

Abstract

Adolescence is a period of rapid development in how young people think about themselves and the world as well as dramatic changes in their organizational contexts and institutional systems that are supposed to serve them. These evolving personal and public pathways are intricately connected, as the psychosocial development of adolescents shapes how they interact with major organizations and institutions and those organizational and institutional structures help to determine the long-term implications of their developmental experiences. Recognizing the complexity of these exchanges is a necessary ingredient of effective policy intervention, and focusing too much on the developmental side or on the institutional side of these exchanges can undermine the goals of well-meaning programs and policies. This keynote delves into the ways that psychosocial interventions are bound by the broader structures and contexts of adolescents' lives and the effects of large-scale institutional reforms vary according to individual developmental experiences. It does so by describing examples from research on risk-taking and peer relations that illustrate the need to integrate insights from traditional psychological and sociological perspectives on the world of adolescence and by going in-depth into a recent national school-based experiment in the U.S. conducted by psychologists and sociologists that captures the value of person x context approaches to educational intervention.