Developmental Assessment Paper

Sydney Garcia

Texas Woman's University

HDFS 5223.50 Child Growth and Development

Dr. Katie Rose

April 19, 2026

Developmental Assessment Paper

Throughout this semester, I observed three children between the ages of 0-8 for a minimum of five hours each. During these observations, I recorded notes on each child's behaviors and skills utilizing the Redleaf Quick Guide designated for their specific age group. This guide lists developmentally appropriate milestones for children's physical/motor, social/emotional, language, and cognitive development. Through these observations, I began to identify the skills each child had mastered, as well as those they were still practicing and learning. Additionally, I was able to identify which behaviors and skills did not appear to be present. This enabled me to develop a clear picture of each child's overall developmental level.

The children I observed included an 18-month-old (Zoe), a 3.5-year-old (Luna), and an 8-year-old (Arthur). Both Zoe and Arthur were observed during Sunday School at Houston's First Baptist Church. Zoe's environment was a mostly unstructured toddler classroom filled with various toys including cars, large foam blocks and a play kitchen. Additionally, Zoe was observed in a soft playroom. Arthur's class during observation was more structured and included planned lessons, crafts and activities. However, he was also observed during free play both within his class and in a large indoor playground. Through parent and teacher reports, I learned that both Zoe and Arthur's settings were familiar to them and included a mix of familiar and unfamiliar peers. Luna, on the other hand, was observed in her grandparent's home during a small family gathering. As familiar adults socialized in the kitchen, Luna and her brothers played in the living room which contained a corner of various toys and coloring materials, as well as a television.

In this paper, I will utilize developmental theory to assess Zoe, Luna, and Arthur's physical/motor, social/emotional, language and cognitive development based upon my observations. This will include consideration of how each child's observed behavior may have been impacted factors such as their setting. I will also describe any developmental themes I have identified. Finally, I will conclude with a brief summary of my analysis.

Physical and Motor Development

Gibson's ecological theory of perceptual development provides useful insight into my observations of Zoe, Luna and Arthur's physical and motor development. According to Gibson, motor development is not merely a result of maturation (Miller, 2016). Rather, as individuals develop, they perceive affordances in their environment which invite action (Miller, 2016). As individuals act on these affordances, their experience enables them to perceive and create new affordances and leads to more complex abilities (Miller, 2016).

During my observation of Zoe, she utilized both fine and gross motor skills as she engaged in activities including running, walking, climbing and coloring. According to Gibson theory, this was largely due to Zoe's perception of affordances in her environment. For instance, the soft playroom offered affordances for running and climbing due to its open space and large foam structures with steps. Additionally, in her class, her teacher offered her a crayon and paper which afforded scribbling. Through this observation, it became evident how motor development is shaped by the interaction between individuals and their environments.

Though Luna's environment was confined to a small space in her grandparents' home, she still perceived various affordances in her environment. For instance, she displayed her physical and motor development by dancing, jumping and twirling to videos on the television, as

well as coloring. These motor actions reflected her ability to perceive opportunities for action even in a more limited setting. According to Gibson's theory, this highlights her growing perception of affordances that her environment offers as she has continued to act upon her setting (Miller, 2016). Additionally, compared to Zoe, Luna demonstrated more control in her actions, particularly in her fine motor movements while coloring. This indicated that the opportunities objects and environments afford also depend on children's abilities (Miller, 2016). For instance, to Luna a crayon and paper invited more complex and skilled movements and drawing than for Zoe's who only scribbled.

Finally, Arthur demonstrated advanced physical and motor development as he ran around the playground navigating various obstacles as well as utilized his fine motor skills to create specific shapes from playdough. His motor movements were highly controlled to compared to that of Zoe and Luna. For instance, Arthur balanced on one foot as he stood on a foam noodle before reaching for and hopping to another one in the playground. This highlights that children's physical development "expands their exploratory potential" (Miller, 2016, p.384).

Social/Emotional Development

Erikson's theory of psychosocial development poses that all individuals encounter a series of crises throughout the lifespan due to physical maturation and societal demands (Miller, 2016). Additionally, each crisis has both a positive and negative dimension which individuals seek to successfully resolve to support their overall social and emotional development (Miller, 2016). Through my observations of Zoe, Luna, and Arthur, it became evident that each child was navigating a unique crisis consistent with Erikson's theory.

Zoe most clearly showed signs of navigating Erikson's first stage of Trust versus Mistrust which occurs from birth through the first year (Miller, 2016). For instance, Zoe clearly demonstrated trust towards her teacher by repeatedly approaching her and lifting her arms towards her. Additionally, she was quickly soothed after separation from her mother, potentially indicating trust that her mother will return. However, Zoe also indicated mistrust during the observation when she pushed away a volunteer that had picked her up. It is important to note that this does not indicate that Zoe is danger of failing to resolve the crisis as "some mistrust is necessary at all ages" (Miller, 2016, p.139). Rather, the goal of each stage is to have a favorable ratio of the positive and negative dimensions of a crisis, which Zoe appeared to have (Miller, 2016).

Having advanced beyond the earlier crisis of Trust versus Mistrust, Luna appeared to be nearing the end of Erikson's second stage, Autonomy versus Shame and Doubt. This was evident in her independence in selecting and choosing between play activities. However, it was clear that she was still learning to adjust her sense of autonomy to social demands as she yanked items from her brothers' hands and make loud sounds to communicate at times (Siegler et al., 2020). Luna also showed emerging signs of Initiative which indicate that she will soon transition into Erikson's third stage which occurs roughly between the ages of 4 to 5 (Miller, 2016). For instance, she took initiative to invite adult family members to play with her and her brothers.

Arthur's social and emotional development showed even further advancement as he was navigating Erikson's fourth stage which is defined by the conflict of Industry versus Inferiority (Miller, 2016). This was reflected in Arthur's behavior that demonstrated autonomy and initiative gained from earlier stages, mixed with a new desire for competence and mastery. For instance, Arthur took initiative in creating new rules for the pom-pom pig activity when he failed at

meeting its initial requirements. In this way, he was able to enhance feelings of competence rather than inferiority. Additionally, Arthur's requests of his teacher's opinion on both his art and pretend play cooking can be understood through the lens of seeking assurance of his competence.

Though Zoe, Luna, and Arthur were each navigating unique critical issues, it was evident that each was seeking a positive resolution of their respective crisis. This provides support for Erikson's idea that maturation and societal demands create specific tensions that individuals must work through (Miller, 2016).Based on my observations, Zoe, Luna, and Arthur, each appeared to be successfully navigating their current stage which will assist in their overall social and emotional development (Miller, 2016).

Language Development

The language development of Zoe, Luna and Arthur can be explained through the ideas of several different theorists including Piaget, Vygotsky and Chomsky. Each of these theorists offered unique perspectives about how children learn and use language as they develop.

During my observation of Zoe, her language was mostly limited to jargon with an occasional single word. However, despite her limited language, she appeared to understand far more words than she was able to express and shared her feelings through sounds. Following the work of Piaget her limited language use can be explained by her recent entry into stage six of the sensorimotor period where children begin to form mental representations crucial for language (Miller, 2016). Additionally, according to Vygotsky, Zoe's development aligns with the primitive stage of speech in which speech sounds can emerge without thought and thought can emerge without speech (Smidt, 2013). This explains Zoe's various sounds during play, as well as her action of pointing towards the cubbies in her class without using words to express what she

wanted. Finally, Chomsky argued that all children are genetically predisposed to language acquisition and understanding (Smidt, 2013). He also noted that young children imitate the speech of adults and may make mistakes as they overgeneralize language to other situations (Smidt, 2013). Zoe showed this behavior as she repeated the 'wee woo, wee woo' sound I initially made when she held an ambulance, then made the same sound as she held other objects such as a dumpster truck.

Luna's language development was significantly more sophisticated than Zoe's. For instance, she spoke in sentences up to seven words, narrated her many of her actions, and practiced her grammar usage. According to Piaget, these advances could be attributed to her developing semiotic thinking which enables children in the preoperational period to increasingly use signs and symbols (Newman & Newman, 2022). Additionally, Luna's language development showed characteristics of Vygotsky's stage of practical intelligence as she used speech to parallel her actions without utilizing it for problem solving (Smidt, 2013). For instance, she narrated her actions with her Barbie doll. Finally, Luna's slightly incorrect grammar at times, supports Chomsky's idea that children actively make efforts to learn and apply grammatical rules (Smidt, 2013). For instance, when Luna stated that she colored her picture "blue and yellow and green," she reflected that she is not merely copying what adults say as it would be unlikely that she has heard this sentence structure from an adult. Instead, she showed that she is practicing how to apply language rules herself by developing mental grammars (Smidt, 2013).

Arthur's language was the most advanced as he conversed on nearly an adult level, adjusted his speech based on the person he was talking to, and used correct grammar. Based on Piaget's theory, Arthur's ability to adjust his speech to help his classmates reflects reduced egocentrism and increasing social awareness representative of the concrete operation stage

(Miller, 2016). Additionally, Arthur's language reflected both what Vygotsky labeled monologuing and inner speech (Smidt, 2013). For instance, he narrated his problem solving when helping a peer with a craft but did not rely on this same language use when building a cup pyramid. Arthur's adult-like communication compared to both Zoe and Luna was largely due to the fact that he formed long sentences and utilized proper grammar. Chomsky would argue that this occurred as a result of listening to others and self-correcting over time (Smidt, 2013).

Cognitive Development

Piaget's theoretical work provides a clear framework to understand Zoe, Luna, and Arthur's cognitive development. According to Piaget's theory, cognitive development proceeds through a series of universal stages in which individuals construct knowledge in distinct ways (Miller, 2016). Interestingly, Zoe, Luna, and Arthur each aligned with different stages enabling me to observe how cognition progresses throughout development.

As the youngest of the children, Zoe's development fell within Piaget's first stage, the sensorimotor period. In this stage, Piaget proposed that children begin to understand the world through their sensory and motor movements, become intentional in their actions, and develop object permanence (Miller, 2016). This was consistent with my observation of Zoe as she used her sensory and motor movements to explore the textured pages of book I read her and appeared to intentionally place toy food items in the play kitchen's microwave. Additionally, Zoe displayed her emerging object permeance by retrieving a toy car a peer had kicked under the table which was briefly out of view.

Progressing from Zoe's sensorimotor intelligence, Luna's cognitive development aligned with Piaget's preoperational stage which children encounter from roughly age 2 to 7 (Miller,

2016). This enabled Luna to move beyond the heavy reliance on sensory and motor exploration exhibited by Zoe and begin to increasingly rely on mental representations to guide her thought (Miller, 2016). Her pretend play represented this shift as she utilized symbolic representation to allow a plastic cup to symbolize a bathtub and a pillow to symbolize a bed for her Barbie. However, Piaget argued, preoperational children still face limitations in their thinking due to factors such as egocentrism (Miller, 2016). This egocentrism was apparent in her refusal to share markers with her brother and in her laughter while hiding during a game of hide-and go-seek which made her easier to locate.

At 8 years old, Arthur's cognition advanced far beyond that of both Zoe and Luna. According to Piaget's theory of cognitive development, this is due Arthur's progression to the concrete operational stage. This stage is characterized by an increasing ability to think and "reason logically about concrete objects and events" (Siegler et al., 2020, p.123). Arthur demonstrated this new way of thinking throughout my observations of him. For instance, during one observation, Arthur implemented a new strategy to build a cup tower when his previous attempt left him with an extra cup. Though his new strategy did not yield a cup pyramid, with a teacher's prompting, Arthur again used logical reasoning and was successful in creating a pyramid.

Through my analysis of Zoe, Luna, and Arthur's cognitive development a clear pattern of progression emerged. This aligned with Piaget's statement that "children move from an understanding of one's world based on action schemes, to one based on representations, to one based on internalized, organized operations" (Miller, 2016, p.51).

Analysis and Conclusions

Through my observations of Zoe, Luna and Arthur, I began to gain understanding not only each child's individual development, but how development progresses throughout early childhood. For instance, in my observations of Zoe, I observed her master developmental milestones typical for her age including the ability to run, use an adult as a secure base, and understand more words than she could express (Developmental Milestones Redleaf Quick Guide, 2010a). Additionally, Luna had mastered most of the developmental tasks associated with her age range including the ability to jump, make simple choice, and use symbols in play (Developmental Milestones Redleaf Quick Guide, 2010b). Finally, Arthur, also displayed developmentally appropriate abilities including good body coordination, increasing use of reasoning and advanced language (Developmental Milestones Redleaf Quick Guide, 2010c). Thus, each child's abilities overall aligned very well with expected milestones.

Nonetheless, certain behaviors were either not observed or were still being learned or practiced by Zoe, Arthur and Luna. For instance, I did not observe Zoe master the developmentally appropriate skills of using a spoon (Developmental Milestones Redleaf Quick Guide, 2010a). Nor did I observe Luna play with unfamiliar peers or Arthur using slang, both of which are typical for the children's developmental age (Developmental Milestones Redleaf Quick Guide, 2010c). This does not indicate developmental delays in the children. Instead, it could potentially reflect that the children's environments did not provide the opportunity to display the skill. Additionally, since development progresses over time it is typical that the children will continue to learn and practice newly emerging abilities until they become mastered at later ages.

References

Developmental Milestones Redleaf Quick Guide (2010a). Developmental Milestones Observational Record: One-Year-Olds. *Redleaf Press.*

Developmental Milestones Redleaf Quick Guide (2010b). Developmental Milestones Observational Record: Three-Year-Olds. *Redleaf Press.*

Developmental Milestones Redleaf Quick Guide (2010c). Developmental Milestones Observational Record: Eight-Year-Olds. *Redleaf Press.*

Miller, P. (2016). *Theories of developmental psychology* (6th ed.). New York, NY: Worth.

Newman, B.M., Newman, P.R. (2022). *Theories of human development* (3rd ed.). Routledge.

Siegler, R.S., Saffran, J., Gershoff, E., & Eisenberg, N. (2020) *How children develop* (6th ed.). Worth Publishers.

Smidt, S. (2013). *The developing child in the 21st century* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.