Learner development from the time a student begins school through the completion of his or her education is influenced by many factors. A child’s behavior, environment, and other internal variables each have a direct influence on one another as the student develops cognitively and behaviorally (Ormrod, Stevens, 210). For this essay I have interviewed an eighth-grade student using questions that will provide insight into some key areas of development for the adolescent age range. The questions I’ve used were designed to determine which of certain aspects of education are most important to the student. I will be comparing the answers to the interview questions with research on cognitive and behavioral development. The interview questions were as follow:

1. Is it more important to get a good grade or to understand what you’re being taught?
2. Is it more important to have the highest grade in a class or to have an A?
3. If you are given a group assignment, is it better that all participants earn the same grade or should the group members each get their own grade?
4. Is it more important to learn a little about many different subjects, or to become an expert at one or a few specific things?
5. What factors besides intelligence influence success in school?

According to Peter Lorain, significant intellectual processes emerge during adolescence. Adolescent students are developing skills in deductive reasoning, problem solving, and generalizing (Lorain). When asked question one, my eighth-grade interviewee responded although both are important, he felt that fully understanding content was more important than earning a good grade. His reasoning was that understanding what is being taught would have the biggest impact on future success. As students mature, they become more independent in their learning. I designed question two intending to determine whether the student judged success based more on his own performance or relative to the performance of his peers. His interpretation of the question was different, and in his response, he said it would be best if everybody got an A. He said that rather than trying to earn the highest grade in the class, students should work together and push each other towards success. However, in question three he decided that he’d rather receive his own grade for his efforts on a group project, instead of receiving the same score as the other members in his group. His argument was that if he was the one to do the most work on a project, he should earn the highest grade in the group. The student’s response to question two is indicative of behavioral development. In this case, it is apparent that the student is becoming more conscious of other individuals, as he took the success of other students into account. However in question three it can also be seen that he is taking more ownership of his learning, and is becoming more independent due to cognitive development.

According to Caskey and Anfara, adolescents begin to view complex moral and ethical questions in shades of gray instead of mainly black and white (Anfara, Caskey). This can be seen in the student’s indecisive response to question one, as he first decided to himself that both options were correct in some ways before reaching a final answer. Our class text states that during late elementary through junior high, children begin to consider other people’s perspectives and intentions when making decisions (Ormrod, Stevens, 274). This idea can also be seen in the student’s response to question two, in which he decided that the best scenario would be the wide-range success of the classroom as a whole.

In question four I asked the eighth-grade interviewee if it was better to learn a little about a lot of different subject areas, or to become proficient in one or a few specific things. My intention in asking this question was to determine where the student is on the scale of self-identification. As children near high school, they begin forming an identity for themselves (Ormrod, Stevens, 259). I wondered if the student had begun this process, and had begun taking an interest in a more individualized approach to his education that he might receive in high school or college. The student’s answer was that he thought it was better to have at least a basic understanding of a wide variety of subject areas. I believe that this could mean either he has not arrived at the final stages of self-identification, or that he has begun to and views himself as a well-rounded student.

Caskey and Anfara state that adolescent students are eager to learn about topics that they find interesting and useful (Anfara, Caskey). My final question was what the student felt influenced success in school besides intelligence. His answer was that the only two things he could think of were effort and interest in what was being taught. This interview was enlightening and provided valuable insight and real-world examples of cognitive and behavioral development in an adolescent student.

References

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