

*Promoting Citizen Engagement through
Youth Work:
Perspectives from Ireland and Europe*

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Citizenship

- We can identify different types of citizenship, e.g.:
 - **Civic** (freedom of expression & faith; property; justice)
 - **Political** (participation; a share in power)
 - **Social** (welfare; a decent ‘standard of living’)
- [Sometimes described sequentially, after Marshall 1949]

Citizenship

- We can also conceive of citizenship in terms of either
 - a **status** (with rights, entitlements and duties)
- or
 - a **practice** (recognisable in what people actually do)

[Oldfield 1990; Lister 1997, 2003]

Not mutually exclusive...

- Status and practice interact
 - a ‘good citizen’ is socially aware and participates in elections (practice) but that depends on having the right to vote (status)
- Citizenship is not just an individual matter
 - it has to do with *social groups*, and therefore reflects, and shapes, social in/equality

Citizenship for young people

- ‘Youth’ is by its nature a transitional stage between childhood and adulthood
- The transition involves changing statuses *and* practices
- Youth citizenship is highly complex and contested!

Legal entitlements...

- Buy cigarettes
- Buy alcohol
- Drive (different types of vehicle)
- Work (different types; different working arrangements)
- Have consensual sex
- Get married (with or without parental consent)
- Enter a contract independently
- Own property
- Vote (different types of election?)
- Stand in elections (different types of office?) [etc., etc.]

‘Youth work’

- Can have multiple meanings, e.g.:
 - Youth employment
 - Any type of professional work with young people
- Has a more specific meaning in countries with British connection or influence, and increasingly throughout Europe
- But still historically and culturally shaped

Youth work – different traditions, different names

- Youth work (EN) L'animation socio-éducative (FR)
Jugendarbeit (DE) Ungdomsarbejde (DA) La animación juvenil (SP) Jeugdwerk (NL) L'animazione socioeducativa (IT)
Ungdomsarbete (SV) Animação socioeducativa (PT)
Nuorisotyö (FI) διοργάνωση δραστηριοτήτων για νέους (EL)
Prací s mládeží (CS) Noorsootöö (ET) Az ifjúsági munka (HU)
Darbas su jaunimu (LT) Jaunatnes darbs (LV)
Hidma maż-Żgħażaġh (MT) Praca z młodzieżą (PL)
Mládežnícka práca (SK) Mladinsko delo (SL)
Социално-възпитателната работа с младежта (BG)
Activitatea pentru tineret (RO) Obair don óige (GA) 青年工作

‘Five defining elements’

[Jeffs & Smith]

- ‘For over 150 years, five elements have fused to delineate what we now know as youth work and to distinguish it from other welfare activities. It is distinctive only when all are present...’

‘Five defining elements’ (cont.)

- Voluntary participation
 - ‘In an increasingly regulated world that offers young people fewer and fewer genuine opportunities to exercise judgement – as opposed to being invited to participate and be listened to – the chance to voluntarily engage with a worker or agency is **a rare opportunity for them to act as citizens**, and to meet with others.’

‘Five defining elements’ (cont.)

- Education and welfare
 - ‘Historically, youth work did not develop to simply ‘keep people off the streets’, offer activities or provide amusement...Each of [its] traditions [of practice] encourages us to focus on learning through conversation, experience and relationship.’

‘Five defining elements’ (cont.)

- Focus on young people
 - Although there have been shifts in age boundaries, youth work remains an age-specific activity...

‘Five defining elements’ (cont.)

- Association, relationship and community
 - Youth work is fundamentally about **community**; about working, as John Dewey (1916) put it, so that all may share in the common life. It is an activity of communities.

‘Five defining elements’ (cont.)

- Being friendly, accessible and responsible while acting with integrity
 - ‘Youth work has come to be characterised by a belief that workers should not only be approachable and friendly, but they should also have faith in people and seek to live good lives...the person or character of the worker is of fundamental importance.’

[T. Jeffs & M.K. Smith, ‘Introducing Youth Work’, in Jeffs & Smith *Youth Work Practice*, Macmillan, 2010]

Ireland - Youth Work Act 2001

- Youth work is:
 - A planned programme of **education** designed for the purpose of aiding and enhancing the **personal and social development** of young people through their **voluntary participation**, and which is
 - (a) **complementary** to their formal, academic or vocational education and training; and
 - (b) provided primarily by **voluntary organisations**.

Principles underpinning youth work standards

- A clear understanding of youth work's **educational purpose**, methodology and content.
- Commitment to **continual improvement** and best practice.
- **Transparency** of governance and operation.
- **Equality and inclusiveness** embedded in policy and practice for staff, volunteers and young people.
- Protection of the young person's well-being by ensuring **safe learning environments**.

– [National Quality Standards Framework, Ireland]

European Union – *European Youth Strategy* 2010-2018

Eight fields of action:

- Education & training
- Employment and entrepreneurship
- Health and well-being
- Participation
- Voluntary activities
- Social inclusion
- Youth and the world
- Creativity and culture

European Youth Strategy 2010-2018

‘Under this framework of cooperation, *supporting and developing youth work should be regarded as cross-sectoral issues*... Youth work belongs to the area of “out-of-school” education, as well as specific leisure time activities managed by professional or voluntary youth workers and youth leaders and is based on non-formal learning processes and on voluntary participation.’

EU Council Resolution on Youth Work 2010

Nature of youth work :

‘Youth work takes place in the extra-curricular area, as well as through specific leisure time activities, and is based on **non-formal and informal learning** processes and on **voluntary participation**. These activities and processes are self-managed, co-managed or managed under educational and pedagogical guidance by either professional or voluntary youth workers and youth leaders and can develop and be subject to changes caused by different dynamics.’

EU Council Resolution on Youth Work 2010

Benefits of youth work:

- Provides ‘comfortable, safe, inspirational and pleasant environment’
- Creates space for young people to ‘express themselves, learn from each other, meet each other, play, explore and experiment’
- Promotes participation, engagement, active citizenship
- Strengthens community building and civil society at all levels

EU Council Resolution on Youth Work 2010

- **Benefits of youth work (cont.):**
 - Develops creativity, awareness, entrepreneurship and innovation
 - Provides opportunities for social inclusion of all; reaches those with fewer opportunities
 - Complements formal education; contributes to other youth-related policy areas
 - Supports economic development, creates employment

The individual and the group

- Youth work concerned with opportunities for *all* young people, as *individual* (young) people
- Also concerned with rights and wellbeing of *groups* of young people who have particular identities, needs or circumstances or who are experience inequality

Acceptance...and aspiration

- Youth work ‘starts where young people are at’
- Then it enables, empowers and *challenges* them to go further

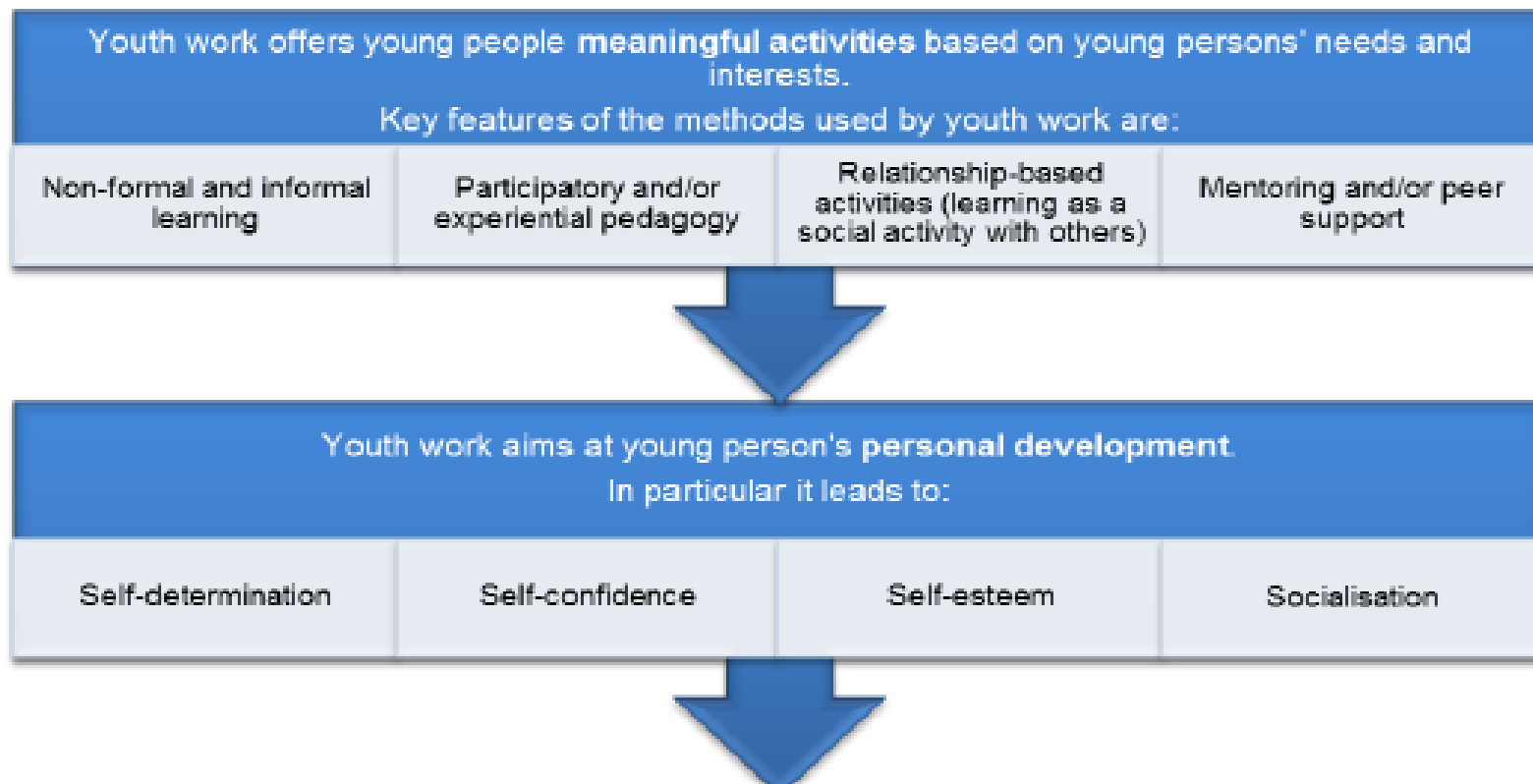
EU Youth Work study (2014)

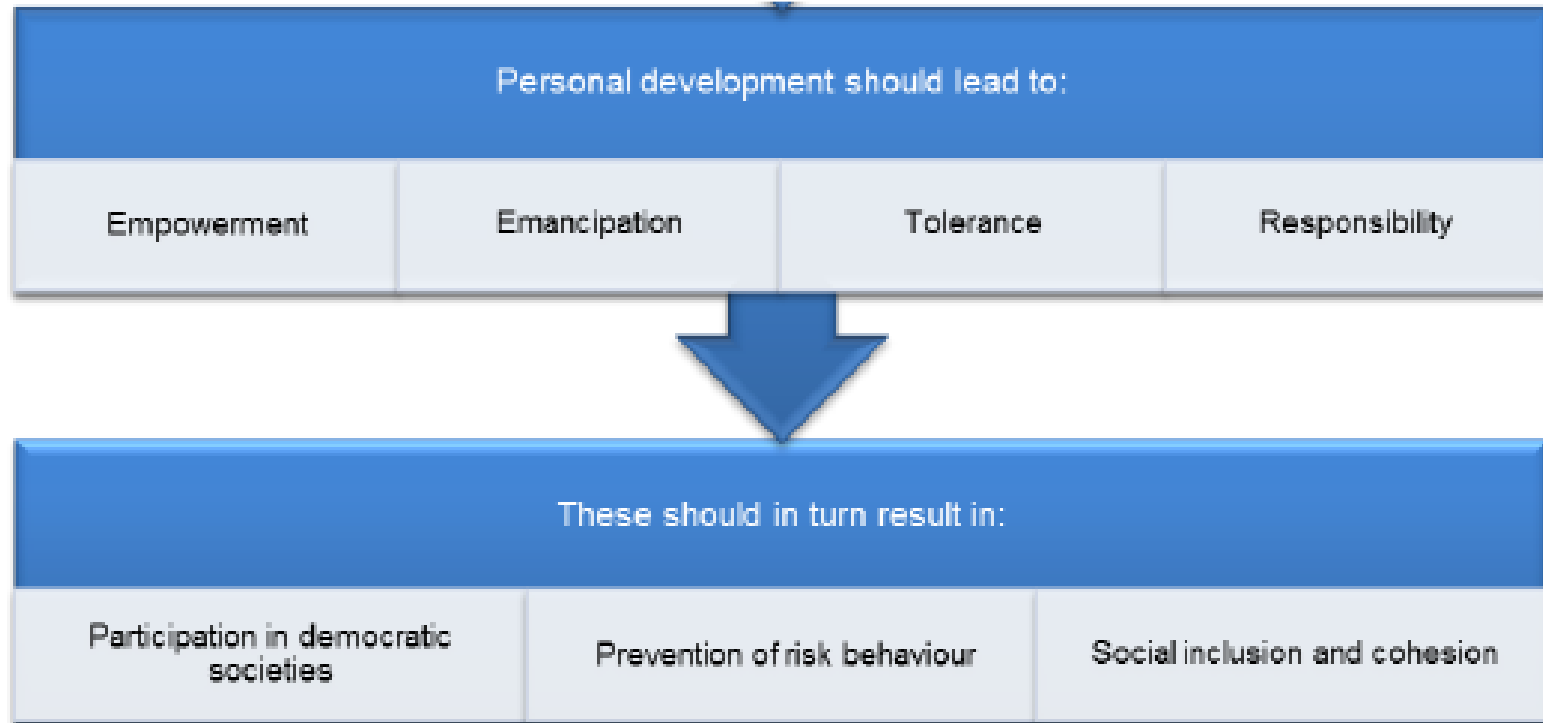
What is youth work?

The term 'youth work' is used to describe a diverse range of activities, topics and measures provided by a range of actors in assorted fields and settings. However, at the heart of youth work there are three core features that define it as youth work distinct from other policy fields:

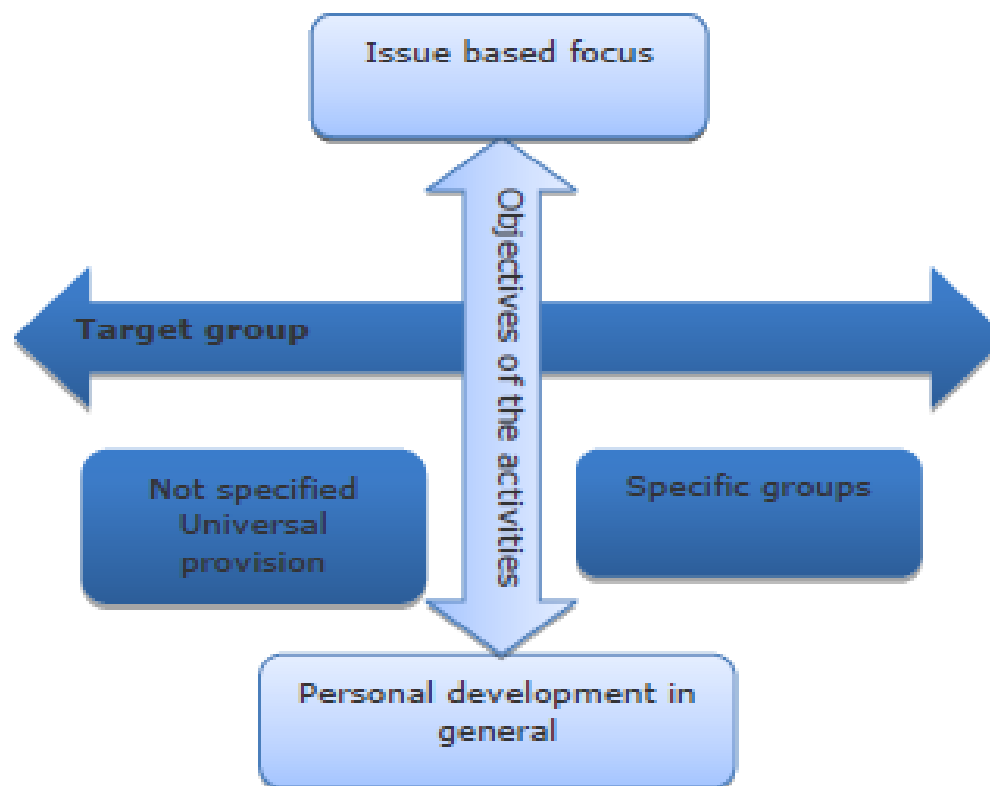
- a focus on young people,
- personal development, and
- voluntary participation.

Not all countries have a formal definition of youth work and amongst those that do, there is a variety of definitions. Based on a review of national definitions and experts' views, this study identified that the following characteristics are frequently cited when describing youth work:





A typology of youth work



Citizen engagement

- Youth work uniquely well suited to promoting citizen engagement in the modern (and post-modern) era
- Distinctive intergenerational character – a space for mutual respect and voluntary *contact/contract*
- In the vanguard of *peer* education and engagement

Changing ‘youth’

- Earlier maturation in physical and cognitive terms
- Increasingly protracted and precarious transitions
- Delay in securing social adulthood and associated citizenship...

Changing ‘youth work’

- Other adult-led institutions lack the ‘authority’ and legitimacy to engage young people on their own terms
- The role of youth work has never been more important or necessary...provided that it too changes in response

- ‘Throughout its history, the success or otherwise of youth work has depended most centrally on the extent to which it has remained in touch with the changing needs and circumstances of young people. If “youth” changes, then obviously “youth work” must change, if it is not to become irrelevant, ineffectual, or both.’
- [National Youth Work Development Plan, Ireland]

To BGCA...

- Wishing you many more years of positive change and positive development...
- Happy 80th anniversary!