

Cognitive Development Theories

Piaget

In this assignment I am going to choose between Piaget, Vygotsky, Bruner and Howard Gardner who are all cognitive development theorists, to describe and evaluate the cognitive development that they have explored whilst including reflective observations of this development in practice.

After researching all the theorists, I have decided to do my assignment on Piaget as I personally find him the most interesting to gather information from. In this paper I will describe his cognitive developmental learning theory and relate it to its practice, I will then summarise all the information I have gathered and highlight my key points and findings.

Although I researched many theorists to decide which one to do this assignment on and in the classroom, I found Piaget's theories most interesting as they differ in many ways from other theorists. Piaget's theories are different as it is only concerned with children and how they behave, rather than learners of all ages. Next, it focuses on development rather than learning so it not just addresses how different people process and gather information and finally, Piaget's theory proposes discrete stages of development which are marked by qualitative differences rather than a gradual increase in the number and complexity of behaviours, concepts and ideas. Piaget's theories differ as his main goal is to explain the mechanisms of this theory in full detail to a very reliable gathering of information. He does this by gathering findings from an infant and including reflective observations of his development in practice.

I am going to demonstrate an understanding of a developmental theory by explaining that theorists suggest the developmental stage theories are theories that divide child development into distinct stages which are characterized by qualitative differences in behaviour. There are a number of different views about the way in which psychological and physical development proceed throughout the lifespan.

Jean Piaget is a cognitive development theorist that was born in Switzerland in 1896. Piaget was first trained as a biologist which gave him a constructivist approach. Piaget has key 'piagetian principles'. One of these is that a child's thought process is cognitively different from adults. Although Piaget focuses on child cognitive development, he does have stages of cognitive development throughout life from a child until the end of someone's life.

Piaget's theory which he brought to light in 1936 discussing his findings of cognitive development explains how a baby or young child constructs a mental picture of the world and their surroundings in their head. After reading other findings from other theorists, he disagreed with the theory that intelligence is a 'fixed trait' and regarded cognitive development as a process of which occurs due to a person maturing in a biological way and through interaction with their surrounding environment.

Piaget first had the tools to fully start gathering findings when he got employed by the Binet Institute in the early 1920's where his job title there was to develop French versions of questions on English intelligence tests. Whilst gathering findings at the Binet Institute he became intrigued as to why the children were giving wrong answers to questions that only require logical thinking. He believed that after finding these findings that children and adults' thinking processes are very different.

Piaget demonstrated that key barriers and challenges were faced by an individual across their lifespan by putting someone's lifespan into six different stages. These are infancy, childhood, adolescence, early childhood, middle age, older age and birth-two years.

Firstly, the term lifespan is 'development refers to age related challenges that occur from birth all the way until death. Although Piaget's main focus is the early years of someone's life, he put the lifespan into six groups to easily explain them.

He firstly made the group 'infancy' which is from when someone is born until they are two years old. This is when the child is fully dependant on a guardian for survival. During the first 2 years is when the bond develops between a child and their primary caregiver and they learn to trust them as this will be very important for their mental health in later life. From two to ten years old Piaget grouped this stage of your life as 'childhood'. During this stage is when a child starts to become more independent and not fully dependent on a guardian as they start to learn to do things themselves and gain more self control. It is during this stage children's cognitive skills develop mostly as they also start to develop an understanding of what is right and wrong in life. From the ages between 20 and forty years old is categorised as 'early adulthood'. This is the age when you start to establish personal and financial independence after gaining full independence and even becoming the carer for another child or person as you may decide to start a family or go into the nursing industry for example. During early adulthood Piaget also says this is when you decide to gain relationships like marriages and develop intimate relationships you may not have had before.

After middle age comes 'middle age'. This is when someone is 40-65 years old and during this period will have an expanded social life and explained personal involvements and responsibilities. This could be advancing highly in their career or supporting their own families they have created.

The final stage of life Piaget created was 'older age'. This stage is for individuals who are 65 years until the end of their life and a period of considerable adjustment to changes in someone's life and their own self perceptions. For many people who are older this is the most liberating time of their life as many people are in retirement and don't have as many responsibilities and more time to just enjoy life.

Although Piaget created the six stages of life, he made his theory up of three basic components. These are:

- Schemas
- Adaption processes that enable the transition from one stage to another
- Stages of cognitive development

Firstly, schemas are described as the building blocks of knowledge. Secondly, adoption processes that enable transition from one stage to another are also known as equilibrium, assimilation and accommodation and finally the stages of cognitive development are from sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational and formal operational motor skills.

Going more in depth, schemas are defined as 'a cohesive, repeatable action sequence possessing component actions that are tightly interconnected and governed by a core meaning.' schemas are the basic building blocks in cognitive development and enable us to form a mental representation of the world in our heads. For instance, schemas imagine what it would be like if you did not have a mental model of your world? It would mean that you wouldn't be able to make as much use of the information from past experiences or plan future actions. Piaget called a schema a basic building block of intelligent behaviour as it is a way of organising knowledge in your head.

Jean Piaget included assimilation and accommodation into his cognitive learning theory as using assimilation is using an existing schema to deal with a new object or situation and accommodation is when an existing schema doesn't work and needs to be changed, further equilibration is the force which moves development along. These are all important to be included as Piaget's cognitive processes as he uses these components to try and describe how a child's brain processes information and how that differs to an adult's information process being digested.

To outline Piaget's developmental theory he outlined 4 cognitive developmental stages which each child goes through in the same order.

These are:

- Sensorimotor (birth-24 months)

The sensorimotor stage main goal during this stage is to gain object permanence. This is knowing an object is still there even if it's been hidden behind something.

- Preoperational (18 months- 7 years old)

The preoperational stage is when a child starts to think about things in a more symbolic way. This is the ability to make one word have two meanings. Even Though the child's thinking process is expanding, their thinking process is still egocentric and the individual has difficulty seeing someone else's point of view.

- Concrete operational (7 years to 11 years old)

The concrete operational phase is considered a major turning point in someone's thinking process according to Piaget as it is the beginning of logical or an operational thought process. This means a child can work something out from themselves in their own head using their thinking process instead of needing to see it in an object form in front of them.

- Formal operational (Adolescence-Adulthood)

The formal operational phase begins when someone is 11 and finishes when they reach adulthood. During this stage people develop the ability to think about abstract concepts and think logically.

Although for a majority of us this will be the exact order we develop in from a child to an adult and no stage can be left out, there are individual differences that may be different for all of us.

The sensorimotor stage main goal during this stage is to gain object permanence. This is knowing an object is still there even if it's been hidden behind something.

Having said this, there are individuals that can go through these stages at different rates which can be a barrier for this theory for Piaget to be successful as some people never reach the later stages.

Although Piaget's theory was respected by many theorists, some theorists like Carlton and Buskist had concerns about his theories and the stages of life he created. They have concerns about Piaget's terminology of his stages. They said, from a scientific viewpoint that it is necessary to define new terms properly and not duplicate other words to express the information he has gathered. The uncertainty from these theorists come from the stage theory itself as it could be seen to be inaccurate to every individual as everyone's process of learning comes at different stages in life and he also didn't add factors of disabilities. These issues could be seen as barriers in this theory.

To conclude, in this assignment I chose Piaget's developmental theory and talked about and considered possible barriers through a person's lifespan. Although I chose Piaget to talk about for my behavioural theory assignment, I also included other theorists' opinions and talked about their theories as I think it is important to have a broad understanding of all the theorists and their thinking process.

I also demonstrated an understanding of a developmental theory and discussed the key barriers faced by an individual across their entire lifespan

Furthermore, to make my assignment the best it could be I used fluent English throughout my assignment with the appropriate referencing as is said to do so by following the general university presentation guidelines.

References

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