Introduction to the Theoretical Foundation of the Study:

Jean Piaget, an influential psychologist in the field of intellectual development, has made many contributions to the field of psychology with specific regards to children. Many of his theories revolve around a simple observation he made in the beginning of his studies—the idea that children think and perceive the world differently than adults. Dedicating his life and research to this theory, Piaget created many supporting theories that can help us further understand how children learn, perceive, and interact with the exterior world. One of these theories is Child Animism—or the way in which children perceive external objects. In his research, Piaget remarks that young children observe and understand all things exterior to them physiognomically and almost with a sense of anthropomorphism—giving them the qualities of life, consciousness, and sometimes even human characteristics (e.g.- the belief that a rain cloud is sad, or the sun is happy).

With these notions of life and consciousness as his base, Piaget set out to better understand the child’s concept of the world. He asked questions such as, “If I were to prick this table, would it feel anything or nothing...Why?” In asking questions such as this, Piaget was able detect a pattern within his subjects, and from these patterns, develop four stages of Animism that act as contributing factors to the cognitive development of children. The stages are as follows (ages associated with stages are to be viewed solely as loose associations, and are listed merely as a guide for understanding);

1. Anything that is in any way active, is considered conscious. (Birth – 6yrs)
2. Only things that move are conscious. (6 – 9yrs)
3. Only things that move on their own accord are conscious. (8 – 12yrs)
4. Consciousness is restricted to the Animal World. (11+)

In developing these stages, Piaget went on to assert that animism is an important aspect of cognitive development because it is only through learning, by interacting with the world, that children gradually abandon their belief that exterior and inanimate objects feel and live in the world as they do. Piaget’s four stages are the basis in which he provides evidentiary support to this assertion, thus in order to study if children gradually or abruptly abandon animistic beliefs, our research will revolve around these four stages.

The Purpose of the Research:
The objective of this research study is to determine if animism is gradually abandoned within the four stages of animism provided by Piaget, or if children abruptly abandon these animistic perceptions of the world.

Statement of the Problem:
Is it possible to identify if children gradually or abruptly abandon animistic belief by having them observe various demonstrations and rate on scale how they view the object(s) being presented? Will the children fall into Piaget’s outlined stages or can animism only be judged on an individual level, due to individuals suddenly abandoning animistic beliefs?

Guiding Questions:
1. Will the questions we have created support Piaget’s method of identifying animism?
2. Will the children, overall, display a general replication of Piaget’s theory of the four stages of animism?
3. Will there be distinct stages or will we see transitioning children as well?

**Hypothesis:**
Animism is a gradually developing process within a child's cognitive development. Children may individually vary in their beliefs but the stages outlined by Piaget encompass the majority of children in cognitive development. Therefore Animism is a continual and gradual process that is abandoned over time, not abruptly.

**Importance of Human Participants:**
The involvement of human participants in this study is necessary because in order to determine if animism is gradually or abruptly abandoned in children, we the investigators must observe and interact with children, while applying Piaget’s outlined stages as our base, in order to make an educated and informed conclusion.

**Preliminary List of Terms:**
- a. Animism
- b. Physiognomy
- c. Physiognomic Perception (Werner)
- d. Artificialism
- e. Geometric-Technical Perception (Werner)
- f. Consciousness
- g. Life
- h. Activity
- i. Motion
- j. Feeling
- k. Differentiation

**Partial Annotated Bibliography**
*Note to Professor Khirallah: Due to our struggle with extensive Piaget Readings, we are submitting only three annotations. (Approved by Prior Agreement)*

- In this book, Crain explains Piaget’s general theory of Animism, and how he believed children viewed the world physiognomically. He explains how Piaget defined his stages of Animism (but does not go on to list them), and how Piaget believed that children gradually abandon their animism.

- In this book, Piaget dedicates three chapters specifically to Child Animism. Within these chapters he addresses (1) the way in which children attribute consciousness to things within four basic stages, (2) the concept of life to a child and how the word “life” differs from other descriptive words of objects, and finally (3) the origins of child animism and how it affects moral development and physical determinism.
In this book, authors Ginseng and Opper summarize Piaget’s theory of animism as found within The Child’s Conception of the World. They relate animism as when a child believes that living and nonliving things are the same and have the same properties. He divides animism into three stages of development. The first states that the child believes that an inanimate object has knowledge of something (i.e. the sun and the moon know that life began). Animistic statements in the second stage will usually start out as animism, but will gradually change into artificialism. Artificialism is something that is the result of an outside agent such as God and not the result of natural phenomena. The third stage of animistic development is where animism is given up.

Plan for the Research Study:

1. **Proposal Dates of Research:** October 15-November 15, 2010
2. **Location/Setting:** The research study will be held at Good Shepherd Episcopal Church of Dallas or Good Shepherd Episcopal School in Dallas, within a school classroom that is familiar to the children.
3. **Description of Participants:** The Sample of Children to be researched will come from six different classes of the Good Shepherd Episcopal School in Dallas. The research will take place in two parts: the first will be a demonstration presented to the classes of 1st-6th grade, and the second part will be to personally interview an additional two students, selected randomly from each class. The total number of students to be surveyed will be 120; the total of students to be interviewed will be 12.
4. **A detailed Script of the Procedure:**
   
   a. Enter each class and explain the demonstration:
      
      *The Demonstration:*
      
      **Equipment:**
      
      a. A Lamp (Light Bulb)
      b. A Balloon
      c. A Toy Car
      d. A Stuffed Animal
      e. A Flower
      f. A Fake Flower
      g. Worksheet with spaces for their Age, Gender, and then the numbered questions with space to circle, “Yes” or “No”

      Using the items listed above, we will explain to the subjects that we will be showing a few “everyday” objects, and asking 10-20 questions.

   b. Say “Today we will be asking you to tell us about a few fun toys and objects we have hidden in this box. To start, we are going to hand out the worksheet, and then we are going to ask you some questions.”

   c. Instructions: “On each of your sheets, we would like you to circle if you are a girl or a boy. And now write down how old you are.”
d. Continue: “Now we are going to bring out the toys and objects and ask you all some questions. Please do not say your answers out loud – circle your answer on the worksheet.” [For younger children, consider using a gimmick. For example, ask them to hold up their pencils while they are thinking. Then, when you have finished providing all necessary information about a given object, then say “Pencils down – decision time!!”

e. Present the items and their corresponding questions:
   - Lamp: Present the light and ask, “Is the light alive, yes or no?”
     When the light is on, ask, “Is the light alive, yes or no?”
     “Does the Light know when it is on, yes or no?”
     “Does the Light feel anything if I touch it, yes or no?”
   - Balloon: Present the balloon and ask, “Is the balloon alive, yes or no?”
     When blowing the balloon up ask, “Does the Balloon know I am blowing air into it, yes or no?”
     When the balloon is full, push the balloon with my finger and ask, “Does the Balloon feel when I push on it, yes or no?”
   - A Toy Car: Present the car and ask, “Is the Car alive, yes or no?”
     Wind up the Toy and Release it (to display its movement) and ask, “Does the car know it is moving, yes or no?”
     “Does the car feel it is moving, yes or no?”
   - A Stuffed Animal: Present the Stuffed Animal and ask, “Is the Bear alive, yes or no?”
     “Does the Bear feel anything when I scratch its head, yes or no?”
     “Does the Bear know when I hug it, yes or no?”
   - A Flower: Present the Potted Flower and ask, “Is the Flower alive, yes or no?”
     “Does the Flower know when the sun is out, yes or no?”
     “Does the Flower feel when I shake it, yes or no?”
   - A Fake Flower: Present the Stuffed Flower and ask, “Is the Flower alive, yes or no?”
     “Does the flower feel know when the sun is out, yes or no?”
     “Does the Flower feel when I shake it, yes or no?”

f. Collect the Worksheets from the Children.

g. At the end of the demonstration, Thank the Children and the Teacher for their Participation and Help. Present the Teacher with the Demonstration Flower, and distribute a treat to each of the Children (i.e. - Fun Pencils/UD Pencils to all the children.)

h. Following each demonstration, by random selection, we will hand-picked two students (one girl, one boy) to further interview.

i. The two students will accompany us to the hallway or teacher-designated “interview-location” (e.g.- the library, another classroom, etc.)
j. Once we are in our designated interview location, we will explain, “Thank you for helping us. We are going to ask you just a few more questions.”

k. We will present the questions we just previously asked in the classroom, but instead of just asking, “yes or no” we will consult their answer sheet and ask, “why or why not did you say it is alive, knowing or feeling?”

We will record each answer on a sheet of paper, to be rated at a further time.

- Lamp: Present the light and ask, “Is the light alive, yes or no?”
  When the light is on ask, “Is the light alive, yes or no?”
  “Does the Light know when it is on, yes or no?”
  “Does the Light feel anything if I touch it, yes or no?”

- Balloon: Present the balloon and ask, “Is the balloon alive, yes or no?”
  When blowing the balloon up ask, “Does the Balloon know I am blowing air into it, yes or no?”
  When the balloon is full, push the balloon with my finger and ask, “Does the Balloon feel when I push on it, yes or no?”

- A Toy Car: Present the car and ask, “Is the Car alive, yes or no?”
  Wind up the Toy and Release it (to display its movement) and ask, “Does the car know it is moving, yes or no?”
  “Does the car feel it is moving, yes or no?”

- A Stuffed Animal: Present the Stuffed Animal and ask, “Is the Bear alive, yes or no?”
  “Does the Bear feel anything when I scratch its head, yes or no?”
  “Does the Bear know when I hug it, yes or no?”

- A Flower: Present the Potted Flower and ask, “Is the Flower alive, yes or no?”
  “Does the Flower know when the sun is out, yes or no?”
  “Does the Flower feel when I shake it, yes or no?”

- A Fake Flower: Present the Stuffed Flower and ask, “Is the Flower alive, yes or no?”
  “Does the flower feel know when the sun is out, yes or no?”
  “Does the Flower feel when I shake it, yes or no?”

l. At the end of the questioning, we will thank the student for their help and answers.

m. Following the Demonstrations and Interviews, we will rate each Demonstration Answer and Interview Answer on a scale. (Consult Scale on pp. 6)
### Demonstration Answer Scale:

| Belief that the object is “Alive” | - 1 point |
| Belief in the object having “Feeling” | - 1 point |
| Belief in the object “Knowing” | - 1 point |

| Belief that the object is “Not Alive” | 0 points |
| Belief in the object “Not Feeling” | 0 points |
| Belief in the object “Not Knowing” | 0 points |

*Exception: Belief that the Real Flower is “Alive” – 0 points

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**Relevance of the Points: Analyzing Results**

- 14-18 points = The First Stage of Animism
- 10-13 points = The Second Stage of Animism
- 5-9 points = The Third Stage of Animism
- 0-4 points = The Fourth Stage of Animism

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### Interview Answer Scale:

| Anything that is in anyway active, is conscious. | 3 points |
| Consciousness limited to anything that moves. | 2 points |
| Consciousness limited to things that strictly move on their own accord | 1 point |
| Consciousness is restricted to Animal World | 0 points |

*Exception: Comments about the Real Flower being “Alive” – 0 points

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**Relevance of the Points: Analyzing Results**

- 37–54 = The First Stage of Animism
- 19-36 = The Second Stage of Animism
- 1-18 = The Third Stage of Animism
- 0 = The Fourth Stage of Animism

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*Results of Research are to be strictly used within the Child Growth and Development Course.*

*Safeguards, etc. listed in Participation Letter below*
Dear…..

As students of the University of Dallas, currently enrolled in a Child Growth and Development Course, we are inviting you to help and cooperate in a collaborative research project investigating Child Animism, or the way in which children perceive the world as conscious and living. The research is important in understanding cognitive development in children, and will provide us with greater insight into how children perceive the world around them.

The research study involves three tasks (see the attached worksheets). All students in grades 1 through 6 are to respond to written questions on the worksheets involving all three tasks. Selected students (two from each grade) will then be asked to submit to interview questions to clarify their written responses. During the study, each child will be shown a series of demonstrations aimed at getting children to differentiate living from non-living things (i.e. – a lit up light bulb, a balloon, etc.). After observing each demonstration, each child will answer questions about what they have observed on the worksheet. Two randomly selected students – one boy and one girl – from each class will then be asked to clarify the answers they have written. In compliance with child protection guidelines, we will interview the two students together. Participation in the classroom group study is expected to take no longer than 20 minutes. Participation in interviews is expected to take 10 minutes.

Your decision to participate in this study is completely voluntary. You may withdraw your consent and discontinue your participation at any time. Should you choose to partake in this study, the researcher will maintain the confidentiality of each participant. To ensure that all specifics remain private and confidential, all names will remain unidentified throughout the research, and each individual will only be identified by age and gender.

In this project there are no legal, economical, physical, psychological, or social risks to the participants in either immediate or long-range outcomes, and all safeguards have been taken to minimize risks, including both researchers having completed and received certification in the National Institute of Health (NIH) “Protecting Human Research Participants” course. Additionally, to further ensure the protection of the participants, we are happy to comply with any safeguard regulations your organization requires.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the nature of this study, please contact Professor Khirallah, Department of Education, University of Dallas - Irving, TX, 75062, (972) 721-5334. For any questions that relate to your participation in this research, please contact _____, telephone …, or ______, telephone….. Thank you for assisting us in our research.

Sincerely,

_________________________________  __________________________________
Student Signature                      Student Signature