# Piaget's Stages

Major Concept Summary: Piaget’s stages

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Summary

Jean Piaget was a psychologist who made a great contribution to the understanding of children’s cognitive development. His contribution began when he noticed children of certain ages tended to give the same types of incorrect answers. Then he developed his theory that children's cognitive development occurs in stages.

The four stages of intellectual development are: (1) sensorimotor, (2) preoperational, (3) concrete operational, and (4) formal operational. Each stage happens in this order and only occurs after the one before it. No stage can be missed, there are individual differences in the rate at which children progress through stages, and some individuals may never attain the later stages.

1) sensorimotor stage: The age of birth to 2 years. This is the first stage that Piaget developed about sensory-motor and during this stage, the infant is focused on physical sensations and on learning to coordinate his body movements. A range of cognitive abilities develop including object permanence and self-recognition. If that infant cannot see something then it does not exist. This is why if you hide a toy while it watches, it will think it disappeared and will not search for the object once it has gone out of sight. The main achievement during this stage is object permanence - knowing that an object still exists, even if it is hidden. This requires the child to need to form a mental representation of the object.

2) preoperational stage: Two years to seven years of age. At the start of this stage, the child does not use operations, so the thinking is influenced by the way things appear rather than logical reasoning. During this stage, the child cannot conserve which means that the child does not understand that quantity remains the same even if the appearance changes. Also, the child is egocentric. That means he assumes that other people see the world as he does. They also demonstrate animism which is the tendency for the child to think that non-living things have life and feelings like a person’s.

3) concrete operational stage: The stage between the ages 7 to 11. At the beginning of this stage, the child can use operations so he can conserve quantities. The child realizes that people see the world in a different way than he does and he has improved in inclusion tasks. Children still have difficulties with abstract thinking. The child also becomes less egocentric and begins to think about how other people might think and feel. This stage is a major turning point in the child’s cognitive development because it makes the beginning of logical or operational thought.

4) formal operational stage: This stage is from the age of 11 and over. As adolescents enter this stage, they obtain the ability to think abstractly, the ability to combine and classify items in a more sophisticated way, and the capacity for higher-order thinking/reasoning. Being able to think more systematically and with reason allows them to understand politics, ethics, and science fiction. They can understand abstract concepts and ideas.

In summary, the main goal of Piaget's theory is to explain the mechanisms and the processes by which the infant, then the child, develops into an individual who can think and reason.



### Prominent Criticisms/ Warning box

Researchers have critiqued Piaget's theory that it has some shortcomings, including overestimating the ability of adolescents and underestimating an infant’s capacity. He has also neglected cultural and social interaction factors in the development of children’s cognition and thinking ability.

### Vocabulary

 - Cognition: all mental activities associated with thinking, knowing, and remembering

 - Cognitive Development: the process by which pre-existing knowledge is altered to fit in the new information

 - Classification: mentally group objects into categories according to similarities

 - Schemas: concepts or mental frameworks that organize and interpret information

 - Assimilation: an adaptation process by which new information is taken into the previously existing schema

 - Accommodation: the process by which pre-existing knowledge is altered to fit in the new information

Media examples

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IhcgYgx7aAA&t=11s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IhcgYgx7aAA&amp;t=11s)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TRF27F2bn-A>

### Prominent Figures

Jean Piaget

Piaget was a Swiss psychologist who was most known for his study of the acquisition of understanding in children. He is thought by many people to have been the major figure in 20th-century development psychology. He was born on August 9, 1896, in Neuchatel, Switzerland. In his early studies, he was interested in Zoology. He studied zoology and philosophy at the University of Neuchatel and received his doctorate. However, soon afterward he became interested in psychology. He first went to Zurich, where he studied under Carl Jung and Eugen Bleuler, and he then began two years of study at the Sorbonne in Paris in 1919.

In Paris he planned and conducted reading tests for schoolchildren and became interested in the types of errors they made, leading him to investigate the reasoning process in these young children. By 1921, he had begun to publish his findings. He was a professor at the University of Neuchatel, and in 1929 he joined the faculty of the University of Geneva as a professor of child psychology, remaining there until his death on September 16, 1980.

Piaget saw children as constantly creating and re-creating their model of reality, achieving mental growth by applying simpler concepts to higher-level concepts at each stage. He argued for a “genetic epistemology,” a timetable established by nature for the development of the child's ability to think, and he traced four stages in that development. These four stages are the sensorimotor stage, preoperational stage, concrete operational stage, and formal operational stage. Piaget reached his conclusions about child development through his observations of and conversations with his children, as well as others.

Current events in education:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/12/technology/personaltech/12basics.html>

This article is from the New York Times and it talks about what age children should get their first cellphone, laptop, or virtual persona. It then describes the four stages of Piaget's theory and how the child would be affected by electronics in each stage. At the end of the article, it says that the use of batteries is a discovery waiting to happen but that toys work best when they are matched to a child’s level of development.

### Teacher Connections/connections to education:

Piaget’s stages of cognitive development can be useful to teachers in several ways:

 - Teachers develop a better understanding of their students’ thinking. They can also align their teaching strategies with their students’ cognitive level.

 - Piaget recommended to teachers that they should take active, mentoring roles toward students. Instead of pushing information at students while they sit and listen passively, share the learning experience and encourage students to be active and engaged. Take your students seriously and respect their ideas, suggestions, and opinions.

This is very useful because when you better understand your students, you can work more effectively and it can be a positive learning experience for both the students and teacher.

### Summary box:

The main goal of Piaget's theory is to explain the mechanisms and the processes by which the infant, then the child, develops into an individual who can think and reason.

### Ask the Teacher

According to Brooke Combs who is a Senior at Arizona State University (ASU) as a student teacher, she believes Piaget's stages of development are very important and vital in the classroom. “I teach 2nd graders and they are in the concrete operational stage. This means that I have no expectations for my students to think abstractly. They are logical thinkers or approaching logical thinking.”

“I use this in the classroom to see where my students are which helps me to form questions and to form assessments. Knowing that they aren’t able to think abstractly yet, all of my questions and assessments are logical. I also understand that you can’t put all students in one group, not all students are the same and they all develop and think differently. It is vital to get to know each of your students individually to help them succeed.”

While in the classroom Brooke doesn't usually think of the names of each stage but thinks about their abilities for their age. “As I observe my students I can tell that they aren’t ready to think abstractly. I also use their assessments to see how they score and where they are intellectually and developmentally. I think that knowing and understanding the Piaget stages of development is very important to have a successful classroom.”

References and further reading:

<https://www.simplypsychology.org/piaget.html>

<https://www.edpsycinteractive.org/topics/cognition/piaget.html>

<https://positivepsychology.com/piaget-stages-theory/>

<https://www.theneurotypical.com/piagets-four-stages.html>

Read this online at <https://books.byui.edu/science_of_learning/maj_21_piagets_stage>