

Domain Research Paper

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Introduction

Throughout this course we have investigated a variety of theories and factors that impact development. Included in our studies are the four domains: physical state, cognitive state, language ability, and social/emotional state. Each one of these four domains can be applied to different life stages. In this paper, I have selected three women from my personal life that are all currently in different life stages. Using the four domains, I investigate how they apply to and differ amongst each individual in their various stages of development.

Person 1 – Child

Physical State

Zoey is a three-year-old who is around 33 inches tall. She is short for her age and is predicted to take after her mother who is a shorter than the average American woman. Her hair is dark brown like her mother's, but her eyes are green like her father's. The brown hair that Zoey inherited portrays dominant genes that were passed down by her mom, where the green eyes she inherited from her father were recessive. Zoey reflects many of the gender norms associated with being female and frequently sports flower dresses. Although she displays feminine traits, Zoey spends much of her time outdoors and is frequently covered in dirt and scrapes. She is also strong and seems to have better gross motor skills than many of her friends. This is seen when she navigates up and down steep terrain that her peers frequently fall on or crawl up. Her fine motor skills seem normal as she can maneuver game pieces and paint pictures that resemble her surroundings. When painting, she seems to favor her right hand which demonstrates the development of lateralization in her brain.

Cognitive State

According to Piaget's theory of development, when a child is around the age of three, they are in the preoperational stage. Zoey models this through play when she makes “soup” by filling a bucket with sand and rocks and “feeding” it to the people around her. When she does this, she will typically slosh the bucket around to see how full it is to ensure that she will not spill when carrying it from one person to the next; this is an early sign of metacognition. Pretend play is important when engaging with her environment because “the cognitive development of children’s methods of learning promotes that children obtain their self-knowledge when they actively engaging their environment” (Roslan, et al., 2022).

Zoey is also in a stage where her current understanding is driven by how things look rather than derived from logical reasoning, also known as perceptual salience. This concept can be seen when Zoey watches magic tricks. One particular magic trick she likes is when her uncle “eats” a coin and then proceeds to pull out that same coin from behind her ear. The adults can use logic to understand that the uncle is using sleight of hand, whereas Zoey is going off what she is seeing, and truly thinks the coin is reappearing out of thin air.

When interacting with other kids she engages well and demonstrates the ability to share. Occasionally Zoey will struggle when she doesn’t get what she wants and proceed to externalizing the problem. For example, her mother has been struggling with Zoey bringing home gold coins from preschool, and when confronted Zoey will cry and yell when they are taken away. Her mom is attempting to help Zoey understand the moral concept of stealing, but she is not able to grasp the concept quite yet. This is normal for kids Zoey’s age are in a phase of egocentrism where they struggle to understand other people’s point of view. Despite this, Zoey shows signs of empathy and is working on her manners, such as saying please and thank you.

One last factor in Zoey's cognition is she is experiencing a decline in perseveration errors and transitioning into memory strategies at this age. This can be seen when she is coloring, as she names some of the colors and will even sort out some of the similar looking shades. Zoey's attention span is short, but if she is interested, she will stay focused on the activity at hand and when asked to perform a simple series of tasks she can complete them with relatively little help.

Language Ability

Zoey's language skills are sharp for her age. She voices her own needs in short but clear sentences and will occasionally use expressive body language to enhance her statements. When talking with kids who are older, she uses simple script but responds using complete sentences during conversation. Her words are generally pronounced well. Her mom frequently finds her talking to her dolls, a concept that Piaget called the preschool-age preoperational thinking, that is, not yet having logical mental operations. Zoey loves to sing to songs and recite basic rhymes. She is also in her partial alphabetic phase and will attempt to sing the alphabet, and while she knows some letters, much of it is still gibberish. When asking Zoey questions, she will listen if she is not distracted and can usually come up with a response or follow the request.

Social/Emotional State

Being an only child without a father in the picture, Zoey has a close relationship with her mother. She also sees her grandparents and extended family often and enjoys spending time with them. Zoey's mom also is a part of many communities so she has spent lots of time interacting with a large variety of people. Zoey is not shy when it comes to chatting with new people and will often try to convince them to play with her.

This year Zoey started preschool and her mom stated that she had no problem adjusting to the new social environment. Despite being an only child, Zoey is not shy and instigates

pretend play with other kids her age. “According to Vygotsky, play creates a zone of proximal development of the child, in which children can train and perform activities that they are unable or unwilling to perform in real-life situations. It might help children learn to understand social situations and to regulate their behavior” (Jaggy, et al., 2023). Pretend play is a joyful activity for Zoey. If Zoey does encounter something that intimidates her, she typically will seek out her mom for support. Overall, Zoey seems well adjusted and active in her current environment.

Person 2 – Teenager

Physical State

Ande is a 14-year-old who is around 5 feet tall. She has a slender build and consumes a fair amount of junk food and energy drinks. Her hair is blonde like her mothers, but has dyed some strips of it blue. Ande’s identity reflects an “emo” style. Most days she wears heavy eye makeup and rainbow jewelry and her wardrobe primarily consists of dark colored skinny jeans and shirts from her favorite bands. Her demeanor is relaxed and she is often seen slouched over her phone or walking around with her headphones in. She is not particularly athletic but finds joy in honing in her fine motor skills by drawing detailed animations.

Cognitive State

Ande is at the age where she is starting to build her identity. She sees her strengths and weaknesses more realistically at this point and has taken on the mindset that she does not like school, but does like things that allow her to be creative. She seems to get pretty average grades, despite having a negative view of her education. She does think about her future and voices that she would like to pursue a career as an interior designer one day. Outside of school she often spends hours at a time in her room working on drawings of animation characters, sometimes even creating stories for them. Looking at her pictures, they show many details and patterns of

abstract thought. At the age of 13 Ande is in Piaget's formal operational stage which highlights the transition from operational thought to include more abstract ways of thinking.

When it comes to her home life Ande's mom frequently expresses how, compared to her other children, Ande is a productive worker and gets her chores done efficiently. She is also a routine winner during family game nights, especially when it comes to games that require speed. At this age, Ande has transitioned into confronting problems with a more logical line of reasoning, which her parents have picked up on as they find themselves in more complex arguments when she wants something to go her way. They also find themselves bargaining more as they are frequently faced with her instrumental hedonism approaches; "You scratch my back and I'll scratch yours".

Language Ability

Like many teenagers, Ande spends much of her time texting friends and scrolling social media. Social media markets and shares its own versions of language and expression. "Social media literacy is focused on the development of different abilities that range from the technical to the socio-emotional. In this sense, social media, by making possible and favoring social interactions, bring with them requirements for people to perform adequately on digital platforms, understanding that there is no separation between the digital plane and the physical plane; therefore, a mutual influence is produced" (Polanco-Levicán & Salvo-Garrido, 2022). Simply put, teenagers like Ande are developing much of their language through online sources. Some even argue that emojis are a modern day form of punctuation. Ande frequently uses trending language from the internet and is developing a modern version of communication that many define as casual.

Social/Emotional State

Ande is the oldest of three children. Her parents are together, and even though she has “pulled away” from them in the last couple of years, she still joins them for dinners and game nights. Ande also used to have a boyfriend, but they recently broke up after a month of dating. Although it was evident that the breakup was painful, she has not talked to her parents much about it. This could be because it is common at this age to deal with hardship by internalizing problems rather than externalizing them, especially to adults.

When out at public events, sometimes Ande will become irritated when her dad teases her, stating that people are going to notice and avoid her. This is an example of Ande experiencing the imaginary audience phenomenon, where something embarrassing happens and she thinks everyone is going to notice (Sigelman & Rider, 2021, p. 204).

As discussed previously, social media and online platforms are also a social connection for Ande. A recent study highlighted how social media is not only a source of entertainment but also a social engagement for younger generations.

Both online and offline, teenagers actively participate in conversations around content and meaning, discuss and share thoughts, and suggest content to be watched and appreciated. In addition, these digital media spaces act as connection hubs, allowing audiences to forge and maintain friendships both online and offline. (Balleys, et al., 2020)

Although social media has been around throughout Ande’s childhood, it became increasingly important for her during the COVID pandemic when she relied on an online presence to stay connected with her friends and attend classes.

Social media aside, like many teenagers her age, Ande has developed her idols, which are made up of various celebrities she fancies. She is also shifting her social life to revolve around

her friend groups rather than her family. She has a few close friends with similar interests. She really enjoys sleeping over at her friend's houses, where she enjoys watching movies and staying up late. She is not able to get a formal job quite yet, but one of her mom's friends provides her with the opportunity to work at the farmers market on the weekends to earn some cash. And she likes the work, voicing her favorite part is setting out and organizing the produce.

Person 3 - Adult

Physical State

Xaria is a 56-year-old African woman who is around 5'7, although she claims she used to be 6ft tall. She has curly hair that used to be black, but is now mostly grey. She has a strong build with hunched shoulders. Her appearance is tidy and she favors wearing her floral skirts. She is a busy body that spends much of her time working on tasks around the house. She confidently hand kneads dough for bread and walks over a mile once a week to see her friends. She also displays good fine motor skills as she maintains her own garden, planting individual seeds each season. Xaria also goes to yoga twice a week to maintain her flexibility. She is a big believer in the concept of "use it or lose it".

Cognitive State

Xaria is a woman who values staying active and engaged, not only physically, but mentally too. Information-processing research shows that adults often function best cognitively in domains in which they have achieved expertise" (Sigelman & Rider, 2021, p.128). Xaria is a great example of this, as she struggles to use technology but excels in the kitchen- a place she has lots of experience in. To stay sharp, in her free time she likes to teach and take cooking classes at her local Co-Op. By continuing to learn Xaria is contributing to her neurocognitive reserve, or stockpile of neural resources that are saved up over our lifetime that can be drawn

upon to offset declines in cognitive performance throughout the aging process (Sigelman & Rider, 2021, p.128). Xaria also works part time at a nursing home, voicing that it brings her meaning and gets her out of the house.

When watching Xaria in the kitchen she is a skilled cook. Cooking with her I have noticed that she has become more forgetful as the years have progressed, and she voiced that she finds herself taking longer to complete tasks than it did when she was younger. Xaria shows resilience to her aging however, expressing how grateful she is to have her health and the opportunity to grow old. This positive self-perception of aging has been found to correlate with increased processing speed, short-delay memory, and increased executive function as people enter adulthood (Brown, et al., 2020). It is common for Xaria to express positivity and she is known for her optimism by those around her. She also is a relativistic thinker and enjoys finding the grey area when confronting issues, as well as “seeing both sides of the coin”. Xaria’s mindset is a classic example of grit, showing a combination of passion and perseverance as she achieves her goals, even when faced with obstacles (Sigelman & Rider, 2021, p. 290).

Language Ability

Xaria is an excellent conversationalist. She loves to theorize and share stories. She is also a good listener, despite having some hearing loss. As she has aged, she feels like she is slower to recall words, but finds herself brushing past it and finding other ways to explain the concept instead. Xaria still has an advanced and developed vocabulary that she likes to exercise by writing poetry sometimes. She is bilingual as well, which may be positively contributing to Xaria’s mental health. “The most dramatic effect of bilingualism in older age is the accumulation of cognitive reserve that manifests as a delay in symptoms of dementia. The central notion for cognitive reserve is that there is a dissociation between cognitive level and underlying neural

structures such that individuals with cognitive reserve outperform levels predicted by their neural resources” (Bialystok & Fergus, 2022). With that in mind, knowing a second language could be helping Xaria stay ahead of the curve and avoid neurological challenges that start to present themselves in her age group.

Social/Emotional State

Xaria is happily married to her husband of 36 years, and has two children, and one grandchild. Her kids live relatively close and she gets to see them about once a month. She takes on a companionate grandma style and enjoys watching her grandson but is happy to send him home. Xaria and her kids have a relatively secure attachment now; however she says that due to a more authoritative parenting approach, it took time to rekindle those connections with her kids. She voices that it was hard for her to come from Africa and raise kids in the American culture- it took lots of reflection and patients.

Xaria currently lives in the suburbs and has friends that live near her. She is an active member in many communities including work, yoga, and her local Co-Op. She seems content with her life and where she is at, and is always looking for the next new thing to learn about.

Conclusion

Using the four domains: Physical state, cognitive state, language ability, and social/emotional state, the life stages of three different women were explored. To enhance the understanding of these domains, theories such as Piaget’s four stages of cognitive development and Vygotsky’s social development theory were applied. This highlighted some of the transitions that are involved throughout the aging process. Furthermore, different methods were investigated for each age group regarding ways to either aid in development skills or build up cognitive reserve. Development is inevitable, and understanding the way it interacts with the different stages of life

is special. A quote by Betty Friedan (n.d.) sums up this process nicely by simply stating that, “Aging is not lost youth but a new stage of opportunity and strength”.

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