

Developmentally appropriate practices involving high school seniors



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The final year of high school is an interesting point in development-children reach the age of 18, “ adulthood”, and often make the transition from student to professional, or at least from mostly dependent to mostly independent in the time surrounding the senior year. Educators working with students of this age, then, are responsible for serving more than just a teacher’s role. They must understand the social and emotional, cognitive, and psychomotor development of their students, and encourage the incorporation of these for general progress and promotion to the next stage in a young adult’s life. Developmentally appropriate practice (DAP), which is the “ notion that children’s development should be taken into account as adults interact with children, structure their time and space, and plan activities for them” (Dickinson, 2002, p. 27), has faced some changes as an educational philosophy since its introduction in 1987. The progression of the theory has featured several changes in the consideration of literacy education; the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), which tagged the idea of developmental consideration in the construction of educational practices we know as DAP, has even collaborated with the International Reading Association to address development and literacy education in more depth (Dickinson, 2002, p. 26). As a senior high school English teacher, this focus on literacy will prove beneficial in my future classroom(s); and developmentally appropriate practices will be necessary to successfully guide my students from childhood into adulthood at this final step in their standard education.

Social and Emotional Development

According to the Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002 and its first follow-up study in 2004, high school students have high social and emotional values for themselves, pertaining to their professional life after school. Having a successful career, a happy family, strong friendships, and a good education were weighed as important by a large majority (at least 81 percent) of high school seniors (Ingels, Planty, Bozick, & Owings, 2004, p. 7). When career development assistance is integrated into the curriculum for upper classmen in high school, the students-turned-young-professionals are more successful in fulfilling those aforementioned desires. Because a teacher has gone through many of the steps of becoming a professional in a particular field, education, he or she can serve as a great role model for students, and can introduce career development activities in the classroom appropriately. In my high school, students (especially college- or career-bound seniors) looked up to the teachers as more than an authority, but as a professional in a field, who can give personal accounts and emotional and leadership support. Creating a notion of future goals seems to me an essential component to this age and social and emotional development at this point is almost completely dependent upon forming relationships, a support system, and collaborating in forming ideas. For this reason, I plan to focus very much on building an understanding, accepting, but professional relationship with my students, and a classroom environment conducive to developing those particular types of social-emotional abilities. In fact, student-teacher bonding, according to a study by Crosnoe, Johnson, and Elder (2004), is at its highest rate during 12th grade-which potentially

derives from these typical social developmental traits of students looking forward to becoming like the adults surrounding them.

There is crossover in the fields of social-emotional and cognitive development among high school seniors looking forward to a professional life, as well. Students who put more effort into the cognitive processes of “critical career awareness, exploration, and planning skills,” which are common emphases of senior high school education see more satisfactory results in the following years’ professional endeavors, as well (Lapan et al., 2007). In turn, the implementation of these cognitive methods helps create an emotional sense of optimism about future success, and satisfaction with present achievements. While certainly, there are things to be taught in an English classroom that are not directly linked to career development, it is a good place to set examples for how the “real world” works, simply adjusting things to accommodate content. Providing students with some choice over, perhaps, pieces of literature to be examined, is developmentally appropriate because it weans them from being told what to do, as they most likely were in lower grades, and boosts initiative. Another great method is using cooperative learning to promote social interaction centered around a cognitive activity such as analyzing, summarizing, or creating written works.

Cognitive Development

Of late, meta-cognition is becoming a focus for those examining cognitive ability in high-school aged students. The ability to recognize cognitive acts in oneself is fairly higher-order processing; to develop this introspection, or meta-cognition would surely lend itself, then, to a simultaneous development of the cognitive processes being recognized within. The study of this

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correlation is not specific to the high school age group, but it is generalizable to all students; in fact, Dahl's study (2004) suggests that "development of the pupils' metacognition will help any pupil at any level" (p. 153). If a student has not reached the level of introspection necessary to use metacognition for improvement of cognitive ability by the time he or she has reached senior year of high school, it is essential that a teacher encourages this. Fortunately, the English classroom is an excellent place for activities on introspection-writing and journaling assignments inherently encourage reflection. Perhaps, for an even more basic method, one could form a lesson plan in which students are asked to analyze the thoughts of literary characters, and to describe their actions in terms of those cognitions, and how the two are inter-related. Then, the teacher can push the students to apply the same practices to their own thoughts and actions, leading them into meta-cognitive development.

As far as English content area is concerned, the typical level of cognitive development (more so than social or psychomotor development) exhibited by high school upperclassmen is more relevant to success in the subject matter. A study by Zhang (2007) concluded that older students (i. e., senior high school students) use a more creative form of cognition than do younger students (p. 689). The same study, though, questions whether this is due to a greater amount of enthusiasm for creative thinking amongst educators and peers of high school children, or whether this is a natural developmental shift.

Regardless, creativity works in favor of teaching the humanities, one of which being English or Language Arts. Discussions of fictional works and <https://assignbuster.com/developmentally-appropriate-practices-involving-high-school-seniors/>

creative writing exercises are the perfect means for allowing students to externally display their creative cognitive ability. Because this is a developmental change from the less creative cognitions of earlier years, it requires teaching to a certain level of development for success and forward progress for the students in the subject, as well as in personal growth in general. A major implication of the findings about creative cognition is that while most high school seniors use this type of cognitive processing to attack and interpret problems, not all high school seniors are at the exact same developmental marker in any sense, let alone cognitively. Thus, a teacher cannot expect that only creative cognition is at work in the classroom, and must construct lessons that are acceptable for students falling anywhere within the spectrum of cognitive development. Perhaps using creative practices, deemed developmentally appropriate by this research, is acceptable most of the time in a high school senior English class, and will cater to those progressing at any level, but it may be helpful to occasionally revert to activities reliant on direct cognitive processing, to boost the optimism of students who simply have not reached the creative depth of others, yet.

Psychomotor Development

It is often difficult to align psychomotor activities and processing with the typical workings of an English classroom. However, if you extend this image of students exhibiting psychomotor activities outside of those school walls, the relation of this type of development to English or Language Arts learning becomes clearer. Physical activity, by means of Physical Education classes and extracurricular activities and sports, has been shown to improve grades

in general content areas, including English (Trudeau & Shephard, 2008, p. 7). To take action within the classroom in boosting energy, attention, and understanding, a teacher could use fairly interactive lessons to force students into psychomotor processing. There are several activities that I have had experience with, in the classroom, involving physical movement, such as a game in which students passed an imaginary ball around the room, verbally describing their tossing action, to ensure cooperation from other students in “catching” it. This activity, for example, does not only involve psychomotor activity in that it is essentially playing a game of imaginary catch, but it also requires deep cognition and verbal ability. Students must plan to catch the ball and how to describe their throw; they must imagine the size and weight of the ball and adjust their body to accommodate those factors-it is a multi-faceted activity which calls for the usage of all processes to some extent. Just as not all students (nor all people, in general) enjoy physical activities, in groups or independently, not all students need this type of psychomotor participation to succeed in cognitive assessment and action. Some of these, though, can still benefit from psychomotor activities when introduced in a more innovative way. Sports will not appeal to every student in any given English class, so varying the types of activities usually associated with psychomotor development is necessary. For example, acting out a play or story which is being read aloud forces participating students to analyze what they hear, create an image or plan, and then embody it through acting. This is an activity that I have been a part of and certainly plan on using myself, as an English teacher to high school students.

A study on the importance of physical activity during youth indicates that “allocating more curricular time to programs of physical activity does not negatively affect academic achievement, even when time allocated to other subjects is reduced,” (Strong et al., 2005, p. 4), which may be the only argument against practicing psychomotor development activities in schools. This, like the other characteristics exhibited by the students of this point in development, works two ways: students benefit and grow from practices based on what is deemed developmentally appropriate, and having students perform activities designed for these practices helps contribute to better results in the classroom, related to that developmental characteristic and otherwise.

Rationale: Why Do We Rely on Developmentally Appropriate Practice?

Developmentally appropriate practices in education are extremely important for addressing the needs of students specific to that point in their life. While academia plays a large role in aiding the developmental progress of students, teachers must extend their sphere of influence beyond the classroom, and engage with students (particularly at the higher age groups, such as junior and senior years), to help them grow socially, emotionally, and physically as well. While you cannot typify a student completely, there are elicited developmental characteristics of high school senior-aged children that need to be considered when preparing to instruct a general body of students of this age group. Social and emotional developmental markers, revolving greatly around professional and familial goals as we see in the results of the Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002, allow teachers to peer into the

minds of their high school students, and to adjust lesson plans to creatively incorporate social aspects into the lesson plan. Not only will this assist the students in their developmental progress, but it will also help lead to a more cooperative and successful learning environment, where teachers and students can work together in respectful and understanding relationships. Cognitive developmental markers are key in determining what is developmentally appropriate within lesson planning. The generalization that older high school students use more creative cognition helps instructors to design activities that allow students with this higher cognitive ability to flourish, but also ones that help catch less creative students up with the standards for cognitive development for their age. The implications of psychomotor developmental traits of high school students are less represented in the research I have found, but what is found as the general result-that the importance of having students move and think simultaneously is great-is well supported. Moving away from direct instruction in the classroom, and toward more interactive, physically-involved lessons is becoming more popular and more necessary in the high school classroom today.

Above all, it is important to understand the developmental stage that students pass through as they finish their standard high school career, in order to help them with the transition to being a professional or a student of higher education. Often, students in their last year, and especially last semester of school lose motivation, and experience what we call the “senior slump” (Kirst, 2000). By familiarizing ourselves with the experiences of being an individual at that point in development, we as educators can create

developmentally appropriate practices that help students recognize and take advantage of incentives and motives that the educational system and society have to offer.