

Chapter of Choice - Chapter Nine Artifact

Much of my past summer was spent babysitting two children for a teacher in my hometown. I had babysat them two times prior the year before and had begun to notice some changes in their behavior and comprehension. It wasn't until my Psychology 110 class here at Centre College that I could begin to explain the phenomena I was observing, as well as apply terms for the explanations of their behavior and growth. I am describing their characteristics and tendencies from April 2019, the first time that I babysat the children, and also describing their behaviors and growth from July of 2020. The purpose is to use my personal experience to discuss and describe the process and the characteristics of human development.

Out of respect for their privacy, I have decided to use other names in place of the children's real names. I will call the girl Cynthia, and I will call the boy Luke. In April of 2019, Cynthia was five years old, and Luke was two years old. In July of 2020, Cynthia was six years old, and Luke was three years old.

The first time that I babysat the children they were brought to my house, and I had my mom there to help me. Like many children that are taken to a babysitter, myself included, Luke began to cry when his mom and dad dropped him off. Cynthia was more excited than sad at first, but she would have moments where she really began to miss her parents. Cynthia and Luke had developed an attachment to their parents, particularly a secure attachment. This means that, over the years, they formed a strong emotional bond with their parents (Gazzaniga, 2018, p. 347). The "secure" attachment is demonstrated because the children were happy and satisfied with being held by my mom or me when their parents were still present and visible to Cynthia and Luke, but

had a much harder time adjusting and becoming comfortable when their parents left the room (Jones, J. D., & Cassidy, J., 2014). Luke was not yet able to talk and wanted to be held at all times. He cried in order to elicit a response from my mom or me if he was hungry, sleepy, or needed to be changed. It has been shown that caregivers, particularly adults, have an innate predisposition to respond to such actions in a baby (Gazzaniga, 2018, p.348). My mom and I both reinforced this observation, considering we reacted with care and love each time Luke began to cry or seem distressed. Luke would suck on a pacifier and his thumb. At any point that someone would hold him, he would want to put a finger or hair in his mouth to chew and/or suck. This behavior reflects the first stage of development in Jean Piaget's theory, which is the sensorimotor stage (Wood, K. C., Smith, H., & Grossniklaus, D., 2001). During the sensorimotor stage (ages birth to two years of age), a child will begin to notice the difference between itself and other objects, as well as learn to act with intention (Wood, K. C., Smith, H., Grossniklaus, D., 2001). Luke's action of sucking reflects the reflexive behavior of nursing from his mother (Gazzaniga, 2018, p. 354). He has begun to learn that he could suck on other things, such as his pacifier, my finger, or a "sippy" cup. Cynthia, on the other hand, demonstrated a higher level of cognitive development. She was able to use language to convey her thoughts and desires, but was still relatively self-absorbed. The word "self-absorbed" here does not mean "selfish" in this context, it just means that Cynthia was still looking at the world and situations through her own experience. Cynthia had to be reminded that I also had to take care of her brother. It wasn't just about keeping her safe and satisfied at all times, I also had to attend to her brother, considering his dependent stage of life. Cynthia also demonstrated a complex and constant imagination. She could

create detailed and thoughtful stories and also wanted to play “make believe.” Cynthia’s actions reflect her stage of life. This stage is what Piaget would have referred to as “pre-operational (Wood, K. C., Smith, H., & Grossniklaus, D., 2001).” In the pre-operational stage (ages two to seven), children demonstrate the ability to speak and are prone to use a “wild”, or complex, imagination (Wood, K. C., Smith, H., Grossniklaus, D., 2001). They also demonstrate behaviors that involve self-interest (Gazzaniga, 2018, p. 355). These behaviors also coincide with Lawrence Kohlberg’s theory of moral reasoning, particularly the pre-conventional level (Lally, M., & Valentine-French, S., 2020). At the pre-conventional level, self-interest and outcome are what determine morality (Lally, M., & Valentine-French, S., 2020). Luke was still at a stage in which he was not yet able to understand others’ needs and desires. Cynthia demonstrated behaviors that coincided with that of the pre-conventional level, as well as the conventional level. At the conventional level, rules and the opinion of others are what motivate behavior (Gazzaniga, 2018, p. 362). Cynthia demonstrated behaviors that reflected self-interest, like that of trying to get my attention after I told her that I also needed to take care of her brother, but she also demonstrated behaviors that showed that she cared what I thought of her and abided by rules that I had set in place, like the time that she did not take more snacks than she was supposed to because “Ella said so.”

In July of 2020, Luke demonstrated more observable growth than Cynthia, however both grew in several ways. Luke began to talk more and would repeat words back to someone if they talked to him. He began to group objects together based on certain features, such as green tractors and his sister’s pink tutus. This demonstrates his cognitive leap from Piaget’s sensorimotor stage to the pre-operational stage

(Gazzaniga, 2018, pp. 353-355). As I began to babysit them on a regular basis, they started to become more comfortable with me, and we formed a sort of attachment of our own, although they ultimately would rather have had their mom, dad, or “Mimi (grandmother).” Cynthia began to become more bold and would argue with me more consistently. She still demonstrated the characteristic of self-interest that coincides with the pre-operational level, like the time that she locked all of us out of the house because she wanted to go to their Mimi’s house and I had said “no” (Wood, K. C., Smith, H., & Grossniklaus, D., 2001). Although not the age that is regularly associated with Piaget’s “concrete operational” stage, Cynthia began to demonstrate characteristics that coincide with this stage of development. In the concrete operational stage, children begin to form more logically-based conclusions, as well as begin to grasp the concept of conservation quantity (Gazzaniga, 2018, pp. 355-356). Cynthia demonstrated a classic example of this cognitive leap, catching me when I switched cups that held her Sprite. One cup began to overflow, and she said, “Just switch the cups. It’s not as pretty as the sparkly one, but I still get just as much Sprite.” This demonstrates Piaget’s concrete operational stage due to her understanding of “conservation quantity” and that the amount of Sprite remains constant, regardless of the type of cup that the drink is in (Gazzaniga, 2018, pp. 355-356).

At the time that I was babysitting them (aka pre-PSY 110), I didn’t think much about their changes in behavior or cognitive development. In hindsight, I was given a first-hand experience to watch two young children grow and develop in ways that psychologists have observed and studied for many years.

References

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