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 252 / February 2020

ISSN 1605-7406

The CYC-Net PRESS

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Scottish Journal of Residential Child Care

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

February 2020
ISSN 1605-7406

Refocusing Our Priorities in 2020

Tuhinul Islam

Last year, I visited many African, Asian and European countries, including Palestine, Israel, Syria, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and South Africa, for work and attending conferences. During these visits I had the opportunity to observe and engage with the various child and youth care practices of these countries. I was able to examine the different children and youth care systems, policies and practices in place. I heard from national practitioners and academics of their understanding of what worked at the global level and the impact the systems their individual countries had adopted had had on the lives of the children in care and the staff that supported them.

What I learnt from my engagements, discussions and debates was vastly at odds with what was being presented at the 'high profile' conferences I was attending. My feeling is that the themes and issues presented at international conferences in many ways fail to portray the lived experiences found in the 'field'. In fact, conferences taking up the theme of 'child and youth care' repeatedly feature the same keynote speakers, hold the same types of workshops and churn out the same ideas which dominate in the 'Minority World', mainly the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, England, Scotland and Ireland. In most cases the stories

presented at conferences have little or no relevance to the situation found within the 'Majority World'. Yet, these themes, supported by funding and sponsoring bodies are given credence. In fact, they are not the reality on the ground! To sell their agenda, the funders often use tokenistic examples taken from organisations based in the 'Majority World' and often those who write the conferences agendas financially support these organisations.

Many of us believe that child and youth care is a 'global profession'. We are trying to establish our own 'identity', but it seems we prefer not to associate with other established social science disciplines and scholarships – shying away from international conferences and programmes. We hardly develop or implement cross-cultural, cross-national and developing countries multi-disciplinary or integrated projects which are not directly linked with child and youth care or social work.

It seems we are content with what we have offered the world over the last 20-25 years, written mainly in English, from a Developing World's perspective, though in many cases we have confined our practice and our writings to the themes of boarder residential/foster care; adoptions and family care; physiological perspectives, and more recently, highlighting trends in historical abuse, care leavers/emerging adult/young adults. From our studies and practices, we hardly find cross-cultural, cross-national developed and developing countries joint work, and interestingly, no significant piece of work that can be used to influence global evidence-based policy or politics.

I find it disturbing to see our absence in the major global child and youth care policy-making arena. As a field, we seem to have 'zero influence' on global child and youth policy making. Many people in high positions in global policymaking and funding organisations lack the broader child and youth care, social work, human and social care knowledge, understanding

and experience. In addition, their significant knowledge gap between developed and developing countries and care approaches operating within contexts of war and conflict, poverty and environmental disaster, differing cultural norms and regulations, hinder the progress of social justice for the marginalized communities they seek to serve. These 'powerful' self-proclaimed experts make bureaucratic assumptions and decisions of what is necessary for child and youth care to work well. They expound policies on how they want to see child and youth care develop globally, in the name of child protection, child safeguarding and alternative child and youth care.

As child and youth care practitioners and academics, we want to establish our own identity. We want our practice-evidence to be heard, replicated and implemented as good practices and policies, globally. Yet, we seem too reluctant to get involved with those global academic and social disciplines that influence our 'daily practices'.

Our presence is negligible in global child and youth care policy, yet we rarely take part in any advocacy work with global reach. So far, we have failed to create any global campaigning platform to offer our holistic understanding of child and youth care, let alone influence policy or stop the crusade toward 'positive outcomes', 'better outcomes' and 'safeguarding/child protection'. The debate between family/foster care and residential care is ongoing. The case is not yet closed on the merits of deinstitutionalisation. Care within a family is viewed as good, while care in a residential unit is viewed as bad. This is a polarising, simplistic and ideological way of looking at the world. It is not supported by evidence and indeed is not in the interests of the orphans and vulnerable children it proposes to serve.

Being a researcher, academic and having been involved at the field level, supporting many children in disaster situations such as war, violence,

poverty and environmental disaster in countries such as Syria, Lebanon, Libya, Sudan, South Sudan, Bangladesh, I find it heart-wrenching to note our lack of presence in situations where thousands of children and their families are killed, abused, forced into refugee status and/or orphaned.

Currently, Myanmar's ethnic cleaning policy has meant that over 60,000 Rohingya children have entered Bangladesh as unaccompanied minors – their parents either lost or killed. Similarly, in Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Sudan, South Sudan, Libya and Somalia countless children have been killed or forced to flee those states. According to UNICEF and UNHRC, in 2018,

> *153 million children became orphaned, 8 million children live in institutional care and 70.8 million people have been forcibly displaced from their homes, over half of whom are under 18. 1 in 4 of the world's children live in a conflict or disaster zone and 37, 000 people are forced to flee their home every day due to conflict or persecution.*

I have encountered hundreds of Rohingya children living in the refugee camps set up in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar, whose parents were brutally murdered by Myanmar's army. Similarly, I have spoken to Palestinian children and Syrian children in refugee camps in Jordan, Turkey and Syria. Worldwide conflict, uncertainty and the selfishness of man towards his fellow man by occupying neighbouring sovereign lands is resulting in millions of children becoming orphans. As such they become destitute and vulnerable to exploitation by others. The West's 'war on terror' is creating more terror instead of establishing peace. Refugee children and young people fleeing war are the new generation of worldwide admissions to residential child and youth care.

The number of admissions rises each day and I don't see signs of it abating soon. If we, as child and youth care practitioners, academics and policymakers, fail to unite and get involved in global advocacy and campaigning work to stop the massacres taking place, the situation will only worsen.

We need to work together to understand global child and youth care culture, values and policy. We seek a future where no child will be placed unnecessarily into a care home; a future where care leavers are empowered to be more effective contributors on the world stage and more responsible citizens in the countries they call 'home'.

Think about what is to happen to those thousands of children who have no family member to look out for them? In cultures where bonds of kith and kin are essential, to be without family is to be excommunicated. If we cannot find answers to the plight of these children and their families, we will not be forgiven.

Let's work together for better futures for children and young people by refocusing our priorities for 2020.

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CYC-Online
Working Professionally with Children and Youth
e-journal of the International Child and Youth Care Network (CYC-Net)

Writing for *CYC-Online*

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Being a Good Child and Youth Care Practitioner

Kiaras Gharabaghi

What does it mean to be a 'good' child and youth care practitioner? I have been contemplating this question for some time, and it is a surprisingly difficult question to answer. For one thing, there are many ways in which one might conceptualize the idea of being 'good' at anything. Is it about one's ability to reflect, as much as possible the theoretical and conceptual elements of the practice? Is it about generating 'good outcomes' (raising the question of what we mean by good outcomes)? Is it about meeting the expectations of the employer? Or is it perhaps about calling out the injustices embedded in institutional, structural and procedural dynamics that impact young people generally? Perhaps it is about being good at relational practice, which, by extension, also means one is good at child and youth care practice. Then again, is it possible to be good at relational practice but not be a good child and youth care practitioner? I would suggest that is indeed possible. Those interested in recruiting young people for the purpose of human trafficking, for example, are often very good at relational practices, but I don't think they are good child and youth care practitioners. Maybe it is necessary to be good at all of the elements of child and youth care practice in order to be a good practitioner. Then again, if one operationalizes all of the elements of child and youth care practice well and young people still experience hardship, failure, regression and potentially harm as a result of a terrible

CYC-Online
e-Journal of the International Child and Youth Care Network (CYC-Net)
February 2020
ISSN 1605-7406

organization or a corrupt service, should one not abandon child and youth care principles and practices and adopt instead a position of resistance, sabotage and subversion?

Over the past ten years or so, we have established several different ways of assessing the preparedness of good child and youth care practitioners; one of these ways, and perhaps the dominant one, centers the idea of competencies that can be tested through certification exams and the like. And yet we know that many people perform exceptionally well on exams but perform quite differently in practice. And we might wonder whether such exams predetermine both the boundaries of the practice and an ideologically driven way of designating 'good practice'. Certification by demonstrating competencies may establish a degree of legitimacy, but this does not inherently lead to confidence in the quality of practice. In fact, I very much question whether it is even possible to establish criteria for determining what constitutes a good practitioner. More likely, we are able to identify some things that might suggest a 'bad practitioner', but even then, we may still be prejudging things based on an *a priori* established set of criteria.

Yet it seems important to be able to say something about what we might consider to constitute good practice, and how much of that good practice is necessary to be a good practitioner. And so, in the spirit of provoking some thought on this issue, I would like to suggest the following criteria for designating the 'good practitioner':

1. The good practitioner measures the good of their practice against the feedback and responses of the young people, their families and their communities instead of their conformity to employer

procedures, system dynamics, or value expectations presented by the field itself.

2. The good practitioner rejects all forms of universalism and recognizes that the constructive potential of relational practices is nevertheless contingent on multiple manifestations of identity, social context and power relations.
3. The good practitioner moves seamlessly from the interpersonal to the systemic and vice versa; people's lives unfold within the visible and invisible dynamics of systems, but their interpersonal relationships nevertheless represent the medium through which systems are engaged, resisted or absorbed.
4. The good practitioner offers no solutions to anyone's problems; instead, the good practitioner is comfortable 'being with', sometimes merely as a shadow, and at other times as the shield from harm, and again other times as the avatar warrior in the fight for access to justice, rights, and fair process.
5. The good practitioner doesn't talk all that much. They know their voice is relevant but often not that important.
6. The good practitioner can translate fragments into systems – no matter where they appear, the good practitioner recognizes quickly the interconnectedness of individual behaviour, conduct, identity and disposition, the aesthetic of the physical context, the symptoms of power imbalances, and the creeping of history with all its consequences into the present and the future.
7. The good practitioner carries multiple competencies and accumulates more of these far beyond the confines of child and youth care practice – they learn languages, how to fix things, how to build things, culinary skills, advocacy skills, political skills, and also

theatre, music, sports, culture and animal care – because the good practitioner is more than a preacher; they can actually *do* things when things need to get done.

8. Finally, the good practitioner has an instinct to embrace first and ask questions later; you, they, all of us are part of the good practitioner's circle of friends, of professional networks, and of the never-excluding version of child and youth care practice.

Things are changing in our field, at least in North America. Those amongst us who have for many decades built an infrastructure for the field are better placed than anyone else to identify the structural components of what we built that may serve as barriers for good practitioners to emerge and eliminate those barriers. If we don't do this soon, the good practitioners will do what must be done – tear down what is and replace it entirely. That would be a shame.

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The Unconditional Space: A 6th Dimension

John Digney and Max Smart

The world is divided into two classes, those who believe the incredible, and those who do the improbable.
Oscar Wilde, Irish Poet and Playwright

Suspicion is a heavy armour and with its weight it impedes more than it protects.
Robert Burns, Scottish Poet and Playwright

Introduction

As we go about getting on with the task of living our lives in the everyday, we are seldom consciously aware of the complexities of how we

CYC-Online
e-Journal of the International Child and Youth Care Network (CYC-Net)
February 2020
ISSN 1605-7406
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as individuals and as part of a collective automatically navigate physical space. Merely walking along a busy street involves a coordinated dance, as we 'bob and weave' around and between each other, sometimes only millimetres apart. It is surprising that collisions rarely occur.

We seem to have an innate sense of space and of 'other' - slowing, pausing, stopping, shifting weight from one leg to the other just before a potential bump. Although a near miss can elicit some grumpy words, we seem programmed (in general) to avoid a human pile up. The space between people may be small but still space is maintained; we acknowledge that it is a shared space in which we live and operate, whilst at the same time appear to have an unconscious understanding of the existence and importance of personal space (both our own and others').

How we then consciously interpret what might be our own space and the space of others is often a different matter completely. When we are more consciously aware of our space (outside of our 'automatic' and habitual ways of navigating the world) we react very differently and are more intentional when we encounter a deliberate or accidental incursion into it. Space and spaces are very important to people.

And so it is in the world of Social Care, as we live our lives and share our space, be it in working in disability services, elder care or indeed Child and Youth Care. We need to understand the myriad of spaces, be they private or public. And we need to be aware of the therapeutic potential of these and the need to understand the rules (whether implicit or explicit) around these spaces. What is it that can make a space seem safe and what might make it seem risky? Understanding the 'in-between' and interactivity of the 'in-between' is essential if we are to give the appropriate value to the spaces that exist, occur naturally or are created purposely by us. In this paper we explore the concept of 'the unconditional space' as a necessary

and imaginative way to connect and engage with some of our most troubled and troublesome kids.

The 4th & 5th Dimensions

Time[1] and 5D-Space[2] are constructs that exist as separate entities, but which have been described by philosophers, scientists, mathematicians and astronomers, to be not only separate entities, but to be highly interconnected. Einstein, for example, called the fourth-dimension time, but noted that time is inseparable from space.

Generally, when we consider the notice of 'a space' (be it physical or mental space) it can be viewed as benign, something to be used beneficially. How often do we hear phrases such as, 'take some space to reflect'; 'find a quiet space to take some time out'; 'look for space, just for yourself'. Then change the word from Space to Time and we begin to say, 'take some time to reflect', 'look for some time, just for you': similar but different. Exploration of these concepts is not relevant to this paper, as we wish to explore what we are calling a 6th Dimension – the unconditional space.

Most spaces tend to have social or adult centric conditions attached to their occupancy. We talk of creating a safe space for people to live and work; but these safe spaces can be loaded with rules, regulations, policies, systems and conditions, all of which can become barriers to inclusion.

We are fascinated by the concept of space and how it needs to be congruent with the concepts of safety, normality and being therapeutic.

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[1] Time is often thought of as the fourth dimension. It plays a key role as a dimension in mathematical formulations of physical laws and theories such as general relativity and string theory.

[2] 5D Space, is a space with five dimensions. If interpreted physically, that is one more than the usual three spatial dimensions and the fourth dimension of time used in relativistic physics. Retrieved from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Five-dimensional_space on 13th January 2020.

We have reflected on the effects of having specific belief systems associated with the use of space and in particular, the notional safe-spaces; the normal spaces and the therapeutic spaces that exist, occur or are created.

We have considered the different ways that people can conduct themselves in public spaces or private spaces (such as one's home life) and how these can be so different. How people cope with social space with their peers where the norms, beliefs and systems alter from more formal spaces (such as in school), can create very different persona. To understand this more fully we need to consider how we go about learning the rules of these different spaces and how we manage (or not) when the 'norms' are challenged; the social expectation is broken or there is conflict between the spaces that we live our lives within.

Space and our interaction with it, determines our social fit, safety and deemed belonging; it determines where one fits and where one does not. As noted by a colleague, '... a child's immediate life space wields more clout than the broad ecology' (Brendtro 2009, p.xiii).

Throughout our professional careers, we have encountered numerous kids who do not seem to fit neatly into either their immediate or broader spaces or ecology. These 'square-peg kids' struggle in most environments ('round holes'), be that at home, in school, within community or being around peers (the four worlds of children) and of course it follows that this will be exacerbated within substitute care environments. These young people require help and support from understanding and committed adults to assist them to eventually fit the space they are in. Those who struggle to have a natural ecology often seem lost socially and emotionally and then seem to fight for or withdraw from whatever space they find themselves in.

To make a difference in the lives of such kids we understand that it is our task to find ways to make the 'round holes' become 'less round and more square' and to not force the kids to become 'round-peg kids'. This entails a better understanding of and use of the different spaces that exist, occur or are created. We do not give up on these kids, lost like astral debris, destined to drift through space and time without encountering the correct fit within an ecology; a space to which they feel they belong. We keep on trying and never stop asking, 'why is it so hard for these kids to find space to fit and belong'?

Conditionality of the Life Spaces

As we have already noted, spaces within human societies tend to be conditional. At the very outset, entrance to most 'spaces' depends on the acceptance of others already inhabiting the space. This may be an informal social setting or peer group; an association or club; an education setting or other such formal space. Thereafter, in order to safely inhabit that space there then needs to be, (i) support within the space to maintain connection with each other and (ii) a need, drive or desire to be there.

When there is an observation conditional met with a space, things are beneficial and mutual. We hear comments such as, 'they seem like peas in a pod'; 'they go together like peaches and cream'. When conditions and expectations are unmet, there is dissonance and a perceived lack of fit, the mantra changes to, he is the black sheep of the family', 'why do he not conform, he is a delinquent', 'such a loner / social outcast'.

We know that those who are left to their own devices tend to falter. After all, humans are designed to be social creatures, biologically pre-programmed to group together, for safety and survival. It is probably from the need for survival that humans constructed societies based on social

conditions, conditions that determined who fits and who does not; who conforms and who does not; who is safe and who is not. The prescribed conditionals ensure that society considered those who struggle to conform as a threat to social order and therefore to be treated as such.

When someone is considered a threat or deemed undesirable, it seems that the default response is to keep them at a distance (both emotionally and physically). They can be exiled, banished or ostracised. We might 'lock them up', 'exclude them from schools' 'chemically calm them' or behaviourally compel them to correspond to the expected norms – ignoring their current inability to make the fit.

If a young person is supported to feel connected and safe, they may make the leap of faith and begin to do things differently, enough to fulfil the conditions that have been set. They can re-programme their thinking, adjust their values and beliefs and ultimately their behaviour, to the extent that they develop the skills required and desired to fit in. Others struggle to fit the spaces that society has let open to them. These tend to be the kids living with the effects of deep trauma; relational trauma. These are the kids who encounter serial rejections and who seem impervious to helping interventions (Smart, 2012).

Finding a space for such kids to fit is fraught with difficulty as these are the kids who are not inclined to want to please adults. John Seita noted '… angry and defiant children often have a long history of unpleasant and painful experiences with adults. Even [with] well-meaning adults, a young person's emotional memory signals, don't trust this person or you will be hurt again' (2002, p.37).

Whether as a result of relational hurt, emotional turbulence, mental health difficulties, or vulnerability as a result of race, gender, sexual orientation or religious belief, many children feel like there is no safe space

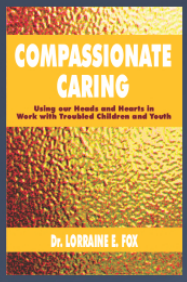
for them, no space to have acceptance and belonging. The pressure of conditions seems like an intentional barrier to belonging. Even adults intending to be supportive and helping can be perceived as dangerous and uncaring if they seek to make kids fit spaces by trying to fit round the pegs. Such attempts are seen as exploitative, hurtful or rejecting, all over again.

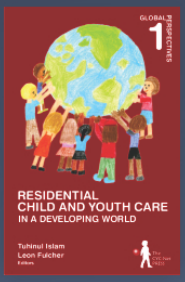
Spaces that are conditional are common in the social care world and particularly in that of Child and Youth Care. All situations are dependent on something else … 'If you go to school every day this week, you can go to the cinema at the weekend', 'if you attain the necessary points today, you will get other freedoms, honours and or favours'. 'If you stop assaulting or running away, we will let you stay' … 'but if you don't …!'

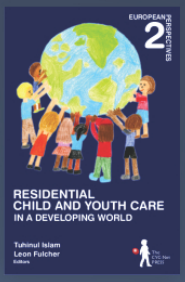
Accessing Conditional Spaces?

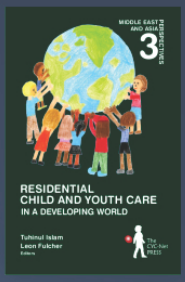
Although some kids conform and graduate through often crude behaviour modification systems, compliance within a space does not mean positive or sustainable personal change. It might just be a way to achieve some access to an artificial space. That is problem number one.

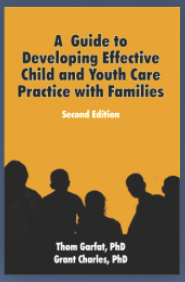
Problem number two exists with kids that don't even try to comply with or conform to adult expectation. This can be out of some desire to control their own space, a fear of the conditional space or a lack of ability to understand 'the ways of the world'. Seeking compliance in a way a horse is 'broken-in' before it can be ridden, leads to dangerous and naive practices. Where it was once thought that compliance was the key to transformation and rehabilitation, we now know there are better ways to help and heal.

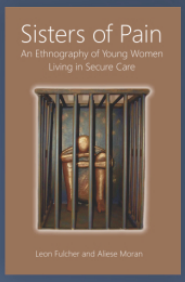


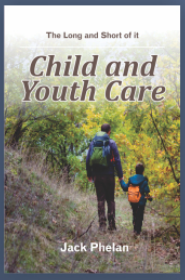


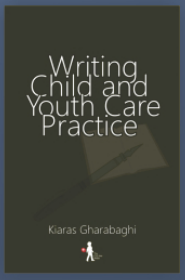












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A Different look at spaces

We know that behavioural compliance alone is not durable or lasting, we also know that without the presence and commitment of helping adults with understanding, compassion, kindness and a relational connection, compliance does not extend beyond the eyesight of supervising adults. Enduring change, '... involves building strengths in young people and then providing them with ongoing support in their natural environment' (Brendtro 2009, p.125). Yet their natural environment may seem incongruent with that which is acceptable to society, or their natural environment may be a space void of connection, love or future.

Is it time for spaces that are less conditional or indeed, for unconditional spaces to be created or be given opportunity to be explored as alternative interventions in working with troubled youth?

The 'square peg kids' that we encounter tend not to comply to conditions and become self-defeating, they act out and elicit rejecting behaviours from others. Those in the most need are the kids who, because of their inability to comply, experience the most rejection and criticism. They require adults to think outside of the normal boxes to imaginatively create spaces where a fit becomes possible.

This is the space we refer to as the 'unconditional space'.

Smart (2012) writing about unconditional space for young people suggested, '... unconditional space [needs to be designed] around the needs of the youth and not the problem behaviour' (p.35). Caring environments and Child and Youth Care professionals must consider wider possibilities than just assume that these kids will ever easily 'fit the programme'. There must be a willingness to be creative and to see other possibilities beyond simply controlling behaviour. These kids are the ones who display highly conflictual behaviours, who rule break, ignore adult

limitation, fail to engage in programmes (be they therapeutic, educational or socially orientated). They are the ones who fight us every step of the way (about everything). These are the kids who grind us down, wear us out and ultimately are 'moved along' to somewhere else.

The Unconditional Space

What are we to do about these kids who don't achieve a safe space, whose inner fury is fuelled by their inability (or lack of desire) to find acceptance and who are propelled further along the negative route by negative adult reactions? Dietrich (2011) said, ' conflict is simply the sound made by cracks in a system, a boundary that can best be transformed by communicating across the many internal and external borders we have erected to keep ourselves safe, or exclude others' (p.20).

Dietrich (2011) and Allerstorfer (2013) are among a group of writers in the field of conflict resolution and peace studies, who have used their thinking to influence how protracted conflicts around the world can be ended. Peace Studies may on initial inspection seem unrelated to the field of Child and Youth Care, but closer inspection shows many similarities, particularly in relation to the intentionality of healing pain and hurt with those we encounter. The parallels in the fields have over years become more apparent and reflect what Brendtro (2009) refers to as consilience, a concept which seeks wisdom from many sources, to '... build bridges between [fields and disciplines] ... with the truth tested against multiple perspectives of science, practice wisdom and universal human values (p. *ix*).

Allerstorfer (2013) reminds us that arbitrary conditions generate pre-set oppositional forces which create barriers to productive dialogue, and it is only when freed from such conditions that positive traction occurs.

Unconditional spaces offer up a field of potential transformation. This notion resonates with Child and Youth care practice, particularly when we seek to understand the meaning of experiences for young people and then try to co-construct an experience which allows us to attain a common ground.

The concept of unconditional space in Child and Youth Care, generates thinking in our field about how we might create alternative bridges to connection and generate creativity in our thinking and doing. If we wish to be successful in our interventions with troubled young people, we muster the best knowledge and practice wisdom together to create a more rounded picture of what is going on for these kids. We must cultivate the opportunities where connection, empowerment and understanding can take place.

As we consider the canvas on which we do our art, we consider the common features within the context of these kids' lives; rejection, pain, shame, fear and a sense of hopelessness. We must reconsider their inability to unhitch the narrative of their life histories from their current ecologies and that which might be fearsome to them in the present. Seita (2002) pointed out, '... reared in a violent culture, experiencing conflict at home and school, and perhaps ridiculed by peers ... the most seriously damaged youth leave a trail of broken relationships and see adults as enemies rather than protectors (p.33). Unfortunately, the kids that need helping adults to be most creative and enduring are the ones who seem to push us away the most; these are the kids most in need of unconditional spaces.

An Unconditional Space is a space without condition. It might be a soccer game, or a time agreed with the youth to do an activity. It might be using a music studio, climbing walls or burger restaurants. It might be a trip to see a young person's most revered sports heroes or music idols. The

unconditional component is that this space is committed to the youth by the adult, as part of an educational, socialising or therapeutic plan; despite ongoing challenging behaviours in other adult or social spaces.

When it comes to looking for 'consequences or punishments' this unconditional space is untouchable. Kids will test our commitment through various behavioural transgressions (either intentionally or by inability to fit the other spaces / ecologies in which they dwell). The aim of using unconditional space is to move a kid from a place of non-engagement to engagement; to co-construct a place of acceptance and safety; to locate a place when needs can be met, and hope can flourish. The space is created, wherever the space can be created. From there on whatever 'grows', grows.

Smart (2012) pointed out that a positive environment should not be viewed as a privilege but a response to a need. This interpersonal space is the arena to claim the youth and build belonging. It seeks to find a space and place for such young people, that is a place of relief from the 'unpleasure', of daily life, (Fahlberg, 1991). Unconditional spaces created by helping adults have a potential to act as safe havens for the youths who do not fit in other spaces. Such spaces offer opportunities to the kids to see their world differently, through a positive lens, and to know that connection, belonging and love are not preloaded with a million different conditions.

The concept of the Unconditional Space will be further expanded in coming months, as the Celtic Reconnection continues.

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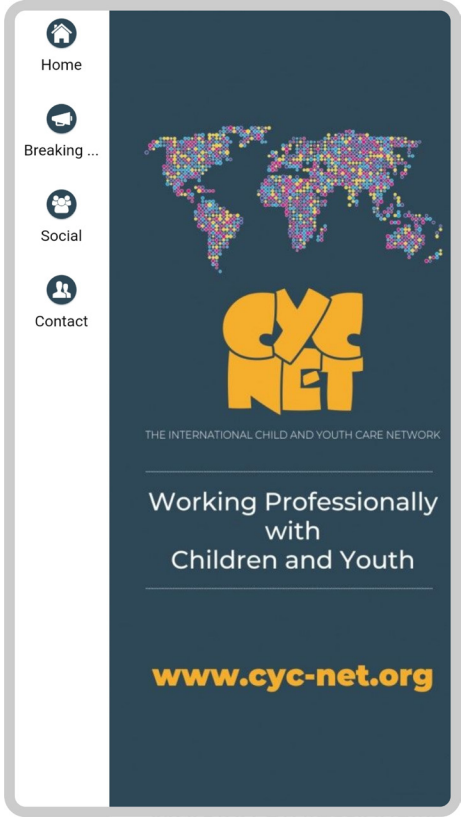

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CYC Conferences: Reflections, Insights and Suggestions

Jenny McGrath

I have been hearing a lot about CYC conferences lately. Some good. Some not so good. So, I am writing my thoughts with the hope of offering some perspective, insight and ideas.

I am currently working as a tenured faculty and Department Chair of a Canadian Child and Youth Care degree program. Yes, that certainly grants me privilege. I am paid well, I can usually get the time to attend conferences, I am allotted some personal professional development money and I can apply for additional funding within my institution. But this position also brings responsibility. I need stay involved and informed about what is happening in our field so when I go into the classroom, I am teaching future CYC professionals from a place that is current, critical and reflective. One of the ways I keep engaged and passionate about my work is by attending conferences.

I am not funded for all the conferences that I attend. Never have been, never will be. That is an unrealistic expectation. I am going to the Canadian national conference in Newfoundland and Labrador because I think it is important for me to be there, however, because I chose to use my available Professional Development money to support my travel to the World Conference in South Africa last summer, this one is out of pocket. I will stay with friends to cut down on my expenses.

I have not always been an academic. In 2000, I was working front-line in a group care program with youth, making a meagre salary. I was selected by my employer to attend the CYC international conference in Cleveland, Ohio. All my expenses were paid but I shared a room with three of my coworkers and I was expected, upon my return, to provide workshops about what I learned to those who were unable to attend the conference. I was also expected to help plan the next Canadian national conference that was to be held in my home province. Having the privilege of attending the Cleveland conference is likely the only reason I am still working in this field today. I was seriously considering completing a master's program in another discipline so I could find professional space with a unified purpose. When I walked into that conference, I felt like I had found "my people". I am still here, practicing CYC some 20 years later.

Since that time, I have attended every Canadian national CYC conference, every CYC world conference, several *Unity through Relationship*, several provincial, and several international conferences. The conferences I missed, were not because I was not interested or could not find the means to attend. The reality is, I had to work because it was not my turn to go. A few of these experiences were fully funded, some were partially funded, but for many, I covered all costs myself. I have also helped plan many of the above. I share this to illustrate my varied experience with conferences in the hope that the thoughts I share here might be of use to people who are struggling to find ways to attend conferences and support their professional development.

I want to highlight a few things about the planning and expenses of CYC conferences:

- Our conferences are typically organized by CYC associations, led by a small group of volunteers. If not connected to an association, they are

still organized by a small group of dedicated volunteers. Unity through Relationships in Ireland is a prime example of this. These professional associations do not have large operating budgets to incur conference expenses. In fact, they chose to run conferences, despite the enormous work involved, in part to gain much need revenue to support the work of their association.

- Conferences are expensive. Full stop. Even when you try to collaborate with others and get space donated, which is possible with some of the smaller conferences, there are still many expenses. Some conferences are able to secure sponsorships and grants to offset costs, but most cannot. Conference fees are determined to ensure that at minimum, the organizers break even, but preferably they also make some money for their Association.
- National and international conferences typically have a minimum of 300 participants. Very few venues can accommodate space for that number of people. For example, I work at a decent sized university and the largest auditorium we have holds 200 people. And this space doesn't come cheap either because colleges and universities also see conferences services as a revenue generator. Therefore, the larger conferences are typically held at hotels or conference centers because they have the space, staffing and resources to be able to support the larger numbers. These venues are expensive.
- In recent years organizers have decided to provide lunches and/or breakfasts which certainly adds to the expenses. But in many cases, this has been done so they can offer shorter lunch breaks and a more extensive program. It is exciting that more and more people are submitting presentation proposals, but there is only so much time in

the schedule so shortening breaks means more people can present which in turn provides more varied sessions to participants.

- Lastly, but I think this is an important point. The volunteers who organize these conferences and events do so because they want to provide space for CYC professionals to learn, to engage and to collaborate. I commend everyone for the work you do to provide these opportunities.

I know everyone wants to attend conferences but do not always have the support or the means. What follows are some suggestions that have worked for me.

- **Volunteer**. With your professional association. With a conference committee. With a student club. If you are part of the planning, you will be at the conference. I have been at every conference in the province I have lived in, because I was on the committee. And even though you will miss some of the sessions because you are working, you will still have opportunities for learning and collaboration. And in my opinion, this is the most valuable aspect of conferences.

- **Speak to your employer or to your school**. Express your interest in attending a conference and clearly explain why you think there will be value in it for you, and for them. To do this you will also need to indicate what you are willing to do to have this opportunity. For example, link it to your learning goals, courses or supervision plans; offer to run workshops for others when you return; and offer to share expenses. Part of this may be advocating around the importance of training for yourself and others. But believe me, it is worth the effort.

- **Apply for grants, scholarships and bursaries.** Most college and university programs will have some options for this. If you are unsure what is available to you, ask your Department Chair, faculty, research office, or student union.

- **Fundraise.** When I was working in residential care, my colleagues sold chocolate covered almonds for three years so they could attend a conference in another province. I know practitioners and students who have held bake sales and flea markets.

- **Collaborate with others to present.** I have presented at every conference since my first one because my employers were more likely to support me financially if I was doing a presentation. That has been my reality. An interesting point is that I have never presented alone because I see much value in sharing the experience with others. I also learned much about presenting strategies because I was supported by my mentors. For my first few conferences, I asked people to support me in my learning process. Now, I support others. Remember that conference committees cannot accept every proposal that is submitted, so I recommend topics that are relevant to a varied audience.

- **Find cheaper or shared accommodation** than the conference hotel. In all the conferences that I have attended, I have only once had my own room (and this was not intentional). When I know I am going to a conference, I reach out to my conference buddies and we make plans for room sharing. Some of the best learning, connections and friendships I have are as a direct result of this. And now, I do not need

to wait until the next conference to find support and a unique perspective because I have CYC friends that I can call at any time.

- **Attach your personal holidays to conferences.** This may not work for everyone, but I often plan my holidays around the conference schedule. If a conference is being held in a place I have not yet been, I get the opportunity to see new parts of my country and new parts of the world. My friend, Frank Delano, and I have now had meals together in every province in Canada, multiple US states and six countries. We have made this a very fun conference event over the years. In fact, our first meal together was at my first conference in 2000. I share this to show how valuable these experiences can be!

- **Get an airmiles card.** I purchase everything on my visa so I can build up my travel points. If I cannot get funding for travel, I tell my employer that I will cover my airfare and share accommodations. It is then easier to ask if they would be willing to cover some of the other costs.

- **Open a conference/travel account.** I have had one for twenty years. I put whatever I can afford into it. The amount has varied over the years. Some months I can't afford anything, but when I need to reach into it, it makes travel possible. I would have never been able to travel to South Africa without it. And that is with funding from my employers and sharing accommodation.

- **If you have the privilege of attending a conference, step outside your preferred social group and meet new people.** Attend the social events. Take in a workshop that you think will challenge you. Learn

about the history of our field. Explore new possibilities for where we can go!

I hope to see you at a future CYC conference! Come say hello or join Frank and I for a meal!

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Volume 32 Issue 4 / 2019

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Suicide and Sadness

Hans Skott-Myhre

Over the holidays I lost a friend to suicide. It was one of those deaths that was unexpected (at least to me) and a bit of a shock. We had not been in close touch for several years, but I still thought of her from time to time and looked forward to bumping into her when I visited the area where she lived. It was one of those relationships where you are quite close for a period of time and then drift apart in terms of actual contact, but retain the warmth of fond memories and an anticipation of the possibility of re-establishing contact. In short, I thought of her in good terms and always wished her the best. Hearing that she passed was quite difficult to wrap my head around.

Like most people that I value beyond superficial and polite interchange, my friend was complicated and to some degree, messy. She was fun and funny with a wicked sense of irony. She was Indigenous and identified with being French in an English-speaking part of Canada. Her intersectional coordinates were complex and didn't neatly fit into non-indigenous frameworks of race, gender, class, or sexuality. I experienced her as holding her heritage as lived experience.

I remember that she and another indigenous friend once came to my house determined to help me "get" Indigenous humor. They played a Franco/Indigenous derived comedy show (in French, which I don't speak) that they found extremely funny. They kept patiently translating the jokes and really being a bit frustrated with me that I couldn't see the humor. I felt very much like a fish out of water in that simple interchange, while at the

same time deeply honored that they saw me, an English speaking white settler, as someone who somehow might be able to enter (at least a little) into the way they saw the world.

What they *were* able to convey to me that evening, however, was how hostile they found the white English-speaking settler community that surrounded them. The land theft in the area where we lived was brutally obvious and still highly contested. There were demonstrations and complicated discussions at the University where I worked about the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives in the curriculum. Little of this seemed to directly impact on my friend, who lived off the reserve and never directly addressed anything overtly political. That said, there was a cautiousness and even a bit of cynicism towards the white anglo-settler small town community in which she lived. In this, I suspect there was both the pleasure of a close circle of friends who understood her social coordinates intuitively, and the pain of always being on the outside.

In short, like most of us she was complicated, nuanced, and difficult to pin down to a simple set of emotional, psychological, or social coordinates. Was she depressed and sad? It would seem so, given her suicide. But she was also joyous, life affirming, funny, bawdy, and very full of life. Did she suffer from the effects of trauma, both personal and social? No doubt, however, she also managed for a long time to be resilient and resourceful in the face of ongoing cultural trauma and personal hardship. Could we group her in with the horrific statistics on rates of Indigenous suicide? Sure, but that would obscure the rich complexity of her life in particular. Was her gender a source of suffering and pain within the largely patriarchal blue collar culture in which she lived? Again yes, gender relations were a site of ongoing conflict in her life. And, she was a powerful woman in her own right in many aspects of her life.

The trouble is, when someone kills themselves, we tend to reduce their life to that act, and they are so much more than that moment. I don't mean to disparage or dismiss the profundity, overwhelming pain, and grief that surrounds the act of suicide. It is one of the most jarring of life's events. That said, there is more to a life than how it ends. More important, in some ways might be a full accounting of the richness and complexity of that life.

We have a habit, in the world of late stage capitalism, to look for sound bites and algorithms to summarize ourselves and those we encounter. In doing so, we can inadvertently reduce the depth and expanse of our emotional, psychological, and physical experiences to reductive summaries of complicated living entanglements. We are so much more than can be described by terms like trauma, depression, suicidal, bi-polar, addict, on the spectrum, and so on. These descriptions lump us into statistical groupings of human behavior, conflating us with clusters of symptoms, giving us the impression that our lives can be summarized into mechanistic frameworks that claim to explain our struggles and pain.

It is always troubling to me to recognize that we continue to import 19th and 20th century ideas to explain our lives in the 21st century. The idea that our bodies are machines that break down and require repair is an idea imported from industrial capitalism. It is a hallmark of traditional scientific medicine that reached full force in the 20th century with groundbreaking innovations in surgical procedure, the development of pharmaceutical interventions, and the development of sports medicine with its increasingly nuanced understandings of body mechanics. However, when these ideas were applied to complex adaptive systems that function ecologically, such as viruses, immune systems, neurological systems, emotions, and thoughts, the model stumbled. These living systems didn't respond in predictable patterns of cause and effect. They responded

systematically through unintended and unanticipated adaptions and mutations.

In terms of our emotions and neurology, the medicines we have applied to recalibrate our feelings and thoughts, initially seemed successful, but then began to break down as our system seemed to reject them. This has been the case with almost all psychotropic interventions. Even when medical interventions into our emotions and thoughts succeed, we have no idea why.

That said, the success or failure of psychopharmacological intervention leaves aside the question of whether such interventions into "aberrant" thoughts and feelings simply work to adapt us to a society that is quite mad in its own right. That society has social epidemics in gun violence, drug addictions, ever increasing rates of suicide, the spread of hate driven political projects, extensive perpetration of sexual and assault of women, rampant political and economic corruption, wars that never end, the ongoing and escalating decimation of other species, and habits of social behavior that appear to be producing an increasingly toxic environment for all living things. While these events and actions are clearly the acts of a species gone rogue, we have yet to acknowledge or address the extreme alienation and denial that constitute our consciousness here in the early part of the twenty-first century. What does it mean to pharmaceutically or psychologically become adapted and comfortable within such an environment?

I was wondering about this and pondering the death of my friend, when I came across an article in the New York Times entitled "Why Are Young Americans Killing Themselves." The article begins by stating that "Teenagers and young adults in the United States are being ravaged by a mental health crisis — and we are doing nothing about it." It notes the

increasing numbers of teen suicides and points out that suicide is now the second leading cause of death among young people.

> *After declining for nearly two decades, the suicide rate among Americans ages 10 to 24 jumped 56 percent between 2007 and 2017, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. And for the first time the gender gap in suicide has narrowed: Though the numbers of suicides are greater in males, the rates of suicide for female youths increased by 12.7 percent each year, compared with 7.1 percent for male youths.*

The article goes on to detail accounts of significant increases in teen depression (up to age 24) and to delineate a number of theories as to its genesis, including social media, cell phones, and cyberbullying, while correctly pointing out that the data here is correlational and not causal. Drugs and alcohol are listed as possible culprits, but usage patterns have not increased while rates of suicide and depression have, More causally linked are anti-depressants themselves which have been shown to increase the rate of suicide among young people.

The author suggests that depression and suicide are just like any other health crisis, that can be addressed if we can just get our young people to the doctor for treatment. In a stunning moment of psychiatric hubris the author states,

> *The good news is that we don't have to wait for all the answers to know what to do. We know that various psychotherapies and medication are highly effective in*

treating depression. We just need to do a better job of identifying, reaching out to and providing resources for at-risk youths.

Leaving aside the fact that the article has just delineated the fact that medications may have a causal role in suicidal ideation among young people, the statement implies that the solution to an epidemic of suicidal behavior does not require that we know what to do. Instead, the article goes on to lay out a public surveillance campaign that would target any young people who evidence *warning signs* of suicidal ideation. We should watch our young people carefully and subject them to universal screenings at school to see who might be depressed or possibly suicidal. And we should, of course, pour more money into conventional psychological and pharmacological interventions and diagnoses.

I have to say I was stunned by the rather bold assertion that even though we don't really need to know what we are doing, we should proceed posthaste with partially proven treatments and marginally understood chemical interventions. The author has already acknowledged that we have very little idea as what might be at the root of the epidemic. I would suggest that, the production of a system of surveillance to monitor all of our young people's emotions and behavior would very likely have unintended consequences and increase the already extent sense of alienation and disenfranchisement.

Such a proposal takes away any responsibility and accountability on the part of adults, corporations, the pharmaceutical industry, conventional psychiatry and psychology for any culpability in the production of this crisis and places it squarely in the private arena of young people's bodies and neurology. It could be read as saying to young people, it is you that are

broken and need to be fixed. You, who are deficient in your levels of resilience. You, who are chemically unbalanced and need intervention. In short it removes any necessity for adults to take a hard look at the world we are producing and its possible implication in this epidemic.

And, it does something else as well, that is perhaps even more pernicious. It gives us the impression that suicide and depression are easy to address. That despair and hopelessness are amenable to simple remedies. That all we need to do is to find our broken children and make the proper adjustments and they will fine.

Of course, anyone who has worked at the cliff face of deep sadness, knows that this is not true. Human beings are complicated, complex, indeterminate sets of capacities and possibilities. They are not easily reduced to simple solutions. That is not to say, that some degree of pharmaceutical/psychological intervention can't be helpful in reducing the threat of suicide, but it also not that simple. If we are machines, we are quantum assemblages in which any intervention into our operations will have ongoing cascades of unintended consequences. It is one of the reasons I prefer the recent work on suicidology by CYC practitioners such as Jennifer White and Scott Kouri who suggest that we,

> *create new spaces for thinking suicide otherwise, and to mobilize opportunities for youth to think with adults in the exploration of life affirming alternatives. Working against any final or authoritative impulse to determine "what suicide is", we draw on theoretical and ontological frameworks that privilege difference, complexity, multiplicity, movement, and contradictions.*

In mourning the death of my friend, I have to say that I don't believe she was a simple set of social machinery that could or would have responded well to conventional approaches to saving her life. I would argue that her death, although named a suicide, might call into question any authoritative definition of what a suicide is. I prefer to think of her and all of the other friends, colleagues and young people I encountered in my work who took their lives, as ending their life on a note of contradiction rather than certainty. That their deaths point us to the edge of what we know and asks of us that we open ourselves to the possibility that we don't know and may never understand volitional death. But we can learn to be there in the lives of the living in ways that acknowledge their richness and complexity, while knowing we all will die, some of us on purpose. That is the challenge of the work we do and the love we give.

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Relational Child & Youth Care Practice

Volume 32 Issue 4 / 2019

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ISSN 2410-2954

The CYC-Net PRESS
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Laplace and the Probability of Everyday Life

Doug Magnuson

We might interpret CYC as the deliberate attempt to increase the probabilities that a child or youth will be successful, however success is defined. It is in fact defined this way by some, in an attempt to sound "scientific." What if we took the idea of probability seriously and put numbers on the everyday life opportunities and risks that children and youth face? We need some way of measuring these probabilities that is relatively easy, and we also need to have some idea about what to do to increase the probability that good things will happen and decrease the probability that bad things will happen.

There is a simple formula for calculating probabilities of future events, described by Laplace in the 18th century and called the "rule of succession." We count the number of times something has happened in the past and add one, and then divide that number by the number of opportunities, plus two. This is a useful approximation when our data is a moving target, and this is an easy formula for calculating quick and dirty probabilities with small pieces of data. For example, if your bus is late 3 days out of 10, the probability that your bus will be late today is 4 out of 12, or .33.

You will notice that it is different than the way you may have been taught to calculate a probability, which is 3 of 10. The addition of one to the numerator and two to the denominator has to do with the uncertainty of

future prediction—not just what happened in the past. Another example: You've been hoping that a child will share her worries with you, before the day starts, so that you can provide support before trouble happens. If the child has done so 1 out of the past 7 days, the probability that she will do so today is 2/9, or about 22%. Seem silly? It is, and yet it helps us focus on these important, short-term, goals. If the goal is shared with the child, then it may also become a mutual goal that you work on together.

Another good reason for thinking this way is that our cognitive biases lead us to focus on problems and we overestimate the likelihood that they will occur in the future. A second reason is that our world is filled with diagnoses, professional judgments, and assessments that are based on past data without a future prediction, and so we tend to expect the worst. It is better to set those diagnoses and judgements aside and focus on everyday data that we can control. Here's a mostly random, sometimes silly, selection of ideas.

What is the probability that a child will …

… learn a new math skill today?
… not fall behind in school today?
… have time to practice a new skill?
… share a hilarious new joke with you?
… find some use for you today?
… experience the psychological state of "flow" while playing today?
… receive a hug today?
… make a friend this week?
… be the object of a restraint this week?
… help another child with a task today?
… misbehave today in the manner that led to your involvement?

... help you know what anxieties dominate today?
... tell you what they want to do today?
... be ignored when using anger to get attention?
... witness a violent tantrum this week?
... be offered some illegal substance by acquaintances?
... witness more than 10 murders on your TV this week?

We can also use this to monitor ourselves. For example, what is the probability that I will be anxious and defensive with this child? Probabilities are not deterministic—they are indicators of change.

These—and almost anything else--can be calculated using Laplace's formula. Once we have a sense of daily life frequencies, we can do something about it. We work on the organization of daily life to increase the probability that good things will happen and decrease the probabilities that trouble will ensue.

Further, if we are the experts about everyday life, our data about everyday life ought to be better than anyone else. At case conferences, education meetings, assessments, and probation reviews the data presented is often terrible, if any is presented at all. Ours can be better.

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Relational Complexity

Jack Phelan

Child and Youth Care is focussed on using relationship energy to create positive progress in supporting young people and families who are struggling in their lives. This is an easy statement to believe and most CYC practitioners, from new students to mature practitioners can agree that this is an accurate description of what we do. Yet each CYC person will have a somewhat different understanding of the use of relationships and what that entails. Merle Allsopp, a colleague from South Africa, once stated that CYC practice is like art appreciation – everyone can judge art, but the depth of our understanding is quite varied. The more you know about how to do art, the greater is your ability to understand it.

Even brand-new hires with little training can verbalize the desire to have relational connections with the young people in our programs, because it is obvious that having a relationship will promote cooperation and progress. Also, most people attracted to this work feel very comfortable with their own ability to have relationships and see themselves as people who are easy to talk to and good listeners. Students who begin field placement coursework eagerly look forward to talking to young people about their problems and building connections. Unfortunately, the ability of people who have experienced serious abuse and neglect in their lives to comfortably engage in relationships is quite limited and attempts to quickly connect with them are usually not successful.

CYC-Online
e-Journal of the International Child and Youth Care Network (CYC-Net)
February 2020
ISSN 1605-7406

Successful CYC practitioners eventually work through the chasm between young people and families who fear connection and their own eagerness to relate. This process is a major part of the journey toward becoming a CYC professional. Students who are fortunate enough to be taught by experienced relational CYC practitioners and employees who have skilled relational CYC supervisors will be exposed to the layers of complexity that they will have to master as they become better relational workers.

Relational practice is much more complex than just having conversations and being a good listener, and the typical frameworks of building friendships do not translate easily into becoming a relational practitioner. One example which I have discussed recently in this column is the mistake of intentionally working to become a role model for young people, since the real need is to support them to like themselves, not to like you.

Today I will discuss another issue that has to be understood as relational CYC practice develops, and this is something that becomes relevant as mature practitioners advance in more complex relational ability. I call this issue the paradox of "other-awareness" sensitivity. Becoming tuned in to what others need and how they feel about you is an integral part of growth. Indeed, it is simply stated as the Golden Rule, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you".

The need for most self-protective and ego-centric people is to gradually become more attuned to the needs of other people, not just their own needs. This is part of the developmental journey that we all undertake as each of us becomes more socially aware and appreciative of the requirement to consider how our actions affect other people, not just ourselves. So relational practitioners are regularly trying to build other

awareness in the young people and families that they support, with the goal of creating a social logic that includes treating others well. This also builds a greater desire to be connected to others for support and assistance.

As skilled relational CYC supervisors teach these intentions to developing relational practitioners, they are simultaneously supporting the practitioner to develop a clear internal locus of control, an ability to be a self-authoring thinker who does not rely on relationship feedback to value himself or his results. The goal is to become clearer about what ones' own values, skills, and beliefs are, to become fully responsible for self, and not be swayed by the criticisms, praise or opinions of others because of a need to be liked. So, a relational practitioner needs to be able to build other-awareness in ego-centric people to increase attachment ability, social logic and empathy, while decreasing his own other-awareness on a much different level, to become more capable of self-authoring thinking.
This relational practice stuff is not as simple as it first seemed.

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Significant Stress and Real Rewards: The Ecological and Ambiguous Experiences of Foster Parents

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Abstract

To obtain an insider's perspective of the unique dynamics and needs of foster parents, surveys and interviews were conducted using human ecology and ambiguous loss as a guiding framework. The resulting qualitative and quantitative data show significant and distinctive stressors for foster parents. These include challenges with agency staff and procedures and ambiguous situations. However, these parents generally found meaning and satisfaction in service and coped with the help of informal and formal supports.

Key Words

Foster care, foster parents, stress, support

The removal of children from birth parents is often traumatic, and subsequent adjustments are difficult for everyone, including the foster parents (Buehler, Cox & Cuddeback, 2003). For example, new

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

February 2020
ISSN 1605-7406

foster parents are often surprised by the intensity of foster children's behaviors and emotional outbursts (McFadden, 1996; Whiting & Lee, 2003). Also, foster parents may have conflicting feelings about their role, such as when the children need continuity and reassurance, but the parents need respite. Foster parents often grieve when foster children are removed, but they may also feel guilty for being relieved (McFadden, 1996). Despite these unique challenges, many foster parents cope well and find rewards in their relationships with these children (Buehler et al., 2003).

It is critical for child welfare professionals to understand the distinctive dynamics and character of foster parents. Despite the important service that foster parents provide, they are not always well supported, and are sometimes scorned or labeled as saints or martyrs (Molin, 1994). Hearing directly from foster parents can correct misconceptions by providing a realistic and complete picture of their experiences. This can inform the decisions of practitioners and policymakers who work with them.

Foster parents interact with individuals within various systems, including the birth family, agency, other foster parents, and professionals from educational, medical, and legal settings (Lee & Lynch, 1998). Often, decisions affecting the foster parents and foster children are made at the state or agency level and are motivated more by funding concerns rather than the interests of the families (Curtis, 1999). Foster parents are rarely afforded an opportunity to give formal feedback to those who direct the policies and procedures of the system (Rindfleisch, Bean, & Denby, 1998). Until recently research on foster parent perspectives has been scant (e.g., Brown & Calder, 2000; Buehler et al., 2003), although one large-scale study of U.S. foster parent characteristics and recruitment was done in the early 90s (Administration on Children Youth and Families, 1993).

The purpose of this study was primarily exploratory in nature, with the objective of articulating and describing aspects of foster parents' lives. The goals of the study were twofold: first, to understand more clearly the interactions that foster parents have with other systems, including the agency. Of interest was how the context supported or constrained foster parents. The second goal was to gain an insider's perspective of the inner experience of foster parents, including how they make sense of ambiguous situations, challenges and loss, as well as their motivations, rewards and strengths.

Theoretical Framework

Due to the complexity of the foster care environment, human ecology, with its focus on individuals in interaction with multiple systems has been identified as a useful framework for understanding foster care (Lee & Lynch, 1998; Whiting & Lee, 2003). Such a framework presumes that in order to best serve the children, all levels must be interacting openly and functioning with purpose (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The "[ecological] framework provides interpretive power in terms of contextualizing the experience" of individuals, including understanding how interacting systems shape behavior and inner experience (Arditti, 2005, p. 252). For example, a foster parent may grieve or become frustrated (inner experience) when the agency (ecological system) chooses to remove a foster child or withhold information about a placement.

The theory of ambiguous loss (Boss, 1999; 2004) is well-suited for understanding the uncertainty, instability and losses that foster parents experience. Although foster children and birth families experience ambiguous losses, so do foster parents. These include losing temporary family members, and living with the ambiguity of trying to help foster

children while maintaining their personal or familial well-being. According to ambiguous loss theory, two situations are considered to be especially stressful, and both apply to the experience of foster parents. The first is when individuals are physically absent but are kept psychologically present, which is how birth parents and agency workers may be experienced by the foster family. The second circumstance occurs when individuals are physically present but psychologically absent. This is illustrated by a foster child who is overwhelmed with grief or previous trauma, and is therefore emotionally preoccupied (Briere & Armstrong, in press; Davies, in press).

The two theories complement each other to create a helpful framework for exploring foster parents' experience. The ecological framework highlights the complexity and pervasiveness of the systemic interactions between child, foster parents, birth parents, and agency, and the lens of ambiguous loss focuses on how foster parents experience these unstable and challenging environments and situations. Ecological theory emphasizes interactions with external systems, and ambiguous loss looks at the twofold unit of analysis of family and individual (Boss, 2004). In this study, the unit of analysis is the foster parent, with an emphasis on the interactions that these parents have with their environment.

Ecological Context: Supports and Constraints of Foster Parents

The combination of high expectations with uncertain rewards or supports can make foster parenting a daunting prospect. Agencies expect foster parents not only to be "good parents" but also have the skills to help children deal with losses, trauma, and split loyalties (McFadden, 1996). Foster parents must balance the needs of biological and foster children,

cooperate with the agency workers, and access needed medical and psychological resources. To succeed, foster parents need to find supports.

One support for foster parents is preservice training. Years ago, Boyd and Remy (1978) asked: is foster parent training worthwhile? They, and others since, have generally agreed that it is (e.g., Baum, Crase & Crase, 2001; Rosenfeld et al., 1997). Preservice training can weed out those who are not ready while providing skills and confidence for those who are (Fees, Stockdale, Crase, Riggins-Caspers, Yates, Lekies & Arnold, 1998). Training can provide knowledge as well as a supportive cohort of other foster parents, which increases placement stability and retention (Burry, 1999; Chamberlain, Moreland, & Reid, 1992; Cook & Fletcher, 2002; Titterington, 1990). Training can decrease the uncertainties felt by new foster parents and help minimize multi- ple placements of foster children. One U.S. government study found that improvements in training led foster parents to feel more personally empowered and less likely to discontinue (ACYF, 1993).

Inner Experience: Ambiguities, Losses and Coping

It is important to identify how supports affect the inner experience of foster parents, because a significant challenge for the future of foster care is retaining high-quality caregivers (Barbell & Wright, 1999; Cox, Buehler, & Orme, 2002). The loss of foster parents is a serious problem. From the mid-1980s until the late 1990s, the number of children entering foster care increased 74%, while the number of foster families declined by a third (Burry, 1999). This has resulted in overcrowded placements and overwhelmed caregivers who may be asked to function beyond their level of preparation.

Research has suggested that foster parents need to have positive values, high energy, resilience, and good judgment (Daly & Dowd, 1992). It is likely that these types of personal characteristics help foster parents cope with the challenges of the work. These attributes are different than skills or knowledge that can be taught. Rather, these may include virtues or character strengths that increase resilience and perseverance (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). For example, the reasons for becoming and remaining a foster parent are often related to personal values and character strengths (Baum et al., 2001).

Research Questions

Several research questions were used to guide the project. These questions align with the research goals of exploring the ecological context of foster parents and the influence this has on their inner experiences. These questions included: (1a) What aspects of foster parents' environment and interactions are most stressful? (1b) What ecological influences are found to be most helpful in supporting foster parents? (2a) How do foster parents process stressful situations, and how do they become overwhelmed? (2b) What inner attributes or strengths help foster parents succeed and continue as foster parents?

Method

In order to explore the experience of foster parents from multiple angles a mixed methods approach was selected, in which both survey and interview data were gathered. These data were analyzed using quantitative survey techniques and ethnographic methods (Tedlock, 2000). Combining methods is an effective way to explore a topic in greater depth, especially from an insider's perspective (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Sample and Procedure

Agency contact persons in six U.S. states, Georgia, Kentucky, Michigan, Pennsylvania, South Carolina and Wisconsin, were sent packets of surveys that they distributed. The agency contacts chose to distribute the surveys by various means, such as mailing or handing out to foster parents at the agency. Due to confidentiality restrictions regarding foster parent identities, the researchers were unable to monitor the distribution of surveys. Exceptions to this were Kentucky and Michigan, which allowed the researchers to randomly choose 75 addresses from each state list of active foster parents. Packets for each foster parent included a cover letter inviting them to participate, a survey, a card that could be returned to be entered in a drawing for a restaurant gift certificate, and a stamped return envelope. Due to the confidential nature of the distributions, follow-up reminders were not sent. The 450 surveys were evenly divided among the states (75 each). The final return rate was 33.6% (n = 151). Of the survey respondents, three-quarters (75%) were female, 13% were single, 78% married, and 9% were divorced or widowed. Over 60% had some college experience or a degree, and 11% had done graduate work. The sample was 78% Caucasian, 14% African American, 1% Native American, and 7% unidentified. The age of respondents ranged from 26 to 76, with a mean of 48 (*SD* = 11). Over the course of their tenure as foster parents, participants reported that they had foster children in their homes from a few months to 37 years, with a mean of 8.1 (*SD* = 7.6) years. For parents who had fostered for many years, these lengths likely reflect numerous placements. The response rate was similar across states.

The qualitative sample was obtained by a combination of convenience sampling (interviewing those whom the researchers knew), and snowball sampling (asking participants for referrals), (n = 9). There were 6 female

participants and 3 males, and foster children had been present in their homes from 1 year to a total of 7.5 years.

The interview narratives complemented and deepened the survey data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The interview participants heard a scripted explanation of the project, were assured of confidentiality and then confirmed their willingness to share information. A semi-structured interview guide was used that contained questions about the foster parents' ecological interactions, training, challenges and rewards. Interviews were led by one of the authors. After each interview the recorded content was transcribed and analyzed using ethnographic methods (Tedlock, 2000). Software was used to assist in coding, organizing, and synthesizing the data (QSR NVivo, 2000).

Instruments

A foster parent questionnaire was developed that addressed a number of content areas, including: (a) a checklist of reasons that they had chosen to become foster parents, with space to list other reasons; (b) five general questions about how prepared and satisfied they were with the experience of foster parenting; (c) seven questions about satisfaction with preservice and ongoing training; (d) eight questions related to stress; (e) a list of topics to be ranked on how adequately they were covered in training; (f) a checklist of types of continuing training they had used; and (g) a checklist of reasons that they believed foster parents discontinued foster parenting.

The first, sixth and seventh sections were checklists of items that could be marked or left blank. The other items on the questionnaire were responded to using a 5 point Likert-type scale asking respondents to rate how much they agreed or disagreed with the statement or topic. The instrument was developed by the authors from the research questions and

existing literature. It was refined in a process of having experts, including foster parent trainers and current foster parents, review it to suggest modifications.

Data Analysis

The survey data were primarily analyzed and summarized using descriptive statistics. Tables of items were generated that showed categories of responses and their relative importance to these foster parents.

The qualitative analysis began with the initial interviews. These were guided by an ethnographic semi-structured interview guide (Fetterman, 1989). The analytic process proceeded using a reciprocal procedure between data collection and analysis known as the constant comparative process. Interviews were transcribed, reviewed and then loaded into the software. The authors and a graduate assistant examined the transcripts line by line and electronically labeled them according to conceptual categories in a process of open coding (Tedlock, 2000). This proceeded in an organic fashion, with some categories becoming more prominent and others remaining undeveloped. This was followed by axial coding, which was the examining of these themes for logical and conceptual relationships (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Validity, or trustworthiness, was strengthened by the use of multiple reviewers and coders who both independently and jointly analyzed the data (Tedlock, 2000). Memos were kept within the software to reflect thoughts about the research process of coding and analyzing. These were included in the data analysis.

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Results

The results are organized according to the research questions, with both survey content and ethnographic themes illustrating the findings. Within each of the broader research question categories, independent ethnographic themes were identified and labeled. These themes reflect foster parent topic areas that were relevant to the research goals and that emerged across multiple interviews. These themes will be identified in the text by italics (e.g., *conflicting roles*), and discussed in context of the research category reflected by the heading.

1a Ecological Constraints

Both the survey and the interviews yielded considerable information relative to the foster parent's experiences with external systems, especially the agency. The ethnographic content from the interviews indicated that many foster parents had strong reactions to their experiences with their agency personnel. For example, one recurring theme related to *poor communication* with the agency. One foster father said, "they weren't always prompt in answering your questions or getting back with you or even finishing the process of the home study." Another said, "I would leave a message for them to call me and then two days later I still hadn't gotten a call, so I would call and leave a message again and a lot of times that call wouldn't be returned." "I know that they have a heavy case load," one mother said, "but we have responsibilities [that] we are supposed to do, and can't do it. We took from April to June or July to get a consent [form] signed to see a doctor." Other remarks included: "That level of support that you were trained to expect wasn't there," and another said, "it is hard to do your job when they are not responding, not working with you." One was

concerned about the "lack of information … [about] the biological parents and the … plan for permanency."

Other agency themes related to the foster parent feeling *devalued* by agency members. Two parents felt that the workers favored the birth parents and were suspicious of them: "You always feel like you're on the defensive." One woman had her foster child repeatedly returned to her birth parents despite her recommendations to the agency: "[she] kept going home and coming back with injuries . . . like cigarette burns, [and we ended up taking] her to the hospital." This foster parent said that she had "the police come and document photos, but [the team] kept sending her home and it got to the point where we called the 1-800 abuse number and reported the team."

There were others who found *training inadequacies*. One felt that the time was not worth it: "For the hours you put into it, I don't know that it was a whole lot of a benefit." Two people mentioned the hassle of continuing training although another mentioned its importance. Several mentioned certain parts of training that were helpful, but these were different for each foster parent. One foster mother of an infant did not feel that discipline was a helpful topic, but other parents wished for more training in that area.

The survey asked respondents to rate a series of 32 topics on whether they were covered adequately in their preservice training. These topics were chosen from a review of several common training programs (Huber, Whiting, & Koech, 2007). Responses varied widely (range of 1-5 on every item), which may reflect a diversity of training programs, but also the respondents' opinions and experiences with their specific children.

The five items that respondents felt were *least* adequately covered were: (1) Suicide; (2) Oppositional Defiant Disorder and Conduct Disorder; (3) Aging out of Foster Care; (4) Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder;

and (5) Handling the stresses of foster parenting. A follow-up question asked respondents to list topics that they felt were not adequately covered, but needed. Over half (54%) of the respondents listed additional comments in this section. These included variations on listed topics as well as frustrations or satisfactions with their training. Several mentioned needing more information about the logistics of getting medical or dental care for their foster children, and several wrote of struggles with the agency. Many had frustrations regarding visits with or lack of information about the biological family. Topics that were mentioned by several included: Reactive Attachment Disorder (RAD), stress on family members, behavior management, and more realistic appraisal of what is involved in foster parenting – what one person called "expectations training." One wrote: "a lot was covered, but nothing can prepare you for the things you have to go through!"

1b Ecological Supports

Ecological themes that were positive included *supportive agency workers*, and these sometimes coincided with negative experiences from the same agency: One father said: "We've heard horror stories of caseworkers and we have amazing caseworkers." Other comments included: "She is very professional and right on top of things and that's been great." "I think she does a great job. She's been doing it for twenty or thirty years … she answers my calls immediately. She gets the information that I need quickly." Others appreciated monthly visits from their caseworker and another foster parent mentioned that she visited her caseworker weekly, commenting: "We are pleased with her." Foster parents also found benefit from seeking other *informal and formal supports*. These included family, friends, church, agency or other foster parents.

Table 1

Reasons for Discontinuing to Foster	% Checked
Negative experiences with agency caseworkers/staff	71.7
Too stressful	63.8
Too many behavioral problems with foster children	59.2
Too hard on biological children	42.1
Too difficult to have foster children removed from our home	36.8
Lack of support from others	34.9
Not enough extra time	32.9
Personal problems	30.9
Too difficult financially	24.3
Caused marital/partner stress	23.7
Other reasons	21.1

Supportive themes that emerged relative to the training included *realistic expectations*. Many mentioned that training helped them know what to expect regarding foster parenting: "They [helped you] imagine how … foster parents and children feel, the things they go through" another said: "the training gives … some reality of the system. I think our trainers were very frank."

Another mentioned, "[the training] depends on the quality of the teacher. And I think we had three good teachers in our training period and our needs were pretty well met." One said, "We went into it thinking, 'oh,

we want to get a child' and we came out of it going, 'we understand the foster process.'"

The survey indicated that these parents had participated in a variety of *ongoing* training during their service, including: on-site training (84%); reading materials such as books, manuals, or handouts (66%); or Internet/CD-ROM materials (34%). Other methods noted were variations of on-site training (e.g., state workshops), or learning from foster parent groups, therapists, TV programs, church groups, or personal experience.

2a Ambiguities, Losses and Stress

The interviews yielded specific qualitative categories related to stress and challenges, including *emotional ambiguities*, as described by a parent's experience with "the rollercoaster of going each week [for visitation], because we would love to adopt him, yet we really try to maintain a distance … really believing that the best is being with his … birth parents." Another said: "The hard part is, of course, you get attached to the children when they are in your home for a long time and then knowing some of the circumstances they go back to." Another discussed the ambiguity that comes with not knowing their future with the child: "when he graduates or gets married, are we going to be a part of that?" One mother recalled the initial ambiguity of becoming a foster parent:

"[Getting our first foster child] happened very quickly. After things had gotten settled down and we had gotten him to bed, we were just sitting up talking, thinking 'wow, now it has started …' At that same moment, somewhere else, there was a mother and a father who were very upset and very sad about what had happened that night. The connection we now have to these, otherwise complete strangers is not really something I

thought through or really prepared for … and it is different than we thought it would be."

Other foster parents struggled with *conflicting roles* related to these ambiguities, such as trying not to resent the birth parents for mistreating their own children, "we don't want to help them, but we know that we need to."

Another stressor was related to feeling *defensive* from being accused or attacked. This came from feeling mistreated by the agency and the birth parents. One parent felt that the biological family perceived her as the "enemy" and directed anger at her instead of the workers. Some felt *powerless*, having heavy responsibility, but little authority to make decisions for the child. One mother described this: "Birth parents have the rights but we are advocates for these children." Some felt trapped by scrutiny of their parenting with limits in how they could intervene: "they don't give you any choices except time out or taking away privileges and for some kids that doesn't work." Most of these parents agreed that there were stressful things about the foster children themselves, citing *behavior or health problems*. Hyperactivity, defiance, and other behavioral problems were mentioned, in addition to discipline ineffectiveness. Others mentioned challenging child characteristics including medical issues, developmental delays or depression.

The survey section that asked parents why they believed most foster parents discontinued fostering reflected both systemic and individual factors. As Table 1 shows, their reasons reflect opinions about agency and individual stressors. The top reasons that were identified included: bad experiences with agency personnel (71.7%), general stresses (63.8%), and behavior problems (59.2%). Of the 21% who offered further commentary, some elaborated on checked items "not being taken seriously by the

professional team" or "false promises" or "lack of information from the agency." Others offered: "inexperienced caseworkers", "no time off" or a "lack of guidelines."

The qualitative data confirmed these reasons, with many offering ideas on what causes *burnout*, such as too many "headaches and disappointments." Other reasons parents gave for discontinuing were often related to the stressors already examined, such as the agency or the children. One mother reported that at her foster parent group meetings, the number one reason foster parents quit was to "get rid of the social workers." Others talked of being worn out by the foster children, and the negative effects on biological children and the family. Others mentioned discontinuing due to adoption of the children or retiring due to normal life course events.

2b Satisfactions & Strengths

Despite the challenges, many parents enlist to take foster children into their home, and some do so for years. These parents discussed why they chose fostering, what positive experiences they had, as well as their personal attributes that related to their longevity. The survey asked foster parents to indicate what had led them to fostering. Table 2 shows the categories most often checked, with the primary reasons being "desire to help" (85.4%), and "desired the emotional rewards of making a difference" (51%). Some expanded on these reasons listed, or wrote others, including fostering for spiritual or religious reasons, and having a strong love of children. Ethnographic themes added further perspective on the personal reasons for fostering. These included *finding meaning* in serving. One said: "Foster parenting exists for the child, it doesn't exist for you. And if you want to make a difference in the life of a child, then you continue." One

couple “felt that God wanted us to get involved.” Others mentioned a *desire to parent*, sometimes because they were unable to have children. Several mentioned an interest in adoption. Many had multiple reasons for fostering, such as one mother who wanted take medically fragile children so that she could make a difference by using her nursing skills while staying home with her other children.

Table 2

Reasons for becoming a foster parent	**% Checked**
Desire to help less-fortunate children	85.5
Desired the emotional rewards of making a difference	51.3
Hoped to eventually adopt children	30.3
Could not have children (or as many children as we wanted)	25.2
Knew specific children who needed out-of-home placement	23.0
Was asked to by a relative/friend	13.2
Inspired by a media or print story about foster parenting	10.5
Financial benefit of fostering	4.6
Had been in a foster home myself as a child	4.6
Other reasons	30.3

Other themes illustrated the coping methods and supports that keep people involved. These included taking *time away* (from fostering, or having children in a day care), *diversions* (having hobbies), and *creating structure* (having routines and expectations). Some discussed *attributes or virtues* that foster parents would need in order to be successful. These included characteristics such as being "patient, extremely patient, disciplined, [with] consistency, and a lot of love." Others mentioned the need to be unselfish, child-focused, flexible, and able to handle chaos.

The rewards of fostering were varied, and sometimes difficult to describe. Some talked of *love*, "we just try to do the best we can while we have them, and as far as knowing whether you have done them much good, I think it is hard to tell. But, enjoying them is certainly a joy." Another agreed that "the reward is having the children, they are a blessing." Other comments included: "When you open up the front door and you come home and they come running and grab you and they go, 'Mommy it's you! I miss you so much!'" Another agreed, "the biggest reward is that it changes your life."

Some talked of the satisfaction of bringing *new members into the family*, getting "two wonderful little boys that we are going to be adopting," and others mentioned the satisfaction of *making a difference* for the child, including saving the life of one medically fragile infant, "The fact that he's gone from nothing to something . . . at least now he has a chance he didn't have before." Another parent felt similarly: "It has been a wonderful experience to have a child in the home . . . to see [him] grow and learn."

Discussion

Implications for Practice

It is important for agencies to examine their own policies and assess where communication gaps exist. Consistent communication from the agency helps foster parents feel appreciated (Crenshaw, 2004), as many of these parents confirmed. This can begin during the initial placement of the child. Foster parents want detailed information regarding the child's background, especially when there are potential risks for family members. This may include being apprised of dangerous behaviors such as aggression or fire starting, or knowing that the child has accused other foster families of abuse. It is also important to know of past maltreatment to avoid situations that may inadvertently retraumatize children (McFadden, 1996). Workers may need incentives to communicate this information to foster parents. They may hesitate to share needed information with the foster parents because they are concerned with finding a willing home, rather than finding the best fit for the child (Goerge, Wulczyn, & Harden, 1999).

Several of these parents felt disconnected from the agency in regard to what was happening with the biological family or the permanency plan. Also, it appears that better information is often needed regarding practical matters, such as having dental forms signed or getting reimbursement. Giving foster parents the chance to provide feedback through a phone survey or "how are we doing?" questionnaire may help them feel heard, even if not all of their requests are feasible. It may also be a useful way to ascertain if parents are becoming burned out or likely to discontinue. This can provide an opportunity to intervene before foster parents become completely disengaged. Also, better information for foster parents helps

them to be frank and appropriate in their discussions with their foster children. This is important because lack of information can leave foster children vulnerable to self-blame and prevent them from grieving and working through loss (Boss, 2004; Folman, 1998; Whiting & Lee, 2003).

Most of these parents agreed that training was an important part of their preparation for receiving children, but there was disagreement on what constituted the best training. Former studies have shown that many foster parents think that their training is insufficient, and this still seems to be the case for many (ACYF, 1993). This is relevant because foster parents who are not well prepared are not only more likely to discontinue, but are more likely to rely on heavy handed control techniques with the children, such as excessive time outs or restraint (Daly & Dowd, 1992). Additionally, most foster parents want more support than they receive (ACYF, 1993), and ongoing training and agency support has been shown to reduce foster parent drop-out (Chamberlain et al., 1992).

Better tailoring of content and skills for foster parents could improve the training that foster parents receive (Cox et al., 2002). Topics that have historically been suggested for training programs include: “attachment and loss, legal issues, the special needs of children in care, assertive communication, family adaptation to fostering roles, positive discipline, and protecting the foster family from allegations of abuse” (McFadden, 1996, p. 552). From our findings it appears that it might also be helpful to spend time on suicide, aging out of foster care, handling stress and grief as a foster family, and ADHD. Also, parents need more training on agency-specific policies as well as what to expect regarding communication with the agency personnel. Another way to target parent needs is to have a second tier of training that is structured toward the age level of the children that the foster parents will receive. A family licensed for babies and

preschoolers will not deal with the same issues as will those who take teens. This second tier could be online or in agency-prepared manuals for easy access and review.

Ecological interventions must address systemic and contextual issues, not just individual problems (Bubolz & Sontag, 1993). Ecological supports that exist for foster parents include formal groups and mentor programs, which are used in some states but not others. These can strengthen foster parents, especially during the initial transition into fostering. Providing targeted follow-up training or caseworker contact during early placement makes it more likely that foster parents will continue and have realistic expectations of the process (ACYF, 1993; McFadden, 1996). Other support strategies to help parents deal with ambiguities and losses include: gathering information, talking with others regarding losses, not blaming one's self, and reaching out (Boss, 2004).

It would be helpful for agency workers to view the process of placement and its subsequent adjustments with an ambiguous loss framework. This includes recognizing that each time a family is disrupted through the entry or exit of its members, uncertainties follow that may involve guilt, feelings of failure, anger, adjustment or demoralization (Brown & Calder, 2000). As these parents discussed, losses and stresses are experienced differently by each family member, with foster mothers typically most central to the process. These parents mentioned that the strains on marriage and children were common reasons for discontinuing fostering. Although individual therapy is one of the most common supports provided by agencies (ACYF, 1993), family therapy may be better suited to address the systemic and relational issues that are common in foster families (Lee & Whiting, in press). Typical presenting problems that could be treated in family therapy may include parent adjustment issues, marital stress, child

jealousy, ambivalence, divided loyalties, changing roles, and grieving. For example, it would be typical for the birth children to feel angry with foster siblings for making life difficult, but also feel loyalty toward the parent's decision to foster. These biological children may struggle with ambivalence, embarrassment about foster siblings' misbehavior, or a sense of unfairness due to different standards applied to them and their foster siblings.

Family therapy may also help with addressing foster parents' anger at the biological parents for past maltreatment, as well as normalizing the rivalry between foster and biological parents. Therapists could also help address some of the more serious problems that these foster parents missed in training, such as suicide, attachment disorders, or grief. Therapy is a good place to address problematic systemic issues as well as individual experiences with ambivalence and loss (Boss, 1999).

Implications for Research

This study has added to the discussion of the challenges of recruiting and retaining foster parents by sharing insiders' perspectives on these problems. Further scholarship on recruitment and support of foster parents could address questions such as these: What characteristics of the parents, children, and context are associated with more successful placements? What parental styles, virtues, or character strengths are associated with foster parent resilience (e.g., Hart, Newell, & Olson, 2003; Peterson & Seligman, 2004)? What types of training are most helpful for specific foster parent challenges?

Other questions that could be pursued relative to understanding foster parent challenges and burnout could include the following: How does the grieving process affect foster parent's ability to continue fostering? How do

foster parent challenges relate to agency challenges? Do different types of agencies (e.g., public or private) have different levels of support? How does the match between the foster parents' goals and resulting experience of fostering affect their willingness to continue? For instance, a parent hoping to eventually adopt a baby girl has very different expectations than a parent who wants to help troubled teens get back to their family. It is likely that more congruent placements will be more successful for the foster children and foster parents.

Limitations

The sample in this study was limited in that the survey distribution was only to parents in five U.S. states. These findings may differ from those of foster parents in other countries or other U. S. states, as training programs and agency styles vary widely. Additionally, the ethnographic interviews added deep, but not broad, content. The participants in the interviews were of a homogenous group, and different foster parents may have emphasized other aspects of fostering. It is also important to clarify that these foster parents worked with public foster care agencies. It is possible that those parents working with private agencies would have different degrees of difficulties or supports from their agencies. The agency context will affect the support of foster parents. Agencies face difficult work, lack of funding, case overload, and high turnover of staff (Goerge et al., 1999), and often feel public scrutiny that has resulted from highly visible deficiencies as portrayed in the media (e.g., Sieg, 1998; Smalley & Braiker, 2003). Strained agency workers will likely be less available for the foster parents.

It is also difficult to account for the many ecological factors that influence foster parents (Lee & Lynch, 1998). These include agency or funding types, state regulations, agency policies, community

characteristics, and workplace culture. Any of these factors could influence the amount of support from the agency or other family members. Another important ecological consideration is culture and race. While there was ethnic diversity in the survey sample, there was little in the interview participants. This is especially relevant for foster care populations, where children of color are disproportionately represented in care ([DHHS], 2004). A more representative sample would be preferable.

Conclusion

This research helps to clear up misconceptions about foster parenting, such as their motivation being "in it for the money" (Molin, 1994). Only 4.6% of these foster parents mentioned financial considerations as a motivator to foster. These parents discussed multiple reasons for fostering, suggesting that there are many types and motivations for taking children (Schatz & Horesji, 1996). Most of these parents took in children to make a difference, and nearly all of them said that they would do it again.

In the survey and interviews, these foster parents expressed strong feelings and reactions. They generally appreciated the opportunity to speak out, which is not surprising given that a frequent complaint of foster parents is not being heard. This data can help practitioners and researchers better understand the issues that are important to these parents, both contextually and individually. This can help improve the lives of the foster parents, children, and families who are involved in the foster care system.

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This peer-reviewed article was originally published in Relational Child and Youth Care Practice*, Volume 20, No.2, pp9-20*

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OK Boomer

Garth Goodwin

The The young have had their fill of us - baby boomers. I do not blame them. I have certainly had my fill of one of us and cannot wait to see the back of him be it in a few weeks or eleven months. Or not. The President of Russia just pulled a number to effectively extend his term to

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

February 2020
ISSN 1605-7406
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forever. He may have got the idea from the President of China who just went for it, for life. Heavens, with this column this writer is flirting with the concept following 16 Volumes of columns with the *Relational Child and Youth Care Practice*. While this may be a case of leaving the pan and jumping into the fire with the seasoned pros of this publication, it is just a way to keep my hand in, even if only as a pundit for the practice of child and youth care. This is a mere dabble compared with the august presidential offices mentioned above. The President of the United States has mentioned his approval of lifetime office and he appears to be acting like he has it in the bag just more or less doing what he wants. OK Boomers, how did we get here? What happened to all that peace not war, love and brotherhood, and an era of balanced living? Unbridled enterprise tinged with greed may sum it up. As the gentleman at a climate change protest above puts it, *fix it now* more or less announces the jig is up. He was delighted to have contributed his message and a photograph to the cause. Still, he is only half the story as the other half views all of this as fake, happy days are here again, keep it white, keep it right and the greatest is yet to come. This column explores the way this standoff creates a curious neutrality in which elections are close, governments dither or destroy and denial reigns supreme.

There is probably no more vital issue that affects the entire globe than climate change and yet it appears stuck in neutral with weather events winning. I had the good fortune to live the outdoor lifestyle at the lake to the point of being in tune with nature itself allowing you to begin to tell time, forecast weather and sense seasons through intuition. This gave me a lifelong interest in geography and weather which is applied daily. Intellectually, climate change made total sense to me but what I was not prepared for was its speed, destruction and insidious targeting of our finest

natural worlds. Acres of forest in northern British Columbia, California and now the continent of Australia have been impacted by disease and fire. Australia especially with its massive kill-off of the world's more unique living species has been painful. The recent realization that the totally individual platypus has been severely impacted as the drought dried up its environment. The massive sequoia forests are also threatened. Glaciers and the ice sheets of the poles are retreating at unforeseen speeds. A warm spot in the ocean is killing birds in the thousands. Weather is not just weather anymore. It is weather on steroids, weather operating at extremes. As I write, Newfoundland Labrador is experiencing a storm so violent a state of emergency had to be called. Personally, I have seen our canopy of elm and ash trees battered by disease and ice storms resulting in huge gaps as trees are brought down for our safety. Our basin on our great lake experienced wind enhanced erosion on such a level it had to be storm proofed with limestone berms removing the natural shoreline. Last spring, a drought called for a fire ban that went on for over a month. The point being that many of us have experienced weather events linked to climate change and yet a significant number of us deny it as a reality. Incredibly, the government of Australia campaigned against it and their Prime Minister went on holiday as his country began to burn. While many continue to fight the good fight as we understand it in the face of this denial, the fact is there has been little progress as targets are missed. The great unknown is the unknown. Will North America experience another round of fires? Will the breadbasket of central North America experience a drought, like the Dirty Thirties?

Curiously, successful protest regarding climate change fell to Greta Thunberg who at age 15 literally sat out a year with a sign board on the steps of the parliament in Sweden. As Kiaras Gharabaghi noted in the

January 2020 issue of CYC-Online, she was not alone with girls emerging in many nations echoing her concerns. In short order global student protests were organized drawing record crowds. Adults attended like the senior viewed above and many schools closed to allow students to attend. Climate deniers responded by attacking Greta often in extreme and personal ways totaling abandoning the fact she was still a minor. Fairness and basic respect have no place in this fight. Fortunately, Greta continues to take the direct approach a crisis demands.

Unfortunately, her peers are taking a more extreme way out through suicide. "In Canada, suicide is the second highest cause of death for youth aged 10-24." [1] Youth suicide is growing throughout the first world. There is no definite link to climate change as such. Social media is often cited as an influence. As one who grew up in the far north of Canada where news was a day late as newspapers and film had to be flown in, the sense of isolation was acute at times and leaving for the south was a shared mission. In a world where news is immediate and on the phone in your hands or on your wall in televised 65 inch blazing colour with crisp definition contrasts the gulf between broadcast media and traditional life experience. Contagious outbreaks of suicide claim children and teens in indigenous communities. Within the last month in Winnipeg there have been three deaths due to suicide [2], homicide [3] and exposure [4] that amplify aspects of the challenges

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[1] https://canadiancrc.com/Youth_Suicide_in_Canada.aspx

[2] https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/kelly-fraser-fiercely-open-with-fans-1.5410546?__vfz=medium%3Dsharebar&fbclid=IwAR1d0P8_xJx74DIFn3UNg1ESQLElUkqWHsr4fJKY4wIlbukT-aWEKF6I-js

[3] https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/sheena-marie-dubois-suspicious-death-1.4943069?fbclid=IwAR33sede2rAoeMDO9OazeYaPaVMtghJPYDN_A0pQy4PXRfhcwA35ri8JKk8

[4] https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/jaeda-vanderwal-death-family-winnipeg-police-probe-1.5430286

that confront young indigenous females. Please follow the links to read them and then attempt to accept it all as routine and forgettable. The denial involved here is so deep historically it is almost reflexive.

The image above was taken in the early 60s by my father. The subject is the flour packing contest of our town's annual festival which included a day

of indigenous contests at the lake with the reserve. At the time I recall being transfixed with the physical effort of carrying 100-pound bags of flour with the champions hitting the 700-800 pound mark. The small Union Jack was fitting as a reference to a tour several decades later to the Northwest Company Fort in Thunder Bay, Ontario. This is a living museum with actors taking on the roles of the indigenous people, the British colonists with the social differences between them. The fort was a central processing center for the removal of felt from beaver pelts which was pressed into sheets for shipment via Montreal to England where the felt was spun into the black top hats that graced Georgian gentlemen. The brute work of hauling those pelts and other furs fell to the indigenous people and the flour packing replicates what it may have been like. Trade routes extended deep into the country, several provinces in. This period of enterprise saw the beginning of the Metis people along these trade routes and perhaps the end of shared living in what quickly became the country with warfare, blankets carrying disease, alcohol, the execution of Riel and residential schools polluted relations to the point of segregation and the reserve system. Reconciliation and land rights resolutions have begun to address issues here and throughout the Commonwealth and the nations touched by colonialism.

The issue looking forward is the fact that mankind will no longer have the advantage of time in dealing with issues. In just a few years the compound impact of climate change has resulted in thousands of extinctions, trillions in damages and the serious destruction of much of a continent. Governing has become less about confronting the current reality than readdressing the work of the previous administration. The President of the United States faces impeachment and yet along with a lot of golf has the time to announce (on her birthday) a roll back of former First Lady Michelle Obama's nutrition guidelines for school lunches ordering his

preference for burgers and pizza, the very junk food they were intended to avoid. Social programs and especially social programs involving children and youth become immediate victims in such governments and have across the so called first world. This reach for absolute power, for structural policies that favour the wealthy and restrict the poor, the vulnerable and the right ethnic group suggests a self-serving response to crisis rather than dealing with it. Globally, humanity has the communications capacity, the manpower and the ingenuity to set goals, realize goals and review to address climate change. Many are working on it now, but their efforts are blurred by 'official government policy' and the constant 24/7 'noise' that passes for news. And still, racism persists here in Canada with a major bank handcuffing a 12-year-old over opening a bank account [5] and in the United States a TSA agent can disrespect an indigenous woman's braids [6] While the adults continue on being stymied into a persistent statistical 50/50 split that renders them useless it falls to girls to speak plain truth. Autumn Peltier, Canada's youth activist, also in Davos echoes Greta stating: "I just feel being a youth we are not as heard as we can be." [7]

If being a youth care practitioner has taught me anything, it is to listen to the young person and/or help them find the words to speak. Yes, young people do not have a clue about holding down a job, paying a mortgage, a car loan, and putting food on the table yet they do have a luxury with that to see insights denied others. When I was 15 I knew the smelter smoke pouring out of our ore processing company in town was killing off forests for miles along its prevailing wind trails. It was not our place to be

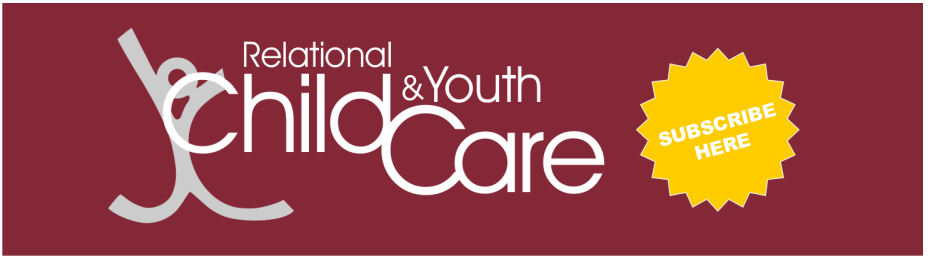
[5] https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/12-year-old-indigenous-girl-recounts-handcuffing-at-bmo-1.5433662

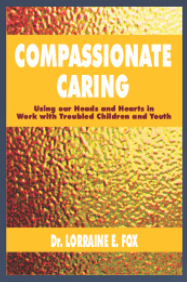
[6] https://www.cnn.com/2020/01/16/us/tsa-giddy-up-native-american-woman-trnd/index.html

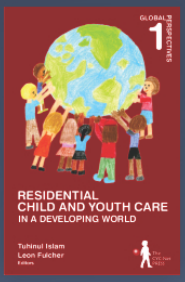
[7] https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/autumn-peltier-thunberg-davos-1.5435091

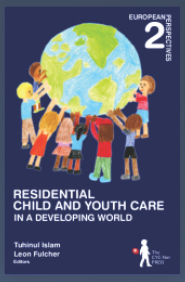
concerned. A lifetime on I have to accept that all that enterprise of mining, milling and smelting ore was pumping pollution over 100 years or so contributing to the present crisis. Similarly, indigenous people were segregated to their reserve, roughly twenty miles away in a separate world. The jig is up, it is time to fix this. The times call for resilience, forgiveness, collaboration and acceptance by all, for all.

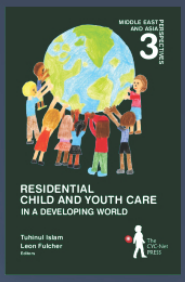
GARTH GOODWIN *spent his 41-year career in both practice and as a database designer and administrator. In over 30 years of frontline practice he worked for both public/board and private agencies. He was the first recipient of the National Child and Youth Care Award in 1986. He nurtured the Child and Youth Care Workers Association of Manitoba through its formative years and became its representative to the Council of Canadian Child and Youth Care Associations. He has been privileged to be the witness and participant in significant events in CYC history and remains an active observer in the field of CYC.*

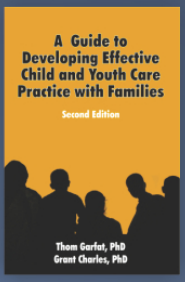


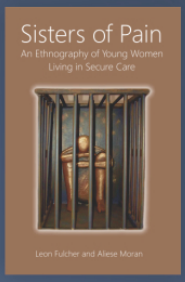


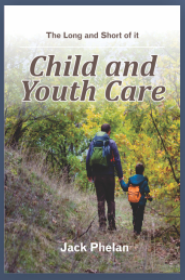


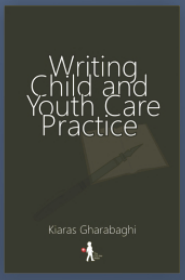












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Postcard from Leon Fulcher

Waitangi, New Zealand

Kia Ora Whanau – Warm greetings to all engaged in the world of child and youth care work! February is a very special month in the New Zealand calendar when attention focuses on the signing of our founding document of nationhood – The Treaty of Waitangi. Celebrations of protest and nationhood often take on special meaning in each election year, with all political parties seeking Maori support.

It is important to note how New Zealand became a British colony and not the French Novelle Zealande in 1840. In order to declare sovereignty over 'foreign countries' outside Europe, it was necessary to first establish settlements. The French established a settlement at Akaroa, near Christchurch in the South Island. The British offered Maori Chiefs citizenship under Queen Victoria and in so doing, they 'settled' the New Zealand through the device of a Treaty. It is reasonable to say that the English and Maori versions of the Treaty left much open to interpretation between Treaty partners.

New Zealand's Treaty of Waitanti is always with us!

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

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ISSN 1605-7406
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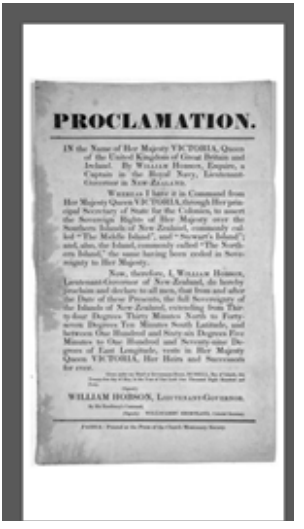
During the second half of the 19th century, Māori lost control over most of their lands, sometimes through legitimate sale but often due to unfair land-deals or through outright confiscations at the end of 'the New Zealand Wars' of 1845-1872. In the period following the New Zealand Wars, the New Zealand government mostly ignored the Treaty.

The setting in New Zealand's Northland where the first Treaty signatures were given

Then, in an 1877 court judgement in the case of Wi Parata vs The Bishop of Wellington, Judge Prendergast who oversaw proceedings concluded that the Treaty of Waitangi was 'worthless' because it had been signed between a civilised nation and a group of savages' not capable of signing a treaty.

From the 1950s onwards, Māori have used the Treaty as a platform for re-claiming rights to sovereignty and to reclaim lost land. New Zealand governments in the 1960s and 1970s



PROCLAMATION.

IN the Name of Her Majesty VICTORIA, Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. By WILLIAM HOBSON, Esquire, a Captain in the Royal Navy, Lieutenant-Governor in New-Zealand.

WHEREAS I have it in Command from Her Majesty Queen VICTORIA, through Her principal Secretary of State for the Colonies, to assert the Sovereign Rights of Her Majesty over the Northern Islands of New-Zealand, commonly called "The Middle Island", and "Stewart's Island"; and, also, the Island, commonly called "The Northern Island," the same having been ceded in Sovereignty to Her Majesty.

Now, therefore, I, WILLIAM HOBSON, Lieutenant-Governor of New-Zealand, do hereby proclaim and declare to all men, that from and after the Date of these Presents, the full Sovereignty of the Islands of New-Zealand, extending from Thirty-four Degrees Thirty Minutes North to Forty-seven Degrees Ten Minutes South Latitude, and between One Hundred and Sixty-six Degrees Five Minutes to One Hundred and Seventy-nine Degrees of East Longitude, vests in Her Majesty Queen VICTORIA, Her Heirs and Successors for ever.

WILLIAM HOBSON, LIEUTENANT-GOVERNOR.

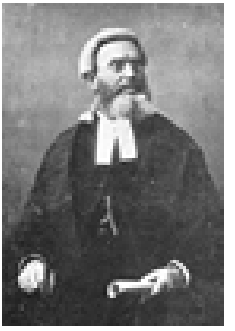
The Treaty of Waitangi formalities as signed in 1840

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

February 2020
ISSN 1605-7406

responded to these arguments, giving the Treaty an increasingly central role in the interpretation of land rights and relations between Māori people and the state.

In 1975 the New Zealand Parliament passed the Treaty of Waitangi Act that established the Waitangi as a permanent commission of inquiry tasked with interpreting the Treaty, researching breaches of the Treaty by the British Crown or its agents, and suggesting means of redress. In most cases, Tribunal recommendations are not binding on the Crown, but settlements totaling almost $1 billion have been awarded to various Māori groups since the Treaty was recognized, not as a matter of law but as guiding principles forming the foundations of nationhood.



Supreme Court Chief Justice Prendergast influenced Treaty decisions for decades

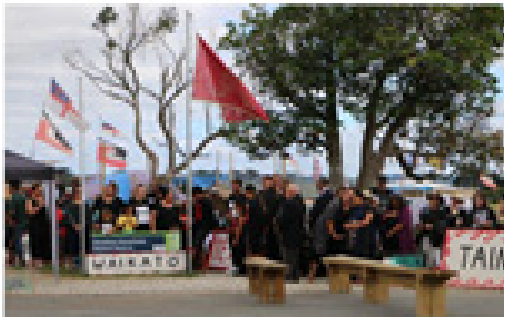
The setting in New Zealand's Northland where the first Treaty signatures were given

Each year at Waitangi, there are re-enactments of historical features of the Treaty signing. Some locations on the site are reserved for formal celebrations

while another location is generally used to raise political arguments that advocates say requires government action in the coming year.

A current issue in South Auckland is almost guaranteed to generate political discussion at Waitangi this year. It concerns an old quarry where stone was extracted to build much of Auckland. As the site was sold to a major New Zealand contractor to build a major housing development, the issue of confiscated lands has returned to contemporary debate.

Re-enactments of Maori arriving at Waitangi for the Treaty signing



A current issue facing Treaty Celebration concerns confiscated land at Ihumātao

The current Māori King of Aotearoa New Zealand, Kiingi Tūheitia has played a key role in the Ihumātao negotitions and in recent days, he and

his entourage have returned to collect the King's Flag that has flown over the site occupation blocking building equipment. It would seem that progress with negotiations have continued with the Maori MPs and the Kingitanga leaders to find resolution in time for a Treaty of Waitangi announcement on 6 February. New Zealanders watch these developments with interest as we approach another general election – held every three years!

Maori self-determination is now a prominent feature of New Zealand life

Information

Publishers

CYC-Online (ISSN 1605-7406) is an open-access e-journal published monthly by The CYC-Net Press

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

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CYC-Online is a monthly journal which reflects the activities of the field of Child and Youth Care. We welcome articles, pieces, poetry, case examples and general reflections from everyone.

In general:

- 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
- We are open to alternative presentations such as poems, artwork, photography, etc.

Articles can be submitted to the email address below for consideration.
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CYC-Online
e-Journal of the International Child and Youth Care Network (CYC-Net)

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ISSN 1605-7406

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

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