

Human development observations children and young people essay

[Family](#), [Children](#)



INTRODUCTION

This essay is going to give a critical reflection of human development theories. It will compare and contrast human development theories, linking the theories with the events observed of a child aged three and a half years in a nursery setting, over six weeks. It will also evaluate the recording method used and what I have learnt relevant to the social work practice. For the purpose of maintaining confidentiality in accordance with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), (2012), Guidance on Conduct and Ethics for Students, the child has been named under the pseudonym of Eva. Eva is a three and a half year old girl of black African origin and lives with her parents. She is the youngest in a family of three and has a sister and a brother. Both her parents work full time and she attends nursery full time. In the nursery setting Eva and other children were highly encourage participate in a wide range of activities.

Observation Log 1

Cognitive Development

I conducted six observations on Eva, over a period of six week in a nursery setting and one of the theories I am able to link to the observations to, is the cognitive development theory. This theory is associated with the work of Jean Piaget (1896–1980) and his work focused on understanding how children view the world. Piaget believed that children are born with a very basic mental structure on which all subsequent learning and knowledge is based and the mental processes will have a progressive reorganization as a result of biological maturation and environmental experience. Piaget's

assumption was that children are active participants in the development of knowledge, adapting to the environment through actively seeking to understand their environment. He suggested that cognitive development happens in four stages, 0 to 2 years being the sensorimotor, 2 years to 7 years the preoperational, 7 to 12 years the concrete operations, and 12 years and above the formal operations. (Beckett and Taylor 2010) According to Crawford and Walker (2008), Piaget assumed that in the preoperational stages, (the stage Eva is in) children have not yet mastered the ability of mental operations and still do not have the ability to think through actions. He believed that children in this stage are considered to be egocentric by showing difficulty in seeing things from a point of view other than their own. Eg They engage in collective monologues, in which each child is talking, but not interacting with the other children. Eg They also focus their attention on one aspect of the situation and have difficulty seeing that a situation may have a number of dimensions. Eg They also lack reversibility by failing to understand that working backwards can restore whatever existed before. Eg... states that, Piaget believed that children build their understanding of the world through activities for example dramatic play. At the preoperational stage they also learn skills like drawing and language and sort objects in groups. eg However, Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934), also did a study on cognitive growth and did not see children as individual explorers of knowledge, but as learners from social interactions. He emphasised the role of language and the importance of relationships and interactions between children and adults. He believes that the members of the culture, for example teacher, parents or siblings, construct the child's learning. While Piaget believed that

children should not be presented with problems and materials beyond their developmental ability, Vygotsky believed that a knowledgeable adult can help them achieve the skills and he called it scaffolding. He referred to area of development as the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). For example Now the Eva is capable of doing the puzzle. Vygotsky believed language is an important tool for thought and plays a key role in cognitive development. He introduced the term private speech, or self-talk. This refers to when children "think out loud." After learning language, children engage in this self-talk to help guide their activity and develop their thinking. Generally, self-talk continues until children reach school age. Both Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky believed that children build knowledge through experiences. Piaget believed this happened through exploration with hands on activities. Vygotsky, on the other hand, believed that children learn through social and cultural experiences. Interactions with peers and adults help children in this process. While interacting with others, children learn the customs, values, beliefs, and language of their culture. In contrast to Piaget, Vygotsky believed that learning was not limited by stage or maturation. Children move forward in their cognitive development with the right social interaction and guided learning. Like Piaget, he saw children as active partners in their own learning, and increasingly so as their ability to interact with others develops. Vygotsky saw the adult as vital to the process of scaffolding the child's behaviour. Piaget's concept have been criticised of denying other aspects of thinking such as intuition and creativity and also not examining and explaining individual differences in children. However, they both emphasise the active role of the child in its intellectual development; Piaget, we might

say, regarded each child from birth as a kind of scientist, trying to make sense of the world around it, trying to construct a model of the world it experiences which makes sense. Vygotsky's theory emphasises in particular the role of culture and social interaction in making this possible and identifies the function of 'scaffolding' in the child's learning. He saw learning as a continuum from birth to death, and did not focus on particular 'stages'. They are other theorists of cognitive development like Jerome Bruner who also emphasised the connection between language and thought. He saw children as active participants in making sense of their world. Like Vygotsky, he saw cognitive development to be a social process and he promoted the idea of discovery learning, where the environment provides the answers but the child makes the connections. He also used the term scaffolding to describe the role of others in fostering a child's social development.

Observation Log 3

Social Play

I chose to use play as play range from a wide range of activities and there are many theories of play. I will look at the theories of Piaget and Smilansky, Parten, Vygotsky. Children explore the world through play and they use their senses and movements. For young child, play is a way of developing intellectual abilities, constructing knowledge and building social skills. According to Piaget (1972) play promotes mental and social abilities and helps children learn how to express and manage their feelings. Piaget argued that for children to think things through they need to play and by doing so, play facilitates and transforms the children's thought processes. Vygotsky

(1986) believed play enable the developmental process and leads to independent thinking. (Casper and Theilheimer 2009), Piaget categorised play into sensory motor, symbolic and games with rules. A child up to 2 years is in the sensory motor stage and uses various senses and motor skills to explore objects and their environment. In the symbolic play which is seen during the preoperational stage, children engage in imaginary games and fantasy role play. In the games with rules stage, which is Piaget's concrete operations stage, children are able to follow rules of games. Piaget did not tend to see play as learning through the accommodation of new information, but rather the assimilation of new materials into existing cognitive structures. In his view it is relaxed practice time rather than the challenging learning time for taking in completely new information. Smilansky (1968) identified four types of play: functional play, constructive play, dramatic play, and games with rules. Smilansky developed three stages of play based her work with Piaget's but expanded to include Functional play which occurs in the first two years of life. In the dramatic play stage, children imitate the world through role play. Smilansky's work highlights the importance of considering cognitive development (particularly the inspirational work of Jean Piaget) when we look at the levels of play. Piaget, along with socio-emotional theorists such as Erikson, believed that children could use play to act out unpleasant experiences or experiences where they had very little power. This explains why children entering school play teachers over and over again with younger children, acting out teachers who are ferocious in their ability to order and command. The child can imagine themselves in the position of power and this helps them to deal with being powerless. This is also common

with children witnessing or involved in violent households. Vygotsky saw play as much more significant than Piaget. He saw it as crucial to learning in the preschool period, particularly imaginative play. Vygotsky saw play as a major contributor to the development of the zone of proximal development if children can imagine themselves doing something, they are closer to doing it. Play also fosters the separation of thoughts from actions and objects.

Parten (1932), categorised children's play into six stages, unoccupied play, solitary play, onlooker play, parallel play, associative play and cooperative play. The ability to join groups of other children, and the desire to do so begins, at an early age and progresses through a developmental sequence. Parten focussed on the different types of social play. In her research she discovered that children of different ages actually played together differently. They were capable of different levels or categories of social play. Her categories of social play are still a useful tool to help focus us on how social play changes and develops at different stages of our lives. Remember that the stages identified by Parten are not always followed in a linear fashion by all children in other words, a child may not progress directly from one stage to another. You might also find that a child will often engage in different stages of social play depending on factors such as the child's familiarity with either the situation or their playmates or the child's temperament.

Onlooker play This can occur across many stages of development. Evidence of onlooker play is seen when children are near a group of other children and are often following the actions or copying what is happening in the play. The children, however, do not usually want to participate or are waiting for someone to aid their participation. Parallel

play This is usually seen during toddlerhood. During parallel play toddlers will play alongside each other and with similar materials but do not interact with each other. Associative play This is first seen usually in the early preschool years. Children will begin to play and talk with each other in dramatic play situations where roles may be taken on. However, these roles are usually not sustained for any length of time. There does seem to be a common purpose to the play. Cooperative play occurs in the later preschool years. Children are able to take on roles and sustain them for the duration of the play. The group of children have agreed upon goals and roles for the play.

Play and learning theory

Evaluation of the observation process

(how I managed the process and as an observer how may have affected the process)

Evaluation of recording method

Reflection (feelings, attitudes, beliefs and professional values, anti oppressive)

Ruch (2009) states that, reflective practice enables the practitioners to acknowledge the actual or potential emotional impact of the observation and be able to transfer the awareness to practice.

What I learnt

McKinnon (2009), states that child observation is a process which enable the worker to be responsive rather than intrusive through watching and listening in an alert and informed way that raises awareness and sharpens understanding. It involves learning how to monitor feelings and reactions and

how they can provide information. The observation process provided me with an opportunity to focus on the vulnerability, resilience and the relative powerlessness of children in a nursery setting. It also provides me with knowledge and skills on how to conduct an observation and according to McKinnon (2009), well developed observational skills can act as a safeguard. It also provided me with an opportunity to discover and have a deeper understanding of how children communicate, play, engage with adults and most importantly about their development.

IMPLICATION FOR PRACTICE

As a social worker student I need to have knowledge on human life course development in order to understand their use in practice as the practice requires me to take a holistic approach and understanding of an individual's circumstances. Social work practice involves interactions between people, which are influenced by each person's life course and their experience and perceptions about their own life. As a social worker student I need to have an understanding of how people develop and place people's life situations in the context of the expectations of normal life course development. This will enable me to appreciate that a person's experience, their growth and life experiences have a direct impact on who they are and how they see their world. The social work profession is based on the supposition that people can be helped and supported to change and grow as a result of their experiences. Therefore, in order for me to be sensitive and appropriate in my communications with people and in the services I offer and provide, I need to appreciate and understand their life course and what makes them who they

are. Understanding how people grow and develop is central to the role and task of a professional social worker. Crawford and Walker (2007)

Evaluation

As you examine different theories of development, you will find that some (such as Erikson and Piaget) are criticised for being too committed to identifying stages, ignoring the diversity which is found in psychosocial experience and behaviour -while others are criticised for failing to take account of the sequence in which changes occur, not being clear enough about which changes become possible at which stage, and which changes are ruled out until a certain level of maturity is reached. According to Moffatt (1996) argued that some models of human development are cultural biased and they did not include some aspect for example person's experience, race, class, gender and sexual orientation.