

# *Crosscurrents*

Steering a course for *youth work* as a growth profession  
in the Commonwealth and in Europe

3<sup>rd</sup> Commonwealth Conference on Youth Work

Conference: 6-8 November 2018

DB San Antonio Hotel, Triq it-Turisti,  
Qawra, St Paul's Bay  
Malta

This conference will address youth work across the Commonwealth and Europe, examining, connecting and looking to strengthen the status and standard of practice.

This will include exploration and discussion of professionalisation, its place, the potential and actual development of its meaning and contextual relevance globally.

### Theme

Theme of the conference: “Crosscurrents - steering a course for youth work as a growth profession in the Commonwealth and in Europe”.

As part of both, the Maltese Islands are in the crosscurrents between the Commonwealth and Europe, and in the crosscurrents between how they interface and interact in the development of youth work as a growth profession.

### Context

Recent policy initiatives and developments in the youth work field in both the Commonwealth and Europe provide us with an opportunity to discuss and consider together some of the salient features of youth work and how it can best be promoted as a professional practice that supports the education and development of young people worldwide. What are the values, policies, methods, practices and priorities that we have in common? Where are the points of difference, variation and perhaps counter-flow? What can we learn from each other and how do we go about sharing our knowledge and experiences to enable us to work together in the future, alongside young people, to create a better world?

At the 9<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Youth Ministers’ Meeting in Kampala, Uganda, Ministers reiterated their commitment to promote youth work as a profession across sectors that work with young people, and in relation to advancing the Commonwealth Higher Education Consortium for Youth Work. (CYMM Communique, 2017, p. 3). These commitments to the recognition of youth work were further strengthened at the 2018 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting held in London.

In tandem with these government commitments, the Commonwealth published *Youth Work in the Commonwealth - A Growth Profession* in 2017, a survey of 35 Commonwealth countries on the recognition and practice of youth work. It had the aim of:

*“...to establish a baseline to inform planning and implementation of initiatives to professionalise youth work among Commonwealth member states”.*

The Commonwealth Alliance of Youth Workers’ Associations (CAYWA) was also established by the Commonwealth Secretariat in 2016 during the 2<sup>nd</sup> Commonwealth Conference on Youth Work to ensure the representation of practitioner voices across the

Commonwealth and now is voice to 15 member associations and collectives across the Commonwealth.

In Europe, there has been a particular focus in recent years on the promotion and development of quality youth work. The European Commission’s communication “Engaging, Connecting and Empowering young people - a new EU Youth Strategy” (2018) includes among its aims, “supporting youth empowering through quality, innovation and recognition of youth work” and implementing “a youth work agenda to increase the recognition of non-formal learning”. The Council of Europe’s “Recommendation on Youth Work” (2017) states that;

*“...youth work makes an important contribution to active citizenship by providing opportunities to acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes for civic engagement and social action”.*

As part of the strategy for the knowledge-based development of youth work in Europe, a mapping exercise on existing education/training and carrier paths for youth workers in member states was conducted in 2017.

### The way the conference will work

The aims of the conference:

- The promotion of discussion, debate and exchange between practitioners, Ministers and other stakeholders,
- Provision of opportunities for CAYWA members and others to liaise/work with senior government officials in developing potential actions/strategies to raise the quality of youth work in Commonwealth member states and Europe,
- Facilitation of the building of partnerships between European and Commonwealth where possible/appropriate.

This will be done through

- Open spaces for discussion and debate of topics generated by conference participants,
- Four workshops specifically related to the conference themes,
- Present seminal speakers, to encourage stimulate the above.

Participants will be encouraged to move around the venue and explore innovative ideas in youth work. It is envisaged that participants, including senior officials and CAYWA members will use the opens spaces to organise dedicated meetings and seminars

focused on developing concrete actions to advance youth work in their own national context and globally. In short, the structure of the event will be participatory and to an extent voluntary, that many might understand as being in the tradition of youth work.

### Creators not Consumers

Generally speaking the structure of the event will be participatory and to an extent voluntary, that many might understand as being in the tradition of youth work. As far as possible we will look to facilitate forms of co-production. There is a certain amount of potential chaos built into this model, but as adults and as such potentially autonomous learners, we are confident that participants will be able to organise themselves. If this proves to any extent not the case, there is certainly learning in that.

We have chosen to use at least part of our time together to foster creativity, positive and constructive argument; the invitation is for you to be actively involved in the generation of the product of what is 'our' event (not your, their or my conference). We do not want nurture forms of inactive consumption of other people's ideas – when we all fly our separate ways the hope is there will be a sense of 'usness' and that our collective vision will show that 'we' have made something 'we' can carry forward.

### Co-production

There is no single formula for co-production but there are some key features that are present in co-production initiatives. They include:

- Helping define people's assets with skills
- breaking down the barriers between people
- building on people's existing capabilities
- encourage reciprocity (where people get something back for having done something for others) and mutuality (people working together to achieve their shared interests)
- working with peer and personal support networks alongside professional networks

Co-production not an easy option. It is much harder than sitting listening to someone else and thereafter saying you agree or disagree. It is not just a word, it's not just a concept, it is a meeting of minds coming together to find a shared solution. In practice, it involves people being consulted, included and working together from the start to the end of any project that affects them. It is a way of working together to create a decision or service which works for all. The approach is value driven and built on the principle that all those in a service or provision or vision to help design it.

Co-production is a relationship where people share authority and influence to take

power to plan and deliver services or generate ideas together, recognising each person has vital contributions to make in order to improve quality of life for people and communities.

There is a difference between co-production and participation: participation means being consulted while co-production means being equal partners and co-creators.

### Dialogue and Dialectic

Education based on dialogue can be understood as an alternative to traditional education practice, which has been characterized as a process whereby experts transmit information for learners to passively receive:

*There is a new awareness now, that on all the major problems that face the modern world, no experts have all the answers. Each may have valuable information to contribute, but we need dialogue to draw in the insights of all who are concerned as we search for solutions (Hope and Timmel 1996 p.17).*

Freire devotes a chapter to elucidating his concept of dialogue in education. For Freire, this always involves both action and reflection:

*Thus, to speak a true word is to transform the world (Freire 1972 p.75).*

For Freire, dialogue humanizes, and that education without dialogue can only objectify, oppress and indoctrinate:

*Without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education (Freire 1972, p.81).*

Participants in dialogue should learn from each other, not simply impose their views and debate from fixed positions:

*...dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of one person's "depositing" ideas in another, nor can it be a simple exchange of ideas to be "consumed" by the discussants. Nor yet is it a hostile, polemical argument between men who are committed neither to the naming of the world, nor to the search for truth, but rather to the imposition of their own truth (Freire, 1972, p.79.)*

Vella (2002, p.3 and p.10) notes that the literal, etymological meaning of dialogue is "the word between us" or "through relationship". Freire suggests that the term dialogue:...is not simply another word for a mere conversation among people about everyday matters (Freire, in Leisty, 1999 p.46).

However, for Smith (2001, p.7):

*We should ... not make too much of the differences between conversation and dialogue. In common sense terms dialogue could be seen as a form of conversation - a particular 'serious' format.*

Whilst everyday conversations may seem insignificant in comparison to critical dialogue, Smith (2001, p.7) suggests that informal educators (here he is chiefly referring to youth workers) make more regular use of conversation than dialogue, and that “seemingly trivial exchanges” can actually be very important in terms of being and belonging. Arnett (1992, p.4) agrees, suggesting that rather than necessarily concerning “special moments of great depth of conversation”, dialogue in education is founded on ideas, relationships and values.

Arnett (1992, p.11) argues that dialogue cannot be a formula because each relationship “offers a different and unique starting place for discourse.” However, he is prepared to acknowledge some foundational conditions for dialogue, including: starting from a position of openness to the possibility of changing one’s mind in the light of new evidence; and a commitment to maintaining positive regard towards partners in dialogue. Similarly, Oesterreicher (1986, p.99) notes:

*...dialogue is not a surrender;  
it is rather the arduous task of listening to,  
and learning from, one another.*

This feels very important in terms of achieving an educational encounter. How can I learn from you if you are not ready, willing and able to learn about me from me? This might be thought of as the defining question that separates mere instruction or orders from the experience of education; to teach others one must be able to learn from them – for the student to learn from the tutor they must be in a place where they are prepared to teach the tutor about them as a starting point. This does not limit the capacity of the student to only teaching about themselves, but provides a foundation for both tutor and student to develop more general and broad insights.

Smith (2001) states that the concept of dialogue in education is mostly associated with Freire, Gadamer, Habermas, Bohm and Buber. He notes that:

*Today, when the word 'dialogue' is spoken in educational circles, it is often linked to Paulo Freire. The same is true of 'subject' and 'object'. Yet, in the twentieth century, it is really in the work of Martin Buber that the pedagogical worth of dialogue was realised (Smith, 2000, p.1).*

Arnett (1992, p.6) expresses concern that universities may be providing knowledge whilst failing to “offer an education beyond questions of self-advancement.” In recommending an approach based on dialogue, he cites John Gardner, who fears that tertiary education can lead to:

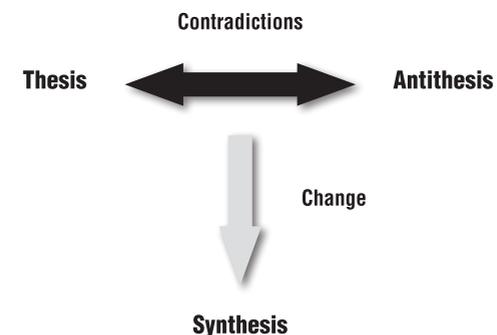
*...an overvaluing of intellect as against character, of getting there first as against growing in mind and spirit, of food for the ego as against food for the hunger of the heart (Gardner, cited in Arnett 1992, p.6).*

He goes on (p.32) notes that the educational institution that pushes every student to learn dialogically “will invite a “tyranny of intimacy.” So, although education cannot solely consist of dialogue, through dialogue education can:

*...develop students' character in a way that would enable them to live in society humanely (Morgan 2007, p.11).*

**Dialectic**

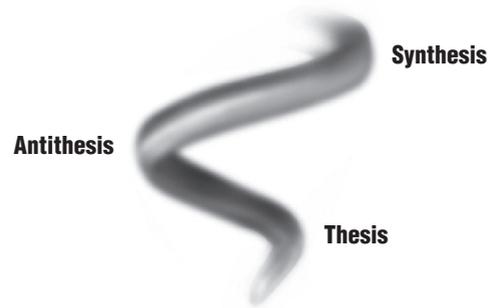
Much of what is referred to as dialogical interaction is in fact dialectical. The supervisory interaction, for it to be both educational and informative, needs to aim for more than a straightforward dialogical situation. In the best of all possible worlds supervisor and supervisee, if each are to realize being both teacher and learner, need to be aiming to promote a 'dialectic'. This, straightforwardly, is a situation wherein ideas can shared and so developed in order to promote new ideas and insights. The diagram below outlines this process:



Here you can see that one (supervisor or supervisee) starts of with an idea (Thesis). This demands to be met with ideas that might challenge/enlarge that idea (Antithesis).

This brings about a new understanding (the two perspectives coming together – the Synthesis)

A similar graphic illustrates this as a sort of ‘intellectual pathway’ for developing our understanding of reality:



As you can see, this is a leap forward from simplistic dialogue, which can become pretty much aimless, or a situation wherein it is all too easy for the supervisor to dominate the process via their aims to educate the supervisee, which they are sometimes tasked to effect by employers, even though the supervisee might feel/be told they are making the pace/creating the agenda. This dialectic process of mutual discovery might be understood as the sort of interaction one might expect following the establishment of dialogue. It complements dialogue (and dialogue allow it) while providing insights that can be expressed as opposed to what might be thought of as a ‘stationary dialogue’ where the insights cannot be expressed or transmitted. However, the above spiral might be thought of as potentially eternal rather than the picture of a whole journey.

For all this, the point is for both parties involved (although more than two people might be implicated) in the dialect to develop insight, understanding and awareness. It is a different process to that premised on the aim that the supervisee should somehow simply learn from or be educated by the supervisor. This would in fact not be education at all; it might be thought of at best to be advice giving, instruction or confessional (perhaps encompassing symbolic or actual absolution and penitence) at worse it could be understood as indoctrination, domination or colonization.

The programme will be conducted via four themes (outlined below). Each will have basic objectives linked with desired outcomes. This is not a limiting structure, and is offered to

provide a scaffold and fairly flexible direction for discussion and engagement within the open spaces provided.

### **Themed sessions**

The following four conference themes will be addressed via workshops. These will involve a 10 to 20-minute introduction. The latter will be presented not as prescriptions for practice and policy; they should not be ‘this is the way’ session, but look to facilitate, encourage and motivate exploration and questioning of and discussion about the themes, with the aim of addressing the proposed outcomes and propose definite and clear recommendation for action.

Those attending are respectfully asked not to be passive participants, but look to work together to create a positively questioning debate of issues arising. Participants are free to leave these sessions at any time as they feel fit. Engagement rather than obligatory attendance is emphasised.

#### **1. Developing and implementing policy and strategies**

Many countries have legislation, policies and/or strategies in place aimed at or encompassing young people, their education and welfare; some include youth work. However, relatively few countries appear to have specific legislative provision, policies and or/strategies for youth work: relatively few have any ‘legal’ or agreed practice based definition of youth work.

#### **2. Professionalisation, education and training**

The education and training of youth workers in many countries appears to be a mix of the formal/non-formal approaches and/or accredited/non-accredited programs/courses; the relative balance between these differs from country to country and sometimes within national contexts. The professionalisation of youth work is often seen as a contentious issue, in terms of both what it means and implies and its impact on what has often been understood traditionally as the essentially voluntary nature and character of most youth work.

#### **3. Ethics and young people’s welfare**

Ethical considerations are a feature of youth work in all countries; however, addressing issues such as the protection and safeguarding of young people varies globally. What might be considered to be ethical practice within any profession logically needs to be established by that profession. However, there are relatively few national professional associations for youth workers, fewer still can claim to be the voice of the majority of youth workers in their context. This means what is ethical, in large part, has to be assumed, using guidelines from other contexts or referral to sources that are, in the main, generated more from academic settings, rather than by the involvement

of and consultation with grassroots practitioners. Often, what passes for ethical consideration is closer to expressions of personal and group morality.

Nonetheless, it is common to look to apply ethical standards that can work to ensure appropriate behaviour/conduct, something that is central to the very concept of youth work. It is hard to see how such considerations might not be a defining feature of professionalisation. For youth workers, both professional and voluntary, standards of ethical practice and behaviour are essential for what they do.

#### 4. *Emerging issues and innovative responses*

The old geographic, cultural, and economic differences that long defined the world have either vanished or are fast disappearing. These often oppressive or at least limiting structures are being replaced by new realities, new opportunities and new challenges for the youth of the world. Young people today are confronted with novel developments in the ways and means of learning; often rapid economic change, social dislocation and growing, if uneven, affluence; increasing urbanization and rural isolation. At the same time the effects of climate change and threats to the natural environment pose far reaching and complex challenges to future populations. Political instability and the shadow of ethnic and religious conflict, increasing social and economic inequalities, forms of radicalization, extremism and violence hang over the lives of many young people. How youth work and youth workers respond to these new challenges and opportunities will determine the future of youth work but also this can potentially play a positive part in addressing national, regional and global agenda and concerns.

#### ***The open space***

This part of the conference is the opportunity for participants to add their voice to proceedings. You will need to let the Open Space Organiser (OSP) who will be introduced at the start of the conference, know what kind of contribution you want to make (seminar, talk, lead or propose a discussion group and so on) and the subject area. On a 'first-come-first-serve' basis you will be allocated a space and time to make, host or present your contribution. In the spirit of the overall ethos of the conference, that is based on dialogical processes that facilitate dialectical discussion the 'open spaces' should not be used to deliver lectures or be dominated by a single person input. Straightforwardly the open spaces should engender and promote non-formal (youth work oriented) conversation. To state the obvious didactic, non-inclusive presentations would not fit this description.

On the first day of the conference the OSP will be ready and happy to discuss how ideas for the open spaces can be shaped to fit this criteria.

#### **Bibliography**

- Arnett, R.C. (1992) *Dialogic Education: Conversation About Ideas and Between Persons*, Southern Illinois University Press : Carbondale
- Freire, P. (1972) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Herder and Herder : New York
- Hope, A. and Timmel, S. (1996), *Training for Transformation* Mambo Press
- Morgan, W.J. (2007) Martin Buber: Philosopher of Dialogue and of the Resolution of Conflict, *British Academy Review*, Issue 10, 2007, p p.11-14
- Oesterreicher, J.M. (1986) *The Unfinished Dialogue: Martin Buber and the Christian Way*, Philosophical Library : New York
- Smith, M.K. (2001) *Dialogue and Conversation*, the encyclopaedia of informal education, [www.infed.org/biblio/b-dialog.htm](http://www.infed.org/biblio/b-dialog.htm) last updated in 2001
- Vella, J. (2002). *Learning to Listen, Learning to Teach: The Power of Dialogue in Educating Adults*, Jossey-Bass

## THE PROGRAMME

Monday 5<sup>th</sup> November 2018

### Arrivals

Day 1: Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> November 2018

09:00	<p><b>Registration / Introduction to theme and topics</b></p> <p>Participants will get to know each other and are introduced to the theme and the cross current topics:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Developing and implementing policy strategies;</li> <li>2. Professionalization, education and training;</li> <li>3. Ethics and young people's welfare;</li> <li>4. Emerging issues and innovative responses.</li> </ol>
09:30	<p><b>Exploring the Local Context</b></p> <p>After getting each participant to choose a cross current topic, participants will visit a site to get introduced to the Maltese context.</p>
13:00	<p><b>Buffet Lunch</b></p>
14:30	<p><b>Official opening of the conference</b></p> <p><b>Welcome Addresses</b></p> <p>Hon Clifton Grima Parliamentary Secretary for Youth, Sport and Voluntary Organisations</p> <p>Mr Mauro Pace Parascandolo Executive Director MCVS</p> <p><b>Exploring the international context</b></p> <p>Contributions from the European Commission, Council of Europe and the Commonwealth Secretariat about recent youth policy developments in their institutions.</p>
16:00	<p><b>Coffee Break</b></p>
16:30	<p><b>Inspiring Key Note Addresses:</b></p> <p>'Young people, navigational capacities and the role of youth work'</p> <p>Sharlene Swartz, Executive Director: Education and Skills Development Human Sciences Research Council.</p> <p>'Communities of practice and practice architectures'</p> <p>Tomi Kiilakoski, Senior Researcher, Finnish Youth Research Network.</p>

17:45	<b>Reflections, introduction to the Open Space and conclusion of the day</b>
19:00	<b>Departure for dinner</b>
20:30	<b>Night tour at Mdina and Dinner at Bottegin Restaurant in Rabat</b>

Day 2: Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> November 2018

09:00	<p><b>Plenary</b></p> <p>'The Voice of the Youth worker and the Role of Youth Work Associations'</p> <p>Robyn Broadbent, Chair for the Commonwealth Alliance of Youth Workers Associations</p>
09:30	<p><b>Plenary</b></p> <p>'Professionalisation'</p> <p>Dana Fusco, City University of New York</p>
10:45	<p><b>Break</b></p>
11:15	<p><b>Parallel Sessions</b></p> <p><b>Workshop 1: Developing and Implementing Policy Strategies</b></p> <p>Facilitated by Layne Robinson and Miriam Teuma</p> <p><b>Workshop 2: Professionalisation, Education and Training</b></p> <p>Facilitated by Robyn Broadbent and Jane Melvin</p> <p><b>Workshop 3: Ethics and Young People's Welfare</b></p> <p>Facilitated by Tim Corney</p> <p><b>Workshop 4: Emerging Trends</b></p> <p>Facilitated by Tamara Methebula and Jason Zammit</p> <p>In this first round of workshops participants will discuss the role of the principal stakeholders: the state, the voluntary sector, young people and supranational organisations with regards to these cross current topics.</p>
	<p><b>Workshops (cont.)</b></p> <p>In this second round of workshops participants must set out in writing what they perceive the role of the principal stakeholders are and a way forward.</p>
13:00	<p><b>Lunch</b></p>
14:30	<p><b>Open Space for Innovative Practice and Initiatives – Round 1</b></p> <p>This space will be facilitated by two open space organisers and participants are encouraged to share their innovative practices.</p>



