

Concepts, Kinds, and Cognitive Development

By Frank C. Keil

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Concepts, Kinds, and Cognitive Development By Frank C. Keil

In *Concepts, Kinds, and Cognitive Developmen*t, Frank C. Keil provides a coherent account of how concepts and word meanings develop in children, adding to our understanding of the representational nature of concepts and word meanings at all ages.

Keil argues that it is impossible to adequately understand the nature of conceptual representation without also considering the issue of learning. Weaving together issues in cognitive development, philosophy, and cognitive psychology, he reconciles numerous theories, backed by empirical evidence from nominal kinds studies, natural-kinds studies, and studies of fundamental categorical distinctions. He shows that all this evidence, when put together, leads to a better understanding of semantic and conceptual development.

The book opens with an analysis of the problems of modeling qualitative changes in conceptual development, investigating how concepts of natural kinds, nominal kinds, and artifacts evolve.

The studies on nominal kinds document a powerful and unambiguous developmental pattern indicating a shift from a reliance on global tabulations of characteristic features to what appears to be a small set of defining ones. The studies on natural kinds document an analogous shift toward a core theory instead of simple definition. Both sets of studies are strongly supported by cross cultural data.

While these patterns seem to suggest that the young child organizes concepts according to characteristic features, Keil argues that there is a framework of conceptual categories and causal beliefs that enables even very young children to understand kinds at a deeper, theoretically guided, level. This account suggests a new way of understanding qualitative change and carries strong implications for how concepts are represented at any point in development.

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Editorial Review

Review

Keil is arguably the most original thinker in the field of conceptual development.

(James Russell *Times Higher Education Supplement*)

The exposition of the empirical studies is admirably clear, and the findings themselves are significant. For linguists interested in concept development and concept representation, and also for philosophers of language who are interested in the causal theory of reference, this book is valuable.

(Paul Saka *Language*)

About the Author

Frank Keil is Professor of Psychology at Cornell University and Co Director of the Cognitive Studies Program at Cornell. *Concepts, Kinds, and Cognitive Development* is included in the series *Learning, Development, and Conceptual Change*.

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