

Youth Partnership

Partnership between the European Commission
and the Council of Europe in the field of Youth



MOOC – ESSENTIALS OF YOUTH WORK

Values and ethics in youth work

TRANSCRIPT

Katya [00:00:02] Hello and welcome to podcast about values and ethics of youth workers that is organised within the MOOC "Essentials of youth work". And today in our virtual studio we have Hillary Tierney. She teaches youth work in the Maynooth University and Antti Korhonen from Finland, a youth worker in the National Youth Centre of Martinen in Finland. Hello, Anttie. Hello, Hillary. How are you?

Hilary [00:00:35] Hey, everybody. Good morning from a slightly grey Ireland.

Antti [00:00:41] Good morning from Finland as well.

[00:00:44] So the topic of the day, it's about the values and ethics in youth work. And this is the part of the module about the youth workers as professionals and as persons as well. So, my first question to you would be "Is it important in general to talk about values of youth workers?"

Hilary [00:01:08] So do you want one of us to start? That's a big question.

Katya [00:01:12] Yeah (laughing), Hilary, you can start as you started already.

Hilary [00:01:16] I think it's probably not possible to talk about youth work and doing youth work without talking about values. I think to me, in whatever country we are in, that youth work is about a promise to young people to work with them in a particular sort of way and perhaps in ways that they don't often experience in their day to day lives. So, in ways that include them as partners, that value their voices, that seek to empower them, to give them agency in their life. So, when we talk about youth work for me, we're automatically talking about values. And in any education and training for youth work, we talk about not just purpose of the work, but the how of the work and how we youth worker uses values in action to create relationships, to create change within alongside young people. That's how I think about it anyway.

Katya [00:02:23] Thank you, Hilaty

Antti [00:02:24] I completely agree as well, and I think it's an ongoing discussion, as anything developing basically in educational youth working and that has been going on as long as there has been educational work and youth work. And this I don't know if it's a set of values that state's standards. I don't think that's true. But, of course, it's a needed discussion and it cannot be separated from educational work or youth work in any way.

Katya [00:03:01] Thank you, talking about this set of values. Of course, we are all different we are all from different countries. Europe is big. The world is even bigger. But do you think if we can talk about some common values that youth workers should have?

Antti [00:03:23] I mean, it's a tricky question for me. And, you know, the first thing that comes to my mind that - I'm sorry, who the heck am I to name those values and to say that? And it's more a question and an invitation for me to ponder on my own values as a professional youth worker or in the work or in the life that I do as a human. What I do and I do believe that there's, you know, better ones and worse ones. But that's my subjective thought on it. I mean, I'm sure that Hillary can add and we have in Finland as well, we have kind like a code of conduct or let's say, a value base for youth work and what it's supposed to be and what's the purpose and that they're listed even. But what it's hard to say is, should we have a collective community of values or community that applies the same values in their work and in their actions? What do you think, Hilary is that?

Hilary [00:04:31] I think I think you're right. I think it is a complicated practise and a complicated question to talk about values, because, of course, no one organisation or no one country, you know, owns youth work or owns the definition of youth work. And even in Ireland, you know, where we have a definition of youth work, the definition itself doesn't, do you know, give you some indication of possible values, particularly doesn't name them. So, when I was thinking about this, I think for me, the big thing about youth work for me is that it's a hopeful practise, that it looks at what's positive and what is hopeful, how we can create change. So when I was thinking about it, so say in the context of Ireland, say, looking at the National Youth Council of Ireland, you know, which is a big representative body, and when they talk about values, they talk about things and certainly in the Irish context, for instance, voluntary participation is a key value of youth work that young people choose to be there. But more importantly, can also choose to leave. And that for a lot of young people, they often have very little choice in their lives because as young people, they are considered children until the age of 18. And that limits their choices and limits their rights. So when we talk about the values of youth work, and I suppose this is where it starts to link into ethics later, you start thinking then about the rights of children and young people in the Irish context, for instance, empowerment is a key value. That youth work is not something that is done to young people or for young people but is an enabling and empowering process for them. It's based around ideas of equality and inclusion and respect and the active participation of young people in decision making about issues that impact on them. And that I think one of the other ones for me that's really important is that it models perhaps a different sort of relationship between adults and young people, which is one of partnership where young people's ideas of participation are valued and heard and that their voices are amplified in some way. And I think that's probably a really important experience for young people, where a lot of the time they are subject to adult control, whether that's at home or in school or on the streets and public spaces. There they don't have those same rights as adults have.

Antti [00:07:16] I've got this one. I think one angle to that, is also that what I think is really important in youth work, I don't know if it's a value per say, but that we look at young people as individuals, but also as part of a group or a community or society and so on. So, it's what Hilary mentioned, the relationship between the young person and the adults or the society or whatever it is, that it's both of these levels, basically individual one and the part of something. When thinking of why I ended up doing this and I still remember I've read it in my university time or some somewhere, it was Carl Rogers did the whole concept of people's right to grow to their full potential. And the youth work's role in that. So, for me, when talking about values and what support that young person or a group of young people, for some growing to their full potential.

That's kind of something that that's always resonated with me strongly. And what can I do and what kind of value base can I work through that supports that naming? Also, the ones that Hilary was saying, the voice of young people or the encounters we think people. How do you do that? What action do you take to further that cause in a way?

[00:08:40] And did you find this answer? In your practice for example, how do you promote these values?

Antti [00:08:49] Well, it causes reflection. Do I? I think it's the choices that I take intuitively in the daily practise that we do, but also then reflected decisions when looking at. You know, I work a lot with project work. I work a lot with fundings and then directly with young people. I think for me, it's something that lace the base basically for the actions that I take. Of course, values are that. But how do they show in my work? I was thinking about this and I think, I hope that it shows for the young people that I work with, I hope that it shows, to let's say funders, I hope it shows and the organisation, but for me to say that how can I prove that these values are working very hard to answer directly.

Katya [00:09:57] Thank you, Hilary, and what about you?

Hilary [00:09:58] And I think that's a really interesting question. You know, and I absolutely agree with Antti that I think reflective practice. And I think we talk about that somewhere later in this module. I think that's really important. But I think the big thing for me about values is that they're easy to say and harder to live in the sense that, you know, values are not just words on a piece of paper or even a lovely poster of welcome at the entrance to a youth project is that our values are to be lived, to be embodied, to be enacted in some way. And that, I suppose, in an ideal situation, do you know? And again, it's easy to say that it's easier to say than to do is that perhaps my values should be visible to somebody who doesn't know the values of youth work when they see or says youth workers working with young people and with groups of young people. There should be something, I think, in terms of how we interact, how we listen, how we talk, how we engage our body language, demonstrating, I suppose, an interest in young people, a curiosity about their lives and valuing of their opinions that young people should be active and visible, taking a lead in the space rather than perhaps following the youth worker. And that's not easy to do, I think. I think living the values is a big ask of youth workers and adults generally because it turns on its head in some of the ways that young people are often portrayed in society as being perhaps volatile or not knowing or needing to grow before they can take responsibility or, you know, being unreliable or being hotheaded or...And I suppose what youth work does is it gives young people's opportunities to make decisions, to take responsibility, to make mistakes, to live through consequences of decisions. And the only way to do that is to do it. Not to talk about it, but to do it. And that's hugely challenging because sometimes it can feel a bit risky and a bit scary, like what happens if it goes wrong. But of course, the learning is and where it goes wrong, which is why youth work to me, is an educational and a developmental practise, perhaps through activities and through experiences. But the fundamentals of it are about learning and experience. And we do that through those values are what give us the framework within which, you know, to design and develop those experience alongside and with young people.

Antti [00:13:06] And it's the one thing that comes to mind, is that the tendency is that we start paying attention to the values when they luck and when, as an example, now I am aware that they can open a Finnish discussion, for example, amongst youth workers that let's say we have the migration crisis and immigration and the refugee crisis in Syria a couple of years back. And then

there was a big discussion going on, which I think was a value discussion and professional values as such in Finland. Can a youth worker, for example, openly belong to a group that wants to close the borders? And, you know, that is a kind of the values we value, the things that are or we can name the values in the profession when happens something like this. I find in my practice, when there's a challenging situation, when it comes down to naming that, what are the values that I am going with here? And often enough, it becomes a very human thing rather than a professional youth worker thing, when push comes to shove, in that sense. Which makes me wonder also, that when talking for professional or youth work, value-based or set of values, as I said, we have an ethical or the code of conduct in Finland for youth work and we have the functions of youth work named. But thought that it's for me in my practice, this becomes a question. When there's an issue or when it becomes more visible, let's say when they're pushed and when I'm, for example, as a professional in the set situation that strikes me in my core, which is the human core, not only the youth worker cor in a sense.

Katya [00:15:02] Thank you.

Hilary [00:15:04] Can I just say I think that's really important? What he has said is that, you know, it's absolutely our values are easy to live. You know, when they face with how we look at the world generally anyway. Do you know it's sometimes the values are harder when they challenge us personally. Do you know when they're a little bit uncomfortable? And I think that's where the reflective practice is really important. And I suppose the idea that in some way that there are professional commitments that come with youth work, that the set of values for youth work is it isn't like a pick and a mix. It's like, oh, I like the one about, you know, inclusion and participation. But I'm not sure I like the one so much about equality. You know, I don't know that we can do that. And so for me, it's about the integration of all of those values. And that is I think that ending sentence is can be very challenging to do that. And so there's something about a quarter of this. And maybe that's where we lead into the conversation about ethics. Is that something else then? Ethics or what help us to make that distinction between "what is my commitment to call myself a youth worker? What's my ethical commitment in this context?" Even if sometimes it makes me feel a bit uncomfortable.

Katya [00:16:25] That was my question. Yes, about ethics. How they can help us with the values and who is an ethical youth worker and what does it mean?

Antti [00:16:34] I've written a list of names and you to make the cut, but I don't know who is the ethical one. I mean, again I have the feeling of who am I to say on who is the ethical one. And I, I mean, I, I researched it and looked back into the Finnish youth work Ethical Code of conduct, for example. And what it means for me, the short answer is that whoever ponders and reflects and practise on the ethics or the ethical actions and behaviours and so on and hopefully gets support also for that is an ethical youth worker or has the potential to be an ethical youth worker. So again, it's about reflective practise but that always need a mirror in a way that where I find, for example, a code of conduct to be a good one. So, for me to go through the Finnish one again, looking into coming podcast now that it actually launched the whole morning, I was thinking whether I'm ethical when it comes to due to my practices. And so that for me is the answer to that. I don't know.

Hilary [00:17:59] Thank you, Hilary, what do you think?

Hilary [00:18:01] I mean, I think that's the thing, isn't it? I mean, that's what makes youth work for me. Part of it being a hopeful and the developmental practise in some way is that it is when we

think about ethics. Ethics isn't about being perfect. Do you know what I mean, it isn't about, you know, necessarily getting everything right all of the time, because when we deal in human relationships and we are trying to create change. Do you know there are you know those things that... It isn't always certain what's going to happen. So, I think, like one of the things in Ireland, we don't have a formal code of ethics. And very many countries don't. And even if we're there is a code of ethics for youth work it's often a voluntary code in the sense that it's unlike codes of ethics, perhaps, that you might associate with, you know, doctors or lawyers in some way. So, but for me, for instance, I think some of the things aren't that our starting point and you often hear youth work saying this is not my starting point, is young people, this notion that young people are our primary consideration. Do you know, I think there's ethics like do you know that we recognise that young people are impacted and that their circumstances and their lives and their opportunities are impacted by the social context in which we live and that we are committed to not just recognising that, but acting on that in some way, that we're committed to ideas around equality and equity, not just zero, both in the larger sort of side societal context, but also perhaps, you know, within groups of young people. So recognising, you know, racism, recognising xenophobia, recognising sexism, recognising where the exclusion perhaps of young people who are different, visibly and invisibly different. So, you know, having a duty of care, being careful about being confidential, you know, and sometimes, you know, this is really can be quite challenging questions when increasingly youth work is being funded by the state. And records are being kept on young people and. And how do we manage all of those? So, I think for me of an ethical framework is a way of thinking through your values in practice and sort of thinking into scenarios and having some guidance about how you might act in those contexts or being clearer about the boundaries. Say, for instance, that one that we hear. I think Antti might have something to say about this one, but being, you know, like a friend but not a friend. So, what's the boundary between us? Because you're not a teacher. You know, you're not a probation officer or a social worker or a police person, you know? So. So but you're not a friend equally. But your relationship is based on conversation and collaboration. So, what's the boundary, what's possible and what's not possible? And for me, ethics are part of what helped you to think that through.

Antti [00:21:20] That's true. I mean, in my practice. It doesn't need to be big questions about young people either. But in relation to the different practices working in international fields, for example, and so that that I mean, coming from a country where youth work is fairly established in the context of Europe and so on, that those boundaries, for example, might be easier for me to find when I can rely on a code of conduct in my practice or when I can rely on The Youth Act legislation on the background and so on. Then I think, you know what I mentioned about support for this kind of questions and so on. But one actually one thing in the code of conduct for ethics and the finish setting is that they did. And the topic for this, that youth workers should maintain their well-being as well. That's one of the values. They do things on the background, which, you know, when working in a smaller setting or at I know many people listening to this might be working for NGO also works freelance or work just with an informal group of young people and so on. But that. Being able to put those boundaries and be being able to see or roll them in relation to the group of young people or the young person is very important. I can confirm that I have personal experience also. And at that point of sustainability, and your capability basically to continue that work. And I think Hilary is saying that it's deep, deep, the values put into action and the ways to point out that it's also very safe for myself, for a cleansing process to go into that reflection every now and then I'm going to do to make sure that I'm sustainable in a sense and create those boundaries for myself. I know. I'm guessing that a lot of people listening to this are also struggling or doesn't struggle with the fact that where do I draw the line when it comes to the amount of work or acting for or acting with the young people. And, you know, what's out there. And then I think the biggest challenges are

when kind of for me. When your humanity encounters that youth worker that are done, it becomes a grey line when it when it's actually now referring back again to the experiences with, you know, day to day the refugee crisis or something bigger happening in society and so on. Where youth work expected to react. But humans are expected to react even stronger. And that's kind of what comes to mind for me.

Katya [00:24:19] So from what I understand, it can be useful to have kind of a code of conduct for youth workers that support somehow and guide ta bit or not necessarily? Because from what I heard, it seems to me that it can be useful and can support us in our work.

Hilary [00:24:41] I think the language is can be quite complex. And I'm really conscious, you know, that I'm of I'm the one here who only speaks English and the both of you big multiple languages. So, for, say, for instance, in the context of obviously a code of conduct is often equated with the idea of like a set of rules that tell you what to do and what not to do. And I think and I don't know if that's exactly the most useful word in English, but I'm conscious that it's a word and in translation. So, for instance, when I think about ethics and I think about the complexity of youth work, for me, the value of having a framework. And I think one of the people, Tim Corney from Melbourne, from Melbourne, from Victoria University of Melbourne, who has written a lot about this, talks about the idea of a framework for ethical practice. And I think I really liked that idea that youth work is a practice is a way of engaging young people for, you know, for a particular purpose and a particular sort of way. And that the framework he suggests that has proposed and he's proposed an international framework is a framework for ethical practice based on the idea. The fundamental starting point is the basing on the idea of human rights and the human rights of young people, which all young people have, regardless of their context. And I suppose for me, what a framework around ethical practice does is it gives us some guidance about how to work out what we might do in more or less complicated situations. And I agree with Antti that it's not always for the really complex things we need to think about ethics could be for very ordinary, everyday sorts of things. But for me, I suppose the thing is that a framework for ethical practice helps us to think about what we might do in a situation rather than tells us what to do in that situation. And maybe that's one of the big challenges for youth work, is that it is, and maybe it's one things that's exciting about this is that we're constantly in a state of developing our practice, developing our understanding and going back to some of the things Antti said. I think we do that through reflective practice. We do do that in terms of managing our boundaries, in taking care of ourselves as much as we take care of others. And we do that in communication or in collaboration with other workers. I think that's the big thing for me is like youth work is a social practice. It's a practice of people together. And that it's really helpful I think to talk through some of our ethical questions and our what if and what might happen and what might we do or this, I think that's one of the things that's really helpful in it, is to do it together rather than feel I have to work this out on my own.

Katya [00:27:55] Thank you, Hilary. Thank you, Antti. And actually this is the question that we ask our participants after this podcast is to reflect about their values and reflect about ethics and the role of the ethics and to share with us their thoughts. So, thank you very much for being here today with us.

Antti [00:28:19] Thank you.

Katya [00:28:20] And I wish you to have a good day. And I wish to our participants to enjoy the process of the reflection that you will have and see you and goodbye.

[00:28:37] Thank you. Bye, bye.