Chapter 8: Developing theory about the development of theory

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Abstract

This chapter provides a unique perspective on how to develop new theory. The chapter begins by describing what theory is not: it is not true, objective, or deductive. From there, the chapter explores what theory and theory development might actually be. In the most expansive section, the chapter articulates 20 points that constitute a unique approach to developing theory. These 20 points constitute a rich set of observations on theory building that are more interesting and relevant than they are rigorous or tested.
Piaget's (1936) theory of cognitive development explains how a child constructs a mental model of the world. He disagreed with the idea that intelligence was a fixed trait, and regarded cognitive development as a process which occurs due to biological maturation and interaction with the environment. When Piaget talked about the development of a person's mental processes, he was referring to increases in the number and complexity of the schemata that a person had learned. When a child's existing schemas are capable of explaining what it can perceive around it, it is said to be in a state of equilibrium, i.e., a state of cognitive (i.e., mental) balance. Piaget has been extremely influential in developing educational policy and teaching practice.