Three Ages Project

Madison Wessells

Longwood University

Introduction

For this project, I decided to interview three males to obtain a different perspective on the development of children. As a female with a little sister, I have experienced the development of females first-handedly and thought that a different view would lead to me learning more from this project. I developed questions based on their personal life and the theories that were discussed in class. The interviews were each conducted in a one-on-one environment so that the participants' answers were not influenced and their responses were recorded and then transcribed after the interview process was completed.

I first chose to interview my best friend’s little brother named Cole who is six years old. The interview was conducted while he was playing with his toys after dinner while I was home for fall break. I chose this time because he was able to think about his responses in a comfortable environment and did not feel pressured or intimidated. He has known me for over six months and is comfortable with me since I have been to his family’s house multiple times. I decided to interview him since I knew him well but did not know much about his personal life or his personality.

The second person that I interviewed was my best friend’s other little brother named Luke who is ten years old. I conducted the interview while we were in the car coming home from dinner so that he was not distracted by his little brother. He has known me for the same amount of time as Cole, so he was comfortable around me which made the interview process less stressful and he was able to give me detailed responses.

Lastly, I interviewed my boyfriend named Jacob who is 17 years old, and I have known for over six months. The interview was conducted while we were in his room after dinner watching television which allowed him to be more comfortable and his family was not able to influence his answers. I was able to casually conduct the interview by asking him questions during the commercials which allowed him to give genuine responses to the questions.

Interviews

Before I conducted the interview, I talked to Cole about his day and about school to allow him to be more comfortable with me asking him questions and allow his mind to shift from playing to answering the questions. The first set of questions that I asked Cole were used to gauge his physical development.

Me: “ Do you get sick a lot?”

Cole: “Sometimes when the rest of my class is sick.”

Preschool-aged children have a weak immune system compared to adults and older children which makes them more susceptible to colds because they have not built up the antibodies and have not been exposed to that type of environment before. However, major diseases, such as asthma, are not prominent in this age group. The most danger that a child ages, 3-6, faces is the risk of injury because of their high level of activity. Also, children this age are more likely to take risks because they have not experienced or remembered certain types of physical pain that result after an injury.

Next, I asked Cole about his height compared to the rest of his classmates and how much he has grown in the past year. He replied that he was around the same height as the rest of his classmates and that he has grown almost 3 inches in the past year. During the preschool years, children begin to lose the appearance of a baby and see a steady increase in height and weight. With this increase in height and weight comes an increase in physical activity including playing outside with friends. Preschool-aged children view playing and interacting with their friends as a way to pass the time.

Me: “ What do you like to do in your free time?”

Cole: “ I like to play outside with my brother, ride my four-wheeler with my friends and

play soccer.”

As the myelination of neurons increases in the areas of the brain related to balance and coordination, children in this age group are able to do more physical activity such as running, skipping and jumping.

Older preschool-aged children engage in cooperative play which is when “children genuinely play with one another, taking turns, playing games, or devising contests.” (Feldman 2019) I asked Cole what he liked to do with his brother and his friends, and he said that he liked to “play tag, practice for soccer, play on the trampoline, and pretend to be a cop like my dad.” Playing and interacting with friends is critical to the social and cognitive development of children. According to Feldman, “play helps the brain to develop and become more sophisticated.” Friendships in this stage of development are based on whether they like each other and if they like to do the same activities together. After being asked how many friends he had, Cole replied that he had a lot of friends. As age increases, friendships begin to play a more critical role in the development of children and become more complex.

I then shifted the focus of the questions from his friends to his family. During the infant years, children socialize mostly with their family members, but as they get older and enter school, they become less reliant on the socialization from their family and more on the socialization with their friends. With an increase in myelination in the frontal lobes of the brain, preschoolers are able to develop more emotional characteristics such as self-awareness and a theory of mind. (Feldman 2019) Theory of mind “refers to knowledge and beliefs about how the mind operates.” (Feldman 2019) Preschool-aged children with older siblings that interact with them on a regular basis tend to have a more developed theory of mind because their older siblings actions are influencing them. I asked Cole if he liked being the youngest child and Cole said that he did because he liked playing with his older brothers and he was able to more stuff than most of his friends because his brothers taught him how to do activities such as playing soccer and reading.

After I interviewed Cole, I asked Luke when he wanted me to do his interview, and he said that he wanted me to wait until after dinner because Luke was hungry and couldn’t think about his answers unless he had dinner, so I waited an interviewed him in the car after he had eaten his dinner. He saw me talk to his brother, so he knew what to expect. I first asked Luke about his height compared to his classmates, and he replied that he was taller than most of his classmates. This question helps me to be able to gauge if he is growing at the same rate as his classmates and friends. Children in this age group tend to have slow but steady increases in both height and weight, with weight being redistributed as height increases. According to Feldman, children in elementary school continue to grow an average of two to three inches per year. During middle-childhood, height and weight differences between children of the same age are common because as children begin to approach puberty, their bodies start to develop at different rates. Children in middle-childhood that experience puberty at an earlier age and begin to grow at a more rapid rate than their classmates. Another question that I asked to determine Cole’s physical development was if he had lost any of his baby teeth. When he replied he proudly responded that he had lost almost all of his baby teeth or primary teeth. Around the age of six years old, baby teeth or primary teeth begin to fall out at a rate of four to five per year and are replaced by permanent teeth. (Feldman 2019)

From his responses about his physical development, I was able to judge that Luke’s emotional development. When asked how tall he was compared to his classmates, he smiled and said that he was taller and when he was asked about his baby teeth, he was very enthusiastic about his response. This type of answer to these questions shows that his physical development has, in turn, increased his self-esteem which begins to rise during middle-childhood before decreasing during adolescence. (Woodhead 2016)

Friendships become increasingly crucial in middle-childhood. Unlike friendships developed between preschool-aged children, children in middle-childhood tend to form more complex relationships that are based on personality traits and qualities. Children in this age group tend to have fewer friends but have more close friends. The framework of relationships during this stage of development is trust.

Me: “How many friends do you have and What do you like about them?”

Luke: “7-8, We get along good, we like to do the same things together also I can trust them.”

Me: “ What do you like to do with them?”

Luke: “ go fishing, play in the woods, ride the four-wheelers”

At this age, children begin to form groups with their friends and segregation of the groups can be noticed. In middle-childhood, friend groups start to develop which will further divide in adolescence.

After I finished interviewing Luke, I was able to talk to Jacob. He had known for weeks that I was going to interview him and the types of questions that I was going to ask, so he was better able to prepare for the interview. I began the interview similar to how I began the interview with Jacob by first asking him questions about his day and work. After that, I started to interview him and asked questions about his physical development.

Me: “ How tall are you compared to your friends and your classmates?”

Jacob: “ They are the same height as me.”

Since Jacob is at the older end of adolescence, he has most likely already gone through puberty and has had his growth spurt. According to Feldman, around the age of 15, boys begin to experience a growth spurt which is rapid and is most likely the last time that they will experience a growth spurt. As they increase in age, the amount that they grow each year decreases.

During adolescence, children tend to become more distant from their families and tend to socialize with their friends.

Me: “How do you get along with your family and do you like to spend time with them?”

Jacob: “ Pretty good. We argue sometimes, but that is normal. Yea, when I’m not with my

friends or at school.”

Adolescents become more independent as they are preparing for adulthood. Friendships formed in late adolescence closely represent those formed in adulthood. Friendships grow based on closeness, similar views, and opinions on certain subjects and mutual trust. These types of friendships also allow adolescents to develop a sense of self-identity and help shape what kind of adult they will become. (Woodhead 2016)

Me: “How many friends do you have?”

Jacob: “ I have about 3 or 4 close best friends.”

Me: “What do you look for in a friend?”

Jacob: “Someone who has your back, and someone that you can always talk to”

Closer friendships in adolescence increase self-esteem and confidence because they are able to engage in personal conversations with their peers. (Woodhead 2016) Due to the increase in cognitive development in adolescence, they are more likely to create cliques instead of groups that are formed in middle-childhood. (Feldman 2019)

Discussion

After interviewing the three boys, I was able to see similarities and differences between the individuals and between the genders. All of the boys enjoyed spending time with their family, but Cole spends less time with his friends than Jacob which can be expected due to the age difference. Jacob is more independent than Cole and Cole’s brother, Luke. When compared to females, the boys participate in more active play, and outdoor play whereas females engage in more “pretend play” and tend to be more creative. Vygotsky states that pretend play is important for preschool-aged children because it helps to increase cognitive and social skills. During pretend play, children are able to ““practice” activities that are a part of their particular culture and broaden their understanding of the way the world functions.” (Feldman 2019) Playing pretend with friends helps children to develop more social relationships and allows children to start learning how to compromise with others. (Goswami 2010)

Jacob’s relationships with his friends were more developed and more complex than Cole’s. Jacob’s relationships were based on trust and loyalty along with getting along whereas Cole’s were based off whether they liked each other or not and whether they liked to do the same things together. Luke’s relationships were slightly more developed than Cole’s because children in middle-childhood tend to also factor in trust when choosing friends but not as much as in adolescence.

One of the main points of Piaget’s theories is that different aged children think differently. The responses from Cole and Luke were much shorter than those from Jacob. Jacob gave thoughtful responses with lots of detail compared to Cole and Luke’s interviews which required asking more questions to get more details. Because Jacob’s cognitive abilities are more developed than Cole and Luke’s, it was easier for him to give me more detailed answers.

This project has allowed me to gain more insight into the development of children, especially boys and apply the material that was presented in class. Conducting the interviews and analyzing the answers allowed me to understand the material better because I was able to apply the theories and research to real-life situations. The insight that I gained from this project will help me in the future with my career since I will have to work with children.

References

Feldman, R. S. (2019). *Child Development*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.

Goswami, U. (2010). *The Wiley-Blackwell handbook of Childhood Cognitive development*.

Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons.

Woodhead, M., Faulkner, D., & Littleton, K. (2016). *Making Sense of Social Development*.

London: Routledge.

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