Discussion Questions for Chapters 1 - 3

Discussion Questions for Chapter 1

1. What areas fall under the heading of “children’s thinking”? Which of these strike you as core areas, and which as more peripheral?

2. What does it mean for a quality to be innate? What are some innate qualities of children? Why have philosophers for the past 2000 years been interested in what qualities of children are innate? What difference does it make?

3. What does it mean to say that a child is in a particular stage? Why do some theorists believe that development occurs in stages, whereas others do not?

4. Why are psychologists interested in individual differences in children’s thinking? Is the importance primarily for practical reasons, for theoretical ones, or both?

5. Do infants have intelligence in the same way as older children? What does it mean for an infant to be intelligent? What does it mean for an older child or adult to be intelligent?

6. Of what use is knowledge of brain development to people interested in children’s thinking?

7. What level of Bronfenbrenner’s model of context do you think has the greatest impact on children’s development?

Piaget Theory Study Questions I

1. Why has Piaget’s theory endured so long?

2. How did Piaget’s philosophical ideas shape his theory?

3. What does Piaget mean when he says a child is in a particular stage?

4. What evidence indicates that a child is in a particular stage?

5. What are the strengths and weakness of Piaget’s proposed change mechanisms of assimilation, accommodation, and equilibration?

Piaget Theory Study Questions II

1. How has use of new methods influenced our views of the accuracy of Piaget’s descriptions of children’s thinking?

2. What are the implications of findings of early competence for Piaget’s theory?
3. In what senses does children's thinking show qualitative changes and in what senses doesn't it?

4. How broad are the regularities in children's thinking at a given age?

5. How well do Piaget's general characterizations, such as preoperational stage children being described as egocentric, fit children's thinking?

6. What type of theory is needed to improve on Piaget's theory?

**Information Processing Theories Study Questions I**

1. What similarities unite information processing theories?

2. What dissimilarities divide them?

3. Does the capacity of sensory memory really increase with age? Why might we be skeptical regarding the conclusions of Cowan, et al.?

4. How does automatization contribute to age related improvements in the amount of material that children can remember? How can it be harmful?

5. How does encoding contribute to age related improvements in the amount of material that children can remember?

6. How are neo-Piagetian theories similar to Piaget's theory, and how do they differ?

7. How do Case's analyses reveal the value of developmental theories for improving educational practice?

8. What are the advantages of combining information processing and psychometric approaches to cognitive development?

**Information Processing Theories Study Questions II**

1. What are the advantages and disadvantages of production system approaches to cognitive development relative to neo-Piagetian ones?

2. How do connectionist approaches to cognitive development differ from production system ones? How are the two similar? Do you think the similarities are greater or that the dissimilarities are?

3. What are the implications of cognitive variability for Piagetian and information processing approaches to children's thinking?

4. Is the general analogy to evolution useful for thinking about cognitive development? Why does overlapping waves theory avoid more specific evolutionary
analogies, such as explaining cognitive development in terms of the environments in which early humans evolved?

5. Could the separate information processing theories discussed in this chapter be combined into one grand information processing theory? Would such a synthesis work out well?