**Piaget, Jean (1896-1980)**

Born in Neuchâtel, Switzerland, Jean William Fritz Piaget pioneered the field of cognitive developmental psychology using empirical methods to study children. Like Walter Benjamin, Piaget was one of the few modern thinkers to take children seriously, and his enduring impact is attested by the fact that he is the second most cited psychologist in the twentieth century after Sigmund Freud (Haggblom). A precocious student, who had published his first scientific article at the age of ten, Piaget received his doctorate in zoology at the age of twenty-two. It was while assisting French intelligence researchers Alfred Binet (1857-1911) and Théodore Simon (1872-1961) with the administration of children’s standardized reasoning tests that Piaget found that children’s explanations to incorrect answers were far more illuminating than their explanations to correct answers. This observation was an important precursor to his cognitive development theory, which remains central to current understanding of human intelligence and childhood development. Piaget sequenced learning in stages according to age and postulated children’s agency, advancing that children are active thinkers who continuously and persistently construct representations of the world, what Albert Einstein (who corresponded with and met Piaget) described as ‘[t]he idea of a genius, such simplicity’ (qtd. in Furth 6). Piagetian concepts such as conservation (the stability of object property when it is transformed), object permanence (the existence of objects even when out of sight) and deferred imitation (the reproduction of a perceived action with delay), though not uncontested, have been seminal in influencing psychologists such as Lev Vygotsky, Lawrence Kohlberg and Howard Gardner, as well as the fields of educational psychology, special education, socio-emotional development and childhood psychopathology.

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