Development Through Three Ages

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EDUC 245

Professor Taylor

November 19, 2019

I have neither given nor received help on this work nor am I aware of any infraction of the honor code.

For this project, I interviewed Abby, Alexis, and Robert. I changed their names for confidentiality purposes. Abby is six years old; Alexis is eleven years old, and Robert is eighteen years old. Abby and Alexis are my younger cousins and I conducted their interviews over facetime. However, Robert is my twin brother and I interviewed him in person. I asked my aunt prior to questioning Abby and Alexis and she was more than welcome to allow them to help out. They called me in the late afternoon, and I explained the purpose of the interview and asked them to answer the questions with as much information as they would like and with as much detail as they would like. I chose to interview Abby and Alexis because I thought it would be interesting to compare each of their answers to each other when they grew up in the same environment and how their development could relate. Although my brother, Robert, was not intrigued to help when I first messaged him about answering the questions for the interview, he decided to agree and help. Furthermore, I decided to interview him because we grew up in the same time period with the same environment and experiences and I wanted to look at how his development was similar and different to my own. I created a questionnaire for each age group and recorded these interviews by taking notes with as much detail as possible. However, throughout the paper I will add information that I have witnessed that may have aided in each individual’s development even if they did not specifically respond with it in their responses.

**Interview Goals**

My goal after conducting each interview was to be able to identify the stage of development each individual is in based on the questions asked and their responses. I interviewed individuals at three different ages because that will allow me to compare their physical, cognitive, and social/emotional development to each other and others their age. I based many of my questions on the basis of the social-emotional aspect of development. I think it will be interesting to see how each individual answers the same questions and how those answers will vary depending on their age, gender, and other experiences that occurred in their life. Furthermore, I think it will be interesting to see how their answers relate due to the fact that they are family and have experienced some of the same things in the same environment. I expected the younger child, Abby, to give shorter and more simple answers. However, I expected the middle-aged child, Alexis, and the adolescent, Robert, to give more detailed answers because of the degree to which they understood and interpreted the questions.

**Temperament**

The social and emotional aspect of development includes temperament and the attachment to others. NCBI describes temperament as “an innate attribute that defines the child’s approach to the world and his interaction with environment across 9 dimensions which are activity level, distractibility, the intensity of emotions, regularity, sensory threshold, the tendency to approach versus withdraw, adaptability, persistence, and mood quality” (Malik & Marwaha, 2019). This can begin with bonding with the parent(s) or with the primary caregiver. As children develop, they first begin to communicate through emotions, which will evolve over time as seen in my interviews. During early childhood at age 5 or 6 the child will be able to follow simple rules and tasks. Furthermore, he or she will enjoy making new friends and will develop imaginative play. Around age 10, friend groups will start to become more important to the child rather than family, just like what occurred with Alexis. They will start to become more independent from their family and begin to make their own decisions. As independence increases the individual will start to enter adolescence. This will come with social interactions such as dating relationships, arguments, and closer peer groups as seen with Robert. As individuals move into adolescence, they will also have to make important decisions about identity and where they are going with their life (Malik & Marwaha, 2019).

**Early Childhood**

Abby resembles the early childhood stage of development. As children enter this stage of development they will learn through the idea of play. Furthermore, they will begin to understand what other individuals are thinking and feeling. According to Sigmund Freud’s psychosexual stages of development, Abby would be in the phallic stage. During this stage the child will begin to focus on the same-sex parent. Furthermore, Erik Erikson describes this age as the psychosocial stage identifying with initiative versus guilt which is seen in the basic family. Jean Piaget, another development theorist, believes that there are four stages of cognitive development. Abby would be in the preoperational stage which is between two and seven years of age. Children in this stage of development are self-focused and struggle to think in logical terms. They may use mental symbols to represent things and their thinking is known to be egocentric. It will be difficult for these individuals to see the world through someone elses perspective (Levine & Munsch, 2017).

When I interviewed Abby, I focused many of the questions on the social and emotional aspect of development. For example, I asked questions related to family, friends, beliefs, emotions, and self-image. Social and emotional development includes the way individuals connect to others, relationships, self-concept, and understanding one’s own emotions (Levine & Munsch, 2017). When I asked Abby to describe her family, she replied by saying “My family is nice um crazy and sometimes mean. I have 2 brothers and 1 sister.” Although she did not include much detail and her sentence was not well thought out, this was expected due to her age. I babysit her and her sibling’s each summer and I find it really interesting to see their interactions with one another and how their life at home could have influenced their answers to these questions and ultimately affected their development. Abby is the youngest and she has 2 twin brothers who are eight years old and her sister, Alexis, is eleven years old. From personal witnessing, I have recognized that Abby is highly mature for her age and is where she should be in development at this age. As she grew up with twin brothers, who were a year older than her, she was able to pick up on things quicker, learning from them, and is at the same stage of development with them. I also asked Abby how she would describe herself. She replied saying “I am six, I am in second grade, I don’t know what else. Um I am crazy sometimes. Only crazy because I can’t think of anything else except kind.” I found this answer interesting because children during this age are usually self-focused. However, Abby struggled to find words to describe her personality and it was difficult for her to answer questions that directly described herself and form them into sentences. Her stumbling between words indicated this difficulty and how she struggled to focus upon herself. Abby is active outside of school in different sports and activities such as gymnastics, spending time with family, and watching her brothers play football. This would help her development because it gives her an opportunity to build friendships while also building her self-concept. She is in second grade and attends a large school which also has given her the opportunity to involve herself in social interactions. Although she claims to get emotional quickly, the range of classifying emotions and the rate and which one gets emotional is different for every individual, so her answer is just an opinion of her viewpoint and can differ between each child. I think that the environment she was raised in and her experiences will help shape her emotional development and allow her to reach her full potential in future years.

**Middle Childhood**

Alexis resembles the middle childhood stage of development. She is eleven years old and is in sixth grade. During this stage individuals will begin to focus on maturing and will enter into Freud’s latency psychosexual stage. Sexual energy will decrease, and the individual will begin to shift their focus to learning and friendships. Erikson states in his psychosocial stage that the individual will be in the industry versus inferiority area where they will begin to learn the tasks of society. According to Piaget, Alexis would be in the concrete operations stage of development. She has begun to think in more logical terms compared to Abby. However, her thinking is more concrete rather than abstract (Levine & Munsch, 2017).

I asked Alexis the same questions that I asked Abby and was looking for similar but different and more intellectual answers. I expected Alexis to give more detailed answers with a higher vocabulary. Alexis explained her family as being supportive which helped me recognize where she was intellectually in development and what was important to her. Furthermore, I asked her what she wanted to be when she grew up. She replied by saying, “I want to be a veterinarian and go to Virginia Tech and have my master’s degree in veterinarian science. I like caring for animals and I hate when people have to deal with animal loss, and I hate to see them cry so I want to help them.” Although she did not specify what influenced her decision to be a vet when she grows up, I was able to draw conclusions from information I already know about her family and the environment she was raised in. My family lives on a family farm and every grandchild has grown up being around animals and learning to take care of them. This lifestyle had a huge impact on my development, and I can recognize the impact it also had on her with this decision for her future. Therefore, I think this had a major impact on her decision to become a veterinarian because her environment and culture shaped her experiences which led to this response.

The questions that related to the social and emotional aspect also were important when interviewing Alexis. It has been researched that as individuals’ transition from childhood into adolescence, their self-esteem is tested. She described herself as being “athletic, kind, sometimes respectful, compassionate, and dedicated to what I do.” I believe that the vocabulary she used not only showed her cognitive development but also her emotional development. These words can attribute to a positive self-esteem. However, as it has been researched, the likelihood of her self-esteem decreasing as she enters into adolescence is high. When asked who she goes to when faced with an issue, Alexis exclaims that she tries to fix it herself before she goes to either God, her teacher, her parents, or her sister. A personal fable is the “belief held by teenagers that their experiences are unique and different from those of everyone else” (Levine & Munsch, 2017, p. 239). During this stage of development, Alexis may develop a personal fable and that can be why she goes to herself first when faced with an issue rather than an adult. I think that Alexis has reached her potential at this age of development and she will have no issues reaching her full potential as she enters into adolescence.

**Adolescence**

Robert resembles the adolescence stage of development. He is eighteen years old and just graduated from high school and is currently in the job force working on our family farm. Robert would be towards the end of Freud’s genital stage of psychosexual development where sexual urges will reawaken and the sexual interest between peers may increase. Furthermore, he will be in the identity versus role confusion stage of Erikson’s psychosocial theory. This means that the individual will not only think about who they are as a person but also where they want to go as they enter into adulthood. This may be confusing for some adolescents as they are trying to develop a sense of self and where they belong in the world or society. According to Piaget, Robert would be in the formal operational stage of development where he has begun to develop abstract thinking. He will no longer take certain statements literally and will rather think abstractly about the certain concepts. Although Piaget believes this is the final stage of development, there are many theorists who believe there is a post formal operations stage afterwards as they continue into adulthood (Levine & Munsch, 2017).

One of the first steps of adolescent emotional and social development is finding autonomy, or freedom, and to start to become independent and establish their own identity separate from those around them. This may begin in the early teen years where individuals will distance themselves from their family and begin to focus on their peer groups, such as the middle childhood stage of development. Often times, during this stage of development, the individual will begin to compare themselves to the others in their peer group, called social comparison. By middle adolescence, the peer groups will begin to combine with boys and girls resulting in more intimate relationships that involve love and dating. Conflicts within the family and arguments may be at the highest it has ever been due to the changes the individual is experiencing, desire for independence, and puberty. By later adolescence, the individuals will disconnect from their parents and be almost fully independent with a few exceptions. Family conflicts will often resolve or become less frequent by this age as the individual is seeking to acquire adult status. Self-concept and self-esteem are both important in the development of adolescence as they strive to find their identity. They may experiment with different friend groups, dressing styles, or activities in search for who they are or who they want to be. As individuals reach the end of adolescence, they should be able to regulate their own emotions and deal with the emotions of those around them (Sanders, 2013).

Although the interview questions covered the same material for Robert, I based his questions off of work rather than school. I was expecting to get answers that were quite different than Abby and Alexis because of the age gap, gender difference, and different life experiences. Robert explained his family as being loving and helpful. In the future, Robert sees himself having a family and a well-paying job to support them. This can testify to the fact that during adolescence the individual is seeking independence and trying to find his or her identity. Furthermore, he describes himself as being “a hard worker, determined, confident, and strong willed.” As I mentioned earlier, Robert is my twin brother. However, I did not mention that he has a physical handicap and is not able to walk. This past summer he had double hip replacement and is working towards being able to walk, but these experiences have greatly shaped his physical and emotional development. Therefore, the words he used such as confident and determined I think are clear representations of the way he has emotionally developed. When we were younger, he often times was bullied in school and this would lead to some really hard times for not only him but also my family. He had to learn to deal with the opinions of others and build his self-confidence so that other words or actions would not hurt as bad. Robert’s experiences and physical setbacks forced him to learn to cope with his emotions and the opinions of those around him which has allowed him to reach his full potential.

I was excited to see how Robert would answer these questions because I would be able to recognize why he answered the questions the way he did. For example, I asked him how his job has affected him or what it has taught him. He replied by saying, “It has taught me to never give up. Don’t wait until tomorrow for what you can do today. It also taught me to work hard for what I want in life.” Although this question was aimed towards his job, where he works on our family farm and runs machinery, I wanted to see if he would draw his handicap into it which he did not. I think his answer fully emphasized that it takes a major amount of effort and determination to work on a farm and run big machinery. However, it had a larger impact on him because he had to push through his handicap, adjust, and make things possible. This answer showed his emotional development because I have recognized throughout his life that he has never given up and can do anything he puts his mind to despite his handicap and what others think. I believe that takes confidence in one-self and a high level of emotional development to understand that and work through it.

**Area of Focus**

My area of focus was on the emotional and social side of development. I asked questions such as “How would you describe yourself?” or “Who do you put your trust in?” I asked these specific questions because I wanted to see how each individual would answer based on their age. Each individual answered the questions differently but used their similar past experiences to form their responses. Although each individual has a more positive attitude and image of themselves, I think it is important to recognize that as Alexis is entering middle school that her self-esteem will likely change due to social comparison, puberty, and major life decisions. While conducting the interviews, Abby and Alexis both had a more positive attitude about answering the questions. However, Robert just wanted to get it over with. This could be because of gender, age, or personal preferences. For example, Robert told me that he enjoys doing hands on activities rather than book work. Therefore, he may have viewed this interview as relating to school and therefore had a more negative attitude. Abby and Alexis do not have a preference, they enjoy school, and learn either way which could have explained why they were more eager to help. The main thing that characterized Abby’s development was her focus on family and making connections to those close to her. However, Alexis’ development focused more on friendships and descriptive ideas of who she wants to be when she grows up. Robert can be characterized in the adolescent stage of development because he is beginning to question where he wants to go with his life and who he is.

**Similarities**

The main thing I found evident in each interview was the love for working and animals. Although Abby and Alexis did not specifically mention working as in a job, they spoke about taking care of animals. Furthermore, Robert works everyday to help around the farm and is also around animals. I think this was important in each individual’s development because it taught them self-discipline and that you have to work for what you want in life even if it isn’t easy. This can attend to their emotional development because they learned how to deal with their emotions and work through situations that others their age may have not been given the opportunity.

**Favorite Interview**

I really enjoyed conducting each of these interviews, but my favorite was my interview with Abby. At first, she was shy and wasn’t inclined for me to do this interview. However, after I explained the purpose and that her answers only mattered to me and there was no right or wrong answer, she changed her mind. Abby was eager and enthusiastic to answer each question and perform the interview as a whole. Although some of the questions were difficult for her to answer, she tried her best. I had to further explain some questions but, in the end, she was able to answer each question to the best of her ability and tried to give as much detail as possible. Alexis had some enthusiasm but was not as eager as Abby to answer the questions. Robert just wanted to get the interview over with so he could go back to what he was doing. Therefore, he did not give as much detail as I would have liked him to, but I was also able to draw from what I have recognized and his responses to help identify the stage of development he has reached.

**Overview of Interviews**

Abby, Alexis, and Robert are all different in their development and all have reached or will meet different milestones at different times. Abby answered each question to the best of her ability and was excited to be a part of this research. Alexis may not have answered with as much detail as she could have but she was still eager to help. Robert answered each question with enough information, but I think could have given more. Although Freud mentioned that Abby should be in the phallic psychosexual stage of development, I did not recognize this as much. However, I think she does fit into Jean Piagets preoperational stage of development. It may be difficult for her to think logically and understand other individuals’ perspectives, but she is able to draw conclusions about certain situations. As I mentioned in the beginning, Alexis has entered into Freud’s latency psychosexual stage. I was able to recognize this as she talked about her friends and, although she mentioned she liked talking about boys, she still fits into this stage as she was more focused on friendships rather than a dating relationship. Piaget believes Alexis would be in the concrete operations stage of development because she is beginning to think more logically and concrete. Robert would be in Freud’s genital stage. I did not conclude this from his interview but the past few years I have been able to recognize this as he moved from middle childhood to adolescence. With Robert I wanted to emphasize Erikson’s psychosocial theory and the identity versus role confusion stage. During the interview, Robert mentioned having a job to support his family in the future. I think this shows that he is trying to find his purpose while he is trying to find his place in the world so he can support his family in the future. Piaget claims that Robert would be in the formal operational stage of development where he would be thinking more abstractly, I do not think he is fully in this stage yet, however, he has entered it. He is able to think abstractly when on the job and working on equipment. However, he does not think as abstractly when it comes to schoolwork (Levine & Munsch, 2017).

**Recommendations**

I think that in the future, Alexis has potential to be whoever she wants to be, whether that be a veterinarian or anything else she puts her mind to. Within a few years she will be entering into the adolescent stage of development. This will come with many difficulties and new experiences that she may need encouragement to get through such as puberty, entering high school, and self-image. Although Alexis claims to have Abby for support, she does not have anyone her age to go to for help and Abby is much younger than her. She is the oldest out of all her siblings and I would be the closest supportive member of her family that is close to her age. When I was at this age, my mother began to explain the things that were coming in the future and built a trust so that I could go to her if I ever needed anything. I think this is important for Alexis and I believe that her mother should do the same things in order to make the transition into adolescence a little easier. In doing this I think it will strengthen their relationship. I know from personal experience that my mom is my best friend and I would not be where I am today without her. Therefore, I think that is it very important in this stage of development to form this bond so that when difficulties arise there is someone there that Alexis can trust to go to. I would recommend Alexis to not only form this relationship with her mother but also to be involved in school activities and the community throughout the rest of her middle childhood and into adolescence.

**Conclusions**

Throughout this process and researching the different stages of development, I am able to conclude that each individual is where they are recommended to be in development. My findings were expected, and I was able to use them to fully research and analyze the stages of development each individual was in. The only issue I encountered was finding the appropriate time to conduct the interview with Abby and Alexis. However, I spoke back and forth with my aunt and was able to narrow down a time that fit with my schedule and their school and sports schedule. I believe that my observations are valid because I researched each stage and recognized the similarities between the individuals and what normal development consisted of. I also believe that because each individual was towards the end of each age period that they would have had longer to enter into each stage of development and meet the milestones associated with it. If I were to conduct these interviews again, I would add questions such as “How important is emotional health to you?” or “Tell me what your dream life would be.” I think these would be important questions because they would make the individuals think more about themselves and what is important to them in the future along with their emotional development. My goal before this project was to conduct interviews and identity the stage of development each individual was in. I believe that I was able to appropriately identify each stage correctly with supporting evidence. I was able to learn how to analyze information and how certain characteristics are similar and different throughout development.

References

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