

The main features of piagets theory



Jean Piaget (1896-1980) is well known for his theories of development which have been a hot subject not only for psychology but also for educational fields (Berger 1988). The following text is going to discuss the main features of Piaget's theory of cognitive development. Furthermore, is going to analyze the concepts of schemas, the developmental stages, assimilation - accommodation and finally, equilibrium.

Jean Piaget was a Swiss psychologist who is the founder of the cognitive development field as it is known today (Flavell 1996). As Miller (1993) explained: " Piaget transformed the field of developmental psychology. If a developmental psychologist were somehow plucked out of the 1950's and set down today, he would be bewildered by the talk around him. He would hear psychologists discussing strategies, rule-governed behaviors, cognitive structures, schemes, plans, and representations, instead of stimulus generalization, mean length of utterance, mental age, conditioning, discrimination learning and learning set. To a great extent Piaget was responsible for this change. He altered the course of psychology by asking new questions that made developmentalists wonder why they had ever asked the old questions in the first place. Once psychologists looked at development through Piaget's eyes, they never saw children in quite the same way."(p. 81)

Piaget's theory of cognitive development, as mentioned, had a massive impact on the disciplines of education and psychology. According to Kail and Cavanaugh (2004), his theory of development focuses on how children manage to build knowledge and how this knowledge forms and changes over time. Piaget, due to the active exploration children performed, and because

they 'run' some kinds of experiments, for e. g. on objects, pushing them off the table to see if they would fall to the ground, argued that children behave as 'little' scientists that form theories about the world. Piaget also believed that children revise these theories in three critical points of their development (at ages 2, 7 and 11) and that this procedure is so fundamental that the revised theories become one, brand-new theory (Kail & Cavanaugh, 2004). From this exact belief the four developmental stages were born.

The first stage of development is the Sensorimotor stage. This stage is from the birth of a child to barely 2 years old. Piaget(1951, 1952, 1954) implied that the two first years of the child shape a distinct level in human development. In addition, this stage, according to Piaget(1951, 1952, 1954), is divided into six sub-stages in which every infant is progressing through in the same order, but at a different rate. By name, the six sub-stages are: 1) Exercising reflexes (roughly 0-1 month), 2) Learning to adapt: primary circular reaction(roughly 1-4 months), 3) Making interesting events[secondary circular reaction(roughly 4-8 months)], 4) Behaving intentionally: Separating means from ends(roughly 8-12 months), 5) experimenting(roughly 12-18 months), 6) Using symbols(roughly 18-24 months). Due to the fact that every child advance to the next level uniquely, the ages mentioned above are only approximations.

The second stage of development is the Pre-operational stage (approximately 2 - 7 years old). In this stage children begin to understand the world symbolically and their use of language increases.(S. Milioritsa, PSYC1031, lecture, October 27, 2010). According to Kail and Cavanaugh(2004), the cognitive abilities of children are still limited. Some of

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these limitations include Egocentrism, the fact that the child is having difficulties seeing the world from another's perspective, Centration, the fact that the child can only focus on one aspect of a problem and cannot identify the whole problem from a spherical view, Animism, the fact that the children 'give' life to inanimate objects, believing that they are real.

The third stage of development is the Concrete Operational stage (approximately 7 -11 years old). In this stage the limitations of the Pre-operational stage become achievements . For instance, Egocentrism is 'in the bring of extinction' in this stage due to the fact that children of this age are more experienced with friends and siblings who express different opinions, so children realize that there is not only their perspective(Kail & Cavanaugh). The most important limitation in this stage is that children cannot reason abstractly, only if they are with dolls, according to Piaget.

Te fourth and the last stage of development is the Formal Operational stage(approximately 11 years old +). In this stage, children entering adolescence, achieve the limitations of the Concrete Operational stage, but the most important achievement is that they can reason abstractly(Bond 1995). Another achievement is that young adults can work organized in tasks.

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