Evidence Review Youth Work – Agency and Empowerment

Section 1: Background and approaches to youth work

Research Centre for Children and Families

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Acknowledgement of Country:

The Research Centre for Children and Families acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Australians, whose lands, winds and waters we now all share, and pays respect to their unique values, and their continuing and enduring cultures which deepen and enrich the life of our nation and communities.

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Background and context

Overview

- 'Youth work' refers to a broad range of supportive and educative practices and activities conducted with young people across a range of different settings.
- Youth work is voluntary, participatory, responsive, and contextual. Authentic relationships built on trust and mutual respect form the foundation of good youth work practice.
- Contemporary youth work emerged in Western, English-speaking countries post-WWII. Practice in North America is characterised by a therapeutic approach, while practice in the UK is traditionally based on the principles of informal education. Youth work in Australia and Aotearoa (New Zealand) takes a rights-based approach based on the premise that young people should be empowered to make their own decisions, with youth-led or partnership approaches a key mechanism for creating positive outcomes for young people.
- While in principle youth work is open access and available to all young people, youth work is increasingly structured and targeted towards specific sub-populations of youth who are considered 'at-risk' or 'vulnerable'.
- Qualification and training opportunities and requirements for youth workers vary significantly across Western, English-speaking countries.
- Proponents of the professionalisation of youth work argue that professionalisation is necessary for the preservation of the discipline and will increase sector accountability and transparency.
- Professional supervision is an important component of good practice which enables youth workers to reflect critically on their practice and on ethical and theoretical considerations.
- Good youth work is culturally safe youth work. Conducting culturally safe youth work is holistic and nuanced undertaking.
- This scoping review found the following key approaches and theories to be central to conducting good youth work practice: anti-oppressive practice, trauma-informed practice, informal education, critical pedagogy, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems theory, rights-based approach and youth participation, civic youth work, strengths-based approach, positive youth development and the narrative approach. See 'Youth Work Approaches & Key Practice Ideas'.

Introduction

This document provides a background and context summary of contemporary youth work practice in Australia, Aotearoa (New Zealand), the UK and North America. A definition of youth work is provided alongside a brief overview of the post-WWII history of youth work and an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspective on youth work. The current state of the youth work sector is then considered alongside arguments for and against the professionalisation of the youth work discipline. Finally, summaries of key practice ideas and approaches to youth work practice are presented with further reading options provided.

Youth work is increasingly moving beyond a deficit-oriented, risk-averse approach to support of young people and instead giving primacy to youth participation in decision-making and processes that shape

youth organisations. The recent shift in Australia towards a rights-based approach and the recognition of youth voice and participation in decision-making have seen a number of programs emerge that variously empower youth by safeguarding their rights to participate in the processes that shape youth organisations (see Hall, 2020). These shifts in youth work policy and practice shed light on the concepts of agency and empowerment. While many programs and approaches seek to foster agency and empowerment, there is minimal attention in the literature to how these concepts are defined and recognised in research with young people (Spencer & Doull, 2015; Coffey & Farrugia, 2014). To some extent, these conceptual and definitional inconsistencies preclude an exhaustive or robust review of the evidence-base for programs that foster agency and empowerment in youth.

Nevertheless, synthesis of the available research showcases some of the varied processes by which young people are empowered to participate in democratic processes, develop a sense of control and self-esteem, a desire to contribute to community change and showcase leadership skills (see Ozer & Douglas, 2013; Zeldin et al., 2013, 2014, 2016; Schwartz & Suyemoto, 2013). Ultimately, many of the youth work interventions and approaches canvassed in this summary promote equitable relationships and increase youth participation in decision-making.

Methods

Scoping review

This scoping review involved a series of searches conducted across academic databases, youth studies journals and grey literature databases. Reference selection and characterisation were performed by two independent research team members. The searches yielded 696 references, varying in terms of purpose, methodology and detail of reporting. These references were screened according to established inclusion and exclusion criteria (documented in Appendix A), leaving a final 428 references included in this review. All included references were iteratively mapped into broad topics and conceptual categories, including 1) 'What is youth work?'; 2) 'Youth work interventions'; and 3) 'Youth work interventions that foster agency and empowerment'. The aim of this scoping review was to examine the extent, range and nature of research in the youth work space.

Certain aspects of youth work practice were out of scope for this review, to keep the review to a manageable scale. For example, youth accommodation work was excluded in part because in certain parts of the world (e.g. the UK), youth accommodation work does not fall within the purview of youth work practice (H. Sercombe, personal communication, September 15, 2022). The accommodation side of youth accommodation work may also integrated with other practices such as detached youth work or employment-based programs not necessarily within the ambit of youth work. In Australia, youth accommodation work represents a significant sector of youth work practice (Cooper, 2018). Given this, further research into the role played by youth accommodation work in the Australian context is warranted and would be an appropriate subject for its own evidence review.

The scope of this review is limited to interventions which could generally be categorised as 'early intervention'. Factors influencing this decision include commissioning requirements, the limited time frame of the review and the volume of research literature available for specialist youth work practices

such as out-of-home care. Categories of youth work that have therefore been excluded from this scoping review include those relating to housing and accommodation, practice occurring in intensive care settings such as residential care, psychiatric wards, emergency departments and juvenile or migration detention centres.

Background and context searches and results

General 'youth work' searches were conducted across the following academic databases:

Social Services Abstracts	JSTOR
Sociological Abstracts	PsycINFO
FAMILY-ATSIS	Google Scholar
Family and Society Studies Worldwide	ERIC
Informit Family & Society Collection	Web of Science
	Scopus

General 'youth work' searches were also conducted across the following youth studies journals:

Child and Youth Care Forum	Youth Studies Australia
Child and Youth Services	Journal of Youth Development
Youth and Policy	Journal of Applied Youth Studies
Journal of Youth Studies	Children and Young People Now
International Journal of Child, Youth and Family Studies	

Youth work search terms included "youth work*", "youth and childcare work*", "child and youth care*", "youth care" and "youth work practice". In addition to these general youth work searches, targeted searches for youth work theories were conducted across the aforementioned academic databases, youth studies journals and grey literature databases. Youth work search terms were combined with theory terms such as "theor*", "doctrine*", "ideolog*", "premise*", "approach*" and "principle*". Results were limited to English language, peer-reviewed literature published from 2000-2022. Seminal publications and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander literature published outside of this date range were also included.

The research team also conducted keyword and topic page searches across the following grey literature databases and peak body sources:

Association of Children's Welfare Agencies (ACWA)	CREATE Foundation
Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS)	Early Intervention Foundation
Analysis & Policy Observatory (APO)	National Youth Agency
Australian Research Alliance for Children & Youth (ARACY)	What Works for Children's Social Care
Australian Youth Affairs Coalition AYAC	Youth Affairs Council Victoria (YACVic)
Campbell Collaboration	Youth Affairs Council Western Australia (YACWA)
Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare	Youth Affairs Network Queensland (YANQ)
Child Family Community Australia (CFCA)	Youth Endowment Fund (YEF)
Closing the Gap Clearinghouse	Youth Network of Tasmania (YNOT)

Cochrane	Youth Action
Council of Europe	Youth Coalition of the ACT

All search results were title screened according to established inclusion and exclusion criteria. The remaining results were then abstract screened for relevance according to review topics and organised into subcategories including: Who are 'youth?; What is youth work?; The history of youth work in selected countries; The youth work profession and youth work approaches and key practice ideas.

A call out for submissions from youth organisations in NSW was made to gather materials not publicly available and that speak to local work in this space. Youth organisations were not asked to prepare any materials specifically for this research, but rather, to send through relevant existing documents highlighting their programs, practices and approaches. Submissions received from youth organisations in NSW were screened for relevance to this review topic and included in the final number of references for this summary.

What did the scoping review find?

A total of 30 references were identified from the searches with relevance to the definition and history of youth work. This includes 9 journal articles, 9 books and/or book chapters, and 12 grey literature sources. A total of 147 references were identified from the searches pertaining to the youth work profession and professionalisation. This includes 69 journal articles, 26 books and/or book chapters, and 52 grey literature sources. Finally, a total of 73 references were identified from the searches relating to key concepts and theoretical approaches to youth work. This includes 51 journal articles, 17 books and/or book chapters, and 5 grey literature sources.

Additionally, of the 60 submissions the research team received from youth work organisations, 7 submissions pertained to the youth work profession and theory. No submissions were received relating to the definition and history of youth work. Submissions relating to the youth work profession and theory came from Weave, Project Youth, Humanity Matters and StreetWork Australia. These submissions included the following types of documents/resources: book (*n*=1), video (*n*=1), discussion article (*n*=1), practice standards (*n*=1), practice framework (*n*=1), practitioner resource (*n*=1) and report (*n*=1).

Who are 'youth'?

In Australia, 'youth' generally refers to persons aged between 10 and 25 years old. 'Youth' occurs between childhood and adulthood. Though youth is characterised as a stage of transition, "youth is not separate from adulthood. It is the becoming of adulthood." (Sercombe & Paus, 2010, p. 81). Youth remain in a state of transition between dependence and independence for increasingly longer periods of time due to extended participation in higher education, the increasing inaccessibility of the housing market and a more precarious employment market. Often families can support young people through this challenging transition, however this transition can become problematic if no support is available. This is where youth work occurs.

> **Further reading**
>
> To learn more about the history of the terms 'youth' and 'adolescence', and the construction of youth as a socio-political category, see Bessant, Sercombe & Watts (1998) Sercombe (2010; 2015) and Cieslik & Simpson (2013).
>
> For the implications of late modernity on youth development and citizenship, see France & Wiles (1997).
>
> To read more about the definition of youth work, see Sercombe (2010)

What is youth work?

Banks (2010) identifies three overarching definitions of youth work: youth work as an activity (working with young people), youth work as a specialist occupation (a 'youth worker') and youth work as an academic discipline that teaches the theories and practices of youth work. Youth workers in the US can also be called "youth development workers" (Banks, 2010, p. 6). Youth work as an activity covers a broad spectrum of practices that can be conducted virtually anywhere, from institutional settings such as schools to casual settings such as shopping centres.

From a research perspective, the breadth of practice that falls under the umbrella of 'youth work' is both advantageous and problematic. While this breadth enables flexibility and creativity for practitioners and youth, it also inhibits disciplinary cohesiveness. In their systematic review on the impact of youth work on young people, Mundy-McPherson, Fouché, Elliot found that evidence was "limited and disjointed" (2012, p. 213). Key recommendations for the youth work sector concluded by the review include: "more rigour in [research] design and consistency in the terminology of youth work."

The challenges of evidence-based youth work
Humanity Matters CEO Mary Malak speaks to the challenges of building a youth work evidence base (2020, p. 79):

> Evidence based upon experimental or randomised control trial findings, are held up as the gold standard for validating the effectiveness of practice methods. Marginalised young people that can only be reached in highly unstructured settings and with flexible approaches, responsive to individual communities, results in a lack of evidence for streetwork both within Australia and internationally. Knowledge based on people's lived experiences is too often dismissed by funding departments as subjective and unreliable.

Youth work scholars note that youth work has been described as contested (Davies, 2010) and as difficult to define (Bradford & Cullen, 2014), particularly when those definitions are activity-based (Sercombe, 2010). Sercombe (2010, p. 22) argues that:

> It isn't difficult to talk about what youth workers do, the literature is able to do that quite articulately. The difficulty is to say what makes youth work *distinctive*: different from what parents, police, schoolteachers, commercial leisure proprietors, psychologists and sports coaches do ... we know that youth work is distinctive. You know youth work (and youth workers) when you see it, and it doesn't look like anything else.

He argues that the distinctiveness of youth work lies in the relationship with the young person, rather than exclusive claims over particular practices. He defines youth work as "a **professional** relationship in which the young person is engaged as the **primary client** in their **social context**" [original emphasis] (2010, p. 26)

Banks (2010) explains that youth work practice as occurs along a spectrum of services spanning from a universal, open access programming to specialist or targeted programming. Open access programs tend to be characterised by recreational or leisure-based activities, while targeted programs are characterised by more individualised activities that are care-oriented or instructive in nature (Banks, 2010).

Jeffs and Smith (2010, p.1-3) propose that youth work is defined by the following five qualities:
1. Voluntary participation
2. Education and welfare
3. Young people
4. Association, relationship, and community
5. Being friendly, accessible, and responsive while acting with integrity.

> Youth Work Definition
>
> Youth work is a practice that *places young people and their interests first*. Youth work is a *relational practice*, where the youth worker operates alongside the young person in their *context*. Youth work is an *empowering* practice that *advocates* for and *facilitates* a young person's *independence*, *participation* in society, *connectedness* and realisation of their *rights*.
>
> [original emphasis]Australian Youth Affairs Council (2013, p. 3)

Fusco (2014, p. 50) confers that youth work is a relational practice and describes youth worker engagement as "participatory" and "responsive". Fusco frames the ideal youth work practitioner as a thoughtful and reflective individual who walks alongside young people to achieve the goals that they have set for themselves, as active "curators" of their own lives (2014, p. 50). In youth work, the trusting relationship that develops between a practitioner and a young person is the goal, not the vehicle (Mundy-McPherson, Fouché & Elliot, 2012; Davies, 2010). Youth workers aim, where possible, to meet

youth 'where they are at' in settings that feels safe and familiar. This helps to balance the power difference between adults and young people which is conducive to building mutual respect (Tilsen, 2018).

In response to prolonged sector demand for a definition of youth work, the Australian Youth Affairs Council (AYAC), developed a definition of youth work (see text box), following an extensive consultation process with the youth sector.

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> [original emphasis] Australian Youth Affairs Council (2013, p. 3)

While there are differences of emphasis and terminology, under the surface these definitions are broadly congruent. Where Fusco talks about young people being 'active curators', Sercombe talks about 'the primary client', and AYAC speaks of placing 'young people and their interests first'. Where Jeffs and Smith talk about 'Association, relationship and community', AYAC refers to the' social context', Each of these definitions stress the relational core of the practice. In Australia, the AYAC definition has wide national acceptance.

The history of youth work in selected countries

The following section provides a brief contextual history and overview of the current state of practice of youth work in Australia, Aotearoa (New Zealand), the UK and North America.

Youth work in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

Lucashenko (2010) states that 'youth work' has been practiced in Australia for thousands of years by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Raising young people into community-minded adults continues to be an important and highly involved process in First Nations communities (Lucashenko, 2010). The following list (adapted from Lucashenko, 2010, p. 6-7) details the traditional attributes and skills of youth raised in Murri cultures:

- Be good learners & good thinkers
- Respect themselves and elders
- Care for country
- Have self-control and patience
- Be part of a community
- Care for other youth
- Provide, build and make
- Trust and resolve conflict
- Be physically tough
- Behave in accordance with marriage and relationship Law.

> **Further reading**
>
> On the history of youth work in Australia, see: Bowie (2005) and Bessant (2012).
>
> On the history of youth work in the UK and Western countries respectively, see France & Wiles (1997) and Sercombe, (2015a).
>
> For the sociological and political underpinnings of various youth work models and practice, see Cooper (2012), Fusco (2015) and Cooper (2018).

The transition from childhood to adulthood generally differed between boys and girls in Murri culture (Lucashenko, 2010, p. 5-6):

> Everybody in the clan knew that at around or just before puberty, boys were normally selected to go through their first Law, if the older people in the clan felt they were ready … [a]nd everybody also knew that the girls would be taken aside by the older women when their time came to be made into women.

'Youth work' or raising youth in First Nations communities continues as a holistic process for all young people entering adulthood, not a deficit-oriented process that targets 'at-risk' youth.

Youth work in Australia, Aotearoa (New Zealand), the UK and North America

Prior to WWII, youth work programs in Australia, Aotearoa (New Zealand) and the UK were largely provided by voluntary Christian organisations such as the Young Mens Christian Association (YMCA). Generally, these programs centred on education, physical fitness or recreation and leisure activities and were provided universally. In reality however, these programs were only 'universally' available to white youth (Brooker, 2014; Bessant, 2012). We know that in Australia, most early forms of youth work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were "patronising and punitive, based on the belief that eventually the native populations would either die out or be totally assimilated" (Bowie, 2005, p. 280).

Youth work that is most similar to contemporary practice in Western countries today emerged during the 1950s-1960s (France & Wiles, 1997; Bowie, 2005). In Canada and the US, youth work post-WWII was informed by a therapeutic care model, as a form of social welfare (Brooker, 2014). This therapeutic approach continues to characterise the Child and Youth Care sector in North America today. The Canadian Council of Child and Youth Care Associations defines the scope of practice for Child and Youth Care as follows (n.d., para. 1):

> The practice of Child and Youth Care occurs within the context of therapeutic relationships with children and youth who are experiencing difficulties in their lives. Intervention takes place within the family, the community and other social institutions, and centres on promoting emotional, social and behavioural change and well-being within the context of daily living.

Notably, that the participant age range for Child and Youth Care in Canada is 4-18 years old, (Brooker, 2014), which is younger than other comparable English-speaking countries.

Youth work in Australia is heavily influenced by work conducted in the UK (Bowie, 2005). Bradford and Cullen describe post-WWII youth work in the UK as "informal, experiential and participative" (2014, p. 94). Informal education is a defining element of what might be considered 'traditional' youth work. Informal education is delivered conversationally in non-traditional settings to empower youth to think critically about society as active, engaged citizens (see Informal Education). Where earlier forms of youth work were offered universally and were more informal, recreational, and group-based as discussed above, youth work today has shifted to a much more targeted and individualised practice (Forrest, 2010). This work is mostly conducted with young people considered to be 'at-risk' or vulnerable (Jeffs & Smith, 2002; Spence, 2004; Jenkinson, 2011), who are often disengaged from education and/or employment (Bradford & Cullen, 2014; Jones, 2012). Casework is a common approach in this more targeted practice (Slovenko & Thomson, 2016; Nurden, 2010; Brooker; 2014), and the individualised format enables workers to track a young person's progress towards specific goals, in line with the organisation's performance outcomes.

Youth work in Aotearoa (New Zealand) is also influenced by the UK, however as Aotearoa is a bi-cultural country, it is dually informed by settler and Māori culture (Brooker, 2014). Two models act as frameworks for thinking and practice in Aotearoa (New Zealand); the "Circle of Courage" (informed by Positive Youth Development and Western values) (Brooker, 2014, p. 141) and the Māori health model: "Te Whare Tapa Wha" (Brooker, 2014, p. 142). Both models comprise four key parts that are essential for the development and care of healthy, happy, and engaged youth. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (see Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory) is a third key influence woven into the youth work framework in Aotearoa (New Zealand) (Brooker, 2014). Youth development and wellbeing as understood through the lens of ecological systems theory informs practice that is both holistic and contextual.

The youth work profession

National accreditation / registration body	Professional association	Qualifications	Other
Australia			
No.	Yes - Western Australia and NSW and Victoria all have state-based professional associations for youth workers.	Training is available at certificate and diploma levels. Limited youth work qualifications at the degree level, mostly located in universities in Western Australia and Victoria.	Youth Workers Australia, whilst Victoria-based also assumes some national responsibilities (H. Sercombe, personal communication, September 12, 2022)
Aotearoa (New Zealand)			
No.	Volunteers and paid professionals can become Korowai Tupu members which holds them account to a code of ethics and requires an ongoing commitment to professional development (Ara Taiohi, 2022).	Training is available at a certificate, diploma, degree and postgraduate certificate levels (Ara Taiohi, 2022).	Large voluntary (unpaid) workforce and a small number of qualified workers. All graduates must hold first aid certificates and pass a police check (Brooker, 2014).
England			
No.	Yes – Institute for Youth Work.	Training is available at a certificate level (via apprenticeship), diploma level or degree / masters level. University level qualifications widely available across England (National Youth Agency, n.d.).	The National Youth Agency produces key resources for the sector including a national curriculum and Safeguarding and Risk Management Framework.
USA			
Yes – Child and Youth Care Certification Board.	Yes - The Association for Child & Youth Care Practice.	Few higher education programs focus exclusively on child and youth care	N/A.

3 levels of certification available in USA: entry, associate and professional (CYCCB, n.d.).		(Roholt & Rana, 2011; Freeman, 2013). Many entry-level practitioners have degrees in related fields (Freeman, 2013).	
Canada			
Yes – Child and Youth Care Certification Board. Only the professional level of certification is available in Canada (CYCCB, n.d.).	Yes - each province (except Saskatchewan) has its own professional association for Child and Youth Care practitioners (CCCYCA, 2022).	Training is available at diploma and degree levels across the country (Freeman, 2013).	The Child and Youth Care Educational Accreditation Board of Canada maintains quality standards for post-secondary education (Freeman, 2013).

Youth work education and professional development

Youth Work educational and accreditation requirements differ substantially between different countries, as depicted in the table above. Youth work, as a specialist field of social care, is not offered uniformly at a degree level in the Western countries listed above. As a result, scholarship within the youth work discipline, though robust, is lacking in cohesion. A 2012 systematic review of the impact of youth work for young people revealed two key barriers to the collection of data about youth work interventions: imprecise terminology and a lack of rigorous methodologies (Mundy-McPherson, Fouché & Elliot 2012). A profession that lacks a strong disciplinary foundation risks de-prioritisation and defunding from universities, the ultimate consequence of which is de-professionalisation (Bessant & Emslie, 2014; Emslie 2012).

Australian scholars Bessant and Emslie (2014) posit that whilst VET level training (TAFE) provides students with the technical knowledge and competencies to practice youth work, it does not provide students with the ideas, knowledge and context that inform youth work as a discipline. Bessant (2012, p. 65) argues that:

> A critical test of a good youth work education is whether it helps equip graduates to exercise good judgment about where on the continuum between the paternalistic approach typically expressed as the need to override a young person's human agency and the need to support them to make their own choice and then to have the capacity to know what kind of support they need to achieve what they chose to do or be.

When university-level training is not available to youth workers, professional development can be an alternative way to deepen practice and learn new skills (Roholt & Rana, 2011). In a study exploring how

youth workers learn in a professional development context, Ranahan and Alsaieq identified that "efforts to develop specific content knowledge … must begin with an acknowledgement of professionals' experiential knowledge" (2019, p. 595).

Professionalisation

Arguments both for and against the professionalisation of youth work exist in the literature, however arguments in favour of professionalisation are dominant. Emslie (2012) argues that the professionalisation of youth work would lead to an increase in the number of qualified youth work professionals which would help to stem the worker shortage in regional Australia. Emslie (2012) further highlights that professionalisation increases the accountability and transparency of the youth work sector. Emslie (2012) argues that this increased accountability could, in turn, contribute to the prevention of harmful practice with young people in Australia, against a backdrop of historical institutional child abuse in the care sector.

Arguments against the professionalisation of youth work highlight perceived risks posed by the rigidity of standardised practice frameworks which may threaten the responsiveness, creativity, and spontaneity of youth work practice (Fox, 2019; Cooper, 2013). Johnston-Goodstar & Roholt acknowledge the potential of professionalisation to stymie "alternative and innovative practices" (2013, p. 15), however they retain hope that the discipline can professionalize *and* preserve the diverse and innovative ways of working.

> **Practice resource**
>
> Wiedow (2018) provides a practical resource for youth work managers seeking to integrate professional development into everyday work activities.

Challenges that cut across the youth work sector include, but are not limited to the following:

- The impact of short-term funding contracts that prohibit long-term service planning and programming (Jones, 2014) which spurs competition rather than collaboration between service providers (Malak, 2020)

- The national housing shortage and affordability crisis (Youth Affairs Network Queensland, 2013)

- Insufficient resourcing to conduct culturally safe and informed work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Myers and Knowles, 2021)

- Burnout among workers due to the stressful nature of working with persons experiencing crisis and/or distress (Barford & Welton, 2010)

- High staff turnover (Myers and Knowles, 2021)

- Feelings of being misunderstood and undervalued as professionals among youth workers (Ranahan, 2018)

- Youth work interventions and programming are increasingly subject to positivist, scientific evaluations and monitoring that are ill-equipped to measure their true efficacy (Fusco, 2013; de St Croix, 2017; Slovenko & Thomson, 2016).

Youth work approaches and key practice ideas

The following theories and practice ideas reflect the key findings of this scoping review. This is not an exhaustive list of the theories and influences of youth work and readers are encouraged to access further readings where noted.

Youth work ethics

Like most caring professions, youth work is underpinned by ethics; a moral code that describes the values in which a group believes (Davie, 2011). There is no international code of ethics for youth work, however, the Commonwealth Alliance of Youth Workers Associations has developed Guidelines for Establishing a Code of Ethical Practice. Youth work codes of ethics developed in Western countries are generally drawn from "principle-based ethics" and "character and relationship-based ethics" (Banks, 2010, p. 18). The Australian peak body the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition is working towards the national adoption of the Code of Ethics developed by Sercombe in 2002 and endorsed with commentary by Youth Action in 2004 (Sercombe, 2004).

> **Further reading**
>
> AIFS (2014) provides a comprehensive Practitioner Resource for the supervision of youth workers.
>
> For more on supervision see Wood, Westwood & Thompson, 2015.
>
> Herman (2012) offers a supervision model using participatory action research to integrate evidence-based-practice in real-time.

Sercombe is also the author of seminal text *Youth Work Ethics* (2010). The fourteen components of the Western Australian code are (Sercombe, 2004):

1. Primary Client
2. Ecology
3. Non-discrimination
4. Empowerment
5. Non-corruption
6. Transparency
7. Confidentiality
8. Cooperation
9. Knowledge
10. Self-awareness
11. Boundaries
12. Self-care
13. Duty of Care
14. Integrity

Supervision and reflective practice

As in social work and psychology, a youth worker's ability to reflect on their practice is an important component of good practice. Emslie (2009) however, highlights a lack of literature on how to teach reflective skills to youth workers in training, and Herman (2012) points out that supervision or reflective practice can often be de-prioritised in busy practice settings. Supervision is a place for professional development and for working through any challenges that may arise in the context of care work. Supervision provides a space for practitioners to reflect on their work and to think critically about the power dynamic between themselves and the young people with whom they are working. The settings and participants for supervision can vary; supervision can be conducted in a one-to-one setting with a manager or external consultant, in a team or as a peer-led activity among colleagues. Two key influences

on youth work supervision are drawn from social work (Kadushin, 1976 as cited in Wood, Westwood and Thompson, 2015) and counselling (Proctor, 1987 as cited in Wood, Westwood and Thompson, 2015) respectively.

In the adapted list below, Wood, Westwood and Thompson identify three core components from these practitioners that continue to inform supervision today (2015, p. 138):

- "Administrative/normative": the assignment and assessment of work and the promotion of compliance with workplace procedures

- "Educational/formative": the professional development and growth of the supervisee as a youth work practitioner

- "Supportive/restorative": assists the youth worker with stress management.

In addition to the standard form of supervision described above, practitioners working closely with persons from a culture different to their own should seek cultural supervision. Cultural supervision provides youth workers with support and guidance to work in a respectful and meaningful way with First Nations youth. Cultural supervision belongs to a holistic range of practices required to conduct culturally safe youth work, discussed below.

Culturally safe youth work with First Nations youth

A rapid evidence review conducted by Zulumovski et al. (2021) found six common elements critical to establishing cultural safety in the literature. These elements include (Zulumovski et al., 2021, p. 4-5):

1. Recognising the importance of culture

2. Self-determination

3. Workforce development

4. Whole of organisation approach

5. Leadership and partnership

6. Research, monitoring and evaluation

> **Good Practice in NSW**
>
> Our Place: Stories about good practice in youthwork with Aboriginal young people by Reed-Gilbert & Brown published by South Sydney Youth Services (now Weave) is essential reading for practitioners working with First Nations people.

Sources identified in this scoping review echo the findings of Zulumovski et al. (2021), particularly the recognition of culture, workforce development and partnership. Multiple authors highlight the recognition of culture as key when working with persons whose culture is different from one's own (Walker & Grant, 2011; Lucashenko, 2010; Reed-Gilbert & Brown, 2002). In practice, this requires the development of self-awareness and the ability to reflect upon one's own culture, beliefs and values. Youth work practitioners are strongly encouraged to learn about the cultures of the persons with whom they work and about the communities where they live and practice.

Every young person has different needs, goals, and desires and those may or may not relate to their cultural identity. There are, however, some cultural differences of which youth workers and youth work organisations should be mindful when working with First Nations young people. In Western cultures,

individual rights are held in high regard, however in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, there is a stronger emphasis on collective rights and the sharing of resources (Lucashenko, 2010). Family and culture are central to the identity and wellbeing of First Nations people (Reed-Gilbert & Brown, 2002; Lucashenko, 2010). Youth workers can honour these values by involving community members, family and elders in their work with youth as often as possible (with the consent of the young person). Practitioners should also be aware of the different communications styles among some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. While in Western cultures a lack of eye contact for instance might be perceived as rude, this is the opposite in some First Nations communities where young people actively avoid looking their elders in the eye as a sign of respect (Reed-Gilbert & Brown, 2002).

Cultural Safety & Wellbeing: Evidence review

The findings of the Cultural Safety and Wellbeing Evidence Review conducted by Gamarada Universal Indigenous Resources Pty Ltd and the Social Policy Research Centre can be found via the NSW Department of Communities and Justice Evidence Portal.

The 'Evidence to Action Note' provides helpful, evidence-based guidance for practitioners to work in a culturally safe way with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, families, and communities.

With respect to workforce development, sources identified in this scoping review highlighted two dual needs. Organisations need to both hire Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Reed-Gilbert & Brown, 2002; Zulumovski et al., 2021) and they need to enable those staff members to sustain their connections with communities, and access professional development and training (Reed-Gilbert & Brown, 2002). It is important for First Nations young people to have access to workers they can trust who are also role models with shared cultural histories.

Finally, partnership was identified as an important aspect of cultural safety. Establishing and maintaining genuine partnerships with First Nations leaders and community members is of central importance to good youth work practice. To illustrate, Reed-Gilbert & Brown (2002) highlight that First Nations people often report being consulted about various projects or issues without a follow up plan in place to provide them with necessary updates about their contributions. To work towards cultural safety through the establishment of genuine partnerships, youth work practitioners and organisations must ensure that a feedback and follow up process is enacted after consulting with cultural experts. Tokenistic consultation does not help to build intercultural trust. Against a colonial history of systemic oppression often presented under the guise of 'welfare', First Nations communities have good reason to distrust care professionals such as youth workers. Working with authenticity and honesty is especially important when working alongside First Nations young people. Reed-Gilbert and Brown offer the following advice in developing trust (2002, p. 35):

> "The rule is time: trust takes time"

Rights-based approach and youth participation

In 1990, Australia signed and ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Article 12 of the Convention (see text box) secures the rights of children and young people to express their views and to be taken seriously. To enable children and young people to freely express their views, individual workers and organisations must prioritise authentic and meaningful participation. Collins, Sinclair and Zufelt (2021) argue that for practitioners to incorporate youth participation as a routine and everyday aspect of their practice, youth participation must be a central and consistent element of youth work educational curriculums.

Article 12, United Nations [Convention on the Rights of the Child](), 1989

Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the view of the child being given due weight in accordance with age and maturity of the child.

Collin, Lala & Fieldgrass (2018) provide the following examples of youth participation in action:

- Youth advisory boards
- Surveys
- Consultation roadshows
- Workshops
- Youth positions on boards and committees
- Youth leadership programs

Wood, Westwood, Thompson pose a series of generalised questions that might be used by youth workers and their organisations to enhance youth participation in their practice (2015, p. 218):

- What opportunities are there for young people to shape and influence the organisation's work?
- How do young people feel about participation?
- What evidence is there that participatory practice has been part of the work of the
- organisation?
- What mechanisms or approaches are used to listen to young people?
- How might my own work be enhanced if I adopt a co-production approach?
- What barriers might limit young people's opportunities to influence the organisation?
- How might young people have a say beyond the organisation?

For participation to be authentic, participation of young people must be voluntary. Not all youth will want to contribute or will want to contribute in the same way. The task of the youth worker is to adapt their approach to meet youth where they are at. Collins, Sinclair and Zufelt highlight that fair representation is an important factor to consider when conducting participatory work (2021, p. 289):

> While young people's participation in general tend to be overlooked, young people in racialized communities, with disabilities, in the criminal justice system, discriminated due to their gender and sexual identities, or who have displayed aggressive/challenging behaviours are even less likely to be heard and have their opinions valued and listened to by others.

Finally, where youth have been invited to participate, co-create or have been otherwise consulted, follow-up is essential. Following up demonstrates to young people that their involvement has been meaningful and not tokenistic as part of a 'tick-a-box' exercise (Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia, 2016).

Anti-oppressive practice

An anti-oppressive approach is essential to conducting youth work that is just and non-discriminatory. Daniels draws on Kumashiro (2000) to define anti-oppressive practice as that which understands "the importance of challenging systemic injustices that have come to be embedded in everyday practices, policies, procedures and thought patterns" (Kumashiro, 2000, as cited in Daniels, 2021, p. 11). Oppressive systems include discrimination based on gender and sexuality, racism, colonialism, ableism, ageism and poverty. Anti-oppressive practice prompts practitioners to develop an understanding of how the different identities of a person can overlap and intersect to produce different outcomes (Crenshaw, 1993 as cited in Daniels, 2021), the result of which is sometimes a compounding of different forms of oppression. Unsurprisingly, persons experiencing systematic oppression in one or more forms "can experience a significantly diminished quality of life" (Daniels, 2021, p. 125).

To successfully practice in an anti-oppressive way, practitioners must be reflective and willing to interrogate their conscious and subconscious biases (Wood, Westwood & Thompson, 2015) which can be an uncomfortable but deeply necessary process. Wood, Westwood & Thompson (2015) offer a range of practical strategies for combatting oppressive behaviours in a youth work context, including disrupting discriminatory humour, changing the environment and/or providing a wider range of resources (e.g. allocating an all-gender/unisex bathroom or providing information and brochures in Easy English and in other languages spoken in the local community).

> **Anti-oppressive resources**
>
> Youth Affairs Network Queensland provides a guide for youth workers and youth organisations: Involving Young People with a Disability: Effective Practices for Engagement, Participation & Consultation.
>
> AIFS provides a guide for inclusive communication with LGBTQIA+ young people.

Trauma-informed practice

Youth work is increasingly targeted towards young people who are classed as 'vulnerable' or 'at-risk' (Jeffs & Smith, 2002; Spence, 2004; Jenkinson, 2011). It follows then, that young people receiving youth work services are likely to have experienced trauma. The impact of trauma on the everyday functioning of an individual is significant. Research has shown that experiences of trauma are effectively 'stored' in the body, which cause measurable physiological changes that can directly affect one's behaviour (van der Kolk, 2014). When trauma is passed down between generations of a family or community, this is called intergenerational or transgenerational trauma. Brokenleg speaks to the impact of intergenerational trauma in the context of his First Nations Lakota community in US (2012, p. 10):

> In some form, this cultural trauma affects every Native person. It sculpts how we think, how we respond emotionally. It affects our social dynamics and, at the deepest level, impacts our spirituality. Intergenerational trauma has wounded us deeply.

Reed-Gilbert and Brown (2002) highlight that internalised intergenerational trauma in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in Australia may present as anger or 'acting out' through behaviours such as drug taking or self-harm. For persons experiencing cultural forms of intergenerational trauma (First Nations, refugee and asylum seeker youth), work that reconnects with culture can be healing (Lucashenko, 2010; Brokenleg, 2012). When working with young people who have experienced trauma, intergenerational or otherwise, consistency and reliability (Reed-Gilbert & Brown, 2002) are important qualities for youth workers to embody to foster trust and stability.

It is important to note that trauma-informed care should also be used to support staff. Youth workers can experience vicarious trauma (Babic, 2015) during their work with youth who may be in crisis or experiencing distress. Preventative steps should be taken to minimise the risk of vicarious traumatization. A healthy workplace and organisational culture that prioritises staff wellbeing can support workers' resilience during tough times.

Informal Education

Informal education informs traditional British youth work practice (Slovenko & Thomson, 2016; Davies, 2012a), which has influenced youth work practice in Australia and Aotearoa (New Zealand), as Commonwealth countries. Jeffs & Smith define informal (sometimes called 'non-formal') education as: "the process of fostering learning in life as it is lived. A concern with community and conversation; a focus on people as persons rather than objects" (2005, p. 11). Crucially, informal education is voluntary in nature and has a strong pedagogical commitment to "democracy, fairness and truth" (Gee, 2020, p. 108). Improvised, yet meaningful conversation that is guided by the young person characterises informal education. Practitioners of informal education challenge young people to think critically, with a view to empowering them to act and make change (Corney et al., 2021).

Wood, Westwood and Thompson (2015) identify a series of techniques that illustrate how practitioners enact informal education. These techniques include "catching the moment … steering the conversation [and] creating a talking point" (Wood, Westwood & Thompson, 2015, p. 54). 'Catching the moment' describes the information imparted by the youth worker to a young person at an opportune moment during conversation. For instance, a young person might disclose feeling hungover, so the youth worker 'catches the moment' and instigates harm reduction by explaining 'safer' drinking practices such as drinking at a slower rate or drinking a glass of water between each alcoholic beverage (Wood, Westwood, Thompson, 2015). 'Steering the conversation' is a more direct approach that enables the practitioners to guide or steer the conversation where learning can occur through discussion and the exchange of viewpoints (Wood, Westwood, Thompson, 2015). 'Creating a talking point' might entail, for instance, the youth worker wearing a t-shirt with an eye-catching statement (Wood, Westwood, Thompson, 2015) intended to prompt learning by sparking conversation among young people.

Informal education is characterised by practitioner improvisation, conversational and experiential learning. This way of working does not lend itself to the measurability and outcomes-tracking required of evidence-based practice favoured by policy makers and funding bodies. For this reason, Slovenko and

Thomson (2016) propose social pedagogy (see below) as a viable framework to replace informal education as the dominant form of youth work in the UK and other Commonwealth countries.

Social pedagogy

Social pedagogy in action…

Weave Project/Group Worker Kate Munro illustrates critical pedagogy in action in describing her partnerships with young people (Weave, 2018, 1:52):

I've had some really awesome experiences around things like art-space projects and music-space projects- because I'm not- I have none of those skills, so, I'm looking at young people going: 'I can't do this! You're gonna have to do this! You're gonna have to figure this stuff out, how are we gonna do it? [I]ts about me having to step back as a professional and not kind of trying to put my five cents in every two seconds.

'Social pedagogy' is alternatively known as 'social education', 'critical pedagogy' or "critical social education" (Batsleer, 2013, p. 229). Social pedagogy underpins European models of youth work (Slovenko & Thomson, 2016). The term 'pedagogy' refers to a particular kind of approach within education and teaching. The 'social' component of social pedagogy acknowledges that education and personal growth does not occur in a vacuum, rather within the context of a community within society (Slovenko & Thomson, 2016). Social pedagogy is informed by critical theory and philosophy which emerged from the Frankfurt School in Germany during the twentieth century. Scholars of influence to social/critical pedagogy in youth work include Paulo Freire, Antonio Gramsci, Karl Marx and Michel Foucault (H. Sercombe, personal communication, September 12, 2022).

Slovenko & Thomson argue that social pedagogy shares the spirit of informal education, sharing key characteristics including "inclusivity, equality, work with groups (as well as individuals) and … treating young people with respect" (2016, p. 21). Most importantly, a social pedagogy framework enables the development of strong, trusting relationships between youth workers and young people.

Social pedagogues believe both that an individual is shaped by their environment *and* that an individual has the power to determine their own path (Slovenko & Thomas, 2016). The goals of social pedagogy are two pronged: the development of capable, independent, self-determined individuals and the development of community-minded citizens (France & Wiles, 1997; Slovenko & Thomson, 2016). Social pedagogy is informed by humanistic principles which compel practitioners to support disadvantaged members of their community, by helping them to live up to their full potential (France & Wiles, 1997).

In practice, social pedagogues favour creativity and co-production, where practitioners work alongside young people as equal partners in the completion of a task or project (Hatton, 2018, Slovenko & Thomson, 2016). Social pedagogy is a holistic practice which perceives learning to be an ongoing, lifelong process (Slovenko & Thomson, 2016) which justifies the positionality of the practitioner as equal, learning in partnership with young people. Creativity in social pedagogy is a vessel through which to enable young people to "maximise their potential, increase their ability to make decisions and improve their life chances" (Hatton, 2018, p. 157).

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory has a significant and continuing influence of youth work practice today (Derkson, 2010). Ecological systems theory understands human development as occurring within the context of one's environment. Shelton explains: "the person exists in a system of relationships, roles, activities and settings, all interconnected" (2019, p. 10). The theory proposes that power and change are multidirectional and complex – as the environment can change a person, a person can change their environment.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems framework is often depicted as a series of concentric circles starting with the individual at the centre moving outwards to the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem and the chronosystem. The microsystem captures persons and settings that are interrelated to the young person (Shelton, 2019); friends, school, their soccer team, for instance. The mesosystem functions as a porous boundary between the microsystem and the exosystem. Shelton explains that the mesosystem "incorporates all the settings, and the microsystems they contain, *in which the person actively participates"* [original emphasis] (2019, p. 71). The exosystem refers both to "the settings a person does not participate in, but that are consequential in development, and … the relationships of those settings to each other and to the settings in the person's mesosystem" (Shelton, 2019, p. 91). For example, while the young person at the centre of the model does participate in the production of mass media in the exosystem, that young person's fashion sense is likely influenced by depictions of popular fashion in mass media. The macrosystem comprises the overarching culture and ideas within which a society is organised. In Australia, Christianity and democracy would be two major ideologies located within the macrosystem. Finally, the chronosystem refers to time. Each individual and the systems that surround them also exist within a specific period of history which denotes specific levels of sociological and technological development. See the 'Further reading' box for more information on Ecological Systems Theory.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems model contradicted developmental psychology narratives (Derkson, 2010) of the 1970s which effectively pathologised youth (Sercombe, 2015). Unlike developmental psychology, which posits a highly individualised theory of human development, Ecological Systems theory understands young people in the context of their environment. Ecological Systems theory acknowledges both the impact of one's environment on their development *and* the agency of that individual to alter their environment.

Further reading

For more on Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, see Bronfenbrenner's seminal works: The Ecology of Human Development (1979) and Making Human Beings Human: Bioecological Perspectives on Human Development (2005).

Also see: The Bronfenbrenner Primer: A Guide to Develecology (Shelton, 2019).

Civic youth work

A civic youth worker seeks to empower young people to act on issues that matter to them in their community. Civic youth work is conducted with groups of young people, where the youth worker acts as facilitator whose actions are led by the goals and decisions made by the group of young people to

undertake a project of their choosing (Roholt & Cutler, 2012). Roholt, Hildreth & Baizeman describe civic youth work as an "embodied invitation" (2007, p. 165) which invites young people to identify the issues they care about and to decide *if* and *how* they wish to address those issues.

Civic youth work is a democratic way of working that fosters active citizenry in young people (Roholt & Cutler, 2012). This practice is grounded in the belief that children and young people are inherently valuable members of society whose ideas and opinions are worth listening to taking seriously (see also 'Rights-based approach and youth participation'). This belief challenges the idea that young people are not mature enough to be active citizens (Roholt & Cutler, 2012). Civic youth work instead empowers young people to construct or re-construct their identity as a person who is engaged in their community and capable of meaningful change. The very process of planning, setting goals and taking action can help young people to express "how they want to be in the world" (Roholt & Cutler, 2012, p. 175).

As a type of group work practice, young people involved in civil youth work must learn to negotiate group dynamics with other young people with whom they may not ordinarily interact. In addition to working well with others, young people also learn key vocational skills during their project (Roholt & Cutler, 2012). These skills may include public speaking, engaging with authorities or public officials and developing an understanding of bureaucratic processes. Finally, civic youth work provides young people with a safe place to practice their newly acquired skills and to explore the intended and unintended effects of their project. In this space, youth can work together to become articulate in their arguments for change and to consult the youth worker facilitator for explanation and guidance where required (Roholt & Cutler, 2012).

Strengths-based approach

Youth workers who work from a strengths-based approach prioritise the existing skills and agency of young people above the 'problems' or 'deficits' for which they have been identified. The strengths-based approach can be found across a range of human service professions, including youth work. Most theories and approaches to youth work identified in this scoping review are underpinned by a strengths-based approach. Strengths-based youth work is sometimes also known as 'asset-based' youth work.

A strengths-based approach actively rejects practice which emphasises assessment of risk and organises care around the elimination of risk rather than on the holistic growth and wellbeing of the individual. Wood (2018) explains that strengths-based practitioners do not disregard risk factors, rather they seek to place an equal, if not greater, emphasis on protective factors, or strengths. By focusing on strengths, a youth worker can gather more information to better inform their work (Wood, 2018). Asking a young person what is going well for them and about the relationships that are important to them might reveal a hidden support network or speak to the hopes and dreams of a young person that they may not have otherwise mentioned. Knowing the strengths of a young person can help a worker to tailor solutions to support a young person in a way that is meaningful and sustainable, because it is designed to fit in with the young person's life and goals. In practice, a strengths-based approach can empower young people: "[w]hen a youth worker works from a strength based (as opposed to a deficit) model, power is shifted to the young people themselves and they are able to utilise existing skill sets" (Couch, 2018, p. 223).

Positive Youth Development

Positive Youth Development (PYD) is a strengths-based approach to youth work (Nolas, 2013). PYD draws on the principles of positive psychology, with PYD programming designed to "maximiz[e] the positive aspects of youth character and increase engagement through encouraging a sense of belonging and purpose, leadership, and formation of strong attachments within the community (Lerner et al., 2005 as cited in Maletsky & Evans, 2017). Like other youth work approaches such as informal education or civic youth work, PYD lacks a set curriculum and is better understood as philosophy that underpins youth work.

As per the strengths-based approach, PYD steers clear of a deficit-based view of young people, instead perceiving risk to be a result of the challenging circumstances and lack of resources affecting the young person (Moensted, Day, Buus, 2020). PYD seeks to address 'risks' by countering negatives with positives. PYD programming is characterised by the development safe and supportive relationships with adults and fellow peers. Within the context of these supportive relationships, young people can develop prosocial behaviours and develop lifelong skills and competencies (Moensted, Day & Buus, 2020; Meschke, Peter & Bartholomae, 2011).

Nolas highlights that PYD is used in UK youth work as a targeted intervention to address "a range of youth problems including educational outcomes, substance misuse, delinquent behaviour and civic orientation" (2013, p. 2). While PYD can be employed in a targeted way, it is also suitable for more universal types of youth work. Meschke, Peter & Bartholomae explain that PYD is a form of "developmentally appropriate practice" (2011, p. 90) that highlights "the importance of psychosocial development and life course theory in promoting the health and well-being of youth" (Kurtines et al., 2008; Montgomery et al., 2008 as cited in Meschke, Peter & Bartholomae, 2011).

Despite the popularity of the PYD, multiple criticisms of the approach are identified by Nolas (2013). Though PYD acknowledges risk as a product of environment and resources, some authors argue that the approach still endorses harmful neoliberal ideas (Sukarieh and Tannock, 2011; Shildrick & MacDonald, 2006 as cited in Nolas, 2013). Specifically, critics claim that the PYD approach "promotes a decontextualised approach to youth and ignores the socio-economic landscapes that impact on young people's leisure practices … and continues to universalise and individualise personal change" (Nolas, 2013, p. 2).

Narrative approach

A narrative approach to youth work seeks to promote a positive conception of self in young people through the act of deep listening and re-framing by the practitioner. Hartman, Little and Ungar explain that "[n]arrative practices are concerned with the stories that make up individuals', families' or groups' identities" (2008, p. 47). When a young person speaks about themselves, their lives and their history, practitioners using a narrative approach will listen closely for an alternative reading of the young person's narrative which highlights their strengths (Tilsen, 2018; Hartman, Little and Ungar, 2008). This simultaneous process of listening to the young person and listening out for alternative interpretations is called "double listening" (White, 2000, as cited in Hartman, Little and Ungar, 2008). White posits that the narrative work is a way of "co-constructing meaning with young people to mobilize new

understandings and create the conditions for them to live into preferred storylines and futures" (2018, p. viii). It is important to note that narrative approaches do not seek to minimise real risk or to excuse harmful actions, rather they function to help individuals rebuild self-worth and self-belief.

> **Further reading**
>
> Tilsen's 2018 text Narrative Approaches To Youth Work: Conversational Skills for a Critical Practice offers a comprehensive and practical guide for practitioners.

A narrative approach can also be applied to narratives told *about* young people at an organisational level (Hartman, Little and Ungar, 2008). A narrative approach can be used to counter the often deficit-based professional jargon and terminology that plagues the care sector. For example, instead of a practitioner describing to a young person as 'borderline', using a narrative approach the practitioner would describe the young person as having received a diagnosis of borderline personality disorder. Using a narrative approach to shift our language helps to disentangle an individual from their perceived problems and reinstate personal agency (White, 2018).

Faith-based youth work

Youth work is grounded in religious, specifically Christian roots in the Western world, however this kind of youth work is not what we refer to when we talk about 'youth work' today. Faith-based youth work that is delivered in religious settings or within a religious framework is usually explicit in its' intention to develop or strengthen a young person's connection to faith. In Australia, faith-based youth work is usually delivered in a 'youth group' format comprising young people of a similar age who attend the same place of worship.

While targeted youth work is conducted by major religious corporations in Australia today (e.g. Wesley Mission, The Salvation Army), service users and staff are generally not required to participate in any religious activities. For more information on faith-based youth work, see (Green, 2010).

Limitations

The selected findings presented are intentionally brief and are provided for practitioners as a 'jumping off point' to conduct their own further reading or to pursue further professional development and/or education.

Youth work looks very different in practice across different parts of the world. The practices highlighted in this scoping review are conducted in Western, English-speaking countries. Youth work in Europe and the Global South was not within the scope of this review. This scoping review also generally focuses on youth work categorised as 'early intervention' for the sake of scope. Categories of youth work that have been excluded from this review include those relating to housing and accommodation and practice in intensive care settings such as residential care, psychiatric wards, emergency departments and juvenile or migration detention centres. These are specialised kinds of youth work which would require their own separate reviews.

One major limitation to this scoping review is the lack of research cohesion that characterises the youth work discipline. Without a shared disciplinary language, frames of reference and international codes and

practice standards, the professionalisation of youth work remains an ongoing challenge for practitioners.

With respect to inclusivity, this scoping review did not capture sufficient data about youth work with LGBTQIA+ populations and for young people living with disability.

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