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Using a children's rights-based approach to create a zine



Reflections on taking a children's-rights based approach to creating a zine.

This post is written for Human Rights Education (HRE) educators in any specific field, teachers, youth workers, project managers and more. This document is also beneficial for creating content or activities that relate to International Youth Day!

Introduction

In the Spring of 2021, Equitas' team wanted to create something to highlight the innovative and impactful youth-led community action projects that emerged from our 2020-2021 programming in Canada (information can be found at equitas.org). While normally we would host an in-person gathering to highlight the contributions and achievements of youth leaders, we could not do so because of pandemic-related restrictions. We surveyed our program partners to get a better understanding of the type of celebration they would like to take part in, and based off their responses, we decided to create a zine. A zine is a short, self-published print-work, often related to issues of social justice, art, or self-expression.

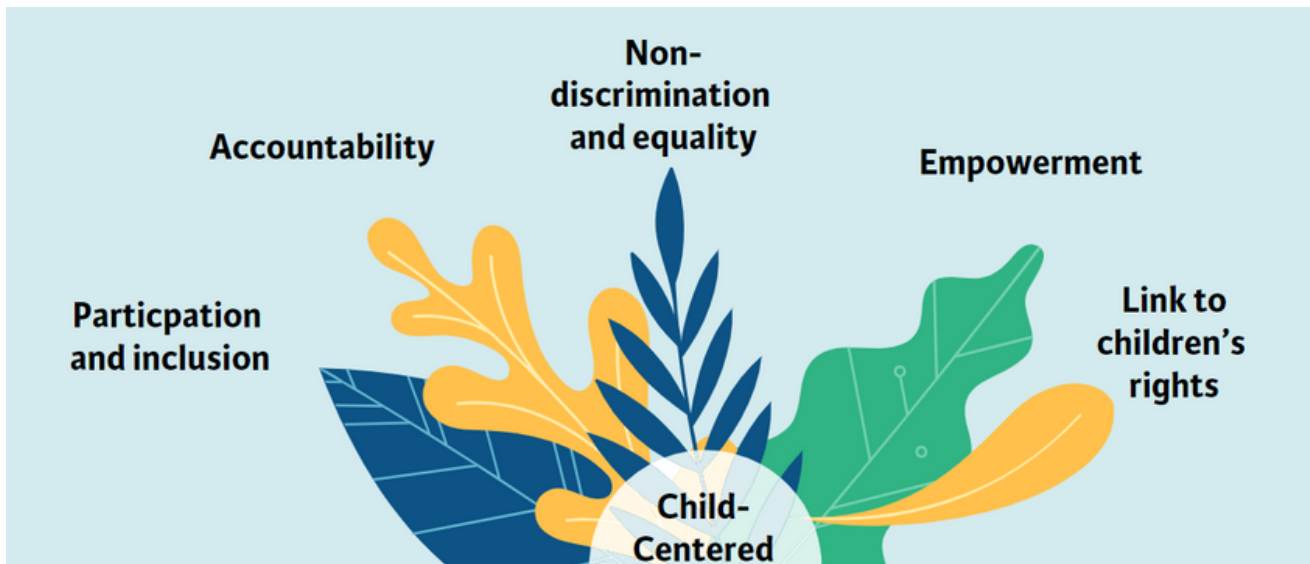
The approach we took to creating the zine was the same as that which we would have taken to hosting an in-person event - a children's-rights based approach (CRBA). This meant that we intentionally thought about how to keep youth at the centre of the process, and reflected on the elements of participation and inclusion, accountability, non-discrimination, empowerment, and linking the project to rights. The following offers an explanation of how we did this, and can perhaps serve as a starting point for others who are looking for ways to integrate CRBA into their projects, programs and processes.



Structure of Content

The content is built around 5 categories :

- 1) Participation and inclusion
- 2) Non-discrimination and equality
- 3) Accountability and transparency
- 4) Empowerment
- 5) Link to Rights



Participation and Inclusion

A children's rights-based approach promotes the active, meaningful, and voluntary participation of diverse young people. As we strove to make participating in this zine as accessible and inclusive as possible, we intentionally took steps to increase young people's motivation and capacity to participate.

We began this process by reaching out to our implementing program partners to see if any young people would be interested in collaborating with us for the artwork and design portion of this project. When there were no young people who were able to participate, we decided to reach out to various young artists across Canada to contribute to the zine.

In the planning stage of the zine creation process, we budgeted to be able to pay zine contributors. **We strongly believe that artists need to be fairly paid for their work, so we offered a just remuneration to the artists, which also in turn increased young people's motivation and capacity to participate. We also prioritized people's wellbeing and life experiences over timelines.** For example, when certain participating artists needed deadline extensions for their contributions, we adjusted our timelines to account for this.

Non-discrimination and equality

Non-discrimination is a fundamental element of a children's rights-based approach. This means intentionally thinking about who is included and excluded from programs and policies.

It was important to us that the artists we commissioned represented the diverse identities of the children and youth who realized the projects that were going to be highlighted in the zine. Therefore, we focused our outreach to artists who were young (18-30 years old), Black, Indigenous and People of color (BIPOC), queer and who live in different parts of Canada. When reaching out to the artists, we made sure to be very transparent about intentionally prioritizing representation and diversity in our selection process.

We actively sought out BIPOC artists to promote the participation of often excluded groups. In Canada, Indigenous and racialized artists are systematically less represented and less remunerated than white artists. "Indigenous artists make a median income of 68 cents for every \$1 for non-Indigenous artists. [...] Racialized artists make a median income of 72 cents for every \$1 for non-racialized artists." (Hill, 2020). Prioritizing the commission of BIPOC artists is a small but important action for all organizations who are committed to playing a more active role in supporting racialized people who have been invisibilized, and who are more at risk of facing the systemic barriers and racism that prevent their full participation.

Accountability and transparency

A key element in a children's rights-based approach is being accountable and transparent in programs, processes and policies. Creating youth-friendly communications is one way to be accountable and transparent.

While we, as an organization, report to our funders on our activities, we rarely get the opportunity to be accountable to the youth we serve, and to report back to them. In promoting the stories, artwork and projects led by a very diverse community of youth across the country, we are also hoping to reinforce our accountability to them and their communities. This zine, which summarized our Canadian National Program 2020-2021, was a way to do just that.

To ensure the zine has a broader impact, we are distributing it to decision makers, community members and influencers working in partner communities, so that they have the opportunity to learn more about the human rights issues youth are taking action on. Distributing the zine, exposing our creation process in a transparent way and sharing it with our fellow youth workers and youth leaders is also one way of being accountable to the work the youth have done in their community action projects.

Empowerment

Young people are empowered when they know their rights, have the capacity to claim them, and can hold decision-makers accountable. Part of the intention behind the creation of this zine was to create something that young people were proud to share with decision-makers and their wider communities. This zine also regroups projects led by young across Canada, and connects participants to a wider network of changemakers like themselves, which in itself can be empowering.

Link to Rights

We connected each of the themes that emerged from the projects to various articles in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Linking programs, projects and processes to rights is central to a children's rights-based approach. Highlighting the rights to which the different emerging themes were associated was one way to make rights visible, and to connect them to the everyday lives of young people.



Concluding Remarks

What lessons have been learnt?

Taking a children's rights-based approach is an ongoing process. As we reflect back on the creation of this zine, there are numerous things we think we could improve on next time. For example, paying youth to write more of the content would be an additional approach to building the capacity and motivation of youth to get involved, and would have been another way of centering youth's experiences and voices.

As you approach your own programming with the iterative CRBA process in mind, we encourage you to ask yourself questions before, throughout, and after the process about how to intentionally encourage participation and inclusion, accountability, non-discrimination, empowerment, and making links with rights.

Thank you to all participants of the conversation for contributing their insights and examples to this knowledge building and sharing activity on this zine!

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