

Synopsis



Jean Piaget theorized about cognitive child development. Piaget believed that children acquired knowledge by actively exploring in order to make sense of the world surrounding them. Piaget's work focused on how children develop intellectually as they advance through distinct stages of development. Also, he wanted to know why children gave incorrect answers on questions that needed logical reasoning. Piaget was able to show that children thought differently from adults and are not less competent thinkers (Wadsworth, 1984). According to psychologist, children mental development progressed through four main stages, such as Sensorimotor Stage, Pre-Operational Stage, Concrete-Operational stage and Formal-operational stage.

Sensorimotor Stage (From Birth to 2 Years)

It is the first stage in Piaget theory. The infant focuses on trying to make sense of the world around them. During this stage, an infant's knowledge is very narrow and within limits of what he or she can perceive via his/her senses and muscular activity. Behaviors exhibited are within limits of simple muscular responses to sensory stimuli. Children utilize innate skills and abilities like looking, listening and sucking to acquire knowledge about their surroundings (Flavell, 1963). This stage of development is evident because children below the age of two years have a cognitive system limited to muscular reflexes. Much of what they do is responding to sensory stimuli from the environment. For example, a hungry infant at this stage will cry in order to be fed. This idea has received criticism since Piaget underestimated the intellectual abilities of children at this stage (Santrock, 2009). Research has shown that young infants can succeed in simpler forms

of tasks requiring the same skills.

Pre-Operational Stage (From 2 to 7 Years)

The children language and skills of mental imagery develop. At this stage, even though they have not developed concrete conceptualization, they are egocentric and find it difficult to take others point of view. During this stage, children increasingly use symbols, as manifested through their increase in playing and pretending. For example, a child may pretend a twig from a tree is a car. This stage is evident in most kids in preschool who belong to this stage. Most of these kids are good in pretense and are always pretending things that are not true (Elkind & Flavell, 1969). Common criticism on this idea is against Piaget's theory that predicts that thinking within a cognitive stage would be same to all in that stage. For example, the idea that all preschool children should be at the preoperational level in all cognitive activities can be wrong since some kids can be ahead of others cognitively, whereas some can be fixed at some stages of development.

Concrete-Operational Stage (From 7 to 11 Years)

At this stage children gain a better knowledge of mental operations. Piaget argued that during this period children used inductive logic whereby they formed generalized ideas from experiences. Also, at this stage children find it challenging to use deductive logic that entails the use of general principle to determine the outcome of an event. In addition, a child has an understanding of reversibility and is capable of

reversing the order of relationships between mental categories (Bryant, 1982). For example, a child might have the capability to recognize a kitten is the young one of a cat, and that a kitten is a cat, and that a cat is an animal. At this stage, the child understands that others have perspectives different to child's own, but the child may not have knowledge of the content of other's perspectives (Wadsworth, 1971). This idea is boosted by the fact that children at this stage can engage in decentration. Therefore, they can focus on multiple components of a problem at once rather than assessing a situation from a single perspective (Santrock, 2009). However, this idea has received criticism since some children at this age can have a sophisticated understanding of other people's mental processes and perspectives.

Formal-Operational Stage (From 12 years to Adulthood)

It is during this time that people develop the capacity to think about concepts of theoretical and hypothetical nature. Skills like logical thinking, deductive reasoning, and planning systematically arise during this developmental stage. During this period, a person is capable of putting into consideration many different remedies to a problem before acting. The formal operational person considers previous experiences, current demands, and future consequences in endeavors to succeed in his or her adaptation to the world (Wadsworth, 1984). This idea draws strength from the fact that when children gets to adolescence they are able to think about abstract concepts. However, this idea has drawn criticism since Piaget maintained that the different stages of development were absolute which is often not the case since some children can be retarded leading to slow cognitive development or

others can have a hastened mental development depending on their upbringing environment.

References

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