



# Recognition of Youth Work

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# Vision for Youth Work: ASPECT 7 (NYCI 2023)

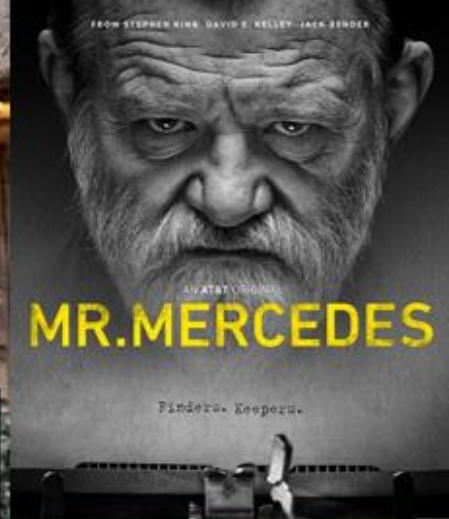
Recognition and resources

The distinctive nature and contribution of youth work is widely recognised and valued within society as a whole...

*“So, I think the first problem we have to overcome is getting the state and getting society to value youth work as an educational and developmental tool.”*



Recognise anything?





What are Youth  
Work's defining  
features?

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# Defining Characteristics of Youth Work

5 ideas that most writers have agreed upon

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Young People: Age range debated but young people should be 'perceived and received as young people' (Davies, 2021)

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Voluntary Participation: Freely able to engage or disengage (Davies, 2015; Devlin and Gunning, 2009; Ord, 2009)

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Association: Doyle and Smith (1999) recognise the 'educative power of playing one's part in a group or association'. Groupwork, fostering relationships and community enable this to happen.

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Democracy: working democratically in a participative way has been core to youth work (In Defence of Youth Work, 2011)

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Education and Welfare: here since the foundation (Jeffs and Smith, 2010)



Purpose: Think of  
a time when  
Youth Work  
worked...

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## Statements of Purpose of Youth Work...

'Personal and social development' (Youth Work Act, 2001)

'Personal and Social Development' [*central theme of the curriculum*] (Dept of Education, 2003)

Young people should be enabled to 'operate independently in the world'. Merton et al., (2004)

'Engage with young people in the process of moral philosophising through which they make sense of the world' (Young, 2006)

'Enable young people to develop holistically, working with them to facilitate their personal, social and educational development' (National Occupational Standards for youth work, 2014)

'Education' (Mahony, 2001)

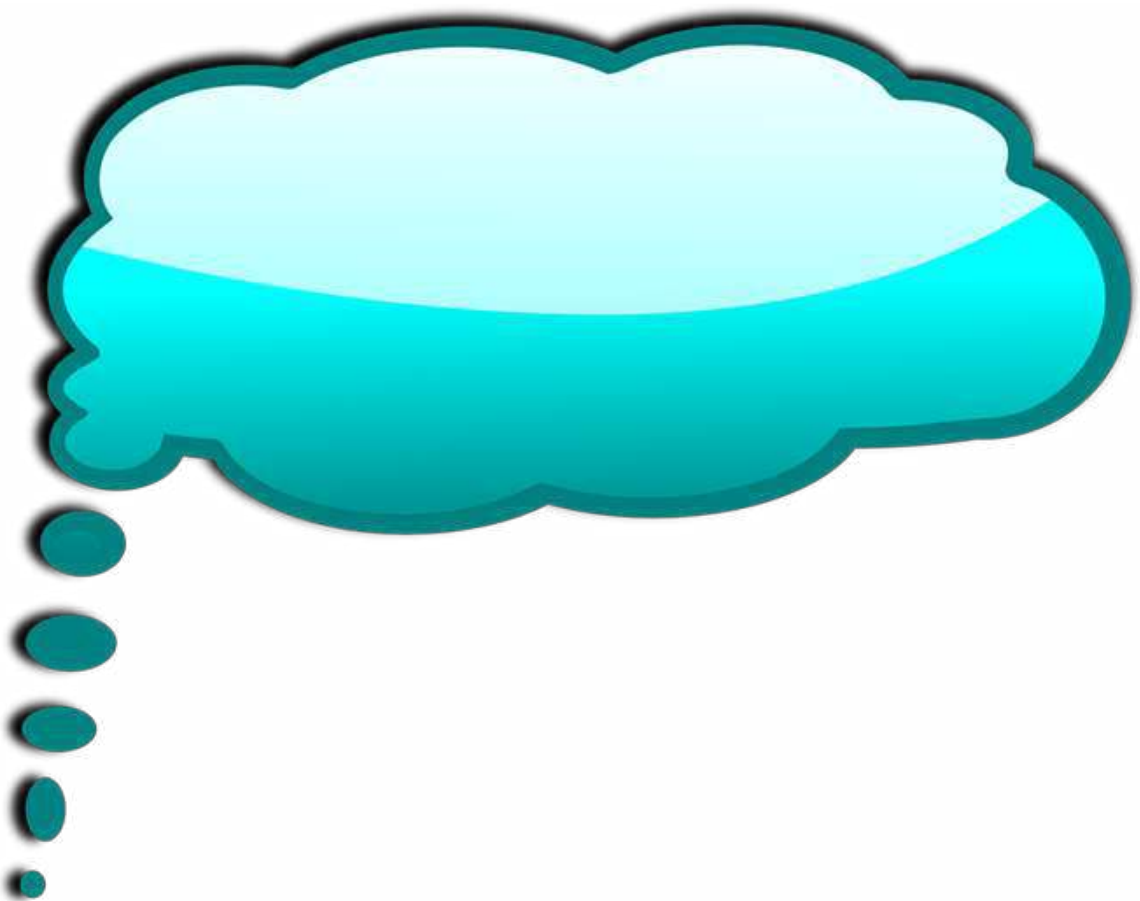
'Promote social, educational and political changes at various levels' (Sapin, 2013)

'Critical pedagogy' (Seal 2014) 'Social Pedagogy' (Slovenko and Thompson, 2016; Corney et al 2024)

WE HAVE  
ESTABLISHED...

# YOUTH WORK IS (AS) EDUCATION

(CRITICAL AND SOCIAL PEDAGOGY)



# Youth Work: How do we do it?

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WHAT ARE THE PROCESSES?

# 4 theory informed processes at the heart of youth work

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<b>Relationship Building</b>	<b>Conversation and Dialogue</b>
<b>Participation and Democracy</b>	<b>Experiential Learning</b>

# Relationship Building

PROCESSES WITH PURPOSE

ROGERS 1967; CHRISTIAN AND  
GREEN 1998; TIFFANY 2001;  
BATSLEER 2008; DEVLIN AND  
GUNNING 2009; BLACKER 2010;  
HENRY ET AL 2011; SAPIN 2013;  
MURPHY AND ORD 2013; ORD  
2016; DAVIES 2021; COOPER ET AL  
2024;



# Thoughts on Relationship Building

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*“I think the relationship is deep, meaningful, trustworthy... it’s about not walking away – even when they have made huge mistakes in their lives, even when they’ve done the maddest of mad things”*

*“...you have to have a non-judgemental approach and young people have the freedom to say something and for me to be skilled enough to be able to listen and actually just hear them... that’s a core element of a relationship”*

*“if you have a good relationship with young people then it has an impact on everything else, it impacts on the process, it impacts on the outcomes of the young people and just in their general well-being and their development as people”*



# Conversation & Dialogue

PROCESSES WITH PURPOSE

MARTIN BUBER (1878-1965)

MIKHAIL BAKHTIN (1895- 1975)

JACK MEZIROW (1927 -2014)

PAULO FREIRE (1921 – 1997)

# Thoughts on Conversation and Dialogue

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**“how can you build relationship up without having a conversation with young people, without spending time with them without understanding them, so to me that’s probably one of the biggest processes in youth work is actually engaging in conversation, trusting in conversation, and understanding the process”**

**“conversation is more the purpose of youth work... the conversation is the reason why we’re establishing that relationship”**

**“I believe it’s through conversation that young people change, that young people reflect, and that young people grow”**

**“in engaging in conversation, you are supporting young people to develop their critical thinking skills”**

# Participation & Democracy

PROCESSES WITH PURPOSE

ARNSTEIN (1969)

SMITH (1982)

WESTHORP (1987)

HART (1992)

ROCHA (1997)

SHEIR (2001)

LUNDY (2020)

&

WIERENGA (2003)



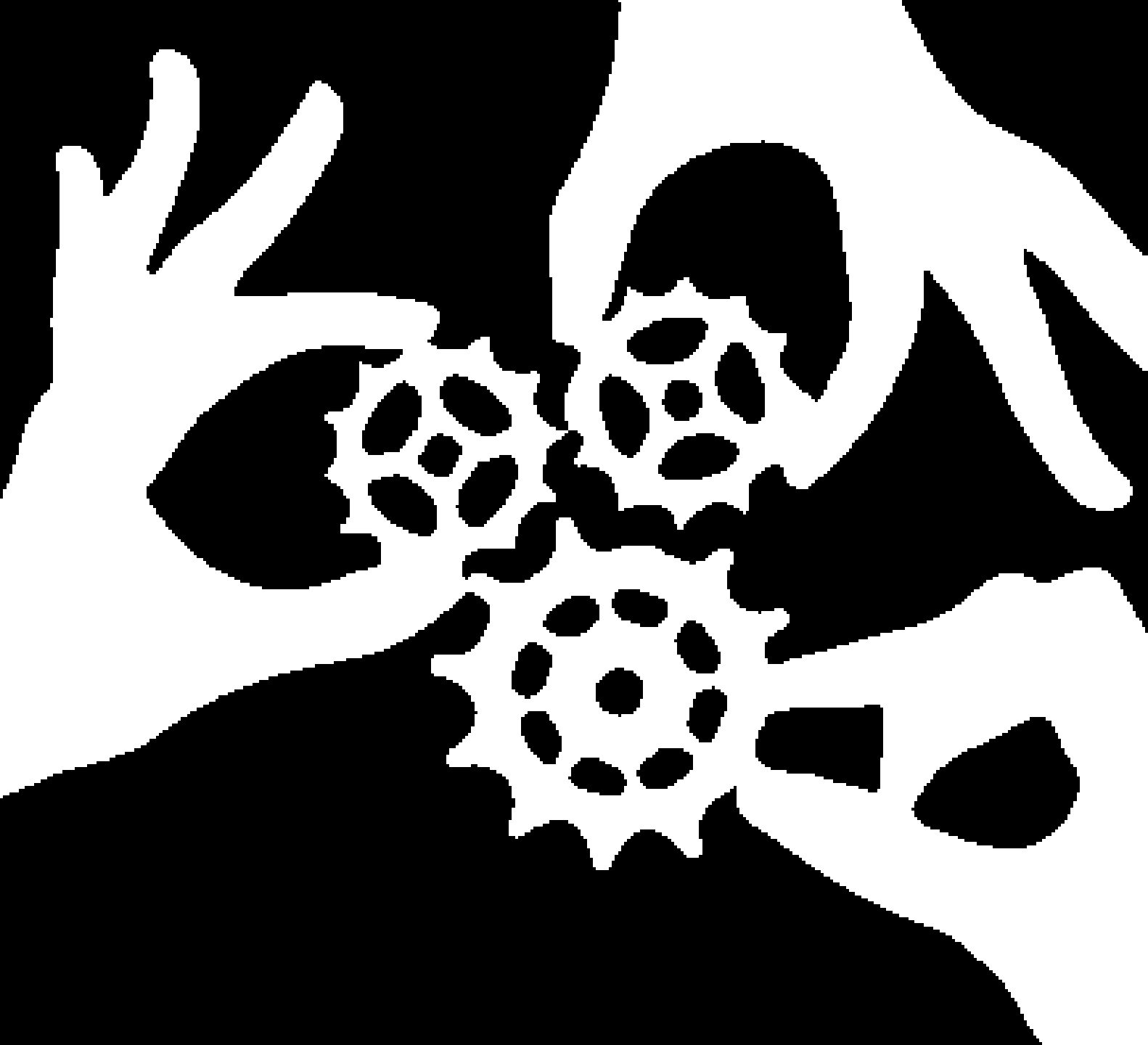
# Thoughts on Participation

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***“in a position where they have power and control over the direction that they’re travelling in or they want their lives to go”***

***“it’s young people having a say in issues that impact on them, you know whether it be in their youth group, in their youth club, in their community”***

***Sometimes “it is tokenism... my problem with participation is too often, it is a funder or a manager saying, oh, you’ve got to have a steering group of young people; oh you’ve got to have a youth parliament in the city council or we need to have a place for two young people on our committee”***



# Experiential Learning

PROCESSES WITH PURPOSE

DEWEY (1938)  
GREENAWAY (1995)  
RACE (2007)  
JARVIS (2012)

# Thoughts on Experiential Learning

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*“I think the vast majority of education is learning through experience”*

*“it’s actually about creating opportunities where young people can have an experience that can promote change”*

*“it is about giving young people a chance to test things out in a comfortable way, in a secure way that’s not threatening to them and then they can try something out”*

# 4 Emerging Processes

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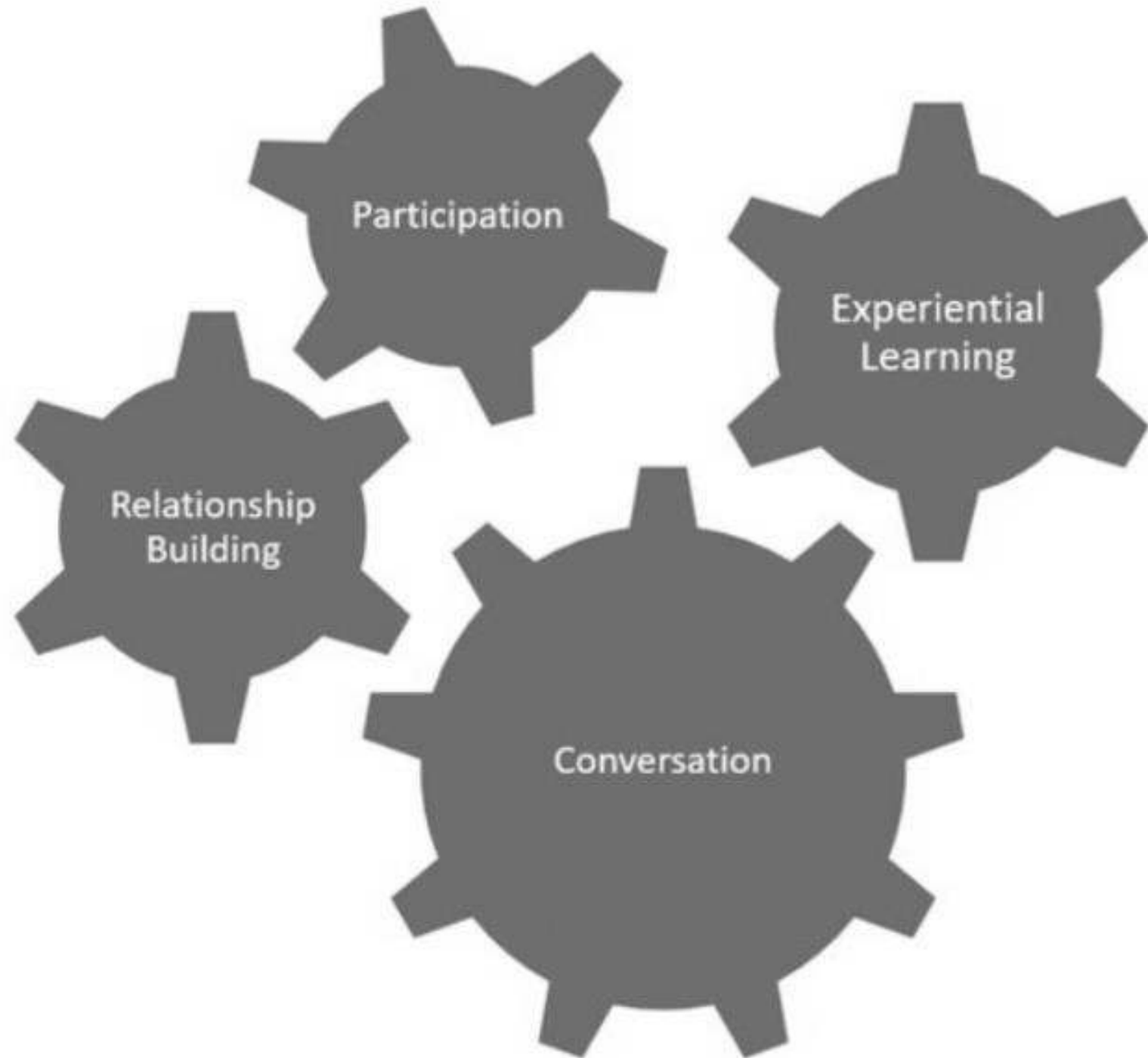
- ❖ Relationship building
- ❖ Conversation and Dialogue
- ❖ Participation and democracy
- ❖ Experiential learning

How might you prioritise these processes?

Is this how we want Youth Work to be recognised?

The findings suggest...

Conversation & dialogue  
“is the cog for turning  
everything else”



# Issues facing the recognition of youth work

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**A contested occupation:** Not everyone recognises what youth work is, what youth workers do or how they operate.

**Fluid definition and disparate practice:** It is the place between, liquid-like, and hard to tie down.

**A profession:** There is professional endorsement body for youth work training but no formal registration system.

**Recognition is a journey and a destination:** Gaining recognition from policy makers, government, funders, schools, youth justice, communities etc is a process and a product.

**Outcomes & Measurement:** If it is youth work, then its outcomes should be determined with and by young people. It's difficult but not impossible to measure.

**Targeted and Universal:** Youth Work needs to be recognised in all its guises across informal and non-formal settings.



Surely, It's about  
time youth work  
was recognised

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# Recent and Relevant Academic Publications

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Cooper, T. (2018) 'Defining youth work: exploring the boundaries, continuity and diversity of youth work practice', in P. Alldred, F. Cullen, K. Edwards and D. Fusco (eds) *The Sage Handbook of Youth Work Practice*, London: Sage Publications, pp 3-17.

Cooper, T., Corney, T., Tierney, H., Gorman, J., & Sutcliffe, J. (2024). Talking about relational youth work: why language matters. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2023.2298327>

Davies, B. (2021) 'Youth work: a manifesto revisited - at the time of Covid and beyond', *Youth & Policy*, <https://www.youthandpolicy.org/articles/youth-work-manifesto-revisited-2021/>

Hammond, M., & Harvey, C. (2021). Reclaiming youth work: A return to the founding principles of youth work during the COVID-19 pandemic. Paper presented at Ark Policy Brief. [https://pure.ulster.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/128763076/Reclaiming\\_Youth\\_Work\\_Hammond\\_and\\_Harvey\\_ARK\\_YouthPact.pdf](https://pure.ulster.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/128763076/Reclaiming_Youth_Work_Hammond_and_Harvey_ARK_YouthPact.pdf)

Hammond, M., & McArdle, E. (2024). Conversation in Youth Work: A Process for Encounter. *Child & Youth Services*, 45(1), 140–160. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0145935X.2023.2279305>

ORD, J. et al. (2022) 'European Youth Work Policy and Young People's Experience of Open Access Youth Work', *Journal of Social Policy*, 51(2), pp. 303–323. doi:10.1017/S0047279421000143

Slovenko, K., & Thompson, N. (2015). Social pedagogy, informal education and ethical youth work practice. *Ethics and Social Welfare*, 10(1), 19–34. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17496535.2015.1106005>

# Some more useful References

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Davies, B. (2010). What Do We Mean by Youth Work? In Batsleer and Davies (eds), What is Youth Work? (pp. 1-6). Exeter: Learning Matters.

Freire, P. (1970). Pedagogy of the Oppressed. London: Penguin

Kolb, A. Y. and Kolb, D. A. (2008). The Learning Way: Meta-cognitive Aspects of Experiential Learning. Simulation & Gaming, 40 (3), 297-327.

Ord, J. (2016). Youth Work Process, Product and Practice: Creating an Authentic Curriculum in Work with Young People (2nd Edition). Oxon: Routledge.

Rogers, C. (1967). The Interpersonal Relationships in the Facilitation of Learning. In Harrison, J; Reeve, F; Hanson, A; Clarke, J. (eds), (2002) Supporting Lifelong Learning, 1, Perspectives on Learning (pp. 25-39). New York: The Open University.

Seal, M. (2016). Critical Realism's Potential Contribution to Critical Pedagogy and Youth and Community Work: Human Nature, Agency and Praxis Revisited. Journal of Critical Realism, 15 (3), 263-276.

# As defined in law...

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Youth Work Act 2001, states

Youth Work is:

A planned programme of education designed for the purpose of aiding and enhancing the personal and social development of young persons through their voluntary participation, and which is:

(a) complementary to their formal, academic or vocational education and training;

and

(b) provided primarily by voluntary youth work organisations