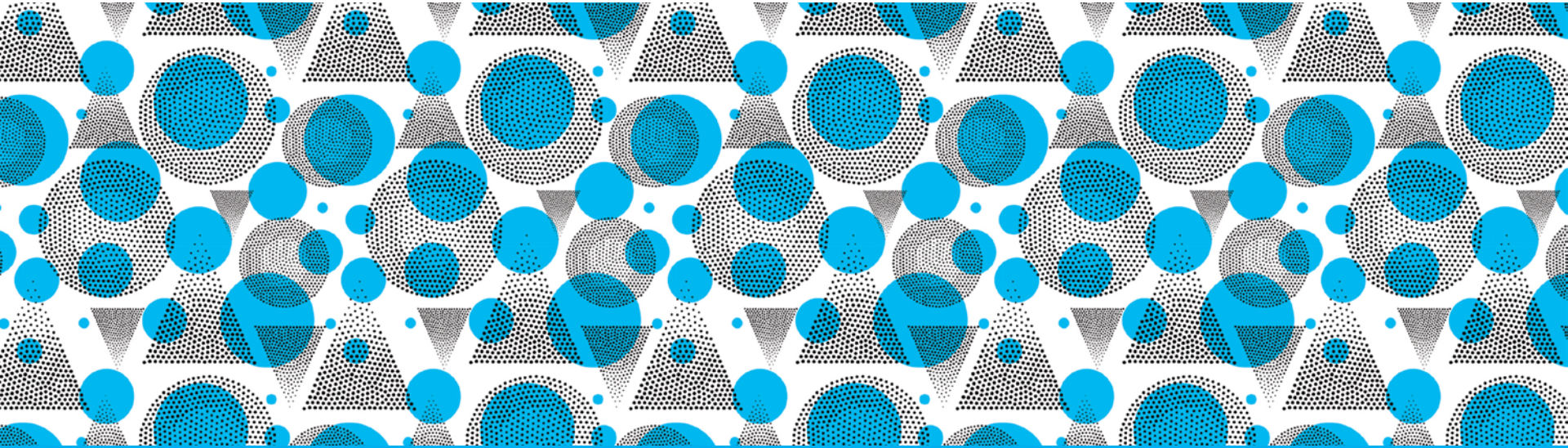




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Together we are stronger



Pekka Mäkelä, the Regional manager of Youth Services (City of Vantaa), answers to the critical questions as follows

Views on theoretical groundings

How might thinking about internal and external assets help with your professional practice?

In the practical work it is not clear what are the differences between external and internal resources. But the main thing is that both are mapped. There is much advantage from this because those answers are found from the young themselves. Assets can be searched with this kind of a tool and we can be found these resources from the young. Too often we forget the fact, that the young people have a lot of those resources and we ignore them. We must ask and clarify from them and must take them into consideration.

Views on theoretical groundings

How might thinking about your assets based approaches, appreciative inquiry and shared expertise help to inform your professional practice?

First of all that appreciative inquiry which is a new concept to me. But if you can understand that a young are equal and in it is appreciated, it is really good. It gives value to the young whom it belongs to. It is a good starting point. In the mapping of these resources, it is obvious that we can obtain information and their thoughts from the young people itself. This is the information that we the workers can't possess in the first place. If we would have this kind of information, then we would be thinking that the young people do think this way. This participation and the including of the adolescents are really important in the youth work. If by using such good methods and in appreciating young people this way, it brings a new dimension to our work. In youth work we see that inclusion of the youth builds on working from young to the young. In that process youth share their expertise and experience among themselves. Often it will go just so, when you have gained something, then you want to give back in return. In that situation we listen to young people. We will find out their thoughts, experiences and information. This process also trains our youth workers to understand how much good and useful information the young people have. It increases youth workers understanding and it empowers them too; It also further increases the appreciation of the young people and their own work. They understand that their work is valuable.

Views on application possibilities

What opportunities does this open, or indeed close off, for you as a practitioner?

It doesn't close off anything. This brings to the centre what is essential. We really listen to those young people what thoughts they have and how they see these matters. In that situation us professionals and adults we make that mistake that we think that we know what is best for the young and we know how to act. We don't ask from the young and we ignore them. By listening the youth we create such an atmosphere and procedure that we really obtain their thoughts. This brings great extra value to the methods that we use in youth. In this way we bring out the voice of the adolescents.

Views on application possibilities

How can practitioners who draw on experience rather than knowledge promote equality?

By taking the experiences of their adolescents seriously. Of course we need both, a theory and information are always needed. But the experiences are much more valuable. By combining them both, it makes a good combination. We need sufficient theoretical information and also experience. That would be the best combination.

Views on application possibilities

How might it be applied in different contexts, to what degree is it generalisable?

This kind of thinking can be thought of in any given situation or operation with the young people. The ordinary evening in youth center with the adolescents can be conducted in the management of the youth workers. But on the contrary, it can be carried out by just the other way around. The young people will decide and tell they want to do. They'll tell what kind of programmes and events they want. We really listen what the young people want. In the youth work it is important that we know what the young people think of and are their thoughts. How can we utilize this information that young people possess. And all those resources, then they can be used when they participate. They bring out their opinions and then they will join together in activity. Even more and more, we'd want these youth to join.

Views on application possibilities

How would you apply it in your practice and context?

As a manager, at least I would create such possibilities and preconditions that the young people could be listened to and the resources of the adolescents can be obtained. We should not be too busy to even notice and do things "like we have done always". By good leadership we can change this kind of thinking. We can integrate this new way of thinking to our strategy, objectives, scorecards and action plans in youth work. In those we can present that "we do our youth work this way - we take all resources of the adolescents into use".

Think of a context you are operating in:

What kind of community are you operating in according to five commonly acknowledged community types?
(Healy, 2012)

At first glance I am not able to identify what would be the best option. Youth work is so broad-based activity. At its best, it is operated in all those areas. According to its name it is service to the young people. The word youth services tells you already that it is a service. But at the same time we serve the whole communities and adolescents' relatives. We give support to all the residents in the, even though the target group is young people. We are developing a lot and do community planning. The voice of the adolescents is being strongly brought out in those activities. In our education, the knowledge and experience of the adolescents are brought into use for the young people, but also for adults. The young people also tell the teachers, for example about their experiences on the school bullying.

Think of a context you are operating in:

How is power distributed in this community from the viewpoint of the young?

Unevenly of course. In youth services, youth center can be considered as a community. The young people visit there and there are our youth workers. Yes, it is a very equal community. The youth workers as an adults will ultimately decide and they are responsible for that all the operations and activities are conducted correctly. When you compare any service to another, in youth services the young people are in a very equal position and quite much on the same line with adults. Where the youth workers decides something, a young people can propose an alternative option that "can we be do this this way?" It is one part of the citizenship education, so that the young people are able to influence. When they participate, they will see that they are able to have an effect on things. It is really important to us that their voices are heard. It does not perhaps take place at schools or at some other communities so much. In our community it is totally possible. We the division of the power is looked at from the point of view of the adolescent, the young people think that adults rule and they decide on everything and the young people are not listened to. Because of it, we have created other influencing forums to youth, such as youth council. That is why we must think particularly of those young people. On other multi-professional forums the voice of the adolescents is weak. They are not present in those forums, so they are not able influence on matters by themselves. But in those forums, we are advocating their position and it is our one task to be the voice of the adolescents.