

Some 60 months later, I was parenting a son who could print his name, tell unsuspecting strangers long tales of his life (real and pretend), invent pretend schools (at which his imaginary teacher was Cinderella and his imaginary coach scheduled six basketball games a day), argue with great sophistication over bedtime and mealtime rules, and remember details of trips and conversations that had occurred months earlier.

As I write this edition, I travel this journey with my now 23-year-old son and my 15-year-old daughter. It's amazing to watch them use their abilities and confront challenges. These personal experiences, combined with my professional interest in cognitive abilities, have led me to wonder about the origins of those abilities. So far in this book, the capacities, skills, and strategies used in cognitive tasks all have been described in terms of a person who has presumably mastered or acquired most, or even all, of the skills considered necessary for a fully functioning cognitive being. It can be argued, however, that our understanding of adult cognition is fundamentally incomplete unless we understand its development. The reasons why adults use their memory, reach one conclusion rather than another, and perceive something in a certain way may have a great deal to do with their previous experience

with cognitive tasks as well as with their current ability to understand the demands of the task in front of them.

In this chapter, we will pause to consider how cognitive capacities, skills, and strategies come to be—when and how they are acquired or mastered and what sorts of influences affect their growth. We will examine how infants and children at different points in their development cope with different cognitive tasks. Although our look at development will go only through adolescence in this chapter, we will take up the issue of adult cognitive development in Chapter 14.

Our review of cognitive development will necessarily be quite selective. There simply isn't room in one chapter to consider the development of performance on all the cognitive tasks that we have previously discussed. Whole books have been written on the subject (including one by me—Galotti, 2017)! Instead, we will first look at broad theoretical approaches to cognitive development, considering the general question “How do cognitive abilities change and grow as an infant matures through adolescence?” To do this, we will focus on two major kinds of theoretical approaches: stage theories, such as the theory developed by Piaget, and nonstage theories, such as information-processing models.