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This project is a hands-on learning and application experience providing the opportunity to study three different ages and the stages of development they are currently experiencing. Each child provided different insight and examples of what I have learned in the Education 245 Honors course. The three participants chosen for this project are Tommy, a four-year old male; Mia, Tommy's eleven-year-old sister; and Ellie, my fourteen-year-old sister. I chose these three participants because I have watched each child grow and develop into their current personalities, as they are either cousins or a sibling to me. Most importantly, I thought it would be interesting to seek insight on their developmental progress and compare their responses. I asked each participant ten questions in order to seek more information on their physical, cognitive, and socio-emotional development. I found recurring concepts and ideas as each child spoke of similar, yet different, experiences in their childhood.

Each interview took place over FaceTime due to distance and limited time being an issue. As a result of this problem, Tommy and Mia were in the same room with their parents during the interviews. This proved to be distracting at most points in the conversation, yet helpful when extra explaining was needed to better understand my questions. Mia was my first interview and Tommy followed second. Ellie was interviewed after a long school day, while being tired from completing homework. As a teenager, she was uninterested in the interview process until I explained the purpose of these questions. She began to open up and reveal her passions to me as the interview continued. Overall, the participants were able to provide insightful responses in the midst of distractions, exhaustion, and family bonding. I wanted to compare and contrast nature versus nurture with each relative participating by asking them to describe their family. I found that each child mentioned which number sibling they are and at least one characteristic of their

family dynamic. I noticed Tommy reacting in similar ways as Mia when he did not understand or had difficulty thinking of a response. The *Social-Cognitive Learning Theory* by Albert Bandura is prominent throughout Tommy's responses as he demonstrates learning through imitation of a peer or family member (Levine, 2017). In this case, his first response was "I don't know how to say them," while Mia hesitated and asked what I was asking for seeking a better explanation. Ellie stated the number of males and females in her family including a fondness for cats in the family, while Mia mentioned a similar passion for soccer. All three participants mentioned that their family was "funny" in some sort of way, whether it was because of a similar liking or their personalities. Tommy's final response was "I am the oldest because I am four." This response was wrong, as he is actually the youngest child further leading to my interest in the cognitive development within the group.

In terms of physical development, I only asked one question to learn about their potential physical health goals. For example, Mia mentions a common love for sports, especially soccer, among her peers and family. I asked each participant what their favorite activity to do was in their free time and I received various responses, not necessarily physical activities. I began to think whether they associated their sports as a chore or a separate category because they may not view a sport as free time due to weekly or daily practices and games. Mia responded with her love to read books, while Ellie likes to listen to music because it "makes me feel good and I am able to relax." Ellie also mentioned that she enjoys playing the piano when she is home alone because she can make "all kinds of noise" and practice her skills. Tommy adores to have books read to him and play hide and go seek, which he then proceeded to explain how the game is played in great detail. Tommy also informed me that he does not yet know how to tie his shoes but is trying to learn. I found that each child likes to participate in calmer, more relaxed

activities while they have extra time, however, some responses to other questions demonstrates a love for sports and physical activity.

With the goal to provide more background information to help me better compare each participant with Piaget's Theory of Cognitive development, I chose to ask each child what their favorite subject is to learn in school and what their current favorite book is. Mia shared that her favorite class was handwriting because she enjoys writing stories. She is entertained by reading books full of imagination, humor, and mystical cures. More specifically, her favorite book is *Mrs. Piggle Wiggle* by Betty MacDonald. These books are meant for a younger audience, or toddlers, which are to be read as a bedtime type of story. Mia is currently in the concrete operations stage where she is learning to think more abstractly and has better reasoning for her opinions and thoughts in a logical sense (Levine, 2017). Tommy quickly responded with the book *Cars and Trucks from A to Z* by Richard Scarry. He is just becoming exposed to schooling, but he is enrolled in a Spanish class at the Co-Op the family attends. Vygotsky's theory of cognitive development is displayed in Tommy because he is learning Spanish as a result of his cultural background within the family. Tommy is just at the end of the pre-operational stage of cognitive thinking where he struggles to conceptualize (Levine, 2017). In order for him to gain a better grasp of an idea or concept, he needs more visual and physical explanations. This is prominent throughout the interview as I often had to rephrase the questions or provide multiple examples to help him create a response. Ellie responded with her favorite book being *The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson Burnett because it is "cool and magical." She stated that she preferred math class because it does not take a vast amount of time to complete. Ellie is in the formal operations stage, where she is able to provide the most insight on hypothetical questions best (Levine, 2017). For example, when asked what she would do if she saw a peer being

bullied, she responded that she would stand up for them and offer advice. There is an overall theme of imagination and creativity in the books read by these participants. I believe this is a positive finding because it demonstrates that they are constantly thinking about and creating new ideas in their minds.

I chose to focus on the socio-emotional aspect of each child's development to further investigate how they behave with different circumstances. I asked each participant to describe themselves and I received only positive character traits, however, each child interpreted the question differently. Tommy told me games he likes to play and went into great detail about "sliding on the slides that go down." Each child told me which number child they were in comparison to their siblings, but Tommy stated that he is the oldest while he is actually the youngest child. Mia and Tommy associated with their hobbies, while Ellie stated that she is "cringy, silly, and open-minded." Although, they spoke highly of themselves when directly prompted, there were a few negative comments throughout the interview. For instance, when I asked Ellie how she would respond to a peer being bullied, she made a comment about her own advice being "terrible." I had to restate the question for Tommy, so I asked what he would do if he saw someone sad. He thought about it and decided he would apologize, not say anything at all, or give them a hug. Then he continued to tell me how he wished he could give me a hug and asked how I am doing. At another point in the conversation, he asked where Longwood University is and if his mom could take him to Farmville the next day. Mia said that she would stand up for her friends by telling the bully to stop being mean. I found that these responses involving helping someone often represented empathy and compassion. I also wanted to know why they chose their current role models because it will allow me to interpret how they wish to portray themselves. When I asked each child who their role model is, two of the children

immediately answered “ME!” When I asked Ellie why she chose herself, she responded “because you always say to only be yourself, not like anyone else.” Her more serious response was “Mac de Marco because he doesn’t care about what other people think.” Ellie portrays a level of self-confidence that other teenagers do not have because her role model is confident in who he is. Most teenage girls choose a role model based on their looks, body image, or talent abilities. Mia looks up to an older girl on her soccer team because she is “really good at soccer.” Mia’s chosen role model demonstrates that she is willing to work harder at her soccer skills. Tommy chose his best friend Jack as his role model because “he is so nice.” The friend that Tommy thinks of as a role model reveals that he notices positive attitudes and actions in a person. I then asked each participant to tell me their favorite qualities about their best friend(s). Mia explained that her best friends are her sister and Anna because they are often together for family or school activities and they see each other every day. Tommy tells me that his best friend is just “so nice,” while Ellie tells me that her best friends are “funny, gorgeous, and caring.” Ellie went on to explain that they often have sleep overs and mentioned that one of her reasons for the friendship is that “they like me as I am.” These responses make me question if the participants experience early and childhood friendships based on convenience for the family and the child. Out of curiosity, I asked the children what their favorite food is as an attempt to seek information on emotional eating. Oddly enough, Tommy and Mia both said pasta was their favorite, but each had different reasoning. Tommy stated that pasta and hamburgers are his favorite, while Mia said pasta because “it goes with cheese and I like cheese a lot!” Ellie told me her favorite snack was currently *Goldfish* because she enjoys the crispy texture and savors the burnt cheese flavors. I did not find much connection to emotions and food through the single question other than the pasta similarity. The last question I asked was what makes them happy.

My goal was to learn what they find their joy in and associate their positive emotions most with. Ellie told me that “having people that care about me and are there for me” makes her happy. Tommy states that he enjoys “playing games like *UNO*” and Mia immediately responded with watching a movie with her family. Comfort, affection, and entertainment seem to be prominent in each of these responses. Overall, high self-confidence was demonstrated along with joy found in compassion and positive environments.

As I reflect on the responses each participant has given me, I have thought of a couple recommendations to be taken into consideration. I suggest that Tommy would continue to take classes in this Co-Op, where he is exposed to new information and pursuing more education. His cognitive growth will continue to develop as he is transitioning into the abstract way of thinking in the Piaget’s next stage, concrete operations (Levine, 2017). Social referencing was prominent with Tommy’s answers as he was responding to his surrounding environment. Also, Tommy should continue to be placed in groups of children similar in age to further his socio-emotional growth. This will prove beneficial as he will be able to communicate and get along better while placed in large groups or overwhelming situations. It will also help him to grow out of an attachment relationship with his parents. While I was interviewing Mia, she seemed very shy and embarrassed to answer some of the questions. I believe that Mia should gain more exposure to female friends similar in age and development to further encourage her self-confidence to increase and self-consciousness to decrease. Likewise, she should continue to practice soccer, if not solely focus on that sport, to keep in shape and increase her skills. From the information gathered in the interview, she appears to want to be a successful soccer player. I believe that Mia’s family has greatly influenced her love for soccer because of her brothers love for soccer. Both of these suggestions will prove beneficial to both her mental and physical health later on in

her adolescence as she is developing quickly and undergoing puberty. Ellie portrayed signs of anxiety and low self-confidence as she responded to my questions. For example, often she would state her response but then follow it up with something like “but my advice is bad” or “I am not as popular.” On a daily basis, Ellie experiences pressures and stress to obtain efficient grades and continue to act well-behaved and attentive in classes. I recommend that she participates in more physical activities to relieve stress, tension, and anxiety. For example, join a sports or recreational sports team, or even a community service club. As a middle school female, peers tend to be extremely judgmental and harsh towards each other. Therefore, many students do not attempt to go out of their way to try out for new sports or school activities. I suggest that Ellie should take part in a musical program, whether it is starting guitar or piano lessons or even joining the school band. These groups would allow her to share her musical talents and express her emotions through the music, further strengthening her socio-emotional growth. Overall, there is a large amount of room for each child to grow within their current stage of Piaget’s Theory of Cognitive Development (Levine, 2017).

The Three Ages project was meant to solidify everything that has been taught in the Education 245 Honors course up to this point. I found it interesting how each participant provided a larger amount of information and went into greater detail as their responses grew in depth with each age group. I also noticed how they offered more details about things they were most passionate about. Tommy especially demonstrated his stage of cognitive development throughout the interview as he was consistently getting sidetracked and making unrelatable comments throughout the process. The obvious issue within the socio-economic portion of Piaget’s Theory of Cognitive Development is that each child struggles to seek confidence in themselves. Instead they are constantly seeking approval of their peers or parents, especially as

an adolescent. As each child matures, they will struggle, but eventually have a steady increase in their self-esteem and self-confidence. Each child interpreted the questions differently, leading to a wide variety of responses. I enjoyed comparing each child and learning more about how they view themselves and the family because of the familiar relationship between them.

References

Levine, L. E., & Munsch, J. (2017). *Child Development: An Active Learning Approach*(3rded.).
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