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Unit II Paper  
March 11, 2009

Developmental Psychology: Ages 2-12

During the play years (ages 2-6), the average child goes through many physical changes. Children become taller, slimmer and more coordinated. The average child will gain about 3 inches and 4 ½ pounds during this period (Berger, 2008). During this young age, kids' appetites decrease because they are more active. This worries parents who end up over feeding their children. This has ultimately led to the growing weight and rate of diabetes in our population. Modern children are eating more and are exercising less than previous generations. Children in this stage are usually picky eaters. They must have their food prepared in a particular way and will eat only certain foods (Berger 2008).

The brain goes through a lot of changes from age 2 to 6. Most of the increase in brain weight occurs because of myelination (Berger, 2008). Myelin is a coating on the axons in the brain that speeds communication between neurons. The corpus callosum grows rapidly during this stage and is responsible for communication between the two halves of the brain. This allows for lateralization of the brain, which is simply specialization of the halves to control different human functions (Berger 2008). The prefrontal cortex also matures during this time allowing for more regular sleep, controlled emotion and temper and less tendency for impulsiveness. During the play years, the amygdala, which is responsible for emotion, becomes more active. This may be one reason why young children have nightmares (Berger, 2008). Memory also sharpens with maturation of the hippocampus. During the play years, children are refining their gross and fine motor skills. Gross motor skills are those that involve large body movements, such as riding a tricycle (Berger, 2008). Fine motor skills involve small body movements and are harder to accomplish.

There are many theories about cognitive development in children ages 2-6. According to Jean Piaget, a child at this age is in the preoperational stage of cognitive development. He described four characteristics of the preoperational child: centration, focus on appearance, static reasoning and irreversibility (Berger, 2008). Centration is the tendency to focus on one thing with the exclusion of all others. These children are

egocentric, which means that they only see things from their own perspective. A 2-6 year old is also known to focus on appearance. One example that Berger gives is when a little girl gets a short hair cut, she might worry that she has turned into a boy. A child this age also thinks that things are irreversible. Piaget devised many experiments that revolved around conservation. He found that young children fail to understand that the amount of something remains the same despite a change in its appearance (Berger, 2008).

Vygotsky had a slightly different view of the 2-6 year old child. He believed that every aspect of cognitive development is learned through social contact (Berger, 2008). Vygotsky called this child an apprentice in thinking. He also believed that each child has a Zone of Proximal Development. This includes all of the tasks the child can perform with slight assistance. Vygotsky believed that these skills could be achieved through scaffolding, which is temporary sensitive support from others (Berger, 2008).

Another theory of cognitive development is the theory-theory. This simply states that children have a drive to create theories for everything they hear and see (Berger, 2008). Most of the questions that children ask center around human behavior and characteristics. Researchers found that children this age do not ask many questions about nonliving things. During this stage, a child will develop theory of mind. This is when a child can understand the emotions and thinking of others. This idea leads to the thought that people can be deceived (Berger, 2008).

Early childhood has proven to be a sensitive period for language. During this time, they can easily master grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation (Berger, 2008). Scholars estimate that children age 2-6 learn 10 new words a day. Children also tend to learn grammar very well. However, they sometimes extend grammar rules to things they shouldn't. This is called overregularization. This creates problems when a language has many exceptions to grammar rules, such as the English language (Berger, 2008). Scientists believe that this stage of development is the best time to learn multiple languages. It is easier for a young child to learn a second language, and many cognitive skills are improved by bilingualism.

There are many different ideas on how young children should be educated. Child-centered programs stress children's development and growth. This approach uses the child's interests to teach them. There is no push to follow adult directions. The

Montessori Approach uses pupils to teach other pupils. Children collaborate with each other and do not sit quietly while a teacher instructs them (Berger, 2008). The program instilled in public schools is teacher-directed learning. This is just how it sounds, a teacher lecturing to children who are expected to be able to repeat what they are told on tests. There are also many intervention programs that aim to teach low-income children. One such program is Head Start. These programs have proven to be effective and graduates are more likely to become law-abiding, gainfully employed adults (Berger, 2008).

During the play years, a child will develop emotionally. They are now able to regulate and control their emotions. A child 2-6 years old is in Erikson's third stage of emotional development, Initiative vs. Guilt (Berger, 2008). The child begins to form self-esteem and a self-concept. This child may begin to feel guilty when they realize their own mistakes (Berger, 2008). Preschoolers also show signs of empathy, meaning they can feel someone else's pain as if it were their own.

There are three different types of aggression exhibited in children. Instrumental aggression is common in young children. They hurt people without meaning to in order to gain something for themselves. Reactive aggression is impulsive and becomes better controlled with emotional regulation (Berger, 2008). Bullying aggression is when a child intentionally hurts another. Bullying can be verbal, relational or physical.

Different parenting styles affect how a child develops. An authoritarian parent is one that sets down clear rules and holds high standards (Berger, 2008). These parents are strict and tend to show little emotion to their children. This parent will raise a child that is obedient but not especially happy. They may feel guilty or depressed. A permissive parent is nurturing, accepting and their punishment is lax (Berger, 2008). They get very involved with their child's life and let them do whatever they want. This child will most likely lack self-control and inadequately control their emotions. An authoritative parent sets limits and enforces rules, but also listens to his or her child (Berger, 2008). They are usually considered the middle ground between an authoritarian parent and permissive parent. These parents raise children that are generally successful, kind, and well-liked.

During this stage, most children start to develop some sort of sexual identity. One theory of gender differences is Freud's psychoanalytic theory. Children ages 2-6 are said

to be in the phallic stage and the child supposedly experiences sexual desires for their opposite sex parent. The child resolves this conflict by identifying with the same sex parent. Another theory for gender differences is behaviorism. This theory states that gender roles are learned through the reinforcement and punishment of society (Berger, 2008). The cognitive theory of gender development says that children have gender schemas. This simply means that a child creates mental categories for girls and boys and identifies with the characteristics of one category. The sociocultural theory states that societies teach values and desired behaviors for men and women (Berger, 2008). Some societies are moving more toward androgyny, a balance of masculine and feminine characteristics (Berger, 2008). Epigenetic Theory explains gender identity through human nature and biology. This theory bases gender differences off of hormones and differences in male and female brains. Epigenetic theory also recognizes that the environment can shape, enhance, or halt those genetic impulses (Berger, 2008).

The physical development is slowed considerably during the school years (ages 7-12). However, their lung capacity expands and muscles get stronger. Most children this age are still pretty slim, however childhood obesity is an ever growing problem. Modern children have less chronic illnesses than past generations due to advances in immunizations and medicine. However, asthma is a very common disorder for kids this age. This is a condition that inflames the airways and makes breathing difficult (Berger, 2008). Some experts are hypothesizing that children are overprotected from bacteria and virus which in turn weakens their immune system and makes them more susceptible for conditions such as asthma (Berger, 2008).

The brain continues to mature during the school years. There is a noticeable difference in this child's reaction time. They are much quicker to respond to a stimulus due to increased myelination (Berger, 2008). They are also becoming much better at being selectively attentive.

Children in the school years are in Piaget's concrete operational thought stage. This is when a child starts to classify things into groups that have some property in common (Berger, 2008). They also begin to grasp the idea of identity and reversibility. The information-processing theory bases human cognition on a computer model. Children this age begin to search, analyze and express information like adults (Berger,

2008). This theory includes three different types of memory: sensory, working and long-term memory. Children in this stage will also start to think about thinking, which is called metacognition. Their language skills in grammar and pragmatics also increase.

Children ages 7 to 12 grow quite a bit socially. They begin to compare themselves to their peers and become more socially aware. Their morals begin to become more concrete and more developed. Erikson theorized that children this age were in a stage called industry vs. inferiority (Berger, 2008). This is when they judge if they are competent or incompetent at tasks in life.

This is commonly the age in which various disorders are discovered and diagnosed in children. Many children are found to have ADHD, an attention deficit disorder in which they are inattentive, impulsive, and overactive (Berger, 2008). Learning disorders are also more apparent after age 7. One common learning disorder is dyslexia, which is unusual difficulty in reading. Autism is becoming more prevalent in today's society. It is a disorder characterized by woefully inadequate social skills (Berger, 2008). It is difficult for a child with autism to understand emotions exhibited by others and therefore have difficulty relating with other people. Asperger Syndrome is high functioning autism. Children with these disorders all need special attention in order to learn and perform at their optimum levels.

Children ages 2 to 12 go through many changes physically, socially, and cognitively. As their brain matures, they become more independent and adult-like. All the developmental theories work together to explain how we develop as human beings.

*very well written, use of good examples  
demonstrates overall knowledge of material -  
good flow/use of citation - includes relevant  
information. (good job.*

Works Cited

Berger, K.S. *The Developing Person Through the Lifespan*. Available from  
<http://www.ebooks.bfwpub.com/bergerls7e.php>

**A. Spelling/Grammar – Basic Structure** Total Points Earned = 20 / 20 ÷ 2 = 10.

1. There are no serious spelling errors which would cause confusion in the document.

3 / 3 pts possible

2. There are no serious grammatical errors which would cause confusion in the document.

3 / 3 pts possible

3. Basic sentence structure is observed (no long/run on sentences). Each sentence presents a single idea.

4 / 4 pts possible

4. Basic paragraph structure is observed (only one main idea per paragraph).

3 / 3 pts possible

5. Paragraphs contribute to the entire paper.

3 / 3 pts possible

6. Paragraph organization makes sense.

4 / 4 pts possible

**B. Main Article** Total Points Earned = 40 / 40.

1. Article is identified according to class guidelines.

5 / 5 pts possible

2. Main points of article identified (why the article was written).

5 / 5 pts possible *very well done*

3. Main finding of article identified.

10 / 10 pts possible

4. Summary of Article includes pertinent information/background on subject.

10 / 10 pts possible *very well done*

5. Summary of Article shows understanding of material by the author of the paper.

10 / 10 pts possible

**C. Overall Total Points** = 40 / 40 ÷ 2 = 20.

1. The article chosen was within the specified domain of the assignment (it is not popular press, has to do with class relevant psychological research, is relatively current).

5 / 5 pts possible

2. The comparison article chosen was within the specified domain of the assignment (it has something to do with the article chosen, contributes in some way to the understanding of the main article).

5 / 5 pts possible

3. The paper shows an understanding of the concept covered in the article/outside source.

10 / 10 pts possible

4. The paper shows critical thinking/reasoning above and beyond that presented in the article. Other examples of this would be the ability to take BOTH the outside article and the main article and apply to some aspect of personal/professional life.

10 / 10 pts possible

5. Margins/line spacing is correct (1" top/bottom/right/left margins, double spaced).

5 / 5 pts possible

6. Font/size is acceptable. (Font is legible; size is not above 12pt.)

5 / 5 pts possible

**A:** 10 + **B:** 40 + **C:** 20 + 30pts. = 100 / 100.