

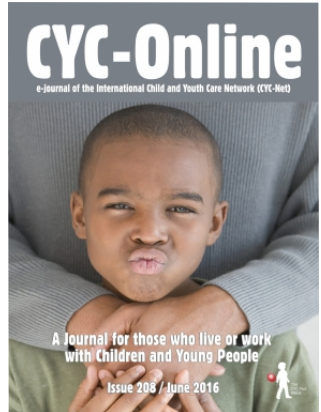
CYC-Online

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

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

Issue 208 / June 2016



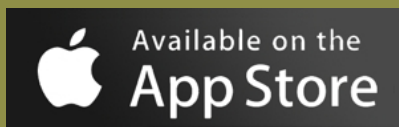


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The new CYC-Net app is now available!



Experiencing Connectedness through a Conference Experience

I am at the annual conference of the Ontario Association of Child Care Counsellors conference in Thunder Bay and it is an amazing experience. As always at a CYC conference, it feels like a family gathering with the old folks like Jack Phelan and I, the new folks who are just beginning their journey in the field and all those in-between. And as always there were moments and events of significance for our field.

One of the most significant of those events was the presence of Zeni Thumbado from South Africa who shared with us the story of the Isibindi programs and the structure and activities of the South Africa National Association of Child Care Workers. Zeni's presence and sharing was significant because of how it helped so many see the global connections within our field. While Zeni talked about how Canadians had influenced the development of CYC in South Africa, we also shared the experience of the NACCW's influence on Canadian CYC. Exposing and reflecting on this process of mutual influence helped everyone to realise that this family of ours is so much bigger than some might think.

For me, one of the most significant of moments was when Zeni taught us all to sign a song from South Africa about 'why I am a child care worker' – for those of us who have had the opportunity of being present at a South African CYC conference and heard the participants break into song, the distance between us all shrank even more. While we sang in our reserved Canadian spirit, our spirits joined just a little more.

The presence of James Freeman from California, Jack Phelan from Alberta, Kiaras Gharabaghi and Andy Leggett from different parts of Ontario just enhanced the picture of a large and inclusive family. We all have professional relatives in every corner of the globe.

Some of the people here were students and, they confessed, they were nervous about meeting people whose writing they had studied and whose names are well known in the field; people who, they have been told, are significant, like Jack. Every one



Zeni Thumbadoo speaking about the Isibindi programmes in South Africa

of them who spoke about their experience mentioned how they found these 'significant' people to be welcoming, accessible and, well as one student put it, 'normal'. Many of them left having experienced inclusion and belongingness. We are fortunate to have educational instructors who promote their students to come and participant.

This is, for me, one of the most wonderful characteristics of our field – it is inclusive, welcoming, supportive and accepting. It was that way when I began many years ago and it still remains the same. When I reflect on other professional conferences I have attended, this experience is unique – there is little relational distance in our field between the 'experts' and others.

As one who has had the opportunity to participate in many CYC conferences, I find myself grateful for the chance to meet with family in so many places. Soon I will be going to the Newfoundland and Labrador CYC Conference, and will have the chance to hang out with more of our family. And I look forward to deepening the connections.

As the conference was closing Zeni shared her hope that one day we will have an International CYC Association where we are all joined together.

Now there's a dream worth living, eh?

– Thom



CYC-Net Clan Gathering 2016 – Vienna

Bridging the Gaps

The CYC-Net Board of Governors invites you to join the 3rd CYC-Net Clan Gathering Pre-Conference Day Event in Vienna on

Sunday, 21st August from 9am to 5pm

with an optional Dinner (but we hope you'll stay for that too!)

The first CYC-Net Clan Gathering was held in Paisley, Scotland in 2012 and the second in St. John's, Newfoundland in 2013.

It is said that in some circles, discussions have focused on different kinds of gaps which exist in our field – like between academia and practice; between different service sectors; between training and service delivery; between North America and elsewhere, and between differing philosophies, etc.

As we gather in Vienna (Wien), the historic centre where our child and youth care field really started, join us and spend some quality CYC-Net Clan time together.

Sign-up for the additional pre-conference programme [here](#) and join us in this important Gathering of the CYC-Net Clan!

Leon, Thom, Martin, James, Heather and Jennifer on behalf of the CYC-Net Board

New Conversation Partners for Residential Services

Kiaras Gharabaghi

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Over the years, I have frequently ranted about residential group care. I confess that in spite of my love for working in residential group care, I have mostly had negative things to say about this form of being with young people. I have complained about the rules in group homes, their aesthetics, the huge variations in staff qualifications, and the on-going deeply embedded need for control on the part of the staff, the supervisors and the management teams. In some cases, the feedback I have received has been quite positive, with practitioners writing to me and expressing their thankfulness that someone is saying what they have been thinking. Sometimes, however, the feedback I received is quite negative, with people who have been involved in residential services telling me that I am disrespectful to their years of hard work, to their commitment and dedication to young people, and that I furthermore misrepresent what actually happens in residential group care. On the whole, I am grateful for all of the feedback, positive and negative, because I always hope that by the time someone writes to me, they might have engaged in some discussion with colleagues as well. This is, of course, the goal of all of my writing. Good things happen when people engage in critical discussions about what they do.

This month, I want to take a different approach. I want to present a simple model of inviting feedback for residential services that is implementable without much cost, without much planning, and without having to change anything right from the start. I

want to do so without judgment and without predetermination of what is good and what is not so good. My proposal for such a feedback system is based on a level of clarity I have acquired fairly recently, largely as a result of my association with a residential services review process in Ontario, Canada, and within that association, my conversations with one of my students. The clarity is about this: in order to really have a sense about what we are doing, how it might impact young people, and whether or not it makes any sense at all, we need to engage new conversation partners. It is a hallmark of the residential service system, at least in Ontario, that a relatively small group of people have grown up as professionals within that system together for the past few decades. This means that they have been talking to each other, sharing their success and failure, encouraging each other, and creating the discourses and narratives that have been driving the form, structure, and process of residential services for decades. To be clear, these people (and I may well be one of them) have done excellent work. In fact, the generation ahead of me has been my inspiration forever. I have learned from them, I have grown with them, and I have admired the dedication and commitment they have demonstrated in such a frustrating context for such a long time.

But (for students: never start a sentence with 'but'), in spite of what I would consider brilliant work, the reality of residential care, especially from the perspective of young people living in this context, is not only mediocre, but often terrible. Even from the perspective of practitioners, that reality is inadequate, and most practitioners I have met have said that they wish it were different. In fact, the only kinds of people who fairly consistently speak highly of their own residential services are the senior managers and executive directors of agencies and organizations. Whenever I converse with them, the presentation of their residential services sounds awesome; there is treatment, clinical sophistication, youth engagement, care and nurture, and all of the measures that go with proving the successful outcomes for young people and for the program.

So here is what I think every organization that operates residential group care could do, with virtually no financial cost and very limited time investment. Find new conversation partners, and specifically look for these profiles:

1. Young people living in your program;
2. Young people living in someone else's program

3. Relatively young people (say between 20 and 25) who don't live in any program
4. New practitioners with between one and three years experience
5. Parents or kin with exposure to residential services in their own lives
6. Young adults with neurodevelopmental challenges who are living independently

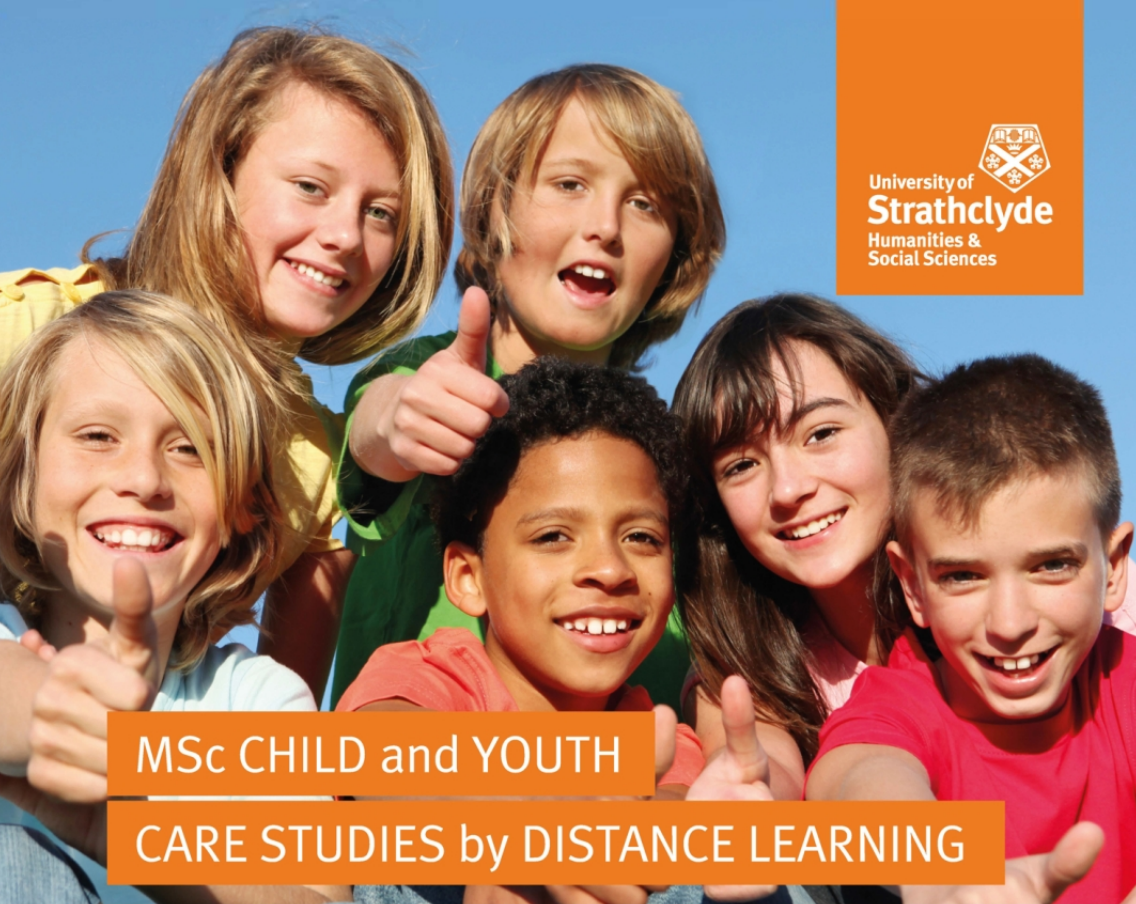
Once a strong grouping of these people has been formed, I recommend a process of conversation that starts very much at the everyday level of routines and structure; allow each and every member of this group to reflect on and comment on the value of every rule, every routine, every piece of structure in your residential program, including also the environmental context for that program, such as furnishings, sensory contexts including sounds and smells and relational contexts including in particular the range of relationships that are made available through the program.

Why? Because the generational context of our field matters. I have noticed as of late that everyone more or less my age or older (so somewhere between a half century and three quarters of a century) sounds different than even those who are perhaps ten or fifteen years younger. Amongst academics and commentators, I invite you to compare in-depth the language, concepts and core values presented in writings (right here on CYC-Net) by the likes of Garfat, Fulcher, Charles, Gharabaghi, Ricks, Stuart, and others on the one hand, and then look at the writings (or listen to their presentations at conferences or through the CYC Podcasts produced by Wolfgang Vachon) of people like Newbury, Anderson-Nathe, Vachon and others. There are, of course many differences amongst the 'old folks' and also amongst the slightly 'younger ones', but between these two groups, pay attention to the differences in the constructions of and assumptions behind core processes and values such as gender, identity, communication and yes, even relationship. For me at least, these issues came to the forefront during a collaboration with one of my students in particular who presented me with a generational challenge I simply cannot resolve. Her assumptions about conversation, relationship, love and caring, identity, gender, race and aesthetics are so fundamentally distinct from mine that although we are nearly identical in our fundamental dedication and commitment to young people, our frames of reference in relation to being with young people differ substantially. Even simple things, like how to have a conversation, differ; for me, a good conversation involves a total commitment to the other, paying full attention to every word spoken by the other, to their body

movements, and also to the tone in their voice. For her, multi-tasking, engaging in several conversations simultaneously through various technologies, and using extremely variable voice filters is perfectly normal and indeed, desirable.

So (note to students: never start a sentence with 'so') while I still think I have much to offer to residential services, I am realizing that what I have to offer is so much better when it is engaged with conversation partners representing different worldviews driven largely by generational positioning. Of course, within the generations, social location and identity also matter, which is why I think that a strong group for reflecting on any residential service today must include the range of people I have identified above. You might notice that aside from fairly obvious participants (such as youth in your program and youth in other programs) I have also identified young people (slightly older than your residents) who are not involved in any program. This is because we cannot meaningfully understand the context of residential services outside of the context of everyday life for young people, including youth sub-cultures, identity considerations, issues of gender and class, as well as generational approaches to aesthetics. I have also identified new practitioners as essential members of such a grouping. This is because the absurdities of the everyday context of residential services can most easily be identified by those who are exposed to these but for whom such absurdities are not yet normalized. And I have identified young adults with neurodevelopmental challenges specifically because the worldview of neuro-developmentalism is perhaps less generational and more contextual to the uniqueness of a differently-oriented brain. It is unreasonable and likely false to think that our half or three quarter centuries are able to capture the meaning of core concepts such as love and nurture, relationship, identity and life space for young people whose brains produce an entirely different way of seeing the world and all social processes within it.

I always worry when I propose something to such a great group of people as you! Some will say that this is great, but we already have been doing this for years. Others will say that this is just another dumb idea from an aging cynic. All I can say is that child and youth care theory and practice are built on the capacity for honest, genuine and hard-hitting self-reflection. So reflect on this: The Kardashians are considered 'interesting' by millions of young people. If you don't get that (and I certainly don't), you need some new conversation partners.



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Supervision Possibilities with Socialized Thinkers

Jack Phelan

The transition from Socialized to Self-Authoring thinking stages is a vital journey for people who want to be fully competent CYC practitioners. Some of the issues of this developmental journey have been discussed in earlier columns. Simply put, the transition to self-authoring thinking is necessary for competent relational work to occur. Supervisors who are hopefully self-authoring themselves, struggle with creating motivation and challenge for socialized thinkers who are struggling with their practice.

The focus for the supervisor is not what needs to be understood (content), but how it is understood (context). For example, conflict with another can be seen as a process of connection and learning about each other, rather than as a weakness in the relationship. When I allow myself to be open to the influence of someone, that vulnerable position can greatly enhance our connection, but I need to be able to maintain responsibility for what I believe, not expect you to be responsible for it. If I allow myself to be controlled by the influence of others, which is not the same as being open to another way to understand things, then I am thinking in a socialized manner. A person's logic about the world keeps them balanced and safe and socialized thinkers are not really able to self-challenge some of their logical beliefs. When their logic creates a conflict with someone else, that is a threat to the relationship and someone has to be wrong, when often both are right for themselves.


There is little tolerance for ambiguity, since sameness (mutuality) is a big need. Responsibility for your relationships is a major stumbling block. Socialized thinkers believe that each person is 50% responsible for the relationship, while self-authoring thinkers believe that each person is 100% responsible for the relationship. Just thinking about that idea is a challenge for socialized thinkers.

Supervisors need to create safe places for discussions to promote the journey from socialized to self-authoring thinking. Some of the supervisory issues to highlight are:

- Discourage simplistic solutions (this is where “common sense” needs to be challenged.)
- Listen to your own voice (be open to your own curiosity about conflict)
- Share authority and expertise with others to solve problems.
- Work collaboratively as a team.
- Don’t take obvious paths when things don’t work.

A balance of support and challenge needs to be maintained and patience with the process, which can be quite gradual, are important things to keep in focus.

We will look at the benefits of self-authoring thinking next month.



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With Tentative Certainty: The art of experimental CYC Part III

Hans Skott-Myhre

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To engage our work as a field of relational experimentation means to let go of a certain degree of certainty about anyone we encounter in our work, including ourselves. Not all certainty, because that would be impossible. In order to act at all, we need to have some ground from which to leap into the uncertain future. Instead, I am proposing a tentative certainty in which we might ground ourselves. This way of perceiving ourselves, and others, takes knowledge as always open to being modified, shifted, changed or even disproven and abandoned. To work this way means being extremely well attuned to the nuances of the encounter in each and every moment. It does not mean that we assume a stance of ignorance or pretend we don't come into an encounter with preconceived ideas and notions about the other. Of course, we all have our fantasies about all of the people that transit through our lives from the stranger we encounter in a public space and never directly engage, to the most intimate long term relationships.

In each encounter we come equipped with prefabricated templates for reading the other. Some of these are premised in our past experiences and depend on our perception of similarity. In other words, we look for the ways in which the person we are encountering acts or looks like someone else we have known or encountered. In psychoanalytic terms we might call this transference. That is, we are transferring one set of relational coordinates and mapping them onto another set of relational coordinates. In most cases, we do this somewhat cautiously to see if they fit. However,



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to the degree that the initial relationship was painful or dangerous, we tend to apply our map more quickly and with less nuance or reflection.

Of course, we have been trained to see how the young people we encounter do this to us as workers and we take this transference into account in making attempts to assist them in working through their issues with others through their encounters with us. We work relationally to provide a different and more positive experience based on the fact that we may have apparent similarities to other historical personages in their lives.

There tends to be a blind spot in this aspect of our work, however. I would argue that we are not as good at seeing how young people and colleagues trigger similar reactions, premised in transference, in us as workers. If we did, we might spend more time in our case meetings talking about the ways in which our feelings about each other and the young people we encounter bring up affects and perceptions rooted in our own relational histories. We might explore how our own sense of danger or alienation, when encountering our colleagues or young people, may have less to do with any qualities they may hold in actuality and more to do with the way we map them in terms of our own relational history.

To the degree that we can begin to explore our selves as an integral subjective part of the interaction, we can open a liminal space of indeterminacy, where we allow for the fact that we might be too certain about what we know about our colleagues and the young people we encounter. In that space we could work collectively with both young people and our colleagues to open new inter-relational mappings that stand the possibility of seeing aspects of the other we are blind to because of our preconfigured knowledge about them. This is tricky of course, because so much of what we know about the other operates unconsciously as reactions and gut feelings. I am not arguing that certain levels of intuition are not useful, I am only arguing that they may not signal what they appear to signal: certainty about what we know.

When we engage in mutual explorations that include an open discussion of our irrational, intuitive and tentative understandings of our selves, our colleagues and young people, we stand to open a field of dialogue that combines all of what we know individually into something we know collectively that is richer than our individual knowledge and is sometimes quite surprising. This is the premise behind the reflecting team practices of the Norwegian family therapist Tom Anderson as well as the *assemblia* in the work of anti-psychiatrist Franco Basaglia.



In Anderson's work with families he took the original usage of the one way mirror developed by the MRI group (I mentioned them the first column in this series) and modified it in such a way as to amplify and extend the notion of reflection in very interesting ways. In the original usage, the MRI group took the scientific deployment of a one-way mirror as a way to surreptitiously observe and record subject behavior, and turned it into a vehicle for communicating team consultations to clients.

The way this was done was to place a therapist in room with the client and a team of therapists behind the one-way mirror. The therapist would meet with the client and/or family while being observed by the team. The team would have a phone with which they could call in suggestions to the therapist that could be used to change their approach to the client/family based on the team's advice to them or to directly share the team's insights or suggestions with the client/family. The therapist could also excuse himself or herself and consult with the team outside of the therapy room and return with input from the team. In the traditional version, the consultation was structured as the final intervention in the session with the team's advice or instructions to the family given at the very end. The team was set up as the invisible expert opinion based on the old medical model of psychiatric expertise. However, the interventions were premised in the kind of paradoxical non-linear logic we delineated in part one of this series.

Anderson became interested in what would happen if the role of expert was shifted to include the client/family as co-experts. He began to play with the one-way mirror by placing the client/family behind the mirror and the team with the therapist in the room. The team would talk about their feelings and reactions to the client/family situation in front of the family who could phone in questions and observations to the team. Anderson' approach sometimes involved multiple switches of the team and the client/family and might also include various combinations of family members and team members behind the mirror ie. young people and part of the team behind the mirror and parents and therapist in the room or one parent and the children in the room with the therapist and team and the other parent behind the mirror and so on. The idea was to introduce the idea that multiple combinations of expertise both internal and external to the family might produce a rich set of reflections with ideas and possibilities traditional configurations were unable to imagine.



Michael White and David Epston in their work in Narrative therapy extended Anderson's work to include entire communities. They also amplified the team's reflections so that they became increasingly subjective. The team would talk about how listening to and watching the family brought up issues or insights for them that had implications for their lives. The exchange became less of providing expert advice to the client and more towards what Harlene Anderson and Harry Goolishian called collaborative therapy. The mutual production of shared insights and collaborative productions of possibilities used transference as vehicle for a multiplicity of intersecting and entangled perspectives opening onto unanticipated capacities for thought and action for both the team and the client/family.

This work echoes the earlier work done by Franco Basaglia in what he called the *assemblia*. Working in the asylums of Italy in the latter part of the twentieth century, Basaglia was interested in deinstitutionalizing the mad house. He found that the forces of long-term institutional involvement significantly reduced the ability of both the staff and the patient to think outside the logic of the institution. As part of his attempt to break the hold of the institution, he opened all the wards and held large meetings with all the staff and patients in which anyone was allowed to say anything. The staff was able to express their frustrations, as were the patients without any institutional repercussions. This mutuality of expression led to an increasing understanding of common areas of frustration between the staff and the patients and finally to a series of acts taken in common to break the hold the institution had over everyone involved in its logic and practices.

Each of the examples I have cited above, uses elements of mutual subjective collaboration to break down hierarchical distinctions between people identified as helpers/workers/therapists and people defined as clients or patients. The breakdown of traditional architectures of accrued, implied, and overt modes of dominant power is undertaken in order to increase the force of collaborative creativity. In sharing subjective tentative perceptions of a commonly undertaken set of exchanges in what has been traditionally called therapy, counseling or human service work, the boundaries set up by professional hierarchies of difference are challenged and our common humanity is highlighted. Relationship in all its messy complexity becomes a field of shared perception in which each of our perspectives is blended through the act of sharing.



Of course this is more complex than it seems. It requires a level of relational sophistication that comprehends or is open to difference. A certain willingness to let go of what one knows about the world has to be surrendered to the possibility that we can know more through entangling our differences than we can through any one set of perceptions or knowledge. There is a valuing here of the phenomenological or experiential wisdom of all ages and circumstances. Each subject position has something to offer, but no subject has access to generalizable truths about the world; not even their own world. The trick is keep the flows of interchange, intersection and entanglement dynamic and alive. While there may be moments of certainty, they are understood to be temporary. No one is an expert, but everyone is an artist.

Imagine if you will, a CYC institution in which all case meetings include the young people being discussed. The discussion, however, among the staff, is not about the young people as objects of observation and intervention. Instead, the conversation is about how the young people are changing and challenging the staff's understanding and knowledge of themselves and their work. Imagine that during the meeting the young people could interrupt with questions and observations; that the staff took these questions and observations deadly seriously. What if at a certain point the roles were reversed and the young people began to talk about how their interactions with the staff have begun to influence their perceptions of themselves and their lives. During this time the staff could ask questions and make observations. As the meeting went along, the staff and the young people might begin to think together about how to reimagine their work together and how the agency or institution might need to be reconfigured to make that happen.

Of course, such a scenario may seem a bit idealistic. Perhaps in the world of CYC, as an extension of 21st century neo-liberal capitalism, it seems somewhat unrealistic to imagine working in this way. Would it difficult and challenging? I would argue that it would be. Would it require considerable rethinking of how we do things personally and institutionally? I would have to say, once again, yes. But, more than anything else it would require the courage to experiment; to let go of what we think we know, in order to imagine a future in which we become the artists and architects of the future, rather than mere technicians of the present.

The non-linearity project is next I promise ...



Crisis and Connection: Pain and healing in group care



Maxwell Smart and John Digney

*True love's the gift which God has given, to man alone beneath the heaven:
It is not fantasy's hot fire, whose wishes soon as granted fly; It liveth not in fierce desire.*

Walter Scott, Scottish poet and playwright.

*A Man is original when he speaks the truth that has always
been known to all good men.*

Patrick Kavanagh, Irish Poet and playwright

Introduction

For many years it has been recognized that children and youth, from all over the world, when entering group care are 'in crisis'. This crisis may have contributed to their need for this invasive intervention or the intervention may be a contributor to the feeling of crisis. We (the profession) have come to understand and accept that these youngsters are generally exhibiting some deep pervasive emotional pain and that

they (for good reasons) are unlikely to trust the people now seen to be charged with their care.

Staff encountering youth in this situation are aware that young people are (or at least should be aware) that these young people are likely to exhibit behaviors that may be interpreted as defiant, self-defeating and abusive. This is a byproduct of their survival techniques, as they seek to defend themselves against a world that is often perceived to be cruel and hostile. Even as our understanding of behavior increases and we become more attuned to the internal working of the human brain and psych, we still struggle with knowing what has to be done with such youth in crisis?

In other words, what it is that we need to do, to help make that which seems unsafe begin to feel safe for youngsters in this situation?

Joining with rather than Pushing Away

In 1970 Beedel suggested that when working with young people in such crisis that there is a requirement for a three pronged approach to engagement and healing. We need to provide:

- protection from danger, discomfort and distress;
- opportunities for intellectual, social and physical growth;
- and enable the growth and maintenance of person integrity.

Cairns (2002) who recognizes the impact of trauma on children and youth has also written about three phases of recovery that enables growth and restoration of equilibrium:

- stabilization
- integration and
- adaption.

It would of course be difficult to disagree with all this but prior to providing these opportunities and entering into a recovery phase, we would assert there is still a requirement for someone to be able to focus on what is occurring within the youth at an emotion level and of taking the time to get to a place of 'connection'.

Thinking about Healing

In considering this article, the writers recalled incidents in our own childhoods where we felt hurt and pain. We recalled parents and siblings coming to our rescue and providing hugs, reassurances. We recalled adult abilities to regenerate a sense of well-being that we would be okay. Rarely did we experience crude attempts to eliminate in that moment our problematic behaviour that maybe caused our distress at the time. There would always be a time where that teaching and learning would come as we recovered and could learn a bit more about cause and effect of our actions.

Phelan (2009) advises that systems dealing with troubled youth often (unsuccessfully) attempt to tackle the 'crisis' issues by focusing on attempts to simply eliminate problematic behaviour. Phelan describes this approach as naïve. The reason being that the behaviour being displayed, such as anger, verbal abuse and violence are symptoms of some deep emotional pain. He does not advocate a tacit acceptance of problematic behaviour but he recognizes the need to work on how to remediate these difficulties without the "quick fixes" of physical restraint or chemical cosh.

This is a position supported by other contemporary writers (e.g. Garfat, 1998; Anglin, 2002; Smith, 2009; and Smart & Digney,

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2013), who all refer to problematic behaviour and emotional pain, and who seek alternatives beyond adult power and control. Our initial focus with these kids in crisis should be to work on establishing a connection and at the same time seek to find a way to alleviate some of this pain. Whilst we also recognize that dangerous behaviour must be 'stabilized' in order to create a platform to work on the emotional pain; we wonder whether as a profession, we have the balance right, between control, containment and relational connection.

Anecdotal analysis would suggest that as a profession we can often struggle along with youth in getting the balance right as often crisis leads to counter aggressive responses from adults who then disconnect rather than connect with the youngster. The authors have noted in other writings that, '... angry kids who challenge authority, who often appear to hate authority, are often the same kids rejected by those charged to help and nurture them,' Smart & Digney (2013) and of course this disconnection pushes us away from youth in difficulty and does little to create emotional safety and alleviate emotional pain.

We must look at how we can create healing connections with kids when they are in crisis, even when they seem to be fighting with and rejecting us, in order to effectively alleviate the crisis.

Those who See Opportunity

As we reintroduce these topics for consideration, we also pose some questions:

- How is it that some skilled CYC's seem to see possibilities for connection where others see nothing at all?
- If we can understand these skills, how can we find a manner to 'pass them on' to colleagues? and
- Is such an understanding necessary if we are to work with pain-based behaviours and are concerned with healing?

We know that effective practitioners seem to have access to some intrinsic 'relational radar' and that they are proficient in their timing skills.

- They can pick the right moment and the right actions to generate a safe enough connection with a kid;
- they can manage the kids and their own anxieties, whether the youngster is in crisis or not
- and they have an ability that overrides the child's fear response and can create moments that the child and adult can share without fear.

What is most astounding is that practitioners with these relational radars kick into action with ease and comfort – seemingly without effort, yet we know these actions and interventions must be sophisticated and intricate. When observed they seem to fully understand timing, how to manage their body language, how to display comfort, how to use humour, and when to reframe or re-contextualize situations.

The characteristics of staff with these gifts seem to occur so effortlessly almost as if they are simply intrinsic to their DNA as workers. We are asking, can we teach those skills and characteristics in order that these become the ways of being in all CYC programs and not just the gifts of special practitioners.

Over the coming months we will seek to explore some of these issues and concerns further as we look further into the troubled waters of crisis and connection.

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Maneuvering our Digital Identities

Aurora De Monte

“As digital communication technology has become more and more ingrained into all aspects of our lives, be they social, cultural, individual or collective, they have changed the way we experience and perceive places, people and time. Technological change has always brought about cultural reordering as new experiences change the way we see the world around us and ourselves” (Koosel, 2014, para. 34).

I recently wrote about the use of social media and technology in relational practice. I continued to explore this topic curiously asking “what is the influence of our online virtual dimension within practice?” What I found after discussions with friends, colleagues and students was that there is set of social media etiquette and expectations, which may have influence upon daily relationships in the lives of young people. Expectations of engagement in social media sites appear to be influenced by the marketing strategy of creating a personal brand: a unique identity, communicating who you are to the broader public. It appears as though there is pressure to engage rapidly with others as well as continuously update personal profiles. Individuation is a core component of personal growth and development: however, this has never happened with the option for so many to witness and participate.

What we post informs others of our priorities in life, the experiences that we cherish (or not), and the people who are important to our growth and development. It also blends the imaginative with the reality. Sung, Lee, Kim & Choi (2016) in researching the motivations for posting selfies (picture of oneself) on social media sites, noted that these sites provide an opportunity to convey an ideal identity linked to self-worth and self-affirmation. Someone may post thoughts, dreams and desires and these may change throughout the course of life. This in itself is not a bad thing, as we have seen that it can provide opportunities to maintain supportive relationships with like-minded individuals. However, I have worked with many young people who have said



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that their social media pages were filled with aspects of their lives by which they no longer wished to be defined. If this is no longer their ideal identity, how do we support change via this medium? As practitioners we know that our past does not define our future, however how do we support young people and others in the safe exploration and understanding of our online identity, its impacts and influences on our lives?

Social networking sites and apps are not going to go away and this age of 'sharing' is something that we have to learn to negotiate in safe and healthy ways. We know that our identities, interests, values and beliefs may change as we develop through the ages and stages of life and so discussions surrounding our online identities as providing an 'image in time', identifying aspects of self that may have been significant at that time, rather than taking it as 'fact' of whom one will always be, may be helpful. An activity to support/promote congruence and self-awareness is exploring our 'inside' and 'outside' selves, identifying what it is that we demonstrate to others (characteristics, personality traits, activities, etc.) and then what it is that others do not know about us (characteristics or traits that we may hide for some reason, or may not be aware of). Are there aspects of our internal selves that are not conveyed yet are critical to our identity? If so, what might be a first step to align these aspects of our representations of self, so as to promote congruence? The activity can be done artistically and creatively, which adds a fun twist to the discussion and exploration and provides a tangible tool for us to return to and explore.

Facilitating conversations surrounding social media sites and apps that young people use, without judgment or fear, but with curiosity (they are by far the experts and much more savvy than us older folks), may promote engagement and connection in our relationships. We want to understand the meaning-making of young people by asking them, checking-in with them, about their experiences, thoughts and ideas, and if what is being presented is an honest and desirable representation of who they are and/or where they are in their journey of life.

Below are some beginning thoughts on how we might begin to engage with young people in maneuvering online identities. This will require work from us – more from those of us that were not raised with the Internet and such technologies, or who may be self-proclaimed luddites. Here are some ideas on how we may proceed:



1. Since we want to talk about it, we have to begin with some sort of an understanding of what it is that we are talking about, thus researching the various sites is important. Some sites and apps that are gaining attention are: Kik Messenger, WhatsApp, Vine, Whisper, Tinder, just to name a few. At this site (<https://www.common sense media.org/blog/16-apps-and-websites-kids-are-heading-to-after-facebook>), you can find out brief information about social media apps and sites that you may not yet be aware of. Safety is always an important subject to discuss and here are some go-to youth-related internet safety guidelines sites:
<http://www.safekids.com>
<http://www.wiredsafety.com>
<https://www.onguardonline.gov>
2. Let's engage in curious conversations about identity creation and expression. It may be useful to pull on the activity explained above ('inside', 'outside'), noting aspects, values, and traits that appear significant to a person. Here we may explore how something broad, such as gender expression, links into identity, noting how this aspect may have changed throughout our lives. Young people can look at photos or think of memories from the past to illustrate how aspects of their identities have changed as they have grown. In this manner, we can begin to explore experiences and beliefs that may contribute to self-expression and representation (it also provides for a great photo or memory collage too!)
3. Together explore various sites – Check out the ones from the [common sense media.org](http://www.common sense media.org) site as a start. You can explore personal accounts (not our own) that people have created (note that you may have to download apps to do this). I would suggest looking up public figures that the young people you may be working with know and are interested in, thus encouraging an interest in participation. Through the exploration of peoples presentations of themselves, we can highlight aspects of meaning-making or interpretation that may have been unknown prior and as well as illustrating the similarities and differences between interpretations.



4. When we identify needs of young people as well as themes that are present in their lives, we can use social media as tools to support the reflection and connection. For example, if there was a need for a sense of belonging, pull on strengths of the young people, finding like-minded communities and members they may choose to connect with or follow. This may promote greater identification with these strengths of self, as well as a shift in self-awareness.
5. And last but not least, it is important to try to stay connected to the changes and new developments on the Internet and social media apps, which means listening and asking about what young people we are using and engaging with the technology ourselves.

Let us not ignore the power and position of web-based tools and apps in our relational world. We may just be coming to understand these tools ourselves, and what an excellent time to engage young people on the subject! Many young people today have grown up in a world where the Internet surrounded them from birth and as such we cannot deny the presence these tools and sites have on our identity, relationships and within our lives. As stated in the beginning, technological changes are forever changing how we experience others and ourselves in the world. Let's be sure to take this opportunity to explore such technologies in our practice with young people and families.

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Putting the “Home” in Group Home and the “Care” in Youth Care: My Journey

Melissa Crooks

As I checked the mail one sunny day I received a letter from my employer. Wondering what it was, I quickly opened it as my two children laughed in the back seat of my car. I read the first line and realized it was congratulating me on ten years of service with the organization and the field of Youth Care. I smiled and, felt proud. I folded up my letter and tucked it away. Later that evening while the house was quiet I reflected on what I have experienced and learned over those ten years, the children and youth I have met, and how I have grown personally and professionally.

I noticed in the last year I had been questioning my own thoughts on the work that we do, and that I had been passionate about for so long. I had begun challenging and questioning my own perspectives and quickly realized they had changed, drastically. I could no longer make decisions clearly and was easily swayed by my team members and the youth. I found myself in this spot of grey. Nothing I was doing was with certainty. Always being able to see things from every direction, but not being able to lean one way or another with a concrete thought or perspective. I decided to hit the research again. It had been a long time since I reviewed some of the core philosophies of our organization and the larger world of Youth Care Professionals. I found many articles that contained a paragraph or two that “spoke to me” or inspired me, and that I could say I agreed with. However, it became quickly apparent that in my ten years, I had developed my own beliefs about Youth Care work and what I believed could better serve our youth in group care facilities. At that time I realized I needed to reflect and organize my thoughts.

In writing about my own development I want to share with others how to notice the contexts of our work and reflect on ways to be better. It fulfills my own need for clarity and I am hopeful it will inspire others on their journey and consider challenging themselves further.



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Environment and Home

I know a clean, organized environment is a key component in providing a sense of safety and assisting youth in feeling a sense of belonging. After working five years in a crisis center and returning to long term care I started taking it a step further. I realized this is their home, at least while they are residing with us. I leave after twelve hours while, they do not leave. How would I want my home to feel? Often I sway from using the word “home,” because not all youth see it that way. In my experience more times than not youth who settle into facilities make statements such as “this is my house”, “who’s moving into my home?”, and “I will be home at 9:00 pm.”

I came to the conclusion I will never accurately interpret for every youth what their life or family home was like, however I can try to provide them with a new home environment in which they feel comfortable, accepted and safe. To achieve this I began to focus on making the environment as much a normal home as possible. Locked doors, different staff every twelve hours, asking for treats out of locked cupboards, calling a social worker because your sneakers fell apart, and returning “home” to find out your fellow resident has moved out without any notice is not “normal.”

My approach was changing; I threw away the thirty page pamphlet of “program guidelines.” Really, if I am being honest, I can’t even keep track of them. I challenged myself to try and think of that many “guidelines” for my own home, without any luck. I tried to imagine what entering a facility for the first time would feel like. As soon as a youth comes into their new “home” they are overwhelmed with what must seem like millions of rules and I think really, there are usually two outcomes with these guidelines. First, the youth who sits down and memorizes each and every one so they can call me out on being inconsistent and engage in power struggles whenever possible or, second, the youth who throws them to the side thinking they are all the same and that they are going to do whatever they want. Who needs the rules anyways? VanderVen refers to point systems explaining you must get so many points to do this, or do that, which can be compared to “you must do this to get that”, a picture I am sure we all understand. She gives ten reasons why such “grading” is not congruent with the field’s values and purposes. She states:



“[Point systems] are not related to normality. Does anyone in the community live this way? Imagine going into a family’s home and telling them they have not cleaned up their room on time and will lose ten points and not be able to go to the movies tonight.”
(1999)

I questioned if programs could limit their guidelines to one page. I thought keeping it simple will help the youth know what is expected daily and establish a more recognizable routine. Often times we are looking for “compliance” however in children that have been abused in some way, they have complied and it has not worked out for them, but instead has caused pain. Lorraine Fox asks “How can we help, “treat”, heal, our wounded children and youth, physically and emotionally bruised and bleeding as a result of their compliance with compliance-oriented programs!” (1994)

Some young people need routine and predictability and we can be mindful of different needs, utilize individual interventions, planning, and expectations. VanderVen questions: “Whatever happened to the idea of recognizing why children and youth are in care abuse, neglect, rejection, family disruption then tailoring our programs accordingly?” (1999)

In my experience the external controls that I have put in place are about me and not about the youth at all. How many times have I sat down to prepare an intervention and determined what a youth needs is control, yet, I have continuously set them up by taking away any and all controls they have in their own “home.” I stop and think about every power struggle I have ever engaged in with a young person. Power struggles that have ended in a physical restraint, property damage, charges on the youth, discharge from the program, spoiled relationships, the consequences to such power struggles all end in damage to some degree. Was it really worth it? These young people have been through enough in their young lives that I do not need to add further damage. Fewster explains “don’t try and establish a framework of rules in an attempt to avoid problematic ambiguity. Personal boundaries are a much more effective means of creating self-expressive relationships.”(2011, 8)

I start thinking how scary and out of control the environment will be if I throw away the guidelines, my “go-to” concrete answers to everything. Despite the uncomfortable feeling and out-of-the-box thoughts, I slowly started incorporating this into my practice. I discussed my struggles with some of my team members and



expressed where I was coming from. Some of them were confused and frustrated I'm sure, but appeared supportive. I made sure not to undermine them or the program. I documented every reason and conclusion I came to for every individual intervention and decision I made that did not coincide with the guidelines.

This was hard, emotionally exhausting work, but it was effective. I realized what I was doing was larger than our book of program guidelines, bigger than any lesson that will be taught by only doing laundry during laundry hours, or any sense of responsibility a daily chore will teach. It is what I believe has kept me passionate, engaged, and amazed by youth for ten years and counting. The only thing we and our youth have at the end of the day is our relationships. I was connecting with them and we were connecting in meaningful ways.

Relationship and Care

As I sit here and think of the relationships I have had during my experience I can't help but be struck by my own raw emotions. Relationships are a two way street. You cannot have a relationship without being engaged. I realized this meant I needed to be my true self, be honest, be real, be an advocate, and really get to know not only myself but the young people that reside in the facility. How do they think? How do they feel? What is their favorite food? What do they like to do? What are they thinking about when they lay in bed at night? What are their dreams? Who do they love? Why do they hurt? How have they been so resilient?

What I experienced personally was not what I had planned. I felt extreme ups and downs, frustration, disappointment, vulnerability, sometimes pain and hurt. I knew it was always important to stay calm, but I was connected and I was no longer robotic. I struggled to really feel without becoming reactive, teary eyed, or angry. This was foreign to me, can I be connected and truly feel for the young people, without my own emotions taking over? This was tricky, but I began to discover this was okay, as long as our relationship allowed for discussion and follow-up always, no exceptions. I knew this was something I had to be careful with as Fewster (2011) explains that we need to be aware of our own motives and only in understanding ourselves can we begin to understand others separately.

I needed to be honest at all times, and at all costs. This allowed them to trust me



and know I am human. I make mistakes and I have feelings too. I recall sitting in a restorative justice circle with a young lady who had been charged with assault following an incident while I was working. When I expressed my feelings of what had gone on for me during the incident and told this young person I was in fact scared, her eyes immediately filled up with tears. She apologized without any prompting by the leader and couldn't understand why I was scared. She stated "I would have never hurt you". I started expressing myself honestly to the youth in the facility, explaining when I needed my own space, I needed to cool off and walk to another area of the house, when I was disappointed or when I was hurt, whatever the emotion was they were aware of it. When I was vulnerable, they became connected and vulnerable. It was true inner commitment to my personal growth and self-awareness, to our youth and that special connection. It continues to be hard work, however, the feeling of knowing I may have made a small difference or a small connection with a young person makes it worth it to me.

I believe that if I can achieve a true feeling of caring and safety through relationship together, the program expectations, the daily tasks, and the commitment to our programs will follow. Based solely on the self-respect, expressions of caring and sense of belonging I have allowed myself and the young person to feel in relationship.

I think about the youth that resided at a facility five years ago, but still calls in whenever they are in trouble because they have no one else. The youth who pops in just to say "hi" and the smile on their face when they see you, and the youth, who despite not doing well, tells you things are "all good" because they want you to be proud of them. Then I question, why? Why do they call? Why do they pop in to say hi? Why do they smile? Why do they tell little white lies about their outside world? I believe it is because we were successful. We were successful in making them feel that we do care and feel the connectedness of a true relationship.

I have come to realize this is not only scary for our youth, but for me as well. If I cannot become vulnerable they will not either. Is not relationship what we are all are longing for? If I can achieve that connectedness and sincerity as a Youth Care Worker with a youth, it is that learning they will take with them in their life's path. It is that feeling they can reflect upon and know they are worthy.

I want to show youth I am available to connect by listening and making their needs a priority. I challenge myself to do something small, personal and individual for a youth



every shift. I catch them while they are alone and tell them something I have noticed. I know their favorite dinner or dessert and surprise them. I purchase their favorite ice cream and ask for a hug for no reason. I offer to paint their nails and have their favorite snack prepared when they return from school. I leave them a note in their lunch or on their pillow. I always, always say good-bye when I leave. I fold their laundry without them asking and leave a note in it. I ask how they like to be woken up and wake them up to breakfast in bed for no reason. I print out or draw a picture and color it for their door and remember days that are special to them and acknowledge it. I hang out around the common areas with them, smile and laugh with them, and provide them with the knowledge and feeling that someone cares and someone will take care of them.

I have been in this field long enough to see my own values and beliefs shape who I am as a Youth Care Worker and how much that can affect the young people in our care and our relationships. As Fewster reminds us “only when we know what belongs to us can we begin to know where we end and the other begins” (2011, 15)

Every youth will be different and it is my job and commitment to my professional growth that will determine what will work and what won't. My concern was I was forgetting to even try. I spent so much time focused on making sure I knew who was on what consequences, who's laundry day it was, who had two treats, who didn't clean their room or do their chores, and who slept until noon despite attempts to wake them. I was forgetting to check in with them, to be with them in their “home”, and to stop them before they rush out the door to just smile, acknowledge them, and inform them I hoped they would be safe. That thirty second engagement and effort may be the only positive moment they have for the rest of the day, potentially their lives.

My intentions were always good. I wanted the youth to succeed, and move forward. The reality is they are only with us for a short period of time. I cannot, nor have the right to, attempt to re-teach years and years of already learned behaviors, beliefs, values and uncertainty of the world and the people in it. I do not have enough time to work on it all, nor would I ever be successful if I tried. So I have focused on providing them with a safe place they can call “home” and know that within the walls of the facility they are surrounded by someone who cares and will do anything within my power to assist them in making healthy choices and enjoying life.



Conclusion

I want to praise and acknowledge all the hard work Youth Care Workers are doing every day. I thank every Youth Care professional I have been fortunate enough to come across for shaping who I am as a person and as a Youth Care Worker. Many have assisted me in becoming confident enough to challenge myself and question others. I truly believe we can always do better, be better and achieve more. It is for this reason I am stepping out of the box, being vulnerable and sharing my journey. I hope it will allow others to reflect, discuss, and understand that what we do and how others perceive it can change the depth and impact of the relationship.

I thank all the young people who I have had the pleasure of working with and what they have taught me about trust and relationships. I thank them for keeping me on my toes, sharing their experiences, sharing their opinions, and allowing me into their world even if for a short time. They continue to make me better every day.

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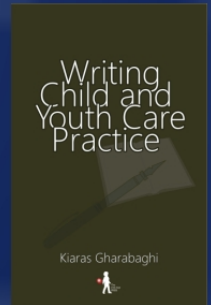
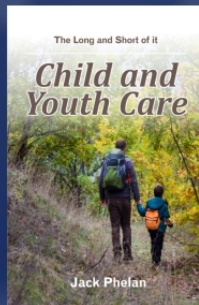
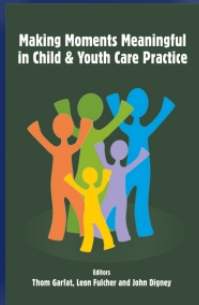
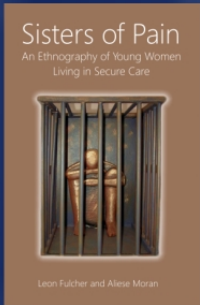
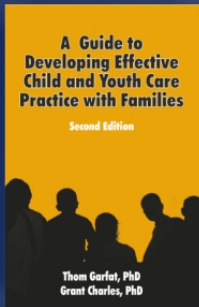
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An ostrich wearing an eye patch, speaking French, balancing on a giant watermelon with one leg, while playing jazz on a flute: Reflections on creating a meaningful moment in child & youth care practice

Shawn Mercer

The therapeutic use of everyday life events; making a moment meaningful. Using this moment in a meaningful way to help a young person, or other, reach a goal we have agreed on together. This is the Child and Youth Care way. Using the moment as it presents itself (Garfat, 2013, p. 142).

How do we plan and help create meaning in the work we do?

About 8 years ago I was working in a residential/group care program which housed four male youth ages 12-15 years in age, each of whom were designated as having complex needs. One particular resident, Cody (whose name has been changed to protect and respect confidentiality), seemed to always have the place on wheels. He was quick witted and sharp, theatrical and deep, as well as confused and in need of a lot of attention and hope.

With self harm, plans for suicide and running away – he showed us his pain. With his music, vocabulary, intelligence and creativity – he showed us his potential.

One evening shift Cody, who was having a particularly painful night, began to hurt himself by running into the walls and the situation became so dangerous that police/mental health intervention was utilized. I went with Cody, who was placed in



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handcuffs, to the child psychiatric assessment section of the hospital where he would be assessed for suicidal ideation.

As we waited in the bland, boring white painted, sterile room, I looked at Cody and wondered how there could be anyway to find opportunity to do some CYC work in this, what seemed to be, a particularly mundane and inhospitable environment. I found a hospital issue blank notebook on the counter in that little room and recovered a pen out of my coat pocket. Remembering that Cody enjoyed artistic expression, I asked “Would you like to draw something while we wait?” He looked at me and said calmly “No, would you like to draw me something while we wait?” I agreed that I would, and just as I was in the process of asking what Cody would like me to draw for him, he, without missing a beat, asked me, in one breath, to draw an ostrich wearing an eye patch, speaking French, balancing on a giant watermelon with one leg, while playing jazz on a flute.

Now you might be thinking, “what an odd request?!” But you would likely not think this were you to know Cody. He does not think in a unilateral, cookie cutter style manner. He is free thinking and creative and not afraid of expression. All I could think was, “MAN! Do you ever come up with some off-the-cuff stuff-wicked stuff!”

So I proceeded to draw an ostrich wearing an eye patch, speaking French, balancing on a giant watermelon with one leg, while playing jazz on a flute (see the next page).

As you recover from utter shock at my underappreciated Van Gogh-style artwork, try to focus on the important bit which happened next.

Cody looked at the drawing very carefully, his eyes deeply pierced the paper as he examined the details. After a few seconds, he glanced at me with what looked to me like a curious inquisitive expression, but before we could exchange words the resident psychiatrist came in to start the assessment.

Cody and I would go on to work together for a few more months until he was moved to a treatment centre that was better equipped to deal with his complex and ever changing needs.

Fast forward three years ...

I am now working in another residential program in the same area of the city. I pick up a young person I am currently caring for and his friend is waiting with him. The friend is Cody.





“Hey! You are Shawn! Remember me!?” Cody exclaims and I exchange enthusiasm that I do. Both lads get in the car and Cody begins to share some old war stories from his time in residential. I smile as I drive the lads back to the facility where they are going to hang out for a while until the evening draws closed.

I go into the office to complete some paperwork when Cody pops his head in. He is looking for some uninterrupted one-to-one time. I oblige.

He talks about dad. He talks about mom. He talks about meds and treatment. Then, his buddy and he are ready to go. Cody collects himself and goes to leave and then turns around and faces me in the doorway. That is when it happened.

“Shawn do you remember what you drew me in the psych ward that time?” Cody asks.

“Yeah I do” I tell him with hints of recollection expressed in my voice.

“You drew me an ostrich wearing an eye patch, speaking French, balancing on a giant watermelon with one leg, while playing jazz on a flute.” He said this; however we said the last five words together in unison smiling at one another.

Relationally, we went back to that place. We were close in that moment. “What did that experience mean for you?” I asked, having no idea where this was going.

Cody looked at me and said “That you are warped in the head ... and I was going to be just fine.” He turned and walked out the front door with his buddy into the evening air.

Garfat (2004) states meaning making is the process a person goes through in making sense of their experiences. It has been a profound lesson for me in my practice and development to realize and see that events in our lives are not as important when compared with how we construct meaning of those experiences and the impact or impression that is then left behind. That something seemingly inspirational can arise from a situation that appears to be so seemingly uneventful.

It means hope can be created in the artistic impression of a large bird balancing on a large fruit.

It means some seemingly small act can have influence; on how another understands themselves, their struggles and their path. It means this, too, is in the balance.

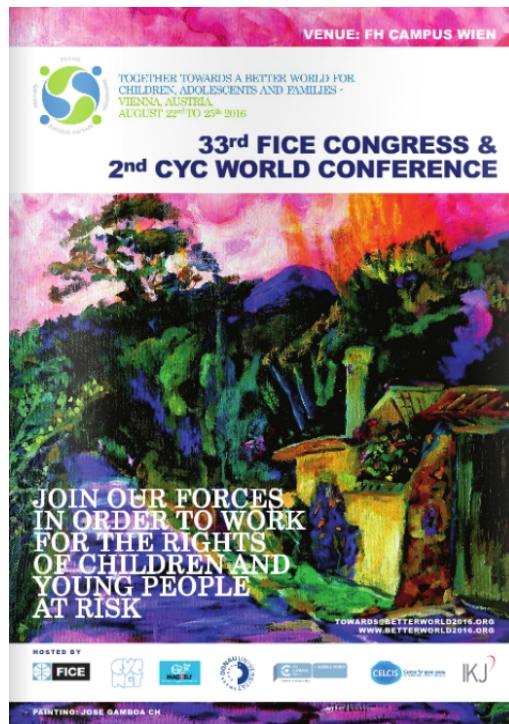
How will you construct meaning in your practice?



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Infant Mental Health in the Global Village

An invitation to reader's debate: emerging infant environments, and future research

Niels Peter Rygaard

Introduction

This essay aims to identify some hotspots of future infant research. It was inspired by the 2014 WAIMH Edinburgh conference, and the author's observations from developing international online educations for orphanage and foster care systems. Focusing on risk factors, the text projects current global and urban trends, pointing to possible future environments for infants, in a world where the organization of daily care is undergoing rapid change. The urban infant environment is reflected upon from several perspectives: How may the altering patterns of reproduction, migration and social mobility affect the organization of the family, daily infant care, government child policies, and the abandonment of children? To highlight the impacts of urbanization on family life, Danish examples representative of global statistics are used. The discussion pertains to the areas of theoretical concepts, possible new designs of studies, and the use of technology to disseminate results and professional dialogue with global audiences. (Topics for debate are in italics.)

Urbanization, Migration, and Infant Environments

The development of infants reflects their utter dependency of the immediate environment. Thus, to some extent, a short overview of demographic changes in infant environments may encircle future challenges to research. The UNICEF 2012 theme was: "Children in an urban world". While war, famine, epidemic diseases, and dwindling water supplies represent well known physical threats to families and infants, global



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urbanization creates a new habitat of human life shaping the social, mental, and emotional organization of early care.

A few figures may illustrate the scale of change: In 1800, only 2 percent of the world population lived in cities. A modest 2014 UN report estimate suggests that "Today, 54 percent of the world's population lives in urban areas, a proportion that is expected to increase to 66 percent by 2050" (DESA, 2014). Of the one billion poor, three out of four live in urban areas without shelter and basic services. Twenty-nine percent to forty- eight percent of cities in the developing world have areas considered inaccessible by the police, making infant social services a risky a air. As for infant health, 5.8 percent of children in cities of the developing world die before reaching the age of five (UNCHS, 2001).

The overall topic for discussion is simple: How can research identify key areas of improving urban infant environments?

Reproduction: The Reversal of the Age Pyramid and Policies of Infant Care

In urban settings, there are fewer births and more elders: by 2050, the number of persons older than sixty in the world will more than triple, while birth rates decrease (UNCHS, 2001). A possible cause of this may be that urban life demands workforce mobility and extensive education. In contrast to rural methods of production, urban life demands exclude children and the elderly by turning them into an economic burden for both parents and society; childhood is extended, and so is old age. In any circumstance, one consequence for developed countries is that parental identity will more often hinge on a single child and so to speak may "overload" the relation with expectations, worries and wishes; that more parents remain less experienced first time parents, and that the child no longer has a number of siblings for peer experiences and relief from parental ambition and worry. The peer group in the daytime outside home tends to replace the rural society sibling and local child group.

In the circumstance of a reversed age pyramid where the influence and needs of the elderly are a dominant political concern, governments may lack the interest, logistics, and means for investment in infant welfare policies: In Denmark for example, the 13.5 percent decrease in birth ratios since 1994 and "the elderly burden" now stress childcare state budgets, eliciting massive budget cuts in kindergartens, schools,



institution and foster care placement, and special needs care. In this political game of priorities, the familiar statement of early intervention being the best investment [such as the Heckman Equation (Campbell et al., 2014)] has limited bearing, and government policies are frequently paralyzed by antagonistic parties either preserving traditional values or propagating adjustments to urban life, spurring conflicts over prevention, abortion, and divorce.

How can research influence government infant policies and societal priorities in the case of infants representing a reduced part of developed country populations?

Uneven Tempo of Change – Migration and the Cultural Chessboard City

World countries may be described as being on different stages in a general process of urbanization causing a steep decrease in childbirths when completed, while Africa, Indonesia, Pakistan and the Philippines will struggle with many births. For example, growing from 38 million in 1950 Nigeria is expected to outnumber the U.S. population by 2050 (United Nations, 2014). This circumstance creates the trend that developed countries hold a shrinking proportion of the world population. Europe has long been unable to reproduce populations (Mathiesen, 1983); China is abandoning the one child policy to avoid a future lack of work force (Settles & Sheng, 2008), and a 2008 study of 39,600 Chinese women shows that 35 percent preferred only one child, 57 percent plan for two, and only 6percent percent planned for more (Hesketh, 2008). The decrease seems to be somewhat synchronized with urbanization.

This population void, combined with civil unrest and poverty, creates waves of migration from less to more developed countries – from Africa to Europe, from Latin to North America, from Asia Minor to Turkey – on a scale far exceeding the migration waves that brought down the Roman Empire, leaving many children in their wake. At the moment, such a wave of 3000 Syrian fugitives to Denmark divides the waters between isolationist and globalist political parties, the former parties opposing fugitive family reunion and integration.

One outcome is that any city becomes a multi-cultural and multiethnic chessboard entity, producing and immediately importing conflicts from other parts of the world (as in the recent Hebdo attack in Paris), border problems, and also spurs innovative inter-cultural mergers. Religious and cultural concepts of family structure from



different cultures co-exist, merge, and clash. In an urban bus, a veiled wife with five children may sit next to a conservative Christian and a hardcore women's lib single mother. Many families have multicultural origins (Fitzgerald, Mann, Cabrera, Sarche, & Qin, 2010). However, in time all urban parents become subjected to the urban environment, and face identical challenges to organize work and childcare.

Is it possible that as like languages and dialects disappear, so will local child rearing traditions be replaced by common sets of urban norms? Much research in cultural diversity stresses cultural differences. Can research explore a basic set of principles to define urban quality infant care?

From Preserving Traditional to Constructing Innovative Urban Parenthood

For urban parents, constructing childcare norms and practices becomes an individually composed task, mixing elements from the original cultural values with their own designs. Caregiving competences and practices are no longer only handed down vertically from grandparents: parents identify horizontally (even internationally) with other parents. Parental identity, authority, and emotional state-of-mind concepts such as family, couple, parent, gender, relative, individual versus group needs, etc. are constantly constructed and re-constructed. From a fixed lifelong structure, the family is liquefied into a process of negotiations between individuals.

Family therapy, parent counseling and mediation are professional responses to this development. How can such methods identify elements to reduce the pain of change and increase the ability to create secure and flexible family relations?

The Organization of Urban Infant Care: The Requisite Membership Family

The rural extended-family-clan base, where children are not separated before school age and participate in daily production and reproduction seems to dismantle under the urban stress of both parents working, the geographic daily separation of family members, and the transformation of cultural norms in city life.

Denmark, having reliable and detailed data on all citizens, may illustrate developed country trends. In the past 20 years, the number of children 0-2 in daytime care increased from 43 percent to 79 percent. Divorce rates (Danish parents have the longest total work hours in Europe) have now reached 43 percent (1955: 4 percent),



peaking at two years after birth of the second child. The frequency of divorce has moved from peaking at nine years after marriage for couples married in 1960, to five years for couples married in 1970, with a higher frequency in urban areas. Since 2000, the number of single maternal and paternal providers increased by 25 percent and 50 percent respectively (Olsen, Larsen, & Lange, 2005). Parents tend to be late debutants: most first births are given by mothers 30-34 years, and still less by mothers 15-29 years (figures from the Danish Institute of Statistics).

The fact that we live longer creates serial family memberships. In what may be coined "the requisite family", any membership tends towards temporary, exchangeable actors in the ongoing process of family constructions. Members may or may not be genetic relatives. In the daytime each individual is a member of external groups of identical peers or colleagues within a uniform age span: Child institutions practice strict age limits, and children thus lose the diversity and social interaction of age diverse peer groups. Family constructions frequently break down, and members become actors in other constructions, sometimes with double or triple memberships, or children living with a single parent. Twenty percent of divorce children peddle between parents. Since 2000, the number of single Danish mothers or fathers increased by 25 percent and 50 percent respectively (DIS, 2012).

For infants and toddlers, this organization of care poses an increased risk of separation trauma, loyalty conflicts; and frequent shifts in relations with important attachment figures, as well as with siblings, daycare and kindergarten peers. How do frequent daily caregiver, peer and group shifts affect the attachment process, and child behavior? And how does "age ghetto" care affect the social development of the child?

Society's Response to Insecure Environments: The Child Labeling Diagnostic Culture

Common child and youth problems in this environment are: low self-esteem, identity problems, suicide and suicide attempts, self-mutilation, eating disorders, learning problems, restlessness, hyperactivity, social phobias, withdrawal, and depression. Treatment designs in therapy, psychiatry and medicine tend to focus on individuals, on parent-child attachment, or at best on families. However, the distribution of child diagnosis seems to be also an urban and cultural phenomenon. For example, the frequency of the ADHD diagnosis is extremely low in Southwestern U.S., and



increases gradually towards the Northeast (CDC, 2011). Other causalities of hyperactivity notwithstanding, the stresses of the urban family and restricted physical spaces for child activity may be important contributors to abnormal behaviors. Symptoms of failure to thrive mentally could be interpreted similar to the physical symptoms of urban child obesity (Brody, 2002) and urban cardiovascular diseases (Smith, Ralston & Taubert, 2012).

Do we, so to speak, ignore structural organizational care problems by ascribing them to individual children (and anxious and guilt-ridden parents), instead of interpreting these reactions as healthy and normal responses to intolerable numbers of separations, and increased levels of anxiety, insecurity and stress? Should research further extend the individual and relational focuses to group, intergroup and culture, such as community based interventions? Should we further consider the weaknesses of the DSM system (as does the US National Institute of Mental Health) and search for another paradigm, based on understanding child behavior as a reflection of stressful environments?

Perhaps the basic question is: to what extent are urban environments suitable habitats for infants, toddlers and their parents, and, do they generate a host of negative long term effects on mental development? If so, can research suggest models for "the resilient infant environment"?

One example in this direction: a major recent survey of international research since the 1930s concludes that in nurseries and kindergartens, three factors influence long term child development, including higher levels of education as adults: fewer children per caregiver, smaller groups of children, and ongoing education of staff . Positive effects are most prominent in children from disadvantaged risk families. The most important factor is the quality of the interaction between children and adults (Christoffersen, Hoejen-Soerensen & Laugesen, 2014), concordant with orphanage intervention research.

Multiple Parenting Stakeholders: The Struggle for Continuity in the Puzzle of Daily Care

As stated by Bowlby, infants need a secure base in order to play, learn and explore; i.e. long term social and emotional relations with one or a few caregivers, especially during the first years of life. This basic premise for healthy infant development has been



confirmed by epigenetics, neurology, attachment studies, and other disciplines. In less industrialized settings the early care unit is created by the village: the parents, the relatives and neighbors. Inclusion into a long-term secure group of peers gains importance when the infant becomes a toddler. However, the social relations of all urban individuals tend to increase in numbers and daily caregiver shifts, while reducing in stability and longevity, contradictory to attachment definitions of quality care.

In urban settings, the young parent family is only one piece in the puzzle of shifting daytime groups for infant care, and the age limit for the first daytime separations from parents is dropping. Urban parenting skills may be defined as not only the parental provision of secure style care, but also the skills to construct and manage a network of groups where many separate actors are responsible for the child during the day and the week. These actors have a professional - more than a parental attachment-like approach - to their job, they are responsible for groups rather than for individuals, and they have very limited possibilities for intimate individual relations. Professionals too are requisite caregivers: the average general length of job service in Denmark is now down to three years – for social workers managing fragile families, down to nine months in the Copenhagen area. One study indicates that children in foster care develop less well the more often the foster family's social case manager is exchanged (Egelund, 2009).

Ways to enhance coherent networks and cooperation between daily caregiving groups, to provide security and continuity in infant relations may be important areas of study, including countermeasures to the effects of caregiver staff mobility.

Developing World Challenges: Children Growing up without Parental Care and Protection

Mostly in developing countries, the centrifugal power of multiple family stressors tends to sling children from parents into orbit. In the global perspective a considerable number of parents are simply forced to give up (nine out of ten "orphans" have live parents, the correct term would therefore be "children without parental care"). This population is estimated to be well over 100 million, out of which some seven million children grow up in orphanages. Sixty-four percent are girls. Five percent of this population is younger than five. The U.S. has more than half a million children in foster



or institutional care. As for Europe, 1.5 million are without parental care; out of these some 90,000 are younger than three, and figures increase in spite of lower birth rates. Only some 50 percent ever complete school or get a job, and many end up in prostitution, abuse, gangs, and suffer from personality disorders and reduced social competences (UNCF, 2004). Sadly, this poor outcome may apply even to developed countries (Vinnerljung, 2014). Many expelled children grow up as easy prey for extremist, warmonger, or criminal organizations, and as such pose a future threat to democracy in adulthood in both developing and developed countries (the terrorist brothers attacking Hebdo in Paris grew up in an orphanage).

Why are the outcomes of public and NGO non-family systems so poor, even in countries investing large amounts in care for abandoned children?

Major Challenges in Improving the Lives of Children without Parents

As pointed out in a recent IMHJ editorial (McCall, Groark, & Rygaard, 2014) the lack of government social services systems in developing countries is the major obstacle for care improvement. For example, one relatively developed country, Indonesia, has 250 social workers in a population of 235 million; these workers are also responsible for overseeing the 8,000 orphanages (BPSW, 2010).

In the global perspective, the trend of preferring foster care in favor of institutions may be questioned (McCall, 2014): quality foster care requires strong government monitoring systems, usually non-existent in developing countries. In countries where the extended family is still prevalent (Muslim and Asian cultures), family kinship is the condition for inclusion, preventing the use of foster care. A study of the effect of madrasahs (Muslim orphanages) found positive effects in life development, ascribed to lifelong group membership (Khalil, 2014). In Japan children in foster care are stripped of their family name when placed, are not allowed to see parents while in care, and at age 18 get back their name and are left without aftercare. The result is a high suicide rate among former foster care youth (HRW, 2014) (this author currently cooperates with child psychiatry professor Kamikado Kazuhiro at Nagano University to develop online training programs for Japanese foster care www.fairstartglobaljapan.org).



In general, the social-emotional relations quality of care systems seems to be more important than the type of placement, the physical environment, and other variables measured (Crockenburgh, Rutter, Bakermans-Kranenburg, VanIjzendoorn, & Ju er, 2008).

One possible pathway for research may be to o er governments large-scale program designs: supporting young parents to keep their babies or re-unite, and intervention programs for urban community responsibility for the same. Training programs for foster carers, day carers and nurseries, supporting and educating parents. Programs teaching professional caregivers attachment and relational based practices, to understand that their professional role is also "in loco parentis. Infants should be offered stable attachment figures in professional environments.

Discussion

In the essay, various aspects of infant urban environments have been touched upon to hypothesize possible pointers to future research, and reflections on how rapid demographic change may call for a revision of how we conceptualize infant research. What seems to be clear is that research and intervention designs must be adjusted to the two realities of developing country settings versus developed country settings.

Revisions of theory and research to comply with urban reality

As an example of a concept revision: attachment theory focuses on the mother-and-child relation. Obviously, the role of fathers is an upcoming area of study, but to set the question at tip: how does this theory apply to the busy urban mother building a network of caregivers, or the Chinese worker who relies on grandparents for care, and sees her child once a year. Constructing a secure urban base calls for combining attachment, group dynamic, and social systems theory in order to reflect reality. For example, can we apply attachment theory to "the secure group", or to "the secure infant care network"? If it takes a village to raise a child, how can we recreate the village in urban care units?

Technology spurring innovative research designs, focusing on vertical validity

As brilliantly demonstrated by Swain (2014) at the Edinburgh conference plenum, we are now able to map what goes on in areas of sensitivity in a mother' brain as she



interacts with her two-week old baby. This is only one study simultaneously measuring observed micro-processes and, in this case, neurological and dyadic behavioral interactions.

Such designs indicate that validity is no longer only established by a single discipline by comparing results with other identical method studies (horizontal validity). Also, validity is established as vertical, linking micro-processes to still broader scopes of social interaction patterns (Rygaard, 2007). Studies of infant mental health tend to be produced by interdisciplinary groups of experts, comparing processes measured from different distances to the object (epigenetic, synaptic, cortical, behavioral, interactional, group dynamic, etc.). This development of course makes it difficult to define the borders and areas of validity for any discipline involved, including former borders between somatic and mental research. In psychiatry, Millon's multidimensional diagnostic approach (Widiger, 2007) is one example of this way of thinking.

What innovative theories and interdisciplinary methods may redefine infant research? Can we conceptualize cross-disciplinary models to link organizational intervention studies and inter-group, group, relational, behavioral and internal physical processes in infants?

Today, WAIMH can be compared to a sizzling stock exchange of diverse infant knowledge. Can the WAIMH forum and other research societies join to design a global interdisciplinary research bank, setting global standards for urban infant quality care, to support systems for infants in the future?

With gratitude towards WAIMH for the inspiring Edinburgh Conference, and the members who generously share their knowledge to qualify the FairstartGlobal project, the author hopes that these reflections may inspire further debate.

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Editors' note: This article was first published by the World Association for Infant Mental Health (www.waimh.org). We are pleased to share it here with permission because of its international scope, focus on the earliest of childhood experiences, and the impact of changing family dynamics in various cultural contexts.





The Parking Lots of the Serengeti

Nils Ling

The other day I was in my car, driving around the parking lot at the mall in search of the perfect parking space. This is as close as I'll ever get to hunting and gathering. I imagine myself on the plains of the Serengeti, prowling, a keen eye trained on the herd of parking spots, waiting to cut one out of the herd and move in for the kill.

Suddenly, a movement! I watched out of the corner of my eye as a woman with a shopping cart moved slowly along the first row ... then stopped. All the time I'd been edging towards her, trying not to seem too purposeful – I didn't want to spook her or alert any of the other hunters that a spot might be opening up. Then out came her keys, the trunk opened up – and I realized instinctively that this would draw the jackals in. I smoothly accelerated into position, and stopped, turn signal blinking.

That last act – the engagement of the turn signal – was the ultimate declaration that this was my spot. I couldn't have been more clear if I went over and peed on each corner of the space. And frankly, with the turn signal there's much less risk of getting arrested.

By now I was feeling light-hearted. A spot right in front of the doors. I was already looking forward to telling my wife. She's always on my case about what she calls my "obsession" with parking close to the doors.

"What's an extra twenty or thirty feet to walk?" she says. "Park in the third row." Right. And turn my back on thirty million years of genetics. "Ha-ha- ha", I laugh, in a very deep voice.

But what's this? An intruder! He had come from the other direction, while my attention was diverted. I looked up and he was there – and his turn signal was on, too. He was clearly in violation of the *International Rules of Parking*, section 4, subsection c. But this didn't matter to him. I had run afoul of that most odious of human beings, the rogue parker.

Oh, laugh if you must. But for someone like this person to just scoff at the rules, to just roll in and park willy-nilly without regard to people who were there first and who clearly had their turn signal on ... I'm telling you, that's the thin edge of the wedge. If we allow that to happen, we might just as well kiss civilization goodbye.

Well, not on my watch.

I began to edge forward. I focussed my attention on the woman in the parking space, getting ready to leave – she was struggling with her seatbelt. I ignored the intruder – because by convention if you look at the other guy in this situation, you have to acknowledge that you're both waiting for the same spot, and since it would be silly to argue over something that trivial, of course you'd be glad to let him have it. Which is, of course, the human equivalent of rolling on your back and presenting your throat to the opponent. And I wasn't about to do that.

Finally, the backup lights came on and the woman started to edge out of her spot. This was the moment of truth. One or the other of us would have his way blocked by her car as she pulled out of the space. The tension mounted as she carefully maneuvered, clearly aware she was caught in the middle of a primal struggle. Or that two dopey males were fighting over her spot, one or the other.

To make a long story short – if that ship hasn't already sailed – she backed up right into his face and I zoomed triumphantly into the parking spot. I jumped out, locked my door, and bounded into the store without so much as a disdainful look back at my vanquished foe.

It's a hard life, out there on the parking lots of the Serengeti. Only the strong survive. But that's the way nature intended it to be.



JUNE 2016
Tuai, New Zealand

Kia Ora from our local village at Lake Waikaremoana! It has been a challenging time for the 300 or so people in our village, most of whom are Maori, as we have had to deal with the deaths of three of our

important elders in a ten day period. Interestingly, we are approaching *Matariki* – the Maori New Year – when traditional belief holds that the old people commonly pass on in the days leading up to these New Year celebrations. Events during recent days have soundly reinforced these beliefs.

The first two deaths involved *Kuia* (or female elders of standing) in our village. Their funeral service was carried out according to Anglican traditions communicated in the Maori language. *Koro* (the third elder to pass on) was a *Tohunga* (or keeper of traditional knowledge), and his service was conducted according to *Ringatū* traditions. The *Ringatū* church was founded in 1868 by te Kooti Arikirangi te Turuki, the symbol for the movement an upraised hand or *Ringa Tū*. For more details see:

<http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/maori-prophetic-movements-nga-poropiti/page-3>

Regardless of where they have been



Approach to Kuha Pa and Hinekura Marae at Lake Waikaremoana



Hinekura Wharekai Where Food and Informal Activities Take Place



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Tamariki (children) and Mokopuna (grandchildren) are Welcome at Hinekura

living, with each death, the *whanau* (or family) brings their relative home, to their ancestral place. If the people of your tribe total no more than 35,000 members in all the World, it is no surprise that births and deaths are given such importance! All three *Tangi* (literally meaning tears) or funerals took place at *Kuha Pa* – the hamlet of extended Waikaremoana family members living near

an ancestral house named after *Hinekura*.

Death is an integral part of living in our village. For a long time *Koro* played a key role in children’s learning at our local school, *Te Kura o Waikaremoana*, and all of the 22 pupils at this primary school had a personal connection with him. As *Koro*’s body was returned home from the hospital where he had passed away, the hearse diverted, entered and circled the school grounds so that children, teachers and friends could salute him before joining the procession of cars driving up to *Hinekura Marae*. Arrival of the body initiates a 2-3 day *tangihana* grieving process.

A tent called a *Whare Mate* (or house of the dead) is erected on one side of the ancestral house. As the closest family members bring their loved one onto the *Marae* for the last time in this physical realm, they lay him to rest for 2-3 days in the *Whare Mate* where family members were always with him until Ringatu incantations released him from the terrestrial realm, enabling him to move on to life with the ancestors.



The Carved Poupou Kaitiaki or Guardian overlooking Hinekura Marae





Taku Rakau E – Ka Pai Koro

Then the coffin was removed by family pall bearers from the *Whare Mate* and carried out the front of the marae complex and down a hill, over a bridge and then up another hill to the *Uru Pa* (cemetery) where a grave had been dug. More incantations were spoken as *Koro* was lowered into the grave, while everyone sat around on stones removed from the many graves in the *Uru Pa*



Hinekura Wharemate Where Children Gather to Farewell Their Koro

and chatted about *Koro* and being together with him at this time of passing.

Children are actively involved in the entire *tangihana* process, although supervised during formal speeches. Some children sought reassurance from their teacher that they could enter the *Whare Mate* and 'hang out' with *Koro*. Learning to live around death becomes an important legacy in all this.

Later, we travelled on our own to Papakorito Falls, the Praying Falls shown in the film by Kararaina Rangihau – *Taku Rakau E*, shown at an earlier Thunder Bay Conference. Farewell *Koro* and to the other Hinekura *Kuia* as you continue your celestial journeys. Thank you for sharing your influences.



Papakorito Falls – a Place of Remembrance at Lake Waikaremoana



Returning to the Tears of the Ancestors at Lake Waikaremoana

endnotes

Youth is happy because it has the capacity to see beauty.
Anyone who keeps the ability to see beauty never grows old.

Franz Kafka

Stories you read when you're the right age never quite leave you. You may forget who wrote them or what the story was called. Sometimes you'll forget precisely what happened, but if a story touches you it will stay with you, haunting the places in your mind that you rarely ever visit.

Neil Gaiman, *M Is for Magic*



When I look back, I am so impressed again with the life-giving power of literature. If I were a young person today, trying to gain a sense of myself in the world, I would do that again by reading, just as I did when I was young.

Maya Angelou

It takes a very long time to become young.

Pablo Picasso

Time in dreams is frozen. You can never get away from where you've been.

Margaret Atwood, *The Blind Assassin*



Sunday School I like.

Monday through Friday School I could do without.

It is easy, when you are young, to believe that what you desire is no less than what you deserve, to assume that if you want something badly enough, it is your God-given right to have it.

Jon Krakauer, *Into the Wild*

I'd like to get away from earth awhile
And then come back to it and begin over.
May no fate wilfully misunderstand me
And half grant what I wish and snatch me away
Not to return. Earth's the right place for love:
I don't know where it's likely to go better.

Robert Frost, *Birches*

information

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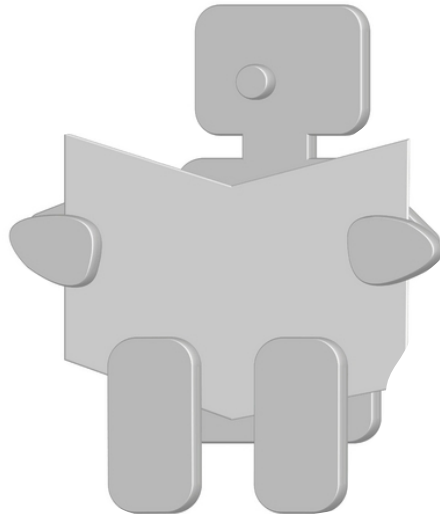
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