

Canadian Policy Research Networks Inc. (CPRN)

600 – 250 Albert Street Ottawa, Ontario K1P 6M1

Tel: (613) 567-7500 Fax: (613) 567-7640

Web Site: <http://www.cprn.org>

Highlights:
Youth and the Transition to Citizenship

By

Caroline Beauvais
Lindsey McKay and
Adam Seddon

Based on Discussion Paper CPRN|02
A Literature Review on Youth and Citizenship
June 2001

Highlights: Youth and the Transition to Citizenship

Citizenship is a status traditionally reserved for adults. Therefore, while many people might accept that youth are *citizens*, at the same time they might be skeptical of the notion that youth, even those over 18, are *full citizens*. Somehow it seems that they cannot be more than “citizens-in-becoming.”

In fact, examining their situation shows youth to have a precarious citizenship status. While they may have their own passports and driving or marriage licenses, and they can form couples and families, take up full-time work, be put into jail and vote, they also seem caught between statuses. Some young people are the backbone of and big earners in the “e-economy,” sometimes becoming very rich before they are old enough to drink alcohol. Yet, many still live at home, and more are returning home after time at university or living as a couple.

Youth unemployment rates are high, and many young people remain for years in part-time jobs or internships. Some governments show little compunction about denying social assistance benefits to young people who have reached the age of majority, and forcing their families to maintain “responsibility” for them, even though they are old enough to vote. HIV/AIDS and other health menaces can make sexual activity a frightening prospect, even as the age of menarche is dropping. While there is increasing evidence that, on average, girls do much better than boys in formal education, young women heading lone-parent families have one of the highest poverty rates in the country.

At the same time, the category of “youth” has been extended considerably in recent years. Younger children are now included, since the category is sometimes applied to those aged 12 and older. More common, however, is the prolongation of the status until the age of 29 or even older.

If there is a consensus that it is normal for a 16-year-old not to have full citizenship rights, the situation is quite different for young people over 18. We will observe that many and perhaps an increasing number of young people over the age of majority and well into their twenties have the formal, legal rights of citizenship but do not enjoy full citizenship. The reality of their situation is a limited capacity to exercise full citizenship.

Given all of these real but contradictory characteristics of young people’s lives in Canada today, attention to their citizenship status is in order. The literature review upon which this report is based represents an effort to create some order out of this confusion. It reviews in detail the literature on youth, re-reading it so as to answer the question: *What is the citizenship status of young people today and, in particular, where are the inequalities across social and economic categories, as well as between younger and older people?* It also assesses whether young adults have the capacity to achieve full citizenship. As they gain formal civil and political rights, are they also gaining social and economic rights? *Do they have the necessary independence to construct the full citizenship that most older adults enjoy?*

CPRN embarked on this project to lay the groundwork for future research on youth as citizens. A literature review was conducted to identify areas of research that were well covered and determine where more research was needed. The review focused primarily on published and predominantly academic literature on youth. It covers English and French material that deals with young people in Canada and in several other countries.

A Roundtable was held to discuss the draft report, the proceedings of which are summarized in Appendix A. The detailed findings are contained in discussion paper CPRN|02, *A Literature Review on Youth and Citizenship*. This report presents the highlights of those findings.

A Framework for Thinking about Youth and Citizenship

We consider that citizenship is composed of three analytical dimensions: (1) rights and responsibilities, (2) access, and (3) feelings of belonging (that is, identity). All three dimensions must be present in order for someone to be a citizen, although not everyone has the same rights, responsibilities, access, or feelings of belonging.

The extent to which people enjoy these three dimensions of citizenship establishes a certain citizenship status, often one that is less than *full citizenship*. This is the case for many youth, either because their age or their social and economic circumstances exclude them from full citizenship.

Being a *full* citizen, therefore, means having the capacity to exercise the three dimensions of citizenship. It is more than having theoretical rights to citizenship, it means *actively seeking to engage* so as to realize one's rights, exercise one's responsibilities, have access to political institutions, be empowered, and share a sense of belonging to the community – national as well as local. Being a full citizen means having the resources and opportunity to participate in different areas of life.

Independence is a key element of citizenship because it helps gain – and indeed underpins – each of these three dimensions of citizenship. Following this argument, the longer that young people stay dependent, the longer it is likely to take to become a full citizen.¹

The extent to which youth from different socioeconomic groups can achieve the independence required to be full citizens varies. So, the second foundational principle is that of *equality*. Equality is another key principle of citizenship since theorists have long agreed that there is no real citizenship without the notion of equality among citizens. Therefore, if rights, responsibilities and access are unequally distributed among young people of the same age or between young adults and older adults, then the citizenship status of some is limited.

¹ We admit that this vision of citizenship is derived from a western notion of “the good life.” It does not take into account cultural differences, such as societies in which adult children remain in the family home even while they are founding their own families. Rather, it assumes that the experience of Western European and Anglo-American countries of the last century apply to Canada as a whole. Therefore, we assume a sign of being fully adult is living separately from ones parents. The reason we adopt this stance is that it underpins the vast majority of the academic literature reviewed here. Developing indicators more sensitive to diversity would be a research task, and the need for such is one of the conclusions of this work.

Some youth enjoy a better citizenship status than others, and we will seek to uncover patterns of discrimination and barriers to full citizenship. There are two different ways that equality can be examined:

- One is to assess the extent to which inequalities exist among young people of different social backgrounds, ethnicities, national allegiances or genders.
- The second is to examine intergenerational inequalities.² If independence is a defining component of full citizenship, there are consequences in terms of intergenerational inequalities in prolonging young people's period of dependency.

While there is a great deal of literature on youth, it has not been analyzed from a citizenship perspective. This is an important task because research on youth citizenship issues in Canada, especially in English, remains rare. In contrast to the United Kingdom and France, the matter of youth and citizenship has rarely been taken up. Some thinking about the matter has taken place in Quebec. Nonetheless, this remains the “exception that proves the rule” that insufficient attention has gone to the vital matter of young people's rights, responsibilities, current citizenship status, and access to full citizenship.

It is thus through a “citizenship lens” that connections are made between two sets of literature, one that deals with youth and one that deals with citizenship. The literature review undertaken has two goals: (1) to revisit the literature on youth using a citizenship lens, and (2) to describe the current citizenship status of young people, as well as the capacity of young adults to become full citizens. Keeping in mind the components of citizenship, we examined twenty areas of young people's lives to determine the citizenship status of youth today. The conclusions and observations presented in the rest of the paper are all drawn from the detailed analysis found in *A Literature Review on Youth and Citizenship*. The complete bibliography is also found there.

Education – An Avenue to Exclusion or a Route to Independence and Equality?

With respect to education, we found that in most cases it promoted a move towards greater independence and equality, and was a primary route to full citizenship. In some cases, however, educational experience was a factor limiting the achievement of full citizenship. Many young people experience exclusion from mainstream Canadian society. Despite declines in the high school drop-out rate, a full 20 percent of young people fail to graduate. In the past, those with low levels of education could find employment, but those who now fail to complete high school face the very real prospect of being unemployed for long periods or finding poor paying and insecure work. They are therefore more likely to live in poverty, without the economic independence considered key to achieving full citizenship. This problem particularly affects Aboriginal youth and those from disadvantaged families, perpetuating inequality across generations.

² As Gøsta Esping-Andersen writes in *Les trois mondes de l'État-Providence*, « la plupart d'entre nous a d'ailleurs probablement eu des emplois peu rémunérés dans sa jeunesse sans avoir à en souffrir de façon significative plus tard. La question est alors celle des garanties de mobilité sociale. Un état-providence vraiment « parétien » pour le 21^{ème} siècle est celui qui redéfinit les droits sociaux dans le sens d'un ensemble de garanties, ou de droits, dans le sens de meilleures opportunités et d'une plus grande mobilité » (Paris : Presses universitaires de France, 1999: 294).

Exclusion can also exist within the school system itself. Schools continue to stream young women into “traditional” career paths and gender roles. The in-school presence of both racism and discrimination based on ability is well documented. These practices often have the effect of isolating young people who are deemed “different”.

While there is a growing concern that young people must “learn” to become good citizens, citizenship education is not taught in a direct or consistent manner. Rather, the focus remains on the study of the social sciences more generally and on political institutions. Observers fear that even an explicit citizenship education curriculum will not encourage young people to think about it critically if it is not accompanied by a more intensive practice of engagement by youth. Moreover, the institutions most responsible for teaching citizenship, the schools, are often seen as insufficiently democratic. Therefore, the school environment may not reinforce good citizenship practices.

Studies have found a relationship between volunteering or extracurricular activities and political involvement later in life. Therefore, some observers are alarmed about the effects that budget cuts may have on access to extracurricular activities. The costs of participation in sports, in combination with the introduction of user fees, is making it increasingly difficult for all families, especially low-income ones, to maintain access. These trends may therefore have long-term implications for political engagement and for the social exclusion of disadvantaged members of society.

It was also found that overly simplistic messages that promote abstinence – from alcohol, tobacco and recreational drug-use – fail to provide young people with the proper tools and resources to make informed decisions. Abstinence is rejected as hypocritical given that many adults drink alcohol, for example. Moreover, recreational substance use often reflects an attempt to explore issues of personal identity, and in part represents a young person’s shift to a more mature adult status. Insufficient information is also a concern regarding sex education. Researchers and young people themselves observe that the teaching of sexuality in school is often inadequate, failing to provide young people with the knowledge and capacity to make informed and intelligent choices. This can be detrimental in a world characterized by fatal sexually transmitted diseases. Compounding this lack of appropriate education is the limited and declining access to preventive health services.

Education, Economic Independence, and Security

Those who have a good education (that is, a post-secondary degree or diploma) fare much better in the labour market than their less educated peers. When literature on youth touches upon issues of citizenship, it often presents the argument that access to a quality job is a key foundation upon which independent citizenship status rests. However, general trends in the youth labour market are negatively affecting many young people. There has been a 20-year trend of declining real and relative earnings of young people, a trend observed in most industries and for most educational groups.

During the same period, and especially so over the past decade, there has been a significant increase in post-secondary enrolment numbers. While in absolute terms, access to post-secondary education has increased for all groups, it has increased at a slower pace for those from poorer backgrounds. In short, polarization is taking place along socioeconomic lines.

Given that studies consistently highlight the sensitivity of poorer students to tuition increases, this polarization in access probably reflects the steady increases in tuition rates that have taken place since the early 1980s. Concomitantly, the incidence and depth of student debt have increased markedly over the past two decades, as has the reported increase in repayment difficulties. Moreover, young people have been denied the right to declare bankruptcy on their student debts for a full decade after graduation, a restriction that will haunt them well into their adult years.

Along with access to a good job, the ability to leave home has been used as a major indicator that young people are close to attaining independence. Studies find that the age at which the majority of young people are leaving the parental household has been increasing, therefore raising issues about their citizenship status. This is an outcome that reflects many factors including tight housing markets, a decline in relative wages, high levels of unemployment, prolonged education, and high levels of student debt.³

Yet another indicator that independence has been attained is the timing of having a child. With both the lengthening school-to-work transition and delays in leaving the parental home, the age of family formation has been rising. The result is that young women may find themselves “squeezed out” of their prime childbearing years.

Justice and Freedom from Discrimination

In terms of justice and freedom from discrimination, the literature on youth points to several areas in which young people’s citizenship status is infringed upon. This occurs directly and indirectly on the basis of age and due to membership in a particular category (e.g., gay or lesbian) or community (e.g., newcomers to Canada). If youth come into contact with the criminal justice system, harsh treatment is a likely outcome given the current shift towards a more punitive manner in dealing with youth crime. In addition, youth sometimes encounter discrimination when they enter the labour force a tier lower than their older and more established co-workers. Indeed, two-tiered compensation structures disproportionately affect young people because youth represent the majority of new entrants to the labour market.

Being homeless or lacking financial resources can contribute to a weakened citizenship status due to problems in accessing health and social services. Youth are not treated equally with respect to social assistance requirements and, for many, this “entitlement” is conditional upon meeting certain obligations such as workfare or participating in training programs.

³ The return of young people to the parental home after they have left may be part of new set of living arrangements “chosen” by young people. However, for much of the academic literature, it still represents a threat to their capacity to achieve full citizenship.

In matters of reproductive health, contraception may be difficult for young people to obtain. As well, there are significant barriers for young women in accessing health care services should they seek to terminate a pregnancy.

In several policy spheres, the treatment of young people can be seen as inconsistent – youth are both treated as adults and children. Rights and responsibilities are not granted in tandem but, instead, are uneven and inconsistent. There is also considerable variation across Canadian jurisdictions in the age restrictions set for accessing services.

Personal Security and Well-being in the Community

The ways that youth interact with their environment has an effect on their citizenship status. The literature on youth and health indicates that the right of youth to protection from harm is infringed upon most by the transportation system and by societal problems related to gender, poverty and marginalization. At the most fundamental level, youth morbidity and mortality is highly affected by injuries in motor vehicle crashes, sports, and intentional violence. Systemic discrimination against young women and Aboriginal youth has a disproportionate effect on the rates of sexual violence and the high suicide rates they experience.

These findings suggest that the context in which youth live put certain young people in a position where they lack access to basic citizenship rights such as personal and environmental security. Research also points out that young people may also be the perpetrators of violence. In such cases, young people fail to uphold their citizenship responsibilities of obeying the law and refraining from harming others.

Youth participation in recreation is a form of engagement in the community. It, too, is mediated by differential access since income, transportation and parental rules serve as barriers to participation. There is a significant difference in leisure activities between male and female youth, and among some youth of colour. Opportunities for extracurricular activities in sports and culture also vary significantly by school or school district, and by young people's access to material resources. The introduction of user fees and the high cost of recreation equipment have made class differences increasingly significant. Inadequate physical activity among young people may undermine their access to health and well-being in the future, as well as in the present.

Identity, Belonging, and Participation

Youth citizenship is about identifying with and feeling a sense of belonging to one's community. This would logically translate into political participation at all levels of government. However, the literature examining this aspect of young people's lives identifies areas in which young people feel excluded and do not fully participate. While there are several research gaps in the youth literature as it relates to political citizenship and belonging, the context in which young people live emerges as an important factor in explaining patterns of participation.

Societal problems such as racial discrimination and unemployment affect the outlook of youth. Having hope for the future and feelings of belonging influence both youth participation in mainstream politics and their resistance to marginalization, which is expressed through the formation of subcultures and via political protest.

The Citizenship Status of Young People Today – Findings and Comments

This survey of the literature has found that youth possess a citizenship status that might best be characterized as *precarious*. Many young people are arriving at full citizenship, enjoying its fruits, and contributing to their communities. Nonetheless, the picture is not equally positive for all youth. Problems still remain, and this conclusion will focus on areas in which Canadians still need to think about improvements to ensure that *all* young people first can aspire to, and then achieve, full citizenship in our society.

For young people who have passed the age of majority and therefore have attained “citizenship,” precariousness in this status comes from the gap between formal and substantive rights. Many youths have not attained full citizenship, because they have not yet achieved *independence*. For younger Canadians, their citizenship rights are limited by their age, to be sure, but we have also observed that there are frequently contradictions between the responsibilities expected of young people and the rights conferred upon them.

Moreover, for both older and younger groups, we have found significant patterns of inequality related to the economic, social, and cultural circumstances of youth subgroups. Therefore, the notion of *precariousness* best captures the experience of youth citizenship with respect to the exercise of rights and responsibilities, as well as to both access and belonging.

The Labour Market – A Key to Accessing Independence for Youth?

Access to quality employment is identified by many authors as the “key” that unlocks the door to independence, thereby serving as a major prerequisite to full citizenship. Yet many young people are in a precarious position with respect to the labour market. Changes in the labour market disproportionately affect youth because they are the newest entrants to the world of work, and are therefore among the first to experience changes in labour market and hiring practices.

The evidence suggests that, over the past two decades, it has become increasingly difficult for young people to establish economic independence, although labour market conditions have improved somewhat over the last year or so. The state of the labour market that young people enter is of paramount importance their ability to move out of the family home and form their own autonomous household. Decent employment is also needed to provide sufficient economic resources to support children and to provide young people with the capacity to participate meaningfully in their community.

New patterns in the school-to-work transition are further delaying the movement of many youth into independence. While increasing numbers of young people are staying in school longer and thereby improving their labour market prospects, rising debt levels and the prolonged school-to-work transition are resulting in the formation of autonomous households later in life. This is due in part to the increased cost of schooling and the relatively lower real wages that young educated workers now command vis-à-vis previous generations. In other words, although education is necessary to do well, the pay-off is no longer as great as it once was.

While the labour market appears to have weakened for most if not all youth, some are better equipped to deal with these obstacles than others. Young people from wealthier backgrounds are more likely to attend institutions of higher learning and emerge with substantially less student debt. Similarly, there is a correlation between being poor and dropping out of school. As a result, the more well-off will be in a better position to succeed in the labour market vis-à-vis youth who come from poorer backgrounds. The fact that drop-out rates are higher among those from poorer and Aboriginal families suggests that an intergenerational transmission of marginalization and poverty may be occurring.

With “employment flexibility” having become the order of the day, we are in effect expecting young people to accept this state of affairs as normal. However, little attention is paid to the consequences of this trend. For young people, being adaptive often comes at the expense of financial security, with job stability and quality pay becoming increasingly elusive. The age at which young people become self-sufficient and participate in society has been postponed.

The Retreat of the State – Are We Abandoning Youth Citizenship to the Market?

The literature reveals that an increasing number of young people are experiencing a citizenship status that is best described as precarious due to various “holes” in social policy. The abandonment of the nominal commitment to full employment, increased difficulties in accessing higher education due to funding cuts, a lack of affordable housing, limited access to health and social services, and cutbacks to social assistance are all increasing the number of gaps through which young people may fall. Many youths are therefore finding themselves *en route* to exclusion.

For a number of authors, these problems are linked to an observed retreat of the state. Today’s conventional wisdom is that a lean state is a good state. Therefore, individuals, families and communities are expected to take increased responsibility for themselves and others. However, when families lack adequate resources to help young people integrate into society, there is less of a safety net to which they can turn in difficult times. In addition, some jurisdictions are denying young people social assistance or limiting their access to it. Moreover, housing markets are tight in many of Canada’s larger cities, a situation worsened by the removal of rent controls and by the capping of social housing expenditures, leading to a decline in affordable housing. Therefore, although young people are legally deemed to be adults at the age of 18, economic independence occurs later in life, and families are increasingly forced to help support their children well into their twenties.

One of the major outcomes of the retreat of the state and the increased reliance upon market forces is polarization among youth. The inability to claim citizenship rights means that private resources and access to social capital increasingly determine who has access and who does not. Policies that previously ensured equal opportunity to full citizenship have eroded, with the result that the capacity of youth to achieve independence is increasingly conditioned by their relationship to their parents and less by their relationship to the state. Hence, those who come from wealthier backgrounds have more resources to draw upon – primarily provided by their parents. This divides youth into “haves” and “have-nots” based on family background.

In short, the intergenerational reproduction of social inequalities results in different opportunities and constraints for youth. In the current political climate, where youth issues rarely find their way on to the political radar, the *de facto* policy appears to be one of allowing citizenship rights to be determined by the market.

Youth Citizenship Status – More than Economics

Despite the importance of economic security, placing too much emphasis on the labour market can lead to a form of economic determinism. In other words, economic independence and employment may become mistaken for acquisition of full citizenship. If this were indeed the case, a simple solution would be a return to a policy promoting full employment.

While access to quality employment is very important, this literature review has shown that other factors must also be considered. Full citizenship includes the right to be free from discrimination, the right to have adequate access to health care and social services, and to have the ability to be politically active. These non-economic issues have yet to be given adequate attention and, as this paper has highlighted, today’s young people face complex challenges on the road to full citizenship in these areas.

Feelings of alienation from one’s community can often result in people having a lack of interest or desire to better one’s community. In this vein, it might be worth considering what the community can do to better support the move of young people into independence. While access to the labour market is extremely important in the move to independent citizenship, family and community also have important roles to play.

In terms of justice, as well as for access to social services and health care, the literature shows that the ages for acquiring different rights are varied and inconsistent. This appears to weaken young people’s rights. Entitlements become privileges that are accessible only on the condition that young people fulfill obligations that do not apply to others. The citizenship status of youth is also weakened for those who belong to groups that face discrimination in society: gay and lesbian youth; homeless youth; young mothers; youth seeking contraception; pregnant women who wish to terminate a pregnancy; and young low-income parents. In many instances, young people are too old to receive services targeted at children, and too young to qualify for those provided to adults. Youth are blamed when they veer from the norm but, at the same time, they are denied equal access to the means needed to achieve independence, act responsibly, and fully participate in society.

We have also seen that “younger” youths have restricted opportunities to influence decisions that concern them. Even though we know that participation is a key component of citizenship education, this is not what the curriculum across the country tends to emphasize. One effect of citizenship education without meaningful participation could be to emphasize the responsibilities of citizens earlier in life without addressing the corresponding rights. Empowering youth to make healthy choices also appears to be missing in health education, where youth want more complex and inclusive discussions. The desires or dilemmas youth face regarding sexuality or substance use are not reflected in educational messages to delay or abstain from such activities.

Also a problem for many youth is direct and systemic discrimination in schools is on the basis of race, sexual orientation, ability, and class. The possible presence of a “hidden curriculum” for girls at school can encourage the persistence of “gendered” choices in careers as well as in participation in recreational activities.

The literature review has also shown that violence is a problem for many young people, often resulting in injuries and, in some cases, death. While automobile crashes are the primary cause of youth mortality, many young people fail to be protected from violence, and young women experience a greater incidence of sexual violence than do young men. Disturbingly high rates of youth suicide occur in Aboriginal communities, in part a reflection of abject poverty and the loss of cultural identity. High levels of sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS, and a lack of basic needs such as food and shelter for those forced to live on the street, illustrate other ways in which marginalization affects human capital and citizenship status.

The Implications of New Trends on Full Citizenship

What was in the past a relatively smooth and intersecting set of changes over the life course has become more disjointed and prolonged for many young people today. The extension of the period called “youth” can have major implications for young people’s capacity to become full citizens. The lengthening of the “transition” of youth to adulthood by 10 to 15 years often comes at the cost of postponing the process of leaving home, obtaining a first secure job, purchasing a first home and, if desired, the arrival of a baby.

The first implication of this lack of independence is that it can possibly delay parenthood for those who wish to have children. Young women require many years of education to attain a salary equal to men and high enough to form an “autonomous household” – in other words, enough to pay off high student debts, rent or purchase a home, and support a family. Due to labour market conditions, obtaining secure employment with the right to parental leave is not likely to be acquired until a woman is in her late twenties or her thirties, if at all.

This situation raises several issues. First, it suggests that teen pregnancy may not be the most significant reproductive problem of youth. Second, it raises the question of the “legitimate” age for childbearing. The central issue with respect to parenthood thus revolves around young people’s right to have and raise children in an environment free from poverty, and within a reasonable timeframe (that is, before women reach 36 to 42 years of age, when their fertility declines). The links to socioeconomic status found in much of the research – pushing some women to choose to have children before they are economically stable *and* forcing others to postpone childbearing – indicate that *independence* is the important variable, not *age*.

This example shows us that “youth issues” need to be seen in the context of overall societal shifts. For example, teen pregnancy rates need to be placed in the context of broader trends such as older ages for marriage, more co-habitation, a decline in lower-skilled jobs for high school graduates, declining wages, unequal sexual relationships, and challenges in negotiating safe sex. Similarly, youth crime occurs within contexts such as changing family patterns, declining community services, reduced investments in recreation, diminishing social resources (which vary by province), and a lack of support for youth in care once they reach age 18.

The prolongation of “youth” also raises some questions about intergenerational equity. While issues such as health care for the ageing population are important, they risk overshadowing issues confronting the needs of young people. The dominant political agenda stresses issues affecting older people, such as retirement, health care, and taxes. This could alienate young people, who are more concerned about access to education, employment and housing, and in the prevention of illness and injury. The concerns of youth seldom register on the political radar, although calls for their increased participation in political processes are on the rise.

Some authors observe that unions, employers and older workers also need to become more conscious and sensitive to the difficulties that many young people are experiencing as they try to enter into the world of full-time work. While there has been a great deal of attention paid to issues facing those trying to exit the labour market through retirement, the issues that are of primary concern to those trying to enter the labour force have received relatively little attention.

Youths Who Face Particular Barriers in Accessing Full Citizenship

There is often a tendency in the literature to treat youth as a homogeneous group. However, this paper has illustrated that young people come from diverse backgrounds and face many different challenges. While all young people are, in theory, capable of succeeding and attaining full citizenship, some face more onerous challenges than others. Indeed, a young person’s socioeconomic class, race, gender, place of residence, and age all have important consequences for their citizenship status. Physical ability (which can change over the life course) and sexual orientation are also important to the attainment of citizenship, and discrimination on these grounds may hinder its achievement.

The literature review also identified the absence of basic human rights for segments of the youth population who are lacking private resources. Without the necessities of life, and with the barriers to health faced by certain groups – the homeless, in particular, but also Aboriginal youth and those subject to discrimination – some youth are propelled into a process of exclusion that directs them further and further away from full citizenship. Unemployed youth, young people of Aboriginal descent, youth from low-income families, and immigrant youth are often reported to have particular difficulty in accessing full citizenship or often have a very tenuous citizenship status.

When a range of different issues are looked at as a whole, it is clear that there are inequalities among young people that preclude the possibility that all youth will have an equal opportunity to acquire full citizenship status. As this paper has shown, young people seem to be caught between statuses. Somewhere between childhood and adulthood, youth are “citizens-in-becoming” in search of equality and independence, whose citizenship status is, at best, precarious.

Areas for Further Research

In our attempt to determine the citizenship status of young people and their ability to become full citizens, we applied a citizenship framework to the stock of knowledge that currently exists about youth. While there is generally no shortage of information or case studies documenting trends, attempts to link these findings to the concept of citizenship remain rare. While some authors have tried to make a connection, especially certain Western European observers, North American literature making this link is essentially non-existent. The one exception was found in the Quebec literature. By and large, the link between citizenship – encompassing the principles of independence and equality – and the status of Canadian youth was one that *we* made.

Given that there has been relatively little interest in the citizenship status of youth in North American literature, further research on Canadian youth as citizens is needed. The gaps in the literature are many, thus providing numerous avenues for future exploration.

Based on this literature review, we have suggested a series of questions that might help guide various future research agendas. In light of the literature review, we have thematically divided potential areas for research into the following broad categories: youth-state relations and the global economy; independence; justice; identity; equality; belonging; health and safety; youth-to-youth; and environments. Roundtable participants identified additional gaps, which are outlined separately in Appendix A.

We feel that the question of young people and their citizenship status is extremely important. Therefore, we hope that this review promotes greater public dialogue and more in-depth research on the issues presented in the following sections.

Youth-State Relations and the Global Economy

- What changes in government policy have affected the citizenship status of youth? How do current policy changes affect young people's citizenship and their capacity to become full citizens?
- What role can governments play in assisting youth in their journey towards full citizenship?
- How can we design a youth policy that takes into account the interrelations between all the elements of youth citizenship status?
- What lessons do the experiences of youth in other industrialized countries have to offer Canada? What might Canada do differently?
- What are the opportunities and constraints for policy makers and for youth that result from international trade agreements and other changes in the international political economy? Do we need to build these dimensions into analyses, which have thus far focussed primarily on national circumstances?

Independence

- How does economic and social polarization affect young people? Are there more inequalities between youth than before? Do new groups face difficulties that were not evident 20 years ago? What groups are most at risk of failing to achieve full citizen status?
- Are current trends in the labour market (some of which have been at play for at least two decades) likely to disappear as the labour force ages or economic conditions improve, or are these new and permanent features of the labour market? To what extent are young people likely to "catch up" to older cohorts over the life course? Studies are needed to track the situation as the labour market turns up, and in order to identify opportunities for youth.
- Are declining investments in social housing having a disproportionate effect on young people? What is the economic cost of the lack of affordable housing for youth? What can be done by governments to alleviate the housing crisis that young people in many Canadian cities are currently facing? What lessons might we learn from other countries?
- In a context of reduction of state support, what are the consequences of family breakdowns to young people's citizenship and their access to independence? Do the changes to family structures affect the capacity of youth to be full citizens? Studies are needed to identify the types of family supports, programs for youth in care, and support for street youth that would allow young people to survive family breakdown.
- How are changes in young people's circumstances affecting decisions about childbearing and parenting? What policies are needed to enable parenting when one is still young?

- Material conditions influence decisions about childbearing. What impact does the need to save or spend money on children have on decisions to attend post-secondary school? What impact does educational achievement have on the capacity to have children? What is the relationship between parenting and lifelong learning? One way to approach these questions would be to undertake a comparative study examining the impact of different supports and different forms of labour market attachment on parenting decisions in Scandinavia, for example, as compared to Canada.
- The evidence that young people do not have access to social assistance and that parents on social assistance are struggling to make ends meet calls for a review of youth access to the means to survive. A broader survey of access and levels across the country could be followed by a study of what impact reliance on social assistance has on youth in the present as well as over time.

Justice

- What responsibilities are we expecting from youth? Do they coincide with their rights? This question could be asked in regard to the revision of the youth justice system, as well as social protection and education.
- What program interventions work best to foster good citizenship and discourage criminal behaviour? Analysis of the effects of access to recreation, mentoring, schooling, and so on would address this question.

Identity

- What are the aspirations of youth towards citizenship? We do not know what youth think about citizenship, what they define as citizenship, or what being a full citizen means to them.
- How youth see and understand their relationship with the state is at the heart of the notion of citizenship. Are current changes such as globalization affecting how youth perceive their relationship with the state? Are young people creating their own sense of citizenship in a context of globalization? Detailed dialogue about values and expectations would be useful to answer these questions, and to supplement public opinion poll data.

Equality

- A barrier to better knowledge of the impact of class and social differences on youth is the lack of statistics on socioeconomic status based on the family and later on individuals. Similarly, small studies indicate that newcomer and Aboriginal youth are not equal in some measures to other youth. The absence of statistics recording race and ethnicity hide these differences, however, preventing a comprehensive understanding of how youth of different backgrounds are fairing in terms of education and employment. Therefore, research including creation of new measures and indicators is needed to fill this gap.
- Despite the emphasis on the Canadian diversity model, there is serious lack of research and data on youth immigrants and different aspects of their citizenship status.

- Some youth lack access to the resources of citizenship on the basis of age or factors such as sexual orientation, family income, or gender. How can we improve equality of opportunity among youth? How do youth overcome the difficulties of marginalization? Answering this will require research into youth “who make it” and achieve full citizenship through the acquisition of economic independence and freedom from discrimination.

Belonging

- Given that the notion of citizenship is itself a “liberal” concept, and as such has tended to place the individual at the forefront of analysis, there might be some merit in moving the emphasis away from the individual and focussing more on communities as the unit of analysis. One area that requires attention for example is to examine how the environment and culture of the community impacts citizenship in terms of harm prevention.
- Are current trends leading young people to increasingly rely upon one another? Research might examine the living arrangements of young people who are or are not romantically involved but who form dependencies in order to pool resources and lower costs.
- What contributions do participation in recreation and leisure make to fostering citizenship?

Health and Safety

- What variation exists in health curricula across the country? It would be valuable to know what proportion of time is spent in such programs on specialized information (preventing addictions, sexuality, mental health, coping with negative life events, and so on) versus basic life skills (finances, nutrition, and so on).
- The violence youth encounter in the form of suicide attempts or intentional harm inflicted by others bears a relationship to the life circumstances in which young people live, circumstances that are often beyond their control. Further study of this major health problem is needed.
- Additional research is needed on patterns of hard drug use among youth.

Youth-to-Youth

- This literature review found that youth are not consistently practising safe sex, and the dynamics of relationships are important factor in this regard. Research is needed on equality within youth relationships, including how young people communicate with one other to protect their own health. What can be done to overcome unequal gender structures in these relationships so that all young people can exercise control over their health?
- How do youth adopt, adapt, reject or otherwise react to sexism? What impact do different experiences have on young people’s present citizenship status? For young women who are victims of violence, how does interaction with (or lack of protection from) the justice system influence their citizenship status?

Environments

- Literature on youth health demonstrates that unintentional injuries have a disproportionate impact on youth. To reduce deaths by automobiles, we need to better knowledge of what regulations reduce fatalities. A comparative study of differences in European and North America jurisdictions could lead to recommendations that would improve the protection of youth from premature mortality.

Appendix A. Roundtable Summary

The participants in the Roundtable found the draft paper to be a good review of the literature on youth, as read through a citizenship framework. They described this as an original reading of a large literature. Academic experts in the field confirmed this originality, despite the existence of a number of other literature reviews addressing, for example, youth at risk.

The day was divided into two, albeit unequal, parts. Each reflected one of CPRN's two goals in conducting this literature review: to assess the state of play in the field and to determine whether there is need for further research. Thus, the Roundtable's first objective was to assess the adequacy of the paper, *as a review of the relevant literature*. The second was to brainstorm in order to identify possible directions of research for each of CPRN's Networks, that is Family, Health and Work as well as the corporate program on citizen engagement.

Throughout the day participants made a number of key points that will be listed and expanded upon below, categorized by these two purposes. The goal is not to produce a verbatim account. Rather, it is to classify and organize the comments, so as to reflect the general spirit of the discussion and the ways that participants addressed CPRN's two objectives over the course of the whole day.

General Impressions of the Literature Review

A number of participants characterized the paper as "conventional," by which they meant that it reflected the current state of the literature on youth and their situation. In particular, because there has been a paradigm shift in recent decades, analyses of young people's concerns and needs tend to focus on a series of crises about youth, such as teen pregnancy and youth delinquency. One participant characterized the paradigm shift as a move away from the tendency in the 1960s to see youth as a social movement to the current treatment of youth as a problem. Others pointed out that this shift means young people are treated as a sociological category. However, the reality of their situation is often poorly presented. Hence the characterization of the literature as "conventional."

Participants first identified three major ways in which such treatment of youth in the academic literature, as reflected in this paper, is an inadequate reflection of the realities of most young people's lives. A recurring theme was the lack of "youth voice" in the review. In other words, what is written *about* youth is usually written *by* adults.

In general, the literature reviewed did not contain "voices of youth," which are often more engaged and active than the academic literature would lead one to expect. The difference between what young people say about themselves and how the academic literature describes them leads to a disjuncture and an inability to understand what the actual issues are. Young people are confronting new circumstances such as globalization, participation in social movements, new sources of knowledge and communication (i.e., the Internet), and changing identities. Youth were also identified as the target of global advertizing that promotes consumerism.

Given the lack of material produced by young people, there was deemed to be a “pathological bias” in the analysis of youth. This gives a very negative and even discouraging cast to this paper, although it does reflect the current state of the literature available and reviewed. Participants were hungry for more positive stories and reports about the successes of youth, in particular with respect to cultural and community participation. This type of information was thought to be a key to a better understanding of citizenship, and social and political participation. Others called for a focus on young people as agents of their own lives, rather than only as subjects of structural change.

The absence of voices of youth in the literature means that young people’s own definitions and understanding of citizenship could not be highlighted, an unavoidable limitation of the literature review methodology. Here, a number of participants stressed the need to distinguish between agencies that are *youth driven* and those that are *youth serving*.

Participants were aware, of course, that the reality of young people’s lives is often one of difficulty. In particular they identified the following areas of concern:

- Several participants agreed that the various sections of the paper gave short shrift to the particular needs of some social categories. There was not enough attention to the racism encountered by people of colour, in particular Black youth, and second and third generation immigrants.
- Other participants were concerned that too little attention was given in the literature and the paper to naming the problem as one of “poverty” and “exclusion.” Perhaps it is a mistake to say that the problem is youth, when it is more likely caused by structural factors such as income polarization and labour market changes, and political ones such as re-designed welfare states and social programs that do not meet young people’s needs. Examples given included child protection and programs for young parents.
- There were also questions raised about using a conceptual framework that stresses “independence” and puts a great deal of emphasis on labour market participation. Some participants were not comfortable connecting economic autonomy with independence. While participants recognized that the paper does reflect the literature, there was some concern that independence may be a culturally loaded concept. Different ethnocultural groups may define citizenship in fundamentally different ways.

Finally, it was observed that the lack of a “magic dividing line” between childhood, youth and adulthood is a problem characteristic of the literature on youth. There was a general discussion of the appropriate categories for defining “youth.” Some participants pointed out that there was a lack of literature from the discipline of psychology. The concepts of autonomy and independence are understood in different ways in the psychological literature. Moreover, an argument was made for greater recognition of differences based on age and particular points in the life course within the youth category. Others acknowledged that the de-synchronization described in the paper, and in the sociological and economic literature, makes a wider age band appropriate.

Specific Comments on the Literature Review – Small Group Discussions

The three small groups each addressed two sections of the report. The rapporteurs brought back a summary of the discussion to the plenary session. Despite focusing on only particular sections, there was actually a good deal of overlap among the three breakout groups and in the general plenary discussion. Therefore, the main themes are presented here, but not identified with a particular group.

Identifying Youth and their Circumstances

This theme came up with respect to the need for improved age categories, in order to reflect the different stages of life experienced as “youth.” There are different concerns for 15-year-olds compared to youth aged 25, for example. The “pathological bias” in the literature (described previously) leaves the experiences of the “healthy middle” silent. Participants stressed the need to analyze their situation as well. In particular, the tendency of observers, whether academics or policy makers, to reason in terms of “crises” – which critics consider false crises – produces a sense of unease and renders successes invisible. Youth disengage, but they also engage in other, albeit sometimes rebellious, ways.

Attention was drawn to differences in accessing social and cultural support for youth living in rural areas versus urban areas. Other issues not covered include the impact of virtual communities on the Internet, and the impact of migration, particularly among Aboriginal youth who move between communities in Western Canada. Concern was raised that barriers to accessing resources contribute to the isolation and disconnection that are consistent variables (across race, class and gender) among youth in need. Other participants identified the absence of attention in the paper to the family system as a source of difficulties in really identifying the situations young people confront.

Education

Education and educational institutions received a good deal of attention. The distinction made is the important one between “education as curriculum” and “education as an institutional setting” in which a number of processes affecting young people’s lives occur.

With respect to curriculum, discussion turned primarily on values education, in particular teaching certain values as the underpinning of citizenship. Some participants perceived that the objective of teaching citizenship is to promote compliance, not engagement. Participants were skeptical that the focus of many public authorities on citizenship education as a basis for social cohesion and stability would actually strengthen schools’ capacity to foster key citizenship practices, including democratic participation. In light of this concern, the undemocratic nature of school organization was also mentioned. Here some attention was also given to health education, beyond sexuality education, and the need to pay attention to anti-violence teaching to combat bullying.

With respect to the institutional setting of education, there was concern again about the citizenship “messages” school organizations might be sending via the hidden curriculum. Another issue was how to cope with the diversity of values characterizing Canadian society, and the need to identify a sub-set of these, which might be termed “citizenship values.”

Work and Employment

As in the first session, there were a number of comments focussing on the issue of labour market participation, restructuring and globalization. In particular, the experience of many young people was described as one of “multiple marginalizations” – associated with growing up in poverty, in care, without completing an education, and so on. However, political discourse and policy makers seemed to prefer to address factors of marginalization piecemeal, rather than holistically. Gender differences were also frequently raised, both with respect to earnings and types of work, and with respect to differing cultural values for gender relations. “Adult” organizations such as unions were identified as needing to take a more active role in engaging youth.

Youth Activism

Following up on the theme of “youth voices,” there were several calls for attention to young people’s activism, and the values underpinning their vision of citizenship. What motivates their opposition to current forms of free trade and globalization? What attachments lead to youth involvement and activism? When and under what conditions do some young people take on their citizen responsibility to participate? The importance of agency again came to the fore.

In particular, the media were singled out as too often demonizing young people and denying youth a voice. Other participants criticized the definition of participation used in the literature and the paper as too narrow, focussing too much on the political. They called for more attention to other forms of activism and the organizational life of youth in clubs, teams and religious groups. There was also interest in examining how youth Internet participation may be changing the definition of community.

Looking Forward – Suggestions for Research

Participants made a number of imaginative and highly constructive suggestions for future research directions that CPRN might follow.

- First among these suggestions was the need to listen to the voices of youth. Young people need to be built into research projects and provided with the opportunity to construct their own research projects – ones that would allow them to define their notions of citizenship, to identify their citizenship practices, to locate real barriers, and to put to rest common assumptions made about youth. This suggestion arose in all three segments of the Roundtable and was voiced by many participants, no matter their chronological age.
- Participants also recommended comparing the “haves” to the “have nots” among youth to examine the extent to which access to resources influences different kinds and degrees of civic participation.

- Another suggestion was to locate the discussion of young people and youth in an intergenerational framework, one that would allow for evidence-based discussion of intergenerational solidarity, including not only parents and children but also grandparents and grandchildren. Adult attitudes were pointed to as possibly the greatest barriers to youth participation and decision-making. To learn about youth, adult views also need to be examined. This notion linked to another research item – that of demographic change, and the consequences the ageing society will have for employment prospects and possibilities as well as for the sharing of resources in the coming decades.
- A number of participants called for research on governance, albeit framing their research concerns in a variety of ways. Here there was mention of the question of how to involve and engage youth in areas that are important to them, such as policing. Effectiveness of engagement was also a key concern, and participants were especially attentive to the need for such participation in governance to be meaningful, not token. Again the notion of best practices was mentioned, as was the need to address the contribution of adults and youth to youth-run organizations.
- Another research question related to governance was that of jurisdiction. Several participants pointed to the need for further research about local levels of government. Too much attention is paid to provincial or federal governments, while municipalities and other local authorities deliver a large number of the programs for young people and their families.
- Attention to the local level was frequently, but not exclusively, linked to the need for greater information about what policies and programs actually work. The list of such programs ranged from citizenship education and teaching values to those for labour market inclusion. Concern was expressed that research was not addressing the situation of the most vulnerable. While several participants sought to have best practices identified, others called for research that would locate Canadian practices vis à vis other jurisdictions.
- There was a call for research on citizenship education to move beyond simple advocacy. Participants spoke about a lack of knowledge on what is being taught, on how people learn values, and on identifying what works and what does not with respect to increasing civic participation.
- Participants frequently mentioned the need for research on some of the “forgotten categories” of young people such as youth with disabilities, those living with HIV/AIDS, young people from ethnocultural communities, participants in the sex trade, rural youth, and youth who are parenting. The links between citizenship and health could be further explored. There was also a mention that young people’s participation in organized religion and views of spirituality is too little researched.
- Social policy and particularly child protection remains a researchable area, despite the attention already given to it. In particular, research on mental health needs and policy were called for, as were studies of the consequences of cost reductions and rising demand across the health and social services generally.

CPRN Funding Sources

Core Funders

Canadian International Development Agency
Citizenship and Immigration
Fisheries and Oceans
Health Canada
Human Resources Development Canada
Public Works and Government Services Canada
Transport Canada

Corporate Support

TELUS (formerly BCT. Telus Communications)
Canadian Pacific Charitable Foundation
Clarica
Hydro Québec
IPSCO Inc.
Noranda Inc.
Power Corporation of Canada
The Bank of Montreal
The Royal Bank of Canada
Scotiabank
Sun Life Assurance Company of Canada

Family Network Support

Canadian Pacific Charitable Foundation

Project Funders

Canadian Heritage (Canadian Studies Program)
Citizenship and Immigration Canada
CPRN Research Development Fund
Health Canada
Human Resources Development Canada