Three Ages Project Stage 2:

Interviews and Discussion

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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.

For this project, I interviewed 3 young males. Participant one, known as James, is a four-year-old. Participant two, known as Sam, is an eleven-year-old. Finally, participant three, known as John, is a fifteen-year-old. All three interviews took place in my home, specifically on my couch in my living room. I recorded each participant’s answer with a pen and paper. I chose these particular participants due to availability. Two of them, Sam and John, are my brothers, while James is someone who lives in my neighborhood that I frequently babysit. I wanted to make sure that I knew each participant on a personal level, allowing me to interpret their body language and answers in order to see how it correlated with their personalities. My group chose six particular questions that explored the physical, cognitive, and socio-emotional development of children in order to see how each subcategory differed among each age group. I found a particular interest in the cognitive side of this project, and found it very interesting how much the answers differed when it came to each participant within each age group. I expected the answers to be very different, especially when factoring in the physical development of the brain in each stage, which causes the older children to be more thorough while the younger child much more basic. Based on what we have learned about each subcategory; I was eager to see how well the textbook lined up with each personal interview with the participants.

Physical development is defined as “examining the ways in which the body’s makeup in areas such as the brain, the nervous system, the muscles, and senses help determine behavior” (Feldman 2012). Physical development makes up the basis of age progression, and it can affect cognitive and socio-emotional development in many different ways. In order for one to develop cognitively and socially, one must first develop physically. For this particular section we selected two questions that would examine how each age group viewed the different aspects of physical development: question one asking what the participants eye color was and if they knew where it came from, and question two asking the participant how tall they are and something else that was that tall. When James was asked question one, he hesitated in responding, not sure of what color his eyes were. With a little bit of prompting from his mother, he was able to come the conclusion that his eyes were green. When prompted to answer where that color came from, he responded with “the people who made me in mommy’s tummy made them that color.” Egocentrism is common at this stage in development, and according to Piaget, “egocentrism of the young child leads them to believe that everyone thinks as they do, and that the whole world shares their feelings and desires” (Telecommunications), which would explain why James thought eye color came from people who made it specifically for him. When asked how tall he was, he responded with “this tall” and pointed to the top of his head, and when asked what was the same height he responded with “me!” in a very excited voice. Again, egocentrism is very present at this stage of development, and James demonstrated that he was not very aware of others around him and the affect that they have on his development. In contrast, Sam’s answers were definitely more developed. When asked question one, he responded saying that his eyes are a mixture of blue and green and he got them from his dad. When asked how tall he was, he was able to answer saying “about 5 feet tall” and when asked what else was that tall he was able to compare his height to that of a dresser or bookshelf. Clearly, Sam has lost the sense of egocentrism that James has, and is able to understand the world around him and how it relates to him. Finally, John was able answer both questions thoroughly, as to be expected from a child at his age. He was able to say “grey, from my dad” in response to question one, and “5’11, similar to our refrigerator” in response to question two. John’s answers were expected to be concrete, due to the fact that he is almost fully developed physically, and no longer has the sense of egocentrism that James had. Although Sam and John’s answers did not differ much due to the small age difference between them, their answers differed greatly from James’s, showing the clear difference in physical development from age four to ages eleven and fifteen.

Cognitive development is defined as “seeking to understand how growth and change in intellectual capabilities influence a person’s behavior” (Feldman 2012). Cognitive development is very important due to the fact that it is a main factor in developing one’s personality. For this section, we chose two questions, that again, we thought would best show how each age group develops differently on a cognitive level. For question one we asked the participant’s preferred style of learning; whether it be lectures, visuals, or hands-on learning. For question two we asked the participant to recall their last birthday and describe it to us. When James was asked question one, he replied only after being prompted several times, finally saying “pictures because pictures are pretty!”. This answer was to be expected from a child his age due to the fact that he has not been in environment yet where he is forced to decide which method of learning he prefers. When asked question two, he responded in great detail about his monster truck birthday party, and proceeded to show me many different toys he had gotten from his parents and friends. I was surprised he was able to recall so much at such a young age, but I later found out that his birthday had only been a few weeks ago, giving an explanation of his accurate memory. According to Piaget, James is currently in the preoperational stage of cognitive development, which is characterized by “perception dominated and intuitive thought which is prone to errors in classification” (Arnold 2003). I expected James to not be able to recall his birthday accurately, if he was even able to recall it at all, and I think that if I were to ask him again later on, he would not be able to describe it correctly. He does align with the perception domination, thinking that the way he sees the world is the way all others do. Sam, on the other hand, is in the concrete operational stage, which is when children “begin to reason logically and organize thoughts coherently” (Arnold 2003). When asked question one he responded with “I like to learn through visuals, videos especially”. When asked question two he was able to talk about each and every friend who came to his party, the gifts he received, the theme of the party, and even the desert his mom made him. Although according to Piaget, Sam should only be able to remember some things from the past, he was able to remember a lot from almost a year ago, showing that Sam may have higher capabilities cognitively that what is expected of him at this stage. Finally, when John was asked question one he responded saying he prefers hands on activities because he prefers to learn by actually doing. He responded to question two with, again, a detailed list of where we went out to eat for his birthday because he chose to not have a party and all of the different gifts he received. According to Piaget, John is now in the formal operational stage, and he now has the ability to think abstractly. I agree with Piaget’s aspects of the formal operational stage, and think that they align very well with where John is at this point in his life cognitively. All three participants also align with Vygotsky’s theory when it comes to their preferred types of learning, because according to him “education should focus on activities that involve interaction of some sort” (Feldman 2012). Although James is too young to actually decide how he prefers to learn, he chose pictures when given the choice, and the other two boys agreed with him, choosing visuals and hands-on activities. Surprisingly, all three participants were quite similar when answering these particular questions dealing with the cognitive aspect of development. All three were able to recall their most recent birthday, and all three agreed that they prefer to learn through actually seeing it, rather than being told it. These questions showed me that stages of cognitive development are not always concrete, and a child at any age has the capability to excel cognitively.

Socio-emotional development is defined as the “way in which individuals’ interactions with others and their social relationships grow, change, and remain stable over the course of life” (Feldman 2012). Aside from cognitive development, socio-emotional is the most important factor when developing personality. Social development aides in figuring out who a child will become fast friends with and then later on decide who they will create life long bonds with. The two questions we chose for this subcategory allowed our group to examine how the children interact socially across the span of adolescence. Question one asked the child what they would like to be when they grow up, and question two asks whether the child prefers to play alone or with others. James responded to question one by saying that he wanted to be a superhero, because he wanted to be able to fly and crush cars. This answer was to be expected from James, because according to Ginzburg’s Three Periods, James is currently in the fantasy period where “all career choices and discarded without regard to skills, abilities, or available job opportunities” (Feldman 2012). Although James is at such a young age where he is not at the point where he needs to be thinking about what his career path will be, he is still clearly in the fantasy stage due to the fact that his career choice is unattainable. When responding to question two, James stated that he preferred playing with his friends rather than alone. Although he did not specify how he enjoyed playing with others, I would assume that he is currently in the stage where he participates in parallel play, according to theorist Mildred Parten. He then went on to describe how he played with his toys, not how he interacted with others using the same toys, further backing my theory. Sam responded to question one with “I am not quite sure yet, most likely something with computers”. He responded to question two saying he prefers to play with others. According to Ginzburg, Sam is now in the tentative period, where adolescents “begin to pragmatically think about the requirements of various jobs and how their own abilities might fit with those requirements” (Feldman 2012). Sam is somewhat aware of what he wants to do, and is beginning to figure out what jobs would best fit his personality. It is also quite common at his age to enjoy playing with others, showing that he is in the correct place socially. Finally, John responded to question one with large amounts of detail saying how he wants to become an airline pilot and what specific school he has to go through for that particular job. He answered question two by saying he actually prefers to be alone, also taking stating he “does not really play anymore”. John is clearly in the realistic period of Ginzburg’s three stages, where “people explore career options through job experience and training, narrow their choices, and eventually make a commitment to a career” (Feldman 2012). John has a clear, concrete idea of what he wants to do with his career, showing that he truly has reached the realistic period. It is also common for children to become more independent and not rely on others as much as they grow older, showing that the fact that he prefers to spend time alone is within his developmental limits. This is the subcategory where the answers varied most among the participants, which I expected. Career choices are a personal, social choice, which is expected to vary among different people. I also expected the younger participants to prefer to play with others and the older one to prefer to be alone. These questions showed me that socially, different age groups vary significantly, and it is hard to predict someone’s socio-emotional status based only on age.

When beginning the interview process, I expected my participants to be very different based on the gap between their ages, but they actually turned out to be very similar physically, cognitively, and socio-emotionally. I found the greatest, if not only, major difference between the three of them to be physical, especially when taking under consideration how egocentric James is at this stage in his life. Sam and John were able to connect their height and eye color to things around him, while James was prone to think that those things were made specifically for him, not contributing factors from people in his family. Other than physically, the three participants were very similar cognitively and socio-emotionally; all knowing things like what they wanted to be when they grew up and how they preferred to learn. Although the answers differed slightly merely due to the age difference between them, they all seemed confidant in their answers and knew how to answer my questions accurately. Developmentally, I noticed only a few specific things about each participant. As said before, James was highly egocentric, and that was evident through his answers, but that is developmentally appropriate at that age. Sam had grown out of the egocentric phase, and was able to coherently answer all of my questions thoroughly, but I could tell that he was still dependent on others in some ways. John was the most independent, which is to be expected because he is the closest to adulthood. When looking at all of the participants, I noticed the theories of Piaget and Ginzburg the most. Piaget’s stages of cognitive development were very clear in all three subjects, and it was interesting to see how they all fell into the categories he theorized. Ginzburg’s theories aided me a lot when looking at the career all of the participants chose, and how each age group fell into the correct stage of career development. I was also able to notice small parts of Vygotsky’s and Parten’s theories; Vygotsky explaining the preferred type of learning to be visual, and Parten describing the different types of play in preschool children. I only found inconsistencies with Sam in Piaget’s concrete operational stage, seeing that I observed him to be more capable cognitively then Piaget’s stage expected.

James still has a lot of developmental milestones to meet, and I think that he will eventually meet them all with the correct assistance. Although he is only four, he seems very attached to family, and not as social as he could be at that age, which makes it difficult to develop along with others and reach full personal potential. Putting him into preschool is the best course of action at this point, and I think that it will be a good experience for him. Being around others will allow his egocentric personality to decrease, causing him to be more aware of others and their affect on his life. In school I think that he should be placed in a group of children with similar interests as him, thus allowing him to form bonds with other children that will force him to reach his full physical, cognitive, and socio-emotional potential.

Overall, my three participants answered in the ways I expected them to. With the theories of Piaget, Ginzburg, Vygotsky, and Parten, I was able to see the stages of development we learned come to life within my subjects, which was something that I think made the interview process so interesting. The only surprises I encountered were some participants exceeding the expectations that the theorists had set in my mind about development, but that was really only present in Sam cognitively. I ran into a few difficulties with getting James to answer the questions fully, which was to be expected from his young age, and I was able to coax the answers out of him eventually. I feel that although my observations aligned with so much of what we have learned, all of them are not specifically valid. In order to achieve full validity, I would have interviewed a larger amount of people and compared all of their answers by age. With such a small sample it is hard to determine whether my answers were completely valid, or just specific to my three participants. If I was ever to do a follow up, I think I would try to ask more questions that focused on the cognitive side of development, due to the fact that that particular category shows the most distinct difference in development, and it cannot strictly be seen like physical and social development. Through the questions I asked and through observation of the behavior of my participants, I was able to get a strong understanding on the features that differentiate one age group from another, especially when dealing with the subcategories of physical, cognitive, and socio-emotional development.

Works Cited

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