Case Study:

An In-depth Observation of Sam

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Sam is a four-year-old male residing in the town of North Manchester, Indiana. He lives with his biological parents and sixteen month old sister, Lydia. According to Sam, the dog, Jake, is also a member of the family. Sam’s father, Brad, is a third grade teacher in Warsaw and his mother, Melissa, is the Director of Advancement Services at Manchester College. Both Sam and Lydia attend the Manchester Early Learning Center five days a week during the school year and in the summer they stay home with their dad. Sam has several interests which include animals and the outdoors. This can be attributed to the fact that Sam’s father enjoys hunting and displaying taxidermy in their house. Some of his dislikes consist of eating broccoli and being surprised. I am observing Sam at the MELC, for my Child Development class, in order to understand the growth of a child.
Physical Development

Sam’s mother, Melissa, had a normal pregnancy, but the delivery was another story. Sam was Franc Breach, which means he was butt down and had to be delivered by c-section. Throughout this pregnancy, Melissa craved peaches and ham, both of which Sam enjoys.

The first few years of a child’s life are very crucial. This is the time when they begin to crawl, walk, and talk. Sam started walking and talking around his first birthday. The second word that he spoke clearly was “deer.” Sam’s utterance of “deer” can be attributed to his father, who is an avid hunter.

Sam is now four years of age. According to Feldman (2007), the height and weight of a child this age should be forty inches and thirty-five pounds. However, Sam is forty-eight inches in height and weighs eighty pounds. Sam is a healthy eater at home and at day care. He likes fruit and meat and dislikes broccoli. Among Sam’s interests is drawing. He especially likes to use the animal stencils at the Manchester Early Learning Center. When drawing or writing, he properly uses a pencil or marker in his right hand. While coloring, Sam does not stay in the lines, but if he concentrates on the picture, then for the most part he can stay in the lines. Along with fine motor skills, his gross motor skills are mostly average for his age. Some days Sam likes to pretend he is an animal. If he is pretending to be a frog, then he will hop and leap like one. Tyrannosaurus-Rex is his favorite animal to pretend to be. He will roar like a dinosaur and run toward pretend trees and food.

With the exception of Sam’s height and weight, his physical development has been normal. He has met the average milestones up to this point. Through my observations it is clear that Sam’s fine and gross motor skills are on track for a four-year-old.
Cognitive Development

During Melissa’s pregnancy, she was careful to prevent herself and her unborn child from being exposed to teratogens. Sam was born without any defects, which may be attributed to Melissa’s cautiousness. Therefore, Sam’s cognitive development during the prenatal period can be perceived as normal.

According to Piaget, Sam was in the sensorimotor stage of development from birth to two years of age. This stage can be broken down into six substages. The first month of life he learned the sucking reflex, which caused him to suck at anything placed at his lips. By age two, Sam had passed through each of the six substages and entered into the preoperational stage. Not long after Sam turned two years of age he began to speak in full sentences, although they were not sophisticated.

Sam, now four years old, is in the middle of the preoperational stage. He has not mastered the concept of conservation. Feldman (2007) believes that children in the preschool stage “are unable to realize that a transformation in appearance does not imply a transformation in quantity.” When Sam was asked which row contained more cars, he chose the row that appeared longer, even though that was not the correct answer. Sam also displays another common characteristic of preschoolers, which is egocentric thought. “Preschoolers have difficulty in thinking about how another person feels” (Crosser 2008). An example of such behavior was when a group of boys at the Manchester Early Learning Center were playing with the trains and Sam decided he wanted the one that Brennen was playing with, so he grabbed it out of his hands. In addition to Sam’s cognitive development is his ability to recognize most of the letters of the alphabet. He can even print his own name, without any assistance. Sometimes when Sam draws a
picture he likes to label what he is drawing, such as the family dog. He has yet to learn how to spell “Jake,” but does not hesitate to ask an adult for help.

Up to this point, Sam’s cognitive development has been on the right track. His thought and language processes are greatly improving. By age seven, Sam should be ready to enter the concrete operational stage.
Social/Emotional Developments

Throughout Melissa’s pregnancy, she, along with her husband and sister talked to the unborn child. Their voices were most familiar to Sam when he was born. In fact, Sam responded best to those voices during infancy.

During infancy, Sam babbled profusely. His mother said that once he started saying actual words he just never stopped talking. Additionally, Sam displayed characteristics of vicarious emotional responses (“Emotional Development,” 2008). Whenever he saw someone crying, he began to cry as well. Emotions such as this can be caused by the mere observing and recognizing what is happening to others.

When Sam first started preschool, at the age of three, he experienced separation anxiety. However, this form of anxiety did not last long. Sam’s parents could not recall if or when he experienced stranger anxiety. Now, at the age of four, he enjoys conversing with people. If he does not know a person, then he will introduce himself and ask questions, such as “What is your name?” and “How old are you?” This frightens Sam’s parents because in Sam’s eyes this person is no longer a stranger. Since Sam is very social, he also likes to share his thoughts and feelings. A few months ago Sam was at a funeral and he spoke with family members he did not know well. During these conversations, he expressed many feelings associated with the loss.

While at preschool, Sam likes to build with the blocks. He takes pleasure in trying to build a huge tower, then knocking it down. Usually, Sam likes to build his creations in solitude but he will sometimes share the blocks with his classmates. This type of play is known as associative play, which is the most common type of play I have seen Sam engaged in.
Up until now, Sam’s social and emotional developments have been on schedule. He has a unique personality that encompasses his expressiveness. Even though he does not always understand his feelings he is still willing to share his emotions with those people around him.
Reflection

Throughout my case study, I intently observed Sam at the Manchester Early Learning Center (MELC). I was able to spend time with some of the other children, but the majority of my time was spent with Sam. I quickly came to learn that he was fascinated with animals. There were several books at the MELC that were related to the animal theme and I believe that Sam and I read every single one of those books. However, out of all the books, dinosaurs were his absolute favorite.

During most of my visits Miss Gore was the primary caregiver of the four and five year olds class. She takes the time to play with each child or small group of children. She interacts with the children on their level. I remember one day Sam was pretending to be a T-Rex and Miss Gore and I decided to be dinosaurs as well. All three of us roared like dinosaurs and chased after one another.

One of my struggles throughout this case study was trying to explain the concept of sharing to Sam. Sometimes he has difficulty sharing toys, which causes frustration among the children involved. I know it is impossible to reason with a four year old; however, at times I found myself trying to reason with Sam. Additionally, if Sam is playing with a toy and has to go to the restroom, he will ask me or another adult to “guard” his toy until he comes back. One time in particular Sam went to the restroom and left his train unguarded. When he came back to the train another child was playing with it, so he snatched it away from that child. I tried to direct Sam’s attention to another toy and explain that he could play with the train later, after the other child was finished. Nonetheless, he ignored my explanation and became upset with the other child.
This case study has helped me understand some of the concepts we discussed in class. Conservation was something I had a hard time comprehending until I experimented with it. When I conducted this experiment I was amazed because the results followed the book exactly. I was also able to see the different kinds of play that all the children engaged in. Not all the children were involved in the same type of play, which could be due to their differing ages within the preschool stage.

Observing Sam allowed me to see how much a preschooler can grow in just a three month period. Reading the growth developments in a book is one thing but actually seeing these changes in an individual is remarkable.
References

