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

In this paper, I analyzed three interviews conducted to discover if age affects the response given to socio-emotional, physical, and cognitive development questions. I wanted to see if longer, in depth responses were correlated with increasing age of a child. By using theorists Erikson and Piaget and the responses given by the participants, I showed that it is imperative for younger children to make strong social connections and preschool age children have a hard time seeing the whole picture.

To study the development of children, researchers have used observation and interviews as a way of getting firsthand accounts of how a child is behaving or thinking. My interviews were conducted with three children who were easily accessible to me. The first child,” Brad “, attends my aunt’s daycare within her home. Brad is five and is half way through kindergarten. The next participant in my study is my cousin “Ava”, who subsequently attends my aunt’s daycare as well. Ava is seven years old but is going to turn eight in less than a month. The last child, “Shay”, is a friend of mine and she is eighteen years old. These people were chosen because I could readily set up a time to interview them and they were comfortable around me. Both Brad’s and Ava’s interview took place outside at a table on my aunt’s porch. It was a nice and breezy day. Four other children were playing outside while I was conducting the interviews. Shay’s interview was conducted at her kitchen table. During the interviews, I relied solely on interview note taking. The rationale behind my project was to discover how development at a certain age affects the response to questions on the socio-emotional, cognitive, and physical areas. I was looking to see an increase in the depth of answers, whether age correlates with the perception of images, and if age affects corrections made while balancing. As a perspective speech pathologist, who will most likely work with children and adults with special needs, I was interested in learning the developmental characteristics of a normally developing child. I expected to find that the vividness and accuracy of answers would grow as age increased. Also, I expected that Brad’s balance would be the worst compared to Ava’s and Shay’s.

As children grow they go through a multitude of changes such as physical development, cognitive development, and socio-emotional development. Physical development includes the “brain, nervous system, muscles, sensory capabilities, and need for food, drink, and sleep.” (Feldman 4) Cognitive development is the acquisition of intellectual abilities including “learning, memory, problem solving, and intelligence” (Feldman 4). Socio- emotional developments are enduring characteristics that make up someone’s personality and makes them an individual, unique person. Each subsection of development listed above works with one another to produce a successfully developed child. One division of child development affects another. For example, a child who is malnourished not only suffers in physical development, they will lack myelin which is a “fatty substance that helps insulate neurons and speeds the transmission of nerve impulses” (Ch.5 Physical development). Then because the brain needs calories to function, malnutrition slows intellect and learning capabilities. This can cause bursts of inappropriate behavior due to frustration and children who behave in that manner tend to be outcast by their peers, which relates to the socio-economic aspect of development. The questions I asked to Brad, Ava, and Shay covered all three topics of development. The first question was socio-emotional and stated if you could be any person in the world, who would you be. From there I asked what would you do as that person and what type of job would you have. Secondly, I asked a question to investigate cognition. I showed four pictures in the order of a house, butterfly, car, and a test. These pictures were very clear and only showed the item in question with no background images. For each question, I asked what was in the picture, how does this picture make you feel, have you seen this item before, and what do you do with the item. Lastly, I asked them a question that related to physical development and balance. I asked, how good do you think your balance is. Then I asked them to stand on one leg for ten seconds and I recorded if they fell or wobbled. Finally, I asked them stand on one leg again and wave their arms across their body and recorded what I saw.

Brad’s answer to the first question was that he would be a nice person who would do fun things, play with people, and have a job that travels. Ava would be a superhero and she would save the world by being fast and have destructible power. Shay would be Adele because she is free spirited and doesn’t care what others think about her. She would still be a singer and she would give concerts to people who can’t afford them and give money to many charities. In the second question about cognitive abilities, Brad described the first picture as a “house which you go inside, sleep, watch tv, play xbox.” He knew what the butterfly was and that “they fly and they eat nectar.” He also knew about the car which he said he sees almost everywhere, he almost got hit by one, and he likes orange and green ones. Finally, I showed him the picture of the test and he described it as “a pencil with a piece of paper and you can write with them.” Then I asked the final questions about balance and he said that he had good balance. On the first balance test, he wobbled very little at the beginning and then wobbled more towards then end. During the second balance test, he fell after three seconds and was very reluctant to pick his foot back up again. Ava knew all the pictures and noted that she had seen a house “a thousand times”, the butterflies are beautiful but she is scared to hold them, she likes to be in cars when the music is on, and said that tests make her feel “horrible and she will have one on Friday.” When she conducted her first balance test, she was steady throughout. The second balance test concluded in her falling on the eighth second. However, she did try to correct herself by making circular motions which was different that Brad. Shay also recognized all the pictures. The house made her happy because it reminded that she was not a college. The butterfly picture made her “uncomfortable” because she had a traumatic experience with one. She likes cars because driving gives her freedom. Tests make her anxious and she has seen them throughout her whole school career. She said her balance is “just okay because of her knee replacement from a car accident.” The first balance test went well with a little wobbling. The second test she wobbled more but corrected herself with arm movements.

During the interview, Brad seemed more excited to answer questions and tell me his thoughts as opposed to Ava who was nonchalant. However, Ava’s nonchalant attitude was most likely because she is my cousin. Shay was very direct about her answers. When analyzing the answers to the first question a connection can be made to Erik Erikson theory of developmental stages. Both Brad and Ava would face the industry vs. inferiority stage. During this stage, school age children “experience unresolved feelings of inadequacy and inferiority among (their) peers, (they) can have serious problems in terms of competence and self-esteem.” (Davey, 2017) To the first question if you could be anybody who would you be, Brad answered he would be a nice person. From Erikson’s perspective, Brad wants others to view him as nice to gain relationships with his peers. If his peers view him as being mean, then Brad will be an outcast and this would be a detriment to his socio-emotional development. Ava answered that she would be a superhero which would allow her to be seen by her peers as strong and confident. Therefore, leaving Ava to feel secure in her interactions with others. Another observation that can be concluded from the interviews, relates to Piaget’s developmental stages. When Brad, Ava, and Shay were asked to describe the picture of the test, Brad answered that he saw a piece of paper and a pencil. Ava and Shay saw a test. This is very significant because young children cannot distinguish between the whole picture and individual items within the picture. Piaget would say that because Brad is in the pre-operational stage, he “(does) not yet understand concrete logic, cannot mentally manipulate information.” (Cherry, 2017) The other participants, Ava and Shay, realize the picture was of a test and not just a piece of paper and a pencil.

Ava is a bright child who is very curious. Some recommendations that would benefit her development in adolescence is to maintain a proper balance of food and exercise, get enough sleep, and learn ways to cope with stress.

Besides the obvious differences in age and gender, these people are different because they show variations of concrete and abstract thinking. Brad, as a younger child shows more of concrete thinking while Ava and Shay reveal increased abstract thinking. Erikson’s and Piaget’s theories were relevant throughout my interviews. There was no abstract thinking used by Brad in his interview. Everything he told me could be possible. Ava’s answers became abstract when she wanted to become a superhero and have destructible power and Shay wanted to be Adele. As the age of the participant increased, the use of abstract concepts increased.

The findings on the interviews were surprising because I was not expecting directly connect the information I was given to a theorist. Some problems that occurred during the interviews were trying to convince Brad, a five-year-old, to sit still long enough to answer the questions. To encourage patience in Brad, I told him that he could have a piece of candy when the interview was over. Also, when conducting the questions about balance, the participants balance could have been affected because I was watching them balance. I counteracted this by allowing each participant to balance a second time and used whichever attempt was best. I feel that my observations were mostly valid because all the same questions were asked in the same order. There may have been some unconscious bias when conducting Ava’s interview because she is my cousin, but none that was intentional. If following up with an additional round of questions, I would ask where they saw themselves in five years. I would want to see how their answers correlate with their age and how they would fall into Erikson’s stages of development.

Works Cited

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