

# CYC-Online

e-journal of the International Child and Youth Care Network (CYC-Net)



**A Journal for those who live or work  
with Children and Young People**

**Issue 216 / February 2017**



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*Age considers; youth ventures.*

**Rabindranath Tagore**



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# About those distractions

James Freeman

**T**here are so many distractions in our everyday lives. There have certainly been plenty of political distractions in many parts of the world lately. It's hard to know what to pay attention to when everything on the news feed looks like it is all of the same level of importance.

Most of our work in caring for children and groups of young people is about moving through continuous distractions. Is that tone of voice worth addressing? Are those two fighting or just working something out? Should I answer the phone now or call the person back later? When Sandra says she doesn't want what's planned for dinner does she really mean something or just wanting to speak up?

Then we have our own personal lives. There are the shifting priorities of work and life and family. There are the old friends we want to make time for. There are the new connections who we want to make a part of our life. Attention is needed to finances, health, our homes, transportation and - too often left for last - our own wellness. All the while there are advertisements screaming to us about what salespeople and corporations believe we need, well-meaning family and friends telling us what we might do with our lives, and – perhaps the most challenging for some - the inner voices that sometimes overwhelm.

The challenge is that the difference between a distraction and the core of our reason for being here can be so subtle.

Our hope is that CYC-Net is a place of refocusing for you. A way to recenter on the here and now. A place to sort out what is a distraction and what is at the center of your calling in life.



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This month we're excited to bring a collection of six articles that do just that. Bristow reminds us of the importance of equity and social justice. Curry gives us an example of community among our peers. Skott-Myhre brings lessons from history to help us make sense of the marches, movements, and revolutions happening in the world. Gharabaghi reminds us of the strength of the youth we care for in spite of our own selves and systems. Strother, Maikoetter, Freado & Brendtro remind us of our history and share the six drives described in the Model of Leadership and Service. And finally a special moment from Fulcher as we listen in to his postcard this month to CYC-Net co-founder Brian Gannon.

Join with your colleagues around the globe as you grab a tea or coffee and carve out a few moments of your day to digest, debate, and dream about the ideas in this February issue. If there is anything in this issue that helps you refocus and navigate the distractions in our world I'd love to hear from you. You can reach me at [james@cyc-net.org](mailto:james@cyc-net.org).

# The new CYC-Net app is now available!



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# Strong Youth

Kiaras Gharabaghi

Recently I had a discussion with a residential team about the team's anxieties related to announcing to the youth that the group home would be moving to another part of the city, relatively far away. The senior managers of the agency were scheduled to come on Friday afternoon to tell the youth that their current home would be sold and a new home would be bought by the summer of this year. The team felt very badly about this, in part because they already knew that this was going to happen but they had been made to keep it a secret. They anticipated that the youth would call them on this and accuse them of having lied to them. They also anticipated that the youth would be upset about this news because their current group home was their home after all, and change, especially the kind where one has no control, is always hard for young people. Finally, the team worried about the new location, how it would impact the young people's schooling, their social networks, their part time jobs and many other things.

As we were having this discussion, I marveled at the commitment of the team. Their concerns were focused on real-life issues for the youth, and they felt uneasy about the lack of transparency with which they had been made to approach the issue. In fact, all of their concerns were indicative of a very deep level of caring for the youth, and of a desire to protect the youth from change and uprooting that seemed random and unhelpful. I spent much of the discussion validating their feelings, reminding them that although their concerns were important, sometimes the things we catastrophize don't quite materialize in the ways we thought.

A few weeks later, I came back to talk with the team again. I wanted to know how the announcement of the impending move was received. The team was noticeably more relaxed, and said that the youth responded very well to the announcement. Some of them thought it was a good idea, but that it wouldn't really



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impact them because they had plans to move out before that anyways. Others were looking forward to a newer house, with better bathrooms. And again, others reminisced about their time in the current home, the good times and the bad times. Those who had plans to move out before the move, promised to visit the new location and to stay in touch. And those who were going to be part of the move chatted excitedly about what sort of features a new house might have.

All of this reminded me how easily we underestimate the strength of young people. It is without a doubt true that many of the young people we work with in residential care have multiple vulnerabilities, often associated with unpredictable moves, relocations and replacement. At the same time, however, those same young people maintain a sense of optimism about the future that we, as practitioners, sometimes struggle to match. Moving the group home from one location to another was greeted as an opportunity for better things, not worse things. And it was seen as exciting to have a new place, with new bathrooms, and who knows what other features. The young people probably did, or will at some point before the move, experience anxiety about this change in their lives. But that anxiety will be mixed with the excitement of new possibilities.

Two things come to mind that I think are important to reflect on this context. One is about the participation of young people in the relocation process. I think the young people can contribute a great deal to this process, including with respect to the decorum of the new house, the actual move of the old house, and also the way in which the old house may be remembered through mementos, time capsules, and other rituals. The other thing relates to the residential team. Clearly, when I first talked with the team about the impending move, there was anxiety in the room. It was not the young people's anxiety; the team, and the individual practitioners, had their own anxiety to deal with. Residential care has become a very unstable and unpredictable sector; there is enough uncertainty for practitioners to wonder whether this move is just a prelude, or even a euphemism, for closure, downsizing or some other process that will affect them directly.



Practitioners have learned to be cynical, worried and even afraid of senior management-initiated changes.

What all of this means is that we now have an unexpected disequilibrium in young people and practitioner worldviews. The practitioner worldview is filled with dread, worry and anxiety; the young people are, as they have always been, strong, and maintain a worldview of high expectations, positive opportunities and meaningful adventure. The trick will be to ensure that our negativity doesn't subdue the positive spirit of the youth!



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# The Drive to Thrive: Lighting the Fire

**Mark Strother, Michelle Maikoetter, Mark Freado and Larry Brendtro**

*“A central question of youth development is how to get adolescents’ fires lit, how to have them develop the complex of dispositions and skills needed to take charge of their lives.”*

**Reed Larson, University of Illinois<sup>1</sup>**

Scholars since Aristotle have noted that humans possess an inborn tendency toward positive growth. Yet researchers and practitioners often become preoccupied with pessimistic views. With such a mindset, the goal of education, treatment, and childcare is constricted to controlling and modifying behavior. Writing about the purpose of youth work, Canadian researcher Kiaras Gharabaghi (2014) observes most major stakeholders – except for young people themselves – are looking for ways to make youth less troublesome for the rest of us. The prevailing formula is simplistic: reward good behavior and punish the bad. But controlling behavior cannot be the sole purpose of practice as this undercuts the primary goal of preparing young people for responsible independence.

Since Pestalozzi reclaimed street urchins over two centuries ago, there have been inspired charismatic leaders who intuitively knew how to draw out the best in youth workers and young people they served. Unfortunately, the vision of these reformers seldom persisted beyond their era. Sustaining effective programs in changing times and with constantly churning staff and clientele requires more than charisma. What is needed are approaches informed by science and best practices, and tested training resources to translate this knowledge into practical tools for all who serve children and families. While preserving traditions is important, the fields of child care, education, and treatment have often been afraid to change, even in the light of research that shows what was done in the past does not work now.



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Noted therapist Carl Rogers has said that, “successful living is healing” (Doncaster, 2011, p. 252). Throughout the last century, quality residential programs have been laboratories for the most significant studies on working with the most troubled and troubling children.<sup>2</sup> Such youngsters need more than an isolated therapy hour but the therapeutic impact of “the other 23 hours.” Even the most troubled and troubling youth can thrive in a milieu with relational child care, inspired teaching, a positive peer group, family support, and rich recreational and service opportunities. These total living and learning environments provide unique opportunities to develop holistic approaches instead of “breaking people into bits” to fit narrow professional views (Magnuson, 2014). However, abuses in some institutional settings and a push to cut costs have sparked highly-publicized attacks aiming to defund and disband residential programs—causing the most vulnerable and traumatized to be discarded by default to correctional facilities currently ill-equipped to meet their needs (Thompson, Huefner, Daly, & Davis, 2014). Since all the experiences in a child’s life can impact the course of development, all who work with youth in any context need to focus on meeting core needs for positive development.

### **What Matters Most: A Unifying Theme for Leadership and Service**

An essential quality of all effective programs for reclaiming children and families is a unifying theme, a set of beliefs that bind together leaders, staff, and those they serve in a common purpose (Wozner & Beker, 1986).

The vast explosion of knowledge makes it difficult to identify the most important ideas that would inform successful approaches. Further, different professional disciplines operate in silos, often unaware of how contributions from related fields might inform their own work.



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Figure 1



Creating a unifying theme can be confusing since programs are mandated to use “evidence-based” practices – but methods of every ilk claim such status. Further, the research supporting these practices may report statistically significant results that have minimal impact. Thousands of variables might conceivably have some measurable effect on success in working with youth. The challenge is to identify powerful factors that produce meaningful change: as John Lyons suggests, our goal should be transformation rather than being satisfied with barely measurable minutia (Lyons, 2009).

The Model of Leadership and Service is based on a consilience of research and best practices (CF Learning, 2008).<sup>3</sup> As seen in Figure 1, this model focuses on six universal brain-based drives which operate across the entire developmental lifespan. These six drives (D<sup>6</sup>) motivate humans to meet corresponding



psychosocial needs – in healthy or unhealthy ways. This model which links leadership and service reflects the truism that helping children thrive requires adults to meet these same basic needs in their own life and work. Research also has shown that the organization’s management system should be matched to the educational or treatment methodology. Thus, while a centralized authoritarian model would match a behavior modification program, only staff who feel empowered as team members are prepared to empower young people (Babcock & Sorenson, 1979).

A wealth of management research shows that focusing on developing strengths of employees in an environment that meets their needs produces the most productive organizations (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999). A massive Gallup study showed the most important questions asked by talented employees included Does someone at work care about me as a person?; Do I have an opportunity to do my best every day?; and Do I have opportunities at work to learn and grow? Similar findings are the classic studies by Douglas McGregor (2006) who distinguishes between Type X leaders who stress the importance of administering external rewards and penalties and Type Y leaders who foster inner motivation and job satisfaction as workers approach tasks creatively.

Behavior modification has been a driving force – not only in childcare but also in the workplace. Much has been written on the negative impact this framework has on intrinsic motivation, creativity, and achievement (e.g., see Deci & Ryan, 2000; Pink, 2011). We dangle goodies in front of people in the same way we train the family pet, and as Alfie Kohn (2006) quips, rewards motivate people to get rewards. While administering “consequences” may produce compliance, it fails to create deep, lasting change. When the goal is short-term control, what gets lost is long-term, internal, authentic transformation.

Historically, our field has been preoccupied with finding names for the problems and “disorders” presented by youth. Our brain’s natural tendency is to categorize, as this creates a sense of control. Diagnosing and labeling children may shift responsibility to others to intervene. Labeling a child with Reactive Attachment



Disorder or as a victim is not helpful – either to the child or to those providing care. These labels tell us a child is struggling with relationships – but relationships cannot be healed by medications, isolation, or punishment.

So, without the traditional tools of diagnoses, shame, rewards, and punishments, how can we make others do what we want them to do? We cannot. To the chagrin of adults, young people are motivated to do what they want regardless of punishments piled upon them. Those who have been severely punished – physically and emotionally – are not the most well-behaved. If the abuser is not around to enforce obedience, the child may be extremely unruly and aggressive. Underlying the most challenging behaviors are feelings of separateness, inadequacy, powerlessness, shame, and fear. Interventions which increase this distress exacerbate the very behaviors we seek to extinguish. This drives a cycle of increased control and isolation.

In contrast to coercion and control, the developmental perspective is the centerpiece of positive psychology. “Development, after all, is a process of growth and increasing competence” (Larson, 2000, p. 170). A rich tradition focuses on basic growth needs including research by pioneers such as Henry Murray (1938), Abraham Maslow (1943, 1955), Robert White (1959), and Carl Rogers (1963). Needs identify conditions which are necessary for psychological growth and resilience. A large body of evidence supporting these needs-based approaches comes from the fields of positive youth development (Benson et al., 2006), self-determination research (Deci & Ryan, 2013), and resilience science (Masten, 2014).

In the title of a noted research review, humans are “hardwired to connect” (Commission for Children at Risk, 2003). Studies of child and adolescent brain development point to powerful, practical strategies for creating environments in which all young people grow and flourish. This research also springs from a synergy between neuroscience, trauma, and resilience (Perry, 2009; Rendon, 2015; van der Kolk, 2014). When their most basic needs are met, humans thrive.



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**ISSN 1605-7406**

## **The 6 Drives (D6)**

Many theories of behavior focus on administering extrinsic rewards and punishments. Beginning with research on intrinsic motivation, Deci and Ryan pioneered Self-Determination Theory which describes universal human needs or drives that motivate the most significant behavior, such as a need for relatedness, competence, and autonomy (Deci, 1980; Deci & Ryan, 2013). Research in neuroscience shows that drives originate in the core limbic brain and are closely wired to the prefrontal cortex in the higher brain, the seat of meaning and decision making (Damasio, 2005). These drives have been given other names by various disciplines, including primary values, ultimate motives, and brain-based goals (Lawrence & Nohria, 2002). Social environments that satisfy these basic needs foster healthy functioning and resilience but thwarting these needs triggers maladjustment – also a central finding of resilience science (Masten, 2014; Sroufe, Egeland, Carlson, & Collins, 2005; Werner & Smith, 1992). Below we briefly describe each of the 6 Drives (D<sup>6</sup>).

### **Safety**

“Felt safety” which has to be determined by each individual includes emotional, physical, and relational security (Purvis, Cross, & Lyons-Sunshine, 2007). The opposite of feeling safe is feeling threatened or frightened. Fear is a primitive emotion linked with our survival. Humans can only survive when protected by others, so belonging to a group is necessary for individuals to experience a sense of safety. As long as the brain determines one is unsafe and must protect self from harm, higher levels of functioning, such as logical and rational thinking, are not accessible. Safety is at the core of this model and the crux of work with children and each other.

Much behavior is driven by the need for safety. This is not just protection from extreme abuse, but from subtle threats to one’s sense of self-worth and sense of competence. The need for safety is driven by emotions of anxiety, fear, loss, and shame. Whether child or adult, everyone needs to feel safe from hurt or



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humiliation. The children we serve must feel secure before healing can begin; only then are they free to focus on developmental challenges without feeling burdened with the worries of the world. Further, adults who feel safe in their family, workplace, and leadership roles are best equipped to foster positive growth in themselves and others.

Infants begin life without any means to keep themselves safe other than to signal their distress to caregivers. With predictable parenting, they gradually acquire the ability to self-regulate emotions. But throughout life, being in the presence of trusted persons fosters safety. A dedicated brain system in humans reads emotional cues in facial expressions and tone of voice to determine if others are friend or foe (Porges, 2011). The perception of being unsafe triggers primitive defensive fight/flight reactions. But sensing one is safe creates social engagement and tones down stress reactions.

Safety is in the eye of the beholder, and much problem behavior is driven by a perceived need for self-protection. Bruce Perry of the Child Trauma Academy established safety as the key need for many children whose behavior was triggered by brainstem drives to defend against threat. One cannot just counsel these fears away; in Perry's terms, the brain-based sequence in healing trauma is regulate, relate, and reason. When states of hyperarousal cannot be regulated, these can become entrenched traits which are harder to change.

Panksepp and Biven (2012) identified two universal brain programs designed specifically for safety, activated by emotions of fear and rage, triggering fight or flight. A more primitive freeze mechanism kicks in when neither flight nor fight is possible. All of us temporarily experience these defensive emotions to adapt to danger, but traumatized children are ever vigilant for danger when no threat exists. While the drive for safety has its own brain pathways, this drive intersects with the other biosocial needs, notably to build secure relationships.

Listening to what children had to say suggested very tangible things we could do to foster safety. Youngsters who have experienced previous trauma or who do not feel safe from mistreatment by peers find comfort in having a lock on their



bedroom door. Some children are better able to sleep with weighted blankets wrapped around them. Availability of food creates a feeling of safety, so snacks are no longer regulated. Kids can even have them in their backpacks. Young children do not feel safe in chaotic environments, and predictable routines such as bedtime stories foster a sense of safety.

## **Belonging**

*Every child needs at least one adult who is irrationally crazy about him or her.*

**Urie Bronfenbrenner<sup>4</sup>**

Belonging begins with our primary drive for attachment with primary caregivers. The quest for relationships expands beyond the family to peers, teachers, and mentors. At the most global level, humans fulfill their needs for belonging by joining groups of like-minded individuals. We even develop a sense of belonging to our culture, ethnic group, and nation. Primary relationships are meant to be grounded in trust. Regardless of place or position, everyone needs trusted others. Nicholas Hobbs (1982) concluded that trust between a child and adult is the foundation for successful work with troubled and troubling children, the glue that holds teaching and learning together.

Trust is particularly important to children whose lives have been riddled by rejection, failure, loss, and betrayal. Trauma expert Bruce Perry concludes, “The more healthy relationships a child has, the more likely he will be to recover from trauma and thrive. Relationships are the agents of change and the most powerful therapy is human love” (Perry & Szalavitz, 2007, p. 230).

Attachment theory, pioneered by John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth, has been described as “the most visible and empirically grounded conceptual framework” in the field of social and emotional development (Cassidy & Shaver, 2008, p. xi). Bowlby became interested in studying attachment through his early experience



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working in a residential school for maladjusted children in England. Two children intrigued him; one, an affectionless youth who had never had a stable relationship, the other, an anxious child who followed Bowlby around like his shadow (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991). One of his first publications was *Forty-four Juvenile Thieves: Their Character and Home-life*. (Bowlby, 1944). Bowlby saw attachment as a biologically based drive and described in detail the relational trauma resulting from neglect, separation, and loss. His collaboration with Mary Ainsworth has produced an impressive body of research on attachment in children and adults (see Cassidy & Shaver, 2016). Children who are securely attached use their caregiver as a safe anchor or base as they explore their world. Youngsters without secure attachments are less able to develop a stable sense of autonomy and identity.

In their classic 1995 study, *The Need to Belong*, Roy Baumeister and Mark Leary gathered a body of evidence to show that humans have a universal biosocial drive to build and sustain relationships. Additional science behind the drive for belonging comes from Jaak Panksepp who identified brain circuits for seven brain based emotions (Panksepp & Biven, 2012). Two of these emotions are:

- **Attachment**, producing feelings of well-being when in proximity to an attachment figure and distress or panic when separated.
- **Caring**, responding to others in need or distress with nurturing behavior.

Attachment and caring produce oxytocin which lowers stress and aggression. Children growing up in Romanian orphanages had very low levels of this trust and bonding hormone, which is needed to help regulate the stress system (Wismer-Fries, Shirtcliff, & Pollak, 2008). The lack of human connections alters brain development and contributes to a host of emotional, behavioral, and learning problems (Nelson, Fox, & Zeanah, 2014). A primary symptom of relational trauma is emotional dysregulation, and children develop self-regulation through secure attachments (Perry & Szalavitz, 2010).





Strong relationships between children, families, and caregivers build interpersonal understanding and allow children and their parents to experience dignity, self-respect, and joy. A secure sense of belonging provides the confidence to transform a frightened, unsure person into a connected, caring individual. Bruce Perry notes that the most destructive aspect of any trauma is shattering human connections. Those who are harmed by people who are supposed to love them are robbed of relationships that allow them to feel safe. Thus, recovery from trauma is all about human relationships (Perry & Szalavitz, 2007).

## **Achievement**

*Motivation to educators usually means school motivation. The youngster may be highly motivated, but the motivation may be to have fun, escape work, be noticed, or confront the teacher.*

**William C. Morse<sup>5</sup>**

Robert White (1959) authored the classic account of competence motivation, seeing this as a primary drive of humans, closely tied to survival itself. Harry Harlow (1958) is best known for his research on attachment using wire and terrycloth “mothers” with monkeys. But his earlier research (Harlow, Harlow, & Meyer, 1950) showed that these animals had an innate drive to solve problems, even without any reward and punishment. He provided eight monkeys with a simple mechanical puzzle which required pulling out a pin, undoing a hook, and lifting a hinge. The puzzle was placed in a cage to familiarize the monkeys prior to a problem-solving exercise. To the experimenters’ surprise, the monkeys began playing with the puzzles with great enjoyment and, in short order, figured out how the contraptions worked on their own.

Curiosity is the brain’s most pervasive human emotion and prime neural pathways are dedicated to learning about our world (Izard & Ackerman, 2000). Panksepp identifies “seeking” as one of six primary emotions. Small children are



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scientists, exploring every cranny in their physical environments and asking interminable questions to figure out their world. Between ages two and five, children ask 40,000 questions, producing an explosion of brain connections (Harris, 2015). Ironically, questioning is virtually extinguished in the traditional school environment. The natural intrinsic motivation to learn quickly decays.

High rates of boredom and disconnection may be indicators of deficient learning environments that fail to engage students rather than symptoms of pathology. Larson (2000) hired teens to carry pagers which signaled them at random times to complete a quick questionnaire on what they were doing, thinking, and feeling. When paged in school, most students were making efforts to concentrate but intrinsic interest in learning was very low. Even high-achieving students were seldom operating on intrinsic motivation. However, when paged with friends or in structured voluntary activities such as sports, arts, and organizations, youth reported both intrinsic motivation and deep attention. Rather than viewing socializing and extracurricular activities as interfering with education, the drives for belonging and adventure complement learning.

Traditional theories of intelligence presumed that IQ was a largely fixed trait, tethered to our DNA (Herrnstein & Murray, 1994). This myth is burst by decades of studies at the University of Michigan. The human drive for achievement is inborn, but it can easily be derailed by the fear of failure (Atkinson & Raynor, 1974). Environments, not heredity, are the prime factors impacting achievement (Nisbett, 2009). Studies of effective schools for students at risk found two essential ingredients of a positive environment—both were qualities of teachers who a) provided uncommonly warm emotional support and b) prevented students from failing (Gold, 1995). In positive school climates, students with histories of behavior problems and school failure were able to increase achievement from an average of .65 years of gain annually to 2 years gain for each school year (Brendtro & Mitchell, 2015). Even if they cannot solve all family problems, youth who engage in school are on the pathway to successful life outcomes (Gold & Osgood, 1992).



In her book *Grit*, Angela Duckworth (2016) describes how talent is a product of investment in learning and perseverance. The mindset of learnings—at any age—predicts whether or not they will fulfill their potential. According to Carol Dweck (2006), everyone has one of two basic mindsets. Those with a fixed mindset believe their talents and abilities are set in stone. They try to prove themselves, trying to look smart and avoid failure. This is a self-fulfilling pathway to mediocrity or maladjustment. Those with a growth mindset know talents can be developed. Failure is an opportunity for feedback and developing new strategies rather than disengaging from learning. These individuals are on the pathway toward success. The important point is we can change mindsets in ourselves and our students at any point in life.

Engagement in learning and connection to school can be a powerful force in helping troubled youth turn around their lives, even when major problems still exist in the family and community (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010; Gold & Osgood, 1992). Unfortunately, the advent of “zero tolerance” has given schools a rationale for pushing out vulnerable youth who could most benefit from a positive educational experience. A major study of thousands of students in Texas found that over half were suspended during their middle school and high school years; repeat performers were in the pipeline from school failure to the justice system (Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2011). The research is clear: there is zero evidence for zero tolerance.

The fact that most students are not intrinsically motivated to learn poses a challenge and opportunity. Across history, great educators were able to engage students in the joy of learning. Achievement intersects with all of the other drives we are discussing. For students in conflict with peers or teachers, school must become a place of safety where they experience a sense of belonging. Motivation is directly related to a sense of power and purpose.

Working together toward common goals connects adults with young people who develop their unique gifts and build each individual’s confidence. We are laying



the foundation for these young people to overcome adversity and pursue their dreams.

## **Power**

*Conscious will is a power which develops with use and activity. We must aim at cultivating the will, not breaking it.*

**Maria Montessori, *The San Remo Lectures*, 1949<sup>6</sup>**

As noted in the earlier discussion of safety, children begin life powerless, without the ability to regulate emotions which reflexively signal their needs to the caregiver. The fledgling stage in developing power is self-regulation. This is only learned in an attachment relationship through co-regulation as the caregiver meets needs and calms the distressed child. After thousands of these events where the caregiver loans a calm brain to the upset child, a new pattern emerges: the child learns to self-calm. This self-regulation requires building circuits in the higher executive brain which is a two-decade process. When children are born with reactive temperaments or are subjected to trauma, self-regulation is the first casualty (Bath, 2008). While it may be intuitive to calm a distressed child, addressing an upset teenager does not come quite as naturally. But at whatever age self-regulation is learned, the youngster needs the calm brain of the adult. Imagine the irony when the adult in authority screams in the face of the wayward child to “calm down.”

The second stage of power is self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) in which children develop a sense of power, believing that they can control their world to meet their needs. Lacking self-efficacy, the person retreats into learned helplessness and defeat. Psychiatrist Ruth Benedict (1934) observed modern society deprives young people of opportunities for responsibility and then complains about their irresponsibility. In the words of W.E.B. DuBois (1909, p. 235), “Responsibility is the



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**ISSN 1605-7406**

first step in responsibility.” Without a sense of control over their own destiny, youth feel powerless and are vulnerable to hopelessness and depression.

Effective programs seek to replace coercive with cooperative processes. For example, instead of fighting with kids about the use of cell phones, one can engage them in discussion about what the issues would be. Youth can be supported in solving the problem rather than having adults make all those decisions. A fervent proponent of democracy in working with youth, Rudolf Dreikurs (1971) challenged adults to put aside notions of superiority and treat young people as social equals. This does not mean youth always get their way, but they certainly should have their say. Positive Peer Culture research (Gold & Osgood, 1992) shows that adults who nurture responsible autonomy in youth create climates of cooperation instead of confrontation—youth become partners in empowerment (Tate, Copas, & Wasmund, 2012).

Leadership is an exercise in power. Youth work pioneer Anton Makarenko (1951) made sure all young people had opportunities both to lead and to follow. Kurt Lewin (1948) studied three styles of leadership exercised by adults working with children’s groups: authoritarian, permissive, and democratic. Children with autocratic leaders were under control only when supervised by the adult, and their own peer dynamics were riddled with bullying. Permissive leaders were just ineffective. But democratic leaders formed group cultures where youth supported one another and kept on task even in the absence of the leader. This does not mean that youth vote on every decision, but they are treated as persons capable of responsibility.

Finally, moral development researcher Martin Hoffman (2000) described three patterns of discipline used by adults: power assertion, love withdrawal, and inductive discipline (problem solving). While power assertion sometimes may be necessary, if this becomes the primary method, youth fail to develop empathy and moral values. Love withdrawal is blatantly destructive as it jeopardizes the most basic need of children for safety and belonging. Problem solving engages youth in evaluating their behavior and developing responsible values, thinking, and behavior.



Difficulties become opportunities for growth. Daily life experiences become teachable moments to develop personal responsibility and self-discipline.

## **Purpose**

*Only a positive prosocial purpose can provide the lasting inspiration, motivation, and resilience that is characteristic of a truly purposeful life.*

**William Damon, *The Path to Purpose*, 2008<sup>7</sup>**

Humans are born with a built-in capacity and drive to search for purpose and reflect on life's ultimate ends. Children are biologically hardwired, not only for close connections to others but also for "deep connections to moral and spiritual meaning" (Commission on Children at Risk, 2003, p. 5). Finding moral and spiritual meaning involves commitment to some cause beyond one's self. Viktor Frankl's search for meaning reflects on his holocaust experience which showed that those who had some purpose such as faith or service to others were able to survive.

William Damon (2008) observes: "The most pervasive problem of the day is a sense of emptiness that has ensnared young people" (p. xii). Researchers find that only one in five youth have a clear vision of where they want to go in life. Young people are described as having little motivation, but the core problem is the lack of a source for motivation, some purpose for living. Purpose involves pursuing something both meaningful to the self and consequential to the world.

In the 4th Century, Aristotle wrote that finding happiness and fulfillment is achieved by loving rather than being loved. Resilience research also shows that persons engaged in helping others develop a sense of purpose in life (Werner & Smith, 1992). Those pursuing a selfish, hedonistic life style experience pleasure in the moment but diminish their sense of meaning in life (Baumeister, Vohs, Aaker, & Garbinsky, 2013). Simply, human beings are designed for a purpose larger than themselves.



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Pioneering school psychologist John Morgan (1927) saw the primary challenge in development as helping young people find “the proper balance between selfishness and altruism” (p. 33). Life has little meaning if driven by egoistic narcissism. Panksepp and Bivin (2012) have identified the brain circuitry for the human emotion of caring. Neuroscientist Shelley Taylor (2001) observes that humans survive not by overpowering one another but through the tending instinct. Tending and befriending others is essential in the human experience.

Children draw on their connections, competencies, and power to give purpose to their lives. They develop a sense of worth by being of service to others. In turn, engaging in prosocial actions strengthens autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Weinstein & Ryan, 2010). However, the benefits of helping others emanate when this is a personal decision, rather than an expectation imposed by others. Sentencing delinquent youth to community service as a punishment is of less value than engaging them in voluntary helping activities.

## **Adventure**

*This stupid experiment of organizing work and failing to organize play has, of course, brought about a fine revenge. The love of pleasure will not be denied, and when it has turned into all sorts of malignant and vicious appetites, then we, the middle aged, grow quite distracted and resort to all sorts of restrictive measures.*

**Jane Addams (1909, p. 6)**

Writing of *The Spirit of Youth and the City Streets*, Jane Addams (1909) observed that the youthful spirit of adventure can spark high-risk behavior and even delinquency. Since this drive is innate, it cannot be suppressed but must be channeled. She called for schools to become places of joy, and participated in founding the Playground Association of America to provide recreation for urban youth.



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**ISSN 1605-7406**

The emotional brain of teens surges in seeking pleasure and peer relationships. At the same time, the executive brain's capacity for self-control and thinking ahead will only fully mature in the mid-twenties. Laurence Steinberg (2014) states that adolescence results in remodeling the brain so it is more easily aroused, especially in seeking pleasure and rewards. This is a natural process of prepping teens for striking out toward new relationships and experiences. The drive for novelty and risk-taking marks a period of exuberant brain growth akin to the neuroplasticity in early childhood. Thus, adolescence is a particularly powerful stage in forming intelligence and identity.

Given the natural quest for stimulation and adventure, most schools do not do a very good job in tapping this drive. In fact, one common method of behavior control is to take away pleasurable activities as a "consequence." Such strategies fail to recognize that children, and adolescents in particular, need adventure and stimulation for well-being. Fritz Redl (1966) demonstrated that depriving youth of opportunities for rich rewarding activities was as counterproductive as starving them for behavioral control. Likewise, Nicholas Hobbs (1982) prescribed joy as an essential ingredient in creating successful living and learning environments.

Throughout the history of the human race, children channeled the drive for adventure into play activities, often involving exploring nature. Today, sedentary lifestyles leave a generation of children so plugged into electronic diversions that they are suffering from a virtual nature deficit disorder (Louv, 2008).

Neuroscientist Jaak Panksepp has identified play as a primary emotional drive in mammals. Play is not just wasted time but a format for brain development; he hypothesizes that depriving children of this normal developmental experience impedes social, cognitive, and self-regulatory functions (Panksepp & Biven, 2012).

Play shapes the brain, opens the imagination, and invigorates the soul, according to psychiatrist Stuart Brown. Play is anything but trivial, but is a basic biological drive as integral to our health and functioning as sleep and nutrition (Brown & Vaughn, 2009). Many schools and public parks are banning playful roughhousing by children, and students are tethered to their seats with minimal opportunities for





unstructured play. But brains are designed with the drives for adventure, exploration, and play, which build intelligence (Pellegrini & Smith, 2005). Play has lifelong benefits since those with greater opportunity for exploration and novelty during the early years are more likely to seek out these experiences throughout the lifespan (Pellis & Pellis, 2009).

A rich literature on adventure and experiential education has been ignored by many group care programs and certainly in traditional education. Adventure contributes to positive youth development for all young people and can create “islands of healing” (Schoel & Maizell, 2002). Further, a flood of research on the teen brain shows a developmentally-based need for novelty and adventure (Galván, 2012; Siegel, 2011). This calls for designing positive opportunities for risk taking rather than allowing this need to be met in destructive ways. Life is meant to be filled with moments of passion. By encouraging reasonable risk, innovation, and laughter, children, families, and teachers can more deeply experience excitement in daily life. Schools and communities become joyful places that kindle the spirit of adventure.

## **Conclusion**

Reformers in education and youth work recognized intuitively that young people thrived in an environment that met their needs. Robust research shows this to be the core of positive growth throughout the lifespan. We close with wisdom from Gisela Konopka, an early pioneer in the field of youth development:

*The final purpose of any work with people, whether they are healthy or sick, young or old, is to help them use as many of their capabilities as possible so that they are themselves happy and can contribute to society as a whole.*

**Konopka (1954, p. 15)**



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Now science attests that powerful living and learning environments are organized around the drives that motivate youth as they grow and develop. Adults who are creating these environments also need to feel connected, competent, and committed to remarkable challenges and opportunities of transforming young lives.

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## Endnotes

1. Larson, 2000, p. 170.
2. Notable examples of quality residential programs are the Life Space Model (Morse, 2008); the Re-ED Model (Hobbs, 1982); the Teaching Family Model (Boys Town, 2016); and a host of therapeutic



residential care programs worldwide (Blau, Caldwell, & Lieberman, 2014; Fulcher & Garfat, 2008; Smith, 2009; Whittaker, del Valle, & Holmes, 2015).

3. CF Learning provides research, publications, and training through CF Learning, a program of Cal Farley's of Amarillo, Texas, one of the nation's largest nonprofit child and family organizations. See [cflerning.org](http://cflerning.org)
4. Bronfenbrenner, 1977.
5. Morse, 2008.
6. Montessori, 1949, p. 27.
7. Damon, 2008, p. 40.

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This article first appeared in the monograph, *A Thousand Fires Burning* (2016), and is reprinted with permission from CF Learning. [CFLearning.org](http://CFLearning.org)



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# RESIDENTIAL CHILD AND YOUTH CARE IN A DEVELOPING WORLD

Tuhinul Islam  
Leon Fulcher  
*Editors*



**CYC-Online February 2017**

ISSN 1605-7406

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# Sophie Cruz: The Children's Revolution

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A few weeks ago, literally millions of people across the globe marched in the streets to assert the intersectional agenda of what might well be described as an invigorated and reinvented women's movement. While there is a great deal to be said about how recent events in the world of global capitalist patriarchal politics have spurred people to action, for me as a CYC scholar, it was a reminder of the threats and possibilities young people face in the years to come. One of the aspects of the march that was profoundly evocative for me was to see how many young people were in the march, on the organizing committee, and on the stage as speakers. I want to briefly offer this as an obvious material rebuttal to the regressive and inaccurate portrayal of millennials as uninvolved, narcissistic, apathetic and lazy.

Of course, those of us who have the opportunity to work with young people we know this already. My students and the young people I encounter in my other life as a musician, and those I interact with in my community are engaged and dynamic, creative, hardworking, independent thinkers, artists, scholars and activists. I have been stopped in bars and at music festivals by young people who want to talk with me about social change and the future. I have been texted and asked if I would have coffee to discuss the finer points of economic theory, from libertarian capitalism to Marx.

I want to note that these were not my students. These were working class kids who heard through the grapevine that I was someone they could talk with about these things. I didn't seek them out, I wasn't working with them in counseling or youth work, I wasn't their professor and in a couple of cases I didn't really know them at all. I should also note that this didn't happen in a big city milieu rich in



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liberal discourse, but in a small town in rural Georgia. To be fair it is a university town, but many of the young people who sought me out were not university students.

However, I should note that my students in psychology and human services/CYC are also rather remarkable to me in their desire to change the world in order to bring about a more just and equitable society. Their driving questions and research interests, at both the graduate and undergraduate level, have to do with how to bring about grassroots change that distributes wealth and facilitates communities of compassion and caring. They are committed in ways I have not seen in a very long time. They embody the fundamental principles of CYC of relationship and love in very concrete and palpable ways. They are frankly rather surprising to me given the media discourse about their generation. That is until I saw them en masse in marches all across the world.

While there were many things the marches brought up for me to reflect on, there are three I would like to note here. The first is a historical resonance of a somewhat forgotten or overlooked historical march that I would argue has deep importance to CYC today.

The event took place nearly 114 years ago, in 1903, in Philadelphia. It was there, that an Irish immigrant widow, who became known as Mother Jones, alerted the rest of American society to the desperate conditions of children working in the textile mills. It was a strike of tens of thousands of textile workers for a 55-hour work week that caught her attention; a strike in which tens of thousands of children participated as workers. It was estimated at the time that 15% of all children under 16 worked full time rather than attending school. They worked up to 60 hours a week, many times sustaining terribly injuries in unsafe working conditions, including disfigurement and amputations.

Mother Jones asked the media of the time why they did not cover the plight of children workers in their reports about the labor unrest. They replied, that children held no stock in the newspaper companies. Mother Jones is reputed to



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have responded, “I’ve got stock in these little children, and I’ll arrange a little publicity.” In her autobiography, she reports that,

*A great crowd gathered in the public square in front of the city hall. I put the little boys with their fingers off and hands crushed and maimed on a platform. I held up their mutilated hands and showed them to the crowd and made the statement that Philadelphia’s mansions were built on the broken bones, the quivering hearts and drooping heads of these children. That their little lives went out to make wealth for others. That neither state or city officials paid any attention to these wrongs. That they did not care that these children were to be the future citizens of the nation.*

Mother Jones then led what has come to be called the March of the Mill Children from Philadelphia through New Jersey and New York to the summer home of Teddy Roosevelt on Long island. While Roosevelt ignored the march, the country did not and those children marching all that way changed labor laws in the years that followed in significant ways that echo to today.

Cut forward almost a hundred years to Brazil at the meeting of a UN assembly on climate change. Twelve-year-old Severn Suzuki from Vancouver Canada addresses the adult leaders convened from all across the planet to try to find solutions to the ecological crisis facing humanity. Severn had been organizing and working on environmental issues since she was in kindergarten. When she was 9 years old she and some friends started the Environmental Children's Organization (ECO) whom she represented at the meeting. The speech is well worth watching in its entirety (CYC students showed it in my class today <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oJJGulZVfLM>), but I want to highlight two things she said.

*At school, even in kindergarten, you teach us how to behave in the world. You teach us to not to fight with others, to work things out, to respect others, to clean up our mess, not to hurt other creatures, to share, not be greedy. Then, why do you go out and do -- do the things you tell us not to*



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*do? Do not forget why you are attending these conferences – who you're doing this for. We are your own children. You are deciding what kind of a world we are growing up in.*

Twenty years ago, Severn called us, as adults, to be accountable to our children and to be true to the values and morals we teach young people in their earliest education. Certainly, as CYC workers and scholars we would hope to be exemplars in this respect and yet, while I think we can be proud of the work we do with individual young people in our daily encounters with them, I am not sure we have managed to attend to their future wellbeing on this planet as a whole. I am not sure that we have demonstrated the kind of “stock in these little children” that Mother Jones evidenced. For Mother Jones, the crisis was one of brutality in the use of children in industrial production. For us, the stakes are both larger in terms of ecological crises and more endemic in terms of the impacts of global capitalism on the lives of children across the globe.

Severn ended her talk by saying,

*Do not forget why you're attending these conferences, who you're doing this for – we are your own children. You are deciding what kind of world we will grow up in. Parents should be able to comfort their children by saying “everything's going to be alright”, “we're doing the best we can” and “it's not the end of the world. But I don't think you can say that to us anymore. Are we even on your list of priorities? My father always says “You are what you do, not what you say.” Well, what you do makes me cry at night. You grown ups say you love us. I challenge you, please make your actions reflect your words.*

Since Severn gave her talk, we adults have been called to action by other children such as, 16 year old Malala Yousafzai who braved the savagery of the Taliban, when they didn't want her to advocate for schooling for young women, or 12 year old Elijah Lemaian who spoke to the UN about the AIDs in his home in



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Kenya and most recently, six year year old Sophie Cruz who spoke at the Women's March a few weeks ago.

Sophie Cruz came to the worlds attention, as an advocate for young people, when at age of five, she broke through police barricades and threw herself into the arms of the Pope in order to beg him to speak out about the plight of undocumented immigrant children and their families. A year later she stood on a stage in front of nearly a million people with her undocumented immigrant family and called us, as adults to act with her to protect some of the most vulnerable among us. She spoke without notes in both English and Spanish (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qPa464CEbuE>). Her message to us was simple but profound. She told us,

*Let us fight with love, faith and courage so that our families will not be destroyed. I also want to tell the children not to be afraid, because we are not alone. There are still many people that have their hearts filled with love. Let's keep together and fight for the rights.*

As CYC workers and scholars, I would argue that, we need to take up the call for action and global advocacy from these young people and allow these children to lead us. We need to take seriously the urgency of these calls from the next generation. Our actions need to extend both into our daily work with individual young people, as well as onto the broader stage of political and social resistance and rebellion against the harm being done to our children. We are very fortunate to be able to work on the front lines with the young people we encounter in our work. I would argue that good fortune comes with an obligation to be fully accountable to the suffering and the harm, we as adults inflict upon them at both the profoundly local level and in the sphere of the broader social. Sophie Cruz ended her speech with "Si se puede! Si se puede!" I agree with her. I believe that we can.



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Relational  
**Child & Youth  
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Practice

Volume 29 Issue 4 / 2016



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# Working Towards an Anti-Oppressive Framework in Child and Youth Care Practice

Yvonne Bristow

**A**s a Child and Youth Care Practitioner (CYC-P) working within the education sector in Ontario, I have always been curious to hear and learn about the equity and social justice interests of other practitioners. I've been interested in exploring how privilege and oppression influence the ways I interact, serve and respond to the needs of diverse children and youth. Throughout this piece, I will share how my education, training and experiences have helped prepare me to work from an anti-oppressive framework.

## Equity and Social Justice Studies in Child and Youth Care Education

Before entering my Masters of Professional Education in Equity, Diversity and Social Justice Studies program at Western University, I had developed my own practical and theoretical education from a child and youth care perspective. CYC-Ps have a variety of options for pursuing post-secondary education in Canada including an Advanced Diploma, Bachelor's Degree and some continue onto Masters and PhD level training. I began studying my Advanced Diploma in Child and Youth Work at Humber College. I fondly remember taking two Professional Skills courses during my diploma that informed me about social justice and equity practices in child and youth care. These courses examined some fundamental approaches that CYC-Ps focus on when working with a diverse population of children and youth. We had conversations about our diverse identities and our socio-economic status as well as how our own personal history might influence how we work as CYC-Ps.



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I've referenced these courses a lot in my career as I've witnessed or experienced challenging situations like calling the Children's Aid Society, working with families who have a history of abuse, or when witnessing discrimination and I believe these courses have helped me to respond professionally while creating positive and realistic changes for students.

The educational experience that defined my role as a CYC-P came from my field placement experiences. While enrolled in this program, my three placements included an adult school program for students with disabilities, a behavioral classroom program for elementary aged children, and a youth shelter serving young men from ages 16-24. Being able to work with students from a variety of identities allowed me to understand how diversity impacts the field of child and youth care; we often work with young people who come from different racial, social and cultural positions. CYC-Ps frequently work with those who identify as minorities based on their ability, race, culture, socio-economic status and gender/sexual orientation.

Following my years at Humber, I continued to pursue my education at Ryerson University. There were numerous courses that demanded critical thinking. During my time here I developed a deeper insight on the legal, social and cultural process that serve to protect children and youth in Ontario. In our lectures and class discussions I was encouraged to expand my thinking on issues within our field. One of the core readings I was introduced to was Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2010). This phenomenal resource is has been relevant for me in my practice because it has helped me to challenge my views on privilege and oppression. Freire calls on us all to challenge our critical investigation of privilege and oppression within our society, with emphasis on empowering social and cultural minorities. One of my favourite quotes from Freire is "For apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other" (p. 72).





## **Oppression and Privilege in Ontario, Canada**

It is common for those living and growing up in Ontario to be taught about oppression and privilege from a multicultural lens, as this is how our curriculum is designed (Lee, 2014). Multicultural education predominantly has a “focus on literature, art, food, dance, clothing and folk rhymes” of the many cultures represented in Canada (Rezai-Rashti, Segeren & Martino, 2015, p.143). In many contexts, this type of learning is considered to be an appropriate way for young Canadians to learn about diversity yet many argue that multiculturalism fails to recognize how systemic oppression and racism have influenced Canadian culture (Lee, 2014; Rezai-Rashti, 1995). I think it is crucial that we look beyond this basic style of multicultural education when we are talking about race, gender and culture with children and youth.

In Ontario, the dominant culture systemically and historically has determined which groups are privileged and oppressed (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). We see these dominant groups reflected in the media where we celebrate the wealthy and famous, in our children’s story books featuring white characters, and during our holiday seasons where Christmas music can be heard playing in the majority of our department stores. Whether intentionally or subconsciously we all participate in this definition of what is ‘normal’ in Ontario. As Kim Snow once wrote, “Stigmatized individuals develop a devalued and shame-based identity. However, individuals can develop strategies that ameliorate the negative effects of stigmatization by employing multiple identities, compensation, and strategic interpretations of their environment” (2009, para.57) and I believe that the approaches we take as CYC-Ps can help with a positive shift from a more basic type of multiculturalism towards anti-oppressive practice.

## **Financial Inequalities Experienced by Children and Youth**

In Ontario, many families experience poverty and homelessness and many CYC-Ps work to support these individuals. My third year field placement took place in a young men’s homeless shelter and I was employed by this agency after graduation.



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Without preparation from the Child and Youth Worker program, I would have easily felt overwhelmed by the experiences of working with homeless youth. I can still remember many challenging days where I would be connecting with youth who were experiencing abuse, serious mental health concerns, refugees from other countries, substance abuse issues as those diagnosed as HIV positive. I think many of us have preconceived notions on why a person could be homeless, but most these young people had experienced extreme forms of harassment, discrimination and inequitable treatment in their lives that resulted in their homelessness.

There are many financial inequalities experienced by Ontario's minority populations including those who are racial minorities and those with low socio-economic statuses (Block & Galabuzi, 2011). When I think of the high-school students I currently serve, I need to be aware that some of them receive Government funding through Ontario Disability Support Program or Ontario Works and some of them live in residential care. When I was their age I worked at Tim Horton's (Canada's largest coffee and quick-service restaurant chain) and this was possible because my parents had a car and could drive me to my shifts. In grade nine when I was failing math, my parents could afford a tutor that helped me pass the course which otherwise I would have failed. Many events in my life were made possible due to my family's socio-economic position and I try to actively reflect on my own privileges. I remember to critically think about how the young people I serve may have very different day-to-day experiences than I do based on their unique position.

## **Creating a Discourse on Anti-Racist Child and Youth Care Practice**

Racism can be described as the assumptions we as people make on the "fixed characteristics" of others (Hall, 2010). We may assign characteristics, problems and behaviours to different cultural groups that result in biased, stereotypical and hateful ways of viewing people who are different than ourselves.

We can work to dispel stereotyping, while making sure topics like race and racism are still discussed with young people. Often the word 'racism' triggers many



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people to think about generalized assumptions and racial biases they learned as a child or their personal experiences with racism, and we can try to open this dialogue forward towards the deeper historical and social issues. Something I'd like children and youth to know is that just because their race is X, this doesn't mean I know what they eat, where they will live, their political position, their favourite music, what kind of job they will/should have and so forth. Race shouldn't put limitations on how we are allowed to express ourselves as people.

When I think about privilege and oppression within our communities, programs and schools, I'm always wondering how to communicate these issues with children and youth. Teaching about race, gender and class is becoming more present within our school systems, but I think our goal can be to ensure that those experiencing both privilege and oppression are having equal opportunities to learn these lessons (Bohmer & Briggs, 1991). I know as a white woman, talking to students about oppression can sometimes be difficult because I don't relate to their first-hand accounts of racism. Refusing to talk about our white privilege can also create a "discourse of denial" and can further promote oppression in our school communities (Solomona, 2006). I think it is important that we take ownership of our own socio-economic position and class and remain honest in our conversations with our students on these topics. All of us entering the CYC field can work to understand our own racial identity before diving into the topics of race and racism with children and youth. I think if we are not at a point in our lives where we can be critically reflective of our own race and socio-economic position, we can potentially do more harm than good.

## **Personal Reflection on White Privilege**

In order to work from an anti-oppressive model, we need to be able to confront and understand our own biases. I recognize that there are parts of my white identity that influence and shape my daily interactions with others. Examples of my personal privileges include that I know that the children in my family will be given curricular materials that testify to the existence of their race and I know that



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when I turn on Netflix I can see actors representing my skin-colour and gender. I know that when I am out in public there are other people who will speak and write in the same language as me and if I need legal or medical assistance, my race will not work against me. When I go to my local pharmacy I can buy 'skin-tone' Band-Aids that actually match the colour of my skin and I can feel 'normal' in the usual walks of public, institutional and social life. I am aware that these are privileges that I experience because of my position I know that many other people do not experience these same privileges (McIntosh, 1989).

### **Personal Ideas for Promoting an Anti-Oppressive Framework**

When promoting an anti-oppressive framework we may not see big life changes overnight, but we can appreciate and value the small everyday growth that we can achieve together with children and youth. We also can realize that we're not going to make miraculous breakthroughs, but genuine relationships with children and youth can create the most meaningful and positive outcomes for everyone involved. While genuine caring is important and crucial, we can be equipped to understand the complexities of racialized and oppressed students. I think our real challenge in CYC practice is to all be trained to understand the lived-experiences and cultures of others without bias. I think when we reflect on our training and we continue expanding our critically reflexive thinking by staying informed on new evidence-based practices and practice-based evidence, we can create more equitable environments for children and youth.

I believe it is important to be empathetic and understanding of our students, we need to be genuine when we ask and respond to their lived experiences. We also can try to recognize the difference between empathy and sympathy when providing resources and opportunities to students. We can treat all young people as equally capable and skilled. Prejudice is an issue that is present in our world but as CYC-Ps we may feel both individually and systemically obligated to address these concerns. We need to honestly reflect on these issues together with young people so that there can be powerful shifts in understanding how privilege and oppression affect each of us.



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# Reflections from the “Building a Community of Practice” International Conference

## Write On Community of Practice

Jack C. Holden, Michael Nunno, Dale Curry, Laura Steckley and  
Raymond Taylor

**T**he Residential Child Care Project and the Bronfenbrenner Center for Translational Research at Cornell University recently sponsored its fourth international conference with the theme of “building a community of practice” at Lake George, New York, U.S.A. Approximately 250 conference attendees participated in a number of plenary and workshop sessions that included a variety of community of practice forums focusing on research, schools, organizational leadership, trauma informed practice, training innovations, and professional certification. We define communities of practice as:

*... groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis. (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002, p. 4)*

By this definition, a conference cannot be considered a community of practice. Conferences, however, can support the development and maintenance of one or more communities of practice. They are good at injecting energy and enthusiasm by



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ISSN 1605-7406

pulling people away from their day-to-day demands and bringing them together for focused, often passionate interaction about a topic.

Communities of practice can be formally recognized or known only to their members; short-term or long-running; small or large. What makes a group of people a community of practice rather than, say, a community of interest, is the combination of sharing knowledge and *expanding* it – knowledge moves from being a static object to a dynamic, living process (ibid.). While much of the literature regarding communities of practice comes from the business world, Child and Youth Care can benefit from cultivating communities of practice (hence the conference theme), and by supporting those that already exist. CYC-Net, and its online forum for sharing and developing knowledge about Child and Youth Care, is an excellent example of an already existing community of practice.

This article is the result of an initial effort to develop a community of practice related to one particular aspect of Child and Youth Care, that of writing for and about practice. The authors came together in a workshop entitled “Write On: Practice Writing” and what follows are the reflections on the conference and take-aways by several members of the community. We thought that the best way to start this community of practice on writing would be to write together, sharing our reflections on the conference and inviting other aspiring Child and Youth Care writers to our community. We hope to build a vibrant space where people can share writing-related information, inspiration and support.

## **Perceptions from Jack Holden**

From the opening with voices of young people, a youth band, to the close with a parent and youth panel, participants were given an extraordinary opportunity to engage with peers in a communities of practice throughout the conference. The open and peaceful setting, opportunities and places for discussions, the diverse voices, and variety of activities was conducive to engagement, reflection, and learning. The conference created conditions for the development of the conference’s focus, “Building a Community of Practice”.



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Many inspirational and thought provoking messages, ideas, and challenges were presented in the keynote and workshop presentations. These messages led to further discussions held all over the grounds of the conference center. The keynote speakers and many of the workshop presenters were able to weave their talks with other keynote speakers and build on each other's presentations. This set a congruent and consistent tone for the conference and allowed for lively discussions throughout the three days.

I was struck by the countless comments in the conference evaluations such as, "a very collaborative experience", "better than straight theory, much can be applied", "I feel renewed, refreshed, and inspired", "the clear message communicated throughout the conference was that of engagement", "the setting provided a place to think, reflect, collaborate, and have fun all the while learning through a community of practice", and "this was truly an international community of practice for working with traumatized and challenged children."

I found the three-day conference experience exceeded my expectations in every way possible and the impressions, conclusions, action points, and takeaways at the very least will be; "the importance of purpose in life", "clarifying trauma", "simple and deep simple interactions", "understanding income vs outcome", "the importance a child's early life plays in development and not to give up on children", "we as parents and caregivers have to be more dedicated to the outcome of the child than any gang", and "our overall work is to create a psychologically safe space for children to try things they haven't tried."

Finally, my hope is the community of practice process begun at the 2016 conference in Lake George, NY will provide attendees with a means for growing and developing as individuals and collective caregivers in the coming years.

## **Reflections from Michael Nunno**

This conference held my attention like few conferences have done in the past. The themes of purpose, developmental relationships, transformation as organizational purpose, trauma-informed care, and a stories of personal reflection



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resonated throughout. The themes were connected throughout the program and the connectedness brought me to new insights about our work. I was struck by the slope image that Tony Burrow conjured up when describing his research. When asked how steep a slope is while standing and viewing it alone, participants generally perceived the slope to be steeper than if they are viewed it with another person while holding their hand. Together all things are possible was my lesson!

On the practical side of things, I thought also of ways to use the sense of purpose experiment for the benefit of our Therapeutic Crisis Intervention (TCI) and Children and Residential Experiences: Creating Conditions for Change (CARE) practice model implementation. For example, would training participants who have gone through a purpose exercise perceive a child's behavior as less dangerous or threatening?

Another aspect of this conference was the initiation and development of communities of practice. The research community of practice attracted between 15 and 20 active and potential researchers, many of whom were based in agencies and who wanted to engage with more traditional academics in research driven by practice. I heard of at least four significant research ideas that may begin to take shape over the coming year. In order to commit to this type of practice-driven research many, both practitioners and researchers, will have to move out of their comfort zone and into new skills and learning.

But more than anything else Building Communities of Practice reminded me how essential trust and safety are in settings and relationships, and the need for purposeful work within a purposeful life.

### **A few thoughts from Dale Curry**

In addition to the enlightening presentations, workshops, forums, activities and performances, I was appreciating the opportunity to connect with long-time colleagues and recognizing the varied practice settings and legacy of so many child and youth care practitioners who have contributed to the field and emerging profession of child and youth work-the broader community of practice. When Dr.



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Junlei Li, Professor and Co-Director of the Fred Rogers Center was making his amazing keynote presentation, I was reminded of my graduate program in Child Development and Child Care (currently Applied Developmental Psychology) at the University of Pittsburgh where Fred Rogers also received graduate training. Faculty from the program served as consultants to the Mister Rogers Neighborhood television program. Notably the “Pitt” program was founded by Erik Erikson and Benjamin Spock. Life lessons from children’s television pioneer Fred Rogers’ and the Mister Rogers Neighborhood program are currently perpetuated through Daniel Tiger’s Neighborhood program and other initiatives.

We have quite a heritage and our field continues to develop. Child and youth care practitioners contribute in a variety of roles and settings. These efforts are often in direct practice with children and youth but indirect practice as well such as the contributions of Fred Rogers. Training and development is another expanding area of indirect child and youth care practice. On my first day arriving I met a new colleague (a trainer and conference workshop presenter) who was carrying a carload of boxes of handouts from the parking lot to the second floor of the hotel (a section of the hotel that did not have an elevator) on a hot, humid summer day. While the presentation and platform skills of child and youth care trainers are frequently noticed and often admired, a significant amount of work typically occurs much prior to the formal training "show-time." Potential careers as child and youth care worker training and development professionals can now be considered legitimate options for many experienced practitioners.

The Certification Community of Practice session also reaffirmed the significant progress our field has achieved. The contributions of more than 100 volunteers helped the North American Certification Project develop a comprehensive professional certification system that is currently administered by the Child and Youth Care Certification Board (see [www.cycb.org](http://www.cycb.org)). A substantial amount of research providing support for the validity of the various components of the certification program has been conducted and shared via articles and presentations to the larger child and youth care community. Still, I was reminded of the major



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amount of work that still needs to be done as several participants mentioned that they never heard of the certification program. That may be indicative of the broader field. As most child and youth care practitioners are not members of a professional association such as the Association for Child and Youth Care Practice (see [www.acycp.org](http://www.acycp.org)) and many are unaware of the vast child and youth care knowledge base and available resources such as those included on the website of the International Child and Youth Care Network (see [www.cyc-net.org](http://www.cyc-net.org)). We should be proud of the many accomplishments of our field but also challenged to better connect our many colleagues to the rich resources and heritage of our international field of practice. Conferences are essential to promote the professional child and youth care culture and further develop the broader professional community and other pertinent communities of practice within child and youth care. I appreciate the contributions of the Residential Child Care Project personnel and all who participated in the conference for providing such meaningful learning and networking experiences and building communities of practice.

### **Reflections from Laura Steckley**

Thinking back on the Building Communities of Practice conference, I have a strong sense of fullness. Full in terms of its content and activity, but also the fullness of interpersonal generosity that I consistently witnessed and often received. I had some interesting discussions with other delegates about experiences of belonging (and non-belonging) at conferences, and how this one gave them such a strong sense that they had a place there. I felt that way too.

During the week leading up to the conference, my low-grade separation anxiety kicked in, as it usually does before I go anywhere. Also, because I always think I will catch up on my writing over summer and then still find it difficult create the time and space for it, I experience further resistance to heading off in June, July or August to conferences I so easily committed to months earlier. My sense of time-scarcity becomes pronounced and nudges me with questions about whether I should be spending my time this way. Almost always, however, I find the value of



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connecting with colleagues, old and new, outweighs the costs, whether they are in terms of time, money or even sleep. This time was no different. Indeed, it was quite fitting to come together to share information, experience and even inspiration, given the conference theme was developing communities of practice related to residential child care.

I've long been interested in communities of practice – what they are, how they might serve our sector and how we can best cultivate them. While the development of a research community of practice was the strand I attended throughout the conference, I was also interested in (and helped to facilitate a workshop on) a community of practice on writing for and about residential child care. This workshop completely exceeded my expectations. We had hoped that the workshop would provide some information and inspiration to aspiring writers, both inexperienced and experienced, and from this, that a group might develop that is a source of knowledge, support and fortitude for the challenges that a writing practice entails. We were also a little nervous that no one would choose this workshop.

While the community of practice of writers has yet to develop in the way we envisioned, the workshop itself quickly became a space where participants courageously shared deep feelings and desires in relation to writing; the act of writing, the motivation to give back through writing, clearly held profound meaning for many (or maybe all) of us, and with that came a sense of vulnerability. Such emotional connection and courage is rich raw material for good writing, and I'm left wondering how we might build something more lasting from this early encounter.

### **Raymond Taylor's tuppence worth**

"Hope has two beautiful daughters, their names are anger and courage." These words attributed to the 4th Century theologian St Augustine summed up my views of the University of Cornell's 4th international conference on "Building a Community of Practice".



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The anger I experienced was in listening to the sessions held on the last day of the conference. The presentations by Xavier-McElrath-Bey and from the children and adults during the final panel session. The presenters spoke generously, honestly and eloquently about painful experiences in their early lives which had been at best misunderstood and at worst exacerbated by the care system. Each of these contributors spoke with courage about what they had done to survive their experience and what they were now doing to improve the system for others.

Then there was hope. This shone through the presentations by each of the key note speakers. John Lyon's messages about the need for collaboration to achieve positive outcomes, Anthony Burrow's on the importance of purpose in life , Howard Bath's key message of the need to ensure that those who work most closely with children understand trauma and Junlei Li's emphasis on simple human interactions between adults and children.

The Residential Child Care Project team created and fostered a warm inclusive atmosphere throughout the conference. The team paid attention to every important detail concerning each and every participant and all of the workshop sessions. And of course this was all supported by what was a perfect venue for such an occasion.

All of this has helped foster a truly international community of practice.

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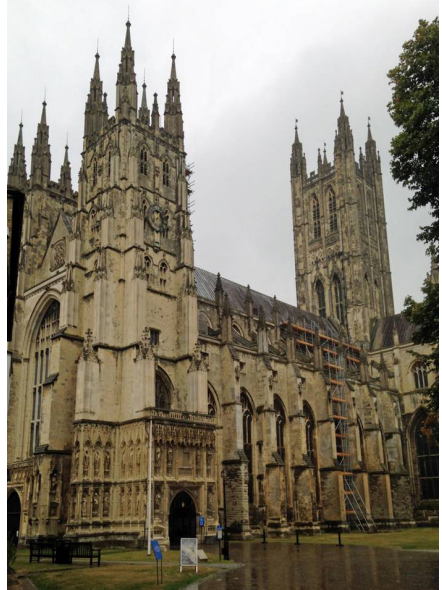
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# Postcard from Leon Fulcher

*Canterbury, SE England*

**K**ia Ora and happy Chinese New Year of the Rooster to you Brian Gannon, and to other colleagues with shared interests in art and architecture. At the end of our European tour last September, we visited the ancient town of Canterbury in south east England (not the New Zealand South Island one). On a rainy day we walked to Canterbury Cathedral for our short visit. We knew we were in the heart of the Anglican Christian tradition and I know that holds special meaning for you Brian. I'd have to say, Brian, you walked with me that day.

The vaulted ceilings in Canterbury Cathedral are truly breathtaking. Vaulted ceilings are to be found in cathedrals and churches all around Europe, but these were somehow different, Brian. I kept wondering what master craftsman went through to learn how to do this kind of construction without hydraulic lifts, and what kinds of youth apprenticeship options were available at the time? You just don't see work like this anymore, and who is teaching young people how to carry these skills forward? I hear other voices say "Who Cares"?



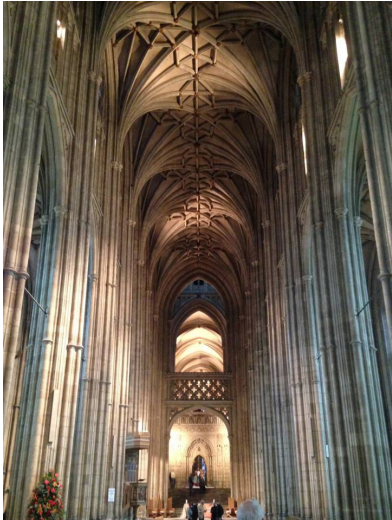
**SE of England's Canterbury Cathedral is the heart of the Anglican Christian Tradition**



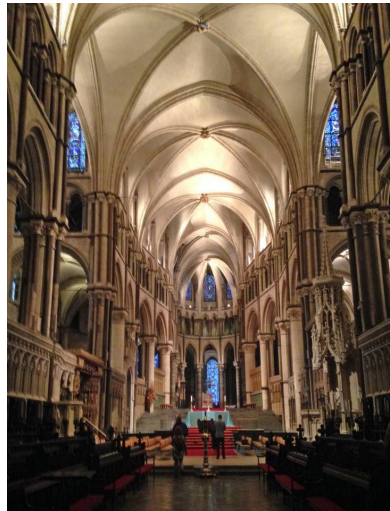
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**The Vaulted Ceilings make one stare in wonder at how they were made**



**Different Vaulted Ceilings offer contrast as one wanders about the Cathedral**

As one moves through the middle of the Cathedral, the vaulted ceilings change and offer different sweeping images of grandeur. It is as if the architect and builders were seeking to recreate clouds sweeping up to heaven. If so, I think they have been very successful.

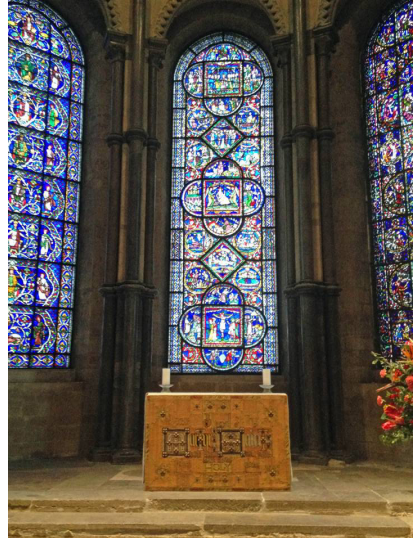
Looking back and gazing from a different angle, the lighting changes and the images of vaulted ceiling clouds also change. Oh that our children and young people might experience their own emotional responses to architectural and artistic genius.

When not gazing upwards into the vaulted ceilings, one could be mesmerized by the diversity and delicacy of stained glass mosaic windows. Here again, I found myself reflecting on the apprentice that joined a master craftsman or craftswoman, and learned to become artisans. What opportunities are available in contemporary times for young people to sign on as an apprentice with a stained glass artisan?





**Changing Images of Vaulted  
Wonderment**



**The Stained Glass is at times  
breathtaking**

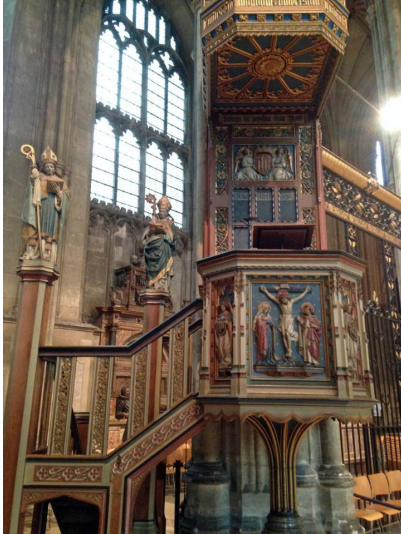
Too often, I think, all that has been handed over to community colleges, polytechnics and technical colleges. One might call this more of a mass production approach rather than a relational approach to learning.

So Brian, I couldn't resist including this picture of the pulpit where the Archbishop of Canterbury probably delivers his annual sermon to the Anglican faith (even those in Africa and elsewhere who separated from the Anglican leadership around the ordination of women and gay Bishops). Regardless, I thought the pulpit held special meaning, Brian.

My visit to Canterbury was not about a pilgrimage to Canterbury Cathedral nor even about having a go at Chaucer's Canterbury Tales after I left. My wife's Scottish family now settled in Kent was the primary focus of our visit. Niece Dr Sophie Lind, Senior Lecturer in Psychology at the City University of London, has become







**It is here at the pulpit where the Archbishop of Canterbury delivers his annual sermon**

an international expert on autism for those working in that field:

<http://www.city.ac.uk/people/academics/sophie-lind>

We enjoyed spending time with this three generation family. I was reminded how kinship care widens care networks for children while including grandparents in family activities.



**Show me the Sand, Man!**



**Kinship Care involves caring for children & grandchildren, and receiving care as elders**



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**ISSN 1605-7406**

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# Information

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CYC-Online (ISSN 1605-7406) is an open-access ejournal published monthly by [The CYC-Net Press](#)

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- Submissions should be no longer than 2500 words
- The style of a paper is up to the author
- We prefer APA formatting for referencing
- We are willing to work with first-time authors to help them get published
- We accept previously published papers as long as copyright permission is assured
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