Development of Children in Early, Middle, and Adolescence

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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

For this project, I conducted interviews of three different people. All of the interviews were in a one on one setting and in person. The ages of the participants ranged from five to sixteen years old. While asking them the interview questions, I took down some notes of their answers and key points that the participant made. Later, I quickly typed up the interviewees answers and was able to elaborate more on their responses. The questions evaluated the cognitive, physical, and socio-emotional aspects of the individuals.

The first child I interviewed was five-year-old Peter. I babysit Peter and his sister over breaks. Peter has such a funny personality and so much energy, so I knew he would be a great kid to interview. When I went home for spring break I messaged his mom asking if they needed me to babysit and if I could interview him. When I got to their house I waited until his little sister went down for a nap before asking him any questions, so he would be focused on me.

The next child I interviewed was Brooke, a nine-year-old in the Sunday school class I teach at church. Brooke is very outgoing, and I knew that she was going to give me fun answers. I interviewed her after Sunday school and all of the other kids left. It was easy to get answers from her.

The last person I interviewed was my younger sister, Evynne. I chose my sixteen-year-old sister because I knew she would be very honest and real with her answers. The interview took place Friday evening over spring break in her room when I was home from school. We were watching movies together and catching up on each other’s lives. It was the perfect opportunity because we were both relaxed and willing to talk to each other.

The purpose of this project was to observe and evaluate the different developmental stages of three different aged participants. Before beginning this project, I expected that participants would act and respond differently to the questions asked. I expected various answers and reactions because each participant is at a different development stage and age group, so they should not be responding the same way.

Interviewing Process

Already knowing how crazy five-year-old Peter is. I wanted to learn more about his hobbies and interest. I started by asking him simple questions about school.

Me: “What is your favorite subject in school?”

Peter: “I like lunch and recess time.”

This question helped to measure the socio-emotional domain of Peter’s development. Although, I asked him a question about school his response had nothing to do with academics. Instead it was more about social interactions. “Social development is the way in which individuals’ interactions with others and their social relationships grow, change, and remain stable over the course of life” (Feldman, 2018).  To explore his social- emotional development more I decided to ask some questions about his personality.

Me: “What makes you smile or laugh?”

Peter: “I get very happy when I get to play tag, kickball or catch with my friends outside.”

Me: “What is something that makes you angry?”

Peter: “I get angry when my sister takes my toys, or I’m not allowed to play with my friends.”

Both of these questions evaluate Peter’s social- emotional domain because it portrays his emotional development. It shows me that he loves hanging out with his friends and playing sports. This also tells me he is most likely going to be into sports for a long time.

While conducting the interviews, I was also able to observe his attention span. He got easily distracted by the tv and wanting to go play with his toys. He was also unable to focus for long periods of time and wouldn’t stop getting out of his seat. All of these things made the interview process difficult but allowed me to evaluate his cognitive development. Cognitive development is “seeking to understand how growth and change in intellectual capabilities influence a person’s behavior” (Feldman, 2018). Cognitive development is usually formed by interactions and hands on experiences. I noticed that Peter was very interested in his surroundings and wanted to touch everything he laid his eyes. He had a hard time focusing and paying attention because he is in the “hands on” stage of life.

“Physical development, examining the ways in which the body’s makeup—the brain, nervous system, muscles, and senses, as well as the need for food, drink, and sleep—helps determine behavior” (Feldman, 2018). It is the process of learning gross motor skills, like kicking a ball, and fine motor skills, such as working a zipper. Strength, coordination and perception are also key elements of physical development. To test Peter’s fine motor skills, I asked for him to take a group of jelly beans and transfer them into a cup. At first, he was confused and began grabbing all the jelly beans at once and putting them into the cup, so I showed him how I wanted him to pick up the jelly beans one by one and put them into the cup. After watching me, he completed the task without any issues. To test his gross motor skills, I started out by having him catch a large ball. Once I saw that he could easily complete this task we moved to a smaller sized ball. Catching the smaller sized ball was a little bit harder for him because it took more balancing and hand eye contact. Both of these tasks were fun, creative, and easy ways for me to test his physical development skills.

My next interview was with Brooke. The interview with Brooke was easier because she is four years older than Peter. Also, because she was older she was more willing to sit still and paid attention better. When asking her the questions she would give me answers without much hesitation. This showed that her cognitive development was further along than Peter. First, I chose to observe her social-emotional development. Instead of asking her the same questions that I asked Peter, I decided to ask them with a different approach.

Me: “What do you want to be when you grow up?”

Brooke: “I want to become a marine biologist.”

Me: “Why is that?”

Brooke: “I love animals and want to help them, and I think that it would be fun.”

Brooke’s response shows that she is still growing socially and emotionally because she cares about animals and wants her career to further this. I continued to ask her questions about her social life to observe more of her social domain.

Me: “What are some of your hobbies?”

Brooke: “I like to hang out with friends by going to the trampoline park and I play softball with some of my friends from school.”

Me: “Why do you like doing these things?”

Brooke: “I like to play softball because my sister plays it and I like to hang out with my friends because it is fun.”

Her answers show that she enjoys hanging out with friends when she is not in school and is athletic. The responses the different questions show that she is very well developed in a social and emotional aspect.

For physical development, I asked Brooke questions and then asked her to perform certain tasks. I felt that this would be a better approach because I wanted to see how she feels she is developing physically compared to her peers and classmates.

Me: “How tall are you compared to your peers?”

Brooke: “I am taller than a lot of the boys in my class.”

Me: “Are your friends around the same height as you?’

Brooke: “Yes! We are all really tall.”

It was very easy to tell that Brooke is tall for her age by just looking at her, but when I asked her to compare herself to others and she responded that they are all around the same height, it shows that Brooke is physically growing at the same rate as her friends. To test her strength and coordination, I threw a ball at her and asked her to hit it with a softball bat. This task was not hard for her because she plays softball, so I increased the speed that I was throwing the ball, and this made it a little bit more challenging, but she was still able to hit the ball. Her physical growth and gross motor skills are right on track for her age, meaning she is developing physically well.

The last person interviewed was my sister Evynne. She was born when I was about two, so we have spent pretty much all of my life together. She is like my best friend and the person that I usually can tell everything to. She turned sixteen over the summer, is in her junior year of high school, and has been thinking about future goals for herself. So, I began by asking her questions about those goals.

Me: “How do you feel about graduating from high school next year and going to college?”

Evynne: “I am looking forward to being done with high school. I want to graduate and start working toward a job in college.”

Me: “Do you have a dream job? Like is there something you have always wanted to do?”

Evynne: “No, but I am looking into different jobs in the medical profession.”

Me: “Why the medical profession?”

Evynne: “I want to become a nurse. I just think that would be really cool and there would always be something different every day. I don’t want to do a job where I’m stuck with the same boring things every day. I don’t really know what kind of nurse I want to be, I just know I want to do something like that.”

After listening to Evynne tell me about her goals, I could tell a huge difference between her social-emotional stage and Brooke or Peter’s social- emotional. The reason for this is because she is far more developed, and her social interactions have developed with age. Evynne is now a young adult and is beginning to have a concept of what she wants to do with her life.

Evynne’s cognitive development was very well developed. She had a much better attention span than the other two participants. It did not feel like an interviewing process because we were just having bonding time together watching movies. When we were little we use to go in each other’s rooms all the time and just watch television or movies. It didn’t matter because the whole time we were smiling and laughing with each other. Getting to interview her felt like we were catching up and not an interview. This made the whole process very relaxing and easy. Although, Evynne is more developed than Peter I still gave her a physical development test, but it was different from Peter’s or Brooke’s. I asked her to think of her favorite holiday and write about it. She wrote:

“My favorite holiday is Christmas. The reason for this is because I get gifts and get to give gifts. Also, I enjoy spending time with my family. We usually have family come to our house and have the best breakfast with the family. My favorite part of Christmas is all the lights outside, seeing people happy, and our traditions.”

This did not take her long at all to write. She knew exactly what she was going to write about and did not have to think much about it. She knew how to write all the letters on the paper and looked comfortable doing it. She did not have a tight grip on the pencil and was freely moving her hand while writing. All of these things show that her physical development is right on track. Evynne has many years of physical development and is therefore able to write down what she was thinking very freely and not think about holding the pencil.

Discussion

After interviewing all three of the participants, I was able to compare and contrast the different responses between the age groups. The attention spans of all the individuals was different which shows cognitive development. The early childhood participant, Peter, had the least amount of attention. He would constantly be moving and looking around the room during the interview. Brooke, the middle childhood, was a little bit better, but she still got distracted by the environment at times. The adolescent or later childhood participant, Evynne, was the best she was very focused on what was being asked and gave reasonable responses. By comparing the attention spans it shows that gaining more cognitive growth also means longer and more efficient thought processes. Peter, Brooke and Evynne all have very well-developed physical development for their ages. This is apparent because they all were able to walk, run, and play sports without any difficulties. Peter enjoyed spending time outside with friends riding his bike. Both Brooke and Evynne are athletic and play softball and volleyball. Riding a bike and playing sports both take strength, coordination and balance which shows that all three participants were right on track for their physical development. The social emotional domain of all three participants is developing well for their ages. By all three being very involved with friends this shows that they have a care and willingness to help others which could play an impact in their career pathways.

It takes a village to raise a child, is a common saying. It is very much true because a child is affected by family, peers, and community. Family helps teach the child basic skills such as walking, running or riding a bike. Family plays a huge part in the physical development of the child. Peers play a part in social-emotional development. For instance, five-year-old Peter has just started kindergarten, so he is learning how to interact with other individuals his age. His teacher is help him learn cognitive skills such as reading and writing. The culture and environment that a child grows up in can also affect the rate of their development. For example, if a child has experienced child neglect they may take a while to warm up to new people and gain friends in their life. The type of people that a child interacts with in their life can play a huge part in their development.

“Piaget suggests that language and thinking are tightly interconnected and that the advances in language that occur during the preschool years reflect several improvements over the type of thinking that is possible during the earlier sensorimotor period” (Feldman, 2018). This is very much true because each of the individuals I interviewed had more complex answers as they got older. They also did not have to hesitate to think of the words needed to express their responses to the questions. Vygotsky’s view is also present in my interviews. “Vygotsky viewed cognitive development as a result of social interactions in which children learn through guided participation, working with mentors to solve problems. Instead of concentrating on individual performance, as Piaget and many alternative approaches do, Vygotsky’s increasingly influential view focuses on the social aspects of development and learning” (Feldman, 2018). This means that thought processes and cognitive skills begin with social interactions. Children are learning and growing from watching the actions of their family, peers and teachers. All of my observations were consistent with the two theories described above.

Conclusion

The Three Ages project was designed to teach me about the development of children at different stages and age levels. I was surprised by how much of a difference a few years of development can have on our cognitive abilities. One problem that I encountered during this project was the short attention span of Peter, the youngest participant. I am use to working with small kids because I babysit a lot, but Peter’s attention span was much shorter than any of the adults I interact with on a daily basis, but I expected this. This just portrayed to me that Peter would rather be running around with friends or toys than answer a few short questions. Taking short breaks during his interview was very helpful because it gave him a chance to run off some energy and came back refreshed and ready to answer more questions.

Although there were challenges, I feel that my observations closely resembled the theories presented by Piaget and Vygotsky.  If given this opportunity again, I would ask the same participants the same questions just five years later. This would allow for me to see how much their development has grown since the last time of answering questions. I would add some questions such as if they were involved in anything new or any new interest since the last time we spoke. This project helped me to grow as an individual because I gained patience from dealing with the short attention span of Peter. Lastly, it was a great opportunity for me to work with kids of different stages of development and compare them.

Work Cited

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