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SPECIAL ISSUE
Child & Youth Care
The First Few Years

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

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Thoughts on the Articles in this Issue

Jack Phelan

There are some wonderful descriptions of the awkward first years of becoming a mature CYC practitioner in these seven articles, each written by people who have passion for the field and a clear desire to inform others to make the path forward more comprehensible. Hopefully every reader will see familiar dynamics and encouraging support for the journey we have undertaken. Michele Briegel urges the new worker to build support by connecting with other CYC practitioners through joining professional groups, finding mentors and learning better approaches through using CYC resources, including this web site. Emily Carty describes the difficult journey she had realizing that experiential practice is more meaningful for her than a counseling approach, but that articulating her job of being an experience arranger (Phelan, 2015) was awkward. Johnnie Gibson relied on the wisdom of David Wills, a brilliant British practitioner from the 70's, to build the foundation of his practice. He also quite accurately describes the need to be a life-long learner and curious bookstore customer to find great ideas. Matty Hillman explores the role of CYC educator and the contradictions and challenges inherent in working in the classroom while trying to support relational practice learning. Stephanie King depicts the isolation of some school-based CYC positions and that the need for collaboration, training and support can be difficult to access as a new worker. Brenna Thompson struggled with believing that she needed to be competent beyond her years, referencing Ben Anderson-Nathe, *The Myth of Super Competence*, as she dealt with an unfortunately inevitable event, the death of a young woman, as a new practitioner. Finally, Ruby Whitelaw



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demonstrates the amount of preparation and ongoing reading that a new practitioner can use effectively in learning the complexities of our field.

I am struck by a few themes that emerge through these stories of professional coming of age. There is a powerful emotional response to engaging in CYC practice that each author describes as an attraction to the work that confirms something inside the self that is almost immediately understood. Then there is a period of confusion and doubt as daily events seem to challenge and block this initial energy, which creates the need for better information and validation, usually found in mentors and the CYC literature.

Finally, I was struck by the belief that each new practitioner had that they should be fully competent almost immediately, usually beyond any reasonable professional expectation. My work on studying professional development suggests that it takes 10,000 hours of practice to achieve the competence of a mature practitioner, yet these descriptions by our authors suggest that all felt disappointed as new workers because they fell short of an unrealistic personal standard.

In my informal discussions with long-term, competent CYC practitioners, we all agree on one thing, our first ten years were filled with rookie mistakes.

I have written about the development process that all new practitioners experience (Phelan, 1990, 2017), with the first year almost completely consumed with a struggle to achieve the ability to build safe places for oneself first, and then the youth and families being served. Until the new CYC practitioner can construct a safe environment to practice within, there is little opportunity to engage in relational endeavors. People who have little CYC experience do not appreciate the complexity and struggle of the initial year of practice and the inability to implement some of the more elegant approaches which seem so possible in the classroom. Then there is the paradox of letting go of the focus on safety, because it becomes the background, replaced by the new foreground of handing over agency and control to the youths since that is how change occurs, and relational practice is the methodology used. There are two more advanced levels of development which occur over several years where relational and developmental CYC sophistication



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become embedded in daily encounters, but this requires ongoing experience, competent supervision and increasing knowledge. The reason that it takes at least five years to become really competent is obvious once you have developed to this point, but new practitioners have difficulty being patient and focused on where they are, wanting, as we all do, to be as helpful as possible as soon as possible.

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The Secret of Caring for Life: Zhuangzi and CYC

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Life has a limit but knowledge has none. If you use what is limited to pursue what has no limit, you will be in danger. If you understand this and still strive for knowledge, you will be in danger for certain.

– Zhuangzi

As I reflect on the first few years I spent in the field from the vantage point of what is quickly becoming my old age, I am increasingly struck by how little I understood then and how little I still understand now. I have always had a tendency, like my friend and colleague Mark Krueger to have a philosophical bent to my reflections on my life and work, and that has only increased with age. Perhaps it is because, as Deleuze and Guattari suggest in their powerful book *What is Philosophy*, that “The question ‘what is philosophy?’ can perhaps only be posed later in life, with the arrival of old age and the time for speaking concretely. It is a question posed in a moment of quiet restlessness, at midnight, when there is no longer anything to ask.” (p. 1) Possibly, it is only with the arrival of old age and the time for speaking concretely that I can reflect on the question of ‘what is child and youth care.’

Isabelle Stengers, in her essay on Deleuze and Guattari’s book, tells us that it is useful to distinguish between a weary book and an old age book. I would suggest that, perhaps, a weary book occurs in a moment of resignation when one feels a



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certain nostalgia or resentment over what has transpired during one's life work. An old age book on the other hand holds no resentment or nostalgia but proposes reflection as a vehicle to elucidate what has yet to be said or done. In a sense, to engage the future through a reflection that isn't possible when one is busy doing it all. As Stengers states –

Determining the value is thus not coming back to the past, in order to elucidate it. Reaching the point where you can ask, “what is it I have done all my life?” is reaching the point where “my life” becomes “a life”, with all the terms of the series coexisting and resonating together as they escape the times and circumstances that marked each of them.

It is in this spirit that I wish to engage a reflection on my early years in CYC work. Of course, I could give an autobiographical sketch of my first few years. I could talk about where I worked, how I got my first position, what my first day was like, who I worked with, and how I experienced myself in the beginning. But I have done that elsewhere and will leave that accounting to other writings and other talks. Here I want to get a bit more to what I consider the heart of the matter. That is, the quality of the work as a sheer affirmation of living force; as a practice of caring for life.

In the writings attributed to the Taoist philosopher Zhuangzi, there is a section that is translated as “The Secret of Caring for Life.” In this chapter, Zhuangzi tells the story of Cook Ting who was preparing an ox for cooking. He describes the way the cook easily removes the meat from the bone in a perfect rhythm. He describes the movements of the cook as a kind of dancing. When questioned about how he does this, the cook replies, “What I care about is the Way, which goes beyond skill.”

Of course, when reading this as a reflection on CYC I am reminded of Mark Krueger's description of the best CYC practice as a kind of dance; a mutually shared set of rhythmic interactions between the worker and the young person.



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But, there is dancing and then there is dancing. We dance in many different ways depending on the context. Sometimes our dancing is a free and full expression of joy and affirmation. Other times, it is a vehicle for releasing anger, pain and frustration. Yet other times it is a ritual prescribed by a set context, such as formal ball or a wedding. In some dancing, we lose ourselves in what Thom Garfat calls the rhythmicity of the relationship. Other times we feel constrained and awkward, bound by the steps we have struggled to master.

When cook Ting says he seeks the Way that goes beyond skill, he is describing what I would call a life work. Life work is premised in an acknowledgment that the life we express as living beings is infinite in capacity. No matter how much we learn, how many skills we develop, how many steps in the dance we learn to master, there is always more. To engage in CYC as a life art is to understand it is never about mastery of any given skill, it is about the mastery of the process of living per se.

In the early days of my work in CYC I didn't understand this. I thought that if I read enough books and articles, learned enough technique, and studied with the best practitioners, I could become truly adept at the work. Of course, I wasn't entirely wrong. The more aspects of life one takes on board, the richer the palette one has for creating our work as a life art. But, it isn't about a set of techniques or interventions. It isn't about being a powerful agent for change, or a super helper, or god forbid a savior of children. In fact, it isn't really about young people at all, although it is those relations that form the grist of the life art that is CYC. It isn't about young people, because that implies a separation of self and other that interferes with the art of CYC practice as a field of ecological creativity; a dance in which we lose ourselves and our partners in the beauty of moving together as one. It is what Garfat refers to as a kind of mutuality that occurs between us, not within either of us.

It took me a long time to understand this and I still struggle to live it day today. In the early days I was struck with the power of the work we did. How much we could help to change the young people we encountered. I was enamored of change



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and the interventions I thought I was making in young people's lives. Cook Ting describes this by saying –

When I first began cutting up oxen, all I could see was the ox itself. After three years I no longer saw the whole ox. And now-I go at it by spirit and don't look with my eyes. Perception and understanding have come to a stop and spirit moves where it wants. I go along with the natural makeup.

In the early days all I could see was young people, their problems, diagnoses, and developmental stages. As time went on I learned to see young people, their problems, their developmental stages and their resiliency. Further on, I learned to see young people and their strengths and developmental stages. Even later, I learned to see young people and their capacities. It took me many years to stop seeing young people and to see myself. Once I began to see myself, then I quit trying to understand young people and began the process of joining in the dance. I began to seriously investigate the flow and rhythm of living force as the purpose of my work in CYC. I want to be clear, I am not interested in any kind of spiritual, other worldly or non-bodily reading of CYC. Instead, I mean the way that things move in what Jack Phelan calls life space work. Pragmatic, as down to earth as cutting up an ox.

When I first entered CYC, I worked very hard. As time went on, I hardly worked at all. There is very little work in CYC as a life art. Cook Ting states that,

A good cook changes his knife once a month-because he hacks. I've had this knife of mine for nineteen years and I've cut up thousands of oxen with it and yet the blade is as good as it has just come from the grindstone. The spaces between the joints and the blade of the knife really has no thickness. If you insert what has no thickness into such spaces, then there is plenty of room for the blade to paly about in.



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In the early days of my CYC work, I was determined to do well. I felt that if I could assert my will to succeed and worked very hard I would be successful. I was taught that many of the clients I would encounter would not want to change. They would be resistant to certain understandings of themselves and pathologically attached to their unhealthy life patterns. Part of my job was to break through their denial to help to them find a healthier and more integrated self. This I found to be very hard work. But, I also found that there was immense ego gratification in breaking through. It was exhilarating. However, on the other side of the exhilaration was a bit of a let-down and I found myself looking for more breakthroughs. It was, in its own way a bit of an addiction. A kind of colonial conquest of the other, a sort of missionary work in which I was seeking to bring others into the light. Exciting at first, but also a pretty good recipe for burning out.

Then, I stumbled on Steve de Shazer's article "The Death of Resistance." Regrettably, I don't see it taught or written about much anymore, but in it de Shazer argues that the idea of resistance is a significant impediment to good practice. He says that when people appear to be resistant, what they are really doing is asking that we not work with them in a particular way. They are asking us to find another approach or avenue. In short, they are assisting us in finding new and creative ways to work.

Like Cook Ting, de Shazer suggest that we look for the spaces between, rather than hack away at the obstacle until it gives way. De Shazer says that working with someone is like being in a maze blindfolded. Rather than attempting to bash through to the center or the exit, one might instead feel ones way gently along until one finds an opening and then move easily through to the next corridor and so on. Cook Ting states –

When I come to a complicated place, I size up the difficulties, tell myself to watch out and be careful, keep my eyes on what I am doing, work very slowly, and move the knife with greatest subtlety until, flop! The whole thing comes apart like a clod of earth crumbling to the ground. I



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stand there holding the knife and looking all around me, completely satisfied and reluctant to move on, and then I wipe off the knife and put it away.

When I was first beginning in this field, I had very little idea about how to handle complicated and difficult encounters. My tendency was to respond with technique and to be frustrated if that didn't work. I often felt an urgency to what I wanted to do and as result tended to rush things. I seldom paused to reflect or to savor any rich and satisfying interactions because I was driven to the next one and the next after that.

It took me a while to realize that some of best teachers were sometimes the least noticed staff, cooks and other CYC's who appeared to do very little. They took their time and seemed to really enjoy simple interactions. To cook with young people, to talk casually, joke and banter, to hang out. I noticed that when things got complicated or tense on the floor, these workers would slow down while everyone else was increasing their frantic efforts to fix things. They watched more than acted so that when they acted their actions truly mattered. Their work was not particularly complicated – in fact, it looked simple. Until you tried to mimic it.

It was in the early days that I had the opportunity to be mentored by one of the founders of brief family therapy John Weakland. John was an amazing teacher whose suggested solutions to very complex problems somehow always seemed to be remarkably simple and elegant. He had a capacity for paying a kind of very deep attention. I asked him once what advice he would give beginners and he said first, go slow to get going and two, shut up and pay attention. It has taken me many years to begin to understand the depth of these two simple statements and I am still not all that good at either one. But CYC is a life art. It was hard for me in the early years to remember that CYC takes all the life you have but gives back all the life there is ... if you let it.



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Focus on The New Practitioner

Jack Phelan

The first year of practice is typically quite turbulent for CYC practitioners. There is an intense orientation which is usually too brief and inadequate to prepare the new staff member for the reality of engaging in life space work with uncooperative and impulsive people.

Becoming a skilled capable care giver involves mastering three basic dynamics. Primary is the focus on personal safety, which includes both fear of injury and fear of being seen as incompetent. The second focus is on establishing an adult persona to create a confident helper image that is more than being a friendly face or a slightly more knowledgeable person but is really a competent resource for the other person to rely on. The third issue is to acquire skills in external control and behavior management so that a safe environment can be established and maintained. These three dynamics are the overall agenda for the first year of supervision.

The basic dynamic that drives this stage is the issue of *safety* and the need of the new worker to manage her own anxiety. This is a fundamental step in professional development that lasts for 12-15 months for the new worker. CYC practitioners who work in the life space are very quickly exposed to a seemingly overwhelming onslaught of stimuli, most of which seems out of their control. Residential program practitioners feel great anxiety for the initial

three months of practice, trying to control for all the ingredients in the life space of admittedly impulsive and hard to manage young people, while family workers struggle with trying to get comfortable in visiting chaotic family homes which are often in disarray because of a recent or persistent crisis. School-based CYC practitioners are charged with creating cooperation and compliance in young



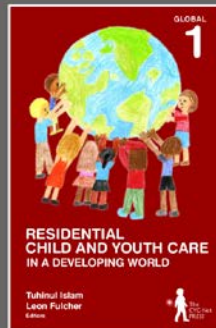
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people whom the system is obviously failing, and community youth workers are expected to work in desperate neighborhoods where they are clearly not welcome. The first level of anxiety is fear of physical harm, but this is quickly followed by fear of being exposed as incompetent. There is also anxiety about doing or not doing something that may be harmful to the youths or families. This anxiety creates a focus on self that makes it very difficult for the new worker to be tuned in to the needs of the person he is trying to help, despite his avowed intentions. New CYC practitioners describe every interaction and experience very personally, (i.e. how they are affected), not how the other person is experiencing things. This safety concern is a major agenda for the supervisor of Level I staff.

The next major task for the competent care giver is to establish an adult persona, so that she is seen by the youth or family as a competent adult, who has resources and skills that are helpful. Many new staff are relatively young and just entering adulthood, so this may be a developmental challenge for them. Generally, older new hires have less trouble with this, but it is always an issue for a while. Becoming friendly quickly and not appearing too authoritative seems to be a useful strategy to new staff who are anxious about confrontations, but this approach

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backfires fairly soon. Basically, the people we are trying to help do not need the worker to be their friend, they need someone who can create trust in her ability to be helpful. Supervisors need to encourage younger staff to appear older, not more like a contemporary, and to trust in the program and the team of staff to support them to be a useful resource.

Finally, behavior management is an important early skill to be mastered by new staff because, until a safe environment is established, no change will occur. Family support workers must manage the chaotic dynamics in some households, school-based practitioners need to create a safe presence for themselves in the parking lot and playground, community youth workers have to manage navigating within dangerous neighborhoods before they can do anything useful.

This behavioral focus is a strong emphasis for Level I practitioners, because no trust will exist when people are not confident that you can handle them and the often messy situations that arise. (Phelan, J. 2017 *Intentional CYC Supervision*, pp 10-11) This very uncomfortable early experience of being in life space practice gets forgotten fairly quickly as practitioners mature and develop skills, but it is a critical period in each person's professional development.



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My First Few Years in Children's Rights

Tara M. Collins

My first few years of experience with children's rights were all-encompassing, challenging and inspiring. When I began, I had no idea that this was it: my life's calling!

I was determined to serve people in my career and after my master's degree, I decided that I needed a job in my chosen field of human rights. I gave myself the summer the chance to find that job while serving tables at a restaurant. As I had spent a lot of time working with children at summer camp, volunteered during my undergraduate degree directly supporting others including a child's literacy in a reading program and an all-night van for young people on the streets of downtown Montreal, I was thrilled that I ended up with a job at a national non-governmental organization: the Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children. On July 1, I moved to Ottawa for a part-time job of three days a week and started the job as Coalition Administrator the following day. This organization was created to promote and monitor the Convention on the Rights of the Child in Canada. (See further <http://rightsofchildren.ca/>) At that time, there were approximately 50 national NGOs and professional associations that were members including the Canadian Teachers' Federation, Canadian Association of Social Workers, Canadian Child Care Federation, UNICEF-Canada and Save the Children Canada among others. This work involved a whole range of responsibilities including administration, policy and programming work, proposal writing, advocacy, research and eventually overseeing and training interns. Within a week and a half, I had a full-time job because I got involved in the Coalition's research project on developing a framework for monitoring children's rights (being full-time, even with a low daily salary, definitely helped when paying my rent and buying the groceries!)



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I worked in the Coalition’s office on the third floor of the YM-YWCA in central Ottawa. There were numerous other offices including Experience Canada, a federal government youth employment organization, Child Welfare League of Canada, its Canadian Resource Centre for Children and Youth, and Adoption Canada. It was a stimulating place to be surrounded by local, national and international issues and such dedicated people.

Soon after I started, a child and youth participation coordinator started a new Coalition project for several months and I learned about the challenges of supporting meaningful participation. I supported work with young people in relation to children’s rights. After involvement in youth issues including participation in 1998 in the World Youth Forum and on the Canadian delegation for the first ever World Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth (so exciting!), I got involved in ultimately unsuccessful efforts to start a national youth council. Child and youth participation is an issue that continues to drive some of my work in relation to children’s rights.

There were different challenges in the early years. I ran the office by myself for much of my three years there and there were many days that I ate my breakfast, lunch and dinner at work since there was so much to do all the time! (This is probably more a reflection of my workaholic tendencies as well as the love of my work!) One somewhat terrifying memory was walking to work during the ice-storm of January 1998 in Ottawa, hoping that I would get there safely and that no massive trees or branches would fall on me (as they littered the roads and sidewalks) as I had a looming project deadline. The many winter days before the building heating turned on or was insufficient proved to be physically difficult because there were many days in my three years of work there that I had to wear my winter coat, hat, scarf and gloves while typing at my computer because the building was so cold!

I learned that children’s rights involved a lot of trials in practice. That most people think it is “nice” to work on behalf of children (not necessarily understanding that it could also be *with* them too). That many people believe



strongly that children “over there” need their human rights respected, and the importance of speaking up to them to stress that children all over Canada need this respect too. My heart would break a little each time that I got phone calls at the Coalition due to concerns about individual children usually in schools when their voices were ignored. I learned about the importance of advocacy in relation to individual children as well as necessity of addressing systemic issues related to children.

There were so many other lessons as well. I learned about the roles and functions of various actors in society by working with them in various capacities: children and youth, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), government at different levels (municipal, provincial and federal), which is also known as “the other side” in the NGO world. I met so many interesting people including the Honourable Landon Pearson, a major children’s rights champion, who terrified me at our first meeting in her office on Parliament Hill, who later became an important mentor and valued friend. I was surprised too that I couldn’t quell the questions that I generated and kept bouncing around in my head. They had to be answered



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and this task led to my PhD. For instance, I wondered what is monitoring and why is it significant? Why did the child rights sector focus only on the Convention on the Rights of the Child and what did the rest of the international legal framework have to offer? What opportunities for supporting children were there at national, regional and international levels? I wondered how to make monitoring meaningful to children and youth and others and the implications of how it is approached. I found it curious how few people know about children's rights, how they are not just legal concerns, and that lawyers (including many of our politicians and public servants) generally do not know about international law, highlighting the role of advocacy. I also realized that it is critical to pay attention not only to specific groups or individual young people and the various issues that concern them, but also to the procedural means of how to support them including monitoring, child and youth advocates and ombudspersons, budgeting, child rights education, and coordination of efforts across actors and institutions.

During this time, I got involved as a Big Sister and met "Johanne" (a pseudonym). A beautiful Francophone 15 year-old who was the first person in care of the state matched by the Big Sisters program in Ottawa. She had various life experiences that I don't think that anyone should have to go through. But we connected and really enjoyed our time together whether at my home baking, going on outings or preparing for Christmas parties. There were also difficult times that we had to navigate due to group home changes and conflict with the law. She helped me learn the importance of hanging in and meeting her where she was at no matter her behaviours or difficulties. Unfortunately, she is no longer a part of my regular life but she remains in my thoughts and heart forever.

In conclusion, my first few years in children's rights were intense, stimulating and created the course for my life that I continue to follow. I am deeply grateful for my instrumental introduction to the rights framework and to everyone with whom I worked and collaborated back then as well as those I engage with now in the world of children's rights.



The First Few Years in a Journey to Finding my Sense of Self

Emily Carty

The career path of an Outdoor Youth Worker is often winding and unplanned. Each outdoor program is fairly unique in design and focus. Outdoor professionals often view themselves as guides, instructors, leaders, programmers, and on the rare occasion, Child and Youth Care practitioners. My journey in becoming a CYC practitioner had me questioning my sense of self and my choice of profession.

I entered the Child and Youth Care world through Outdoor Education, with a degree in Sociology and lots of outdoor experience. As an outdoor professional, I often found myself so focused on the present – constantly wondering how to keep myself and the participants dry, warm, and fed while in the wilderness, that I rarely had time to think about my future. Whenever the short contracts ended, I sought my next thrill, jumping to another challenging contract, learning on the go.

When my outdoor experience led me to become an Outdoor Educator, I thought that I had found my life's calling. I found a job that combined my passions of playing, adventuring, mentoring, and connecting. Many outdoor professionals work extremely long days, receiving a per diem that equals a few dollars an hour, and yet this was the happiest group of leaders I have ever shared experiences with. My supervisors were passionate, leading hour-long debriefs of our experiences; no one was watching the time, as our hearts felt full of excitement and passion.

A mentor of mine guided me in the direction of supporting teenagers who seemed to have complex, yet fascinating histories and life stories. My introduction to outdoor education as a bubbly leader, creating fairly superficial relationships



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over a few short days of camping was long forgotten, replaced by the connection of supporting youth who would open up their lives to me. My joy and passion was still there, but my emotions were riddled with fear, concern, hurt, and sadness. This was a new way of experiencing life in the wilderness, and a new life of adventure for myself. The connections I had made from the months spent camping with the youth we were supporting felt genuine. After a few years of learning on the job, I wanted more. I wanted to learn new ways of thinking and being with the youth I was supporting. I was surrounded by passionate outdoor professionals, and our high energy and easy-going ways were often not enough to support the youth in our care.

My desire to return to school was not about the desire for a degree, but about my passion to continue to grow and learn. I was not thinking about the possibilities of new jobs. Instead I wanted to hone my skills and knowledge, to return and continue supporting youth in the wilderness program. I was eager to bring Child and Youth Care to the outdoor industry. I began my journey as an MA student in the University of Victoria's CYC program.

The first days of an MA student can be very intimidating, surrounded by intelligent, experienced professionals. Our professors led conversations about our hopes and goals as practitioners and students, and our ever-daunting thesis topic. I listened as my classmates, whom I later learned felt as uncomfortable and unsure as I did, spoke about wanting to become counsellors after completing the MA in CYC. When my turn came I mustered courage and said that I wanted to continue to work front-line for a while. That seemed to satisfy my professor, but I wondered why I felt so uncomfortable saying that I wanted to work front-line? Is that not the basis of Child and Youth Care? Did I really feel like it was less of a profession while surrounded by people about to graduate with an MA in CYC? Should my goal be to become a counsellor?

My discomfort grew and changed throughout my time at University. As expected I was challenged and grew as a person; however, my job choice post-graduation became more uncertain as time went on.

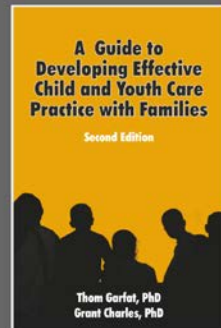
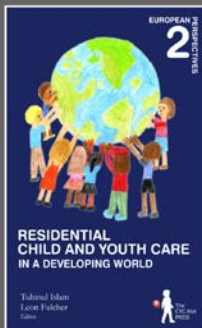


While in the MA program I took a 4th year CYC course on Mental Health. With an undergraduate degree in Sociology, I had yet to take a course on mental health, and I was excited about the opportunity. Throughout the course I continued to develop an insecure sense of self, primarily based on my “status” as a graduate student. My thoughts spiraled. Wanting to justify my position in the course, wanting to be proud to be learning, I was quiet, never speaking up in class, worried that my classmates and professor would expect more from me, more wisdom, more knowledge.

My insecurities stretched into the field. While working on my MA, I worked front line at group homes, outreach programs, and a youth shelter. I loved these jobs, they were exciting and challenging, and I continued to learn. All the while I was uncomfortable telling my colleagues that I was in school for my MA in CYC, while my classmates held the more prestigious Teaching Assistant positions.

I was eventually convinced by my cohort’s eagerness for counselling, that a counselling practicum was the best way to advance myself, and I by no means wanted to shut the door on becoming a counsellor if that was the ideal position for

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me. I found a nature-based counselling program that provided longer, more natural-feeling (outdoor and physically active) sessions with clients. By the end of my eight months I realized that direct counselling was not a role I felt very comfortable with.

Nonetheless, after graduation I applied to a counselling job at an outdoor program in BC. I was eager and ready for the challenge, or so I thought. When the interview came, they had said they appreciated all my outdoor experience, but they had never actually heard of Child and Youth Care before and had to look it up. I was frustrated in that moment, thinking again I had taken the wrong degree program. They asked a lot about my counselling techniques and theories which I was not as certain about. I spoke highly of CYC and realized I was selling them on the fact that I build relationships through life-spaced intervention and that really, I was an ideal candidate for their much lower paying job, as a front-line professional. I felt defeated.

I returned to Ontario and worked a contract which I had worked in my early days of Outdoor Education. Working for less than minimum wage, surrounded by people much like myself, who were accepting and understanding of my uncertainty of the direction my life would lead. We were living in the moment, with joy in our hearts. What we were forgetting was that those “moments” would end.

Once the Outdoor Education season was over, I returned to Toronto with nowhere to live and no job in sight. I knew I did not want to be a counsellor, and for a few months I did not even want to tell people I had an MA. It did not take long to feel deflated, and my self-talk was a broken record of questions. Who is a Master at supporting Children and Youth? What does that even mean? Look at all these wonderful people who have 30-40 years of experience who are managing programs. Who am I to think I have anything worthy to add? Should I go back to school and get an MA in Social Work instead? Is working front-line all that bad?

I fortunately have very supportive parents who were both, at some point in time, in the CYC profession. Growing up I could feel my father’s passion for CYC radiate down on us, as he very proudly called himself a Child and Youth Care practitioner. I was having a very difficult time finding that pride.



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Working front-line in the Outdoor field was a difficult job to maintain. Emotional support was kilometers away, and often only accessible through a spotty satellite phone. A shift could be 8-10 days long, making them physically and emotionally taxing. As “luck” would have it, one of the coveted management jobs in the Outdoor Youth Work field surfaced a few months later. For the first time in years I felt comfortable with who I was. I could bring my passion for front-line practice to outdoor practitioners who, much like previous myself, had not had the training CYC practitioners receive in school. While supporting the strong Outdoor Adventure Youth Workers, I realized then that my passion all along had been Child and Youth Care. I recognized that I enjoy day to day successes, the in-between moments, the time often required to build a trusting relationship. I enjoy conversations with youth that do not always have to dive deep into their pasts, the laughs we share when we are canoeing, cooking dinner, or relaxing around the campfire. CYC has a balance of depth and fun, based on our genuine selves.

Since then more has changed in my career, as it will hopefully keep changing, as I change alongside it. My passion and pride for CYC is stronger than ever, working front-line and coordinating services for Bartimaeus has allowed me to recognize CYC as a life-long profession to be proud of. The connection I feel to CYC is amplified through my relationships with my colleagues. When I need passion rejuvenation, I find a way to attend one of the amazing CYC conferences around the world to keep my relationships with other CYC practitioners alive and strong. I still currently work front-line in various settings, and because of my strong sense of self and connection to CYC, I can support young people with the strength and commitment they deserve.



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Reflections: my Practitioner Development

Michelle Briegel

When I reflect on my first few years of child and youth care, I do so with a combination of both fond and also some regretful memories of awkward practice. Over my twenty-five years of practice I learned the value of putting in my time to become a competent and confident child and youth practitioner, as well as the value of child and youth care as an educational discipline, and the importance of having a network to belong to. By transitioning through the stages of practitioner development (Phelan, 2017), engaging in professional child and youth care development education, and becoming part of a larger association of practitioners I was able to move past those awkward early years of self-doubt and external guidance to that of what one might call a seasoned practitioner. Although, I am still far from being the authority on practitioner development I would like to share some of my lessons learned, in hopes that something might resonate with people new to the field and help them along in their journey.

I entered the field in the early 90s with a diploma in Criminology, a major in Corrections, and a focus on youth at risk or in trouble with the law. I entered the field with the intention of becoming a youth probation officer. At the time that I had decided to go to college and choose my career path, my knowledge of jobs that involved working with youth was pretty narrow, but I knew that I was drawn to youth at risk – at risk of what I wasn't really sure, but youth in trouble sounded like a place that I needed to be. I guess, in hindsight, I was drawn to the idea of helping youth get out of trouble or helping them to turn their negative experiences around. To sum it up, I wanted to do work that I knew very little about.

During my time as a college student I had a professor who owned a private group home; this is something that was popular in Alberta the 80s and 90. It was a six-bed



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facility referred to as a long-term group home. This particular professor saw something in me that he thought would make a good youth worker, and he offered me a job. I started work at a six bed, co-ed, long-term group home as a relief worker. I remember having no idea what this meant, other than being ready to show up at a moment's notice. I went to the group home to fill out some paperwork and was scheduled right away for a training shift. My training shift involved spending an evening with the shift supervisor and the other staff on shift, running through the procedures of the home and having the backstory of why each youth was there explained to me. I was given a typed-up manual to read about the rules of the house, some youth files to read, and a set of keys to the group home. I remember being so scared. I had no clue what I was doing and not much training to help me.

I was able to spend the first few shifts working with a small variety of shift partners (five different people that I remember), each that spanned several hours. Spending time with different shift partners was helpful, in that I could see the unique way that each person approached their interactions with the youth in the group home, but I was still feeling incredibly nervous to be with the youth. In hindsight, and with the proper knowledge about the field of child and youth care, what I was feeling was completely normal. Jack Phelan (2017) explains it as the developmental stages of child and youth care practitioners; stating that new practitioners first make sense of their role by adhering closely to the rules. Being rule-bound in this way was very true for me, as it probably is for many others. I needed to stick close to other staff, learn the rules and policies, and stay safe in my black and white thinking. What I failed to realize is that the very black and white, rule-bound thinking that was keeping me safe was also causing me a great deal of grief.

Many of the rules and policies that informed our practice in the early 90s, by today's standards, are poor practice. In hindsight, it was the poor rules and policies that I was holding so strongly to as a new youth worker that caused me much difficulty in relational practice. For example; when a young person acted out behaviourally while in our group home, it was our practice to send them for a timeout. The timeout was supposed to give the young person a chance to reflect on



their behaviour and come up with a way that they would do better next time. Staff would check on the young person after some time in their timeout to see if they were ready to join the group. They were ready to join the group once they were able to explain what they did wrong and what they were going to do differently.

What we did not practice or understand well at the time was the very nature of isolating a young person who is having difficulty regulating their behaviour, with the task of realizing what they did wrong, was a fast way to enter into a power struggle. How can a young person identify what they did wrong, and how they would fix it, if they have not been taught or guided in self-regulation of behaviour or the opportunity to reflect and plan for future events with someone who can give them healthy coping strategies? Much of the time youth have not had consistent role modelling and direction about behaviour and will not know how to do what is asked of them. I knew this felt wrong, but at the time I was not about to stand up to my senior shift partners or program director; nor did I have an alternative solution that I was able to articulate. I was too scared; and so it was best to just follow the rules. Had I received some guidance about asking questions, and challenging ideas, perhaps the outcome would have been different.

Guidance for my criminology education stream was focused more on law and order, offender management, and rehabilitation services. I did not know about concepts such as the Life Space Interview (Redl, 1957) until much later in my career when I was finally introduced to the models and theories specific to child and youth care. It was like a lightbulb going on for me, when I realized that there was an actual discipline and theories that backed up some of the practice and instincts that I already had. Not only did child and youth care specific knowledge validate much of what I was already doing, it also illuminated practice that needed to change at the group home I was working at. Thankfully, around the same time that I was learning about child and youth care as a discipline I was also developing into a more confident practitioner and was able to confidently begin speaking up when I thought something needed to change. Coincidentally, the children's services system of the region I was working in started to shift thinking as well, beginning to adopt a more child and youth care informed policy and practice framework.



As I continued along my growth journey of child and youth care practitioner development I became involved in my provincial child and youth care association. The association provided me with the belonging that I was looking for. It was the place and people that I needed to identify with in order to develop into the seasoned practitioner that I have become today. Associations allow for a collective of practitioners to come together, share knowledge, grow in skill, and promote change in the field of child and youth care. Becoming involved in my association was probably the best thing I did, as it opened many doors to connections and opportunities that I would not have otherwise encountered.

My recommendations for anyone who is new to the field of child and youth care are to first make sure you have a solid base knowledge of child and youth care education. If you do not have a post-secondary education in child and youth care there are ways that you can obtain the knowledge, just get in touch with your supervisor and your child and youth care association and they can guide you in the right direction to find the best options to suit your needs. Second, make sure you align yourself with a strong practitioner at your program and arrange for regular supervision time. Supervision helps you to understand and move through the developmental stages of child and youth care practitioner development. Lastly, become active in your local child and youth care association. If you do not have an association look for another group to become involved with. CYC-Net discussion group is a great place to ask for some guidance with what groups are best to align with; there are several local, national, and international groups that are made up of extremely wise and talented child and youth care practitioners to learn from and with. Of course, CYC-Net online journal is a tremendous resource to grow your knowledge and skill – so keep reading and learning!

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The First Few Years ... The early theoretical building blocks of a residential social worker

Ruby V Whitelaw

For as long as I can remember I wanted to be a social worker; I had no idea what field of social work I wanted to be in, but I knew I wanted to work with teenagers. At the end of 1994 I secured a second job working as a houseparent within a local authority children's home but having challenged the practice of a senior colleague my time there was limited to around 14 weeks. With no training or expertise, I was like a fish out of water relying on my own experiences of being parented and how I parented my own children, then aged 8 and 10 years. We had cash, log books and case note entries, but I don't remember much else about the systems. My focus in this first residential experience was in forming and building relationships with the children who ranged in ages from 5-15 and ensuring that their needs were met. Despite this brief rocky beginning to residential care the dye had been cast and the kids had me hooked.

I started my social science degree in September 1994 moving into the social work programme in 1996, the year I began to work with a large charitable organisation as a residential worker. Some 22 years later I am still there but it is my first two years there that will be the focus of this article. Although I wasn't aware of it then, on reflection there were several resources that have had a significant impact on my practice and approach to the field. Whilst there is a plethora of research articles and text books now relating to residential child care, I still return to the readings that started me on the journey that has resulted in me spending



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almost half my life with children and young people who are accommodated outside the family home in care paid for by their local authority.

The grounding in social science and exceptional theorists such as Marx (Marx, Engles, Moore and McLellan, 1992) who helped me to make sense of structural factors and Weber (Gerth and Mills, 1991) who helped me to understand multiple causality heavily impacted on my belief that behavioural challenges are not simply a young person acting out. Piaget, Freud, Vygotsky and Bandura (Bukatko and Daehler, 1992) helped me to develop a better understanding of child development and books like Vera Fahlberg's 'A Child's Journey Through Placement' (1991) and Barbara Kahan's 'Growing up in Groups' (1994) influenced my practice considerably as they helped me to gain insight into the impact that placement factors can have on the young person's experience of growing up. The former as it identified developmental milestones that had to be achieved, the latter as it made me aware of the secondary needs of young people due to their placement within group care. Bowlby, Mia Kellmer Pringle and Maslow, 1988; Mia Kellmer Pringle, 1978; Bukatko and Daehler, 1992) were fundamental to everything in the worker child relationship as without building healthy attachment relationships I knew I would find it impossible to meet any of the young people's needs including the basic need for safety and security which would form the foundation for all healthy development.

Possibly the first report I read in my early years was Angus Skinner's 'Another Kind of Home' from 1992. He promoted residential care as a positive choice for some groups of children and young people. The values espoused promoted the individual nature of young people and their development, the need to work collaboratively to meet needs and achieve positive outcomes, the need for good basic care, with rights there were responsibilities, the importance of working in partnership with parents and the importance of safety, health and education for a child's development. In practice this resulted in core values that have continued with me to this day. Whilst shy and lacking confidence during my first few months in the job I was encouraged by two mentors that I am eternally grateful for; Mick who was a superb orator and very principled natural leader who encouraged me to



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come out of the shadows and help young people to settle at night by listening to stories and building meaningful relationships and Morag, an experienced educator who took the time to show me the systems, policies and procedures that would help me to achieve more for the young people in my care. Neither of these influencers were managers but both were very experienced night staff workers who had been with the agency for some time.

In 1996/7 we received one lecture in residential child care at university. I can't remember the practitioner, but I do remember his enthusiasm and love for his vocation. Two articles have stuck with me for over twenty years and I have shared them during that time with dozens of my social work students and hundreds of staff. The articles provide insight into the residential task and the first of these appears to have been written for students on placement within the residential setting. CCETSW (1989) 'Residential Social Work. Models of Good Practice' broke the role of the residential worker into team membership, participation, interventions, transitions and networking with anti-discriminatory practice embedded in all aspects of the work. Team membership is about developing relationships and expertise so that you have equal membership within the multi-disciplinary collective, this will in turn be hugely beneficial to the resident group. Participation refers to the life space where you are required to respond sensitively to the needs of the young people, working in partnership, positively role modelling and assessing individual and group needs. A range of interventions needed to be planned and executed in recognition of the complex array of needs within the residential setting. The effective use of transitions meant ensuring that from the outset, which was pre-admission, that appropriate courses of action were taken. Finally, networking was the use of external environments to support the meeting of the young person's needs. Networks would include families, communities and external services. Anti-discriminatory practice was at the core of all social work training in the nineties and recognising factors and challenging stigma and issues that disadvantaged young people was at the heart of my practice and resulted in my involvement in the development of ADP training and policies such as the anti-



bullying one. This is a core value that continues to be evident in my work but let me give an example of some of the other areas highlighted in this article in my early years practice.

One of the first young people I key worked had become so challenging within the placement that he had been moved to a singleton placement on site. I joined the team and he was due to transfer to the independent living unit with me. We had the semblance of a good relationship because of the time I spent with him working weekends which allowed us time and space to get to know each other and build up a trusting relationship. Family addiction issues were endemic and while he consciously tried to avoid repeating this family pattern of behaviour it became a feature within his placement. I built key professional relationships with significant others including my team, his social worker, his Mum and Dad, education colleagues, careers services and the local addictions worker. In those days there wasn't a plethora of resources within my agency for structured interventions but I worked closely with an education manager looking at ASDAN, a skills based learning programme that we wanted to inform part of a Personal Social Education (PSE) programme that I hoped would help my young person to feel of value; he struggled with self-esteem issues. To help us to monitor his addiction issues I kept a rudimentary record so that we could record triggers, flashpoints and remedies. This was reviewed and evaluated on an ongoing basis. Motivation to change wasn't something I was familiar with then and with hindsight this young person was in the pre-contemplative stage and didn't believe he had any issues with addiction.

The second article I have cherished is the CCETSW paper (1983) *Need for a Shared Framework*, this has allowed me to help staff and students make sense of the events and activities involved in residential care. Resulting from the workshop and publications of Ainsworth and Fulcher (1981), it shows what a small world the child and youth care field really is. A distinction is made between direct and indirect care. Direct care has eight aspects: the organised programme specific to the environment so this will include structures, resources, policies and procedures; 'team functioning'; 'activity programming' – a term I continue to use which refers to



how you occupy the young people's time and encouraged me to think educationally and recreationally and recognise that activities can be both fun and educational; 'working with groups', this relates to not only the young people but groups of others; 'on-the-spot counselling' resonates with Ward's opportunity led work (1995); making use of everyday events – allows us to show care for those in our charge as we meet their day to day needs; 'developmental scheduling' provides opportunities for age and stage appropriate learning and growth with staff role modelling and providing hurdle help and encouragement to teach new skills; and individual care planning.

There is considerable cross over in the two articles but the fact that I've kept the hard copy of them both for over twenty years pays testimony to the influence they had on my work practice. My social work course provided two other features that I believe were fundamental in my early years and throughout my career. I attended university at a time when the new children's legislation was enforced in the Children (Scotland) Act 1995. It worked very much in our favour as we were taught this at a time when other practitioners were familiar with the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 and were coming to grips with changing terminology and law. I was able to use this to my advantage in the early days as I was aware of the improved support put in place for looked after children through sections 29 and 30 of the act which meant that young people were entitled to throughcare and aftercare support until they were 18 or 21 if this related to advice, support and guidance, provided they remained on their supervision order up to their 16th birthday. I was able to advise young people and colleagues alike about this and it worked to the advantage of the young person I spoke about earlier.

I think my knowledge of the legislation also gave me a confidence in my status. It was not unusual for residential workers to be looked down upon by their qualified social work colleagues. I'm unsure whether this hierarchy resulted from their statutory role, their perceptions of residential workers as unqualified, financially driven due to pay differences or resulting from something else but it was palpable within meetings where I had to fight to have my views heard to ensure that the best



outcome was achieved for my young person. Today residential workers can be viewed as experts as others recognise that due to the quality time they spend with service users they have a detailed understanding of their life and circumstances.

The final and possibly the most influential reading in my early residential years was Compton and Galaway (1994) *Social Work Processes*. This process was key to all my work and ensured that everything had a beginning a middle and an end. They identified three phases to the social work process: contact or engagement, the contract phase and the evaluation or action phase. They broke each of these phases down into tangible tasks that ensured that all work was holistic and did not focus solely on the individual, by this I mean that the problem was not found within the young person. Within my early years I was able to use this process to gather fundamental information from the outset to help me make sense of the young person's circumstances. This ensured I avoided triggering unwanted behaviour and allowed me to focus on building a working relationship with the relevant stakeholders. During the contract phase the importance on partnership working was stressed. If the young person did not identify the same problem as me, we had to work and meet in the middle as change was not likely to be affected if we were pulling in different directions. The importance of evaluation could not be overstated. If what I was doing wasn't working. it was time to change what I was doing and not the young person. How often have I heard the young person has outgrown their placement when actually what that means is we haven't found the right way of working with them yet.

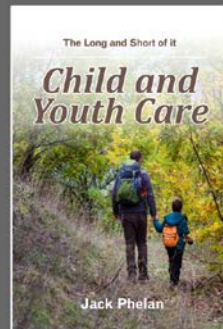
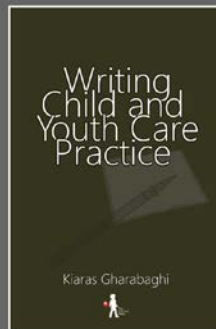
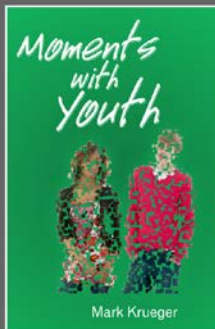
In 2008 my master's dissertation asked whether the social work degree was the appropriate qualification for residential workers, my findings were that in itself it wouldn't make anyone a good residential worker. I continue to believe that the grounding the course provided me with added to the skills and qualities I have ensuring that I could be the best worker I can be. I've yet to see other qualifications have the same impact. It has equipped me with eclectic social science knowledge and fundamental social work principles and a holistic approach that colleagues who are social work qualified seem to value and appreciate.



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That was Then, This is Now: Reflections on the Earlier and Later Stage of a Career in Child Care

John (Johnnie) Gibson

It was 1972. I was 21. On a Friday in June I quit my job as a dispatch clerk and delivery driver in a factory and on the following Monday I started work as a House Parent in a small group home just outside of Belfast, Northern Ireland. My only ambition from childhood was to join the police; I wanted to help people. It was a naive ambition. Naïve but 'pure'. It took me some time to realise that by dint of personality and core values I was not destined to be a police officer. 1972 saw the highest death rate in the Northern Ireland civil strife, euphemistically called 'The Troubles'. The high death rate was not what deterred me. It was by happy coincidence that the House Parent post was advertised just as I was about to join the police. The advertisement caught my attention and got me thinking that I'd like to do that work. I applied and was successful. My only prior experience of youth work was as a Sunday School Teacher. My core values are faith based as in the Christian tradition. Sometime after I started in the child care field I read a scripture verse that said, 'Open your mouth judge righteously, plead the cause of the poor and needy' (Proverbs Chapter 31 v 9). That became my light, the driving force, the motivation that has kept me focused for forty-six years. I do not interpret 'poor and needy' though the lens of a patronising or paternalistic stance; Dr Martin Luther King spoke of the need to be 'tough minded and tender hearted', I take that perspective regarding how I interpret the phrase 'poor and needy'. Tough minded means bringing a rigorous theoretical focus on why some children are 'poor' and



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are poorly served. As I discuss below, tough minded also means being convinced that there is a way to promote children's growth and development and working to make that happen. Tough minded also means understanding that societal structures favour some and disadvantage others; blaming the victim is not acceptable, neither is pity. Tender hearted, to me means to 'hold others in mind' (Ironside, 2012) and act with compassion toward all; a real challenge sometimes to embrace the 'all'.

I loved the work in the children's home. It was a campus type facility with plenty of grounds. It was located on the shores of Belfast lough. Three groups of eight children lived in the main house, an old Victoria property. Two other cottages housed between them another sixteen children. I found a place where I could begin to do what I wanted to do, to help people. It was confusing at first. I found that few of the thirty-eight children and teens seldom actually wanted my help. In those days the children referred to the staff, not by name, but as uncle or auntie. They were supposed to add our first names to that prefix but often we just got called 'uncle' or 'auntie' and sometimes just 'staff'. When that happened, I felt like 'a nothing' and non-entity. It was in this context that I first encountered the term, 'institutionalisation'. I realised that I was nothing special to these children who were in long term care with little prospect of return to their biological parents. I was just another adult who would arrive for a while and then leave. I learned that I had to make the effort. I had to reach out. To be available.

The home was owned and managed by a national not-for profit organisation. They were forward thinking so during my first few months there a social worker was appointed to act as a contact between the children and their families. That led to some of them going home for weekends, thus began five-day care for those for whom that was possible; in those days, that was innovative practice. It greatly encouraged those children.

The first significant bonding event came when I accompanied two brothers to their mother's funeral. They were admitted to the home due to her terminal illness. In the second week of their admission she died. The head of home and I took the two boys to the funeral. As the cortege left the funeral home and walked



a little distance along the road I was asked to take a turn at carrying the coffin. I had never carried a coffin before. It was like a dream. I remember thinking to myself, a few weeks ago I was driving a delivery van around Northern Ireland and here I am carrying the coffin of a woman I never met along a street in Belfast. The sun shone, and the pathos of that shared moment established a bond. There was an unfortunate negative side. On his admission, the elder boy was wearing a knitted green jumper. It was not in good condition and sadly got thrown out. He searched for it for days and for quite a while he reminded the staff that they had discarded a thing of value from his past life. That was painful for him and for me; I learned from that experience and later in my career when I encountered the theory of symbolic interactionism (Hewitt, 2000) I appreciated the depth of 'meaning' for the boy that he associated with the green jumper.

There is a truth that in caring for and working with others we discover ourselves. In time, as I looked back, I realised that I too found a 'home' in the work. I had a 'good enough' family experience and never questioned parental love and acceptance, one benefit out of the choice of work was that it extended my 'family time' and allowed me opportunity to resolve some personal issues. The family I came from was impoverished in terms of capacity to deal openly with conflict and strong feelings, care work over many years gave me opportunity to resolve some of my own issues

I had something else in common with the children and teenagers in the home. None of them did well at school. Neither did I. By all the standards in play when I left school I was an educational failure. I just did not connect with learning. I was a compliant pupil. Never in trouble, never a problem but hiding a learning difficulty. No one outside of family noticed. My parents did not know how to help. That experience of 'not being noticed' became a strength and a driver in my work with children and young people and fed into being a voice for the 'poor and needy'. Working in residential care enabled me to 'find myself' educationally. I started to read about the experience of pioneers in the field.



One book had a profound impact on my thinking. In “Spare The Child” (1971) David Willis described the account of a traditional British borstal for boys. The work described a school in transition from a punitive regime to a therapeutic community. I was hooked. Bookshops became a regular haunt as I searched out books on psychology, sociology, group psychology, social work and residential child care. I did not know then that I would become a ‘life-long’ learner. My driving quest turned to developing a knowledge base to inform my desire to be an effective helper.

The Wills book resonated with something core to my being. The transition he described centred on the redistribution of authority and power from a centralised and brutalising hierarchy characterised by adult dominance. Dominance that affected staff as much as boys. Dominance that suppressed care, and human engagement between damaged teens and older adults. With the passage of time and opportunities for reflection whilst training in Youth and Community work between 1973 and 1975 I made connections between the oppression described by Wills and the oppression experienced by a section of the Northern Irish population. It was different only by scale. I wanted no part of it.

Wills reported a process that took courage and leadership and an eventual transition to a different regime. A regime that was not the opposite of oppression and dominance, but one in which, what the field now refers to as emotionally traumatised youth, met emotionally mature adults, secure in their role and able to provide for these young people ‘good experiences of comfort, care, and control’ (Winnicott, 1971), the therapeutic factor was relational and involved meeting or re-meeting primary needs (Dockar-Drysdale, 1968), and the new organisation become the facilitating environment (Winnicott, 1965).

The children’s home that I worked in was not brutalising, neither was it dehumanising, at least not the way that Willis described the English borstal, but it was hierarchal and staff dominance was a feature. The job title of Superintendent described the role of the person in charge. His word was law and long-term staff were as institutionalised as the children. The Willis book and other reading (for



example Dockar-Drysdale, 1991 , Dockar-Drysdale, 1968) indicated that other more thoughtful forms of care were possible.

Reading about children care and child development acted to ‘switch on’ my desire for and ability to learn; something that traditional school-based learning never did for me. I owe my professional and academic education to that motivational source. I read about the therapeutic community approach to organising care (Jones, 1978) and then got opportunity to undertake an internship in a therapeutic community for adolescent boys. It was a growth experience (Frick, 1990). I learned about the power of collaborative relationship. I learned something of the nature and meaning of ‘use of self’ (Rossiter, 2007, Feilberg, 2011). The design and implementation of true therapeutic care in the context of a the therapeutic community approach requires strong leadership and management; an early text (Balbernie, 1966) explored the nature of leadership required in that setting. I met Richard Balbernie in 1973, it was he who headed up the innovations in the school described in the Willis book that I mentioned earlier. He was a courageous man, ‘tough minded and tender hearted,’ it was from him that I learned the importance of having a strong and evidence informed programme model to inform the work of caring for children with ‘deeply scared histories’ (Ironsides, 2004).

In the early days of my career the professional narrative used to describe and explain the children’s behaviour when they displayed aggression, anger, suspicion of adults, running away, inability to cope with school etc., was that they were ‘maladjusted’ or ‘emotionally disturbed.’ Or, that they were ‘dominated by a strong superego’. I recall being confused by these terms, what part of their being, I wondered, was ‘maladjusted’ and how did that happen? It was a completely unsatisfactory language – it did not explain what had happened to these children to disrupt their ‘normal’ development and produce contradictory and at times bizarre behaviours. As Harwood (2006 p.5) points out, the language had become part of a ‘familiar landscape’ to such an extent, ‘that there was no longer any pause for reflection (and) the words ‘appeared truthful and comfortable.’ I felt confused by



the way these children, on the one hand, craved relationship and closeness, but on the other hand, shut down and rejected offers of closeness.

So, what about nowadays – what is the dominant narrative. As I was writing this article I received the latest copy of a well know human services publications company book catalogue. I counted twenty-five books that had the word ‘trauma’ in the title and many others that focussed on attachment related issues. Writing in 2008, Judith and Alan Schore, (2008) among others, (Perry, 2006), refer to the last decade of the 1900s as the ‘decade of the brain’ and argue that the resultant ‘deepening knowledge’ has led to ‘increased clinical relevance’ across the helping disciplines, including social work. As I look back on my forty-five-year career, I contend that the last twenty have been the most exciting and relevant precisely because of this knowledge explosion in the field of brain development and attachment theory. Of course, knowledge is of little use if it is not translated into practice, and that requires ‘strong programme models’ (Holden and Gibson, 2003). As I enter what will inevitably be the last few years of my career it is good to cast an eye on positive changes for the section of the youth population in Ireland who require care in alternative settings; staff are better trained; the facilities are smaller and not institutionalised; at least one organisation on this small island has implemented what is now an evidence based model of care (Holden, 2009); there is a greater emphasis on family support. While these changes are welcome, they are less than what is required to really value children, for there is a huge shortage of social workers; no other group of children who start life with such disadvantage are expected to be sufficiently mature and functional at age eighteen (or less) when they leave care and live independently. That is not acceptable. These children are still being failed by the rest of us. I encourage others to be ‘tough minded and tendered hearted’ on their behalf.



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First Few Years as a Child and Youth Counsellor in a School Board

Steffani King

Accepting a job as a Child and Youth Counsellor at a school board can seem like a dream come true for a significant number of Child and Youth Care students. The job has stable hours, decent benefits, and you can work with children and youth of a variety of ages, skills, and development levels. The opportunities appear to be boundless. There are many positive aspects of working within a school setting. Yet the job is not without its challenges. The first few years of navigating supply and contract roles before becoming a permanent employee can be the most formative years of a school career. In my experience, one of the most challenging domains of practice is that of professional development. Entering the school environment as a new Child and Youth Care Counsellor can be daunting, confusing, and potentially stressful. The expectations of your role may not be clear, and you are unsure of how you are going to be able to practice to the best of your abilities. In sharing my experiences, I hope to clarify the confusion, decrease the stress and provide strategies I have personally found effective in my early years working in the Child and Youth Care field.

Staying Current

I began working for a school board while I was completing my last year of the Child and Youth Care degree at Ryerson University in Toronto, Canada. At the time, I felt I had enough strategies and theories fresh in my toolkit, ready to practice. As I started working occasional replacements (supplying, it is called) consistently at schools, it became increasingly clear there were very few



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professional development opportunities available. I wondered how I was going to be able to stay up to date on effective strategies if I continued to work in a supply or contract position. Supply Child and Youth Care Counsellors do not have access to the workshops and trainings contract and permanent employees do. That said, even though contract employees have access, they may not always be compensated for the time and money required to attend professionally related trainings. I found myself researching agencies who offered more cost efficient and greater availability of time slots for workshops.

For Child and Youth Care Counsellors entering the school setting straight from a post-secondary program, there is little expectation to attend additional trainings to stay current. As new employees begin to work contract positions (with the potential to become permanent), it becomes necessary to research workshops that are be offered through the employer or associated agencies in order to maintain growth for professional development. A variety of workshops and trainings may be offered to assist with learning about new technology, reflective practices, mental health, behaviour modification, self-care, etc. I consider myself fortunate that my recent roles have supported the need for additional training, but not all schools are willing to send non-permanent employees to board funded workshops. New employees at a school board should inquire about potential trainings available to them and take advantage of any professional development opportunities extended to them by staff, the principal, or via weekly newsletters. The information on trainings is not often readily available to employees who are not permanent, therefore it is crucial to take initiative in order for your practice to stay up-to-date and effective.

Holding Yourself Accountable

Out of all the aspects of the professional development, keeping oneself accountable in a non-permanent Child and Youth Care position is by far the most challenging to uphold. In my experience as a Supply, there are limited expectations for responsibility. Child and Youth Care Supplies in schools are essentially a band-



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aid; expected to keep the students they support safe in the assigned rooms. Only on two occasions did a principal follow up with me about students I was assigned to support. It is difficult to understand just how much responsibility you are supposed to accept in a Supply role. There is often very little communication to Supplies about the daily expectations they are accountable for. One practice I put into place, as a Supply, was to write a note about the day and any challenges that occurred, as well as situations that may require follow-up by the regular Child and Youth Care Counsellor. This allowed me to reflect on my practice and take accountability for my actions throughout the day.

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As a contract Child and Youth Care Counsellor, there are additional responsibilities and the expectation to account for one's actions increases throughout the duration of the contract. Some contracts may only be 30 days, yet others can span to the end of the school term. It is during these longer periods of employment, that Child and Youth Care Counsellors should invest in reflective practice. I prefer to keep a journal of daily occurrences and brainstorm how I can approach situations differently. Having a journal allows me to reflect on what is or is not effective for the students I support. In a contract position, there are opportunities to attend team meetings to discuss how to best support students who are struggling to succeed at school. It is during these types of meetings that having documentation about strategies in place for students and the changes that have been observed become quite valuable. That said, it is perfectly acceptable to admit that your practices have been ineffective with a particular student. Holding oneself accountable is incredibly important while working in a school. You may be the only Child and Youth Care Counsellor /Educational Assistant within the school and you must be able to take responsibility for how you choose to interact with students and staff. As mentioned, keeping a written journal can prove to be invaluable for reflection as well as providing documentation for any significant changes that are implemented in your role. Transparent and supportive communication between staff, principals, inter-disciplinary teams and yourself will also assist in the process of accountability.

Managing the Workload

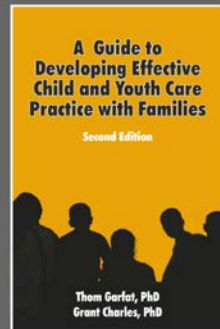
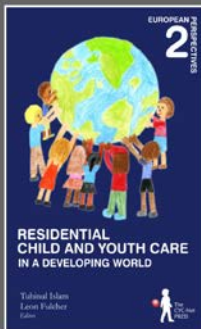
In my opinion this is, by far, the most challenging daily component of professional development within a school board role. Entering the workforce as a fresh Child and Youth Care graduate, I did not completely understand the scope of my role. As a Supply, there is a significant amount of "grey area" surrounding the limits of practice. Supporting children and youth you have never met can be a daunting task, compounded by the fact that you may not ever see them again after working with them for 7 hours. I would feel apprehensive about asking staff



questions about students I was supporting because there seemed to be an unspoken expectation that I should intuitively know what to do. I had confidence in the skills in my toolkit, yet as a Supply, I would be thrust into situations where I was expected to perform the same quality of duties as the regular Child and Youth Care Counsellor. While this could be stressful at times, knowing I was in this particular role for a limited amount of time assisted me in managing the workload of the day.

Transitioning to a contract Child and Youth Care Counsellor can lead to an increased workload. You may be assigned 1:1 with a student, work in a community classroom, or support the entire school. Each role comes with a unique set of expectations that can test any Child and Youth Care Counsellor's ability to manage their caseload. At times, you may be solely responsible for the creation of programming for a student you support. On the other hand, you may be part of a small team working collaboratively to form a functioning and effective community class program. Lastly, you may have to keep detailed, daily documentation of situations that arise from any of the students within a school. Over my first few

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years working in schools, I had quite a few questions about identifying precisely what my caseload and role expectations were. Child and Youth Care Counsellors might be asked to take on roles that are not necessarily what the person has trained for. Talking openly with your classroom team and/or principals can clarify how you are expected to perform your role. It is important to advocate for yourself, especially if the views of your role within the school have become skewed or the workload is becoming overly demanding for one person. Learning how to manage the workload in each role can be a stressful, yet rewarding, experience. The key is to identify who is a part of your support system and can assist you with navigating the daily challenges of your role and workload.

Building Your Support System

“It’s quite the learning curve working with some of our challenging students.” A superintendent recently shared this piece of wisdom with me when I felt I had been stretched to the limits of my patience at one school. It was then that I realized I did not have a strong enough support system to rely on. It can be challenging to build a network within a school board when only working Supply or Contract positions as a new employee. Sometimes, as a Supply, you do not even get to meet the principals or vice principals of a school. As well, Supply Child and Youth Care Counsellors might only interact with a handful of teachers and support staff at each school they work at. This makes it particularly difficult for a Child and Youth Care Supply to begin building the necessary support network they need in order to add to their professional development and to provide opportunities to debrief. If a Child and Youth Care Counsellor experiences a violent situation during a supply shift, there might not even be time or staff available to sit and debrief with them about it. The stress of working at a new school with different students each day of the week without proper supports for reflection of practice can start to wear down any Child and Youth Care Counsellor. Within the specific board I work for, there is no specific person Supply or Contract Child and Youth Care Counsellors can contact as a supervisor to debrief with about stressful or violent situations.



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In my first two years of working in a school board, I found my best supports to be peers and placement supervisors from my college/university programs. My peers understood my concerns as quite a few were experiencing the same challenges. My previous supervisors were able to provide advice based on my strengths and areas of development, as well as insight as to how schools manage various situations. Once I began working contract positions, I had the ability to build a stronger system. I felt more comfortable asking staff questions about procedures and daily practices. There were opportunities to build relationships with students, teachers/support staff, and principals. I also gained a sense of purpose, knowing I was at the school for the whole year, and could practice strategies with long term goals.

Working as a Child and Youth Care Counsellor in a school is one of the most rewarding experiences I have had in the field. Being an integral part of students' success and well-being during their school career has provided countless learning experiences and lasting memories. Transitioning from new graduate, to supply and contract work, to permanent Child and Youth Care employee can be an intimidating journey. Open communication, having a strong support system, and creating clear expectations of the role are crucial in ensuring new Child and Youth Care hires are successful and able to advance their professional development in the field. Take advantage of any workshops made available and do not be afraid to ask questions and advocate for yourself. Being in control of your professional development plan is integral to remaining effective in practice and supporting the students to the best of your abilities.



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“Do you remember me?”

Brenna Thompson

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Working in the realm of mental health had never been on my professional radar, especially within a hospital setting. I remember the day that I met with my program’s field placement co-ordinator and she enthusiastically proposed two hospital-based placement options for my final year. Quite frankly I wasn’t sold on the idea initially, as I had always envisioned myself working with children and youth with autism spectrum disorder- quite a contrast from an adolescent inpatient psychiatry unit.

After mulling this over, speaking to students in that setting from a year my senior, and researching the hospital more in depth- I was sold, I knew that was what I wanted. The group interview was filled with excitement, curiosity, determination and well, a lot of nervous sweat. A few short weeks later I received news that I was offered the eight-month practicum experience at my city’s children’s hospital in the inpatient psychiatry unit.

My First Day

I was fortunate enough to have a supervisor who believed in the whole “sink or swim” mindset for the students she agreed to take on. I learn best this way, so it felt like a match. Within the first few minutes of my endless reading session of fire code procedures, occupational health and safety manuals and so on, she had to run off the floor due to being bit by a young patient we had on the unit. She laughed, and I laughed too as she shuffled past me through the door- however in that moment I knew this was where I was supposed to be. I felt immediately drawn to



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the unpredictability of each day's landscape and the ever-changing challenges and successes.

This feeling continued, day in and day out. I felt a rush coming onto the unit each day, eager to support new adolescents, their families and link back up with patients I had been working with the day or week prior. Within those eight months I laughed harder than I ever had, was moved deeper than ever before, learned more than I thought possible, but also doubted myself more than I ever had. When I heard that she successfully committed suicide following her discharge, my world stopped. As a twenty-four year old Child and Youth Care student in her final practicum, I was now faced with my first field related death.

Now What?

As I am sitting here writing this at the desk in my bedroom, the sun is beaming in across my hands, my tea has gotten cold and a photo of her face is hung next to me from one of the newspaper articles about her death. Nearly a year has passed since she ended her life, and I still think of her nearly every day. I want to use the perfect words, form the perfect sentences, and use the perfect tone to convey my thoughts to you as you take the time to read of my experience. I think this coincidentally echoes how I felt about navigating her death in the professional context, something that was so foreign to me. I fixated my energy on trying to create the perfect front that suggested I was untouched by this tragedy – that yes, it was a shame, but it was part of the job and would happen again.

However, my internal thoughts could not have been more opposite. I was hurting, I was questioning what I did wrong, or what I didn't do enough of. I was replaying all our interactions in my head, especially the last one we had which was picking out a pair of socks. She found a pair that had giraffes on them and we couldn't stop laughing, she quickly put them on her feet and looked at me while she wiggled her toes. I knew she was being discharged the next day and I wouldn't see her again, so I told her how thankful I was for all she shared with me and our time spent together. I told her she was tough and had the resilience and skills to fight



through the demons that haunted her. I saw her sweet, shy yet thoughtful personality shine through one last time that day.

In the days and weeks following her passing, I couldn't understand why I was trying so hard to mimic the acceptance and passiveness of other professionals on the unit, both in my discipline and others. I wanted to appear strong and unphased, as I believed that would show how skilled a student I was and would be as soon as I graduated of the field. In the shifts following her death, I craved debrief, or even just the opportunity to mutually speak about how devastating this loss was. Working in an environment where other practitioners had decades of experience, including with loss, I felt shut down. I felt as though this event was not a big deal and didn't warrant any attention moving forward. When leaving the hospital following a shift, I came undone- bursting at the seams. I couldn't pretend or lie anymore about what this experience had meant to me and ignore my ongoing struggle to cope.

Meaning Making

A professor whom I greatly admire, Dr. Stephanie Griffin, formulated a lesson plan around Ben Anderson-Nathe's idea of the 'Myth of Super Competence' (2010) as part of a professional issues class in my final semester, only a few weeks before this young person's death. I immediately saw a profound connection with this idea of practitioner supercompetence and my lack of support around navigating my personal and professional processing of a client death.

“Youth workers interpreted their moments of not-knowing similarly: they were humiliating precisely because, in their minds, anyone else would have known what to do to prevent or avoid the situation. This belief ... speaks to what I have come to call the myth of supercompetence. It is the individual belief (often held strongly enough to be a conviction) that I, as a youth worker, should be not only competent but supercompetent in my work. Although our professional rhetoric suggests that no one can



expect perfection in practice, since we seldom – if ever – hear one another’s not-knowing stories in supervision or even idle conversation with other youth workers, we can allow ourselves to see our colleagues as fundamentally more competent than we are” (Andersen-Nathe, 2010, p. 89).

This was the most significant moment of not knowing I had ever experienced in the field. A thirteen-year-old youth that I worked with ended their life. Of course, this was a moment of not knowing- how could I have answers? I didn’t even have a diploma under my belt, or years of related experience to support my navigation of this event. However, implementing the supercompetence framework (Andersen-Nathe, 2010) played a powerful role in how I made meaning of this experience. It propelled me into a state of constantly wondering why there is such a desire to appear unphased, as if the ability to do so is linked to practitioner effectiveness or ineffectiveness. This field is populated by some of the most empathic and non-judgemental humans one could ever find, so why would any practitioner feel ashamed to speak of and share their hardest moments? I do recognize and postulate the topics of burnout and compassion fatigue would hold a piece in the answers to those questions, but maybe that will be my next paper a few years down the road!

Exhale

My first moment of exhale came in my Thursday seminar class which consisted of a professor, ten of my peers and myself. Each week we began with a check-in to review any highlights or significant moments throughout our week at placement. I knew when it came to my turn I would be overcome with emotion due to finally receiving an acknowledged moment to grieve and release. As expected, no words came out. As I started to cry, I figured my best bet was to excuse myself, pull myself together and come back to ensure I didn’t lose any participation marks- sounds ridiculous, doesn’t it? After leaving I was subsequently followed by my



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friend, also placed in the same hospital unit as I was, and our professor. The ten or so minutes that we all spoke started my journey to professionally and personally healing from this experience. It also taught me that erring on the side of being human was something I needed to hold onto, no matter what.

In the weeks following her passing, I also reached out to professors in my program to seek support. I remember one professor sharing several client deaths she had experienced in her time as a front-line practitioner. These conversations gave me such validation for the way I was feeling. I felt heard, and I received confirmation that my reactions and responses to this event were natural and made sense. This was the support I had longed for since I received the news of her passing.

Growth and Learning

I wish I didn't fall victim to the nonsense of trying to appear strong and unphased. I would have saved myself a lot of difficulty, however looking back I value all pieces of this experience. Although this event will always remain a tragic piece of my practitioner identity, I am thankful for the learning that ensued. It taught me to be more present in both my professional and personal life. It taught me how nothing in this world is forever or permanent, and all moments must be taken full advantage of while we are still in them. It taught me to re-evaluate some of my priorities and has weakened the guilt I feel when I don't put my job or studies first above all else. It has weaved a new sense of tenderness and patience into my practice and has made me far more mindful than I have ever felt.

My hope with sharing my experience and thoughts is that more raw and truthful conversations will follow, free from fear of judgement linked to professional incompetence. Whether a student, experienced supervisor, professor, executive director and so on in the field of Child and Youth Care, all members must strive to support the creation and maintenance of a safe space to house these difficult and often confusing types of conversations. Whether formally or informally, the cathartic benefits are undeniable. As I mentioned, I recognize all the grief I could



have avoided and hope that my words prompt an increase in these necessary conversations. This field is an exciting, enthralling, demanding and rewarding place to be, however I encourage those who support students and new graduates not to discount the reality of client death, whether intentional or not, and begin these conversations.

Looking Forward

The writing of this article did not come easy. I found some days were easier to write and brainstorm than others. Balancing work and a CYC degree, I found it hard to pull up emotions from this time and revisit the struggle that her death brought with so much else demanding my physical and emotional energy. However, I felt passionate and determined to share this with our community. Sharing my thoughts as a young member of the field with hardly any experience on such a large platform brought feelings of anxiety and worry, but as I near the end of my piece I feel proud and excited for what comes next for me in this wild world we call child and youth care.

I take with me and hold very dear the resiliency I saw in her in our short time together. I feel fortunate and humbled every day to be in the role that I am and enter each therapeutic relationship with the same gentleness she showed me. Often my family and friends who are not in the field question why I chose this profession and ask if all the stress and frustration is worth it. To be honest, I sometimes ask myself the same thing, as I'm certain many of you reading this can also relate to. I can validate their concerns, worries and so on but immediately follow up with explaining how they haven't seen or felt the good. Those moments, no matter how rare or short lived, are my reasons why.

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The First Few Seasons: Reflections from a Rookie CYC Educator

Matty Hillman

An Inspired Draft Pick

I realized early in my practice that I wanted to be a Child and Youth Care (CYC) educator. I was in the second year of a Human Services diploma program at a community college in the Kootenay region of British Columbia, the traditional territory of the Sinixt people. The program had only one instructor with an academic background in CYC and she delivered the courses specific to supporting the optimal development of children, youth, families and communities. I can still recall the day she told me that CYC needed more men and I could go far in the field, if I wanted. I could even teach at the college one day, she said. Looking back, this was certainly what Garfat (2001) describes as a transformative event in my personal and professional development; it was an experience that initiated and forever changed the way I saw myself and my place in the world.

I completed my diploma in CYC at Selkirk College in 2011 and later my BCYC and MA from the School of Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria. Throughout my full-time studies, I worked hard to gain diverse practice experience in the field. I held numerous positions, working in a plethora of youth and family service settings including residential care, emergency shelter, family support and child protection advocacy. Currently I am teaching my fifth semester at Selkirk College in the Human Services program and I now have the distinct honor of calling the instructors who were so influential to my academic and professional development my colleagues and friends.



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Rookie Challenges

My first few years of teaching post-secondary have been a lot of things: exhausting, frustrating, humility inducing, and rewarding. They have also spurred several questions and exposed several tensions and complexities I continue to find myself challenged by. For the remainder of this article I am going to briefly outline some of my thoughts and actions from this formative period.

With two degrees and over seven years of practice experience under my belt I felt prepared and hopeful for my debut teaching season. However, I quickly became aware that being an effective educator is a separate skill from being a practitioner and I would need to acquire a different set of competencies in order to teach in an inclusive, accessible and enjoyable manner (Phelan, 2017). If the journey of professional achievement can be measured in a linear fashion (I have my doubts), I felt like I was starting back at square one.

Many challenges, both pedagogical and pragmatic, have presented themselves in the last 20 months. I have no doubt other instructors have also encountered these issues and I expect they will continue to present themselves for years to come.

I have struggled to find balance in several areas of teaching:

- Flexibility versus structure. In my experience, students want both. Some insist on unique and individualized lessons and assessments (and so they should), while others seem to prefer the expert, “sage on the stage” approach.
- Egalitarian versus authoritarian. My core values tell me to be transparent and humble about my newness to teaching, yet some of my mentors have reminded me that by virtue of my role I am in a position that necessitates authority and classroom management.
- Support versus independence. I find it a formidable task to present a diverse group of learners with ideas and assignments that are within their grasp yet enough of a challenge to push them towards a higher level of understanding, reflection and practice.



Veteran Knowledge

So, with these challenges of my burgeoning pedagogy in mind and being a humbled, yet motivated novice instructor, I did what any good recent graduate would do: I researched some of the experts. Below are some musings of seasoned (and not so seasoned) CYC educators that I have found interesting and inspiring. However, like most good writers, their thoughts and suggestions have simultaneously inspired and aroused further questions. To that end, I approach these ideas with a conversational tone, seeking to engage in further dialog and to join and contribute to a Community of Practice in CYC Education (Snell, Shaw & Weninger, 2016).

As the nearest to my stage of professional development as an educator, Jaspreet Bal's "Five things I learned in my first-year teaching Child and Youth Care" (2016) resonated with my early experiences in many ways. The need to surrender ample amounts of control has been a big learning for me in the past year. The delusion that I could somehow create a syllabus, lesson plan and assignment package that would inspire, challenge and please every student needed to be swiftly smashed. Further, it is incredibly validating to hear about Bal's (2016) realization that student success requires a collaborative effort by both student and teacher; that what they bring to a course matters as much as what I do and there is no guarantee that a lesson will be received as intended. In regard to the many relationships CYC educators can find themselves in with students, I strive to minimize being their counselor (but refer onto one), maximise being their mentor (through example) and be friendly without being their (Facebook) friend.

Sago and De Monte (2017) offer many suggestions for creating a sense of safety in the classroom by attending to both emotional and personal needs of students. In the physical space, I offer flexible office hours and have an open-door policy for students needing to drop by. I have taken the course outside of the classroom to visit community agencies and take reflective walks throughout the auspicious lands that the campus occupies. In virtual space I have been experimenting with learning



applications like Flipgrid which allows students to video record questions and comments for their forum posts in online courses.

At the beginning of the year, students are asked to develop their own rubric outlining course expectations for professionalism. Areas identified by students include self-awareness and emotional regulation, showing up (regularly and on time) and sharing the space. To facilitate composing this set of guidelines, I provide students with Arao and Clemens', "From Safe Spaces to Brave Spaces" (2013). In addition to defining and outlining the importance of ensuring that the classroom is a safe space, the brave space framework includes expectations that disagreements will occur and having diverse points of view can contribute to a stronger classroom community. It is my hope that these discussions seed the realization for students that moments of discomfort are fundamental to their learning and practice experiences.

One of my favorite moments of taking the learning outside of the classroom occurred at the beginning of this winter semester when I was preparing students for their inaugural practicum experience. I was attempting (with marginal success) to tell a student about the local youth council where she would be starting her placement in a few weeks when I realized that I was heading to the council's advisory board meeting that afternoon. I promptly invited the student to attend the meeting with the hope that seeing the council in action would illuminate the program's vision, mandate and personnel structure much better than I could. The student decided to attend the meeting where she met the program co-ordinator, several youth members and various community service providers. I am happy to report that this placement has turned out to be a great fit and the student is excelling in her role there.

With the intention of beginning to cultivate a troubled consciousness within my students, White, Kouri & Pacini-Ketchabaw (2017) have inspired me to initiate classroom conversations about the contradictory spaces that CYC work can occupy and our complicity in the very structural inequalities we work to minimize. This semester, I began with simple social location exercises and discussions about



the privileges many of us take for granted. Moving forward, I touched on more daunting revelations like the fact that the best theory and practice frameworks in the world will not fully prepare students for CYC practice in these incredibly complex times. It is my hope that students become familiar with dialectic thinking and aspire to a life of learning; it is my fear that they unravel into a space of existential purgatory.

One of the biggest challenges I come across when developing my lesson plans is finding a balance between theory and practical skills. I feel strongly that many theories that underpin CYC such as feminist, critical, systems and many more are essential to establishing a baseline of knowledge for working compassionately and effectively with young people, families and communities. Yet, I am acutely aware that students desire practical skills that are directly transferable to the field. The fact that I also teach in a community college, where students exit into practice after only one or two years of study impacts my planning. Of course, lessons about theory and practice are far from mutually exclusive and certainly should be integrated and I do this to the best of my ability, yet this is a tension that persists.

I also recognize the necessity of continuing to explore my complicity in the homogeneity of our field and confront my own discomfort in order to challenge and support students to unpack their privileges (Munroe, 2016). To this end, I am committed to a process of endless reflection on my assumptions regarding what constitutes valuable knowledge and ways of being, as well as the inclusion of other voices and identities in my courses. I regularly bring in guest lecturers with diverse backgrounds such as activists and community organizers, Indigenous counselors, family members and individuals with lived experiences of mental illness, as well as youth service users. I have also participated in research that supports decolonizing CYC through identifying, contesting and struggling with white settler privilege in our field. Finally, I try to cultivate personal embodied knowledge – to challenge my predominantly academic epistemology – by advancing my personal art practice and continually seeking out ways that CYC and experiential knowing can and do intersect.



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Future Game Plan

The above thoughts and suggestions for CYC education are but the tip of the iceberg for what our and allied fields offer in terms of relational teaching strategy. In the years to come, I will continue to research and apply new pedagogical approaches and with a lot of hard work and a bit of luck my teaching practice will improve.

But, what about the challenges to teaching that occur outside of the classroom? What about the philosophical challenges to teaching CYC in a post-secondary setting? By their very nature, institutions tend to be formal and impersonal; they are outcome driven and require detailed and strict policy and procedures in order to produce their desired results. I doubt that I am providing any kind of considerable revelation when I say that I often find the post-secondary framework incongruent with the process-driven, self-reflective and inclusive ideals of CYC. More than simply being discouraged by this realization, it has spurred more questions: is it possible to perform relational evaluations? Can academic assignments be relevant to preparing students to work with people? How can historically ethnocentric theories be inclusive of other ways of knowing?

In attending this year's World CYC conference in Ventura, California I hoped for several experiences. In addition to meeting new colleagues and taking in some California sun I hoped to engage in dialog with other CYC educators about these challenges I was experiencing as a new instructor. Put another way, I hoped that I would meet an educator that not only could identify with these challenges, but through their extensive years teaching had figured them all out and was willing to pass these secret revelations on to me.

Suffice to say that this wish did not materialize exactly as I envisioned. However, it turned out I received something much more valuable. During the banquet dinner on the final evening of the conference, the CYC community in attendance was treated to an incredible performance-based keynote presentation. Long-time CYC educator Heather Snell and her amazing troupe of CYC practitioners and youth artists performed: "Child and Youth Care Education: Is it



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time to turn out the lights?”), which was a combination of spoken word, dance and personal narratives. Their performance blurred the lines of art and education, audience and performer and in the process had the entire room captivated for the duration of their routine.

Snell’s dialog spoke to some of the research she has been doing into CYC education programs. It also provided an intimate glimpse into the self-reflective process she navigated following her invitation to perform the keynote. But mostly, she spoke to the challenges that she has noticed and experienced in CYC education: that enrollment in CYC programs is based on economics, not on goodness of fit; that application requirements can be prejudicial and exclusive and; that human rights can put unprepared practitioners into the field. Simply put, there are inherent incongruences that exist between CYC practice and education; the relationship between the two is uneasy as institutional academic practices can be antithetical to CYC pedagogy (Snell, 2018).

I hope you can imagine the immense sense of connection I felt to these insights that were being delivered on stage. As the youthful performers gambolled about, this wonderful woman was verbalizing nearly every challenge I had been ruminating on over the last few semesters. I felt that she was speaking directly to me. In addition to articulating areas of disconnect between these diametrically opposed establishments, Heather’s speech was full of encouragement for the potential for true care to exist in CYC education. Her queries about whether care can be practiced as a verb in CYC education and whether we dare to bring love into the classroom inspired me, like a challenge of sorts, to do just these things. As a visual artist I am excited to offer creative alternatives to my current assessment methods. I want to make space for students to show their knowledge through embodied learning such as art, music and spoken word because these are the traits that will inform their future practice. I want to see learners’ emotions and experiences valued as credible types of knowledge for this will be the materialization of a truly diverse classroom.



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So, as I approach the summer break of my second year, I find that I have received many things during my first few years of teaching CYC. I have been blessed with insightful suggestions from new and experienced educators alike. I have been granted validation that the frustrations I have experienced may be universal to the position. I have gained a deeper sense of comradery and connection to my field. Although the therapeutic milieu I now occupy is the classroom, I know that my nascent pedagogy will continue to be informed by diverse sources: other faculty members, researchers, program administrators, young people, students, artists and you! Because as Heather stated: “we are all complicit in this thing called Child and Youth Care Education - we are all CYC educators”.

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Postcard from Leon Fulcher

Some reflections on learning during the first few years of my child and youth care journey

Kia Ora and
Assalamu
Alaikum

Brothers and Sisters as I write during the Holy Month of Ramadan. May the Peace be upon you – wherever you may be. I've been thinking about the first few years working in our field, and about what I didn't know during those years. It was difficult learning that the more I know, the more I know what I don't know.

For a start, I didn't know about the Ottoman Empire – what it was, where and when it was in power. Where I grew up, World War I had little direct impact on my own family and relatives. Unlike small UK, Canadian, Australian and New Zealand towns or villages, young men went off to trench warfare in Europe and never returned, draining the life blood from these places.



The Ottoman Empire and Other WW I Colonial Influences in the Middle East



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This new learning has been highlighted during the final proof-reading of our latest volume in the *Residential Child and Youth Care in a Developing World* series, *Volume 3 – Middle East and Asia Perspectives*. During my only visit to Israel, I learned about the Youth Aliyah initiatives that assisted WW II orphans settle in their ‘promised land’ from 1947 – a whole new look for me at how residential group care can be a positive influence for change.

Then, living in the United Arab Emirates, Palestinian colleagues shared new learning that had escaped my awareness growing up and being educated ‘south of Calgary’, in the State of Idaho during the Vietnam War. I learned about indigenous families and young people fenced out of their ancestral lands, and I was gradually confronted with questions associated with truths I had learned growing up in a

Republican, Pacific Northwest State. Nothing prepared me for realities associated with providing university student residential housing and activities for Sunni and Shiite Muslim youths who can’t live together in the same houses!



Millions of World War II orphans were re-settled in Palestine and Transjordan



Contemporary relationships involve knocking down and building houses



It was a long way into my child and youth care career before I walked on The Great Wall of China and learned that working definitions of contemporary social work don't work very well in China and Malaysia. Walls are symbols that limit relationships, reinforcing the dynamics of us and them. I understand predator fences that protect native species from introduced creatures like feral cats, stoats, weasels and rats. But walls erected around wealthy settlements are not about managing introduced predators. Some walls safeguard settlers claiming Biblical entitlement to occupied land.

The new US Embassy in Jerusalem was opposed by all but a handful of small UN countries, the US and Israel. Palestinian protests were managed by fences, tear gas and snipers.

My early years in the field involved living and working in Scotland, outside my usual comfort zone and learning about the British Commonwealth for the first time which had little meaning where I grew up so my learning curve as a child and youth care worker extended. What does it mean that



Walls are erected between new Israeli settlements and old Palestinian villages



Protests against moving the US Embassy to Jerusalem – see the snipers?



a coalition of Sunni Saudi Arabian and United Arab Emirates began air strikes in March, 2015 against Iran-supported Shiite Houthi tribes-people? These air strikes continue after three years with new US-supplied war planes purchased through multi-billion-dollar contracts. Spare a thought for the millions of Yemen orphans and young war refugees.

During my early years, I knew nothing of the importance of these matters. I also learned how easy it is for such matters to be dismissed as unimportant compared with “local concerns”!



For 3 years, Saudi Arabia with the UAE have flown strikes against Yemen Houthis



Houthi people – supported by Iran – have long indigenous traditions in Yemen



Roger's 2015 Political Cartoon in the Pittsburgh Post Gazette says it all!



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Information

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