Capacity Building of Adult Allies in Youth-Adult Partnerships to Facilitate Youth Participation

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Abstract
This conceptual paper makes the proposition that human capital development initiatives can enhance the abilities of adults when they work through Y-AP to facilitate youth participation. The development of adult allies' skills in Youth-Adult Partnerships (Y-AP) is essential to create an inclusive, effective, and culturally sensitive collaborative environment for youth participation. Research shows that the skill set development of adults also reduces practices associated with adultism which prevents them from positively working through Y-AP to facilitate youth participation. The particular interest of this paper is to extend knowledge accrual, and thus fill knowledge gaps on how Adult Allies the Y-AP approach outside the United States of America where the conceptual approach was conceived. This interest is motivated by propositions forwarded in previously published research papers on the application of Y-AP in Malaysia that suggest that there is limited non-Western research, which also takes into account the influences of cultural context. Recent studies indicated that power-distance relationships in the cultural context of Asia between adult allies and youth may hamper the positive application of the Y-AP approach for positive youth development.
Keywords: Human Capital Development, Youth-Adult Partnership, Adultism, Adult Allies, Youth Development, Youth Participation, Cultural Context

Introduction
The United Nations is currently concerned about the disengagement of the global youth population which stands at 1.2 billion (UN World Report, 2016; UNDESA, 2015). The lack of youth participation leads to "negative engagement" of youth in society and social structures (UN World Youth Report, 2016, p.66). The UN suggests that this disengagement or alternative or negative engagement is a cause that "leads to the exclusion of young people from formal political processes" and "threatens the legitimacy of political systems and

structures" (UN World Youth Report, 2016, p 64). In 2018 the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in a joint publication with Plan UK joint on the Sustainable Development Goals suggested that engagement of youth is vital "to unleash the creativity and energy often cited as the key attributes of young people" (ADB, 2018p.4). Furthermore, this publication also suggested that all UN agencies, governments, and civil society organisations should work towards improved youth participation (ADB, 2018).

The process of getting youth to participate should include their efforts to organize around issues of their choice and include efforts by adults to involve youth in the community or even public sector agencies (Checkoway, 2017). These efforts can operate within the framework of youth and adults in inter-generational partnerships, and working in partnership approaches such as Y-APs (Checkoway, 2011). To corroborate this collaborative opportunity of youth working with adults, Y-AP offers a new paradigm whereby adults work as natural mentors, there is a mutuality of benefit, with power distance reduced in decision-making and activities created community connectedness (Zeldin et al., 2017). Hall (2020, p.4) states, "The emergence of Y-AP reflected a paradigm shift whereby adults began to relate to youth differently. In particular, adults started working with rather than for youth (Arnold et al.2008)."

The Y-AP approach involves both youth and adults working together on common cause activities that facilitate community connectedness (Zeldin et al., 2013). Adults working in Y-AP relationships are often known as Adult Allies (Krauss et al., 2014; Zeldin & Collura, 2010; Camino, 2005). Along with competency building for youth, Adult Allies' human capital development is also important for the success, sustainability, and longevity of Y-APs (Weybright, Hrncirik, et al., 2016; Zeldin et al., 2013). In this paper, we moot the idea of enhancement of awareness, skills, and abilities of adults to counter the challenges of adultism in the application of Y-AP to facilitate youth participation, within the cultural context.

Youth-Adult Partnerships

The concept of Youth-Adult Partnership (Y-AP) originated in the USA in the 1970s as a new concept of partnerships between youth who participate as equal partners with adults in a variety of settings, aimed to develop the individual to engage in community development (Zeldin et al., 2018; Camino, 2000). Zeldin et al (2013, p.388) state, a working definition of Y-AP is the practice of (a) "multiple youth and multiple adults deliberating and acting together", (b) "in a collective [democratic] fashion" (c) "over a sustained period", (d) "through shared work", (e) "intended to promote social justice, strengthen an organization and/or affirmatively address a community issue". Zeldin et al (2013, p. 388) differentiated Y-AP from other types of youth-adult interactions stating that "the most salient differentiating feature is that Y-AP focuses on multiple youth working with multiple adults," and thus "its essence is found in the dynamics of group interaction".

Hall (2020) suggests that Y-AP's goal is to maintain respectful and meaningful collaborations over equality between youth and adults. The Y-AP approach has been constructed to enable youth participation by building skill sets, competencies, and pedagogical knowledge and experiential learning of both youth and Adult Allies (Zeldin & Collura, 2010). Zeldin, et al (2013, p.388-9) state, "Y-AP focuses on multiple youth working with multiple adults.

Y-AP is not one adult interacting with one youth, which is the traditional mentor or apprenticeship model (Hamilton & Hamilton, 2005). In 2013, Zeldin et al. stated, there are four core elements of Y-AP: authentic decision-making, natural mentors, reciprocal activity, and community connectedness (Fig.1)." (2013, p.389). The conceptual framework for understanding Y-AP in Figure 1 suggests that the Y-AP approach "essence is found in the

dynamics of group interaction, with young people developing multiple relationships—some deep and some cursory—with a variety of adults (Zeldin et.al., 2013, p.388-9).
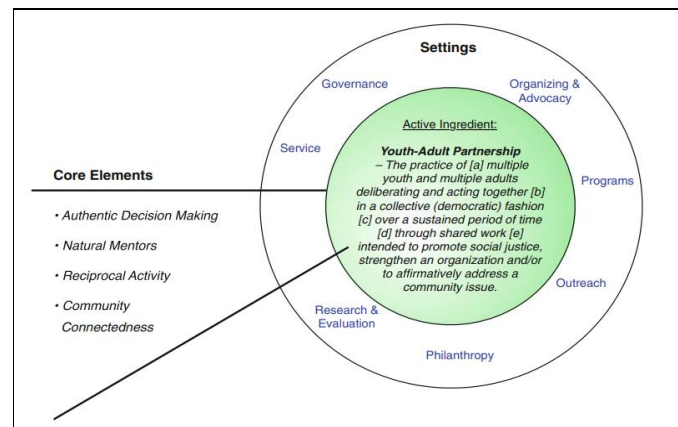

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework: Four Core Elements, Zeldin et al. (2013)

A hallmark in the working definition of Y-AP and a crucial objective in the application n the need for the aim to "promote social justice, strengthen an organization and/or affirmatively address a community issue" through democratically organised, engaged, and pursued actions (Zeldin et al., 2013; Mitra, 2009). Both youth and adults are involved in the realization of this objective. Zeldin et al (2013, p.) state, Y-AP contrasts with the objectives of the singular and individualized "learning-level" processes, it focuses on setting goals by taking into account "specific local problems and social inclusion (Prilleltensky, 2010)" because one of the central objectives is to "to gain the greatest educational benefits through democratic action on issues that matter deeply to them."

Furthermore, Y-AP requires an emphasis on ''collective, democratic action'' and ''shared work'' where the assignment of roles and division of labor "is not determined by age", however, it uniquely adopts a progressive attitude and approach that is based on the "specific motivation, skill, and network that each individual brings to the endeavor" (Zeldin et.al., 2013, p.388-9).

Hall (2020) suggests that the Y-AP's approach aim is to help youth build social and cultural capital by exposing them to the world of adults (Zeldin et al., 2013). Y-AP is in substance an approach designed to enable the enhancement of positive micro-level relationships between youth and adults and thus is often associated with linkages to proximal processes that are the engines for youth development (Ramey et al., 2017; Collural, 2016; Zeldin et al., 2013). Additionally, research indicates that in the Y-AP approach, Adult Allies can play a significant role in promoting youth participation, engagement, and development in Asia, although it can be influenced by cultural context, it also transcends culture and context (Zeldin et al., 2017; Krauss et al., 2014; Camino, 2000).

Researchers from Zeldin et al (2017); Ramey et al (2017); Weybright et al (2016) among others suggest Adult Allies may facilitate youth participation in the following ways: a) Creating a supportive environment; b) mentoring and skill development; c) providing resources; d) advocacy and influence; e) facilitating access and advocating for youth voice. Additionally, a researcher from Nouri et al (2023); Krauss (2017); Arokiasamy and Krauss (2017), along with others suggest Adult Allies can facilitate: a) team and trust building; b) fostering positive youth development and leadership development; c) facilitating conflict resolution and promoting reflection and learning; and d) sustaining the youth-adult relationship.

The Y-AP approach in effect focuses on developing capacities, competencies, and awareness of both youth and adult allies (Zeldin et al., 2017; Weybright et al., 2016; Camino, 2005). It is an ideal approach that can be used to overcome the challenges of adultism, especially when adult allies have been trained in how to work in an inclusive and collaborative environment (Hall, 2020; Zeldin & Collura, 2010; Camino, 2005). Additionally, when the development of adult allies' skills in natural mentoring, being advocates and facilitators of authentic decision-making, and promoters of reciprocal benefits for youth and themselves in community connectedness, the practices of adultism may be redressed (Hall, 2020; Zeldin & Collura, 2010; Camino, 2005).

Adultism
There is a large body of research globally that suggests this challenge of adultism in youth development diminishes youth participation (UN World Report, 2016; UNDESA, 2015). As an example, a recent publication on enhancing Y-AP application and positive youth development in Asia (Malaysia) suggests adult power distance relationships within cultural context may limit the application and impact of the Y-AP approach, thus reducing youth engagement and participation (Nouri et al., 2023; Krauss et al., 2014).

The phenomenon of Adultism hampering youth participation is not new, however, there is only limited research on this subject, with few studies in the Asian cultural context (Nouri et al., 2023; Arokiasamy & Krauss, 2017). Adultism takes many forms and is a term used to describe a system of discrimination or prejudice against children and young people based on the belief that adult is inherently superior, and can act on the "behest" of youth or children without their input or consent (Richards-Schuster & Timmermans, 2017; Weybright et al., 2016).

Adultism is rooted in paternalist attitudes and power dynamics whereby adults hold authority over youth in various social, cultural, and institutional contexts (Pease, 2021; Checkoway, 2017; Hart, 1992). Additionally, some adultism may arise from cultural norms, values, and traditions (Peace, 2021; Bandura, 2006; Bell, 1995). This age-based discrimination operates solely based on age differentiation between adults and youth and hampers the abilities of youth to participate in or influence decisions, policies, and opportunities that affect them (Weybright et al., 2016; Wong et al., 2010; Hart, 1992).

Furthermore, adultism manifests in many ways (Hall, 2020; Zeldin et al. 2016; Bell, 1995). For instance, covert and overt adultism behaviors, policies, and practices can restrict and limit youth freedoms, opportunities, and rights (Pease, 2021; Checkoway, 2017; Bell, 1995). These adult-centric behaviors and policies can also undermine the autonomy of youth and children while undermining youth agency development and empowerment (Hall, 2020; Weybright et al., 2016; Zeldin et al., 2016).

Additionally, adultism can stifle youth voice and participation, because adult actions knowingly or unknowingly can result in stereotyping of youth leading to disengagement of youth (Hall, 2020; Zeldin et al., 2018; Checkoway, 2017). It can deny young people the right to make choices or take responsibility for their actions, even in situations where they are capable of doing so (Checkoway, 2017; Zeldin et al., 2016; Camino, 2005). It is also suggested that adultism can lead to the denial or limitation of rights and opportunities for young people to have access to education, healthcare, employment, or participation in meaningful interpersonal, civil, and community-connected activities (Hall, 2020; Checkoway, 2017; Zeldin, et al., 2016).

Youth Participation

Youth participation is a right protected by the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Research suggests that Youth participation is a process of involving young people in the institutions and decisions that affect their lives (UN World Youth Report, 2016; UNDESA, 2015; Checkoway, 2011). Additionally, Checkoway (2011), suggests that Youth participation is influenced by many factors such as race, gender, age, income, education, national origin, family and community context, rural or urban residence, residential segregation, religious tradition, cultural beliefs, and mass media. Other factors such as civic knowledge, extracurricular activities, community service, public policies, legal constraints, institutional barriers, school disparities, parental and teacher encouragement, and adult attitudes, also impact and influence youth desires to participate (Krauss, et al., 2014; Checkoway, 2011).

It often is assumed that youth participation means that young people are competent citizens, rather than passive recipients of services and get involved in many activities (Weybright et al., 2016; Checkway, 2011; Mitra, 2009). However, many youths are passive recipients of services and are not active citizens (Checkoway, 2011; Mitra, 2009). Additionally, most young people do not participate in any activities (Checkoway, 2011; 1996). Only a "small proportion" of youth are very active and are not representative of the overall population (Checkoway, 1996, p.1). The reasons for this lack of participation are numerous and varied but can be related to socioeconomic conditions, educational levels knowing and unknowingly the attitudes and behaviors of adults (Checkoway, 1996).

Cultural Context

Research indicates that cultural context can be a barrier to youth participation (Arokiasamy & Krauss, 2017; Krauss et al., 2014). These cultural context barriers can take different forms as different cultures have unique norms, values, and expectations that can influence how both adults and young people behave (Krauss, 2017; Krauss et al., 2014; Bandura, 2006). Adults as allies within cultural norms, traditions, and values can encourage or discourage youth participation in civil, social, community, and economic activities (Krauss, 2017; Arokiasamy & Krauss, 2017; Krauss et al., 2014).

In some cultural contexts, activism or participation in social, political, and alternative economic movements may be stigmatized or viewed as disruptive, primarily by adults (Pease, 2021; Krauss et al., 2014; Bell, 1995). This often adult-centric attitude may deter youth from being involved in such activities that are not considered mainstream or culturally acceptable, fearing social, economic, and familial repercussions (Pease, 2021; Checkoway, 2017; Bell, 1995). For instance, in some cultures, the traditional gender roles and expectations of youth may limit participation (Krauss et al., 2014). This is the case particularly for girls who may be expected to focus on domestic roles, hampering their involvement in community, economic, and political activities (Kabeer, 2021; Palmer, 2021). Similarly, disabled youth may be discriminated against due to cultural context norms, traditions, and values (Daley et al., 2018; Poon-McBayer & Wong, 2013).

The efficacy of activities aimed at enhancing adult allies' capacity to promote adolescent engagement in youth-adult partnerships can be considerably impacted by cultural barriers between Western and non-Western perspectives (Krauss et al., 2017). It is essential to acknowledge that cultural distinctions need not be overly simplistic, given the substantial variation seen in both non-Western and Western civilizations. On the other hand, a few broad themes and ideas can be covered.

In Western cultures, equality is frequently valued and cooperation and open communication are encouraged. There could be a drive to dismantle established hierarchical systems and give

young people more say in the framework of youth-adult collaborations (Rhodes, 2009). Nonetheless, there may be more robust hierarchical systems in some non-Western cultures, where authority and age are important factors. It may be considered impolite to criticize authority figures or elders in some cultures, which might impede candid dialogue and young involvement.

To overcome cultural obstacles, solutions that respect and take into account different cultural viewpoints within the framework of youth-adult relationships must be developed. These strategies need a sophisticated awareness of the particular cultural settings involved. Effective capacity building in this setting requires cultural awareness, adaptability, and a collaborative approach.

Discussions

Barriers to youth participation are sometimes intentionally caused by adultism, however, most often, the case that adults may unknowingly and unintentionally perpetuate uneven levels of youth participation in the community, and in particular community connectedness (Zeldin et al., 2013; Checkoway, 1996). For instance, Checkoway (1996) states that adults "often reach out to youth who already hold leadership positions rather than identify those who are traditionally underrepresented" (p.2). This in turn may "perpetuate existing patterns of power and privilege, promoting young people who are already active rather than identifying those with potential and encouraging them to participate more actively." (Checkoway, 1996, p.2). The reality is that only a few adults actively seek to "engage underrepresented youth in community affairs" (Checkoway, 1996, p.2).

Other reasons include the lack of awareness of how to work with youth (Richards-Schuster & Timmermans, 2017; Weybright et al., 2016). Additionally, it can also be caused by the lack of training of adults to be able to work with youth (Richards-Schuster & Timmermans, 2017). Richards-Schuster & Timmermans (2017, p.285) site being an adult mentor is difficult without the appropriate awareness and training as this kind of role requires the adult "to learn to share and negotiate power with youth which is often difficult for many adults, even those that want to partner with young people (Bosma et al., 2008; Heffernanet al., 2017; Mitra et al., 2014)". Furthermore, for adults who intend to be involved in youth engagement work "must also recognize that there is a complex negotiation between youth and adults around agency, power, and flexibility in roles." Richards-Schuster & Timmermans (2017, p.289).

Human Capital Development in Y-AP

The roles of Adult Allies when positively developed in Y-AP can enable adults to counter the challenges of Adultism to facilitate youth participation. Zeldin et al (2013)stated, that there are four core elements of Y-AP: authentic decision-making, natural mentors, reciprocal activity, and community connectedness (Figure 1)." (2013, p.389). Building adult allies skill sets and competencies can potentially counter the challenges of adultism or youth being involved at the behest of adults (Checkoway, 2017; Weybright, et al., 2016; Hart 1992).

Using Zeldin et al. (2013)'s conceptual framework which indicates the crucial four core elements - authentic decision-making, natural mentors, reciprocal activity, and community connectedness, as a guide and lens we can identify areas that need to be included in Adult Allies human capital development interventions to facilitate youth participation (Nouri et al., 2023; Hall, 2020; Zeldin et al., 2017). Suggested below areas for human capital development interventions

i) *Roles of Adult Allies as Positive Change-makers*

Adult Allies or supportive adults countering adultism of other adults and facilitating inter-generational cooperation between adults and youth for Youth Voice, authentic decision making, and competency development across a varies of areas including e.g., Mentoring for Youth Voice and confidence enhancement, soft-skills like decision-making processes skills, communication skills, activity planning, knowledge and project management, etc. (Umar et al., 2021; Krauss et al., 2014; Zeldin & Collura, 2010).

ii) *Youth Participants Agency Development*

Psychological Agency Development of youth enabled them to work better with adult Allies in Y-AP activities while becoming better citizens and positive contributors to their communities and nationhood development (Zeldin et al., 2018; Zeldin et al., 2013; Lanson & Angus, 2011). Youth and Adults experience agency development that enhances participation through youth development activities, community connectedness, and a desire for nationhood development (Ramey et al., 2017; Zeldin et al., 2013).

iii) *Mutual benefits - Creating a 'Win-Win"*

Through Youth working together with supportive Adult Allies in the Y-AP approach adopting an egalitarian stance barrier can be broken which enhance youth participation (Ramey et al., 2017: Weybright et al., 2016). Mutual benefits are accrued, with youth developing confidence and competencies skills nurtured by supportive adults (Zeldin, et al., 2013; Zeldin & Collura, 2010; Camino, 2005). For instance, while participating in community connectedness activities set up by adults, youth can learn about skills that can socially and economically enable them to become self-sufficient and positive socioeconomic contributors to nationhood development.

Furthermore, other pedagogical and experiential learning from participating in Y-AP relationships between Adult Allies and Youth fostered cooperation in activities that enabled youth to learn new competencies and develop confidence, self-esteem, and self-reliance (Weybright et al., 2016; Larson and Angus, 2011). Youth and Adult Allies working together can be advocates and teachers allowing them over time to build self-confidence, especially in areas of business, marketing, and sales in the social enterprise. They were also to be able to get new skills that could get them employed and if they wished in the future establish enterprises of their own (Krauss, et al., 2014; Wong et al., 2010).

Organizational Readiness to Implement Positive Y-AP

When the Y-AP approach is utilized organizational readiness to enhance youth participation is important (Zeldin et al., 2013; Zeldin & Collura, 2010; Camino, 2005). The researchers suggest that by having a common purpose through the creation of organizational readiness in its programs both youth and adults can work together gaining mutual benefits (Ramey et al., 2017; Ramey et al., 2015; Zeldin & Collura, 2010).

Cultural Context in Human Capital Development Initiatives

Y-AP research has indicated that when addressing cultural context barriers, there is a need for a nuanced approach that takes into account the respect for cultural diversity (Arokiasamy & Krauss, 2017; Krauss, et al., 2014; Camino 2000). Cross-country transposition of conceptual approaches should be subtly adopted as Bandura (2006, p.32), suggests, "It is widely claimed that Western theories lack generalizability to non-Western cultures. The blend of individual, proxy, and collective agency varies cross-culturally." He adds, "For example, residents of

Japan get categorized as collectivists and those in the United States as individualists" (Bandura, 2006, p.32). Nevertheless, intervention strategies could include cultural sensitivity training for both adults and youth, for decision-makers, creating safe spaces where both youth and adults can express themselves and teach each other (Arokiasamy & Krauss, 2017; Krauss et al., 2014; Camino, 2005). Furthermore, fostering inter-generational dialogues to bridge gaps and reduce power-distance relationships in respectful ways may result in long-term mutual benefits (Nouri et al., 2023; Zeldin et al., 2018).

We cite several propositions about Y-AP in action regarding case studies from the global north and south that show, possibly how particular and unique cultural norms, traditions, and values impact its functionality vis-a-vis adults and youth interactions. In some of these case studies it is apparent that the researchers understand and are aware of the complexity of transposing a conceptual approach developed within a Western cultural context, outside this setting, or even with ethnic minorities within Western environments (Bell, 1995; Arokiasamy & Krauss, 2017; Said, 1991). While others are not.

Starting with Linda Camino from the USA author of one of the earliest research papers on the application of Y-AP in the country indicated that Y-APs are a multidimensional construct and contain "principles and values, which actors use to orient the relationship and to guide behavior" (Camino, 2000, p. 14). In this paper, highlighting interviews of youth and adults on the Y-AP approach in multiple case studies, Camino (2000, p.14), suggests respondents felt, "Adult community participants in the initiatives had a common goal: to work with, rather than for, youth". In the same paper by Linda Camino, she indicates that on the application of Y-AP by Native Americans who are struggling to come to grip with racism and the imposition of assimilation to European ways and to abandon their cultural tradition, the parity between youth and adults in Y-AP is viewed differently. Camino (2000, p.18) states, the adult respondents state "It is a hard thing" and "Because of the history of our people we're trying to figure out how much of the past to keep, and how much to leave behind …" and these respondents added, "52 percent of the population [of approximately 300] is under 18, but lots of adults are saying, 'we'll let the kids do this later.".

We compare the cultural context nuances and complexities of the USA in Camino's case study research paper with a non-homogeneous population cohort, with a recent research study in Nigeria, a nearly homogeneous population cohort on youth voice in School Board Management Systems a clear reality of cultural influence emerges (Umar et al., 2021). Umar et al. (2021, p.362), state that in Nigerian society, young people afford older adults much respect." in the committees from the outset "adult members expected the younger members to go along with the adults, as the latter realized that they would not be questioned." Umar et al. (2021, p.362) state that the youth interviewed themselves "found it impossible to challenge the adults' views", as these youth due to the particular cultural context of Nigeria would classify them as "arrogant and disrespectful to challenge the adults".

Thus cultural context does matter and researchers suggest that cultural context influences should be taken into account (Arokiasamy & Krauss, 2017; Krauss, et al., 2014). Furthermore, very little empirical research exists on this subject of cultural context influences complexities in Y-AP research (Arokiasamy & Krauss, 2017; Krauss, et al., 2014).

Conclusion

The researchers aim to garner interest in human capital development based on the understanding of the 'what', and 'why' and how the process of Y-AP assists with overcoming adultism, within a cultural context to promote youth participation and engagement. Hall (2020) suggests that to begin with "first anti-adultist interventions offer opportunities for

youth to build social and cultural capital." For example, adult roles may include creating "structure for and to facilitate youth-adult interactions in group settings; serve as buffers and bridges between youth and adult spaces; scaffold learning opportunities." (Hall, 2020, p.5). Therefore, to achieve the bridge building and space creation the researchers moot that there should be more research on this field of human capital development for adult allies who work through Y-AP application to enable youth participation. These discussions can also provide additional support to justify the practice of Y-AP to those who might be unaware of its potential application in the realm of adult allies nurturing youth competency in community connectedness (Krauss, et al., 2014).

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