Pre-School Children Understanding of Class Inclusion: A Matter of Cognitive or Language Abilities?

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Abstract:

Jean Piaget believed that 2-6 years old pre-operational children are unable to focus on two aspects of a problem simultaneously. His maintained that cognitively they lack understanding of hierarchical relations and were unable to reason. However, McGarrigle, Grieve and Hughes (1983) revealed that the pre-operational children can succeed on inclusion problem if they understand what comparison the adult is requiring them to make. In this study, children’s cognitive development is assessed by conducting a class inclusion interpretation task. The study aims at examining children’s cognitive ability in comparing classes with their constituent subclasses and to explore whether the class inclusion interpretation task could be accomplished if questions are clearly phrased to them. In the assessment, a set of two yellow and three red erasers, and another set of five red erasers were arranged in sometimes in vertical and at other times horizontal positions or in mixed positions. They were presented to 10 preschool children aged 6 years old. Trial runs were conducted several times to ensure that the children understood the researcher’s instruction particularly in their ability to differentiate
colours and the arranged positions of the erasers. The result confirms Piaget’s contention that the children failed to accomplished inclusion problems. However, the reason underlying the failure is not so much due to their lack of cognitive ability than to their inability to understand the researcher’s instruction. It was found that the children’s interpretation of the task improved when the questions were phrased clearly to them. The result of the study is discussed in view of Piaget’s idea on children’s cognitive development.

Key words- class inclusion, cognitive development, preoperational stage, preschool children, cognitive ability, Jean Piaget.