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.

**Introduction**

When I first read over this project, I was concerned that I would have to interview each of my participants over facetime. I wasn’t sure when I would be home next and I would be able to visit each of them. Luckily over spring break and the beginning of the corona school closings, I was able to interview two out of the three face to face. I interviewed Emily (four), Tiana (eight), and Anthony (14). I chose these three participants because they are all part of my family and comfortable talking to me about their lives. I conducted each of these interviews later in the evening when the participants had eaten and were calm in order to get the best results. I interviewed both Emily and Anthony in person in the living room of their houses. This way they were separated from others and could focus on me. Tiana was interviewed through facetime, where she sat in her bed and answered my questions. These settings allowed each of the participants to focus on the questions being asked where they were comfortable and avoid distractions from others. I video recorded both my in-person and over the phone interviews with the permission of each of the participants' parents so I was able to look back at their physical along with their verbal responses to each question.

In order to complete this project, I will apply what I have read and learned about Human Growth and Development to actual individuals. I will be asking questions to each participant that will help me evaluate their physical, cognitive, and socio-emotional development with additional questions focusing on my particular area of interest. The area of interest I chose to evaluate was how their movie preferences change through each stage. I chose this particular area of interest because I find it interesting to look back at what I found to be entertaining at a younger age as to what I find to be entertaining now. Throughout the four areas I will be exploring I am expecting to see more creative answers within the younger age groups that come off the top of their heads. For the older age group I expect more sophisticated answers that are well thought out. I expect to find both similarities and differences between all of the groups and be able to compare their stages of development.

**Early Childhood**

For my early childhood group I decided to interview my youngest cousin, Emily. Emily is four years old and was very excited to answer my questions, as we are very close so she enjoys talking to me. Around this early childhood age children develop many new skills. Their motor skills start to improve and the type of physical activity they can engage in changes as they begin to throw and catch balls as well as run, jump, and hop. I saw that Emily’s motor skills have definitely reached this point when I asked her what she does when she’s with her friends. She quickly responded “basketball!” oozing with energy as she also stated that she played in tunnels around the house. Also around this age children appear less clumsy as they develop their balance and are in need of physical activity. According to the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (2009), preschoolers should get at least 60 minutes of structured physical activity, as well as 60 minutes of unstructured physical activity (Levine and Munsch 269). By the time I was done with Emily’s interview I was sure she got enough physical activity as her favorite things to talk about were how she played with her friends as well as her favorite part about school. When I asked Emily what her favorite part about school was she eagerly replied “I get to play with the space bin!”. Confused as to what this space bin was, I asked her to explain and she told me that “It’s a toy you play with so much people and so much rocketships!” as she demonstrated a spinning movement. As I quickly realized how much Emily enjoyed playing with others, I decided to ask more socio-emotional based questions.

Within the stage of early childhood, children begin developing new emotions as well as the ability to express and control these emotions. They learn how to express feelings and recognize them in others. Curious as to how Emily would respond if one of her friends needed help, I asked her what she would do. She responded by telling me she would hold their hands and lift them up. While this isn’t physically possible for her, she understands that by “lifting them up” she will be raising their spirits in an attempt to help them. Her response warmed my heart and I wanted to know more. I then asked her what she would do to show someone she cared, which she responded to with her arms wide open “I would give them 150 hugs!”. She understands that hugging is a way to express how she feels about others and makes sure that her friends and family know she cares about them. Also within the socio-emotional development during this stage of early childhood, children begin to represent events in their lives through language and pictures. Talking about these events helps them feel their emotions. When I asked Emily about where her favorite place to go was, she explained to me that it was disney because there are “so many princesses there” and she went with her parents and brother. She made sure to add in that while she was there she got her hair done, as that was one of her favorite parts. When beginning to explain this to me she became very excited as she was remembering how she felt while she was there. I realized quickly that Emily is very in touch with her emotions and knows what makes them change, so I asked her what makes her happy, sad, and scared. She responded by stating very happily that staying with me made her happy, and then suddenly seeming unhappy told me that what made her sad was when she did things wrong and got punished. What she shows through this answer is that she has “moral knowledge”, which often develops in this stage. She is able to discriminate between right and wrong and understand that if she does something she isn’t supposed to she may get punished, as well as the other way around.

Cognitive development is very important during the age of early childhood, as they begin to develop a level of thinking that prepares them to attend school and learn in new ways. If children were behind in this cognitive development, both their physical and socio-emotional development could suffer as well. If they are not prepared for school, they will not have as many encounters with peers their age and they won’t form as many relationships. Relationships are very important to all stages of development during this age. According to Piajet’s Theory of Cognitive Development, during what he calls the “preoperational stage”, it is a major accomplishment during this age to be able to use symbols. Symbols include anything that represents something else that is not present (Levine and Munsch 287). By asking Emily what her favorite book was I was able to see if she had this understanding. Through her answer of “Giraffe and a half because it has a giraffe and a pigeon and the giraffe puts a chair in his hair and a snake eating cake with a rose on his nose!”, it was clear that she did. Not only was she able to see the book and title in her head, she was able to repeat back to me a phrase within the book that she memorized. This shows that not only is she able to use symbols, but her memory has continued to improve. Along with memory: attention, executive function, and social cognition also improve during this stage. Through her interview, I was able to determine that Emily is in the right place with each stage of development and is on the right track to meet her full potential.

**Middle Childhood**

For the middle childhood group I interviewed another one of my cousins named Tiana. This interview was completed through facetime, so I was still able to read her body language that accompanied her verbal answers. During the middle childhood stage, there are many changes in physical development. One of these changes includes a considerable amount of development in both fine and gross motor skills and because of this now enjoy activities that rely on these skills. I could tell that Tiana had come to this point in life as she expressed to me she enjoyed playing basketball along with other sports when asked what she liked to play outdoors. She also explained to me that she knew how to and enjoyed riding her bike. Part of the reason for the development of these motor skills is the improved connectivity and coordination between different areas of the brain during this stage of development. Changes such as these occur in the brain to prepare the child for more complex learning and thinking that we see in middle childhood as well as later in adolescence (Levine and Munsch 363). Such complex learning helps with their success in school and it was apparent that Tiana was developing these complex learning skills during my interview. I asked her what her favorite part about school was and she replied “math” without hesitation. Due to the development of her brain during this stage, she is able to understand and enjoy subjects that contain this complex level of learning and thinking. Along with the changes in the motor skills and brain, food preferences tend to change around this age. Children begin to prefer foods with a lot of fat and sodium and can often lack adequate amounts of vitamins A, C, and E in their diet. I saw this change in food preference in Tiana when asking her about what made her happy, sad, and scared. When responding to what made her sad, Tiana replied with “When I don’t get McDonalds” which shows her cravings for unhealthy foods and even how she feels when she is not allowed to eat them. This also shows in part her socio-emotional development.

During the stage of middle childhood, children are able to better express and control their emotions. They now understand what makes them feel certain emotions and are able to identify that. Curious as to what made Tiana feel different emotions, I asked her what made her happy, sad, and scared. Her response that family made her happy touched my heart because during her early childhood years she kept to herself most of the time and didn’t like interacting with us. As she has grown she has come out of her shell and realized that we are here to support and love her. This newfound ability to successfully manage their emotions plays a critical role in their ability to form and maintain social relationships as peers begin to play a larger role in children's lives (Levine and Munsch 433). Over the past couple of years Tiana has made a few friends that have been constant in her life ever since. These friends, along with her siblings, played a big role of Tiana coming out of her shell and interacting with other people. The relationships made with peers and siblings during middle childhood are really important to children’s socio-emotional development. The relationships made around this time are a big part of what helps with stress and anxiety during this age as their cognitive development continues to expand.

The shift of cognitive abilities occurs between early and middle childhood and is sometimes referred to as the 5-7 year shift. During this shift children begin to learn skills that they need in order to be successful adults in their society. Piajet was one of the first theorists to talk about this shift, which he described as the beginning of his third stage of development. This third stage is the stage of concrete operations, which allow children to think logically. However, their abilities are still limited because their thinking is concrete instead of abstract (Levine and Munch 391). This concrete operational stage can be seen when Tiana explains what she wants to be when she grows up. Her response to this question was “A police officer because I want to rescue people”. Through this answer it can be seen that Tiana sees just the basic understanding of this job. She understands that police officers save people, however, she doesn't understand what else the job entails. Also during this stage of middle childhood, the ability to sustain attention and avoid distractions greatly increases. This ability has been linked to achievement in both math and reading (Levine and Munsch 393). This brings me back to Tiana's answer of math as her favorite subject. This development can also be seen in Tiana through her answer to my question asking what kind of books she reads. Moving into middle childhood, children begin to acquire skills of conventional literacy (Levine and Munsch 400). Responding to my question Tiana stated that she is able to read small books on her own as well as small chapter books with the help of her mom. All three stages of development are very important during this age and lack of proper development in any of the three can affect the development of the others.

**Adolescence**

For the adolescence stage of development I was able to interview my little brother, Anthony. I interviewed him in person in our living room after making sure he paused the show he was watching so I had his full attention. During adolescence, there is continued development in all three parts of development: physical, socio-emotional, and cognitive. Looking at the physical change, there is continued growth in the brain. While it is still far from maturity, the brain changes focusing more on reorganizing existing structures and functions to allow for a greater efficiency and higher level of cognition and behavior. During adolescence, the brain goes through a specific wave of pruning that is usually complete in some areas of the brain by the age of 12. The changes that occur in this wave of pruning allows the teens to develop most sophisticated levels of thought (Levine and Munsch 465). This can be seen in Anthony through his answer to my question of how he would design a treehouse. Instead of responding with “super big” or “in a tree” like one in early or middle childhood might say, he said he would build it with electricity and include a nice hammock on the inside. This shows that Anthony is portraying more sophisticated levels of thought and is able to express them. Along with brain development in this stage, their eating and sleep habits change as well. In order to support their physical development, adolescents should make sure they are getting enough sleep, physical activity, and proper nutrition. Only 9% of adolescents report getting the optimal amount of sleep each night and ⅔ report getting fewer than eight hours (Levine and Munsch 484). When I asked Anthony on average how many hours of sleep he got per night he said he got 10, which is really good for kids his age. However, when I asked him this we were in quarantine and he wasn’t getting up for school in the morning. When I changed my question to the average amount of sleep per night while school was in session, his answer changed to eight. This is still a good amount of sleep for an adolescent, but it decreased because of school. I think it’s a good idea for high schools to start opening later so kids that don’t get as much sleep as Anthony are able to get the proper amount and succeed better in school. Along with his sleep pattern, I asked Anthony about what he does for physical activity as well as what his go to snacks were. For physical activity he will often ride his bike, workout, and play golf. When I asked about his go to snacks he told me that they were “oreos, cheese sticks, and chips”. These are common snacks for an adolescent as they are drawn towards food that contain a lot of fat and sugar. It is very important for adolescents to take care of their health and nutrition because if they don’t it can affect their cognitive development as well as lead to stress and depression.

Within the stage of adolescence, there is evidence that suggests teens experience more extreme emotions and more changeable moods than people of other ages (Levine and Munsch 546). Emotions such as stress and depression are more likely to become extreme around this age and can be affected by their physical development as mentioned above. I asked Anthony what made him happy, sad, and scared and he expressed that: his dog made him happy, quarantine made him sad, and heights made him scared. When he told me that quarantine made him sad, I felt the same way. I think the quarantine we are currently in is affecting adolescents most as they often rely on physical activity and being around friends to help them emotionally. I found it interesting that what Anthony said scared him was heights. In the stage of adolescence, fears seem to become more general than specific. When I asked my participants for early and middle childhood, they responded with specific fears such as a bug or a scary face. The fear of heights is a more complex fear that one understands better around this stage. According to Erik Erikson (1963-1968), not only do adolescents understand their emotions better, they also need to understand and get comfortable with who they are and who they want to become as they move into young adulthood (Levine and Munsch 541). Anthony is still in the early stages of adolescence, so he is still trying to figure out what he wants to do in his future. I asked Anthony what career he wanted to pursue when he was older and he replied “I don't really know, maybe a landscaper?”. After answering this question, he expressed to me that while he was unsure if that would always be the case, he knew that he enjoyed helping our dad with yard work and being outside. A big part of figuring out who you are, is finding your group of friends. When I asked Anthony if he had found his group of friends that he enjoyed being with, he explained to me that he had found some and they play a big role in who he is today. These things are very important because physical, cognitive, and social changes of adolescence are reflected through changes in the self-concept. Peers can have a huge affect on one's academic achievement. The cognitive changes that occur during the stage of formal operations are reflected in the way the adolescent can now think about the self (Levine and Munsch 541).

The idea of the stage of formal operations was created by Piajet when examining the cognitive development of children within early childhood, middle childhood, and adolescence. Piajet explained that by the age of 12 children begin to reason logically about hypothetical possibilities rather than only about the concrete world. He called this “hypothetico-deductive reasoning” or “scientific reasoning” (Levine and Munsch 503). Piajet believed that this was the last stage, however, he did not believe everyone could reach it. I could tell that Anthony has reached this stage by his response to my question: if he were to write a book what would it be about. He understood that this was a hypothetical what-if question and responded with “the art of hunting because that’s what I know most about”. If I were to ask Emily that question, I believe she would give me an answer such as “I don’t want to write a book” or “I read books”, as she is not yet able to understand these hypothetical situations. Due to these cognitive developments, children are expected to be able to do more. Therefore, it is believed that children will continue to do well in school as the workload and expectations increase significantly. To see if Anthony was experiencing this yet I asked him what he was learning in school and which subject was the most difficult for him. I was surprised when he responded with such a long list: “geometry, trigonometry, english, close reads, world history, and ancient rome”. He expressed to me that this workload was a huge change from middle school and at times it was hard to keep up with it. Along with what he was learning, he told me that the subject he struggled with the most was english. His reasoning behind this was that he struggled to keep his attention on writing or reading. This is common in adolescence as children around this age often try to divide their attention, which isn’t actually possible. One of the main reasons for this is the increased amount of time spent on electronics. Anthony told me that his parents will often try to limit distractions by turning off electronics and sitting him down at a table to help him succeed in school. When I asked him about their parenting style, his description of them was the definition of authoritative. Adolescents whose parents practice an authoritative parenting style have higher achievement orientation than children raised with other parenting styles; they are more motivated and to learn and do well in school (Levine and Munsch 533). Through this interview with Anthony, I found that he was in the right stages of development and on the right track to reach his full potential.

**Particular Area of Interest**

The particular area of interest I chose for this project was to examine how children's movie preferences changed throughout the stages of early childhood, middle childhood, and adolescence. I asked each of my participants the same questions of what their favorite movie was as well as their favorite part in that movie. As I predicted, I received three completely different answers. Emily responded with “princess movies” and I had to ask her which princess movie she liked best. At this question she responded with “Ariel, my favorite part is that she has a mermaid tail and a mermaid body”. When I asked Tiana her answer was “High School Musical”, but when I asked her which part was her favorite she couldn’t decide and just sighed as she said “all of it”. However, Anthony’s response was a little more detailed. He explained that his favorite movie was Avengers and his favorite part was “when Hulk smashes Loki”. Before asking this question I was expecting the answers of Emily and Tiana to be less specific than Anthony's answer. I was correct in thinking this, as Anthony was able to identify an actual event that happened in the movie. On the other hand, Emily explained why she liked the main character as she didn’t completely understand the question, and Tiana couldn’t remember a specific part she liked best. This occurred because within the stages of early and middle childhood their brains are not fully developed to understand such complex questions and their memory is not fully developed either. I also realized that each participant chose a movie that was made specifically for that age group. This means that the producers of the movies were successfully able to create them for the specific audience while allowing the audience to fully understand what was happening.

**Discussion**

After interviewing all three of my participants, I found it easiest to find similarities between early childhood and middle childhood as well as middle childhood and adolescence. I found small differences between each of the interviews, however, I found the biggest differences between early childhood and adolescence. One of the similarities between Emily and Tiana was their development of motor skills. With Emily’s motor skill development she is appearing less clumsy and she now enjoys throwing and catching balls, running, jumping, and hopping. Similar to this, Tiana's development of fine and gross motor skills allows her to start to enjoy activities that rely on fine motor skills and eye-hand coordination. Different from both Emily and Tiana, Anthony’s physical development stops focusing on adding anything new and focuses on reorganizing existing structures and functions to allow for greater efficiency and a higher level of cognition and behavior (Levine and Munsch 465). To compare and contrast all three groups on their cognitive development, I used the information from Piajet’s cognitive theories. In early childhood I followed the description of Piajet’s preoperational stage, which allows children to represent actions mentally rather than physically using symbols. In middle childhood I followed the description of Piajet’s concrete operational stage, which allows children to think logically even though their abilities are still limited because their thinking is still concrete rather than abstract. Finally in adolescence I followed the description of Piajet’s stage of formal operations, which allows children to begin to reason logically about hypothetical possibilities rather than only about the concrete world. Based on the interviews, I didn’t find any inconsistencies with my participants based on Piajet’s theory. I found the socio-emotional stage of development to be similar in all three participants. In all three stages, the development of self-concept is very important and continues to grow stronger. Children's ability to understand and control their emotions is also constantly developing throughout each of the three stages and will be tested through hardships throughout the rest of their lives.

**Recommendations**

I decided to do research and find recommendations for possible assistance in future development for my participant in early childhood, Emily. I chose Emily because as she is still in the early childhood stage, she has the largest amount of growth and development ahead of her. While Emily’s development seems to be on the right track, parents should still do what they can to promote development. To help promote physical development in early childhood, parents should make sure their child is getting enough physical activity. At this age children need at least 60 minutes of structured physical activity as well as unstructured physical activity. Some examples of structured activity could include games such as follow the leader and musical chairs, while an example of unstructured physical activity would be free play. Making sure their children get the right amount of physical activity will help them thrive in their physical development. Memory plays a big part in this stage of cognitive development and it is important for parents to participate in activities with their children that can promote it. A parents role in helping promote their childs memory can be as simple as asking about what they did at daycare or school. This will prompt the child to reach into their limited long-term memory and exercise it. Another way parents can promote memory is through music. Constantly listening to music can improve memory because when someone enjoys the music they want to remember it for enjoyable purposes. Learning the songs exercises their memory and begins to promote it. While memory develops by itself overtime, doing exercises to promote it will speed up the development and assist the child in school. When it comes to promoting socio-emotional development within the stage of early childhood, parents play a big role. Around this age children are developing new emotions that they have never experienced before and they are learning to express and control them. Also during this time they are learning what is right and wrong, which is largely determined by what others tell them. To promote socio-emotional development it is important for parents to encourage their child to talk about their emotions. While they may not know what these emotions mean, talking about them with their parents will increase their knowledge and help them to understand. It is also important for parents to help their children learn right from wrong. This can be done in many ways depending on the parenting style. Parents should try to strive for the authoritative parenting style, which sets rules and regulations while still upholding a positive environment. Children who have authoritative parents often feel more comfortable talking about their emotions to their family. While I only talked about three, there are many ways parents can help to promote physical, cognitive, and socio-emotional development for their child.

**Conclusion**

From each of the interviews, I have concluded that each of my participants are in the correct stages of development for their age. I evaluated each participant's physical, cognitive, and socio-emotional development based off of the information I learned throughout my Education 245 class. I was not surprised with my findings in any of the participants, as they are all family and I know them well. The only problems I encountered during this process was finding the time to interview each of my participants. I wanted to conduct each of the interviews in person, however, I had to resort to interviewing Tiana over facetime. I feel that my observations were valid because I made sure the environment of each of the interviews were free of distractions. I also conducted a lot of research to make sure I had the correct information on what should happen during each of the stages of development. If I had the opportunity to follow up on my observations with an additional round of questions, I would ask more questions based on socio-emotional development because I want to learn more about the development of self-concept in each of the children. I enjoyed interviewing each of the participants and doing more research for this project. I learned a lot about development and can’t wait to be able to use this knowledge in my future career as a speech pathologist.

**References**

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*learning approach*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.