

“Students are required to discuss the principles, values and characteristics which underpin Youth Work practice, and demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of Youth Work and where it takes place. Your assignment should be supported by wider reading and linked to the Youth Work National Occupational Standards (CLD Standards Council Scotland, 2019)”.

Youth work is an important aspect of community and works to bridge the gap between community and their young people. It is a “distinct educational process” (NYA, 2023) adaptable to a “variety of settings” (ibid) which is used to “support a young person’s personal, social, emotional and educational development” (ibid). It enables the youth worker to grow and evolve a “unique, challenging and developmental relationship” with a young person (ibid). These relationships with the young people are used to “explore” their diverse values, beliefs, ideas, and individual issues, enabling them to develop their “voice, influence and place in society” (ibid). Youth work aims to “facilitate learning practical skills and life skills,” assisting them to “realise their full potential” (ibid).

According to the Youth Work in Wales: Principles and Purposes, youth work should have five main values and/or characteristics which are; to be “inclusive”, to be “empowering”, to be “expressive”, to be “educative”, to be “participative”. As mentioned by Jeffs and Smith (2008), Youth Work has three distinguishing features; it is unique, it is distinctive, and it is powerful. They state that “all dynamics have to be present for something to be called youth work.” (Jeffs and Smith, 2008) There are many roles a youth worker could take on, but some are more prevalent in practice, like building relationships, being an educator and an advocate for the young people and within this, providing opportunity for the young people to develop and grow through engagement

and encouragement. An important aspect to understand of youth work is that young people will physically show their approval or disapproval of something, somewhere or someone. This means that if they do not like something or they feel uncomfortable or disrespected that they will not want to stay and they will show you that as the leaders and/or youth workers. This emphasises the reasons why it is so important that youth work is young people led.

The values, principles and characteristics of youth work should recognise that at the heart of all youth work is a young person led approach. These values should be placed within local, social, and political contexts and they should illustrate the holistic development of young people. Some examples of values and principles within Youth Work include; participation and active involvement, equity, diversity, and inclusion, Partnership with Young People and others, and Personal, social, and political development. There are a variety of characteristics that a youth worker should attempt to acquire in practice such as creativity, inclusivity, patience, effective communication, active participation, active listening, efficient organisation, to be caring, to be approachable, enthusiasm, to have adequate control on personal emotions, to be adaptable, to be encouraging, to have suitable time management skills, to have fun, to be engaging and to engage, to be knowledgeable, to gain experience and use previous experience in future practice, and to have confidence in practice, along with many others. These are all essential for the development of the young people and one in the practice of youth work.

Following on from this, Birmingham City School of Social Sciences (2023) refers to “Five Traits You Need to be a Youth Worker” and this supports the roles, values and characteristics of a youth worker. Firstly, they mention good communication skills,

meaning you can communicate clearly. Therefore, you are enabled to clearly verbalise help and advice in a way that young people can understand and also to enable the capacity to listen to others and to properly take in what people are saying. Secondly, they explain that self-belief in a youth worker is important. In social work, trust in yourself is vital to a worker. It helps one to have a positive mindset, even in challenging situations. Thirdly, resilience is the ability to withstand adversity. It is essential in coping in difficult situations professionally without losing sight of your passion or practice. The penultimate trait mentioned is adaptability. This means one would have the ability to use information that is relevant and useful; especially as nothing stays the same. Society, technology, and youth culture are constantly changing, and your practice should adapt to what the young people need, not what you think they need. Lastly, this trait is empathy and this one brings the others together. There is only so much one can do with knowledge, skills, and communication, but it is essential to empathise with someone's problems in this type of work. This will help you to connect with the young people and help to overcome issues. (BCU, 2023)

Youth Work will take place anywhere young people are; this means it could be in a variety of places such as schools, hospitals, youth clubs, streets, and parks, amongst many others. The most well-known or popular methods of youth work are as follows; detached work or outreach, mobile centres, clubs that operate regularly, specific project work; e.g., Duke of Edinburgh, units based on the identity of young people, specialist projects based on the young people's issues, such as health and young carers, Information services, such as; schools, colleges, Barnardo's, health centres, social service units, Youth Offence, multi-agency projects (education welfare officer). There are also different models of Youth Work which come in designs such as; Centre based

youth work, Youth clubs, Issue based youth work, Health based youth work, School based youth work, Outreach youth work, etc.

In Youth Work, learning should be seen as 'a valued outcome with young people; central to work as youth workers' (Harrison and Wise, 2007). Youth work is informal and non-formal education, unlike formal education used in the school environment. Non-formal education is "...work which emphasises responsiveness to the situations and the needs of young people, rather than the completion of a syllabus or the realisation of pre-determined outcomes" (Harrison and Wise, 2007). This furthers the collaboration of the young person and the youth worker which enables learning and development to emerge and the commitment of workers to the voluntary and participatory relationships with young people characterises this type of work (ibid). Informal education encourages young people to use their experiences of everyday living as opportunities for learning about themselves and it also encourages the process of drawing out meaning from experience such as reflection. Jeffs and Smith (2009) conveys the idea of Youth Work as educational in "Informal education is the lifelong process in which people learn from everyday experience whereas non-formal education is organised educational activity outside formal systems." The informal and non-formal education of Youth Work should always complement formal education. There are two definitions of formal education here; the first one is "formal instruction which might occur at school or at a training course" (Harrison and Wise, 2007), which names examples of formal education, and secondly, Mahoney (2006) who indicates that "we associate formal education with particular settings, and with a way of learning" "that emphasises product... rather than process" (ibid). This educative system lets young people learn how they learn best.

Policies and legal documents in Youth Work are invaluable for assessing working with risk and for keeping young people safe. One of the most used and most important documents is the National Occupational Standards (CLD Standards Council Scotland, 2019). Some of the standards most highlighted in this document is how youth workers should be building and maintaining professional relationships with young people, how to protect and safeguard young people following the correct safeguarding rules and policies, how to lead and plan relevant activities for young people, how to support and engage with the young people and the important of exploring and developing their values and beliefs. These are all important aspects of youth work, and it highlights the essential nature of the voluntary and participatory relationships that youth workers should have with their young people. There are many other important documents and policies too, such as the Albemarle, Milson-Fairbairn, and Thompson reports, which underlines the significance of the 'power-shift between adults [youth workers] and young people' which 'embodies the purpose of Youth Work.'

In conclusion, there are numerous important aspects of youth work values, principles, purposes, and characteristics that fall in line with the policies and legal documents, making youth work what it is in the present. One significant aspect of youth work is the voluntary participation by the young person, creating a young people-led approach with active participation from the youth workers, which is why youth work is as distinctive as it is and different from your usual system of formal education. The essence of youth work enables young people to learn and be educated in a way that works for them, rather than the way that works for the majority. The policies in youth work are there to keep everyone, young people, and youth workers, safe and to safeguard all practice and all involved.

Reference List:

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