Revisiting The Ape and The Child Experiment: A Mindsponge-based Interpretation

Minh-Hoang Nguyen

Centre for Interdisciplinary Social Research

Phenikaa University

Yen Nghia, Ha Dong, Hanoi 100803, Vietnam

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“As one can see, Kingfisher upholds dignity highly, especially when he has pledged Heaven and earth. To this day, he still keeps the secrets deep in his heart. As such, no one at all knows about what has happened inside the cave.”

In “A Shocking Secret”; *The Kingfisher Story Collection* [1]

Several days ago, the famous experiment The Ape and The Child by Kellogg [2], which I read years ago, recalled in my mind when I was thinking about the Mindsponge mechanism. The recall made me wonder whether the Mindsponge mechanism [3,4] could be used to explain the experiment's result. I think it could be.

But why Mindsponge? It is because the Mindsponge mechanism demonstrates the learning, unlearning, and innovation generating process of a human. Chimpanzee, our closest sister-species, are found to acquire a rich behavioral complexity [5]. A recent review on innovation in chimpanzees by Bandini [6] also delineates that both wild and captive demonstrate "an impressive ability to innovate solutions to novel problems." Given the capabilities above of chimpanzees, it is plausible to assume that a chimpanzee might acquire a human-like learning and unlearning process, which can be explained by the Mindsponge mechanism.

In Kellogg's experiment, he raised his infant son Donald and an infant chimpanzee Gua together. He treated them alike in every detail for assuring "the animal was always treated as a human and never as an animal, particularly a pet." The experiment happened until the spring of 1932 with a careful day-by-day record of observations, films, and tests. The experiment showed that the chimp progressed faster than the boy in learning in the earliest stage but gradually lagged. While the genetic characteristics held the chimpanzee back from learning, the boy began imitating the chimpanzee's noises.

In Mindsponge mechanism's language, the boy and the chimpanzee acquired two different Mindsponge. Due to the genetic constraints, the Mindsponge of the chimpanzee had a lower capacity of processing information than the boy. At the earliest stage, the chimpanzee's superiority could be explained by different mature periods between the chimpanzee (puberty at around four years old) and the human (puberty at 12-14 years old). However, as the processing speed of the boy's Mindsponge was faster than the chimpanzee's, the boy lately excelled the chimpanzee and eventually began imitating the chimpanzee's noise (or language). Considering this observation, I prospect that if the experiment were continued, the boy would significantly behave more like a chimpanzee.

In contrast, the chimpanzee would progress to a human-like form, but with minimal pace. In other words, during a certain period, the boy – who was still in the fastest learning phase (or when the Mindsponge works most effectively), would significantly devolve to the chimpanzee's intellectual level. In contrast, the chimpanzee might slightly evolve to the boy's intellectual level. I call this a phenomenon of intellectual devolution.

The devolution phenomenon and its driving mechanism – the Mindsponge mechanism – in my opinion, can be applied for advancing knowledge in multiple scientific disciplines, such as biology, communication, education, management, psychiatry, etc. [7] In psychiatry, the devolution phenomenon and Mindsponge mechanism can explain the suicide contagion in which the suicidal ideation and behavior can be transmitted among people [8,9]. In management practices, how employers and employees, or the business principals and agents interact and behave is a topic worth applying the Mindsponge mechanism [10].

I acknowledge that there are still many limitations in my explanation, so I welcome all the constructive comments to make the Mindsponge mechanism and the devolution phenomenon more transparent. Finally, given the contemporary scientific community's ethical issues, any experiment like Kellogg's has been forbidden, so classical experiments should be reused and rejustified. Such a practice would improve scientific integrity and reliability.

References

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