

**Infant development from Piaget to today**

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**Elizabeth Spelke, Harvard University*****Core knowledge and the development of intelligence: A perspective on Piaget's theory*****Abstract:**

Over the course of cognitive development, Piaget argued that children develop new and more powerful concepts. These concepts, he maintained, emerge neither through associative learning nor through the blind unfolding of maturational processes, but rather through constructive processes that build on experiences tracing back to infancy. This position was criticized in the 1970s and 1980s, by cognitive scientists who argued against the very possibility that more powerful concepts could be constructed on the basis of less powerful ones (e.g., Fodor, 1975). Here I suggest that Piaget's picture of conceptual development in childhood prevails over those arguments, and that apparent contradictions in his theory disappear if it is viewed in light of subsequent research on cognition in infancy. Piaget underestimated the perceptual and cognitive capacities of infants: capacities that came to light long after his own seminal studies. Thus, many of his claims concerning the initial cognitive competences of infants were mistaken, but his more central theory of conceptual development may well be correct. I review some key findings concerning infants' conceptual capacities and then focus on new evidence supporting a version of his claims for conceptual change in the domain of number.