

Outline and evaluate Piaget's research into object permanence. [8 marks]

Marks for this question: AO1 = 3 and AO3 = 5

Possible content

Object permanence (object concept) is the understanding that an object still exists even when out of sight.

Piaget's study involved a child playing with a toy which was then covered in a blanket/cloth.

Children under 8 months would not continue to search for the toy.

Children over 8 months would continue to search for the toy.

In variations on the original research, the toy would be hidden in place A or place B – children show the A not B error.

Possible evaluation points

Piaget may have underestimated children's cognitive ability in relation to object permanence.

Object permanence tasks lack human sense – response may be a reaction to the deliberate removal of the toy.

Possible confusion of lack of performance with lack of understanding - failure to search does not necessarily mean child did not understand that the toy still existed.

Counter-evidence shows that children do continue to search if object is made to disappear in more subtle ways, e.g. Bower and Wishart.

Contrast with infants' performance in violation of expectation studies.

Example response i

Piaget had a 4-stage theory of cognitive development that included sensory motor, pre-operation, concrete operation and formal operation. Object permanence is something that develops in the first stage, sensory motor, and it is the understanding that things continue to exist even if they are out of view. Once children have grasped the concept of object permanence about age 2 years, they move on to the next stage which is pre-op. In this essay I am going to describe and evaluate research into object permanence. First of all, Piaget carried out a study in the 1960s where he watched individual children of various ages and when they

started to play with a toy he took it and hid it under a blanket. Piaget was interested in whether the child looked for the toy and where they looked. If the child searched for the toy, then they must remember where it is and have an understanding that even though it is hidden it still is there. What Piaget found was that infants under the age of 8 months did not look for the toy but around the age of 8 months they did begin to look under the blanket. It is not until about 1 year old that children will search in a second hiding place, even if they have seen you take it from the blanket and hide it under a cushion. From about 8 – 12 months they always go back to the first place of hiding, showing that object permanence begins to develop about 8 months but takes until 12 months to fully occur. In this essay I have discussed Piaget's famous experiment on object permanence. This is the ability to understand that objects exist even when they cannot be seen. He found that this develops between 8 and 12 months.

Example response ii

Object permanence is the understanding that objects exist even when they are no longer visible and according to Piaget this develops in the sensory motor stage from 0-2 years. Piaget observed the behaviour of infants who were looking at an object when it was removed from their sight (e.g. a toy is placed behind a screen). Until about 8 months, children would immediately switch their attention away from the object once it was out of sight. From about 8 months onwards the infant would actively look for the object. Piaget concluded that before the age of 8 months children did not have object permanence. Piaget also noticed that when children get used to looking behind a particular screen for a hidden object, they will continue to look behind the same screen even when they have seen the experimenter hide the object elsewhere. Some people suggest that Piaget underestimated the infant's ability on object permanence and that the problem was with the task Piaget did which confused children. Bower carried out an experiment that seemed to show babies with object permanence much younger than Piaget suggested. Bower presented 4- to 8-month-old infants with an object which moved from right to left behind a screen before reappearing. Bower observed the direction of the infant's gaze when the object disappeared behind the screen and found that the infants continued to look for the invisible object. This suggests infants develop object permanence earlier than Piaget proposed. It could be that infants under the age of 8 months did not search for the toy for a variety of other reasons. For example, infants of that age may not have had the motor skills, eg they could not crawl or move towards the toy. They might simply have lost interest in the 'game'. Although Piaget carried out research to support his theory of object permanence in the sensory motor stage, more recent evidence, using alternative methods that make more sense to the infant, has found object permanence may be present much earlier than Piaget suggested. One thing that Piaget did create was an interest in cognitive development which led to further research into object permanence and his other concepts.
