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.

Abstract

The goal of the Three Ages Project is to observe and examine changes in development through different stages from childhood to adolescence. I interviewed three participants, asking them two or three questions with respect to the physical, cognitive, and social-emotional domains of development, as well as two questions dealing with a special interest. My three participants were Mark, Rose, and Jason. Mark is five years old and in the early childhood stage, Rose is eleven and in later childhood, and Jason is seventeen and in the adolescent stage of development. Within the discussion, I examined some of the participant’s responses compared to typical characteristics of physical development, Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory, Gardner’s Theory of Multiple Intelligences, and Erikson’s Psychosocial Theory. I found that, for the most part, the participant’s responses were consistent with aspects of these theories.

Three Ages Project

During this project, I interviewed the three participants with questions regarding their physical, cognitive, and social-emotional development. This project included the stages of early childhood, from three to six years, later childhood, from seven to twelve years, and adolescence, which includes ages thirteen to seventeen years. The three participants for this project were Mark, Rose, and Jason. Mark is five years old, Rose is eleven years old, and Jason is seventeen years old. I chose Mark because he is the only child I know in the early childhood age range. His mom is the co-leader of a Girl Scout Troop along with my mom and I have babysat Mark a few times. Mark was interviewed in his bedroom with my sister also in the room. I recorded the interview on my phone and took a few notes after the interview regarding what Mark was doing during the interview and a few things that I noticed after the interview was over. Rose is the youngest of my two sisters and is at the end of the later childhood range. Rose’s interview was completed in the living room at our house and was also recorded on my phone. Unlike the interview with Mark, Rose was not doing anything else during the interview and was able to completely focus on the questions and her answers. The last participant, Jason, is my brother and is near the middle of the adolescent age range. The interview with Jason was done in the front living room in our house and was also recorded on my phone. While Jason was not doing anything else during the interview, he was not as focused and serious about the interview like Rose was but joked around while answering the questions. My goal for this project is to see how certain aspects of physical, cognitive, and social-emotional development change from early childhood to later childhood to adolescence. In order to do this, I asked each of the three participants the same questions or variations of the same questions to accurately compare the changes in development across the age groups. For the area of special interest, my questions deal with what the participant wants to be when they grow up and what their favorite form of entertainment is. For these questions in particular, I expected the reasons behind the answers to be more thoughtful as the age ranges increased. For example, I expected Mark to say the first career that came to his mind and provide a very basic explanation for why he chose that specific career, contrasted with Jason who is in adolescence. I expected Jason to have a more thoughtful explanation and career choice. Overall, I anticipated the answers to the questions to become more thoughtful and developed in each proceeding age group.

**Interviews**

The first set of questions that each participant was asked pertained to the domain of physical development. Physical development is defined as the changes in the body and brain, such as changes in size and strength, as well as the development of fine and gross motor skills (Levine, 2016, p. 9). For my first question, I asked each of the participants what sports they play; however, the second part of the question varied slightly between the age groups. For Mark in early childhood, I asked what his favorite activity to do outside was while for Rose and Jason, in later childhood and adolescence, I asked for their favorite physical activity. Mark said that he did not play any sports, but he is about to start “basketball, wait, soccer ball” and that his favorite thing to do outside is hula hoop because he already knows how to do it. Throughout the entire interview, Mark was flipping around his room and doing cartwheels, and after the interview, he talked about how he goes to gymnastics on Fridays. This type of high energy is typical for Mark, as well as younger children. Rose is not currently involved in any sports, but she participated in track conditioning this year and played on a basketball team two years ago. When I asked why Rose likes basketball, she stated that she was not interested in any sports until she played basketball in gym. She started to like basketball and continued to play it after she made her first basket, stating “I like this game cause I’m actually good at it and can do stuff.” This feeling expressed by Rose can be connected to her self-esteem, as she feels better about herself and her athletic abilities after finding a sport that she is good at. The boost in her self-esteem helped to spark her interest in basketball and other sports, like track. Jason is not involved in any sports either, but he would like to start competing in Strong Man. Jason’s favorite physical activity is working out because “it’s fun and people don’t talk to me when I work out.” For my second question, I asked each participant if they are shorter, taller, or the same size are their peers and for early childhood. I also asked Mark if he could tell me someone or something that is shorter, taller, or the same size as him. Mark stated that he is the same size as all of his friends and that his sister, who is in later childhood, is taller than he is. Rose stated that she always says she is short but she “thinks she is about average size for most of the sixth graders” and is “four foot ten.” When I asked Jason, he simply answered “short.” He then elaborated, explaining that most of his friends are girls, so they are all shorter than he is, but when he is around other guys, he is typically shorter.

I next asked each participant questions relating to cognitive development. Cognitive development involves the changes in how one thinks, understands, and reasons about the world. This domain also includes how one uses all of their knowledge to solve problems and make decisions (Levine, 2016, p. 9). I asked each individual what their favorite subject in school is, as well as asking the participants in the later childhood and adolescent stages how their grades in this subject compared to the grades in their other courses, expecting to see a higher grade in their favorite subject. When I asked Mark this question, I listed the main subjects of math, science, history, and reading. Mark said that he has history, but when I asked if it was his favorite, he said it was fine. He went on to say that he “forgot about it” and he is “doing it tomorrow.” When I just asked what his favorite thing to do in school was without listing subjects, Mark said that he liked computer lab the best because he could play games, especially the My Little Pony game which is his favorite. Mark explained that in this game you just move the pony to get all of the coins and when you get all the coins, you get a power up. Rose said her favorite subject would be math or band. Her reasoning for band included that it is fun, she gets to practice her instrument, it is “probably one of the easiest classes” that she has, and she “loves the trombone and music.” For math, Rose began by saying that most people will say that they hate math because they are bad at it, but she finds it easy and likes doing math and is a “nerd.” When asked if her grade in these subjects were higher than the grades in others, Rose laughed while saying no. In all of her other subjects, she has an A; however, in math she has an A-. After stating that she did not know why she has an A- in math instead of an A, Rose suggested that it may be because she has a difficult time on all of the tests and will “panic a lot.” After repeatedly answering “lunch,” Jason came to the conclusion that “psychology is pretty fun” and he had “good grades in there because [he] did stuff.” Then, I asked each child how they learn best, providing examples like worksheets, writing, hands-on activities, reading, or listening. Mark responded that when he is in school, he likes playing games more and again talked about the My Little Pony game. When I asked Rose, she said that it depends on the subject, for example, she learns by doing math problems in math, experiments in science, reading in civics and English, and playing her instrument and being able to hear the correct notes in band. She said there is not one method that she prefers; however, she is the worse with auditory learning, except in a class like band where you have to be able to listen to the notes. Jason also stated that his learning style depends on what he is doing and said that if he is “learning nuclear physics [it is] probably not with his hands, but if it’s like building a house” he learns better by doing it. He kept saying that he learns by just “doing it” and he remembers things more when he reads them rather than when someone is talking because he does not pay attention when others are talking. From this, I concluded that he is most likely a kinesthetic or visual learner. Finally, I asked Rose and Jason how they typically solve a difficult problem, further explaining the question by asking if they generally give up, set it down and come back to it, ask someone else for help, or continuously try to solve the problem on their own. After thinking for a little, Rose said that in math, she will usually ask someone for help, but in her other subjects she will come back to it later and then ask for help if she still cannot solve the problem. Jason said that he generally tries to figure the problem out or he will go to someone he knows is good in that particular area for help.

The third category of questions refers to social-emotional development, or the changes in how one connects and interacts with others, as well as understand their own emotions and the emotions of others (Levine, 2016, pp. 9-10). I began by asking the three participants about the size of their friend group. For Mark, I asked if he liked to play with one to two friends or a lot of friends at one time and he immediately exclaimed “one hundred” and said that it is more fun to play with more people. Usually, Rose prefers to hang out with a smaller group of people, like two or three people, because when she is in a larger group, “it starts to get overwhelming.” She said that even in math, the class where she has the most friends, she typically only talks to one. Jason said it depends on the group of friends he is hanging out with, but “smaller I guess unless I want to hang out with a big group.” After asking him to define what constitutes a small and large group, he said that a small group is around three people, a medium group is about five to seven, and a large group is in the double digits. Then, he said that seven is about how many people he hangs out with at one time, therefore, he prefers to be in a medium sized group. As a way to get an idea about how each person handles their emotions, I asked each participant what they do when they get really angry, scared, or excited. Mark immediately responded that he “slaps people in the face” when he is angry and runs out of the house when he is excited. When I asked if he actually slaps people or if that is what he wants to do, he said that he actually slaps them. Mark’s mom mentioned that he has been a little more aggressive; however, I am not sure if he has actually slapped anyone in the face out of anger. Rose kept responding “I don’t know” and then said that she does not remember ever being really mad, scared, or excited. I then asked her to pick any emotion and she said that if she is nervous, she laughs a lot and if she gets really nervous, she might have a panic attack. She said that even though she is lazy, when she is sad, she gets even more lazy, but does not cry that much. After joking that he punches someone to handle every emotion, Jason asked if “not handling my emotions is an option.” He said that sometimes he ignores them or brushes them off. As his sister, I mentioned that when he is angry, he will yell at others and he said that is what happens when he is pushed over the edge and explodes after people know he is mad and keep antagonizing him.

Finally, I chose two questions of special interest to ask each of the three participants. I decided to ask what they wanted to be when they grew up and what their favorite form of entertainment is. I chose these two questions because they could possibly be applied to any of the three domains depending on the participants answer, therefore, giving me more information about that participant’s development within a particular domain. Following a little thought, Mark said he wanted to be a race car driver because he can “ride fast.” I then asked him what his favorite show is, and he said, “My Little Pony because I love unicorns,” then listed off the ones that he has, which are also his favorite ones in the show. Rose wants to be a teacher when she grows up because she likes helping people. She then told me a story of her fifth-grade year in which her class would go help a first-grade class, which she really enjoyed. They would help the students and sometimes would teach them something that was at a higher level, for example, she helped teach a student multiplication after they finished their work. Rose said that she listens to a lot of music and watches a lot of videos, but she also enjoys reading. She loves going roller skating or bowling but does not get to do those activities very often. Finally, she chose music as her favorite form of entertainment because “music is fun” and listening to music helps her relax if she is stressed about homework or something else. Jason immediately said that he wanted to be a Christian counselor because he “thinks it would be cool and I think people need people to help them do things.” When I asked why he wanted to be specifically a Christian counselor, he said “because I’m a Christian and want to be a counselor.” Jason’s favorite form of entertainment is YouTube because he can spend hours watching videos. He has a wide variety of interests in the videos he watches, watching anything from Minecraft videos, workout videos, and videos about knives. He also likes YouTube because it is easily accessible since it is on his phone and he can watch it anywhere so if people are annoying him, he can leave and keep watching the videos.

**Discussion**

By asking the same or similar questions in each interview, I was able to observe some similarities and differences between the three participants even though they were each at a different stage of development. For physical development, I asked about each participant’s height compared to their peers, and from this, I observed that each of the three participants are on track in this domain, at least with respect to height. Mark, who is five years old, said that he is the same size as his classmates; Rose, who is eleven, is four foot ten, and an average height compared to her peers; and Jason, seventeen years old, is taller than most of his peers who are girls, but is short compared to other boys his age. Typically, girls will experience a growth spurt around the ages of nine or ten years while boys will experience a growth spurt about two years later, so roughly the ages of eleven or twelve (Levine, 2016, p. 467). Rose is on track developmentally, which is evidenced by her being roughly the same size as most of her peers. Rose is eleven years old, meaning that she should have experienced a growth spurt, resulting in her being taller than some of the boys who have yet to have a growth spurt. In a few years, if Rose and her peers are developing at the average or expected age, most of the boys should be taller than the girls as they will also have had their growth spurt. During his interview, Jason mentioned that he is taller when compared to girls his age, but shorter than most of the other boys, showing that he is also on track with his physical development. Generally, girls are shorter than boys due to them experiencing their growth spurt at an earlier age than boys (Levine, 2016, 468). Jason is taller than most of his peers who are girls, which is consistent with the ideas of physical development of adolescents. However, Jason is shorter than most boys his age, but this can be the result of genetics, as both of Jason’s parents are around the same height, if not shorter, than Jason.

One of my focuses in the cognitive domain was how the participants handled difficult problems. When writing and asking this question, I used the example of a difficult math problem to help the participants better understand what the question was asking. Although I did not ask this question to the participant in the early childhood stage, Lev Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory and Zone of Proximal Development can be applied to the participants in the later childhood and adolescent stages. The Zone of Proximal Development, or ZPD is the area in which the child can almost perform a certain task but needs assistance from a more knowledgeable or skilled adult or peer, known as scaffolding, in order to move ahead and accomplish the task (“Vygotsky’s Sociocultural,” 2018). Both Rose and Jason said that when faced with a difficult problem, they will continue to try and work it out on their own, but eventually will ask someone else for help, and as Jason stated, someone who is skilled in the area they are having trouble with. This is an example of Vygotsky’s ZPD because both participants are almost able to complete the problem on their own but need a little more help from someone more skilled in that area in order to accurately solve the problem and be able to do it on their own. Both participants stated that they will continue to try and solve the problem on their own first and may even set it down and come back to it later. However, if they still cannot solve the problem correctly, they find someone who they know is skilled in that area to explain the problem to them. By finding someone to explain the problem rather than looking up and copying the answer, Rose and Jason will both be better able to complete this same task on their own in the future because they received support from a more skilled peer or adult in that particular area. I also asked about each of the participant’s learning styles, which relates to Howard Gardner’s Theory of Multiple Intelligences. All three participants preferred to play games or do hands-on activities to help them learn and would most likely be kinesthetic learners. One of Gardner’s eight types of intelligence is bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, which involves physical movements and motor control and people in this type of intelligence are more likely to remember concepts by doing them instead of simply seeing or hearing about the concept (Cherry, 2019). Rose also mentioned that she preferred doing experiments in science and her favorite subject is math, meaning she is also strong in logical-mathematical intelligence. People who are strong in this type of intelligence are often good at reasoning, logically analyzing or solving problems, as well as the ability to think about abstract concepts (Cherry, 2019). Because Rose enjoys math and science and is able to easily and logically solve problems, even ones she may not completely know how to do, she is most likely strong in both bodily-kinesthetic and logical-mathematical intelligence.

For the social-emotional domain, I asked each participant about the size of their friend group to get an idea of how social each person is, as well as what they do when they experience certain emotions, such as anger, to see how they generally handle their emotions. Mark seems to be the most social, answering that he likes to play with one hundred people while Rose and Jason both seemed to prefer to be in a smaller, more intimate group. These preferences can be explained by Erik Erikson’s Psychosocial Theory. Erikson’s theory is comprised of eight stages that account for infancy through later adulthood. Mark, who is five, would be in the third stage, initiative versus guilt, which covers ages three to five years. The main outcome of this stage is the virtue of purpose, therefore, children in this stage may be more assertive and can even be more aggressive (McLeod, 2018). This is consistent with my observations of Mark as he stated that when he is angry, he likes to slap people in the face and his mother’s comment that she has seen Mark become a little more aggressive. Play is also a staple of this stage, as children will be interacting with others more now that they are starting school, and this gives the children a chance to initiate activities, as well as develop interpersonal skills with other children (McLeod, 2018). During the interview, Mark said that he liked to play with “one hundred” friends at a time, which is also consistent with Erikson’s initiative versus guilt stage as a child in this stage will be more regularly interacting with others. Industry versus inferiority is the fourth stage in Erikson’s theory and includes ages five to twelve years. During this stage, peer or friend groups tend to “gain greater significance” (McLeod, 2018). Rose, who is eleven, stated that she prefers to hang out with a smaller group of people, even when she is in an area where she knows most of the people. She prefers a smaller group because it is more intimate, meaning she is able to form very strong connections to a few friends rather than having a multitude of friends, all of which she may not have as deep of a connection. Children in this stage start to seek approval and take pride in their successes and if children are encouraged, they can gain a sense of industry, while if they are restricted or not encouraged, they can feel inferior (McLeod, 2018). Rose has an A in all of her subjects, except math which is an A-. She is proud of her accomplishments in school, however, she gets nervous during tests, which can cause her to perform worse than expected. While Rose may have more experiences relating to the industry side of this stage, her performances on tests may make her feel inferior when it comes to other tests, causing her to become nervous and again not complete the assignment to the best of her ability. Jason is in the fifth stage, identity versus role confusion, which lasts from twelve to eighteen years of age and involves the sexual and occupational identities (McLeod, 2018). Jason is currently seventeen; however, throughout his time in this stage, I have seen Jason become more involved with his church and take pride in his various accomplishments and involvements with his church. Jason now wants to be a Christian counselor when he is older, which can be explained by him finding his identity through increased involvement and pride with his religion and church. He has also realized that he wants to help others and a Christian counselor is a way to combine both of these aspects about himself into one career. Sexual identity is another aspect of this stage and it is common for children in this stage to not like their body image and seek to change it. Jason stated that he likes working out because it is fun, and no one talks to him. However, Jason may also be uncomfortable with his body or just want to improve his body image and seeks to do this through working out every day.

**Recommendations**

After conducting all the interviews, the main recommendations that I have for each participant deals with how they handle their emotions. Mark stated that when he gets really angry, he will slap people in the face. I would recommend that Mark develop other strategies for expressing his motions, especially anger, and that his parents also work with him to help him develop these skills. Mark’s parents and teachers can possibly work with him to focus more on using language to express his emotions instead of expressing them through physical actions. Rose did not remember a time when she was extremely angry, sad, or excited, but instead talked about when she gets nervous. She stated that she does not do the best on tests because she starts to panic and when she gets very nervous, she can have panic attacks. For Rose, I recommend that she try and find ways to help her calm down when she is feeling very nervous. Rose has already stated that she likes listening to music, especially when she is stressed, to help her calm down. She may be able to use music, whether listening to it or playing her instrument, as a way to calm her nerves. Jason stated that he does not really handle his emotions but tends to ignore them until he explodes. I think that Jason can find ways, such as talking about how he is feeling or even removing himself from the situation, as a way to handle his emotions as they come up and prevent the explosion or outburst that will result from him ignoring everything that he is feeling.

Through this project, I aimed at seeing how development occurs across different stages, specifically early childhood, later childhood, and adolescence. With this interview, I was able to apply Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory, Gardner’s Theory of Multiple Intelligences, as well as Erikson’s Psychosocial Theory. Initially, I anticipated that the responses would become more thoughtful or detailed as I went up through the stages. While I think that this was somewhat of the case, I think Rose’s responses were more thorough than Jason’s. This may be because Jason joked around more during the interview and normally does not take things too seriously. All of Rose’s answers had a more in-depth explanation, for example, when talking about what she wanted to be when she grew up, she provided a story explaining why she chose that career and that showed her deep interest in that future career choice. However, Mark’s answers fit more with what I expected as they were mostly shorter answers that had to do with his interests at the specific time that the interview was done. He gave his responses quickly instead of taking time to pause and think about what he really wanted to say as Rose did during her interview. While I feel that some of my observations were valid, there are many factors that may have affected the outcome of each interview. For example, Mark was doing cartwheels around the room during the interview and was distracted during certain points because he wanted to play on my phone or another game. I think to get a better idea about Mark’s development and improve my observations I could ask Mark the same or similar questions but make sure that Mark is more focused on the interview. Asking these questions to all of the participants again and making sure that they are in a comfortable environment where they can fully focus on the interview will help improve these observations as well as other observations in the future. Overall, this project gave me a better insight into the changes in development in the physical, cognitive, and social-emotional domains for children in the early childhood, later childhood, and adolescent stages.

References

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