Developmental theories and milestones

Supported GRE teaching and original transfer practice

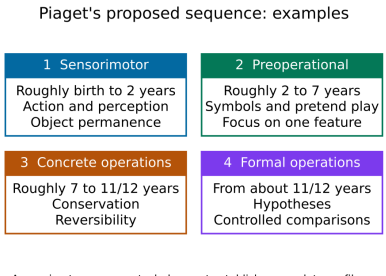
Developmental theories and milestones

- Describe Piaget's stages by what children can do, including **object permanence** 客体永久性 and **conservation** 守恒.
- Explain **assimilation** 同化 and **accommodation** 顺应.
- Compare Kohlberg's and Erikson's stage theories.
- Interpret **attachment** 依恋 patterns and tests of **theory of mind** 心理理论.

Piaget's stages

- Sensorimotor (birth to about 2): learning through action. **Object permanence**, knowing that hidden objects still exist, develops during this stage.
- Preoperational (about 2 to 7): symbols and pretend play, but egocentrism and no conservation. A child thinks a tall, thin glass holds more than a short, wide one.
- Concrete operational (about 7 to 11): conservation and logical operations on real objects.
- Formal operational (from about 11 or 12): abstract and hypothetical reasoning. In the pendulum task, the child tests one factor at a time while holding the others constant.

Figure: Piaget's stages



- Piaget defined each stage by how the child reasons, with approximate ages
- Match each part of the diagram to the text.

How schemes change

- **Assimilation**: fitting new experience into an existing scheme. A child calls a cat "doggie".
- **Accommodation**: changing the scheme when it does not fit. The child forms a separate category for cats.
- Vygotsky added the zone of proximal development: what a child can do with help but not yet alone. Scaffolding is help that organises the child's thinking without giving the answer.

Moral and psychosocial stages

- Kohlberg: preconventional reasoning (avoid punishment, gain rewards), conventional (approval, rules and law), postconventional (universal principles). He scored the reasoning, not the decision.
- Erikson: eight psychosocial crises across life. Trust versus mistrust in infancy; identity versus role confusion in adolescence; intimacy versus isolation in young adulthood; integrity versus despair in old age.
- Stage theories describe a common order, not a fixed timetable.

Attachment

- Secure: the infant explores, is upset at separation and is comforted at reunion. This is the most common pattern, about two thirds of infants in the original samples.
- Avoidant: little distress, and the infant ignores the caregiver at reunion.
- Resistant (ambivalent): great distress, and the infant clings yet is hard to comfort.

Attachment (2)

- Disorganised: confused or contradictory behaviour (added by Main and Solomon).
- Sensitive caregiving predicts security. Early patterns relate to later relationships but do not fix them.

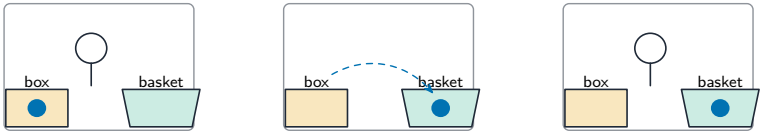
Theory of mind

- Passing a false-belief task means predicting from the other person's belief, not from reality.
- Deliberate lying needs the same skill: you must model what the listener will believe.

Figure: Theory of mind

passes: the box

not yet: basket



1 searcher puts the ball in the box

2 searcher leaves; ball moved to the basket

3 where will the searcher look?

- Passing means predicting from the searcher's belief, not from reality.
- Match each part of the diagram to the text.

Worked example: identifying the stage

- A child pours water from a short glass into a tall one and says the amount is the same "because you could pour it back": concrete operational (conservation, reversibility).
- A child searches under a blanket for a toy she saw hidden there: **object permanence** (sensorimotor).
- A teenager tests whether string length or weight changes a pendulum's period, one at a time: formal operational.

Worked example: a conservation question

- A leading question ("It's still the same, isn't it?") gives away the answer.
- A better question: "Is there more, less or the same? How do you know?" Then pour the water back.
- The child's reason, not the word "same", shows the stage.

Common errors

- Assigning a stage by age alone.
- Treating stage ages as fixed.
- Mixing up **assimilation** and **accommodation**.

Common errors (2)

- Placing identity versus role confusion in childhood; it belongs to adolescence.
- Treating an infant's **attachment** pattern as a personality diagnosis.

Key terms

- **object permanence**: Knowing that objects continue to exist when they cannot be seen.
- **conservation**: Understanding that a quantity stays the same when its shape or arrangement changes.
- **assimilation**: Fitting new experience into an existing scheme.
- **accommodation**: Changing a scheme to fit new experience.

Check yourself

- In which Piaget stage does conservation first appear?
- An infant shows little distress at separation and ignores the caregiver at reunion. Which pattern is this?
- Which Erikson crisis belongs to old age?