1. **THOUGHTFULLY NOTATE THIS ARTICLE TO SHOW EVIDENCE OF YOUR THINKING THROUGHOUT YOUR READING (this includes using vocab strategies, as well).**
2. **RESPOND TO THE “Food For Thought” SECTION BELOW THE ARTICLE.**

**Probing the secrets of the teenage brain**

By The Leader-Post (Regina) June 6, 2007

http://www.canada.com/topics/bodyandhealth/story.html?id=5028d08e-0344-4bc8-bbe6-a1b18437a465

OTTAWA -- They travel in packs, refuse to button their coats or wear hats in frigid weather, are often moody and have perfected a look that falls somewhere between incomprehension and disgust, especially when addressed by a parent or teacher.

Many adults view adolescents as if they were potentially dangerous visitors from a remote planet with whom communications are best left to a minimum. Among some teenagers, the attitude is not only mutual but may have helped fuel teen-oriented music, fashion and culture over the past 50 years or so.

But what if the generation gap was all just a misunderstanding?

That's one interpretation of the recent explosion of science peering inside the teenage brain.

When adolescents respond to a request with a mouth-wide-open stare, they are not being insolent, it turns out. They are just reacting naturally, says Sheryl Feinstein, author of Secrets of the Teenage Brain.

"Neuroscientists have discovered that teenagers don't act or think like adults because their brains are still a work in progress. Teenagers actually rely on a different part of their brains than adults to interpret the same information. Reading body and facial language is something they are in the process of learning. The result of the overemphasis on emotions is a great deal of misunderstanding and misinterpreting information."

So teenagers, for developmental reasons, often misunderstand the cues they are given and adults often misunderstand the cues teenagers are giving them.

That might be changing, especially among educators, many of whom are eagerly studying the latest science on the teenage brain in order to better understand the students with whom they spend their lives working.

The results are encouraging for parents, educators and teenagers.

Adolescents were once considered over the hill when it came to brain development because much of the architecture of the brain is put in place during the first few years of life. But during the past decade, brain research has heated up and scientists have determined that adolescence is a period of massive brain growth -- in fact, the most tumultuous time of brain development since coming out of the womb, says neuroscientist Dr. Jay Giedd, who was involved in a Frontline documentary on the teenage brain several years ago. Add the hormone influx adolescents are also undergoing and you have a combination that sometimes results in moody and baffling behaviour.

More importantly, scientists say, is the knowledge that teenage brains are still growing and connections are still being made that will affect how those brains work -- which is where parents and teachers come in. Exposure to new ideas and experiences during teen years can actually affect brain development, as can the relationships teens have during those brain-growth years. While teenage behaviour sometimes seems designed to push parents away, researchers say strong family ties are crucial to brain development during the teen years. Some educators have used recent brain research to argue more funding needs to be directed toward educating and enriching the lives of 10- to 15-year-olds.

Educators understand learning and relationships during the teen years can affect brain development. And understanding more about how the teenage brain works helps improve communications between teachers and their students.

That doesn't mean you'll always find them easy to live with, Trudy Brand-Jacobsen told parents recently. But, added the principal of Fisher Park school -- for Grades 7 and 8 students, we like these kids and we understand them.

Teachers understand, for instance, that some of their students, who are also going through massive growth spurts, find it uncomfortable to sit still for long. They also find it difficult to be alert first thing in the morning and some of them may find complex instructions difficult to follow. It's mostly developmental.

Frank Allan, the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board's principal of curriculum services, plays a lead role in keeping Ottawa teachers of adolescents up to date on research and its implications.

Allan has even organized book clubs and workshops to discuss research and books such as Secrets of the Teenage Brain and recommends additional reading about brain development and teenagers.

The science, he says, "reinforces what was always good teaching. There is no excuse any more."

There are some basic lessons for teachers in the research, he says, including that teenagers' brains are different than adults' and that lessons that include an emotional punch are more likely to make an impact.

There is also a "use it or lose it" message in the research. Beneficial activities during the adolescent years can have lasting benefits in brain development. On the other hand, damaging behaviour, particularly drug use, can have the opposite long-term effect.

All of which makes it even more crucial that parents and teachers try to understand even the most irritating teenage behaviour.

Is the generation gap simply a failure to communicate? It is probably a little more than that, but as a parent of a child entering adolescence, I find it comforting to think that the age of misunderstanding may eventually become a little clearer.

**FOOD FOR THOUGHT:**

1. **In the space below, note three new words you learned in this article, along with YOUR OWN definition.**
2. **What THREE items in this article do you feel it would be important for the adults in your life to know?**
3. **WHY would you want those adults to know these things? How could they potentially make your life better?**