

# Media Education for the Inclusion of At-Risk Youth: Shades of Democracy 2.0 from Finland

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## Abstract

At-risk youth, those on the verge of dropping out of school (and eventually society), are of ongoing global concern. However, there is a paucity of critical discussion on media education for supporting at-risk youth. This text considers how schools and youth institutions can promote media skills and motivation for autonomous digital agency as 21st-century citizenships in technology-driven democracies and proposes media education that uses account-inclusive perspectives through participatory media. Media education here is understood as pedagogies on multiliteracies supporting youth agency in digitalized societies with their public nature calling for expressive media skills. An extensive, action-based qualitative study was conducted, consisting of eight sub-studies implemented in 2015–2017 with youth institutions around Finland. Each sub-study included a media workshop promoting youth media-making as self-expression for participation through public media cultures. The workshops were attended by nearly 100 young people, mostly ages 15–22. Several kinds of marginalities comprised “youth at risk,” such as dropping out of school, displaying social and learning difficulties, or encountering challenges in language or life situations. As a result of the study, this chapter proposes a model of *Inclusive Media Education* for supporting at-risk youth for the enhancement of Democracy 2.0 in digitalized societies. The model contains five key features of media education as everyday practices: *safe spaces*, *caring interaction*, *trust in competence*, *creative media-making* and *authentic agency*. The goals are to advance: at-risk youths’ motivation to participate, communicative media skills, autonomous agency, relatedness and experiences of inclusion in both educational settings and society.

**Keywords:** action research, at-risk youth, agency, inclusion, media education, multiliteracies, participatory media

\*\* The *Young People in the Limelight* study (2015–2017) has been funded by the Kone Foundation (Finland): <https://koneensaatio.fi/en/>.

## 1 Introduction

In an age of economic uncertainty, increasing immigration, and multiple societal crisis, youth marginalisation is of ongoing global concern. Being “at-risk” as young people in society means, for example, having diminished ability or motivation to make personal life choices or to maintain one’s autonomy, or lacking everyday life skills because of situational, psychological or physiological factors (Liamputtong, 2007). In digital societies, these difficulties can also compound of poor media skills and lack of motivation to use diverse media autonomously and in constructive, literacy-building ways. In particular, at-risk youth may have limited capacities for digital agency that are essential in order to practice their citizenships in 21<sup>st</sup> century society as, for example, in Finland which belongs together with other Nordic European countries to the promoters of neo-liberal democracies focusing on subjective skills rather than communities (e.g. Drotner, Frau-Meigs, Kotilainen & Uusitalo, 2017). Good media skills and critical media literacy could in part help the youth to overcome the at-risk situation, as they would be able to function better in school and working life. However, there is a shortage of critical discussion on media education for supporting at-risk youth on the verge of dropping out of school, and eventually, society (e.g. Buckingham, 2013; Dekelver, Van den Bosch, & Engelen, 2011; Hopkins, 2010; Vickery, 2014). A key question is, then, how can schools and institutions working with at-risk youth promote their media skills and motivation for autonomous digital agency and education for democracy, while keeping in mind their vulnerabilities? This text proposes as an answer media education that incorporates account-inclusive perspectives through participatory media (e.g. Asthana, 2012).

Asthana (2012) uses a global perspective to conceptualize youth agency related to participatory media as an important way for young people to participate in societies and increase their understanding of mediated cultures. With participatory media, we refer to the opportunities enabled by digital media, such as social networking, collaborating in digital platforms and publishing on the internet (e.g. Jenkins, 2009). However, we also understand participatory media as youth-based productive activities and media publications created together with adult media educators and youth professionals such as teachers and youth workers in outside-school activities.

Adopting Asthana’s (2012) notion, this text assumes the potential of media education practices, related to participatory media with at-risk youth, to encourage them to be active agents in their lives as potential actors for responsible citizenship and democracy instead of citizens-to-become. By this we mean that the youth are presently accepted as worthy citizens, despite their difficulties and seen already as a part of a society, and not seen as persons outside of the society to be integrated back into it (e.g. Rose, Daiches, & Potier, 2012). That is the idea behind the Youth Act (2016) as well, the legal base for under-aged youth to be heard and to have their say on matters concerning youth in Finland, the societal context of this study.

Finland belongs to the European democracies that have adopted media education policy from early childhood education to upper secondary level education at school (see e.g. Frau-Meigs, Kotilainen, Uusitalo, 2017). Similar to all Nordic countries in Europe, the country has been considered as a welfare state, including free basic education for all of its 5,5 million citizens, although the welfare system has recently been in crisis (Saari, 2011). We are concerned about the increasing number of youth born Finland, who are not interested in education and who are disempowered for reasons, such as social or learning difficulties and differing language or culture. According to the youth research statistics, they account, for example, girls living in rural parts of the country and the second generation of immigrant youth who have little confidence in their potential to participate in Finnish society (Myllyniemi, 2016). Moreover, the amount of

NEET (not in employment, education or training) youth has nationally increased since 2010 (Alatalo, Mähönen, & Räisänen, 2017).

Media education here is understood within the frame of pedagogies of multiliteracies (e.g. Cazden et. al., 2001) focused on enhancing youths' media literacies as understandings of digitalized societies with their public nature. In regards to the latter, this includes practical, technical skills along with expressive knowledge and critical awareness of mediated public cultures (e.g. Buckingham, 2013; Kotilainen & Pienimäki, 2019). The objective is to support youth voice through public media participation, as the core activity of citizens in democratic societies in the 21st century (Rodríguez-Jiménes & Gifford, 2010; Hopkins, 2010).

Applying a practice-based perspective to the use of participatory media with at-risk youth, we discuss features of *Inclusive Media Education*, a result of a three-year intensive action research project entitled *Young People in the Limelight: Towards Agency through Multiliteracies* (2015–2017) (hereafter YPAM) (see action research e.g. McNiff, 2013). This research project implemented eight sub-studies around Finland. Nearly 100 young people, mainly ages 15–22, were involved, along with institutions like municipal youth centres and non-governmental youth organisations. The young people were considered to be “at risk” of dropping out of society because they had learning or social difficulties, psychological problems like depression, or challenging life situations, for instance, due unemployment or immigration background. About half of them were students at basic education or were just starting their studies in secondary education. The other half were officially unemployed or were outside the job market and the school system for other reasons, such as being asylum seekers.

Concerning the ethical aspects of the study, the young participants were informed about the purpose and nature of the study and of the voluntariness of their participation. The young people and the parents of minors signed informed consent forms in each workshop. In addition, the nature of the study was repeatedly explained during workshops as many of the participants gradually gained an understanding of the study's purpose, for instance, due to limited language skills. We were also delicate to protect the privacy and anonymity of the participants, as the study contained a public aspect. (See more on ethical aspects, Pienimäki & Kotilainen, 2018.)

In all of the workshops as sub-studies, the young people were asked to create self-expression-based media content (e.g. photographs, videos, creative texts) and to publish their work through social media, like Instagram or a blog; mainstream media, like a youth magazine; and offline, like in an art exhibition. The participatory media-based workshops lasting 16–40 hours were designed by 8 researchers in cooperation with the teachers and youth workers of each institution. The media-making varied from quick one-day assignments to entire projects, such as a photography exhibition or a stage play. The researchers collected multiple qualitative data through mixed methods, including research diaries (n=10); interviews with youth, teachers and youth workers (n=39); questionnaires for the young people (n=71); summaries of World Café discussions with youth workers, teachers and researchers in two seminars (n=12); and a large amount of media content made by young participants (e.g. photographs, videos, blog texts).

In the next section, we will outline the key features of the *Inclusive Media Education* model as the key result of the study. We will discuss how at-risk youth can be supported as active agents in their lives and as citizens practising democracy through using pedagogies that rely on participatory media, learning by doing, and collaborative design and drawing upon a pedagogy of multiliteracies.

## 2 Towards Inclusive Media Education

The starting point of the YPAM workshops resided in the pedagogy of multiliteracies, which was introduced by the New London Group in the 1990s (Cazden et al., 1996). The pedagogy is based on the observation that the globalized societies of today are culturally and linguistically diverse and that information and communication technologies (ICTs) have contributed to a variety of text forms and multiple ways of reading, writing and learning. It proposes that all children and young people should benefit from learning across a range of modes (e.g. linguistic, visual, audio), regardless of their gender, language or culture, and that they can participate fully in public and community life (Cazden et al., 1996). Whereas digital literacy together with media and information literacies (MIL) are focusing mostly on skills as literacies, multiliteracies comprises multiple intertwined literacies, including mediated critical literacies and skills, and an account-inclusive view on pedagogy (see e.g. Cope & Kalantzis, 2010).

The YPAM workshops shed light on good practices related to media education with at-risk young people. These practices can be categorized into five key features: *safe spaces*, *caring interaction*, *trust in competence*, *creative media-making* and *authentic agency*. We propose these features as cornerstones of a media education supporting the inclusion of at-risk young people in educational settings (see Figure 1).

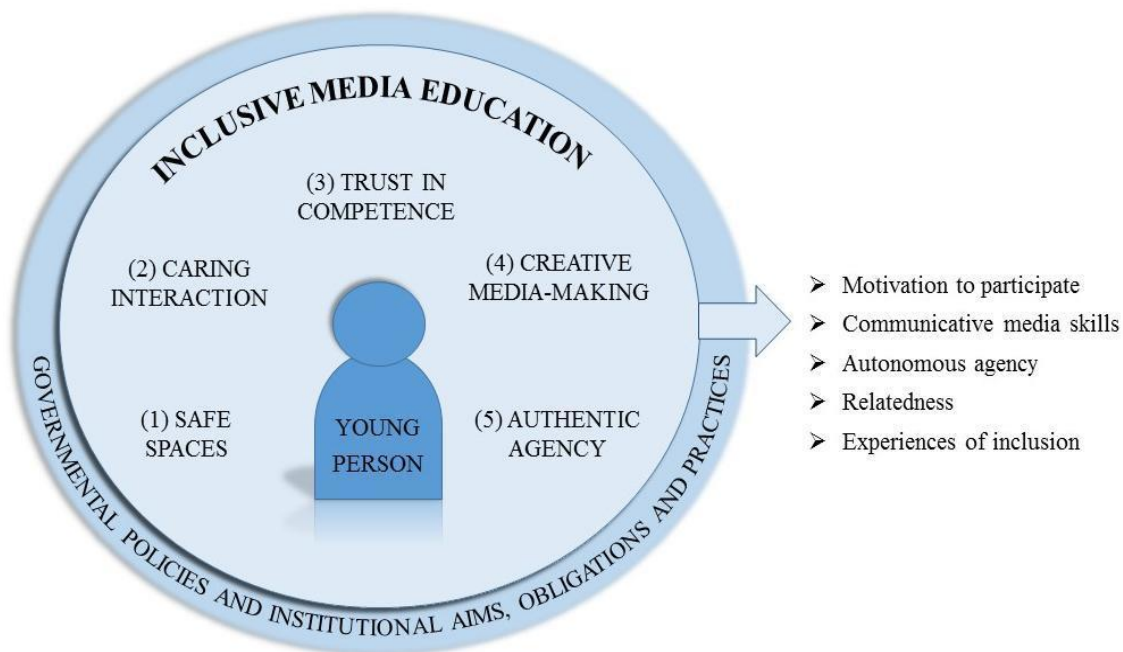


Figure 1: Features of Inclusive Media Education (IME)

As in the pedagogy of multiliteracies (e.g. Cazden et al., 1996), the very first point in the proposed *Inclusive Media Education* (hereafter IME) is acknowledging the interests, identities and (mediatized) lifeworlds of the young people, because their motivation for agency arises foremost from these aspects. This notion is the basis of the first instructional phase of multiliteracies, called *Situated Practice*. The pedagogy of multiliteracies realises that “people do not learn anything well unless they are both motivated to learn and believe that they will be able to use and function with what they are learning in some way that is in their interest” (Cazden et al., 1996, p. 85). Thus, it takes into account the affective and sociocultural needs of learners. (See

more on multiliteracies, Cope & Kalantzis, 2010; Cummins, 2009). Furthermore, in the YPAM study, we assume that, besides wanting to engage with things that are in their interest, people desire self-realisation: to learn new things and develop their best capacities (competence), to make choices and decisions about their own lives (autonomy) and to relate to others and experience a spirit of community (relatedness) (e.g. Ryan, Huta, & Deci, 2008). In the IME, the special characters, difficulties, disabilities and challenging life situations of at-risk youth are as well recognized, since they may significantly limit the youths' capability to participate and thus cause youth to require additional help, such as scaffolding in learning.

As the pedagogy of multiliteracies is chiefly aimed at a school context, it proceeds from the motivation-related phase of *Situated Practice* into the conscious learning of curriculum content. Although the researchers of the YPAM did not rigorously apply the following instructional phases of multiliteracies, as the study was largely situated in the context of youth work, many of the ideas behind these phases were found useful. For example, *Overt Instruction* includes active interventions by an instructor in order to assist learners in a more successful accomplishment of a complex task than if they were to complete the task alone (Cazden et al., 1996). Certainly, the experience of success can build future motivation for participation.

The pedagogy of multiliteracies relies on the idea of learning by doing. It draws from learners' lifeworlds, builds a conscious understanding and a *Critical Framing* of the addressed matters and, above all, pursues a recreation of these matters with a reflective manner in the final phase of *Transformed Practice* (Cazden et al., 1996). Even if the learners do not fully reach the transformed practice, the process of making (of media, for instance), is by itself worthy, as it can develop the active agency of learners and create an experience of inclusion, particularly in collaborative projects. However, we want to stress that in order for youth to experience societal inclusion, it is essential that they are actually included in the discourses and practices of our society, for example, through the final phase. In fact, the idea of offering the youth real opportunities to show or publish their art and media content in authentic settings, such as a youth magazine, was already incorporated into the research design of the YPAM study.

As most young people are interested in media, we believe that education that uses participatory media offers a promising way to reinforce the inclusion of at-risk youth. The participatory media of today enable youth to accomplish many things of interest on their own, to share their accomplishments on the internet and to interact with others through media. Furthermore, through the process of making media themselves, they can develop a critical media literacy, encompassing production, languages, representativeness and audiences of media (Buckingham, 2013), that will serve them well as engaged citizens. Consequently, in the YPAM study, we combined participatory media with the ideas of the pedagogy of multiliteracies and inclusivity as a method of media education (see also Cooper, Lockyer, & Brown, 2013). This method in an educational setting with at-risk young people led us to conclude the following five key features as the cornerstones of the *Inclusive Media Education*:

- (1) *Safe spaces* are not only good ethics but are also crucial in facilitating the initial involvement of at-risk young people in media activities. Safe spaces in media participation include encouraging and friendly atmospheres, informal activities and secure interaction both face-to-face and through social media. (See also Broderick, 2014; Charmaraman, 2017; Sellman, 2015; Vickery, 2014.)
- (2) *Caring interaction* around or with media can increase the agency of young people. It can be expressed through supporting their identities and forming empathetic and trustworthy

relationships with them and among peers, face-to-face and in social media. In addition, acts of democracy can imply to the youth that their opinion truly matters. (See also Bruce et al., 2009; Cummins, 2009; Dekelver et al., 2011; Grauer, Castro, & Lin, 2012; Lin & Bruce, 2013; Vickery, 2014.)

- (3) *Trust in the competence* of at-risk youth is a key feature in building their motivation for media participation. This can take place through helping them discover their interests, highlighting their strengths, helping them rely on those strengths, giving them plenty of positive feedback and enhancing their self-reflection skills. (See also Bruce et al., 2009; Lin & Bruce, 2013; Charmaraman, 2017; Pariser et al., 2016.)
- (4) *Creative media-making* is of utmost importance, as it improves youths' communicative media skills and can thus improve their capacity for digital agency. It can also advance their critical media literacy, such as understanding media languages and the aspect of representation. Supporting their creative media-making means teaching them media skills which may require *Overt Instruction* on the part of the instructor. It is also crucial to promote the creativity of at-risk youth, as this can help them to reach the *Transformed Practice* and to excel beyond the limits they had set for themselves, thus creating feelings of success for them. Yet, the promotion of creativity may also require *Overt Instruction* in the form of active interventions; for instance, the instructors may have to introduce methods of creativity and offer several examples and sources of inspiration. The experiences of success and competence can endorse the youths' empowerment and, furthermore, their motivation to participate in school, youth work, and real-life forums, thus be included in society. (See also Banaji & Burn, 2007; Broderick, 2014; Buckingham, 2013; Grauer et al., 2012; Hopkins, 2010.)
- (5) *Authentic agency* implies providing at-risk young people with authentic opportunities to be included in society. It means understanding that despite their difficulties and challenges, they are already a part of our society, not citizens-to-become. Consequently, they should be included in diverse activities of society and, for instance, be offered opportunities to publish their media content through authentic media forums that they find intriguing. In other words, the *Transformed Practice* greatly benefits at-risk youth when it is performed in authentic, real-life contexts. The opportunity of authentic digital agency can also offer the youth understanding about audiences as an aspect of media literacy. (See also Broderick, 2014; Buckingham, 2013; Charmaraman, 2017; Hopkins, 2010; Sellman, 2015; Vickery, 2014.)

To sum up the goals of the IME, it utilises participatory media to form a motivation for at-risk young people to participate in educational settings and to be included in society. It aims to improve their communicative media skills and media literacy so that they have a capacity for agency and ability to express their ideas in society. It awakens their courage to express their opinions, to participate in decision-making and to take initiative. In other words, it fosters autonomous agency in youth. Relatedness is also an important goal of the IME, as it is a condition for one to feel inclusion in a group or society (e.g. Ryan et al., 2008). Media is considered as a potential channel for social interaction beyond face-to-face interaction. Lastly, the IME aims to offer at-risk young people authentic opportunities to experience their inclusion in society. (See more about the key features in Kotilainen & Pienimäki, 2019; Pienimäki, 2018; 2019; Pienimäki & Kotilainen, 2018.)

The proposed *Inclusive Media Education* model is directed at institutions working with at-risk young people, such as schools, libraries, museums and youth houses. Contextual factors like

institutional objectives, obligations and practices should also be recognized while using it; furthermore, governmental policies, such as school curriculums, should be taken into consideration. As the model relies on identity-related media-making, it can bring up delicate issues regarding the identity of at-risk young people, who can very well have psychological problems, for instance. Thus, youth practitioners should have good contact with diverse health and social institutions in order to guide the youth in proper care, if necessary.

### **3 A Case Example of the Five Key Features of Inclusive Media Education**

The five key features of the Inclusive Media Education are illustrated in a story about at-risk young people creating a photography exhibition in a youth house targeted at-risk youth. The youth house is situated in one of the biggest cities in Finland, and it is attended by young people who have especially social difficulties or challenging life situations. Many of the youth also have other difficulties, such as challenges in learning or language skills.

In the spring of 2016, a youth worker and a YPAM researcher, as instructors implemented a photography workshop in a youth house. It was their third workshop together. There were eight young participants, five of which had attended the previous workshops; for some youth, the instructors were familiar, and for some, they were new. In this third workshop, the idea was to let the young people determine what kind of photography project(s) they would like to work on during the ten weekly meetings, as the earlier workshops had been based on photography assignments introduced by the instructors.

In the first meeting, after some introductory and ice-breaker games, the instructors proposed a big joint photography project as the final activity, to be published outside their youth centre. Those who had attended the previous workshops were especially excited about this opportunity of *authentic agency* to create something together and to publish it in a real-life context. During the earlier workshops, these youths had already experienced publishing their photographs on Instagram, in a youth magazine or in an art exhibition. So, it appears that the positive experiences gained by *authentic agency* (publishing) started their empowerment process. In other words, authentic agency increased their motivation and commitment to participate in future workshops.

Offering an opportunity for authentic agency had further value, as it built the young people's *trust in their own competence*. It was as if the youth interpreted the opportunity to publish in an authentic or unusual forum as a sign of the adults' trust in them. This trust encouraged them to try harder. They did not always succeed; however, there were better chances of success when they did not underachieve due to a lack of motivation or faith in their competence. Furthermore, these opportunities enabled the youth to gain feedback from various audiences, not merely from those involved in the workshop. Thus, they could experience the influence their work had on others, which was important in the growth of their motivation and agency. At the same time, they learned about audiences as an aspect of critical media literacy, for instance, how various audiences may interpret the same photographs differently.

In the beginning of the workshop, a "tree of ideas" (Figure 2) was introduced to help the young people create an inspiring project, as the instructors' experience was that the youth lacked ideas. The tree consisted of four different sets of ideas written on Post-it notes, which were placed on a sketch of a tree. The youth were asked to write down things they were generally interested in, issues they would like to change in their life or world, topics they would like to photograph and types of projects they would like to create (e.g. exhibitions, reportages, photographs on mugs). The participants most clearly understood their personal interests, but they were very shy or afraid



to discuss them with others. Thus, they were divided into small groups of 2–3 persons. These groups seemed to establish an informal and *safe space*, wherein the participants were more inclined to discuss their interests and ideas. In fact, throughout all the workshops, diverse informal situations (e.g. photography excursions, peer tutoring) increased their social interaction. Furthermore, having the opportunity to reveal their ideas *safely* through the written Post-it notes instead of orally helped the youth talk about their views.

At the end of the first meeting, all the Post-it notes were placed on the tree. This way the ideas (i.e. answers) of the four question categories could be viewed side by side, with the hope that the ideas of different categories would mix into a unique combination; a big project as a final activity. However, the young people were unable to come up with many ideas of a project. Furthermore, as the youth had had difficulties in innovating ideas, the instructors had given some examples, for instance, what the final activity could be (e.g. a reportage). Almost all of the examples were found from the Post-it notes. The youth seemed both to be inclined to please the instructors and to lack creativity.



Figure 2: A “tree of ideas”.

Thus, in the second meeting, the young people were tasked with creating a “treasure map” presenting their dreams of the future in a collage of magazine pictures. The instructors’ hidden aim was to engender an informal situation (*safe space*) through the map-making, wherein the joint media project could be discussed incidentally. Another important aim was to discover more of the youths’ interests and *to promote their creativity*, for instance, to collide diverse styles, topics and ideas. In fact, throughout all YPAM workshops, the creativity of youth was endorsed, for instance, by visits to intriguing places (e.g. photography studio, media house) and by familiarizing with diverse cultural content (e.g. art photography, journalistic writings, popular culture). At the same time, these opportunities taught the young people for example about professional practices of media and art.

The youth were inspired by the task of the “treasure/dream map,” as it provided them with an opportunity to reflect on their identities and later, when the final maps were discussed all together, to tell about themselves and to get to know others in *safe space* governed by the instructors. Simultaneously, the task offered the instructors an opportunity to give supportive and caring comments on their identities. Throughout the workshop, such moments of *caring interaction* seemed to form feelings of acceptance in the young people and to create trust among them that in turn grew their agency and willingness to express their opinions. The caring words, friendly feedback and encouragement in part created a safe space to interact both face-to-face and in social media. In the formation of a safe space, it was also crucial to promote trustworthy relationships among peers, especially face-to-face.

After the young people looked at the finished dream maps, the idea of a big project was addressed explicitly. It became clear that such creative methods as the “idea tree” and “dream map” could improve their creativity, and eventually, the youth were able to come up with an innovative project. However, this process showed that with at-risk young people, it is not enough merely to teach them media skills, as they first need to have a motivation to accomplish things well and a *trust in their own media skills and competence* to do it. While building the young people’s motivation, the aspect of *creativity* had particular value, as supporting their creativity helped them to excel in media-making beyond the limits they had set for themselves. The experiences



of success and competence increased their engagement with media and elevated their autonomous agency (e.g. taking initiative, participating in decision-making) and interaction with others in the future. So, the improvement in *creativity* contributed to *trust in competence* and an elevated motivation for media-making, wherein their critical media literacy improved as well.

However, the young people initially had difficulty choosing from the different ideas of a project. In the joint talk, they were reluctant to volunteer their wishes. They lacked the autonomy or courage to talk to others and make a joint decision. Once again, it was crucial to engender a *safe space* to support the youth to express their opinions and to reach a decision. This space was formed by anonymous voting between different project options. This act of democracy also seemed to give them the feeling of being heard, as it created an experience where everyone's opinion was equally important.



Figure 3: A photoshopped picture made by a young girl with social difficulties. She imagined herself as Batgirl in her world (i.e. to have courage to be amid social situations). For the exhibition, the picture was printed on a black T-shirt.

While making the final decision about the type of project, there were two strong candidates: a photo reportage and a photography exhibition. Interestingly, these two projects had already been accomplished in the two previous workshops. This implies that the motivating factor was not necessarily the newness of a publication forum or publishing in a mainstream media or offline forum. It seemed rather that the young people wanted merely to gain more experiences of *publishing in authentic forums* outside their school and youth centre, for instance, to publish in some respected, intriguing or unusual forum where they did not think they could publish something.

In the end, the workshop participants decided to create a photography exhibition representing superheroes and other fantasy self-portraits (see Figures 3 and 4), printed on T-shirts or put in frames and hung in an exhibition space. In the following meetings, the young people were provided with many sources of inspiration and opportunities to make their self-portraits, such as taking photographs outdoors and in a studio and making a collage combining their own photograph with, for example, the body of superhero or penguin (see Figure 4). Their own media-making taught them about the visual language of photography, such as how meanings are created in photography; and about the aspect of representation, for instance, that photographs do not merely imitate things but always represent things in a particular way and that they show things always from a particular point of view. These diverse opportunities to make one's self-portrait also helped the youth to explore their identities and interests, to discover their strengths in *creative media-making* and, further, to rely on their strengths, which contributed to better success. These experiments also led to a wealth of feedback developing their self-reflection skills, which seemed to be a factor in building their *trust in competence*.



Figure 4: A photo created by a migrant girl who had arrived from Africa some months before the first workshop. She was a content person, yet had limited language skills. She felt like a penguin in Finland, possibly in many ways. The photograph was originally printed on a black T-shirt.

In this YPAM workshop, and all others as well, it thus appeared that at-risk youth were more easily persuaded into learning critical media literacy through hands-on media education than merely through analyzing already published media texts. From a social point of view, making media together was valuable, as the youth would more easily relate to peers during media activities than through merely talking with each other.

#### 4 Conclusion

The YPAM study revealed five key features of democracy 2.0 for promoting the inclusion of at-risk youth in media educational settings that form the model of *Inclusive Media Education* (IME) integrating skills-based view with communal-oriented pedagogic activities. These features are the following. (1) *Safe spaces*, such as a friendly atmosphere and safe interaction through social media, facilitated the youths' initial involvement in media activities. (2) *Caring interaction* around or with media further encouraged them to participate in the activities, for example, supporting their identities during media-making. (3) *Trust in their own competence*, which was a major factor in forming motivation for media participation, was engendered especially by raising the youth to an expert position (e.g. a peer-teacher) from the outset. (4) *Creative media-making* taught the young people media skills, promoting their communication and agency for democracy 2.0. It also enabled them to excel themselves in media-making, which increased their future motivation to participate. (5) *Authentic agency* was enhanced by opportunities of acting and publishing in authentic art and media forums, contributing experiences of inclusion in society.

Although the proposed model is based on the extensive empirical data of the YPAM study, it still needs testing and reflecting in praxis. For example, it is very likely that the model functions best in long-term use, since the growth of motivation and empowerment can take time (e.g. Hopkins, 2010). However, the length and extent of applying the IME in different educational settings to reach optimal results is still unclear. Furthermore, the five key features are intertwined in many ways; for instance, *caring interaction* can in part contribute to *safe spaces* and *trust in competence*. In addition, *trust in competence* can increase youths' social interaction, and the feature of *creative media-making* is facilitated or increased by all other features. These relations should be further explored. Furthermore, the overall usability of the IME model needs to be tested in diverse educational settings and in different cultural contexts as well.

To conclude, the IME emphasises the importance of safe spaces and caring interaction while working with at-risk youth, for instance, in schools and youth work. It suggests, in particular, that more effort needs to be put in motivating the at-risk young people to become active agents of their lives and so to find their own lifepaths, and eventually become active citizens not only accepting only neo-liberalist views, but promoting more communal-based views on democracy enhancing belonging as well (see Drotner, Frau-Meigs, Kotilainen and Uusitalo, 2017). The model proposes as well that education should lean more on media-related practices, including performance in authentic settings both in mediated public spheres and offline spaces. Media is itself a motivating factor, as young people by large are interested in participatory media, yet media is not enough alone. In particular, trust in their competence from the outset can spark the motivation of at-risk people. In the formation of motivation, the IME highlights the value of developing their creative media skills, as this progress can lead into compelling media content and, consequently, into experiences of competence. In addition, the advancement of creative media-making can build critical media literacies, which can contribute to skills and knowledge, assisting the at-risk youth, in part, to conquer their at-risk situation. Yet another crucial matter forming trust in competence is authentic opportunities to exhibit one's skills and creative outputs

and so to express their freedom of speech and democracy. Such opportunities taken by YPAM youth generated for them as well valuable feelings of being included in society, elevating their motivation for agency simultaneously. In other words, the model also suggests that it is necessary to generate and offer more opportunities of authentic, democratic agency for the at-risk youth.

The IME can build a foundation for multi-voiced society—and so for democracy 2.0—in our mediatized culture. As Dahlgren (2013) claims, communicative media competencies are essential for a democratic citizenry. Not only do people need to have multiple literacies to act in society but also the ability to express their views, offline and online as well. Consequently, the creative media-making emphasised by IME forms ground for active democratic citizenry. In addition, we want to stress that the at-risk youth must have courage and motivation for active citizenry, expressing democracy and belief that their agency can be of value. In fact, the paucity of participation, for instance in politics, does not only concern at-risk youth—the decline of political participation appears across younger generations by large and is of global concern (e.g. Bakker & de Vreese, 2011).

According to Dahlgren (2013, 11) civic apathy is not a simple question and it “must be understood in the context of the dynamics and dilemmas of late modern democracy more generally”. There are diverse reasons for the scarcity of participation. For instance, the political power seems to transit to the private sector and the established parties are insufficiently responsive, so resulting in a disbelief in electoral politics. However, Dahlgren (2013) asks to look upon alternative democratic paths, where appears renewed engagement, that is on multiple groups and loose collectives acting mostly outside the field of party politics, such as NGOs, social movements and citizen networks (see also e.g. Bakker & de Vreese, 2011). As these alternative democratic paths utilise greatly the technology, channels and languages of media, critical media literacies afford people this kind of political participation that is collectively monitoring, criticizing and intervening all kind of issues in diverse settings. Consequently, IME should offer the at-risk youth opportunities also for alternative democratic paths where there are authentic opportunities for political agency and real chances to experience being influential and included in society. Positive experiences of being heard can evoke the motivation of at-risk youth and build their belief in political participation as a worthy case.

As Dahlgren (2013, 11) states, “There is full consensus that democracy needs people’s participation”. If only the people in power are engaged in building democratic societies, the needs and rights of marginalised, vulnerable and at-risk people may not be understood or met. Democracy 2.0, where all citizens have equal rights and fair opportunities in education and unique lifepaths, it must then be build on multi-voiced society including, among others, the voices of at-risk young people.

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