



The Concept of Youth

A Secondary Research Report

Calience Research and Consulting

30 April 2023



The Concept of Youth

Contents

Introduction.....	3
An Evolving Conceptual Framework	4
of Youth Empowerment	4
The Concept of Youth	6
Empowerment.....	9
Purpose	11
Power.....	12
Participation	14
Capacity Building	16
Youth Employment	19
Brief Context.....	19
Youth employment programmes	20
Conclusion	24
Bibliography	25
Notes	30

Introduction

There is a vast amount of literature on the topic of youth, which has been extensively theorized and researched within several disciplines and traditions, including psychology, anthropology, sociology, education, social work, cultural studies, and youth studies. This report explores several core concepts related to youth with the purpose of enhancing the understanding of organizations that seek to work with young people. It does not aim to be comprehensive nor exhaustive; there is so much theorizing about and research into the period of youth that it would be impossible to do it justice. Rather, the objective is modest: to identify some initial insights into these concepts that could help shape the approach of organisations serving youth. These initial insights can be refined and built upon in the context of an ongoing process of action-learning.

The literature scan was conducted in March 2023 principally by searching the JSTOR and Sage online databases for peer reviewed books, book chapters, journal articles, and research reports, master's and doctorate dissertations in English using keywords associated to youth, including "youth" "the concept of youth", "youth development" "youth empowerment", "youth participation", and "youth capacity building. As this is an area in which many government departments and non-governmental organizations work, a search of grey literature from reputable organizations working with youth was also conducted along the same lines. In addition to electronic searches, reference lists of relevant articles were reviewed to identify additional sources. Attention was given to literature produced in the past 10 years. However, as there was a historical dimension to the topic, some earlier literature was included. Abstracts or executive summaries were reviewed first to exclude articles not directly related to the principal purpose of the report. Those not excluded were read in full, assessed for bias, and analyzed using a thematic approach, from which core concepts described in this report were identified and explored.

An Evolving Conceptual Framework of Youth Empowerment

The notion of youth has evolved considerably over the past 150 years, influenced by historical processes including industrialization, urbanization, globalization, migration, as well as scientific discoveries, technological developments, and shifting values and norms. While a great deal has been theorized about young people, there remains an incomplete and inadequate understanding of youth – partly due to a highly fragmented approach to their study by an array of disciplines, including psychology, anthropology, sociology, social work, and education – and partly due to the rapidly changing social landscape.

Further complicating the landscape is a media discourse about youth that is often stereotypical, feeding into a sense of crisis and moral panics.¹ Media tends to exaggerate, sensationalize and decontextualize youth by presenting atypical cases as representative, resulting in an image of young people that does not always correspond well to actual behavior.² Market researchers brand and commodify young people, further stripping them from their context and reducing them to clichés, target groups, and ciphers providing sound bites for media.³

Organisations working with youth must navigate this rugged, complicated landscape, littered with ideological sentiments, media stereotypes and clichés and layered with historical and often countervailing conceptions of youth – many no longer considered valid but which, like fads, continue to circulate in society. Because the work with youth is complex and multifaceted, it demands a strong, coherent, long-term process of action-learning dedicated to the development of youth in society. Otherwise, youth-serving organisations could end up merely contributing to the replication of social patterns and be unable to help youth live fruitful and rewarding lives.

Learning about young people requires a dedicated process of action, reflection on action, consultation and study aimed at generating and applying knowledge about the period of youth in the context of a rapidly changing social landscape. At the heart of such a learning process is an evolving conceptual framework, which ensures that theory and practice are not fragmented but pursued together in a single, coherent movement. In the final analysis, sound action depends on sound understanding.

By conceptual framework is meant a set of concepts that guide research and action in an area of inquiry, in this case youth and society. Such a framework enables insights to be drawn from various theories without requiring a total commitment to any of them. It generates a working vocabulary that facilitates collective discussion and exploration; it invites study, action, and reflection. A conceptual framework is not static; it evolves as

knowledge is generated, enriching the understanding of the concepts, and thus helping to guide further action-learning.⁴

This report examines a several relevant concepts: youth, empowerment, purpose, participation, and capacity building as an initial contribution to such an evolving conceptual framework.

The Concept of Youth

The notion of youth is ancient, but many scholars argue that its modern conception emerged in the seventeenth century among the upper classes as education became valued as a means of overcoming superstition, promoting rationality, and enabling the next generation to obtain a livelihood in an industrializing economy and changing society. The period of youth became associated with a time of preparation in which a dependent child transitioned to an independent adult with the assistance of formal education. It was not until the nineteenth century as child protection laws were enacted and public schooling became increasingly extended that working-class childhood also became well distinguished from dependent adulthood. The many social and educational reforms in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries – often associated with welfare capitalism – generated the policies and legislation that currently shape our perception and understanding of youth; it is now viewed as a period of transition in which a child prepares to assume the responsibilities of an adult.⁵

A recurring and problematic theme in youth studies and discourse is the characterization of the nature of youth as difficult and troublesome, a conceptualization that traces back to developmental psychology, the first discipline to study youth at the turn of the twentieth century. In 1904, Stanley Hall, widely considered the founder of developmental psychology, described adolescence as a period of “storm and stress”.⁶ It was a time of struggle when the “the very worst and best impulses in the human soul struggle against each other for possession.”⁷ Ana Freud, writing over three decades later, similarly described adolescence as oscillating: “adolescents are excessively egotistic, regarding themselves as the centre of the universe and the sole object of interest, and yet at no time in later life are they capable of so much self sacrifice and devotion they formed the most passionate love relations, only to break them off as abruptly as they began them. On the one hand, they throw themselves enthusiastically into the life of the community, and then the other, they have an overpowering longing for solitude. They osculate between blind submission to some self chosen leader and deviant rebellion against any and every authority. They are selfish and materially minded and at the same time full of lofty idealism.”⁸

Youth, then, was initially associated with struggle, inconsistency, and irrationality. Much of the literature and policy regarding youth continues to be influenced by these assumptions,⁹ propagating a problematic and largely erroneous notion of youth being unstable and constantly at risk. Developmental psychology sought to identify universal stages of adolescent development that were correlated with normative behavior. Such an approach promotes the idea of standardized linear transitions from childhood to adulthood and ends up pathologizing those that do not correspond to the norm,¹⁰ resulting in those who do not transition as predicted being labeled as “failed”, “stalled”, “at-risk”, “blocked” “in limbo” – trapped in their youth.¹¹ The underlying norms, constructed according to white middle

class, male expectations, failed to account for the diversity of youth in terms of social, economic and cultural backgrounds as well as their aspirations and capacities.

It also failed to address the social nature of youth.¹² The concept of youth is not fixed nor universal in place nor time. It is influenced by cultural, societal, and economic processes. It is shaped largely by institutions, particularly the family, educational, political, legal and media structures. These institutions, through the norms, policies, laws, representations, and expectations they establish and propagate, influence the perception of youth, and shape the way they are positioned, approached, and treated in society. Youth is not merely a biological and psychological process related to age, it is also a social one related to the transition to adulthood, which is not consistent across cultures and time.¹³

The theorization of youth in the first part of the last century shaped an orientation to young people, now often referred to as a “deficit-model.” The deficit model describes positive development as the absence of negative or undesirable behavior. Such an approach is often grounded in an assumption that children are “broken” or in danger of becoming “broken.” A successful young person then is one whose problems have been well managed or, even better, absent; that is, a successful young person is one who is not engaged in criminal behavior, not using drugs nor alcohol, etc.¹⁴ This may explain why many of the first youth-serving organisations, formed in the early part of the twentieth century, tended to focus on youth in crisis, poverty, homelessness and those entering or leaving the judicial system.¹⁵

It was not until the 1960s and 1970s that theorists and researchers began to challenge the deficit model of youth and to consider the idea of “healthy adolescent development.”¹⁶ The field of youth studies that emerged in the 1960s drew insights not only from psychology but sociology, anthropology, social work, and education. Towards the end of the 1990s the limits of a deficit approach to youth had been well established and the major themes of a new approach, which came to be termed “positive youth development” were defined.¹⁷ The 1990s and 2000s were a time of shifting paradigms within youth studies and for youth-serving organisations.¹⁸

Positive youth development moves away from a deficit approach and a focus on prevention, toward building on the strengths of young people, developing potential, building capabilities, and cultivating character. It moves away from a focus on quick fixes, toward strengthening engagement of youth and adults in the development process. It moves beyond schools and community centres to include families, neighbourhoods, community organisations, workplaces, and service agencies. It moves away from viewing youth as recipients of services – as clients – to recognising them as contributors to their own development.¹⁹ Development itself is understood as the “natural unfolding of the potential inherent in the human organism in relation to the challenges and supports of the physical and social environment” and enables youth to lead a healthy and rewarding life.²⁰ Attention is directed to helping all youth to build on their strengths, involving them in decision-

making processes regarding the design and planning of programmes and providing them an active role in implementation.²¹

The positive youth development approach incorporated aspects of the work of Urie Bronfenbrenner, a prominent American psychologist who wrote extensively about child development. He argued that a laboratory was not well suited to study children and their development, as it is not the environment in which children live, learn, and develop. These environments affect the child and the child in turn affects that environment. Think of the difference between a static, emotionally sterile laboratory where a researcher observes a child and a home where two parents welcome and relate to the child they know and love. The child affects the parents, who in turn affect the child. It is an organic relationship. Bronfenbrenner proposed an ecological system theory to describe these dynamic interactions between a child and the environment. He conceived of the environment in which a child develops as a “set of nested contexts ranging from families and peer groups (microsystems) to the culture and government (macrosystems).”²² Youth development is more than helping one young person at a time, it involves working with a whole community. Sometimes the phrase “community youth development” is used to capture this aspect of the positive approach.²³

Positive youth development holds that young people develop through conscious, active engagement with their environment. Development is not something that just happens to a person; nor something done to them. Youth, Bronfenbrenner argued, are more than passive recipients of external influences.²⁴ While agency is situated – embedded in social, cultural, and economic contexts – youth do make choices and in doing so they simultaneously shape their environment and their own development. Youth need to be viewed not as recipients, not as empty containers to be filled, but as participants, as responsible actors.²⁵

The concept of youth has changed considerably over the past century, evolving from a period of storm and stress to one of potential, in which youth represent a reservoir of capacity that can be dedicated to improving the wellbeing of their communities. Youth is now widely viewed as a period of transition from dependent childhood to independent adulthood that is not tied directly to biological age, and which unfolds in the context of a relationship between young people and society, particularly its institutions.²⁶ Care must be taken, however, not to compartmentalize young people and lose sight of either their place in society or that they are whole, coherent beings. The period of youth is not a rupture or discontinuity. And the transition is not unitary and linear. Perhaps an appropriate image is one of a rope consisting of multiple, interconnected strands – for example, education to labor market, child to parent, living in the parental home to forming households. Young people can become adults along one strand but not another.²⁷

Empowerment

The concept of empowerment has been used to refer to adults for quite some time, dating back at least to the 1970s, but over the past couple of decades, following the emergence of positive youth development, it began to be applied to youth, especially to those considered vulnerable. The concept is somewhat ambiguous and tends to lack clear boundaries, being applied in different situations and processes in various ways.²⁸ Some authors have described empowerment as an active, continuous process, others as an outcome. Some characterise it as a process occurring at the individual, organisational and community levels. Some have proposed that it is easiest to define empowerment when it is lacking, for example in situations of weaknesses.²⁹ Moreover, while a substantial body of literature has emerged on the topic, there is a lack of empirical evidence related to the various theorizations. What empirical research has been undertaken has focussed on intrapersonal relations and perceptions of control over the socio-political sphere.³⁰

While there is not a clear definition of empowerment, there is widespread agreement that it involves individuals, groups and communities gaining control and power of their own lives in their life context.³¹ Martínez, Jiménez-Morales, Masó and Bernet reviewed various definitions adopted by numerous authors and identified a number of dimensions that trace an outline of the concept. This outline can serve as a starting point for organisations working with youth. Below is a summary of these dimensions:

The personal growth and well-being dimension views empowerment from a personal perspective. The aim of empowerment is the well-being and heightened self-esteem of the individual which leads to improved personal relationships and enhanced community life. Empowerment can be assessed by the degree of wellbeing obtained by satisfying basic needs.

The relational dimension which refers to empowerment being achieved through relationships with peers and adults, leading to youth having an increased self-perception because of their involvement in the community and sense of shared power with adults. A mentorship between adults and youth facilitates positive youth development, along with other aspects including “the development of abilities, supportive relationships and the mentor’s ability.

The educational dimension includes participation and involvement in change, indicated by self-efficacy, the confidence, conviction, and ability to achieve an outcome; critical thought, sociopolitical awareness; and a belief that it is possible to influence change in the world. It points to a need for collective recognition of the potential for young people to be agents of social transformation.

The political dimension is concerned not with participation in partisan political activities per se – something in which younger generations of youth have less interest – but as a space to make decisions about and seek to influence specific institutions to advance social development. Some authors highlight an aspect of empowerment that stress motivation to face up to hierarchies of power.

The transformative dimension is concerned with social change. It stresses the connection between critical reflection and meaningful action directed at the root causes of problems, including changes in systems, institutions, values, norms, and practices. Here youth develop consciousness and skills necessary to envision social change and understand their role in promoting it. This dimension often draws on the ideas of Paulo Freire in which empowered youth are the opposite of oppressed youth, as they are not victims of adversities but use their potential to obtain equal access to resources.

Finally, an emancipated dimension involves creating and supporting conditions that enable youth to act on their own terms and not be controlled by other. As an outcome youth gain the ability and confidence the need to make decisions to change their own lives and the lives of other people.³²

Maria Betancor offers a particularly helpful insight that helps draw the above aspects of empowerment together into a coherent whole. She describes empowerment as having two dimensions. The first involves individuals building capacity to act effectively. The second concerns the individual's environment and the possibilities and opportunities for action that are allowed or denied. "Empowerment processes are the result of an interaction, negotiated to a greater or lesser degree, between the capability or capabilities of a person, group or community and the options provided by the physical and sociocultural contexts in which they manage their lives. A person, group, or community's level of empowerment at any given moment in any given sociocultural context is the result of this negotiation."³³

The two dimensions Betancor describes are interrelated, the one acts on the other. As individuals develop capacity, they can have an increased effect on their environment and as the environment changes it affects the possibilities of development for the individual.

The aim of exploring empowerment in this paper is to identify how the concept can be drawn upon by organisations seeking to work effectively with young people. An important implication for the work of youth-serving organizations is that efforts directed at empowerment must simultaneously be aimed at building capacity in the individual and at the transformation of society, particularly its social institutions, and at the level of culture. A precise definition of empowerment is not necessary for it to be a useful concept. An initial set of principles and guiding ideas can shape approaches and programmes at the organisational level. As organisations serving youth act, the concept can be progressively clarified in a process of action, reflection, and consultation.

Concepts are not understood in isolation but based on the relationships they have with other concepts and ideas. For example, in physics, the concept of mass is understood in relation to the concepts of gravity, force and acceleration. The concepts most frequently linked to empowerment are power, participation and education.³⁴ These concepts are discussed below with a view to further understanding of the concept of empowerment and how it can inform an approach to working effectively with young people.

Purpose

To act effectively during a time of rapid social change requires a strong sense of purpose. Building on the dimensions of empowerment summarized above, such a sense of purpose could be described as twofold. On a personal level, purpose is directed toward the development of one's potentialities, talents, and characteristics. On a societal level, it is directed toward the promotion of the wellbeing of the community, to the development of social institutions, to the enrichment of culture – to the advancement of society. There is no tension between the two aspects; they are inseparable, reciprocal, interwoven aspects of one necessary movement.³⁵ The strength of this sense of purpose is positively correlated with empowerment.

Such a conception of purpose moves away from false dichotomies between the “inner” and the “outer”, between the individual and society, between culture and nature – dichotomies that can dampen and misdirect a sense of purpose so central to empowerment.

The three “pernicious dichotomies” left us wondering how we conscious human beings related to ourselves, to each other or to the world of nature and facts....

The split between mind and body, or between inner and outer, gave rise to the dichotomy between extreme subjectivism (a world without objects) and extreme objectivism (a world without subjects). Thus, Idealism denied the reality or importance of matter and reduced everything to mind, while materialism denied the reality or importance of mind and reduced everything to matter. Freud assumed that the inner was real and accessible, while the outer was all projection, and many strains of mysticism mirrored this view — for example the world is the veil of Maya, a veil of illusion. At the other extreme, Behaviourism assumed the outer was real but denied the relevance of the inner. It became psychology without the psyche.

The split between the individual and his relationships led on the one hand to an exaggerated individualism, to a selfish will to power and possession, and on the other hand to an enforced communitarianism like that of Marxism, which denied the meaning or importance of individuals at all while stressing the absolute primacy of relationship.

The split between culture and nature led both to relativism of all sorts — factual, moral, aesthetic and spiritual (value judgments) — and to dogma and extreme fundamentalism. There seemed no middle ground between the two extremes of saying that a given way of looking at things was only one of many contingent and relative ways of looking at them, or between saying there was only one, true and absolute way of looking at them. There seemed no way to say that we were not either wholly creatures of culture, and therefore unrooted in any established facts, or wholly creatures of nature (of the given), with no flexibility or room for creative development.

In the West, these dichotomies robbed our individuality of its context and landed us in the deepest isolation, leading to narcissism. We were cut off from an outer confirmation of our inner life, leading to nihilism, and denied the confirmation of our ideas, leaving us with relativism and subjectivism. Each nourished a form of alienation, and the sum total of this alienation is the curse of modernism.³⁶

The individual cannot be segregated from the environment. There is an organic relationship between the two. Our inner lives and character mould the social environment and we are ourselves affected and shaped by it. Meaningful development of both the individual and society arise from the mutual interaction between the two.³⁷

Such a conception of purpose implies that programmes seeking to engage youth need to pay simultaneous attention to the development of their individual potential and to assist them to direct their energies to the wellbeing and betterment of their communities. Placing too much focus on building individual capacity can create feelings of superiority or inferiority; focussing too much on activism without attention to individual growth and responsibility can lead to a loss of compassion and ultimately become a fragile enterprise.

Power

The concept of power, central to the concept of empowerment, has been extensively theorized and researched. It is well beyond the scope of this paper to recount the various conceptualizations of power and its operation. Our aim is merely to consider how this concept can contribute to a coherent approach to the empowerment of young people, aligned with the ideas of positive youth development.

Most authors who discuss power in the context of youth empowerment do so in relation to those who are vulnerable, who lack power in numerous ways, either due to a lack of personal or community resources or due to structural inequalities. Empowerment is about progressively gaining access to power.³⁸ Consequently, discussions of power end up centering on domination of one individual, group, or class over another, whether achieved

through the direct application of force; through “soft” means such as persuasion; whether through culture and ideology; and whether exercised at the centre or the periphery.

When domination is accorded a central role, it necessarily implies conflict and contention, which poses challenges for a conception of empowerment being outlined here. Power is indeed necessary for development, whether of the individual or society, but it is difficult to understand how acting according to a conception of power that values competition for political, economic, and cultural power can lead to prosperity and wellbeing for either the individual or society.³⁹

Empowerment that is concerned with assisting youth to develop their potential and to contribute to society will need to explore other forms of power, often obscured by a focus on domination and conflict. The power of love, of trust, of harmony, of sincere deeds, for example, are not tied to limited resources for which one struggles and competes. Yet, such powers can foster and enhance reciprocity and interconnectedness. “When these forms of power are recognized, empowerment can become a process that calls for the development of one’s capacity to accompany others and to release their powers and capacities. The process advances as power is generated and increased through cooperation, sharing responsibility, and working together.”⁴⁰ Power is always

...a power potential and not an unchangeable, measurable, and reliable entity like force and strength.” It is actualized when people are together “in the manner of speech and action” and when in their being with one another they have reached a state in which “word and deed have not parted company,” “words are not empty and deeds not brutal,” and “words are not used to veil intentions but to disclose realities, and deeds are not used to violate and destroy but to establish relations and create new realities.” Power in the sense that Arendt describes is “boundless” and intimately connected to action. It is the condition of unity that ties power to action: “power corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert. Power is never the property of an “individual; it belongs to a group and remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together.”⁴¹

The notion of power central to the empowerment of youth will need to transcend a focus on resisting or seeking domination – for otherwise it becomes a never-ending struggle of one person, group, nation, class against another – and be concerned with the power to act in concert with others for the wellbeing of all. This is not to suggest that there are not a host of social and economic systems, structures, and processes in which various forms of power are used to manipulate, dominate and control and that are in need real reform. What is suggested is that the kind of empowerment described above will need to draw upon a more expansive conception of power, one that allows efforts at empowerment to be freed from an us versus them mindset.

Participation

The concept of youth participation has been around for many decades and more recently has come to be regarded as an indicator of youth empowerment. The concept has assumed a wide range of meanings over the years and, unfortunately, is too often reduced to merely asking youth for input for feedback. Meaningful youth participation is challenging to achieve and sustain. It requires trust in the capacity of youth and a strong commitment to capacity building. Consider the following seminal description of youth participation:

Youth participation is the involving of youth in responsible, challenging action that meets genuine needs, with opportunities for planning and/or decision-making affecting others in an activity whose impact or consequence is extended to others – i.e., outside or beyond the youth participants themselves. Other desirable features of youth participation are provision for crucial reflection on the participatory activity and the opportunity for group effort toward a common goal.⁴²

Participation implies more than listening to a “youth voice”, or “seeking youth input.” It is not about their passive presence or token roles, but their active engagement and real influence on outcomes of the community and larger society.⁴³ Participation involves responsibility, opportunities for goal setting, planning, resource allocation, and involvement in genuine decision-making in activity that impacts the lives of others. It is enhanced when action is carried out with others and when opportunities for reflection on action are interwoven in activity. It echoes the notion of a twofold purpose, to develop one’s talents and capacities and contribute to the wellbeing of others.

Youth participation assumes that young people are valuable resources, competent citizens, and not merely passive recipients of services. In harmony with the approach of positive youth development, it contrasts to the portrayal of youth as “victims of poverty” and “problems in society”; to social science studies that find youth “alienated from community” and “withdrawn from participation”; and professionals’ focus on youth deficiencies and services.⁴⁴ It rejects the notion that youth are apathetic and rebellious, instead viewing such behavior when it arises as chiefly the result of social structures and processes. Mark McFadden, in considering youth’s resistance to schooling offers an explanation: “An alternative interpretation then of the evidence on student resistance is that students from certain kinds of backgrounds have experiences of schooling which restrict their opportunity to extend their knowledge. The response to this form of schooling from many students is to resist it. What students are constantly rejecting, or sometimes at best, merely complying with regardless of class, gender, race and ethnicity is schooling which disempowers them. As Furlong (1991) notes, ‘pupils do not reject abstract social structures, they reject real teachers going about the day-to-day business of schooling.’”⁴⁵

Young people tend to care a great deal about their families, their communities, and the world. They are anxious about the host of issues that face humanity. Their lack of

involvement is often because their participation is not fully welcomed and, perhaps more fundamentally, because the structures of decision-making do not actually extend to them. Youth is often viewed as a period of preparation, which, while accurate, tends to result in the period of youth being viewed a time of waiting and not doing; being seen and not heard. Extending structures to enable youth to participate will involve overcoming such a view, to appreciate that acting is as much a part of preparation as studying or observing. The community is a social space where youth can contribute a great deal along a great many lines of necessary action and as noted below, community-serving organisations can play a significant role in this regard.

There are numerous models of youth participation that reflect the thinking described above. One of the most frequently used is Richard Hart's ladder of children's participation, which has been adapted to be applied to youth. The model describes degrees of youth participation analogous to rungs on a ladder. The bottom rung is manipulation, where youth do not understand the issues nor their action; adults use the idea of participation to achieve their own ends. The next rung up is decoration, where youth are involved, but only peripherally, and have little understanding of the cause. The third rung from the bottom is tokenism, where youth are ostensibly given a voice but, in practice, have little or no discretion regarding the subject and how it is presented and little or no opportunity to formulate their own opinions. In contrast, at the top rung of the ladder youth and adults make decisions together, each respectful of each others knowledge and capability.^{46 47}

While such models can be helpful, the heart of the challenge is not solely adultism, or adult-centered thinking; but rather to overcome habits of thought, patterns of action, and modes of expression – all of which are embedded in social structure – that inhibit the right and responsibility of every human being, including youth, to contribute to the generation and application of knowledge aimed at individual and social wellbeing and progress.

The discussion of power and participation are, of course, linked. To enable everyone to participate in the generation and application of knowledge requires a broader conception of power. The more one thinks in terms of “we” and “they”, the farther away seem the people one wishes to serve, and the harder genuine participation is to achieve. Is there not a profound difference between being acquainted with people as an agent of development or bearer of charity and working among friends for a common purpose?⁴⁸ Does not the empowerment of youth call for a mode of operation characterized by friends accompanying each other for a shared purpose?

Capacity Building

A commitment to youth participation necessarily involves an equal commitment to capacity building. While most of the literature focusses on youth participants, there is much less related to the development of the organisations that serve them. Capacity needs to rise in each.

The reports and papers of the 1990s and early 2000s that called for a more ecological and positive approach to youth development led to an increased acceptance of youth development as a broad goal requiring intentional acceptance and monitoring.⁴⁹ Yet, changes to approach and programming have been slow to materialize. A large number of youth programmes seek to support youth, particularly immigrant youth, but most do not clearly articulate the issues on which they focus nor do they articulate the theoretical bases for their approaches to service delivery, indicating they do not operate in a learning mode⁵⁰ A substantial percentage of programmes are recreational in nature and lack the scope and depth to pay adequate attention to deeper issues, or to build capacity in youth to develop critical insights into their political, social and culturally situated realities⁵¹

While this paper has not focused exclusively on immigrants, programmes that engage newcomer youth tend to reinforce support for adaption and integration into Canadian society. There are far fewer activities aimed at helping build capacity in the receiving community to adapt and change in response to new socio-cultural realities. Focus is primarily on providing social and educational support in the early stages of acclimatization without seeking to promote their active participation in the wider community or addressing more complex needs and issues in the economic, political, cultural, and social spheres of life. There is little evidence of an ecological approach, of explicit meaningful effort to connect newcomer youth, families, and the community, which, for immigrant youth can end up risking reinforcing an over-reliance on immigrant networks.⁵²

A capacity-building orientation requires youth-serving organisations to move beyond a service-delivery approach, beyond thinking about youth as clients, to one concerned with helping youth shoulder responsibility for their own growth and development while contributing to the life of their communities. Development is not something that just happens to a person, nor to a community; it is not something one does to another. This conception underlies the principle that youth are participants rather than simply recipients; they are responsible actors.⁵³ Such an approach is grounded in the belief, for which there is ample evidence, that youth are able and willing to take on significant responsibility when given the opportunity and appropriate support. Such an approach rejects treating youth merely as consumers of services, to viewing them as engaged, active participants able to contribute meaningfully to the wellbeing of their communities. In doing so, young people learn to make sound decisions and gradually assume more and more responsibility.

The challenge youth-serving organisations and their staff face is how to create environments conducive to such empowerment of young people, who come to see themselves as active agents of their own learning and growth and participants working together with others to generate and apply knowledge to effect individual and collective wellbeing. A particular challenge lies in the appreciation that youth development is more than helping one young person at a time, it involves working with groups of youth and the integration of family, school, and community efforts. It also does not imply that young people should be left to make all the decisions on their own⁵⁴; they benefit from consultative environments with other youth and the encouragement and accompaniment of older peers and adults. Research indicates youth benefit from a degree of structure and from high expectations and accountability.⁵⁵

In most development efforts, mentorship figures prominently. Effective accompaniment is animated by a genuine interest in the youth and their families and is motivated by a desire to see them advance and to contribute. Such development entails the creation of a range of contexts and settings, including people and activities that promote youth development. Ideally, they constitute a system in the sense that they are inclusive, enduring, connected to each other, and connected to the larger macrosystem that surrounds them (e.g., labor, market, government, mass media). This definition of a system as inclusive, internally coherent, connected to other systems, and enduring differentiates a system from a programme.⁵⁶

What is being articulated is a development approach to youth, for which experience is still nascent. Initiatives that have shown promise seem to weave together youth development, community development and social change.⁵⁷ A specific approach that shows promise is engaging youth in meaningful participatory action-research at the community level. Youth are trained to identify, analyze, and promote actions on issues relevant to their lives. They use the insights they gain from conducting research to advocating for positive change in relevant programmes, policies, and environments.⁵⁸ Evidence suggests that engaging youth in such research on a range of issues increases sociopolitical awareness, social action, and civic engagement, and leads to a greater sense of control and to hopefulness. It strengthens problem-solving, research, and public speaking abilities, building capacity to reflect deeply and critically on complex issues and to collaborate with others on learning about social problems and opportunities.⁵⁹

A positive development approach builds a wide range of capacities in youth, including the capacity to contribute to processes of social change along a continuum of complexity; the capacity to research scientifically; the capacity to facilitate group activities and discussion with a view to building consensus; the capacity to develop and maintain relationships with members of a community; the capacity to express complex thoughts clearly and eloquently in speech and writing. There is evidence that as youth build such capabilities they gain

clarity of vision about their future aspirations, including about their careers. They learn to formulate realistic plans and their motivation and sense of optimism strengthens.⁶⁰

There is a difference between a development approach and approaches designed to prevent and treat specific problems and issues that youth may experience. This has been described as analogous to that between public health and medical treatment. A blend of both approaches is needed.⁶¹ However, the key to long-term sustainable health lies in building capacity among people and communities to be healthy and to promote health. A development approach then is foundational.

Approaching youth positively, with a view to empowerment is challenging. Part of the challenge rests simply in a legacy of welfare approaches to development, and of a problematic discourse on youth as being “unstable”, “vulnerable”, “fragile”, “at-risk”, etcetera. Work with youth is still breaking free from a culture of paternalism and welfare.

Perhaps most challenging, however, is that the social service sector does not exactly operate in a learning mode. Funding priorities shift often from one focus to another based on priorities often influenced by political and ideological convictions. There is a constant pressure for approaches to demonstrate almost immediate positive results, generating a pressure that can easily undermine processes of learning that require time to mature. A research project pursued by the United Way of Greater Toronto in 2008 described “system-wide problems, primarily the growth of an increasingly complex and fragmented youth sector characterized by incoherence in services, policies, and funding sources. Most youth service providers rely on short-term funding from multiple sources, which results in short-term or time limited initiatives that are difficult to sustain with long-term planning. As a result, the overall public policy response to youth issues has developed in a piecemeal fashion, with various supports and services set up in isolation from each other by different governments, agencies, and departments. At a time when youth face big challenges, the programmes and supports to help young people are not close to hand and easy to access departments.”⁶² Commitment to a development approach to youth – one built on a positive vision of young people and cognizant of the reservoir of capacity they possess to contribute to social and economic wellbeing – will require a commitment to learning, to long-term action, and a willingness to set aside the expectation for immediate results. This will require an ongoing conversation among youth-serving organisations and government and non-government funders.

Youth Employment

A positive conception of youth has numerous implications for organisations that seek to support and nurture young people. This section considers the influence that such a conception could have on approaches to youth employment. The purpose is not to comprehensively analyze the issue of youth employment nor assess specific employment programmes, but to consider how a focus on youth empowerment, grounded in a positive conception of youth, would further shape efforts to help youth navigate work and the labour market.

Brief Context

Any attempt to summarize, poses the danger of treating youth as homogenous when there is, in fact, a great degree of diversity of thought and experience among them. A whole generation cannot neatly be placed in a single group with age as the only defining characteristic. There is much variation in condition, in how youth think about themselves and how they navigate the social landscape. However, the diversity of condition and experience is not overwhelming; and there is also great similarity.

Today, youth in Canada are the most ethnically and racially diverse generations in the history of the country.⁶³ They live during a time of relatively rapid, cultural, social, and economic change. Young people generally associate adulthood with independence and responsibility, with having a steady job, good relations with family, home ownership and community engagement, not that different than in previous generations.⁶⁴ Yet, they face a complex world with changing social and family dynamics, a challenging labor market – in part due to emerging technologies and to new approaches to organizing work that rely on short-term, temporary contracts – and a housing market under pressure with short supply and increasing demand. Youth also inherit a world facing crucial hazards including climate change, widening inequality, and systemic racism.

The transition from childhood to adulthood has become less clear, direct, and predictable than in the past. Many youth are remaining in education longer, often due to perceived higher educational requirements in the labor market, and are staying at home longer than previous generations, due to increased costs of living. The percentage of young adults aged 20 to 34 living with at least one parent has risen in each of the past four census periods, rising from 30.6 percent in 2001 to 34.7 percent in 2016. In larger urban centres this number is higher, over 40 percent in Toronto and Vancouver.⁶⁵ The period of youth is elongating.

Unemployment rates for youth aged 15 to 30 are higher than for older Canadians, even correcting for those in full-time school. It is harder for youth to find employment, and when

they do it is often precarious, short-term work that creates frustration and uncertainty. In 2021, 30 percent of youth aged 15 to 29 were precariously employed⁶⁶ Accommodation and food services, retail trade, information, culture, and recreation employ the largest numbers of young people.⁶⁷ Fewer youth than a generation ago move directly from education to stable long-term employment; and such stable employment is difficult to find. Youth today enter a labor market where it is likely they will work many jobs and their career trajectories are less well defined.

Immigrant youth face additional challenges. The employment rate for immigrant youth is lower compared to Canadian-born youth, likely due to several factors including discrimination, language skills, delayed acculturation and an emphasis on education over employment. They tend to work fewer hours than Canadian-born youth and have lower hourly wages, with newcomer youth consistently earning less than established immigrant youth.⁶⁸ ⁱ

Youth employment programmes

Youth employment unfolds within wider social systems and processes that require ongoing analysis. What it means to be modern, to progress, to be successful, are locally specific modes of evaluation that help shape young people's attitudes towards work and their career aspirations.⁶⁹ The evaluation criteria and standards that help a young person determine what is successful employment are determined in local contexts of culture and community. Family, religious convictions and media also shape youth's conception of success, progress, and meaningful employment. However, organisations that seek to help youth with employment are embedded with values and have their own standards in this regard. An ecological approach implies those working to help youth with employment strive to be conscious of their own values, assumptions, and selection criteria; as well as those of the organisation for which they are working; and of the youth and their families. Otherwise, programmes may not tend toward empowerment, but toward guiding youth according to the aspirations and frustrations of others.

For example, much of the literature describing the career conception of new immigrant youth notes their desire to achieve prestigious, well-paying employment. However, while many first-generation youth desire financial stability and recognition – something often denied to their parents – they also value a career going beyond these pecuniary objectives and making a positive impact on society.⁷⁰ In Canada, career has often been thought about as principally an individual enterprise. For first-generation immigrants, however, while a career should provide financial and social resources to contribute to society, it should also

ⁱ This is unsurprising as there a large body of empirical research in economics that demonstrate how wage gaps of new immigrants to a country gradually narrow and converge over the long term with those of their non-immigrant peers.

be meaningful and enable them to directly contribute to the transformation of society – they want their career to make positive, meaningful change.⁷¹ There are no known definitions in the career literature that consider this altruistic social goal embedded in the notion of career.⁷² Such aspirations affect how employment or career counsellors help young people think through their career-decisions.

Youth employment programmes are part of a larger ecosystem of social services that aim to promote the wellbeing of youth. All of these are influenced by currents of thought in the wider society that also require a degree of analysis and historical awareness. The 1980s was a period of intense globalization and economic crisis leading to significant downsizing of labor forces in the 1990s, breaking an implicit bond between employer and employee of secure employment for loyal services.⁷³ In this social context, the notion of employability emerged as a guiding approach to employment. The term at its core refers to a set of attributes and achievements that make individuals more likely to gain employment and advance in their chosen occupation.⁷⁴ As employability is a set of individual achievements, primary responsibility for acquiring these rests on the individual. It is the individual's responsibility to identify labor market needs of society and develop themselves to meet these.⁷⁵

Governments at the time were unable to stimulate labour market growth and began to reinforce this concept of employability. They first launched job training and employment search programmes, in which individuals could choose to participate to upgrade their skills and connect with employers, and then tied unemployment benefits to an individual's efforts to acquire needed skills.

The focus on this notion of employability did not occur in isolation but alongside a set of ideas now often referred to as neoliberalism, which emphasizes individual liberty, free-market capitalism, deregulation, privatization, and minimal government involvement in the economy as the most effective means of stimulating economic growth and prosperity.

By now, employability has become common sense and is rarely questioned deeply in social discourse. In placing principle responsibility for employment on the individual, work to analyze and address social inequalities of a structural nature is neglected⁷⁶, and a simplistic, individual-focussed, casework approach is adopted.⁷⁷ Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, social policy and programmes shifted “to embrace a casework doctrine that assumes that social problems and the problems of social cohesion can be addressed solely by treating the supposed deficiencies of the individual.⁷⁸ Programmes became “client-focused.” Attention shifted away from the systemic challenges that disproportionately affect the lower classes of society to notions of merit and mobility that are very much in keeping with neoliberal ideas.⁷⁹

Underlying this shift in policy is an implicit belief that social problems stem primarily from individuals and the choices that they make. The community is largely ignored, and society

is conceptualized as an aggregate of individual attributes and choices. Social progress is defined as economic expansion that provides greater resources and scope for individuals to pursue their vision of a good life. When social issues arise, the problem is individualized, and the solutions are policies and programmes to remedy deficiencies in individuals, to “build their capacity” or “empower them.” If societal progress is achieved through economic expansion and development then individuals are principally economic citizens, who benefit the most when assisted to excel in the labor market.⁸⁰

Contemporary youth employment programmes have emerged in this milieu, influenced by a neoliberal tradition and the notion of employability. How do such programmes reconcile a narrow emphasis on individual responsibility with awareness of the limiting influence of systemic barriers and challenges? How do they reconcile promoting conceptions of individual success and the values and hopes of the family and the community? Are such programmes able to take a family-centric approach or do they treat youth as autonomous individuals outside the family?⁸¹ How do they reconcile the aspirations of young people with the labor requirements of industry and business?

A criticism of youth employment programmes is their narrow conception of success that is defined by the number of youth who become employed, regardless of the kind of work, whether it meets their needs, and whether it is in the least suitable to helping them gain the experience they require to advance toward their aspirations.⁸² Are youth channeled to the most available work, generally requiring the least amount of training and investment, or are they helped to find work in consonance with their aspirations?

A great number of questions need to be asked when elaborating and deploying employment programmes to young people if contradictions of thought and action are to be avoided. What is the purpose of work? Youth commonly state that they want meaningful, purposeful work that is morally responsible and contributes to the transformation of society.⁸³ How do youth employment programmes help them to achieve these objectives? Can all aspirations be achieved only once work is obtained? Are employment programmes equally distributed across neighborhoods? Have they reduced relative poverty over generations?

When economic activity and employment are viewed as an individual end goal, as one to be achieved above or before most others, opportunities for young people to grow and to develop, to explore and nurture their talents and to pursue their aspirations are can easily be constrained. A positive youth development approach opens a host of questions. How can they overcome an “us” and “them”, “provider” and “client” divide? How can youth employment programmes take an ecological approach to analyze youth in the context of their environment? How can they work with youth in a holistic manner, considering all the aspects of their lives in an integrated fashion, seeking to accompany them coherently? These are difficult questions that can only be responded to over time in a process of action-learning. Some initial insights are emerging.

A positive conception of youth implies that approaches and programmes would view youth coherently and holistically. Coherence implies not separating and compartmentalizing aspects of their lives – physical health, mental health, education, volunteer service, employment, recreation, etcetera, but treating them as whole human beings with capacity, concerns, and aspirations. Holistically implies taking an ecological approach and accounting for the social environment in which a young person lives and the various social structures and processes that shape experience.

To do so implies transforming the “provider-client” relationship to one of accompaniment. Accompaniment, as a concept, implies a posture of learning. Those working with youth need to be genuinely interested in youth, curious about their lives, about their circumstances and the conditions with which they are dealing. The encouragement and support youth workers provide needs to be offered not in the abstract but based on genuine knowledge about a youth’s life and circumstances. Such knowledge will only form if there is trust and mutual respect; and such trust and respect require both parties to consider themselves as treading the same path, avoiding a perception of “me and you”, “knowing and ignorant” of “insider and outsider”. It will also not form if youth are reduced to economic persons.

One of the most promising approaches that runs like a current through virtually all the recent research on youth is that of long-term committed mentorship.⁸⁴ The use of such mentors, who pay attention to all the aspects of a young person’s life – particularly their education, their emerging career aspirations, and their family life – would incline employment programmes to broaden and deepen their approach to help young people develop coherently. This helps ensure that progress in one aspect of life contributes to strengthening other areas. It would also lead to a deepening engagement with the community and to draw on community capital. Doing so may open possibilities that a neoliberal, individualized approach to employment cannot easily achieve. Finally, it would deepen the relationship with employers, opening more sustained discussion on how employment – even when it is lower-skill – can be organized in a manner that builds capacity and is endowed with meaning.

Conclusion

The far reaching and rapid pace of change in society, affecting every department of human life, impacts each generation of youth differently. Helping the youngest generations with this period of transition requires a systematic process of action-learning guided by an evolving conceptual framework. Learning is too often mistaken for problem-solving when it is principally concerned with advancing understanding and the generating knowledge. In the absence of shared vision and a common evolving understanding of concepts, contradictions of thought undermine effective action. Learning to work effectively with youth requires organizations to move between clarifying understanding of concepts and refining practice in the field. Hovering too long at the abstract conceptual level or at the level of practice ultimately leads to superficial thinking and anemic action.

This brief review aimed to describe how the concept of youth and several related concepts – empowerment, power, participation, and capacity building – have evolved over the past several decades with a view to contributing to a discussion on how to effectively support youth. The area of employment was discussed as an initial example of how an evolving conception of young people can lead to reshaping approaches and programs aimed at helping them. In doing so, it identified further concepts to be progressively clarified, including employment and career.

Bibliography

- Arendt, Hannah. *On Violence*. S.I.: New York: Penguin Books, 2023.
- Ballonoff Suleiman, Ahna, Parissa J. Ballard, Lindsay Till Hoyt, and Emily J. Ozer. "Applying a Developmental Lens to Youth-Led Participatory Action Research: A Critical Examination and Integration of Existing Evidence." *Youth & Society* 53, no. 1 (2019): 26–53. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0044118x19837871>.
- Bancroft, Lindy. "Not So NEET: A Critical Policy Analysis of Ontario's Youth Job Connection Programme", *Social Justice and Community Engagement*. (2017).
- Barata, Data D. "Hope Is Cut: Youth, Unemployment, and the Future in Urban Ethiopia." Daniel Mains. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012. XIII + 193 Pp." *American Ethnologist* 40, no. 2 (2013): 401–2. https://doi.org/10.1111/amet.12029_3.
- Bellous, J. and Pearson A. "Empowerment in teacher education" in Biesta, G., (Ed.), *Studies in Philosophy and Education* (1995).
- Benson, Peter L., Peter C. Scales, Stephen F. Hamilton, and Arturo Sesma. "Positive Youth Development: Theory, Research, and Applications." *Handbook of Child Psychology*, 2007. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470147658.chpsy0116>.
- Bronfenbrenner, Urie. *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiment by Nature and Design*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981.
- Checkoway, Barry. "What Is Youth Participation?" *Children and Youth Services Review* 33, no. 2 (2011): 340–45. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2010.09.017>.
- Christens, Brian D., and Tom Dolan. "Interweaving Youth Development, Community Development, and Social Change through Youth Organizing." *Youth & Society* 43, no. 2 (2010): 528–48. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0044118x10383647>.
- Chuang, Susan S. "New Start for Youth Study: An Examination of the Settlement Pathways of Newcomer Youth." Canadian Immigrant Settlement Sector Alliance (2010).
- Curran, Amelia. "The Construction of At-Risk Youth: A Qualitative Study of Community-Based Youth-Serving Agencies", master's thesis (University of Manitoba, 2010).
- Daniel, Shannon M. "Writing Our Identities for Successful Endeavors: Resettled Refugee Youth Look to the Future." *Journal of Research in Childhood Education* 33, no. 1 (2019): 71–83. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02568543.2018.1531448>.
- Cuzzocrea, Valentina. "Young People and Employability." *Handbook of Children and Youth Studies*, 2014, 1–10. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-4451-96-3_18-1.

Daniel, Shannon M. "Writing Our Identities for Successful Endeavors: Resettled Refugee Youth Look to the Future." *Journal of Research in Childhood Education* 33, no. 1 (2019): 71–83. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02568543.2018.1531448>.

Eriksen, Ingunn Marie, and Idunn Seland. "Conceptualizing Well-Being in Youth: The Potential of Youth Clubs." *Young* 29, no. 2 (2020): 175–90. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1103308820937571>.

Farid-Arbab, Sona. *Moral Empowerment: In Quest of a Pedagogy*. Wilmette, 2018.

Freud, Anna. *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence*. London: Routledge, 2018.

Gillies, Val. "Raising the 'Meritocracy.'" *Sociology* 39, no. 5 (2005): 835–53. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038505058368>.

Gonzalez, Emilia. "Centering newcomer youth's experiences in theory and practice: An ethical approach to generating knowledge and developing equitable services in Montreal." Masters thesis, (McGill University, 2021).

Hall, G. Stanley. *Adolescence Its Psychology and Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology Sex, Crime, Religion and Education*. US: Hesperides Press, n.d.

Hallman, Stacey, Heather, Lathe, Martel, Laurent, Menard, France-Pascale. "Young adults living with their parents in Canada in 2016," Ottawa: Statistics Canada (2017).

Hamilton, Stephen F., Mary Agnes Hamilton, and Karen Pittman. "Principles for Youth Development." *The Youth Development Handbook: Coming of Age in American Communities*, (2004), 3–22. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452232560.n1>.

Harper, Sharon. *The Lab, the Temple, and the Market Reflections at the Intersection of Science, Religion, and Development*. Ottawa: International Development Research Centre (IDRC), 2000.

Harrison, Roger, and Christine Wise. *Working with Young People*. Open University Press, 2005.

Helve, Helena, and Gunilla Holm. *Contemporary Youth Research: Local Expressions and Global Connections*. London: Routledge, 2020.

Ho, Elaine, Amelia Clarke, and Ilona Dougherty. "Youth-Led Social Change: Topics, Engagement Types, Organisational Types, Strategies, and Impacts." *Futures* 67 (2015): 52–62. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.futures.2015.01.006>.

Jones, Gill. *Youth*. Hoboken: Wiley, 2013.

Kamara, Jeffrey. "Youth Policy: What Works and What Doesn't." Toronto: United Way of Toronto (2008).

Kohler, Mary Conway. "Developing Responsible Youth through Youth Participation." *Child & Youth Services* 4, no. 3-4 (1982): 5–12. https://doi.org/10.1300/j024v04n03_02.

Labour Market Information Council. "Labor Market Outcomes of Immigrant Youth: Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic." (2021).

LeMenestrel, Suzanne M., and Lisa A. Lauxman. "Voluntary Youth-Serving Organisations: Responding to the Needs of Young People and Society in the Last Century." *Journal of Youth Development* 6, no. 3 (2011): 137–52. <https://doi.org/10.5195/jyd.2011.180>.

Lerner, Richard M., Amy E. Alberts, Helena Jelicic, and Lisa M. Smith. "Young People Are Resources to Be Developed: Promoting Positive Youth Development through Adult-Youth Relations and Community Assets." *The Search Institute Series on Developmentally Attentive Community and Society*, n.d., 19–39. https://doi.org/10.1007/0-387-29340-x_2.

Matejko, Emily, Jessica F. Saunders, Anusha Kassan, Michelle Zak, Danielle Smith, and Rabab Mukred. "'You Can Do So Much Better than What They Expect': An Arts-Based Engagement Ethnography on School Integration with Newcomer Youth." *Journal of Adolescent Research*, (2021), 074355842110560. <https://doi.org/10.1177/07435584211056065>.

MacKinnon, Mary Pat, Sonia Pitre, Judy Watling. "Lost in Translation: (Mis)Understanding Youth Engagement – Synthesis Report: Charting the Course for Youth Civic and Political Participation," Canadian Policy Research Networks, (2007).

McFadden, Mark G. "Resistance to Schooling and Educational Outcomes: Questions of Structure and Agency." *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 16, no. 3 (1995): 293–308. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0142569950160302>.

Mckeen, Wendy. "Diminishing the Concept of Social Policy: The Shifting Conceptual Ground of Social Policy Debate in Canada." *Critical Social Policy* 26, no. 4 (2006): 865–87. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0261018306068479>.

McQuaid, Ronald W., and Colin Lindsay. "The Concept of Employability." *Urban Studies* 42, no. 2 (2005): 197–219. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0042098042000316100>.

National Commission on Resources for Youth. "Youth Participation: A Concept Paper: A Report of the National Commission on Resources for Youth to the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Office of Youth Development" (New York: National Commission on Resources for Youth, December 1975).

- Newman, Keith. "Canadian Millennials: Social Values Study," Environics Institute for Survey Research (2107).
- Province of Ontario. "Stepping Stones: A Resource on Youth Development," Toronto: Government of Ontario, (2022).
- Perry-Hazan, Lotem, and Anna Bauml. "On Youth Participation and Adult Manipulation: Exploring the Lowest Rung of Hart's Ladder in a Youth Organisation." *Childhood* 30, no. 2 (2023): 194–209. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09075682231169363>.
- Philp, Katherine D., and Michele Gregoire Gill. "Reframing after-School Programmes as Developing Youth Interest, Identity, and Social Capital." *Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 7, no. 1 (2020): 19–26. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2372732219892647>.
- Pirroni, Stephanie M. "Interweaving Personal and Community Transformation in a Capability Approach: An Education for development Case Study in Colombia," PhD dissertation, (University of Massachusetts at Amherst, College of Education. (2019).
- Planas-Lladó, Anna, and Xavier Úcar. "Evaluating Youth Empowerment: The Construction and Validation of an Inventory of Dimensions and Indicators." *American Journal of Evaluation* (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1177/10982140211055643>.
- Shields, John and Omar Lujan. "Immigrant Youth, Settlement, and Resilience: A Qualitative Examination of Newcomer Youth and Settlement Services – Primary Research Report." Centre for Excellence in Research on Immigration and Settlement, (2019).
- Shields, John and Omar Lujan. "Immigrant Youth in Canada: A Literature Review of Migrant Youth Settlement and Service Issues Knowledge Synthesis Report." Centre for Excellence in Research on Immigration and Settlement, (2018).
- Smith, Noel H., Ruth Lister, Sue Middleton, and Lynne S. Cox. "Young People as Real Citizens: Towards an Inclusionary Understanding of Citizenship." *Journal of Youth Studies* 8, no. 4 (December 1, 2005): 425-43. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676260500431743>.
- Van Ngo, Hieu. "Patchwork, Sidelining and Marginalization: Services for Immigrant Youth." *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies* 7, no. 1 (2009): 82–100. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15562940802687280>.
- Walker, Melanie, and Samuel Fongwa. "Universities, Employability and Human Development," (2017). <https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-58452-6>.
- Walther, Andreas, Demet G. Lüküslü, Patricia Loncle, and Alexandre Pais. "Regimes of Youth Participation? Comparative Analysis of Youth Policies and Participation

across European Cities.” *Young* 29, no. 2 (2020): 191–209.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1103308820937550>.

Westergaard, Jane. “Working with Groups of Young People.” *Working with Young People*, 2013, 164–78. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526436047.n16>.

Wood, Dustin, Reed W. Larson, and Jane R. Brown. “How Adolescents Come to See Themselves as More Responsible through Participation in Youth Programmes.” *Child Development* 80, no. 1 (2009): 295–309. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2008.01260.x>.

Wyn, Johanna, and Rob White. *Rethinking Youth*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2014.

Zohar, Danah. *The Quantum Self*. London: Flamingo, 1991.

Yorke, Mantz. “Employability in the Undergraduate Curriculum: Some Student Perspectives.” *European Journal of Education* 39, no. 4 (2004): 409–27.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1465-3435.2004.00194.x>.

Mantz Yorke, “Employability in Higher Education: What It Is, What It Is Not.” *Learning & Employability Series*. Lancaster University (2006).

Úcar Martínez, Xavier, Manel Jiménez-Morales, Pere Soler Masó, and Jaume Trilla Bernet. “Exploring the Conceptualization and Research of Empowerment in the Field of Youth.” *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth* 22, no. 4 (2016): 405–18.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02673843.2016.1209120>.

Notes

- ¹ Gill Jones, *Youth: 17 Key Concepts* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 30.
- ² Joanne Cheryl Minaker, Bryan Hogeveen, *Youth, crime, and society: issues of power and justice* (2009), 11.
- ³ Gill Jones, *Youth: 17 Key Concepts*, 59.
- ⁴ Gerald Filson, “A Reading of Sona Farid-Arbab’s ‘Moral Empowerment – In Quest of a Pedagogy’” (2018), 1.
- ⁵ J. Spence, “Concepts of Youth,” *Working with Young People* (2013), 49.
- ⁶ G. S. Hall, *Adolescence: Its psychology and its relations to physiology, anthropology, sociology, sex, crime, religion and education* vol. 2, 15. See also Suzanne M. Le Menestrel, Lisa A. Lauxman, “Voluntary Youth-Serving Organisations: Responding to the Needs of Young People and Society in the Last Century”, *Journal of Youth Development* (2010), 139.
- ⁷ G. S. Hall, *Adolescence: Its psychology and its relations to physiology, anthropology, sociology, sex, crime, religion and education* vol. 2.
- ⁸ Anna Freud, *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence* (London: Hogarth Press, 1918), 149-50.
- ⁹ Johanna Wyn, Richard White, *Rethinking Youth* (New York: Allen and Unwin, 1997), 18.
- ¹⁰ Johanna Wyn, Richard White, *Rethinking Youth*, 19.
- ¹¹ Gill Jones, *Youth: 17 Key Concepts*, 86.
- ¹² Gill Jones, *Youth: 17 Key Concepts*, 28.
- ¹³ Helena Helve, Gunilla Holm (Eds), *Contemporary Youth Research: Local Expressions and Global Connections*, (2020), 3.
- ¹⁴ Richard M. Lerner, Amy E. Alberts, Helena Jelcic, and Lisa M. Smith, “Young People Are Resources to Be Developed: Promoting Positive Youth Development through Adult–Youth Relations and Community Assets,” (2006), 19.
- ¹⁵ Suzanne M. Le Menestrel, Lisa A. Lauxman, “Voluntary Youth-Serving Organisations: Responding to the Needs of Young People and Society in the Last Century”, (2100), 1.

-
- ¹⁶ Suzanne M. Le Menestrel, Lisa A. Lauxman, “Voluntary Youth-Serving Organisations: Responding to the Needs of Young People and Society in the Last Century”, (2011), 7.
- ¹⁷ Suzanne M. Le Menestrel, Lisa A. Lauxman, “Voluntary Youth-Serving Organisations: Responding to the Needs of Young People and Society in the Last Century”, (2011), 2.
- ¹⁸ Suzanne M. Le Menestrel, Lisa A. Lauxman, “Voluntary Youth-Serving Organisations: Responding to the Needs of Young People and Society in the Last Century”, (2011), 8.
- ¹⁹ Suzanne M. Le Menestrel, Lisa A. Lauxman, “Voluntary Youth-Serving Organisations: Responding to the Needs of Young People and Society in the Last Century”, (2011), 8.
- ²⁰ Stephen F. Hamilton, Mary Agnes Hamilton, and Karen Pittman, “Principles for Youth Development” in *The Youth Development Handbook: Coming of Age in American Communities* (2004), 3.
- ²¹ Xavier Úcar Martínez, Manel Jiménez-Morales, Pere Soler Masó & Jaume Trilla Bernet, “Exploring the Conceptualization and Research of Empowerment in the Field of Youth” *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, (2017), 413.
- ²² Stephen F. Hamilton, Mary Agnes Hamilton, and Karen Pittman, “Principles for Youth Development”, (2004), 9.
- ²³ Stephen F. Hamilton, Mary Agnes Hamilton, and Karen Pittman, “Principles for Youth Development”, (2004), 9.
- ²⁴ Urie Bronfenbrenner, *The ecology of human development: Experiment by nature and design* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 21.
- ²⁵ Stephen F. Hamilton, Mary Agnes Hamilton, and Karen Pittman “Principles for Youth Development”, (2004), 13.
- ²⁶ Gill Jones, *Youth: 17 Key Concepts*, 88.
- ²⁷ Gill Jones, *Youth: 17 Key Concepts*, 95-96.
- ²⁸ Xavier Úcar Martínez, Manel Jiménez-Morales, Pere Soler Masó & Jaume Trilla Bernet, “Exploring the Conceptualization and Research of Empowerment in the Field of Youth”, (2016), 408.
- ²⁹ Xavier Úcar Martínez, Manel Jiménez-Morales, Pere Soler Masó & Jaume Trilla Bernet, “Exploring the Conceptualization and Research of Empowerment in the Field of Youth”, (2016), 407.

³⁰ Xavier Úcar Martínez, Manel Jiménez-Morales, Pere Soler Masó & Jaume Trilla Bernet, “Exploring the Conceptualization and Research of Empowerment in the Field of Youth”, (2016), 408.

³¹ Xavier Úcar Martínez, Manel Jiménez-Morales, Pere Soler Masó & Jaume Trilla Bernet, “Exploring the Conceptualization and Research of Empowerment in the Field of Youth”, (2016), 408.

³² Xavier Úcar Martínez, Manel Jiménez-Morales, Pere Soler Masó & Jaume Trilla Bernet, “Exploring the Conceptualization and Research of Empowerment in the Field of Youth”, (2016), 410-12.

³³ Xavier Úcar Martínez, Manel Jiménez-Morales, Pere Soler Masó & Jaume Trilla Bernet, “Exploring the Conceptualization and Research of Empowerment in the Field of Youth”, (2016), 413.

³⁴ Xavier Úcar Martínez, Manel Jiménez-Morales, Pere Soler Masó & Jaume Trilla Bernet, “Exploring the conceptualization and research of empowerment in the field of youth”, *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, (2017).

³⁵ Sona Farid-Arbab, *Moral Empowerment: In Quest of a Pedagogy* (Willamette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2019), 19.

³⁶ Zohar, Danah, *The Quantum Self*, William Morrow, (1991), 217-18.

³⁷ Fundación para la Aplicación y Enseñanza de las Ciencias, *Discourse on Social Action: Basic Concepts* (Cali: 2015), 17.

³⁸ Xavier Úcar Martínez, Manel Jiménez-Morales, Pere Soler Masó & Jaume Trilla Bernet, “Exploring the Conceptualization and Research of Empowerment in the Field of Youth”, (2016), 405-18.

³⁹ Sona Farid-Arbab, *Moral Empowerment: In Quest of a Pedagogy*, 23.

⁴⁰ J. E. Bellous and A. T. Pearson, “Empowerment in teacher education” in Biesta, G., (Ed.), *Studies in Philosophy and Education* (1995), 54.

⁴¹ Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (2023), 54

⁴² National Commission on Resources for Youth, “Youth Participation: A Concept Paper: A Report of the National Commission on Resources for Youth to the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Office of Youth Development, (1975).

⁴³ Checkoway, Barry, “What is Youth Participation”, *Children and Youth Services Review*, vol. 44(2), (2011), 342.

⁴⁴ Checkoway, Barry, “What is Youth Participation”, 342-3.

⁴⁵ McFadden, Mark G., “Resistance to Schooling and Educational Outcomes: Questions of Structure and Agency.” *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 16, no. 3, (1995), 300.

⁴⁶ Various versions of Hart’s ladder are available, including [Harts Laddar.pdf \(rnao.ca\)](#).

⁴⁷ Perry-Hazan, Lotem, and Anna Bauml, “On Youth Participation and Adult Manipulation: Exploring the Lowest Rung of Hart’s Ladder in a Youth Organisation”, *Childhood*, (2023): 2-3.

⁴⁸ Farzam Arbab, “Promoting A Discourse on Science, Religion and Development” in “The Lab the Temple and the Market” Sharon L. Harper (ed), (1999), 218.

⁴⁹ Suzanne M. Le Menestrel, Lisa A. Lauxman, “Voluntary Youth-Serving Organisations: Responding to the Needs of Young People and Society in the Last Century,” (2011), 143.

⁵⁰ Hieu Van Ngo, “Patchwork, Sidelining and Marginalization: Services for Immigrant Youth,” *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies* 7, no. 1, (March 6, 2009), 88.

⁵¹ John Shields and Omar Lujan, “Immigrant Youth in Canada: A Literature Review of Migrant Youth Settlement and Service Issues Knowledge Synthesis Report” (2018), vi; See also Van Ngo, Hieu. “Patchwork, Sidelining and Marginalization: Services for Immigrant Youth”, (2009), 90.

⁵² Van Ngo, Hieu, “Patchwork, Sidelining and Marginalization: Services for Immigrant Youth”, (2009), 89.

⁵³ Stephen F. Hamilton, Mary Agnes Hamilton, and Karen Pittman, “Principles for Youth Development, (2004), 10.

⁵⁴ Stephen F. Hamilton, Mary Agnes Hamilton, and Karen Pittman, “Principles for Youth Development, (2004), 10.

⁵⁵ Dustin Wood, Reed W. Larson, and Jane D. Brown, “How Adolescents Come to See Themselves as More Responsible Through Participation in Youth Programmes,” *Child Development* 80, no. 1 (January 1, 2009), 295–309.

⁵⁶ Stephen F. Hamilton, Mary Agnes Hamilton, and Karen Pittman, “Principles for Youth Development, (2004), 11.

⁵⁷ Brian D. Christens and Tom Dolan, “Interweaving Youth Development, Community Development, and Social Change Through Youth Organizing,” *Youth & Society* 43, no. 2 (June 1, 2011), 541.

⁵⁸ Ahna Ballonoff Sulieman, Parissa J. Ballard Hoyt, Lindsay Till, Emily J Ozer, “Applying a Development Lens to Youth-Led Participatory Action Research: A Critical Examination and Integration of Existing Evidence”, *Youth and Society* 53(1) (2021), 26-53.

⁵⁹ Ahna Ballonoff Sulieman, Parissa J. Ballard Hoyt, Lindsay Till, Emily J Ozer, “Applying a Development Lens to Youth-Led Participatory Action Research: A Critical Examination and Integration of Existing Evidence”, 26-53.

⁶⁰ Stephanie M Pirroni, “Interweaving Personal and Community Transformation in a Capability Approach: An Education for development Case Study in Colombia,” PhD dissertation, (2019). See also Ahna Ballonoff Sulieman, Parissa J. Ballard Hoyt, Lindsay Till, Emily J Ozer, “Applying a Development Lens to Youth-Led Participatory Action Research: A Critical Examination and Integration of Existing Evidence”, 34.

⁶¹ Stephen F. Hamilton, Mary Agnes Hamilton, and Karen Pittman, “Principles for Youth Development”, 25.

⁶² Jeffrey Kamara, “Youth Policy: What Works and What Doesn’t”, (2008). See also John Shields and Omar Lujan, “Immigrant Youth in Canada: A Literature Review of Migrant Youth Settlement and Service Issues Knowledge Synthesis Report”, (2018).

⁶³ Keith Newman, “Canadian Millennials: Social Values Study” (2017), <https://www.environicsinstitute.org/projects/project-details/canadian-millennial-social-values-study>.

⁶⁴ Keith Newman, “Canadian Millennials: Social Values Study” (2017), <https://www.environicsinstitute.org/projects/project-details/canadian-millennial-social-values-study>.

⁶⁵ Stacey Hallman, Heather, Lathe, Martel, Laurent, Menard, France-Pascale, “Young adults living with their parents in Canada in 2016”, (2017).

⁶⁶ Canadian Council for Youth Prosperity, “Canadian Youth in Precarious Work,” - Snapshot Issue 1, (2021), (wildapricot.org).

⁶⁷ Canadian Council for Youth Prosperity, “Youth in Canada: A Profile”, Youth in Canada: A Profile (2020), (wildapricot.org).

⁶⁸ Labour Market Information Council, “Labor Market Outcomes of Immigrant Youth: Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic”, (2021).

⁶⁹ Daniel Mains, "Hope is Cut: Youth Unemployment, and the Future of Urban Ethiopia" in *African Studies Quarterly* vol. 14(3) (2012), 193.

⁷⁰ Daniel M. Shannon, "Writing Our Identities for Successful Endeavors: Resettled Refugee Youth Look to the Future," *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 33:1, 75, (2019).

⁷¹ Deepak Mathey, "Career Decision-Making of Immigrant Young People Who are Doing Well: Helping and Hindering Factors." PhD Dissertation (University of British Columbia, 2019).

⁷² Shannon M. Daniel, "Writing Our Identities for Successful Endeavors: Resettled Refugee Youth Look to the Future", 75-7.

⁷³ Amelia Curran, "The Construction of At-Risk Youth: A Qualitative Study of Community-Based Youth-Serving Agencies", Masters thesis (2010).

⁷⁴ Mantz Yorke, "Employability in Higher Education: What It Is, What It Is Not" *Learning & Employability Series*, (2006).

⁷⁵ Mantz Yorke, "Employability in the Undergraduate Curriculum: Some Student Perspectives", *European Journal of Education*, 39(4), 409-427.

⁷⁶ Valentina Cuzzocrea, "Young People and Employability", In Wyn, J., Cahill, H. (eds) *Handbook of Children and Youth Studies*. (Singapore: Springer, 2015).

⁷⁷ Wendy Mckeen, "Diminishing the concept of social policy: The shifting conceptual ground of social policy debate in Canada", *Critical Social Policy*, 26(4), (2006), 870.

⁷⁸ Wendy Mckeen, "Diminishing the concept of social policy: The shifting conceptual ground of social policy debate in Canada", 870-71.

⁷⁹ Val Gillies, "Raising the Meritocracy", *Sociology* 39 (2005): 835 - 853.

⁸⁰ Melanie Walker and Samuel Fongwa, *Universities, Employability and Human Development*. (2017), 37.

⁸¹ John Shields and Omar Lujan, "Immigrant Youth in Canada: A Literature Review of Migrant Youth Settlement and Service Issues Knowledge Synthesis Report", (2018).

⁸² Bancroft, Lindy, "Not So NEET: A Critical Policy Analysis of Ontario's Youth Job Connection Programme", *Social Justice and Community Engagement*. (2017), 27.

⁸³ Deepak Mathey, "Career Decision-Making of Immigrant Young People Who are Doing Well: Helping and Hindering Factors," (2019).

⁸⁴ Shields, John and Lujan, Omar. “Immigrant Youth, Settlement, and Resilience: A Qualitative Examination of Newcomer Youth and Settlement Services – Primary Research Report”, (Toronto: Centre for Excellence in Research on Immigration and Settlement, 2019). See also, Emilia Gonzalez, “Centering Newcomer Youth’s Experiences in Theory and Practice: An Ethical Approach to Generating Knowledge and Developing Equitable Services in Montreal” master’s Thesis (Montreal: McGill University, 2021).