6 KEY CONCEPTS OF YOUTH WORK IN YOUTH WORK CURRICULA

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Introduction

Whenever youth workers, youth (work) researchers or youth policy makers meet, there are always ongoing discussions about 'what youth work is and what it is not'. These discussions are still prevalent at the national, European, and global levels (see Walker, 2016 and IDYW, 2018). There is a reason behind it – youth work is a very contextual practice and, certainly, our histories, but also present, including culture, education, economy, social problems *etc*. differ. For some countries, youth work is a rather new practice and profession– for example, for post-Soviet countries – but there are other countries where youth work already has long traditions and roots. So, understanding the differences, but appreciating similarities, is important. While discussions about 'what is youth work?' are continuing, there has at least been some agreement expressed in the Declaration of the 2nd European Youth Work Convention (2015) which states that youth work is:

1) educative
2) empowering
3) participative
4) expressive
5) inclusive.

Connecting to this shared understanding about the essence of youth work, this chapter will introduce some of the key-concepts which have influenced youth work in Europe: non-formal and informal learning in youth work, empowerment, participation as well as cultural youth work. Some examples from Estonia, Finland and England, with a glimpse of Australian youth work and US youth development work will be presented. The authors will explore how the concepts have developed and been used in youth work, keeping in mind different contexts of the countries. As all the authors are involved in teaching youth work, some examples on how the key-concepts are integrated into university curricula will be presented together with examples of everyday youth work practice. Examples in this article are illustrative and do not cover everything about the key-concepts in youth work curricula of the universities mentioned in the article or youth work practice in the countries identified.

This chapter aims to give a short overview of the key-concepts in youth work, also providing a very brief introduction to some of the authors and theories behind them, but mostly addressing the values, contradictions, and dilemmas behind the concepts, also taking into account contextuality of youth work.

Non-formal and Informal Learning in Youth Work

Educative being of youth work brings in terms like 'non-formal education' and 'non-formal learning'. Non-formal education and learning, but also informal education and learning are terms often confusingly used in English language literature (Colley, Hodkinson & Malcolm, 2003; Duke 2001). The use of the term 'non-formal' in educational contexts has become increasingly unfocused. On the other hand, there has been a change of the discourse from 'education' to 'learning' (Rogers, 2014). 'Learning' finds its place in youth work more easily than 'education', as the latter term is more often 'exclusively owned' by schools and therefore considerably institutionalized leaving the learner-perspective aside more easily (Walker, 2016).

The term 'non-formal education' was first defined by Coombs and Ahmed (1974) as 'any organized, systematic, educational activity carried on outside the framework of the formal system to provide selected types of learning to particular subgroups in the population, adults as well as children'. It was mostly seen as an alternative or extra possibility in circumstances where formal education had failed or was not accessible (Fordham, 1993). Therefore, non-formal education was seen and still is seen as important and key for the **empowerment** of underprivileged groups. On the other hand, after Maastricht Agreement in 1992 with more coordinated educational policy between EU member states and with the rise of lifelong learning framework after Lisbon Strategy in 2000, the discourse of non-formal education changed the direction slightly by bringing in the understanding and statement of 'learning to all' (Naumanen, Leppänen, Rinne, 2008). This understanding is strongly connected with the principle of youth work being **inclusive**. Rogers (2014) argues that the birth of the concept of lifelong learning is the turning point of the discourse from 'education' to 'learning' and draws attention to:

1) the aim of lifelong learning, which tries to bring together and accept learning in all settings: formal, non-formal, and informal.
2) the danger in assuming that participation in any kind of a learning situation will definitely lead to 'real learning'.

Real and long-lasting learning cannot be guaranteed just by participating in either non-formal learning programs or by engagement in formal education systems, where you can complete your studies and pass your exams, but forget the knowledge later. So, instead, Colley, Hodkinson and Malcolm (2003) argue that separation of formal, non-formal and informal learning is not necessary from the viewpoint of the learner as real learning can occur in any of these settings. The question of how learning outside of the formal educational system is translatable or transferable into the language of the formal system (and may be for the society in general) is the remaining dilemma as the formal educational system is a much earlier social construct: historically approved, but also therefore privileged and dominating whenever we talk about learning (Norqvist, Leffler, 2017). This is the reason why placing youth work on the educational continuum, understood by many, can be seen as important (Walker, 2016). From the 1980s with the birth and funding of EU youth programs non-formal learning through youth work has had special attention. Indeed, it has been one way of explaining what youth work is about and what its value for the society is (Kiilakoski, 2015).

The definition of non-formal and informal learning used in youth work is mostly (at least in connection to EU youth programs) as follows:

> *Non-formal learning is purposive but voluntary learning that takes place in a diverse range of environments and situations for which teaching/training and learning is not necessarily their sole or main activity. These environments and situations may be temporary, and the activities or courses that take place may be staffed by professional learning facilitators (such as youth trainers) or by volunteers (such as youth leaders). The activities and courses are planned, but are seldomly structured by conventional rhythms or curriculum subjects. They usually address specific target groups, but rarely document or assess learning outcomes or achievements in conventionally visible ways. Informal learning at least from the learners' viewpoint is non-purposive learning which takes place in everyday life contexts in the family, at work, during leisure, and in the community. It does have outcomes, but these are seldomly recorded, virtually never certified and are typically neither immediately visible for the learner nor do they count in themselves for education, training or employment purposes. (Chisholm, 2005, 4)*

This definition brings in some questions not yet entirely addressed in everyday practice: do youth workers plan non-formal learning, do they choose methods and environments according to the purpose, do they assess it?

Non-formal learning in youth work is often aimed at developing social skills, creativity, cultural competences, language competences and through that it can either be seen as adding extra value to formal school curriculum or as the alternative learning-path (see Norqvist, Leffler, 2017; Rannala, Allekand, 2018). Considering the model of 'qualified differentiation' in education – there can and should be different equally appreciated educational (learning) trajectories which take into consideration abilities and interests of students, but also the question of what competencies are needed in the changing society these days (Mørch, 2003). At the same time, the aspect of how well youth workers are prepared to facilitate non-formal learning activities as planned, methodically thought through and assessed or meaningfully discussed, may have been underestimated so far (Rannala, Allekand, 2018).

Another question without a clear answer is the balance between informal and non-formal learning in youth work as many would argue that the main value of youth work is within informal learning, which takes place in trustful relationships between youth workers and youth in everyday situations at youth clubs or centres. So, on one hand, adopting the concept of non-formal learning helps to explain the educational value of youth work but, on the other hand, it has brought some formality into the youth work, as non-formal learning is planned, systematic and evaluated or reflected educational activity. Discussions for and against measuring, evaluating outcomes or other ways of 'formalizing' youth work are rather strong in some youth workers' professional communities here and there (see Ord, 2016; Kiilakoski, Kinnunen, Djupsund, 2018).

Non-formal learning as a valuable part of youth work seems to be more important in countries where youth work stands closer to education and culture than to social work: Finland and Estonia, for example. In the both countries youth work is coordinated through ministries of education and the core principle of youth work 'opened to everyone' or 'accessible to everyone' is manifested (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017; Republic of Estonia Ministry of Education and Research, 2014)). This core principle is indeed well connected with the discourse of the lifelong learning framework 'learning possibilities to all', and with the principle of youth work being **inclusive**. Therefore, for example, at Tallinn University in Estonia there are subjects like 'Inclusive Youth Work', 'Non-formal Learning

Environments and Methods', 'Learning-friendly Environments', and 'Meanings of Lifelong Learning' included on the diploma and Master studies levels. The School of Educational Sciences of Tallinn University has three academic study areas, and one of them focuses on lifelong and non-formal learning, where curricula of youth work and adult educators nest. Strong cooperation between youth work and adult education students and academics supports peer-learning during studies and practice, joint research and other activities which aim to improve (future) youth workers knowledge and skills as facilitators of non-formal learning.

Empowerment in Youth Work

A much contested and somewhat elusive concept, empowerment, gained prominence among people of work professions across England in the early 1990s. A somewhat sceptic opening line in Jeffs (2005) reads, *'in the 1970s we had enfranchisement; 1980s participation; 1990s empowerment and now citizenship'* and, according to Morley (1995, p.1) referencing the National Youth Bureau (1990), *'The word even appears in ministerial documentation regarding the role and responsibilities of professional workers in relation to young people'.* Arguably (as the last three words of the above-given sentence in Jeffs suggest), in the recent years the term has become less of a buzz word in the service sector. Nonetheless, it is still very much the common parlance of the day to day discussion amongst service sector professionals. Such uninterrogated use of the term in the public discourse has, for many years, necessitated an exploration of its various meanings and usage across Youth and Community Work Courses. At the Youth and Community Work programme in Newman University, whilst there is no specific module on empowerment, the term is often discussed across the cohorts in modules such as Principles and Practice, Intersectionality and Critical Pedagogy with further interrogation of the concept in the three-hour long tutor group sessions aimed at exploring the relationships between theory, practice, the self and wider society.

In problematizing what might initially appear to be a progressive concept, questions focusing on the nature of power are raised: is power a 'thing' that can be acquired, does power equate to physical attributes or material resources, is power a way of understanding relationships on the individual, cultural or societal level? And following such questions, there are often further perplexities relating to how one might become empowered, one can give power, or whether power can only be taken. Who is empowering whom, for what purpose and who decides when someone is or is not empowered? And, indeed, what does this all mean for the practitioner and the young people they are working with?

Exploring the shifting ideology of public services in the 1990s, Morley (1995) asserts that the term, having once radical origins, has been usurped by the New Right. Where the power relationships between the teacher and students or the worker and the client were once problematized in order to bring about dialogue and interaction based on a privileging of the client/young person's/students experience (as per Freire 1996), we now see a marketized approach where empowerment equates to individual self-sufficiency and the adoption of behaviours that encourage people to fit in rather than challenge the status quo. Citing France (1999), Crawshaw et. al (2000) make the point that youth work and research aimed at those viewed as 'at risk' is in danger not of empowering but exploiting through the imposition of 'expert' agendas on those who do not see themselves as disempowered. Such exploitation for the purposes of funding criteria (albeit with, perhaps, benevolent intentions) serves, in effect, to raise the profile of certain groups of people and open them up to surveillance and control.

It is this critical stance on this and a lot of other assumed foundational concepts that is adopted in the Youth and Community Work programmes of Newman University. Such a stance encourages students not only to develop an appreciation of the very real situations that the young people they work with are living through but also the potentially destructive power of uninterrogated assumptions inherent in practice undertaken in the name of empowerment. Perhaps, given the changing field in the UK that has witnessed the decline in generic, open access and universal services as well as youth workers becoming employed in a vast array of fix-term funded roles with quite specific client groups and targets, there is a need for further exploration into the nature of empowerment in such circumstances.

Participation

Given the large number of often contradicting definitions of youth participation, it is necessary to identify and understand the core essence of truly meaningful and progressive youth participation: participation of young people in decision-making is and should always be about sharing and distribution of power - from and between those that typically control the process to those they seek to engage (Farrow, 2018). Youth participation, therefore, can be defined as 'a process where young people, as **active citizens**, take part in, express views on, and have decision- making power about issues that affect them.' (Farthing, 2012).

It is important to acknowledge that youth participation is already a compulsory element and a guiding principle of youth work in a lot of countries. Furthermore, in some countries, such as in Estonia and in some states of Australia, such as in the state of Victoria (Youth Work Act, 2010 [Estonia]; YACVic, 2007), the principle of youth participation is enshrined in the relevant youth work legislation and codes of ethics. Outside of youth work, on the policy arena, participation of children and young people is supported locally, regionally, and internationally by various policies and programs, international treaties and legislation, most notably by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

When considering youth participation, it is important to take into consideration changes in the external environment. The rising populism and nationalism across Europe and beyond, new and shifting forms of power and use and influence of technology are three of the main key factors guiding the discourse about youth participation in 2018 and beyond (Farrow, 2018). The concept of youth participation is closely linked to principles of democratic governance. Roger Hart (1992) notes that a nation is democratic to the extent to which its citizens are involved, particularly on the community level, and that for this reason there should be gradually increasing opportunities for children and young people to participate in any aspiring democracy, and particularly in those nations already convinced that they are democratic. Yakovlev (2003) somewhat widens the discourse and argues that treatment of its children is the litmus test of any government, however it may describe itself.

Youth participation is not merely one among a myriad of topics to be "covered" in the course of delivering youth work - it is a guiding principle of youth work and how youth work is to be planned, implemented, and evaluated. Whereas youth participation happens everywhere, not just in youth work, the onus and responsibility of championing meaningful youth participation often lies on youth workers. In other words, youth work has a solemn duty to practice what we preach: if we expect policy makers, service providers, schools etc. to involve young people in decision-making processes, we should make sure that we do it ourselves in our youth work practice.

As such, it is imperative for professional training of youth workers to properly address the concept of youth participation. Using the example of youth work curricula in Tallinn University in Estonia and Victoria University in Australia, where youth participation is a dedicated standalone unit of study, in both of these universities, the aim of this standalone unit is, on the one hand, the principles inherently connected to participation: power, active citizenship, social exclusion and inclusion, rights etc. and, on the other hand, understanding the process of participation: introducing youth participation models such as Hart's Ladder, Shier's pathways and others as well as getting to know formal and informal structures (youth and student councils and organizations, etc.) for youth participation.

Without emphasizing the growing importance of the role of youth work as the enabler of youth participation in professional training of youth workers it is difficult, if not impossible, to expect further progress to be made in enabling more power sharing between adults and youth workers in youth work and beyond.

Culturally Responsive and Cultural Youth Work

Being expressive, youth work is well-connected with the concept of cultural youth work – the term actively used in Finnish youth work and as such is not much used elsewhere, although cultural competencies, meaning first and most of all – understanding the culture young people come from – are underpinned in the United States as one of the main ways of supporting youth development. The term 'culturally responsive youth work' is used (Walter, Grant, 2011). Culturally responsive youth work pays attention to the competences also described under **lifelong learning** key-competences, under 'cultural awareness and expression competence': understanding and expressing own cultural 'self', understanding and respecting others' cultural self, intercultural communication skills, etc. (The Council of European Union, 2018; Walter, Grant, 2011). Therefore, culturally responsive and cultural youth work are strongly connected with **non-formal learning** programs and activities.

There is not probably one and clear explanation on how and why cultural youth work became so important in Finland within last decades, but maybe some answers can be provided by Finnish youth researchers. Youth (subculture) research during the 1980s had the dominating 'youth and subculture' discourse and was viewed by some Finnish researchers as an attempt to construct youth as 'deviant and borderline or criminal (also the way 'subculture' translates into Finnish). Tommi Hoikkala (Hoikkala, 1984 via Hoikkala, Suurpää, 2005) has stated that:

'I interpret relations between young people's group participation, local identities, styles and social structures without referring to the concept of subcultures, because as I see it, it is a concept constructed for purposes of analysing the cultural identity of stable, clearly defined and distinct groups of (British) young people in an industrialized society'.

Youth researchers, practitioners, and youth policy makers have been working together rather closely in Finland (Hoikkala, Suurpää, 2005). Based on that knowledge, it can be assumed that some of the research, especially application-oriented has influenced youth policy together with youth work practice. Focusing on lifestyles, life-choices, life-management, peer-group cultures, the 'culture of being young', adapting to multiculturalism in society, interdisciplinarity, etc. instead of subcultures, marginalization, linear pathways from youth into adulthood or specific targeted services, etc. (*ibid.*) may have resulted in upbringing cultural youth work in Finland.

The concept of cultural youth work is often limited to the use of art, music, theatre, and other creative methods in youth work. However, it can also be seen more widely. Cultural youth work can

be defined as a form of youth work that includes art and cultural content supporting **participation**, active citizenship, and democracy education. The aim of this kind of work is to produce experiences and **empower** young people. In this kind of work, it is important to develop different kinds of methods for youth work together with ethical and value **education**. (Tuliainen 2006)

According to the Youth Department of the City of Helsinki (2012), cultural youth work is seen widely as participatory, self-motivating, and youth-promoting activity where young people act and are considered as subjects. In the Finnish Youth Act (1285/2016) cultural youth work is defined as action that strengthens **inclusion**, growth, independence, communality, and recreation. It supports equality and the rights of young people. The starting points of such work are solidarity, cultural diversity, and internationality.

The University of Applied Sciences in Finland (Humak) trains both cultural managers and community educators, both working in the field of culture. Due to the diversity of cultural concepts, students of Humak are offered a broad view of the topic. They are to build strong roots and carrying wings so that they can convey this kind of aims to young people.

The students start by exploring the roots, the history of Finland, and, in particular, the development of public services and organizations. The students gather information on the evolution of youth culture over decades. They also conduct interviews in different organizations, plan, and carry out projects. The importance of interdisciplinary work is emphasised so that these future professionals learn the network approach. The wings grow, for example, through participating in youth house, library, music, theatre and game events, LARP (live action role play) activities and other art projects or adventures. For example, young people can have sleepovers in libraries cooperating with youth workers; Rock Academy offers music business newcomers guidance and a stage to show their skills; Game Academy is a new platform for e-sports enthusiasts.

In Humak, the studies of multicultural and international competences are important because of the growing need of work with different cultural backgrounds of young people. The students take part in international youth exchanges and experience international **learning environments**. Their target groups vary and are multicultural: they may be girls and/or boys, representatives of various minorities or different cultures.

Students participate in practical training in organizations according to their interests. They may take part in experimental culture projects; explore opportunities for digital youth work or indulge in intensive international weeks. These experiences enable student to become aware of the importance of involvement and self-reliance working as a professional in youth work. Graduating community educators of Humak acquire a huge number of methods for constantly developing cultures. With the "backpack" of these methods they can support young people's self-confidence, courage, and creativity. These social activities give young people opportunities to influence their community and society in Finland and globally. Culture and cultural youth work activities belong to everyone supporting personal growth, strong roots, and carrying wings.

Conclusion

Although at the beginning of the chapter we referred to the agreement in Europe regarding the essence of youth work being educative, empowering, participating, expressive, and inclusive, it becomes apparent that we still might not have the shared understanding of those key concepts. On the other hand, we learned that at least some of those concepts we share on the global level as well.

There is more than one theory behind each concept and there is no room in this chapter to discuss them all. But it is evident that each key-concept described here has a dilemma within itself, to a smaller or greater extent: is young person seen as someone who must adapt into the society as it is and is youth work working towards it with the help of these key-concepts or is it more about critical thinking and changes – understanding, accepting, and creating multiple realities together with the young? This dilemma together with different contexts across countries where youth work is practiced might be the reason why the introduction of the key-concepts and their main definitions in this chapter started with the words 'confusion, elusive, contradictive'. This might as well be the reason why we cannot agree globally on what youth work really is.

The way young people are seen brings us to power issues and through that the concepts of empowerment and participation become especially important. Non-formal learning and cultural youth work can and sometimes do 'serve' these concepts. At the same time, we could see that definitions, principles, and goals within the concepts overlap. Non-formal learning can be 'justification' of youth work in itself, but it finds content from other concepts: empowerment, participation, cultural youth work. Cultural youth work supports participation, active citizenship, democracy and value education (learning). Participation may involve empowerment and is supported by non-formal learning (education) and cultural youth work thorough even cultural participation, for a start. Inclusiveness was not separately discussed in this chapter as the authors find that it is a recurrent principle within other key concepts. Although, as mentioned above, even here the dilemma appears in different countries: targeted youth work versus youth work accessible to everyone.

This brings us to thinking about the different contexts of different countries where youth work is practiced. This topic deserves research and a lot more space than this chapter could have provided. But even in this short overview we came across some contradictions between understanding or constructing of concepts of youth, youth cultures, empowerment, and assessment of youth work. The list is not complete most probably. Although the chapter touched upon the question of the 'British influenced youth work' very briefly and only in the youth research context, the question of how and by whom youth work has been and is constructed in research, scholarly texts, and academic training might not be well thought through or provided enough arguments for yet. Our incapacity to agree on what youth work is and how its' key concepts can be interpreted may as well be hidden here.

Therefore, first of all, reflective practice and discussions about the values, goals, and meanings of key-concepts in youth work are very important. Secondly, understanding and connecting of those discussions to the contexts more clearly – first on the level of one's own country, but definitely also on a wider level. This is another step to make, and cooperation between universities teaching youth work, which, for example, has resulted in this book, is a good start. Thirdly, there are questions worth of being researched that are also mentioned in this chapter – international cooperation here is vital.

So far interpretations of 'educative, empowering, participatory, expressive, and inclusive' might be similar and/or different, but youth work training and research at universities are to enable and support future youth workers, researchers, and youth policy makers to think critically, analyze, compare, and debate on the topic. We hope that these discussions are also supported by some insight given in this chapter and the whole book as well.

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