

AGE DIFFERENCES IN CHILDREN

Age Differences are obvious to any parent. Here are a few “studies” of what they are – reflection on these combined with your own observations will help you relate those differences to your teaching.

Dorothy Sayers in her essay on “*the Lost Tools of Learning*,” refers to three stages of childhood she calls the Poll-Parrot, the Pert and the Poetic stage. She noted that children grow naturally through three stages, each one corresponding to the three elements of that *Trivium*: grammar, dialectic, and rhetoric. This essay has a significant impact on the Home and Christian School movements.

In the elementary years (generally), the students occupy what she called the **Poll-Parrot stage (ages 9-11)**. They love to chant, memorize, and recite, individually or in groups. If they are not given things to chant, memorize, and recite, then they will make up their own. They enjoy the sounds of strange words. This corresponds to the grammar stage of the *Trivium*. At this point in their education, the kids would memorize vast amounts of information—presidents, kings, mountain ranges, rivers, multiplication tables, battles, catechism answers, psalms, and so forth. In doing this, the school is cutting with the grain. The children enjoy taking large amounts of information on, and so we will gladly accommodate them. They do not yet have it all sorted out, which is fine. That will come at the next stage. *Grammar—the study of language and the fundamental rules of each subject—involves learning the basic facts about English, history, science and the Bible.*

From this point, the children grow into what Miss Sayers called **Pert stage (ages 12-14)**. This matches the dialectic stage of the *Trivium*. This is the point where they begin to question and dispute. . They like to argue. They enjoy correcting the mistakes of their parents and teachers. They are beginning to develop the ability for abstract thought. They wonder why they are being made to learn all this stuff. They wonder why they can't listen to a portable CD player during lunch hour. They wonder why, how, and how come? They develop a natural disposition to argue, and so, continuing to cut with the grain, we teach them to argue. This is why they will take a course in symbolic logic and argumentation in the eighth grade. In their other courses, they are learning to relate all the various facts they have already accumulated. This stage corresponds generally to the junior-high or middle school years. *Logic—learning to define terms accurately, structure arguments, and organize thoughts—involves learning to argue correctly, learning to look for fallacies in what they read and hear.*

They reach the **Poetic Stage (ages 14-16)** in their high-school years, corresponding to the rhetoric stage of the *Trivium*. This is the age when the young people are very concerned with their appearance, how they are coming across. Students finally show the ability to formulate their own creative written and oral expressions. They are ready to demonstrate their desire for independent thought. Consequently, this is when the school should teach them how to present themselves in a rhetorically winsome way. They will take rhetoric during these years, along with all their literature courses. In Bible, they should be offered apologetics. Instead of a prom, they should be trained in manners and etiquette in preparation for various "protocol nights," where they attend different cultural events as a class—for example, dinner at a classy joint, and then a night at the opera. *Rhetoric—learning how to express thoughts and ideas—involves learning how to prepare eloquent and persuasive arguments, the importance of style and applying the tools of learning previously received.*

To Read Dorothy Sayer's Essay: <http://www.gbt.org/text/sayers.html>

Children at different stages of development have different needs: A storyteller's perspective:

- *Youngest listeners respond to rhythm and repetition, simple direct plots in which familiarity is mixed with surprise, short dialog, clear and simple images, action that quickly builds to a climax and a satisfying ending....*
- *6-8 year olds have a peak interest in traditional folktales and fairy-tales. Through the story content they work through their inner fantasies and come to terms with the "real" world....*
- *9-11 year olds enjoy more sophisticated folktales. They are looking for something that will appeal to their developing power of reason and judgment and to their concern about competency. These children enjoy hero tales, myths and legends....*
- *11-13 year olds are experiencing sexual awakening and are involved in a search for personal identity. They are ready to appreciate the development of plot, the beauty of language and the deeper meanings that lie behind the words."*

-Baker and Greene, Storytelling: Art and Technique

"Pre-school children understand you literally. They don't distinguish clearly between fantasy and reality....

For younger elementary children, going to school, making friends, enjoying creating things, struggling to be persons in their own right, and handling the tension between being safe and taking risks dominate their lives. They need role models and affirmation as persons of worth....

Older elementary children are trying hard to master and control reality... competition is uppermost in their minds."

-Robert Coleman, "Maximizing the Children's Sermon", Leadership -Winter 86

Jean Piaget's theory of Cognitive Development identifies four developmental stages and the processes by which children progress through them. The four stages are:

1.Sensorimotor stage (birth - 2 years old)--The child, through physical interaction with his or her environment, builds a set of concepts about reality and how it works. This is the stage where a child does not know that physical objects remain in existence even when out of sight (object permanence).

2.Preoperational stage (ages 2-7)--The child is not yet able to conceptualize abstractly and needs concrete physical situations.

3.Concrete operations (ages 7-11)--As physical experience accumulates, the child starts to conceptualize, creating logical structures that explain his or her physical experiences. Abstract problem solving is also possible at this stage. For example, arithmetic equations can be solved with numbers, not just with objects.

4.Formal operations (beginning at ages 11-15)--By this point, the child's cognitive structures are like those of an adult and include conceptual reasoning.

Moral Judgment and Reasoning

An aspect of children's personal-social development is their ability to reason and judge morally - how to decipher between right and wrong and to judge how people should behave in certain circumstances. For years, teachers, parents, and psychologists have debated over whether values should be taught in school. In recent years this is no longer a question. The new debate is not whether values should be taught, but which values should be taught. During the past two decades, Lawrence Kohlberg has been one of the most influential theorists and researchers in the area of social cognition dealing with judgement and moral reasoning. Kohlberg believed that as people develop, they create a pattern of increasingly complex moral reasoning. This pattern can be divided into three main levels of moral reasoning, with two substages at each level.

Kohlberg believed that preschoolers and elementary school children reason at stages 1 and 2 of the preconventional level. In other words, preschoolers will:

- Base their moral reasoning on good and bad acts.
- Worry about being punished by adults and people they views as authoritative.
- Want to satisfy their own needs if they can. She will form friendships in terms of "what can you do for me?".

Stage 1: Respect for power and punishment..... Motto: "Might makes right."

A young child (age 1-5) decides what to do--what is right--according to what he/she wants to do and can do without getting into trouble. To be right, you must be obedient to the people in power and, thus, avoid punishment.

Stage 2: Looking out for #1.Motto: "What's in it for me?"

Children (age 5-10) tend to be self-serving. They lack respect for the rights of others but may give to others on the assumption that they will get as much or more in return. It is more a matter of "you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours," instead of loyalty, gratitude, or justice.

Stage 3: Being a "Good Boy" or "Nice Girl."..... Motto: "I want to be nice."

People at this stage (age 8-16) have shifted from pleasing themselves to pleasing important others, often parents, teachers, or friends. They seek approval and conform to someone else's expectations. When they are accused of doing something wrong, their behavior is likely to be justified by saying "everyone else is doing it" or "I didn't intend to hurt anyone."

Stage 4: Law and order thinking.Motto: "I'll do my duty."

The majority of people 16 years old and older have internalized society's rules about how to behave. They feel obligated to conform, not any longer to just family and friends, but also to society's laws and customs. They see it as important to do one's duty to maintain social order. Leaders are assumed to be right; individuals adopt social rules without considering the underlying ethical principles involved. Social control is, therefore, exercised through guilt associated with breaking a rule; the guilt in this case is an automatic emotional response, not a rational reaction of conscience based on moral

principles (as in stage 6). People at this stage believe that anyone breaking the rules deserves to be punished and "pay their debt to society."

Stage 5: Justice through democracy. Motto: "I'll live by the rules or try to change them."

People at this stage recognize the underlying moral purposes that are supposed to be served by laws and social customs; thus, if a law ceases to serve a good purpose, they feel the people in a democracy should get active and change the law. Thought of in this way, democracy becomes a social contract whereby everyone tries continually to create a set of laws that best serves the most people, while protecting the basic rights of everyone. There is respect for the law and a sense of obligation to live by the rules, as long as they were established in a fair manner and fulfill an ethical purpose. Only about 20-25% of today's adults ever reach this stage and most of those that do supposedly only get there after their mid-twenties.

Stage 6: Deciding on basic moral principles by which you will live your life and relate to everyone fairly.Motto: "I'm true to my values."

These rather rare people have considered many values and have decided on a philosophy of life that truly guides their life. They do not automatically conform to tradition or others' beliefs or even to their own emotions, intuition, or impulsive notions about right and wrong. Stage 6 people carefully choose basic principles to follow, such as caring for and respecting every living thing, feeling that we are all equal and deserve equal opportunities, or, stated differently, the Golden Rule. They are strong enough to act on their values even if others may think they are odd or if their beliefs are against the law, such as refusing to fight in a war.

General criticisms of Kohlberg's Stages

Kohlberg's conception of moral development is based on thinking and logic, not on feelings for others. Surely feelings cannot be neglected. Likewise, Kohlberg believed that morals were based on age and "wisdom," rather than real life experience and empathic identification with others. The truth is that children of 3 or 4 can and do empathize with others and try to help. Kohlberg's focus is on the individual, not on what makes for a moral community. Thus, he doesn't balance a self-orientation as opposed to a group-orientation. He doesn't ask, as the Greeks did, the question "what would accomplish the greatest good for the greatest number of people?" And, he doesn't question, as do the Quakers, the morality of settling issues by voting (resulting in as few as 51% imposing--often with glee--their preferences on the remaining 49%) rather than by consensus (everyone agreeing to a carefully considered compromise). Yet, these stages can be a useful way to begin assessing one's own morals. More current thinking suggests that Kohlberg and Piaget seriously underestimated the influence of parents on a child's moral development and that a great deal of moral learning takes place when children observe and interact with their parents. Significant gains are made by children of parents who frequently elicit their child's opinion, ask questions that clarify an issue, paraphrase what their child say, and check for understanding. In instances where a parent's level of sociomoral reasoning was not very well developed and styles of discussion were either information-giving or conflictual, fewer gains in the child's sociomoral reasoning were noted.