A CRITICAL (RE)TURN

EUROPEAN YOUTH WORK & CHANGING CIVIC SPACE

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WHY NEW APPROACHES (AND WHY NOW)?

- "Circumstances are shifting", but aren't they always?

    - Social and economic inequality & inequity: Old (and persistent) problem that is growing

    - COVID-19 made existing inequalities even more stark

- Not about specific *methods or interventions*, but *approaches*

- TODAY: some interesting developments that seek "new" approaches in European youth work

EXAMPLES OF "NEW" APPROACHES IN THE EUROPEAN YOUTH SECTOR

Critical youth citizenship

Intersectionality

CRITICAL SOCIAL THEORY

CRITICAL SOCIAL THEORY (BROADLY)

- Way of understanding and addressing societal structures that underpin social, economic, and political inequity (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1981; hooks, 1994)

- Analysis of structures of privilege, oppression, power and identifying opportunities to change and transform those structures

- Key part: critical consciousness – 3 parts (Watts et al, 2011)

  - Critical reflection

  - Political efficacy

  - Critical action

- A (re)turn to critical pedagogy in youth work? Late 1960s early 1970s in response to student uprisings (UK, France, Germany)

WHAT DOES "CRITICAL" LOOK LIKE?

(FOR YOUTH WORK)

"CRITICAL YOUTH CITIZENSHIP"

- 2017 JfE conference: 'Speak UP! Step UP! European youth work empowering young people's democratic values & active citizenship'

- 2020 Ohana: discussion paper *What's politics got to do with it? European youth work programmes and the development of critical youth citizenship*

- 2021 JfE: 'European Symposium on the Development of Critical Youth Citizenship' *(forthcoming)*

- Criticism of "de-politicised" European youth work

- Is European youth work living up to its promise? (e.g. more democracy, better outcomes for young people)

FOR YOUTH WORK, "CRITICAL" LOOKS LIKE:

- Explicitly working on *socio-political issues* with a normative approach based on *democratic values and human rights*

- Focuses more on *policy and politics* (What are the policies that are harming youth wellbeing? Harming democracy? Which parties are pushing for them? What forces are keeping them in power? Why?)

- Youth participation that is more than "personal and professional skill building" but aimed at *activism* (How can we change these policies?)

- Youth participation in *more spaces* other than on youth policy (e.g. economy, foreign policy, climate policy)

- Closer to the *grassroots* (less professionalised participation structures, less gate-keeping)

INTERSECTIONALITY

- 2014 CoE: *Barbaripen: Young Roma speak about multiple discrimination*

- 2021 CoE: Online Consultative Meeting "Applying Intersectionality in the Youth Field"

- 2021 SALTO ID: "ID Talks Intersectional: We are all so different in different ways"

- Addressing discrimination & marginalisation with an intersectional aproach

    - Systems of privilege and oppression interlock

    - *Unique* experience of marginalisation (not additive or multiplicative)

FOR YOUTH WORK, "CRITICAL" LOOKS LIKE:

- Recognising *highly specific* profiles of marginalisation (e.g. Young Roma women, Young LGBT Roma people, Migrant young Roma) and the *systems* of discrimination (e.g. racism, sexism, classism) as both *interpersonal* and *structural*

- Extending *contextualisation* to other groups (e.g LGBT refugees; young women with disabilities)

- *Centering the voices* of those experiencing marginalisation (to speak for themselves)

...AND "CRITICAL" CAN ALSO LOOK LIKE

- Community development, policy advocacy + youth work

- Tailor-made work with highly specific (and highly local) groups to account for context

- More nuance to thinking about "Youth with Fewer Opportunities" - clustered exclusion factors?

- Challenges:

  - More context – less international?

  - More specificity – less replicability?

  - "Old" way of doing things reflects entrenched powers, funding concentrated at a high level - Discomfort with an adversarial approach

  - Belief it is beyond the remit of youth work (Ohana, 2020)

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

- Social change phenomenon are shaped by existing structures that make it better/worse for some people

- Circumstances shift, but structures – power, privilege, oppression - that shape outcomes, hardly do

- We need to examine structures (and also aim to change them)

- New approaches (not just methods) are needed for youth work to keep (or expand) scope for influence

- Needs to be agile enough to respond to any circumstance - and keep relevance

THANK YOU