UNIT 3:
Global Youth Work: A transformative youth work practice model
WELCOME TO UNIT 3: Please watch the Unit 3 Video before proceeding further.

Setting the Scene –
Global Youth Work: A transformative youth work practice model

What you will learn

In this unit you will learn about:

• The key knowledge, skills and attitude that Global Youth Work seeks to foster as a critical social education model of youth work.
• How Global Youth Work relates to anti-oppressive practice, which seeks to address injustice, inequality and discrimination.
• Why Global Youth Work is a transformative practice and the key thinkers, writers and activists who have shaped the Global Youth Work approach.
• How reflecting on our own lives, assumptions, worldviews is crucial to being a Global Youth Work practitioner.

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The Knowledge, skills and attitudes fostered in Global Youth Work

Good Youth Work seeks to support young people to learn from one another alongside practitioners and to address their needs and interests collectively (Sapin, 2013: 4). A Global Youth Work approach recognises that globalisation and global justice issues impact on young people’s learning, needs and interests in a variety of ways. Global youth work seeks to help young people to understand and take action on the global issues which impact on their lives by:

- Starting from young people’s everyday experiences.
- Engaging them in critical analysis of local and global influences on their lives and communities.
- Raising awareness of globalisation, the world’s history and rich diversity of peoples, particularly in relation to issues of justice and equity.
- Encouraging young people to explore the relationships and links between their personal lives and the local and global communities.
- Seeking young people’s active participation to build alliances and create change, locally and globally.

– DEA (2007:21)

Global Youth Work seeks to foster the knowledge, skills and values of young people in a variety of ways.

Knowledge and understanding –
That young people may develop knowledge and critical understanding of:

- local, national and global societies and cultures.
- globalisation and the global dimensions of the world around them.
- the role of human rights and human rights approaches locally and globally.
- the impact of personal or local action on global events.

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**Skills** – Young people may develop the ability to:

- analyse issues critically.
- carry out enquiries.
- challenge their own and others’ attitudes.
- build alliances with others locally and globally.
- show empathy and global solidarity.
- take action collectively to address issues.

**Attitudes** – Young people may develop attitudes that demonstrate:

- self-respect.
- self-awareness;
- support for justice and fairness.
- open-mindedness.
- critical thinking and reflection.
- a global perspective on their world.
- an orientation toward action.

**Global Youth Work and critical social education**

Global Youth Work, according to Adams (2014: 139) is aligned to a Critical Social Education model where (Hurley and Treacy, 1993: 41–43):

- Youth work has the positive intention of transferring power to young people.
- Relationship with young people is undertaken with a view to ‘engaging’ them as partners.
- Youth worker adopts the role of ‘problem poser’.
- Young people actively involved in identifying, exploring and understanding issues of concern to them.
- Two-way process of mutual dialogue between young people and adults.
- Action is the result of analysis and reflection.
Hurley and Treacy suggest the ‘outcomes for young people’ of this model include:

- Young people have developed the ability to analyse and assess alternatives and the capacity to define ‘their position’ in their world and the skills to act to change it that they sought.
- Young people are aware of the inequities which institutions promote.
- Young people are active in mobilising groups at local level to seek changes within existing structures.

**Global Youth Work as Anti-Oppressive Practice**

Youth work is an ethical practice which is concerned with the promotion of the rights, voices and interests of young people within a human rights and equality frame. It is recognised that ‘an ethical obligation exists for youth workers to challenge the social structures that cause young people to be marginalised and disadvantaged’ (D’arcy, 2016). Flowing from this ethical commitment, a Global Youth Work approach encourages and supports practitioners and young people to identify, explore and address oppressive social structures locally and globally.

In the video accompanying this unit, you will hear a variety of practitioners speak about youth work as an anti-oppressive practice.

An anti-oppressive approach to practice is concerned with an awareness of power differentials, challenging wider injustices in society and working towards a model of empowerment and liberation. It is a practice that requires youth workers and youth practitioners to have an understanding of oppression and power, a commitment to empowerment, and the ability to reflect, critically analyse and change their practice (Chouhan, 2009: 61).

Oppression has several faces, according to Iris Young (2005):

- Exploitation;
- Marginalisation;
- Powerlessness;
- Cultural imperialism;
- Violence;
Incorporating an anti-oppressive approach into our work with young people is crucial because without it, we may unconsciously reinforce discrimination and oppression for young people and their communities. As Thompson (2016: 10) argues:

‘practice which does not take account of oppression, and the discrimination which gives rise to it, cannot be seen as good practice, no matter how high its standards may be in other respects’.

Thompson (2016) suggests that oppression occurs in society at multiple interconnected spaces – personal (P) cultural (C), structural (S) – which must be addressed in an anti-oppressive practice. The personal space is that of words and actions between individuals. This is in turn shaped by ideas in the wider culture, promoted by the media, social media, education etc. Such widely held and promoted attitudes then shape the laws and institutions of society – the structural level.

Paying attention to each of these spaces, global youth workers can critically reflect on the ways in which oppressive experiences and practices arise and impact on the lives of young people. Thompson’s (2016) framework enables us to analyse how oppression becomes embedded in society. Prejudices and stereotypes at the personal and cultural levels interact with structural discrimination as dominant ideologies (the values, beliefs, assumptions and worldviews of the most powerful group in society) shape our social worlds. The viewpoints, experiences, and values of oppressed groups are marginalised in these systems and not incorporated into how social institutions operate.

Chouhan defines what an anti-oppressive practice is and how it is based on the understanding and belief that:

- Society creates divisions and people also divide themselves.
- Some groups of people, whether consciously or unconsciously, believe that they are superior to other groups of people in society.
- Such beliefs are embedded deep within structures and institutions, in culture and in relationships with each other.
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Challenging oppression
Ideologies, together with power and prejudice, lead to systems of oppression that include:

• Classism.
• Sexism.
• Heterosexism and Cissexism.
• Discrimination toward persons who are differently-abled.
• Racism including anti-Roma and anti-Traveler racism.
• Extreme nationalism and xenophobia.

Ideologies include but are not limited to:

• Capitalism (the dominance/superiority of the wealthy leading to classism).
• Patriarchy (the dominance/superiority of men leading to sexism).
• Heteronormativity (the dominance/ superiority of heterosexual people leading to homophobia).
• Cisnormativity (the assumption that all, or almost all, individuals are cisgender – i.e., they identify with the sex assigned at birth).
• Ableism (the belief that able-bodied people are superior to persons who are differently abled).
• Eugenics (the dominance/superiority views of white Western people based on false science leading to racism, and historically to discrimination toward groups such as Roma, persons who are differently abled, and LGBTQ+ people and peoples that were colonised. Its legacy continues today with discrimination predominantly directed toward racialised groups).

Video on anti-oppressive practice:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PbTOWG1q1UY

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What makes Global Youth Work transformative?

This section will explore the journey of change and consciousness raising using the tools of Global Youth Work. You will see that Global Youth Work promotes critical consciousness and action for youth workers and young people, where they think critically about their world in order to challenge inequality and oppression, and advocate for social justice. Practitioners reflect on the transformative nature of Global Youth Work in the accompanying video.

As we explored in unit 1, Paulo Freire’s (1972) educational approach emphasised the unity of action and reflection (praxis) to support learners to become active agents in their lives and communities (we will explore Freire further below). Similarly, in the core of a Global Youth Work approach lies the prospect of transformation through action and reflection. This is a journey that ties in with some of the values central to youth work. These values include:

- Creating a safer and more secure space for young people to be able to learn, express themselves and be challenged.
- Being honest when exploring with them the truth about inequality, oppression and discrimination.
- Supporting the personal and social development of young people.
- Promoting life skills, including leadership, teamwork, planning and decision making, communication, problem solving, initiative and responsibility.
- Presenting different approaches and possibilities of working together
- such as non-hierarchical collective work.

—Transforming Hate in Youth Settings (NYCI, 2018)

Justice, agency and critical thinking: Key thinkers and actors for global youth work

This section examines the contributions of three important thinkers and actors who have shaped the philosophy of Global Youth Work: Paulo Freire, bell hooks, and Augusto Boal. Each of these people worked to understand the nature of oppression and how we can work collectively to address it. Their writings and lives offer us a variety of critical insights and practical tools.
Paulo Freire and liberatory education

Paulo Freire was a teacher and philosopher from Brazil. As a child from a poor family, he spent his days playing football with other children in his neighbourhood. A change in family fortunes enabled Freire to attend university and train as a teacher, but his early upbringing shaped how he understood poverty and later it helped him construct his arguments on education and its role in people’s lives.

Key to Freire’s understanding was his realisation that poverty affected his and other people’s ability to learn. By looking at the causes and the cycles of poverty, Freire further understood that social conditioning is the prime influencer in people’s lives as he saw a direct relationship between social class, knowledge and the role of socioeconomic privilege.

Freire developed a highly successful radical literacy programme which he described as a pedagogy of liberation. The word pedagogy refers to the methods and practice of teaching. In his famous book, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, first published in English in 1972, Freire identified how oppressive social structures are reinforced through the mainstream method of education. He called this the ‘banking model’ of education because teachers deposited information in students’ heads without the students developing critical thinking skills. Freire felt that this banking approach is an instrument of oppression because, by denying students the ability to question injustice and inequality, it sustained oppressive social structures.

In contrast to the banking model, Freire advocated a problem-posing concept of education as an instrument for liberation. In this approach, educators asked questions which encouraged critical thinking for the whole group. This supported educators and learners to engage in consciousness raising: a mutual process of liberation from the ideas which constrained and oppressed them. Freire defined consciousness raising as ‘learning to perceive social, political and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality’ (Freire, 1972). Taking a problem posing approach in global youth work, practitioners and young people can begin to recognise the contradictions in our lives and change the narrative and act together in a process of inquiry.

This short video explains how Freire’s early literacy programme supported peasant farming communities to both learn to read/write and think critically. Freire described this as learning to name the word and the world.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ZgV0eJ1qwQ
Applying Freire’s method in Global Youth Work

Freire called his group learning spaces ‘culture circles’. While youth workers might not adopt this terminology, Freire’s philosophy and approach can be adapted to the local context of practice. The culture circle has a number of stages. Let’s look at how youth workers might use this approach in Global Youth Work.

**Stage one: Listen to young people**
Youth workers begin by listening informally to young people to understand how globalisation is experienced by young people, how it affects their lives and identities. Workers might note the challenges, injustices, inequalities – as well as opportunities and possibilities – that arise in the young peoples’ worlds. Freire called this stage a ‘Listening survey’.

**Stage two: Identify key issues**
After spending some time listening to the lived experiences and concerns of young people, youth workers meet to discuss what they have heard and identify the key issues, which Freire called ‘generative themes’ because they have the potential to generate the energy for action with a group. In a global youth work process, workers might reflect on how young people’s issues relate to and connect with globalisation and global justice.

**Stage three: Make or find creative prompts**
With the Freirean approach, youth workers are not trying to give answers to the issues they have heard from the young people. Instead, they aim to prompt a discussion. To do this, youth workers identify some prompts such as images, poems, songs/music videos, stories or movie clips. These prompts capture and reflect back to the young people the ‘generative themes’. Freire called the prompts ‘codes’ because they have meaning encoded in them.

**Stage four: dialogue**
The youth workers come together with the young people and use the prompts to facilitate a creative dialogue about the ‘generative themes’. Youth workers focus on posing questions and inviting reflection from diverse voices. The reflective practice exercises in unit 1 might be used as workshop tools here.

**Stage five: Identifying and taking action**
Key to the Freirean approach is supporting people to feel empowered to act in the world and address the issues that affect them. Through the process of dialogue, a response to the issues might emerge from the young people and workers can support them to take action together. This process might be repeated several times or adapted as a group evolves its understanding through the reflection and action process of praxis. It may be combined with a variety of other tools and approaches, such as Augusto Boal’s Forum Theatre, discussed below.
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The role of emotions in global youth work

“People will act on the issues on which they have strong feelings. There is a close link between emotions and the motivation to act. All education and development projects should start by identifying the issues which the local people speak about with excitement, hope, fear, anxiety or anger.” (Hope and Timmel, 1984: 8)

Freire brought his transformative practice to life by talking about the link between emotion and motivation. He believed that transformative education is not limited to reason and action but also must link into feelings; emotion is key to transformation. Only by starting with the issues that raise strong feelings for young people—hope, fear, worry, anger, joy, sorrow, and bringing these to the surface, do we have the opportunity to challenge apathy and a sense of powerlessness. See the Global Issues Spectrum in Unit 2.

Freire believed that people are not naturally apathetic, but when blocked from reaching their potential, they may slide into apathy (Hope and Timmel, 2014). The role of the youth worker is to help young people find hope and connection as they tap into their natural energy. Workers do this by listening to young people and identifying the generative themes which can draw out energy and hope through creative dialogue. This approach seeks to support critical thinking about global issues.

bell hooks, critical thinking and agency

Critical thinking is one of the corner stones of Global Youth Work practice. In the video accompanying this unit you will hear a variety of practitioners reflecting on the role of youth workers in supporting critical thinking. Freire demonstrated the power of asking questions rather than imposing answers. Thinking critically about the social structures in which we find ourselves was also crucial for bell hooks (1952–2021) a Black feminist scholar and activist who grew up in Kentucky, US, during a time of racial segregation and discrimination. hooks deliberately styled her own name with lower case letters to focus attention on her message rather than herself. Her message was one of love and justice, using critical thinking and action to question and dismantle systems of domination and oppression in society.
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For Chouhan (2009), critical thinking and analysis is essential for youth workers and youth practitioners to work in an anti-oppressive way. In order to be able to enter into and facilitate problem-posing spaces with young people, youth workers must explore their own values, assumptions and position in society. This includes:

• Identifying and challenging assumptions.
• Recognising the importance of the social, political and historical context of events, assumptions, interpretations and behaviour.
• Imagining and exploring alternatives to the status quo.
• Exercising reflective skepticism towards claims to universal truths or ultimate explanations.

Reflection – Naming our oppressions and privileges

• On your own or with colleagues think of examples from your own life where you may have experienced oppression? It may be your own experience or something you observed.
• On your own or with colleagues think of examples from your own life where you may have experienced privilege?
• Can you think of or describe when you have changed the narrative of your life in fighting oppression and/or acknowledging privilege?

I think thinking critically is at the heart of anybody transforming their life and I really believe that a person who thinks critically, who, you know, may be extraordinarily disadvantaged, materially, can find ways to transform their lives, that can be deeply and profoundly meaningful in the same way that someone who maybe incredibly privileged materially and in crisis in their life may remain perpetually unable to resolve their life in any meaningful way if they don't think critically.

–bell hooks (2005), also available here: 4mins 10 sec  
https://youtu.be/zQUuHFKP-9s

Hand in hand with critical thinking skills is having agency, which Chabal (2009: 7) defines as ‘directed, meaningful, intentional and self-reflective social action’. Agency means having a sense of responsibility for our own lives, and having the motivation and confidence to take action in situations in order to positively benefit our lives.
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According to the Indian philosopher of social justice Amartya Sen in Development as Freedom (1999: 18–19), to be an ‘agent’ is to be ‘someone who acts and brings change, and to whose achievements can be judged in terms of her own values and objectives whether or not we assess them in terms of some external criteria as well’. As the anti-oppressive practice lens shows, a person’s agency is influenced by the cultural and structural context around them. As Musolf (2003: 3) explains:

Human beings are producers as well as produced, shapers as well as shaped, influencing as well as influenced... Agency emerges through the ability of humans to ascribe meaning to objects and events, to define the situation based on those meanings, and then to act. Endowed with agency, the oppressed can oppose [oppressive] structure... they can and have taken to the streets and won policy for themselves.

As the well-known youth work text by Mark K. Smith (1982) says, our practice aims to support young people to be ‘creators not consumers’. In other words, youth workers are supporting young people to experience their agency as creators of their own world. Of course, a sense of agency varies from person to person, community to community, country to country and continent to continent. It is important to acknowledge that one’s agency is dependent on a number of significant factors including economic circumstances and resources, knowledge and education, legal, social and cultural issues, geography, and whether one lives in a democracy or not. We may also experience a strong sense of agency in some areas of our lives and feel like that agency is constrained in other areas. Oppression can also work by encouraging people to internalise negative self-images and a lack of confidence (Moane, 2011).

This is what the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu called **symbolic violence**, or unconscious modes of social and cultural domination (Threadgold, 2017).
bell hooks (2005) explains further how agency relates to our internalised self-view:

‘As someone who’s moved from teaching at very fancy private predominantly white schools to teaching at an urban, predominantly non-white campus in Harlem. The first thing I noticed was that my students were equally brilliant in the Harlem setting as they were when I taught at Yale or Oberlin but their senses of what the meaning of that brilliance was and what they could do with it, their sense of agency was profoundly different. You know when students came to Yale, they came there knowing that they are the best and the brightest and they think that they have a certain kind of future ahead for them and they in a sense are opened to embracing that future. It has nothing to do with the level of knowledge. It has more to do with their sense of entitlement about having a future and when I see among my really brilliant students in Harlem, many of whom have very difficult lives, they work, they have children, is that they don’t have that sense of entitlement, they don’t have that imagination into a future of agency and as such, I think many professors do not try to give them the gift of critical thinking.

In a certain kind of patronizing way education just says, all these people need is tools for survival, basic survival tools, like their degree so they can get a job and not, in fact, that we enhance their lives in the same way we’ve enhanced our lives by engaging in a certain kind of critical process.’

As global youth workers, we aim to address these issues by supporting young people to critically question and reflect on the ways in which their agency is constrained, including by internalised assumptions about what “people like us” do and can’t do in the world (Ruane, 2018). Developing critical thinking provides a frame to think about the world in which we live and to question the things that we may take for granted. This is supported by youth workers who recognise the role transformative education plays in supporting young people to develop the knowledge, skills, and confidence, to be empowered and to take informed action to enhance their lives and those in the communities they are part of and interact with.
Stepping onto the stage: Augusto Boal, forum theatre and agency

Augusto Boal (1931–2009) was a Brazilian theatre practitioner and activist who was influenced by Freire’s ideas to use drama and theatre techniques to support people to become aware of their own and other people’s oppressions. Boal’s ‘Forum Theatre’ approach (2001) invites both actors and audiences to stage dramas that depict lived experiences of oppression or injustice in a community. Forum theatre facilitators then re-run the drama and invite the audience to pause the action and suggest alternative endings aimed at defeating the oppression. In doing this, Boal hoped to support people to move from spectators to ‘spect-actors’ in their own lives. To do this, Boal argued that it is important to understand the impact of systems of oppression in everyday life and explore the role of power and dominance in society. The forum theatre approach allows people to do this work together through playful experimentation. In playing out a scene, Boal invited people to consider:

- Who has the greatest influence?
- What do those with the greatest influence say?
- In what ways do those with power benefit by maintaining their dominance?

The forum theatre approach helps participants to reflect on how people with power in situations of oppression work to maintain their dominance through everyday social interactions at the personal level and ideological constructs at the cultural level, whereby those in power shape dominant ideas of what is acceptable, normal behavior. This, as we have explored in our discussion of anti-oppressive practice, then leads to structural oppression and discrimination through the laws and institutions of the state.

Examples include a legislative system that condemns homosexuality; eugenics as an academic theory that puts white people on the top of a hierarchy based on skin colour; patriarchy that treats women as second-class citizens; capitalism that assumes the dominance of financial wealth as a means of valuing everything, including care work.

Youth workers should not be put off by a feeling that they are not actors or directors: Boal’s approach is designed for ordinary people to explore their lived realities and develop their agency to address the issues they face. It has been used with young people around the world in a variety of settings (Duffy and Vettraino, 2010).
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Returning to reflective practice

In unit 1, we explored the importance of reflective practice for Global Youth Work. In this unit we delved more deeply into the theory behind a Global Youth Work approach, with a particular focus on how it relates to anti-oppressive practice. Reflective practice is a key tool for youth workers who wish to analyse and address oppression and inequality in society. Our ability to reflect on these issues shapes our ability to respond to them. This honours our ethical commitment as practitioners to the young people with whom we work. As Chouhan (2009: 73) notes, the reflective practitioner is one who recognises:

Ethical dilemmas and conflicts and how they arise (for example through unequal power relationships with users; contradictions within the welfare state; society’s ambivalence towards the welfare state…). They are more confident about their own values and how to put them into practice; they integrate knowledge, values and skills; reflect on practice and learn from it; are prepared to take risks and moral blame. There is recognition that personal agency and values may conflict and that the worker as a person has moral responsibility to make decisions about these conflicts.

Exercise – Identifying power and privilege:

• On your own or with colleagues try this exercise:
• Call to mind the first person you noticed today that you might identify as different to you. Maybe it was someone you met, or someone you read about or heard about on the radio. Try to recall what you thought or felt about them. Think of as many feelings and thoughts that come to your mind.
• Can you identify who holds the power between you and the person you are thinking of?
• Does their difference put one of you in more power or privilege over the other?
• Are there other differences between you that shift the relative power or privilege that you both have?
• Can you identify (or imagine) how life is different for the person with the least power? Are there places and groups that they/you are excluded from?
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Reflective questions for practice:

• Reflect on your own personal views, prejudices and stereotypes of different identities. Why do you think you hold these views, and how are they reinforced?
• Do these views influence why and how you work with young people?
• How do you explain the differences in the life chances and opportunities open to different groups of young people you work with?
• In what ways do you seek to challenge inequality and oppression?

(For a more detailed exploration of bringing a transformative approach into your practice, please refer to Gearing up for Transformative Practice, YouthPact, 2019).
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Aim: To introduce the Art of Change as a tool for young people to use in their activism.

The Art of Change reminds us that change is a journey, a process with stages, a set of signposts for how we might best attempt to do something about the issues that are causing harm to our communities, our society and the world as a whole.

The Art of Change is a tool, it challenges us to be prepared for change making, to be conscious of the journey at all stages, to commit to a process and to accept that it may take time.

The Art of Change is an invitation to START something, it's a reason to gather the combined energy and the collective imagination of a group of people who see the necessity of change making and the responsibility of being a change maker as fundamentally linked.

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References


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Books

bell hooks – *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (1994)


Websites and Web Resources

Development Education

Focus Learning – exploring the subject of learning in youth work

Global Youth Work And Development Education – National Youth Council of Ireland

Participatory Methods

Partners Training For Transformation

CONCEPT Journal – celebrating the 50th anniversary of the publication of Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

CDRA The truth of the work – theories of change in a changing world

Co-Creating Youth Spaces: A Practice Based Guide for Youth Facilitators

The Barefoot Guide Connection – A convergence of creative ideas, stories, practices and resources from social change leaders and practitioners across the world

Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures Collective – A collective of educators producing excellent tools and resources for critical education on global issues.
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Coyote Magazine & T-Kits – CoE-EU Youth Partnership Resources

- Human Rights
- Discrimination
- Sustainability and Youth Work
- Youth Transforming Conflict
- Intercultural Dialogue
- Human Rights Education
- T-Kit 4 Intercultural Learning

Dates for your Diary

• 20th February: World Day of Social Justice
• October: Black History Month
• 17th October: International Day for the Eradication of Poverty
• 1st December: World AIDS Day
• 18th December: International Migrants Day
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Summary

This unit focused on the theoretical concepts and philosophical ideas that underpin Global Youth Work. In particular, we highlighted how Global Youth Work supports young people to develop their critical thinking and collective agency from a values base of anti-oppression. Bringing together each of these elements, Global Youth Work is a transformative approach to youth work practice. We have seen how it requires practitioners to critically reflect on their own lives and to maintain a reflective approach to practice.
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