Middle Childhood (6-12 years)

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  - peer group
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Middle Childhood

General Information
During this stage, children are learning and practicing the skills they will use throughout the rest of their lives...
- Of interest: there is a reciprocal relationship between the skills that are developing and the tasks children are devoting themselves to.

Physical Development
Children grow more slowly during this period than they had been growing during earlier stages, and more slowly than they will grow during adolescence

Physical Development (continued)
- As children grow taller, their body proportions change and they look slimmer. Muscles become stronger, endurance improves, and strength increases overall.
- Physical equality between the sexes is the norm during this stage.

Developmental Tasks
- The textbook considers five developmental tasks:
  - concrete operations
  - skilled learning
  - self evaluation
  - friendship
  - team play
Cognitive Development: Concrete Operations

Somewhere between the ages of 5 and 7 years, a “cognitive revolution” occurs (5-7 transition)

- Basically, the limitations of the previous stage fall away and the school-age child becomes able to apply cognitive actions to what is known or can be seen. Piaget refers to this as the stage of **concrete operations**.

- A mental operation is a transformation carried out in thought rather than action, or an internal representation of an alteration in the relationship among objects.

Concrete Operations (continued)

During this stage, the child is no longer fooled by appearances and can:

1. Consistently apply the rules of logic,
2. Conserve
3. Classify objects by several traits simultaneously
4. Pay attention to many characteristics of an object or event
5. Reverse actions mentally

But these newfound skills can be applied only to what can be seen, acted upon or known (not to hypotheticals).

- As a result of these changes, the following skills become possible:
  - reading (letters as concrete symbols which represent sounds and in groups, represent words
  - mathematics
  - writing (requires both physical and cognitive abilities, as well as coordination between them)
  - memory improves

- Note: the changes associated with movement into this stage do not occur all at once, and children’s abilities to demonstrate the various skills are affected by context.

- As the order of the physical world become more apparent, children begin to seek logic and order in the social and personal domains….
Self Evaluation

Children’s emphasis on skill building brings with it a new focus on self evaluation.

- During this stage, the peer group becomes quite important in affecting children’s self-evaluations. The peer group:
  - provides motivation to conform
  - provides a group for comparison
  - provides a new source of feedback (including criticism and approval)
  - Note that experience in previous stages will influence whether all of this is approached within a framework of self-confidence or self-doubt.

Self Evaluation (continued)

There are said to be two paths toward self-evaluation:

1. **Self efficacy** - reflects personal judgement and ability; and
2. **Social expectation** - reflects impact of others’ expectations on child’s performance

- **Efficacy** - a person’s sense of confidence about performing behaviors demanded by a specific situation. These may vary from situation to situation and are based on the following:
  - enactive attainments
  - vicarious experience - observing others
  - verbal persuasion - (encouragement can help)
  - physical state

- **Social Expectations** - in our society, it is difficult to define or identify clear standards for success. As a result, judging success is a complex affair.
  - Children therefore rely very much on external feedback, and their sense of teachers’ parents’ and peers’ feedback becomes incorporated into their own self evaluations.
  - This process and its impact on children’s self concept appears to come to fruition during second and third grades, and has important implications both for how expectations are communicated to children, for the nature of those expectations.
Friendships

There are many changes in children’s relationships during this stage, and these are understandable based on consideration of changes in children’s thought and social understanding.

**Social cognition** - along with changes in cognitive abilities come shifts in children’s thinking about the people in their lives. For example:

1. During the previous stage, children judged their actions and the actions of others in terms of consequences, which was very simplistic. Now, children begin to think about and understand that behaviors are motivated, and (for example) can distinguish between intentional and accidental actions.

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2. School age children come to recognize that other people have feelings and needs and reasons for acting as they do (higher level of empathy).

3. Children gain the ability to see themselves through the eyes of others, which in turn contributes to their decisions regarding their own behaviors (egocentrism is declining).

These skills have obvious importance for making and maintaining relationships, and this is evidenced by a general trend toward more considerate behavior, and in the development of more intense and sophisticated relationships.

**Friendships**

School age children spend a great deal more time with their peers and less time with their families. A number of changes coincide with this trend:

1. **Social perspective taking** - children realize that different points of view are represented within their peer group, and develop better understanding of their friends’ feelings;

2. **Sensitivity to social norms and pressures of the peer group** - children care very much about what their peers think about them. Conformity becomes more likely, peer approval becomes very important, and adult influence may decline.

3. **Closeness to same-sex peers** - (self explanatory!)

Along with/because of these changes, for the first time, friendships become based on shared likes and dislikes and are also based on caring. Relationships become deeper and more permanent than before, and serve as building blocks for adult relationships...
Children can be categorized on the basis of their abilities to relate to and get along with peers.  

- **popular** - mostly positive nominations, these children are very good at social perspective taking
- **neglected** - seldom nominated, usually ignored by peers; not aggressive and not sociable, but not lonely and may have good social skills.
- **controversial** - high pos. and neg. nominations (may be aggressive, but also socially skilled)
- **rejected** - high negative nominations -- experience problems throughout school and beyond
  - **aggressive** - impulsive, immature social cognitions (misinterpret intentions, misunderstand needs)
  - **withdrawn** - inhibited, anxious, reserved, with negative self-concepts (interpret negative peer reactions as result of own failings)
  - **withdrawn-aggressive** - least well liked

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**Team Play**

The school years are a time when many children become involved in team sports. There are many important features associated with these experiences:

- interdependence (I affect the group for good or bad)
- division of labor (all are working toward a common goals; different jobs involved)
- competition (winners and losers, by definition)
- in-group and out-group attitudes (us vs. them mentality is unavoidable and must be dealt with)

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**The Psychosocial Crisis of Middle Childhood: Industry vs. Inferiority**

- It is during this stage that children’s attitudes toward work and the strength of their motivation to achieve success are established
- Crisis: **Industry vs. Inferiority** - the child is developing still more sophisticated skills that provide new opportunities to become more like adults at the same time expectations become much more challenging as children take on more responsibility, experience higher demands in their school setting, and face more rigorous social challenges.

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Industry vs. Inferiority

- **Industry** - an eagerness to acquire skills and perform meaningful work—a sense of oneself as productive and competent, which contributes to an enthusiastic and energetic approach to activity in any task.
- **Inferiority** - a sense of oneself as worthless and inadequate

There are three components to personal industry:
- **Cognitive**: acquisition of the basic skills and knowledge valued by culture;
- **Behavioral**: the ability to apply skills and knowledge effectively through things like concentration, perseverance and work habits;
- **Affective**: the positive emotional orientation toward the acquisition and application of skills and knowledge

In extreme cases (resolution in favor of inferiority) children show overall reluctance, self doubt, and withdrawal and cannot conceive of themselves as having the potential to make a contribution to the larger society.

To be aware of regarding inferiority:
- feelings of inferiority can come from the self as well as from the social environment, with the school being an especially important context;
- school performance and personal appearance are two of the most significant predictors of a child’s global self-worth;
- though the experience of failure is universal, success in one area can compensate for failure in another;
- but... not all “successes” are reinforced equally

The Central Process: Education

- Every culture devises a way of passing on to its young members the wisdom and skills of past generations. In our culture—schools carry the burden of responsibility for educating our children.
- Ideally, schools:
  - provide children with the basic tools for learning;
  - teach children a code of conduct that maximizes the potential for an optimal learning environment while also teaching about respect and cooperation;
  - expose children to strong role models

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Prime Adaptive Ego Quality: Competence

- **Competence**: a belief in one's ability to make sense of and master the demands of a situation—to figure out what needs to be done and to do it.
- Competence allows for the free exercise of one's skills and abilities in the completion of a task.
- Leads to high levels of motivation & achievement

Core Pathology: Inertia

- **Inertia** is an overwhelming sense of apathy or disinterest. Individuals with a sense of inertia are likely to be withdrawn and passive, to have trouble initiating actions or changing the course of events in their lives, to be unable or unwilling to formulate, evaluate and enact plans of action.

Divorce and its Effects on Children

Three factors affect the influence of divorce on children:

1. **Harmony/Discord of Parent's Relationship**
   - The more bitter and open the conflict between parents, the more likely children will become depressed and angry, lose interest in schoolwork and play, become hostile with teachers and peers, with parents, etc.

2. **Stability of Daily Life** - the more disruption children experience, the more difficulties they will have. Disruptions include: loss of contact with one parent, change in family income (standard in living, school, neighborhood all can be affected)

3. **Custody and Caregiving** - Who will care for the children? Custody arrangements are difficult to decide upon and difficult to manage even after they are decided upon—often a source of conflict.