Development Through the Ages

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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.

I am very close with my sister and my cousins so the participants for this project came very easy. Although I am not able to see my cousins in person often because the live a couple hours away, they are very comfortable talking through Facetime as we tend to do this often. My youngest cousin, Ben, is six years old. My other cousin, Grace, is nine years old. They are siblings who live together so it was sometimes difficult to just talk to one of them, but their parents were a great help at keeping one of them busy while I talked to the other. During their interviews, I took notes on what they said and tried my best to write down exactly how they answered. My sister, Jackie, is sixteen years old. I was able to interview her while I was home for spring break. We sat down in her room and I interviewed her and took notes. I asked each of the participants many of the same or similar questions and compare the answers to determine different ages of growth and change in their development. I expected the oldest of my interviews would give me more concise, on topic answers while the younger two would give me more unsure answers or become off topic from the original question. The results showed a large range of development at all ages.

When interviewing my youngest cousin, he would sometimes be difficult by running away from the computer or not answering what I was asking him. It would sometimes take a few times asking him the same question before I got an answer from him. Some of the first questions I asked him were about things that he would want to do at the beach or outside because I know that he likes to go outside, and we have been on a beach trip together. He is always very active and running around, so when I asked him about what the first thing would be that he would do at the beach, I was not surprised when he told me he would go swimming. He tends to be in great physical shape because of how active he is with his family and pets. Him being active seems to be good for his cognitive and socio-economic development and as long as his activity and nutrition stay good, he should continue to have good physical development. I continued the interview by asking him about some of his favorite movies and books. He has just started learning how to read so he is starting to find some books that he enjoys reading himself. Many of his favorites include silly books, one of his favorites being “Don’t Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus” as well as the rest of that series. He enjoys learning but there are times that he cannot sit still long enough to finish a story. One thing he will always sit still for is movies and shows. I asked him what his favorite movie is right now, and he told me Harry Potter. He said he can do magic like Harry and explained to me that he has a wand from his visit to Harry Potter world in Universal Studios. The amount of TV and movies that he watches do not seem to be impacting his cognitive function at this time except for his attention span however, it could impact him more as he grows older if he continues to watch the same amount and focus less on reading and school work. I continued the interview by asking about his friends. He has a couple friends from school, but he also tells me that he plays the most with his sister. His social development seems to be going fine as he is able to make friends at school and has a good relationship with his family. During this interview, Piaget’s theory of cognitive development in the preoperational stage was present in the way that he was able to explain his ideas. Piaget says that the biggest difference for children going into the preoperational stage are able to tell an action through an explanation with words instead of having to use a symbol or object to represent the action (Levine & Munsch, 2016, p. 287). Overall, Ben’s development seems to be on track for being towards the end of early childhood and many of his habits seem to project a stable development as he continues to grow.

My second interview was with my other cousin who is nine. She is right in the middle of the middle childhood stage, so she was a perfect person to interview for this age group. I started out by asking her some of the same questions that I had just asked her brother. I asked her about some of her physical activities that she likes to do, and she responded with swimming and horseback riding. She also explained to me that she is on the local swim team and also takes horseback riding lessons. She is not always as active as her brother because she seems to tend to be calmer than him. However, she still seems to be getting the exercise she needs to stay healthy. If she is able to continue swim team and horseback riding as well as maintain a healthy diet, she will not need to worry about her physical development. As I continued the interview, I asked her about her favorite book or series. She responded with the Harry Potter series and proceeded to tell me how her dad had painted Hogwarts School of Magic on the wall in her bedroom. She is able to read much of the books on her own but will often read with her mom so that she is able to get help with some of the harder words. She is right on track for her cognitive development as she was able to stay engaged in the interview and I was able to get an on-topic answer for almost every question and she seems to be ahead or on level in her schoolwork. I was also able to ask her about what her favorite drawing was that she had done recently because I know that she enjoys art. She showed me a very detailed drawing of a dragon that she had done recently which showed me that her fine motor skills have improved greatly based on the amount of detail she was able to include (Levine & Munsch, 2016, p. 359). The last couple questions I asked her were about her friends and family. She told me about many of her friends from school and the neighborhood and told me that they like to ride their bikes together when it gets nice. She also told me about how her and her brother will often play with their dog either inside or outside. Her relationship with her family seems strong and she seems to make friends easy which leaves me to believe that her socio-emotional development is on track, especially if she continues to be close with her family and friends. Grace seems to be right on track in her development and should stay on track if she continues many of her current habits.

My final interview was with my sister. I was able to interview her when I was home on break which allowed me to pay closer attention to some physical reactions and have it be a less formal interview. The first questions I asked her involved her favorite sport to play as she has played multiple sports as she has grown. She said that her favorite sport to play would have to be soccer as it is what she has played the longest. Soccer tends to keep her very active, but she is not planning to pursue a career in soccer, so she does not do many workouts outside of practice. Even though she has played sports for many years, she has not suffered any serious injury but is aware of the risk as injuries in sports are more common as children get older (Levine pg 492). Her diet is not strict, but she still tends to eat well. She often snacks and eats smaller meals throughout the day. Her physical development seems to be on track but as she gets older, she may have to watch her diet more especially if she does not continue soccer or another sport. I continued the interview by asking her about school. She told me that she is becoming very interested in psychology and is thinking about studying that in college. Her interest in psychology shows Piaget’s stage of formal operations where kids are able to utilize abstract thinking (Levine & Munsch, 2016, p. 503). She is currently a junior, so she is having to start looking at colleges and possible majors. School is a big part of her life as she is also in choir and is casted in many of the musicals. These after school activities have helped her improve her cognitive function as well as her socio-emotional development. The final questions I asked her were based around her friendships. She has a couple very close friends, including some she has known since elementary school. She also has other friends who she does not see as much but is still close with. She has good connections with others and seems to be excited about the coming years, so I believe that her socio-emotional development is going well. Overall, her development seems to be on the right path to allow for her to be successful as she continues to grow. There are a few things that she could change to ensure her development stays on the right track but nothing that will drastically change her lifestyle.

Two of the kids I interviewed live together and the other is in their family, so their development is generally similar and all going well. Although their development is going well for all of them, each has something that if it continues could affect good development. Some of the developmental characteristics I focused on the most were their future plans as well as attention. James Marcia expanded on Erik Erikson’s theory of identity crisis and identity confusion. Marcia has split this time into four sections to describe a person’s own identity and how they got there: identity diffusion, identity foreclosure, moratorium, and identity achievement (Morelli, n.d.). I was able to recognize some of these stages with my two oldest subjects. Grace is currently nine, but she lives in a college town, so she is often exposed to the idea of college as well as many different majors and jobs. When I asked her what she wanted to be when she grew up, she talked about many things. She mentioned a doctor or a teacher because that is what her parents are. She has not looked much into anything else, but she also knows that she has plenty of time to explore that, so she is not very committed to either job possibility. I believe that she is between the stages of identity foreclosure and moratorium because she has started to explore some possible careers but has not committed strongly to any one job. I was also able to explore the final stage during the interview with Jackie who is sixteen. She is close to being in the identity achievement stage as she has a very strong idea as to what her ideals are as well as what she wants to do in life. She may still be exploring some of her other options, but it seems like she is mostly committed to her current decisions. Another theory I was able to focus on during the interviews was Piaget’s stages of development. All three of my subjects are in different stages of his theory but it was especially noticeable in the younger ages. During Ben’s interview, he was able to show Piaget’s first stage of development through completely explaining his thoughts with only words and not having to use symbols to describe his actions. This is the biggest difference between the stages of sensorimotor and preoperational (Levine & Munsch, 2016, p. 287). During Grace’s interview, she was able to give me logical answers for the questions that I asked her on the first try. This represents Piaget’s stage of concrete operations (Levine & Munsch, 2016, p. 391). Many of the ideas of these theorists were either proven or not seen during these interviews. Their theories seem to fit the average development of a child very well.

The child that I decided would make the most sense to look into closer is my youngest cousin, Ben. His actions are fine or often normal for his age but if they were to continue much longer, it could negatively impact his development. One thing to not is his short attention span. He will willingly pay attention for a couple minutes but then likes to get up and run around. The only time he seems to pay attention for more than a few minutes is when he is watching a show. He does not even seem to like sitting still for the duration of a movie. At age six, this is common but as he gets into school this should stop or at least become less severe. This could be an early sign of ADD or ADHD especially if it continues as he becomes more involved in school. One way to possibly improve his attention would be to find something he enjoys and try to time him and see how long he is able to stay focus on whatever he is doing. As the days pass, try to keep his attention to his activity for longer by adding a minute or two each day or week. If it is something he enjoys, he will most likely be more willing to continue doing it for extra time. Another way to do the same exercise would be to find a puzzle he likes to do and try to keep his attention on finishing the puzzle. As he is getting better at having a longer attention span, give him a harder puzzle as it should take him more time to finish even if it does not seem that way to him. His short attention span could also be from only watching short clips or episodes that are very active and engaging so that when he is having to do another activity, it is not as exciting, and he is less likely to stay as engaged. One way to possibly increase his attention span with videos would be to allow him to watch a longer movie but stop it when he stops paying attention. This may make him pay attention more if he wants to find out the ending. His actions are not currently hurting his development, so it is not an emergency to try and change, however, it is something to watch as he continues to grow.

Through these interviews, I was able to catch a glimpse of childhood development and the ways that a person changes as they grow older. I was able to see some developmental theories in person, including Piaget’s stages of development as well as Marcia’s stages of self-identity. My findings were very similar to what I had believed they would be as I had tried to base my guesses on the current theories that I knew and with the children I had chosen, they seem to have an on track, average development which allowed me to see all of the stages easily. The only problems I really had with the interviews were with attention span of the younger children and planning out when I would be able to interview everyone, which was just a scheduling issue. I was lucky that my family is flexible and allowed me to take all of the time I needed to interview everyone and as each interview went on, I was able to keep each child engaged by asking them about stuff I knew they were interested in or that they liked talking about. The only problem that I faced that I feel was not overcome is the fact that I had to do two of my interviews over FaceTime instead of in person. I feel as though this causes my findings to not be complete but due to the fact that they live a couple hours away, it was not a possibility to hold the interview in person. I tried my best to ensure I was able to get as much information from them and pay attention to their body language, but some things are just harder to do without being there in person. Although I do not feel as though my findings are complete, I do believe that they are still valid. There could be more developmental problems beyond what I was able to see but I also think that it is just as important to be able to note what I was able to find. The only thing that I would possibly change would be to possibly ask some follow up questions focused more on their feelings. I was able to hear about how they interact with others and their relationships, but I did not get to hear much about how they felt about everyone. I hope that I will be able to continue seeing healthy development with all of the children as they continue to grow and develop.

**References**

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