Chapter 5

Communication as Social Influence on Academic and Developmental Growth of Today’s Adolescent:

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ABSTRACT

This chapter will show how growing social interactions among today’s adolescents impact their academic performance and identity development. The author will explain these challenges using a historical reference to socio-ecological perspective and socio-constructivism influence in middle-level education. This chapter provides a review of research detailing the role of discourse and the practices of creating culturally and developmental relevant communications among adolescents and suggests how social opportunities geared specifically for this age level influences learner attitudes and career interests. Discussion on the social influences of the mentoring process and the way it is used to help improve academic performances in hopes that it enhances the development of adolescents in the digital age.
SOCIAL INFLUENCES ON THE GROWTH
OF ADOLESCENTS AND DEVELOPMENTAL
GROWTH OF TODAY’S ADOLESCENTS

This chapter provides for readers an explanation on how the increasing societal
interactions adolescents encounter (in school and their communities) impact academic
performances and identity development. With the purpose of exploring the social
interactions that are offered in middle-level education environments that can help
students succeed academically and also develop positive identities of themselves.
By pinpointing specific aspects in which past and present influences within systems
that foster the emotional and educational well-being of adolescents.

Background information on social interactions and discourse will be explained
as it shapes adolescent development and academic performance. These aspects
of development and performance remain a struggle for middle-level education
programs as they try to find balance in identity development and curriculum. Early
adolescence is a pivotal period in students’ lives, as it is the time in which they
establish academic identities, as well as set the motion for a sequence of activities,
related to social interactions, that continues to high school and beyond (Eccles, Lord,
& Midgley, 1991; National Middle School Association, 2010; Umansky, 2016). The
key concept addressed in this manuscript is a description of the social environment-
the individuals and their roles within the middle-level education system. The
ecological theory by Bronfenbrenner (1979) frames the manner in which society
and social semiotics structure the social landscape of middle-level education. This
manuscript supports how Vygotsky’s (1978) social constructivism influences social
interactions of adolescents regarding how learning groups are structured. Today
the middle-level classroom and school environments are structured with goals that
afford openness of diversity of knowledge to help improve students’ learning and
achievement (Linn & Burbules, 1995; Wenzel & Carano, 2015).

Not to be marginalized, there is still a lack of culturally and developmentally
relevant discourse in middle-level settings (Busey & Russell, 2016; Chandler &
McKnight, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 2003; Urrieta, 2005). This lack of conversation
does not enhance the development identity of all adolescents. The dominant culture,
typically White Americans, benefit from these opportunities, leaving minority
students struggling to find their status and place in the learning environment. The
increase of social opportunities outside of the traditional middle-level classroom and
school environment, such as social media, camps, afterschool programs have led to
active construction of student learning and the development of self-identity by all
middle-level learners (Fraser, 1989; Linn & Burbules, 1995; Schoenfeld,1989). The
rapid growth of mentoring opportunities has led to middle-level learners increased
aspirations to be self-driven and find comfort in learning about themselves and
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