

Youth exchange – with heart and responsibility

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Overview

Young people on the long and winding road to adulthood

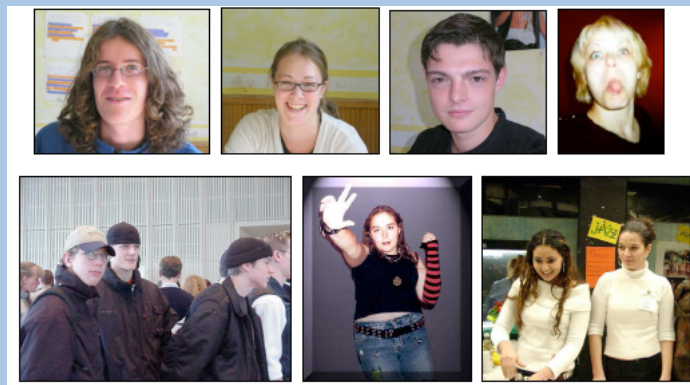
- > **Prejudices about young people**
- > Facts about young people - growing up in a rapidly changing world
- > What makes the difference? The secret of resilient youth

Prejudices about youth have a long tradition

*Today's young people have bad manners, they show disrespect for elders and love chatter in place of exercise...
They no longer rise when elders enter the room.
They contradict their parents, chatter before company, cross their legs, and tyrannize their teachers.*

Socrates (470 - 399 a.C.)
Plato's Republic, Book 4

However: Youth has many faces



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The secret of resilient youth

Skills to be developed in adolescence

Developmental goals: knowledge and skills for life

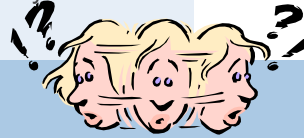
- Expert competence - school/professional knowledge
- Methods competence – ability to organise oneself in daily life, to work efficiently
- Self-competence such as self-confidence, purposefulness, perseverance, self-control
- Social competence – to be able to work in a team, cope with conflicts

Transition to adulthood today

Growing demands of a rapidly changing society

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- > During biographical transitions we all are more insecure, and more vulnerable than usual (giving up old roles and adopt new ones is not always easy).
- > The transition to adulthood is a crucial phase. Due to their little life experience young people need guidance and support - and good framework conditions. This was so in the past, and this is also true in present - possibly even more than in the past.
- > Today, young adults are confronted with the difficult task to develop their identity in a complex world as well as to achieve a high level of social integration (taking over professional and social responsibility).

Changing Realities

Changing norms, more options, less repression

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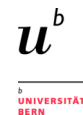
- > Youths' views of their parents have changed. Whereas once "the old man" was someone to escape, today's young adults often consider their parents to be good friends. And parents (especially fathers) appear to have changed as well, spending more time involved in their children's lives.
- > Today's youth are much freer to explore options and take their time in settling down. Especially women have a much wider menu of options today (from jobs to family), and middle- and upper-class women are often much more reluctant to settle down.

Changing Realities Education



- > With the shifting economy, the demand by employers for education of young people have never been higher.
- > The costs of higher education have also been rising. Many lower and middle-income youth stretch college out as they intermittently drop out to work and save, or they take fewer classes while working part-time.
- > More youth (of all income brackets) live at home during or between college and a job or a graduate degree. Although college costs are increasing, the return to education has never been greater, and therefore college is one of the best investments youth can make.
- > Families are increasingly called on for more support for a longer period of time (“never empty nest”). This support takes the form of both money and time, as well as extended health insurance and other supports.

Changing Realities Goals for Life and Work



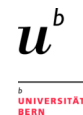
- > Importance of *wealth* is on the rise. Being wealthy was important to 45% of seniors in 1976, and 63% today.
- > High-prestige *jobs* become more important. Having a high-prestige job was important for 56% of seniors in 1976, and 67% today.
- > *Upward mobility*: In 1976, 83% considered it important to give one’s children better opportunities, today 91% did.
- > Importance of being a leader in one’s community jumped from 21% in 1976 to 40 today.
- > New concepts of authority and democratisation of knowledge: Knowledge is not any more primarily a top-down issue, but is free available for everybody.

Changing Realities **Relationship, Marriage and Family**



- > Youth continue to be committed to marriage, family, and relationships.
- > However, youth today are delaying marriage and family longer, and often feel it's necessary to have all one's ducks in a row (education completed, career well established, money saved for a house, etc.) before marrying.
- > They also view potential partners in a much more romantic ideal. They are looking for *that* soul-mate. They are also less willing to give up their independence. Whereas past generations typically viewed marriage as you + me = us, today's youth see it as you + me = you and me.

Changing Realities **Civic society**



- > Civic participation is the backbone of democracy, strong communities, and an engaged and active public.
- > Young adulthood is a prime time for crystallizing civic responsibility and political orientations. Yet reports are that youth are more disconnected today, less trusting, and more cynical. Their confidence in the Supreme Court, the executive branch, the Congress, and the press has sunk significantly.

Changing Realities **Attitudes toward self and others**

- > A sense of personal control over one's fate has declined:
In 1976 64% disagreed that "planning makes for unhappiness since plans usually don't work out" whereas 54% disagreed these days.
- > Attitudes toward others / Social trust
Trust in others is also declining. The percentage who believed that most people can be trusted declined from 32% in 1976 to 20% these days.

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The secret of resilient youth

Resiliency

What knocks over some – make others strong.
The mystery of resilient people

Kauai Longitudinal Study

Prof. E.E. Werner studied the offspring of chronically poor, alcoholic, abusive parents. Measurements at age 1,2,10,18, 40.

To her surprise 1/3 of these high-risk children grew into competent, confident and caring young adults, they succeeded in school, managed home and social life well.

New paradigm:

Don't abandon kids who fail, but learn from those who succeeded.

Resilient people: What makes the difference?

Resilient youth - Protecting factors

Genetic disposition play a role, however the presence of a variety of positive influences in kid's environment is more crucial:

- > Cognitive competence, and an active, sociable, sunny temperament, humour
- > High personal awareness, and high self-responsibility
- > Affectionate ties with parent substitutes (older siblings, teachers, mentors), who encouraged autonomy and initiative – social models
- > External support system in groups (school, youth groups, church), that rewarded their competence and provided them with a sense of coherence and faith.

Big brother/big sister = youth mentoring

Ingredients of excellence

2 examples out of many others



Stéphane Lambiel, 23 years old Swiss
2 x World Champion figure skating

Rita Levi-Montalcini, 1909*,
Italian Nobel Prize Winner in Medicine



- **Self-confidence** - the conviction, that the idea, the issue is „right“-
- **Self-efficacy** - the belief that one can make it
- **High own standards:** patience, endurance, diligence

Help to self-help

The importance of good models

J. H. Pestalozzi (1746-1827): heart, head, hands.

The power of the heart, intellectual and manual skills.
These elements are inseparable from each other and need to
be kept in harmony.

Main goal of education is “help to self-help” for
developing:

- cognitive competences
- socio-emotional competences
- practical skills



*The future of humanity lies in the hands of those
who are strong enough to provide coming generations
with reasons for living and hoping.*

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (SJ, 1881-1955)



References

The Network on the Transitions to Adulthood

([John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation](#))

<http://www.transad.pop.upenn.edu/about/whatwewknow.html>

Jekielek, S. & Brown, B. (2005). The transition to adulthood: characteristics of young adults ages 18 - 24 in America. The Annie E. Casey Foundation, Population Reference Bureau, and Child Trends.

