

Adolescent and Adult Intellectual Development: Investment and Differentiation

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Abstract: One of the hallmarks of the modern educational system in the US, is that as children transition to adolescence and beyond, there are more opportunities for them to engage in “elective” courses of study within the school system (e.g., sciences, arts and humanities, languages, technology). Opportunities for such specialized knowledge and skill acquisition accelerate when young adults graduate to specialized post-secondary education or occupational training. I will review both a theoretical framework that integrates ability and non-ability trait determinants of individual differences in topic knowledge and a series of associated empirical studies across adolescent and adult age groups. Finally, technological changes in the nature of how people solve intellectually-demanding tasks also will be discussed in the context of reconsidering how we conceptualize and assess adolescent and adult intellectual abilities.



Bio: Phillip Ackerman received his PhD in Quantitative/Measurement Psychology from the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. His research spans several related research areas of differential, educational, cognitive, applied experimental, and industrial and organizational psychology. He has conducted theoretical and empirical research related to the nature of adult learning, skill acquisition, student and employee selection, training, abilities, personality, and motivation. His recent empirical research and theoretical contributions address the ability, motivation, personality, interest, and self-concept determinants of skilled performance and training success, and on the development and expression of intellectual competence in adulthood. Current research projects focus on age differences and gender differences in the breadth and depth of adult knowledge, on the taxonomic nature of perceptual speed abilities and their role in the development of skilled performance, and on physiological correlates of cognitive effort and fatigue.