

EUROPEAN ACADEMY ON YOUTH WORK - WORKSHOP REPORT

Youth Work-Research Connection: It's Not Really Rocket Science

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TOPIC ADDRESSED

The **aim** of the proposed workshop was to strengthen the practice-research link in order to contribute to the overall quality of the youth work practice.

The **specific objectives** were:

- to increase awareness of the importance of research within practice;
- to make the practitioners understand that research is and should be an inherent part of their own activities and not a specific field reserved for abstract science or specialists;
- to introduce everyday research tools that can be utilised;
- to discuss how to integrate a research dimension into youth work practice, from “needs assessment” to “monitoring and evaluation”;
- to underline and discuss the importance of producing evidence in order to support further policy and practice developments;
- to explore how to establish and strengthen links with the research community as practitioners.



METHODOLOGY AND CONTENT

The session was held in the format of a workshop. The participants had the chance both to discuss and exchange opinions and to receive input on definitions and the current state of art in research practice and research policy debate within youth work in Europe.

The flow of the workshop was as follows:

- **Research as an everyday practice:** As an introduction to the workshop and to initiate the discussion, a series of individual and group exercises was done. This was followed by a discussion on: how do practitioners in the youth field develop questions about their work and how do they search for answers. This part was concluded with a discussion about a systematic and scientific approach to the youth work – research linkage.

- **Practitioners' perspectives on researchers:** The participants were asked to share their perspectives on researchers using Mentimeter, and the result was discussed as a group:

I think researches are:



- **Researchers' motivation:** The session continued with discussing and comparing youth researchers' motivation (as perceived by the participants) and identifying which incentives were shared by the practitioners. Some of the incentives listed by the participants are as follows:

- To know
- To find answers to questions troubling them (I hope!)
- To understand the reality and to improve some aspects
- Because they earn money with their profession
- They want to understand the world better
- Find patterns and suggest new systems
- Money
- Scientific interest
- To improve something
- To get a deeper understanding of social phenomena
- To see the connection between different phenomena
- To understand the reality
- To give answers back to practice
- To improve something
- To interpret the state of things they are researching
- Passion
- To gain more insight on the reality
- They are interested in evidence
- So the field can develop in the right way

- **The importance of evidence in youth work:** The group discussed the importance and necessity of evidence in youth work and agreed that there was an increased pressure for evidence based practice, which is constantly demanded by funding and administrative authorities. However, the group had mixed views on the prioritisation of using evidence, as presented in the group voting below:

Evidence based



In terms of evidence based practice, the discussion focused on the importance of Evidence Based Practice (EBP) and the major issues of EBP were presented: the needs of the stakeholders; the suitability of the practice for the targeted groups; the effectiveness of the practice; the preferences of the recipients and finally, the accountability of the practitioners.

- **The Research agenda:** The participants were invited to share and discuss which topics they considered the most relevant for research. The discussion results are as follows:

What topics should be researched?



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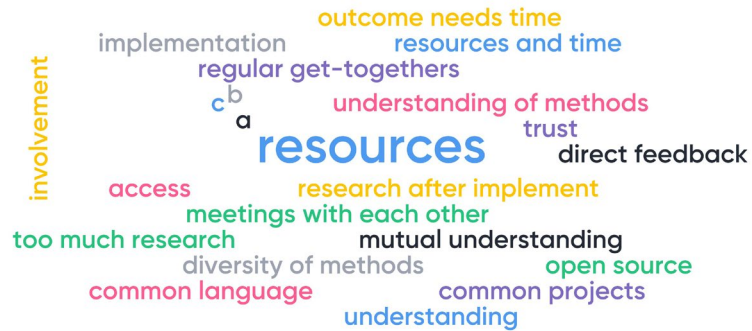
- **The researcher's needs:** The group worked together to come up with a list of recommendations on what is needed to conduct research in youth work. Some (selected) suggestions are:

- Access to other realities to observe different perspectives
- Willingness, motivation Methodology, aim
- Guidance, training, handbooks
- Needs and interests of young people
- Participants
- Theoretical understanding of methods
- Self-motivation
- Knowing and reflection on the methods used
- Knowledge about the basics of research.
- Clarity about the research question
- An (own) frame to shape their research
- Time (lots of)
- Practice :) practice :)
- Internet
- A clear research topic. And to be unbiased
- To see the point of it
- Time, space, practice and observations
- Previous results of research
- Practice, training, topic



- *The research-practice link:* In the final round of the workshop, the participants discussed how to establish and strengthen the link between research and practice. As the participating group was composed of both practitioners and researchers, the exercise was interesting and productive. The final outcomes of the exercise were as follows:

What is missing in RESEARCH - PRACTICE linkage?



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CONCLUSIONS

The workshop was interesting and important for the mere fact that it allowed the practitioners and researchers to explore, exchange and discuss the popular issue of producing evidence in youth work.

It also aimed at providing a framework for the practitioners to approach research as part of their everyday practice and internalise research from needs analysis to evaluation and impact analysis of their work. This practitioner-researcher link also represents the innovative approach for youth work: to encourage practitioners to integrate research into the planning, design and implementation of their practice and not externalise it, leaving it to the research field only.

Finally, the session also created a space for pointing out what is needed and what needs to be improved to facilitate the practice-research dialogue as well as how to make research more practice friendly.



FEEDBACK FROM PARTICIPANTS

Some of the concluding remarks by the participants included:

- Keep the practice of publishing open calls for contributions to Youth Knowledge Books (<https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/knowledge-books>).
- The European Platform on Learning Mobility is the perfect place for researchers and practitioners to meet, discuss and develop cooperation on this issue (<https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/european-platform-on-learning-mobility>).
- Thank you for the to-the-point and interesting session.
- Great contribution that provides food for thought.



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