

## **Laboratory 2**

### **Piaget's Conservation Task**

#### **Assignment Overview**

One of the key lessons in Piaget's theory is that there appear to be qualitative changes in children's thought as they develop. For Phase One of this laboratory assignment, you will need to find two children between the ages of four and six who are willing to cooperate with you. You will then administer a task to them that allows them to demonstrate their ability or inability to conserve volume. For Phase Two, you will classify three children's responses into Piaget's stages of cognitive development, using Piaget's terminology.

#### **Phase One**

***Participants.*** Your participants for this project will be **two** children between four and six years old. Be sure that you have both the children's and their parents' permission before you begin.

***Setting.*** Interview the children separately in a quiet room free of distractions. You and the child should be comfortably seated at a table where your materials are appropriately arranged.

#### ***Materials.***

- (1) Two clear drinking glasses that are exactly the same size and shape, each filled with the same amount of liquid (about half full).
- (2) Another clear drinking glass that is taller and narrower than the others (or shorter and fatter). It should have enough capacity to hold the water from *one* of the other glasses.

#### ***Procedure.***

- (1) Spend a short time talking with the child to put him or her at ease. Ask the child to cooperate with you in "playing a game."
- (2) Point out the two half-filled glasses and identify one as "my glass" and the other as "your glass." Say "If this glass is mine and this glass is yours" (pointing) "which of us has more to drink, or do we have the same amount to drink?" Record the child's response and ask "Why? How do you know?"
- (3) Pour the water from the glass nearest you into the tall, thin glass and say "I have decided to change glasses. I poured my water into this glass. Now, who has more to drink, you or me, or do we have the same amount to drink?" Record the child's response and ask "Why? How do you know?" Continue to ask the child to explain, so long as the child gives you useful responses.
- (4) Ask the child to pour the water in the tall, thin glass back into your original glass, and again ask who has more to drink.
- (5) Repeat steps 3 and 4 if the child gives a non-conservation response until the child loses interest or runs out of explanations.

***Written Transcript.*** Submit a typed manuscript of your interactions with the child, including both your questions and the child's responses, as well as any important nonverbal behaviors.

#### **Phase Two**

Analyse the interview transcripts that are given based on Piaget's theory of cognitive development. Take each child separately. Based on the child's answers to the questions, classify the child into one of Piaget's stages. Justify your classification by explaining how the child's responses fit into this category. (You may use direct quotes from the child here.) Be sure to use Piaget's terms in explaining the child's responses and cognitive development.

Conclude by writing an application and/or critique of Piaget's theory. What are some implications of pre-operational thought for the teaching or counseling of young children? Do you think the theory accurately explains cognitive development?

#### **Marking Scheme**

- Interview followed Piaget's conservation task procedures (3 points)
- Quality of written transcript (3 points)
- Accurate classification of children's responses into Piaget's stages (6 points)
- Application/Critique of Piaget's theory (3 points)