

Understanding the Adolescent Learner

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ABSTRACT

Adolescence is regarded as the difficult and complex period of life where many do exhibit a sense of withdrawal from realities and responsibilities. It is also a period of identity crisis, poor maturity, role confusions, biological changes, but it still remain as the period of high potentiality with rich source of energy, an anxious mind with curiosity. It is a vital period of everyone's life to be understood where everyone needs to have a trusted relationship on whom they can rely upon or somebody who can think in their tune to get along with them. As the reality seekers, adolescents generally avoid the people with parental attitude and directional philosophies. Hence it was believed that if there is somebody who can really understand and care for them by winning their trust and faith they can do wonders in this world. If a teacher can understand the adolescent students and their nature definitely they can bring tremendous desired changes in their life. Hence the present paper is an attempt to throw some light on few psychological aspects to understand the adolescent learners.

Keywords: *Adolescent Learners, Cognition, Personality, Motivation, Interest*

Life is a sequential act of learning and unlearning of feelings, ideas, actions, attitudes, etc. Learning involves mastering new skills as well as balancing emotions, cordial interaction, and adjustment with the living environment. Psychology defines learning as a relatively permanent change in behaviour which occurs as a result of experience or practice. Learning can be of four kinds (i) habituation, in which an organism learns to ignore a familiar and inconsequential stimulus; (ii) classical conditioning, in which an organism learns that one stimulus follows another; (iii) instrumental conditioning, in which an organism learns that a particular response leads to a particular consequence; and (iv) complex learning, in which learning involves more than the formation of associations. Even if something is complex it can be learned effectively if it is intentionally attempted.

Adolescents are more so than children, they are very much aware of what they do not know and adjust the way they study to accommodate for the gaps in their knowledge. Children on the other hand, often fail to realize when they have not learned what they have been studying.

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Received: February 3, 2018; Revision Received: March 1, 2018; Accepted: March 2, 2018

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The ability to think logically, abstractly, and hypothetically increases with age throughout adolescence (**Hale, 1990; Overton, Ward, Noveck, Black & O'Brien, 1987; Ward & Overton, 1990**). Adolescents can understand the expression to mean that some individuals bluff their way through situations. Their ability to understand figurative uses of language makes many types of literature accessible that previously were not. Adolescents can also appreciate metaphor; a metaphor makes an implicit comparison between ideas or objects to show some hidden similarity (**Geller, 1985**). Early adolescents also understand irony, sarcasm, and satire. Their ability to think in terms of hypothetical situations as distinct from actual one makes an understanding of these concepts possible.

Adolescent learners are active, goal-directed, and self-regulating. They assume personal responsibility for contributing to their own learning. The successful learner, over time and support and instructional guidance, can create meaningful, coherent representations of knowledge. Students need to generate and pursue personally relevant goals related to being a successful learner. Successful learners can link new information with existing knowledge in meaningful way. Knowledge widens and deepens as students continue to build links between new information and experiences in their existing knowledge. Successful learners can create and use a variety of thinking and reasoning strategies to reach learning goals. They continue to expand their repertoire of strategies by reflecting on the strategies that work well for them, by receiving guided instruction and feedback, and by observing and interacting with appropriate models (**Siegler, 2001**). Successful learners are metacognitive. They reflect on how they learn and think, set reasonable learning goals, set appropriate strategies, and monitor their progress toward learning goals (**Winne, 1995, 1997, 2001**).

Cognition

During the early adolescence major changes take place in thinking and problem solving (**Keating, 1990**). Compared to those who are younger, adolescents can think abstractly and more efficiently. They also become more self-aware and self-reflective and can view problems from several perspectives rather than only one. Thus the thinking of adolescents is qualitatively different from that of younger children. One of the significant outcomes of these cognitive changes is that adolescents are freed from the cognitive limitations of concrete reality. This means that they can apply their logical skills to such abstract concept as live, justice and truth and can contemplate heady social and political issues that would never occur to a younger child. This ability to engage in abstract thinking also frees adolescents from existing solely in the present. This newly developed ability to conceive of future events in one reason they spend so much time fantasizing, planning and worrying about their lives-to-be.

Personality

Adolescents are faced with a number of challenges in the realm of personality. They must grapple with identity questions, cope with changes in gender-role expectations, and deal with the stresses of the moving from childhood to adulthood. As adulthood looms closer, adolescents turn their attention to their place in the larger social order. **Erik Erikson (1968)**,

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an influential psychoanalytic theorist, used the term identity to express this important psychological connection between self and society. Identity refers to having a relatively clear and stable sense of being one in the larger society. In Erikson's theory the stage of adolescence is of pivotal importance; the challenge of this period is achieving identity. **Stanley Hall (1904)** specifically characterized adolescence as period of "storm and stress". Hall attributed this turmoil to the conflicts between the physical changes of puberty and society's demands for social and emotional maturity. A study made by **Jeffrey Arnett (1999)** stated that there is evidence that conflicts with parents increase during early adolescence (**Laursen, Coy, and Collins, 1998**), although parent-adolescent relations are not as difficult or contentious as advertised (**Lerner & Galambos, 1998**). Adolescents also experience more volatile emotions and extremes of mood than preadolescents or adults do (**Larson & Richards, 1994**). Some adolescents also engage in increased risk behaviors: criminal activities, substance abuse, dangerous driving, and careless sexual practices. If they are properly guided and channelized in a constructive way they can easily adopt in their life.

Motivation

Motivating the adolescent learner is the processes of energizing, directing, and sustaining the learned behaviour. Different psychological perspectives explain motivation in different ways. The behavioural perspective emphasizes external rewards and punishments as keys in determining a student's motivation. Incentives are positive or negative stimuli or event that can motivate a student's behaviour. Advocates of the use of incentive emphasize that they add interest or excitement to the class, and direct attention toward appropriate behaviour and away from inappropriate behaviour (**Emmer, Evertson, Clements, & Worsham, 2000**). The humanistic perspective stresses students' capacity for personal growth, freedom to choose their destiny, and positive qualities. This perspective is closely associated with **Abraham Maslow's (1954, 1971)** belief that certain basic needs must be satisfied before higher needs can be satisfied.

The cognitive perspective on motivation focuses on such ideas as students' internal motivation to achieve, their attributions, and their belief that they can effectively control their environment (**Pintrich & Schunk, 2002**). The social perspective stresses that the need for affiliation or relatedness is the motive to be securely connected with other people. This involves establishing, maintaining, and restoring warm, close personal relationships. Students' need for affiliation or relatedness is reflected in their motivation to spend time with peers, their close friendships, their attachment to their parents, and their desire to have positive relationships with their teachers (**McCombs, 2001; McCombs & Quiat, 2001**). Students are more motivated to learn when they are given choices, become absorbed in challenges that match their skills. Current evidences also strongly favors establishing a positive and vibrant classroom climate that can intrinsically motivate the students to learn (**Wigfield & Eccles, 2002; Hennesey & Amabile, 1998**).

Interest

The interests of adolescents depend upon their gender, intelligence and the environment in which they live, the opportunities they have had for developing interests, what their peers are

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interested in, their status in the social group, their innate abilities, the interest of their families, and many other factors. As adolescence progresses, many of the interests that were carried over from childhood wane are replaced by more mature interests. Furthermore, with experience most adolescents acquire a different and more mature sense of values. This is reflected in a shift in emphasis on different interests. Interests that were of major importance in early adolescence, such as clothes and appearance, become less important, while interest in a career now becomes dominant. All young adolescents possess these interests to a greater or lesser extent, and they all have specific interests of different categories. The most important of which are recreational interests, social interests, personal interests, vocational interests, religious interests and interest in status symbol.

The interest of adolescents toward education is greatly influenced by their vocational interests. If they are aspiring to occupations which require education beyond high school, they will regard education as a stepping-stone. They will be interested in the courses they feel will be useful to them in their chosen field of work. As is true, adolescents consider the success in sports and social life as important as academic work and a stepping-stone to future success. Educational interest of an adolescent is greatly influenced by a number of factors like peer attitudes, parental attitudes, grades which indicate academic success or failure, relevance or practical value of the various courses, attitude toward teachers, administrators, and academic and disciplinary policies, success in extra-curricular activities and degrees of social acceptance.

CONCLUSION

Transitioning from schooling to college is not just an easy task for the students and that undergoes lots of challenges and pressures like adjustment problem, academic stress, peer pressure, adaptation to modern life style, use of e-resources and etc. but adolescence is the potential period during which they can be mentored in a right way. Understanding the adolescent learners will help the teachers and parents to nurture them as proper citizens. Providing conducive learning environment will also promote the mental health of the students and will create interest to learn. Further if love, recognition and moral support is extended definitely they will create a wonderful future for this nation.

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How to cite this article: Ramaprabou V & Dash S K (2018). Understanding the Adolescent Learner. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, Vol. 6, (1), DIP: 18.01.060/20180601, DOI: 10.25215/0601.060