

Critical Thinking: The Developing Person

Life is quite miraculous. From the moment of conception to the moment you shed this mortal coil, you undergo continuous changes. Sometimes the changes are quite dramatic, such as the loss of your first tooth or the appearance of pubic hair. At other times, the changes are subtle, so much so that you may not notice the little differences that suddenly become apparent. Developmental psychologists focus on the nature of those changes, emphasizing physical, social, cognitive, and emotional differences over time. In this chapter, we explore many of the frameworks that psychologists have used to describe, explain, and predict those changes.

Exercise 1- When Bad Children Aren't Bad (Pattern Recognition)

No matter how charming the child, eventually parents find themselves exasperated with their child's behavior. Sometimes it is easy for a parent to assume intentional misbehavior when other motives actually may be at work. By watching his own children Piaget gave us some cognitive concepts to reexamine what bad kids may really be up to. See if you can identify the cognitive concept from Piaget that explains each child's cognition.

- Although the parents spend \$300 on holiday toys for their 1-year-old daughter, she spent more time playing peek-a-boo by sticking her head in and out of a box that one of the toys came in. Why should the parents have kept their money?
- A well-meaning aunt talked with her 9-month-old nephew about meeting her new boyfriend. However, when he saw the young man, the child shrieked inconsolably. "It must be his mustache!" the aunt thought. Explain why.
- "Stop doing that!," screamed the exasperated mother in response to her infant's irritating habit of throwing his bottle from the high chair to the floor. She must have stooped over at least twenty times during this meal alone and her child just wasn't learning! What should the child's behavior not be surprising?

Critical Thinking: The Developing Person

- An older brother and younger sister constantly fight when they are playing cards. No matter how many times the brother explains the rules to his sister, the sister spreads hers out in a long line instead of a pile and declares, "I win! I have more cards!" What principle is keeping the sister from learning the rules?

- Two-year-old twins were forever arguing about whose toy belonged to whom. The young father decided to put a stop to the arguing once and for all. He sat them both down and gave them a lecture about understanding the way the other twin felt. Although the twins nodded their heads, they were fighting again almost before the father had left the room. Why should the father have saved his breath?

Exercise 2- Piaget Meets Santa Clause (Perspective Taking)

Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget was a careful observer of the cognitive patterns of children. Through systematic observation and careful recording he was able to deduce stages of cognitive activity that becomes apparent as children interacted with their environments over time. One of his most well established concepts is *conservation*, the ability to recognize that even though the shape of an object changes, its mass does not change. To demonstrate conservation, researchers may form shapes out of equivalent amounts of clay, perhaps rolling one mass of clay into a snakelike configuration and shaping the other into a ball. A child who can conserve recognizes that the physical masses of the two objects are the same despite their different shapes.

Although the conservation demonstrations of Piaget are interesting to watch, we demonstrate our ability to understand physical realities through the life span in other ways as well. An effective comparison contrasts how humans in different phases of development react to cultural symbols, such as Santa Clause.

Your task in this exercise is to develop the point of view of children who are dealing with Santa at various stages of their cognitive development. As you assume the perspective, try to anticipate the kinds of observations and impressions an encounter with Santa would trigger. How would you react in each stage of development? What would you believe about his existence?

To be successful in this task, you must develop an objective and unbiased way of looking at a concept you already know quite well. Changes are good that you are a formal operational thinker in relation to the existence of Santa Clause. But can you set aside what you know (and believe and feel) in order to describe an encounter with Santa from the perspective of a child at the stages targeted in this exercise? The characteristics of the stages as Piaget described them should help you identify with experience, thoughts, beliefs, and feelings of those whose behavior you are attempting to explain. You may want to review the stages of cognitive development in your text before you predict the experiences of children in the different stages.

What are the general characteristics of *sensorimotor stage* child?

Critical Thinking: The Developing Person

On encountering Santa, what would the *sensorimotor stage* child

- observe?
- think and feel?
- believe?

What are the general characteristics of *preoperational stage* child?

On encountering Santa, what would the *preoperational stage* child

- observe?
- think and feel?
- believe?

The breakdown in belief in Santa Clause tends to correspond with a child's transition into the *concrete operations stage*.

What are the general characteristics of *concrete operations stage* child?

Critical Thinking: The Developing Person

On encountering Santa, what would the *concrete operations stage* child

- observe?
- think?
- feel?
- believe?

How do these transitional experiences differ from the characteristics of the formal operational child and adult?

Exercise 3- Your Cheatin' Heart (Perspective Taking)

Psychologists have identified a technique to determine how moral reasoning influences the actions we take. This technique, called the moral dilemma approach, requires individuals to make moral judgements about their behavior in response to a challenging ethical problem. Lawrence Kohlberg used the moral dilemma approach when he developed his stage theory of morality. He often used stories in which a man named Heinz confronts the moral dilemma of whether he should steal a drug so his terminally ill wife might live. Kohlberg based his evaluation of an individual's level of moral development on the justifications the person offered for the behavior chosen. Kohlberg believed that assumptions and values underlying the decisions determined how highly evolved the individual would be as a moral reasoner.

Kohlberg distinguished three general levels of moral reasoning. In the *preconventional level*, self-interest appears to drive justifications for behavior. The primary motive in this stage is to avoid punishment or to secure rewards. In the *conventional level*, conforming to rules dominates moral reasoning. The opinions of others matter. Laws and social norms help you to determine how to secure approval or escape disapproval. In the final stage, the *postconventional level*, rules and laws may be altered in accordance with abstract principles. Justifications of moral judgments emphasize personal ethics, complex extenuating circumstances, and the affirmation of rights.

Critical Thinking: The Developing Person

Moral dilemmas are not always as dramatic as the one Heinz faces. In fact, throughout your educational career you routinely confront moral decision making in the form of opportunities for cheating. If your teachers are very trusting and not particularly skilled in preventing cheating, every examination or assignment becomes a choice between cheating and completing the work on your own. The behavior of other students presents a further challenge. What if you don't cheat, but other students around you do? If professors grade examinations comparatively, the cheating of others has the potential to harm you directly. Do you turn them in? Do you pretend you don't see their cheating?

This exercise asks you to view this dilemma from the perspective to three students: one who cheats, one who watches cheating and ignores the act, and one who watches cheating and reports it to the teacher. For each of these students, three different justifications or excuses are proposed for the particular course of action. Your task is to identify the level or moral reasoning apparent in the answer and to describe the values represented in this judgment.

It may be helpful to think of first about your own position on this dilemma. Are there any circumstances in which you might cheat? What values seem to dominate your decision making? Perhaps, for example, you normally wouldn't consider cheating, but you know that the results of one particular test will determine whether you will gain access to a job you truly want. In this instance, you might feel a serious conflict between the values of honesty and self-gain.

What about your own reactions to observing cheaters? Do you pretend not to see the problem? Do you accept cheating as a fact of life and try to avoid being upset by it? These courses of action suggest that you place a high value on privacy, noninvolvement, or individual choice. Perhaps you don't react this way. Maybe you commit yourself to altering your teacher to help minimize these violations. If so, you may place a high value on integrity and fair play. Each course of action reflects the triumph of one value over another, although either decision may be reached only after considerable turmoil and discomfort.

Having thought a bit about your own possible responses to the moral dilemma of the test situation, consider this scenario:

It is time for the psychology midterm exam. Dr. Sanders administers a multiple-choice test and monitors the test carefully for the first 40 minutes. At that point, another professor knocks on the door and asks for a conference. Dr. Sanders stands in the doorway, her back to the class, and confers with her colleague. Crystal quickly pulls out her crib notes and adjusts some of her answers. To her left sits Sam, who has never cheated in his academic career. Sam notices her behavior but quickly averts his eyes, focusing on only his work. Tyrone, who studied all night to catch up on his reading for the course, sits to the right of Crystal. He not only notices her behavior but commits himself to a confidential talk with Dr. Sanders after the examination. He intends to report his conclusions about Crystal's behavior during the interruption.

Your task here is to read through three justifications that each of these three students might offer for his or her selected course of action. Try to identify the level of moral reasoning that is most characteristic in each answer. Then state the underlying value that each individual relies on in crafting the justification.

Crystal, the person who cheats:

Justification: "If the teacher is dumb enough to turn her back, what she doesn't know, won't hurt her."

Underlying value(circle): Self-interest,
Rule conformity, or
Personal ethics

Moral Stage: _____

Critical Thinking: The Developing Person

Justification: "Multiple-choice tests don't say anything about what kind of doctor I'll become."

Underlying value: Self-interest,
Rule conformity, or
Personal ethics

Moral Stage: _____

Justification: "Everybody cheats at least once in their life."

Underlying value: Self-interest,
Rule conformity, or
Personal ethics

Moral Stage: _____

Sam, the person who refuses to cheat or turn in a cheater:

Justification: "All I am interested in is seeing how well I really have learned the material ."

Underlying value: Self-interest,
Rule conformity, or
Personal ethics

Moral Stage: _____

Justification: "I don't rat on my friends."

Underlying value: Self-interest,
Rule conformity, or
Personal ethics

Moral Stage: _____

Justification: "I can't afford to make my friends angry with me."

Underlying value: Self-interest,
Rule conformity, or
Personal ethics

Moral Stage: _____

Tyrone, the person who will turn in the cheater:

Critical Thinking: The Developing Person

Justification: "It isn't right for some people to exploit these opportunities."

Underlying value: Self-interest,
Rule conformity, or
Personal ethics

Moral Stage: _____

Justification: "This exam will be graded on a curve. I'm not going to be penalized by the actions of others."

Underlying value: Self-interest,
Rule conformity, or
Personal ethics

Moral Stage: _____

Justification: "I can't stand by while others violate the trust of teachers should be able to have in their students."

Underlying value: Self-interest,
Rule conformity, or
Personal ethics

Moral Stage: _____

Exercise 4- Piaget, Kohlberg and Erikson Situations

Piaget: Use your knowledge of Piaget's cognitive development to explain the following behaviors/scenarios.

1. A three year old child asks for a glass of milk. You pour the last of the milk into a large glass where it barely reaches the middle. The child looks at the glass, and without drinking says, "More!" You don't want to deal with a temper tantrum. How can you satisfy the child without getting more milk?

Critical Thinking: The Developing Person

2. You have made a deal with a four year old to eat a small piece of a new vegetable before she leaves the table to play. When the child refuses, you consider cutting the vegetable into several pieces to make it easier for the child to eat. Why would this plan not work?

3. Billy has three cookies to share with his three year old little sister Ann. He breaks one cookie in half and gives both halves to Ann. Will she be satisfied with a broken cookie?

4. What is assumed by the following joke? A child went into a bakery and purchased a coconut cake. The clerk asked, "would you like me to cut that for you?" The child replied, "no thank you, my mom's on a diet."

5. Nine year old Ken sees a contest in a candy store. There is a goldfish bowl layered with multicolored jelly beans: 20 green jelly beans, 40 yellow jelly beans, 20 green jelly beans, and 10 black jelly beans. The contests asks, are there more yellow jelly beans or are there more other colored jelly beans? Will Ken win the contest?

6. Dr. Kendall asked a group of children the following questions and received the following answers. What Piagetian concepts are each of these groups of children illustrating?
Group 1:
 Why does it get dark out? So I can go to sleep.
 Why does the sun shine? To keep me warm.
 Why is there snow? For me to play in.

Group 2:
 Why do trees have leaves? To keep them warm.
 Why do stars twinkle? Because they are happy.
 Why does the sun move in the sky? To follow children.

Critical Thinking: The Developing Person

Group 3:

Why is the sky blue?

What makes thunder happen?

Why does it get dark out?

Somebody painted it.

Somebody's bowling in the sky.

Somebody takes in the sun at the end of the day.

Kohlberg: Use your knowledge of Kohlberg's moral development to explain the following behaviors/scenarios.

1. Tamara has five tests in one day. She is a good student but did not have time to study for her French test. She knows the person who sits next to her in French class is also a good student. This girl has copied from Tamara on occasion. Tamara decides to look at the other girl's test for the questions she doesn't know. "Besides," thinks Tamara, "I never should have five tests in one day anyway."
2. Scott thought about leaving school early and going to a baseball game. He stayed in school because he was afraid of getting caught.
3. Juanita's friends were at the mall, and someone suggested they do a little shoplifting just to see if they could get away with it. Juanita wouldn't participate and said stealing is wrong.
4. Muhammad lives with his mother in a poor section of the city. His mother is quite ill and needs outpatient services daily at the hospital some miles away from their home. Muhammad steals a car to take his mother to the hospital.
5. Martina, a young woman living in a war torn region of the world, distributes food to orphans living in the streets. This activity is actually against the law. She frequently has to deceive the authorities in order to keep these children alive.

Critical Thinking: The Developing Person

6. Grant wants to spend time after school volunteering at the hospital. However, he is a good basketball player, and practice interferes with this volunteer program. The coach and the other teammates pressure him to play. Grant decides to play with the team.

Erikson: Use your knowledge of Erikson's social development to explain the following behaviors/scenarios.

1. As Jill was looking to go back to work after taking the first two years off to raise her child, she began to observe and interview day care facilities. As she was at one facility, she observed one of the toddler rooms. She was happy to see that the children were acting just like her daughter Sam. They were playing with all kinds of toys looking to see how to manipulate them and make them work. She also saw the children trying to jump, run, climb, and ask to go to the potty. One boy even yelled, "do myself" as a teacher tried to help him with his coat.
2. The Smith's were very happy that they had survived the "terrible twos" with their daughter, Hannah. Now they were enjoying the fact that Hannah was more interested in doing things like running, jumping, wrestling, climbing, falling, drawing, roller-skating, and constantly asking questions of her parents than throwing a tantrum every time she did not get her way.
3. The Browns just had their first child. When a family friend came to visit, she was surprised that the baby smiled very little, cried all the time, and the parents did little to comfort the new baby.
4. Jim and Billie were out to dinner one night (without their twin boys – they were at Grandma's for the night). During dessert, Jim and Billie talked of how much their boys had grown. They tried to make a list of all of things their boys have been doing which included riding a big bike, art projects, helping around the house especially with the new puppy, not fighting too much with their friends or each other, and doing well in school especially doing their homework without being asked.