



University of
Zurich^{UZH}



The First 1000 Days

The New Jacobs Center
for Productive Youth Development

University of Zurich
Jacobs Center
for Productive Youth Development
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A Time of Growth for the Jacobs Center



Prof. Dr. Michael Shanahan
Research Director



Prof. Dr. Cla Famos
Managing Director

We are delighted to share our review of the first 1,000 days of the expanded Jacobs Center for Productive Youth Development (JCPYD). The Center was originally founded in 2003 by sociology professor Marlis Buchmann and since then has been home to COCON (Competence and Context), her landmark study of Swiss youth. In 2015, the Jacobs Foundation and the University of Zurich decided to invest CHF 70 million to fund an interdisciplinary expansion of the Center to include economists, psychologists and sociologists who work together to conduct the very best scientific research to improve the lives of young people. We are now building on that foundation and creating an enduring center of science and public engagement.

We hired, and then we hired some more: We added 35 highly talented people – including seven professors, 23 scientific personnel and five administrative staff members – to our team, and we also welcomed nine collaborating professors from four departments.

We built up our infrastructure, including expanding and renovating our physical space, installing a new computing environment and creating a new website and social media channels. We also established our by-laws, mission statement and budgeting systems, which cut across the foundation, the university and three academic departments

We taught and learned, sponsoring 15 interdisciplinary workshops and numerous didactic seminars, organizing several symposia involving scientists and practitioners and hosting numerous academic guests from across the world.

We published and communicated with the public around the world. According to our estimates, we published 183 scientific articles and gave 212 presentations in 13 countries, communicating with journalists to ensure that this work reached the public via newspapers, magazines, internet articles and radio shows worldwide. We collected state-of-the-art social, psychological and biological data from thousands of young people across Switzerland as part of the COCON study and our second flagship study, z-proso (Zurich Project of Social Development from Childhood to Adulthood). What's more, our interdisciplinary community is planning new and exciting initiatives, including major new research projects and cohort studies designed by professors from several disciplines.

Our doors are open for cooperation, and we look forward to pursuing our unique and worthy mission with the support of the Jacobs Foundation and the University of Zurich.

The Jacobs Center for Productive Youth Development is a scientific center at the University of Zurich that focuses on youth research. The Center is a joint venture between the University of Zurich and the Jacobs Foundation. Our goal is to research human development in an interdisciplinary fashion, thereby helping to improve the life trajectories of young people. Our researchers have backgrounds in economics, psychology and sociology. We also work together with researchers from other disciplines in order to better understand the first decades of life.



The New Jacobs Center: The First 1,000 Days



Prof. Dr. Gabriele Siegert
Deputy President of UZH and
President of the Jacobs Center
Steering Committee

The expansion of the Jacobs Center for Productive Youth Development (JCPYD) in 2015 saw the Center leave its infancy and make productive strides into the future as a mature organization within just a short period of time.

This transformation was thanks in part to the excellent foundation laid by the Center's smaller but no less successful predecessor organization. The JCPYD was in such good shape when the expansion started that success was practically guaranteed.

This success was also due to the trust that the Jacobs Foundation has in the University of Zurich, which has led to the Center receiving generous financial support. The JCPYD now stands before a world of possibilities, thanks also to the ongoing interdisciplinary collaboration between economics, sociology and psychology professors who enhance each other's work, provide mutual encouragement and share new and different paths of knowledge.

I look forward to seeing the JCPYD continue its wonderful development. It is also my hope that, despite its newfound maturity, the Center maintains a certain youthfulness and spirit of childlike curiosity so that it may continue to be home to many interesting and exciting research projects, activities and findings in the future.



Lavinia Jacobs
President of the Board
of Trustees of the Jacobs Foundation and Vice President
of the Steering Committee of
the Jacobs Center

The first 1,000 days of life, the time spanning roughly between conception and one's second birthday, is a unique period of opportunity in each child's life. During this period, the foundations of optimum health, growth, and neurodevelopment across the lifespan are established. What parents invest in their children during this time pays off in many ways.

Perhaps the parallels to the Jacobs Center for Productive Youth Development are not so obvious as we are not really talking about the first 1,000 days of the Center here. The Jacobs Center is already a "young adult" and was successfully led by Marlis Buchmann for more than a decade.

And yet, the energy, care and not least the financial resources that the University of Zurich and the Jacobs Foundation have jointly invested in the "new" Jacobs Center testify to the importance we attach to this collaboration. And that is why I am convinced that our investment will pay off – in many ways.

On behalf of the Jacobs Foundation, I wish the Jacobs Center and its new team much success – in the next 1,000 days and beyond!

Key Figures for 2017–2019

The Jacobs Center for Productive Youth Development (Jacobs Center) is dedicated to the networking, promotion and coordination of research and teaching in the field of child and youth research at the University of Zurich.

183 academic publications

212 presentations in 13 countries

15 workshops ↗

43 media mentions ↗

35 team members

7 professors

23 academic staff

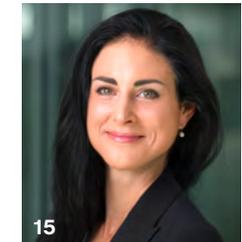
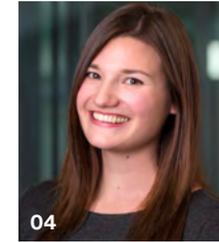
5 administrative staff

9 collaborating researchers

CONTENT

The Jacobs Center Team: 2017–2019

01 Averdijk Margit **02** Basler Ariane **03** Bechtiger Laura **04** Borbas Réka **05** Buchmann Marlis **06** Chumbley Justin **07** Dobrijevic Marta **08** Eisner Manuel **09** Famos Cla **10** Fehlbaum Lynn **11** Florin Ines **12** Grütter Jeanine **13** Hackl Laura **14** Igel Corinne **15** Jehle Nicole **16** Junghans Alex **17** Kalumba Stecy **18** Kappeler Stefan **19** Kernich Stephanie **20** Kindschi Martin



Financial Overview of the Jacobs Center

The Jacobs Center is a joint venture between the University of Zurich and the Jacobs Foundation.

Total financing: CHF 70 million over 20 years,
**borne in equal parts by UZH
and the Foundation.**

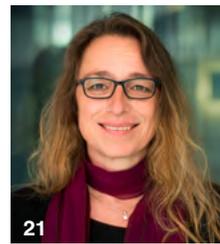
UZH and the Jacobs Foundation each contribute
CHF 1.75 million annually

Internally financed research projects at the Jacobs Center 2017-2019

- COCON longitudinal analyses: Child cohort (ages 6-18):
8th survey wave: CHF 668,161.80
- z-proso supplementary: Peer relations in childhood
and later CTRA expression patterns: CHF 43,000
- Substance Use: CHF 408,000
- Experience Sampling add-on project (D2M): CHF 18,837.31
- Integrated Research Project (IRP): CHF 542,000

Third-party funding and grants, 2017-2019

- Total third-party funding: CHF 1,306,347
(CHF 141,943 + CHF 59,000 + CHF 1,105,404)
- Participation in research projects supported by third-party
funding:
Dollar: 10,651,755 (total direct and indirect costs awarded)
Euro: 6,069,015 (across 12 sites)



21 Kocher Sandra **22** Mähr Maximilian **23** Potente Cecilia **24** Raschle Nora **25** Ribeaud Denis **26** Schönholzer Maria **27** Schwandt Hannes **28** Shanahan Michael **29** Shanahan Lilly **30** Shan Xiaoyue **31** Sorrenti Giuseppe **32** Steinhoff Annetrin **33** Xu Wenjia **34** Yusof Jeffrey **35** Zöhlitz Ulf

We create opportunities for exchange and continuing education for both up-and-coming and established academics. Every semester we conduct an interdisciplinary research colloquium and offer a range of interdisciplinary workshops, summer schools and smaller academic conferences. We also regularly welcome guest researchers from all over the world.

2017

2017

January

Our webpage is being thoroughly revised and has had over 25,000 hits from people in 90 countries over the past 8 months. [Website](#)

June

COCON turns 10: Academic symposium at Marbach Castle

To celebrate the 10th anniversary of the COCON longitudinal study, we held an academic symposium at Marbach Castle. The symposium focused on the central theme of the study: social inequality, transitions over the life course and socio-emotional and productive development during adolescence.

An interdisciplinary group of renowned scientists from across the world came together to discuss the most recent findings in this area based on analyses of various international data sets. The group also discussed current challenges, open questions and promising perspectives for future research.

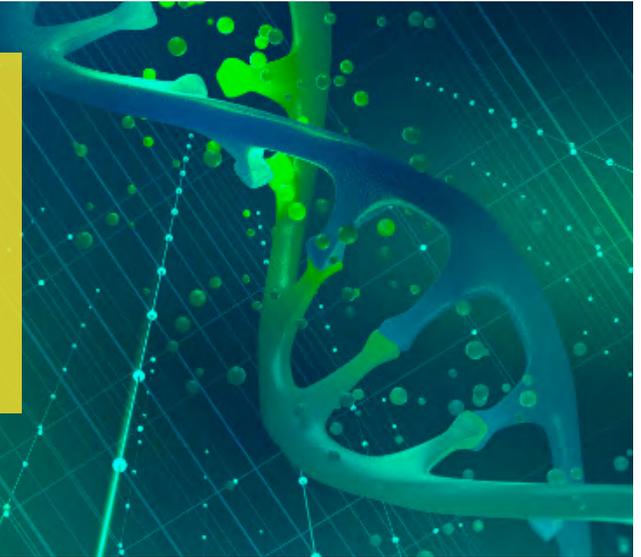


The symposium was held in conjunction with a celebration **in honor of Marlis Buchmann**, principal investigator and director of the COCON study and former director of the Jacobs Centers for Productive Youth Development. A series of speeches by Lavinia Jacobs, Gabriele Siegert, Tina Malti and Michael Shanahan honored Marlis Buchmann's work – both in building up and advancing the scientific work of the Center and in making exceptional contributions to human development and life course research. In his role as the new director of the Jacobs Center, Michael Shanahan concluded the talks with an outlook of the future expansion of research programs at the JCPYD.

CONTENT

Do Genes Define Our Life – or Is It the Other Way Around?

Michael Shanahan wants to know how our lives change. In his interview he speaks about conducting research in Switzerland, how social circumstances can affect genetic expression and what he would do if he had a magic wand.



You are a professor of sociology at the University of Zurich and director of the Jacobs Center. What brought you here?

I was a professor in the US and quite happy when I learned about an incredible opportunity to participate in the development of the Jacobs Center. The founding of a major research center is a rarity, and my wife Lilly and I decided to embark on this new adventure.

Why did you decide to become part of the Jacobs Center?

Since graduate school, I have been an interdisciplinary scientist at heart, with interests in sociology, child psychology and behavioral genetics. In my experience, the Center is a unique place to conduct interdisciplinary work.



Prof. Dr. Michael Shanahan

Professor of Sociology
of Child and Youth Development
Department of Sociology
Principal Investigator of Social
Genomics Research Area

Is doing research in Switzerland different from doing research in the US?

There are some advantages to conducting research in Switzerland. For example, a Swiss professor has a small stable working group that forms a scientific core and excellent administrative support. Switzerland is indeed a place of rules, but it is also surprisingly flexible, and there are many supportive resources.



The 2017 Summer School on Longitudinal and Life Course Research, University of Zürich | Monday, August 21st to Friday, August 25th, 2017

Life course research is a burgeoning, interdisciplinary field of studies. It is characterized by theoretical approaches that reflect and inform diverse areas such as sociology, demography, epidemiology, economics, psychology, and social biology. It is also characterized by a set of commonly-used quantitative research methods, such as event-history analysis, multi-level modeling, and sequence analysis that span disciplinary boundaries.



The Summer School on Longitudinal and Life Course Research brings together scholars from diverse backgrounds and introduces them to the main theories and methods in this interdisciplinary field. It aims to bridge social (macro and micro) and biological perspectives. Previous schools have been held in Antwerp, Oxford, Bamberg and Milan.

CONTENT

Could you tell me something about your current project, “Genetic Transcription, Society, and the Life Course”?

Many people think that genes cause things like a person’s health and even their educational careers. There is truth in this idea. But there is also another way of thinking: Our social circumstances affect genetic expression, which influences our behaviors and health. My team focuses on this idea, and we study, for example, how our experiences as children may influence our genetic activity later. For example, Dr. Cecilia Potente, a demographer on my team, is leading our studies of how birth weight and BMI through the first decades of life predict gene expression patterns in the mid-30s. We find that over- and under-weight status at birth is associated with common diseases like cardiovascular disease and Type II diabetes.

What would you describe as the most surprising finding in your research so far?

We are seeing new evidence that a child’s circumstances predict genetic expression related to aging processes. Children who grow up in difficult settings, on a genetic level, age faster than children coming from stable, peaceful and prosperous families. We have known for decades that a good home is the foundation for one’s life, but now we see that the household-of-origin is changing gene expression patterns many decades later.

What do you think is the most important thing to be done to increase productive youth development in Switzerland?

If I had a magic wand and could change one thing, I would wish that everyone stopped smoking. Switzerland has a high rate of smoking, and people often start smoking at a young age. Many people do not realize how bad parental smoking is for children: It is essentially filling the child’s environment with poisonous gas, and from results from my own research, I think it probably has a big negative impact on children and their behavior into adulthood.

What are the biggest challenges that you are confronted with in your field?

No one person can master my area of study – it would require expertise in the social and psychological sciences, genetics, molecular biology, statistics, and immunology, too. In this situation, I am humbled but also inspired. And because of this complexity, we must work as a team both here in Zurich but also with scientists in the US and elsewhere. This requires science, people-skills, and a desire to learn new things every day.

I am extremely fortunate that I work with such amazing people, and I do indeed learn new things every week.

October

2017

Appointment of Prof. Dr. Ulf Zölitz as a new assistant professor of economics



November–December

We completed major renovations and set up a state-of-the-art computing environment.

2018

2018

March–April

COCON: Collected 8th wave of data

z-proso: Collected new wave of data; held scientific workshop and led public outreach event

May

Approval of the new by-laws of the Jacobs Centers for Productive Youth Development (JCPYD) at UZH by the Steering Committee (24.4.2018)

COCON Study Understanding how children grow up

Since 2005, researchers working on the COCON study have been investigating how children and adolescents from German- and French-speaking Switzerland grow up and develop. The aim is to lay the foundation for projects that foster a more prosocial society in Switzerland.



Content and competent young people are important to Switzerland's future.

The COCON study – short for “Competence and Context” – has been collecting and evaluating data on the development of children and young people since 2005. The aim of researchers is to find out, for instance, how children and adolescents learn social (and other) skills, how they develop value systems, and what connections exist between their family, school and peer environment and important transition periods in life.

August

2018

Visiting scholar: Prof. Steve Cole, Geffen School of Medicine, UCLA



October

z-proso Symposium 2018

The Zurich Project of Social Development from Childhood to Adulthood (z-proso) is an internationally significant long-term study that has tracked the development of 1,675 young people since they entered first grade at elementary schools in the city of Zurich in the autumn of 2004. In September 2018, researchers completed the eighth wave of surveys of the study participants, who have since grown into young adults.

Thanks to this data collection effort, the study provides a well-founded look into the development of young people at the beginning of the 21st century. Questions about the causes and consequences of aggression and being victimized were central at the beginning of the study and have remained an important focal point of the research. However, other questions were added over the course of the project, for instance perceptions of the law and the police, the causes of substance use and the dynamics of mental health.

[Program ↗](#)

Over 3,000 participants

More than 3,000 young people have taken part in the study since its inception. Researchers divided participants into three groups: The youngest were six years old at the beginning of the study, while the other two groups contained fifteen- and twenty-one-year-olds, respectively. The participants' closest caregivers – typically fathers or mothers – and teachers were also included in the study so that they could deliver additional outside insights.

After the first surveys 15 years ago, researchers collected data on the youngest and second youngest groups at least every three years. This yielded two types of results:

- cross-sectional studies that show how each group was doing and coping at a specific point in time, allowing for differences within said groups to be researched
- longitudinal studies that observe the multi-year development of a group and show differences between the groups at the same age.

This marks the first time that a study has recorded age-matched data over a longer period of time, making the findings of great significance for Switzerland. Collecting data on very young participants is particularly challenging, which is why COCON uses child-appropriate methods alongside classic questionnaires and interviews. One such method is the Berkeley puppet interview, in which the child does not speak directly to the researcher but is instead drawn into a conversation with two puppets, allowing the child to express their attitudes and experiences.

Adolescents choose gender-typical apprenticeships

Two examples illustrate the broad range of projects within the COCON study. Researchers were able to discover that, by international standards, young people in Switzerland very often choose vocational training that is typical for their gender. The assumption is that this is due to the popularity of apprenticeships in Switzerland, which often happen to be designed in a gendered way. However, the higher the level of education required for a profession, the less important this gender focus becomes. Adolescents who visit a vocational high school or university prep school tend to gravitate towards more gender-neutral careers.

Another finding that we know thanks to the COCON study is how parental expectations shape the performance of children at school. The younger the child, the stronger they feel the influence of their parents' expectations. And the higher the expectations, the higher the child's self-assessment of their academic performance later – although this effect decreases with age. Taken the other way around, however, children's self-assessment was not found to have any impact on the expectations set by the parents.

Thanks to results such as these, researchers hope to be able to provide policymakers with a solid foundation for sociopolitical projects – a step toward making Switzerland a better place for families, children and education.

November

2018

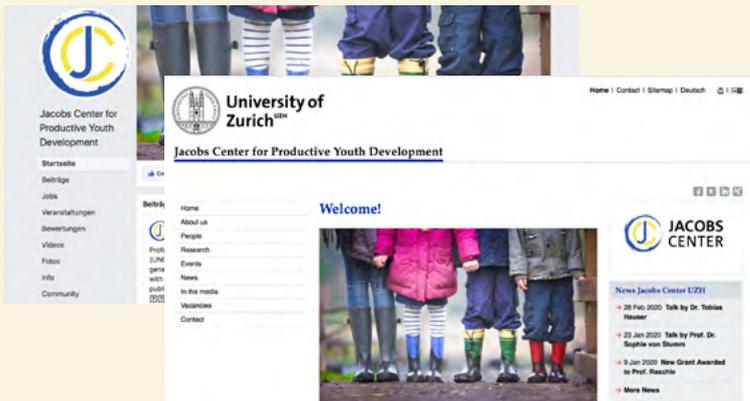
Technologies Linked to Child and Youth Development: Measurement, Interventions and Applications



The Jacobs Center and the Center for Child Well-Being and Development held this workshop to explore recent technological innovations that create exciting opportunities for research. The central question: How can we apply these novel technologies to better understand child development and trigger real-time responses?

December

Facebook page launched; website greatly expanded



Pictures of the Pediatric Brain

Nora Raschle uses modern imaging techniques to research how the brains of children and adolescents develop and what deviations from healthy development look like. She wants to make her knowledge and work accessible to a wide audience that includes young people themselves



Prof. Dr. Nora Maria Raschle
Assistant Professor of Psychology,
Principal Investigator of Developmental
Neuroscience Research Area

Working with images

The first thing you notice when entering Nora Raschle's office is that she loves working with images. Depictions of her academic work adorn the walls: some in the form of comics and some drawn by the researcher herself. A neuroscientist and assistant professor of psychology at the Jacobs Center for Productive Youth Development, Raschle works together with her team to investigate how the brains of children and young people develop.



2019

2019

April

Appointment of Prof. Dr. Nora Raschle, assistant professor of psychology



June

Workshop on “diseases of desperation” in young adults: risk, resilience and prevention



Professor Lilly Shanahan organized this workshop to better understand the recent spike in deaths by suicide or substance abuse in the US. Highlights of the workshop included lectures by professors Kenneth Dodge (Duke University), Jessica Ribeiro (Florida State University), Richard Miech (University of Michigan) and Rick Hoyle (Duke University).

Using images to research

Raschle’s research also has images at its core: She uses fMRI – functional magnetic resonance imaging, a technology that has been around since the 1980s – to examine the brain in real time, allowing her to monitor which areas are activated during certain activities. For a long time, researchers primarily focused on using fMRI to study adult brains. The first research groups dedicated to studying children’s brains popped up after the turn of the century. Focusing on the pediatric brain is a great deal more complex, as children’s brains are constantly developing, and the structures undergo changes much more quickly. Children are always acquiring new skills, and this is reflected on fMRI images. It is precisely this area that Raschle has dedicated her research to: She wants to discover how brains typically develop in the early years and find out how to detect abnormal development.

Raschle is particularly interested in using brain imaging to understand how children develop language skills as they grow up and how children learn to manage their emotions in order to fit into the social order – for instance, by solving conflicts without resorting to violence. Raschle is at the forefront of her field in Switzerland. She spent several years as a researcher at Boston Children’s Hospital and Harvard Medical School, learning the knowledge and skills she needs to conduct her work.

And it’s work that holds great potential: Once we understand how a healthy child’s brain develops, specialists will be able to recognize much earlier if something is not quite right and give children the support they need before certain symptoms manifest too strongly. This holds true for conditions such as dyslexia, a reading disability that persists despite children’s best efforts to overcome it. Currently, dyslexia is only diagnosed in the second or third grade, once it becomes clear that a child has tried and failed to learn how to read. However, by this time the child will have already fallen behind their classmates.

Earlier intervention and support would be ideal – and within the realm of possibility. The first symptoms of dyslexia can be spotted much earlier using computer exercises or written assignments. What’s more, researchers like Raschle have used fMRI to demonstrate biological changes in the brain even before the child enters first grade. Children at risk of dyslexia show weaker activation or fewer linkages in the areas of the brain used in reading. If these clues were used for early detection, children could be supported with targeted exercises before a clinical diagnosis is possible. This would mean less remedial work at school and probably less frustration for the child, their parents and their teachers.

Using images to explain

Raschle also uses images to make it easier for her young test subjects to take part in her research. In order to record an image of the brain, subjects have to lie completely still for several minutes – something that is particularly hard for children. The process goes much smoother if they can watch videos during the scan. It is also helpful if children know what is happening to them and how they are helping contribute to research. Raschle and her team use their own comics and drawings for this purpose, helping to pass on their knowledge to children and families as broadly and compactly as possible.

Raschle also wants to ensure that her findings can be turned into practical applications that benefit young people, for instance by making childrearing or policymaking suggestions that aim at creating ideal environments for different kinds of children to unlock their full potential.

June

2019

Meeting of the Add Health mRNA research group

The Add Health mRNA research group, led by Professors Kathleen Mullen Harris and Michael Shanahan, met at the Jacobs Center from 24–26 June 2019. The group investigates how social experiences over the course of one’s life are connected to certain gene expression patterns. Important discussions on findings and plans for future research took place at the meeting.



July

IRP meeting

Jacobs Center integrated research project

Jacobs Center professors met regularly with colleagues from various disciplines to plan the Jacobs Center Integrated Research Project (IRP), a new prospective longitudinal study of Swiss children. Specialists from various disciplines including economics, pedagogy, pediatrics, psychology, psychopharmacology and sociology were invited to participate in and contribute to designing this new study and to discuss their shared research interests. This new interdisciplinary study is ultimately aimed at answering novel research questions that should help improve the lives of children and adolescents.

Toward Healthy Development with Developmental Psychology

As a professor of clinical developmental psychology, Lilly Shanahan knows that just as our bodies sometimes fall ill, many people also experience mental illness at some point in their lives. This is relatively normal and quite common even in young people. Shanahan focuses her research on the psychological development of children and adolescents.



Prof. Dr. Lilly Shanahan
Professor for Clinical Developmental Psychology Department of Psychology
Principal Investigator of Risk & Resilience Research Area



Depressive symptoms, self-harm and anxiety are terms that one doesn’t necessarily immediately associate with young people.

However, according to Lilly Shanahan, it is precisely these symptoms that occur frequently in childhood and adolescence. Many families are not aware that professional psychological support can be helpful, a source of relief and a way of preventing future issues.

Workshop on transdisciplinary comparisons in human development research



Professor Mike Shanahan organized an interdisciplinary workshop on conceptual models and empirical approaches for researching human development with the use of transdisciplinary comparisons. Discussion topics included social status, early trauma, curiosity and aggressive behaviors. Cross-topic discussions included questions about the assessment of behavioral measures, the social and physical environmental stimuli that organisms perceive and react to and neurological circuits and sensory channels that are involved in the transmission of information.

Professional help still stigmatized

Unfortunately, there is still stigma associated with receiving professional psychological help. Shanahan's research is aimed at breaking down the stigma toward mental illness and psychological treatment and at fostering health-promoting behaviors in children and adolescents. In concrete terms, this means getting enough movement, maintaining friendships and family connections and getting support from professionals if necessary.

While this may sound rather banal, Shanahan points out that it is not all that easy for young people to stick to healthy habits. During adolescence there are many new stress factors that arise and have to be dealt with, which can make it difficult for young people to lead healthy lifestyles.

Puberty: a time of tremendous change

The physical changes of puberty are tremendous, and they are accompanied by a range of psychosocial changes as well: gradually detaching from one's parents, becoming increasingly oriented toward one's peers, first experiences with heartbreak, changing schools, deciding on college or vocational training and trying to look cool in front of one's friends the entire time. Findings from developmental psychology can help improve the mental and physical health of kids and teenagers.

International and interdisciplinary

Shanahan's research is not just limited to Switzerland. She has 16 years of research experience at different American universities, where she contributed to several large longitudinal studies, some of which spanned decades. For each one of these studies, she was part of an interdisciplinary team. And rightfully so: One discipline is not enough if your aim is to understand how people develop over the course of their lives. Shanahan has worked together with experts including anthropologists, nutritionists, biostatisticians, doctors, sociologists and kinesiologists. For Lilly Shanahan, this interdisciplinary approach is the kind of research she loves best – but it also comes with special challenges. Each discipline uses its own terms and methodology and has its own culture of training and publishing. It is not always easy to find a common denominator, but once found, it means that the science of human development becomes even richer. It is for this reason that Shanahan is glad to be conducting research at the Jacobs Center for Productive Youth Development, where conditions for successful interdisciplinary study are ideal.

Science is working hard on improving the health of children and adolescents, but unfortunately the findings don't always penetrate the public consciousness. This is one of the challenges that developmental psychologist Lilly Shanahan is happy to be tackling in the future.

October

2019

Second annual symposium to promote exchange between practitioners and academics



Muriel Langenberger (Jacobs Foundation) and Vigeli Venzin (Department of Education, Canton of Zurich)

Our second annual symposium to promote exchange between practitioners and academics was a great success. The title of the 2019 symposium was “Problem behavior at school, early development and educational success.” Talks were given by the following real-world practitioners and policymakers: Dr. Silvia Steiner (president of the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education and member of the governing council of the Canton of Zurich), Beat Zemp (honorary president of Dachverband Lehrerinnen und Lehrer Schweiz) and Enrico Violi (specialist for violence at school, Department of Education, Canton of Zurich). The Jacobs Center was represented by Prof. Dr. Michael Shanahan, Prof. Dr. Manuel Eisner, Prof. Dr. Ulf Zöllitz, Dr. Margit Averdijk and Dr. Denis Ribeaud. The symposium was moderated by Prof. Dr. Lilly Shanahan (Jacobs Center).

[Brochure](#) ↗

CONTENT

z-proso Study Understanding how children experience violence

Since 2004, the globally acclaimed long-term z-proso study has been tracking the social development of children in Zurich with special focus on how young people experience violence and aggression – both as victims and as perpetrators.



Much time has passed since 2004...

It was the year in which Roger Federer was the undisputed number one tennis player and Mark Zuckerberg founded Facebook. The US was in the third year of its “War on Terror,” and the Swiss public cast their voters in referenda on embryonic stem cell research and lifelong imprisonment. 2004 was also the year in which 1,675 first graders in Zurich were invited to report their experiences with violence. It was the children’s first experience with a survey of this kind, but it wouldn’t be their last.

[z-proso website](#) ↗

z-proso: Three Main Objectives

The Zurich Project of Social Development from Childhood to Adulthood (z-proso) was launched by Prof. Dr. M. Eisner (University of Cambridge and University of Zurich) and is led by Prof. Dr. M. Shanahan and Dr. D. Ribeaud (both of the University of Zurich). z-proso is now part of the Jacobs Center for Productive Youth Development at UZH and receives financial support from the Swiss National Science Foundation as part of the country's national research infrastructure. The study has three main objectives:

High-quality research



z-proso contributes to a better understanding of behavioural problems in children and young adults through interdisciplinary research excellence.

Capacity building



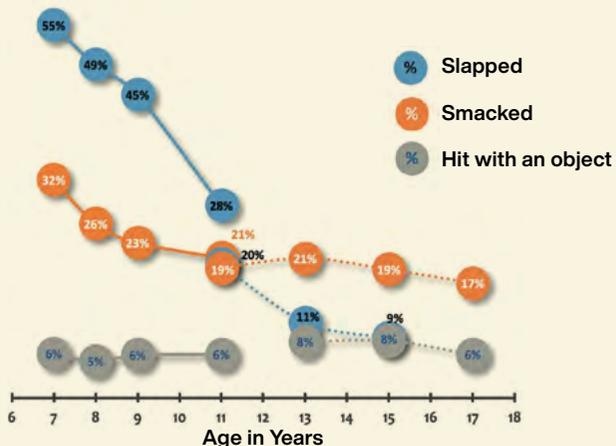
Through its international network, z-proso inspires early career researchers in Switzerland and abroad to address innovative questions while supporting them in their academic development.

Knowledge transfer with impact



z-proso works with local, national and international policymakers to develop more effective strategies to promote psychosocial health and reduce violence.

Physical violence from parents: 7–11 years (according to parents), 11–17 years (according to adolescents)



By 2018, there had been seven additional survey rounds, yielding a rare and precious data set for psychological and sociological research.

Over 70% of the children remained in the study until the end, and parents and teachers also took part, making z-proso a source of unique scientific insight into the maturation process of these children. However, as one of the focal points of the study was children's experiences with violence, not all of the findings were particularly uplifting.

Violence from parents and peers

The interviews showed that over half of the children just starting school were at least occasionally subject to physical punishment: by spanking, slapping or in some cases even being hit with objects. As the children grew older, the physical assaults reduced in frequency, but even 20 percent of the teenagers who were surveyed reported that they were occasionally or frequently slapped.

Violence can come not only from parents but also from peers. Teachers observed that up to one-third of the children just starting school displayed aggressive behavior, hitting, biting and kicking their friends relatively often. As the children grew older, they developed better self-control and physically lashed out less often.

What is the significance of these violent experiences for children? There is good evidence that victims of violence often become perpetrators, and this finding was backed up by z-proso. The schoolchildren who were victims of violence judged violent behavior more positively and tended to show more violent behavior: a vicious cycle, but one that can be broken with the right preventive measures.

Building trust to prevent violence

In the process of becoming adults, children learn important skills that help them avoid violent behavior. They become more empathetic and helpful and can better distinguish right from wrong. However, z-proso found that mistrustful children buck this trend: They tend to display more aggressive behavior as they get older compared to their more trusting peers. The takeaway is that helping young people build more trust in others can be one path to preventing violent tendencies.

Alongside parents, teachers also have a decisive role to play here. In the Zurich school system, children get new teachers after the third grade. z-proso was able to obtain insights into how this change impacted the schoolchildren: If their relationship with the new teacher was worse than with the previous one, the children showed more aggressive behavior on average than if the relationship with the teacher improved. This shows that good relationships between teachers and pupils are beneficial for children's positive social development.

More surveys lie ahead

The children from 2004 are now young adults in their early 20s. Most of them are more prudent, more sociable and show more self-control than they used to. However, some have become wilder, more aggressive and more violent. The z-proso project has shown how multi-layered the causes can be and delivers clues as to how violent tendencies in children can be better prevented.

As this long-term study is set to continue, researchers hope to find out even more about the social development of children.

Our Mission Statement

The Steering Committee put the mission statement into force on 31 October 2019.

Identity

The Jacobs Center for Productive Youth Development is a research center at the University of Zurich. It is jointly funded by the University and the Jacobs Foundation. Our mission is cutting-edge research on the interplay among biological, psychological, social and economic factors as they influence children's and adolescents' development.

Aim

We are committed to improving the lives of young people on the individual, the institutional, and the societal level so that they become socially engaged, contributing members of society.

Interdisciplinarity

We are committed to an interdisciplinary approach involving exchanges among sociologists, psychologists, neuroscientists and economists at the Center, as well as among our research partners in many disciplines. We foster open dialogue while respecting the unique commitments of each discipline.

Research strategy

We cover the whole lifespan from the prenatal phase to adulthood with a strong emphasis on early childhood and adolescence. Large-scale assessments and multi-modal longitudinal studies are used to better understand the possibilities leading to sustainable productive development. We strive to uphold the highest quality in all aspects of our research activities. To maintain professional standards, we regularly monitor and evaluate our performance.

Signature project

In addition to numerous individual research projects, we focus on a signature research project that integrates diverse perspectives and scientists. This project is our joint effort to improve the lives of young people, with a special focus on:

- Strengthening parents as partners in learning
- Organizing diversity to promote everyone's success
- Managing stress to foster learning
- Helping students become citizens
- Encouraging all students to reach their potential

CONTENT

It's All About Your Peers

Ulf Zölitz researches the impact of a person's social environment on their behavior and decision-making. In a current research project, he is investigating how individuals within a group contribute to the better academic performance of other group members. He hopes that the findings can also be transferred to the workplace.

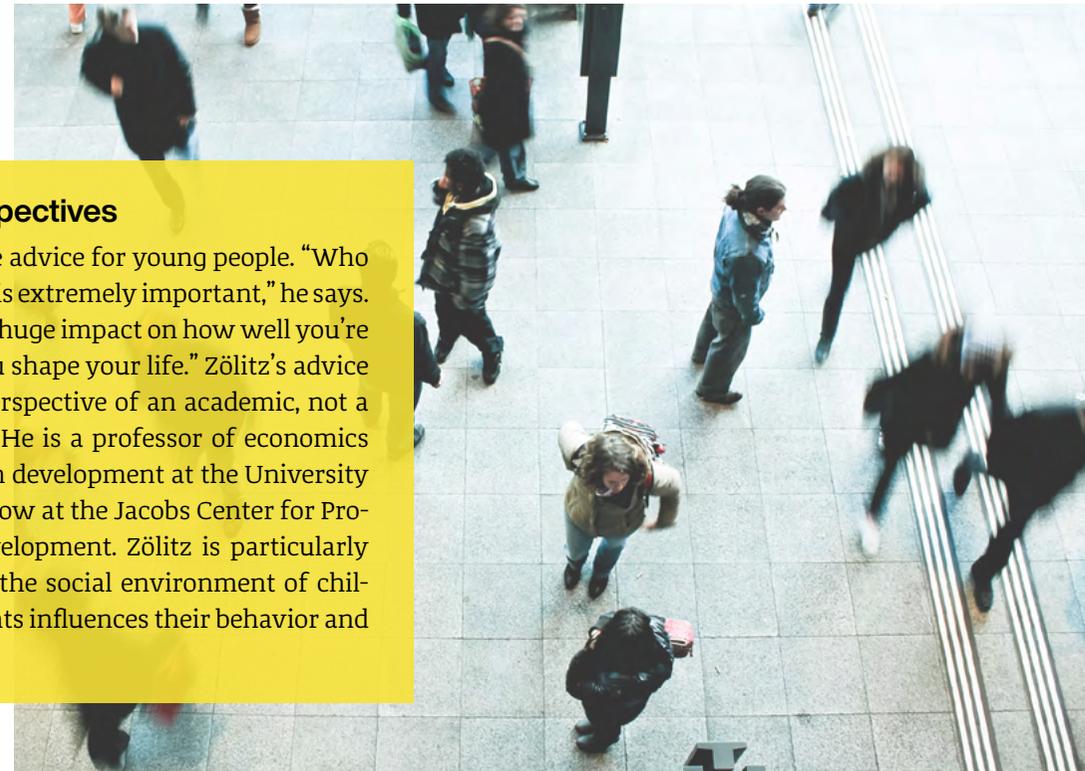


Prof. Dr. Ulf Zölitz

Assistant Professor of Economics
for Child and Youth Development
Department of Economics
Principal Investigator of Education
Economics Research Area

Economic perspectives

Ulf Zölitz has some advice for young people. "Who you hang out with is extremely important," he says. "Your peers have a huge impact on how well you're doing and how you shape your life." Zölitz's advice comes from the perspective of an academic, not a concerned parent. He is a professor of economics for child and youth development at the University of Zurich and a fellow at the Jacobs Center for Productive Youth Development. Zölitz is particularly interested in how the social environment of children and adolescents influences their behavior and decision-making.



Home of long-term longitudinal studies

Historically, we have hosted two flagship longitudinal studies on childhood and adolescence in Switzerland: the Swiss Survey on Children and Youth (COCON) and the Zurich Project on the Social Development from Childhood to Adulthood (z-proso).

International research hub

To broaden our research horizons and foster the exchange of data, we serve as an international research hub for outstanding scholars from other research centers throughout the world.

Diversity

We ensure equal opportunity for women and men and support the principle of non-discrimination in all areas. All staff members are encouraged to act in an ethically responsible manner.

Governance

We endeavor to achieve a spirit of shared responsibility and self-management when pursuing our goals. We foster the intellectual, professional and personal development of our staff. Our governance is based on principles of participation, transparency and balanced interests.

Training of young scholars

We emphasize the promotion of young scholars through research seminars, summer schools, interdisciplinary workshops, scientific conferences, visiting scholar programs and interdisciplinary PhD programs.

Visibility

We share our research with the international scholarly community as well as with the broader public and with political decision-makers through publications, public lectures and workshops open to the public.

Vision

We engage in scientific discovery, pushing boundaries in the study of youth and applying the latest scientific understandings to improving the world of youth and their futures.

At first glance it seems far-fetched to research these issues from an economic angle. However, economic perspectives and theories actually go a long way in helping us better understand how children and adolescents behave and what the optimal conditions are for their development.

Individuals influence the performance of the group

In an ongoing research project, Zölitz is investigating the extent to which individuals – or peers, as they are called in the vernacular of the field – have an influence on the academic performance of their group. He wants to find out which behaviors or skills they transfer to other members of the group to improve their performance. Do they explain new things to their classmates? Contribute subject-specific knowledge or methods that were otherwise not present within the group? Create a more productive learning environment through their behavior? Zölitz quantifies all of these factors as the PVA – or peer value added – that an individual brings to their classmates. This sets him apart from other peer effect researchers who primarily focus on how the group as a whole impacts the performance of individuals. This new approach has paid off, as Zölitz was able to measure the impact of individuals on the performance of others within the same group.

For his research he evaluated randomly composed study groups at the University of Maastricht. It turned out that 13 percent of all group members improved the grades of their cohort significantly. This improved performance wasn't a one-time thing, either: The group members also scored better on later measures of performance. What's more, the students who benefited from the presence of a classmate with a high PVA also developed a higher PVA themselves.

One interesting observation: People with a high PVA do not demonstrate any particular traits or characteristics that would allow them to be categorized as such in advance. Researchers were only able to identify these individuals after the fact when doing the performance assessment. However, students seem to have a good gut feeling as to which classmates could be helpful to them: If a person with a high PVA was present in a group, the group members rated the interpersonal contact better than in groups without a high PVA person.

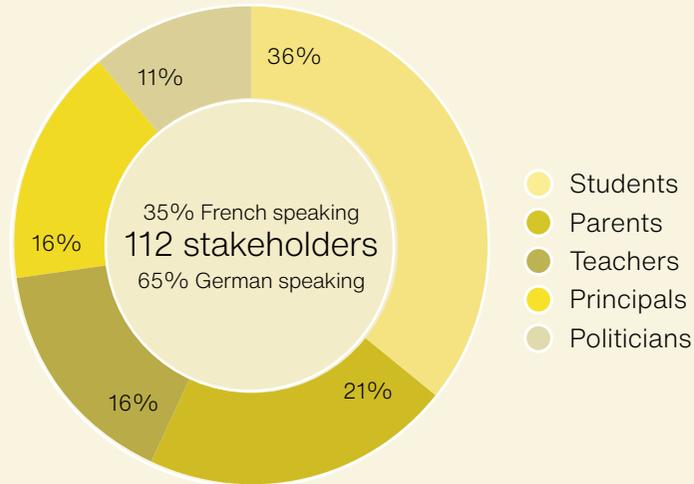
Applicability to the working world

Zölitz points out that we are in the first stages of trying to identify this positive peer influence earlier than is possible today. He could foresee this leading to his findings on PVA being applied to the workplace. The PVA of employees could be measured in a test phase, for instance, in order to come up with the best possible group composition.

After all, if you are surrounded by motivating team members or high-value peers, you will perform better not only at school but also in your career.

Delphi Study (Sample Composition)

Interviews and discussions in focus groups and online communities



Goals of the preliminary study

- A) to test the resonance of the vision and goal behind the IRP,
- B) to verify different concepts of its theoretical framework among stakeholders.

To achieve these goals, the sample we recruited for the preliminary study reflects the design of our main sampling efforts and includes all stakeholders in the Swiss educational system. Through its comprehensive and representative nature, this sample will provide unique insights, interpretations of our concepts and testimonials for our vision from all relevant perspectives.

CONTENT

Bridging Scientific Disciplines and Integrating Knowledge

Michael Shanahan and Martin Kindschi are the driving forces behind a new research project that aims to unite researchers from multiple disciplines. The goal is to foster the development of basic psychological and social skills, healthy lifestyles and inclusion in social networks to facilitate students in their quest to find a place in society where they can realize their full potential.

In our first 1,000 days, we developed an ambitious new data collection effort among Swiss students in primary and secondary education. The project is tentatively called the “Integrated Research Project” (IRP) because it reflects a shared vision and large-scale collaboration among leading scientists from psychology, neuroscience, education, economics, sociology, medicine and network science, all of whom are associated with the Jacobs Center for Productive Youth Development.

As a first step, we collected data in focus groups and online communities and conducted interviews with more than 100 stakeholders in the Swiss educational system, including students, parents, teachers, principals and politicians in the French- and German-speaking areas of the country. Using our theoretical framework as a guideline, the qualitative researchers moderating online community discussions and interviews were instructed to explore the following topics:

a) associations between health and basic psychological and social skills along with responsibilities among stakeholders to foster these skills,

b) access to – and effectiveness of – support via social networks

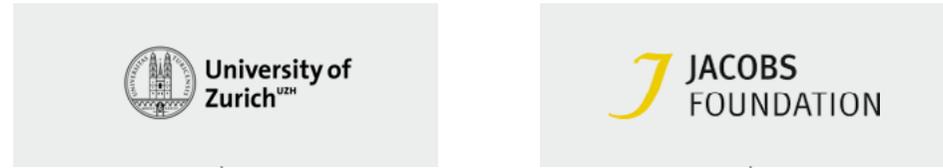
c) stakeholders’ perceptions regarding inequalities in schooling due to socio-demographic factors, along with potential causes and interventions

Some important initial findings that will guide our research are already emerging. For example, all of our stakeholders are very aware of inequalities in schooling due to gender, migration status and parental education, which have also been identified as important points for improvement by scientific studies. In addition, many educators that we interviewed believe that increasing freedom in both curriculum and classroom organization will help foster basic psychological and social skills among students. Moreover, the adolescents in our study viewed parents as their major source of guidance for the development of such skills.

Scientists at the Jacobs Center are now considering both insights from this preliminary study along with other cutting-edge research in order to finalize the research design of our new study and create the best possible scientific and social value.

Organizational Chart

Jacobs Center for Productive Youth Development (JCPYD)



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Michael Shanahan (Research Director)

Cla Famos (Managing Director)

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Managing Director = Chair of the Management Committee | all chairs of the three departments at JCPYD: sociology/psychology/economics | representation of passive members (advisory function)

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Michael Shanahan

**SNSF infrastructure
z-proso**
Manuel Eisner

**Research project
COCON**
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Nora Raschle

**Assistant professor
Economics**
Ulf Zöllitz

**Interdisciplinary
research project**



**University of
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Pictures

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Jacobs Foundation (portrait of Lavinia Jacobs)
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- p. 08 Salvatore Vinci (team photo)
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