



Young Lives: Points for Discussion

Young Lives is a short film showing discussion among young people in their first year of high school. This video will help student teachers to reflect on their own experiences of early adolescence and on the issues that young people face today. Discussion questions are offered below, that could form the basis of a tutorial session or written assignment. However, you may wish to develop your own discussion questions relating to this material.

Think back to your first year of high school and compare your experiences with those of the students in this video. What similarities or differences were there in regard to identity, hobbies, family, school or personal issues?

This question could provide an opportunity to consider social change in Australia and whether the lives of adolescents today differ markedly from earlier generations. If you have a mixture of ages among your own student teachers, this could evolve into a particularly rich discussion. Changing interests over recent generations may have been impacted by technology, with greater access to computer games and the Internet in many households. Student teachers may notice that chatting with friends on-line features as a pastime for several of these young people. This could raise discussion about whether physical activity has declined as a focus for young people and what this may mean for both their physical health and their social and emotional wellbeing. Family life may also have changed, with families facing different social pressures and family structures becoming more diverse. You could also invite student teachers to consider whether Australia has become more or less tolerant of diversity in recent generations. School systems may also have changed with a greater focus on diverse pathways of achievement and different options in the transition to higher education and the workforce, such as VET.

What changes do young people experience in the middle years and when moving from primary school to high school?

You may wish to ask student teachers to list some of the changes that occur for young people at this time of life. There are educational transitions, social transitions and physical changes. Moving to high school often means a larger school and larger classes, dealing with a fragmented curriculum and balancing the workload across a range of learning areas, losing some friends and making new ones, going from being the senior students in a school to the most junior and working with many different teachers. As seen in the video, some students like having more friends and being taught by a range of teachers, while others will initially find this transition challenging. At the same time, there is a range of physical and social changes occurring for students. Young people begin to become more independent from their families and to place a greater emphasis on friends. There are challenges in managing physical changes such as menstruation, breast development, erections, voices changing, etc. You may also wish to point out that physical and social changes and the development of personal identity vary widely between young people, in terms of the way they make these transitions and when they occur. The young people in the video are twelve or thirteen years old and student teachers may note wide variation in physical development and social behaviour, particularly in the mixed group.

If students of this age are worried about something, who are they most likely to talk to? What is the role of teachers in this context?

In general, young people are more likely to discuss personal issues or worries with friends than to approach family, health professionals, teachers or school counsellors. Many young people feel that they can or should be able to deal with problems themselves, or feel that they might get into trouble or be treated differently if they ask for help. As pointed out by the students in this video, some teachers may be more attuned to the emotional wellbeing of young people and seem more approachable. A concerned teacher can play an important role by asking students how they are going, by listening to and chatting with a student who seems unhappy, and by encouraging young people to talk with others where appropriate. While teachers should not try to take on the role of counsellor, they are in a position to refer troubled students to other services. Not all schools have ready access to a counsellor, or students may not be aware of the availability of counselling, as reflected by some students in this video. It is also helpful for teachers to be aware of relevant services and agencies in their local area, particularly as some students will feel more comfortable talking to someone outside the school community.

Did you notice any differences in the interaction between students, when comparing the boys' group, the girls' group and the mixed group? Do boys and girls communicate differently at this age?

In general, the single sex groups appeared more comfortable discussing issues in front of each other, certainly at first. In the mixed group, particularly early in the conversation, the girls tended to giggle at the boys' answers while the boys sometimes smirked when the girls were talking. You may like to discuss different communication strategies with girls and boys of this age and the issues this raises for classroom or group work. You could also relate this to the scene in the Brianna case study video, where boys ostracise Brianna on the way in and where they throw paper at the girls' group. This could raise some discussion about whether such behaviour could be construed in different ways: getting attention from their mates, bullying and power play, or perhaps early sexual attraction manifesting itself as teasing.