1

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
Concepts, Theory, and Overview

Social development is the study of how children become members of the social world. This involves developing social relationships with peers and adults, acquiring morality, figuring out how groups work, developing an identity, understanding others' perspectives, learning about emotions, and interacting with others in a range of social contexts. How do these changes come about and what sources of influence facilitate or hinder these processes? In essence, social development is about how children come to think, feel, and behave towards the people that surround them and how they understand social interactions, relationships, and culture. The developmental changes that occur from infancy to adulthood in the area of social behaviors, social cognitions, and social relationships are tremendous and complex. These changes are related to cognitive, emotional, motivational, and psychopathological development within and between family, community, and cultural contexts.

Debates about the social nature of humans, the origins of morality, the nature of prejudice in childhood, the dilemma of bullying and victimization, the role of emotions in development and communication, and what contributes to healthy peer and parent–child relationships all fall under the topic of social development. Children acquire the fundamentals of social development over thousands of social exchanges and opportunities for reflection, abstraction, inference, evaluation, and interpretation. Acquiring this knowledge is essential for children's survival, and much of this rich database of information about social development is necessary for professionals working with children, such as educators, psychologists, medical experts, and teachers. Children grow up interacting and forming relationships with people who are important in their lives, and they develop beliefs and form attitudes about the nature of humans and how individuals fit (or do not fit) together. Individualized experiences also provide each person with unique perspectives on social development.

The study of social development involves answering (at least) seven important questions: (1) How is social knowledge and competence acquired?; (2) What underlies and promotes change over time?; (3) What types of social influences are important?; (4) What aspects of social development change as a function of the context of social interaction?; (5) What differentiates normative and psychopathological development?; (6) How do institutions promote healthy social development?; and (7) What is universal and culturally specific about social development? These basic questions are explored in this volume, which is focused on the study of social development.

One central assumption of the approach taken in this Reader is that social development is a multifaceted, multileveled process that entails complex interactions that change over time and across settings (i.e., home, school, neighborhood, and culture). This conceptual approach is applied in answering the above-mentioned questions through the exploration of a wide range of topics, including: (1) the foundations of early social development; (2) how children's self-system develops in the context of social relationships and groups; (3) what happens when children are vulnerable and excluded; and (4) the role of the family, community, and culture in making children become healthy members of their worlds. Each chapter in this Reader addresses one of these fundamental issues about what it means to become a social being, and how this process occurs from infancy to adulthood.

Accordingly, in this Reader, we will cover this wide range of topics related to children's social development from infancy to adolescence through the compilation of carefully selected current research papers, which delve into these aspects of development. The study of social development involves "real world topics" and the findings have implications for policy and practice. Theories guide research questions. Knowing the theoretical basis of a study is central and necessary for evaluating the robustness of a finding, and for giving it meaning. Theories answer the "so what?" question. Methodologies, which answer the "how do you know?" question, are the crux of the phenomenon, and help determine how the behavior, attitudes, judgment, belief, or value was recorded, analyzed, and interpreted.

"Legacies" of the Foundational Theories of Social Development

As the field of social development has advanced and expanded over the past several decades, contemporary researchers rarely provide models to explain all of social behavior and development as part of one global stage sequence. Instead, current researchers, drawing on multiple theoretical perspectives, take a domain specificity approach in which different areas of social development are studied using criteria to identify a phenomenon and its related components. Multiple

levels of theory bear on understanding children's social development, from the biological to the societal levels of analysis. Despite the expansion of theory and research foci, most of the "classic theories" of social development remain extremely influential, and form the building blocks for most of the contemporary research on children's development. In the following sections, we provide a very brief overview of these major historical theories, with a specific focus on their continuing legacies.

Psychoanalytic theories. Freud's (1910) psychoanalytic theory, and its later incarnations (e.g., Erikson, 1950), remains largely influential across numerous domains in psychology. Freud was trained in medical school in the area of neurology, where he studied psychological disorders. In terms of social development, Freud's legacy is particularly noteworthy because he was among the first to promote some "core principles" of psychological development that are widely held today, but were considered "radical new ideas" at the time. For example, Freud argued that human development is predictable and understandable, and that it could be understood and explained through science. Moreover, Freud theorized that emotions and thoughts as unconscious processes had a role in determining behaviors. In fact, Freud was the first psychologist to propose a theoretical framework for understanding unconscious processes to explain mental illness. He outlined dynamic, structural, and sequential theories of development. Freud's dynamic theory postulated that humans were basically driven by sexual and aggressive instincts and the desire to reduce stimulation (contrary to most current theories which have demonstrated that humans seek cognitive, social, and emotional stimulation). This part of his theory was largely disconfirmed with the onset of the cognitive revolution in psychology, which demonstrated that humans actively seek cognitive activity and to understand their world.

Freud's structural theory of the id (instincts), ego (rationality), and superego (morality) provided the developmental model for the onset of social and moral development, which occurred with the formation of the superego in early childhood. Through the resolution of the Oedipal conflict for males or the Electra conflict for females, which required a positive identification with the same-sex parent, children

internalized parental values, and became capable of socially oriented behavior and judgments, developing a superego. Thus, in Freud's system, the internalization of parental values was the catalyst for social development (and guilt, as a product of the negative desires for the same-sex parent, provided the motivation to be moral). Freud drew on Kantian philosophy to define morality as a version of the categorical imperative (act in such a way as you would will your act to be universal). He then theorized that this was a principle held by parents who provide the role models for children to become social.

Freud also postulated psychosexual stages of development, which reflected a sequence of resolutions and culminated in adolescence. These stages were later modified by Erikson (1950) who focused on psychosocial rather than psychosexual resolution of conflicts throughout life. The levels of consciousness that Freud proposed, including the unconscious, the preconscious, and the subconscious, were proposed to play a role in how humans interpret, process, and filter information and social experiences in their world, and much evidence suggests that these levels are reflected in how individuals store and interpret information. Perhaps most important for social development, Freud emphasized and promoted the lasting importance and influence of early social relationships (particularly between mother and young child) in the development of children's personalities. As represented in this Reader, these concepts are evident in the exploration of the topics of temperament, attachment, behavior problems, aggression, and personality development.

Behaviorism and social learning theory. In response to the unconscious processes described by psychoanalytic theories, behaviorism emerged as a theory that focused on observable and recordable behaviors. Behaviorists viewed Freud's constructs as mostly speculation. According to the most basic tenets of behaviorism (e.g., Skinner, 1935; Watson, 1913), human development is influenced primarily by emerging associations between external stimuli and observable responses (habits). In this regard, behaviorism introduced the concepts of *reinforcement* and *punishment* as mechanisms that would lead to the increase or decrease of displayed behaviors. By the 1960s, however, the "cognitive revolution" in psychological

research largely challenged the notion that only observable behavior is of interest. From the cognitive perspective, the mind was viewed as a rich part of who we are as human beings, providing the basis for motivation, intention, judgments, attitudes, beliefs, and values. Accordingly, it was argued that observations of behaviors can provide only a part of the information necessary to understand what makes an action social.

Thus, psychologist Alfred Bandura (Bandura, 1977; Bandura & Walters; 1963) adapted learning principles to propose a social-learning theory which accounts for aspects of children's social development that include reflection, thought, interpretation, and mental states. Essentially, his theory purported that children can learn novel social behaviors by attending to "important" others through modeling of their behaviors (e.g., parents, teachers, peers). Social learning theory also described how core constructs of reinforcement and punishment might function within the realm of social development. For example, Bandura suggested that children observe the *consequences* of their own (and others') social behaviors and that the outcomes serve to reinforce or inhibit the future display of these same behaviors.

Among the general legacy of behaviorism, however, is the focus on scientific methodology, controlling variables, and the need for carefully designed experimental protocols. In particular, social learning theory has influenced the study of social development by drawing attention to the critical influence both of parents and of peers as "models" for children's social behaviors. These ideas are depicted in the sections of this Reader that explore such topics as peer pressure, parenting styles, and the development of aggression.

Cognitive- and social-cognitive developmental theories. Piaget (1929, 1932, 1952) was a genetic epistemologist, dedicated to the study of the "origins of knowledge." He studied how infants, children, and adolescents solve problems and understand the physical, logical, and social world. Drawing on multiple disciplines (including biology, philosophy, and psychology), Piaget proposed that children actively construct knowledge about their world through interaction and reflection upon these interactions. Although Piaget is perhaps best known for his research on how children

develop concepts such as number, space, time, causality, and logic, he also explored the development of social knowledge, including moral judgment, communication, and the role of peer relationships in fostering development.

In one line of research, Piaget interviewed children about social dilemmas, the rules of their games, their knowledge of social rules, and their conceptions of authority, autonomy, and fairness. Based on these extensive interviews, Piaget formulated a theory of moral judgment in which young children were initially authority-oriented (holding unilateral respect for authority). Through peer interaction, however, children constructed notions of equality and fairness, leading to a mutual respect for both peers and adults. Peer conflict provided children the opportunity to develop perspective-taking, negotiation, and social exchange skills, which provided the experiential basis for developing an understanding of reciprocity, mutuality, and respect for others. As with his logical theory, in which children constructed knowledge of math by interacting with physical objects, Piaget's social theory was based on the assumption that children constructed knowledge of the social world (and morality) by interacting with others, specifically peers.

Thus, the basic tenets of Piaget's theory of social development were that early social interactions enable children to construct social concepts, and that children's reasoning about what is "fair" evolves from early to middle childhood. Moreover, Piaget documented the ways in which children's schemes (organizing structures for assimilating information) and templates for making social decisions (e.g., allocation of resources, turn-taking, sharing, cooperation, avoiding harm to others, conflict resolution strategies, and demonstrating empathy) changed dramatically over the course of 5–10 years. The research that Piaget conducted in a few decades in the early 1900s led to many expansive areas of research in social development, including the development of morality, cooperation, theory of mind, the role of peer interaction in development, and social cognition in childhood.

A foundational aspect of Piaget's theory was that the tenets of social development are universal. From his view, developing social orientation to others is a basic aspect of being human (and today, some researchers would extend this notion to primates).

Although the way that sharing and cooperation emerge will differ across cultures, the fundamentals are the same because the focus of the acquisition is on peer interaction, not adult–child interaction. Thus, while adult–child interaction styles vary dramatically within and across cultures, peer interaction has adaptive properties that reflect an emerging mutuality and cooperation. This part of Piaget's theory has been tested and examined in many parts of the world, providing a rich understanding of early social development. The legacy of Piaget's theory is pervasive across most areas of social development and is demonstrated throughout the sections of this Reader.

Cultural communication theories. Vygotsky's (1978) theory of development was focused on problem solving, communication, cultural tools, and the role of peer tutoring in facilitating children's development. Although Vygotsky died at the young age of 37 in 1934, in his short life he produced important papers that generated many subsequent research programs. His primary focus was on children's consciousness and how thinking is an active and cooperative process. Indeed, Vygotsky theorized that knowledge is *social* in origin and referred to "cultural tools" (such as language) which help children move from one stage to the next. The phrase "zone of proximal development" referred to the time period from one point in development to the next in which children are most ready to learn and to benefit from teaching and tutoring. Identifying this point in children's development promotes their growth and change. The notion that cultural tools enable children to think in more complex ways has been tested in many cultures, providing a rich evidential basis for the universal nature of the role of culture in development. The theory has spawned research on communication and thought, language, cultural tools, play, and socialization.

George Herbert Mead (1934) proposed that "role-taking" (the mental task of putting oneself in another's position) was the foundation of human social intelligence. Being able to take another's perspective enables humans to relate to one another and to engage in symbolic communication. Mead also proposed a "social looking glass" theory about the development of self-knowledge, asserting that we learn about ourselves by observing the effect that our behavior has on others. Mead's theory provided evidence that

contributed to the notion that children develop a self-concept early on and that their concept changes over time. Mead also emphasized autonomy and self-identity as primary aspects of social development. His notions of self-awareness, and the "mirror" image that individuals learn to recognize, particularly children as they are developing a self-concept, led to a generation of research on self-understanding, self-concept, and self-development.

Ethology and sociobiological theories. Ethology and other sociobiology theories focus on the biological bases of human behaviors and are derived from Darwin's (1877) theory of evolution. Whereas classic evolutionary theory describes processes that may alter the structural characteristics of species, ethology explores how evolutionary processes may shape species-specific *behaviors*. Early ethologists such as Konrad Lorenz (1937, 1950) focused on the study of "biologically programmed" (i.e., instinctual) animal behaviors that evolved because of naturalistic selection (e.g., imprinting in birds).

John Bowlby was among the most influential human ethologists and charted his foundational theory of attachment. Bowlby (1969, 1973) extensively observed interactions between infants and their mothers. He proposed a theory that interpreted specific infant behaviors and maternal responses within an evolutionary framework. For example, infant crying was viewed as a "distress signal" that mothers were "biologically-programmed" to respond to. Additionally, close proximity and physical contact between mother and infant were thought to serve the adaptive function of promoting the formation of attachment. Bowlby also echoed Freud's idea that early parent–child relationships provide a model for future relationships outside of the family.

A central tenet of ethology is the use of a comparative framework for understanding human development. This is accomplished through a comparative study of similarities and differences across species (Hinde, 1974). Indeed, the study of cross-species behaviors has yielded unique insights into social behaviors of children. For example, many different animal species form strict within-group dominance hierarchies (e.g., wolves, chimpanzees, chickens—hence the term "pecking order"). The adaptive function of these dominancy rankings is to reduce intra-group aggression by "predetermining" the outcome of most within-group conflicts, typically pertaining to the allocation of resources (i.e., food, mating partners). Drawing upon these animal models, Strayer and Strayer (1976) conducted extensive observations of children's conflicts over toys in the preschool playroom and demonstrated that a stable dominance hierarchy was established fairly early in the school year and its appearance was accompanied by an overall reduction in classroom aggression.

Comparative research has provided important findings for many areas of social development, including morality, theory of mind, and communication. As one example, Frans de Waal (2005), a prominent primatologist, studied the origins of morality in non-human primates and demonstrated that non-human primate species engage in a number of behaviors that are related to morality in humans, such as sympathy, empathy, non-aggressive means of conflict resolution, sharing of norms, and allocation of resources. De Waal and other comparative researchers have provided extensive evidence for an evolutionary basis of social predispositions in humans.

Ethology remains an influential theory in social development, particularly in terms of its associated methodological approach. Ethologists argue that behaviors can be understood only when considered within context and advocate the use of direct observations in naturalistic settings. Observational methods derived from ethologists have been used extensively in empirical studies on social behavior, conflict resolution, and play patterns with preschool-aged children in day care and preschool settings. Ethological theory also disputes the rigid distinctions between innate and learned behaviors by demonstrating the interaction of environmental and genetic/biological influences, and has accordingly influenced modern behavioral genetics theory and research. The legacy of ethology can be seen in the Reader in the discussion of topics such as child temperament, parent–child attachment, and aggression.

Summary. A summary of the "legacies" of each of the foundational theoretical perspectives just described is displayed in Figure 1.1. As can be determined by the information in Figure 1.1 each major theory has a domain of focus, an explanation about the social acquisition mechanisms, and other enduring ideas. What most of these theories share is a theoretically
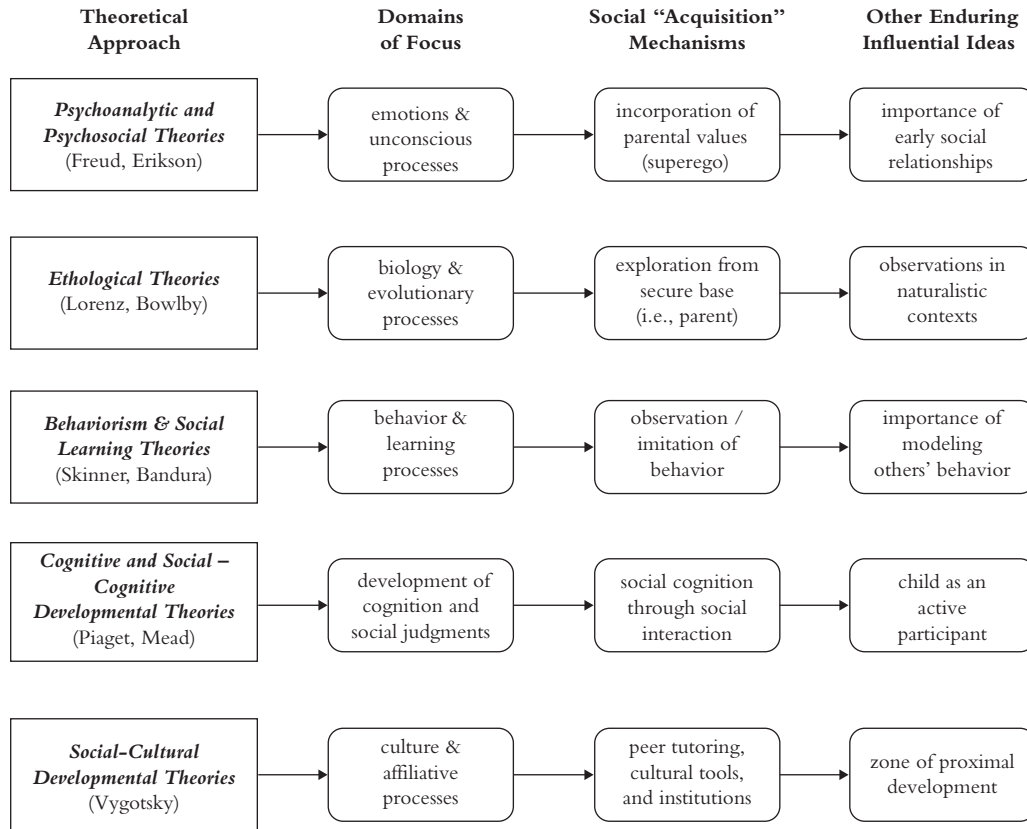
Theoretical Approach	Domains of Focus	Social "Acquisition" Mechanisms	Other Enduring Influential Ideas
Psychoanalytic and Psychosocial Theories (Freud, Erikson)	emotions & unconscious processes	incorporation of parental values (superego)	importance of early social relationships
Ethological Theories (Lorenz, Bowlby)	biology & evolutionary processes	exploration from secure base (i.e., parent)	observations in naturalistic contexts
Behaviorism & Social Learning Theories (Skinner, Bandura)	behavior & learning processes	observation / imitation of behavior	importance of modeling others' behavior
Cognitive and Social – Cognitive Developmental Theories (Piaget, Mead)	development of cognition and social judgments	social cognition through social interaction	child as an active participant
Social-Cultural Developmental Theories (Vygotsky)	culture & affiliative processes	peer tutoring, cultural tools, and institutions	zone of proximal development

Figure 1.1 Legacies of foundational theories of social development.

rich framework for understanding the origins and emergence of social thought, belief, judgment, behavior, and attitudes, and different methodologies for analyzing social development from infancy to adulthood. The focus of development from the "child's perspective" is essential, along with hypothesis-testing theories that provide information about the science of child development. These theories are also multidisciplinary in that most of the scholars drew from multiple disciplines, such as biology, anthropology, sociology, economics, and philosophy. The related disciplines provide ways to think about how to define constructs and how to measure social development.

The theories differ most on the positive or negative view of human nature, as well as the role that culture plays in social development, as evidenced in the articles in this Reader. Most of the research collected by these foundational theorists, however, relied on homogeneous samples, sometimes only boys (not girls), often only middle-income children, with diversity viewed as an inconvenience, not a focus of study. Further, the cultural expectations about who "counts" as members of societies were very restricted, and this was often reflected in the expectations about gender, with race and ethnicity not even discussed. Current research has focused more centrally on how issues of culture, diversity, and hierarchies within cultures contribute to the trajectory of children's social development.

Structure of the Reader

Social development has become a complex and expansive field. To understand the different levels of development, it is important to understand its social–
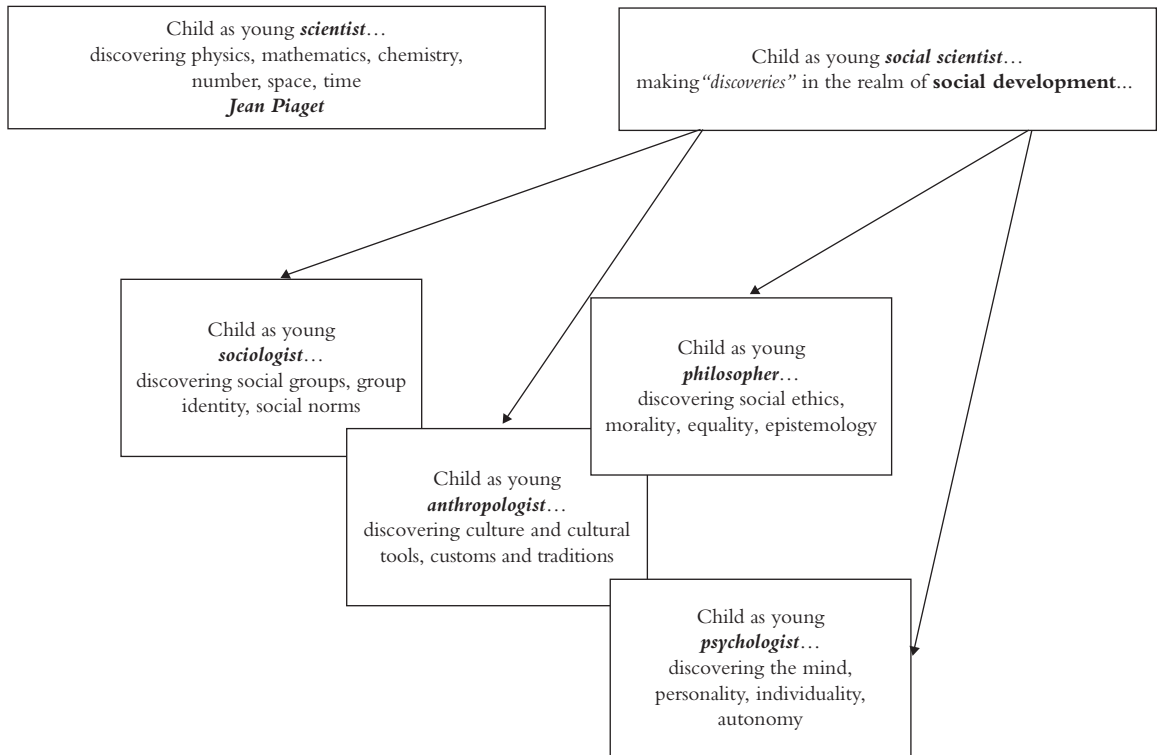
Child as young *scientist*… discovering physics, mathematics, chemistry, number, space, time ***Jean Piaget***	**Child as young *social scientist*…** making *"discoveries"* in the realm of **social development**…

Child as young *sociologist*… discovering social groups, group identity, social norms

Child as young *philosopher*… discovering social ethics, morality, equality, epistemology

Child as young *anthropologist*… discovering culture and cultural tools, customs and traditions

Child as young *psychologist*… discovering the mind, personality, individuality, autonomy

Figure 1.2   Child as young scientist.

cognitive, social–emotional, social–cultural, social–neuro-scientific, and social–personality bases. This is not an easy undertaking as many researchers use different terminology and methods. Reading current theory and research in social development across cognitive, emotional, cultural, neuro-scientific, and personality areas provides a strong foundation for understanding human development. Students of social development have many goals, including becoming scholars, researchers, teachers, medical professionals, childcare practitioners, policy experts, and applying theory to practice in other ways. Contemporary research in social development provides information that is essential, necessary, and of great importance for these many different goals and levels of inquiry.

The articles in this volume enable its readers to delve into the fascinating and engaging world of how humans become social beings and members of societies and cultures. The story of human evolution is always changing and always astounding. In this Reader we have created a selective window for understanding ontogenetic human evolution, the story of social development within the life of an individual from birth to adulthood.

This Reader is designed with a typical 14–15-week academic semester in mind and consists of five sections: (I) Introduction (overview of the foundational theories); (II) Foundations and Early Beginnings; (III) Self, Relationships, and Social Groups; (IV) Peer Rejection and Exclusion; and (V) Family, Community, and Culture. In each section there are three chapters that reflect its themes. For each chapter, three empirical articles were selected that represent the chapter topic. A short introduction is provided for each chapter to orient and guide the Reader, and to provide a framework for interpreting the findings described in the articles. In addition, at the end of each chapter, is a section entitled "A Closer Look…" which includes a

list of discussion questions and classroom exercises to provide discussion, debate, dialogue, and reflection on the week's reading. Finally, 11 boxes with information about current interests are inserted, one for each chapter, which provide a brief overview of a current application of the theory or set of new and provocative findings about the topic. These various venues provide multiple ways to be immersed in both foundational and current research in social development from infancy to adulthood.

Jean Piaget famously proposed the analogy of the child as a "young scientist" whose active and explorative nature allows him/her to "discover" physics, mathematics, chemistry, space, and time. To conclude this chapter, we leave you with an "expansion" of this Piaget-inspired metaphor in Figure 1.2, which also serves to highlight many of the underlying themes in this Social Development Reader.

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