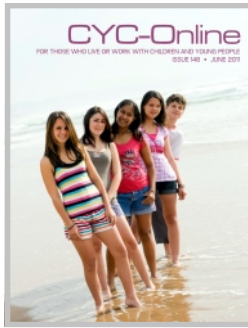


CYC-Online

FOR THOSE WHO LIVE OR WORK WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

ISSUE 148 • JUNE 2011





ISSUE 148: JUNE 2011

Contents

International CYC-Week	/ 3
The Illusions of Behavioural Change as a Program Goal	/ 8
<i>Jack Phelan</i>	
The Search for Islands of Competence: A Metaphor of Hope and Strength.	/ 10
<i>Robert Brooks</i>	
Returning Home: A non-theoretical understanding of childhood	/ 14
<i>Gerry Fewster</i>	
Participation in residential child care in Germany	/ 19
<i>Bernhard Babic and Liane Pluto</i>	
Practical applications of narrative ideas to youth care	/ 28
<i>Alison Little, Lesley Hartman and Michael Ungar</i>	
Building the Bridge to Hope With the Four Ws of Learning and Life	/ 35
<i>Mark Kennedy</i>	
Feedback, Criticism, and Praise	/ 44
<i>John Stein</i>	
The Goalie	/ 52
<i>Liz Laidlaw</i>	
Cat and Youth Care, Part 2.	/ 54
<i>Kiaras Gharabaghi</i>	
Abuse and Historic Abuse in Residential Child Care: Some Thoughts about Certainty	/ 60
<i>Laura Steckley</i>	
Only Halftime: A Tribute and Poem for Karen VanderVen.	/ 64
<i>Mark Krueger</i>	
A Good Man.	/ 68
<i>D.L. Shellenberger</i>	
A week-long conversation	/ 72
<i>Nils Ling</i>	
In Control or In Charge?	/ 75
<i>Estella Abraham</i>	
Leon Fulcher's postcard from East Neuk of Fife	/ 76
Dear Reader	/ 79
EndNotes	/ 80
Information	/ 82

International CYC-Week

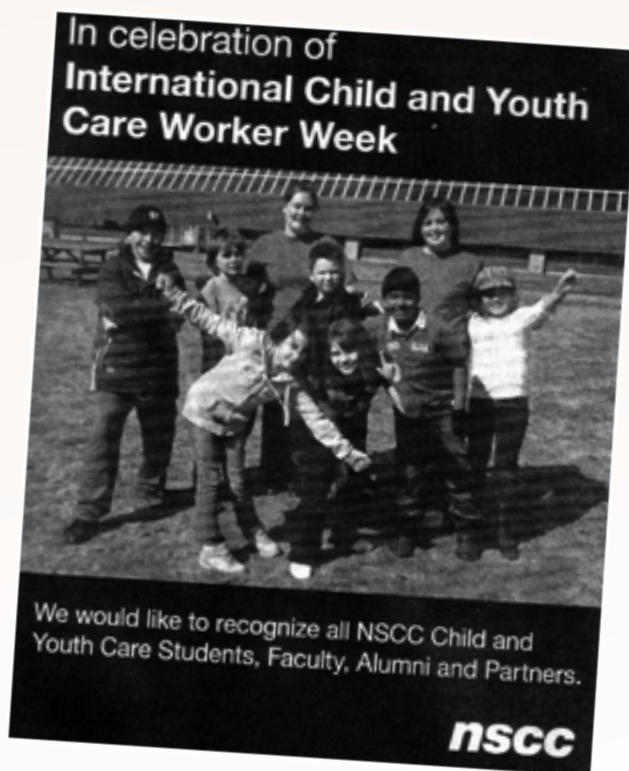
Every year we proclaim that the 1st week of May is International Child and Youth Care Week. And once the week is over we ask people to let us know what they did to acknowledge, celebrate, promote CYC and CYC workers. So, just to encourage everyone for next year, we decided to print here some of the things we heard about.

The CYC Association of Nova Scotia hosted their annual conference during this week. Here is what they had to say:

Approximately 80 youth care Workers and students from across Nova Scotia came to the Truro Campus of the Nova Scotia Community College to celebrate and learn together. The conference, themed, Reviving our Youth: Heart Mind and Soul was opened by Key Note speaker, Dr. Thom Garfat. Dr. Garfat began the conference by illustrating how the Circle of Courage could be used to illustrate the importance of balance and wholeness in our own lives and practice. Concurrent sessions offered by Child and Youth Care Workers from across our province included sessions on sexually acting out behaviour, compassion fatigue, Islam and working with families. Many participants also

enjoyed the banquet and social time on Thursday evening. The conference was closed by Jeffery Reid who shared with us all some of his humour, stressing the importance of self care and play in our own lives and in connection with the work that we do.

And not only that, the NSCC at Truro in Nova Scotia actually took out an advert in the provincial paper recognizing CYC Week.



An Advert! Great stuff folks!

So, that's a pretty big recognition, and there were many others of different types. Here are some of the emails we received telling us what people did.

At LifeWorks in Austin, Texas, we have 24 Youth Care Workers that provide Shelter, Transitional Living and Street Outreach serves to youth. We will be celebrating the last week in May with a cookout and swim party as well as gift cards for each staff to use as they please.

Nice. A get together of recognition and belonging – something we could all enjoy. And a great way to say 'we care!'

The staff of a children's hospital in Ontario decided to try and raise the awareness of others ...

We hosted a lunch and learn here at the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario, where CYC's from all the programs we work in presented a synopsis of their work/roles. Attendance was not overwhelming, but some Social workers and psychologists did come, as well as several other CYCs.

It does not matter if the 'attendance was not overwhelming', what's important is that some people showed up and learned, and hopefully they will share that learning with others. By taking this step, you are promoting the field as a profession – thanks for doing that! We should all follow your lead.

And in another South African program, people were acknowledged and at the same time had the opportunity to learn more about one another and the work

they do – building the family, increasing the circles of connectedness.

A month will be nice! We celebrated the day on the 5/05/2011. Certificates of appreciation were issued to Child and Youth Care workers, valuing their presence and commitments despite odds and challenges. Furthermore, we acknowledged and celebrated the elders in the profession, some have passed on, others working tirelessly to put the profession where it is. The list is very long. The work of child care workers is so very valuable, yet so little said and appreciated. Indeed, perhaps a month would be nice.

Again, from Ontario, another CYC worker tells us that her employer recognized CYC week for the first time – and she has a nice promotion suggestion! As the writer says, being acknowledged, feeling connected, builds pride in one's work.

I am a VERY proud CYC and for the first year ever, my employer recognized CYC Week. We received gift cards for Tim Horton's, it was so nice to be appreciated! Then a co-worker brought in cupcakes. I have been promoting CYC week in my region for the past few years but thought I needed to step it up this year since my emails were not getting me anywhere. I ordered lanyards that said Child and Youth Worker on them and sent them to local agencies that hired CYC's and gave them out. It made me feel so proud to see what other CYC's are doing in my community!

It is a fine thing when your employer recognizes the value of your work and when they don't, as the following writer said, it becomes up to us to make the acknowledgement with our co-workers.

I sent an e-mail out to my co-workers on Monday and brought in dessert at our group supervision. Our supervisor or agency isn't aware of CYC week so as a Child & Youth Worker I brought the celebration to our unit!!

We know there were likely a lot more things that happened, and a lot more recognitions. Whatever they were, we think they are wonderful ☺

But in closing this editorial, I just want to acknowledge that if there is a group of CYCs who have to be the 'champions of celebrations' it is the CYC Workers of South Africa (just go to one of their conferences if you doubt me) and when it comes to celebrating CYC week, they are always raising the bar. Like in this email from Mirriam at the CYC Programme in Durban:

My name is Mirriam Siluma. I'm a lecturer for Child and Youth Care at Durban University of Technology in South Africa. Our celebrations will be three-fold. We are painting posters on Child and Youth Care as a profession which we will display at the library on the 31 May. We are also planning for a lunch-time mini-seminar where we will have a panel to answer questions on the significance of child and youth care as a profession today in South Africa. In addition we have child and youth care

"UMUSA-KINDNESS" day where students will donate basic toiletry requirements to a charity of their choice. Our theme for the month is "Celebrating Courage on the Journey of Professionalization in South Africa".

Well, wow! Well done faculty and staff of DIT CYC Programme.

And not to be outdone, the faculty and students of Monash University in South Africa just went all out recognizing CYC and connecting it to a national movement for children. Building the strengths of the field while being a part of something larger – just follow this [link](#) to get an idea of their celebrations .

So, there you go – some of the ways in which people in our field acknowledged themselves and others. It is the kind of thing that could make a person proud, eh?

Really, we should do more of this, don't you think?

Thom

Want to place
your CYC related
advert here?

Or here?

Or here?

Or here?

Or maybe here?

Our monthly journal, **CYC-Online**, gets over 3 000 visits every month* from child and youth care people, **worldwide** (*Google Analytics).

Advertise your **services, program, courses, conferences** right here.

email advertising@cyc-net.org for rates and more information.



The Illusions of Behavioural Change as a Program Goal

Jack Phelan

Child and Youth Care Agencies that serve the needs of youth and families all have a similar goal, no matter what program or theory is utilized. Every agency attempts to create better functioning people and families, who can live more problem-free lives and see themselves as happy and capable.

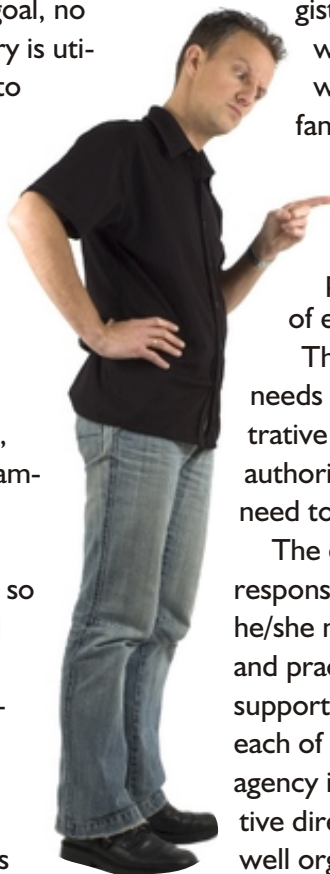
There are several different jobs and roles within each agency. Front-line staff, CYC practitioners or foster parents, interact 24/7 with youth and families, trying to create learning opportunities and challenges, safety and healthy boundaries, so that the people they serve will learn to stay safe and out of trouble, and will no longer suffer from abuse and neglect in their lives. They also try to begin the healing process so that the effects of past traumas

will not create future problems.

Other professionals such as psychologists and psychiatrists, social workers, teachers, and medical staff work directly with the youth and families, as well as advising and supporting the front-line staff so that they can accomplish the goals listed above. Supervisory support for front-line staff is a key part of every agency's approach.

There are financial and physical needs that are taken care of by administrative people, and community, public authority, and professional alliances that need to be maintained.

The executive director of the agency is responsible for the goals of the agency, so he/she must focus on overall functioning and practical results. He/she needs to support the staff to effectively accomplish each of the jobs assigned so that the agency is doing what is intended. Executive directors must create productive and well organized staff, so they can do what



is needed for the youth and families.

In effect, the client of the executive director is the staff, not the youth and families. He/she must ensure that the staff are trained, supported and disciplined, as well as focused on what needs to happen. The job is to organize and manage people, not through mastering all of the differing expertise areas, but by creating support and direction.

CYC agencies deal with youth and families who have suffered both abuse and neglect, often for several generations. These people are not easy to help, and many poorly prepared professionals are astounded by the response their ill-conceived ideas create. Most youth and families have been profoundly disappointed and hurt by well meaning, but ineffective helpers.

Here is the problem as I see it – CYC agencies accept youth who have many behavioral issues, they abuse drugs/alcohol, refuse to attend school, are aggressive and self-centered, and do not respond to authority. We take these youth and create very powerful external control environments which result in immediate, almost magical transformations – the youth attends school, stops abusing substances, is not aggressive, and obeys the rules. This is accomplished through enormous effort by the front-line staff, who diligently enforce every rule and expectation through the imposition of punishment and reward systems that are only possible because of the environmental controls available.

Unfortunately, everyone focuses on this surface change and regularly measures and reports on small progress, weekly or monthly. No one seems to pay any notice

to the fact that within a week after returning to the community, all the prior behaviors return and little long term change has occurred. The behavioral motivations present in the agency do not exist in the community.

The executive director has a key role to play in this poorly functioning system. Behavioral programs do not work to change the youth and families we serve. Yet many training programs, supervisors, allied professionals and “youth experts” promote behavioral strategies to front-line staff. There are many reasons for this, behavioral training is easy, quickly accomplished, and requires little expertise. Many professionals in their graduate training long ago learned behavior modification theory and still do not challenge it today. Developmental and relational approaches are more useful, and CYC practitioners who are skilled in these approaches need to be hired as both supervisors and front-line workers.

Even if there is some suspicion of approaches that do not create immediate accountability and justice, I would hope that most executive directors would at least be willing to admit that behavioral approaches do not accomplish the necessary goals and might be willing to stop doing this even if the next step is unclear.

The Search for Islands of Competence: A Metaphor of Hope and Strength

Robert Brooks

Abstract: *Identifying and reinforcing the strengths and beauty in each child and adolescent as well as in ourselves is a theme that has universal application as conveyed in the author's workshops for parents, educators, healthcare professionals, and business people throughout the United States and abroad.*

More than 20 years ago, the metaphor “islands of competence” became an integral part of my workshops and writings, a concept that my colleague Dr. Sam Goldstein and I continue to emphasize in our books about resilience (Brooks & Goldstein, 2001, 2003). This metaphor was conceived while listening to the words of youngsters in my clinical practice, many of whom were struggling with learning problems and had experienced a great deal of frustration and failure in their lives. Some of their comments were riveting, capturing a profound sense of helplessness and hopelessness. A sample of their statements includes:

“I was born with half a brain. Do you know how to fill in the other half?”

“I feel stupid. I feel I will never learn.”

“I think I'm not smart enough to ever get a job.”

“I can't think of anything that I am good at.”

Adults also harbor strong beliefs of inadequacy. One seemingly successful woman reported, “I feel that what I have achieved is like a facade. One of my greatest fears is that one day people will discover that there is nothing behind my facade, and I will be revealed as a fraud.”

A man noted, “I feel my life is like a house of cards and at any moment even the smallest wind can knock it down.” He added, “There is nothing strong inside me to hold it up.” Thinking negative thoughts appears to make them so.

Many of these children and adults seem to be drowning in an ocean of self-perceived inadequacy. Yet, if there is an ocean of inadequacy, then there must be islands of competence — areas that have been or have the potential to be sources of pride and accomplishment. If children and adults learn to identify and reinforce these islands, at some point, they may become more dominant than the ocean of inade-

quacy. This metaphor is a tool that evokes an image in others of the importance of shifting one's focus from weaknesses to strengths, from pessimism to optimism.

The metaphor "islands of competence" was not intended simply to be a fanciful image but rather a symbol of hope and respect, a reminder that all individuals have unique strengths and courage. By finding and reinforcing these areas of strength, one can create a powerful ripple effect in which children and adults may be more willing to venture forth and confront situations that have been problematic.

The Impact of Islands of Competence on Therapeutic Approach

This metaphor influenced the questions posed and the strategies initiated in clinical practice. For example, parents, teachers, or other professionals who come to discuss children who are burdened with problems are asked to describe the child's islands of competence. Next, they are asked to explore how these islands might be strengthened and displayed for others to see. These questions can alter the mindset of adults as they shift their energy from "fixing deficits" to "identifying and reinforcing strengths."

When youngsters are questioned about what they perceive their strengths to be, some will readily describe their strengths

while others respond, "I don't know." It is essential to convey to the latter group that all possess strengths, but it may take time for some to determine the nature of their positive qualities.

Furthermore, adults who are encountering problems are asked to consider their strengths. This exercise not only initiates a process of identifying the areas of proficiency, but also prompts the consideration of whether, in daily life, one engages in those activities that are associated with satisfaction and accomplishment.

Applying Islands of Competence in One's Daily Life

The metaphor "islands of competence" was embraced and applied by others. Parents, whether in clinical practice or at presentations, communicated that they

were now actively involved in defining and reinforcing their children's islands of competence. One remark offered by a parent was, "I feel like an explorer, looking for qualities in my children I had not thought about in the past." He added with obvious contentment, "It's a very exciting, gratifying journey." A teacher commented on how the metaphor had already been implemented: "The first question we raise at our team meetings and IEPs (individual educational plans) is, 'What are this student's islands of competence and how are we using these islands to help the student



to learn and to feel more dignified?”

Recently, one patient observed, “Whenever I begin to feel anxious and less confident, I remind myself that I do have islands of competence and that I must not lose sight that they exist.” She continued, “When I think about these islands, I don’t ignore my problems, but rather it gives me strength to meet these problems in a more effective way.”

A number of years ago, a mother whose son was struggling with learning problems and depression was impacted by the metaphor. She had attended a presentation and, in hearing the words “islands of competence,” she recognized that she had been punishing her son for school failure by taking away after-school activities that he enjoyed. This is not uncommon. Often, strategies to motivate youngsters unintentionally result in punishing children who are suffering rather than helping them develop a sense of self-worth and dignity. Wisely, this mother not only ceased her practice of removing after-school activities, but she added activities that were especially enjoyable to him such as skiing. She reports the outcome of her shift in mindset and behavior:

This resulted in a five-year position on National Ski Patrol, which led to an interest in EMT and paramedic training. It further provided other ways for him to feel success. He is now a third-year nursing student and has wonderful self-esteem! School is still very challenging, but the life skills he has learned gave him experience to carry-over into goals and to persevere. This is the experience and

information I enjoy sharing with other parents and teachers.

A woman named Patty Reeves sent an e-mail about her experience with islands of competence with her son Patrick. She shares her story:

It was my pleasure to hear you speak here in Florida around 1997, At that time I was just beginning to cope with my son’s learning disability. Not only was he ADHD, he was color blind, left-handed, and spoke as if he had a mouth full of marbles trying to get everything out all at once. I sat in your audience as a participant from the school district I worked for at the time. You had me. You had me at “islands of competence.” I left that seminar and went home with a different attitude, a fresh attitude about what my son could possibly achieve vs. what I was being told the likelihood of success for him would be incidentally, that at most he would be at a fourth grade level academically.

Patty notes that after the presentation she wondered:

If what you are doing is not having a positive effect, why continue to do it? The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results. We must think outside the box. The first thing I changed was my outlook. I began focusing on my son’s abilities rather than his disability. Rather than yielding

to his frustrations, I concurred with him and encouraged him to expect to be frustrated but to do the best he could. In time, the ready-to-quit attitude was replaced by a deep, stern nose into the wind.

Patty describes her journey to think outside the box and to obtain the services Patrick required:

I write to you now the mother of a man. He is beautiful, awesome, handsome, and talented. There is a compassionate side to his personality that I don't believe would be there had he not struggled and succeeded with his own unique learning differences. I write to you this evening thanking you for having a positive impact on my parenting. My son graduated from high school. He is also the recipient of the President's (Bush) Academic Award for achieving A's in his senior year. He is going on to college, too!

As Patty shifted the spotlight from Patrick's disability to his abilities, she created an environment that contributed to the positive changes that have occurred in Patrick's life since 1997.

The emergence of the field of positive psychology reflects a growing recognition among mental health professionals that individuals must not be narrowly defined by psychiatric labels and pathological traits but instead by their assets, skills, and strengths. Psychiatrist Michael Rutter and psychologist Mark Katz, both of whom have written extensively about resilience,

offer some perceptive comments about strengths and the experience of success.

Rutter (1985), describing research about resilient individuals, notes that when success is experienced in one area of life, self-esteem is increased, and the ability to face future challenges is more palpable.

Similarly, Katz (1994) writes that when those around us value our accomplishments, we can more easily identify our talents.

The task of identifying and reinforcing islands of competence in children and in ourselves presents many challenges and in some instances is not easily achieved. However, the search for islands of competence is well worth the effort given the possible rewards that await adults and children alike, namely, a life filled with increased satisfaction, joy, and accomplishment.

References

- Brooks, R., & Goldstein, S. (2001). *Raising resilient children*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Brooks, R., & Goldstein, S. (2003). *The power of resilience: Achieving balance, confidence, and personal strength in your life*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Katz, M. (1994). From challenged childhood to achieving adulthood: Studies of resilience. *Chadder*, May, 8-11.
- Rutter, M. (1985). Resilience in the face of adversity: Protective factors and resistance to psychiatric disorder. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 147, 598-611.

From: *Reclaiming Children and Youth*, Vol 16. No. 1, pp11-13.

I: Returning Home: A non-theoretical understanding of childhood

Gerry Fewster

The Knower is the Knowledge

All you will ever know about kids comes from your own childhood. Whatever you get from books, teachers, and even from kids themselves, is simply information to be considered. Unless you have systematically erased your childhood in the service of some religious, moral or scientific belief system, your decision to choose or reject what others tell you will be based upon the 'truth' of your own experience.

If you're unable to make this connection to your past, your work in child and youth care will amount to little more than meddling with intent. You may use your authority and handed-down knowledge to influence and control a child, but you will never be able to create what all kids need

most – a caring and reciprocal relationship in which they become seen and heard for they really are. Let me illustrate this point a little further.

If you have the opportunity to spend time with a baby, you may assume an adult/professional stance and view the child as an object with specific characteristics, needs and potentials. If you're really knowledgeable, you will be aware of all that stuff about attachment, pre-verbal learning and stimulus satiation and adjust your responses accordingly. In all likelihood, you will get away with playing this role for a while, but it won't be long before the infant tires of this one-way encounter and moves off to find more interesting options.

This is the second of ten articles on the ingredients of effective CYC practice. The author invites readers to contact him directly if they:

1. Read the material;
2. Have any comment on the content;
3. Have anything they would like to say on the topic.

All responses will be acknowledged by the author. The email address is:

fewster@seaside.net

But, if you get rid of all the nonsense in your head and tune into your body feelings and sensations you will open the door to a very different relational experience. If the baby smiles or laughs, you will find a place within yourself that seems to match what the baby is experiencing. If he or she becomes frustrated, you will feel a frustration dating back to the time when you first reached out for an object just beyond your grasp. And if that smile suddenly turns to tears you will feel a familiar emptiness in your belly that comes from the same place. Notice that you didn't have to become a baby to make this connection, you simply drew upon your own pre-verbal experiences to understand and respond from the inside out. Then, as the infant begins to respond to you, you will begin to experience a sense of attunement with a fellow human being who just happens to be at another point along the developmental pathway.

This simple example contains the essential ingredients of what I believe to be the optimal child and youth care encounter – one in which each person becomes responsive to the experience of the other without losing themselves in the process. Here lie the foundations of artless curiosity, personal authenticity, accurate empathy and interpersonal boundaries (the ability to know where I end and the other person begins). These are also the necessary conditions for what I consider to be the most effective skill of the child and youth care practitioner – the ability to accurately mirror the experience of an Other. All are based upon the same principle of tapping into our undeniable internal 'truth' — both past and present.

Reconnecting With Childhood

There are many religious, cultural and familial forces that can draw us away from the raw experience of childhood, but none is more disconnecting and pervasive than the crown jewel of the 'developed' world – formal education. From the outset, the task of the grade one teacher is to repress the inner wonders of childhood and replace them with a pre-determined system of external information. The kids who succeed through the early grades are those that are most ready to exchange their lives on the inside for the external gestures of approval of their teachers. For those who hesitate or resist, the classroom can quickly become a place of deprivation and punishment. Ten years later, the ideal student has come to regard childhood as a diminished state and walks around with a head stuffed full of hand-me-down 'knowledge'. Post secondary education carries on where high school left off. Now it's not simply about disconnecting from childhood but dismissing all experiences deemed to be 'subjective'. Students who continue to challenge tenured authority with their inappropriate feelings and irrelevant thoughts are either graded out or sent to a counselor for remediation. Those who rise to the top with Masters and Doctoral degrees are then charged with the task of perpetuating the system.

I could say much more on this topic but my only real purpose is to underscore the point that to understand kids involves going back to the original source of knowledge – our own experience of childhood. For many of us this is not a simple matter. Having been constantly admon-

ished by my parents for my “childishness,” I went on to complete twenty years of educational indoctrination, leaving the remnants of my childhood hidden in a multitude of nooks and crannies scattered along the way. Retracing the pathway to rediscover these missing pieces was no stroll in the park but it has been a most fascinating and rewarding adventure.

What never ceases to amaze me is how much of what I had chosen to forget was unknowingly projected onto the kids I worked with and I came to conclusion that my constant need to look after them was actually a displaced need to look after myself. While this might have served to underscore my image as a caring and dedicated professional it was also a self-defeating trap that justified my self-neglect and prevented me from recognizing each child as a unique and separate being. In other words, self-care was compromised, my boundaries were confused and the mirror I offered was more a reflection of myself than anyone else. Ph.D. or no Ph.D., these things had to be addressed before I could hope to create the kind of relationships I wanted.

A Hitch Hiker’s Guide to Childhood

There is no simple road map to the recovery of childhood but anyone who is interested in revisiting those early years when the foundations of self and relationships were being established may find the following suggestions and guidelines helpful.

1. First and foremost set aside dedicated time for reflection. Memories of events can be stimulated and enhanced by stories, photographs,

home movies, family records, etc. As thoughts and images arise, *take a deep breath* and pay attention to the sensations and feelings in your body. Remember, the most foundational events take place before thoughts and language come along to mediate experience. In this way you will be able to ‘re-live’ rather than simply recall experiences. In my own case it turns out that the most critical relationship influences probably occurred well before I was born.

2. Draw a family map that includes your maternal and paternal grandparents and their children, your parents and your siblings. Examine the relationships among these people. Use your imagination, you probably know more than you think. This is the context into which you were born. What were the primary patterns and in what ways have these influenced your own relational pathway?
3. Look carefully at your own place in the family structure and ask yourself: (a) Was I planned? (b) Was I wanted? (c) Who wanted me? (d) What did they want me for? One way or another we all born into family agendas and have a job to from conception onwards. What was yours?
4. Examine the relationships in your immediate family and notice at what point you became aware of your role in the family and how you managed to deal with the expectations. Are you still playing that same role in your current life, work and relationships?
5. Another reminder. Keep pausing in your reflections to examine the

feelings and sensations associated with particular thoughts, images and events.

6. If it occurs to you that it was impossible for a young child to fulfill the expectations you were born into, the time has come to stop trying. So let yourself and your parents off the hook. They were doing their best at the time, and so were you. Your adult task is to move on with compassion and appreciation.
7. Whether you feel appreciative or resentful, make an inventory of the gifts you received as a child. The package may not have been ideal but the fact that you are reading this article suggests that it was 'good enough.'
8. Now, from that place of compassion and appreciation, make an inventory of what you *didn't* get. Review this list carefully and come to terms with the fact that you can no longer get these things from your parents, your partner or any other person. These are the matters that only you can address. The little boy who wanted to know his Daddy was proud of him and the little girl who wanted to know she was loved without conditions are still waiting to receive these missing messages from the most significant adult in their lives – guess who that might be?
9. The process known as “Re-Parenting” involves revisiting the early experiences of childhood and giving the Self the messages that, for whatever reason, were not available in those early years. This isn't about just repeating words but expressing the feelings associated

with the words. Without the authenticity of feelings, the words “I love you” are no more than an empty cliché. Describing this process in detail lies beyond the scope of this article but if any reader is interested in learning more, I would be pleased to provide this information on request.

10. As you struggle to re-ignite your earliest wonders and fears, you may want to recognize that the kids you work with are the real experts on matters of childhood and the information they have to offer is vivid and current. In their own way they can all be wonderful guides and resources for your project. This stance alone is a step toward relational reciprocity.

A Final Thought

The above suggestions are directed toward examining your childhood through your history of relationships. But, as I said earlier, there is no road map to be followed or specified outcomes to be accomplished. Each person's journey is different and once you set out, you will discover that you have an inner guide who will take you wherever you need to go. If you allow your guide to lead the way, you will find yourself visiting places familiar and forgotten – explore them to the full and acknowledge the 'truth' they contain. Sharing accounts of your travels, particularly with a fellow-traveler, is a wonderful way to bring that 'truth' into the world.

Bon Voyage



A Brighter Future for Young People

The Kibble Centre in Paisley is one of Scotland's leading child and youth care organisations. Young people are referred to us from across Scotland, and we operate at the intersection of child welfare, mental health and youth justice. Our uniquely integrated array of preventative and rehabilitative services encompasses intensive residential and community services, a full educational curriculum, throughcare and aftercare, intensive fostering and a secure unit.

Tackling Youth Unemployment



"I never wanted a career until I started here..."

KibblePLUS participant

In cyc/online no 146 Kiaras Gharabaghi highlighted the steady increase in youth unemployment in OECD countries, despite fluctuating unemployment in the general population. Kibble has been attempting to tackle this issue since 2005, through its KibbleWorks and KibblePLUS portfolio of social enterprises. We offer training and employment for disadvantaged young people (16 to 24) in construction, recycling, catering, mechanics, gardening, ICT, multimedia, events organising, administration, promotional goods production and general trades. We don't claim to have all the answers, but we are trying to make a difference! We believe that social enterprise is the most appropriate model to use, and we know we are delivering positive outcomes to the young people. However, financial viability and sustainability of the enterprises are still fragile and dependent on external funding sources. We are hoping to work with cyc-net to build a knowledge exchange network, one strand of which will share approaches to tackling youth unemployment, particularly those with a care or custody background. If you would like to learn more, please contact lesley.fuller@kibble.org

KibblePLUS
JOBS CHANGE LIVES

KibbleWorks
LEARNING AND EARNING

www.kibble.org

Partners in Child and Youth Care

Many of our staff are regular readers and contributors to cyc-net. For our type of work, it is the most comprehensive and contemporary web resource we have come across, and we are looking at ways of increasing awareness of the site and its contents.

Kibble Education and Care Centre
Goudie Street - Paisley - PA3 2LG
Tel: 0141 889 0044
Fax: 0141 887 6694

Scottish Charity Number SC026917
Company Limited by Guarantee
Registered in Scotland no 158220

Registered Office:
Abercorn House
79 Renfrew Road
Paisley PA3 4DA

Kibble
EDUCATION AND CARE CENTRE

Participation in residential child care in Germany

Bernhard Babic and Liane Pluto

Introduction

This paper sets out to examine how participation is perceived and enacted in German residential child care. Residential child care varies considerably in Germany. Mostly, residential establishments consist of four or five units which cater for between six and eight young people of different ages and mixed sex. Care is normally provided in shifts by teams of four to five staff. Residential establishments, however, may consist of small groups based on a family-type structure (e.g. children's villages). Other residential units are integrated in 'normal' residential areas which are not directly linked to a larger facility. Yet others may be supported-living units for individuals (Freigang & Wolf, 2001). Residential establishments in Germany combine everyday life with educational and therapeutic services in order that they either seek to ensure the return of the child or young person to his or her own family, or prepare them for living in another family. They can also provide long-term care and prepare the young person for independent living. In legal terms, these three goals are equivalent. In actual practice, a speedy return to the family is the preferred choice, not least for cost reasons.

The main piece of legislation governing

residential child care in Germany is the German Child and Youth Services Act (SGB VIII). The current SGB VIII is designed to encourage participation of children and young people. As it stands, however, the law does not specify the scope and form of participation. Thus, for example, there is no obligation to set up a centralised agency to deal with complaints. It is left mostly to the facilities themselves to find solutions to any problems. Accordingly, the issue of participation generally does not play an important role in the inspection and monitoring of residential care establishments, and typically considered of secondary importance in any inspection process.

The interest in participation by children and young people in residential care has grown in recent times. However, the professional debate on participation is at an early stage and only a small number of empirical studies have been undertaken. Nevertheless, researchers and professionals alike generally agree that as well as being a basic right of the child, participation is ultimately a key quality criterion in evaluating residential care. This paper summarises the results of three research studies and draws out recommendations for practice in this area.

Three studies on participation in residential child care

This section provides an overview of the findings of three studies on child and youth participation in residential care in Germany. The three studies were as follows:

- 1) a quantitative survey of 402 German care facilities carried out in 2003 | 2004. The survey also touched upon other subjects apart from participation (Gragert et al., 2005).
- 2) a qualitative study carried out between 1999 and 2006, on participation by parents and their children in child care facilities. The study focused on how participation can be given more emphasis in the day-to-day care situation. The authors interviewed young people, parents and staff in different practitioner and management roles. They also attended meetings of a 'residential council', and organised workshops and educational events (Pluto 2007).
- 3) a qualitative study carried out in Bavaria in 2003 that investigated ten residential care facilities and processes of child and youth participation. The study did not just ask whether and how participation was practiced but also investigated how those directly involved evaluated such participation processes and the criteria they used them for evaluation. The authors carried out wide-ranging qualitative surveys of managers, staff and residents of all facilities participating in the study (Babic & Legenmayer, 2004).

Understanding the meaning of participation

The overview of research revealed that participation is understood to mean many different things, possibly due to the lack of precision in the Child and Youth Services Act and the many interpretations given to the term. Occasionally managers and staff are quite ready to consider participation to mean a comprehensive and fundamental right of children and young people, or to be an integral standard in their work. More often, however, they take participation to mean a reward for good behaviour or as a method to deal with requests or complaints. Staff members sometimes believe that participation of children and young people indicates a reversal of internal power structures. They begin to doubt their own role within the unit, believing that power rests with the children. Children and young people normally get their understanding of participation from their own experiences of being encouraged to participate. It was found that they generally have a clear idea about whether or not they are actually granted any substantial participatory rights.

Scope and areas of participation

Participation by young people in everyday decision-making processes of residential facilities is not yet a matter of everyday practice. The following table, taken from the study of 402 care facilities, illustrates that young people are still barred from participation in many of the areas. There appears to be no area of their lives where they can all participate. While a small number of establishments

Table I
Frequency of participation by children and young people

Activity	Does not apply	Never	Always
Choice of job training or place	10%	< 1%	80%
Get a driver's license	24%	2%	68%
Contact with parents	4%	< 1%	51%
Leisure activities	< 1%	0%	48%
Food	2%	0%	38%
Planning holidays	10%	20%	27%
Arrangement of common rooms	2%	1%	25%
Furnishing of room	6%	7%	23%
TV	6%	3%	18%
Keeping room neat	5%	3%	12%
Leave periods	8%	7%	7%
Night rest	13%	16%	6%
Employment of new staff	24%	75%	2%

(Source: DJI Institutional Survey of 2004, Gragert et al., 2004).

grant them participatory rights in decisions on employing new staff. others do not even allow them any influence worth mentioning on designing the menu or on choosing leisure activities.

Considerable differences in how German residential establishments handle participation can be seen when two of the items in the above table are compared: 'choice of job training place' and 'employment of new staff.' Young people should expect participation both when it comes to choosing their job training place and in the employment of new staff, since both matters have a direct impact on their life situation. The residential establishment,

however, sees the two situations differently. Eighty per cent of the establishments allow children and youth to participate in the choice of job training place. This is not particularly surprising because job choice is separate from the day-to-day issues confronting establishments.

Involving young people in the employment of new staff, on the other hand, is not seen as standard practice for most establishments. They do not grant participatory rights in decision-making regarding staff recruitment. Possible explanations for this emerged from the findings of the two qualitative studies. In-

interviews with staff revealed that they fear that young people might exploit the selection process to gain short-term direct and personal advantage. Interviews with young people, however, painted a different picture. Provided they see a genuine chance to be involved in staff selection, young people did not define their criteria in terms of gaining personal advantage. Rather, they looked at the expected continuity and quality of relationships. Another reason why staff do not grant participatory rights to children and young people is that they themselves feel powerless. Quite often, the staff themselves are not able to express opinions about who will be their future colleagues.

Types of participation

The quality of a residential establishment in terms of its opportunities for participation is also measured by the types of complaints procedures which are in place. Table 2 shows the results of the

Table 2
Opportunities for children and young people to express criticism and suggest improvements (multiple responses)

Type of opportunity	Total
Discussion with staff	98%
One-to-one discussion with manager	85%
Meetings at unit or group level	75%
Complaints box	22%
Elected representatives	20%
Other	11%

(Source: DJI Institutional Survey of 2004, Gragert et al., 2004).

survey of 402 care facilities.

This table shows opportunities open to young people to complain and submit suggestions. Not surprisingly, residential establishments most frequently identify discussion with staff and with the management. Three out of four establishments offer young people an opportunity to voice criticism at residential assemblies and group meetings. More formal methods, such as elected representatives or complaints boxes are less frequent. In some establishments, children and young people are referred solely to staff and cannot draw on any procedure to use in case of conflicts or complaints. Qualitative findings on participation also showed that formalised types of participation tend to be viewed with some skepticism on the part of residential staff and managers. Staff reason that formalised participation does not suit the situation of young people who are cared for in a setting that is as close as possible to a family structure, and could thus be counterproductive. They concentrate on arranging help tailored as much as possible to individual needs. This often ignores the fact that residential care, being by its very nature a formalised type of care or education, depends on formalised procedures that reflect its character and thus offer a good chance of success.

Evaluation of opportunities for participation

One of the most important (although in the final analysis not really surprising) insights of this overview is that the perception of participation may vary considerably between professional staff on the one hand and children and young peo-

ple on the other. Accordingly, there are considerable contradictions in how staff or young people evaluated participatory processes.

In the two qualitative studies, children and young people frequently evaluated their participatory opportunities (both formal and informal) as being much worse than did the management and staff of an establishment. Generally, there was a high degree of agreement between young people and staff in their descriptions of the facts and processes within a given establishment. The management and staff, however, evaluated the opportunities for participation more highly than the young people, giving insufficient attention to the views of the children and youth.

One example of this would be the meetings between the staff and the residents within a residential group, such as are regularly held by most (but certainly not all) establishments and which are intended to offer participation to children and young people. The timing of such meetings usually depends on staff preferences. Residents have little influence on their agenda, which is often notified only at the meeting itself, so that children and young people cannot properly prepare. It is also notable that the discussion often revolves around subjects of no appeal to the young people themselves, but is used by the staff to pursue pedagogical goals. As a result, such meetings are often not actually in line with the interests of children and young people and are thus unpopular among them, as well as among staff. Only in rare cases are they used to provide a pleasant group experience in a relaxed atmosphere for all parties involved.

To the extent that such meetings are subject to rules, staff are not always governed by them to the same extent as children and young people. The rules themselves are rarely set up in consultation with the young people. While attendance is mandatory for children and youth, this does not apply to staff, and when staff members interrupt children they are almost never reproached. Actual participation rarely goes beyond an opportunity to express a wish, which is then usually decided on solely by the staff. Decisions left to the residents are usually limited to a choice between specified alternatives. The two groups do not differ significantly in their descriptions of such meetings. But while the management and staff typically fail to see anything wrong about such meetings and thus do not perceive any need for change, the children and young people are not particularly satisfied with them, for reasons that are quite understandable.

Discussion

When it comes to young people's participation in the residential care system, we have found a wide range of variation in practice in Germany. This is generally not the result of technical considerations, but typically the consequence of differences in staff commitment to participation; both across different establishments and within individual establishments. Whether or not children and young people are granted the right to reasonable participation in their residential care setting, the scope of such participation is mostly a matter of luck and chance. This is unhelpful for all concerned, not least because the experience of some

establishments has shown that participation can be implemented successfully, i.e. in a form that is 'perceived to be positive by all parties involved.

Positive forms of participation appear to be dependent on the management and staff of a given residential establishment and it is essential that:

- they are convinced that it is right and important for children and young people to enjoy participatory rights.
- they themselves enjoy sufficient opportunities for decision-making and are ready to let others join in. Therefore participation needs to be guaranteed and practised at all levels of a residential establishment. It appears to be no mere chance that the two establishments that had the greatest success in implementing participation by young people, according to Babic & Legenmayer (2004), enjoy an unusual degree of autonomy vis-a-vis their organisation.
- they have been able to create a trust-based relationship with their young people. As a logical consequence, participation can be a suitable indicator of the quality of residential care.
- they have a clear understanding of participation. Participation needs to be more than offering children and young people an opportunity to express wishes without any obligations on the part of management to actually meet those wishes; because this ultimately leads to the idea that good participation means fulfilling as many of the wishes of children and young people as possible. Firstly, this pushes them into

a more or less passive consumer status that undermines rather than fosters their independence, and secondly, all parties will quickly reach their limits, which can cause major dissatisfaction and, thus, massive conflict. What is more, participation of this type quickly becomes a disciplinary tool, i.e. 'participation' is granted to children and young people not as a fundamental right but only as a reward for good behaviour.

- they examine their own expert knowledge to this end and reflect such uncertainties as arise from the demand for participation. This includes training, opportunities for reflection, and dealing with one's own ideas and fears as a staff member.
- they actively support participation processes, carefully prepare themselves and the children and young people for participation and show tolerance for errors – participation can be learned and is both a goal and a crucial criterion for designing this learning process. Accordingly, careful planning must go into the introduction of participatory structures, for example, through training given to staff and residents. It is necessary to constantly familiarise new members with the ongoing situation, not least because of the changing resident population of children and young people!

Opportunities for participation that work and that are positively received appear to be conditional upon participation processes that:

- are developed jointly by all parties involved. What an establishment can be

asked or expected to do is often difficult to determine from outside. For this reason alone, it is sensible to take into account the opinions of as many relevant groups as possible (at the least those of management, staff and residents) in developing and introducing participation opportunities. It appears to be impracticable to determine the shape and scope of participation without consulting all those concerned. Our experience shows that participatory structures and their decisions receive much better acceptance rates when all parties are involved.

- provide opportunities that can be relied on by, and are transparent to, all parties involved (including staff who tend to fear that participation could be turned against them, for example when children and young people complain). That is why participation requires formalisation in our view. Our research demonstrates that without secure participatory structures to support development, the content remains ineffective and withers (if it develops at all). Structures without content are dead edifices. Accordingly, it is necessary to develop both equally.
- do not push children and young people into a passive consumer position. Where participation only leaves room for children and young people to express wishes without any binding regulatory structure for compliance, or to choose from among predefined alternatives without giving them an opportunity to contribute either before or after, they are typically pushed into a position of passive consumers. At worst,

they may refuse to join such processes of fictitious participation. Yet later they may be reproached for their passivity and their refusal may be seen as evidence that further efforts at encouraging participation are unnecessary because they are not taking advantage of that which is already on offer. Excessive and unrealistic wishes expressed by children and young people in this connection are often, in our opinion, a form of resistance against being patronised. They express distrust and may well confirm children and young people in their views that adults cannot be trusted or that the commitment requested from them is not worth the effort.

- are designed to tolerate errors and that allow quick and concrete success in areas that are important for children and young people. Management and staff like to emphasise that children and young people should 'get the feeling' that they are being taken seriously. Participation opportunities are chiefly seen to be an exercise where residents are to learn 'to express their wishes properly.' Staff may think that it is not absolutely necessary for such efforts to have concrete consequences. Ironically, it is exactly this idea that confirms children and young people in their belief that they are not taken seriously. When they perceive participation opportunities to be ineffective or to refer to irrelevant matters, children and young people may become disenchanted. It should also be noted that the children and young people surveyed by us were quite aware of their own limits with regard to their partici-

patory capacities. In no case did they feel all-powerful. In contrast, staff members frequently accepted that young people could well be given greater participatory rights in shaping everyday life at the establishment than they enjoyed at the time of the survey.

Conclusion

This overview of research provides some important messages about participation in residential care. Residential care establishment and staff would gain much by letting go of their fears about participatory opportunities for the young people in their care. Similarly, organisations should learn that their own staff and managers are perhaps best placed to understand their own workplaces. Such expertise should be acknowledged and used in participatory relationships.

References

- Babic, B. & Legenmayer, K. (2004). *PartHe – Partizipation in der Heimerziehung*. Munich: Bayerisches Landesjugendamt.
- Freigang, W. & Wolf, K. (2001). *Heimerziehungsprofile*. Weinheim: Beltz.
- Gragert, N., Pluto, L., van Santen, E. & Seckinger, M. (2005). *Entwicklungen (teil) stationärer Hilfen zur Erziehung. Ergebnisse und Analysen der Einrichtungsbefragung 2004*. Munich: Deutsches Jugendinstitut.
- Pluto, L. (2007). *Partizipation in den Hilfen zur Erziehung. Eine empirische studie*. (Dissertation). Jena: Friedrich Schiller University.
- From: *Scottish Journal of Residential Child Care*, Aug/Sept 2007, pp 32-39.



reclaiming

CHILDREN AND YOUTH

From the very beginning, this quarterly publication was described as “practical,” “powerful,” and “positive.”

Reclaiming celebrates its 20th year by continuing to provide concise information and innovative strategies for all who work with youth.

Subscriptions, back issues, and individual articles now available online!



<http://store.reclaimingjournal.com>



Practical applications of narrative ideas to youth care

Alison Little, Lesley Hartman and Michael Ungar

Abstract: *In this article we look at how narrative ideas commonly used in therapy sessions with youth can be adapted to the work done by youth workers in non-office based settings. Our discussion is based on our efforts to share narrative ideas with staff at Phoenix Youth Programs (PYP) which provides residential, educational and prevention programming for street youth in Halifax, Nova Scotia. We review the key ideas behind narrative practice and how they have come to inform the intentional day-to-day work of PYP staff. We conclude with strategies staff supervisors can use to promote the use of narrative ideas throughout a youth serving agency.*

When Jenny's youth worker met her for the first time in the drop-in centre for street youth, Jenny described herself as a "lazy" and "stupid" young woman, identity conclusions reinforced by her mother and her teachers at school. When her youth worker pointed out how 'thin' these identity conclusions were, Jenny became curious about other ways she and others have described her over the years. Seeking exceptions to these negative descriptions with her primary worker, Jenny remembered that there were many times



when she had tried very hard to get her homework done, and had even asked for extra help from her teachers. Far from being a lazy or stupid young woman, Jenny and her worker began to appreciate that Jenny had a very different story to tell about herself. She is a young woman struggling with learning challenges and ADHD, a resilient individual who has had to

find ways to adapt to her school failure. In fact, Jenny had clearly been trying harder than many of her peers within a system that didn't accommodate her learning needs. With this alternative narrative, it

became clear to both Jenny and her primary worker that her school had let her down. It had failed to provide her with the specialized services she needed to succeed. Strengthened by this understanding, Jenny and her worker planned a strategy to help her complete high school in a more supportive environment.

As the above example illustrates, many youth care workers work in ways that honour a young person's complex personal story. As therapists working alongside youth workers in a community organization serving homeless youth and youth at risk of becoming homeless, we wondered whether the narrative therapy approach we took in our office-based work could also be used by youth care workers in other settings across the organization to augment an intentionally strengths-focused approach to work with young people. How could an emerging trend in therapy towards 'narrative practice' that integrates ideas borrowed from postmodernism, social constructionism and other abstract theories help youth workers practice in a more client-centred, non-pathologizing way with youth who carry numerous labels? In this brief report, we will survey some of the important concepts that narrative therapy offers youth workers and how this approach can be integrated into everyday practices in youth care settings.

Our agency, Phoenix Youth Programs (PYP), is a non-profit community organization offering a continuum of care that includes: an emergency shelter, long term residential care, health care, advocacy, school-based preventions, youth development, therapeutic recreation, career

counseling, remedial education, and individual and family therapy. The organization employs over 70 staff, the majority of whom have some background in youth care or a related discipline.

A brief overview of narrative approaches to counseling

We knew from our work as therapists providing office-based counseling that stories told about youth by others have great power and influence over how these young people define themselves. We noticed that these self-definitions subsequently shape the way these youth behave.

Youth often come to us believing the stories told about them by their families, communities and schools (that they are violent, disrespectful, etc.). Over time, these stories grow into detailed narratives about the youth. Therapeutically speaking, these narratives carry with them totalizing labels, meaning a youth becomes known to others in one way and only one way. Others see the young person as a 'delinquent' or 'street youth' forgetting that this youth may have other stories that could be told about who she is and why she behaves as she does. How different our perception might be if we saw beyond the thin stereotype of the "tough street youth." What we might see instead is youth who are: survivors, sons, daughters, brothers and sisters; youth who are hopeful, funny, caring, and ingenious; and youth who are busy at the business of taking care of themselves in the face of great odds.

Though narrative practices with youth who are deeply entrenched in problem

stories are complex (see for example Freedman & Combs, 1996; Morgan, 2000; Ungar, 2004, 2006), we have found the general practices of our office-based work adapt very well to settings such as residential care, outreach, and educational programming. A quick primer on narrative practice introduced PYP staff to the following narrative-based ideas: truth is negotiable; people are not their problems; from unique outcomes come new stories; and we need a powerful audience to help turn the volume up on the new stories we want to tell about ourselves. Specifically:

Truth is something that is negotiated: Those labels we assign youth are nothing but stories we tell. Like all stories, they can be changed when people start to tell different stories. With the right supports and opportunities, a youth can re-author a problem story, replacing it with a story that details strengths and resilience.

People become the stories that are told about them: Problems are really just stories we tell about our lives. Problems are not people. I may have a diagnosable condition like Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, but I am not ADHD. The disorder is just one aspect of a complex individual. However, these stories can be influential in determining how we see ourselves and what we do. For this reason, narrative-oriented counselors talk about separating people from their problems. As Michael White (1995; White & Epston, 1990), one of the originators of narrative therapy points out, the person is not the problem, the problem is the problem.

New stories can be developed when we find unique outcomes: Not everything a young person does will reflect their

problem-saturated story. There are always aspects of a youth's life that show the young person to be competent, caring or a contributor to the welfare of others. New stories can be told and their volume increased so that others come to know the youth differently.

To get new stories heard they must have a loud and powerful audience: An audience is there to applaud a youth and give power to the new story he tells about himself. Stories become powerful to the extent that others believe and repeat them. The more people who hear us proclaim an alternative narrative about our lives, and support us through the telling, the more likely our new story is to stick.

The goal of narrative-based interventions by youth workers becomes very similar to that of counselors: noticing moments of triumph when a youth is doing something that contradicts a problem identity story.

Adapting narrative ideas to the practice of youth work

Working closely with the youth care staff at PYP, and building on our own backgrounds in community-based settings, we began to work collaboratively with staff to develop approaches to working with youth grounded in concepts borrowed from narrative therapy. We provided the theory; the workers helped us find ways to adapt the approach to their work settings. In particular, we were very interested in the role that youth workers could play as an audience to young people's new identity stories as they emerged. We wondered, given the intensity of their relationships with the youth, if

staff could seek and find new identity stories and provide opportunities for these new stories to be performed for the youth's family and community. We felt that the close proximity of youth workers to youth and their social networks made them uniquely positioned to help argue for new stories to be told. We were certain that these ideas would provide a good fit for the kind of youth-centered work already being done by PYP staff.

To demonstrate how narrative ideas have been used by staff, we can provide a few examples. This list is far from exhaustive. The more familiar workers have become with the approach, the more ways they have found to enhance their practice. These examples were shared with us by participants of the Narrative Learning Series which was a series of seven workshops held to share narrative ideas with PYP supervisors. Supervisors have subsequently assisted as co-facilitators in an on-going learning series provided to front line staff.

A residential dilemma: how to find the time to notice exceptions

Residential programs offer many challenges to staff in regards to consistently noticing when a youth is acting or thinking in ways that are different from her problem-saturated story. Staff on a busy residential shift are often so preoccupied with ensuring that everyone is safe, and that all of the daily functions of a group living facility are being fulfilled, such as chores, meals and curfews, that there is little time left for noticing anything but the "squeaky wheel," the youth who is acting out and getting needed attention for her problems.

PYP supervisors have become more focused on training staff to not only put out the "brush fires" as they arise, but also to get good at noticing and encouraging youth who are engaged in behaviors that set them apart from the problem stories they come to programming with. The more these alternative stories are found embedded in everyday living tasks the easier they are to notice. For example, a typical residential scene involves youth and staff sharing a meal together. A youth who has been struggling with the problem of anger might show a small amount of patience (she doesn't react right away as she might have at other times when teased by another youth at the table). Because youth care staff are present round-the-clock, they are at a particular advantage when it comes to noticing these exceptional moments. As such, they can bear witness and engage youth in conversations about these exceptions. Supervisors have shown us that youth care staff have opportunities to contribute to widening the audience for these new identity stories by exchanging accounts of exceptional behaviour between workers at shift changes, in the daily logs, through case notes in the resident's file and during case conferences with the youth's family and community present.

A magic moment at the walk-in centre: embracing the unexpected

Since PYP is a not-for-profit agency, we often receive generous donations at the door to our programs. One such donation at our walk-in centre was a bag of wool and some knitting needles. While this might seem like an odd donation given the

context of a bustling centre filled with street involved youth, the opportunity the donation presented gave many of the young people the chance to show a different side of themselves. Shortly after the donation, workers placed the knitting material in the common area of the walk-in space so the material could be shared. What ensued was a memorable event where, two street-involved young men dressed head to toe in “street garb,” sporting Mohawks, studs, and safety pin piercings, were noticed sitting side-by-side on a couch in the centre, knitting. As one youth explained to the other how not to “drop a stitch,” and “My Granny taught me how to knit,” staff took note of the incongruity between the youth’s dominant identity story and this other more connected prosocial behaviour.

In cases like this, a serendipitous event can provide youth like these an opportunity to display other truths about themselves beyond the confines of the reputations they carry as “tough and hardened” street youth. While those identity stories are adaptive and protective for life on the street, the Centre’s staff seek ways to offer opportunities for broader self-definitions for the young people who attend. Staff are coming to understand their role as one of creating an atmosphere where it is okay for youth to “come as they are” and dare to try on “other ways of being” while they are there.

The Special Initiative Program: A place for youth to revisit hidden aspects of their identity

PYP’s Special Initiative Program encourages youth to participate in a variety

of activities that assist them in expressing themselves creatively. These activities include art, photography, writing, and music, and therapeutic recreational activities that provide opportunities for self-expression and personal reflection. There are also activities that develop youth leadership. Engagement in public speaking provides a forum for the youth to share their life stories with their communities.

Over the past few years, Special Initiatives have carried out a number of public showings of the young people’s art, photography and music. In one recent example, the youth captured their life stories through video, art, drama and music. A showcase of these self-expressions were shown to a wide audience. In addition to this public showcase a video documentary that captured the youths’ participation in a recent study about their experiences within the social welfare system was shown to a group of social workers at the Regional Office of the Department of Community Services. Through their work, the youth were able to re-story themselves as informed critics of the social welfare system. They challenged the notion that they were merely passive recipients of government handouts.

Since learning of narrative concepts, staff facilitators with Special Initiatives have come to view their work as more intentional. More than a series of self-esteem building exercises, these creative efforts are understood as providing youth with powerful alternative narratives that elevate their status among members of their communities. Through the telling of the youths’ experiences in the first per-

son, young people are being given the opportunity to move from the label “problem youth” to that of ‘artist,’ ‘musician,’ and ‘contributor to social change.’

Incorporating narrative concepts into youth worker training and supervision

Management staff at PYP have suggested a number of ways they have found useful promoting this model of narrative youth work. Supervisors are being encouraged to:

- Take a non-judgmental stance and share with their staff their own challenges using narrative ideas.
- Model how to separate problems from people. During meetings challenge pathologizing language and explore ways to interpret youth behaviour that doesn’t fuel problem stories.
- Remind staff to be careful about collective negative interpretations of a youth’s behavior that get shared between them.
- Pay attention to the language everyone uses, including the supervisor, when youth are discussed in staff meetings.
- Correct themselves in front of front-line staff as a way to model critical self-reflection and intentionality with regards to youth work practices.
- Structure time at staff meetings to address process issues (how the team works together promoting new narratives; policies and practices and how these support or hinder the development of new stories youth tell about themselves and those told about them by others).
- Create short lists of questions for giv-

ing reports about youth that: a) Assist staff to deconstruct the dominant, problem-saturated stories being told about youth; b) Assist staff to solicit youth input to the descriptions of their problems; c) Encourage staff to bring youths’ own definition of their problems and understanding of their life experiences into the staff’s reports about the youth; d) Encourage staff to talk about exceptions to problem stories.

- Encourage staff to be transparent about what happens at team meetings and have conversations with youth prior to discussing them at these meetings.
- Remember that staff meetings are an opportunity to increase the audience for a youth’s preferred story, not a time to embellish problem stories.
- Ask all staff across the unit about exceptions to problem stories they have seen, and ask staff about what identity stories they think a youth would prefer.
- Acknowledge staff activities already in use that successfully support a youth’s preferred identity story.

Bringing a narrative focus to youth work

Though not every situation encountered by PYP staff is an opportunity to build a new story (for example, in cases where a youth threatens violence against staff or other PYP participants), youth workers are expanding the scope of their intentional use of narrative practice concepts. Structures and systems are being reviewed. Forms, intake processes, dis-

charge criteria, agreements with youth and time away/limit setting processes are all being influenced by narrative approaches to intervention. Staff are less likely to impose consequences on youth, such as 'time out' or discharge from a program without turning the disciplinary measure into an opportunity for the young person to reflect on his dominant story and propose a plan to co-author an alternative.

Youth plans have replaced contracts, with their taint of control. Discharges are no longer seen as a sign of failure, but instead an opportunity to look closely at whether the program is well suited to the youth rather than vice-versa. In all these ways, PYP staff are engaging in processes of youth work that have become less about judging young people and more about acknowledging where they are at and the multiple stories they may tell about themselves with the right supports. By affording youth opportunities to get to know and experience themselves in new ways, PYP staff have been helping the youth to forge identities that stand in opposition to the problematic identities they have been burdened with.

References

- Freedman, J & Combs, G. (1996). *Narrative Therapy: The social construction of preferred realities*. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Hartman, L., Little, A. & Ungar, M. (in press). Narrative inspired youth care work within a community agency. *Journal of Systemic Therapies*.
- Little, A., Hartman, L. & Ungar, M. (in press). Introducing the 'narrative construal of reality' and 'the club of life.' *International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work*.
- Morgan, A. (2000). *What is narrative therapy?* Adelaide, AU: Dulwich Centre Publications
- Ungar, M. (2004). *Nurturing hidden resilience in troubled youth*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.
- Ungar, M. (2006). *Strengths-based counseling with at-risk youth*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- White, M. (1995). *Re-authoring lives: Interviews and essays*. Adelaide, South Australia: Dulwich Centre.
- White, M. & Epston, D. (1990). *Narrative means to therapeutic ends*. New York: W.W. Norton.

This feature: Alison Little, Lesley Hartman and Michael Ungar: Practical applications of narrative ideas to youth care. *Relational Child and Youth Care Practice*, Volume 20 Number 4, pp. 37-41

Building the Bridge to Hope With the Four Ws of Learning and Life

Mark Kennedy

Abstract: Understanding and encouraging different learning perspectives can bring youth a step closer to success. The author details four outlooks on learning and life and provides strategies that can bridge the gap between teachers, youth workers, and today's youth.

While standing in line recently at a fast-food restaurant, I noticed that the young man ahead of me was probably homeless. He was so young that he might have only recently been in school, perhaps in a 7th to 12th-grade alternative education class such as the one I teach. The poignancy of the situation, combined with the fact that it was a slow line, made me wonder what causes some youth to remain hopeful in school or other constructive youth settings, and others to drop out, perhaps first from school, then from life.

I made this connection between school and life because, in thinking about that young man, it seemed likely that his report cards would not show a record of success. Although we may never know the correlation between success and failure in adolescence and later life, we cannot deny that there is one. So the question becomes: What can we do in schools and allied youth settings to extend success and to nurture and restore hopefulness for these youth? I believe one answer is to

build a bridge of hope by understanding and responding to the four different perspectives on learning and life symbolized by four Ws.

The Four Ws

During my teaching tenure, I have had the opportunity to experience several classroom settings: ESL, gifted, adult, and alternative, I have also worked with social workers, counselors, pre- and post-incarceration juvenile justice officers, police officers on community and gang detail, clergy, career counselors, and many others who work every day to rebuild hope in our young people. This experience has shown me that, while the circumstances of each situation are unique, there are common elements. I believe that we can begin to learn from these similarities about who is and is not being reached. We can then start to understand how to build bridges in order to reach all of today's youth. We must consider four distinct outlooks on life: *What? Why/How? What If?* and *So What?*

These four outlooks can be understood through the work of Garmston and Wellman (1992), who identify four sub-audiences within every larger adult group. These authors symbolically represent the members of each of the subgroups with an interrogative that expresses what they are most interested in knowing about a new subject: *What? Why/How? What If? or So What?* I suggest that these interrogatives represent major perspectives on teaching, learning, and life (Kennedy, 2000), and that this idea can extend to classrooms, a natural audience, and indeed any youth setting. Recognizing these four avenues of inquisitiveness is the first step in building a bridge that will allow all students to cross over from fear, anger, and frustration to hopefulness.

The Understanding Adult

All teachers and youth workers also have one of these outlooks on learning and life. The teacher who can transcend her or his own perspective and reframe to differing outlooks is granting students access to successful participation in curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The youth worker who can go beyond his or her natural outlook is demonstrating the validity of other perspectives and is validating those youth whose perspectives are different from his or her own. To become capable of such reframing, each adult must first understand his or her own view.

The ***What?*** adult. Very traditional teachers often believe the classroom culture should be one of asking and answering *What?* questions about a sub-

ject (Figure 1). These teachers often see their responsibility to be accurately imparting what is factually known. That is, education is seen to be primarily about perennial truth. This is sometimes called the “Great Books” curriculum. In this conventional classroom, the teacher will most often use direct instruction to impart the central ideas that were true yesterday and will be true tomorrow. Traditional youth workers will often see things as they have always been. The ideal, illustrated by the past, may serve as their goal for youth.

The ***Why/How?*** adult. The teacher who sees the priority of education as asking and answering *Why?* and *How?* wishes for students to learn the basic skills that will help prepare them for the adult job market and other adult skills (Figure 1). The teacher directs the learning of these essentials, which converge on the basics of literacy, vocational preparation, responsible citizenship, and those forms of math and science that seek and then test for one variable at a time. Youth workers with this point of view are generally concerned for the vocational and financial future of youth.

The ***What If?*** adult. Invention or speculation about problems, as well as innovative solutions, are seen as the route to learning by the *What If?* teacher and service worker, a view that leads to divergent paths and results. The teacher who has this perspective will be less a director and more a facilitator (Figure 1). This teacher maintains that schooling is not preparation for later life but is intertwined with the student’s current life. To facilitate

**Figure I
Teacher and Student Outlooks**

Teacher expects to ask and answer about class content			
<i>What</i>	<i>Why/How</i>	<i>What If</i>	<i>So What</i>
factual information is most important to teach and learn?	does the physical world work as it does?	students were encouraged to speculate on solutions to societal problems?	does this learning have to do with the individual student's life?
Teacher believes role is to			
<i>Transmit</i>	<i>Direct</i>	<i>Facilitate</i>	<i>Co-Learn</i>
perennial truths to students.	the learning of skills useful for adulthood	student solving of self-selected current/future) societal problems.	as students pursue issues in which they have a passionate interest.
Student is motivated to learn by asking			
<i>What</i>	<i>Why/How</i>	<i>What If</i>	<i>So What</i>
are the facts of this subject? (as an academic)	do things work? (as a troubleshooter)	there were different possibilities? (as an innovator)	does this have to do with me? (as a collaborator)
Student's most comfortable assessment mode is			
<i>Traditional</i>	<i>Deductive Inquiry</i>	<i>Open Inquiry</i>	<i>Inductive Inquiry</i>
Conventional tests and quizzes, short essay. <i>Test me on the facts presented.</i>	Convergent tests, right/wrong answers, and techniques. <i>Give me a hypothesis: I'll test it.</i>	Divergent assessment/learning builds on student imagination. <i>Give me an idea: I'll make it better.</i>	Student has input with teacher on what/how of assessment <i>Choose assessment from my life.</i>

such learning, the teacher will often point students to tools such as the news, media segments, the Internet, and guest speakers to inspire *What If!* problem solving of societal challenges. Other youth workers will expand on these progressive themes as they seek to re-ignite hopefulness in youth.

The **So What?** adult. *So What?* is a question that initially sounds surly and disrespectful but becomes legitimate with

examination. This type of thinker is really asking, "How does this affect me and those I care about, today?" As Figure I shows, a teacher who sees his or her work from this outlook will most often view curriculum as emergent and instruction as a process of co-learning with students. The focus is on the individual's personal, passionate encounter with learning. Those who work with youth beyond the classroom will be concerned with the quality of daily life for youth.



Engendering Hope by Helping Youth Achieve

We can also see in Figure 1 how the major classroom activities of learning and assessment, and how youth activities beyond the school, look to youths of differing perspectives. How effectively do students use their natural inquisitiveness to learn about and create assessment tools that will teach adults and other students things they may not see from their vantage points? In this era of accountability, high-stakes assessment is seen as the critical test for judging the effectiveness and degree of learning, and so weighs heavily on youth. If we can construct assessment in ways that nurture and even re-ignite hope for learners, this will act as a blueprint from which to build the bridge to hope using curricu-

lum and instruction (Shoemaker & Lewin, 1993). This in turn will offer applications for non-school settings.

The **What?** youth. I have been most successful in curriculum planning and assessment with this group of academics by having them design traditional assessment items, such as quiz and test questions on the factual knowledge learned (Figure 1). Students are vested in the outcome by their outlook—they really *believe* in the importance of conventional assessment—and usually do a fine job. I can then take the best of their questions and use them to compose a whole-class quiz or test. I also give convergent assessment instruments to the divergent and emergent thinkers with the realization that this may not seem like basic knowledge, but higher-order thinking to those of other perspectives (Kennedy, 2000).

Outside of school, these same youth will hold conventional expectations of themselves and others. The past mistakes of these youth—for example, becoming a teen parent or being incarcerated—will haunt them inordinately. Because these idealists can no longer take the traditional route to adulthood, they often feel as if they are beyond redemption. Those who work with these youth will want to help them overcome their focus on the past as well as their all-or-nothing approach to life. I often ask youth who are stuck, “What mistakes in your past would you change if you could? How many of those things *can* you change? Does this mean that your life is over? So what *can* you do?”

The **Why/How?** youth. I have had students from this perspective pursue “I-Searches” in which they asked questions such as, “Why does math have many branches?” (Kennedy, 1996). I generally help these troubleshooters design or refine the question and the process, leaving only one variable, which students can then investigate to gain the solution. We can see that in Figure 1 this is termed *deductive inquiry*. These students are also interested in the mechanics and functions of things around us. They can become very adept at making or explaining illustrations, diagrams, or 3-D models of things such as motors, planets and moons, a ship, an airplane, or a hydraulic lift. These students invariably raise questions about material perhaps touched on but not fully covered in class. Nurturing these students in their natural curiosity about *Why* and *How* things work gives them motivation and context for learning to work within other perspectives—a skill and range that will lead to further academic and life success.

After school hours, these youth, who are realists in outlook, will be interested in practical and mechanical things: the equipment of police and probation officers, how social workers and psychologists achieve results, how the laws that affect them work, the immediate career options/training that can be illuminated by career counselors. These students will want to know the most direct route to completing whatever education is necessary for opening up opportunities in their chosen career paths.

The **What If?** youth. “What if Pythagoras, Euclid, Archimedes, Heron, or Hypatia came to our classroom?” This is the type of question a *What If!* learner would like to hear at the end of a learning unit that covered these mathematicians. Picture one student innovator beginning a reply, standing as she gathers steam: “Oh, you mean what if Archimedes walked into our room right now and started to talk about leverage ... and we showed *him* our modern hydraulics ” I have witnessed such impromptu responses from *What If!* learners on many occasions. These imaginary scenarios can easily go on for a full 5 minutes-laced with facts and concepts that the student has learned. Such beginnings form the foundation for asking what it is that historical figures and epochs, as well as the inventions they have produced, might tell us about the challenges facing us as a community today. Assessment of such learning must be a very open type of inquiry (Figure 1) in which the teacher poses the initial question, and then student imagination takes over. The results will diverge from traditional expectations but will be interesting and worthwhile.

Outside the classroom, these inventive youth will be interested in justice, exploring and finding new paths and patterns, and experimenting with new and innovative ideas. These futurists appreciate those adults who do not respond to their unique suggestions or thoughts with idealism or excessive realism, but rather compliment their ability to generate new ideas. In group brainstorming sessions, these youth, who are among the most in need of special help in America, are irreplaceable. On controversial social questions,

they often take the position of “live and let live.”

The **So What?** youth. This group disdains traditional written schoolwork, but loves to build, draw, and perform. In fact, many have gotten into trouble for doing these things during class time. However, if the *So What?* question of personal relevancy is answered, these collaborators are given a meaningful reason for learning traditional facts and essential skills (Figure 1). They can then often master much of the same information included in the written work from other perspectives (especially if cooperatively grouped with those of differing outlooks), although their products may be constructed in nontraditional ways. For example, often these students complete and organize work from the back to the front, which can be unnerving at first for the traditional teacher. However, this is merely a corollary to their seeking the relevance of learning that includes a need to see the big picture. Without this personal relevancy, these students often have a more difficult time succeeding in a system that will measure them largely in terms of more traditional factual knowledge and practical skills. (This is especially true under the current trend toward standardized assessment.)

Both inside and outside the classroom, these youth are concerned with the significance of lessons and events for their lives today. To reach these youth, we adults—especially traditionalists in outlook or training—will need to learn to begin with personal experiences, and only then make the transition to business. People must come before tasks. The youth worker or educator who has a traditional concept of

what it means to be “professional” with youth (i.e., distant and removed) will reach these youth only by unbending, perhaps to the point of sharing something personal first in order to demonstrate a willingness to appreciate and recognize the youth’s outlook.

To bring this discussion full circle, we might contrast this strategy of effectively working with collegial/collaborative youth with how this personal strategy might play with traditional youth. The latter will see such an approach as a waste of time and may lose respect for the adult using it. If adults first understand and then familiarize themselves with the four outlooks, giving up the one-size-fits-all model once and for all, we are on the way to reaching today’s youth.

Adult Versus Youth Perspectives: When Hope Is Dashed

What if a teacher or youth worker cannot or will not admit that different youth perspectives are real and legitimate? Educators have often missed seeing how such a mismatch between many students’ points of view and that of their teacher can create misunderstandings, lead to frustration, and increase student risk of failure. Unless teacher and student outlooks can be expanded to include and validate different perspectives, student hope will be dashed and teacher frustration exponentially increased. The same holds true beyond the classroom.

To understand the concept of mismatches, take a moment to reflect on your own experiences. As you have read this article and looked at Figure 1, you probably identified most strongly with one

or possibly two of the four perspectives. Equally as likely, you shuddered at the thought of one or more of the others, perhaps thinking, How could anyone really believe that? Now imagine being present at a staff meeting, in-service training session, conference, or university class where the boss or pundit was of the point of view that makes you shudder. Try to recall some of the specifics that made you feel angry, tired, or misunderstood. Now think what it might be like for youth in the same situation, because for some, we are that boss.

By way of illustration, consider this scenario. A new teacher, highly successful in the Great Books curriculum of a large university, meets her new class on the first day of school. She looks out and, from her perspective, sees all those students whom she imagines are eager to learn the factual *What?* she has been so successful in acquiring. However, what she does not see from her outlook is that in the back sit *So What?* Johnny and his followers, whose hope may have been dashed in the past during year-long battles with traditional teachers. What follows can be one of two things: a year of frustration for the teacher and for Johnny-and of course, poor assessment results for him-or just possibly, Johnny's renewal of hopefulness for success in school and life. The latter would occur if the teacher were willing to take the risk of allowing that a very different point of view may have legitimacy.

For a second illustration, imagine a youth counselor (or a social worker, probation officer, or church youth worker-all of whom serve as counselors at times) who believes that an adolescent whom he

is counseling should go to college. The youth is certainly bright enough and would make an excellent professional. The youth herself, however, has a very pragmatic mind-set. She wants to attend a trade school and begin her career as soon as possible. If this counselor does not reframe his idealistic perspective to her realistic outlook, he will risk alienating this youth and perhaps jeopardize her future altogether.

The direction such a situation will take is influenced by the ability to reframe (Bolman & Deal, 1994), or see the situation from another's perspective. However, this is more than just momentarily switching from one point of view to another. I prefer to think of reframing as developing an enlarged perspective that allows for the reality and legitimacy of all four points of view and a change in the entire culture of youth work, from exclusivity to inclusivity.

Building a Bridge to Hope for All Students

One further concept is necessary in understanding how to build the bridge to hope for all students in our institutions and practices. We have heard repeatedly in the 1990s about a paradigm shift in education: that we needed it, that we were in it, or that it was coming. Everyone now knows this concept is an application of Thomas Kuhn's classic, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1970). What may not be so apparent is that in education-and probably society as a whole-we seem to confuse "paradigm shift" with "pendulum swing." That is, our understanding implies replacing the old with the new, which

means both starting over and discarding everything learned from, and even good about, the old. This shift has made most educational reform efforts into either-or propositions (Dewey, 1938).

Whether or not this is a correct perception of Kuhn's idea, I submit that it is our reality in education (and probably many other fields, from youth work to politics and religion). This leaves us forever chasing "the new" and denying the value of the experiences that brought us here. Thomas Oden (1992) calls this phenomenon "modern chauvinism." The shallowness of such a methodology for thinking about and constructing models of reform, which give hope to all points of view, must become obvious.

Instead of continuing with the metaphor of "paradigm," I would like to propose thinking of youth work as a *syn-tagm*, with a specific application borrowed from Dorothy Sayers (1941). In her classic work, Sayers speaks of an arch. In the present instance, we might adapt that to a specific type of arch—a bridge. While the shift implies exclusion (a moving from and to), a bridge is "sustained by the tension of the two—a construction of something not there before" (p. 191). The bridge is inclusive, needing both to exist: "The good that emerges from a conflict of values cannot arise from the total condemnation or destruction of one set of values, but only from the building of a new value, sustained, like an arch, by the tension of the original two" (p. 191).

Only upon solid pylons can we successfully build such a bridge to hope in the classroom or other youth settings. In this case, those pylons are the healthy partici-

pation, access, and understanding of all four youth perspectives. The strong, understanding adult role model serves to connect the pylons and so allows the bridge to be constructed by the joint efforts of both the adult and youth (Kennedy, 1999).

Crossing the Bridge to Hope

As the young man ahead of me in the fast-food line placed his meager order and carefully spilled out some change, I wondered which of the four perspectives he had. Would his life be different today if more adults had understood his outlook? There are countless examples of youth who have altered their course after being allowed to follow their natural perspective. Consider this scenario of the process in action: A student arrived in one county school's class after being expelled from the district and even all the other county classes. This was her last chance. What had she done to be treated so harshly? She had done nothing violent. She had not hurt anyone. She had not brought a weapon to school. She was not involved with gangs. She had never made a bomb threat or even joked about it. She was expelled because she had dared to participate in her own learning by asking *What If?* of her teachers. She did not understand why this brought about such strong reactions. In her view, this was the natural route to learning. She thought that she was contributing to the class, while traditional teachers, counselors, and administrators saw her as challenging their authority. They thought she was interrupting the pattern of teacher talk, handouts, and textbooks. They also viewed her ques-

tioning of governmental authority and practices as leaning toward anarchy instead of a natural part of her learning process.

This student arrived at the “last stop” battered by and wary of educators. The teacher in this class, however, recognized this student as a budding innovator and saw her desire to discover different possibilities as a gift instead of a threat to tradition and authority. The student began to respond. She eventually became a class leader in peer counseling, tutoring younger children, and academic excellence. She graduated from high school a year early and quite ably worked with a very traditional teacher to prepare for her college entrance exams. She is now in college preparing to become an educator herself.

If every educator and youth worker were willing to reframe to see the adult-youth interplay from all four perspectives—turning them into four pylons upon which to build the bridge to hope—the waves of youth crossing the bridge from fear, anger, and frustration to hopefulness would be stunning.

References

- Bolman, L., & Deal, T. (1994). *Becoming a teacher leader: From isolation to collaboration*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press
- Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and education*. New York: Macmillan,
- Garmston, R., & Wellman, B. (1992). *How to make presentations that teach and transform*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision of Curriculum Development.
- Kennedy, M. (1996). A teacher's manifesto: Designing learning which cures rather than causes academic risk: Parts 1 & 2. *The Journal of At-Risk Issues*, 2(2),3-27.
- Kennedy, M. (1999). Elephants and adolescents. *The Journal of Court, Community, and Alternative Schools*, Spring, 13-15.
- Kennedy, M. (2000). *Lessons from the hawk*. Brandon, VT: Holistic Education Press.
- Kuhn, T. (1970). *The structure of scientific revolutions* (2nd ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Oden, T. (1992). *Two worlds: Notes on the death of modernity in America and Russia*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
- Sayers, D. (1941). *The mind of the maker*. San Francisco: HarperCollins.
- Shoemaker, B., & Lewin, L. (1993). Curriculum and assessment: Two sides of the same coin. *Educational Leadership*, 51(5),22-23.

From: *Reaching Today's Youth*, Vol.4 Issue 4, pp51-55. Portions of this article were adapted from the author's book, *Lessons from the Hawk* (2000) with permission of the publisher, Holistic Education Press, Brandon, VT 057033.

Feedback, Criticism, and Praise

John Stein

Gerry Fewster's column in the May 2011 Issue of *CYC-Online*, "[Is There Anybody There?](#)", got me thinking a bit about a number of things, although perhaps not the things he had in mind. He writes about writing professional literature and then getting no response from anyone. In other words, no feedback. No one to say they liked, agreed with, appreciated, or benefitted from his writing. No one to say they didn't like, disagreed with, or objected to what he wrote. Nothing. So he stopped writing until he was approached to write a few more columns.

Indeed, I know the feeling well (although I have on rare occasions gotten feedback on something I wrote, as I suspect did he). I wonder at times whether anyone reads my little efforts. But this is not about me or Gerry or writing. Rather, it is about the importance of feedback, how feedback is not always the same thing as criticism, and how both feedback and criticism affect not only our children, but the staff, as well. People need feedback in order to adjust their functioning, their behaviour, in order to meet their objectives. People do not always need criticism. Feedback and criticism are not always the

same thing.

If I remember correctly from my college days, I first encountered the concept of feedback in systems theory. The concept was borrowed from engineering. An example I recall is in electronics, where a feedback loop is built into a circuit to allow the circuit to adjust itself. For example, some amplifiers have a feature for automatic volume control. It is a circuit that provides information to the amplification circuit about how much electricity is going to the speakers so that the amplification circuit can adjust itself. The more electricity, the greater the volume. When too much electricity is going to the speakers, the amplification circuit must cut back its output to keep the volume constant. When not enough electricity is going to the speakers, the amplification circuit must increase its output to keep the volume constant. In electronics, such adjustments occur almost instantaneously so that there are no perceivable changes in volume. (I would love to have that feature on my TV when those commercials come blaring every six or seven minutes. But then, on second thought, it would spoil my music, eliminating pianissimos and crescendos.)

In short, feedback is information that allows systems to adjust themselves. It is desirable information that systems need in order to meet their objectives.

Driving a car provides a good illustration. Drivers receive a lot of feedback. There is the visual feedback about where and how fast the car is going. There is the auditory feedback from the sound of the engine and tires. There is sensory feedback from muscles about the resistance of the steering wheel and brake pedal. There is tactile feedback from contact with the seat, providing information about changes in speed and direction. And there is internal feedback from our bodies providing information about changes in speed or direction. All of this enables drivers to keep their cars on the road at the speed they want. In fact, there is so much feedback that drivers can do quite well without some of it. For example, early power steering on some cars provided no feedback from the steering wheel—turning the wheel was completely effortless, there was no resistance. But the visual feedback and physical feedback still allowed drivers to keep their cars on the road. (I found the lack of feedback from that power steering most annoying.)

But when a car goes into a skid on ice, much more of the feedback is lost, the feedback from the steering wheel and the feedback from the sound of the tires. There is little or no change in speed or direction. Drivers lose control. They have no idea in what direction their wheels are pointed, and have considerable difficulty regaining control once the car hits dry pavement. And when drivers are distracted (by texting?) and stop perceiving

or attending to some of the feedback, their ability to drive can be considerably impaired.

Not all information that drivers receive is feedback. When the brake lights come on in the car in front, that's information that indicates that drivers need to prepare to slow down or stop. It's not information about something drivers are doing but rather something they need to do. When drivers gesture for other drivers to proceed, that's information that they are yielding the right of way. When drivers gesture in other ways—often obscene—that's information for other drivers that they did something that another driver did not like. It's criticism. It may be feedback, information that drivers did something they do not want to do again. On the other hand, it's likely to be perceived simply as annoying and unwelcome criticism from a jerk.

Information that something we did was successful in meeting our objectives is the strongest reinforcement for behaviour. Information that something we did failed to achieve our objectives is likely to result in our eventually changing our behaviour, in our trying something different. As such, feedback about the failure of our behaviour is one of the most effective (if not the most effective) of punishments. In fact, when there is feedback that people have achieved their objectives, unpleasant stimuli, including punishment imposed by someone else, is not so likely to reduce behaviour and may, in fact, strengthen it.

Socially, feedback is equally important. People are social creatures. They have social needs and wants leading to social objectives. Social feedback can help peo-

ple adjust their behaviour to meet their social objectives, provided they perceive and understand it.

Feedback and criticism are not always the same thing. Feedback is information about what people are doing that helps people adjust their behaviour to meet their objectives. Sometimes, criticism is feedback; other times, it is not. For example, when teenagers dress casually to go out on Friday nights, their objective is often to please their dates or their peers. When their parents tell them that they look ridiculous, it is criticism but not feedback. They are not dressing to please their parents. Should their dates or their peers tell them they look ridiculous, it is criticism, but it is also feedback that is likely to lead to a change in how they dress, perhaps immediately. They are dressing for peer acceptance and approval.

In the same way, praise is not always feedback. Going back to teenagers on Friday nights, compliments (praise) from their parents on how they look is not likely to be feedback. In fact, compliments from parents may raise a red flag. On the other hand, when their peers compliment them on their attire, it is feedback that is likely to have them continue dressing in a similar fashion.

And so I think about the kids with whom we work. They get a lot of criticism. It sometimes seems to me that they get criticism all day long, that criticism is all they get. And then I wonder how much of this criticism is feedback for our children. But then, it's only natural to notice things that are wrong and try to do something about them. After all, the kids come to our attention primarily because of

problems with their behaviour. I think it is only natural to take good things for granted and do little or nothing about them—unless it's to offer up a "Good job!" as I have been hearing too much of lately—I wonder how our kids feel about that trite phrase. But problems—those we have to address. It's our job. Or is it?

In order to understand a bit better, let's take a moment to think about the staff. They get very little feedback. A "Thank you" from the children. Please, don't hold your breath. Or the most important feedback—"Did all my efforts and hard work pay off?" "Did *any* of my efforts pay off?" It may be years until that information is available to anyone, and agencies do not tend to collect it, to follow children after they leave service. That's part of why relationships and being there in the moment are so important. For the staff for whom relationships and being there in the moment are their primary focus, there is plenty of feedback. "Did I succeed in connecting with this kid?" The feedback is there. You can tell, if only from the body language and facial expressions. "Did I succeed in getting through? Did she get it?" The feedback is readily available. Staff can see the light go on. If not, they can get feedback by asking children to repeat what they have learned, figured out, or discovered. These are the staff who help kids. The staff who are there in the moment. The staff who connect.

But for the staff who are too focused on helping children, who are too focused on the future and what the children will become, how they will turn out, the feedback is not so readily available. These staff tend to become frustrated, sometimes

with the administration for not making the kids accept their wisdom, guidance, and advice. In effect, they lose control. They are adrift. They have trouble adjusting their behaviour. Or worse, they become frustrated with the kids. They are not sufficiently in tune to the feedback in the moment. They are too focused on their needs to impart wisdom and change kids.

It's not one thing or the other. We all like kids. We all enjoy being with kids. We all want to help them. Rather, it's a matter of focus.

Criticism vs Feedback

Our children get a lot of criticism all day long. But how much of it is feedback. How much of it is relevant to their needs and objectives? How much of it can they use?

I think the key is to make sure that criticism is indeed feedback. Feedback is information that helps people adjust their behaviour to meet their objectives, their wants and needs. When criticism is feedback, no matter how much it may hurt, and criticism does tend to hurt, nevertheless, it does help people, both staff and children, to adjust their behaviour to meet their objectives. When criticism has more to do with the needs of the person offering the criticism rather than the needs of the person being criticized, it is criticism without being feedback.

And this is where relationships come into play. When we are offering this information, this feedback, this criticism, when it seems that this comes from our interest in the other person and their well-being, well then it has a much better chance of being perceived and accepted as feed-

back—eventually. When it appears that this information has to do with what we want, it is much more likely to be perceived and often resented and rejected as criticism.

So how do we make sure that when we correct children (or staff), it's perceived and accepted as feedback rather than criticism? This is where relationships come into play. When we really do have the best interests of the children in mind (and it has to be real—they cannot easily be fooled), they are much more likely to perceive and believe that we are motivated from their interests rather than our own or those of the agency. But it also matters how we communicate our concerns.

There are several ways to do this. The key is to remember that feedback is information rather than criticism or judgement, then to make the information relevant to the goals and objectives of the children, to their wants and needs. (It is much easier to understand their objectives in the context of relationship.) There are several ways to do this. One is to ask questions to help children discover the relevant information for themselves, to improve their understanding of social situations and of their own objectives. “What did you hope to accomplish when you said that to Billy?” (as opposed to “Why did you do that?”) “I don't know?” “Ok, let's see if we can figure it out together.”

Once they begin to get a handle on their objectives, we can ask questions about what the results of their behaviour were, whether or not it accomplished what they intended. At this stage, we can begin to help them to understand social cues and information that they might not have perceived, to tune them in to social

information that can serve as feedback, then to help them understand the connections to their behaviour. "Did you see Billy's expression when you said that? How do you think he was feeling?" Or how others are avoiding a child. Or seem angry and children have no idea why.

Then we can help them identify alternative behaviours that would be more likely to achieve their objectives. "What else could you have done?" "What do you think would happen if you had done...?"

Then, we can help them to make amends. "What can you do about that?" "What are you going to do?" Finally, we can help them to plan for the future. "What are you going to do next time someone does what Billy did?"

In effect, we are helping children to discover information for themselves rather than providing it. Rather than criticizing them or judging them, we are helping them to understand their social needs and objectives, perhaps to reevaluate them, and teaching them to be more aware of the social cues and information that can serve as feedback in the future.

On the other hand, there are times when we do have to provide children with feedback that does have to do with our own needs or those of the agency. Again, we can avoid the appearance of criticism if we remember that feedback is information rather than judgement. First, we have to be honest, whether it's about our needs or the needs of the agency. "It hurts me when you say those things." "I really need you to respond promptly to fire drills. When we don't evacuate the building within 60 seconds, the fire marshal gives us a bad mark when he does his in-

spection. That in turn gets us a bad mark when we have a licensing inspection, all of which makes more work for me to write a plan of correction. I would really appreciate your cooperation. Ok? Now lets try one more drill."

There is one more problem with criticism. No matter how carefully we provide feedback, children are going to encounter others who are not so careful and who may criticize more directly, perhaps even harshly. Criticism is a problem for many of our children, both from peers and from adults. Many of our children have learned from experience that criticism is dangerous. In their homes, criticism may have often been the precursor to considerable unpleasantness, to screaming and yelling, to psychological abuse ("You ungrateful child, after all I've done for you. You're worthless. You'll never amount to anything"), even to violence and physical abuse. This can result in a vicious circle when children learn to respond defensively to even the mildest and most reasonable criticism, resulting in more criticism and eventually provoking the kinds of scenes they've come to expect with criticism. From a classroom teacher: "You're late." "I was only..." and then on and on. A big production. Teacher: "I've had enough. Go to the office." And in the office, an even bigger scene provoked by a now truly frightened child. Had the child responded to "You're late" with a contrite "Sorry," it would have been over and done with.

In such cases, we can help by teaching children that criticism does not have to be dangerous. Criticism doesn't even mean that they have to do anything other than

to acknowledge it (Say “Ok”) and possibly to apologize (“I’m sorry”). And it’s over. Systematic desensitization can help, i.e., repeated practice, beginning with mild, possibly even ridiculous or humorous criticism. “I’m going to give you some criticism now. Are you ready?” “I guess so.” “Ok. Here it comes. You have a hair out of place.”

Praise vs Feedback

Nearly all of our children do more things right in a day than they do wrong. Oh, I know when they do wrong it can be pretty terrible, but it would be interesting to think back on the day for a child who has had a major problem and to list all of the things she or he did right. Got up on time. Dressed neatly. Was polite and pleasant at breakfast (difficult for me to do). Made Ellen laugh. Went to school. Had no problems at school today. Did chores without complaining. Told the truth. Didn’t steal anything. Avoided a confrontation with Jenny. Helped me carry in the groceries. And countless other things before totally losing it with a peer over an unkind remark and ruining everyone’s day, including her own.

It’s not possible to praise everything. Nor is it desirable to do so. Children do not want to be praised all the time. But they do want to be noticed, especially when they are doing something right. But praise, like feedback, tends to have more to do with the needs of the person doing the praising. The key is to make it relevant to the objectives of children. Children sometimes want to please adults, but they have other objectives that can be more important. “I saw how you avoided a confrontation with Liz outside. How did that

make you feel?” “You helped Larry with his chore. How do you think he felt? How did that make you feel?” Or just, “Thank you for helping Bobby with the trash.” Or, “You are always so pleasant at breakfast. That’s quite different from some of the rest of us.”

It’s ok to express approval or appreciation for something children have done, but many times it’s just as good or better just to let them know you noticed it. What would be the result if, after a child had a major meltdown and was cooling off in her room (serving a restriction?), a staff member handed her a piece of paper and said, “I wanted you to have something to think about. This is a list of some of the things I noticed that you did today.” A list of all the things she did well.

And the ubiquitous “Good job.” I once worked in a strict behavioural program in which staff were encouraged to praise children at every opportunity, in addition to taking points for a list of behaviours that exceeded short term memory (44 of them). “Good job” was tossed around like strings of beads at a Mardi Gras parade. My favorite was when a boy was serving a room restriction of several hours. Room restrictions had just been modified so that children were allowed to sit on a chair outside their room if they chose. (Confining them to their rooms had been determined to be seclusion, and seclusion could not be used as punishment.) During room restrictions, children were not allowed to speak and staff were not allowed to speak to them unless it had something to do with serving their restriction. A manager in charge of the behavioural program walked onto the unit and after a few

moments said to the boy, “Good job serving your restriction!” I still wonder what thoughts went through the boy’s mind.

Feedback for Staff

Providing feedback for staff is a little different. Children come to an agency to get their needs met, not to meet those of the agency or the staff. Staff, on the other hand, come to an agency to meet the needs of the agency (which hopefully includes meeting the needs of the children as a top priority). Consequently, feedback to the staff has to do primarily with the needs of the agency.

In my experience, there are two potential problems with staff—staff failing to do something they should do or doing something wrong. In the first case, when staff have failed to do something, I have found that it is very often because they were doing something else at the time. Perhaps they have their priorities wrong, or perhaps they had their priorities exactly right. In either case, it’s a problem for staff and supervisors to solve together. When staff are doing something they should not do, it is likely a matter for instruction, for teaching.

(When those approaches fail to resolve the problem, then it becomes a matter for criticism and perhaps discipline or dismissal. The worst case scenario is when staff think they know best and run the program as they think it needs to be run after supervisors and management leave for the day. This often involves meeting out a bit more discipline for the children than the program calls for.)

But more often than not, problems with staff provide feedback for supervisors, who must make some changes so

that staff can get everything done. I remember one program where the supervisor—the best child care person I ever worked with—was responsible for tallying up the \$300 petty cash account each week. He would labor over it for hours late into the evening, and still not get it right. The executive assistant was frustrated, and consequently the Executive Director. They were ready to issue some form of discipline. The solution was easy. I simply took over the responsibility. It took me only about 30 minutes and the supervisor was free to do what he did best—meet the needs of the children and his staff. The Executive Director didn’t like my solution, but when there were no more problems, that was the end of the matter.

But the real problem with feedback for staff is, I think, noticing all the things they do, both for the children and for the agency. Many managers, when they visit a unit, feel they need to comment on anything they find amiss. It’s most discouraging for staff. They cringe whenever a manager walks onto their unit. I much prefer to make a mental note of anything I see amiss to deal with at a later time (unless it is such that it requires immediate attention—I can think of no time when I felt it did), and instead to notice and talk about things that are going right. Then, few days later, I can bring any problems up with the staff in a casual discussion.

Or think about the staff whose reports are a little thin in information, always on time but lacking in detail. The standard wisdom—start with a compliment before you criticize. “Your reports are always timely. I appreciate that. But, I need more

information, detail.” It’s a big ‘BUT.’ The compliment gets lost. Better to offer the compliment and to wait a bit for the criticism. First, they know you notice their reports. Nice to have one’s work noticed. Then, wait a few days, then ask for more details. “I’ve been looking over some of your reports.” (Still noticing their work.) “I think you could improve them with a bit more detail. That’s helpful to people who weren’t there.” A chance to improve and tips them off that the manager likes details. Best. Wait until they write a good report. “This report is excellent. The details are terrific.” Let’s them know their manager notices their work and is likes details. The manager may get too many details the next time. Meanwhile, the staff is feeling pretty good. Noticed, appreciated, and knows how to please the manager. Of course, this takes a bit of time and effort. Managers may not have the time and patience and energy for this strategy. And then I wonder—is their time and energy so stressed because they are spending so much time recruiting, interviewing, and training new staff, who also can’t write good reports.

I like to write more memos of commendation than disciplinary memos. In fact, I do not write disciplinary memos. Rather, I write memos of instruction, but only on the rarest of occasions, when necessary for purposes of documentation in case authorities want to know at some point what was done about a given problem. Good staff do not need memos to correct them. When they understand what is needed, they will do their best to do it. (Those who cannot understand or will not do what is required—sadly, I’ve had

a few—they don’t need memos, either. They need a different job.)

Conclusion

Everyone needs feedback. Feedback when we are doing well helps us to keep doing well. It is the best reinforcement for behaviour. Feedback when we are not doing well helps us to change. It is an effective ‘punishment for behaviour. Without feedback, we are without guidance. We lack the information we need to sustain our efforts and the information we need to make changes. And criticism that is not feedback, either for children or staff, well, it’s damaging and demoralizing. So many of our kids are already demoralized. So are too many of our staff. Criticism is too likely to be about the likes and dislikes of the people doing the criticism and based on the condescending assumption that the person being criticized wants to please the person who is offering the criticism. That can be demeaning, even when people do want to please others.

Just one more thing. Feedback is especially important when management wants to implement changes, new policies or procedures. Simply writing a new procedure and having training on it is seldom effective unless management is prepared to follow up, to notice when staff are doing their best to follow the new procedure and provide feedback. When management is too preoccupied to follow up with a new procedure, staff are likely to revert back to the old ways within a short period of time, the new procedure becoming no more than a piece of paper in a largely irrelevant manual that is dragged out only to discipline or terminate staff.

The Goalie

Liz Laidlaw

During my six-year-old daughter's soccer games, I want to hurl myself in front of the ball and help the goalie make the save. Most of the time I manage to control this urge and simply stand vigilant beside the net, keeping company with whoever is fortunate enough to be in the pressure-soaked position at the time. Seeing the pain in their eyes when they let the ball slip by is agonizing. It is especially excruciating when it is my daughter's turn. Watching her raw disappointment when she lets a goal in makes me physically ache inside. This is quite a change from last year when the girls were more interested in hugging each other and chasing bunny rabbits and butterflies on the field. This year, they know the score, and some of them shed tears when they lose.

Standing as sentinel with this team of girls, I'm pulled backwards in time and reminded of my past history in net, and all the trauma and isolation that comes with the solitary position. My introduction to playing goal was at the age of nine, on the ice rinks of Winnipeg. Because my dad was a goalie in ice hockey and because a print of Ken Danby's "At the Crease" hung in our dining room, I felt qualified for the job. Playing goalkeeper also concealed my less than spectacular skating skills. We

played ringette, because for some reason, as girls, we weren't allowed to play hockey. In retrospect, I'm grateful that it was the soft, rubber ring being propelled towards my body and not the mean, hard puck. Mind you, I had enough goalie equipment on to stop a Zamboni. If our team had just piled up all the equipment in front of the net with out a body inside it, we probably would have stopped just as many goals.

The position of goalie seemed a safe choice, except for the mind games. There was a lot of time for quiet contemplation, and I spent most of it ramping up my anxiety about what I'd do when the play inevitably made its way back down to my end of the ice. I bargained and prayed, pleading for just one (or ten) more goals for our team, to give us just enough of a lead to take the pressure off. Watching the electronic score board high above the rink, I attempted to speed time up by sheer force of will. The only effect this had was to actually slow the passing of the seconds down. Whenever my mom or dad or one of the other parents would come down to the end of the rink and keep me company in my exile, I was appreciative. It took the edge off of psyching myself out.

During my teens, I also spent a few

years playing goal in soccer. One of the downfalls of my ringette training was that I tended to “deflect” the soccer ball (off my shins, torso, arms, whatever) rather than claim it. The ball would be sent back out to my opponents who would then gladly take another shot, this time from even closer range. Even with shin pads on, my legs were usually striking shades of yellow, purple and blue. The same little mind games returned, and, although I was always told that it was never truly the goalie’s fault, I still felt the familiar sting of failure when I let the ball slip through my fingers. That said, I returned game after game, looking for more of the same sadistic torture. The challenge of making the save and the allure of winning was an energizing incentive.

I don’t know if it’s maternal instinct or goalie empathy, but back on my daughter’s soccer pitch I simply can’t bear to let any of these girls stand alone in the net. I realize I want to protect these girls from more than just losing. I want to defend and shelter them, stop the ball from ever making it near them, stop any painful and hurtful moments they might have to experience. They are growing up and learning how rough and tough life can really be. Self-doubt has yet to take them away from their true selves but it’s lurking on the horizon. But in soccer, if your defense covers you too well, you can’t see what’s coming and are in no position to protect yourself. You can’t stop the shot if you can’t see the ball. And if they don’t experience shots on goal, and risk being scored on, they’ll never know the pure exhilaration that comes with actually stopping one.

The surest way to make life hard for children is to make it too easy, and I need to give up trying to shield my daughter and these girls from failure. By sparing them the bad experiences, I also block out potential good ones and all kinds of learning opportunities. I can’t make their choices for them, and if I could, my track record is far from perfect; I might not be doing them any favours. Maybe that’s why I’m so apprehensive. I remember many mistakes and painful moments growing up. But in the end, I survived both losing games and growing up. And now, even though I don’t feel like an adult who has all the answers, I am in a remarkable place in my life. I never imagined myself as a wife and mother, and together with being, among other vocational identities, a daughter, granddaughter and sister, I’ve found a challenging and fulfilling (if precarious) balance in my life. Would I have found it and would I be as appreciative of it without all those missteps, mistakes, and goals, the ones I let in and the ones I saved?

I understand that eventually, I will be relegated to the sidelines of my daughter’s life, able only to watch the natural consequences unfold. And there she’ll be, completely beyond my control. In the end all I can do is stand beside her and offer words of encouragement and compassion. That will have to be comfort enough for us both.

Originally published in *Relational Child and Relational Youth Care Practice* Vol 20, Issue 1, Spring 2007, pg.45-46

Cat and Youth Care, Part 2

Kiaras Gharabaghi

Summary of Part 1:

The mice were being very nice
And still the people cried
Let's get a cat, we'll show those mice
And so started our ride

A ride that got the cat alright
But not the one we thought
Instead we brought it home one night
And now we're all distraught.

Our relationship with Pacco evolved only very slowly, and perhaps not in a way that made us feel particularly valued. Essentially Pacco limited his input into the relationship by doing two things: he ate the food we put out for him and he pooped in the litter box. In fact, Pacco ate a lot of food, and biology being what it is, he also pooped rather large quantities. For the first two weeks of Pacco's orientation period in our home, we only ever saw him for fleeting moments. No sooner did he

sense our desire to connect, even in the most distant and non-committal manner one can imagine, did he disappear in the various holes and crevices in our old home's walls and floors. Pacco became the great white elephant in our home. His presence created tension, mistrust, and barely suppressed feelings of resentment and the deep seated desire to assign blame. Questions such as "whose idea was this anyways", "why did you agree to this" and "is he really a cat" replaced previous confirmations of family love and

closeness. Fundamentally, Pacco, as a result of his presence through absence, had rendered our home a battleground where the entanglements of blame and fear quickly became deeply embedded.

We were not passive observers in this process. No, we were not passive at all; indeed, we made several attempts to intervene, and to shift the balance of power back into our favour. After a period of feeling overwhelmed, we did recognize that the appropriate move was to re-assert our authority, to take charge of the situation, to remind Pacco that after all, he was just a cat, who unlike us, possessed neither the knowledge about ethical truth nor the capacity to monopolize violence and make it sound therapeutic. It also helped that we could group together, and approach Pacco as a team, pitting our collective 500 pounds against his 7 pound frame. We did have some discussion about the best approach to deal with Pacco's disturbing posture toward his new family, his home and the generosity we had shown him. It wasn't like we had asked him to do anything for us, other than perhaps deal with the mice, which didn't really count since he ought to enjoy doing that, being a cat and all.

And so we had tried many different techniques to re-assert ourselves in this increasingly frustrating relationship. We raised our voices and made assertive demands for him to cooperate; we tried to manipulate him by gradually moving the food closer and closer to the stairs leading to the first floor of the house (Pacco had not yet ever left the basement). We implemented consequences by first withholding some of the newly purchased

toys (which he had largely ignored anyway) and then limiting his movements by blocking certain areas of the basement (which subsequently became known as 'safehavens' amongst the mice). In other words, we did everything we could to force Pacco to become comfortable in the wonderful home that we were offering him. And we were driven by the deeply held belief that what we were doing was, after all, in his best interest.

At first, Pacco was having none of it. He scoffed at our lame attempts to connect with him. Indeed, the harder we tried, the more he appeared to be sending us messages that he was not going to do as we expected of him. Not too long after the implementation of our more assertive approach, Pacco seemed to start eating messier, with food flying around all over the basement. And while he still seemed to be using the litter box to take care of business, he started 'missing' somewhat, resulting in a chore in our home that replaced 'dusting' as the new least favourite chore.

Eventually, we just gave up. The kids lost interest, and stopped talking about 'having a cat'. As far as they were concerned, a cat that can't be petted, that doesn't purr and that they couldn't torture wasn't really a cat. And my wife and I just became complacent toward Pacco's presence through absence. We fed him, we changed the litter box, but that was about it. And amazingly, about a week after dropping our ambition of ever connecting with him, late one evening when everyone was already in bed and I was writing quietly at my desk, out of the corner of my eye I spotted movement, right by the

stairs leading down to the basement. I tried not to let on that my eyes had indeed registered such movement and carried on writing with my left eye trained on the screen while carefully monitoring the area where I had spotted movement with my right eye. And there he was; Pacco, looking suspiciously my way, sizing me up, and then, ever so slowly, moving toward me. It was like peace finding Jerusalem, Metallica singing ballads of love, two consecutive sunny days in Vancouver. Whatever complacency might have crept into my soul, all of my relational instincts were awoken by this moment of 'rap-prochement'. Pacco approached slowly, with clear suspicion but also with an obvious desire to connect; perhaps not long term, probably with much trepidation, but in this moment, right now, right here, Pacco was ready, and so was I.

It was a night to remember. Pacco repeatedly and enthusiastically pushed himself against my legs, through my legs, rubbing his head against the chair's wooden base, purring loudly. I stroke his back enjoying the sensation of his fur, talking encouragingly to him and declaring that finally, we had found each other. The relationship, I vaguely remember saying, was now confirmed, embedded, and would surely be ever-lasting, based on a foundation of trust and good intentions, proven now for all time to come. In retrospect I realize that I might have built expectations that were just a little high, but in that moment, after all of the challenges we had jointly experienced in cementing our connection, it just seemed right. And Pacco gave every indication that he was on board. We played like best

buddies, leaving behind us the burden of everyday life and giving strength to one another through our mutual presence and engagement.

As it turned out, our first night of engagement did not result in the uninhibited, free-spirited and entirely trusting togetherness I had hoped for. Indeed, I was at first quite disappointed that Pacco seemed to forget quickly our wonderful night together and returned to behaving in his arrogant and rejecting manner. Frankly, it made me feel cheap and used. How dare he?

But over time, I could not fail to notice that indeed, the relationship was progressing. Pacco made more frequent appearances on the main floor of our house, initially always at night after the kids had settled, but eventually he even made brief appearances in the morning. A mere seven or eight weeks after joining the family, everyone of us had at least had one opportunity to pet the cat. Slowly we adjusted our experience of Pacco and accepted the idea that our family had indeed expanded to include Pacco, who may have some emotional issues to work through, but all indications were positive and he would eventually do as one might expect a cat to do.

These were happy times, filled with hope and a deep satisfaction that with patience, even the most distrustful and suspicious being would find amongst us a sense of belonging, a place of safety and ultimately growth and development. But life can be cruel indeed, and just as we adjusted our ever-evolving relationship with Pacco, one dark, sad, tragic evening, he simply walked out of the house. Yes, in



spite of everything, all the progress notwithstanding, for that brief moment when the front door was inadvertently left open by the babysitter for who knows how long, Pacco disappeared into the cold, dark February night.

We were inconsolable. We went searching our little town to see if there was any trace of our Pacco. We called his name, sometimes gently and with love and patience, and at other times loudly and with the onset of hysteria. We were conscious that time was of the essence. Pacco was out there somewhere, in February, in Central Ontario, where temperatures regularly reach minus 20 degrees Celsius. Pacco could not survive such conditions for more than a day or two, not to mention the sinister dangers facing a declawed cat amongst the coyotes, wolves, raccoons, foxes and fishers that roam in our neighbourhood. But it was to no avail; Pacco was gone, and after a week or so, it fell to me to pull together the distraught family, join hands, hang our heads low, and acknowledge, indeed pronounce formally what we all knew to be the case: Pacco had moved on, to a

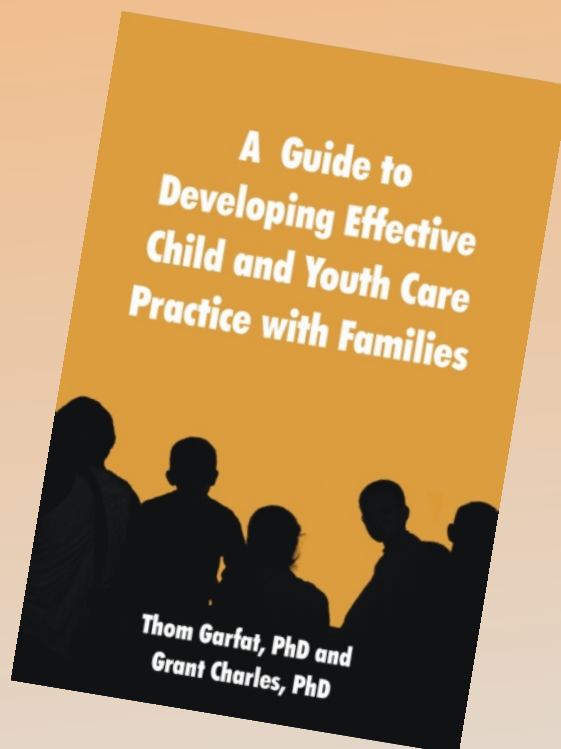
better place for sure, but no longer amongst us here on earth.

Well, life goes on. Canadian winters have a way of reorienting us quickly to the task at hand. Bundle up, shovel snow, sharpen skates, top up the windshield washing fluid in the car. It was a very cold February and continued cold into March. We soldiered on. Life goes on, as I said. It was on one of those cold nights that I took my daughter by the hand, and together walked down our street toward the piano teacher's house where my daughter takes her weekly lesson. We walked in silence, her preparing an excuse for not having practiced as the teacher had demanded, and I just enjoying the silence of a winter night. But then..., what was this...movement to my left...a moment quicker than my eyes could handle. I initially just shrugged it off; whatever it may have been. Probably a squirrel, maybe just the wind blowing something across the snowy driveway of the big old house with the detached garage that has a gaping hole on the one side...

That very night I tucked my kids into bed. My oldest, the teenager, got the

usual “good night buddy”; my ten year old still likes a kiss and a verbal confirmation of ever-lasting love. And my wonderful daughter requires, by law and eternal fatherly duty, a hug, a kiss, a proclamation of ever-lasting love as well as encouraging words for her collection of stuffed animals that include dogs, cats, bears, a sheep, a frog, a couple of animals that I cannot identify, and perhaps most importantly, her favourite horse. Having done all I could to ensure my children’s good sleep and happy dreams, I went downstairs, poured myself a glass of wine, and proceeded to ensure that all the doors to the house were properly closed and (sadly, following Thomas Hobbes) locked. But as I stood by the back door, leading to a small patio that was covered in snow, my heart nearly stopped. There, in the snow, clear as any trapper could only dream about, were the paw prints of a cat. The pattern of the prints told the story: this cat had come from down the street, jumped up on the patio, came right up to the door, and based on the slightly smudged print on the glass, even tried to push it open. But alas, the door was properly closed and the cat had to turn back into the freezing cold. My heart, needless to say, was entirely broken, but at the same time, overwhelmed by what still seemed like a completely irrational sense of hope: Pacco was alive.

To be continued...



A Guide to Developing Effective Child and Youth Care Practice with Families

Can\$22 dollars + Can\$5.00 shipping & handling + applicable taxes

Orders to:

Thom Garfat (garfat@videotron.ca)
207, L'île de Belair E., Rosemere, Quebec,
J7A 1A8

Grant Charles (gcharles@interchange.ubc.ca)
2080 West Mall
Vancouver, British Columbia
Canada V6T 1Z2



NACCW

18th Biennial Conference 2011

Conference dates
5 – 7 July 2011

PROMOTING CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN CIRCLES OF CARE

The NEC of the NACCW is proud to announce details of the 18th NACCW Biennial Conference to be held in 2011 in the Eastern Cape

It is expected that the province will host an excellent event where representatives from across the country will deliberate on child and youth care matters – for the first time in the policy context of the Children’s Act.

Keynote Speaker: Dr. Kiaras Gharabaghi

Conference Theme:
Promoting Cultural Diversity in Circles of Care

Conference Venue: The Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, North Campus Port Elizabeth.

Accommodation: Hostel accommodation at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University which is situated on the South and North Campus. This accommodation is shared accommodation with communal bathrooms. Rate per person per night R170.00 B/B - Bedding included. Soap and towels are not provided. A database of guest houses in the area have been prepared.

Youth Conference

The youth will be accommodated at the 2nd Avenue Campus of North Campus of the NMMU for the period 4 – 8 July 2011.

The theme for the youth conference is: Embracing Cultural Diversity.

For more information visit: www.naccw.org.za

Email: headoffice@naccw.org.za

Abuse and Historic Abuse in Residential Child Care: Some Thoughts about Certainty

Laura Steckley

I remember that brief conversation well. Okay, not the whole conversation, but the part where, I'll call him Allen, came and spoke me while I was photocopying in the downstairs staff office. He was concerned because, I'll call her Trisha, was beginning to see him as her boyfriend. Allen was worried about keeping that boundary without Trisha experiencing yet another adult rejection. That's really the part I remember most. I know we talked about how he might sensitively handle the situation, and I remember that the conversation was brief.

Allen was a trusted member of staff who, as far as I know, didn't give anyone cause for serious concern. From memory, he had been working in our establishment for a couple of years and I do remember that it was his first time doing this kind of

work. Allen sometimes struggled with what I perceived as a desire to take short cuts in developing trust with the kids, and he sometimes appeared to have role confusion related to friendship. Gosh, what new practitioner doesn't struggle with these things?

When Trisha started telling staff that Allen was her boyfriend, no one believed her. We had, however, had regular reminders that if abuse was alleged, whether or not we believed it, we were to report it to our program director and she would contact the local child protection team. Whatever Trisha told the staff, they viewed it as alleged abuse, followed protocol and passed it along to our programme director.

Trisha wasn't believed because she had a long history (with us and before us) of telling lies, sometimes outrageous lies.

She also was sometimes sexually provocative with the male staff, and we believed both behaviours to be related to the numerous incidents of sexual abuse she experienced at the hands of her mother's many boyfriends. We thought we were helping her to work through all of this.

So no one was particularly surprised when Trisha came out with her stories about how Allen was her boyfriend. Nonetheless, members of the child protection team were informed and started the investigation very shortly after Trisha's disclosure.

Within a few days, Donna also came forward with similar information – that Allen was her boyfriend too. Apparently, Trisha had begun to speak to the other girls in the unit. This dramatically changed the impression everyone had about what was going on. Donna was a relatively 'together' kid, one who hadn't (to our knowledge) lied to us before.

During the process of the investigation, Allen gave a detailed confession. Most of the details weren't shared with us; we were told that he had been sexually involved with both girls for a period of weeks, but that he had not had intercourse with either of them. With involvement of the child protection team, Allen made a video that was shown to each girl; in it, he confessed, apologised and made clear that they were not to blame for anything related to everything that had happened and was happening. The girls were spared from having to undergo further investigation and from having to testify in court. We were spared from the uncertainty as to whether he had committed the acts. Allen was sentenced

to two years in prison.

I won't go into how horrible it was to realise that one of our own had been abusing these girls, other than to say that it has stayed with me very vividly. I can't help but be affected by it when I consider the current issues of historic abuse here in the UK.

There have been significant scandals of abuse in residential child care in Britain, much of them reaching back across many decades. These scandals have received high levels of media attention, and in the minds of many, historic abuse immediately comes to mind when people hear the term 'residential child care'. The term 'widespread abuse' rolls off the tongue, but widespread related to what? To foster care? To kinship care? To care in families of origin? We don't know the answer to this, and I suspect we never will.

Still, any abuse is too much abuse.

And even the notion of abuse is complex and contentious. We live in a society where people regularly abuse each other, in all sorts of ways and in all sorts of settings. Sometimes this is clearly acknowledged as abuse and sometimes it is subtle and invisible. We have come through a century in which the concept of abuse and the notion that children are damaged by it was borne into our collective consciousness. Belting kids in mainstream schools was commonplace until relatively recently, not just for misbehaviour but for answering a question incorrectly. Seeing children as active agents who possess rights and help to shape their own life-paths is an even more recent way of thinking – one that still isn't reflected in way that the adult world re-

lates to kids.

Added to this are the questions being raised about the process of investigating historic abuse, and while I don't feel particularly on top of this subject, I do believe that that this issue – historic abuse of children and young people in residential child care – and the way it is addressed will significantly shape the future of our sector. And, I think, the future is now. I suspect the influence of dominant discourses about historic abuse varies across different establishments, and there is likely even greater variation amongst individuals who care (or have cared) for children and young people.

I often reflect on how differently things might have unfolded back when I was working with Allen, Trisha and Donna. If Trisha had been the only child to come forward and if Allen had not confessed, we would not have had certainty. In fact, I wonder if colleagues would have instinctively reached for false certainty. When I mentioned above that Allen was a trusted member of staff, I should add that he was highly integrated into the social circles that often form amongst residential child care practitioners. He had been to the homes of several colleagues, and they had been to his. They had regularly spent time informally debriefing in the bar after work.

I also think about how this might have unfolded here in Scotland. In Colorado, residential child care/residential treatment wasn't stigmatised; it was invisible. So while we still struggled with similar issues of poor professional regard, no required qualifications and poor resources, we didn't feel distrust towards the systems of response to allegations of abuse. If Trisha,

with her history and current functioning, had come forward in a Scottish unit or home, one that perhaps had a history of badly handled investigations in the past, I wonder what would have happened?

Clare Curtis-Thomas, former MP and chair of the all-party group on abuse investigations here in the UK, refers to cases of historic abuse as 'conscious cases'. They are conscious cases because of the prejudicial nature of the offenses, and because of our collective concern [guilt] about children who have been in care homes for years without taking any action against people who perpetrated abuse against them. As a result, according to Curtis-Thomas, there is a predisposition by juries to believe evidence despite any objective counter arguments that there might be. In other words, people have a tendency to cling to certainty rather remain in the discomfort of uncertainty, especially when so much is on the line – in this case, the opportunity to deliver justice for a victim of abuse and to assuage our collective guilt and discomfort. More generally, a large portion of the population is quick to grasp at certainty about the guilt of the accused for the same reason; it is easier to drive that guilt into a handful of people rather than hold it collectively.

By the same token, the opposite can happen. There can be a desire for certainty about the innocence of someone accused, based on the dysfunction of the system, our belief in the positive potential of Child and Youth Care or our own personal experiences in practice. I'm not sure I would have felt certain about Allen's innocence if the situation had unfolded dif-

ferently, but I might have if I had been as close to him as some of my other colleagues were. And I suspect that some of them had been initially certain of his innocence and would have remained so if Donna hadn't come forward and Allen hadn't confessed.

For the past 15 or so years, I have felt quite certain that Allen was grooming me that day in the downstairs staff office. The conversations I had with the investigators reinforced this, and only recently have I opened to the possibility that he might have been reaching out for help. This opening of mind is really just a consequence of thinking more deeply about the relationship of certainty to how we react to these sorts of things. You see, I don't remember how long before the investigation that he and I had had this conversation. It is possible that Allen was beginning to cross some lines with Trisha (or even just considering it) and maybe he was looking for a way back from this. It's also possible that I, we, needed to construct various instances as grooming in order to distance ourselves from what had happened. We needed a clear and distinct line between him – the abuser, and us – the helpers. This natural instinct was further reinforced by a significant focus of the investigation, which was whether or not any of us had colluded with him. Conversely, the conversation with Allen could have indeed been a totally calculated event in order to protect himself should Trisha tell anybody. It could have even been some complex mix of the two.

I'll never know.

Until recently, I thought I had the luxury of certainty in all of this. And to some extent, I did. I have certainty that Allen did what he was accused of doing, and that what he did clearly constituted abuse. I also realise I indulged in some false certainties and simplified things in order to bear the horribleness of what had happened. All sorts of rules proliferated in order to bring about certainty that this would never happen again (e.g., male staff were never to be alone with female residents) and, looking back, I suspect we became less reflective about the ways we did or didn't respect kids' agency and rights. You see, we couldn't tolerate seeing ourselves in even a similar light to that in which we came to see Allen.

So where am I going with all of this? I'm not certain, but I think it has to do with being strong enough and brave enough to tolerate the complexities and uncertainties related to this big, pressing issue of historic abuse in residential child care – to resist that strong, natural urge towards certainty. The current debate is naturally loaded with emotion and it seems to be creating divisions. Yet dialogue and debate serves an important function in forwarding our thinking and understanding. For this to be possible, we need to listen closely and openly, and speak frankly and candidly, WITH one another to find a way forward through this mess.

Only Halftime: A Tribute and Poem for Karen VanderVen

Mark Krueger

On May 23, I attended a retirement symposium in honor of Karen VanderVen, Professor University of Pittsburgh. It was a very moving event attended by her family, Pittsburgh faculty, and many of her colleagues from across several fields, who spoke about the impact her work had on them and their work with children, youth, and families. Her impact has been enormous. Fortunately, as Karen put it, “I am retiring but I am not quitting.”

I have known her since the 1970s, and like many others consider her a contemporary pioneer and leader in the development of child and youth care practice and the profession of child and youth care. She is truly a big name in the field, but she has never acted like a big name. She has always been there to lead and work with us side by side. An optimist, her glass is always more than half full.

For those few readers of *cyc-net.org* who do not know Karen, she is not only one of our most prolific writers but one of our best. In her column here in the *online* magazine and her other academic and informal writing she has constantly challenged, encouraged, and evoked us to take a fresh look at the work.

An activist, from her “soapbox,” she has spoken out in favor of activities and life span care and against the stifling nature of point and level systems. In numerous articles and books she has shown us new ways to look at developmental and relational child and youth care. She was one of the first to encourage us to look at postmodernism and chaos theory applications to practice. Karen was also an instrumental member of the team to develop competencies for certification in child and youth care work in the US and Canada. She has spoken at too many conferences to name, represented the US in international arenas, edited child and youth care journals, and in general been present with her positive spirit wherever she has been needed. No one has done more for the field. (Google her and see all the riches she has given us.)

I always think of her as our brilliant, playful academic. When it comes to activities, she walks the talk. She plays basketball, scuba dives, and collects shells to name just a few of her favorite leisure time activities. Often when I see her we toss the ball around, physically, and metaphorically in our conversations about the field.

When I was asked to write a poem to present at the symposium, I had these and many other images of Karen and her work in my mind. One of the most memorable was her story about her childhood and how she became a child and youth care worker. It was called *My Origins in Child and Youth Care: The 4 C's Pathway*, which was published in the 1992 edition of *The Journal of Child and Youth Care Work*. In the article she spoke about how she knew at an early age she wanted to do something like child and youth care. I remembered several parts of the story including the books and magazines her parents left around the house that spoke to a life in human services, a ball she through over a building, and the way she stood up for others in school. Thus with these and many other images in mind this poem more or less came out in free verse:



Poem for Karen

A ball flies over a roof and a
a child and youth care worker
lands on the other side

A tiger and staunch defender
of playmates and scapegoats

From books around the house
and magazines on a table
to journals on a desk
a bounce pass turning
on itself behind the back

between the legs and into
the hoop swish

A dervish of ideas and play
Twisting, doing, becoming
what is done, ever changing

From a soapbox to a workshop,
shells beneath
the sea like pearls of wisdom
uncovered in the fresh water
of a fluid mind

Steps and strokes forward,
not back against the injustice
and swell of point and level systems

Firsts, then and now,
a pen to paper
the hand that threw the ball
and separated the water

Over ...

Careers in a field where
you can you play
and get paid for it

An ear that hears it deep
always there listening
to move together beyond
basics in new contexts

The unknown in plain language
always developmental
always activity Chaos
and postmodernism
takes two to play
the more the merrier

Opens the door, invites
come in get wet learn
to swim in the waters
of curiosity be in the
game of hoop dreams
with Karen

Play with the
the girl who knew
back then what she
wanted to be

And remember
it's only halftime
in life span care
the break ends
as soon as this
event is over



*If there is anything that we wish to
change in the child, we should first exam-
ine it and see whether it is not something
that could better be changed in ourselves.*

— C.G. Jung

*Conspicuously absent from the Ten
Commandments is any obligation of par-
ent to child. We must suppose that God
felt it unnecessary to command by law
what He had ensured by love.*

— Robert Brault

*Thank you Karen for sharing your words,
voice, friendship, play, and life with us. ■*

Proud Supporters of CYC-Net



Since 1979 HomeBridge Youth Society has been serving youth between 12 and 18 years old who need a temporary or longer term place to live. HomeBridge provides residential care, therapeutic programming and a school in the Halifax Regional Municipality. Our programs include: Hawthorne House, Johnson House, Jubien House, Sullivan House, Reigh Allen Centre, Cogswell House and Bridges for Learning.



HomeBridge

All youth and their families living in Health, Safety and Harmony

www.homebrideyouth.ca

A Good Man

D.L. Shellenberger

After I came back from the war, my dad expected me to work the ranch with him. For his sake, I tried for about six months, but farming just wasn't for me anymore. Besides, being at home only reminded me of who I used to be.

I got a job as a mechanic at a farm equipment outfit in Bozeman. Two months later, I met Lila Atkins. Being with Lila was the farthest away I could get from where I'd come from, short of going back to Okinawa, and there was no chance of that. Once had been enough. I'd never seen a woman like Lila before. I had only known country women, women who could buck bales and ride a horse as well as any man. Not only was Lila gorgeous—a tall redhead who looked like Rita Hayworth—there was nothing capable and sturdy about her. She was like a piece of fine china, fragile and only brought out for best. She needed me to take care of her. I told myself she was the reason I'd stayed alive. We met in February; the wedding was in June.

When I was courting Lila, I had an idea that her drinking would be our downfall. But part of me still believed all that war hero crap. I thought I could save her. Even though I'd never saved anyone before. Most of the guys in my unit were dead, and I hadn't been able to do a damned

thing about it.

It never occurred to me that Lila might want to take me under with her. We weren't married more than three months before I became the reason why her life was a mess. She'd get drunk and throw things at me. When she ran out of things to break, she'd take in after me, tooth and nail. The time she chucked an iron statue of a horse I'd won at the state fair's saddle bronc competition and about took a chunk out of my shoulder, I knew I had to go before she killed me. I didn't know people had such fury in them. I had never seen that. Not even on Okinawa. Even in battles, guys shot at each other because someone else told them to, or because there was no other choice. Fighting was a sport for Lila, and she was better at it than anyone I'd ever seen. If she could have stayed sober, the Marines could have used her.

I'd had my fill of fighting. I went to have the marriage annulled. Lila begged for another chance, and I almost gave in, until my sister Carrie—older by a year and four days—talked some sense into me.

"Miles, have you gone crazy?" She ran out of the room and came back holding a hand mirror, which she thrust at me. "See all the marks she's already left? Don't you know you're just signing up for more if you go back to her?"

Carrie was the only one who knew that Lila was the reason for all the bruises and cuts and scratches. The rest of the family figured I'd come back from the war scrapping for fights. I wasn't going to be the one to tell them otherwise.

Once I left Lila, I moved in with Carrie and her family, just until I got back on my feet. Carrie didn't like me drinking in front of her kids, so instead of going straight out to her place after work, I often stopped by a bar for a quick beer or two. One Thursday evening a woman about my age was the only other customer. I recognized her, not because I'd seen her before, but because the expression on her face matched the way I felt—disappointed, but not exactly giving in. One of her arms was in a sling. While not quite a country woman like my mother and sisters, she looked strong enough. I figured she'd probably fallen off a horse.

Over the next month, I saw her a few more times. I overheard the barkeep calling her Eileen. She always sat on the same barstool and ordered some stiff, grown-up drink.

She was there one Saturday afternoon. She glanced up at me, then hurriedly took another sip of her drink. She had a pretty good black eye.

I sat down, leaving one barstool between us, and ordered my beer. She looked over at me again, and I tipped my cap to her.

"How are you this evening?" I asked.

She took her time answering. I figured she was going to ignore me. Without turning to look at me, she said, "About how you'd expect a woman with a black eye would be."

I took a big gulp of my beer. "Where'd you get that?"

This time she turned in her seat to look my way. "What would you say if I told you it was my husband?"

I took another slug of beer and raised my glass. "Here's hoping the son-of-a-bitch looks worse than you do," I said.

Her good eye narrowed, and she looked away again. I thought she was going to cry. Or hit me. Or run away. "Sorry," I said quickly. "That was a stupid thing to say."

"He should look worse than me, if I had a backbone," she blurted. "But right after I finish here, I'll go home to him. And he may be good to me, or seeing me like this may make him mad all over again."

The barkeep scurried away. That should have been my cue to leave well enough alone—after all, Lila and I had met in a bar, too—but I slid over to the stool next to hers.

"Why are you going back there, then?" I kept my voice low. "Man who'd hit a woman isn't a man."

"Yeah, and where am I supposed to go?" she asked. Looking at her up close, it was hard to believe that any man would ever want to hit her. Or think he could get away with it. She was a spunky little thing, with quick, disarming eyes. "I've got two little boys waiting at home for me."

After that, we still met up a few evenings a week, where she drank her one scotch and soda, wincingly, like it was medicine. It turned out I knew that no-good husband of hers, guy by the name of Brad Mayhew who'd been a year ahead of me in school. I'd always thought he was an

asshole, a town kid who looks down on farm kids. It was his dad who owned the grocery store, not him. And now I find out he beats his wife. Oh, yeah, he's better than me, all right. I offered to talk to him, but Eileen shut down that idea.

"Please don't, Miles," she said. "It'll just make matters worse."

Just in case Eileen was ready to move, though, I asked Carrie if she would take in her and her kids, and she agreed—as long as I moved out first. ("I'm not running a boarding house here," said Carrie.) Eileen said she'd go back to her folks in St. Louis before she'd put Carrie out. But there was the matter of her boys already being settled here. They loved their Grandma Mayhew, who took care of them while Eileen worked. Eileen liked her job as a nurse at Bozeman Deaconess and didn't think she'd like working in a big-city hospital. And eventually, she admitted, there was me. We had a few things in common. We had both been in the war. She'd been an army nurse at the same time I'd been in the Navy.

Eileen and her boys never moved in with Carrie. When Mayhew pushed Eileen down the cellar stairs in their house, turning her from nurse to patient, Brad's parents finally intervened. They were sitting with her in her hospital room when Mayhew showed up all apologetic with a big bouquet of flowers.

"You should have seen Brad's father," Eileen told me later. "He usually wouldn't say shit if it was in his mouth, but he stood up and told Brad he wasn't welcome here, and when Brad said, 'She's my wife; I've got a right to be here,' my father-in-law said, 'She wouldn't be here if it weren't for you,

get the hell out before I call somebody to haul your sorry ass out of here,' and Brad's mother looking all worried but fierce at the same time saying 'I didn't raise you to be a criminal.' Oh, after all those years of them staying out of it, and now they're standing up for me and my boys."

After three days in the hospital, Eileen and her boys moved in with her in-laws. They even paid for her divorce attorney. Soon after Brad ran off to Billings with a new woman. Rumor was her parents had a ranch in Cutbank. After years of making fun of farm kids, he finally married one. That way he'd always have someone to look down on.

Before I asked Eileen to marry me, I talked to old man Mayhew, and he gave me his blessing. That was nice and all, but he wasn't the one I wanted to marry. I asked Eileen three times, and she refused every time. Maybe she didn't figure a mechanic could support her and her boys like a shopkeeper's son. And anyway, she could support herself on her nurse's salary. Maybe she was afraid I'd hit her like her ex-husband had.

Carrie said if I expected Eileen to marry me, I ought to tell her what else we had in common. That was the last thing I wanted to do. Just goes to show that going to war doesn't take the coward out of the man. I was no hero, not in Lila's life, or Eileen's, or anyone else's. Not even Carrie knew all the mistakes I'd made.

When I made up my mind to tell Eileen the whole truth about my marriage to Lila, I felt a familiar dread. It took me a while to place it, until I remembered it was like those quiet times during the war we almost believed were permanent. Right before an

enemy grenade shattered the peace.

Eileen and I were sitting on the back steps outside the Mayhews' house. It was a Saturday night, and we had gone to dinner at the 4-B's and a picture at the Rialto.

"You're so quiet tonight," Eileen said, squeezing my hand.

I shrugged and squeezed her hand back. "What do you want to talk about?"

"Nothing in particular. Sitting here together feels good."

After a few minutes of listening to the crickets' throbbing, I said, "What would you say if I told you my ex-wife used to hit me?"

Eileen started to laugh as if I was joking. Then she noticed I wasn't laughing. "Really?" Even in the dark I could tell that her expression was startled and concerned, as if I'd suddenly sprouted a visible wound. "Why didn't you tell me before?"

I withdrew my hand and hunched over with my elbows on my knees, pretending to study my boots. "Have you ever heard of a woman beating on her husband?"

Eileen had been facing me, but out of the corner of my eye I saw her look away.

"That's what I thought," I said softly.

"You thought what?"

It seemed the night got darker and stiller. My throat was so dry all of a sudden, I didn't know if I could speak. "That no man would ever stand for a woman hitting him," I heard myself say.

I heard Eileen shifting in her chair, and next thing I knew she was kneeling in front of me and reaching for my hands. "I know you were raised not to hit women, and I wouldn't be here with you if you had." In the dark her face shone as pale and featureless as a star.

"So, you're not going to throw me out?"

Her hands were warm and smooth on mine. "That makes as much sense as you leaving me because Brad hit me." Her voice cracked, and as she bent her head, a length of her soft, dark hair veiled her face. "There are just some people in this world who are rotten, Miles, and we had the bad luck to find two of them. That doesn't make us bad people."

I wished I could have Eileen's certainty, because since the war I hadn't always been able to sort out the difference between good and bad, friend and enemy. Back on Okinawa, my buddies and I were walking through the jungle when I heard a branch break above. I looked up, hoping it was a squirrel or some other damned animal, knowing it probably wasn't. Near the top of a tree, a Jap soldier was taking aim. He could have shot the whole works of us before we even knew what hit us. But he didn't. And I think I know why. He was probably just as sick and tired of all the killing as I was and hoped we'd just keep moving along. It was just pure bad luck that he'd lost his footing and given himself away. We all started shooting, and by the end of it, only the Jap was dead. I'll never forget the cracking sound his body made when it hit the ground, like a coconut falling from a tree. Only he was a man.

I felt Eileen's hands on mine, still warm and so alive. "You think I'm a good man?"

Eileen tenderly kissed my hands. "The best," she whispered. "The best." She had to be getting uncomfortable, still kneeling at my feet. I scooped her up onto my lap, and we held each other for a long time, listening to our breathing and the crickets' serenade.

Acknowledgement: *Paradigm*, Volume 2, The Oliver Issue

Nils Ling

A week-long conversation

I have come to the conclusion that I am far too polite for my own good.

Last weekend my wife and I were at a large garden party. As always, we stuck together long enough to get our bearings, then we went our separate ways — she, towards a group of people exclaiming rapturously over some sort of plant that may or may not have been a rose; me towards the bar.

I was almost there when I met my friend Steve. He had a pleasant looking woman in tow, and introduced her as his sister-in-law Carol, from out west. After introducing us, my friend (and I am reconsidering that term) Steve walked off and was swallowed up by the crowd.

That left Carol and me standing there. We smiled politely in silence. It began to get awkward. Surely even the most banal conversation would have to be better than this long, uncomfortable ... nothing.

In retrospect, I should have said, “Lovely to meet you, have a nice evening,” and carried on to the bar. But I’m just too polite to strand someone in the middle of a party where they know nobody. I was surprised that Steve had done just that to his sister-in-law, but surely he

would be back soon.

So I said something utterly innocuous about what a pleasant, warm evening it was. And she began to talk.

Within thirty seconds, I was pining for the good old times, when she and I were standing in awkward silence.

It was one of those situations — we’ve all had them — where you find yourself in conversation with someone with whom you have absolutely nothing in common. We did not share a common world view. We did not share a sense of humour — in fact, I suspect hers had been removed at birth in some form of genetic experiment. We did not share common interests. And she seemed quite happy to be standing there, talking to me, so we didn’t seem to share the uncontrollable urge to get out of this conversation before it killed me.

She may have been the most tedious person I have ever met in my life. I would give you specific examples of just how boring she was, but she was that extraordinarily dull that I found I was able to immediately forget what she was saying *even as she was saying it*. Literally. By the time she got to the end of a sentence, I had no idea whatsoever what it was about.

It's not that she was actively unpleasant. But I tried several conversational forays — politics, weather, popular culture, anything, just to see what was there. I discovered, to quote Gertrude Stein, "There is no there, there."

My Mom once described a young fellow my sister was dating this way: "When he walks into a room, it's as if two people left." I never really knew what she meant until I spent several hours in the company of this conversational black hole.

Okay, actually, it was more like thirty minutes. But it felt like a week. I began to curse that jerk Steve while subtly edging ever closer to the bar. I thought maybe, just maybe I could drink her interesting.

Sadly, no. She did get a little more attractive, though. So my brain had something to keep it occupied while she blathered on. That, and watching for Steve, who I was about ready to kill. Or my wife, who by rights ought to have seen me at some point, recognized the rictus-like smile on my face and come to my rescue.

Finally, Carol brightened up as she waved and a pleasant looking fellow came over. She introduced him as her husband. I had to stop myself from asking him, "How? How do you do it? You wake up every day knowing you have to spend it having conversations with her. Are modern drugs that powerful?" (I thought it, but didn't say it. Again, that's my politeness kicking in.)

But I was able to break away, using the excuse that I had to go find my wife. I didn't add, "Or that (expletive) Steve."

I walked away. Far away. To the fur-

thest reaches of the garden. And finally, I was able to find my wife. Through that oh-so-subtle husband/wife code, I was able to indicate that the evening was over ("Well, that meeting in the morning is on my mind ...").

She was a little miffed in the car on the way home. She had been enjoying herself. In particular, she'd had a really interesting conversation with ...

"Don't tell me. Let me guess. Steve."

"Yes! He has family visiting from out west. I told him he should bring them over some night for a few drinks."

A few? Oh, I don't think so.



This feature: From Nils Ling's book *Truths and Half Truths*. A collection of some of his most memorable and hilarious columns. Write to him at RR #9, 747 Brackley Point Road, Charlottetown, PE, C1E 1Z3, Canada.



nscC

Child and Youth Care Concentration

Do you value and respect children and youth? Are you committed to seeing their strengths and believe they can develop their full potential? Do you think you would enjoy working with a team to design recreational, therapeutic, and social programs for youth who are troubled? Do you think you could be firm enough to facilitate those therapeutic programs and interventions? If so, you will truly enjoy learning all there is to know about being a child and youth care worker.

Child and youth care work takes place 24/7—you must be flexible in your work schedule. Children and youth range from 6 to 25 years old, so you'll no doubt be broadening your idea of what passes for entertainment: get used to playing with dolls, sliding down hills, listening to crazy music. The more you put into the learning process, the more you will gain—and the gains and rewards in this field are tremendous.

For more information: [NSCC Child and Youth Care Program](#)

In Control or In Charge?

Estella Abraham

CEO, *Fostering First International*

I was recently reminded of a conversation I once had with a colleague about the difference between being in charge and in control. I heard myself say, “People who have a need to be in control are not always in charge and those who are in charge are not always in control.” •

When I was in residential work, there was a young man who was 14 years old who kept running away. Repeatedly, he would be brought back and the police would look at me as if I was inept. Yes, I was the person in charge of his care, but I had no control over him and his need to run back to his grandmother.

The care and control of children is an emotive subject. However, adults too can posture and get into standoffs with one another. Sometimes we need to stand back and consider what is going on; if someone has the need to control someone or something else, one has to question why. Is it borne out of a deep seated insecurity, out of paranoia or out of plain old misplaced use of power?

Knowing one’s true authority and worth is usually enough to command respect and, when caring for children or managing staff, resulting control issues or

confrontation often end in tears! How we conduct ourselves when we have the responsibility for others, whether a child or an adult, is an important and fundamental aspect of being a role model. Unconditional positive regard is a basic value that needs to be embraced by all involved in our profession.

This simple concept is so very hard to demonstrate in the everyday life of the competitive world we live in as, like it or not, we sometimes allow thoughts, prejudices and traits — conscious or unconscious — to dictate and determine who we become. Someone who is controlling will not empower people, but someone who is confident about who they are and their position will enable others to find their place and flourish.

Can you recall a situation which became oppositional because of one person’s need to gain control? Exercising positive regard is essential and fundamental to the role of the foster carer, the social worker, the manager and the true friend.

Ask someone you trust how they find you and don’t just hear it; listen carefully.

leon fulcher's postcard from east neuk of fife

Hello from Scotland's *East Neuk*, that sticky-out bit between the Firth of Forth at Edinburgh and the Firth of Tay at Dundee, the Scots name given to the 'corner' of the Kingdom of Fife. While few of you may have heard of the East Neuk of Fife, you may know about it because of the Royal and Ancient Golf Course at St Andrews or because of St Andrews University, one of the oldest universities in Europe. Maybe you've heard of St Andrews University because that's where Wills and Kate met.



What were you daen on the day of the Royal Wedding?

OK, so now for that awkward question. What were you doing on the day of the Royal Wedding? Some might ask *What Royal Wedding?* Ah, but few will have missed hearing about it since the world's media surrounded Westminster Abbey! But my question has yielded a variety of responses. Some shake their heads with disdain expressing no interest whatsoever in anything associated with Royals. Others like my friend Gale are more cautious, never admitting to watching the build-up, the ceremony or the aftermath kisses on the balcony of Buckingham Palace. Others revelled in every little detail; the extended preparations and rehearsals, Match-day trivia, the trees decorating Westminster Abbey, the guests and what they were wearing – even Princess Beatrice's odd hat which subsequently sold on e-Bay for £81,000, – the wedding ceremony itself and the aftermath! Many will have purchased ceremonial tat!



**Developing Relationships Along
St Andrew's Close**

Yes, I admit to watching it all. I was fascinated by the pageantry and few do pageantry like the British. I'm also interested in the symbolism associated with 'a Royal' and 'a Commoner' coming together in holy matrimony. At a time when symbolic acts such as marriage have altered amongst many young people in the Western world, events such as these still hold major appeal. In places where leaders are elected and replaced at regular intervals, or where leaders cling to power for decades, it is worth considering the symbolic meanings associated with Queen Elizabeth II and her family. Ever open to public scrutiny, this family reflects symbolically many of the elements of family life. I accept that there are significant differences associated with wealth and privilege, but in other respects they offer a reference point with which family members associate. I smile at how Royal Wedding events were followed in minute detail by the American media. As a New Zealander, I look forward in anticipation to when Wills gets elevated to the Throne.

Prince William, and his father Charles, are the first of their family to complete university degrees; Charles at Cambridge and William at St Andrews. As we wandered around St Andrews again, I was reminded of the radical traditions associated with this ancient university since its very beginnings. Most will find it inconceivable that a young man named Patrick Hamilton could be burned at the stake in 1524 for heresy through publicly espousing Protestant beliefs inspired by the Reformation! That's a far cry from the student protests of my day, or even today!



The Medieval Village of Crail and Crail Harbour



Radical Traditions Permeate at St Andrews' Medieval University

Moving south along the East Neuk from St Andrews, one comes to the ancient fishing port of Crail. This was a thriving place well before Columbus sailed off to 'discover America' or to launch the European invasion that wrenched North America from the indigenous peoples of that land. Continue driving south and one comes to

Anstruther (the locals call it Angster with great fish & chips), then St Monan's site of an old windmill used to extract salt from the sea and help fuel the Industrial Revolution.



The Royal Borough of Elie & Earlsferry

Not far from the Royal Borough of Elie & Earlsferry one arrives at a village named Kilconquhar. Try pronouncing that one! Would you believe 'Kin-yuk-ar'? Enjoy!

*"Waer dae ye cum frae?" and
"Waer dae ye stae?"*

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Leon'. The signature is written in black ink and features a stylized, circular flourish above the letter 'L'.

Dear Reader ...

In April 2010 I had the pleasure of having one of my articles published on CYC-NET titled "Being Resilient". In just over a year a lot has happened so I felt it necessary to write another on behalf of the strides being made into my future.

To 'recap' the last article I had written, I was in care of the Department of Community Services for 14 years after having my leg broken by my father at the age of five. I spent time in numerous foster homes and group homes, lived around drugs, crime and poverty and was even homeless at one point. For the past two years I have been trying to push forth, determined to change everything. Everything including myself, and the people I come in contact with. I have since happened to gain employment with a Community Services organization I used to be a resident in, as a Residential Counselor which I have been working for, for the past year. I must say it's my pleasure to work for them and the clients it houses as I am able to make such a difference in lives being able to understand where they come from. I am able to sincerely know how they feel about their lives and situations because at one point in my life, I had felt the same way as a client. I have also gained employment working with homeless people of my community as a Client Support Worker trying to make a difference in their lives as well helping them work toward a better future. I have begun working with children in care at the Youth in Care Newsletter Project creating a Newsletter called The Voice. It launched last week and was a great success. At the end of the launch I was approached by a Woman who works for The Depart-

ment of Community Services who wants me to do some work with her. I have done some public speaking as a youth mentor promoting self esteem, resilience and inspiration in youth and the people around me and just recently last week on May 27th 2011, I graduated school with a Child and Youth Care Diploma. I have been able to effectively use my past to benefit the future of others and I will continue to do so until the end of time. Last month I had the honor of attending the Nova Scotia Child and Youth Care Workers Association, Provincial Child and Youth Care Conference and left with a world of new information. I would like to thank them for providing me with a bursary to be able to go on behalf of an article I had written for them. It was an amazing experience and I hope to attend future events. Since my past article had been published on the website, it has been shared all over the world because of social networking. I have received countless emails and messages offering words of encouragement and support for what I am doing. I had a teacher from the United States message me telling me that I am an inspiration to all. I want to thank you all for the support and kind words as everything I am doing, I do it for you. I am trying to change the world, one face at a time and I am slowly getting there with a pile of determination pushing me along. I want to thank CYC-NET for publishing my articles and supporting me and only hope that I get to work with them more in the future. We are 'the future of our youth'.

Thank you again.
George Dean

EndNotes



Barrier

Whether this wire
be real or imagined,
secluding or
self-imposed,
protecting of myself
or others ...
it is a barrier
I know I need to transcend.

Meek young men grow up in libraries,
believing it their duty to accept the views
which Cicero, which Locke, which Bacon,
have given,
forgetful that Cicero, Locke, and Bacon
were only young men in libraries, when
they wrote these books.

— Ralph Waldo Emerson

“Modern cynics and skeptics see no
harm in paying those to whom they en-
trust the minds of their children a smaller
wage than is paid to those to whom they
entrust the care of their plumbing.”

— John F. Kennedy

“The children must get plenty of love
and affection whether they deserve it or
not: they must be assured of the basic
quota of happy, recreational experiences
whether they seem to have it coming or
not. In short, love and affection, as well as
the granting of gratifying life situations,
cannot be made the bargaining tools of
educational or even therapeutic motiva-
tion, but must be kept tax-free as minimal
parts of the youngsters’ diet, irrespective
of the problems of deservedness.”

— Fritz Redl and David Wineman

“One looks back with appreciation to
the brilliant teachers, but with gratitude to
those who touched our human feelings.
The curriculum is so much necessary raw
material, but warmth is the vital element
for the growing plant and for the soul of
the child.”

— Carl Jung



I write lots of letters to the Editor – but I
never know how to actually get them to
the Editor!

Here is a test to find whether your mission on earth is finished: If you are alive, it isn't.

— Richard Bach



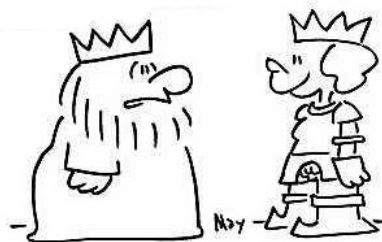
Children's home rebellion: "It's an experiment in semi-independent living: You guys still buy the food and clothing, pocket money and transport — and we get to have a little peace and pivity!"

"None of us got where we are solely by pulling ourselves up by our bootstraps. We got here because somebody (a parent, a teacher, an Ivy League crony or a few nuns) bent down and helped us pick up our boots."

— Thurgood Marshall



"Your psychiatrist may say one thing, Blatworthy, but I say another. But my treatment is free!" (Ronald Searle)



"KNIGHT SCHOOL?--I THOUGHT YOU WERE GOING TO NIGHT SCHOOL!"

Recently a young mother asked me for advice. What, she wanted to know, was she to do with a 7-year-old who was obstreperous, outspoken, and inconveniently willful?

"Keep her," I replied....

— Anna Quindlin

information

CYC-Online is a web-based e-publication and therefore not available in printed form. However, readers are always welcome to print out pages or chapters as desired.

Editors

Thom Garfat (Canada) /

thom@cyc-net.org

Brian Gannon (South Africa) /

brian@cyc-net.org

Correspondence

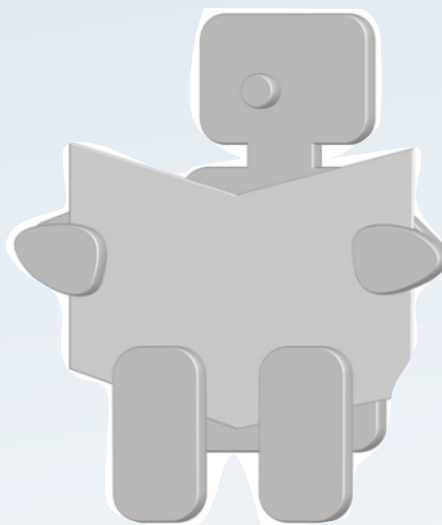
The Editors welcome your input, comment, requests, etc.

Write to cyconline@cyc-net.org

Advertising

Only advertising related to the profession, programs, courses, books, conferences etc. will be accepted. Rates and specifications are obtainable from

advertising@cyc-net.org





ONLINE JOURNAL OF
THE INTERNATIONAL CHILD AND YOUTH CARE NETWORK (CYC-NET)

www.cyc-net.org

ISSN 1025-6121