**Changing Perceptions: The Adolescent Brain**

*Written for Canter, Inc.’s summer/fall catalog, this article indirectly markets a graduate course on adolescent brain research and instructional strategies.*

Restless. Bored. Emotional. Hard to reach and often frustrating to teach, adolescents present educators with some of our greatest challenges. But thanks to recent advances in brain research, we now understand more about the adolescent brain than ever before. This research is dispelling and clarifying commonly held beliefs about adolescents and changing how we teach students struggling through these challenging developmental years.

***The brain is fully developed by puberty*. *False****.*
The portion of the brain that controls judgment, the prefrontal cortex, is still developing well into our twenties. While that finding has obvious implications for classroom instruction and adult guidance, it can also free teachers and parents from counter-productive judgments.

When a teen indulges in typically short-sighted behaviors like shirking homework or risky behavior like texting and driving, it’s not necessarily a question of character. It’s a matter of brain development.

***Adolescents are impulsive and emotional. True.***We now know that, in teens, the brain’s emotional center matures well before its judgment center, rendering them prone to react rather than reflect. In an adult, we interpret such behavior as self-indulgent. In an adolescent, we now realize it’s the normal functioning of a literally immature brain.

Recognizing where adolescents are developmentally, we can create safe classroom environments where emotions support rather than impede learning. In the process of creating an emotionally safer classroom for students, we can ensure a more rewarding teaching experience for ourselves.

***Adolescents are restless and easily bored. True.***As a teacher, it’s important to know adolescents are not (necessarily) bored *by* us or the subject matter we’re teaching.Instead, research shows their brains are often responding to stimuli at odds with the very real way their brains work: from early morning classes out of synch with their natural sleep rhythms, to stress chemicals triggered by confinement to a desk, to the effects of poor nutrition and oxygenation.

With new instructional strategies, we can mitigate some of these adverse factors. With a clearer understanding of the adolescent brain, we can adjust our expectations of students and ourselves.

***The adolescent brain is a work in progress. True.***
Pat Wolfe, Ed.D., is the co-developer of Canter’s graduate course The Adolescent Brain™. Dr. Wolfe reminds us that, “the adolescent brain is a work in progress.” Canter, a leading provider of professional development for teachers, created The Adolescent Brain™ to help educators work alongside adolescents and their families to create positive classrooms and healthy learning environments. Through understanding current and emerging brain research, we can put adolescence *and* teaching adolescents into a more helpful perspective.

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