ANIMISM: IS IT ALIVE?

A POWERPOINT PRESENTATION
BY: JOHN HILL

ELMO SAYS, "PIAGET'S THE GREATEST!!!"
JEAN PIAGET
(not exactly Vygotsky, but still quite the looker...)

• Born in 1896 in Neuchatel, Switzerland
• Began scientific studies as early as 10, and by high school was gaining the attention of foreign colleagues
• Wanted to study the development of the mind, applying his findings to epistemology (the philosophy of the nature of knowledge)
MORE PIAGET

• Became interested in children’s wrong answers

• Carefully studied the tendencies of his three daughters

• Later studies focused on children’s understanding of mathematical and scientific concepts

• Died in 1980

Piaget with wife Valentine and daughters Jacqueline, Lucienne and Laurent
PERIOD 1: SENSORI-MOTOR INTELLIGENCE
- Babies organize their physical action schemes.

PERIOD 2: PREOPERATIONAL THOUGHT
- Children learn to think, although their thinking is illogical.

PERIOD 3: CONCRETE OPERATIONS
- Thinking becomes organized on a mental plane.

PERIOD 4: FORMAL OPERATIONS
- Thinking is systematic on an abstract plane.
NOW, WE ALL KNOW ABOUT GLASS SEBRAF ETC C, ET
HOW ABOUT SOMETHING NEW:

AIMS
• Animism: a child’s view of the world as being full of life and feeling

• Physiognomic Perception: Werner’s version of animism; a child reacting to dynamic, emotional and expressive qualities of an object
THREE “PHASES” OF ANIMISM

1. (Ages 4-6) Children associate life with any kind of activity.
   Ex: The sun is alive because it gives light.

2. (Ages 6-8) Children consider things that move to be alive.
   Ex: A stone is alive because it rolls.

3. (Age 8+) Children restrict life to objects that move on their own.
   Animism is eliminated when children only see plants and animals as alive, therefore making distinctions characteristic of adults.
Do children of varying ages view the world animistically, or are they able to distinguish between living and nonliving things, as adults do? Is animism able to be measured with uniform rules? Or do children grow away from this form of thinking at different ages?
GUIDING QUESTIONS

• Will the youngest children (kindergarten) perceive every object with activity of some sort as “alive”?

• Will the oldest children (4th grade) restrict life to objects that move on their own?

• Will the children who are the same age be in the same stage of animism?
I believe that this experiment will show Piaget’s assessment of animism in children to be correct to an extent. I think that Piaget’s breakdown of steps kids take in weaning themselves of animism is too strict and that the results will show this. While some children will match Piaget’s stages, I believe that there will be younger children with a smaller amount of animism in their outlook on the world, as well as older children with a larger amount of animism.
METHODOLOGY

• 21 children: 7 in kindergarten, 7 in 2nd grade and 7 in 4th grade

• Show the children as a group a clip from Sesame Street involving Elmo (a muppet) and Gina (a human).

• Take the kids aside one by one and ask them questions about whether they believe things are alive or not and why.

• Record all answers and analyze them.

PHASE ONE: the sun (day and night), candle (lit and unlit), and school bell (ringing and not ringing)

PHASE TWO: Hot Wheels car (moving and unmoving), and wind up rabbit (moving and unmoving)

PHASE THREE: Elmo and Gina
### RESULTS: IS IT ALIVE?

#### KINDERGARTEN

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*S = sometimes; “only while the video is on”*
# RESULTS: IS IT ALIVE?

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RESULTS: IS IT ALIVE?

KINDERGARTEN:
One child in Phase 2 (nearing Phase 3)
Six children in Phase 1

2ND GRADE:
Two children in Phase 3
One child in Phase 2
One child completing Phase 2, but not 1
Three children in Phase 1

4TH GRADE:
One child in Phase 3
Six children in Phase 1
Overall, I believe that my hypothesis was correct: children rid themselves of animism at varying ages; age limits are very rough estimates. Children in the same grade level were not necessarily in the same stage of animism, and the 2nd graders were overall more advanced than the 4th graders in this experiment, which proves that age is not a huge factor. As a whole, it seemed Piaget overestimated a child’s ability to abandon animism, as the majority of the children were still in Phase 1, no matter what age or grade level. Piaget was definitely correct, however, in defining these three stages: Almost every single response as to why they answered the way they did involved activity (Phase 1) or movement (Phase 2).
A BIG THANK YOU TO THE HOLY FAMILY OF NAZARETH SCHOOL AND THE SALVATION ARMY AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAM FOR SUPPLYING THE SPECIMENS!
LIMITATIONS

• time constraints- having to do part of the Kindergarten class all at once

• many more girls than boys

• tape recorder

• not sticking to script

• focus of kids

• Elmo- many of them may have already known that he wasn’t alive; not a true representation of the 3rd Phase
• Both biological/genetic maturation and the environment play a role in development

• Easy to exaggerate the role of environment

• Environment stimulates and challenges, but it is ultimately the children themselves who build cognitive structures
KIDS SAY THE DARNEST THINGS...

• One child asked if he was going to get graded on this “test”.

• What *is* Elmo? 3 children called him a “Muffet”, 2 said you could see strings, 1 said he was made out of wood, and 3 said there was “a person inside” a costume.

• 5 children laughed when I asked if the school bell, when it rings, is alive; 2 of these proceeded to tell me it was.

• Kindergarteners LOVE Sesame Street; 4th graders HATE Sesame Street; and 2nd graders are pretty neutral.