

Preoperational stage observation essay sample



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A friend's uncle, who lives in the area, has a set of fraternal male twins named Justin and Christian that just a week ago, turned four years old. And after getting a good connection through my friend, I was invited over to do a few of Piaget's experiments on each of the boys. Being twins, both boys obviously fit into the preschool age-range and I determined that I should test their preoperational thought as it relates to their conservation, centration, and the irreversibility they may feature in their thinking. Piaget argues that adolescents still in the stage of preoperational thinking focus on one aspect of a situation, neglecting its other important features, which is called "centration" (Berk, 2012). They also have an inability to mentally go through a series of steps in a problem, and then reverse direction, returning to the starting point. This is called "irreversibility" (Berk, 2012, p. 322). These factors relate to a children's lack of ability in "conservation" where an object's physical characteristics remain the same, even when their outward appearance undergoes change (Berk, 2012). I chose to test these factors and limitations in these preschoolers to see if Piaget's theory holds true in both subjects.

For both, I first showed them two rows of six pennies, so a total of twelve were used. Both twins pointed out that each row of pennies contained the same amount of pennies. However, when I picked up the 2nd row of pennies and gave each of them more separation than there was in the first row, both boys told me the row, now with wider divides between each penny, had more pennies because "it has more!" as they would stretch their hands as if reaching out was making their case. The question I asked was not complicated and their understanding of it seemed clear when I asked, "

which row has more pennies now?" And yet they both responded that the longer row of pennies that still contained only six, was in fact filled with more pennies. When they used their fingers to count them out after being notified each row had the same amount still, Justin, took his hands and scrunched the longer row back together so that they were even again with the length of the first row of pennies.

Christian seemed concerned that there were more in the newly designed row but instead of counting them out for himself he began to flick the pennies with his thumb so they would go flying off the table and hit a wall or two. How they both focused on only one aspect that could relate to answering the question while disregarding the most important feature that is the amount of pennies in front of them in the two rows reflects the boys thinking of "centration." Irreversibility was shown when they both thought the pennies contained different amounts in the respective rows since both boys could not follow that no pennies were actually added, just disorganized.

I also tried the liquid conservation task where the same amount of water is poured into two identical glasses, then one of the glasses contents is poured into a different shaped glass and I ask the child if the water remains the same throughout the switch in glass. After performing this drill with Justin he thought the water amount changed in the new glass, which was a taller and thinner glass, than its wider counterpart which had the same water in it just five seconds previous. His answer as to why, was because the water reached a "taller" height and thus had more water in the glass. Justin's response again shows the centration in his preoperational thinking where he considers another, less important factor in the situation, the one he makes his answer

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based on. When I did the same task with Christian, after pouring the water into the taller glass, he sat and analyzed the two glasses, staring extremely close into the clear glass as if he was looking through a scope to get inside the water. He finally backed away from the glasses without saying anything and proceeded to drink the water from the taller glass as fast as he could.

He finished the eight ounces of tap water I filled it with and after slamming it down on the kitchen table, immediately began to chug the water from the wider, initial glass. He finished both and set them down. I told him I never asked him to drink it but was only wondering which glass had more water. Christian told me, " I couldn't tell so I drank them both, this one has more water!" and pointed to the wider glass. After I asked him why that one would now have more water in it when all he did was finish them both, he said, " that's why I drank both [of] them so I could see which one took longer to finish." I was very surprised by his change of thought but more surprised by his outside-the-box idea on what would prove to him which glass had more water.

Again Christian, like his brother, proves irreversibility in his thought as he couldn't go through the steps again to return him to the same conclusion that was shown previously. Christian instead thought he could figure it out in his own way eventually leading him to a completely false and irrelevant result (which probably happened because the mouth of the wider glass made it a slower task to drink fully) which is interesting in its own right as a test on drinking out of different sizes of glasses.

I tested each child separately in order to gauge any differences and similarities in the boys' thought processes. I felt having twins do the testing together would change the way they were thinking as individuals and could cloud their judgment even further when analyzing what they see and what I ask them. They both yielded similar results in these two tests and proved Piaget's theories to remain true to children in the current generation. As the tester, I never asked the children questions where they could make real life examples in their own worlds and minds. Many studies show that when preschoolers are given tasks that are made relevant to their lives, they do not display the same illogical characteristics that we see in Piaget's proposed preoperational stage (Berk, 2012, p. 324). In this regard, I may not have a full understanding of the children's current level of comprehension. However, I do feel that I gained a better understanding of a preschoolers mental thought by seeing these tests in action in person as opposed to just explained in text.

These children were both completely aware of who I was (a stranger to them) and followed appropriately anyway with my tests which they knew nothing about. They were fully cognizant of their role in their family and with me, yet couldn't quite grasp the idea of changing patterns and how it can still lead to the same result. I would love to test these same children in one year to understand better when a child enters or graduates out of the "preoperational" and becomes fully or just further operational in their thinking. So I asked to set that up with the twins' father. Hopefully in the future, I can start to distinguish differences between these twins since

because so far, although different in their demeanor and behavior, are currently equal in their cognitive development.