



1st Jean Piaget Conferences

Theories of Development

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11h15

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Vitalist biology and Executive Function

Abstract:

Piaget's rich body of work is the foundation of modern field of conceptual development, and different research traditions lay claims to carrying on his legacy. The "neo-Piagetians" of the late 20th century sought to cash out Piaget's stage theories in terms of domain general changes in informational processing capacities. Constructivists, in contrast, sought to illuminate the nature of qualitative changes in conceptual content at a domain specific level, focusing on theory changes and changes in expressive power within mathematical development. Both of these were important threads of Piaget's own work. For example, in *The Child's Concept of Quantity*, Piaget and Inhelder offered two theoretical interpretations of the developmental changes on tasks that diagnosed children's concepts of substance quantities such a amount of stuff, weight, volume and density. The first placed the observed changes in the context of developmental changes in the child's intuitive theory of matter, and the second in the context of the transitions between preoperational, concrete operational, and formal operational thought. I will use a case study of developments within intuitive biology as an example of theory change and work on executive function as an example changes in cognitive architecture at a domain general level to illustrate how these two legacies of Piaget's work play out today.