CONSERVATISING YOUTH WORK? :

DANGERS OF ADOPTING A *CODE OF ETHICS*

Written by Suzi Quixley and Siyavash Doostkhah, in consultation with youth workers in Queensland

There … exists, what for want of a better term I will call sub-conscious ideological influences. These include ideologies such as Individualism, Conservatism, and Pragmatism. Although few workers would claim to be adherents to any of these ideologies, they are nonetheless very powerful influences over the nature of youth work practice in Australia. The bulk of the workers in the youth affairs field would not see ideological development as important in what they do on a day to day basis. Yet they are still influenced by ideologies in a way which should not be underestimated. The result has been the conservatisation of the youth affairs field in the absence of a consciously developed ideology. That is the influence of these mainstream ideologies, fills the void. More often than not, these ideologies are the same ones that create the negative circumstances which require youth work to exist. If this isn't an ethical issue then I don't know what is.

(Chris Brown, Keynote Address at *Ethics and Standards in Youth Work Practice* Conference, YSTC-SA 1991:18)

Youth Affairs Network of Queensland Inc 2007   www.yanq.org.au

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The Youth Affairs Network of Queensland (YANQ) is the peak community youth affairs body in Queensland that promotes the wellbeing and interests of young people. YANQ was formed in 1989 and became incorporated in 1991. YANQ was established to provide sector development and advocacy services and to link regional networks of youth organisations into a State-wide network.

YANQ has a membership consisting of young people, youth workers and youth services. YANQ also works closely with youth interagencies and networks based in each region in Queensland.

YANQ achieves its aims by:
- disseminating information about youth affairs;
- providing training, forums and conferences to support the professional development of youth services;
- providing policy advice to governments;
- consulting with youth organisations and young people;
- resourcing regional and issues-based networks;
- undertaking lobbying campaigns;
- linking with key state and national bodies;
- initiating projects to respond to the needs of young people and youth organisations.

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Introduction

Recent debate over whether, or not, to adopt a Code of Ethics for youth work has been characterised by an uncritical assumption that having a code is a good thing … that it will automatically produce more ethical practice or protect against unethical practice. This paper challenges these assumptions and puts an alternate point of view about how ethical practice can be achieved in work with young people.

But first, an historical note. This is not a new debate in the youth sector. In the late 1980's and early 1990's, intense discussion occurred about how to maximise ethical practice, and whether to professionalise youth work. In fact, a 3 day conference was held in South Australia dedicated to exploring Ethics and Standards in Youth Work Practice (March 13-15, 1991). Sophisticated debate occurred about the implications of institutionalising a Code of Ethics in the sector. As a result, this pathway was not followed at the time. Many of the references in this paper are from this period. This is because there was a variety and depth of commentary on the subject then, which has not been repeated since. The arguments presented have the same relevance today, as they did then. So … sources from that period are used extensively in this paper, without apology!

The writings of Howard Sercombe are frequently criticised in this paper. These should not be interpreted as a personal criticism of Howard. Rather, it should be seen as a criticism of the youth sector … very few other writers, in recent times, have published commentary on the whole question of ethics in the sector[1], and, in particular on whether a Code of Ethics is a useful contributor to improving ethical practice within the sector. Little use has been made of the substantial existing literature on ethical codes and related topics – both across professions and, historically, within the youth sector. Howard has largely been a lone voice in consistently commenting on these areas … and most of the youth sector has simply adopted his point of view, rather than engaging in thoughtful debate on the issues.

Motivations for being a Youth Worker

Howard Sercombe has proposed that it is simple to identify a shared motivation for youth work – to serve the young person as our primary client[2]. This is a simplistic conclusion. Even street evangelists, or prison officers in the juvenile justice system, might argue that they are doing this … they, like each of us, have a particular view of what the best interests of young people are! Even a worker who cuts a young person off the dole for minor infractions, could readily argue that they see the young person as their primary client … it is teaching them to conform to real world values! The fact that it is not this simple is borne out by the fact that Sercombe does not propose that workers sign a pledge to this statement alone. He proposes a values-

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[1] Judith Bessant, Vaughan Bowie, Lauren Hoiles and Tim Corney have written articles and/or produced conference papers. However all have taken a similar position to Howard Sercombe. In the process of preparing this paper, no recent articles were found which explored alternate responses in any depth – from either an academic or practitioner perspective.

[2] Sercombe 2005:2

based Code of Ethics … to which a variety of explanatory clauses and case studies have been added. As various groups in the sector have explored this draft, they have developed their own statements that sometimes reflect quite different values. (These are explored in greater detail later.)

Even Sercombe admits that we cannot force workers to have a particular motivation. We cannot regulate the professional's own public commitment to serve[3]. Ultimately, our youth work practice is driven by our personal motivations, which in turn are driven by our personal beliefs/values or ideology[4].

Your motivation for wanting to work with young people is inseparable from your beliefs/values and the principles, morals and ethics that guide your actions:

- Some workers share values with the more conservative professions (eg. Psychology, Welfare and Community Work). They work from the assumption that **young people should change** so they can better fit into our society. They see the role of human services workers as assisting this change process.

- Some workers share values with less conservative interest groups (eg. civil/welfare rights groups). They work from the assumption that **society should change** to better accommodate the interests of the full range of its members … including young people.

- Some workers are unclear about their values, and may work from different values and/or beliefs at different times.

In reality, even personal values-consistency is very difficult to achieve. Every decision we make when interacting with, or for, young people is affected by different personal, interpersonal, organisational, social, political and environmental factors. The attempt to achieve consistency in our individual youth work practice is an ongoing process of exploration, challenge and change. When a group of people try to achieve consistency, a multiplier effect occurs. It is therefore very difficult to achieve 100% congruent organisational values and ethics. It is logically impossible to achieve sector-wide consistency, since each individual and organisation in the sector is continually learning, developing and changing their thinking and practice.

At this point in time, workers holding many different values co-exist in the youth sector, providing different types of services from different values-bases. But … can this continue? In particular, can we expect it to continue if the youth sector adopts a uniform Code of Ethics and/or professionalises?   This paper argues that institutionalisation of a Code of Ethics would inevitably stifle learning and debate, and serve to exclude some workers from the youth sector.

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[3] Sercombe 2000:6
[4] Chris Brown, Keynote Address *Ideology and Ethics in Youthwork Practice* in Youth Sector Training Council of South Australia 1991:14-19

What is Youth Work?

The youth sector does not have a common definition of youth work. In fact, some workers hold opposite views on the place of young people in society, and, therefore, the role of youth work:

Place of Young People in *Society*	Formal Ideology[5]	Model of Intervention	Role of Youth Work
Society is fundamentally sound/good. For society to be able to function effectively, aberrant individuals must adjust and conform. Individual young people are responsible for their own problems.	Pragmatism Individualism Conservatism	Treatment	Youth work aims to change individual young people so they will better fit into society through EITHER: (1) Treating their weaknesses and teaching/ forcing them to fit into society better, OR, (2) Focusing on treatment, but also seeking minor adjustments in social rules that make it difficult for young people to fit in.
	Humanism Liberalism Post-modernism	Reform	
Society is the cause of most of the problems experienced by young people … and the majority of the population. Social structures are designed to meet the needs of a few – the dominant culture. Young people experience problems because of injustices such as inequality, poverty and discrimination.	Marxism Socialism Anarchism	Individual Advocacy/ Empowerment	Youth work aims to change society so it can better meet the needs of young people through EITHER: (1) Advocating to meet the immediate needs of individuals affected by injustice, OR, (2) Giving groups of young people the means to challenge (and try to change) the injustices they all face … and ultimately improving society.
		Collective Advocacy/ Empowerment	

The word society is used here to describe the way in which social order is maintained. This includes many dimensions of power that impinge on the lives of young people – the social structures which institutionalise a culture based on winners and losers, and the way this culture has been integrated (rather like

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[5] Feminism is not included because different types of feminism relate to different mainstream ideologies.

internalised oppression) into the everyday behaviour of organisations, groups and individuals within the society as a whole.[6]

It is worth noting that many evangelists, youth workers in schools and police/prison officers would readily, and comfortably, fit into the group advocating treatment of young people.

Different Models of Intervention draw on different bodies of theory and involve very different practices. In other words, they require quite different youth work competencies (skills, knowledge, values/attitudes):

Treatment ⟷	Reform ⟷	Individual Advocacy/ Empowerment ⟷	Collective Advocacy/ Empowerment
Encourages Dependence ⟵————————————⟶			Encourages Independence/ Interdependence
Individually-oriented ⟵————————————⟶			Group-oriented
Worker involvement imposed – worker has primary power in interaction ⟵————————————⟶			Worker involvement by invitation – youth have primary power in interaction
Reinforces dominant culture norms ⟵————————————⟶			Challenges dominant culture norms
Reactive - focused on immediate outcomes (ends) ⟵————————————⟶			Proactive - focused on longer term outcomes (means)

If the sector supported a social control view of youth work, training would focus on areas such as understanding youth behaviour and social norms, work with individual young people based on conventional power over models of practice; ethical training would be concerned with understanding the rules of the profession. If the sector supported a social change view, learning would focus on understanding social systems and human rights, group work/social action skills and power with models of practice; ethical training would be concerned with understanding processes for dealing with ethical dilemmas. If the sector prevaricates and tries to include both views of youth work, the level of sophistication of knowledge/skills/ values learning in each area will be dramatically reduced … resulting in superficial learning.

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[6] This definition of society integrates both the more fluid post-modern understanding of power advocated by Sercombe (1997:2), and a more structural analysis which sees institutions and systems as driving a culture of power over young people. The definition sees the two sources of power as interdependent.

Ultimately:

> *… ideology is not just in the realm of theory and academic philosophising. Ideology is as vital to youth work practice as any other skill which a youth worker requires to do their job. In fact skills, without ideology to guide how those skills are used, can be dangerous. There is not a lot worse than a skilled person who doesn't know what they are doing.*

> *… no matter what we call it, ideology is a means, and I believe the only consistent means, by which we can be clear about what we are doing as youth workers, why we are doing it, how we are doing it, and what it is we are actually trying to achieve. Ideology provides us with a framework to approach these questions with a minimum of contradictions.* (Chris Brown, Keynote Address *Ideology and Ethics in Youthwork Practice* in Youth Sector Training Council of South Australia 1991:15)

What is Professionalism?

Professionalisation in other human services occupations

It is unrealistic to look at the place of a Code of Ethics, without looking at the context in which it exists. **Every** occupation in the human services in Australia that has adopted a Code of Ethics has ultimately professionalised (or perished!). **Once you have a set of rules, then you must have a means of policing them.** As Sercombe has acknowledged:

> *Fundamentally … the rest of the apparatus of professionalisation flows from this: from the recognition than an ethical standard is needed, and then that the integrity of the ethical standard needs to be protected.* (Sercombe 2005:1)

YACVic (quoting Judith Bessant) has taken an even more direct approach:

> *Bessant suggests that a code of ethics would have 'serious limitations unless accompanied by specific mechanisms to give it material effect. To be successful, codes need to be regulatory and enforceable by an organisation that adjudicates complaints of breaches of the code. Without the backing of legislative mandating, and proper sanctions (including the power to strike off practitioners for misconduct), the effectiveness of a code of conduct can only be minimal'.* (Cited in YACVic 2004:24)

The words people associate with professionalism reflect 2 different views:

Those who **support** professionalism will tend to use words like …	*Skilled, standards, altruism, competent, consistent, responsible, knowledgeable, ethical*
Those who **oppose** professionalism will tend to use words like …	*Remote, elitist, middle class, alienating, credentialism, standardised, academic, social status, controlling, bureaucratic*
Regardless, they are likely to include …	*Trained, accredited, recognised, powerful, well paid, accountable*

Professions have typically been seen as the means to achieve standards of behaviour within an occupational group requiring particular values, attitudes, attributes, skills and knowledge. According to one definition, professions include:

7 Steps to Professionalisation[7]	Comments
1. A defined body of knowledge and theory that is (usually) implied by a requirement of an educational degree from an accredited university.	The **foundation** of professionalism is the belief that a particular occupation requires a unique, highly specialised set of academic knowledge and skills. Given that working from different values requires different knowledge, this underlines the importance of overtly **or covertly** articulating a values stance for the profession. It is important to note that these requirements value theoretical knowledge over practical skills and, possibly, values development.
2. A training period of substantial length and specialisation that deals with symbols, not things, and develops an important subculture.	
3. A highly developed sense of community and service orientation. All services are based on universal humanitarian norms and public access (not self interest).	The idea that professionals do not act out of *self interest* is covered later. What are *universal humanitarian norms*? Clearly *norms* are different to *rights* … since many members of society do not have their universally recognised human *rights* met, these cannot be social *norms*. This clause indicates the important role professions play in ensuring maintenance of social norms.
4. Autonomy, ie. the professional proceeds by his or her own judgment or authority without supervision.	One of the key goals of professionalisation is to minimise external *interference* (accountability!). Because only members of the profession have the unique competencies required of a *professional*, professions argue that no-one else is qualified to judge the performance (including behaviour) of their members. This argument is used to justify self-regulation by professions.
5. The professional has an enduring commitment to his or her profession as an identity. The profession has an enduring set of normative and behavioural expectations that the professional internalises.	In other words – don't question!!! Professions actively discourage any questioning of their behavioural expectations by newcomers. Therefore, little training on making ethical judgments exists in most professional training programs. Only existing members of the profession determine who can, and can't become a new member.
6. A highly developed Code of Ethics and a professional organisation to maintain standards.	Ultimately, all professions have developed a Code of Ethics with lots of rules and procedures. Having a code and a professional organisation to police the code are interdependent.
7. A system of symbolic rewards or achievements in the profession.	This directly challenges the idea (Point 3) that professionalisation is not about self-interest. Once an occupation is professionalised, workers are economically rewarded … professionals generally earn more than other workers, and if their practice is privatised, stand to make even greater economic gains!

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[7] Kentsmith *et al* 1986:164

Is professionalisation the best way to achieve *standards of behaviour* or worker accountability? Do all workers need the **same** set of competencies (*values/attitudes, skills and knowledge)* to be able to successfully work with young people?   Is academic study the best, or **only,** way to learn these competencies? Will a process of **standardisation** automatically improve outcomes for young people?

Professionalisation is **not** about improving behaviour, or accountability for behaviour, in an occupational area … it is simply about moving it! It is not about whether workers can/should be made accountable, it is about who they should be accountable to. The process of professionalism **shifts responsibility for ethical standards from workers/agencies to a more remote body** of their peers (mates?). It could easily be argued that making accountability requirements more formal actually reduces accountability in practice … workers can defend themselves in a legalistic manner, and be judged by people who do not see their day to day practice, rather than those who can continually observe them! Worker behaviour is therefore judged in the absence of significant evidence about context and circumstances. And … professional bodies have an interest in protecting the reputation of their profession.

Kentsmith *et al* (above table) claim that professionals do not act out of self interest. Yet, many commentators have argued that professionalism largely meets the needs of professionals, rather than clients. Certainly:

- Attempts to professionalise based on a set of values which **challenge social norms** have met with active exclusion from social power.
- Professionalisation based on a set of values which **conform to social norms** have led to significant social, economic, person and political power for its members.

As Kay Laursen argued:

> *… professionalism by its very nature makes little difference to the underlying causes of client's problems (it does not, nor does it intend to, change the social structure in any radical way such that the more fundamental causes of problems are deal with); that when it comes to the crunch, to a choice between 'the powers that be' and the welfare of their clients, professionals opt for the former, whilst simultaneously trying to convince their erstwhile clients that this betrayal is in their best interests; and finally that professionalism militates against a genuine service to clients because it alienates the professional from his (sic) own humanity, and naturally from the common humanity he (sic) could share with a client.* (Laursen 1975:47)

Every worker is entitled to reasonable pay and conditions. It is important, here, to distinguish between professionalisation and unionisation. Industrial agreements can be written in a way that recognises a wide range of pathways (not only tertiary education) into working in a particular occupational area, such as working with young people. It can include valuing qualification by experience, link remuneration to actual job responsibilities and can allow for exercise of a wide range of values and practices. Unionisation alone has the potential to protect workers' rights whilst not institutionalising professional status.

Equally, it is important to acknowledge that unionisation does not protect against the dangers of professionalisation, particularly when the two are developed in parallel. Unionisation does not protect against workers using their professional status to improve their bottom line (even compared with *non-professionals* doing the same job) during negotiations for pay and conditions. Many industrial agreements have **reinforced** professionalism through tying pay and conditions to academic status or membership of a particular professional association.

Case study: Moves toward professionalisation in Victoria

Clearly, the moves toward professionalisation in the youth sector in Victoria are driven by worker interests. Throughout *That Old Chestnut!* (a discussion paper on professionalisation in Victoria), very little attention is paid to ethics or to the impact of professionalisation on young people. Instead, it focuses on **improving the *status of youth work*:**

> *Another alternative is to do nothing. But what impact would this have on the youth sector? … Many workers are clearly frustrated with the status quo. There is also concern that doing nothing may result in youth work being further marginalised. While related professions … pursue ongoing professionalisation, due regard may not be afforded to youth workers who are not seen as part of a profession. … So this begs the question, can the status of youth work be increased without the establishment of a professional body?* (YACVic 2004:45)

Unlike most descriptions of the aims of professional associations, the Victorian description does not see professionalisation as having a central role in protecting the interests of clients against unethical worker behaviour:

In general professional associations aim to:

- *Promote and build on the professional status of its members and recognise the expertise and proficiency of those it represents.*
- *Work closely with training bodies and tertiary institutions to ensure that qualifications provide the skills needed in the industry.*
- *Provide a forum for networking between workers and the exchange of information and ideas.*
- *Develop models of best practice.*
- *Advocate on industrial issues such as pay.*
- *Be a voice in the media about worker issues.*
- *Provide professional development opportunities.*
  (YACVic 2004:6)

However, like most definitions of a profession, YACVic's paper does emphasise formal qualifications. This is hardly surprising when Victoria has 4 degree-level, 3 post-graduate and 8 diploma/certificate level programs[8]. It is similarly unsurprising that, describing *A Brief History of Youth Work in Victoria*, 29/30 of the historic

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[8] YACVic 2004:15

milestones listed had to do with youth worker training[9]. The paper sees education and training as *an integral component of professionalisation*:

> *We trust expert systems principally because they have an expertise and authority that results from a specific knowledge and skills base that had been approved and certified by formal educational and training credentials.*

> *… restoring and building public trust in those working professionally with young people requires the systematic improvement of their intellectual and professional education … Their professional credibility can only be trusted if the education of its members is taken seriously.* (Bessant quoted in YACVic 2004:21-23)

Judith Bessant goes on to argue that a focus on skills-based training (ie. most non-University training) is an inadequate basis for youth worker competence, and therefore professionalisation[10]. YACVic, despite having not seen ethical management as a key aim of a professional association, argues that worker *professional education* and ethical standards are linked[11]. It is hardly surprising then, that 2/3 models for a professional association proposed in the paper[12], include the possibility of membership based on qualifications, with those without formal qualifications excluded from *full membership*. One alternate method of eligibility for membership is briefly mentioned … adherence to a Code of Ethics![13]

The Impact of Professionalism on Practice

As the different human services occupations have professionalised, they have invariably focused on Treatment and Reform models of practice. In disciplines such as Psychology and Social Work, Advocacy and Empowerment approaches are rarely taught or practiced. Advocacy and Empowerment have largely been marginalised and become the focus of civil rights action groups, welfare rights lobby groups, self-help groups or alternative health practitioners. These *non-professional* groups rarely have the same resources as the mainstream *professional* groups. This severely limits their ability to develop a body of knowledge/skills, build participation or provide services. Therefore, most people in need of services are forced to use services based on Treatment and/or Reform approaches.

The youth sector is in the fortunate position of being able to examine the impact of professionalisation in other disciplines. Essentially, the helping professions function as a hierarchy:
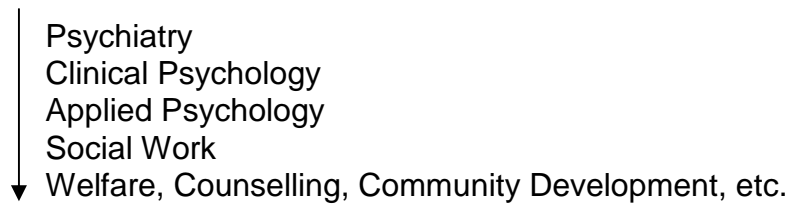
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[9] YACVic 2004:16-17
[10] YACVic 2004:23
[11] YACVic 2004:22
[12] In other words, professional models, rather than an *Industrial Relations Model* – effectively setting up a Trades Union.
[13] YACVic 2004:43-44

> Psychiatry
> Clinical Psychology
> Applied Psychology
> Social Work
> Welfare, Counselling, Community Development, etc.

The order of the hierarchy is determined by a series of factors, all related to social/structural power and status. For example, Psychiatrists have the power to prescribe mind-altering drugs and function as both *judge and jury* when making decisions about forcible incarceration of people with mental health diagnoses. They almost exclusively use a Treatment approach. They also have the highest levels of pay and social status, are the most privatised and use the most conservative models of practice (heavily based in a dominant culture definition of *normality*). They have the highest levels of legal protection around confidentiality and are allowed to use peer appraisal almost exclusively to judge their technical/ethical behaviour.

Much of the language of the mainstream medical model, and therefore its assumptions, are reflected in the thinking of professions lower down the hierarchy. At the lower end of the hierarchy, professions tend to move toward the Reform model (despite sometimes including some social justice principles in their Code of Ethics). The incentive to adopt conservative thinking is high.

In the youth sector in the 1970's and 1980's, many organisations provided services based on all 4 models of service. Most organisations which primarily provided Advocacy and Empowerment have been de-funded. Organisations which provided a mix of types of service, are now generally only funded for Treatment or Reform services … with Advocacy and Empowerment activities carried out at their own cost (often as a voluntary activity). The marginalisation of social change-oriented service provision is well underway in the sector! As Sercombe has described, funding of the sector has moved from grants (1970's/80's), to service agreements (1980's/90's), to tendering to provide services (1990's/2000's). Government has taken increasing power over practice in the sector[14]. This has occurred alongside a growth in formal accredited youth work training throughout Australia.

But …it's not only funding of the youth sector that has followed these trends. The whole human services industry has been subject to these pressures. Sercombe attributes this decline in NGO power to the fact that youth work has not professionalised[15]. This fails to address 2 questions:

- If professionalisation could have held back the wave of conservatism, then why didn't the existence of the highly professionalised occupations of Social Work, Psychology and Welfare/Community Work (with a large number of practitioners and similar values to those proposed in Sercombe's ethical drafts) *hold back the tide* and provide protection to the industry … or even those parts of the industry employing large numbers of their members?
- The youth sector has progressively *formalised* over the past 20 years … and begun to take many of the steps toward professionalism. So why didn't this

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[14] Sercombe 2000:4
[15] Sercombe nd-b:5

trend have any impact on the wave of conservatism toward the human services in general, or youth work in particular?

It would be **at least as logical** to argue that professionalism, and movement toward professionalism, **caused** the Human Services Industry's inability to fight back when cuts and controls were being implemented. That this was, in part, because workers in the Industry were becoming increasingly conservative and preoccupied with their own interests (including continued employment) **at the cost** of fighting for the rights of the people they work with.

So … what has this to do with the debate over whether the sector should adopt a Code of Ethics?

Youth work practice cannot be *apolitical*. As individual workers, **all** our actions are driven by our beliefs and values **whether we are conscious of these or not**. However:

> *It is important to recognise that people do not always behave in a manner consistent with their values. Values guide decisions but do not dictate choices. People can and do make decisions contrary to their values. Such decisions might be made when other factors are given priority … the person acts on emotion … or when one fails to adequately think through and understand the values issues in a situation …* (Morales and Sheafor 1989:209)

One example of factors which can be given priority is the limits of funding or organisational/professional frameworks which over-ride personal values. Someone with *progressive* politics may act in a conservative manner when pressured to do so by the imperatives of income or peer *professional* acceptance. We could end up in a situation where we are obliged to behave in a conservative manner if we want a job!

> *… power is a force which naturally tries to enlarge itself, and to escape control … Here lies the answer to why the professional Code of Ethics in various countries is so high-minded, yet so unrealistic and vague. It is an effort to set one's motives in the best light possible, to place oneself in an unassailable moral position, so that any questioning of one's aims is impossible (because no clear aims are stated) and unthinkable (because the manner of the statement is so virtuous).* (Laursen 1975:60)

Ethical statements are usually extremely general … and don't make their underlying ethical or political basis explicit. Most of the emerging codes in the youth sector are no exception. This may be because[16]:

- Professionals are cautious about being associated with one political line.
- Professionals persist in the mistaken belief that professionalism is compatible with an apolitical or uncontroversial point of view.
- Professionals want to preserve the fiction that agreed-upon values unite the profession.

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[16] Based on Rhodes 1986:14

What are Ethics?

> *Beliefs* – things that we have always <u>assumed</u> were *good* or *bad*, *right* or *wrong*.
> *Values* – beliefs that we have <u>processed</u> - thought-through and conscious.
> *Ideology* (or *Values-System*) – groups of values ordered into a <u>consistent</u>/ coherent body of thought. A comprehensive ideology addresses all the *meaning of life* questions[17].
> *Ethics* – <u>principles</u>, based in values, which guide behaviour.
> *Ethical Behaviour* (or *Conduct*) – <u>actions/practices</u> consistent with these ethics.

Youth workers are constantly faced with ethical dilemmas. It is critical that we are able to make the best possible judgment about our actions in each case. **Ethics are CENTRAL to youth work.**

We each make **many** ethical decisions every day. It is important to acknowledge that **all** decisions, even our *smallest* decisions, are driven by our (conscious or unconscious) beliefs and values. Some simple examples of *small* decisions are:

- **Example 1 – How you dress for work**. On this particular day, the morning will be spent in a meeting with your funding body, and the afternoon in direct contact with young people. Do you dress for acceptance by the bureaucrats? or for the comfort of new young people entering your service?

- **Example 2 – Prioritising workload.** You are in the office writing a funding submission, due this afternoon … and the phone rings. You are the only worker in the office. You know that a particular young person is in crisis at present. Do you answer the phone and risk not meeting your submission deadline?

Other decisions have longer term, direct implications. Here are a couple of examples:

- **Example 3 – Human Nature**. Think about your beliefs/values about *human nature* – Are human beings essentially *good* or *bad*? Imagine you are developing rules for your service. If you believe in the fundamental *goodness* of human beings, you might leave the premises unlocked and have very few rules. If you believe in the fundamental *evil* of human beings, you might institute a lot of rules about young people's behaviour at your service.

- **Example 4 – Ethics and the Law.** Which is the higher value – ethics or the law? This has direct implications for your behaviour in situations where you believe the law is unjust. In the widest sense *the law* could cover any legal requirement – for example a funding agreement. Should you follow *the law*, even though you believe it is unethical? Imagine you are working with a 17 year old woman who discloses past parental abuse but is in a safe situation now. Can you offer her confidentiality? Should you force her into the welfare system, if your State/Territory law includes mandatory reporting for under 18 year olds? Or …

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[17] The 4 key values questions are: What is the nature of human beings? What is the relationship between individuals and groups in society? What is the role of the State/governance? Which methods of social change/control are legitimate? (Quixley 1998:1)
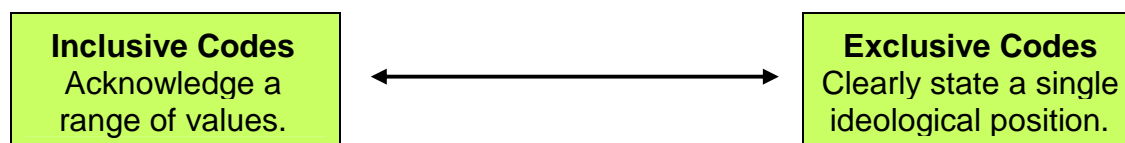
imagine your service takes people on Release to Work orders. A mum, previously imprisoned for outstanding traffic fines, has a sick child … or has an opportunity to take a day's paid casual work … and fails to appear to do unpaid work. Do you report her to her parole officer (assuming that this is required by law)?

Ethics developed in isolation from values/ideology are like a tree with no roots. Values form a critical basis for understanding and interpreting ethics … for answering the question *'Why?'*

What is a Code of Ethics?

A commitment to ethical practice is not the same as a commitment to developing an ethical code. It is impossible to develop a Code of Ethics that can genuinely guide workers on their behaviour in every situation. Because most professions do not clearly state their values, this generates a need for a large (and increasing) number of specific behavioural rules to be developed … generally in reaction to situations that arise (ie. reactively).

Codes of Ethics in the human services fall along a continuum:

Inclusive Codes Acknowledge a range of values.	←————————→	**Exclusive Codes** Clearly state a single ideological position.

Inclusive Codes are often contradictory, implying acceptance of opposite values (leading to workers sometimes justifying opposite behaviours). They are widely open to interpretation and are typically *generalised to extinction* – that is, so vague that they provide very little real guidance for the <u>wide range</u> of ethical decisions being made by workers everyday. (Social worker codes, both in Australia and overseas, typically fall into this category[18].) In **inclusive codes**, the <u>dominant culture of the profession at any given point in time</u> says what everyone else should, or should not, believe – and, what they can, and can't do. This explains the constant review of these Codes (sometimes more than once a year), and the hotly contested elections often held for positions on ethical decision making bodies within these professional organisations.

Exclusive Codes mainly occur at the conservative end of the professional spectrum, and focus on <u>social control</u> of clients. Their statement of values is generally covert,

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[18] Examples include the National Association of Social Workers (USA), the British Association of Social Workers and the Australian Association of Social Workers. The draft Code of Ethics for Youth Work, originally presented to the YANQ Conference, Townsville in November 1998 by Howard Sercombe, also falls into this category. All mainly imply values consistent with a **social control** approach to human services work, with a minority of text that seems to legitimise professionals seeking **social change**.

rather than overt. (Codes for Psychiatrists and Psychologists typically fall into this category[19].) The National Association of Black Social Workers in the USA is a rare example of an overt, progressive, values-based code (see **Appendix 1**). In **exclusive codes**, the <u>dominant culture of the profession at the point in time when the code is developed </u>says what everyone else should, and should not, believe – and, what they can, and can't do. This *winner takes all* approach may generate a competitive culture in the early stages of implementation. It almost certainly generates a conforming culture once a code is instituted and aberrant potential members have been excluded.

The draft title of this paper was *A Code of Ethics for Youth work: 'Smokescreen' or 'Saviour'?* It was based on a conversation with a member of the Disciplinary Committee for a legal professional body … they were suggesting that the main function of a Code of Ethics in the medical profession was to provide a *smokescreen* for doctors. **Every** professional body seeks to be self-regulating. **Every** professional body talks about the ability of its members to make **autonomous decisions**. **Every** professional body emphasises the need for **peer professional review** of complaints about these decisions. **Every** professional body reserves the exclusive right to include or exclude workers as members. **Every** Code of Ethics primarily functions as a wall of protection around professionals.

YAPA has suggested that a Code of Ethics is different to a Code of Conduct[20]. This is correct, since a Code of *Ethics* should only include principles … not practices. Yet, **every** code for **every** human services profession in Australia (including codes being applied or explored by State/Territory youth affairs bodies) includes a mix of ethical principles and behaviours. **All** talk about asking for the explicit permission of clients to breach confidentiality, and **most** talk about not having sex with clients.

The confusion between ethics (unmeasurable principles) and conduct (measurable practices) is common across the so-called Codes of *Ethics* of different professions, internationally. Typically, principles are considered adequate except in the case of **social taboos**. For example, most include explicit rules about sexual behaviour … but not about other (much more common) forms of abuse of power. This is about social conformity; it is because we have strong social taboos about sexuality in western society.

Similarly, most treat the law as a higher force than ethics. Despite the fact that some laws are in direct conflict with the stated ethics of many professions, members of professional associations are generally *ethically* required to follow the law … or, at the very least, it is assumed that they have no choice but to follow the law[21]. For example, many professions claim to offer confidentiality to their clients. Yet, individual professionals have not been penalised by their professional association for breaching confidentiality when required to do so by a court. This reflects the preoccupation of most professions with social acceptance … clearly, a higher value than their ethical stance.

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[19] See the codes of Institute of Australasian Psychiatrists and the Australian Psychological Society.
[20] http://www.yapa.org.au/youthwork/ethics/index.php
[21] This is particularly evident in the Code of Ethics of the Institute of Australasian Psychiatrists, which devotes almost 50% of its code to issues about legal access to client information (… and around 25% to membership).

It is possible to treat ethics as a higher force than law. The journalists' Code of Ethics, for example, states:

> *Where confidences are accepted, respect them in all circumstances.*
> (Clause 3, Media Entertainment & Arts Alliance Code of Ethics – formerly Australian Journalist's Association)

Journalists have been prepared to face imprisonment or fines rather than breach this code of non-disclosure of sources.

Are youth workers prepared to face legal sanctions through defending young people against unfair laws? Speaking to the 1991 Conference, Judge Hal Jackson (Children's Court of WA) said:

> *The law commonly sets minimum standards of behaviour through criminal law. But how fair is it? First, there may well be areas in which the beliefs of particular individuals may be at odds with the criminal law for the time being. For example, a number of offences are described from time to time as being 'victimless'. Having so categorized an activity, however, does not remove the duty to comply or permit anyone to advise others not to comply. Examples might, depending on one's viewpoint, include abortion, homosexual activity, gambling, use of liquor, use of illicit drugs, blasphemy, indecency, aspects of the age at which consent may be given, other sexual relations between juveniles or between juveniles and adults, the border line between what may be done in public and what may be done in private and so on.* (Judge Hal Jackson, Keynote Address: *Legal Issues*, YSTC-SA 1991:24)

To these could be added the whole area of *civil disobedience*. **This tension exists regardless of whether or not youth work professionalises.** However, honest professionalisation requires a common position in the youth sector on questions of ethics and the law:

- If a professional association determines that members should follow all laws (including unjust laws), then they must equally be prepared to assist in policing members' adherence to this requirement.
- If a professional association determines that certain laws are unjust, and takes an ethical position supporting members who break these laws, then it is unlikely to gain social acceptance.

Would a Code of Ethics in youth work give greater *moral courage*[22] to youth workers, particularly in circumstances where ethics and the law are in conflict? If not, we are forced to return to the question *In whose interest?* At this point in time, workers can question the ethics of particular laws, under particular circumstances. Agencies can make decisions to take a moral stance, even where this is in conflict with the law. The sector can debate questions such as the respective roles of ethics and the law in youth work practice. A Code of Ethics, particularly one as conservative as most being currently discussed, effectively excludes the option to challenge unjust laws.

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[22] One rationale for a code from Ron Williams' Keynote Address: *Implementation of a Code of Ethics* (YSTC-SA 1991:32).

Comments on Emerging Youth Work Codes

In the early 1990's, warnings were sounded about the dangers of professionalisation of the youth sector. In particular, it was pointed out that Codes of Ethics are generally driven by a need to gain recognition from powerful social interests:

> *The way a code of ethics works in practice is as a means of enhancing the profession itself, by demonstrating to the 'power that be' that the profession is capable of managing its own affairs, and that it can be trusted to be self regulating. What many codes are addressing, therefore, doesn't have much to do with the field or the profession in relation to external factors but, rather how it will manage and control itself…* (Summary of Arguments for the Negative, The Great Debate: Is the establishment of a Code of Ethics in the best interests of the youth sector?, YSTC-SA 1991:12)

It is particularly pertinent, then, that much of the recent rationale for establishing a Code of Ethics in the youth sector is driven by this need for recognition:

> *Youth workers continue to be marginalised in professional teams, in professional consultations, or case management panels because their professional standing is not recognised by other professionals.* (Sercombe nd-b:2)

Why do we need a Code of Ethics? Howard Sercombe's arguments are heavily based on examples of **government** and other institutional employers (such as schools) which fail to employ youth workers or invite their participation in professional settings (such as case conferences)[23]. It is interesting to reflect on some of the reasons why governments prefer occupational groups to be professionalised. When opening the *Ethics and Standards in Youth Work* Conference in 1991, the (then) S.A. Attorney General, Chris Sumner, argued the importance of such a code. Why? Because it would bring youth workers in line with other *professions* (examples he cited were lawyers, doctors, police and company directors) which had adopted Codes of Ethics. He proceeded to spend the majority of his *Opening Address*, focusing on the importance of youth workers in working alongside other *professionals* to address youth crime!!![24] It is in the interests of government, rather than young people, for youth work to professionalise.

Putting aside the question of whether a Code of Ethics is in the interest of young people, let's look at the emerging draft codes.

This section is largely based on the draft Code of Ethics proposed by Howard Sercombe in 2002[25]. This is because all current drafts in the sector in Australia appear to have been based on this document. The A.C.T. draft code almost directly replicates Sercombe's proposal. The YACWA Code is very similar to Sercombe's proposal, but also includes sections on *Duty of Care* and *Integrity*, and adds further commentary and case studies. The RYDON code is quite different in many ways

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[23] Sercombe 2000:3, nd-a:1. It is worth asking how many of these settings would continue to employ, or invite participation by, youth workers if they continued to genuinely and strongly advocate the rights of young people.
[24] YSTC-SA 1991:2-6
[25] A copy of Sercombe's most recent draft Code of Ethics (2002) is attached as **Appendix 3**. For more detailed analysis, including *Clause-by-Clause* critique see: YANQ & Quixley 2006.

(including its values-focus), but nonetheless largely adopts Sercombe's structure and headings.

Before adopting any ethical code, **our first ethical responsibility** is to ensure that it will function in the interest of young people. As this section demonstrates, this is unlikely to be the case in terms of the emerging codes in the youth sector.

Values base of emerging codes

Some of the words used in Sercombe's draft suggest a **social justice** framework – words like *power, empowerment* and *discrimination* are familiar to workers holding social change values. It would be easy to adopt the code, just because the words *sound* familiar!!! To do so, would be a mistake. Closer examination indicates that the code is essentially conservative. It reflects many of the values of Conservatism and Pragmatism:

- **Conservatism** – Most of the code seems to assume that the **main** role of youth work is provision of services to individual young people (starting with *1. Primary Client*). These clauses imply that the youth worker's job is to enable young people to adjust to the social setting … to work out ways that each can **individually** access power in society (eg. *4. Empowerment*). This suggests that the social structure is essentially *just* … that young people simply need to be taught how to access its resources. Another key element of conservatism is the lack of distinction between the interests of the **dominant culture** in society and the interests of society **as a whole** (eg. the idea that society is struggling for *order and control* … is this the whole society? or just those who run it?) The code is Conservative to the extent that it implies that the current social structure should essentially be maintained.

- **Pragmatism** – The code lacks any analysis of the relative position of young people in society … it suggests that the *struggle by society for law and order*, and the *struggle of young people for survival*, are comparable things. It represents youth work as an activity which is 'on the side' of young people in this tension, but does not comment on the (in)justice of the situation in which young people find themselves. It seems to work from the assumption that *society is what it is* … and there's not much we can do about this.

- **Liberalism and social change ideologies** –Whilst primarily focusing on providing services to individual young people, the *Prologue* and *Ecology* do allow for some concern with the interests of young people as a whole. However, they do not explain anything about the approach to *facilitating change* and *advocacy* … this could be about Reform (Liberalism) or wider Collective Advocacy/Empowerment (more alternate ideologies). The lack of a wider social perspective in the *Empowerment* clause, suggests a *soft* individualised version of Reform (as distinct from Collective Advocacy). The code loosely implies that **social justice** (young people having *full membership of the common wealth*) is at least a minor goal of youth work. However, the lack of distinction between Reform and other approaches potentially supports opposite behaviours by youth workers!

In other words, **Sercombe's Code of Ethics is rendered impotent by the lack of ideological framework.**

By contrast, the RYDON code is more (albeit not completely) consistent, and largely functions from a social change values base. It openly recognises factors such as:

- The *unequal power relationship* between workers and young people,
- Advocating *for young people's access to resources and facilities,*

- Overcoming *unfairness caused by unequal access to economic, social and cultural resources and power,*
- Enabling young people to realise and recognise their rights and to be protected from human rights abuse, and,
- Never meeting worker's self-care needs at the expense of young people[26].

Capacity of emerging codes to guide practice

A Code of Ethics should determine principles which guide practice. Sercombe's code is so vague as to provide little guidance. It is inconsistent and therefore fairly meaningless. Its consequences in terms of implementation could be:

1. **either**, that it provides insufficient clarity to allow any action to deal with unethical workers,
2. **or**, that worker behaviour is open to interpretation according to the values of the dominant culture in the youth sector at a particular time (or place),
3. **or,** that workers (individually, or as groups) justify opposite behaviours based on their interpretation of the code.

The first possible consequence, then, suggests that the document provides little practical guidance, and therefore would not *add value* to the sector. The second and third possible consequences suggest that adopting such a code may put the current variety of the sector at risk. It would leave any worker (particularly non-conservative practitioners) open to penalty, depending who has the power to make judgments at the time. This could (as in other professions) lead to increased competition for power within the sector.

An example of the range of possible interpretations of the text is evident in the different responses of RYDON and YACWA. Both have text in their (draft) codes entitled *Equity*:

- RYDON[27] says *Youth Workers work to overcome unfairness caused by unequal access to economic, social and cultural resources and power*. This position indicates a **social justice** approach, which focuses on changing society to better meet the needs of young people.
- YACWA[28] includes a case study that proposes that if a youth worker is uncomfortable with working with a gay or lesbian young person, they should refer them to another worker (in other words, reject them). This position indicates a **social conformity** approach, which assumes the legitimacy of dominant social values.

Similarly, the RYDON draft sees education of young people as important, and focuses on involving young people in decisions about their lives and supporting their (ultimate) choices. On the other hand, the YACWA Code case study explains *Empowerment* as encouraging young people to act within the limits of their existing knowledge and experience and appears to discourage extending the young person's

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[26] Regional Youth Development Officers Network 2005
[27] Regional Youth Development Officers Network 2005
[28] Youth Affairs Council of WA. 2003

frame of reference, through assuming that the young person should decide, without further support/challenge/ information, what course of action to take.

The question here is not which organisation has interpreted the draft code correctly. Rather, it is exploring the possible consequences of adopting the core text at a national level … and one obvious consequence is that different people/groups are likely to interpret the same words in very different ways! If this is happening after only a few years, then what are the possible long term consequences?

What is the value of a code which is so generalised as to justify opposite behaviours by workers? How can a code which actively supports social control, yet hints at the legitimacy of using social change models of practice, provide any useful ethical guidance?

Clauses rendered meaningless by lack of ideological framework

In Sercombe's *Prologue*, youth workers are described as having a commitment to *healing* in their work with individual young people and society. **Who is sick?** - individual young people? young people in general? the wider society? Unfortunately, nowhere does the code answer this question[29]. This leads to fundamental incongruence (even, direct contradictions) throughout the code and the resulting lack of genuine behavioural guidance.

This code does not take a clear position on the role of young people in society. Whilst mentioning *power* a number of times, the lack of a clear position on the **relative** power of young people and the wider society renders even the *Prologue* confusing, and therefore, meaningless. It suggests that *the struggle by society for law and order*, and *the struggle of young people for survival and recognition*, are comparable things. It certainly appears to argue that advocating for **individual** young people is the best way to address *young people's exclusion from full membership of the Commonwealth*.

Identifying **individual** young people as *primary client* actively excludes (or at least, devalues) a focus on young people as a collective group in society. How can you *do no further harm* if your whole approach is predicated on legitimising social control over young people?

Without an ideological context, *Empowerment* (Clause 4) in particular, makes no sense! For example, how can you act in the interests of two or more individual young people (*1. Primary Client*) if their interests are in conflict? (… unless you determine what their interests are … in which case, you have contradicted Clause 4 … *that young people are competent in assessing … their interests*.)

Ultimately, the assumption of young people's competencies in *assessing and acting on their interests* (Clause 4) effectively functions as a **social control** mechanism. It obliges workers to work within the limits of young people's experience and perceptions, and implies that workers should not add to young people's

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[29] NOTE: The RYDON draft code does not include this text, and does answer these questions. Therefore, its content in relation to all criticism in this section is more internally consistent.

understanding of their situation. It leaves young people working from within the confines of their experience (eg. believing that they are unemployed because they are inadequate, and therefore, they need to develop skills or accept lower wages … even though there is only 1 job for every 10 young people in their town!) **This is distinctly different from *working from where young people are at!*** Without an ideological context, this clause, in particular, makes no sense!

The clause entitled *Ecology* is another incongruent hint at a wider socio-political analysis. The idea that youth workers have a social change role is in direct contradiction with most of the ideas in the overall text. The explicit naming of a role in *changing* young people is inconsistent with working from each individual young person's perceptions (Clause 4). *Changing the social context* again suggests political action … in marked contrast with the role of youth work outlined elsewhere. The A.C.T. PowerPoint presentation for young people is interesting here, in that it clearly defines ecology as related to young people's very localised environment (*how they fit into their families, their communities and their peers*[30]), rather than the wider society/social structures. Given this inconsistency, this clause appears to exist to reassure workers from a social change perspective that their approach is compatible with the overall code … which it clearly isn't!

Clause 8, *Cooperation*, provides no guidance re:

- **Who** it is legitimate to cooperate with,
- To meet **whose** perception of the best possible outcomes for young people.

An ideological context is critical here. If you believe the best possible outcome for young people is to learn to fit into society, then obviously a high level of cooperation with the police is essential.

Again, the lack of an ideological context provides no guidance to the types of *Knowledge* (Clause 9) workers are required *to keep up to date with*. It is simply **impossible** to engage with **all** *information, resources, knowledge and practices.* So, how to do you choose which knowledge to pursue? How do you balance the relative priority of pursuit of knowledge and spending the same time on service provision?

Clause 11, *Boundaries,* is further evidence of the code's commitment to **social conformity**. It focuses on protecting young people from being sexualised. It has the interesting distinction of being the only explicit behavioural statement in the code. Why? Could this be because sexuality is such a taboo area in conservative/Christian culture? This possibility is reinforced through mention of the need to *protect* young people … a particularly parochial choice of language.

Clearly, it is not ethically acceptable for youth workers to sexualise young people. But this preoccupation with sex fails to address the **wider** issues of power in relationships between workers and young people. Emotional relationships can be **at least** as abusive as sexual ones, depending on the experience of the particular young person. For some, having sex would be relatively insignificant; becoming emotionally close, would leave them highly vulnerable to abuse by a youth worker.

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[30] Moore 2004

Contradictions and incongruence in emerging codes

Clause 3, *Discrimination,* says that *Youth workers' practice will be equitable.* It fails to clarify the difference between two quite different (and sometimes opposing) strategies - *equity* and *equality*. *Equity* is the process of positively discriminating in favour of the least advantaged (with a goal of everyone **ending up** equal). *Equality* is about being non-discriminatory. Therefore, **the clause itself is internally contradictory.**

This lack of distinction has already resulted in two groups interpreting the meaning in very different ways:

- **Equality** - YACWA argues the importance of all young people (regardless of gender/race/sexuality etc) having access to services.
- **Equity** – RYDON implies a commitment to positive discrimination in resource allocation.

In his commentary on the draft code, Sercombe focuses on distribution of resources according to criteria such as *need* (as distinct from human rights) – but then implies that positive discrimination would be an uncommon occurrence, requiring special attention and justification.

Clause 4, *Empowerment,* is a flashback to the 1980's, when a national youth sector conference adopted a motion that said: *That empowerment is the ideology of youth work*[31]. Unfortunately, it failed to define *empowerment* … and, as we have seen already, the term is definitely not an *ideology*. In the past it has been used to justify **opposite** actions by youth workers.

This clause advocates a highly individualistic notion of empowerment. **Individual empowerment can be used for good or harm**[32] – to the individual young person and/or others. Combined with a *non discriminatory* approach to young people, this clause suggests that workers should <u>equally</u> enhance the individual power of white, middle class, university educated, employed, able bodied heterosexual young men, and others. In other words, it clearly advocates retention of the current power imbalances in society as a whole, and amongst young people.

For example, it talks about *holding power-holders accountable.* What understanding of *accountability* is being promoted here? Who is accountable to whom, for what? Holding power-holders accountable may involve simply ensuring young people have access to **existing** social remedies … or it may imply the need for political activism to establish **new** social remedies.

Clauses lacking meaning without further explanation

Clause 4, *Empowerment* talks about *supporting the young person in the pursuit of their legitimate claims*. What are *legitimate* claims that young people might pursue? If the legitimacy of claims is determined by the young person, you may have an

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[31] or similar wording
[32] For further explanation see: Quixley, Suzi. (1996), Models of Youth Work: A Conceptual Overview, New Transitions, the Journal of the Youth Affairs Network of Queensland, August 1996.

interesting situation where the values implicit in this code and young people's perceptions are in direct contradiction. For example, a young person perceives stealing from the rich as a *legitimate claim*. Would a worker be obliged to enhance the power of the young person in pursuing this claim … in contraction with their role as a **broker** (as outlined in the *Prologue)* between the law and order interests of society and the criminal empowerment sought by a young person?

What is *truth*? Clause 6, *Transparency*, proposes that *The interests of other stakeholders will not be hidden from* young people. The code provides no direct guidance on what constitutes *truth.* Is it ethical for workers to impose their personal *truths* (beliefs) on young people? What if young people's beliefs differ … if they might understand the *interests of other stakeholders in* a different way? Is the worker then obliged to explain stakeholders' interests within the frame of reference of the young person? For example, what if a young person (who, after all, is *competent in assessing … their interests*) believes that social structures are designed to take away their human rights, and that these should be reclaimed by force?

The clause on *Confidentiality* (7) is particularly simplistic. It fails to address the complex issues related to confidentiality such as whether you are working from *agency confidentiality* or *individual confidentiality.* It provides no guidance for responding to current trends such as inter-agency case conferencing (which suggests *sector-wide confidentiality*), or multi-disciplinary case conferencing (which suggests *professionals-wide confidentiality*) or providing information about a young person to the police. Workers are left to judge for themselves who may use information *against* young people.

Yet, it makes an **unequivocal statement**, that, until a young person has given permission for disclosure, *the presumption of confidentiality must apply*:

- Are youth workers (like journalists) obliged to face imprisonment and criminalisation, if they breach this clause in a court of law? (**If not, why is it included at all?**)
- Are youth workers allowed to behave in a culturally-appropriate manner? This statement does not recognise that, in some cultural settings, young people simply expect youth workers to play a role on their behalf (eg. tell their auntie for them!)
- What on earth are the *contextual limits of confidentiality*? … the social context? the agency context? the funding context? the cultural context? the legal context? the professional image protection context?
- Are youth workers obliged to maintain confidentiality, even where the life of the young person, or someone else, is at risk?

Are there **any** circumstances under which workers are allowed to breach **individual** confidentiality? **If so, clause *7, Confidentiality,* fails to provide <u>any</u> ethical guidance at all!** Unfortunately, it might also give young people a false sense of security, when sharing delicate information with a youth worker.

It is worth noting that the RYDON draft code takes a more open approach, saying:

> **Confidentiality:** *Young people will be made aware of the legal obligations and limits to confidentiality. Youth Workers will seek consent for any disclosures.*
> *(RYDON 2005)*

OVERT indications of worker self-interest

Clause 2, *Ecology,* is a strange heading for a section focused on **social/economic/cultural/ structural** context. Use of this language is potentially alienating for anyone (including workers and young people) who has not studied post-modern theory. It reinforces the idea of professionalisation as exclusivity … that youth workers are a group that uses non-mainstream language to try to mystify a body of exclusive knowledge.

The very existence of youth work is predicated on the vulnerability of young people in society. As workers, we profit **by definition** from young people's social disadvantage*. 5. Corruption* says that *Youth workers and youth agencies will not advance themselves at the expense of young people*. Further, working from dominant social values about the place of young people in society would be, **in and of itself**, about the sector advancing itself even more, at the expense of young people. If this is the definition of *corruption*, then we are, inevitably, ***corrupt***!!!

Clause 10, *Self-awareness,* says that *Youth workers are conscious of their own values and interests, and approach difference in those with whom they work with respect.* Being *conscious* of our own values and interests is clearly a good thing! But this clause does not provide **any** protection against imposing these on young people. And … what is *respect*? Again, this clause gives workers *carte blanche* to treat young people as they wish … provided it fits within their own, personal, definition of *respect*.

What's so good about youth workers being healthy? Why is it important to have a statement about worker *Self-care* (Clause 12)? This clause is a clear indication that this code is designed to work in the interests of workers … at the possible expense of young people. Again, it could function in contradiction to the previous clause on *corruption!* The RYDON draft code, whilst recognising that *workers need to be aware of their own needs and ensure* (sic) *these are met,* clearly states that this should never be *at the expense of young people.*

It is interesting that one of the two *new* clauses added in the YACWA Code of Ethics relates to the protection of youth workers' professional image. Under the title *Integrity*, the code states *Youth Workers are loyal to the practice of youth work, not bringing it into disrepute …*

Addressing lack of behavioural guidance in emerging codes

As detailed in the next section, the Codes of Ethics of most human services professions have started out as short statements, not dissimilar to those proposed by Sercombe. It quickly becomes clear that such statements do not genuinely **guide action**. So begins a long process of developing commentary, explanatory text, case studies, procedures and/or explicit behavioural guidelines.

This is already evident in the YACWA code. Whilst the ACT and RYDON drafts remain at 3-4 pages, the WA Code of Ethics (where a longer process of development has occurred) has already grown to 18 pages long, including

commentary and case studies. The RYDON draft is interesting, in that it proposes a (draft) *Framework for Ethical Decision Making*, which articulates the areas of the draft code to be prioritised when making practical ethical decisions … a **process**-oriented rather than **rules**-oriented approach.

YAPA (NSW) has developed a very useful list of *Model Policies*. **YAPA is very clear that these are not intended to be professional standards.** However their nature, and very existence, sounds some warnings about possible future professionalisation:

1. They reflect the requirements of a series of laws and government-controlled service agreements, standards and guidelines. They therefore, by definition, place the law (in its widest sense) above ethics. This is similar to the trend in professional associations, where law (even unjust laws, or laws which work against clients) generally supercedes ethics.
2. They indicate the amount of documentation required to interpret any inclusive Code of Ethics. The list of topics, alone, amounts to 7 major headings and 45 sub-headings.

Dangers in Institutionalising a *Code of Ethics* for Youth Work

> **Evidence from other professions indicates that Codes of Ethics:**
>
> 1. Mainly function to protect workers, rather than clients.
> 2. Mainly function to protect a particular 'in' group of workers.
> 3. Are often widely open to interpretation.
> 4. Require large amounts of time to maintain – review, re-review, re-re-review …
> 5. Can actually reduce the level of ethical behaviour of workers.
> 6. Encourage conservatisation of the occupation.

Howard Sercombe has claimed that the youth sector can protect against the dangers of professionalisation by treating ethics as our primary motivator[33]. **All** occupational groups in the human services claim to have been driven by ethical (rather than commercial) motives when they originally professionalised. **All** continue to claim client interest, rather than self interest, as their primary motivator.

This section looks at the real **effects of professionalism**, rather than the stated motives of those who instigated professionalisation. This is why the first 2 headings talk about how these codes mainly **function** …

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[33] Sercombe 2000:6

1. Codes of Ethics mainly FUNCTION to protect workers, rather than clients.

The institutionalisation of ethical codes as a symbolic attribute of professional status occurred in the 1920's. The International Association of Rotary Clubs campaigned for each business and profession to write a code of standards of practice[34]. According to Barnes:

> *These codes, in many cases, probably have little effect on the conduct of members of professional associations … and serve as a basis for regulation of disputes within the profession rather than as a means of protecting the public interest.* (Barnes 1979:159)

In fact, a thorough reading about Codes of Ethics and related issues – across professions and internationally - reveals no evidence of professions making significant use of their ethical codes to discipline their members. The ineffectiveness of such tools as means of protecting the public interest is logical, particularly when you consider the *high-minded, unrealistic and vague*[35] clauses they generally contain.

It could be argued that the very use of the word *client* is designed to establish a hierarchy – with the worker as the *expert* and the young person as the *client*. The word *client* immediately implies a power differential. All ethical codes in the human services in Australia create this barrier, or separation, between *professional* and *client*. All have the effect of over-riding the idea of interaction based on our common humanity. At least the word *customer* (with all its commercial connotations) suggests that interactions are an **exchange** with the right to demand your money back!!! Why don't we just call the people we work with *young people*, or *the people we work with?*

> When was the last time that YOU read the Code of Ethics of a professional you were using? (an Accountant? Lawyer? Doctor?) Have you ever read a professional Code of Ethics? Is the *public right to know* a useful rationale for producing such a code?

Typically, Codes of Ethics are not designed to be accessible to clients, or encourage complaints. For example:

- Despite the fact that the Australian Psychological Society code was *developed to safeguard the welfare of consumers of psychological services*[36], it requires 16 different sets of guidelines to guide members in its interpretation. Unfortunately, 15 of these are not available to the general public … only to members! Around 15% (2/13 pages) in the Australian Psychological Society's Code of Ethics is devoted to the complaints process. These pages are entirely focused on the process to be followed with the member, with the exception of two comments about the complainant; that they should find out for themselves whether the Psychologist in question is a

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[34] Barnes 1979:159
[35] Laursen 1975:60
[36] APS http://www.psychology.org.au/aps/ethics/default.asp

member of the APS; and, put their complaint in writing. In other words, this part of the document largely focuses on protecting the member.

- Unfortunately, the Australian Association of Social Workers currently has a *moratorium on receiving ethics complaints* instituted in Jan 2007 for 6 months pending development of a new ethics complaints management structure. This is despite the fact that the most recent By-laws on Ethics were written in 2004. The AASW *Code of Ethics* (1999, new edition 2002) is 36 pages long; its By-laws on ethics are 36 pages long; its *Policy and Procedures for Establishing Eligibility for Membership* is 26 pages long. Clearly, this is primarily designed to protect the professional association and members.

- Similarly, the *Ethics Committee Rules and Procedures* for the American Psychological Association is almost twice the length of the Association's Code of Ethics! This demonstrates, again, that the process is primarily designed to protect the professional association and its members.

2. Codes of Ethics mainly FUNCTION to protect a particular 'in' group of workers.

Read the membership criteria of any professional organisation. Almost invariably they function to include and exclude different groups of workers. For example, the Australian Institute of Welfare and Community Workers Inc. says:

Who is a Welfare & Community Worker

A person, who, through professional training and field education, has the requisite values, attitudes, knowledge and skills to work autonomously, or within a team, in a social welfare agency or community program intended to promote, relieve or restore the social functioning of individuals, families, social groups or larger communities. (AIWCW: About Us, http://www.aiwcw.org.au)

The most straightforward interpretation of this is:

- Only people with formal qualifications can be called a *Welfare Worker* or *Community Worker*.
- The goal of community work is to enable clients to fit into society (ie. social *functioning*)
- Only people working from a Treatment or Reform model can be a member of the AIWCW … or, indeed, call themselves a *Welfare Worker* or *Community Worker*.

The idea that an organisation can 'own a job title' and stop others from using that title, is a common feature of professionalisation. It is illegal, for example, to call yourself a Psychologist or Social Worker in Australia unless you qualify for membership of the appropriate association.

Emerging youth work codes are similarly have the potential to restrict membership to a particular group of workers. Using the Ecology example again … this is a vague term to the everyday reader. Therefore its inclusion may also ultimately **function** to restrict membership to those who have both undertaken academic training <u>and</u> have undertaken it at a time when Post Modernism was central to the curriculum. It

certainly places greater value on those members with this type of background. Similarly, YACVic has repeatedly suggested that a professional association **might** exclude experienced workers without formal accredited qualifications, with the **possibility** that degree-level qualifications or higher might be given greater professional status[37].

3. Codes of Ethics are generally widely open to interpretation.

A common feature of *inclusive* Codes of Ethics is the ability to both totally agree with them, and totally disagree with them, at the same time!!! In other words, most are widely open to interpretation. Perhaps you can agree with them if you use your personal definition of key terms like *justice, confidentiality, autonomy, non-judgmental or discrimination*. But, there is no guarantee that the governing body responsible for judging your behaviour will use those same definitions.

The reality is that ultimately, in practice, interpretation of a Code of Ethics is the responsibility of an elite group within a profession – a discipline committee, or values committee, or governing body. Therefore, an organisation might include members who hold actually opposite points of view on a given *ethic* … and it all depends which faction is in a position of decision making power as to how the *ethic* will be interpreted.

Attempts to reduce the breadth of possible interpretations are reflected in the repeated review of inclusive codes, and the proliferation of regulations designed to further explain them. This has occurred within every human services profession with inclusive codes, internationally.

4. Codes of Ethics require large amounts of time to maintain – review, re-review, re-re-review …

We already have very limited amount of time to address the real issues affecting young people at national events, such as conferences. The evidence from other professions suggests that inordinate amounts of time are spent refining, re-refining and re-re-refining their Code of Ethics. **Do we really want our national time spent focusing on ourselves, rather than young people?**

In the 1980's the British Association of Social Workers adopted a Code of Ethics not dissimilar to the one being proposed for youth work in Australia in terms of its length, content and values base[38]. In was 3 pages long, appeared less conservative than most and sought to provide more than a purely individualistic perspective on human services practice. It was an inclusive code, which allowed for the possibility of Advocacy and Empowerment approaches, though it did not explicitly advocate radical practice. So … how has this code has developed over the past 20 years?

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[37] YACVic 2004:22-23, 44.
[38] See, for example, the 1985 version of the BASW *Code of Ethics* in Watson, David (ed), which is **vastly** different from the current BASW code: http://www.basw.co.uk/articles.php?articleId=2

The current BASW Code of Ethics is 13 pages long, and includes many qualifiers not present 20 years ago.

It is often difficult to access information on the internal workings of professional organisations. However, the Psychology profession tends to be more open than others about its ethical review processes:

Australian Psychological Society	**APS Code:** Previous version in 1986 (revised 1990). Current version adopted in 1997 and revised 1999, 2002, 2003. **Addenda:** 16 different sets of guidelines adopted[39] - 1995, 1996, 1998 (5 sets), 1999 (4 sets), 2000 (3 sets), 2001, 2002. It is not clear how many times these have been reviewed or amended, since all but one are not available for public scrutiny.
American Psychological Association	**APA Code**: Revised in 1953, 1959, 1963, 1968, 1977, 1979, 1981, 1990, 1992, 2002, and currently 16 pages long in tiny print. **Addenda:** There are also currently separate ethical statements on research using animals, use of telephone/teleconferencing/ internet in service provision, and a set of very practical ethical dilemmas … for which the Code does not provide answers (ie. despite some possible guidance, practitioners must still make their own ethical decisions). **Policing:** The Ethics Committee Rules and Procedures, primarily designed to protect the professional association and members, are a further 30 pages long … almost exactly twice the length of the Code itself!

5. Codes of Ethics can actually REDUCE ethical behaviour.

As discussed earlier, professionalism essentially moves the onus of responsibility for ethical behaviour from the worker themselves and their employing body, to the professional body. Unless workers and agencies continue to **process** ethical thinking, the sector risks encouraging workers to think: *Can I get away with it?* rather than *Is it right?* Workers are under pressure to conform to group thinking and/or comply with authority, rather than to undertake their own thinking and/or maintain their personal integrity.[40]

Howard Sercombe has listed activities such as embezzling agency funds, using agency funds for personal use, sharing pornographic movies with minors, selling drugs to young people, purchasing stolen goods from young people or having sex with young people[41], and implied that a Code of Ethics is required to address these

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[39] These sets of guidelines, with the exception of a 1 page *Charter for Clients*, are not available to the public. 16 sets of guidelines in specific areas (desi*gned to "clarify and amplify the application of the principles and to facilitate their interpretation"* p3), are only available to members.
[40] Risks based on ideas from Ron Williams' Keynote Address: *Implementation of a Code of Ethics* (YSTC-SA 1991:32).
[41] Sercombe nd-b:3

behaviours. In fact, all these behaviours are simply **illegal** (as well as unethical), and existing law is perfectly capable of dealing with illegal behaviour. Aberrant behaviours occur in every human services occupation – whether or not they are professionalised. There is no evidence from the professions, that professionalisation has actually decreased incidents of behaviours which are both illegal and unethical. The added veil of secrecy that surrounds disciplinary procedures in the professions may actually increase the likelihood that illegal behaviours will be addressing within the profession, rather than being reported to the police. At the very least, they add a level of bureaucracy which is unlikely to aid young people in reparation of their claims of worker misconduct.

Again, Sercombe has argued that *the lack of any professional structure invites the emergence periodically of charismatic messiahs and mavericks, or 'king of the kids'*[42]. The briefest and most superficial contact with the *Cancer Industry* will demonstrate just how ineffective professional associations have been in curtailing the activities of professionals claiming *magical cures*!

Arguably, abuse of power is actually institutionalised into some codes – for example, the Institute of Australasian Psychiatrists claims joint ownership of information about *the investigation and treatment of the patient's problem*:

> *Treatment always involves cooperation between doctor and patient, therefore this information belongs to both, and access to this information properly requires the permission of both patient and doctor. However, when a dispute arises between patient and doctor, neither should have the ability to forbid disclosure of this information by the other.* (Clause 7, IAP Code of Ethics)

Further, psychiatrists claim that *material pertaining to the doctor's own thoughts and view about the case* belong only to the doctor! In other words, psychiatrists hold ultimate autonomous right to decide when, and whether, to pass on most information about patients to others (even if the patient does not consent).

During the research for this paper, only one professional organisation, the National Association Social Workers[43] (USA) was found which publicly lists members found to be in breach of the Code of Ethics. So much for public protection!

6. Codes of Ethics encourage conservatisation of occupations.

One early attempt to institutionalise a Code which partly advocated social change (early versions of the BASW Code of Ethics) has since been superseded by more conservative versions.

Sercombe has implied that a prime reason for resistance to professionalisation in the youth sector is self interest. That is, longer term workers may be concerned that they will lose their jobs due to lack of formal, tertiary qualifications. YACVic reduces the case against professionalisation to:

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[42] Sercombe 2000:4
[43] See *Sanctions in Force*,
http://www.socialworkers.org/assets/public/documents/resources/profession/default.asp

Arguments against professionalism centre on the possible loss of the idiosyncratic nature of youth work. (YACVic 2004:5)

Sercombe proposes a *grandfather* (sic) *clause*[44] to accommodate concerns about exclusion. This tool allows for the recognition of existing practitioners as members of a professional association. In other professions[45] this has been at the **discretion** of *qualified* workers. YACVic proposes allowing a long transition time so *unqualified* workers can gain qualifications[46].

What these views fail to acknowledge is that the concern of existing workers may **not** be driven by self interest! It may also be driven by concerns about the increasing conservatism of inexperienced workers emerging from formal accredited training which do not give priority to values exploration, and potentially excludes workers with a social justice focus! The reality is that the <u>dominant</u> culture within a professional association will invariably be workers with formal tertiary training … and it is these people who will decide whether, or not, to allow *untrained* workers to access professional status. Institution of means to include existing workers in the process of professionalisation do little to alleviate fears about the long term impact of professionalisation … the conservatisation of the youth sector!

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[44] Sercombe 2000:2. NOTE:

[45] For example, the Australian Counselling Association also allow for this type of membership. It has been interesting to observe the increasing development of bureaucratic barriers, and the increasing privacy of Association processes, around applications of this kind over the past 10 years.

[46] YACVic 2004:44.

A Better Way to Achieve Ethical Practice in Youth Work

This could, and should, be the subject of another paper of similar depth and detail to this one. These are just a few 'starter ideas'.

If individual workers really want the protection of a Code of Ethics …

If tertiary trained youth workers really want the protection of a Code of Ethics, they can always join the Australian Institute of Welfare and Community Workers (AIWCW). Alternatively, some workers are eligible for membership of the Australian Counselling Association, the Australian Association of Social Workers or the Australian Psychological Society. Why go into competition with these organisations by establishing yet another professional body?

If individual workers mainly want proper pay and conditions …

Let's unionise! All youth workers (whether or not they are tertiary educated) deserve proper remuneration for their efforts. The more workers become involved in their relevant State/Territory union, the greater the chance that we can significantly improve youth worker pay and conditions. This is a far more efficient path to proper recognition of the valuable role youth work can play to support, and improve, society.

If individual workers genuinely want *top down* ethical guidance …

National Association of Black Social Workers (USA – see Appendix 1) is an interesting model of a values-driven professional association. Their Code of Ethics is a single page ideological statement, which has served to support their work since 1968. Its simple, clear, ideological stance has clearly been adequate … there is no need for further rules and regulations. The NABSW has not focused on issues such as credentialism and social status; rather, it has prioritised advocacy and lobbying for Black individuals, families and communities in the USA.

Alternately, we can always return to the *Jasper Declaration* (see Appendix 2), adopted at the first National Youth Workers Conference in 1977 … then, apparently, promptly forgotten!!!

If individual workers and their employers are willing to take prime responsibility for maintaining ethical standards …

Much of the commentary on professionalisation of the youth sector (particularly by Sercombe[47]) is based on the assumption that the best (or only) way to improve ethical standards within the youth sector is to have an institutionalised/pro-fessional/sector-wide Code of Ethics. **This is an assumption** … there is a large

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[47] For example, see: papers entitled *Power Ethics and Youth Work , The Youth Work Contract, The Youth Work Professional* and *Disciplining Youth Work: The Professionalisation Dilemma*.

body of evidence that suggests that ethical standards are better maintained through developmental debate in a sector, than by a written document.

There are alternatives to an *all or nothing* approach. Ethics can be viewed as a *journey*, rather than a *destination*:

- Agency-developed values statements can provide a genuine framework for worker behaviour. This is because they can provide a basis for generating ongoing discussion and debate which can directly involve each worker in the agency in examining their own values and practice. They can also encourage coherence of service delivery amongst staff from different professional backgrounds in an immediate and practical manner.

- Ensure substantial values exploration and ethical debate in all accredited youth worker training programs – whether in universities, TAFE or industry. This is at the core of effective youth work practice. Because workers are making judgments every moment of every day, learning how to problem solve from a clear values base should be the majority content of any entry-level program. If we are serious about achieving ethical practice, any accredited training provider who is unwilling to meet these conditions should be boycotted by the sector!

- Peak bodies could, and should, play a key role in designing model processes for values and ethical processing at an organisational and individual worker level. They could, and should, be encouraging the inclusion of these areas in organisational development processes, staff discussion/development exercises and worker *professional* supervision.

If the youth sector wants to test a variety of approaches to improving ethical standards …

Some are presenting the idea of adopting a national Code of Ethics as a *fait accompli*. Several States/Territories and regions have already adopted codes, or are testing drafts within the sector. Rather than simply following them, perhaps the sector could take a more evidence-based approach. We could place a moratorium on a national code for 5-10 years. In the meantime, we could evaluate the impact of Codes of Ethics in the parts of the sector that have already adopted them:

- Has the adoption of a Code of Ethics actually resulted in more ethical behaviour within the sector?
- Have Codes of Ethics with different values-bases produced different results?
- What is the evidence for this?

This would allow for comparative research and informed debate … rather than simply taking a *leap of faith* that somehow, we can professionalise in a way that goes against all the trends evident in other human services professions.

At the same time, we could research current sector practices around ethics. In particular, we could take advantage of the current popularity of Action Research, to test some different approaches to ethical development within the sector.

- What processes are being used in the sector at present (at an agency and peak level) to try to ensure ethical practice?
- Are there patterns/trends in the current practices of these bodies?
- Which approaches seem to be helpful?
- What do individual workers and agencies need in order to improve ethical behaviour *on the ground*?

Conclusion

The bottom line is why would the youth sector want to adopt a Code of Ethics when it is unlikely to lead to improved outcomes for young people … and when maintaining the code will continue to distract time and energy away from addressing issues affecting young people.

A Code of Ethics is *a wolf in sheep's clothing* … a **covert** means of pro-fessionalising, and conservatising the youth sector. If the sector genuinely wants to guide youth work practice, we must begin with a clear ideological statement. To do this would inevitably lead to some existing workers being included in the sector, and others excluded. Even if the sector adopted a statement based on social control, at least it would be an **overt**, open conservatising of the youth work sector.

Human behaviour is driven by values … not words. **The youth sector should focus on encouraging values-driven thinking and analysis … the PROCESS of ethical decision making … rather than trying to END the debate through finalising words.** SO … lets talk about values, rather than trying to get the words *right.*

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Code of Ethics

This code is included to demonstrate that it is possible to have an ideologically-based Code of Ethics. Features include the focus on common humanity (as distinct from the *expert/client* dichotomy), individual worker responsibility (not peer judgment), obligation to challenge unethical practice by fellow *professionals* and commitment to actively participate in social change.

In America today, no Black person, except the selfish or irrational, can claim neutrality in the quest for Black liberation nor fail to consider the implications of the events taking place in our society. Given the necessity for committing ourselves to the struggle for freedom, we as Black Americans practicing in the field of social welfare, set forth this statement of ideals and guiding principles.

If a sense of community awareness is a precondition to humanitarian acts, then we as Black social workers must use our knowledge of the Black community, our commitments to its determination, and our helping skills for the benefit of Black people as we marshal our expertise to improve the quality of life of Black people. Our activities will be guided by our Black consciousness, our determination to protect the security of the Black community, and to serve as advocates to relieve suffering of Black people by any means necessary.

Therefore, as Black social workers we commit ourselves, collectively, to the interests of our Black brethren and as individuals subscribe to the following statements:

- *I regard as my primary obligation the welfare of the Black individual, Black family, and Black community and will engage in action for improving social conditions.*
- *I give precedence to this mission over my personal interest.*
- *I adopt the concept of a Black extended family and embrace all Black people as my brothers and sisters, making no distinction between their destiny and my own.*
- *I hold myself responsible for the quality and extent of service I perform and the quality and extent of service performed by the agency or organisation in which I am employed, as it relates to the Black community.*
- *I accept the responsibility to protect the Black community against unethical and hypocritical practice by any individual or organisations engaged in social welfare activities.*
- *I stand ready to supplement my paid or professional advocacy with voluntary service in the Black public interest.*
- *I will consciously use my skills, and my whole being as an instrument for social change, with particular attention directed to the establishment of Black social institutions.*

Jasper Declaration

This statement was accepted at the first National Youth Workers Conference in 1977. It was originally put together by a group of 8 people over dinner (at Jaspers Restaurant). Like the NABSW Code of Ethics, it is an example of an ideologically-based ethical code. Why does it not have the same status as the NABSW statement, originally developed in 1968 and still current today? Perhaps its disappearance into oblivion can be explained by the non-organic way in which it was developed? Or, the possibility that many workers did not fully understand/agree with it? Or worker self-interest or lack of shared experience with young people? Or, the fact that it was not backed up by a professional association to police its implementation? Whilst some of the details and language are outdated, it remains a useful tool for discussing the place of an ideologically-based ethical statement for the youth sector. As a wise person once said … *Those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it!*
(Reproduced from YSTC-SA 1991:17)

We confess that as youth workers we fail to act as initiators of social change and in effect we are just reactors to circumstances dealing with 'bandaid' situations that often just help in preserving the status quo structures.

We confess that we are content to deal solely with the casualties rather than delving deeply into the cause of those casualties.

We confess that we disregard the enormous limitations imposed on youth and often attempt to make youth content with their basic life situation, ignoring the conflicts which clearly exist by distracting them with some well-chosen structured spare time activities.

We seek a commitment to a new direction in the philosophy of youth work. We will no longer be content to offer programs which merely gratify immediate wants. We are concerned for the fulfilment of individuals over a total life span. We recognise that our commitment to this philosophy will operate within a local context. This legalised process will involve facilitating:

- *people to become aware of themselves and others in the community;*
- *people to engage in human transactions with others;*
- *people to think through issues (consciousness raising);*
- *people to conceive contradictions, the level of manipulation and limitations of their local area, and the scope of their power and the possibility for change.*

The implications of this are:

- *that the changing of attitudes is more important than exclusively providing leisure pursuits;*
- *that the process of 'bandaid-ing' will be challenged because it is perpetuating the present system and aiding its preservation;*
- *that such a model will bring us into conflict with the existing structure of society and often the underlying philosophies of many of the youth organisations/agencies to which we belong;*
- *that such conflict will involve risks and we must be prepared for the type of commitment that may involve costs in terms of economics, position, reputation, time, relationships, etc;*
- *that there will be for us disturbing confrontation with many ethical problems and questions; this confrontation will be particularly great in terms of our degree of compromise and participation in the operation of the system.*

What we have experienced through this conference is this process in operation.

2002 Proposal – A Code of Ethics for Youth Work[48]

Prologue

Youth workers exist because of young people's exclusion from full membership of the common wealth, in the struggle by young people for survival and recognition on the one hand and the struggle by society for order and control on the other. The core of youth work practice lies in the relationship with the young person as the primary client, expressed through a commitment to advocacy and healing in their (sic) work with the young person and the wider society. The following principles are informed by this core position.

1. **Primary Client**
   The primary client of the youth worker is the young person with whom they engage. Where conflict exists between obligations to one young person and another, it is resolved in ways that avoid harm and continue to support the person least advantaged by the resolution.

2. **Ecology**
   Youth workers recognise the impact of ecological and structural forces on young people. Their work is not limited to facilitating change within the individual young person, but extends to the social context in which the young person lives.

3. **Discrimination**
   Youth workers' practice will be equitable.

4. **Empowerment**
   The youth worker seeks to enhance the power of the young person by making power relations open and clear; by holding power-holders accountable; by facilitating their disengagement from the youth work relationship; and by supporting the young person in the pursuit of their legitimate claims. Youth workers presume that young people are competent in assessing and acting on their interests.

5. **Corruption**
   Youth workers and youth agencies will not advance themselves at the expense of young people

6. **Transparency**
   The contract established with the young person, and the resulting relationship, will be open and truthful. The interests of other stakeholders will not be hidden from them.

7. **Confidentiality**
   Information provided by young people will not be used against them, nor will it be shared with others who may use it against them. Young people should be made aware of the contextual limits to confidentiality, and their permission sought for disclosure. Until this happens, the presumption of confidentiality must apply.

8. **Cooperation**
   Youth workers will recognise the limits of their role. Youth workers, in consultation with young people, seek to cooperate with others in order to secure the best possible outcomes for young people.

9. **Knowledge**
   Youth workers have a responsibility to keep up to date with information, resources, knowledge and practices needed to meet their obligations to young people.

10. **Self-awareness**
    Youth workers are conscious of their own values and interests, and approach difference in those with whom they work with respect.

11. **Boundaries**
    The youth work relationship is a professional relationship, intentionally limited to protect the young person. Youth workers will maintain the integrity of these limits, especially with respect to sexuality. Youth workers will not sexualise their clients.

12. **Self-care**
Ethical youth work practice is consistent with preserving the health of youth workers.

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[48] Sercombe 2002