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A B S T R A C T

Every child lives in a world of social encounters, involving him in situations which he least expects. In each of these encounters, one tends to act out in a pattern of verbal or non-verbal acts, empathetic or apathetic responses, which expresses his view of the situation and his feelings for the person.

Pre-operational children, according to Jean Piaget (Wadsworth, 1971) are those of ages two to seven years old. From the ages of two to four or five, the child's speech is largely lacking in communication intent. He speaks in the presence of others, but without any apparent intention that others should hear his words. Even though the child speaks with others, there is no communication and, speech of this type is clearly egocentric.

Jean Piaget characterizes the pre-operational child's behavior and thinking as egocentric. That is, the child cannot take the role of or see the viewpoint of another. He believes that everyone thinks the same things as he does. As a result, the child never questions his own thoughts because they are, as far as he is concerned, the only thoughts possible and consequently must be correct. Furthermore, the pre-opera-



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tional child does not reflect on his own thoughts. He is never motivated to question his thinking, even when he is confronted with evidence that is contradictory to his thoughts. Nevertheless, Piaget believes that egocentrism of thought is not egocentric by intent. The child remains unaware that he is egocentric and consequently never seeks to resolve it (Wadsworth, 1971). Such traditional theories of child development consider young children as self-centered and selfish creatures, quite unable to act altruistically.

Paradoxically, Yarrow and Zahn Waxler, being very sure of their evidence, believe that children have a capacity for compassion and for various kind of pro-social behavior from at least the age of one, though it may co-exist with the capacity for aggression and rage that psychologists have emphasized ever since Freud. Yarrow's study shows that, regardless of culture, the capacity for empathy and altruism exist at a remarkably early age. However, it does not usually follow in this research that children become altruistic as they grow up, between the ages of two and a half and seven. Perhaps a change in environment, particularly an extreme change, would radically alter the child's behavior (Pines, 1979).

