

Drug Education

1

Middle school

The developmental needs, abilities and capacities of young adolescents

The Middle Years is a unique period of growth for young people. With puberty, between 10-15 years of age, young people develop an increased inner awareness in response to a range of physiological and emotional changes. Concurrently they become more aware of and reflective about the wider social environment and their place in it. They begin to understand the problematic and multi perspective constructed nature of many issues and human actions. The associated rapid physical, intellectual, social and emotional changes are complex, interactive and variable.



Social and emotional needs

There are three strongly interrelated concepts that are very important in understanding the socio-emotional developmental tasks of adolescence. These are self efficacy, self esteem and self concept. The social tasks of adolescence relate to peers and to wider social issues and the relationship of the adolescent to those.

The use of narrative, both the study of author written stories as well as writing their own stories is an important strategy in building identity with adolescents (Ewing, 2006). Stories such as, Message in a Bottle or It Couldn't Happen to Me can provide a range of ideas and possible actions and reactions to real and imagined situations as well as characters that can form the basis for role modelling. Stories, supported by teaching and learning activities can also be avenues to confront moral dilemmas and explore different belief systems, as well as stimulating imagination and creativity.

Transition

It is the movement of students from Year 6 to Year 7 that has been identified as one of the most critical issues in the Middle Years (Pratt & George, 2005; Pendergast & Bahr, 2005; Anderson et al., 2000; Galton, 1999; Education Queensland; DET Victoria; Galloway et al., 1998; NSW DET; Hargreaves & Earl, 1996)

It is in this transition where students move from being the oldest leaders with attendant high self esteem and important roles to play in their school to being the youngest student in a larger school with little if any influence or status. Without well planned and managed strategies to support students during this transition, movement into secondary school can be fraught with high levels of confusion, anxiety, alienation and loss of both personal and social identity. Specific teaching of problem solving and coping skills is a very important element of any transition program.

Source: NSW, Department of Education and Training, Strategic Initiatives Directorate, 2008. Middle years of schooling: A discussion paper.