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.

Introduction

This Three Ages Project consists of three different interviews conducted by myself, a current student pursuing a career in elementary education. This project required three interviews with children ranging from three different age groups. Because I knew the children I interviewed personally, the questions I asked ranged from basic, everyday questions to questions that might only apply to them. The three children I chose are siblings. I was curious to see how different their answers might be and how unique their individual qualities might be despite their same upbringing. The questions also cover a broad range of development, including cognitive, physical, and social-emotional.

The youngest participant in my research was a 4 year old named Kinley. Kinley is a joyful, energetic, and a bashful child. After babysitting for years and being deemed her “favorite babysitter,” she has a great deal of comfort with me, so our interview was full of honest and lively conversation. For example, asking her “How much do you learn outside of preschool?” was important because I know she only attends school three days a week. I was also able to ask questions that could give me insight into her social-emotional status and physical development by asking about her time spent playing outside, what she was able to do outside, and what things she can and cannot do. For instance, asking who she is friends with, how often they play together, and what activities they partake in was useful to apply to the developmental theories.

The second child interviewed, Gracie, is 8 years old. Her personality exuberates kindness, sweetness, and leadership. Gracie is bashful, but not nearly as shy as her little sister. She is proud and passionate. I know exactly what she likes to do and learn and because of these passions, this made for a smooth and personal interview. I asked Gracie questions like “What is your favorite part about dance classes and gymnastics?” and “Why do you love animals so much?” I also asked things about SOL’s, her favorite subjects, and what she wants to be when she grows up. Asking specific questions about school, her teachers, and her friends gave me a lot to work with to analyze her cognitive development. Her love for gymnastics and playing outside helps me with her physical development. Lastly, asking Gracie how she makes new friends and how she thinks people should be treated allows me to dig deep into her social-emotional development.

Camden, my last interviewee, is 12 years old. Camden just went into middle school, so this gave me a lot to work with, as it is a new and unique experience for many. While I have been babysitting this family for several years, connecting with Camden has been the hardest. Camden is quiet, much like his siblings, but his creativity shines when he is comfortable . Camden has a lot of excitement and love for his art and video games. This feeds into his social and cognitive development, and possibly physical development as well. I tried asking Camden creative questions that he would find fun, but would also help me analyze him using the developmental theories. For example, “If you could be placed into any video game, which would you pick and why?” While this might spark his curiosity in a fun way, this would later help me see more in terms of his personality, which I cannot find in a generic, interview type of question. Knowing that Camden does not play sports or do a lot of physical activity, these questions were the hardest to create and ask. Instead of asking questions that I already knew the answers to, like, “What’s your favorite sport?” or “What do you do like to play outside?” I asked questions more along the lines of “What is your favorite game in gym class?” or “Do you like to eat fruits and vegetables?”

Application

I purposefully made my interviews “unprofessional” by not recording their voices or videotaping. Instead I used pen and paper and wrote their answers under my questions. In my opinion, using a tape recorder would have made the children act less candid and they would have answered differently. I wanted them to be as comfortable as possible while talking to me, so I made it as normal as I could, as if they were talking to me on any other day. I believe I succeeded in this comfort because I got very truthful and candid answers. Their body language also suggested a level of comfort I probably would not have achieved had I been more formal. For example, I let Kinley and Gracie play with toys while I asked them questions so they would not be so focused on what I was writing or what they would say. For example, asking Gracie a question about why she loves to dance as she was dancing made her answer relevant and she was able to answer immediately without thinking about it. In no way am I suggesting that speaking before you think is appropriate at all times, but in order to get the most blunt and authentic answers I found it necessary to keep it casual.

To start, I will discuss Kinley’s early childhood interview in more detail and analyze her abilities and development more explicitly. As mentioned previously, Kinley only goes to preschool a few days a week. I used this to guide my questions that were intended to grasp her cognitive development. I find Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory of Cognitive Development the most applicable here. According to Vygotsky, “children learn through the process of social collaboration with someone who is more knowledgeable than they are.” (Levine & Munsch 2016). I find this extremely interesting and useful in this context because a majority of Kinley’s current education is from her home. When Kinley was asked “Do you like to go to school?” and “Do you learn a lot?” she was somewhat hesitant in her answers. She told me she “likes” going to school to see her friends and that she does learn “a lot.” These simple answers suggested to me that she was answering in more of an agreement fashion than actually answering the questions I asked her. Kinley has also always been very quick to remind me that she “does not go to school yet,” when I ask about this subject. Kinley does not view her preschool class as school, suggesting to me that she does not realize she is learning here, but rather playing with her friends, reading occasional stories, and doing a lot of crafts. However, I know she is constantly learning and her preschool does implement educational lessons into their days. When I realized Kinley was not open to talking about school with me explicitly, I began to ask more “irrelevant” questions that would still provide insight into her cognitive abilities, so that she would not understand that we were talking about school. Because I let her play with her toys and have fun while I interviewed her, I was able to gauge where she was cognitively. I asked Kinley to use the blocks to spell her name (DeBruin-Parecki and others, 2003). According to the U.S. Department of Education, children in the preschool ages should be able to use letters to at least attempt to spell their names. Kinley immediately grabbed the “K” block to begin. After the first letter, she needed assistance. This directly connects to Vygotsky’s Scaffolding idea: “A sensitive process of providing the support that helps the child achieve what is just out of reach.” (Levine & Munsch 2016). My assistance to Kinley in spelling her name is key to her learning to do this independently. Kinley is on track to doing this task independently, as she knew how to start (with the “K”). Providing guidance along the way will only help Kinley get better at this task. To assess Kinley’s Physical development, I used a series of questions that would apply to her hobbies. A typical activity we do together when I am babysitting is color, so I asked Kinley if we could color next. According to the textbook, “colors inside the lines” is a fine skill that should be developed around age 4 (Levine & Munsch 2016). We began to color in her favorite coloring book. Kinley’s ability to color inside the lines needs work, but because she just turned 4, this is not alarming. Her coloring is not random, but it is not completely organized either. Another favorite hobby of Kinley’s is riding her bike. We did not perform this activity, but when asked “What is your favorite thing to do outside?” her response was “I really love to ride my new bike.” A gross motor skill that most 4 year old’s have at this age is “the ability to pedal a tricycle.” (Levine & Munsch 2016). Kinley can pedal a tricycle, but can also use a bicycle with training wheels. Her fine motor skills might be delayed slightly, but her gross motor skills are most likely right on track, if not above. Evaluating Kinley’s social-emotional development required deeper analyzation of Kinley’s responses. When I asked questions that pertain to emotion, like “What makes you feel happy and smile?” and “What makes you sad?” I got very generic, basic answers like “My mom.” And “When people are mean.” While these are very valid answers, they did not give me much insight into Kinley’s development. Instead, I’ll use the question and process I used to spell her name with the blocks. When I asked Kinley if she could spell her name for me, she pridefully nodded yes and grinned. Eventually, I realized she could not perform this task on her own. This definitely proves that Kinley has a high self-esteem. It is no secret that young children tend to have a high self-esteem, and the textbook has an excellent justification of this. When a child boasts a prideful statement of his or her abilities, they are most likely comparing them to previous years, which from a developmental standpoint, is tremendous progress (Levine & Munsch 2016).

Next, I will assess Gracie’s cognitive, physical, and social-emotional development. To focus on Gracie’s cognitive abilities, I used the books surrounding us. I asked Gracie if she liked to read and got an enthusiastic “YES!” She then asked me if she could read me a story and I said “of course.” Gracie took this as an opportunity to play “teacher” with her little sister and me. Once everyone was settled, Gracie proceeded to read us a story about kittens, her favorite animal. Unfortunately I am unqualified to judge whether or not this book was on Gracie’s reading level, but based on her enthusiasm, ability, and confidence, I would judge that Gracie is above her reading level. I would also say it is valid to assume that Gracie most likely learned to read through “Whole language instruction.” The textbook defines this as “A way to teach reading that emphasizes understanding the meaning of words from the context in which they appear.” This is relevant because Gracie did understand the context, vocabulary, and themes of the story, but another researcher’s definition of this approach digs deeper into justifying Gracie’s connection between passion and understanding. According to the *Journey of Research: What’s the Best Way to Learn to Read?,* whole language instruction “focuses on using reading materials that are inherently interesting to the child.” As a strong believer in interest positively correlating with performance, I believe Gracie strongly benefits from this approach that allows her to thrive through her education by being allowed to apply her personal interests. Aside from animals and reading, Gracie has a dedication to dance and gymnastics. I used this to my advantage to asses her physical development. Gracie told me she has been in both dance classes and gymnastics since she was 5 years old and she does not plan on quitting any time soon. As stated in the text, “Stand/balances on one leg for 30 seconds, walks along a narrow line heel to heel, and hops repeatedly on either leg with controlled landing,” (Levine & Munsch 2016) are all gross motor skills children ages 7-10 years old should have. Not only are these gross motor skills, but they are all very applicable to dance and gymnastics, leading me to believe Gracie is very well developed physically for her age. As far as social-emotional development in Gracie, it is evident that she is confident and kind. This kind of warmth that Gracie radiates suggests to me that she is well developed as an 8-year-old. I asked Gracie, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” and she said “A vet. I want to help all the animals and make them better so their owners will get better too.” Her compassion for others and desire to seek opportunities to help is obvious. Another great indicator of Gracie’s social-emotional development being strong and on track is her relationship with her little sister, Kinley. The text has several statements regarding this type of relationship, like “There is an expectation that siblings will be there to provide support and resources to each other in times of need,” and “Sibling relationships often reflect the quality of the relationship between parents and their children.” (Levine & Munsch 2016). Gracie meets the needs of her little sister regularly. I asked Gracie who her best friend is to which she responded, “my mom because she’s always there and she’s nice.” I believe Gracie’s development is extremely stable because of the balance of guidance and friendship from her parents. Gracie strongly reflects this model when she helps her sister. For example, during our interview, Kinley wanted to have a snack, but could not open her pack of crackers alone. Gracie kindly offered suggestions on how to make opening her snack easy so Kinley could do it independently. This representation of kindness and guidance for others proves that Gracie has moved far past an egocentric phase and her social-emotional stability is advanced.

Camden’s developmental processes were the most challenging to assess. He is old and mature enough to understand that my “trick” questions, did actually have meaning and were purposeful. According to the textbook, “the transition from elementary school to middle school is usually considered the most stressful school transition students experience,” (Levine & Munsch 2016). I used this transition period to analyze Camden, but I had to be very cautious in all of my areas of interest, as it is a very sensitive time for all adolescents. I began to ask basic questions like, “What is your favorite subject?” and as expected, I got very basic answers. Camden’s immediate answer was simply “Art.” I then asked follow up questions and he began to explain that art was much better in middle school because he had more “freedom to draw whatever I want.” This suggested to me that Camden did not struggle in his transition. I asked Camden about this and he told me he missed the “community feeling” elementary school had, but he loves middle school because he has “more freedom,” he also said, “my classes are more challenging, and I have more new friends.” This gave me a lot work with, so I then asked him to elaborate on the more challenging classes. He proceeded to tell me that switching classes, having more time in each class, and a lot more homework made middle school more challenging, but that he did not mind this because elementary school was “getting old.” Camden’s need to seek more challenges in his education and his appreciation suggests to me that his cognitive abilities are well developed. I also think this proves that Camden is in Piaget’s Concrete Operations stage which says: “they become capable of logical thought under concrete circumstances, and an adult-like pattern of thinking begins to emerge. Though they cannot yet engage in hypothetical or abstract thought, they do exhibit a greater understanding of objects’ properties and relationships than children in the preoperational stage,” (Levine & Munsch 2016). I chose this stage because I do see a more mature, “adult-like” patterns in Camden and he is on the early side of adolescence. Piaget’s last theory is not always achieved, so I think it would take further research and time with Camden to apply this stage to him. Camden’s physical development was also a challenge, as adolescent physical development is mostly centered around puberty. Obviously, I had to avoid this topic, so I tried to focus this around motor skills. Camden’s motor skills are well developed as this is obvious that he has no balance or physical issues. Camden’s artistic abilities are mostly taught, but well developed fine motor skills are required for such a hobby. I asked Camden questions like “Do you like to eat fruits and vegetables?” and he responded, “Only certain kinds, but I like when my mom finds creative ways to make us eat healthy.” I think Camden’s physical development is advanced and will continue to progress in this sensitive stage of his life. For Camden’s social-emotional development I again, used middle school to my advantage. I asked Camden what kind of stereotypes he thinks middle school has and he said, “everyone thinks we are always moody and making bad choices,” and I followed up with “Do you think those things are true?” and he told me “they can be, sometimes.” In his use of the word “sometimes,” he made it clear that not all middle schoolers are “bad” and that he was one of the “good.” Camden is aware of the social implications of middle school, like peer pressure and mood swings, but he is also confident in his ability to be strong and mature. I also used his love for video games to tie into his social development. After clarifying exactly what he does on his computer, I was able to apply the friendships he has online to his development. Camden told me that his best friend is almost always online with him, which is almost all afternoon. According to the textbook, adolescents in the U.S. spent up to 2.5 hours a day using screens and 2-3 hours “talking.” (Levine & Munsch 2016). Despite the negative stereotypes against video games, I think this socialization for Camden keeps his relationships going and is a useful tool for him to make new friends.

Conclusions

 Aside from analyzing these three children and their cognitive, physical, and social emotional development, my purpose in this was to use that knowledge and these applications to compare the three siblings. I find it very interesting that the cognitive developments of the children are all very well developed and stable. All three of them showed an interest and excitement about their education. Using Piaget’s theory of development was the most helpful in analyzing this. I found Camden to be the most “bored” with the interview process, but he remained attentive and respectful the entire time. I found Gracie to be the most attentive and excited to talk about education and herself. Kinley was also excited, but very easily distracted. I think all of those observations play a role in their cognitive development, but also fit their age group and expectations. Their physical developments were stable and on track, but comparing this is difficult because they are all in very different growth stages. Kinley and Gracie were easy to asses as their motor skills and physical activity is utilized and growing, but Camden is at an age where physical activity is not as desirable, and he is grown. Their social and emotional developments were also very similar. All three children express a level of shyness, but also a great deal of pride when they are comfortable. Much to my surprise, I found it very useful and easy to apply questions I had planned on being for my analysis of cognitive development to be applied to social-emotional as well. Once I started to utilize all of my questions for all of my areas of interest, the theories and research were more applicable and relevant. If I had to make any changes to the way I interviewed or observed, I would have made use of a longer time period. I am confident that doing this during a babysitting job would allow me to implicitly observe more, eliminating the need to pry and dig deep for information that is not easy to access, especially in young children. Overall, I enjoyed using personal friends and experiences to apply knowledge learned in class and utilize this sort of education.

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