ADOLESCENT VULNERABILITIES AND OPPORTUNITIES

This book explores the central importance of adolescents’ own activities in their development. This focus harkens back to Jean Piaget’s genetic epistemology and provides a theoretically coherent vision of what makes adolescence a distinctive period of development, with unique opportunities and vulnerabilities. An interdisciplinary and international group of contributors explore how adolescents integrate neurological, cognitive, personal, interpersonal, and social systems aspects of development into more organized systems.

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INTERDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVES ON KNOWLEDGE AND DEVELOPMENT: THE JEAN PIAGET SYMPOSIUM SERIES

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(continued after the Index)
Adolescent Vulnerabilities and Opportunities

DEVELOPMENTAL AND CONSTRUCTIVIST PERSPECTIVES

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4.3. Questions posed by students during argumentation on the president topic 79
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In 1970, Jean Piaget participated in a workshop that instigated vigorous discussion in higher education circles about the importance of traversing the boundaries across the disciplines. The workshop, entitled “L’interdisciplinarité – Problèmes d’enseignement et de recherche dans les universités,” was held in Nice, France, in September 1970 and the proceedings were published in 1972 as a monograph entitled *Interdisciplinarity: Problems of Teaching and Research in Universities* (Paris: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development). This workshop and the book that resulted from it set the stage for ongoing debates about how best to view work going on at the intersection of disciplinary boundaries. Piaget’s remarks made clear that new conceptual frameworks were needed, frameworks that underscored the importance of augmenting disciplinary knowledge in order to address the enduring challenges of our times. Whether to do so from multi-, trans-, or interdisciplinary bases and what precisely each of these constructs adds to disciplinary discussions has been hotly debated for the ensuing four decades. What Piaget was wrestling with in 1970 and many others have been pursuing since then are two enduring issues: the complexity of knowledge and the importance of viewing knowledge construction as a process embedded in real time. Piaget understood early on what has become more obvious now, namely the importance of going beyond disciplinary limitations both theoretically and methodologically. This insight has shaped modern thinking on knowledge and development in significant ways.

Around the same time that Piaget spoke at the OECD workshop, a new society was formed. In 1970, the Jean Piaget Society was founded. It has since provided an internationally recognized forum for inquiry about and advances of significant problems in the developmental sciences. The Society has had a long-standing commitment to developmental perspectives
and has been deeply concerned with theories and conceptualizations of
development and the ways developmental perspectives connect to and
influence research. Since renamed The Jean Piaget Society for Knowledge
and Development, the Society organizes and sponsors a book series, an
annual meeting of plenary addresses and scholarly presentations, a schol-
arly journal (Cognitive Development), and a Web site (http://www.piaget.
org). Across venues, participating scholars come from a range of disciplines,
including departments of psychology, anthropology, linguistics, sociology,
biology, philosophy, and education.

The Society has had a long-standing dedication to the publication of a
book series that addresses core problems in the developmental sciences. For
more than thirty years, Lawrence Erlbaum Press (currently Psychology Press/
Taylor and Francis) published the series, carefully edited for its first decade
by Lynn S. Liben and then by Ellin Kofsky Scholnick. Each of the volumes in
the Jean Piaget Symposium series engages well-recognized scholars on a set
of themes that bring together divergent disciplinary perspectives. The series,
which has included nearly forty published volumes, has dealt with topics
such as human understanding, developmental psychopathology, concept
formation, and relations between learning and development.

In a time when there appears to be a proliferation of edited volumes,
one can ask what makes this series thrive. The high regard for these vol-
umes has been due to the careful way interdisciplinary thinking has shed
light on enduring issues with which scholars interested in human devel-
opment are grappling. To a large measure the rigorous system of cultiva-
tion and review plays a significant role in arriving at cutting-edge thinking
that goes beyond juxtaposition of new ideas. Careful attention is given to
taking a theme at the center of developmental science (e.g., epigenesis of
mind; culture, thought, and development; social development and social
justice; developmental social cognitive neuroscience) and weaving scholar-
ship from neighboring disciplines into discussions in ways that hold the
potential to significantly shape ongoing scientific discourse.

Each of the JPS series volumes emanates from the Society’s themed
annual meeting that includes plenary addresses and invited symposia, a
meeting structure that itself is the outcome of a long and rigorous academic
review process. Typically, several revisions are made in the proposal before
it obtains approval from the full Board of Directors. The annual meeting
organizers also serve as editors of the volume. To supplement chapters by
the five or six plenary speakers, the volume editors typically invite other
contributors to the volume. The editors also inform contributors about
the requirements with regard to the volume’s theme and scope. Finally, the
The inaugural volume of our new book series Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Knowledge and Development: The Jean Piaget Symposium series with Cambridge University Press exemplifies the strong interdisciplinary approach that has been central to all of our prior volumes. Edited by Eric Amsel and Judith Smetana, Adolescent Vulnerabilities and Opportunities: Developmental and Constructivist Perspectives continues the Jean Piaget Society’s tradition of providing a recognized forum for advancing inquiry about both enduring and emergent problems in the developmental sciences. This volume brings together neurological, cognitive, self-system, moral, and social perspectives on adolescents’ active processes for coordinating capacities, skills, and understandings. Greater than the sum of its parts, each chapter contributes to the larger conceptual framework contributing to redefining our understanding about this intriguing time of development. As such, this inaugural volume represents the goals of the series splendidly and paves the way for further interdisciplinary scholarship at the frontiers of new knowledge about human development.

Nancy Budwig, Clark University, Worcester, MA
December 2010
Preface

It was a brief conversation between the two of us in Atlanta at the Society for Research in Child Development in 2005 that set the wheels rolling and resulted in this book. It was a time of mounting excitement over new and broad-based findings about adolescent development, including new findings on adolescent brain development, risk taking, identity development, peer and family relations, and contextual and cultural influences. These findings were seen as evidence of biological and socio-contextual factors on adolescent development and further proof that a constructivist framework for understanding adolescent development, once in its ascendancy, is now in decline.

As developmental psychologists, we never found the new findings particularly incompatible with a broadly constructivist framework, a point we reaffirmed in our discussions in Atlanta. We decided then and there that there was value in organizing a conference on adolescent development from a constructivist perspective to make sense of the new findings. Our goal was to reinvigorate the constructivist approach to adolescent development, which we saw as being unnecessarily dismissed as irrelevant to research and theory in adolescence.

As members of the Board (JS) and Executive Committee (EA) of the Jean Piaget Society, we brought our proposal for a symposium to the subsequent board meeting. The proposal was met with positive comments and suggestions about the invited speakers and symposia. We thank the JPS board members and society leadership at the time (President Nancy Budwig, past President Elliot Turiel, and President-Elect Geoff Saxe) for their help in putting together the intellectual content of the conference and sharpening its conceptual focus.

The conference was held in Quebec City in June 2008, as the Thirty-Eighth Annual Meeting of the Jean Piaget Society. The hard work of putting
on the conference was ably handled by the 2008 JPS executive committee, composed of Connie Milbrath (VP Publicity), Chris Lalonde (VP Information Technology), Colette Daiute (Secretary), and Ashley Maynard (Treasurer). Also, we extend our thanks to the many scholars who adjudicated the submitted program to the conference.

Our gratitude goes to the local arrangement team in Quebec City, led by Teresa Blicharski and assisted by Helene Ziarko, Simon Larose, Shephan Desrochers, and Margurtute Lavallee, all of Laval University. Together with an army of their graduate and undergraduate student assistants, the local arrangements team ensured that the Quebec conference ran smoothly, down to the smallest detail.

We would also like to thank a number of institutions and people for their financial and professional support of the conference. The Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada generously supported the conference with a grant through the Aid to Research Workshops and Conferences in Canada program. Thanks are extended to Elsevier, Taylor and Francis, and the University of Laval for their financial support of the conference. Also, a special thanks to Lauren Greenfield, whose photographic work adorned the program and poster for the conference, and to Chris Lalonde and Bill Hallam for designing the program and poster. Finally, a thank you to Aubrey Jenkins and Jessamy Comer for their help preparing the volume and to Nancy Budwig from JPS and Amanda O’Connor from Cambridge for shepherding the manuscript through to publication.

There is an old saying from J. B. Priestley that goes: “Like its politicians and its wars, society has the teenagers it deserves.” The purpose of this project was to better understand teenagers and help them negotiate their transition to adulthood. As editors we would like to thank our families (EA: Judi and the boys; JS: Ron and the boys) for not just tolerating but even supporting our preoccupation with this project and its goal.

December 16, 2010