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Markoulis, Diomedes

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Sociomoral Reasoning in Congenitally Deaf Children as a Function of Cognitive Maturity

DIOMEDES MARKOULIS

University of Thessaloniki, Greece

MARIA CHRISTOFOROU

School of the Deaf, Thessaloniki, Greece

ABSTRACT *The operational and sociomoral reasoning maturity of 70 congenitally deaf children was examined and compared with the respective maturity of a sensory unimpaired control sample, matched in age (7-13 years) and socioeconomic background. Subjects were tested individually on three Piagetian tasks (conservation of substance, classification and class inclusion) and on a number of story pairs dealing with clumsiness, stealing and two dimensions of the justice concept. Results bearing on the operational reasoning showed a slower developmental rate in the deaf, while the two samples were comparable with respect to their sociomoral reasoning maturity. As far as the impact of operational reasoning on sociomoral development is concerned, the 'necessary but not sufficient' assumption was supported with regard to the hearing control sample, whereas no meaningful connection was found between cognitive and sociomoral reasoning in the deaf sample. It seems probable that when the operational reasoning prerequisite for sociomoral growth is not present, deaf children rely on other channels to cope with the demands of their social milieu, such as the visual and affective aspects of the role-taking process.*

Introduction

Piaget's (1968a) pioneer research on the ways children organise, understand and apply the rules of their games resulted in a stage-like theory of sociomoral development. The transformation of children's understanding of law, responsibility and justice, together constitute the core of his theory.

Building upon this framework Piaget has specified two distinct, though overlapping, periods of sociomoral reasoning. The first, characterised as the *morality of constraint* or *moral realism* is overwhelmed by what an adult authority recognises as true or false, valid or invalid. During this period most children up to about age seven view issues related to transgressions in absolute terms, i.e. they cannot