am there to babysit. They have healthy bonds and connections with their parents and family. The most evident stage of development I can see with the twins is Erik Erikson’s stage of autonomy versus shame and doubt (Levine, 2018). They are beginning to do things on their own and when something goes wrong, they get right back up and try again. The family encourages their exploration and is teaching Lucas and Roman how to ask for help. Lucas and Roman were two and half when I interviewed them. At this age they are beginning to change from Piaget’s sensorimotor stage to the preoperational stage (Levine 2018). They still explored the environment with their senses but were starting to think about things symbolically. Their thinking was egocentric. But also showed worry and concern about each other and their other family members. When the two were going up to bed, Roman went up first. Lucas was waiting for his milk and Roman kept coming down to check on Lucas. He’d ask “brother, you okay?” and showed worry about Lucas. Roman was not thinking solely about himself. He was beginning worry This also shows that he understands object permanence. Roman did not think that because he cannot Lucas, that Lucas must be gone forever. Roman knew where to check and ask for his brother. When playing I jokingly said “Ow! That hurt!” and both of them asked where my “boo boo” was to give it a kiss. They know that it hurts, and they have had others kiss their “boo boos”. They are understanding, on some level, how others feel. The two boys are on the right developmental track and show very few inconsistencies with Erikson’s and Piaget’s theories of development.

Colton is right in middle childhood. Fourth grade is when many ideas in school come together. They begin to apply what they know to different areas and reinforce skills. Colton is in Piaget’s concrete operational stage (Levine, 2018). He is not thinking as abstract as Kaylie might be and he is not thinking symbolically like Lucas and Roman. He has concrete thinking meaning he can think logically. He likes math because he is good at it, and dislikes history because it “sucks”. These are rational reasons for favoring math over history. I wish I had tested conservation with Colton while visiting, yet I did see him scoop some macaroni and cheese into two bowls to give to Lucas and Roman. While both bowls were different sized, he told them that they have the same amount of food. I believe Colton has developed the understanding of conservation, one of the main identifiers of the concrete operational stage.

Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory of Development (Levine 2018), is often used in teaching methods. In this theory, students are active learners. They learn by doing the new skill with guidance until they can do the skill on their own. Often seen in teaching of foreign languages, there is a curve of learning which is called “restructuring” (Shlum & Glisan 2016). Colton is learning a lot of new information and is not constantly using it. Added to his preexisting dislike of history, the idea of not using his stored information as much can explain why he feels like he is bad at history. Over time, the use of the new information will become more regular and he will become more confident in his skills. He is feeling like he is bad at history yet is still confident in his reasoning as to why he dislikes it and in his math skills. He is learning the tasks that society deems required of him and is showing to be in Erikson’s stage of industry versus inferiority (Levine 2018). He does not feel like he is less than his peers, or as if he does not measure up to his two older sisters.

Kaylie is also in the middle of her stage, adolescence and late childhood. She shows not just the mental and cognitive changes of her age, but also the physical changes. I did not want to embarrass her, meaning I did not ask any questions about puberty. Kaylie, just like Colton, shows an interest in sciences and mathematics. The difference is Kaylie had a more in depth answer as to why she enjoyed science. Her reasoning was not a simple “because I am good at it”, but because she likes understanding things in deeper detail. She told me that she likes “to see how things work. Her reasoning is delving deeper. At her age, Kaylie should be in Piaget’s formal operational stage. Her thinking has become more abstract that is also supported by reasoning.

During adolescence children begin to show a romantic and sexual preference for their partners. Kaylie is a dating a boy her age and has begun to show her preference for her partner. They both have religious values, big families, and similar interests in sports and school. She has also told me that she would like to get married one day. Many children who grow up in a divorced household often have fears when it comes to the ideas of marriage. Unlike those children, Kaylie seemed confident in her answer. She took no time to reflect deeply on the question, she just knew. Because of forming secure attachments to her parents, Kaylie has strong relationships with those outside of her family. She is a little shy, but it is nothing that is destructive to her social life. All it means is that she has to warm up to new people before being completely open. Kaylie is bright, and socially developing greatly. She communicates effectively and is thinking more abstractly.

These four kids show many similarities, and many differences. They all do not worry about where their next meal comes from, or if they can afford to do their sports. They have taken on the different personalities of their parents and other siblings. Lucas and Roman look up to Colton for how to act and what to do. Kaylie has led her own path and takes on the easygoing personality of her mother. Kaylie and Colton are both interested in the sciences and mathematics just like their parents are. They all have reached each developmental milestone and created secure attachments to their families.

I thoroughly enjoyed spending time with the children and getting a peak into who they are becoming. I saw Piaget’s theory of Cognitive Development and Erik Erikson’s Psychosocial Stages which did not surprise me as I thought it would have. There are many factors as to why I was unsurprised, maybe it was because I had already formed a bond with all of them prior to this assignment. Or that I did not interview a child who had not reached the same milestones as these children.

Roman and Lucas were my biggest difficulty. Two-year old’s do not like to sit still. We had played for probably twenty minutes before I asked them questions. I was hoping to somewhat tire them out and have them trust me even more. I was lucky and grateful that their dad helped me out. Each boy got to sit on their dad’s shoulders while I asked their questions. It helped keep them still as well as to be at my height. I did not want them to think I was talking down to them. They answered all my questions with no problems.

I wanted to interview the other sister, Lucy, who is twelve. She was at a Girl Scouts meeting and did not get out until after I had asked my questions to the others. I wanted to see what the differences were between Lucy and Colton because they are in the same age range for middle childhood. I knew it was not a necessary part of the assignment, so I did not ask Lucy when she got home because she was hungry and tired. I decided I wanted Lucy to eat and get some sleep than be badgered by my questions.

I believe that my findings were valid to an extent. I would have received different answers if I had asked children that I was not previously bonded with. I sadly did not have access to ask other children I was not very familiar with. I could have also looked at children from different socio-economic statuses, as the family I interviewed were very secure and roughly upper middle class. Instead, I made it my focus to find differences and similarities in children from the same household. I wished I had asked Colton about the ideas of conservation to see if he truly was in the concrete operation stage of development. Yet if I had focused on other factors, I would have not had the findings I desired.

I am extremely thankful for the opportunity the family gave me to interview their children. I have a better understanding how to find and notice the milestones and behaviors that had been discussed in class. I found things that I was surprised to see and was even more surprised to see how they connected back to the theories and ideas taught in class.

References

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