Genie – The Wild Child Essay, Research Paper

Genie-The Wild Child

Genie was considered to be beautiful, fragile, and wild. She was born in April of 1957 in Los Angeles where she lived the first 13 years of her life tied to a potty chair, abused and lonely. She could not talk, walk, or even chew. Her arms and legs did not extend fully and she had vision to a distance of only 12 feet. Genie was considered a ?wild child.?

There is a great deal of evidence from the case that supports the nature and nurture theories of language development. Noam Chomsky once declared that we acquire language because it is in our genes, and that we are born with the principle of language. He suggested that we are born with an innate Language Acquisition Device, which is a mental program for how to deal with language. It provides infants with rules of grammar and semantics. Unlike Chomsky, Skinner believed in the nurture theory. He believed that we can explain language development with familiar learning principles, such as association, imitation, and reinforcement. Lenneberg combined both theories together. He agreed with Chomsky but stated that there is a deadline for acquiring language, or a ?critical period? in a child?s life. This critical period occurs around the same time as puberty, at about the age of 12-13. If a child has not been taught to speak by this ?period? it will never pass the 2-3 word telegraphic stage. Lenneberg had two different versions of his theory, a strong version and a weak version. The strong version stated that language will not and can not be achieved after puberty. The weak version said that language will not be achieved normally after puberty. Genie is a good example of the weak version of language development. She achieved telegraphic speech , but nothing more. She had a large vocabulary and could understand words but she could never properly learn grammar. Sentence structures, WH words, tense reflections, and transfers within statements were never correctly learned.

There are many pros of Genie?s case study. A case study is a in depth analysis of a person. It gives us details that no theory or guess can come close to. In Genie?s case study psychologists learned first hand the effects on a child if he/she does not acquire language by the critical period. Before Genie was discovered there were theories on language development, but no real proof. Chomsky, Skinner, and Lenneberg all had logical theories that made sense, but no evidence to back them up. Now we can conclude that Lenneberg had the best theory, since Genie did acquire telegraphic speech. Case studies provide us with large amounts of information, but they do have their cons. Every observation and every piece of information learned from a case study can be used to explain that person, and that person only. Case studies can not be generalized or applied to anyone else., since there is no proof that all children develop the same way as Genie would have. Since Genie had irregular sleep spindles in her brain waves she could have been brain damaged at birth.

Genie?s case study by far did not agree with the present APA ethical guidelines. Although none of the tests hurt Genie in any physical way, it is possible that they could have emotionally. All participants of experiments have the right not to participate. Genie did not have this opportunity, since she could not verbally communicate with the psychologists, and she did not understand what was going on. In my opinion they spent too much time testing Genie and too little time taking care of her. Riggler?s family took great care of her the 4 years she was with them, but then just abandoned her. She traveled from foster home to foster home, where she was beaten and harassed. Genie?s mother tried to sue the hospital and researchers for excessive and outrageous testing, but could not even take care of her daughter herself. Genie was treated more like an object than a human being.

In Piaget?s theory of cognitive development there are 4 stages; sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete-operational, and formal operations. Genie never successfully reached the preoperational stage of 18 months-6 years. She did however, acquire things like accomidation, asssimulation, and object permanance in the first stage. Piaget?s theory revolved around the fact that children move through these stages or ?slots? in the right order at the right age. If Piaget was asked to explain Genie?s development he would most likely ignore the question, simply because since she didn?t ?fit? he wouldn?t have an explanation.

Vygotsky was more concerned with children and their interrelationships with social influences. His theory suggests that children can be guided by explanation, demonstration, and work, and can attain to higher levels of thinking if they are guided by more capable and competent adults. This is knows as The Zone of Promximal Development. The ZPD is the gap between what is knows and what is not known, that is, generally higher levels of knowing. Vygotsky would base Genie?s lack of development on the fact that she didn?t have anyone to be a role model, a good parent, or a teacher. She was unable to learn by explanation, demonstration, or work, because these things did not exist in her life. She had no one to watch and nothing to do all day, therefore she did not have the opportunity to develop cognition.