

Motivating the Teenage Brain: Making Language Matter

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Beyond the boundaries of the dependence of childhood and the independence of adulthood, teenagers can be self-conscious and either act out or silently resist opportunities to learn in the classroom. This workshop reviews research on creating meaningful language-learning tasks, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and opportunities for reflective assessment.

The definition of the teenage brain is a changing one, with recent neural research indicating that brain development roughly continues from ages 11 to 20 for girls and 12 to 25 for boys. Teenagers face particular challenges in learning new languages. Beyond their constant exploration of the boundaries between the dependence of childhood and the independence of adulthood, teenagers can be self-conscious and, for a range of reasons, likely to either act out or silently resist opportunities to learn in the classroom. This workshop reviews the latest research findings of how the teenage brain learns and the application of such findings to engage learners through meaningful language-learning tasks, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and reflective assessment.

Among these findings are that teenagers' brains see themselves (the teenagers) and the world, as unchanging and that teenagers' emotions interfere with teenage brain development of adult thinking skills and the computational abilities. The teenage brain embraces risk, needing more stimulation than the adult brain yet, at the same time, teenagers' anxiety increases as they develop their ability to think abstractly and reflect on their roles and teenagers experiment with emotions, trying them out on teachers, parents and others. Through this, teenagers have difficulty interpreting others' emotions and directions which is further complicated by the fact that teenagers' weakest reasoning skill is cause and effect. Teenagers also differ from young adults in that they are slow to develop empathy for others.

Ken has worked in secondary schools and universities in Asia, the Middle East, and North and South America, lecturing on language teaching and computer-assisted language learning from the primary through university levels and is author of 72 textbooks for Pearson, he has given 300+ teacher-training sessions and 100+ conference presentations in 33 countries. His most recent books are Learning English for Academic Purposes for Pearson Canada.

Key takeaways

- The "teenage" brain continues to develop between the ages 11 to 25.
- Teenagers' brains see themselves (the teenagers) and the world, as unchanging.
- The teenage brain embraces risk, needing more stimulation than the adult brain.
- Teenagers' anxiety increases as they develop their ability to think abstractly and reflect on their roles.
- Teenagers have difficulty interpreting emotions and directions.
- Teenagers weakest reasoning skill is *cause and effect*.
- Teenagers experiment with emotions, trying them out on teachers, parents and others.
- Teenagers are slow to develop empathy for others.

Further Reading

- Jensen, F.E. (2016). *The teenage brain: A neuroscientist's survival guide to raising adolescents and young adults*. New York, NY: Harper.
- Siegel, D.J. (2015). *Brainstorm: The power and purpose of the teenage brain*. New York, NY: Penguin.
- Steinberg, L. (2015). *Age of opportunity: Lessons from the new science of opportunity*. Wilmington, DE: Mariner Books.

Key links

- <https://pearsonerpi.com/en/elt/block-b/leap>
- <https://www.english.com/blog/iatefl-ken-beatty-and-the-teenage-brain>
- <https://www.pearsonelt.com/professional-development/events/iatefl.html>
- <https://www.kenbeatty.ca/kenbeatty@mac.com>

Pearson English hopes to see you next year!