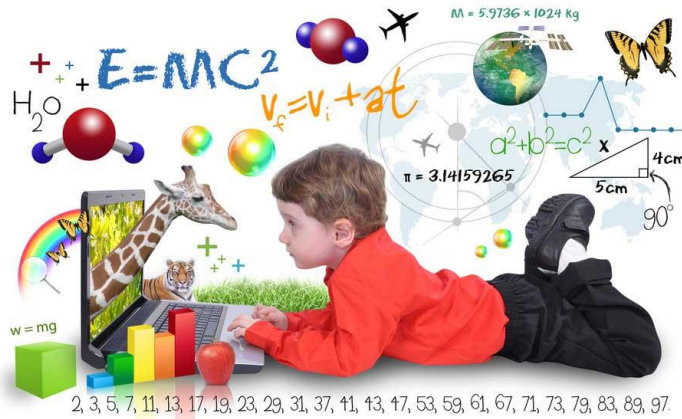# AP Psychology

4.2 – Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development

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Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development

- **Jean Piaget (1896-1980)**

  - Swiss psychologist

  - Theories on Cognitive Development have had a profound impact on our understanding of how the mind develops

  - Prior to Piaget, many assumed a child's mind was simply a small-scale replica of an adult's mind

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Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development

- **Jean Piaget (1896-1980)**
  - Piaget believed that children are not any less intelligent than adults, but that they think differently

  - His stage theory describes how infants, children, and adolescents use distinctively different cognitive abilities to understand the world.

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Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development

- **Piaget's Key Concepts**
  - **Schema**
    - A concept or framework that organizes and interprets information

    - Example: Young children develop a schema for "cars" that includes a vehicle that moves with four wheels

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Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development

- **Piaget's Key Concepts**
  - **Assimilation**
    - The process of absorbing new information into an existing schema
      - Example: As children become older, they see different kinds of car body styles and purposes (Sports Cars, Race Cars, etc.)
  - **Accommodation**
    - The process of adjusting old schemas or developing new ones to incorporate new information
      - Example: Eventually children see different types of vehicles and create new schemas for a "Truck" or "Bus"

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Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development

- **Sensorimotor Stage**
  - Begins at birth and lasts until "significant" language acquisition begins at about age 2

  - During this stage, infants use their senses and motor activities to explore their environment and develop new schemas

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Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development

- **Sensorimotor Stage**
  - At the beginning of the stage, infants lack Object Permanence

  - Object Permanence: The understanding that objects and people continue to exist even when they cannot be seen, heard, or touched.

  - "Out of sight, out of mind"

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Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development

- **Sensorimotor Stage**
  - During their second year, children develop the ability to form internal images or mental representations of objects
    - "Mind's Eye"
    - Allows the child to develop object permanence

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Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development

- **Preoperational Stage**
  - Usually lasts from ages 2-7

  - "Pre-Logic" Stage

  - **Symbolic Thought**
    - As vocabulary expands, children develop the ability to engage in symbolic thought
      - The ability to use words, images, and symbols, to represent the world
    - Example: Preschool child uses a toy steering wheel to pretend they are driving a car

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Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development

- **Preoperational Stage**
  - **Egocentrism**
    - The inability to consider another person's point of view
    - Because of this, preoperational children assume that others see, hear, and think exactly as they do
    - Example: A child wants to give her mother a doll house for her birthday since that is what she wants

  - **Animistic Thinking**
    - Children believe that inanimate objects have feelings
    - "The sun is happy today!"

Cornered   by Mike Baldwin

"It's OK, being completely egocentric is perfectly normal for someone your age."

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Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development

- **Preoperational Stage**
  - **Irreversibility**
    - A child's inability to mentally reverse a sequence of events or logical operations
      - Example: Steven and Steph each get a cookie. Steph breaks hers into multiple pieces and teases Steve because she has "more." Steve cries.
  - **Centration**
    - Only being able to focus, or center, on one aspect of a situation
      - Example: Steve is only centering on the fact that Steph has more pieces than him, not on the equal volume of the cookie

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Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development

- **Concrete Operational**
  - Usually lasts from ages 7-11
  - During this stage, children can apply logical thought to concrete objects and events
  - Principle of Conservation
    - Children can grasp the concept of reversibility
    - Conservation = The understanding that two equal quantities remain equal even though their form or appearance is rearranged

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Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development

- **Formal Operational Stage**
  - Usually begins in adolescence and continues through adulthood

  - Individuals have the ability to think logically about abstract concepts and hypothetical situations

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