



Children's Thinking (4th Edition)

By Robert S. Siegler, Martha Wagner Alibali

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This book offers a unified account of the major research findings and theories on the development of children's thinking from infancy to adolescence; and also considers their practical implications. It examines the change processes through which development occurs, as well as the nature of the changes in language, perception, memory, conceptual understanding, and problem-solving that mark cognitive development. Eight central themes presented in the first chapter integrate and unify the presentation. The authors examine Piaget's theory of development, information-processing theories of development, sociocultural theories, perceptual development, language development, memory development, conceptual development, problem solving, social cognition and the development of academic skills. For anyone involved in the thinking processes and development of children.

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Children's Thinking (4th Edition) By Robert S. Siegler, Martha Wagner Alibali Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #382893 in Books
- Brand: Siegler, Robert S./ Alibali, Martha Wagner
- Published on: 2004-06-19
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.20" h x 1.10" w x 7.00" l, 1.52 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 528 pages

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Editorial Review

From the Publisher

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From the Back Cover

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Children's thinking is inherently fascinating. All of us were children once; many of us have, or expect to have, our own children someday. The ways in which children think are both familiar and foreign. We remember some of the ways in which we thought at younger ages and have impressions of the thinking of many other children as well. As adults, we observe that children's thinking seems generally reasonable, and at times surprisingly insightful. At other times, though, children's reasoning leaves us flabbergasted. Why, for example, would an otherwise reasonable 5-year-old insist that pouring water into a differently shaped container changes the amount of water, even after an adult has just told the child that the amount of water is the same as before?

Until recently, many of the most intriguing aspects of children's thinking were inaccessible to our understanding. Philosophers have argued for hundreds of years whether infants see the world as a "blooming, buzzing confusion" or in much the same way that older children and adults do. Only in the past few years, with the development of revealing experimental methods, has the answer become clear. Even newborns see certain aspects of the world quite clearly, and by 6 months of age, infants' perception resembles that of adults. These and other discoveries about children's thinking are the subject matter of this book.

Who would be interested in such a book? Anyone who is curious about children should find interesting observations and ideas in it. Anyone sufficiently motivated to take an undergraduate or graduate course in this area should find a great deal to intrigue the imagination and stimulate further interest in children's thinking and development.

This new edition incorporates many changes. The most obvious is the addition of two new chapters, one on sociocultural approaches to cognitive development and one on the development of social cognition. These new chapters reflect the enormous growth in these areas in recent years. Some material addressing these topics was present in previous editions; in this new edition, this material has been consolidated and a great deal of new material has been added.

The new chapter on sociocultural approaches begins with Lev Semenovich Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which focuses on the influence of social interaction in cognitive development and on the importance of cultural tools, such as language and number systems, in thinking and learning. The chapter also addresses modern developments in sociocultural theory that build on Vygotsky's insights, and contemporary empirical research in the sociocultural tradition, including research about learning in interaction with adults and peers, guided participation in cultural activities, and the use of language as a tool for thinking. Educational implications of sociocultural theories also are emphasized.

The new chapter on social cognition focuses on children's understanding of social information. This is a broad area that includes knowledge about self and others; knowledge about the mind and the mental states that give rise to behavior, such as desire, intention, and belief; and knowledge about the social world, including understanding of social rules and social categories.

All of the remaining chapters have also been revised and updated. Some of the many additions are increased coverage of interrelations between perception and action, an expanded discussion of children's biological concepts, and additional information about the development of language comprehension.

As in previous editions, we have continued to emphasize the practical contributions of research on children's thinking. Some examples that are discussed are techniques for eliciting accurate recollections of events from children who need to testify in court cases, techniques for assessing children's knowledge, and instructional methods for improving reading, writing, and mathematical skills.

Each of us is fortunate to have had a rich and stimulating intellectual environment in which to work during the writing of the book. Many of our colleagues have given generously of their time to help us improve the book. Some read drafts of chapters or parts of chapters and offered feedback, including Jim Dannemiller, Chuck Kalish, Ken Koedinger, Brian MacWhinney, and Jenny Saffran. We are grateful for the opportunities to discuss children's thinking with these individuals and many others, including Karen Adolph, Zhe Chen, Judy DeLoache, Julia Evans, Susan Goldin-Meadow, David Klahr, Eric Knuth, Patrick Lemaire, Colleen Moore, Nicole McNeil, Mitchell Nathan, John Opfer, Seth Pollak, David Rakison, and Bethany Rittle-Johnson. We would also like to thank the anonymous reviewers who provided comments on the previous edition, and Maureen Kaschak and Karin Ockuly, who spent many hours tracking down references. Finally, we would like to thank Theresa Treasure, who in this edition as in the previous one, did whatever it took to get the work done in a timely fashion.

A different kind of thanks is due our friends and families, who have provided support as well as inspiration during the time we worked on this book. Robert Siegler would like to thank his children, Todd, Beth, and Aaron Siegler, who have progressed over the four editions of this book from unwittingly providing interesting examples of children's thinking to thoughtfully advancing interesting ideas about it. Martha Alibali would like to thank her husband, Peter, who offered unwavering support in myriad ways, and would also like to thank her many nieces and nephews, who provided compelling examples of children's thinking at various stages of development. These individuals make the research come alive for us, and they make our endeavors worthwhile.

We would like to dedicate this book to the new children who came into our lives during the writing of it,

Robert Siegler's granddaughter Alexis, and Martha and Peter Alibali's daughter, Mariana. The opportunity to observe their thinking and to take part in their development has provided us with great joy, and we hope to learn from them for many years to come.

Robert S. Siegler
Martha Wagner Alibali

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