
DISCUSSION TOPICS

**ADOLESCENT COGNITION:
THINKING IN A NEW KEY**

Narration By

DAVID ELKIND, Ph.D.

(30 Minutes)



DAVIDSON *films*

Expanding the Mind's Eye since 1955

735 Tank Farm Road Suite 210 San Luis Obispo CA 93401
Tel: 805.594.0422 Fax: 805.594.0532
dfi@davidsonfilms.com www.davidsonfilms.com

INTRODUCTION

It is not just teenage bodies that undergo tremendous changes in adolescence. Young minds begin working in new ways that sometimes cause awkward situations just as do the newly elongated legs or deeper voices.

Referring to the work of Piaget, Erikson, Goffman and his own studies, David Elkind looks at the intellectual, emotional and social consequences that result from the changes in thinking. These changes permit new ways of reasoning and enable students to take on much more challenging materials. Sometimes the transition results in inconsistent forms of thinking which create social and emotional difficulties.

This video includes newly shot footage in a public middle school and structured interviews illustrating the intellectual challenges of this period of life when adolescents are constructing personal identities and new mental capacities.

We hope that you will send us topics for discussion that we may share with other instructors. Some of the topics can be used as essay questions, others as leads to discussion in class and still others are musings by the producer about what did not get into the videos. Please email us reactions and suggestions so we can continue to make the topics more useful.

Our email address is dfi@davidsonfilms.com.

1. A discussion of the culturally determined ways different societies mark the passage of the young into sexual maturity can be interesting to students who have recently made the transition themselves. In the West, we tend to think of teenage as a recent social invention, but it is good to note that people in other times and places have commented on and created rituals around puberty.
2. Barbel Inhelder was a colleague of Jean Piaget. She died in 1997. She worked with Jean Piaget for forty years and was a collaborator on several of his works. Her work in formal reasoning was especially important. The role of women psychologists in the 20th century was been largely that of collaborators, or perhaps, unheralded workers. It will be interesting to watch how this changes in the next decades.
4. Jean Piaget (1896-1980) was recently mentioned in TIME as one of the one hundred most influential thinkers of the 20th century, and was one of about five that were treated in a major article. His research methods of structured interviews grew out of his initial training as

a biologist in the early part of the century before the field was dominated by laboratory work. Piaget was an observer and his structured interviews were his attempt to control observations. Both his methods and theoretical constructs have been challenged but remain central to developmental psychology courses. A discussion of how human thought is otherwise studied might be interesting.

4. Some see the obtainment of Formal Operations as a by-product of formal education and do not see it as an unfolding of natural abilities. Inhelder and Piaget themselves did not do much cross cultural or even cross social studies although many of their followers have. More mature students might be able to give some good examples of Concrete Operational thinking in adults of their acquaintance.
5. Abstractions. Besides algebra what other portions of the curriculum depends on abstract thinking before high school? What support for fledgling abstract thinkers is possible in the middle school and high school?
6. Propositional thinking. What activities could (or do) schools give for young people to practice this new mode of thinking? Can your students remember “arguing for the sake of arguing”?
7. Ideals. Twentieth century literature abounds with stories of idealistic young people who “become sadder but wiser” in maturity. But after the watershed of the 1960’s there has been a concern that young people are not as idealistic as they once were, and are earlier oriented towards practical concerns. What do your students think about this?. Do young people become disillusioned earlier? Is cynicism fashionable?
8. Thinking about thinking. Can your students remember when they first thought about thinking? What were the issues involved? What school experiences fostered thinking about thinking? Does Elkind’s supposition seem reasonable that the self-consciousness displayed by adolescents is a result of this cognitive transition?
9. Identity. It is hard to remember that this was not a term commonly used in psychology before Erik Erikson’s inclusion of it in his eight-part life stages chapter in *Childhood and Society* in 1950. Is it still a meaningful concept to your students? Is its shadow “role confusion” useful to them in looking at their own current or adolescent lives? In recent years, the concept of identity has more often been seen in the literature in terms of group membership (ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc.), rather than individual roles (daughter, student, or worker). Comment.
10. Is there anything missing from this half-hour video, and if so, what?

RELATED FILMS

Also Available from Davidson Films

VYGOTSKY'S DEVELOPMENTAL THEORY: AN INTRODUCTION (1994) 28 minutes

GROWING MINDS: COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD (1996) 25 minutes

CONCRETE OPERATIONS (1993) 25 minutes

MORALITY: JUDGMENTS AND ACTION (2002) 31 minutes
