



Children Solving Problems (The Developing Child)

Stephanie Thornton

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A one-year-old attempting to build a tower of blocks may bring the pile crashing down, yet her five-year-old sister accomplishes this task with ease. Why do young children have difficulty with problems that present no real challenge to older children? How do problem-solving skills develop? In *Children Solving Problems*, Stephanie Thornton surveys recent research from a broad range of perspectives in order to explore this important question.

What Thornton finds may come as a surprise: successful problem-solving depends less on how smart we are--or, as the pioneering psychologist Jean Piaget claimed, how advanced our skill in logical reasoning is--and more on the factual knowledge we acquire as we learn and interpret cues from the world around us.

Problem-solving skills evolve through experience and dynamic interaction with a problem. But equally important--as the Russian psychologist L. S. Vygotsky proposed--is social interaction. Successful problem-solving is a social process. Sharing problem-solving tasks--with skilled adults and with other children--is vital to a child's growth in expertise and confidence. In problem-solving, confidence can be more important than skill.

In a real sense, problem-solving lies at the heart of what we mean by intelligence. The ability to identify a goal, to work out how to achieve it, and to carry out that plan is the essence of every intelligent activity. Could it be, Thornton suggests, that problem-solving processes provide the fundamental machinery for cognitive development? In *Children Solving Problems* she synthesizes the dramatic insights and findings of post-Piagetian research and sets the agenda for the next stage in understanding the varied phenomena of children's problem-solving.



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