

Research By Well-Known Education Theorists

Many of our beliefs involving middle school students have been developed through the study of well-known theorists. The main experts on adolescent development that we have studied include Piaget, Erikson and Kohlberg and their theories on cognitive development. Our knowledge of these views provides a well-rounded approach to understanding the mental development of middle schoolers.

Piaget

Piaget's views on the intellectual development includes stages of reasoning he believes all adolescents may develop. These stages include the skills of observing, communicating, comparing, organizing, relating, inferring and applying. Piaget believed that all people mature intellectually at different levels, and that these levels may not be attained until the individual is ready to move to a higher stage. This is an important implication for educators; students must be challenged, but not frustrated by attempts to foster their cognitive development. Not all students will mature at the same rate, and this proves to be a challenge to the educator to recognize and accommodate the cognitive levels of all students. The following is a list of the levels of intellectual development included in Piaget's study on adolescent development:

Sensorimotor Stage

In this stage, the child learns by direct interaction with the physical world.

Preoperational Stage

This stage, the intuitive stage, is where language development occurs and includes the use of symbols for this development. The child is egocentric and focuses attention on one dimension of a situation at a time.

Concrete Operational Stage

People at this stage think logically, but at a concrete level- personal experience is necessary for reasoning. Serialization, such as ordering things into hierarchies, occurs as well as an understanding of conservation of mass, height or volume.

Formal Operations Stage

This is a stage that only 50% of adults function at normally. This level includes hypothetical, abstract reasoning and an ability to deal with problems which have many factors operating at the same time. The approximate age for entering this level is around 11 or 12 years, which is the beginning of middle school. An important reminder is that while students may enter this level of cognitive development, it may only be in certain areas, and individuals may be functioning most of the time in the concrete operational stage.

Use of Piaget's Theory for the Educator:

"Learn by doing." -Anonymous (Proverb)

1. Children are "active knowers." An active classroom is the best since it gives the child many opportunities to experience varied stimuli. The child learns through the process of thought, not just an accumulation of knowledge.
2. The curriculum should be based on the students' present cognitive levels and also the levels the students are expected to attain.
3. Provide a freedom of choice and curriculum variety to some activities since children learn best through task variety. Encourage students to examine and explore!
4. Entice students with something new or intriguing. Present paradoxes, contradictions or information discrepancies to create cognitive dissonance which motivate students beyond what they already know.
5. Arrange situations to permit social interaction so that children can learn from each other.
6. Ask students to explain and analyze how they arrive at solutions to problems to become aware of their processes of thinking.
7. Promote structure, organization and meaningfulness in learning.
8. Provide environments for reflective inquiry thinking which encourage both convergent and divergent responses.

Eriksen


Erik Erikson's theory on cognitive development of adolescents includes the belief that all individuals are in constant search of an Identity Status. In his theory, there are different stages of this search for identity, and people move back and forth between stages most of their life. The stages in his theory include Basic Trust, Autonomy which includes initiative and industry, Identity Achieved, Intimacy, and Generosity/Integrity.


While searching for identity in these stages, individuals may land in different stages. One stage is Identity Diffused, where individuals have not actively engaged in achieving identity and no clear decisions have been made. Another stage is the Foreclosed stage where individuals have made premature decisions regarding their identity, usually following others' opinions without challenging these beliefs. Moratorium is a third stage which includes a search for answers which will build identity, but a confusion before any decisions are made. The last stage is Identity Achieved, which includes an individual who has made personal decisions regarding beliefs and is secure in these decisions.


[Erikson's Developmental Stages](#)


Kohlberg


Kohlberg's theories deal with the moral development of the individual. He deals mainly with the concept of justice, and what is right in the world. In his theory is the belief that what an individual believes is what will cause upward movement in that person's moral development. There are seven basic stages to his theory of moral development.

 Stage Zero: An individual has no sense of right or wrong or responsibility.

 Stage One: The personal consequences of what an individual does will determine whether or not the action is taken. Individuals in this stage let authority figures determine standards and obey rules.

 Stage Two: Individualism is emphasized in this stage. Individuals hold an "eye for an eye" standard, are very egotistical, think of self first and satisfy their own needs.

 Stage Three: An individual in this stage holds mutual expectations, pleases the group, and considers the feelings of themselves and others. However, the majority behavior is still the correct behavior and the majority still rules.

 Stage Four: Individuals in this stage believe in a social system and maintain society's normal standards. They believe in doing their duty, following rigid rules and having a respect for authority and majority rule.

Stage Five: In this stage, individuals believe that laws can be changed for the good of the society and that personal values differ between people. Individual rights are respected, even when they differ from the majority. This is the morality held by most in the United States.

Stage Six: This is the self-actualization stage. The conscience is guided by a principle that what the individual thinks is important. An individual in this stage obeys or disobeys laws according to their understanding of justice and has principles that may or may not fit with society's rules. Individuals in this stage also believe in a justice in which each person's dignity is important. [Moral Development](#)

Krathwohl's Affective Taxonomy

5 Steps to Finding a Belief System

Receiving information: In this stage one becomes aware of something and pays attention to it. Something is observed, listened to, and experienced.

Responding: One responds to feelings willingly, and complies with pleasure or satisfaction. A response is expressed, practiced, and allowed.

Valuing: The worth of a feeling is determined by making a preference for or making a commitment to a belief. The feeling is defended, justified, and selected.

Organizing: A personal set of values is formulated and ordered into a relationship. Values are ranked in order, prescribed, and formed.

Internalizing: One lives out, judges, and affirms ones own attitudes, beliefs, or feelings. They are professed, asserted, and affirmed.

One problem teachers have with this principle is the question of how much of their own beliefs do they incorporate into the classroom. A common example is the question of abortion, whether it is right or wrong.

[Krathwohl's Taxonomy of an Affective Domain](#)