

Understanding Youths: A Training Program for Leaders of University Health Programs

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The article presents and analyzes a teacher training strategy implemented in a private university in the city of Buenos Aires, Argentina. This initiative responds to a challenging scenario currently faced by educators and educational program leaders: undergraduate students show limited participation in the activities offered by the university, and residents are demanding better training and working conditions, including fewer hours in the hospital, better treatment from supervisors, or show less willingness to take on additional responsibilities. Additionally, there is a growing number of support consultations regarding difficulties with concentration, fatigue, discouragement, self-imposed pressure, and a lack of confidence in their abilities. These situations prompt us, as educators, to reflect on and examine the world of today's youth to better align our interventions with their motivations and expectations.

Development: In this context, we held a series of sessions aimed at sharing questions, fostering debates, and considering possible actions to address the current demands of those in training at our institution.

Results: In this article, we will share the designed program and the results of its implementation. The approach began with an individual perspective and gradually progressed toward collaborative, well-grounded constructs rooted in our institution.

Conclusions: This work was a first step in identifying and understanding the decisions and expectations of young people to support them in their educational journeys in a meaningful, relevant way that aligns with the current socio-historical context.

Keywords: Youths, Higher Education, Health Sciences, Initiative.

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Juventudes: ¿logramos entenderlas? Un dispositivo de formación para referentes de programas universitarios en salud

RESUMEN

Introducción: el artículo presenta y analiza una estrategia de formación docente realizada en una universidad de gestión privada en la ciudad de Buenos Aires, Argentina. El dispositivo es una respuesta frente a un escenario desafiante con el cual docentes y responsables de programas educativos nos encontramos actualmente: estudiantes de carreras de grado con escasa participación en las actividades ofrecidas por la universidad y residentes que –entre sus demandas de mejores condiciones de formación y laborales– reclaman menos horas en el hospital, mejor trato de parte de quienes los supervisan, o muestran menor disposición para tomar responsabilidades adicionales. Asimismo, se multiplican las consultas a los equipos de apoyo por dificultades en la concentración, cansancio, desánimo, autoexigencia y falta de confianza en las propias capacidades. Estas escenas nos interrogan e interpelan en nuestro rol como educadores y nos invitan a indagar sobre el universo de las juventudes de hoy para acercar nuestras intervenciones a sus motivaciones y expectativas.

Desarrollo: en este marco se llevaron adelante unas jornadas que tuvieron como objetivo compartir preguntas, plantear debates y pensar posibles acciones que den respuesta a las actuales demandas de quienes se encuentran en formación en nuestra institución.

Resultados: en este artículo compartiremos el dispositivo diseñado y los resultados de su implementación. Se propuso un trayecto que partió desde una mirada individual para ir transitando hacia construcciones conjuntas, fundamentadas y situadas en nuestra propia institución.

Conclusiones: el trabajo realizado fue un primer paso en la identificación y comprensión de las decisiones y expectativas de las juventudes para poder acompañarlas en sus trayectos formativos de un modo valioso, pertinente y acorde con el actual contexto sociohistórico.

Palabras clave: juventudes, Educación Superior, Ciencias de la Salud, dispositivo.

INTRODUCTION

Managing a Higher Education Institution requires recognizing the particularities of the student population, their interests, and expectations to support their trajectories. It is possible that, in understanding and comprehending the singularities of students, a diversity of perspectives regarding their needs and how they are expected to navigate educational spaces comes into play. Furthermore, low participation of undergraduate students in university-offered activities is observed, along with residents who –through their demands for better training and working conditions– include requests for fewer hours in the hospital and better treatment from their supervisors while showing less willingness to take on additional responsibilities. Similarly, there is an increase in consultations to support teams regarding difficulties with concentration, fatigue, discouragement, excessive self-demand, and lack of confidence in their abilities. These scenarios challenge and compel us in our role as educators and invite us to explore the world of today's youth to better align our interventions with their motivations and expectations.

The settings in which young people navigate, partly as a result of the structural transformations brought about by the liberal reforms of the last quarter of the 20th century and accelerated technological development, are marked by a new *zeitgeist* characterized, among other

aspects, by the lack of guarantees for maintaining the same social status, the need for continuous education, and the deprofessionalization of professions.¹⁻³ Therefore, it is not strange that their ways of approaching their training differ from those of their predecessors.

We understand youth as a category constructed within the interplay of social relationships. Like childhood, adulthood, and old age, youth is not defined exclusively by age, nor is it understood in the same way across different contexts. That is to say, people's behaviors, commitments, and expectations differ depending on the social, technological, economic, and cultural contexts in which they live. Therefore, rather than judging our young of today for what they do or fail to do, it is necessary to understand them within the historical and social situation that shapes their ways of living.⁴ By recognizing the changing conditions across various socio-historical contexts, we can partly comprehend the communication and relational difficulties between different generations in general and, in particular, those that arise among those of us involved in training within Higher Education institutions.

This article presents a teacher training strategy carried out at the Universidad Hospital Italiano de Buenos Aires (UHIBA), which currently offers eight undergraduate programs and over 30 postgraduate programs and manages over a hundred in-service training programs in the clinical settings of a hospital.

In response to the concerns raised, an interdisciplinary team from the university, composed of professionals from the Academic Secretariat and the Departments of Student Welfare, Education, and Postgraduate Studies, along with students from the medical program, has formed a research group to explore the topic of youth in the university space within the health field. This work focuses on young people training in undergraduate university institutions and residency programs in health sciences. In synergy with this research, the team designed and implemented a training tool⁵ for faculty leaders across all the institution's educational programs.

In this article, we will present the tool we designed, discuss the outcomes of its implementation, and share insights that we hope will support the ongoing creation of inclusive and engaging experiences.

DEVELOPMENT

The III Institutional Teacher Training Conference, "*Youth: Do We Understand Them? Expectations and Decisions of Students and Residents*," occurred in October 2023. Leaders of undergraduate programs, postgraduate programs, and residency programs within our institution were invited to participate over two days. The goal was to recognize the characteristics of the youth trained at the institution, critically examine current conceptions on the subject,⁶ acquire new knowledge, and rethink aspects of university life in which it is possible to draw lines of intervention to accompany young people. All that was achieved through dialogue and interaction among colleagues.

The conference was organized into four key phases:

1. Inquiry and engagement with prior ideas
2. Conceptualizations from the field of sociology (led by Marcelo Urresti, who has a recognized trajectory in this area)
3. The connection between personal ideas, conceptual frameworks, and the institutional context
4. Projection of institutional work strategies

Blocks 1, 2, and 4 were structured as workshops designed following the principles of teacher training already established in previous experiences.⁶ Below, we detail the purpose of each.

1. The first block focused on exploring and making explicit prior conceptions about youth while raising awareness of the topic. People hold concepts that often have little relationship to one another and form theories (intuitive or false) that can become obstacles to learning. For this reason, it is necessary to make them explicit, challenge them, and reflect on them.⁷ Based on this principle, an activity was planned in several stages:
 - a. Search for images representing today's youth and those of previous generations and exchange ideas about the selected images, taking advantage of their symbolic and synthetic potential.
 - b. In randomly formed groups, using a debate-style dynamic, discuss the following pre-assigned positions: "Today's youth are better than we were when

we were young" or "We were better as youth than today's young people."

- c. Reflect on the arguments from the debate⁸ and formulate questions to "bring" to the next conference.

In this way, the different perspectives on the same topic help to understand the complexity of events and foster respect for differences. By gathering different opinions and listening to examples and counterexamples that justify opposing points of view, a cognitive process is encouraged that helps to understand the issue. At the same time, the closing questions aimed to create a space for dialogue and reciprocity⁷. As Perkins⁹ suggests, such reciprocity is essential to foster the development of reflective processes that generate knowledge construction within the framework of teaching for understanding. With these ideas, questions, and problematizations in mind, we proposed participation in the next session.

2. The lecture by Marcelo Urresti, a sociologist specializing in the topic, aimed to provide theoretical conceptualizations from the field of sociology for a deeper understanding of youth involved in higher education within the health field. The organizing team had previous exchanges with the specialist to position his presentation in the specificity of health and institutional reality. Among his key ideas, he highlighted the changes occurring since the latter half of the past century in liberal professions, education, digital communication, and the values upheld and prioritized, which create different ways of being young today.
3. The third section invited participants to revisit the reflections and questions from the first section and review them in light of the conceptualizations presented in the lecture. We then asked participants to: "Represent a scene that demonstrates the relationship between the ideas from the lecture and everyday situations involving those training in our educational spaces." Each group created their scene using a theoretical category developed during the lecture:
 - The deprofessionalization of professions
 - Materialistic and post-materialistic values
 - Relationships and communication with and between new generations

This activity enabled participants to revisit earlier questions through the lens of the conceptualizations and to contextualize the topic within their actual areas of teaching practice. The plenary reflection allowed them to interpret the portrayed scenes, consolidating ideas to apply in everyday reality.

4. The fourth phase gathered the outcomes from the sessions and focused on actionable steps to implement. We proposed:
 - a. Outline action plans to work on communication, understanding, and engagement with students, residents, colleagues, or other young stakeholders. To scaffold the production process, we posed some guiding questions:
 - b. Why is it worth proposing "this" to your students/residents/colleagues? What actions should

accompany the proposed action plans? Who would be responsible for them? Which one would you like to join based on your institutional role? What timeline could it follow? Can you identify any precedents worth revisiting?

- c. Record the resources (material and “allied individuals”) at your disposal and those needed to implement the proposal.
- d. Respond: “What would you tell your team on Monday about what you learned during the sessions?” This activity aimed to highlight the key ideas each participant “took away” from the sessions and emphasize their role in transferring what they learned to their work teams.

In summary, this framework proposed diverse yet interconnected activities that, through successive approximations¹⁰, created conditions for participants to recognize and reflect on their knowledge, challenge it, engage in dialogue with research-based conceptualizations, and even discover “categories” to describe situations they were already familiar with or had experienced. The ultimate goal was to reflect on the concepts by situating them in their specific context and reinforcing bonds among professionals within the same institution.

The protocol for this study was approved by the Ethics Committee for University Research Protocols of the Hospital Italiano de Buenos Aires (protocol number 0011-23), determining that it ‘raises no ethical objections.’

RESULTS/ANALYSIS OF THE EXPERIENCE

A total of 47 directors and faculty members from IUHIBA participated in the sessions, representing eight undergraduate courses, twelve residency programs, five specializations, two MSc degrees, two doctoral programs, and eight areas of institutional management. The lecture, which was open to other educators from the Institution, was attended by 64 people.

Using the activity sections as organizers, we analyzed the results of implementing the framework:

• Section 1 - *What do we mean when we talk about youth?*

The activities made it possible to highlight the representations held by the teaching community and to challenge the idea of youth as a monolithic entity. They also facilitated reflection on how today’s youth differ from previous generations and characterized the current youth, acknowledging them as both producers and products of society.

The central reflections emerging from the debate-style activity highlighted the following traits of today’s youth:

- Questioning social mandates and the values of previous generations (regarding work, family, and the time they must dedicate to responsibilities).
- Prioritizing pleasure in the activities they engage in.

That sparked a debate about whether this reflects a lack of commitment to tasks or whether their commitment

lies in other activities and personal spaces, different from those of past generations. In the words of the participants:

“We used to have more long-term plans, ideals, and collective projects. It was possible to build more group-oriented and less individual spaces.”

“Commitment now has a different metric, a different value scale. There is a commitment of young people in their unique way, with their metrics, with themselves, with enjoyment.”

“Today’s youth distribute life better; it’s not all work, it’s not all pleasure—it’s better balanced.”

The idea frequently arose that the new generations are different because reality is also different. “We cannot maintain the same patterns or paradigms because the world has changed.” Current youth “face a very complex context” in which they must live and learn. The importance of not thinking in dichotomous terms of good and evil was also mentioned: “Youth are different, neither better nor worse; they are valuable and full of potential”; “The debate of before and now is outdated—it is always contextual and subjective.” Along these lines, the challenges for adults are “not demanding that they learn or be what we want them to be,” eliminating prejudices, accompanying them, finding middle ground, engaging in dialogue, understanding, and providing support. Lastly, it is worth noting that several participants expressed concern about what they consider to be a “technological dependency.”

• Section 3 - *Youth in Training Programs*

Through reflection and dramatization of scenes, participants integrated conceptualizations from Urresti’s lecture with their perceptions and experiences. They portrayed the deprofessionalization of professions, materialistic and post-materialistic values, and the relationships and communication within and with new generations in the following scenarios:

- An election for Head of Residents with no interested candidates.
- A challenging surgery scheduled after regular hours, with no resident willing to stay and observe it, instead asking to be filmed to watch it later virtually.
- In-person and virtual classes where a teacher finds it very difficult to maintain the attention and participation of students.
- A resident tells her family that she has decided to abandon her training, questioning the family mandate in pursuit of freedom and happiness.
- A young man tells his family that he will choose medicine and gets criticized for not considering that medicine is not profitable.
- A strike for decent wages and working conditions.

The discussion on the deprofessionalization of careers brought up the declining value placed on healthcare professions and its influence on the reduced interest among today’s youth in entering these fields.

“The medical profession has lost its value. The perception of low income, juggling multiple jobs, working shifts, and managing private practices are things they

frequently observe in us, which discourages them from pursuing the same career path.”

“As time passes, affording an apartment becomes increasingly difficult, making it feel like an unattainable goal. Limited independence extends the period of youth. In the past, professionals earned higher incomes, allowing them to work the same amount of time but enjoy a better quality of life.”

“In the past, there was competition for who wanted to be chief, and now you have to beg them.”

Regarding *materialist and post-materialist values*, there were differences between the values of both generations, which sometimes clash and make dialogue difficult. One issue that repeatedly came up is that adults believe young people see healthcare professions as just a job, not as a life project. It's one of the activities they engage in, but not the only one, nor (in some cases) the most important. Their well-being is a central aspect of life for the new generations. Therefore, the effort put in by students and residents doesn't match what their teachers expect:

“...they're not interested in operating on Saturdays.”

“Now they see it as a job; we saw it as a life project. It was worth the effort; it was a transcendent experience.”

“For them, part of their well-being is setting limits on working hours; they have a different way of seeing life.”

As for the *links and communication with and among new generations*, participants pointed out difficulties relating to young people and their choices. “They choose a path different from the one we propose to them,” and the “challenge is to listen, learn, and try to understand.”

Finally, there were reflections linked to the responsibility of the Institution and the teaching teams in the face of this generational change. What are institutions doing with these new ideas and values brought by young people, which are central to understanding their educational trajectories? What are we doing to welcome and support these new generations? These questions paved the way for the work in the following section.

• *Block 4 - Interventions and proposals for action*

When it came to capitalizing on what they had learned and projecting lines of intervention, general ideas emerged—closer to guiding principles than concrete proposals. They focused primarily on:

- ❖ Engaging students and residents in the reflection and proposal development, and conducting regular evaluations with the community to assess the attainment of desired objectives. Including young people in training within governance areas.
- ❖ Promoting a sense of belonging to the institution.
- ❖ Working toward fostering a positive work environment.
- ❖ Offering short-term incentives that are of interest or considered valuable to them, such as participation in conferences and recreational activities.
- ❖ Establishing genuine communication and listening.
- ❖ Providing greater autonomy for residents to manage their time..

It is also worth sharing some ideas presented by the specialist Marcelo Urresti, as they will allow for a better understanding of the conceptualizations discussed by those who attended the sessions.

The conference focused on the youth who navigate undergraduate and postgraduate higher education institutions. Below, we present the main ideas addressed:

Youth is a socially constructed category.

The concept of youth started circulating in the 19th century in the 19th century and became established as a specific group in the mid-20th century. Youth refers to a social moratorium, where there is biological and psychological maturity, but not a social one, as a period of play, of experimentation, in which their life as adults remains undefined. In this moratorium, young individuals go through a series of transitions toward adulthood. In this moratorium, young people go through a series of transitions toward adulthood:

- From studies to work
- From economic dependence to material independence
- From housing dependence to owning their own home
- Psycho-affective maturation and forming a couple of their own.
- From the role of children to the virtual role of parents

These transitions are longer or shorter depending on the societies and the social strata within those societies.

- The transformations of recent decades in professions, the educational field, digital communication, and the criteria for defining the value of experiences illustrate the social space where this youth develops and help explain (in part) how they navigate their formation.
- Over the past 30 years, professions have been experiencing a decline in autonomy, recognition, and remuneration. In recent years, signs of a deprofessionalization of professions have become evident. Their privileges are eroding, the authority of specialized technical knowledge is waning, distrust in expert knowledge is increasing, and professionals are becoming salaried employees.
- In education, there is a constant need for updating: it takes more time to study (with the proliferation of master's and doctoral degrees), and stabilizing a professional career is becoming more prolonged.
- Regarding communication, there is a trend toward individualization, which alters the relationship with information, learning, and education. These are now available online for free and personalized according to individual interests. The digital revolution has unified all communication media, transforming content into digital formats and its consumption into an "on-demand" model.
- A new subjectivity is emerging, contrasting with the earlier conception based on effort, discipline, and the long-term accumulation of wealth. New generations seek a balance between their personal and work lives. These new values, understood as "post-materialist,"

are linked to the search for integral well-being and prioritization of freedom over security within a short-term framework.

- Today's youth exhibit a different sensitivity and emotionality; they socialize through a mandate to pursue happiness, with a more flexible attitude toward change and relinquishment. The idea of "me first" seems to prevail over-commitment to others, altering the dynamics of interpersonal relationships. That is not related to individualism but rather to the "narcissism" of new generations

In summary, as Urresti suggests, the path of youth toward adulthood is impacted by significant changes in today's society. We live in a culture that requires continuous education, where the stabilization of professional careers and financial independence occurs later, and emotional bonds are less enduring.

It is worth mentioning that the open nature of the conference allowed the participation of other institutional actors, who later requested the organizing team to create new spaces for reflection on the topic.

As an integral initiative, the sessions provided "those responsible for undergraduate and graduate education" with tools to deepen their understanding of the youth educated at our university. At the same time, they enabled the initial outlining of action principles to foster dialogue, bring positions closer, and expand opportunities for listening.

CONCLUSIONS

The intergenerational misunderstandings inspired the need to identify and understand the decisions and expectations of youth to support them in their educational journeys in a meaningful, relevant, and contextually appropriate way within the current socio-historical framework. The sessions were an excellent first step, providing a space to share questions, engage in debates, and consider possible actions to address the current demands of those undergoing training at our institution.

During two days, we proposed a path that started from an individual perspective and progressively moved toward joint, well-founded, and context-specific constructions within our institution.

We hope this initiative will be a contribution to be used/replicated/adapted by other institutions or spaces that find it valuable. Additionally, we aspire for participants to share these reflections within their respective spaces. The research team will seek to continue identifying new actions that could foster these exchanges and sustain the search for interventions that acknowledge the principles of action. It is worth noting that several participants in the sessions expressed interest in replicating the initiative with their work teams.

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