



1st Jean Piaget Conferences

Theories of Development

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11h00

Philippe Rochat, Emory University, Atlanta
Onion Metaphor of Development

Abstract:

Since the seminal work of Piaget, conceptions of child development have drastically changed. Advances in infancy research forced novel developmental theories away from radical empiricism, orderly constructionism or structuralism, putting more weight on both evolved biological mechanisms and the role culture plays in child development..

Based on my research and other selected empirical evidence, I present an “onion” metaphor of development by which children would grow from an implicit biologically given core at birth - distinct layers of awareness about objects, people, and the self. Each added layer of subjective experience corresponds to major qualitative shifts: the emergence of a contemplative stance by 2 months, self-consciousness from around 21 months and the manifestation of an ethical stance from approximately 3-5 years.

In place of a general developmental mechanism, I propose that they are some basic and universal socio-affective conundrums constraining children to develop predictable behavioral patterns such as joint attention, self-consciousness, the exacerbated sentiment of having ownership, and the propensity to negotiate values with others. All are seen as special features of human development, linked to the incomparably prolonged immaturity and social dependence of children that is the trademark of our species.

As part of the multi-layer onion metaphor, I propose that a new layer of awareness emerging in development does not block, re-construct, or fundamentally re-structure “à la Piaget” the expression of those ontogenetically anterior. Rather, each layer offers a particular zone of awareness through which we constantly navigate depending on the mind state of our being in the world: dozing and dreaming, implicitly or explicitly aware, co-aware, conscious, or co-conscious. My main purpose is to show that what develop in children between birth and 5 years are additional ranges of subjective experience, new possibilities of being aware in the world.