

The Cognitive Development of the Preschool Child: A Quick Reference

Competency 5: To construct his/her understanding of the world

Meaning of the competency

This competency is closely related to the children's cognitive development. Through their actions and interactions, they develop strategies and acquire learnings. They become familiar with the subject areas and discover, understand and adapt to the world around them. Through play and interaction with others, they observe, anticipate and experiment. They discover various ways of saying, doing and understanding things and solving problems. They share their discoveries and gradually become capable of autonomous, critical, creative thinking.

Outcomes at the end of preschool

The children know the pleasure of learning. They are curious and are able to use their learnings and creativity in play and projects. They use some basic elements from various subject areas: the arts, social sciences, mathematics, science and technology. They share their discoveries. (QEP, pg. 62)

Piaget's theory of cognitive development

Pre-Operational

The preoperational stage occurs between ages two and six. Language development is one of the hallmarks of this period. Piaget noted that children in this stage do not yet understand concrete logic, cannot mentally manipulate information, and are unable to take the point of view of other people, which he termed egocentrism.

During the preoperational stage, children also become increasingly adept at using symbols, as evidenced by the increase in playing and pretending. For example, a child is able to use an object to represent something else, such as pretending a broom is a horse. Role playing also becomes important during the preoperational stage. Children often play the roles of "mommy," "daddy," "doctor" and many others.

Egocentrism

Piaget used a number of creative and clever techniques to study the mental abilities of children. One of the famous techniques egocentrism involved using a three-dimensional display of a mountain scene. Children are asked to choose a picture that showed the scene they had observed. Most children are able to do this with little difficulty. Next, children are asked to select a picture showing what someone else would have observed when looking at the mountain from a different viewpoint.

Invariably, children almost always choose the scene showing their own view of the mountain scene. According to Piaget, children experience this difficulty because they are unable to take on another person's perspective.

Concrete Operational

The concrete operational stage begins around age seven and continues until approximately age eleven. During this time, children gain a better understanding of mental operations. Children begin thinking logically about concrete events, but have difficulty understanding abstract or hypothetical concepts.

Logic

Piaget determined that children in the concrete operational stage were fairly good at the use of inductive logic. Inductive logic involves going from a specific experience to a general principle. On the other hand, children at this age have difficulty using deductive logic, which involves using a general principle to determine the outcome of a specific event.

Reversibility

One of the most important developments in this stage is an understanding of reversibility, or awareness that actions can be reversed. An example of this is being able to reverse the order of relationships between mental categories. For example, a child might be able to recognize that his or her dog is a Labrador, that a Labrador is a dog, and that a dog is an animal.

References

Beaty, Janice J. (1994). *Observing Development of the Young Child* (3rd ed). Toronto: Maxwell Macmillan Canada

Beaty, Janice J. (2013). *Observing Development of the Young Child* (8th ed). Toronto: Pearson