

Cultural Competency:

A Practice Tool to Potentially Enhance Youth Participation

Research Context:

Look at life through the eyes of a child. That's good advice but all too often ignored by adults.

In our modern adult-centred world, global policy places young people at the centre of the civic engagement debate. However, youth voices are generally missing, especially from the southern hemisphere and girls. Adults tend to apply YCE definitions which are too narrow and restrictive to fully appreciate youth understandings of their own engagements. In short, they're too 'adult' and too inflexible to manage the different ways young people see the world and participate in it.

Research Question & Methodology:

So, how can the problem be fixed? A rights-based approach may ensure young voices are heard but should do so without unbalancing the cultural context. Could the answer be to develop new spaces where adults and young people discuss and debate YCE from their own perspectives, learn from each other about YCE, risk and resilience, and apply the lessons to develop YCE for their context?

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Key Findings:

- There is a mismatch between adult and youth understandings of YCE. Adults understand it as 'political' engagement. Young people interpret it as 'to do good'.
- In five of the six study sites, girl prostitution is named as an engagement/risk. In other words, YCE is important to girls in protecting from a particular problem affecting them.
- There is a lack of services targeting 12-14 year olds.
- When applied to family support, cultural competency:
 - Enhances youth participation and provides a more rounded picture of complexities within the family;
 - Encourages family members to feel respected, meaning they may become more trusting of formal supports;
 - Ensures formal supports become more aware of cultural factors, meaning practice may be improved to promote positive outcomes.

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