YouthWorkAndYou.org

Tallinn University, Estonia
in collaboration with
Victoria University, Australia

Unit 3

Youth Participation and Non-formal Learning

Lived Experiences

TALLINN UNIVERSITY

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY
MELBOURNE AUSTRALIA

Erasmus+

Introduction

Youth Participation - Lived Experiences.

This unit provides you with a short introductory video about real participation experiences and practices, a short analysis on how it connects with knowledge from other units and research on the topic.

This unit will encourage you to support youth participation in many aspects throughout your youth work practice.

Please watch the Unit 3 interactive video before proceeding further.

<u>Setting the Scene</u>

In Unit 2 we learned what youth participation is, how it is explained through different participation models and what theories can help to understand participation. We looked at the history of children and youth participation. We realized that youth participation is always strongly linked to adults and their willingness to share or give away power. We noted that participation starts on an individual level, but grows to social and public participation.

Unit 3 will help you reflect on the role of youth work in youth participation and provides next steps to youth workers or someone who is genuinely interested in supporting children and youth participation.

Unit 3 also starts with individual approaches by connecting real life experiences of young people, youth workers and decision makers with the research and practice of youth participation. In this way we will learn about the benefits and obstacles of youth participation and reflect on how through youth work these obstacles can be minimized and benefits maximized.

What you will learn

Unit 3 Youth Participation - Lived Experiences covers the following:

- Gaining an understanding of youth participation experiences, research and practice.

- Connecting participation experiences and research to participation models and youth work practice

- Getting ready to integrate knowledge about youth participation into own youth work (or other related) practice

Unit 3 Contents

1. Gaining an understanding about youth participation experiences, research and practice.

    Through reflection on experiences of young people and youth workers using research to find out what are obstacles and benefits or barriers and enablers of youth participation.

2. Connecting participation experiences and research to participation models and youth work practice.

    We will look further at how lived experiences of participation and research, connects with participation models (follow on from theory learned in Unit 2). We will ask some questions that encourage you think of how to minimize the obstacles of participation. We will reflect on the expectations put on youth work practice in the light of the knowledge we have.

3. Getting ready to integrate knowledge about youth participation into your own youth work (or other related) practice.

    We will ask some questions to help you reflect on your (future) practice and possible next steps to take.

Questions

What are the benefits of youth participation and what are the barriers to it?

What can youth work do?

To answer these questions we will make connections between lived experiences of youth participation, research, participation models and practice.

<u>Engaging with the Interactive Video Content</u>

1. From lived experiences and research to practice: benefits and obstacles/enablers and barriers to participation

From lived experiences of young people and adults it becomes evident that there are benefits and obstacles or enablers and barriers to participation. 'Enablers' and 'barriers' are terms most often used in research and literature. There is a limited amount of research done on youth participation and most of it is connected to participation in certain programs and services, but also in community life.

Research and lived in experiences show us that the main obstacles and barriers to youth participation are connected to adults willingness, knowledge, skills, prejudice etc. to engage with youth becomes essential for participation to happen (Faithfull et al, 2019). These can be called individual barriers and the same kind of individual barriers can exist from the side of young people themselves. Young people may be convinced that they will not be heard anyway (and it is easier to remain passive) or they know too little about the topic where decisions are made, they may lack the experience, skills or interest in socializing with adults in formal setting.

Then there are organisational or structural barriers. For example - what kind of participation principles are valued and clearly communicated at school? What traditions, tools and ways are used in involving young people into decision making by local community officers? Is there a willingness to agree on local budget by including young people: see [participatory budget](#) in Helsinki, Finland. Organisational barriers usually include lack of finances, unsuitable environments or methods used for engaging young people, lack of plans for ongoing participation etc. (Faithfull et al, 2019). An important resource for participation is time! Participation can be time-consuming.

The benefits of participation are often looked on in the light of the 'positive youth development' concept (Serido et al, 2014; Purdue et al, 2018). What young people learn (new skills and knowledge), gain (network, new contacts) or what they become (active citizens, self-confident etc.) through participation. Although we heard the same opinions from video 3, some benefits like "making life better for other youth" and "being useful" came up as well, as did "doing something interesting and challenging" etc., which may sometimes be overlooked from the adults' side. This side on the other hand can explain why young

people are not so involved in traditional participation (political voting) these days. You will find additional material on the issue at the end of this material. You will also find some more reading on meaningful youth participation which takes into account interests and initiatives of young people themselves and what it takes to change decision-making processes.

There are many benefits which youth participation brings to the organisation, company, community and society. Many have the desire to show others they have included young people in their processes. In our approach, we must be mindful to include young people in a meaningful way, as there is always a danger of restricting their participation, so that consultations with young people are driven only by the interests of adults (tokenism). On the other hand, if youth participation is well integrated into service design there may be great results. For example, there are many benefits in [health care](#) derived from paying attention to the values and principles of youth participation.

We may wonder if, and how much, young people are engaged in designing youth work programs, educational curriculum, etc.

2. Connecting experiences, research, participation models and youth work practice.

We can see from lived experiences, confirmed by research, that barriers and enablers or obstacles and benefits to youth participation cross all main elements of participation according to most participation models introduced in Unit 2: Process, Conditions, Roles. The hindrances can appear during or before the process and can be connected with non-supportive conditions, such as too formal or intimidating environments, logistics, wrong timing etc. Facilitation of the process is also important - what methods are used or how dialogue is enabled; how much, and what kind of, information is provided to young people or how possibilities of participation are secured, communicated and sustained. Is the process understandable to young people? Do young people need extra skills? Can they access decision making process easily at all stages etc.?

These questions bring us to the position of young people and the role they are willing and/or ready to take. This leads us to empowerment for participation through youth work, which is possibly a better known and accepted role of youth work. However, these questions also take us to the role of adults in participation because adults seem to play the most

relevant part in enabling youth participation · conditions and processes are usually in their hands. This brings us back to "power issues" and to the core of youth participation · adults willing to share or give up their power. What role can youth work have here? Can youth workers "open the doors" of power for young people and be their bridge? Can they train adults, including decision makers, in engaging or having dialogue with youth? Can they offer neutral and safe spaces for participation? Should youth workers be activists for active youth and youth participation? These are real challenges for youth workers, especially considering that they can be monitored and paid by local or state government officials · the same people they should convince, train or cooperate with in order to involve young people in meaningful participation. There is a need for cooperation between youth workers themselves and youth workers' associations to clearly state the role of youth workers. There is also a responsibility of universities and non·formal training providers to equip and empower youth workers with this knowledge.

3. Reflections. Getting ready.

At the end of Unit 3 you have reflected on non·formal learning and youth participation from different perspectives. Your own learning has been rather non·formal: with e·learning materials, which may have been part of more formal learning (university course) or not. This non·formal way of learning was purposeful (as non·formal learning always is)

and had learning outcomes which were set by authors of this material. As an independent learner you should now evaluate if you have reached those learning outcomes. If not, you can first turn to suggested reading materials. You can also set new and "higher" learning goals in this topic and plan your further learning path.

The same way you can now evaluate yourself as a (future) youth worker in understanding and supporting youth participation and plan your next steps or "higher" goals. For that, please take a time and reflect and act on questions below:

1. Choose any project you as a youth worker or you as a young person have been in (or possibly are planning to be involved in) and identify obstacles of youth participation.
2. After identifying obstacles of youth participation · what could have been done or can be done to overcome these obstacles?
3. Please choose an adult person whom you know and who is friendly, but who is not familiar with youth work or youth participation issues. Please explain to them the essence of youth participation and listen to the questions or arguments asked. After doing that please evaluate your own arguments and whole discussion and think how you could approach someone next time.
4. Instead of, or additionally to, No. 3, you can write down the arguments explaining and supporting youth participation in your own local context and write an article to local newspaper (or a blog, for example).

Links to further Information and Reading

Here is a list of additional information which will assist you to explore youth participation concept and practice further as well as resources that you can use while working with young people or supporting children and youth participation in other ways.

Articles

Bowen, S.; Sustar, H.; Wolstenholme, D.; Dearden, A. (2013). "Engaging teenagers productively in service design." *International Journal of Child-Computer Interaction* 1, pp. 71-81. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2212868914000038

Faithfull, S. (2019). "Barriers and enablers to meaningful youth participation in mental health research: qualitative interviews with youth mental health researchers." *Journal of Mental Health* Vol. 28 (1).

Purdue, S.; Peterson, H.; Deng, C. (2018). "The case for greater youth participation in monitoring and evaluation in international development." *Evaluation Journal of Australasia* Vol. 18 (4), pp. 206-221

van Reeuwijk, M. (2018). "Meaningful Youth Participation as a way to achieving success - Results from operational research in a large scale youth SRHR program in Africa and Asia." *Canadian Journal of Children's Rights* Vol 5 (1), pp. 200-222. https://ojs.library.carleton.ca/index.php/cjcr/article/view/1301

Serido, J.; Borden, L. M.; Wiggs, C. B. (2014). "Breaking Down Potential Barriers to Continued Program Participation." *Youth & Society* Vol 46 (1), pp. 51-69

Books

Briggs, J. (2017). *Young People and Political Participation: Teen Players*. Palgrave Macmillan

Kay, E.; Tisdall, M.; Davis, J. M.; Prout, A.; Hill, M. (2006). *Children, Young People and Social Inclusion. Participation for What?* The Policy Press

Lesco, W (2006). *Maximum Youth Involvement. The Complete Gameplan for Community Action.* Youth Activism Project. https://youthactivismproject.org/

Westwood, J.; Larkins, C.; Moxon, D.; Perry, Y.; Thomas, N. (2014). *Participation, Citizenship and Intergenerational Relations in Children and Young People's Lives. Children and Adults in Conversation.* Palgrave Macmillan

Walther, A.; Batsleer, J.; Loncle, P.; Pohl, A. (2020). *Young People and the Struggle for Participation. Contested practices, power and pedagogies in public spaces.* Routledge

Websites

Youth engagement in politics: indifferent or just different? Jacob Helliwell. TEDxYouth@Victoria

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vdDFLzyk94k

Global Consensus Statement. Meaningful Adolescent and Youth Engagement.

Global Consensus Statement PDF

Building Effective Youth-Adult Partnerships

https://advocatesforyouth.org/resources/fact-sheets/building-effective-youth-adult-partnerships/

Setting Standards for Youth Participation. PDF Self-Assessment Guide for Governance and Programs.

http://www.youthcoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/IPPF-YOUTH-GUIDE.pdf

Youth-Adult Partnership for Change

http://actforyouth.net/youth_development/engagement/partnerships.cfm
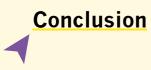
Wrapping Up

Young people have the right to participate in decisions which concern their life and there are not many areas of life which actually don't concern them. There can be barriers to youth participation, both on individual or organisational levels. Removing or avoiding these barriers and facilitating the road of participation is up to adults. And it might be up to youth workers not only to empower young people on the road of participation, but also support, engage and teach adults to share their power genuinely with young people.

Conclusion

1. Youth participation is a process and on the road of this process, different barriers or obstacles can occur. Youth participation requires good planning, time and other resources, but also a willingness of adults to genuinely share with or give away their power to young people, so that meaningful contributions and decisions can be made by them. Once started, youth participation possibilities should be sustained and clearly communicated.

2. Youth participation benefits young people (from the perspective of positive development), but it also benefits organisations, community and society - all of us.

3. Although youth participation means that young people learn something, gain new skills etc., it also means that adults who are involved in youth participation, must learn new skills, obtain new knowledge and new perspectives, let go of their prejudice etc.

4. Youth workers have the role not only in empowering young people for participation, but also supporting, training and influencing decision makers and other adults who hold the 'keys'.

YouthWorkAndYou.org

Unit 3

Rannala, Ilona and Polda, Halliki (2019) *Youth Participation and Non-formal Learning Units 1, 2 and 3.* Youth Work eLearning Partnership (YWeLP). Available at

https://www.youthworkandyou.org/ywelp-module-two/

Contact:

Dr Ilona-Evelyn Rannala

ilona-evelyn.rannala@tlu.ee

School of Educational Sciences
Tallinn University
Estonia

This document was provided by the YWeLP Project.

For more resources like this, go to www.youthworkandyou.org

YWeLP Partner Universities:
Maynooth University, Ireland
HUMAK University of Applied Sciences, Finland
Tallinn University, Estonia
Victoria University, Australia
Ulster University, Northern Ireland

Supported by:
Estonian Association of Youth Workers, The Kanuuna Network, National Youth Council of Ireland, YouthAction Northern Ireland, Youth Workers' Association, Victoria

HUMAK UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES · Ollscoil Mhá Nuad Ollscoil na hÉireann Má Nuad · TALLINN UNIVERSITY · VICTORIA UNIVERSITY MELBOURNE AUSTRALIA · Ulster University · Erasmus+