

Learning involves more than acquiring facts.

done independently tomorrow. In the past, educators may have focused more on the independent level; today we plan experiences for our learners at the assisted level.

These assisted experiences may involve interaction with you or with peers. By prompting, commenting, offering hints and clues, and asking or rephrasing questions, we are helping our learners grow in understanding concepts and building new skills.

These ideas of how our learners build knowledge evolved from the work of Jean Piaget. He described cognitive learning as a struggle between existing ways of thinking and new insights. As learners interact with the world around them, they assimilate new understandings into what they already know. When they encounter a new situation that does not fit their previous understanding, they either reshape their existing categories of

knowledge or create new ones. Cognitive development, then, involves balancing existing ways of thinking and new experiences. Understanding is not only a matter of increasing the amount of existing information, but of growing in the ways we think about what is known.

The theory of cognitive development provides the foundation for the way we work with our learners in catechetical situations as well. In catechesis we believe that knowledge of our Catholic tradition provides important insights for our faith journey. Educational theory shows us some practical strategies for helping our learners build religious knowledge. The interactive dimension of these strategies also allows opportunities for group sharing and community building. As learners gain insight from one another, they begin to see that true wisdom belongs to the whole community of faith.

For Reflection

- When has a teacher or catechist assisted you in coming to a new understanding? What strategy did they use to help you?
- What opportunities do you give your learners to think about and work with the new faith concepts you are presenting to them?