

EUROPEAN ACADEMY ON YOUTH WORK - WORKSHOP REPORT

Developing a Universal Code of Practice for Youth Workers

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TOPIC DISCUSSED

The topic discussed at the workshop was the need for a universal code of practice for youth workers and the process of developing it.

METHODOLOGY

The workshop was carried out in three parts. First, there was an introduction about the contributor and the topic which included the purpose of exploring this topic and the rationale behind the contributor's proposal of this workshop in the EAYW. This was followed by a presentation of what is a code of practice and what is its purpose, and what other relevant codes can be found in the field around the world and in the participants' organisational realities. The third part was a brainstorming session about what should be included in this universal code and according to which categories it could be structured, and how a code of practice could be useful and transferable from one context to another (universal). After the workshop, a survey was sent to the participants to document more of their opinions about these topics.

CHALLENGES

The workshop was a challenge in itself. This is a reality that I have faced since I started this discussion. There was a small number of participants. Only 3 persons registered. This was understandable (though unexpected in the Academy), because discussions about ethics are usually sensitive and less attractive than other topics. It is also frequent that discussing ethics can get personal and can last for hours. This is something people try to avoid in such big events. My assumption is that most participants chose workshops with more practical and tangible outputs.

How youth workers see codes of practice is a challenge. A code of practice is not a new topic. Youth workers have seen it and most organisations have one. This turns off the interest in the topic at the first contact. But if we researched more and looked more deeply into ethical practices of youth workers, we would definitely find that many of these codes are just documents that govern youth workers without any ownership from their side. To have an enabling code, youth workers must be involved in this dynamic process of a series of ethical discussions about the main values we want our profession to be associated with.



On the other hand, previous bad experiences (related to ethics of individual youth workers) have led to too high expectations from such a universal code of practice. Some might think that the existence of a code will elevate the ethical approaches of youth workers. But this is not guaranteed because the last thing we need is another document that tells youth workers what to do and what not to do. Here is where this Code of Practice can be innovative: The aim of this code is to give guidelines to ethical practice of youth work and not a law to abide. It should offer a roadmap on ethical issues that youth workers should consider and rethink tirelessly to develop themselves.

Finally, it is of course difficult to create a universal code that governs an entire profession with the contribution of all professionals, it is nearly impossible. This was the bottom line of the discussion, which was demonstrated in the survey afterwards.

INNOVATIVE RESPONSE(S) TO THOSE CHALLENGES

A code of ethics can be assembled and dismantled according to the context it is used in. Somewhat like a LEGO style code. Obviously, we are not advocating for a way to go around laws and ethics, but we are challenging the norms and exploring the ways to have a global youth centred practice. A code should not be bylaws and restrictions. It should be a reality check process, a self-awareness exercise and proposal for alternative solutions when an ethical dilemma appears. This code should use the digital tools that have become available to youth workers and youth work institutions to become more accessible, transferable and understandable.

KEY TRENDS IDENTIFIED (COMMONALITIES BETWEEN COMMENTS/ PARTICIPANTS)

The participants agreed that the youth work community needs a code of practice urgently as a profession.

This code of practice needs to be universal to cover the full spectrum of the youth work field. However, participants thought that this will not be an easy task.

The code of practice has to be developed in collective way to create a sense of ownership among youth workers.

The purpose of having a code is not to set rules and punish people who break it (we are not the police), the purpose is rather to have a tool for developing practices to the higher standards possible in the allowed environment.

A CODE OF PRACTICE SHOULD NOT BE BYLAWS AND RESTRICTIONS. IT SHOULD BE A REALITY CHECK PROCESS, A SELF-AWARENESS EXERCISE AND PROPOSAL FOR ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS WHEN AN ETHICAL DILEMMA APPEARS.

FEEDBACK FROM PARTICIPANTS

"Ethics cannot be developed but you can be more aware of what's appropriate and what isn't."

"We worked on a code of ethics for months and in the end, it didn't have an impact on our practice."

OTHER FINDINGS

The participants struggled with the idea of connecting competences with values and its direct correlation. Competences are generated originally from values and a code of practice originates from values, too, hence both can be connected and developed simultaneously.

Youth workers can be more self-aware about ethics and their practices, and it is very normal to accept that we have been unethical in our practices before and that this can happen again in a different form. The point is to flag unethical practices and search for their roots in order to undo their harm.

If a code of practice is presented in a document (as the previous efforts discussed), it will phase out and lose its practicality. It needs a new innovative approach.

This universal code can have (initially but can be extended) three main categories: core principles, intermediate practices, and specific context related practices. Universal elements of the code float in between categories according to each and every organisation / community / practice context. They include elements like: transparency, promoting equality, needs based practice, etc.



FOLLOW UP AFTER THIS WORKSHOP

The participants agreed to initiate a survey on two issues (the survey is annexed to this report):

1. What are elements that we can include in the code (the more the better and inclusive)? Elements which were discussed during the workshop and were chosen by all participants in the survey:
 - Recognition of boundaries
 - Knowledgeable profession
 - Safety of young people
 - Confidentiality
 - Needs based practice
 - Transparency
 - Non-discriminatory practice
 - Promoting equality
 - Wellbeing of youth workers
2. Different ways to communicate and disseminate this code to practitioners? Participants mentioned these points:

"I think that we need to have a short document, with bullet points and simple sentences that could be applied to different realities, and have at the end a space of 5 points that should be applied ONLY to the national context."

"I think it should give concrete examples."

"It will for sure be a source of personal development and it should trigger self-development and awareness of one's own way of working."

Note: The participants also discussed the possibility to initiate a KA2 project that aims to research and develop a process-oriented code of ethics to be used as a prototype.

Youth Work Code of Practice (CoP)

1. Do you have a code of practice/conduct/ethics in your organisation?

Mark only one oval.

☐

Yes

☐

No

☐

Other:

2. Youth workers need a code of practice.

Mark only one oval.

1

2

3

4

5

Strongly disagree

☐☐☐☐☐

Strongly agree

3. Code of practice of youth workers must be developed collectively.

Mark only one oval.

1

2

3

4

5

Strongly disagree

☐☐☐☐☐

Strongly agree

4. Code of practice for youth workers must be universal.

Mark only one oval.

1

2

3

4

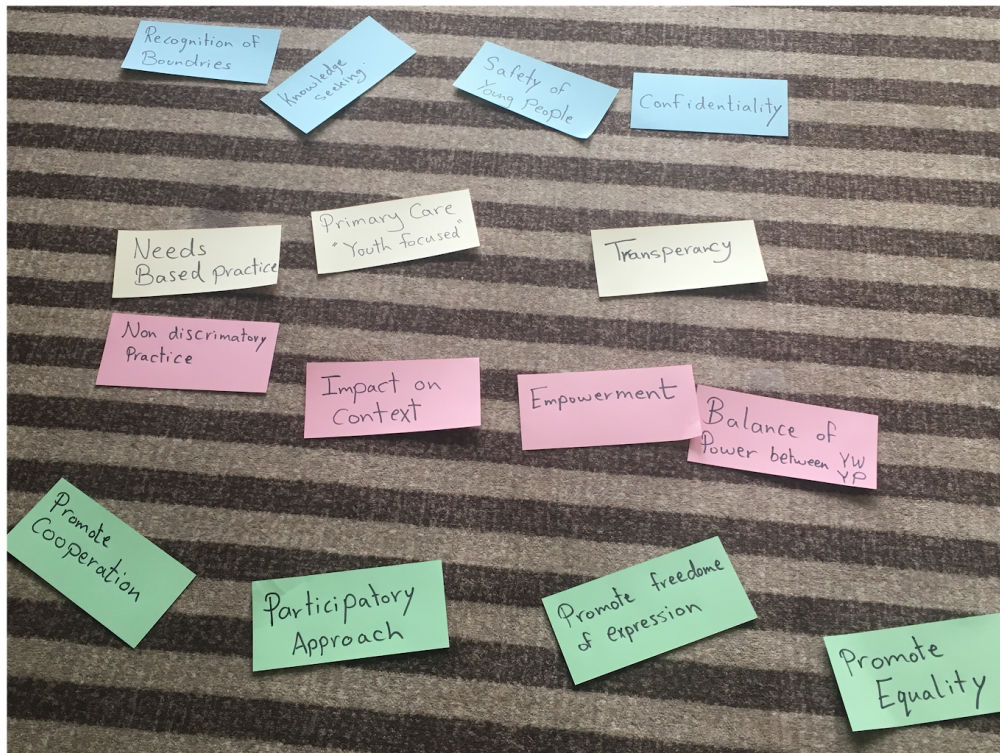
5

Strongly disagree

☐☐☐☐☐

Strongly agree

Potential elements to be inserted in the CoP



5. Select elements which you agree that should be included in CoP for youth workers.

Check all that apply.

- ☐ Recognition of Boundaries
- ☐ Knowledgeable profession
- ☐ Safety of Young people
- ☐ Confidentiality
- ☐ Needs based practice
- ☐ Primary care for youth (youth focused)
- ☐ Transparency
- ☐ Non discriminatory practice
- ☐ Impact on context (more than individual impact)
- ☐ Empowerment
- ☐ Balance of power between YP and YW
- ☐ Promote cooperation
- ☐ Promote equality
- ☐ Promote freedom of expression
- ☐ Participatory approach
- ☐ Other: _____

6. In addition to these elements presented in the workshop, what elements would you add ? The more the better....

7. How can youth workers develop their understanding about ethics and values of the profession?

8. In order not to have a boring document that contains rules and laws, how can a CoP be exciting, useful and transferable to different contexts?

9. How can a community of youth workers react to members not complying to CoP for Youth workers?



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