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YOUTH CONFIDENCE IN LEARNING AND THE FUTURE A CONCEPT PAPER

APRIL 2010



Developing the Youth Confidence in Learning and the Future Project - A concept paper

Published by the Canadian Education Association (CEA)
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Toronto, ON M5V 2L1
Tel: 416.591.6300
Fax: 416.591.5345
www.cea-ace.ca

ISBN: 1-896660-52-5

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Acknowledgements

CEA would like to acknowledge the following for their important contributions to this concept paper: The Canadian Council on Learning for its financial support and, in particular, Wendy McMillan and Douglas Hodgkinson, for their careful and thoughtful reviews of drafts; the youth and expert roundtable participants for their insightful comments; and members of CEA's research advisory committee who shaped our early thinking.

The ideas expressed in this concept paper do not necessarily represent those of the Canadian Council on Learning.

Publié en français sous le titre:

Confiance des jeunes dans l'apprentissage et l'avenir – Document de concepte

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1.0 Introduction

If we want to know what kind of society we are going to have in the future, we need to know what young people are thinking and how their expectations, attitudes and aspirations will shape their pathways and future actions.

... Social change is not only a historical process to which people react but also a phenomenon created by the collective decisions and actions of people. Thus, the kinds of choices youth make about their own lives are likely to be associated with the kind of society that, collectively, they are constructing. (Flanagan, 2006)

The world has changed dramatically for young people, yet the implications for youth themselves and for the rest of society are not yet well understood. We know that most young people are aware of the complex and challenging world they face. Yet we are receiving mixed messages about how youth perceive their futures and how their perceptions affect their aspirations, expectations and choices. For example, while they tend to be optimistic about their personal futures, many young people are pessimistic about the future of their country and the world.

The Canadian Education Association (CEA) is developing a research and mobilization project to examine young people's confidence in their learning and how it influences their aspirations, expectations, and engagement with the world, in particular, their belief that they can act on the world to have a positive impact. The *Youth Confidence in Learning and the Future (YCLF)* initiative will address the gaps in our knowledge and help to kick-start conversations in communities across Canada about enhancing learning environments for young people. The project will profile youth's perceptions and attitudes and identify implications for education and other areas of policy and practice.

This paper explores the context and key ideas underlying the *Youth Confidence in Learning and the Future* initiative and will serve as a conceptual framework for the development of the research tools. Since we expect the conceptual framework to be refined throughout the process, this paper remains, for now, a working document open for further discussion and improvements.

We welcome your comments.

2.0 Background

The Canadian Council on Learning (CCL) funded CEA to develop a concept paper to define youth confidence and its dimensions; the link between young people's aspirations, expectations and behaviour; and possible domains or areas of focus. The project, formerly called a 'youth confidence index', was first pictured as a research tool for measuring and assessing young people's confidence in key aspects of their lives today and their expectations for the future. It was based on the assumption that measuring youth confidence would contribute to an understanding of young people's perceptions and how these perceptions shape their pathways and inclinations to act. The initial areas of interest were learning, working, participating, and caring.

From the earlier goals described above, the initiative has evolved to focus more clearly on learning and the future. Learning is central to human, social and economic development, and it is a gateway to these other areas of human activity - working, participating and caring. The four pillars of learning developed for UNICEF¹ - learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together, and learning to be - will serve as the foundations for exploring these important connections.

In 2009, CEA convened three roundtables to elicit feedback on a preliminary draft of a concept paper - one in Toronto with young people associated with the Ontario Student Trustees' Association and two in Ottawa with government and other social policy, education research, and academic experts. The roundtables, as well as an earlier meeting with research staff of the Canadian Council on Learning, provided thoughtful and constructive feedback. Some suggestions have been incorporated into this paper and others will be taken into consideration as the project moves forward. Three comments are explicitly acknowledged here because of their direct influence on this paper.

- The paper should be explicit about the mobilization role of the project in contributing to community conversations about youth, their perceptions and their prospects, as well as the importance of including youth in those conversations;
- We should not assume that a high level of confidence, either in self or in institutions, is always or necessarily positive. In situations where confidence is misplaced or unwarranted, a high level of confidence is not desirable;
- A numerical 'index' may not be the best approach, given the purpose of the project. An index is usually understood as a numerical scale based on *composite* indicators that are

¹ The four pillars of learning were developed in 1996 for UNESCO by the International Commission on Learning for the 21st Century, chaired by Jacques Delors.

used to compare variables with one another. The purpose of this research is to determine young people's perceptions and attitudes in order to document trends, challenge assumptions, and draw conclusions. A survey, supplemented perhaps by focus groups with young people, might be more appropriate. As CCL noted in its framework paper for the Composite Learning Index, one of the drawbacks of composite indicators is that they "cannot on their own shed light on specific problems that only individual indicators can reveal." (CCL, 2006:11).

3.0 Context: How the world has changed for young people

3.1 More uncertainty and risk

Compared to 30 years ago, young people in Canada and other industrialized countries are experiencing a world of greater complexity, diversity, and pluralism of values; an environmentally compromised world; more uncertain employment prospects; and less assurance of upward mobility. Today's generation of young people is the first in recent memory to earn lower incomes than their parents, as Canada's middle class shrinks in the face of increasing income polarization (Statistics Canada, 2008).

Young people's educational experiences have also changed. Youth are increasingly expected to deal with school as individuals who are held accountable for their performance and who face increased risks should they fail (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007). The movement of manufacturing jobs to low wage economies and the growth of high skilled jobs have eliminated the opportunities available to previous generations of young people who were able to enter the labour market with only a high school diploma or less.

Canada's youth unemployment rate of 16% is the highest it has been in 11 years (Statistics Canada, 2009). With post-secondary institutions and the job market becoming more competitive, the expectations of the public, parents, and students themselves have increased to reflect the higher stakes. A 2009 poll found that almost half of Canadians believe that Canada's education systems are not adequately preparing young people for the future (Harris/Decima, 2009).

Despite the gradual decline of high school drop-out rates and the fact that two-thirds of Canada's young people now attend post-secondary education, youth disaffection and disengagement continue to be issues in Canada. According to CEA's research, overall levels of engagement, particularly intellectual engagement, are quite low among 12- to 18-year olds in Canadian schools (Willms, Friesen, and Milton, 2009). This is consistent with international comparisons showing that Canada has higher rates of student *disengagement* than many countries, notwithstanding the fact that Canadian students rank high in international achievement tests (Willms, 2004).

Today's youth will also have to contend with the demographic and economic consequences of an aging population and all that entails in terms of diminishing political clout and the demands on a society's resources. Political influence may shift further away from young people as their proportion of the total population declines. Although the so-called 'Generation-Xers', those

born in the 1970s, may bear the brunt of these demographic changes, today's young people are experiencing a significant ripple effect.

Interestingly, young people in Canada appear optimistic about their personal futures, even in the face of a failing economy. Reginald Bibby, who has been studying young people for 30 years, interprets this to mean that today's youth are better equipped to deal with uncertainty than previous generations because young people are hopeful and "hope has transformative powers" (Bibby, as quoted in Goar, 2009). International research reveals the same tension between young people's optimism about their personal futures and their low level of confidence in the future of their country (Dusseldorp, 2007; Eckersley, 2007).

3.2 Greater connectedness and ways of engaging with the world

Young people's views of themselves and their place in the world are also undergoing a transformation. Youth today inhabit a world enabled by technology, a world of expanded opportunities for social connectedness, and a world of globalization and the dissolution of borders. More than in the past, young people are negotiating multiple identities and establishing and maintaining global connections. Modern day technology allows young people to have more close friends than previous generations although they may live continents away (Bibby, 2009). It is reasonable to ask, though, how "close" these friendships really are and whether technology-enabled connections might be more illusory than real. (Tilleczek, personal communication).

At the same time, some experts on youth behaviour are concerned that young people are so closely connected to their friends that they are becoming a 'self-referencing' group that looks primarily to other young people for its values and life lessons. According to Neufeld and Maté (2005), this situation may be problematic since young peoples' lives may not be sufficiently anchored in obligation and responsibility. Young people need and benefit from the intellectual and ethical guidance of adults, not only for moral development but also for healthy brain development (Neufeld and Maté, 2005; OECD, 2002). Paradoxically, today's youth have a better relationship with their parents than previous cohorts. What young people find important is friendship, freedom, a comfortable life, and a good education, considerably more so than money, looks, popularity and spirituality (Bibby, 2009).

Young people's approach to civic and political engagement is also changing. While less politically literate and less likely to vote than older Canadians, young people are very interested and actively involved in a variety of local, national and global issues. At the same

time, they are less likely than older Canadians to believe that they can make a difference, and are more likely to believe that they have no influence on what government does and that governments do not care what they think (O'Neill, 2007).

Despite widespread agreement that the world has changed, there are different views on what these changes mean for the well-being of young people and for society as a whole. Some see the social, economic and demographic transformations as offering unprecedented opportunities, particularly to those with 21st century competencies; others are worried that the future will mean growing social and economic divisions in Canada and greater insecurity and risk for many young people, not only for historically vulnerable and excluded groups, but for a growing segment of the youth population. It may be that both are true and that globalization and a narrow interpretation of what young people need to learn to thrive in the 21st century learning are exacerbating these tensions.

4.0 Perspectives on Confidence, Learning and the Future

4.1 Confidence and related concepts

Confidence appears as an important idea in a number of professional fields and academic disciplines, including education, economics, nursing, political studies, and the physical and behavioural sciences. A scan of the literature reveals that confidence may have significantly different meanings and implications and draw on different theoretical backgrounds depending on the field, the purpose of the inquiry, and whether confidence is considered a personality trait or a structural phenomenon.

Confidence is often used inter-changeably with other concepts, most frequently with *trust* and *efficacy*, and as a concept, it borrows heavily from their underlying theories. Social learning theorist, Albert Bandura, commenting on the use of ‘confidence’ in the socio-cognitive literature, argued that “confidence is a catchword, rather than a construct embedded in a theoretical system.” In other words, it is not “rooted in a theory that specifies [its] determinants, mediating processes, and multiple effects” (1997:382). This section looks at some of the conceptual and research literature on confidence, as well as the related concepts of trust and efficacy.

Consumer confidence

Consumer confidence is one of the best known applications of ‘confidence’. The consumer confidence index measures the level of consumer *optimism* toward current economic conditions and future expectations. It is taken seriously because it reflects inclinations to act, in this case, to spend and/or save. Because of this link to future action, many economists “consider consumer optimism an important indicator of the future health of the economy”.²

Confidence as certainty and knowledge

Confidence is generally described as a state of being certain, either that a hypothesis or prediction is correct, or that a chosen course of action is correct. The Oxford English Dictionary defines confidence as “having strong belief, firm trust, or sure expectation; feeling certain, fully assured – having no fear of failure” (as quoted in Sander and Sanders, 2003:3). The behavioural decision-making literature describes confidence as “the degree of belief in a given hypothesis” (Griffin and Tvetsky, in Adams, 2005). The term is used to decide whether a decision was good or correct, whether there is enough accumulated evidence to support a decision. Confidence and trust are frequently linked and contrasted, the difference being the knowledge underlying them. Unlike trust, confidence comes from having specific knowledge. “It is built on reason and fact”,

² http://www.investorwords.com/5473/consumer_confidence_index.html

according to Adams (2005:5), while trust is based partially on faith. Confidence judgments and decisions are, therefore, based on what has been observed in the past.

Confidence as a personality trait or a structural phenomenon

McKnight’s and Harrison’s (1996) analysis of the literature on trust, which develops a set of distinctions among different categories, is also useful in our understanding of confidence. They noted that definitions of trust vary significantly, ranging from a personality trait to a structural phenomenon, and argued that “one can tell at a glance that these two trust types are not the same construct” (1996:3). Using this distinction as a basis, they categorize the trust literature on a continuum from an impersonal structural construct to a personal/interpersonal construct, summarized in the table below.

Category	Meaning	Example/elaboration
Impersonal structural	Trust is an institutional property, founded on the social or institutional structures of the situation, not on personal attributes of the trusting or trusted parties.	Trust as a function of the constancy and predictability of natural phenomena (e.g. gravity) or of assurances provided by social or institutional structures (e.g. banking regulations, the judicial system)
Dispositional	Trust is a personal property or a personality attribute. Some people have a tendency to be trusting across situations or have faith in human nature.	A sense of basic trust, a pervasive attitude toward self and the world
Personal / Interpersonal	Personal - One person trusts another specific person or thing in a specific situation. Interpersonal – Two or more people trust each other in a specific situation.	Appears less relevant to the YCLF initiative

Self- and collective efficacy

The relationship between feelings of efficacy and inclination to act or pursue goals is very strong. In the social cognitive literature, confidence is related to *self efficacy*, people's beliefs in their capabilities to perform a specific action required to attain a desired outcome. Albert Bandura’s (1986, 1997) theories on self-efficacy are particularly influential in education. Self-efficacy determines “how much effort people will invest in an activity, how long they persevere, and how

resilient they will be in adverse situations.” The more self-efficacious an individual, the more goal- and future-oriented she will be. Chandler (2008), in his research on Aboriginal young people in British Columbia, has shown that the reverse may also be true – that a sense of ‘futuraity’ or continuity between past and future can lead to people coming together to take action in their communities.

Social cognitive theory is rooted in an understanding of human agency that sees human beings, including young people, actively engaged in their own development and, presumably, their own learning. Individuals are seen as both products and producers of their own environments and of their social systems. People can make things happen by their actions, either by themselves or, more likely in some situations, in collaboration with others. Since people are social beings and do not live in isolation, human agency includes the notion of *collective efficacy* which comes into play when people with shared beliefs and common aspirations work together to solve a problem or to improve their lives (Nietfeld and Enders, 2003).

Academic confidence

Students with confidence in themselves and their abilities are assumed to be more likely to succeed. However, many students do not succeed, even with confidence, because factors outside of themselves, in school or the labour market, may act as obstacles. While ability and self-confidence DO affect academic performance, the relationship is not straightforward. In a study of academic efficacy, Sander and Sanders (2003) found that academic performance affected students’ confidence more than the other way around. The researchers suggest that confidence is a mediating variable between an individual’s “inherent abilities”, her learning styles, and the opportunities that the academic environment provides.

Institutional confidence, political efficacy, and civic participation

Confidence in public institutions and government is key to social cohesion and democratic citizenship. In response to globalization and a changing world, interest in citizen confidence in social and political institutions, particularly as it affects young people, has been growing. Institutional confidence is “the effectiveness of organisations and institutions in performing their designated roles” (Bean, 2003: 4). Confidence in the political system is closely connected to the notion of *political efficacy* which can be either internal or external. *Internal efficacy* “represents beliefs about the impact a person may have on the political process as a result of their own skills and confidence”. *External efficacy* concerns the political institutions’ responsiveness to citizens’ actions in the political process (Tiffany, 2004).

Research shows that a high level of confidence in political institutions is linked to civic participation. Kahne and Westheimer (2006) found that a low level of confidence in political

institutions can also motivate people to become politically active if they perceive that an institution, such as government, is not being responsive or acting fairly. This finding is supported by research on political trust in five countries which showed that too much trust in political institutions may lead to lower vigilance and participation on the part of adults (Torney-Purta et al, 2004).

School practices and trust in institutions

According to Torney-Purta et al (2004), there is a close relationship between trust in schools and other institutions and school practices, in particular, the existence of an open climate for classroom discussion and the extent to which the school values student voice and participation in school affairs. Interestingly, contrary to the frequent claim, extracurricular activities such as volunteering do not predict either personal or political trust. Instead, “the significant predictors were relations with parents and perceptions that teachers and principals were fair” (p. 5).

Confidence in the future

The growing field of futures research, most of it American and Australian, reveals that young people’s images of the future play a key role in determining actions and in motivating social change. According to Carmen Stewart, “a dynamic link exists between our capacity to imagine and believe in a sustainable future and our present ability to respond to issues of social and ecological survival” (2002:187). Eckersley distinguishes between three kinds of youth futures and notes that there may be tensions between them: i) the ‘expected’ or probable future; ii) the ‘official’ future, the one that government politicians and policies promise to deliver; and iii) the ‘preferred’ future, the future that young people want.

As noted, research into young people’s views of the future can provide clues about their motivations and intended actions. However, there are other reasons for analyzing young people’s perceptions of the future. Hutchinson (1997) draws a distinction between futures research that has predictive value and a newer style of research, the purpose of which “...is not so much in identifying whether there are trends of increased pessimism or a rising ‘sense of meaninglessness’ among young people but in *challenging assumptions that trends are destiny*” (p. 4. emphasis added). He argues that schools that provide opportunities for youth to imagine preferred futures are crucial for choice and engagement. Gidley (1997) found that schools can serve as “sites of authentic possibility”. Her research showed that students in progressive, less conventional schools were “more likely to feel confident about being able to contribute in practical ways to shifting away from their feared futures toward their preferred futures” (as cited in Hutchinson, p. 5).

4.2 The Four Pillars of Learning

There have always been different views on what the primary goal of education should be, ranging from its role in contributing to the growth and development of children (human development perspective) to preparing young people for the labour market (human capital perspective). Although some believe that the various goals are incompatible, earlier debates about the purpose of education are giving way to a broader understanding of what learning is, where and how it takes place, and its pivotal role in human, social, democratic, and economic development.

The 1996 report to UNESCO by the International Commission on Education for the Twenty First Century reinforced the view that learning should nurture all aspects of a person's potential and that education throughout life should be seen as both a public and individual right and good. The International Commission was chaired by Jacques Delors, an economist and former President of the European Commission. It was established to study the challenges facing education in the 21st century – the promises and risks of globalization – and to make recommendations to policy makers from a broad range of developed and developing countries.

The Delors report has had a significant influence on international dialogues on lifelong learning, in large part because it attempted to reconcile different political ideologies and views about the purposes and requirements of education in the 21st century. As Lee (2007) points out, the Delors report did not put forward an “instrumental vision” of education, one that served only the labour market. It recognized that education has other important purposes in addition to providing a skilled workforce for the economy, foremost among which are promoting co-operation and solidarity in order to advance social cohesion, strength and unity.

Delors proposed four pillars of learning as the foundations of learning throughout life – to know, to do, to live together, and to be. The four pillars will serve as the basis for our conceptualization of ‘learning’ because the approach is well suited to the *Youth Confidence in Learning and the Future* initiative for several reasons: i) the four pillars can be applied to both in school and out of school learning; ii) the approach reconciles different views of the purposes of education, thereby increasing the likelihood of agreement around further action; and iii) the four pillars have broad appeal and applicability in Canada and other countries.

Below is a brief description of the four pillars of learning. To provide a Canadian illustration of how the pillars can be applied, the Canadian Council Learning's (CCL's) adaptation for the Composite Learning Index (CLI) is also mentioned.

Learning to know is about learning to think and learning to learn. It is both a means and an end of human existence: a means because people have to understand the world around them in order to lead lives of dignity, develop work skills and communicate with others; an end because it underpins the “pleasure that can be derived from understanding, knowledge and discovery”, a pleasure that used to be reserved for researchers, philosophers and poets but, with a good education, is available to everyone. Learning to know includes intellectual curiosity, critical thought and the capacity to make independent judgments – competencies that are important in the workplace and that enhance people’s lives outside of work. In terms of learning throughout life, learning to know combines a broad general knowledge with working in depth on a few subjects.³

In the CLI, learning to know includes the development of skills and knowledge needed to function in the world. These skills include literacy, numeracy, critical thinking and general knowledge. The CLI uses data from existing surveys to construct its measures.

Learning to do is about acquiring both occupational and ‘people skills’. Delors recognized that new types of skills are required in the modern-day workplace and that personal competence, or ‘people skills’, are becoming increasingly important, not only in the service industries but even in the high tech organizations of the future. New skills, therefore, are required “with an interpersonal rather than intellectual basis” (p.2). Personal competence comes from a mix of skills and talents, including those acquired through technical and vocational training, “social behaviour, personal behaviour and willingness to take risks.” It includes the personal competence to deal with many situations and to work in teams. With respect to learning throughout one’s lifetime, learning to do could involve alternating between study and work.⁴

The CLI defines *learning to do* as the acquisition of applied skills that are often linked to occupational success, such as computer training, managerial training, and apprenticeships.

Learning to live together entails understanding other people, appreciating inter-dependence, and learning to manage conflict. It is the foundation of education, according to Delors.⁵ While all four pillars were considered to be extremely important, the Commission explicitly put greater emphasis on learning to live together. It recognized that “to induce people to implement common projects or to manage the inevitable conflicts in an intelligent and peaceful way” was a lofty, but necessary, goal if we want to build healthy societies.

³ See www.unesco.org/delors/ltoknow.htm.

⁴ See www.unesco.org/delors.ltodo.htm.

⁵ See www.unesco.org/delors.tlive.htm.

Utopia, some might think, but it is a necessary Utopia, indeed a vital one if we are to escape from a dangerous cycle sustained by cynicism or by resignation” (Delors, 1996: 20).

The implications for education are two-fold: i) the need for students to learn about human diversity and develop an awareness of the similarities and inter-dependence of all people; and ii) the recognition that collaborative projects can create “a new form of identity ... which enable[s] people to transcend the routines of their personal lives and attach value to what they have in common as against what divides them”.⁶

The CLI defines *learning to live together* in terms of the values of respect and concern for others, fostering social and interpersonal skills, and an appreciation of the diversity of Canadians.

Learning to be is about human development and nurturing the ‘whole person’. Education should contribute to the complete human development of every person, a “dialectic process” that involves both self-knowledge and relationships with others. Learning to be involves developing one’s personality, acting with greater autonomy, exercising judgment, and assuming personal responsibility. The Delors Commission argued that children and young people must be offered every opportunity for artistic, aesthetic, scientific, cultural and social discovery. Imagination and creativity “must be accorded a special place” so as not to be threatened by “uniformity in individual behaviour”. (www.unesco.org/delors/ltobe.htm)

The CLI defines *learning to be* as contributing to the development of a person’s body, mind and spirit, including personal discovery and creativity. The indicators include learning through culture and learning through sports.

The table below summarizes the four pillars of learning as understood by the Delors Commission and by the Canadian Council on Learning.

⁶ See www.unesco.org/delors/tlive.htm

Pillars of learning	Delors/ UNESCO	CCL's Composite Learning Index
To know	Learning to think and learning to learn. Includes developing intellectual curiosity, critical thinking, and ability to make independent judgments.	The development of skills and knowledge needed to function in the world, including literacy, numeracy, critical thinking & general knowledge.
To do	Occupational skills, as well as 'people skills', the personal competencies to deal with many situations and work in teams.	Acquisition of applied skills that are often linked to occupational success, such as computer training, managerial training, and apprenticeships.
To live together	Developing an understanding of other people, appreciating interdependence, understanding what people have in common, and learning to manage conflict.	Values of respect and concern for others, fostering social and interpersonal skills, and an appreciation of the diversity of Canadians.
To be	Nurturing the whole person/human development. Developing one's personality, acting with greater autonomy, judgment, and personal responsibility.	Learning that contributes to the development of a person's body and mind and spirit, including personal discovery and creativity.

The four pillars of learning still have tremendous currency. A 2007 European conference on "Learning to Live Together: Impact and future of the Delors report" identified several key issues addressed by the report that are highly relevant to the youth confidence initiative, namely:

- Two of the major purposes of learning are i) to develop key competencies based on the *ability to learn*, rather than on the *accumulation* of learning, and ii) to accept that there are multiple identities. This latter point, it was stressed, should lead us away from 'us and them' thinking to a vision of belonging and participation;
- Young people's role in their learning is rapidly changing from one of "absorbers of information" to one of "social change agents" in light of shifting definitions of what is knowledge and who defines knowledge (Carneiro and Draxler, 2008).

5.0 A conceptual framework

5.1 Rationale and goals

The *Youth Confidence in Learning and the Future* project will examine how young people's confidence in their learning affects their aspirations, their confidence in the future, and their belief that they can act on the world to have a positive impact. It will complement CEA's research and development initiative, *What did you do in school today?* – which explores the relationships between student engagement, learning environments and student achievement, with a focus on how young people's engagement in school affects their immediate learning and school experiences.

Asking youth how they assess their learning demonstrates that we value their input and recognize their importance as *subjects*, rather than only objects of research. Both the research process and the findings will help to identify how to improve young people's learning environments and how to support their active and constructive engagement with their communities and the world. The research is important both for the light it will shed on young people's anticipated future actions and, perhaps more significantly, for how it can help us challenge trends that do not advance young people's well-being. Although there are Canadian surveys on the public's confidence in public education and on young people's attitudes towards trust, belonging and educational aspirations, we know of no research on young people's confidence in their learning and its relationship to their expected and desired futures.

What are the goals of the initiative?

In the short term:

- To engage young people in a dialogue on learning and how well it prepares them for their futures;
- To profile and document the perspectives and perceptions of youth in key areas of educational, community and democratic practice and policy;
- To identify needed practice and policy changes in schools and communities.

In the longer term:

- To help mobilize community conversations about enhancing the learning and well-being of young people;
- To advance more accurate and contemporary images of youth, thereby contributing to a cultural shift in public attitudes toward young people.

5.2 Working definitions and assumptions

The following working definitions and assumptions reflect our understanding to date of youth confidence as it relates to learning and the future for the purposes of this initiative.

1. Confidence includes young people's confidence in themselves and in organizations and institutions.
 - *Confidence in themselves* – a belief in their own abilities and competence, and the related expectation that they can act on the world to have a positive impact;
 - *Confidence in organizations and institutions* – a belief in the responsiveness of organizations and institutions and/or their effectiveness in performing their designated roles.
2. Confidence is a function of a person's relationship with the world. Young people's confidence is not fixed; it can be influenced by the world around them. Related to the above, confidence is generally structural or situational rather than a dispositional attribute of individuals.
3. Confidence is not always or necessarily positive; it can have negative consequences or implications. For example, exaggerated self-confidence can result in arrogance or risk-taking behaviour. And unwarranted confidence in institutions, such as the media or government, can lead to complacency or inaction. Confidence, under these circumstances, could be thought of as 'perverse confidence'.⁷
4. The less confidence young people have in their learning, the less positive their expectations, aspirations and actions will be. Learning results in social and cultural capital that has a positive influence on young people's aspirations.
5. Young people's expectations of the future and their aspirations can be different. Expectations are what young people *expect* to happen based on their perceptions and understandings; aspirations are what they *want* to happen. The level of confidence is the difference between expected and desired futures.
6. Learning environments that support young people's engagement, voice, sense of agency or control, and their ability to think critically increase their confidence and capacity to learn throughout their lives and to act so as to meet their aspirations.

⁷ The use of social capital for negative purposes is sometimes referred to as 'perverse' social capital, e.g. social networks being used to support criminal behaviour.

5.3 Research process and focus

We expect that the Youth Confidence project will help answer questions such as the following:

- Do young people feel that their learning/education influences their:
 - confidence that they can make a difference in their own lives and the broader community?
 - trust and confidence in institutions?

- How do youth perceive the relationship between their learning experiences, learning environments and their:
 - capacity to learn?
 - interest in the world outside of themselves? Their willingness to be engaged in their communities?
 - development of a sense of solidarity (rather than seeing the world as ‘us’ and ‘them’)?
 - confidence in and ability to reconcile and affirm their identities?
 - capacity to be active agents in influencing their personal futures?
 - ability to navigate a changing world?
 - expectations of their personal futures? The future of the world?
 - aspirations in the areas of learning, working, participating and caring?
 - capacity to understand and do what is required to meet their aspirations?

Presented below are possible lead indicators for the two major areas of inquiry – learning and the future. Some of the indicators, such as ‘decision-making, control or shared control, and agency’, are common across all four pillars of learning. Others are organized under each of the four pillars. For example, ‘trust in your own ideas’ as an indicator of learning to know; the ‘acquisition of work-related people skills’ as an indicator of learning to do; ‘social justice citizenship’ and ‘solidarity with others’ as indicators of learning to live together; and ‘development of identities’ and ‘personal responsibility’ as indicators of learning to be. Most of these indicators emerge directly from the work of the Delors Commission; others have been included or adapted because of their importance. Although not explicitly referred to in the 1996 Delors report, indicators such as the following are true to the spirit of the Delors report: ‘development of identities’ as a key element of learning to be; and ‘social justice citizenship’ and ‘environmental stewardship’ as central to learning to live together (see Westheimer, 2008; Beairsto, 2009).

In addition to feedback from readers of this concept paper, input will be sought from youth and others to expand and fine tune the conceptual framework and develop lead indicators.

Areas of Inquiry and Possible Indicators

Decision-making/control or shared control/agency Personal relevance (i.e. is what is being learning in school relevant to out of school experience?) ⁸ Critical voice (i.e. climate in which it is legitimate for students to question teachers)				
LEARNING	Learning to Know	Learning to Do	Learning to live with others	Learning to be
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trust in your own ideas • Excitement/joy in learning • Engagement/Intellectual engagement • Attitudes toward learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work-related people skills • Practical skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social justice citizenship • Respect for diversity • Environmental stewardship • Connectedness • Trust in others • Caring for others and being cared for • Solidarity with others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of identities • Personal responsibility

EXPECTATIONS	Personal Futures	Future of the Country	Future of the World
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work/life balance • Access to lifelong learning • Civic engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cohesion • Prosperity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environment • Global economy

⁸ Several of these are taken from the Constructivist Learning Environment Survey (CLES) by Taylor, Fraser, and Fisher.

6.0 Next steps

1) Inviting comments on the concept paper

We will post the concept paper, in English and French, on the CEA website and encourage comments from readers. In addition, we will send it to interested individuals within CEA's networks to review and give feedback, in particular on the conceptual framework section. Invited individuals will include member of the CEA's Research Advisory Committee, the CEA Council and Board of Directors, as well the individuals who participated in previous round tables.

2) Developing one or more provincial or regional YCLF initiatives

The survey will be developed and tested regionally or provincially over the next year, beginning with Ontario. Because we value young people's voices, youth will be key to shaping all projects. The research process will include establishing youth panels to develop and test out lead indicators and to help develop strategies for mobilization and community dialogue. We will publish and disseminate the research findings, use what is learned from the regional/provincial initiatives to revise the research instruments, and develop next practice models on engaging school and community.

3) Launch a Youth Confidence in Learning and the Future national survey

We anticipate being able to launch a national survey in 2011. The intention is to develop a survey that young people could complete on-line and that could be supplemented by in-person dialogues or focus groups. Data from existing national surveys, such as the Youth in Transition Survey (YITS) and the National Longitudinal Survey on Children and Youth (NLSCY), and other indices of well-being, such as First Nations Community Well-being Index, the Progress of Canada's Children and Youth, could be used to provide contextual information. The national survey would measure young people's perceptions and attitudes, and might be expanded to focus on youth between the ages of 14 and 25. For the survey to yield the kind of information we want, it would have to include relevant and potentially significant sub-samples in order to understand where the perspectives of young people are the same or different, including urban/rural, and demographic information on new immigrant, race/ethnicity, gender, disability, income, and Aboriginal status. This data would be gathered through a series of self-identification questions, some of which may be mandatory (e.g. postal code, age) while others could be optional (ethnicity, citizenship status, household income).

Please contact us if you are interested in being involved in the future or if you know of any sources of funding to support a regional or national Youth Confidence in Learning and the Future initiative.

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