

Piaget's early theory of the role of language

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Piaget identifies four periods of cognitive development: sensory-motor, pre-operational, concrete operational, and formal-operational. Each of these periods is associated with mastering certain skills and abilities such as the use of symbols, abstract thinking, etc:

Sensory-motor (infancy): during this period intelligence is demonstrated through motor activity without the use of symbols;

Pre-operational stage (toddler and early childhood): intelligence is demonstrated through the use of symbols, improvements in the use of language, development of memory, and imagination. However, thinking remains illogical and nonreversible; egocentric thinking dominates during this stage;

Concrete operational stage (elementary and early adolescence): intelligence is demonstrated through logical and systematic manipulation of symbols related to concrete objects. Operational thinking develops (mental actions that are reversible) while egocentric thinking diminishes.

Formal operational stage (adolescence and adulthood): intelligence is demonstrated through the logical use of symbols related to abstract concepts. Early in the period, there is a return to egocentric thought. Only 35% of high school graduates in industrialized countries obtain formal operations; many people do not think formally during adulthood (Brainerd, 1978).

According to Piaget, one of the most important aspects that correlate with the progress in cognitive development is physiological maturation: without refinement and differentiation of the central nervous system, thinking could not become more elaborate. Piaget postulates that cognitive growth depends heavily on the child's self-initiated interactions with the physical

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surroundings and biological development that stimulate passing from one cognitive stage to another (Beilin, 1992). At the same time, Piaget admits that social factors play an increasingly crucial role in the process of children's learning (Becker and Varelas, 2001).

The main implication of Piaget's theory is that the development of cognitive mechanisms such as memory, thinking, and sensory abilities is the essence of learning for children. In other words, before a child can master a certain behavioral pattern he or she should have the appropriate cognitive abilities that allow mastering it otherwise the child will simply not be able to fulfill the task properly. Therefore, the timely provision of the learning materials and correct formulation of the assessment criteria and requirements is the key to ensuring the successful cognitive development of children. This major implication is reflected in virtually every serious pedagogical model that has been designed over the last several decades.