

Applying developmental theory to an interview with a child.

[Life](#), [Childhood](#)



Applying Developmental Theory to an Interview with a child. (Introduction)

Erik Erikson, an influential and pioneering psychologist in the field of child development, established a theory of child development described in eight distinct psychosocial stages. Between the ages of 6 and 12, he believed that the conflict of "industry vs inferiority" was central in a child's development. He explained that during this stage of childhood, the child's world extends beyond the home to the school. The emphasis is on academic performance, acquiring abilities, and demonstrating competence in accomplishing work. Therefore, school plays a major role in this stage of childhood. At the same time, a child must learn to overcome or master potential feelings of inferiority. These feelings can arise when a child doubts his/her abilities, which can occur if the child receives no encouragement or positive reinforcement for his accomplishments. I interviewed a young 10 year-old girl named Emily. In her answers, she displayed many aspects of the psychosocial conflict of industry versus inferiority as described in Erikson's fourth stage. (Main body part one) The concept of the sense of industry explains that children, who are 6-12 years old, will be learning to read and write, and to make things on their own. By acquiring skills and completing useful tasks, they will become industrious and gain in confidence. When asked what she was most proud of, Emily mentioned a school assignment that required her to write four paragraphs. In general, she seemed particularly concerned with school and grades. She even went as far as stating that she loved school and homework. Clearly, Emily's answers demonstrated a desire to be competent, successful and to work to accomplish something. Even outside of school, her activities indicate a sense

of industry. Emily stated that her favorite activity to do with her friends was to write songs and make music. Writing music is a creative activity that requires at least a small amount of initiative, focus, discipline, and skill. Consequently, it is an important confidence builder for a child. Emily already seemed to have acquired a substantial amount of confidence and resilience as a result of this. When asked if she would feel discouraged if she failed at something, she answered: " No because I always have a plan B". In a similar type of answer, she stated that if she got a poor grade she would ask the teacher if she could re-take the assignment. She also asserted her belief that she could improve her grades from B's to A's. Clearly, Emily has acquired a feeling of her own competence, and she is not deterred by temporary failure or setbacks such as a poor grade. (Main body part two)

Erik Erikson explained that children between the ages of 6 to 12 might struggle with feelings of inferiority when they encounter difficulty with academic work, group activities, and friends. They would feel that society is excessively demanding and might develop a sense of inferiority. Good grades and school performance are highly valued in society. Students with good grades gain in status and prestige. Conversely, children with poor academic performance also experience failure and frustration, especially if they are less skilled than their peers (Eccles, 2011). When I asked Emily about things that made her angry, she answered " getting a 75 or lower". When she received a bad grade, Emily used the word " disturbed" to describe her feelings. Academic accomplishment seemed directly tied to her sense of self-worth. In some cases, children begin develop a sense of inferiority based on the belief that their failures are due to some innate or

personal shortcoming. Carol S. Dweck, professor of Psychology at Stanford University described this problem: " Under usual circumstances in the American culture, children come to conclude that failure is an indication of their incompetence, not a condition that can be modified by learning or practicing". As we saw previously, Emily seems to have passed this challenge and she believes in her ability to overcome difficulties and failure. Despite this self-confidence, Emily evidently displayed a concern for how she appeared to her peers. This is another aspect of the challenge of inferiority: children wish to be seen as equal or superior to their peers. She described that she believed her friends thought she was " on top of things". She also stated she hated when her friends talked behind her back. It was important for her to appear competent to her peers. (Conclusion/Summary) The psychosocial conflict of " industry vs inferiority" was frequently seen in my interview with Emily. Her concern for academic performance and competency was obvious throughout our interview. She was proud of her hard work, good grades, and already had a clear picture of what she might do for a career: she believes she will become a writer. Feelings of inferiority are clearly a challenge to children around this age, but Emily seems to have overcome them. Her strong self-confidence and self-esteem allow her to face failure as a challenge that can be surmounted, and not as a permanent setback. Overall, I believe Erikson's theory was helpful in analyzing Emily's development. I was surprised by how most of her answers can be framed in terms of a desire to display competence and ability. On the other hand, I did not feel like she displayed a strong feeling or struggle against inferiority. This might be a result of Emily's upbringing and of her academic success. She is a

good student and her parents encourage her to do well. Because of this, she is unlikely to feel pessimistic or inferior. Bibliography Cavanaugh C. John, Kail V. Robert. (2010). Human Development: A Life-Span view. 6th edition. Canada. Cengage Learning. Center for Disease Control and Prevention. (2012, August 15). Child development. Middle Childhood (6-8 years of age). Retrieved October 25, 2012. from <http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/childdevelopment/positiveparenting/middle.html> Eccles S. Jacquelynn, (2011, May 17). When School Is Out. The Development Of Children Ages 6 to 14. Retrieved October 25, 2012. from <http://www.princeton.edu/futureofchildren/publications/journals/article/index.xml?journalid=48&articleid=232&ionid=1518> Dweck, C. S., and Leggett, E. (1988). A social-cognitive approach to motivation and personality. *Psychological Review* 95: 256—73. Woolfolk, A. E. (1987). *Educational Psychology*, (3rd ed.). New Jersey: Simon and Schuster