

EUROPEAN ACADEMY ON YOUTH WORK - WORKSHOP REPORT

The Political /Civic Role of Youth Workers – How to Translate that into Competences?

Gisele Evrard-Marković, SALTO Training and Cooperation RC, Germany
Contact: gisele@salto-youth.net

TOPIC DISCUSSED

The intention of that contribution was to explore the 'political' role of youth workers and the space it takes in their day-to-day practice to act as political human being, to be a role model for others and to work with youngsters on their political interests (which meant to also debate the difference between the 'big P' and the 'small p').

Hence, besides a presentation of the ETS Competence Model for Youth Workers to Work Internationally and the fact that this 'political role' or 'civic engagement' will be turned into the 9th competence area of the model, we initiated an short exchange on this topic.

METHODOLOGY

After a round of who's who, we started the session with a brief introduction of the of the competence model for youth workers. This was not long as we wanted to save time for personal and group reflection.

The next steps consisted in an exercise where participants were invited to explore their role as youth worker vs. as political being. The process went as follows:

a) Youth worker vs. the political being

Each participant wrote on 2 pieces of paper

- Me as a youth worker
- Me as a political/civic being

They drew arrows going vertical on top of the words.

They were invited to stand on the 1st paper and consider (let flow...) all the things that make them a youth worker (if they are). They did the same on the 2nd paper and considered all the things that make them a political/civic being (this was a personal process, in silence) and reflected on 'what defines what?' (which role defines which role and what defines each of the roles).

Participants were invited to pay attention to how it felt to stand on one or the other and to re-arrange their arrows- opposing, conflicting, opposite, contrary, harmony, unified. Play with different options and see how it feels.

b) Sharing in pairs

Participants shared their reflections about their papers and the direction of their arrows with each other. They could decide to change the way it 'felt just' (if so, they were asked to think what would be needed to change this level of influence).



c) In groups of 5-6 persons

Participants gathered in groups and explored two questions:

- What is political (small p) about my practice?
- How does that translate in terms of competences (attitudes, skills and knowledge)

On moderation cards, they wrote key ideas or key words that will be used in the drafting process of the new competence area of the competence model.

d) Zoom out questions

KEY ISSUES RAISED SUCH AS CHALLENGES

The main challenge that is usually connected to such a process is whether to be neutral or take a stand (no matter how it is called: civic engagement, activism, political role...). We are in this case not only facing personal values and how each and everyone considers their work, but we also face the reality (and context) of countries where what resonates with those words varies a lot.

The other challenge is about how to make sure that this competence model and this competence area is guaranteed to be used properly, and not by groups or organisations that do not stand for the set of values we base our work on. This is partially answered by having references to the Human Rights framework, but of course not only, and total control on the use of the model is not possible (and to a certain extent, not wished).

INNOVATIVE RESPONSE(S) TO THOSE CHALLENGES

We did not focus on the innovative dimension as such but on collecting ideas that expressed, for the participants, what should form the core of this future competence area. Focusing on addressing the challenges would have required more time and should, possibly, come at another phase of the elaboration of the competence area.

Inputs on the possible political dimension in the Competence Model for Youth Workers to Work Internationally (non-clustered):

- Provide opportunities for action
- Create a safe environment
- Providing frames for a respectful communication/ setting
- Safe limits for young people
- Ability to inspire and encourage
- Awareness of own values (as youth worker) and their influence
- Put "inclusion" into practise
- Share and not share opinion at the right time
- Awareness raising
- Conflict management
- Working with all/other opinions
- Personal integrity
- Civic courage
- To get informed
- Adaptability
- Be able to analyse one's actions in relation to what values they signal/stand for
- Be aware of the political situation in one's country
- Courage to tackle societal problems
- Fairness, authenticity and "neutrality" (if possible, least important if others are taken care of)
- Critical thinking



- Persistence to bring the change
- Be able to communicate one's values
- Lobbying for inclusion
- Identify/appreciate the civic dimension (=political) of young peoples' activities and ideas
- Humour
- Having a dialogue with policy makers/engaging with policy makers
- Challenging the views of young people II
- #RF CDC model
- Knowing your local, national, European context
- Awareness of environmental issues
- To enable people to understand their democratic/civic influence in society
- To foster participation
- To encourage social change
- To ignite a discussion
- To manage a discussion (moderate/give space)
- Be coherent to values you talk about
- Advocating for projects of youth work
- Picking clothes, venues, speakers, content and methodology
- Relating to differences of tastes, opinions, backgrounds, passions, world views, faiths, values
- Decision about activities, programmes
- We stand for certain values and organise actions which promote or support these values
- Youth work is always political
- To act out little civic gestures and to spread them
- Encouraging empowerment/democratic way of thinking
- Empowering representing one's own interests/rights/ideas/values
- Influencing and shaping youth policy and law on youth
- Creating and shaping spaces for young people to debate/experience/ reflect past, current and future societal/social developments
- Advocating and lobbying
- What is right and what is wrong
- Try to change things and generate change → but to which direction?
- Knowledge of different tools of participation
- Ability to facilitate a (controversial) debate
- Depending already on the kind of interaction I use in my work has an impact. E.g. making people self-governing (→ respectful with each other) or obedient (not really democratic)

**KEY TRENDS
IDENTIFIED
(COMMONALITIES
BETWEEN
COMMENTS/
PARTICIPANTS)**

See question about the challenges and the bullet points above (repetitions have been removed).

FEEDBACK FROM PARTICIPANTS

"I don't think that you can do a mindfulness workshop in 1,5 hours. It's better to concentrate on exchange then. The workshop also didn't bring any new information."

"Very nice workshop. Good and interesting content but also the facilitator was very aware of the group and lead the workshop in a very good and appreciating way."

Both quotes reflect the way things developed. Obviously, the idea was not to have a session on mindfulness but the word was pronounced, and there is indeed that dimension when working with polarities.

The lack of time to go through the full process prevented exploring further the common issues and challenges raised by participants. This led to a reflection by the contributor that should we repeat the experience, we would need to basically start where the workshop ended and be able to already go much more in depth. This would of course require a different sort of preparation, but is possible.

It was interesting to observe and listen to the exchanges in the groups that, on a general note, seemed to be fairly in line with similar consultative processes that took place in other events. On the one hand, this shows a certain coherence and consistency in the way to approach such a topic. On another hand, it might also be the result of approaching this in a too conventional manner, and therefore encourages to perhaps also consult youth workers that we are not so used to working with.

LINKS TO FURTHER RESOURCES OR INFORMATION ABOUT THE PROJECT AVAILABLE ONLINE



<https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/training-and-cooperation/tc-rc-nanetworktcs/youthworkers-competence-model/>



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