



**YouthWorkAndYou.org**

**Ulster University, Northern Ireland**  
*in collaboration with*  
**HUMAK University of Applied Sciences, Finland**

**Unit 2**

# Youth Work in Diverse Societies

## Skills and Self-Awareness for Youth Work Practice in a Diverse Society

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# Introduction

## Knowledge, Skills and Self-Awareness for Youth Work practice in a Diverse Society

This unit provides a digital platform which considers the theory and practice of diversity In Community Youth Work.

As discussed in Unit 1, Northern Ireland is a region where the practice of youth work is informed by questions around cultural identity. Issues of "difference" can be highly charged and contested, and it is essential that youth workers have knowledge, skills and self-awareness to inform practice in any diverse setting.

**Before proceeding please watch Unit 2 video**



# What you will learn

Self-Awareness for Youth Work practice in a Diverse Society will:

- Consider theory and knowledge for community youth work practice in diverse society.
- Examine the Applied Skills of Community Youth Work practice in a diverse society.
- Initiate thinking on self-awareness, personal and professional attitudes and values in relation to anti-oppressive youth work.

## Unit 2 Contents



1. Enhanced knowledge of theory and knowledge for community youth work practice in diverse society

This session examines, terminology, primary theories and contemporary practice models, such as Anti-Oppressive Practice and the Thompson (2012) model and consider how these are debated, understood, and applied in practice. Reflective practice will consider power, powerlessness and situate these concepts and debates in the context of the challenges faced by youth workers in diverse societies globally. You will enhance your critical skills in relation to concepts like inclusion, stereotyping, participation, values and beliefs which have frequently been drawn upon in debates on diversity.

2. A better awareness of the applied skills required for community youth work practice in a diverse society.

You will learn how to critically consider Anti-Oppressive practice models and applied practice in community youth work in your own region. You will explore and consider the important skills, including listening, communication, programme planning and challenging stereotyping and discrimination in practice. In addition, this section explores the competences required for ensuring inclusion and participation in youth work practice.

3. Self-awareness, personal and professional attitudes and values in relation to anti oppressive youth work

Another key theme raised is self-awareness. You will examine personal, cultural and structural understanding of Anti-Oppressive Practice and reflect on how your own personal values, background and beliefs may influence practice. You will also consider how to understand stereotyping in tackling inequalities. Finally, you will reflect on the professional attitudes and values which might be required to tackle unequal treatment of minorities in your own region/area of practice.

Learners will specifically gather a wider understanding of personal and professional attitudes and values in relation to anti oppressive youth work.

# Questions

What are the important qualities, skills and models of practice for youth work in diverse societies?

How important is self-awareness in community youth work practice?

In order to explore these questions we will make links between models of anti-oppressive practice, inclusion, participation and self-awareness in practice.

# Engaging with the Interactive Video Content

## 1. Knowledge in Diversity and Community Youth Work

To practice inclusive youth work we must reflect about *who* we work with, but more importantly *how* we practice with young people, groups and communities to challenge oppression in building a society where difference is celebrated and valued (Friel and McDermott: 2019). The principles underpinning practice include those of social justice and democratic participation.

It is important to understand concepts, such as identity and how this relates to people's understanding of themselves and their relationships with others.

As Woodward (1997, p. 1) outlines, "identity gives us a location in the world and presents the link between us and the society in which we live". There is a complex relationship between individuals, wider groups and the "community" in which we live. The notion of 'community' was succinctly described by Erikson (1974) as associated to a sense of being and belonging. The concept of identity is also inextricably linked to culture. Whilst there are numerous definitions of the word 'culture', Tyler (1871) defines it as "socially patterned human thought and behaviour".

Concepts such as culture, identity and community are often considered as relating to "belonging" to a wider group. However, these concepts are also often used to exclude others who do not fit the "criteria" of belonging. Those with a different cultural background or identity from the "majority" (e.g. language, religion or sexuality), may feel excluded or disempowered.

Good practice in community youth work seeks to actively identify the issues faced by young people and adults with whom we work; to redress oppression; to empower those we work with to make changes in their lives and to influence the factors that contribute to the oppression faced by such groups and individuals (Friel: 2017).

The key concept for youth workers to consider in this process is discrimination. Discrimination can be DIRECT, where someone is being treated less favourably because of race/gender etc or it can be INDIRECT when the "accepted" ways of doing things, the rules or procedures, exclude and disadvantage certain groups and individuals.

## 2. Skills and Models in Practice

Reflective practice is an important approach which helps us challenge inequalities and discrimination. This approach considers how power exists in all relationships. Thompson (2012) laid out three approaches to consider this power dynamic in the **PCS model**.

**Personal (P)** are our individual thoughts, behaviours and feelings, shaped by our experiences. **Cultural (C)** relates to shared understanding and meaning which have over time "defined" what is considered acceptable or unacceptable in a social context. **Structural (S)** relates to how societies are organised and divided. This might involve how people with power hold on to it and stop others gaining it - this is oppression.

Thompson describes how oppression and discrimination become institutionalised in the wider social structures (e.g education, politics, housing, the legal system, class). This model, therefore, illustrates how inequalities and discrimination are perpetuated in society. Questions around diversity have been debated within the framework of what has come to be termed 'anti-oppressive practice' and we can use the PCS model to examine themes in our work.

In challenging processes such as the discrimination of people on the basis of

their ethnic background we, as practitioners, must reflect on our **Personal** prejudices; we must challenge the **Cultural** assumptions (e.g things like derogatory language and views towards a group); and also question the **Structural** allocation of power, systems and social institutions that discriminate and exclude. For example, has a group been excluded because of power-based processes like colonisation which have not been addressed in the legal system?

As noted in Unit 1, minority groups can be subject to discrimination and marginalisation and their culture and identity may largely go unrecognised in the public space, which often results in wider social marginalisation and problems. At this point think again about the various minority groups in your country, then the PCS model of anti-oppressive practice and how this might help you work with young people from these groups.

It is important to consider the application of anti-oppressive practice skills in how we present written communication, gatekeeping reports, and written programmes. Language and verbal communication skills are also fundamental in the training of Community Youth Workers. We must consider our words and phrases, how we "talk" about cultural diversity, our comments and humour. This is because





Anti-Opressive Practice means being aware and willing to challenge.

Conversation is also an important skill through which youth work is carried out and involves many important qualities, such as concern for others, trust (which we have already described) and respect for ourselves and others. Other important skills discussed below are rapport and relationship-building. The relationship and ability to engage young people and groups is central to practice. Active listening, communication skills and confidence to challenge are essential elements in the repertoire of skills for youth work in a diverse society, especially in overcoming historic divisions.

### **3. Self-Awareness and Diversity in Practice**

Understanding diversity means reflecting about who we are and how our values influence the context in which we live and carry out youth work. What does this mean in youth work practice?

It is important to consider your practice and the diverse themes in your geographic or thematic area e.g. disability, gender, race and ethnicity or the experiences of LGBT youth.

Reflecting on themes around diversity involves developing a deeper understanding of "self" – how attitudes and values are shaped and influenced by personal, cultural and structural experiences and the impact in relation to "other" people.

One of the most important practice themes is TRUST and the creation of a trusting environment in working with diversity. Youth workers require a high level of self-awareness to develop a relationship with young people to challenge discrimination and establish rapport. This creates trust between the worker and young person, allowing the space for difference to be accepted.

Young people can be afraid of other groups and individuals, leading to stereotyping, negative values, judgements and assumptions about those perceived as different. Trust is therefore an essential underpinning element in challenging this behaviour.

# Links to other Information and Reading

Here is a list of additional information which will assist you to explore questions around diverse societies and community youth work practice. The resources here will help you further understand this topic and apply to your own work.

YOUTH WORK

DIVERSITY

EQUALITY

## Journal Articles, Books and Reports

Bullock, S. Brestovanský, M. and Lenco, P. (2015). *Inclusion, Diversity and Equality in Youth Work: The Principles and Approaches*. Cheltenham: University of Gloucestershire.  
[eprints.glos.ac.uk/4286/1/01\\_Bullock%20Brestovansky%20Lenco\\_2016\\_Inclusion%20Diversity%20and%20Equality-The%20Principles%20and%20Approaches\\_FINAL0.pdf](http://eprints.glos.ac.uk/4286/1/01_Bullock%20Brestovansky%20Lenco_2016_Inclusion%20Diversity%20and%20Equality-The%20Principles%20and%20Approaches_FINAL0.pdf)

Friel, B. and McDermott, P. (2018). *Shared Stories, Safe Spaces*. Derry-Londonderry, North West Migrants Forum.  
[https://pure.ulster.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/76415442/Shared\\_Stories\\_Report\\_A4\\_v2.pdf](https://pure.ulster.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/76415442/Shared_Stories_Report_A4_v2.pdf)

Harland, K. & Morgan, S. (2003) "Youth Work with Young Men in Northern Ireland: An 'Advocacy' Approach." *Youth & Policy* 81 p74-85

Ratcliffe, P. (2004) *Race Ethnicity and Difference: Imagining the Inclusive Society*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Thompson, N. (2012) *Anti-Discriminatory Practice*, 5th Edn, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

## Websites

Multicultural Practice in Youth Work

<https://www.cyc-net.org/cyc-online/cycol-0103-whittaker.html>

Resources for Intercultural or Inclusive Youth Work

<http://www.intercultural.ie/articles/resources-for-intercultural-or-inclusive-youth-work/>

# Wrapping Up

This unit examined our understanding of diversity , diverse society and the practice of diversity in community youth work. Readers are asked to consider knowledge, skills and self-awareness and how practice is informed by our understanding of Structural, Cultural and Personal oppression and discrimination in community youth work and the skills required to be informed practitioners.

## Summary

A key question for youth workers is to consider their own personal and cultural values and beliefs and how these impact on practice in youth work. An important theme in training is self-awareness - who we are, where we come from and how this influences our work with young people.

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## Unit 2

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<https://www.youthworkandyou.org/ywelp-four/>

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