Developmental Assessment Reflection Paper

A Seven, Four, and Two- Year- Old Child

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Introduction

Conducting observations of developmental milestones in children was a new and extremely insightful experience for me, requiring me to expand my perceptual and attentive capabilities. For my observations I observed Jaxin (7 yr 9mo), Gemma (4yr 4mo), and Jocelyn (2yr 3mo). Jaxin and Gemma are brother and sister, and I observed them at their house during after-school hours. I observed Jocelyn at a daycare center called Kiddin' Around, which she attends regularly. Despite my observations taking place in two different locations, each of the children were being observed in an environment that they are comfortably and regularly apart of. By conducting naturalistic observations, I was able to understand and document detailed descriptions of behavior as they took place in a natural environment for each child (Miller, 2016).

Physical and Motor Development

According to Jean Piaget's developmental theory, children are inherently active organisms that are influenced by an intertwined set of innate reflexes and experiences (Miller, 2016). Jocelyn (2yrs) demonstrated her motor functioning by running, drawing scribbles on a paper, and engaging in exercise play.[1] Gemma (4yrs) showed her interest in art by completing coloring sheets after-school. Her increased motor functions allow her to also engage in more complex forms of outdoor play, such as riding a tricycle with the goal of one day riding a bike. Compared to the younger children, Jaxin (7yrs) was able to ride a bike without training wheels but is still practicing and developing his skills.[2] When it comes to printing words and images,

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[1] Jocelyn practiced exercise play in the indoor playground by climbing and the outdoor playground while playing on a spring rider

[2] While riding his bike, Jaxin fell off while "trying to do a cool move"

Jaxin was able to hold his pencil to write words and draw pictures for homework assignments at a quicker pace. Piaget describes the influence of memory as a present understanding based on previous understandings of experiences with one's physical environment (Miller, 2016). As each of these children physically interact with their environments, they broaden their repertoire of future skills and capabilities.

Social/Emotional Development

Erik Erikson's psychosocial theory of development can be used in order to describe the formation of each child's identity alongside "critical issues" they may experience in each respective stage (Miller, 2016). Jocelyn (2yrs) is in Erikson's stage of autonomy vs. shame and doubt stage. While this stage is centered around potentials for anal control, Jocelyn is not yet toilet training and still uses the restroom in her diaper (Miller, 2016). Furthermore, an aspect of Jocelyn's socio-emotional development that stood out to me was when one of the teachers at the center told me that she used to have trichotillomania. This obsessive-compulsive behavior demonstrated by Jocelyn may be attributed to anxiety from being separated from her parents, discomfort and mistrust in earlier stages, or shame stemming from issues of self-control and independence (Miller, 2016). Nonetheless, Jocelyn did not express any issues with temperament and was able to play well with her peers, including her twin sister Amelia.[3] Gemma (4yrs) is in Erikson's stage of initiative vs. guilt as she develops independence through play and begin exhibiting goal-directed behaviors (Miller, 2016). She demonstrated her emergent capacity to take initiative by speaking of and engaging in activities requiring role-play, such as playing "house" or "family". According to the work of Erikson, this form of play allows for Gemma to

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[3] When her sister took away a toy from her, Jocelyn cried for less than a minute before she got her toy back, her emotions stabilized, and she resumed playing normally

use her imagination to master concepts and adapt to the world, express emotion, re-enact past experiences, and imagine future ones based on culturally agreed upon methods of interaction (Miller, 2016). Gemma's brother Jaxin (7yrs) is in the next stage industry vs. inferiority. In this stage, previous initiative is transformed into industry based on feelings of competency and mastery and can be observed through Jaxin's academic confidence in school subjects such as math and science (Miller, 2016). This confidence will assist Jaxin in the formation of a positive self-concept, allowing him to continue developing skills and reaching his goals as he enters his adolescent years.

Language Development

The work of Michael Halliday describes how language allows human beings to bring meaning into their lives (Smidt, 2013). Variation in lingual skills was one of the most blatant differences I observed between each child. I was able to understand how each child uses their communicative abilities to interact with others and their environments in order to learn, play, and experience relationships. Jocelyn was the youngest and spoke the least out of the children I observed, mostly engaging in private speech or communicating with babbles and facial expressions. Every once and a while, Jocelyn would utter one-word phrases to communicate ideas with others (e.g. "potato", "sissy", "chicken", "outside", "purple"). Jocelyn's ability to communicate through singular words, babbles, and gestures is reflective of what Halliday (2013) describes as protolanguage. In his model protolanguage is defined a means of interaction for infants with developing communicative abilities and is made up of tones and gestures, which allow for the expression of meaning and communication with others (Smidt, 2013). In contrast, Gemma was able to tell simple stories and use language to engage with other people, and attends virtual reading/English tutoring weekly. This supports Vygotsky's theory of scaffolding by

learning alongside the help of a more experienced mentor (Miller, 2016). Nonetheless, she spoke in shorter sentences and still demonstrated some difficulty expressing her feelings when they became too overwhelming.[4] Jaxin, on the other hand, can use his language skills and to engage in more complex tasks such as collaborating with peers, storytelling, and using adult like speech to communicate with others.[5] Vygotsky's framework can also be applied to Jaxin and related back to the work of Halliday, as he is able to continue to develop meaning by acting and communicating in exchange with others (Miller, 2016). Despite their individual capacities for language usage, there was one form of language that spoke to all of them – music.[6] Smidt (2013) describes music as a communal, cultural experience that allows for the expression of ideas, feelings, and thoughts, regardless of a child's ability for spoken language.

Cognitive Development

Jean Piaget's theory describes development as a linear process, with major cognitive stages characterized by advances in logic and thinking (Smidt, 2013). Jocelyn (2yrs) is reaching the end of her sensory motor period and should soon be moving into a period of pre-operations. This movement towards language is highlighted in the period of pre operations and can be observed by Jocelyn's developing interest in books and pretend play. By demonstrating curiosity and using her senses, Jocelyn is able to further develop her cognitive abilities by interacting with the world around her. Gemma is in the middle of the preoperational stage which can be shown through her development of early literacy and understanding of the alphabet (Miller, 2016).[7]

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[4] When Gemma's mom told her she could not have a cookie because she did not finish dinner she hunched her shoulders, looked down, and begun to cry in frustration

[5] Jaxin showed interest in quizzing others on trivia and having people asking him questions

[6] Each of the children responded to music by dancing and singing along

[7] Gemma can spell her own name, the color "red", and half of her brother's name

Additionally, Gemma is able to create more complex concepts through pretend play compared to Jocelyn due to her advances in cognition.[8] Lastly, I believe Jaxin (7yrs) has reached the end of this preoperational stage and has begun the concrete operational stage, which can be characterized by the eradication of egocentrism (Miller, 2016).[9] Jaxin demonstrated ability to read and comprehend chapter books, as well as use logic to solve math equations with ease during his tutoring sessions.

Analysis and Conclusions

Lev Vygotsky's learning theory emphasizes the role of others in learning and scaffolding processes of children in their socio-cultural environments. Studying the differences in the milestone accomplishments of each child allowed me to understand how culture and one's environment can nurture or slow developmental processes (Miller, 2016). Nonetheless, some processes are reliant on physical maturation and take time to develop. Like Vygotsky, I believe learning can be supported and fostered by social interaction with others. For example, some aspects of Gemma's development can be attributed to the modeling behaviors of her older brother Jaxin. Furthermore, Jaxin and Gemma live in a learning-driven household, where online tutoring has been a part of their lives since toddlerhood. In contrast, Jocelyn has a twin sister which can provide opportunities for increased development through cooperation and learning alongside an equal with similar skill sets. Environmental factors at the daycare center also may have affected the presence of Jocelyn's speech, as the presence of other children there may have

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[8] During pretend play, Jocelyn imitated pouring tea into a cup and drinking it, while Gemma played more complex games such as "family", "house", and "veterinarian"

[9] When Jaxin's nanny grabbed his toy monkey by its stomach, he said, "don't hold him there it hurts him!"

caused her to speak less than she normally does. Observing Jocelyn in her home environment may have yielded different results. Overall, it was fascinating to study the developmental milestones of each child to understand how development progresses and becomes increasingly complex over adolescent years.

References

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