

Comparing a citizens' jury with a "youth jury"

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This paper draws lessons from a "Youth Jury" facilitated by MosaicLab with recruitment done by Deliberately Engaging.

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Introduction

What follows are critical reflections based on collective observations of a single deliberative forum, hereafter referred to as a *youth jury*, which was convened by a government-funded organisation and facilitated by MosaicLab, an Australian consultancy, in June 2018. The aim of these critical reflections is to share the learning from the practice team with others who may be embarking on a similar project.

There were four sessions in all: meet-and-greet evening and three daytime sessions—with approximately 19 hours of face-to-face activity in total. The critical reflections are those of the authors plus two client organisers. One of the authors (Lyn Carson) was not an active participant in any way, instead remaining in the background, observing and taking notes.

The question

Of interest to MosaicLab were the perceived differences between working with young people and with groups who are mostly over 25. MosaicLab wanted to know:

What do facilitators need to be aware of when facilitating mini-publics populated only by young people—what differences exist?

The usual approach

A typical *citizens' jury* or *mini-public* would include young people but only proportionate to the entire population. Therefore, with a citizens' jury, young people would constitute a minority. In that situation, youth input inevitably becomes supplementary. Online input might be sought from young people, but this runs the risk of being mostly cosmetic.

Context

This term—*young people*—invites definition. The youth jury observed was made up of 54 people aged between 18 and 27, the majority were over 20. In contrast, Australia's first youth jury in 2003, which was organised and facilitated by university students, brought together youths aged 16-17 from Parramatta, NSW (Carson, 2004). Fifteen years later, the terms, *youth* and *young people*, seem to be more fluid, the term broadened as the population ages. Older adults reflecting on their own experiences aged 20+ are likely to have considered themselves at that age as adults. However, participants in this youth jury in Melbourne used the term 'young people' often and with ease; it was clearly a term they were both familiar with, and identified strongly with.

The youth jury was part of a program that had a particular focus on work and mental health. Young people were consulted about publicity materials for the youth jury from the start and the subject matter was tested with young people.

Unlike a citizens' jury, the youth jurors were required to agree on a suite of 'Asks', rather than 'Recommendations'. The client requested this because the term 'Recommendations' suggests policy change and an activity that is commissioned by government. The client preferred to focus on what the young participants were asking for. It's a softer term especially if/when these agreements are passed onto government.

Recruitment

Recruitment of the youth jury was handled by an independent organisation, Deliberately Engaging. Invitations to participate were distributed in two distinct ways: using the client's networks and partner organisations and using email invitations sent directly to young people using the Vote Compass database.

Around 120 young people volunteered to be part of this process making it relatively easy to meet the demographic goals which were based on Census data for the 18 – 25 age group.

The demographics of the final 54 participants included:

- Participants who ranged from 18 – 26+ (only two people being 26+)
- There were 26 males, 27 females and one person identifying as transgender (the registration form did not ask about sexual orientation)
- Eleven people were not born in Australia and spoke a language other than English at home
- Four people identified as living with a disability
- Only one person identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
- Six of the participants were from regions

Of importance to the client was to ensure that the participants had a range of educational and work experiences, hence the selection was stratified to ensure that the jury's diversity met pre-set goals:

- Eleven participants were still at school or TAFE
- Thirty-three were at university
- Twenty had completed Year 12 or equivalent
- Sixteen were working part-time, four full-time and ten were not currently working

Due to timing and resource constraints there was less follow-up with youth jurors prior to the first meeting than is usual for a citizens' jury process. Nonetheless only one person did not attend the first session. There was no opportunity to detect which participants came from the client's networks and which came as a result of a random invitation.

The combined observations below have been themed, using a grounded theory approach—quotation marks have not been used for the sake of readability. Recurring reflections have been noted and these have been combined under a series of headings.

What's different? Nine key things.

1. Technology

It is perhaps unsurprising that young people are more comfortable with technology than adults. This was evident in their use of online discussion groups (mostly on Facebook) where they chatted and shared information. For some adults, this can be a challenge. There were 14 external submissions received—12 written, 2 YouTube videos and an online Facebook discussion. All of the jury participants were included in the private Facebook group which hosted the submissions from the 15 partner organisations. This allowed for participants to actively comment and discuss each submission prior to day one of the jury. Adults are often disinclined to engage in this type of online chat; not so, young people.

The youth jury also worked with Google docs during the forum—50+ people creating a shared document—and displayed consummate ease as a collective creating a single

document. For several people this was not the first time they had collectively created a shared document with many participants. Again, unusual for many adults.

However, this also meant that they were less inclined than adults to make written notes on templates they were given throughout. Instead they would rely on one person to make notes and others in the group would capture the image on their phone or make notes using their phone.

In general, any use of technology was welcomed by all, far more than is evident in an adult mini-public.

2. Relationships & sexuality

Young people were keen to establish friendships and to be liked. This can have a downside—demonstrating a marked bandwagon bias. Participants needed to be reminded often about this tendency, far more than is necessary with adults whose views are more prone to other biases—e.g. confirmation bias. Facilitators needed to break up the ‘tribe’ in a safe way. Otherwise friends were made and friendships adhered to, creating easy working relationships but sometimes to the detriment of moving the work along. However, when working in pairs with unfamiliar partners, the young people avoided this bandwagon bias, instead exploring differences and finding common ground very quickly.

Overall, young people in this forum were extremely willing to collaborate. Without knowing which participants came from known networks we have no way of knowing if this is a quality of young people generally or if they wished to maintain good relationships. Of note, one participant mentioned a bad experience of group work at university and this is likely to be the case for any who have experienced group assessment at a tertiary level. This could be made transparent when working with young people—that a deliberative experience is very different from their educational one. Adults are not (recently) scarred in the same way.

There was considerable cultural and linguistic diversity in the room. Literacy was an issue for some. People were leaving the room to pray. There were pronouncements of sexual identity and mention of sexuality—e.g. LGBTQIA (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning or queer, intersex, and asexual or allied). Young people care deeply about their own identity and are much more vocal than adults about their expectations regarding these differences and how these should be accommodated. They are also very respectful of the sexual orientation of others and will be at pains to ensure that any differences are respected. This is rarely mentioned in an adult forum. But in a youth forum, ignoring any differences could derail matters if not taken seriously.

3. Open-mindedness, optimism and willingness

In the same way that cultural, sexual and linguistic differences were respected, participants were also very respectful of each other’s opinions, and were very patient with their peers. They were open to ideas and seemed more willing to find and seek out more information than adult jurors. In general, they seemed more conscious that they didn’t know the answers.

Young people will patiently listen to others’ views in ways that are unusual. There did not seem to be the irritation that can arise in adult groups, usually expressed as an impatient—“let’s get on with it!” MosaicLab uses an early exercise exposing four social or personality

types which can help to explain this difference. The four social types are: *drivers*, *analytic*, *amiable*, and *expressive* (Merrill & Reid, 1981). In this particular jury, there were very few *drivers*. This made the dynamics interesting as there were fewer than usual task-focused individuals in the room. One facilitator speculated that this could be because there were a lot of individuals in the room who had either recently left university or were still studying—and they believed they were still learning and were not qualified to have an opinion yet. This seemed to be quite pronounced at the start as there was a lack of confidence when speaking. This proved helpful with the ‘check-in’ of opinions when working in a group, i.e. participants would speak and then check-in with their group that they had reported their discussion correctly and that it was an accurate, shared view of the group, rather than reflecting the speaker’s bias. This was in sharp contrast to adult groups where *drivers* are always evident.

There were exceptions to this open-mindedness. The client was seen as government—therefore a ‘dag’—and incapable of relating to young people. Young people consider that they run things differently. They focus on personal stories. For a deliberative forum, this means that weight must be carefully accorded to both task and maintenance (in group process terms). Adults are more focused on getting the job done and sometimes need to be reminded of the need for group cohesion. Young people have the opposite imbalance. Whereas adults will insert ideas about how to alter the process to achieve a faster, more efficient way forward, young people will be more conscious of taking care of each other’s needs.

The guest speakers who circulated among small groups using a *speed dialogue* method, noted the level of hope, mixed with worry, among this young group. Their motivation was high, and the participants enjoyed hearing ideal solutions to the dilemmas before them. They were receptive to wacky ideas, often naïve and radical. There was much more hope and optimism than is evident in adult juries where participants have developed cynicism and have become disheartened with age.

Assuming good facilitation, the participants were willing to ‘give it a go’. Unlike adult participants, they were not jaded or defensive. But surprising was participants’ lack of attention to ‘pitch in’ unasked, i.e. to help the facilitators. If chairs needed to be moved or the space rearranged, almost no one would lend a hand unless specifically requested to do so. They seemed to see the adult facilitators as there to do their bidding—to fetch etc. With adult groups, participants instinctively offer to lend a hand.

4. Experience and knowledge

Inevitably, a group of young people is going to be sharing its limited life experience. This group lacked understanding of government (local, state, federal) and various areas of responsibility, for example. Of course, it was this very youthful experience that the organisers hoped to tap. The guest speakers were there to add to participants’ existing knowledge. As with any topic, additional input will be needed. It is entirely possible that fabulous ideas will have been missed because of the group’s age limitations.

However, this absence of experience can mean a real openness to being coached, even in a very large group. But a facilitator needs to be highly tuned to their possibly-crippling sense of self-doubt. This needs patience but is fabulous if young people can get past it and this was evident by the end of the youth jury. It was also apparent that young people were open to having fun. They were less reserved than an adult group. Youthful energy will spawn a

cheekiness which can be infectious and productive for a large, working group.

5. Confidence and anxiety

When group agreements were established, the ideas were thoughtfully considered, e.g. urging 'intentional contributions'—i.e. not wanting superficiality—and this permeated all sessions, where there was very little repetition, good listening skills, and respectful contributions.

Compared to an adult group, this group needed a lot more prompting and 'hand holding' at the start (especially at opening session)—i.e. to speak up and be comfortable in the room. Very few were willing to speak up first. This can delay matters because they would persist even if confused rather than ask for help or clarification.

Given an assumed difficulty with working productively alone, and their strong urge to 'soundboard' off someone, better productivity arose from having them work in pairs. This avoided both reluctance to do individual work and also the downsides associated with 'tribalism'.

The adults in the room continued to note a curious combination of arrogance: 'I know it all'—yet very little belief in self, manifested through not wanting to 'stand out' in the group, not wanting to speak up when in a whole group session, not wanting to 'rock the boat' or be 'at odds' with others' views. There was a strong sense of willingness to hear alternative ideas and to be compassionate towards others in a small group setting. Here there were more extremes than would be typical in an adult group. Adults tend toward moderation. But the upside is that young people are more open to learning and obviously less certain that they 'know the answer' to a given problem. Adults are more set in their opinions and less likely to alter their views given more information.

6. Physicality

Young people occupy the allocated space in a way that is quite unlike adults. The way they move through that space, linger in that space and share that space is much more active, horizontally as well as vertically. Adults are often reluctant to move when asked; young people are far more willing. The latter will maintain high energy throughout a lengthy session.

When asked to create small groups, they are likely to take to the floor, cross-legged. Therefore, the floor becomes an effective work area. It is very rare to see adults flop to the floor and not worry about chairs; unlike adults there will be no requests for a table to write on. Young people simply get working on the floor.

7. Attendance

A significant financial incentive was offered to participants which the organisers considered was consistent with the amount they would have received for casual employment that they might have foregone—AUD\$29 per hour or AUD\$638 if they attended all meetings. They were also offered assistance with travel if they lived beyond the city. The six people who lived outside of the metropolitan area were provided with travel reimbursement and accommodation, if required. The amounts were higher than is typically paid as an honorarium to citizens' jurors.

The financial incentive worked. It was impressed upon participants that they were there to work and were being recompensed for doing so. Despite this, the 9 a.m. starts proved challenging. On one occasion, half the group was absent at starting time. Attendance is one of the glaring differences between young people and a regular adult group. It is difficult to attract young people to deliberative forums. Once there they are likely to keep turning up, though often late.

Young people's attention was also good throughout with mobile phones only appearing when a session dragged a little too long. During one activity when attention was focused on a guest speaker, one participant slept, and many others tuned out. Also, noted during this session, all who asked questions were male with a single exception. This suggests that facilitators, during sessions where the whole group are together, need to plan breaks to ensure people can talk to those next to each other in smaller groups, clearly stating that this is an opportunity for some 'different voices' to contribute to the questioning process. Further, speakers can be asked to engage in a way that asks questions of the group instead of talking 'at' them.

8. Facilitation

There were five facilitators in all. Two very experienced lead facilitators from MosaicLab and a young person from their team, along with two inexperienced young facilitators from partner organisations—i.e. inexperienced with deliberative forums. This was evident when observing their inability to gain the whole group's attention before giving instructions, sometimes a lack of clarity with instructions and also a more alarming example of inexperience. One young facilitator felt that facilitators should be able to participate alongside the rest since they were all of the same age and the young facilitators wanted to share their own experiences. This is anathema for a deliberative forum where the independence and neutrality of a facilitator is paramount in order to ensure that the group does not consider itself led in a particular direction.

Even with the best design and resources which this forum possessed, inexperience shows through. However, it was essential to have a youth presence among facilitators because of the strong identification by youth with people of the same age. Having said that, it is also important to trust the outcomes of a deliberative forum and this is impossible if poorly facilitated. An experienced facilitator has an eye on the process and is constantly tweaking the agenda, reframing prompt questions and more.

9. Micro-processes and overall design

MosaicLab used a range of methods to enable the completion of tasks. This diversity ensures that participants do not become bogged down and also that no ideas are lost. Icebreakers that are used for adults work differently with young people. Anything which engendered laughter built on the already-light-hearted nature of proceedings. Micro-processes such as a *fishbowl* also had a different quality, with a foam-encased microphone being thrown amongst the listeners who wished to speak, and observers lounging on bean bags close to the speakers.

One activity which was trialled for the first time worked extremely well to achieve a 'brain dump'. It took the form of a 'graffiti path' (to capture leftover thoughts and ideas). Two large rolls of white paper were ceremoniously unfurled along the floor and participants

enthusiastically took to the floor with pens, draping themselves along both sides, making a note of any leftover ideas. The following day this was cut into 11 pieces for additional work.

During the closing circle, there was almost no awareness of the process used yet this process design is key to success. Process design, for the participants and inexperienced facilitators, was largely invisible. Perhaps that's good: 'leadership is best when the people say—we did it ourselves' (Lao-Tse). Adults have much more awareness of being worked in a different way of engaging and will comment on this. Facilitators who are experienced with deliberative forums and are able to work effortlessly with an invisible process are essential for a successful outcome for young people.

In conclusion...

Returning to the original research questions: *What do facilitators need to be aware of when facilitating mini-publics populated only by young people—what differences exist? What might be borne in mind for future youth juries?* Here are 17 things to consider.

1. The biggest learning is this: young people will focus far more on relationships within a large group than adults. For that reason, they will be inclined towards 'tribes', especially in small groups. These can become very rigid, with quieter members unwilling to challenge the dominant voice, or are overly supportive of those expressing contrary views. They find it difficult to abandon a small-group's allegiance. **They want to be liked, more than they want to find the right answer.** They will tend to amplify a doubt or concern because it feels like a confrontation to dampen it down. Adults are more comfortable with these differences of opinion and will challenge them. This means that modifications need to be made to the way facilitators do deliberative forums with young people: avoid socio-lines (where participants physically place themselves along a line to indicate a personal position), or any activity that will have a pronounced bandwagon effect. Consider, instead, **having young people work in pairs where there is less pressure to conform.** Pyramiding can also be used—joining a pair with another pair and so on.
2. Young people are superficially more confident than their elders, but it seems to mask a deep sense of insecurity. This expected confidence can be accompanied by crippling self-doubt and can be confusing for an observer, especially when these contradictory differences emerge from the same person. Emotions will be at the surface far more than with an adult group so it essential to have someone watching out for that. Young people often need individual care and attention to keep them on track. **Designate a member of the team as someone who will attend to the wellbeing of individuals**—watching for anxiety or any particular needs which might interfere with a smooth functioning group.

What else could be borne in mind?

3. **Publicity materials and the remit for a youth jury should be developed in partnership with young people.**
4. **Start late.** Young people are more energised at night so a 11am or noon start makes sense.

5. Young people have far fewer caring responsibilities than adults and **can work into the evening.**
6. **Ensure the space is large enough and the floor okay for sitting upon. Include bean bags.**
7. **Add appropriate music. Ensure sufficient food.**
8. **Financial incentives work** and should be commensurate with the amount they might lose if foregoing casual work.
9. Time must be built into the process to accommodate reluctance to speak up. **Confidence takes time to build.**
10. **Acknowledge cultural, linguistic and sexual differences.** Young people will expect respect for any individual difference, more so than adults.
11. **Use technology liberally.** Avoid too much pen and paper. Young people are incredibly comfortable with any type of technology.
12. Because of the different way in which they occupy the space, **consider configuring the useable space differently and include lots of physical activities** for youth juries.
13. **Make explicit the difference between group work in a deliberative forum and that encountered in an educational context.**
14. Inexperienced young facilitators are unlikely to appreciate the difference between a youth workshop and a deliberative forum. They are reluctant to keep their distance and thus risk compromising the deliberative outcomes. **They need considerable guidance about neutral facilitation.**
15. **Young people should be used as co-facilitators** to break down any stereotyping that might arise about adult organisers and facilitators.
16. Young people are unlikely to offer to lend a hand. A facilitator will have to **make specific requests** to attract support for re-arranging the room etc.
17. **Keep reminding the group that the task is as important as maintaining good relationships.**

References

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