

Jean Piaget

Jean Piaget is one of the most influential figures in developmental psychology, insisting that there are qualitative differences between adult and childhood thought. Piaget held that children pass through four stages of cognitive development, each stage being qualitatively different from the others. Piaget believed that cognitive growth is a continuous process that begins at birth and proceeds through these stages.

According to Piaget, during infancy children learn from interacting with the environment through reflexive behaviors. For example, based upon repeated experiences with the grasping reflex, infants learn that they can grasp things. Piaget refers to these organized patterns of behavior and thought as schema. Infants develop behavioral schemata, characterized by action tendencies; older children develop operational schemata, characterized by more abstract representation of cognition.

An important principle in Piaget's theory is the principle of adaptation. According to Piaget, adaptation takes place through two complementary processes, assimilation and accommodation. Assimilation is the process of interpreting new information in terms of existing schemata. Accommodation occurs when new information does not really fit into existing schemata; it is the process of modifying existing schemata to adapt to this new information.

Piaget's four stages of cognitive development are the **sensorimotor**, **preoperational**, **concrete operational**, and **formal operational**. During each stage, the child's mental processes are characterized by similar strategies. The

stages are in an invariant sequence, each stage preparing the way for the one that follows it. Although he gave the approximate ages for these stages, the most important thing to be aware of is the order in which a child progresses through these stages.

Stage	Description
Sensorimotor	primary and secondary circular reactions; object permanence develops
Preoperational	Child has not mastered in conservation
Concrete operational	Child masters in conservation
Formal operational	Person has the ability to think like a scientist