Cognitive beliefs and development operate in a loop where behaviour, thoughts and feelings are a result of each other, thus affecting us, our future and others. Emanating from this loop of behaviour are several characteristics such as moral, emotional and spiritual development, all interplaying and aiding cognitive development and its importance in shaping a child’s future. On January 12th 2021 my husband and I were blessed with the most amazing little boy any parent would dream of having, his name is Eaven Michal Alafas. During the course of our marriage, we had seven miscarriages causing us to lose hope. With this amazing news of a baby on the way, we were beyond ecstatic to welcome our son. Using Piaget's cognitive development theory to assist a child between the ages of 2 and 7 can be beneficial for my son’s cognitive growth. I have employed some practical strategies based on Piaget's theory that can support his cognitive development in my aim to mould my son into a future leader with well-developed capabilities in all branches of human development.

Cognitive development, according to Piaget, happens in four separate stages: the sensorimotor stage, the preoperational stage, the concrete operational stage, and the formal operational stage. The sensorimotor stage (birth to roughly 2 years) and the preoperational stage (2 to 7 years) are the two key stages in the framework of early childhood. Infants explore and interpret their surroundings primarily through sensory experiences and motor activities throughout the sensorimotor period. They learn about object permanence or the idea that objects exist even when they are out of sight. Infants also start doing elementary problem-solving exercises and developing fundamental types of memory and mental representation. Children's thinking becomes more symbolic and language-oriented as they go through the preoperational stage. They learn to depict objects and events using symbols such as words and images. However, their thinking is still hampered by egocentrism, and they fail to appreciate the views of others. Another important idea during this stage is conservation, where children struggle to grasp that the quantity of a substance remains constant despite changes in its appearance (Newman, B. M., & Newman, P. R. 2015 p. 89).

Piaget's cognitive development hypothesis has had a significant impact on early childhood schooling. It emphasizes the importance of age-appropriate activities and experiences that encourage exploration, problem-solving, and critical thinking. Educators frequently incorporate Piagetian principles into their teaching approaches, providing environments that encourage children's intellectual development and allow them to actively participate in the learning process. I have started incorporating several methods to assist in my son’s development.

Providing hands-on experiences, Piaget, J., & Inhelder, B., (1966) “emphasized the importance of children actively engaging with their environment. This offers the child opportunities for exploration and play that involve manipulating objects, solving puzzles, and engaging in sensory activities. These experiences allow them to construct their understanding of the world and develop cognitive skills”. I bought toys that my son can assemble and dissemble to assist in sparking his intelligence in placing items in their rightful place. Introducing him to a toy car and screwdriver set which is held together with large plastic screws, he knows after a few tries exactly where each part has to be placed back together. My husband and I are delighted to observe how quickly he is learning and adapting his analytical skills, we have been exposing him to more toys of similar design to expand his thinking.

Encouraging problem-solving at my son’s age of 2 years and 6 months, Piaget. J (1923) stated that “a child should be given age-appropriate puzzles, games, and challenges that require problem-solving skills. This can include tasks that involve sorting, categorizing, sequencing, and matching. Promote critical thinking by asking open-ended questions and encouraging them to find solutions independently”. At an early age of 18 months, I purchased board games with shapes and matching spaces, numbers and their corresponding spots and wooden animal puzzles. At the time we got him this gift he was maybe a bit too young to understand the order of everything but by seeing them frequently and playing from trial and error he was able to place most objects in their rightful space. I would often pick up and shape and ask him where do I put this one, he would indicate to me exactly where I should place each piece.

Getting involved in pretend play also known as imaginative or symbolic play, is crucial for cognitive development. We organize our home in ways where we provide props, costumes, and open-ended toys such as legos, building blocks and various little plastic animals that stimulate our son’s imagination. Eaven would often arrange legos and blocks to make houses, ships or towers and place the animals at random spots to create a scene. Engaging in pretend play with him and encouraging create narratives, we took on different roles and solved problems within the play scenarios to spark his interest in learning more. My husband built a camp over our bed using sheets, we often take the light off and use a small flashlight to play pretend camping and also for him to be brave as most kids are afraid of the dark. It also teaches him that in instances when the lights go off, he can utilise flashlights to find his way. I took off the lights a few times even on occasions we were not playing and he was able to navigate his way to search for the flashlight to stay safe.

By displaying concrete experience to our son at this age range of the preoperational stage, where he is developing his ability to think symbolically. We make use of concrete objects and visual aids to help him understand abstract concepts. When we were introducing numbers or counting, we incorporated physical objects like blocks and toys to make the concept more tangible. At the tender age of six months, our son was able to cover a water bottle with its cap, we realized that he had stability in his fingers and hands already. We bought alpha numerical building block sets where he would stack up to six blocks high and then clap for himself. This is truly an amazing feeling as a parent.

Scaffolding a child’s learning according to Piaget acknowledged the role of more knowledgeable individuals in supporting children's cognitive development. Provide guidance and support as needed, gradually withdrawing assistance as the child becomes more capable. Piaget. J (1923) “this can include modelling problem-solving strategies, offering hints or prompts, and providing explanations when they encounter challenges”. From my experience parents have to have a lot of patience with children who are learning hence the reason why Piaget stresses that adults must be more knowledgeable when handling children and cognitive development because they require constant conversations and endless questions. It's like teaching my son to ride a bicycle and then he can ride off by himself or climb up to go down a slide. Children would not be able to manoeuvre for themselves at first but with guidance, they learn and then their fear begins to erase making them brave enough to complete the same task by themselves.

It is very important to stimulate social interactions with children to highlight social and cognitive interactions according to Piaget, J., & Inhelder, B., (1966) “the importance of social interactions for cognitive development is necessary for each child to learn about personalities, especially because they know only of themselves. Social interaction encourages the child to engage in cooperative activities with peers, such as building blocks together or playing group games. Social interactions foster language development, perspective-taking, and the exchange of ideas, sharing, all of which contribute to cognitive growth as well as emotional development”. We would organize short play dates and sporting activities such as swimming or jumping on the trampoline to prevent boredom and minimize fights or tantrums. Through interactions with peers, parents, and other significant individuals, children have opportunities to learn about emotions, recognize emotional cues in others, and develop a rudimentary understanding of others' emotional states. These social interactions contribute to the growth of empathy and emotional understanding where they learn to care about others. My husband and I have noticed that our son has been more vocal in his words and their pronunciation through his interactions with others his own age. We have a clearer understanding now that children have a little life of their own where they feel like they need to do everything like an adult but with others their own age.

Respecting children's developmental pace as stated in Piaget's theory recognizes individual differences in children's cognitive development. Piaget, J., & Inhelder, B., (1966) “respect the child's unique pace and abilities, avoiding pushing them beyond what they are ready for. Provide appropriate challenges that are slightly beyond their current level to encourage growth, but also ensure they have opportunities for success and mastery in their own little explorations”. Patience is required to train children who may become distracted and bend off on a tangent while they are being taught. I give my son space sometimes, if he is not interested in doing a certain activity I allow him to choose what he wants to participate in. He is still a baby and it is expected that his attention would always be shifting. My son was born during the height of the Coronavirus pandemic which meant that even in present times we manage his lengthy interactions with others to encourage safety and health awareness. There are occasions when he would indicate to us that he has had enough play and he wishes to return home. We respect his request immensely and we are also proud that he has the developing knowledge to recognize that he has had enough interaction and it is time to shower and relax. To urge him to be more interested in certain activities I introduce YouTube videos for him to get a visual on how other children play and interact with games and toys. I noticed that even from the video, his vocabulary has increased drastically and he is able to place more words together while speaking to say things in a descriptive manner.

Cognitive development assist in the moral development of children and the methods we employ to interact with children would give them a sense of the moral norms allowed. During the heteronomous morality stage of early childhood, children view laws to be set and absolute. They believe that rules are enforced by authority and that breaking a rule will result in automatic punishment, regardless of their intentions. External authority and the fear of consequences guide children's moral reasoning at this period. Children develop a feeling of moral autonomy as they progress through the autonomous morality stage, which normally occurs during late childhood and adolescence. However, from an early age, they have a fair idea of right and wrong based on their interactions with adults and they are brilliant enough to constantly grasp corrective measures or verbal interactions with adults in positive or negative situations. They realize that regulations are made by individuals and that they may be modified by reaching an agreement. Their moral reasoning becomes more flexible, taking intentions and context into consideration. Children at this stage understand that a person's motives and the consequences of their behaviour influence whether an action is morally correct or evil. Individuals realize that moral norms vary among cultures and individuals at the final stage, moral relativism. They acknowledge that various people have diverse viewpoints on what is morally acceptable or immoral.

Piaget, J., & Inhelder, B., (1966) emphasized the significance of symbolic thinking and the ability to describe objects and events with symbols like words or mental images. A child with developing cognitive abilities makes use of symbols and rituals to represent and communicate abstract concepts, values, and beliefs is a key component of spiritual experiences and beliefs. Piaget noticed that toddlers frequently engage in transductive reasoning during the preoperational stage, drawing connections between events based on superficial similarities. While this form of reasoning is not expressly tied to spiritual development, it can sometimes lead youngsters to infer links between physical events and supernatural or spiritual explanations. Piaget's theory contains a stage-based framework for moral development that emphasizes the evolution from heteronomous morality (laws that are set and imposed by authorities) to autonomous morality (rules that are changeable and based on mutual agreement). Moral development and spiritual development are often connected, as many religious and spiritual traditions include moral norms and ethical ideals at their foundation.

It's essential to observe at each point of development, my son's cognitive enhancement filters directly into his moral, social and spiritual development. We often pray by having lighted candles and burning block incense that my husband would purchase from the church in Syria. Our son is so accustomed to this ritual, that he knows how to make the sign of the cross for himself and others. We can observe directly how cognitive development aids in the moral, social and spiritual development of an individual from a very young age. I gained an understanding into his specific strengths, interests, and needs when applying these strategies. Through my interactions with people and students in the past I realized that individuals of all ages use a lot emotions when interacting with anything, whether is performing tasks by themselves or in groups. Cognitive development fosters healthy emotional, moral and spiritual development. When applied properly by skilled and caring parents, caregivers, and tutors cognitive development can pull forth the best characteristics from moral, emotional and spiritual development to create the best possible minds for the future. Children view adults as role models, they observe behaviours of an adult like a parents, where they begin to think and behave in the same way. Eventually they would develop their own abilities to think and process information and this is the reason why its of utmost importance to surround children with individuals and situations that adds significant importance towards their highest callings. Observations from my interactions with my son and the teachings I have been applying with him the proud moments of realizing that my son is grasping the lessons I am teaching him is one of the best and most accomplished feelings in this world knowing that I am developing a little human to become a future leader. He would be my mark in this world in the near future to continue my empire.

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