



NEGLECT OF ATTITUDE, APTITUDE AND EMPATHY, MAJOR STUMBLING BLOCK IN THE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF ADOLESCENTS IN INDIA

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Abstract

Adolescence is the most sensitive period in a human being's life. It is a stage of evolution and transition, which pushes the individual to the upward trajectory of growth and social living. Thoughts and emotions often play hide and seek during adolescence, one taking the role of other for reasons either known or unknown. The fickleness of youth hood as such demands care, protection, disciplining, tutoring and counseling for looking after the biological and social requirements. Family and school have a decisive role to educate and empower the adolescents with a focus on accomplishing three major objectives. (a) Develop healthy attitudes (b) Unearth hidden aptitudes (c) Foster empathetic outlook. Teaching the mind to mind the mind is a long and conscientious exercise in the development of empathy. Sadly in India, logical reasoning, innovation, problem solving approach, freedom of choice, exercise of self-awareness or identification of genuine interests are not given due consideration either in family or in school. Right parenting skills and competent schooling are today found to be missing au fond which adversely affects the qualitative growth and development of teenagers. The article analyses the reasons for bringing out the necessity of developing an effective intervention to strengthen the cognitive skills of adolescents and cast in them healthy mindset so that they become goal oriented, more productive and empathetic to fellow beings.

Key Words: - *Fickleness, Empower, Empathy, Self-Awareness, Cognitive Skills.*

Introduction

Adolescence is the most sensitive period in a human being's life. It is a stage of evolution and transition, which pushes the individual to the upward trajectory of growth and social living. Teenage years are often flamboyant and filled with overwhelming curiosities. Peer pressure is another disturbing area to overcome. 'Because of developing characteristics, group and peer pressure are the strongest for most in early adolescence. At that time young people are divided between dependency on parents and greater independence where they search for identity while building their self-respect'. (Marija Lebedina Manzoni Martina Lotar Neven Ricijaš, 2011).

One cannot expect the teenagers to be on the qui vive in their life situations all the time, which is a telling pointer that the phase of adolescence may take a turn for either good or bad, depending a lot on the influence of emotional, intellectual, familial and environmental factors. 'It is the combination of multiple factors that affect adolescents' behaviour in POS (Public Open Spaces) and social factors are often more influential' (Linde Van Hecke, Benedicte Deforche, Delfien Van Dyck, Ilse De Bourdeaudhuij, Jenny Veitch, Jelle Van Cauwenberg, 2016). 'During adolescence teens develop a stronger recognition of their own personal identity, including recognition of a set of personal moral and ethical values, and greater perception of feelings of self-esteem or self worth'. (Jamie Stang and Mary Story).

The fickleness of youth hood as such demands care, protection, disciplining, tutoring and counselling for looking after the biological and social requirements. Family and school have a decisive role to educate and empower the adolescents with a focus on accomplishing three major objectives.

1. Develop healthy attitudes.
2. Unearth hidden aptitudes.
3. Foster empathetic outlook.



'Since the adolescents spend most of their time at school, teachers should be playing the parental role to which learners look at as sources of inspirations'. (Memoir Chimwamurombe, 2011). Any lapse in the process of configuring right thoughts and emotions during schooling would be an opportunity irretrievably lost.

In India it would be unfair to say that health care needs are denied to adolescents, for the Government pursues a number of programmes for their physical welfare. But what is apprehensive is that teenagers by and large are not getting the kind of psycho social support necessary for qualitative growth and development. Today the Government pays hardly any attention to 'parenting skills' which is a matter of deep concern. In the process of systematic Socialization, School teachers and School Managements have an important role to play such as:

1. Building up sound emotional characteristics.
2. Helping discover inherent talents.
3. Equipping resilience.
4. Developing social skills.
5. Making known family values.
6. Moulding desirable characters.
7. Framing behavior patterns.

In fact these tasks which ought to be taken up by schools right from pre primary education are sadly not given due consideration in India. 'When schools change pupils' self-concepts, goals, beliefs about success and social responsibility they exert powerful influence not only on subsequent education but also on employment and community participation in adulthood' (Kathy Sylva, 1994).

The article analyses the reasons for bringing out the necessity of developing an effective intervention to strengthen the cognitive skills of adolescents and cast in them healthy mindset so that they become goal oriented, more productive and empathetic to fellow beings.

Design of Research

The study is based on purposive sampling, limiting the universe to Thiruvananthapuram city, the Capital of Kerala. The population identified are the higher secondary students from 10 schools situated in different parts of Thiruvananthapuram city. The sample size is 250, out of which primary data has been collected from 25 students from each school. The 25 students selected for the purpose is through simple random sampling. Besides Questionnaire, tools like Observation and Case studies have been used congruously. Questions framed are on a 5-point scale in line with Likert scale.

Attitude Means a Lot in Life

Attitude is the key to success in life, for it decides the nature of relationship with others. Healthy mindset would invariably generate sound perceptions. Rigorous, steadfast and sedulous orientation from childhood to adulthood are needed for bringing appropriate attitudinal changes in budding youngsters which cannot be expected to unfold spontaneously overnight. 'Young people develop positive attributes through learning and experience. Although physical and sexual development happens automatically, given adequate nutrition, social and cognitive development does not. These must be nurtured. There is tremendous variation across cultures regarding what is expected socially of young people, but all cultures need to provide the opportunities for young people to experience, learn, and practice competence, connection, character, confidence, and caring'. (Clea McNeely and Jayne Blanchard, 2009).

Hardly any school in India has ever thought of subjecting the students to SWOC (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Challenges) analysis at any point of time. Even thereafter the students would require persuasive exercises for developing perspectives that are germane to their strengths and weaknesses. Such tasks have to be taken up relentlessly for creating Self Awareness, which is the gateway to positive attitudes. 'Self-knowledge shapes people's judgments about which behaviors and qualities define broader traits and attributes' (Faculty.washington.edu/jdb/452/452 _chapter_04.pdf, 2013).

Table 1 shows that 68% [24% + 44%] of the respondents in the study endorse that they are aware of their weaknesses notwithstanding the fact that they had not gone through any educative exercises. 22 % are indecisive.



Also the table indicates that only 10% [9.6% + 4%] disagree with regard to the question of being aware of their weakness.

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|----------------------------|------------------|----------------|----------------------|---------------------------|
| Valid | Strongly Agree | 60 | 24.0 | 24.0 | 24.0 |
| | Agree | 110 | 44.0 | 44.0 | 68.0 |
| | Neither Agree nor Disagree | 55 | 22.0 | 22.0 | 90.0 |
| | Disagree | 24 | 9.6 | 9.6 | 99.6 |
| | Strongly Disagree | 1 | .4 | .4 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 250 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

These results bring a pertinent question to the fore. Do the family and school come out with any concrete programme to help such students overcome and overpower their weakness? That part is found to be entirely void in our educational system which is a matter of deep concern. Adolescents often have a feeling that they are too grown up physically and mentally to listen to the mature words of parents or teachers no matter what the consequences are. They just don't want to be counselled by elders regarding social situations. See Table 2. 60.8% [19.2% + 41.6%] answer that they are upset with teachers who admonish them to keep discipline. 26.4% are not able to give a specific response. But a small per cent, 12.8% [9.2% + 3.6%] give a negative reply. More than 50% of the respondents (52.4%) answered that they dislike their parents trying to control them (Table 3). 27.2% neither agree nor disagree. (Table3). But 20.4% [14.8%+5.6%] like their parents trying to control them. (Table 3). Another encouraging factor observed in the study is that 70% [40% + 30%] endorse their likeness to share a little time every day with their family members and that 20.8% have not given a specific reply. (Table 4). Either way such a mindset of the youth is conducive for developing and strengthening desirable attitudes. Only 9.2% [5.6% + 3.6%] have responded negatively. (Table 4).

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|----------------------------|------------------|----------------|----------------------|---------------------------|
| Valid | Strongly Agree | 48 | 19.2 | 19.2 | 19.2 |
| | Agree | 104 | 41.6 | 41.6 | 60.8 |
| | Neither Agree nor Disagree | 66 | 26.4 | 26.4 | 87.2 |
| | Disagree | 23 | 9.2 | 9.2 | 96.4 |
| | Strongly Disagree | 9 | 3.6 | 3.6 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 250 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|----------------------------|------------------|----------------|----------------------|---------------------------|
| Valid | Strongly agree | 43 | 17.2 | 17.2 | 17.2 |
| | Agree | 88 | 35.2 | 35.2 | 52.4 |
| | Neither Agree nor Disagree | 68 | 27.2 | 27.2 | 79.6 |
| | Disagree | 37 | 14.8 | 14.8 | 94.4 |
| | Strongly Disagree | 14 | 5.6 | 5.6 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 250 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |



| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|----------------------------|------------------|----------------|----------------------|---------------------------|
| Valid | Strongly agree | 75 | 30.0 | 30.0 | 30.0 |
| | Agree | 100 | 40.0 | 40.0 | 70.0 |
| | Neither Agree nor Disagree | 52 | 20.8 | 20.8 | 90.8 |
| | Disagree | 14 | 5.6 | 5.6 | 96.4 |
| | Strongly Disagree | 9 | 3.6 | 3.6 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 250 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

‘Attitude formation is a result of learning, modeling others, and our direct experiences with people and situations. Attitudes influence our decisions, guide our behavior, and impact what we selectively remember (not always the same as what we hear)’. (Jeffrey Pickens, 2005). ‘Attitudes pervade our thinking because they provide valenced summaries of favorable and unfavorable objects and organisms and so serve as a behavioral guide to approach or avoid them. Without such spontaneous guidance by our evaluations, survival in a complex and, sometimes, threatening world would be impossible’. (Frank Van Overwalle and Frank Siebler, 2005). Right efforts initiated at the right time are sure to make amazing changes in the outlook of adolescents because ‘Attitudes are learned by same principles as other learned responses’ (Allport, 1935). According to Winston Churchill, ‘Attitude is a little thing that makes a big difference’.

Unearthing Hidden Talents, Key to Empowerment

The yardstick of motivation, often cankerous and stereotyped is that which plagues the parenting crafts observed today. No different is the predicament found in any educational institution. Logical reasoning, innovation, problem solving approach, freedom of choice, exercise of self-awareness or identification of genuine interests have no place whatsoever either in family or in school. As a matter of fact the process of evolving which ought to be a form of unfolding the inner potential does not take place at any point of time in the life of an adolescent; in lieu, a sort of compulsion is imposed whereby the child’s aptitude never gets surfaced, rather lie hidden and unnoticed forever. It is a great injustice not only to the child but also to the family. That is one of the fundamental reasons why the youngsters often go crazy and are being misled to wrong goals in life. By the time they recognize their genuine talents it would be too late to rebuild the career. The Nation also is deprived of a fair chunk of potentiality thereby.

Educational institutions have a key role in identifying and developing the dormant talents of students. ‘Careful attention to the demands and affordances of different instructional environments enables educators to identify those individuals who are most ready to succeed in them’. (David F. Lohman, 2005). ‘Just as parents are the primary educators of their children, teachers are both primary and secondary educators. Consequently, teachers have the role of identifying unique performances displayed in their classrooms by their students in order to help them unfold and develop them. As identification should be based on general intellectual ability, language, arts, mathematics, science, social studies, creativity, and leadership, it is the duty of a teacher to take into consideration students’ interests when developing enrichment programs for gifted students. It is vital to explore students’ personal interests because their intrinsic motivation, skill development, and performance are enhanced when their areas of personal interests are involved’. (Mary Dorette B. U., Okoye, 2013).

It is encouraging to note that majority of the respondents, 71.2% [42.4% + 28.8%], want to opt for a career which would give them personal satisfaction (Table – 5). 18.4% cannot take a decision. That means only 10.4% think that they don’t wish to get a job that fetches contentment (Figure - 5). Unfortunately no avenues are open to teenagers today to help detect their aptitude at an early age and pursue a career of their choice. Hence they are often led astray.



Ignorance of real interests takes the adolescents and their parents to career gurus for guidance. The problem with teachers and career counsellors in India is that their suggestions are entirely based on job potential and not on talents. In other words vocational guidance is simply job centric rather than candidate centric. In effect the students fall a prey to the fallacious opinions of the so called professional Pundits. Table 6 illustrates that fairly a large number of modern youngsters take such Consultants for granted.

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|----------------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | Strongly agree | 106 | 42.4 | 42.4 | 42.4 |
| | Agree | 72 | 28.8 | 28.8 | 71.2 |
| | Neither Agree nor Disagree | 46 | 18.4 | 18.4 | 89.6 |
| | Disagree | 21 | 8.4 | 8.4 | 98.0 |
| | Strongly Disagree | 5 | 2.0 | 2.0 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 250 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|----------------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | Strongly agree | 49 | 19.6 | 19.6 | 19.6 |
| | Agree | 63 | 25.2 | 25.2 | 44.8 |
| | Neither Agree nor Disagree | 54 | 21.6 | 21.6 | 66.4 |
| | Disagree | 59 | 23.6 | 23.6 | 90.0 |
| | Strongly Disagree | 25 | 10.0 | 10.0 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 250 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

44.8% [19.6% + 25.2%] want to go by the track suggested by teachers or experts while 33.6% [23.6% + 10%] ignore such guidance, which is fairly a workable per cent for genuine choices. (Table – 6). But we don't have a mechanism to support them by stretching out to their proficiencies. 21.6% are neither for nor against career counseling (Table – 6). At the end of the day what is seen is that the youngsters have to feel satisfied with whatever that reaches out to them.

As many as 67.2% [40% = 27.2%] express the flair for involving in skilful jobs (Table 7). The table gives a clear picture of the perception of the budding youngsters about jobs. It is a perspicacious indicator that they want jobs which are creative and deft. In fact these results speak about the unseen, unexplored and unused possibility of the real capabilities of youngsters.

Table 7 - I Love to Involve In Skillful Jobs

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|----------------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | Strongly Agree | 68 | 27.2 | 27.2 | 27.2 |
| | Agree | 100 | 40.0 | 40.0 | 67.2 |
| | Neither Agree nor Disagree | 55 | 22.0 | 22.0 | 89.2 |
| | Disagree | 13 | 5.2 | 5.2 | 94.4 |
| | Strongly Disagree | 14 | 5.6 | 5.6 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 250 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |



Many of us have a wrong perception about aptitude, taking it as a potential which can be generated. We have to understand that supportive interventions can help only identify innate talents and boost them to the best possible extent; also that a large number of people are not aware of the technical difference between aptitude and ability. "A comparison of the terms 'achievement', 'aptitude' and 'ability' may help understand them better. Achievement depends on past experience and training ie, from an individual's present performance one can judge how much the individual has identified or profited from past training or learning. Aptitude is concerned with the future performance, ie, what can be achieved if a certain type of training appropriate to the skill concerned is given to the individual. Ability is concerned with the present. It indicates what the individual is capable of achieving in the present situation'. (Narayana Rao.S, 2010)

Empathy, Gateway to Successful Relationship

'Empathy involves understanding and "feeling with" others' emotions, and is an essential capacity underlying sensitive care in humans and other species. Evidence suggests that the roots of empathy appear early in ontogeny, and that individual differences in empathy bear meaningfully on children's social behavior and relationships throughout development'. (Jessica A Stem, 2017). In the quest for enthusiasm and excitement, space crunch for accommodative thoughts is something which is usually noticed in teenagers. But then it is only a natural and normal phenomenon. Study reveals that empathy factor is not as worse as considered. Look at Table 8. 40.8% [16.4% + 14.4%] feel very sad when they see the suffering of others, while 27.6% are affected only sometimes. Still 41.6% [10.4% + 31.2%] are unmoved by such feelings (Table 8).

| Table 8 - I Feel Very Sad When I See The Suffering of Others | | | | | |
|--|-----------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
| Valid | Never | 26 | 10.4 | 10.4 | 10.4 |
| | Rarely | 78 | 31.2 | 31.2 | 41.6 |
| | Sometimes | 69 | 27.6 | 27.6 | 69.2 |
| | Often | 36 | 14.4 | 14.4 | 83.6 |
| | Always | 41 | 16.4 | 16.4 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 250 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

That does n't mean empathy is alien to the emotional development of adolescents. On the other hand empathy is an essential factor in the emotional well being of a teenager. Adaptability, Self esteem and Healthy relationships are factors which emerge from empathetic outlook. 'Empathy is one of the core "pro-social skills" that enable young people to build community across differences, navigate ethical challenges, and put the collective good ahead of their own self-interest when it matters'. (Erin Walsh, 2017). Hence there must be purposeful efforts in the process of socialization for boosting empathy in student's right from very early days. Empathy cannot be mechanically taught in a classroom just as any other academic subject nor can it be taught overnight. It requires a vision and a mission. Teaching the mind to mind the mind is a long and conscientious exercise. Once such a frame of mind is structured, concern for others, compassion towards fellow beings and sharing feelings would come out naturally and spontaneously.

Parents' contribution in the inculcation of empathetic qualities during childhood is very important. But it all depends on the kind of parenting skills parents have learned. 'Children's empathy and prosocial behavior play an important role in their social competence. Of the influential factors, research has demonstrated that parental behaviors and the quality of the parent-child relationship are important correlates of children's development of empathy and prosocial behavior'. (Yoo, Hana, Feng, Xin, Day, Randal, 2013).

Even without any sort of interventions teenagers do have the ability to express empathy, but it becomes manifest only in certain specific situations. Figure 9 brings out that 55.2% of the respondents prove to be empathetic towards others. 'Teenagers DO feel empathy toward someone from their own background. But, they feel less



empathy toward someone who does not belong to their background group'. (Jonathan Levy & Ruth Feldman, 2017). These research findings corroborate that biological factors are not adverse to the process of social conditioning for strengthening empathetic values.

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|-----------|------------------|----------------|----------------------|---------------------------|
| Valid | Never | 14 | 5.6 | 5.6 | 5.6 |
| | Rarely | 35 | 14.0 | 14.0 | 19.6 |
| | Sometimes | 63 | 25.2 | 25.2 | 44.8 |
| | Often | 80 | 32.0 | 32.0 | 76.8 |
| | Always | 58 | 23.2 | 23.2 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 250 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

Conclusion

Thoughts and emotions often play hide and seek during adolescence, one taking the role of other for reasons either known or unknown. But then that is the usual domineering disposition of teenage. Only through the efforts of conscious socialization the true potential would come out in its totality. Institutionalized intervention strategies along with perceptive family support are necessary to facilitate the overall growth and development of adolescents. The Government should seek the assistance of professionals to put into service effective social welfare programmes for encouraging and enlightening families and educational institutions to take up the causes of the growing youth of the country. 'Knowledge, Attitude, Skill and Empathy' are the driving forces which pull and push the youth to genuine performance. Neglecting these factors would be suicidal and against the interests of the Nation. A country like India should never turn a blind eye to a sensitive social issue which demands immediate attention. 'Don't laugh at a youth for his affectations; he is only trying on one face after another to find a face of his own'. Logan Pearsall Smith. The duty of the State is to educate parents and empower schools/colleges for bringing out the best from each and every adolescent of the country.

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