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Cognitive and Language Development in a Child

Introductory Child Development (ECE2000)

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In the education field, the best way to learn about theories and development is through reading and observation. In this paper, I will use readings and personal observations of a child to discuss the cognitive and language development of this child. Knowing how a child develops is beneficial to future early childhood education teachers as this knowledge helps them to create developmentally appropriate lessons that involve assisting in cognitive and language growth. In my observations, I witnessed different examples of cognitive development and language uses. To understand my observations and the topics they directly address, cognitive and language development must be defined.

As a child grows, his or her mental capabilities expand and use of language becomes more complex. Cognitive development is the working of the brain in making connections and “includes all of the processes involved in making sense of the world around [one’s self]”; cognitive development “refers to the way [one] (thinks and learns)” (University of Cincinnati, 2012, “Cognitive Development”). Children learn and talk through receptive and expressive language with receptive being "what [one] (hears and understands)" and expressive being "what [one] (is) actually able to produce, or what [one] (says)" (University of Cincinnati, 2012, "Language Development").  When children listen to many different people talk, they learn how to talk and how to communicate.  With more social interactions with language(s), children can develop extensive vocabularies and ways to express their emotions through words.  Language development influences cognitive development by helping exercise the left hemisphere of the brains, as that is "the primary source of language development" (University of Cincinnati, 2012, "Language Development").

Due to the manner in which I observed, I still was not able to find out any specific information about the child I watched. My description of him continues to be speculative and, through my final observations, may be found incorrect. To continue to keep anonymity, I will refer to the child as Jack rather than by his real name. Jack is four-years-old and attends a preschool, at which I observe. He is Caucasian and male. Jack is of average build and height for a child his age and appears to have no physical disabilities. He is in class with his identical twin brother, but I do not know much else about their family or background.

Jack’s cognitive development is on track for age and appears to be growing. Though he is slightly egocentric (Santrock, 2013, p. 264), he does know that the other children have a different view from him when he asks one of them to hand him a block from another part of the room. Jack appears to understand things by picking them up and touching them. When he was building a tower, Jack moved a block around in his hands, tapped the block repeatedly against his hand, and moved it around to get a full view of the block. He did all this before even attempting to add a new block to his tower. In some instances of his play, he mimicked the teachers’ actions rather than doing his actions of his own volition. When he was using a screwdriver to twist in a screw to a block, he watched the teacher do it first then attempted to copy the actions precisely. For some actions, he is in the Zone Proximal Development (Santrock, 2013, p. 263, as he repeatedly needs the teachers’ assistance and guidance to perform certain tasks.

I was unable to get any strong observations that reflected Jack’s theory of mind (Anders Holm, 2010, “theory of mind”) as he tended to play by himself and did not speak much. My recommendations to the teachers would be to perform tests like the ones in the video cited above to see where Jack is developmentally with his theory of mind. Based on the results, they could help him understand deception and that his thoughts are private. Another test they could use is one utilizing Gardner’s Theory of Multiple Intelligences (Derrick Purefoy, 2009, “Howard Gardner of the Multiple Intelligence Theory”) to see how Jack appears to learn best, and then they could apply the results to the manner in which they teach Jack new subjects or skills.

Jack spoke to others minimally during my observations as he played in silence. When he did speak, he used his words to express his frustration or pain. After another student bit Jack’s hand, Jack exclaimed, “He bited me!” showing the “morphologic skills as [young children] experiment with making words plural or past tense” and “(overgeneralizing) these rules at first” by using the incorrect tense of bite, an irregular past tense verb (University of Cincinnati, 2012, “Language Development”). Another time he addressed the teacher by telling her that another student “is sitting on the [train] tracks,” showing his understanding of syntax and present tense in vocal language. While he did not frequently speak to others, he did constantly speak to himself, though I was unable to hear what he was saying. Jack would use his private speech as self-regulation while building train tracks and towers, matching with Vygotsky’s theory towards private speech being used to “plan, guide, and monitor [young children’s] behavior” (Santrock, 2013, p. 264).

For my recommendations for his teachers, I would suggest that they encourage him to speak more to others to practice his communication skills. Compared to his twin, Jack is much quieter and, as such, may need more opportunities to communicate independently from his brother. The teachers could sit by Jack and ask him to describe his pan for creating his train track. By engaging in conversation with him, the teachers are not only helping him to communicate his thoughts, but are also gaining insight into Jack’s thought process. Overall, Jack is able to communicate better using his body language, which can often be misconstrued, so his teachers encouraging him to “use his words” may greatly benefit his ability to communicate effectively.

This assignment was certainly beneficial in utilizing my observations to make some constructive and useful realizations and connections to my further educational development. Having read the related chapters and watched the related videos before my observations, I was excited to observe things that matched with what I had read and seen. By observing, I gathered a more concrete understanding of concepts addressed in readings and videos and was better able to understand their implications and connections. This assignment changed how I will work with children in my future career, as I now know that some children need more guidance on practicing their skills than other children need. I now know that cognitive development can be observed rather than assumed, as there are many indicators of where a child is developmentally. I am planning on giving more attention to cognitive development and language skills practice when creating lesson plans. I am looking forward to further observations to see more development with Jack and to better learn about even more developmental concepts.

References

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