

Narrative Construction: A Processing Model

Processing Level	Piaget's Stage As Classically Understood	Re-conceptualized as Experience-Specific Narrative Processing Level
Experiential Level	<p><i>Sensory Motor Stage.</i> Achievements consist largely of coordinating sensory experiences and behaviors. As individuals move through this stage, which involves the accumulation of repeated experiences in their environment, they become increasingly more cognizant of the world outside of them and begin to interact with it in deliberate ways. Object permanence is a key accomplishment: the ability to represent experiences in memory</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A client will present with repetitive and increasingly complex and deliberate interactions with the environment and demonstrate an increasing ability to hold these experiences in memory 2. Client may lack names or labels for experiences; yet describe visual images, emotional responses, and cognitively isolated anecdotal events. 3. Narrative may present with a repetitive quality.
Naming and Early Relating Level	<p><i>Pre-operational Stage.</i> Individuals can represent reality to themselves through the use of symbols, including mental images, words, and gestures. This stage is characterized by perceptual dominance. Of note, individuals often fail to distinguish their point of view from that of others, become easily captured by surface appearances, and are often confused about causal relations</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. As a client gains experience with the concept or issue, they begin to develop schemata for important experiences and behaviors. Labels or symbols at this level are concrete and lack an abstracted understanding. 2. They may begin to label these experiences within their personal or invented nomenclature (The client living with an alcoholic talks about “his mad times” or “after the party times” or “mom’s fixing-things”). 3. They begin to make early connections as they continue to construct narratives.

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Connecting Level	<p><i>Concrete Operational Stage.</i> Individuals become capable of mental operations, internalize actions that fit into a logical system. Operational thinking allows individuals to mentally combine, separate, order, and transform experiences and actions. Such operations are considered concrete because they are carried out in the presence of the objects, people, and events being considered.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The client begins to understand relationships between objects, experiences, and people. 2. The client continues to accumulate experiences and construct a narrative with these relationships and operations. 3. At the later end of this stage, the client begins to form abstractions, or abstract labels, for content with which they have become adequately familiar. 4. He or she can now focus on connections between events, among people, and an emerging understanding of abstract concepts develops (e.g., alcoholism, codependence).
Formal Integration Level	<p><i>Formal Operation Stage.</i> Individuals acquire the ability to think systematically about all logical relations within a problem. Individuals may display a keen interest in abstract ideals and the process of thinking itself. In formal operations, thinking becomes more abstract, idealistic, and logical. Individuals begin to think more like scientists, devising plans to solve problems and systemically testing solutions: “hypothetical-deductive reasoning.”</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The client begins to make more sophisticated associations among abstract ideas as well as concrete experiences. 2. Now they can begin to make connections between abstract ideas (alcoholism), connect individual motives (dad, mom, sister, and self), and contextualize information.

Note. Content knowledge, Processing skills, and Emotionality interact to place a client at various experience-specific narrative processing levels. The level of narrative processing depends on interactions among the three and is content/issue specific. Therapeutic efforts can focus on these interaction as they scaffold and support content knowledge, cognitive processing skills, and emotional processing. The model is explained in detail in the article: Cook-Cottone, C. P. (2004). Using Piaget's theory of cognitive development to understand the construction of healing narratives. *Journal of College Counseling*, 7, 177-185.