Three Ages Project

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Pledge: I have neither given nor received help on this work, nor am I aware of any infraction of the Honor Code.



**Introduction**

To investigate the different stages and types of development throughout early childhood (ages 3 to 6), later childhood (ages 7 to 12), and adolescence (ages 13 to 19), I interviewed one person from each age group. For the first age group, I interviewed Jaquelin, a 5-year-old girl. For the second age group, I interviewed Jaquelin’s brother, Matt, who is 10 years old. I chose them because I go to church with their family, and I had babysat them several times in the past. Therefore, they were both very open with me. I interviewed them at their house so they would feel comfortable in an environment that was familiar to them. More specifically, I interviewed Jaquelin in her bedroom where she keeps all of her toys and Matt in their living room. I also interviewed my friend James, who is a close friend of mine that I know through school as well as a small church group. I interviewed him outside of my dorm on campus. For each interview, I took notes about different observations I noticed regarding details such as the interviewee’s body language as well as recording each response given.

The purpose of these interviews was to take a deeper look into these three different age groups and gauge where they are developmentally. By analyzing the responses that I got from Jaquelin, Matt, and James, I was able to see where each person was developmentally on an individual level, as well as finding out how these characteristics are reflected across all individuals in each given age group.

For each interview, I focused on three specific types of development, which are physical, cognitive, and social development. With each type, I asked questions that were catered towards their age group to gauge where each interviewee was in their development in the given category. Along with these main three components, I tried to look into how different factors such as socioeconomic status, cultural background, and parenting types effected their development. I expected to find that these three individuals would be on track developmentally. I also expected to see how these different factors effected how advanced or behind they were in their development. Through this project, I hope to better understand these crucial developmental stages better as it pertains to the specific individuals I chose to interview and to others.

**Three Areas of Development**

Physical development is essentially how the body grows in its physical makeup. This includes the brain, muscles, nervous system, and gross and fine motor skills. Most of the changes in one’s physical development is apparent in the early childhood stage of life, where children are learning different motor skills and how to use them. From early childhood through much of adolescence, the body is rapidly growing and changing. It must be taken care of and used in order to continue to develop a stronger, healthier body with the ability to use fine motor skills.

Cognitive development displays how an individual is growing on an intellectual level. It also goes deeper to understand one’s behaviors. Specifically looking into Piaget’s stages of cognitive development, the preoperational, concrete operational, and formal operational stages will be most apparent in this project. As I investigate this aspect of development, it is important to note that one’s thoughts should be able to become more abstract and complete as age increases.

Social development is important in understanding how an individual is able to interact and learn from the environment around them. This is especially apparent in understanding how people form and grow relationships with others, as well as seeing how these relationships evolve over time. It is also crucial in investigating how having interactions with other people is shaping the individual in ways such as their ability to be socially adequate or how they may see themselves through the eyes of those around them.

**Interview One: Early Childhood**

My first interview was with a five-year-old girl named Jaquelin. I could notice right from the beginning of our interview that she was fairly distracted, and she did not want to sit still, which I expected for someone her age, which I would assume would have a lot of energy and a short attention span. In relation to her physical development, this was a good sign. She was well able to run around and play, showing her gross motor skills, and her ability to play and interact with her smaller toys showed that she was doing well in developing her fine motor skills. In looking into her cognitive development, Jaquelin is Piaget’s preoperational stage. This means that she should be able to use proper grammar and syntax to express herself. I noticed that she was lacking in this aspect at times. For instance, when asking her, “what do you do before bedtime?” she replied, “I put on my jammies and me and, me and my mommy, me and my mommy we, we like to read. Yeah, we like to read. I like brown bear because, uh, because I know the words.” I could tell that she had a full thought, yet she had a very hard time pausing and getting her words out. She continued to repeat and stumble on her words a lot during the interview, which showed some cognitive weakness. On the other hand, this response also gave insight to how parenting was playing a role in her cognitive development. She let me know that her mom was active in helping her learn how to read, which would give her an advantage in developing intellectually, thus showing that she has a strong foundation in her microsystem. This ability to have a close relationship with her mom was further enforced by the fact that when asked if her mom and dad brought her to daycare, she asked, “What is daycare?” The fact that she did not even know what daycare is was surprising. Now that I knew that she had a very strong family foundation, I wanted to better understand if she was developing well socially, especially without the exposure to other kids through outlets like daycare. Unfortunately, when I asked how she makes friends at question number seven, she was starting to get antsy and unfocused, which wasn’t necessarily anything to worry about because of her age. The questions I asked after this also received “Are we done yet?” kinds of responses. The most revealing response socially was that when I asked Jaquelin if she ever feels mad, she said, “Yeah when my brothers wanna play baseball.” This made me slightly concerned that she was not getting experience in building relationships outside of her family and brothers, and that if her brothers were not playing with her, she was on her own. Since she did not show any evidence of identifying with her peers besides her brother, I noticed that she instead identified more with fictional characters in television shows and movies. She found particular interest in characters like Elsa and the cast of Trolls. In conclusion to investigating her social development, I asked her, “Is a nurse a boy or a girl?” in which she thought that nurses were girls because of the nurse at her school being a girl. This let me know that this could change over time as she gains more life experiences, but as of now, the culture she lives in has affected her viewpoint, even at just five-years-old. Finally, to gauge how she saw herself, I asked her to tell me something that she liked about herself, to which she replied, “I like pink and purple and red and uh blue and orange and uh, um, oh I like gold because gold is the prettiest and everyone loves gold!” Although she didn’t quite answer my question, she did show traces of egocentrism where she assumed that everyone liked the same things that she does. Overall, my impression of Jaquelin was that she was fairly well rounded developmentally.

**Interview Two: Later Childhood**

When I interviewed Matt, Jaquelin’s ten-year-old brother, I was very impressed. I already knew that he was in the Talented and Gifted program in school, and it was very apparent in the way that he carried himself. He was able to sit through the entire interview and he usually spoke in a more mature manner. I felt as if I could carry a full, adult conversation with him. He presented himself to be a very well-rounded child. When I asked him if he played any sports, he said, “Yeah, I’m actually really good at baseball and swimming. I played on the travel team too so, yeah, I’m pretty good at it.” He also mentioned how he played outside with his neighbor a lot, which was a good sign that he was getting a lot of physical activity, something that is necessary for a kid his age. This was also significant in showing how he is able to create social relationships out of his physical needs, thus showing a major overlap in these developmental types. Another way that he mentioned he made friends was from church. All of these factors show how Matt’s microsystem has had a substantial impact on his ability to grow socially. On the other hand, when asked if a nurse could be a boy or a girl, he said, “All the nurses I know are girls. I guess they can be boys too. I don’t know.” This was representative of his macrosystem, and how his culture has exposed him to female nurses. However, as he is at the end stage of the concrete operational stage and moving towards the formal operational stage, as well as considering his gifted cognition, it was notable that he was beginning to break the norm that has been fed to him and begin to think for himself. He was not very confident in his answer, but the fact that he started to shift his thinking was significant. Expanding on his cognitive abilities, when I asked if he enjoyed going to school, he said, “I like school right now, I finally figured out my teacher and I really like her now, cause I like teachers that actually know how to control the class but also let us have fun, so that’s cool I guess.” I noted this to be a very sophisticated answer for a fifth grader to give. His ability to pick out what good discipline looks like as well as being able to analyze others was very impressive. This further enforced how strong standing he is within the microsystem. When I asked Matt to tell me something about himself, I was looking to see how he interpreted himself from the outside looking in, as well as seeing how his passions affect him. He talked about how he could put his foot over his head and how his brother couldn’t do the same thing. This was expected from someone his age, especially how he compared himself to his brother. This was a good reminder of how much siblings and others close in age to those in this stage of development can easily influence someone.

**Interview Three: Adolescence**

The last person that I interviewed was James, a seventeen-year-old boy that I know from school and my church group. Right from the beginning of our interview, I could tell that James was fairly uncomfortable based on his body language. He was sitting in a very closed off manner and he was slightly fidgeting the whole time. You could tell that he was nervous, and maybe even somewhat embarrassed, to answer questions about himself. At the beginning of the interview, we discussed his physical development. When asked if he enjoyed working out and how much sleep he usually got, he said that he did enjoy working out sometimes, and that he usually got six to seven hours of sleep a night. This was fairly typical for someone his age, especially being a busy college student. Looking into his cognitive development, I asked him if he enjoyed school. He said, “No. Well, yes, I like learning, but no I don’t like doing work.” This was interesting in showing how there was a loss of motivation for work, but the desire and ability to think and learn abstractly, as shown in the formal operations stage, was still present. When asked to describe his social life, he said, “Pretty chill. I don’t know. Pretty flourishing. I have a lot of friends right now and I like all of them. How many more questions?” This was on track developmentally as adolescents often find their identity through their friend groups. However, his eagerness to move along with the interview led me to believe that maybe his friend group was not as strong or meaningful as he may want it to be. To get a better understanding of this social development, I asked if he had gone to daycare as a kid, to which he replied that he had. This helped to solidify his ability to make many friends as he was exposed to the need to create new relationships outside of his direct family from a very young age. As a contrast to seeing his ability to create many relationships, I asked James, “How independent would you describe yourself to be?” to which he responded, “I’m very independent, but I like to be around people. I don’t know. I don’t need to be around people, but I like to have people around.” This helped me to understand better how he is actually well rounded socially. His ability to adapt to his situation and seek out both relationships and independents seemed very socially mature and healthy. When I asked James if a nurse could be a man or a woman, he said that “anyone can be whatever they want.” This showed how American dream culture in the macrosystem has influenced his development, and how he does not play into gender stereotypes. Perhaps one of his most interesting responses was when I asked him to tell me something about himself. He said, “I can’t, I don’t know, you tell something about me.” The idea of talking about himself made him incredibly uncomfortable, which can be expected from adolescents in that they often go through cycles of low self-esteem. Also, it seemed as if he would not want to sound like he was either boring or bragging, and that he could not find a middle ground. This need to please and validation in others was expected from this age group.

**Discussion**

In comparing and contrasting the three individuals that I interviewed, I found that their microsystems, as a part of Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model, was the most apparent and influential part of their development, whether that was physically, cognitively, and socially. It seemed as though their background pertaining to how they are being raised or were raised by their parents, their school experience, church groups, peers, and more were the things that had the most direct effect on each response that was given. Without a strong foundation in this aspect, their development in all three categories would very likely fall short of average. In fact, having this strong foundation is what allowed any early developmental advancements, such as Matt’s enhanced cognitive abilities that were ahead for his age. I also noticed Piaget’s four stages of cognitive development as they were apparent in the early childhood stage with Jaquelin and her development of more cohesive language and fine tuning motor skills, and how they were represented through Matt and James in their ability to show their how they conceptualize different subjects and utilize more abstract thinking in a simple interview.

One of the major differences that I saw throughout the three interviews was a vast difference in confidence that I was not expecting to find. Jaquelin, on one hand, was very confident and egocentric. She had a playful, energetic confidence about her, and she felt that everyone understood what the world looked like through her eyes. Her brother, Matt, also showed higher confidence, but only in comparing himself to his peers or siblings. On the other hand, James was a major turning point. His uncomfortable nature throughout the interview and his short, uncertain responses to the given questions led me to understand how self-esteem in adolescents can be a major influencing factor on development. His identity was largely found in his friends, and although he liked to be independent, having a one on one conversation seemed very intimidating to him.

The only observation that I made that was inconsistent with Piaget’s theory was when I interviewed Matt. I felt as though he was able to think abstractly and begin to create more deep, logical arguments when challenged. This is more fluent with the formal operations stage, in which Matt was only a year away from. Regardless, he was very advanced in his cognitive development, and I felt as though he should not be confined to the concrete operational stage.

**Recommendations**

Focusing more on Jaquelin’s development, I feel as though she has a lot of potential in becoming a very bright person. However, she is starting to fall somewhat short cognitively and socially. As for her cognitive development, I would recommend that she receive some help with her speech. Being that she is in Piaget’s second stage of cognitive development, the preoperational stage, it is more noticeable that she is having trouble speaking coherently and getting her thoughts out. She often was very repetitive and could not figure out how to stop and catch her breath to finish her sentence. Also, I would recommend that she should gain more experience socially. It is fortunate that her family is of a high enough socioeconomic status to not need to put her in daycare, but that has confined her friends to her brothers. Although it is important for her to have this close familial bond, it is also important for her to learn how to socialize with others closer to her age and more often, rather than relying on her brothers.

**Conclusion**

Through these interviews, it is apparent how impactful these theories of development are on all stages of life. More specifically, the theories of Bronfenbrenner and Piaget were the most apparent. My findings were mostly in line with where each individual is expected to be developmentally. However, I was surprised to find suck vast differences in confidence and body language over the three age groups. The problems that I encountered were mostly getting the younger children to focus on the task at hand and getting the response that I was looking for in relation to different theories I was aiming to test. For getting the children’s attention, I had to accept and observe this as a part of their development. As for the unclear responses, I had to try to cater the questions to the specific age group. Also, if I did not get a response that I expected, I had to take it as an opportunity to learn something different from what I intended.

I do feel that my observations are valid. This project is a perfect way to further investigate such developmental stages, as it goes to the primary source and gives a first-hand look at each age group. Also, the fact that my findings strongly align with existing developmental theories is reassuring in the fact that each analysis of the interviewee’s responses is valid and useful in educating myself and others of these stages of child development.

If I could follow-up on my observations and add questions, I would want to ask more detailed questions with exacting language. However, I think that it would also be just as important to add some more open-ended questions to gauge how the interviewee would respond without being directly prompted how to answer.

Overall, these interviews were able to better represent the significance of these different types of development and how different theories of development are seen in real life.

**References**

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