

Tests of egocentrism

| You are learning how to... | In the context of... |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compare and evaluate methods for investigating children's thinking. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Piaget's pre-operational stage and tests of egocentrism. |

The 'three mountains' task (Piaget & Inhelder, 1956)

In Piaget's original test of egocentrism the child is shown a three dimensional model of three mountains. They are different sizes and colours and have different features (e.g. a cross, a house, some snow). After the child has had an opportunity to explore the model, a doll is introduced. The doll is placed so that it is 'looking' at the model from a different position from the child's. The child is asked what the doll can see, and indicates its answer by choosing one from a range of pictures, each showing the mountains from a different point of view.

Piaget and Inhelder (1956) found that four year-olds almost always chose a picture that represented what they could see and showed no awareness that the doll's view would be different from this. Six year-olds frequently chose a picture different from their own view but rarely chose the correct picture for the doll's point of view. Only at seven or eight years old did children consistently choose the picture that matched the doll's viewpoint.

The 'turntable' task (Borke, 1975)

In Borke's test of egocentrism the child is given two identical models of a three-dimensional scene (several different scenes were used including different arrangements of toy people and animals and a mountain model similar to Piaget and Inhelder's). One of the models is mounted on a turntable so it can easily be turned by the child. After a practice session where the child is familiarized with the materials and the idea of looking at things from another person's point of view, a doll is introduced (in Borke's study it was the character Grover from 'Sesame Street', a programme the children were familiar with). The Grover doll was placed so it was 'looking' at the model from a particular vantage point and the child was invited to turn the other model around until its view of the model matched what Grover would be able to see.

Borke (1975) found, using the 'mountains' model three-year-olds selected a correct view 42% of the time and four-year-olds selected the right view 67% of the time. With other displays, the three-year-olds' accuracy increased to 80% and the four-year olds' to 93%.

The 'boy and policemen' task (Hughes, 1975)

Hughes tested egocentrism using a model of two intersecting walls, a doll of a little boy and two 'policeman' dolls. To familiarize the child with the task, one of the policemen is placed somewhere in the model and the child is asked to hide the boy where the policeman cannot see him (the walls are too high for the policeman to see over). If the child makes any mistakes these are pointed out and it is allowed to try again. In the test proper the second policeman is introduced and the child is asked to hide the doll where neither of the policemen can see him.

Hughes found that pre-school children selected a correct hiding place for the boy 90% of the time. Even the youngest children in the sample (3 ½ -4 years) got it right 88% of the time.

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