

Teacher Education Institute (TEI)

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Child Development - The Adolescent and Young Adult

Whereas with pre-pubertal children the cognitive process is largely determined by pictorial and imaginative types of thinking, post pubertal children possess, albeit in immature form, the intellectual thinking capabilities of adults.

The ability of an organism to reproduce itself is generally regarded as one of the ultimate stages of growth of that organism. Once this stage is reached other forces which arrest growth and which eventually cause the demise of that organism will have some influence.

In human beings, of course, there is a long period between the ability to reproduce and eventual demise. Nevertheless forces related to adulthood will gradually overcome and then dominate the adolescent.

At a mental level the creative and artistic faculties of pre-pubertal children will change to the analytical and theoretical. Hopefully the education of children up to this point will have related to the harmonious development of both cognitive and affective.

If this has occurred there is a far greater chance that the adolescent will be able to relate the growth of intellectual thinking to attitudes and vision that have grown out of the creative. If this has not occurred and the creative has been looked upon as secondary the growth of intellectual thinking will dominate student's thinking even more.

Unfortunately much of present day educational practice relates far more to the development of the cognitive than to the development of creative, imaginative and artistic faculties. It should not come as any surprise to us that if children of ten view the world in intellectual terms that they, in later life, continue with this type of attitude to an ever increasing degree.

The growth of intellectual consciousness in adolescents culminates in its domination as far as the thinking process is concerned. The result of this dominance is an attitude towards relationships and knowledge which is quite different to that which existed in previous stages.

We saw that in the second stage of child development children regard teachers as natural authorities; they are looked upon as informative and knowledgeable figureheads. With the development of the intellect this relationship changes.

The adolescent desires specialized knowledge and the role of the class teacher of previous years is no longer needed; in other words the authoritative role of the teacher of previous years is superseded by the desire for knowledge itself.

If previous education has been balanced teenagers will grow towards freedom and independence; if not they will continually seek support in a variety of ways. In any case it is only towards the latter half of the third stage that they possess the potential to reach mature, emotional independence.

Eventually the student has to leave school and obtain employment or enter higher education. It is clear that attitudes at this time, and later on, will be influenced by the education received.

If we encourage flexibility in thinking, creativity and the use of the imagination in children we shall eventually create a workforce that can adapt to change more readily; that can adjust to the changing demands of a technological society where work practices and jobs will change rapidly at times.

If we concentrate mainly on intellectual development to the exclusion of the affective we shall end up with a workforce which is inflexible in attitude. Effort and work are always necessary. Add creativity to effort and you have a winning combination.