

Human growth and development for social work essay



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An understanding of the full depth and breadth of a child's development is a prerequisite to effective work with children and youth, especially when the practitioner wants to concern himself with deviations from normal development'. (Maier, 1969) For this assignment the method of observation used was naturalistic observation, which is a method of observation used by psychologists, ' they observe people in their normal environment's'(Boyd, 2007) This type of observation is called naturalistic because behaviour is allowed to unfold naturally (without interference) in its natural environment - that is in the setting that it will normally occur.

The major strength of naturalistic observation is that it allows researchers to study behaviour under conditions that are less artificial than in experiments. Another plus is that in engaging with naturalistic observation can represent a good starting point when little is known about the behaviour under study. (Wayne, 2010) This method is arguably most practical when little or nothing at all is known about the matter one is going to observe as there are merits (and demerits) to it.

It helps the observer get a true glimpse of what is really happening in the life of the observed, in other words, helps to make sense of a child's behavioural pattern. The disadvantage though, could be the time limitation. In clinical observation, one could observe for as long as one needs to but with naturalistic observation, in order to keep interference to a minimum, there will be limited time of observation and this may hinder the accuracy of getting the real feel of what is going on in the life of the observed. Another disadvantage to the naturalistic observation is the observer sometimes does not know what to record.

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A lot of times, bits of recording are missed because of the speed at which some of these actions take place, concentration loss by the observer and the distraction of other children who were engaging with the observer as they were curious as to whom the observer was, and what was the purpose of the observer being in their setting. This was a disadvantage for the observation as this took the observer away from the child that was being observed to engage with other children. For the purpose of this essay, a one hour planned observation over four sessions was undertaken, monitoring and studying a selected child, Child A.

Observing his interests, social interaction and the way he played within the setting his relationship with his peers and teachers, and general level of development were the focus and aim of the observation. It is therefore the aim of this essay to see if this naturalistic approach is effective by using and reflecting upon Piaget's theory of play and evaluating how the observation process will improve on one's knowledge of child development in relation to social work. Jean Piaget is mostly noted for introducing the stages of child development.

These stages directly relate to play, as he stated that intellectual growth occurs as children go through the stages of assimilation, or manipulating the outside world to meet one's own needs—playacting—and accommodation, or readjusting one's own views to meet the needs of the outside environment, or work. Play is a very important part of a child's development which has been agreed upon by various theorists many classical theorists in the 19th and early 20th centuries studied the origins of play and tried to explain why

it exists and the part it plays in human development (Saracho & Spodek, 1995).

Herbert Spencer described play as the purposeless expenditure of buoyant strength (as cited in Peller, 1996; Saracho & Spodek, 1995). It also has been described as the product of superfluous energy left over when people's primary needs are met (Rubin, 1982). Because children's primary needs are met by parents, less of their energy is used for survival (Saracho & Spodek, 1995). According to this perspective, children love play because they have extra energy and look for ways to release it.

The most common explanation of the deeper purpose for play is the so-called practice or pre-exercise theory (Saracho & Spodek, 1995). As early as 1898, Groos thought of play as an essential need of childhood, because it can reinforce the instincts that allow children to prepare skills for the future (as cited in Rubin, 1982). Through play, children can learn much of what they will need to know to survive in the future. Play allows children to practice, elaborate on, and perfect skills before they become necessary for survival in adulthood (Rubin, 1982). (http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3614/is_200207/ai_n9147500/?tag=content;col1)

Child A is a 3 year old boy, an only child who comes from a two-parent loving family. He is a very independent little boy intellectually and socially. Child A was observed at different times during the day when he was playing to enable the observer to gain different aspects of Child A at play. Being an only Child A was comfortable playing by himself and discovering ways to get around issues that seemed like problems at first glance; like trying to reach for a book that was out of his reach.

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He solved this by reaching for a chair and standing on it to give him extra height to enable him to reach for the book 'the lone scientist' approach was observed. Whilst observing Child A, he plays in the sand box and the water tray. He picks up a spoon and stirs the water in the water tray and states that he is making carrot soup, and then he walks across to the sand tray and takes a few spoonfuls of sand which he says is sugar and puts into the 'soup'. He walks around and picks up bricks which are 'carrots' and 'broccoli' and puts into his 'soup'.

He continues to stir his soup. Child C says to Child A 'carrot soup is my favourite. After making his 'soup' he moves to the home corner to play, whilst playing with his teddy bear 'cyber bear' he states that 'cyber bear' has been naughty so he has to go to bed - 'you are going to bed now and stay there and don't come out again'. He leaves 'cyber teddy' in the home corner and goes off to the TV room. However he is observed going back to the home corner and saying to cyber bear 'good boy you did what you are told you can get out of bed now.

This infers that he has seen this happen before- most probably to him and he is acting out his experiences. This demonstrates Piaget's theory of assimilation that he is imitating something that he has seen been done before. Piaget (1962) defined play as assimilation, or the child's efforts to make environmental stimuli match his or her own concepts. Piagetian theory holds that play, in and of itself, does not necessarily result in the formation of new cognitive structures.

Piaget claimed that play was just for pleasure, and while it allowed children to practice things they had previously learned, it did not necessarily result in the learning of new things. In other words, play reflects what the child has already learned but does not necessarily teach the child anything new. In this view, play is seen as a “ process reflective of emerging symbolic development, but contributing little to it” (Johnsen & Christie, 1986, p. 51). In contrast, Vygotskian theory states that play actually facilitates cognitive development.

Children not only practice what they already know-they also learn new things. Discussing Vygotsky's theory, Vandenberg (1986) remarks that “ play not so much reflects thought (as Piaget suggests) as it creates thought” (p. 21). Child A decides to play with the puppets and perform a puppet show. Child B and Child C come over to play with him walks over to the home corner to pick up ‘ cyber dog’. Child A decides that ‘ cyber dog’ is going to be the audience to watch the show that he and his friends are going to put on. They perform their show about how monsters are trying to catch them and put them in prison.

Child A then picks up some bricks to make into a gun and pretends to shoot the monsters demonstrating Piaget theory of role play and the importance of make believe for children ‘ Play is an important part of Piaget's core of human functioning ‘ play, an essential part of the evolution of intelligence, begins with a predominance of assimilation in an adapted activity ‘. (Maier, 1969) However this view has been challenged by Brian Sutton-Smith who believes that play also occurs as an independent process of thought and this was observed by the author whilst observing child A at play.

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The social interaction with Child B and Child C shows that Child A does not just play by himself he enjoys playing with others. Through observation it was observed that Child A did show traits of being a Vygotskian child as well. As he sat at the table cutting out pictures, he is very competent in cutting and knows exactly what he is doing and clearly states ' I am cutting my pictures very carefully because I do not want to cut myself, because if I cut my self I will bleed' showing that he has reached the logical operations stage.

However he also wanted the approval of the nursery nurses in the nursery and actively sought it and was happy when he received positive encouragement displaying Vygotsky's belief that ' social interaction plays a fundamental role in the development of cognition' <http://tip.psychology.org/vygotsky>. Vygotsky believed that play is a means of deferring immediate gratification - instead of tantrums or swallowing the need, the child fulfils needs in fantasy play. He also believed that children learn to live within self-imposed rules during their fantasy play; play allows the child to practice self-regulation.

Play, for Vygotsky, was vehicle for a child behaving more maturely than at other times. " In play it is as though he were a head taller than himself. " (<http://departments.weber.edu/chfam/4990a/Theory&play.html>) Through observation when there was structured play which was led by the nursery nurse Child A was an enthusiastic participant and follows instructions. All the children are asked to make a circle - a child is going to be chosen to be the special helper. So Child A quickly sits down and points out that Child C is not sitting nicely, as all the children are settled down.
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They start to sing songs and Child A is asked to choose a song and he chooses 'twinkle twinkle traffic lights' he enjoys this activity immensely and performs all the actions and continues to sing all the songs and wants to choose another child is asked to choose a song. So the nursery nurse explains that he has already had a turn. When the special helper is chosen Child A is observed being upset that he has not been chosen to be the special helper and asks the nursery nurse why he has not been chosen, she explains to him that everyone has to have a turn.

Observing this emphasised Piaget egocentrism approach as according to Piaget, children experience this difficulty because they are unable to take on another person's perspective to Child A is only concerned with the fact he has not been chosen. With Child A being an only child there was the expectation that he would exhibit more characteristics of a Piagetian child, however from continuous observation it was observed that he also displayed traits of Vygotsky theory of play as he really enjoyed the social interaction of the other children he actively sought their company.

The nursery nurse asks 'does anyone want to go to the garden? Child A, B, C all say yes. Child A goes to get his wellington boots to put on himself but struggles to put them on so he goes to the nursery nurse - 'I cannot do my boots myself and so the nursery nurse gives him a new pair of boots to wear. As he was finding it difficult to do himself he asked he knew could help him demonstrating Vygotsky's theory of the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO). The MKO refers to anyone who has a better understanding or a higher ability level than the learner, with respect to a particular task, process, or concept.

The MKO is normally thought of as being a teacher, coach, or older adult. He heads straight for the slide outside and then looks to see what Child B and C are doing and once he sees that they are not going to the slide he then runs around the garden with Child B playing in the tyres. Then they play hide and seek, with Child A hiding underneath the slide when he is found he laughs excitedly. He waits patiently to take his turn to on the slide and falls and rolls in the snow and observed having lots of fun with his friends. ' Social interaction plays a fundamental role in the process of cognitive development.

In contrast to Jean Piaget's understanding of child development (in which development necessarily precedes learning), Vygotsky felt social learning precedes development. He states: " Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological) and then inside the child (intrapsychological). " (Vygotsky, 1978). Once the children are asked to come inside he does this with no complaints and takes off his hat, coats and wellington boots unassisted.

Observation helps social workers to reflect upon situations before intervening (K, 1998), and the ability to reflect and evaluate is an invaluable tool, and from the observational study of Child A this has highlighted the importance of observation, the difficulties and challenges that social workers face with child observations ' although it is difficult and often puzzling, if student can be helped to distinguished the observation aspect of social work from the role of the active helpful social worker who intervenes, they will

become clearer about their role of assessing, understanding and monitoring before acting.

This capacity to reflect and think before acting is invaluable skill that comes out of observation training not acting but staying with the experience and struggling to be clear about what you know and what remains unknown, is difficult (Richie Le Pat & Tanner K 1998). The role of the social worker in assessing, their perception of things and monitoring becomes clearer.

The process gave an understanding of why and how children are expected to develop intellectually, socially and emotionally and at what different stages the development takes place. For example, it was normal for Child A to run around the nursery playing monsters and to engage enthusiastically in role play and to understand that it was acceptable within his age range.