

The Cognitive Approach – Piaget

Approach theorist

Cognitive:
Piaget

Key words:

- Constructivist
- Schemas
- Adaptation
- Assimilation

Key aspects of the approach or theory relating to children's development and behaviour

Piaget is a constructivist who believes that children's intelligence develops as they grow and that a child needs to construct a model of the world that they can build on. Children construct this world through interacting with their environment and moving through stages that are dependent on their age.

The sensorimotor stage: the child's goal is to develop **object permanence**.

The preoperational stage: the child's goal is to develop **symbolic thought**.

The concrete operational stage: the child's goal is to develop **logical thought**.

The formal operational stage: the child's goal is to develop **abstract thought**.

Piaget believed that this sequence of stages was the same for every child and that it always follows the same order, but not always at the same rate. Piaget was interested in how children began to develop an understanding of concepts such as time, numbers, and quantities. He believed that knowledge does not simply develop out of experiences, but that we have internal building blocks called **schemas** that help us organise knowledge and make sense of the world around us.

Adaptation: Piaget believed cognitive development was a process where we adapt or adjust to the world through assimilation, accommodation, and equilibration. Through **assimilation**, we fit new information into existing schema.

Application of the approach for childcare practitioners and educators in schools and settings

The Foundation Phase Framework promotes children's learning through play and experience based on Piaget's theory of active learning through exploring the world and discovery. Teachers plan student-centred activities to promote learning through active discovery, with a focus on the learning process rather than the end product.

Piaget recognised the importance of observing children to assess their development in order to plan activities that are age and stage appropriate. This is an important part of lesson/ session planning. Children are given opportunities to learn and develop and to use many resources and materials. Observation helps to understand each child's level of achievement, their interests and learning styles and provide suitable learning opportunities.

Piaget's theory influences the characteristics of effective teaching and learning which are:

- children investigate and experience things
- through active learning, children concentrate and keep on trying if they encounter difficulties
- children create and think critically
- children develop their own ideas.