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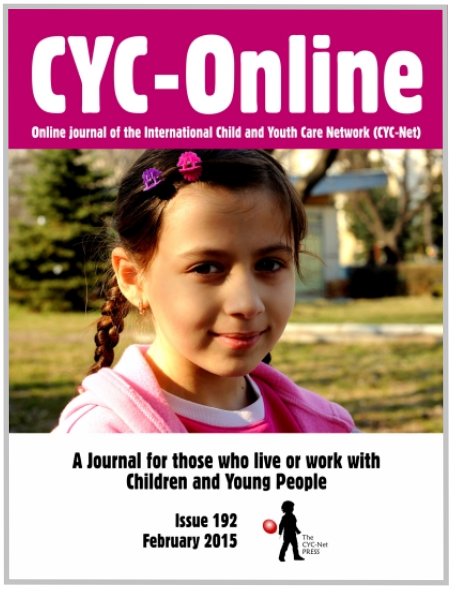

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CYC-Now and Joy

I am just back home from Winnipeg (yes, home of the original Winnie the Pooh – look it up) where Andy Leggett and I spent a day (among other things) facilitating a Joy of CYC Practice workshop.

The Joy workshop (as we like to call it) started in Thunder Bay, Ontario, and has rapidly spread across Ontario (and a few other areas). Look up CYC-Now on Facebook because that is where all the information is hosted. You will find CYC-Now Winnipeg, Thunder Bay, Toronto and many others. It is a 'movement' started by a few CYCs in Thunder Bay to promote the spirit of CYC. For more information see http://www.cyc-net.org/cyc-online/oct2014.pdf

Well, the whole thing is this . . . we get together for a day to share the Joy of our field – we tell stories and we learn together about the characteristics of our field – only positive stories of experience, by the way – and then we gather somewhere in the evening to share a drink, a cake, and time together.

And at other times, we have a few hours together in an evening – no workshop – just to get together and be together recognizing our value, friendship and affiliation as members of one large family of caring people.

Well, we were in Winnipeg doing the Joy workshop and the CYC-Now evening last week – what a combination! And what an amazing experience it was – from students to 'ancient' practitioners, we got together and celebrated our field. All of us, together, feeling good about what we do and remembering and experiencing why we do it – and in-between the moments of sharing Joy we also develop plans, deepening relationships, explore possibilities and generally do what we need to do – be together in Joy to advance the field.

This is such an important thing to do – share the Joy – we spend many, many hours dwelling on the struggles, the pain, the sometimes negative experience of being CYCs and we just do not spend enough time focusing on the Joy, the pleasure, the pride, the wonderful and meaningful moments we share with each other, young people, families and others

with whom we work. And what happens is that we forget the meaning this work gives to our lives.

And when we are together in the room – we were 70 at the Joy workshop in Winnipeg – and about 30 at the 'pub' in the evening - we have been more or less at other places - we feel what a 'family' we are – we feel out togetherness, rather than our isolation – we experience the vastness of our extended family and find ourselves grounded, once again, in why we do what we do.

CYC-Now, and the Joy of CYC Practice workshop, were promoted by a small group of people in Thunder Bay Ontario – and it has the potential to revitalize our field here in Canada. What a wonderful gift from the field to itself.

So, thank you, the CYCs of Thunder Bay, and thank you, the CYCs of Manitoba – for helping us all to re-discover our spirit.

And where will it happen next?

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CYC, The Pavements & Professional Silo's

John Paul Fitzpatrick

It's January! And, as the weather bites here in Scotland, and a thick layer of impenetrable and seemingly permanent frost on turns us all into amateur ice skaters doing a mean impression of Bambi on ice, I find myself thinking about how this relates to the challenges we face in supporting our vulnerable young people. Stick with me and I will explain.

The key to this slippery problem is both prevention and taking ownership. Both concepts, believe it or not, are equally applicable to pavements and looked after children. Let's take prevention first. Think about it – if we took the time to salt and grit our pavements at the time the snow first arrives; the Alaskan style ice layer wouldn't be able to form in the first place, making all of our lives easier! The same is true of investing in young people's care experience at an earlier age. If we intervened earlier when young people and families require support; we would mitigate the damage that drift in decision making creates on young people's prospects for being happy, healthy and supported to achieve their full potential.

Then there's ownership. No one salts or grits their paths these days as they believe it's the responsibility of the authorities. Or the crazy ,chocolate Labrador walking lady with the rainmate and shovel from three doors down who always does it! The authorities doesn't have the resources, so can't take the responsibility and therefore has no choice but to hope that someone else takes the initiative. Unfortunately, this echoes exactly what happens with young people who are vulnerable.

Social work thinks that the issue about school is an education issue. Teachers within the school wonder what is happening in the lives of their pupils and it is probably being progressed by Social Work. The residential worker thinks the social worker is on top of the situation. And meanwhile young Gerry who desperately needs the support or more timely intervention just needs someone to own the responsibility for helping address the problem.

Freeing up and encouraging all staff to take ownership and play their part to address issues quicker and create a culture responsibility to best respond to the needs of families and children efficiently and supportively is crucial if we are to achieve better outcomes for looked after children. Meanwhile, I am off to grit some paths!

Not So Small Anymore!

Kiaras Gharabaghi

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Recently I was having a conversation with a colleague who is an instructor in our Social Work department. After introducing myself as a Faculty member in the School of Child & Youth Care, she immediately became excited and proceeded to tell me that she had several child and youth care students in her class. This, in turn, led her into a long description about what was great about those students. They were, she explained, so practical, and clearly amazed by the incredible content of social work classes. Wouldn't it be good, she asked rhetorically, if child and youth care students could take more social work classes, so that they could learn about anti-oppression, therapeutic counseling, community engagement, and the many other things that social workers apparently do. After all, she suggested, why limit students to their small worlds of marginalized practice when in fact they could be exposed to the global profession of social work.

I quite enjoyed being with this colleague, but I wasn't so impressed with her comments. She clearly had it in her mind that child and youth care is an entry-level task, something that people do when they can't be social workers. It left a slightly bitter taste in my mouth, and got me thinking about where we are at in our development as a profession, a discipline, a craft, or whatever. And that, in turn, brought a smile to my face, because when one really reflects on what is going on in the world of child and youth care practice right now, it is a lot! From my limited perspective, I started listing all the very intensive and significant processes I am particularly aware of right now. So here it goes:

Over the past few weeks, I have been participating in an email conversation with colleagues from Canada about how we will participate in and enjoy our attendance at the 20th bi-annual Child and Youth Care conference in South Africa, coming up this June/July. This conference, which I have attended once before, is a life-altering experience that brings together about 1000 child and youth care practitioners from across South Africa, and usually several delegations from other African countries and also from Europe, North America and Australia. The conference is almost always attended by high-ranking politicians, and when I was there a few years ago, it was in fact attended both by the national minister of social development and the provincial minister from the province where the conference was held. Organized by the National Child Care Association of South Africa, this conference covers everything from national development to the management of the HIV crisis and other health care related issues, to residential treatment and evidence-based practices and also to the politics of organizing a professional and highly educated work force.

In a different context, I am participating in a project related to cross-over kids, a phrase used to describe young people caught up simultaneously in child welfare and youth justice. This project involves the collaboration of child and youth care practice leaders and scholars/researchers, as well as child protection, children's mental health, ministries, youth justice officials, judges, lawyers, probation officers, psychiatrists, and others. It seeks to fundamentally impact the destructive structural disadvantage of young people in care when it comes to their involvement in the criminal justice system. The project itself is co-lead by child and youth care leaders and judges from across Ontario.

Just a couple of weeks ago I emailed some of my closer Child and Youth Care colleagues from across Canada, the US, Germany and the UK about an edited volume I intend to produce this year related to child and youth care practice across service sectors. One email was enough to get an initial group of about ten highly regarded scholars in our field to promise chapters, and within a few more days, several of those ten brought on an additional ten people to write or co-write chapters in areas ranging from Aboriginal contexts to community capacity building to post-secondary structures and challenges. Now we have a group of twenty people collaborating on work that spans child welfare, children's mental health, hospitals, custody facilities, wilderness settings, residential care and treatment, family-based care, community innovation, post-secondary education, immigration and settlement issues, schools, developmental services, policy development and advocacy. All in the name of child and youth care practice.

On another front, I am working with partners from Germany and Provincial Advocates from across Canada, to bring together practice, policy and research leaders to engage the phenomenon of children's lives away from home, including young people in institutional care, home-

less, living in refugee camps, unaccompanied minors and others. This initiative, based fully and completely on the core principles and themes of child and youth care practice, will eventually bring together organizations such as UNICEF, UNHCR, Save the Children, SOS Children's Villages, Child Advocates, and many others to do some incredible work that transcends the institutional and policy silos created over the years in most countries, and this initiative will have at its core the engagement of young people's voices. Another child and youth care initiative of global consequence.

Although I have no involvement in this personally, I saw recently an announcement by CELCIS (based in Scotland) of a free on-line course available to anyone who is interested in being with young people facing adversity. CELCIS is strongly linked to the literature and practice of child and youth care, and many of the core initiators within CELCIS are in fact leaders in our field.

I know that CYC-Net, along with the people who brought us the Global CYC Conference in St. John's, Newfoundland in 2013, are working with FICE International and especially an Austrian connection, to organize a huge conference in Vienna, Austria for 2016. Given the involvement of CYC-Net, a substantial component of this huge gathering will be informed by child and youth care themes and concepts, alongside many other theoretical and social orientations.

What else is going on? Across my home province of Ontario, there are grassroots initiatives that are working actively to embed CYC in political, legislative, research and practice initiatives, services and programs. The Ontario Association of Child and Youth Care is partnering with my School here at Ryerson University to strengthen both institutions' brands and reach. CYC Now, an entirely grassroots initiative that is emerging in several Ontario communities is changing the way practitioners in our field know of each other, work with each other, and value each other.

Aside from these things, CYC-Net itself has expanded dramatically in recent months to include not only the trusted and incredibly useful web site and discussion forum, but also a book press and an electronic, peer reviewed journal. Other international, peer reviewed journals informed fundamentally by a child and youth care perspective, continue their work, including *Child & Youth Services*, a journal I co-edit with my friend Ben Anderson-Nathe from Portland State University.

These are just a few of the things I know are going on in our field right now. There surely are many dozens more initiatives that span the world, impact children and youth living on the edge, and are informed very centrally by a child and youth care perspective. Our field can hardly be characterized as small, emerging, or entry-level. It is huge, it has arrived, and it will change the world. So now I feel a lot better about it all, even though I know I will encounter many other people and conversations that reflect a different image of our field.

Listening For The Absurd

Jack Phelan

CYC workers hear statements from youth that on the surface appear to make little sense. We often attribute this to some negative quality about the youth or just simple lack of common sense. An example is when a youth will deny doing something even though he knows that we will be able to confirm it very easily (a phone call or checking the log). New staff members view most youth as untrustworthy because of a few encounters like this. Other examples seem to indicate no concern for others, sarcastically expressed, "If you don't like my music (playing loudly), then don't listen."

Listening carefully for these illogical or senseless statements will make you an effective CYC practitioner, if you learn to listen for valid meaning and truth. I have found that almost all of the youth who

have said things that I initially interpreted as foolish were actually making a lot of sense from their point of view. When I got more capable of appreciating this, I became better at building relationships and seeing resiliencies.

Effective CYC practice is developmentally and relationally focused. The developmental process of each of us is unique, but there are dynamics that are true for different stages. When a CYC practitioner starts to listen without fitting the message into his/her own developmental process, but rather understands the meaning from the other's developmental process, true meaning-making becomes possible.

If you desired to take a person and stall his development significantly the most effective method is to neglect and/or abuse him at a very young age. The result will be a very self-protective and suspicious human. Almost all of the people CYC practitioners serve have this background.

Developmental issues for our youth and their families include lack of trust, feelings of powerlessness, anxiety about intimacy or even basic friendship, self-interested morality, a hopeless future vision, hyper vigilance and fear of vulnerability. These are all attributed to poor developmental progress. Every normal two year old can be described as a sociopath, but we just see their behavior as typical of a certain developmental stage. The ability to see the behavior of our youth as developmentally appropriate for what they have experienced is an important challenge for us to face.

So when a youth tells us they were in class all day, even though we both know that this will be validated or not within an hour by a phone call, they are being morally true and correct, even as we, from our developmental perspective, label this as lying. When a youth, asked if he has any really close friends, thinks carefully and states that he has 231 close friends, we use our definition to smile at their silliness. A youth of 14 who bullies others to get what he wants may be a three year old developmentally, pushing another toddler away from a desired toy. The lack of caring for how my behavior affects others is normal for young children, and it really is not possible to change this lack of concern by sermonizing or punishment. A 15 year old who gets mad when you bring up yesterday's bad behavior to deny a privilege today may only be capable of living in the present moment and legitimately sees you as being unfair. A 14 year old girl who agrees with you that she should only have sex with someone she truly loves, defines true love as when a boy looks her in the face when having sex (a definition arrived at with other 14 year old girls).

When youths make statements or question our competence angrily or out of frustration, we too often use our own developmental awareness to interpret the interaction. The competent CYC practitioner can listen carefully at those moments, putting aside his own need to be right, and hear developmental information that can be very helpful in connecting and eventually healing some of the stuckness that keeps our youth from being successful.

Listening as a CYC Improviser

Wolfgang Vachon

*This is the fourth article in a series on improvisation in child and youth care. In this article the author explores **listening**. He discusses the purpose of listening, different listening styles, and the specific behaviours which contribute to effective listening.*

As child and youth care (CYC) practitioners we are frequently in a process of listening, speaking and acting. While much of our work happens outside of dialogue, the ability to communicate verbally is essential to effective practice (Stuart, 2013). Silence and speaking are two activities we move between in our conversations (and indeed in most of our interactions) with children, youth and families. In our work as CYCs, silence is not waiting to speak and our speaking should not silence anyone else. Silence gives us, and others, the opportunity to *listen* in order to comprehend what is being communicated and formulate an appropriate response. Both silence and speaking are acts of engagement with the person (or people) we are with. This article will look at the first half of the conversation process, listening.

I originally conceived this piece as one on "voice in child and youth care". Voice as a concept/term encompassing listening, speaking, and acting. As I started to write I realized that space prohibited me from adequately addressing all these factors in a single article. I have decided to break voice into two separate pieces, this one dealing with listening and the next one focusing on speaking and acting.

The improvisation of Listening

One of the differences between scripted theatre and improvisation is the memorization of text. With a script every person on stage knows *what* is going to be said by whom, and by the time it is performed in front of an audience, *how* it is going to be said. One of the challenges for actors is nevertheless still to listen, despite knowing what is going to be said. The actor may be able to say every line that is being spoken to her and has heard them all dozens of times. However, when she stops listening, the audience notices. Through not attending, the actor is communicating that what is being said is not worth listening to. The audience is then cued there is no need listen, and their re-

sponse might be to stop paying attention. Krueger (2005) in a short piece about the similarities between actors and CYCs writes "When asked what they (actors) think is the most important acting skill, a large number say listening. Good acting requires the ability to hear what the other actors are saying. Everything from the timing to the genuineness of the response depends on the ability to listen" (Para. 4). Even when the actor knows what the person is going to say, the skilled performer still listens. Listening means being fully present and engaged with the other person on stage. As someone who has performed the same show for weeks at a time, I can appreciate how difficult it is to listen. It can be incredibly challenging consciously to actively pay attention to what is being said. It requires great effort to not anticipate and then just to respond the same way we did the night before.

Sanford Meisner, an American actor and theatre teacher, developed a widely used approach to theatre called the *Meisner Technique*. In his book *On Acting*, Meisner outlines this process through the documentation of training acting students over the course of 15 months. On the first day he begins with listening exercises — simple activities like listening to the cars they can hear outside. He then tries to have them understand the difference between listening as themselves and listening as a character. Were they listening to the cars, or were they being actors in a class, showing that they were listening? He then moves into one of his most famous activities, the Word Repetition Game. He has partners observe each other and notice something about the other person. Then one of the dyad names what it is that they have noticed, such as "your hair is shinny". The person this was said to then repeats what they hear, and the first repeats what they hear:

Your hair is shiny.
Your hair is shiny.
Your hair is shiny.
Your hair is shiny.

Meisner recognizes that the activity "probably seems unbelievably silly … but it is the beginning of something. Are you listening to each other? Are you repeating what you hear? You are … It's inhuman … But it has something in it. It has connection… It's a connection which comes from listening to each other, but it has no human quality – yet … It is the basis of what eventually becomes emotional dialogue" (Meisner and Longwell, p.22). The actor starts by not being an actor. The actor starts by listening to what is around him, then listening to what is being said, and repeating what is being said. Not as an actor, not as a character, but as a person. Listening not as a character but as a person is what CYCs strive to do. We don't listen as a-CYC-showing-everyone-that-we-are-actively-listening-to-the-client. We listen as a person. We are, of course, a practitioner in all our interactions with those we work with, and should always keep that function present in our work. However, we are also *not* a practitioner. We are a human in connection with

another human. We are in connection with a person who deserves the quality of an engaged relationship. When I go to a movie, I want the actors on screen to have the skills that allow me to forget they are acting.

"How much of our work is scripted? How many roles do we play? How much of our self comes through in our acting?" (Krueger, 2005, para. 8). It can be tempting to listen exclusively from the role of a CYC. The role provides safety and clarity in our interactions. Many of us are trained to do exactly this, to not "over-share", to not bring too much of our Self into the work, to maintain boundaries that clearly delineate the role of a CYC and "client". However, the role can limit us to the point where we, too, can seem inhuman — you have shiny hair, you have shiny hair, you have shiny hair (or, how does that make you feel, how does that make you feel, how does that make you feel). It can be easy to slip out of a quality human interaction and into the character of a CYC, and thus in the process lose the "person to person" connection.

In theatre improvisation, one usually doesn't know what's going to be said next by the other actors on stage. One must listen in a different way than in a scripted production. In improvisation, one listens for the offer (a word, phrase or gesture that invites a response). Only by attending will the actor be able to follow the story effectively. If they don't listen they will not hear the offer. The same happens in music. "A jazz musician has to listen carefully, to recognise not only the music being played, but also what it could be, to listen for the prophetic foreshadowing in even the simplest phrase." (Lipsitz, 2015. Para 3). Listening is about what could be. The CYC listens with intention, and as she listens she reflects upon what is being said; what's the offer being made? She asks herself, "how can I accept and advance the offer?" Even the simplest phrase has the possibility to open up the life space of the young person. Within each offer there are infinite opportunities.

Listening is not knowing what's going to happen, it is attending to what *may* happen, and thus being more prepared for what *does* happen. Speaking, from the young person, is the invitation and listening, from the CYC, is the acceptance. To not listen, to cut off, to interrupt, to phase out, etc., is to block the bid for connection and understanding (for more on bids and blocking see Vachon, 2014). Listening allows the CYC to understand "the life space of young people as it is articulated and experienced by them" (Gharabaghi and Stuart, 2014, p.6). Through listening we gain insight into how the person we are with experiences the physical, mental, relational and virtual dimensions of their life space. As Gharabaghi and Stuart (2014) write about working with young people through a life space intervention framework "considerable attention is paid to the nuances of language" (p.6). This attention comes through listening. Listening requires being prepared and ready for the moment. The preparation comes from the sum of our knowledge which has led to this moment: our history, our studying, our

practice wisdom, and our relationship with the young person. The preparation also gives us the skills to shape what will happen. Through understanding what is being communicated we are able to advance the moment.

What is listening?

As a species, our listening takes up a significant amount of time when it comes to communication activities. Studies over the past 89 years have consistently shown that listening is the communication activity we do more than any other single activity (Janusik and Wolvin, 2009). Despite it's prevalence, sometimes we can forget what it actually is, how to do it, and it's purpose. For CYCs, effective listening requires both behavioural skills and attributes that people can sense. Watson, Barker and Weaver (1995) identified four different listening styles. They suggest that people use a particular style based on habit rather than a conscious choice. They write that "differences in listening styles reflect attitudes, beliefs, and predispositions about the how, where, when, who and what of the information reception and encoding process" (p.2). Even when a different style might more effectively serve a particular situation, people are hesitant to switch. What their work suggests is that as CYCs we can, and need to, adapt our style depending on the context. There are times when one style may be more effective than another. The style we use should reflect the needs of the individual, the moment, and the relationship. The four styles Watson *et al*. identify are people, action, content, and time-oriented listening.

People-oriented listening focuses on others' emotions; the listening tends to look for common areas of interest and the listener responds empathetically. This is the style most frequently taught to CYCs. Action-oriented listening focuses on concision, "error-free presentation" (Watson *et al*. 1995 p.5) and organization. When listening from this style people can become frustrated and impatient when the presentation is disorganized. This is a style that

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might be useful when gathering evidence after a young person has been the victim of a crime (without losing our empathy of course). Content-oriented listening appreciates complex, detailed and challenging information. The focus of this style is on facts and details before making assessments and judgments. This may be completely appropriate listening when doing an intake or assessment. A time-oriented listening style prefers "brief or hurried interactions with others" (Watson *et al*. 1995 p.3). I think of the cold nights when I worked at a shelter. At times there was a line-up of people outside at curfew waiting for beds that became available from those who did not return. We had limited room in the waiting space and oppressive rules about letting people in before doing an intake. On those nights I switched to a more time-oriented listening style so that I could get though as many people in as short a period as possible. Watson et al. developed a listening scale assessment tool which became very popular but is now seen as having low reliability. There does however seem to be validity in the idea of listening styles (Bodie, Worthington & Gearhart, 2013). There are also some assessments being developed regarding how people like to be listened to. Itzchakov, Kluger, Emanuel-Tor & Gizbar (2014) found that speaker-centered listening was preferred by the majority of the respondents they studied.
Speaker-centered listening is being empathetic, person-centered and sensitive to the emotions of the speaker.

In CYC practice one frequently hears about active listening. Active listening has it roots in the work of Carl Rogers and the term comes out of Parent Effectiveness Training as developed by Dr. Thomas Gordon (Weger, Bell, Minei and Robinson, 2014). It involves not judging the individual you are listening to, showing interest in what the other person is saying, paraphrasing, asking appropriate questions, and using moderate to high non-verbal interactions (back channels) (Weger *et al*., 2014). An example of this can be seen in Nonviolent Crisis Intervention (NCI). NCI uses a listening format they call Empathic Listening. This process has five aspects to it: "Give the young person undivided attention; be nonjudgmental, focus on the youth's feelings, not just the facts; allow silence for reflection; and use restatements to clarify messages (Schubert, 2007, p.228).

Weger *et al*. (2014) developed a study to look at active listening in comparison to advice or "simple acknowledgement" in initial interactions. Like Watson *et al*., Bodie *et al*, and Itzchakov *et al.* above, Weger *et al*. are coming from the field of communication studies. Most of the above studies were conducted with participants in post-secondary educational institutions and there is little discussion of ethno-racial or class differences. These are significant limitations to keep in mind when applying these studies to a CYC context. Weger *et al*. found that people preferred active listening to advice or simple acknowledgement in initial interactions. These interactions were not therapeutically based. The authors' findings matched several other studies which they cited

which show that active listening is preferred over either advice or simple acknowledgement, particularly in counselling. However, they also noted several other studies that indicated this is not always the case. For example college students in academic counseling situations preferred advice to active listening responses (Scholl, 2004 as cited in Weger *et al*. 2014) and people calling a crisis line rated counsellors who gave advice as more helpful and likable than those providing active listening (Libow & Doty, 1976 as cited in Weger *et al*. 2014).

When we engage in listening, as CYCs, it is important to keep the above literature in mind. While it's necessary to understand and be proficient in active listening, it is only one listening style. It's important to remember that this may not always be what people want or need. We think of advice as being listener-focused, in contrast to active listening which is seen as speaker-focused. However, if I am always using active listening regardless of context, then perhaps my active listening has become listener-focused rather than speaker-focused. It becomes about *my* preference, habit, and comfort; not the needs of the person I am listening to. I may be asking questions, paraphrasing, summarizing, etc. while the young person I'm with just wants to get inside from the cold and fall sleep after being up for a day and a half. As an improviser, I need to be able to adapt to the offers I am given, and not fall into habits of style. Paraphrasing is not necessary when someone is asking directions to the toilet (although that might make for a very funny scene on stage). As an actor I trained my voice, and part of this was going through my whole tonal range. In my daily life I may use a limited range but as a performer I needed to be comfortable across my full vocal capacity. As CYCs we need to be comfortable across a full listening capacity. To develop this capacity we need to be familiar with different forms of listening, understand when each form would be an appropriate response, and then to practice listening in that manner. When is advice the best response? When is content-listening appropriate? When is simple acknowledgement required? How is each one done? If one has become habituated to a certain style of listening, one risks using the same tool regardless what the situation calls for. A chainsaw is great for cutting down a tree, it's is a deadly choice for changing a fuse!

Not understating different listening styles may also blind us to the diversity in the ways others listen to us. In our habituation we may expect others to listen from our style, rather than honouring theirs. Do we start to think that the seventeen-year-old standing in the cold waiting to get in is "rude" if they are adopting a time-oriented listening style? If we don't appreciate context and listening styles will we think the parent who is action-oriented is not caring about their child? Understanding different listening styles allows us to understand how we are being listened to and to become aware of why a particular style may be chosen. This may also give us insight into how the person

likes to be listened to (although I have seen no data on such a correlation).

Bodie, Cry, Pence, Rold, and Honeycutt (2012) did several studies (published together) to lay out a framework of what "competent listening" is. They attempted to separate and rank in importance the attributes and behaviours of competent listening. They identified the attributes of "being attentive", "friendly" and "responsive" as the most important to the speaker, with "conversational flow" and "understanding" being less relevant in an evaluation of attributes. They found that verbal responses "were consistently perceived as having more to do with listening impressions than non-verbal behaviours" (p.20). How the listener *seemed* was more important than what they did. When analyzing what behaviours speakers identified as most important in defining "competent listening" they were (in descending order): "listening", "pays attention", "responsiveness", "eye contact", "questioning", "understanding", "conversational flow", "friendly/polite", "intelligence/competence", "confident/extraversion", "nonverbal/body language", "humour", and "clarity" (p7). It is important to note that this was not in a professional or caring relationship but was a study done which looked at general social interactions. The most important attribute is "being attentive" and the most important behaviour is "listening". These are both vague and revealing. While defining the behaviour of "listening" as the most important behaviour of "competent listening" seems circular; it indicates to me that a great deal of listening is about presence. How present are you in the relationship with the other person? As a CYC improviser do you attend (pay attention), do you accept (friendly), can you advance (respond)?

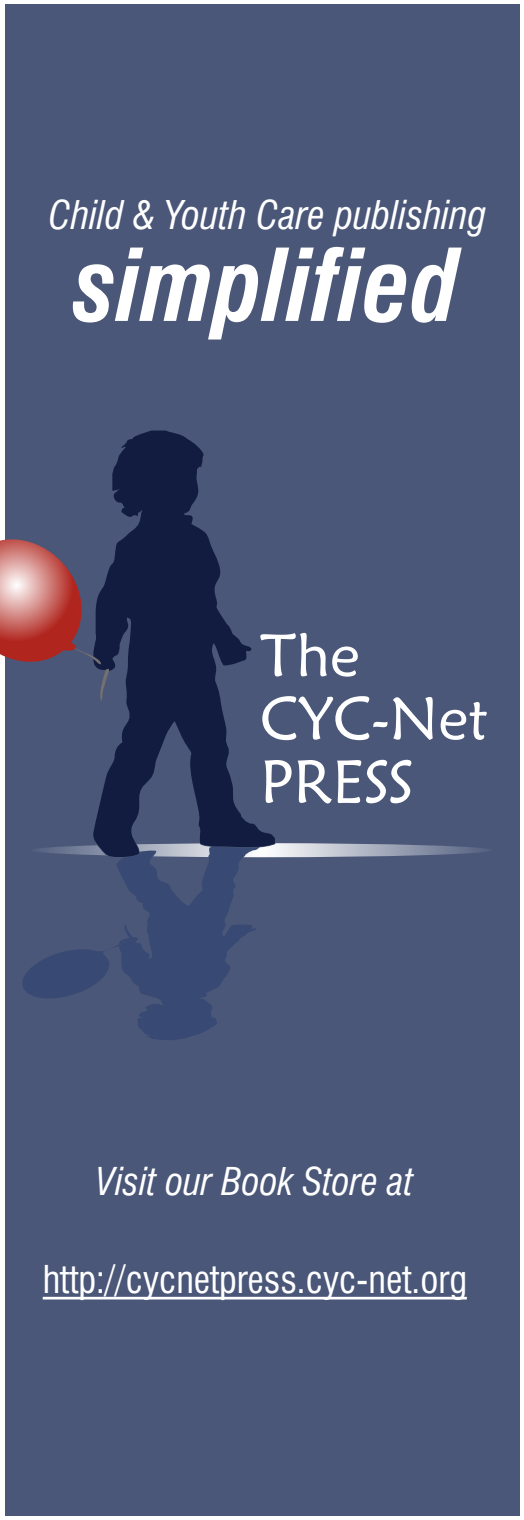
Listening and hearing

Several years ago while I was teaching an interventions course, a student spoke about the difference between listening and hearing. The essence of her point was that hearing a sound pass through the ears is not the same as processing the words and actions of the other to understanding what is being communicated. Hearing something spoken, at a biological level, requires one's brain to receive the sounds, turn those sounds into words and then to make meaning from the concepts embedded within the words. Sound from the speaker passes though the ear into the auditory cortex, which then distributes it to a variety of other areas each specializing in specific aspects of comprehending. The amygdala for emotional tone, Wernicke's area for decoding words, then to the anterior temporal lobe and inferior frontal cortex to extract the meaning of words spoken, and finally into the frontal lobe for comprehension, which is based upon our memory. All of this takes about ½ second (Carter, 2009). We do this many thousands of times a day, is it any wonder that sometimes we "tune out"?

Listening requires us to understand *what* is being said, and it also requires us to understand *why* it is being said and why it

is being said *that way* (Spunt, 2013). In order to do this we must understand beyond the words. We must comprehend vocal intonation, facial expressions and body language. However, full comprehension also recognizes that speakers say and do things for specific purposes, ends or goals. Listening can be used to infer what the speaker believes, their disposition and what motivates them. All this is called "mentalizing" (Spunt, 2013). Mentalizing is listening with an understanding towards the mental states of others.

"If 'to hear' is to understand the sense (either in the so-called figurative sense, or in the so-called proper sense: to hear a siren, a bird, or a drum is already each time to understand at least the rough outline of a situation, a context if not a text), to listen is to be straining toward a possible meaning, and consequently one that is not immediately accessible" (Jean-Luc Nancy, 2007. P.6). Hearing is about registering the sounds and developing a general awareness of them, listening is moving towards meaning. I am currently trying to learn a new language. As part of my learning I try to expose myself to the language being spoken. I can hear the sounds but it is only through a conscious process of listening that I pick up the words and start to understand them. It's easy for me to let the sounds pass through my ears without grasping what they mean. This starts to happen when I'm tired, distracted, or would rather be doing something else. I suspect these are some of the same reasons that I occasionally don't listen to a young person who I'm with. "Hearing just



happens, but listening entails attention and interpretation. Listening is an act of deliberation and discernment, a capacity that gets cultivated through experience" (Lipsitz, G. 2015, para. 7). There are still times when I tune out; however, through understanding this tendency and practicing my skills I am able to develop mechanisms to minimize this.

The International Listening Association makes comprehension (and action) an essential component of listening. "Listening is the process of receiving, constructing meaning from and responding to spoken and/or nonverbal messages" (International Listening Association). Comprehension (and action) is also central to the Communication Domain of Practice as described by Stuart (2013). "Conversations develop relationship and help people to find common ground, to get to know and understand each other. Conversations move from 'small talk' to more in-depth 'meaningful talk' that helps you to understand the other person's perspective, to a mutual agreement on solutions or 'next steps' (Stuart, 2013, p187). When CYCs listen they are doing so to comprehend all of what the young person or family member is communicating. They listen for the *what*, the *why* and the why *that way*. "Workers listen with an awareness of the meaning of what they are hearing, the atmosphere in which they are listening, and the nature of the listening experience… They also demonstrate through attitude and feedback the capacity to understand the meaning of a youths' words and actions" (Krueger and Stuart, 2002, para.2).

Listening requires one to be present and willing to accept the future. Not in a fatalistic way but rather to be open to possibilities, to transformation, to change, to what may come. As we listen we are tuning into the strengths of those we work with, to understand what they may need. A strengths-based approach is premised upon "the belief that clients are the experts of their own lives and have the best insight into what they need to be successful. This means the helper's role is not to tell clients what to do, but to listen to and support their perspective on their situation. The helper-client relationship is collaborative and respects clients' capacity to make their own choices" (Oliver, 2014, p. 46). Improvisation is also about being open to the possibilities and listening for the expertise of the person the improviser is in relationship with. It is accepting the choice (the offer, the bid) the other makes and building upon the other's strengths. The improviser does not enter with assumptions about how things are going to proceed but allows the moment to unfold. "As a form of artistic practice that accents and embodies real-time creative decision-making, risk-taking, trust, surprise, and collaboration, improvisation has much to teach us about listening — really listening—to what's going on around us, much to tell us about responsibility and hope, about how we can adapt to change, about how we might… choose to create a shared future." (Ajay and Caines, 2015. Prologue, para. 7). A future that the CYC improviser collaboratively creates with those we are in relationship with through

our listening, and acting.

When we listen we let the other person know that we are available for them. Listening communicates what sort of a CYC we are; it lets the other person know if they can share with, and trust, us. Stuart (2014) writes about deep listening "a theoretical concept that involves experiential learning, reflection, and the development of an unconscious physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual competence with a focus on understanding. It must be practiced and repeated, reflected upon and refined" (p.4). Deep listening comes out of the work of Pauline Oliveros, a pioneer in early tape, electronic and improvised music. Deep listening requires going within the self. Through an understanding of our self, we can understand our relationship to others. Deep listening is a focus on self *in relationship*. As Burns (2012) reminds us, "The Self is the interpreter of reality, and you, like the rest of us, interpret reality differently" (p.9). As the writer Henry Major Tomlinson put it "We see things not as they are, but as we are." This applies to listening as well as seeing. We hear things from our self, from all the experiences, fears, joys and other factors that make up our life at that particular moment. How many times have you had an experience of reflecting on a conversation with someone and the two of you have completely different memories of what was said? Deep listening is a call for our CYC practice to be "practiced and repeated, reflected upon and refined".

All listening requires us to practice, repeat, reflect and refine. We are surrounded by sounds that we hear all day long. Much of it we do not bring our conscious attention to. This makes sense, reflecting upon every sound would prohibit us from ever leaving bed when the alarm goes off in the morning. We *listen* far less frequently than we *hear*. As CYCs we need to ensure that we listen when required. It is important to know what listening is, to appreciate the different ways to listen, to understand how people want others to listen to them, to know this can shift, based upon context, and then to be present with the individual we are with. We use all our skills so we can fully listen to them, as they need to be listened to in that particular moment.

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Some Thoughts about Authority

Laura Steckley

In my last column, I discussed how disruption-repair might be attempted when trying to maintain boundaries, set limits and create safe environments without exacerbating the vicious cycle of pervasive shame. I offered some ideas, and soon after sending it to our editors, I realised that I didn't include any mention of authority in my discussion. So I've been chewing on this for several weeks, and what follows is merely a bit of an exploration.

Here in Scotland, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, along with theoretical developments in relation to childhood and child-centredness, have impacted the way we think about practice. Some of these impacts have been positive, with a greater emphasis on the serious consideration of children's views about matters that affect them (though the related gap between rhetoric and reality is sometimes chasmic). Other impacts have been less than positive, with a sometimes superficial conceptualisation and application that runs counter to children's best interest. In the midst of this, I think we've become unclear about the place of authority in practice.

So what is authority and what is the place of it in progressive, informed residential child care practice? As we collectively become more enlightened about children's agency and integrate principles of strength-based practice and empowerment into our practices, should we let go of the perceived need to exercise our authority as part of good practice?

I guess a good starting point in trying to address this question is to step back and consider what is meant by 'authority'. Most general definitions of authority link it with power and enforcement. Within mainstream understandings, it's about being in a position of power that enables one to make something happen, maintain something as it is, or to stop something from happening. It has the connotation of authority *over* others.

The idea of lording over children and young people is likely to be off-putting to most readers of this journal and is probably linked to some of the preceding discussion about developing understandings of children's rights, strengths-based practice and recognition of children's agency. Yet most of us would agree that there are times when stepping in and stopping something from happening, one child harming another, for instance, is not only a good thing but is required of us. Back in 1952 Redl and Wineman wrote convincingly about children's need for adults to protect them, even sometimes from themselves. And if you've ever worked with someone who is unwilling or unable to convey to children and young people a willingness to step in and take charge when necessary, you may have noticed how unsafe that can make everyone feel.

This leads to an interesting question about whether it is only in situations of imminent, serious harm that one should exercise authority. My own instinct about this is to answer, only if that exercise of authority is in a coercive manner. But there are many other ways that we exercise authority in practice. If you've ever worked with someone who conveys a quiet authority, you may have noticed that there are fewer occasions in which an overt exercise of authority is actually needed when this person is around. From my own experience, I would say that those practitioners who can bring a sense of personal authority to the encounter tend to be more effective at making kids feel safe – safe enough to take the risks and tolerate the feelings of vulnerability that arise during the processes of relationship, growth and recovery. A sort of 'borrowing' of external controls can happen that provides a bridging experience towards stronger internal controls.

The kind of authority that promotes growth is firmly rooted in care and a strong sense of fairness. Vanderwoerd has argued, it must also be rooted in a fundamental respect for children, with a view towards developing greater equality in the relationship, as each young person is ready (you can read his article here http://www.cyc-net.org/cyc-online/cycol-0607-vanderwoerd.html on *CYC Online*).

Growth-promoting authority also requires competence, confidence, self-awareness and self-control. These are admirable qualities under normal circumstances but are especially difficult to maintain in situations of rising tension or escalating threat. Just as a fear of exercising authority will often make things worse, an overblown display of authority is also likely to backfire.

So how does one get it right? Where does this confidence come from and how does one acquire it? For me, the key is in the answer to the question, confidence in what? Perhaps many of us made the mistake, in our early days of practice, of thinking it was confidence in our ability to control situations or achieve the desired response from kids. This kind of confidence may come in handy some of the time – and successfully taking control can really be a boost to confidence – but it will be shaken every time we come up

against circumstances that are beyond our control or kids who will thwart our aims.

The confidence that supports growth-promoting authority comes from a fundamental belief in the inherent potential for connection, growth and health in every single kid we work with, no matter what their history or current functioning. It is also comes from a belief in our own. This kind of confidence comes from knowing that we won't always get it right, and not all situations are going to turn out like we hope, but that in any given moment, we have the capacity to plug into something beyond surface details of a seemingly dire situation. We are not alone in the endeavour – young people's inherent potential for growth is always present and may be kindled at unexpected moments and in unexpected ways. And ours can be too.

Authority that comes from this kind of committed belief is less vulnerable to becoming adversarial and more likely to be accepted or even welcomed by children and young people. It also allows for a greater sense of shared authority, not just amongst staff but also with children and young people (as they can manage). In the longer term, children and young people who have sufficiently positive experiences of authority figures will be more likely to develop internal controls and a basic respect for others. As adults, they will be better equipped to manage relationships with authority figures and to exercise authority constructively.

Until next time …

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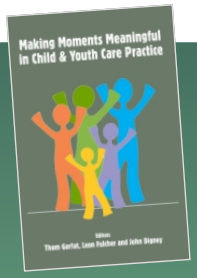

MAKING MOMENTS MEANINGFUL IN CHILD AND YOUTH CARE PRACTICE (2013) is the latest book edited by Thom Garfat, Leon Fulcher & John Digney. In this volume, CYC practitioners, educators and trainers demonstrate the applicability of a **Daily Life Events (dle©)** approach across various settings and practice areas. It demonstrates the breadth and depth of the Child & Youth Care field and how it has evolved. This is an excellent student or professional development volume.

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The Role of Intellectuals in CYC:Part II

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In the first column in this series last month, I suggested that the intellectual cadre of CYC needed to be accountable to thinking and writing in ways that promote work that meets the material needs of young people and workers. I argued that our work is founded and cannot be separated from the structures of truth and ideology that comprise our contemporary modes of life. In our interactions with young people we disseminate beliefs, ideas and social practices that either support or challenge the prevailing systems of domination and control. To engage our work with any degree of craft we need to know how to read the social, affective and relational nuances that compose the moments of our working day. I proposed that CYC intellectuals have a role to play in providing the tools to support the capacities for such a reading.

This role comes with a certain set of responsibilities that I argued includes the mandate to provide theories and ideas that are useful and responsive to living concerns of those involved in the work itself. In following that mandate I want to propose some ways of structuring the relationship between intellectuals and workers that might assist in thinking through how we might be increasingly responsive to the work.

To do this I want to blend two readings that on the surface seem as though they might be quite far apart. The first is a section from an essay on the Italian post-Marxist concept and practice of Workerism. In particular, I have focused on a section on the role of intellectuals in the movement. The second is a provocative essay by Doug Magnuson called "Stop Breaking People Into Bits: A Plea for a Peopled Youth Work" in the book *With Children and Youth: Emerging Theories and Practices in Child and Youth Care Work*. In Magnuson's writing, he also focuses on the role of intellectuals, but in the field of CYC. On the surface, the two pieces of writing are a bit at odds with each other. The Workerist movement and particularly the intellectuals are deeply rooted in postmodern and Marxist theories while Magnuson' piece critiques both frameworks when they are used in ways that uses "everyday life to illustrate a theory." Or when the use of such theory "becomes a pursuit in itself . . .and pulls us into self-referential dialogues." Magnuson also critiques the misuse of science, in ways I have critiqued it in the previous column in this series, but it is his critique of the theories of critique that I am interested in here. I am going to make the argument that it is critical that those of us engaged in critical and postmodern theo-

retical engagements pay close attention to Magnuson's concerns. These are concerns also addressed in the Workerist article and there is more connection between the two than one might imagine.

In his plea for a peopled youth work, Magnuson makes a strong case for returning to the roots of CYC in an emphasis on everyday life; writing that can be accessed across disciplines because it puts theory in the service of amplifying; and explicating actual lived experience and a caution against fads.

> *Peopled writing cautions us against fads. Peopled writing refuses to reduce practice to slogans and people to automatons; early in the twentieth century, youth workers resisted behaviourism's influence. In the 1980's, 1990's and today, this resistance was needed but missing, as program fad and principle rolled through youth services, diverting attention from sound programs to the cult of the presumed new that would sprinkle magic dust on our problems: outdoor adventure, positive youth development, trauma and loss counselling, wraparound services- everyone has their own list. (p.47)*

The workersists are similarly opposed to easy slogans and simplifications. However, they add another dimension to Magnuson's wise counsel. Magnuson is concerned that theory might obscure the difficult and complex relations of day-to-day work, and this is a concern shared by the workerists as well. But they are also concerned with the way the demands for a simpler discourse forces theory into sloganeering and makes it available for dissemination as propaganda or fads. They make claim to a complexity of thought and what might be termed intellectualism or "an excess of abstract thought." In this regard, they take pains to clarify the relation of the intellectuals in the labour movement that is workerism and the role of the workers on the front line. They state that workerist intellectuals

> *Never claimed to be able to "teach" workers the life of revolt or revolution. On the contrary, the workerist practice of "coresearch" meant simply that militants must "learn" from the workers and listen to them, but always maintaining the role of intellectuals, who were able to transmit the tools of thought and analysis which could be useful to the worker who intended to undertake a collective journey of liberation.*

There are several key elements here for those of us who work in the role of intellectuals within CYC. The first is the idea that intellectuals cannot teach those living and working in the actual material conditions out of which revolt or revolution can arise. This realm is the realm of what Magnuson defines as a peopled youth work. The absolute living relations are the ground out which the work arises and it is the conditions of work, and who controls them, that is at stake in any form of youth work or CYC interested in justice, equity or revolt. That said, let us not forget that the worker is profoundly immersed in the world of fad and ideology that comprises the agency and governmental

logics upon which they are dependent for the means to live. The intellectual cannot teach the worker about the life of the work, but they can learn from the worker and from young people what life is like in the day-to-day struggle in the work. Indeed, it is incumbent upon them to do so and Magnuson makes this case well. They, also however, have a responsibility to use their skills as intellectuals to deploy the tools of theory and analysis as demanded by the situations they encounter. This will, at times, require an initial complexity of thought and articulation that will operate outside the common vernacular of the field. It is incumbent upon the intellectual class to engage the workers in such a way that evolving theory encounters actual practice and is translated into terms that are useful on the ground. In this however, CYC intellectuals should not pander to a populism or anti-intellectualism to build alliances with field. As the workerists put it –

> *First of all, Workerism always refused the populist attitude, very common among the militants of extraparliamentary groups of 1970s Italy, of disguising oneself as a worker, of wearing overalls to appear like the workers, hiding with shame one's bourgeois origins. On the contrary, those who had the fortune of being able to study, go to university, have at their disposal the tools to enrich their own knowledge, and develop critical thought; those who had the fortune to study abroad, learn languages, and more closely understand capitalist thought; those who had the fortune of studying the history of the workers' movement, Marxist thought, had the duty of improving these tools of knowledge to the maximum extent, of reaching the highest levels of scientific production, and of putting their knowledge at the disposal of all, and in particular the workers. Intellectuals must see themselves as cells of a service infrastructure.*

Those of us who have the luxury of academic appointment or other forms of intellectual endeavor, such as teaching or consulting have a responsibility to value and use, to the best of our abilities, that privileged position. To engage in anti-intellectualism or populism that decries theory or complex ideas in order to "fit in" with the perceived values of those working on the front lines is to betray our accountability to the very workers we claim as our own.

Instead, I would propose that we need to use our access to the tools of thought and knowledge production to the maximum effect we can, while being fully aware that the development of theory has direct political implications for work being done between young people and workers. In this sense, any working theory should be tested ethologically. That is to say, instead of asking whether a particular theory advances a set of truths, we should instead what it does to practice. As ethologists the question for the intellectuals is, what does thinking this way allow workers and young people to do that they couldn't do before. What new worlds of practice and possibility are opened up and what worlds

are foreclosed by thinking in this way. Referring to an earlier iteration of the relation between workers and intellectuals in CYC Magnuson states,

> *It was blue collar work theorized by members of the white collar classes, many of whom had a prescient vision of play and the importance of healthy communities in the eyes of children. These activists had a keen eye and ear for the informal education possibilities embedded in everyday life.*

Magnuson's articulation of a possible set of relations between white collar academics and blue collar youth workers echoes the terms delineated in the workerist conception and opens the possibility that theory can open future capacities of the work premised in a deep relation of learning from those doing the work. In other words, the intellectual can only open the future of the field based in the ability to perceive the capacities of the work itself as it is currently being practiced. To the degree that theory is developed and articulated without direct relation to the work, it betrays a central but generally unacknowledged element of relationship in our relationally driven field of endeavor. Intellectuals in CYC need to learn from workers and workers then need to learn from intellectuals. This should be an ongoing conversation of mutual critique and sharing of knowledge. Foucault refers to this as the ground out of which insurrectionary politics arises. He said that there are subjugated knowledges. These are the unacknowledged and marginalized ways of knowing that don't comprise the dominant domains of truth. I would argue that the knowledge that is gained through truly relational work on the ground is just such knowledge. Generally what youth workers know about working in relation with young people is forced into pre-exiting dominant frameworks of truth determined for them. The lived experience of the work is lost as Magnuson notes when this happens.

> *In the 1960's and 1970's, in an effort to become more professional, social work left group work and direct practice behind, and in the process it loosened its connection to its blue-collar roots in the face-face-face care and advocacy.*

What Magunson terms the blue-collar roots of the field hold the lived experiential knowledge of who we are and what we do. Foucault said that this kind of subjugated knowledge could be combined with the hidden and marginalized accounts and theories to be found in the dusty back rooms and neglected texts of the academy. When the subjugated knowledge of the worker is combined with the marginalized knowledges of the academy there is the possibility of what he called a revolt of subjugated knowledge and the capacity for new thoughts and new practices. This Mobius strip of practice and thought, reflection and action, worker and intellectual has profound force. To lose it would be to impoverish our field of endeavor.

To be continued ...

EXPLORING SEXUAL DIVERSITY:

Helping children and young people develop understanding and respect for differences in the human family

Lorraine E. Fox, Ph.D

This is the last of a 3-part article. Parts 1 and 2 appeared in the previous two issues of CYC-Online.

Questioning Young People

By now you should be convinced that we have validated a quote by an author who writes frequently about sexuality:

> *"Sexuality is very complex, and we know far too little about sex for our own good"* – Presnell.

As young people develop into adolescents and their sexual hormones become more active they begin to experience sexual urges and social and sexual attractions to their peers. The nature of these attractions, we we've discussed, begin to provide them with information about themselves, and the degree to which they are comfortable in their own bodies, and the degree to which they are comfortable with their feelings of attraction.

Unfortunately, more children than we would like to acknowledge are prematurely exposed to sex by being sexually abused by an adult. Sexual abuse confronts young children with an experience for which they are both physically and mentally unprepared.

Most sexual abuse begins when children are pre-adolescent and without sexual urges of their own. Premature exposure to sexual activity can lead to considerable confusion around their own sexuality when it's "time" for them to start dating and feeling attractions and responding to the attractions of others.

Since there is no way to know whether exposure to either pleasant or unpleasant sexual experiences at an early age lead to same sex orientation it is not useful to engage in speculation at the expense of working with a young person to deal with their current feelings. We can only know what comes "naturally" if they are left to develop normally and in safety.

- Pleasurable experience (orgasm, affection) during an abusive same-sex relationship can cause a young person to wonder if that means they are gay
- Unpleasant experience (fear, shame, guilt) during an abusive opposite-sex relationship can cause a young person to conclude that all opposite-sex experiences will be the same and therefore think they must be gay.

We do not know what "causes" homosexuality, or gender discomfort, which unhappily leads to rampant opinion and speculation that can cause distress to youth struggling with their sexuality. It is important to remember that there is a very good chance that you will not know whether a young person you are having contact with has been abused, since it is rarely acknowledged. For that reason we want to be able to openly discuss with them the many unfounded theories they will be exposed to as they hear adults and peers talk about "why some people are queer". They will almost certainly hide their distress as they try to make sense of what they are hearing compared to the experiences they have had.

Most scientists today agree that sexuality and sexual orientation is the result of a "complex interaction" of environmental, cognitive, and biological factors. The evolution of one's identity is a web of interconnecting and interdependent features, including gender, ethnicity, class, ability, sexual orientation, thoughts, feelings, and experiences; the picture is fluid and always being negotiated (White, 2004).

Realizing that development is fluid and cannot be dictated causes anxiety not only in young people but in some adults who walk the developmental journey with them.

An adolescent may be in a stage of "exploration" or may feel in a stage of "confirmation" as a teen. A young person may be feeling a same sex attraction, but not feel comfortable labeling themselves as gay or lesbian. The pressures of dating can lead to severe stress for a young person who is not yet sure about their affections and attractions. It can be especially puzzling to be attracted to both sexes. Be sure to reassure them that although there is pressure to "declare oneself" they actually have time to figure it out. Some people have quite surprised themselves as adults when they discovered a sexual aspect to themselves they didn't know existed. As adults, we each have the responsibility to find a way to let young people know that they can bring their questions and talk with us without being judged. The good news for both them and us is that we don't need to have "answers" to be their friend and to listen.

Confronting contributors to mental health problems for LGBTQ young people

Most emotional problems experienced by LGBTQ young people are not related directly to their sexuality but to adjustment difficulties related to their sexuality. For this reason we want to help them understand and deal with the potentially

hurtful behaviors they will encounter due to human problems with difference. Why, exactly, humans seem to have so much difficulty with something that is part of all of nature, namely that nature is replete with difference, is a feature of humanity that is puzzling and troubling. The inability to deal well with differences among people can lead to enormous harm – both emotional and physical – to young people struggling with being sexually different. Even people who claim to be Christian and thus follow the "Prince of Peace" often provide stress and pain rather than peace and fail to handle differences with respect and compassion, as Jesus did. The longest one-on-one conversation between Jesus and another person recorded in the Bible is that of Him and the Samaritan woman. Not only did Jesus have a long conversation with a woman, not something done in His time, but with a woman despised by the Jews, His own people. Further, not only did Jesus talk to her, he drank from her cup! Wouldn't it be helpful if truthful stories like this could be shared with struggling LGBTQ young people.

A variety of research indicates that perceived or actual homosexuality and gender-nonconformity are two of the top three reasons teens are bullied (the third is the victim's appearance"). In addition to other challenges presented by being sexually different, bullying – whether in person or online – increases LGBTQ teens risk for anxiety disorders, depression, nightmares, substance abuse, post-traumatic stress disorders and suicide. Many studies indicate that LGBTQ youth are at least twice as likely to attempt suicide as their same-sex peers.

Non acceptance of differences in sexuality can lead LGBTQ young people to experience increased risk for mental health problems, from multiple sources:

- For some, the struggles with mental health stem from genetics, in the same way that is true for non-gay young people.
- For some, the struggles with mental health stem from childhood history of abuse and/or neglect, in the same way that is true for non-gay young people.
- For others, the struggles stem not from family history or experience, but from lack of acceptance by others that cause them added stress and lead to risky behavior or mental health issues (*Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine,* April 2013).
- Gay and lesbian kids can be happy and healthy dealing with the normal things adolescents deal with. But they are also a group that, because of pressures from society, face a number of challenges and risks other teens don't.
- Avenues of support, such as family, friends, school, the community available to typical youth may not be asked for help by LGBTQ youth who fear the possible response.
- Family acceptance – or rejection – of LGBT adolescents can make a significant difference in their health and well-being outcomes (*Family Acceptance Project*).

- Unlike other minority populations, LGBTQ youth do not grow up with people like themselves, leading to more loneliness and feelings of isolation.
- Gay teens risk losing self-respect as they "pretend" to be straight in an attempt to fit in.
- Friendships are often less genuine if a gay teen is hiding his/her identity.

Sorting out the origin of mental health problem for sexual minorities becomes difficult as we try to the contributions of personal characteristics vs. the context in which their development is compromised by the additional stresses of being different in a world that prefers sameness. Further, LGBTQ young people whose families affiliate with a religious group may be additionally challenged as they try to find an open, affirming, and non-rejecting church family. Research has found that even though people tend to struggle with differences in religious beliefs among people, groups tend to deal with these differences even better than they do with sexual differences.

Adults living and working around sexually diverse young people owe it to them to become especially sensitive to the use of derogatory language or jokes regarding LGBTQ people. Unlike racial and ethnic diversity, LGBTQ young people are more likely to be exposed to hurtful treatment because their struggles with sexuality are not apparent. We always want to assume that it is possible that someone in a group may be hurt by something that is said, and step up and step in to interfere with harmful behavior. Ignoring such behavior and failing to "call others out on it" presents an unspoken endorsement. Loving our young LGBTQ neighbors may involve causing some momentary discomfort to others as we challenge them to be mindful of who may be listening to pronouncements, off handed remarks, or jokes that cause internal wounds. We can train ourselves to listen to others in an "as if" manner, so that we listen "as if" they were talking about us. This will make it easier to do the right thing on behalf of those who may not yet be strong enough to stand up for themselves.

Using verbal misrepresentations to promote prejudice, bias, phobias and stereotypes

Let's move now to a more general consideration of the human attitudes and behaviors that have caused the grief and misunderstanding for LGBTQ people that we have been discussing. Although even adults can find it challenging to discover what is really so, it is especially important to help children learn to "sort out" what they hear from others, whether it's from their peers, adults they come in contact with, or the media. *Saying that something is true doesn't make it true; and believing something doesn't make it so.*

Children are at a distinct disadvantage because they don't yet have enough knowledge to distinguish between truth and fiction when exposed to new information. When you don't have existing information to compare new information

with, it's easy to take the new information as fact. And children are not yet sophisticated enough to "consider the source".

Another complicating factor is that when people are trying to convince someone of something they use many different words for the word "think" in an attempt to have the listener believe they are hearing the truth and to give ideas more credibility.

Have you noticed how often people use the word "believe" when they want to make sure you pay close attention to their point. "You know, Frank, I don't believe you are correct". Or, "you know Margaret, I believe you will find…." So what's the difference between think and believe? None. A belief is an idea. There is no difference between something you think and something you believe. Except that the word believe somehow carries more weight. People who use religious creeds to reinforce what they think is correct start with "I believe". It is my belief sounds more powerful than it is my idea. We want our kids to be careful what they "believe".

Another word that often gets used to beef us ideas is the word "conviction". I am convinced sounds more definite than "I think I am right about" something. People will sometimes state that they "happen to know" something, said in a way that puts others on the defensive to contradict what is being said, even when you happen to know something different.

This is more than just a lesson in grammar for children. It is a lesson in learning how to evaluate the truth about what is being said, which is particularly important when learning how to evaluate the truth about what is being said about other people.

People tend to act on their beliefs. Therefore people are known to cause great suffering to other people by acting on beliefs about them that happen to be incorrect. This can be applied to almost every LGBTQ person you will ever meet. Every sexually different person has a story to tell about emotional harm that has been caused out of ignorance and misinformation. But this is also true for a wide variety of people who are different from those around them. As parents and adults who work with or care about children, we want to provide very early lessons about language and truth, so that no child we know causes hurt and harm to another child or adult based on wrong information.

If you hear a child say something that has no basis in fact, challenge them immediately – in a soft and gentle way, of course. Ask them where they got that information, and then help them to figure out why they assumed it was true.

Confronting "thinking errors": prejudice, bias, phobias, and stereotypes

One of our tasks in preparing children to be able to challenge the various forms of thinking they will encounter – thoughts, beliefs, convictions, ideas, information, (which are all the same thing), to be sure that what they are being told is factual, not just what someone *thinks is* true. Of course, this is not a bad idea for adults ei-

ther. Once children are aware that saying that something is true doesn't make it true, and that people often misrepresent truth, we can introduce them to specific forms of erroneous thinking that can cause harm to others. Specifically, we want to introduce them to prejudice, bias, phobias, and stereotypes.

Prejudice

This word is based on the word "pre-judge". To pre-judge is to pass judgment on prematurely or without sufficient reflection or investigation. Prejudice is an unfavorable opinion or feeling formed beforehand or without real knowledge, thought, or reason.

We can show prejudice either positively or negatively. Usually when we hear the word prejudice we assume it's a negative judgment, but that is not necessarily true. Prejudice is *any* preconceived opinion or feeling, either favorable or unfavorable. For example, if we see a person wearing glasses and carrying a lot of books we may "assume" that they are smart. Or if we see an unkempt homeless person on the street we may decide, without any evidence, that they are an addict, or mentally ill, or unmotivated.

No matter how open minded or accepting we believe ourselves to be, and no matter how good a job we think we are doing when it comes to helping to raise tolerant children, the fact remains that we all carry prejudices and biases. You may want to share with your children times when you've made the wrong judgment about someone so they know how common it is and that is something to be careful about, not ashamed of. There are, unhappily, numerous news stories that will provide a platform for discussions of prejudice, and of the harm that can come from un-checked judgments about others.

Bias

Prejudice can lead to bias, which is an opinion, attitude, or tendency formed again without evidence, which leads us to favor one group or people over another, very often without any justification. Racial prejudice often leads to bias, when people assume that white children are "smarter" than black children and then treat them differently in our educational systems.

Phobia

A phobia is an intense, irrational fear. Common phobias are intense fear of spiders (even harmless ones), or talking in front of other people. One is "phobic" about something because they expect something awful to happen by what they are afraid of.

We've talked about sexually diverse people, who regularly experience prejudice, bias, and "homophobia", which is an intense, irrational fear, disgust, or hatred of intimate same sex relationships that becomes overwhelming to the person.

Irrational fears effect the way an individual treats individuals who provoke the fear. Homophobia sometimes results in fear of knowing, befriending, or associating with gays, lesbians, or bisexuals; fear of being perceived as gay, lesbian, or bisexual; and fear of stepping outside of accepted

gender role behavior.

Some gay people have been killed because someone mistook friendly gestures as "coming on" to them. Here we see how prejudice and phobias act together to cause totally unnecessary harm. You can do an exercise with your kids to see if they have any "phobias", and ask what kinds of irrational behaviors they may have done in response to this phobia?

Stereotype

A stereotype is a fixed image of a person or a group of people that is oversimplified and does not consider different individuals in a group. Again, stereotypes can be either positive or negative. There are many stereotypes based on ethnicity and culture. Talk with your children about stereotypes about their heritage. Discuss where those stereotypes come from and where they reflect some truths and where they reflect myth. Stereotypes are a little more complicated than prejudices and phobias because there is often an element of reality for particular groups. Here it is important to sort through some stereotypes that we can just accept and even enjoy ("little old ladies; speech patterns common in a particular ethnic group; "senior moments"; strong silent types) from those that may hurt others. For example, when doing classes on culture and difference, almost always when I tell people that I'm Irish, gestures and jokes begin immediately about drinking. Well, in fact the Irish have more pubs than restaurants and are known to enjoy a pint. But if my family was struggling with alcohol addiction the joke might not be so funny to me. For this reason, we want to help children understand that something may be true a lot of the time, but not true all of the time. It is true that some gay men are comfortable feigning womanly gestures, but that is not true of all or even most gay men. A man using effeminate gestures being tagged as "gay" is a stereotype. It is true that some lesbians like flannel shirts and jeans and have short hair. But it is equally true that some lesbians wear lipstick and dress in female fashion.

So our task here is a little complicated. When can we accept and enjoy some stereotypes? When should we avoid using stereotypes to "pre-judge" a person? Most importantly, when should we notice that we are using a stereotype or pre-judging another person and use care to "get the facts" about a person before deciding who they are.

Working toward the principle of being "open and affirming"

To review our considerations of sexual diversity: We began by outlining the broad spectrum of sexuality that is part of the natural world, including the world of human relationships; We put the task of dealing with sexual diversity in the context of coming to terms with all diversity, including racial diversity, religious diversity, gender diversity, and the entire rainbow of difference that comprises the human race. Working toward justice for all peoples has been a challenge throughout history, and we are glad that "God is still speaking" and

working with us to embrace what the Creator has already embraced: a full range of difference in creation to keep life interesting and fun; we have covered differences in sexual and affectional attraction, differences in gender identity, differences in conformity to social expectations with regard to sex and gender, and differences in how individuals come to terms with their own similarities or differences with regard to their peers; We have reviewed the evidence that suggests that failure of parents, teachers, peers, and social groups to come to terms with sexual differences leads many to suffer with a variety of mental stresses; We explored how verbal misrepresentations and thinking errors lead some to form biased, prejudicial and stereotypical ideas about people who are different from them. But many "errors" can be corrected, and this one.

We end our discussion by outlining what the prophet Micah has called us to do as far as walking humbly amidst those who differ from us, extending kindness to others who may not love as we do, and seeking just ways of treating others, regardless of who or how they love.

"Tolerance" has often been promoted as a goal, but I don't think that is really what we want to aim for with our young people. If you heard that someone's opinion of you was that they could "tolerate" you, would you consider that a compliment? Of course not. We don't want to be just tolerated. Wouldn't you rather have someone truly "accept" you, as you are, and not just put up with you? Like tolerance, acceptance is really not our ultimate goal, but for some people it's the best we're going to get.

While better than tolerating, accepting someone or something implies that there is something that "needs" to be accepted: such as, "you're not gay to me, you're a person". For some people this is as far as they will be able to go, and it is certainly better than prejudice, and also better than tolerance. Acceptance does not imply "approval", and some people will never be able to bring themselves to "approve" of others who are not like them, so it will be work for them to learn to accept others. A limited goal, but on our way.

What would really be "just", would be to learn to "affirm" others, not just tolerate or accept them. To affirm is to assert positively; to maintain the other as true; to support and uphold the other, despite differences. For many individuals, affirming also includes admiration, and acknowledging that being gay, lesbian, bisexual, gender non–conforming, questioning, or transgender in our society takes strength. Another part of affirmation is an *appreciation*, which values the diversity of people in many areas and sees LGBTQ persons as a valid part of diversity. Affirmation also includes *nurturance*, assuming that our LGBTQ young people are indispensable in our society, viewing them with genuine affection and delight.

The road to justice and peace among peoples is a long and difficult one. History reveals a host of obstacles and hazards along the way. Our goal is clear, especially when it comes to providing our children and teens what they deserve in terms of

acceptance, approval, and understanding. Some are still traveling, but thankfully not alone.

There are many good things about people. One is that they are each unique and diverse in a myriad of ways. Another really good thing about people is that they can change. Learning to embrace diversity, including sexual diversity, is something everyone can do if they listen to the Creator who created the diversity and to their own conscience. One of the wonderful features of children and teens is that they don't struggle nearly as hard as adults to change. This makes them a little unpredictable, which makes them interesting, but it also makes them more flexible than us. Our children and young people can move nicely, with our guidance, from ignorant (unknowing), to questioning, to accepting, to affirming in a beautiful way.

Think of yourself. How many of you thought dandelions were "flowers" and made a lovely bouquet for your mother? How many of you were "hit" as a child, and later decided to raise your children differently? How many of you who were raised reading the Bible eventually found yourself uneasy with the casual references to slaves? As I said, people can change.

I wish you and your children well on your journey through diversity. The world provides a wonderful path for exploration. I'll meet you at the corner of Interesting and Wonderful.

For every girl who is tired of acting weak when she is strong, there is a boy who is tired of appearing strong when he feels vulnerable.

For every girl who is tired of people not trusting her intelligence, there is a boy who is burdened with the constant expectation of knowing everything.

For every girl who is tired of being called over-sensitive, there is a boy who is denied the right to be gentle and weep.

For every girl who is called unfeminine when she competes, there is a boy for whom competition is the only way to prove his masculinity.

For every girl who throws out her EZ bake oven, there is a boy who wishes to find one.

For every girl who takes a step toward her liberation, there is a boy who finds the way to freedom has been made a little easier.

– Author Unknown
(published in *Relational Child and Youth Care Practice,* Vol.17, N0.3)

Thoughts and encouragement for christians struggling with acceptance of sexual diversity

I recognize that many faith traditions present followers with a challenge on their

journey to respect for and acceptance of sexual differences. I am not in a position to address the struggle from all perspectives, but as a Christian person I can offer some encouragement. I believe "The Bible" has been misused and misrepresented in ways that have caused much pain for LGBTQ young people and their family members.

No Christian I know follows everything written in the Bible, which contains writings from thousands of years ago and from a variety of people (men) who struggled to understand God and to please the God they construed. While many Christians are perfectly comfortable totally ignoring almost all of the "laws" and "purity instructions" (over 300) in the Old Testament, certain passages are pulled out to obscure the historical intentions of certain teachings to imply that they should apply to our lives today. No Christians I know are "pleasing God with regular burnt offerings" and no Christian I know asks women if they are menstruating before touching them, although touching menstruating women is specifically forbidden by the Bible. Nor do we kill people found working on the Sabbath. And although I go to church regularly and attempt to follow Jesus, I am not fond of His instruction to "sell all that I have in order to enter the kingdom of heaven".

We are often told that "the Bible" calls homosexuality "an abomination". Yes it does. The Bible also uses the exact same word to condemn: women wearing slacks; eating shellfish and pork, or sacrificing an imperfect animal. The Bible also prohibits "wearing clothes made of wool and linen woven together", but most Christians do not inspect clothing labels for these abominations before buying something they like.

Incest (Lot) and having "concubines" (Abraham) and stoning and slaughter are not listed as abominations.

In the New Testament Jesus Christ is critical of adultery, lust, and divorce, but he was completely silent regarding same sex relations that we now call homosexuality. The only New Testament writer, and there were many other contributors, to condemn homosexuality was Paul, who is usually quoted out of context. The verses of condemnation usually cited are in the book of Romans which contains a very long paragraph full of "shameful" behavior including all manner of "lusts". Gossiping and being "haughty" is included in the same list as lustful same- sex behavior.

The Bible has been used to justify: burning women alive who "preached", slaughtering Jews, Indians, and Muslims; and enslaving Africans. Thankfully, we find more verses in the Bible telling us that God is Love, and that what God wants from us, yes "requires" of us (Old Testament, Micah) is to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God, and in the New Testament to love God and love our neighbor, thus "fulfilling all the law". And The Bible does not tell us which neighbors to love and which not to love.

I hope this helps.

Epiphanies and Apostrophes: Catching the moment and looking at what's important

John Digney and Maxwell Smart

... it is not the literal past, the 'facts' of history, that shape us, but images of the past embodied in language.
Brien Friel, *Irish playwright.*

O Life! thou art a galling load, Along a rough, a weary road, To wretches such as I.
Robert Burns*, Scottish Poet*

Reversing Decisions

At 2pm on 31st January 2015 it would be fair to say that the end of the month is fast approaching and with it a few important deadlines: – monthly accounts, activity level reports and the submission deadline to CYC-NET for its February edition. But here we are (one of us in Ireland and the other in Scotland), sitting down to begin putting pen to paper (well, starting to type). The only problem is that we have not discussed or decided on a topic (or a title) for what has now become our 'Plan B' column.

January has been a hectic month – with the usual catching up after Christmas and also the unexpected crisis and usual demands that occur so often in the field of Child & Youth Care. As our workloads increased and demands on time become amplified, it was probably inevitable that we began to notice some tasks slowly slip down the 'to do list'. It is always interesting to 'notice' things but it can be even more interesting to try to understand why they happen. We notice that a young person becomes more reluctant to go to school or that another young person has become more sociably recently – very interesting to watch, but do we do enough drilling down to figure out why. As we

consider our own task list and notice an almost unconscious 'prioritising' going on – when do we stop and consider why? What do we use to decide on what is most important or most urgent?

Last month we submitted what was to be the first in a series of 3 papers on 'Transition'. We had expected to have paper 2 completed for February, but as we stated above, January has been hectic. So rather than rush and submit an article we are not satisfied with we decided to hold it back for a month (this was decision number 1) and as we talked through the concerns we had about making that decision we eventually agreed then that it was OK to miss an edition of CYC-NET' (let's call that decision number 2).

Well, as the morning of 31st January (today) arrived there was a 'joint spontaneous symbiotic scramble' – whatever that means - decision number 2 is to be reversed (this reversal is of course decision number 3).

The right time for an Epiphany

Seeking inspiration we reflect on the month and just like that we had an epiphany. In fact this epiphany can now be considered the 3rd immaculate epiphany associated with January. Theology students and those with certain religious backgrounds will be aware of the 'Feast of the Epiphany', a Christian holyday which occurs on January 6t.h and marks two events in the life of Jesus – the arrival of the Magi to visit Jesus soon after his birth and then years later when Jesus was himself baptised.

So, what is our epiphany? With the fear of confusing the reader even further, the epiphany was about epiphanies – It was a light-bulb moment which caused us to wonder about the cause of epiphanies. Here we are talking about epiphanies which meet the definition below.[1]

An example

This past week one of the authors sat on an interview panel looking to recruit new staff. During the course of one interview a candidate began to relay his involvement in the changing of the culture within his current organisation. He mentioned that in the past they had had quite a punitive and controlling way of managing challenging behaviour and that it was only around twelve years ago when some people working within this culture spontaneously began to wonder if there was a better way … a way which did not involve physical and chemical restraint, seclusion, isolation and punishment. A massive and yet fundamental move in prac-

1 An epiphany (from the ancient Greek ἐπιφάνεια, *epiphaneia*, "manifestation, striking appearance") is an experience of sudden and striking realization … it can apply in any situation in which an enlightening realization allows a problem or situation to be understood from a new and deeper perspective. Taken from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epiphany_%28feeling%29 on 31st January 2015.

tice and thinking – as he himself said, a paradigm shift. As we drilled into this with the candidate he was able to name some moments in time when he remembered seeing the 'light bulb' going on for some colleagues, but he was not able to pin-point the exact moment for himself when his epiphany occurred.

There have been so many moments in the history of our profession when someone brought a new or different perspective to the work we do – we think about people like Redl, Bettelheim, Kruger, Maier and some more contemporary folk (who we will not name as we don't want to swell their heads even further). But for each of these pioneers, champions and trail blazers, it seems logical to wonder where and when their personal epiphany occurred.

A Personal Epiphany

Having been working with children and youth for almost 25 years one of the author can recall two very important 'light-bulb' moments that occurred for him, only within weeks of each other. The first being when he actually realised he was working with kids (amazingly this epiphany occurred after 6 years working in residential care). This might sound strange, but at that time these young people were being defined by their labels: 'emotionally disturbed', 'delinquent', 'behaviourally challenging' and the like – they were seen as something to do with the labels that had been posted on them – not as 'children in need' or 'kids in pain', as we now refer to them. The second epiphany related to the potency and importance of our work with these kids. This light-bulb went on when the author began to recognise the privilege and power that we as a profession have been given – the power to do so much good with so many and yet a power, if not wielded well, one with the potential to be so destructive.

The most noteworthy epiphany that occurred for the other author involved the whole concept of relationship – a word we use so often and think we know so well. This epiphany related to the discovery that the term 'relationship' was so differently defined and lived by ourselves and our cousin profession, Social Work – particularly as the author has a very robust grounding in and knowledge of Social Work. One would imagine that the word 'relationship' as a word so commonly used by people from each profession, would have the same meaning. This epiphany was that 'genuine relationship' requires connection and empathy, things that were often forgotten in engagement with young people and their families when procedure and detachment over-leap care, love and support.

What about apostrophes?

This little 'side bar' relates to another observation made by one of the authors this last two weeks and caused the author to have a minor epiphany. As we all know there is a huge amount of paper work involved in our daily life with Case Conference Reports and Court Reports

being two documents that we all probably have experience of completing, submitting and defending.

Two weeks ago a comprehensive report on an especially complex case was submitted to a family court. The case involved 6 children, two parents (estranged), a step-parent, two sets of grandparents and a range of services including: psychology, psychiatry, education, learning disability, and juvenile justice, family support and so on. All in all there were about thirty professionals involved in this case, all with their individual opinions, analysis and beliefs about the individual family members and their collective relationships, all having something to say!

The author of this particular report (a veteran CYC staff of over 20 years), seemed to have an impossible task, working within a situation of enormous complexity, never mind trying to succinctly explain this complexity to other systems and professionals. Within the report she had noted and described the very many complex and on occasion competing issues, challenges and worries and managed to concisely and respectfully capture the essence of all (family members and professionals) involved. She made recommendations which took the views of all into account and her analysis and assessment were agreeable to all.

The report submitted, the judge allowed a twenty minute interlude in the court to give him a chance to read it and deliberate on it. When the court reconvened this author was shocked to the core when the judge began to speak. 'Did you not go to school', he demanded, glaring at the CYC staff. 'I can't get my head around your incorrect use of comas and apostrophes … this is difficult to read'. On he went for a further five minutes – giving her the report back and asking her to 'come back to me after you fix it'.

The point dear reader (and thank you for enduring) is how is it that we come to assign importance or priority? To this judge, it was almost as it he had taken on the role of cranky college professor admonishing a student for poor use of a few apostrophes. The reality for the CYC staff was that months of work had gone into getting an agreed proposal to reunify a family with complex circumstances. A vast array of resources had been accessed, received and agreed. However for the judge the priority SEEMED different. He may have felt disrespected by being asked to consider a report that contained, what subsequent scrutiny revealed, about ten minor typos. The amazing thing is that many people (within the CYC workers line management structure and clinical team) had previously read the report prior to submission and not noticed two commonly misused punctuation marks, instead focusing on the content.

The Meaning of the Meaning

Now as authors we recognise that meaning and meaning construction are important concepts, not just for the legal profession, but for us all. In a court of law the 'fine print' of a legal case and the ultimate presentation of that legal action may

be the key to winning or losing of a legal case. Points of law are expected to be precise and a Judge may have considered typos in a report as being sloppy. On the other hand he may have been exercising professional power over another discipline, to the detriment of the family involved.

Whilst we will not presume to know the motivation of the Judge, in some ways this relates to the same processes we need to come to terms with every working day where we should ask questions about our thinking and interventions:

- What is really important here (for me and everyone else)?
- What do I see as relevant and why?
- What am I disregarding?
- What really is my task or role?
- How am I assigning importance?
- Why am I assigning importance in this way?
- Does it really matter if I can't punctuate or even spell all that well?

Do we often loose sight of what really matters? Do we focus on measuring outcomes that are irrelevant? What agenda do we work from anyway? We believe that things can get confused and often with competing priorities we end up going the wrong way or making decisions to abdicate involvement.

A Challenge

As we go about our day we have many experience that impact on us – things that can create shifts in our way of thinking about the world and about ourselves. Yet, do we give conscious thought to these to a degree that helps us reflect on how we got to here and where we are planning on going. What are our beliefs about the work that we do with vulnerable child and families and from where did we get these beliefs? How do we prioritise what we do and what we 'long-finger'? How do we place value on things? What really is important and why?

Our challenge to you this month is to consider the questions we have raised, reflect on your experiences and in thinking about the work you do see if you can locate your own most important moment of epiphany. Then consider, what made this moment some important?

Well, here we are – two hours later with a short reflective piece and hopefully a piece that is worthy of inclusion in CYC-NET. As we often here - it's not always about picking between A or B – sometimes there is a 'C'.

Digs & Maxie

Being with Families in Moments of Opportunity

James Freeman

We had finally got the parents to meet together after school. It had been some time that their son was struggling with his personal goals, one of which was completing the required credits for his high school diploma. The more immediate hurdle that day was the substance abuse incident that violated his probation. When I asked what their understanding of some of the challenges might be, the mother turned to her husband with a scowl and said, "You should ask him!" She then got up and walked out of the room.

It was not at all what I expected to happen. I had been so focused on getting them all in one place just long enough for a conversation together. I knew that "successful planning for the permanency and support for traumatized children relies on respectful, collaborative engagement with family members" (Vandivere & Malm, 2015, p. 3). This youth needed both parents at the table.

After talking for a few minutes with the father and son, I walked out onto the patio where the mother was sitting. It was much nicer out there I remember thinking to myself. I sat down across from the mother. And for what felt like a long time didn't say anything. She then broke the silence, "No one cares about my opinion anyway". With just a few simple follow up questions she began to share painful examples of times she spoke up and was either ignored, disrespected, or mistreated because of it. It started to put into focus the challenge of sitting around the table for a difficult conversation.

What she needed in that moment was someone to be with her, perhaps in a way that she had not been able to experience before. Someone who would listen when she was ready and felt safe enough to talk.

I didn't realize it in the moment, but looking back, I notice it was a opportunity for change which she courageously stepped into. It was the door of a new opportunity for her to see that although certain things worked certain ways in the past, they didn't have to for the future. This was critical for her son and the support he needed in the present because "no force is more powerful than parents who are the life span experts on their offspring" (Brendtro & Mitchell, 2011, p. 8).

"We're not going to do this without you", I said. "We're not going to do anything to you or for you, but we would love

to be a part of moving forward with you." The invitation was now in the open, hanging in the in-between with the two of us on the patio.

A few moments later she took a deep breath, stood up and walked inside to her husband and son, signaling she was ready to give it a try.

It would have been so easy to move forward without both the parents. There were plenty of "interventions" that would have fit and, in some way, helped the young person. Yet we need to remember the wisdom that reminds us:

> *All too often, professional people disparage parents, regard them as the cause of the problems of their children, and diminish their sense of responsibility and dignity. The foresighted professional person knows that it is the parent that bears the responsibility for the child, and that the parent cannot be replaced by episodic professional service.*
> (Hobbs, 1975, p. 228-229)

Child and youth care is not just about getting the young person what they need, it involves getting every member of the family attending to the needs of their family. The ways in which we choose to be with them, supporting them in these small steps clear the path for moments of hope and opportunity.

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Helping Supervisors see "Progressive Discipline" with a Positive Mindset

Frank Delano

Progressive discipline is an area that is often very difficult for supervisors. It is something that many dread, or just avoid. Worse yet, it can sometimes enter into an "I will write you up" mode which is usually destructive for all involved, and certainly doesn't reflect the style we would want our workers to use with children and families. Conversely, excellent and professionally sound progressive discipline can be an extremely positive vehicle for staff development, will establish and reinforce high practice standards, and help a struggling worker get back on track while improving their performance. Using a progressive discipline process positively can improve overall program morale as others see the supervisor holding the professional standards at a high level. This can help avoid what I refer to as "peer drain" on excellent workers who many times choose to move on from a program because they are frustrated with the level of functioning of their co-workers.

Some basic pre-requisites for an excellent progressive discipline process are:

When the supervisor feels a worker's behavior may require a disciplinary process they should be in touch with their supervisor and/or Human Resource experts in the agency as soon as possible.

- Ideally, before moving to a process of formal documentation the supervisor will have made a number of attempts at constructive confrontation to collaboratively address the situation with the worker.
- The supervisor should be very clear, and honest, with Human Resources. This would include talking about where they, or the agency, may be at risk if it develops into a more serious mode. For example, personnel evaluations not completed, the behavior has gone on for some time before being addressed, etc. "Trust the experts" as you go forward!
- Especially when frustrated, or disappointed, in the worker the supervisor should be sure to avoid the "I will write you up" mode and focus on a mindset

that sees the process as supportive to the worker and connected to better practice. This is not to suggest that a supervisor should be "soft" or lower practice standards with a worker who is not performing at acceptable levels. There are clearly times when a supervisor should firmly recommend termination of a worker's employment. It is a crucial supervisory responsibility related to monitoring quality of service to clients. However, in those cases one wants to be sure the process was professionally sound and the worker was given a fair chance to improve. ***The mindset should be seeing progressive discipline as a way to retain a worker and improve their performance, and not as a way to "get rid of people".***

Jill Shah and I have developed a basic working model for progressive discipline that might serve as a guideline for supervisors if they find themselves in a disciplinary process with a worker. Before implementing these it would be important for the supervisor to check with agency Human Resource experts to be sure they are comfortable with these guidelines.

Working Model for Progressive Discipline

1. Identify the behavior that is unacceptable

The supervisor should identify the behavior that is not acceptable. It should be described in behavioral terms and not in terms of personality or work habits. It should be described in as measurable a way as possible.

2. Identify why the behavior is unacceptable and how it affects service

The supervisor should be very careful to explain why the behavior is not acceptable framed in what Jill Shah and I have referred to as a "Professional Package" (Delano and Shah, 2009). That is, it is described in relation to a commonly accepted professional standard that is not being met, and not related to the worker's personality, work habits, attitude, etc. Framing it in a professionally packaged way has many benefits including another opportunity to establish a high standard, credibility with any outside observers of the process, and the willingness of the worker to engage positively in the process. At the very least it allows for a way to see if the worker agrees with the standard, and might provide a "hook" to motivate the worker to improve. Few would want to engage in a process where they feel their personality, integrity, etc. is being challenged, but they may be much more likely to engage in a process to produce a higher professional standard.

3. LISTEN to explanation and dialogue how to make it better

Once the expectations are laid out the supervisor should use their best active listening skills to allow the worker to explain why they believe the behavior is at the level it is and to explore *what the worker believes* would help improve it.

4. Identify the new behavior that is acceptable and why

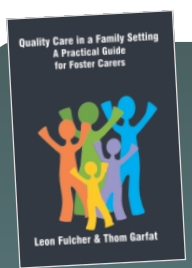
The supervisor should clarify the new behavior that would be acceptable and explain why this would be important. Early on that may be to produce "better service for clients", "a better professional image for the worker", "better able to contribute to the team", or in the worst case scenario, where the worker has not been engaging well, "to keep your job". The crucial piece here is that if one is trying to re-direct a behavior then the person asked to change behaviors has to see what is in it for them if they are going to invest in changing.

5. Identify *resources you will add* to help move this forward

This is the most crucial step, and very often the one where progressive discipline comes apart and fails to hold up. A number of crucial things are accomplished by the supervisor assessing and adding specific resources to help the worker achieve the desire progress. First, providing resources accentuates the fairness part of the process, and is actually a key part of the supervisor's overall responsibility in regards to staff development. Secondly, if the process does not work and there is a legal process that takes place the provision of resources will be gigantically important to validate the supervisor and agency have met their responsibilities to be fair. Special effort should be given to a collaborative effort between supervisor and worker to identify the most appropriate resources. These might include more training in a specific area, more or adapted supervision sessions, readings, outside consultant coaching, etc. Of course, the most important benefit of added resources is that it may be exactly what the worker needed to improve their performance!

6. Establish clear times to review and evaluate progress

Once a plan is established the supervisor should set up times to review the progress. Be sure to spend just as much, or more, time reviewing the process if the behavior is improving as you would if it was not progressing well. The supervisor



QUALITY CARE IN A FAMILY SETTING (2008) by Leon Fulcher & Thom Garfat, offers theory, practice tips and everyday advice for helping young people in Foster Care develop the strengths and skills necessary to navigate life's challenges. Training and practice standards are now frequently used to enhance, monitor and evaluate the quality of care for children and young people in out-of-home care, yet Foster Carers are often expected to perform miracles without practical assistance. This book helps to bridge that gap.

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has a golden opportunity here to reinforce a positive, collaborative process that should strengthen the relationship with the worker.

Progressive discipline should be documented thoroughly, meticulously and respectfully, but should not be about a "write-ups" mode. Excellent and professionally sound progressive discipline can have many "ripple effect" benefits for both the supervisor and agency. If the worker does not engage positively in the process, or cannot improve to the expected level, and has to be asked to leave then the supervisor can at least look in the mirror and say they were fair, supportive and professionally sound in the process. It may also have positive ramifications for other workers who have viewed the process seeing the supervisor and agency as having high standards for practice, yet as fair and ethically sound in holding those standards high. If the worker does engage well, takes advantage of the process, and gets back on track they will be grateful for the support and that may be a foundation to improve the supervisory relationship. Other workers can assume that if they are struggling one day, they will be treated in a similar manner with support and respect to help them improve. Professionally sound progressive discipline is a win-win for all, and should be viewed as a key staff development tool by the supervisor and the agency.

Reference

Delano, F. and Shah, J. Defining supervision in a professionally packaged way, *Relational Child and Youth Care Practice,* Volume 22, Issue 1, Spring, 2009

For readers who want more information on progressive discipline they can also see Floyd Alwon's work from his Effective Supervisory Practice *series.*

For more on how to link constructive confrontation to progressive discipline readers can refer to Using the "Professional Package" to Help Supervisors Enhance Cultural Sensitivity When Confronting, *Journal of Relational Child and Youth Care*, Volume 20, Issue 1 Spring, 2007.

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Conquering Big Bunny

Nils Ling

I was having lunch with a friend of mine the other day when he announced – in a tone of voice that implied I should be extremely envious – that he was going on a spring skiing trip next week.

Big deal. I'm not impressed.

I've tried downhill skiing. It's not my sport. I've never quite figured out just what my sport is, but when I do, I'm pretty sure it won't involve being found crushed and broken at the bottom of a mountain wearing two barrel staves and a latex jumpsuit. Call it a hunch.

I can say this with some authority, because I've tried downhill skiing. And I'm pretty good at some parts of it. For example, the downhill part.I'm great at that. Very few people can go downhill the way I can.

But you see, there's the matter of those

pesky turns. If you do what I do, point your skis downhill and go, it takes a long time to get down to the bottom. Oh, you cover the first hundred yards in World Cup time. And, depending on how well your clothing slides, you can keep a pretty good pace for a while longer, bouncing and flipping and cartwheeling down the slope.

But sooner or later, you'll fetch up against something – say, a rock or a tree or another skier. That'll slow you right down. Then there's the long wait for the ski ambulance, and the precious seconds while they load you up, and that slow, humiliating ride down. The whole thing takes up most of the day. Doesn't leave much time for sitting around the whirlpool in that fashionable white plaster apres ski outfit, sipping schnapps from a wineskin to kill the pain.

The first time I ever went skiing it was with my wife – she was my girlfriend at the time and I was still trying to impress her. She asked if I liked skiing and I s aid "Sure, I love it." Testosterone ought to be declared a lethal substance.

It became apparent to her very early on that while I might like skiing, I didn't know how to actually do it. So she took me over to what they called "the Bunny Slope". This is a part of the hill that runs downward at approximately the same angle as a suburban driveway.

You get to the top by way of a rope tow. To ascend a rope tow, what you do is elbow your way past the four year olds, grasp the rope slowly as it slides through your finger, then hold on for dear life as it jerks you off your feet and drags you screaming along. If you're lucky, you can pry your fingers off the rope as it reaches the top and collapse in a snowbank in a quivering lump. At which point, they expect you to ski down and do it all again.

After only a few tries, I was able to negotiate the slope - unsteadily, to be sure, but without serious injury. That part comes later, once they've made you sufficiently over-confident.

As soon as I had conquered Big Bunny, my girlfriend took me up the chair lift to where – as she put it – "the big people ski". She picked out a slope where there hadn't been many recent fatalities, and off we went.

Well, off she went. I stood there, frozen in fear, staring in disbelief. This slope was – and I'll try not to exaggerate here – ninety degrees straight down.

When I edged towards the lip of the slope and peeked through the tips of my skis, I saw nothing but air. Then my girlfriend called out to me, the testosterone levels peaked, and away I went.

It was a wonderful ski holiday. They treated me very well, except the food was rotten and the nurses kept waking me up to give me sleeping pills. My future wife visited me just about every day.

So my friend can have his ski trip. Maybe he's better at it than me. I hope so. He's a nice friend. I'd hate to lose him.

Postcard from

Leon Fulcher

FEBRUARY 2015

Howdy Folks! It's been Summer here in New Zealand where we live, and time again for the Wairoa A&P (Agricultural and Pastoral) Show. Rural children and young people participate fully in everything, competing with garden produce, a full equestrian-dressage event, sheep dog trials, sheep shearing, rodeo and a farming ironman competition involving wood chopping, fence building and moving hay bales.

Wairoa A&P Show Rodeo

We spent most of our time at the Rodeo where secondary school cowboys and cowgirls from Australia were competing in the third stop in a series of 7 regional rodeos in both islands of New Zealand. Each summer this international series crosses the Tasman Sea. Competitors often go on to have short rodeo careers.

Pre-Match Haka: New Zealand – Australia Youth International 2015

After a horse borne Flag Ceremony, the rodeo international began with the New Zealand team performing a Maori Haka of challenge to their Australian competitors. Those not familiar with the scoring process in rodeo events, some are timed events, such as calf roping, steer wrestling and barrel racing. Life stock events involve staying aboard a bull or a bareback bronc for 8-seconds, or 10 seconds for a saddle bronc rider. Two judges score the bucking horse or bull (0-25) and a successful rider (0-25).

The New Zealand team came to the

New Zealand Youth Saddle Bronc Rider in 10-second Ride

Wairoa leg of their tour with a marginal lead in the series. The Saddle Bronc riders and the women competing in the Kiwi Barrel Racing Team narrowly edged their Aussie competitors.

New Zealand Women's Youth 3-Leaf Clover Barrel Racer

It was in the Bull Riding that the Australian youths earned full points. As I watched the Wairoa Youth Rodeo International, I found myself reflecting on how bull riding is no longer a feature of child and youth care work at Cal Farley Ranch in Texas. New Zealand gives full Accident Compensation and Rehabilitation Insurance coverage to everyone, and skilled bull fighters readily assist cowboys with every bull ride.

Australia Youth Bull Rider with 2 Judges and Bullfighters

This made me think about how in child and youth care work, decisions are often taken NOT to engage is some activities. Some might argue that rodeo is an unsafe activity, whilst others claim animal cruelty. If one grows up on a ranch as a cow-

New Zealand Bull Rider at Point of Impact: Bucking Off before 8 secs

boy/cowgirl, or worked with horses and dogs on a large sheep station, then such arguments simply highlight urban perspectives where even climbing trees in a park is carefully regulated.

It's true; the St John's Ambulance Crew did attend to at least 3 young people who were injured during the course of being bucked off a horse or bull. But then, how often might that happen in a rugby or American Football match, cricket or hockey?

New Zealand Rodeo Cowboy Arena *Pickup Man* – with Cricket Pads!

I knew that I was not in Alberta, Idaho, Wyoming or Texas as I watched the Wairoa Rodeo Pick-Up Man assist riders dismounting from bucking horses, and 'escorting' snorting bulls from the arena. Very clever use of cricket pads under the leather chaps!

The competitive youth sheep shearing also caught my attention. Farm lad, Owen, and I watched 14 year-old youths 'man-handle' and shearing large sheep within seconds!

A&P Youth Sheep Shearing Competition: *Where a Singlet with Pride*

Wairoa A&P Show Rodeo Self-Portrait by Owen

EndNotes

"I believe that imagination is stronger than knowledge. That myth is more potent than history. That dreams are more powerful than facts. That hope always triumphs over experience. That laughter is the only cure for grief. And I believe that love is stronger than death."
— **Robert Fulghum**, *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*

"Try not to be in a hurry to get older because youth happens once in your life. Thereafter, old age stays with you forever."
— **Chris Jirika**

"The children almost broken by the world become the adults most likely to change it."
— **Frank Warren**

"We must be careful not to discourage our twelve-year-olds by making them waste the best years of their lives preparing for examinations."
— **Freeman Dyson,** *Infinite in All Directions*

"Some stories end in despair, some begin there."
— **Marty Rubin**

"You get to be about eleven or twelve and everything's old hat. They've drummed the miraculous out of you, but you don't want it to be like that. You want the miraculous. You want everything to still be new."
— **Tim Tharp,**
The Spectacular Now

POOR KIDS

"The poor are always rich in children, and in the dirt and ditches of this street there are groups of them from morning to night, hungry, naked and dirty. Children are the living flowers of the earth, but these had the appearance of flowers that have faded prematurely, because they grew in ground where there was no healthy nourishment."
— **Maxim Gorky**

If you ask an Irishman for directions, he might be quick to answer: "Well if I were going there, I would not start from here!"
— **Steve Stockman**

"Life is simple. You just have to stop trying to figure it out."

— **Marty Rubin**

"A student was given a mentoring opportunity, in the hope that when you had somebody to lean on you, you would begin to stand a little steadier yourself, and get manliness and thoughtfulness."

— **Thomas Hughes,** *Tom Brown's Schooldays*

"I smelled silt on the wind, turkey, laundry, leaves ... my God what a world. There is no accounting for one second of it."

— **Annie Dillard**, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*

"Home is where you are loved the most and act the worst."

— **Marjorie Pay Hinckley**

"My mother refused to let me fail. So I insisted."

— **Walker Percy,** *The Second Coming*

"I come from a broken family. Dad broke it and Mom left it that way."

"Wonders happen either way. With you or without you."

— **Sergey Vedenyo**

If we would listen more to our kids, we'd discover that they are largely self-explanatory.

— **Robert Brault**

"Stop looking at what everyone else has! You have to figure out who you are before you can be anyone!

— **Setona Mizushiro**

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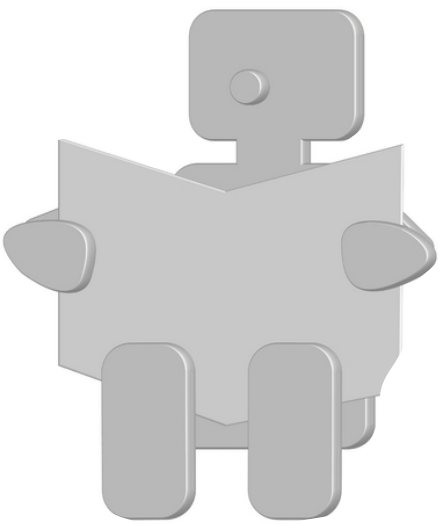

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