

Exploring the relationship between cognitive development and educational programs

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As has been shown in the previous articles, human societies involve an ongoing dynamic whereby demands are placed upon each of its individual members. In modern Dutch society, children are now being called upon to make difficult and important decisions that will have important long-term repercussions. The central question addressed in the present issue is whether children are inherently able to adjust to these demands.

In this section, two articles will describe the implications of cognitive development for educational programs in the Netherlands. In *“Structural and functional changes in the prefrontal lobes of the adolescent brain: Implications for executive function”*, Claessen (2010) describes the latest neurocognitive findings on cognitive development in young people, exploring the structural and functional changes that take place during brain development. He discusses new findings about brain development in adolescents, focussing on when this development actually ends. Are our brains fully developed after early childhood? Or does this process take more time? What kind of implications do brain development and related changes have for adolescents? – These are among the questions that Claessen (2010) addresses.

The second article, titled *“Decision-making during the “Tweede Fase”: To what extent does this educational method correspond to the cognitive abilities of a child in the modern society?”* (Pama, 2010) explores the same issues. Pama (2010) discusses the implications of the findings regarding cognitive development in adolescents. Specifically, her article focuses on a component of the Dutch educational system called the “Tweede Fase”. This system requires teenage students to make important decisions that will have repercussions far into the future. The main question that Pama (2010) attempts to answer is whether a system like the “Tweede Fase” can be expected to work for the teenage students for whom it is designed, given certain apparent limitations in their cognitive abilities.

Thus, the following two articles will discuss the modern conception of the child in the Netherlands today, along with the expectations that flow from this conception. At the heart of the two articles is an attempt to address a single question: Are the demands that contemporary Dutch society imposes on teenage children fair and realistic?