

CYC-Online

FOR THOSE WHO LIVE OR WORK WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

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Keeping on Target

The recent CYC-Net “Clan Gathering” in Scotland had left your Editors very much aware of “Child and Youth Care” as an ever-widening field. It is no longer represented solely by the local group home and residential program, and, in a growing number of cases, practice looks and feels very different from the way it was five, ten, fifteen years ago.

Only this week, in our regular pages on the CYC-Net web, we published an interesting feature by Mark Krueger describing his first day in the field (look at www.cyc-net.org/quote4/quote-1882.html) and we recognised it as a genuine piece of “history”.

Of course there are still many programs where group care and residential

programs are the order of the day, and these continue to serve an appropriate and useful service to thousands of children, youth and families in difficulty. Indeed, practitioners in these places are very much more inventive, skilled, and trained than were their forebears of fifteen years ago, and they are expected to multi-task across a range of functions. For them, we feel that *CYC-Online* still meets their need for new and interesting reading.

But there are many others whose work has an altogether different shape. They work in day programs to which clients come daily from their own homes; they work in offices and consulting rooms, in recreation and self-help programs, they work in the wider community itself, within

clients' own homes and schools.

These largely non-residential workers may concentrate on specific problem areas such as psychiatric, medical and health issues as teachers, counsellors, trainers ... they may work *on behalf of* youngsters, in advocacy and political roles; they may be advisers to teachers, club leaders and community recreation and sporting organisations.

Wherever they work, they require the same knowledge and skills which their residential colleagues need, and above all, they require the same qualities of understanding, relationship-building, support and encouragement as the rest of us. And in this respect, much of what appears in the pages of *CYC-Online* is of interest and value to all.

But it is in his "mix" that we are now seeking input from you, our readers. Or perhaps more focussed than that: from *you, our reader*.

We need to know what you, in this rich soup of child and youth care, do from day to day, what you find interesting here and what more or different you would like to your specific purpose.

For one thing, we would like to hear about your work and how you apply the principles and practices of child and youth care in *your* work. Of course, as you share this with us, we are able to share your information with others in the field. This way they all get to better see and realise the range of the field, to see perhaps what might interest them as they pursue their own carers.

And we at *CYC-Online* get to see what we are missing out, how we can sharpen our focus in these monthly issues and be of more use to everyone.

If you agree with our thinking, there are at least two ways we can go about this (and you may think of more!):

1. Simply write a piece for inclusion in *CYC-Online*, telling us what you do and with which client group, what you find interesting and fulfilling about it, and perhaps something you would like to know more about. We would be very grateful and interested, and you can simply send this to us at info@cyc-net.org and we will kick the ball into play.
2. Simply write a piece (or ask a question or express an opinion, whatever) to our discussion group (or the same e-mail address as above), and 3500 child and youth care people will read your message, and who knows where that may lead?

You may well get to meet (actually or in cyberspace) someone who shares your interest, and they would be pleased to hear from you!

But for us here at *CYC-Online*, you would help us to sharpen our target and broaden our foraging for material, so that we include everyone who may be interested in a different slant by reflecting everyone's interests and passions.

Looking forward to hearing from you!

From all of us at *CYC-Online*



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Everything you always wanted to know about being stupid

Cedrick of Toxteth

Just because you're a kid doesn't mean you're stupid. If your parents or teachers think you are, they're probably pissed-off because you're not following their program. Now, in my book, that might make you courageous, stubborn, brilliant, misinformed or misunderstood, but to them, you're simply stupid. Ignore their demands or tell them to go to hell and there'll be other words, like 'defiant,' 'disruptive' or 'devious,' heading your way. They may say they still love you, even throw in a trip to Disneyland for good measure, but stick to your guns and the only trips will be to your room, if you still have one. You may wonder how they can really love you if they don't know what you think and how you feel, but love is a word with many meanings, just like 'stupid'.

But be prepared. If you continue to resist the regime, the experts will come sniffing around and the bullshit will get even deeper. You'll become a 'client' for people called "counselors" who'll use all kinds of trickery to throw you off course. They may say they're interested in your thoughts and feelings but what they really want is to get you into line with the "good" kids. Learn how to play their game and you might come out unscathed, but tell them to fuck off and you're back in the snake pit. Next come the shrinks with their handbook of phony disorders and diseases. Before you can learn to say "psycho pathogenic mega colon," you'll be diagnosed, drugged and duped into becoming a 'patient'. No longer responsible for your stupidity, your critics will back off and those little pink pills will seem to

whisk your troubles away like a hit of Ecstasy. Life will become easier. Your teachers will welcome you back into the classroom and your parents will smile at you again. That trip to Disneyland is back on the schedule and when those old troubles begin to bubble up again, as they surely will, there'll always be more pills and the odd injection to keep them at bay. So now you can just go on to become what they wanted you to be in the first place – attentive, compliant, successful, and incurably stupid.

What really pisses *me* off is that so many adults have this idea that kids need to be told everything from the get-go, like the difference between right and wrong. This doesn't mean they'll tell you everything you want to know. Some things you're not supposed to know because they think you're too young to understand. But most of the interesting stuff is still missing because they don't know about it themselves. They'll never admit this because folks who don't know about interesting things are called "ignorant" (an adult word meaning 'stupid'). So the message is clear - pretending to know what you don't know is a very important part of growing up. You don't have to be smart to look smart - just make sure you don't end up looking ignorant.

Something you probably don't know is that one of the smartest people on the planet, a guy called Dalai Lama, said that all kids are born knowing more than their parents? Most parents don't know he said this, and those that do tend to keep it to themselves because they don't like the idea, or more likely, they haven't two clues what he's talking about. Either way,

they wouldn't want *you* to know. You see, Dalai is a rather strange man and most people don't want to be associated with some weirdo in a red robe that likes to sit around thinking about life, rather than just getting a real job like a normal human being. It's true that some strange people can become very rich and famous, but most are either laughed at or locked up. There are all kinds of words for these poor suckers.

Your parents don't want you to be strange. They want you to follow in their footsteps, believe what they believe and make sure you have all the things they always wanted but never had, like being a doctor with a big house in Snobsville. According to the experts, this is what it means to be a 'good parent' and, if you stay with the program and make them proud, everyone will call you a "good kid." Then, if all goes according to plan, you'll end up wearing the smug smile that identifies you as the successful product of a happy family. And, should the smile fade, as it undoubtedly should, you'll still have all the dough you need to rent the best Shrink in town and paint it back on. You may never know who you really are, but you won't be a loser and you'll never let down those wonderful folks back home who sacrificed everything to make you a success.

If you want to test your parents, ask them to tell you what the Dalai Lama said about kids and then check out his Blog, "Hello, This is the Dalai Lama Speaking". This won't only help you to understand your parents better, it will also remind you to always check out information from at least two independent sources. The

word 'independent' is very important. Kids can be easily conned into believing poppycock just because Mom and Dad, and everybody down the street, is saying the same thing. Millions of flies might agree that doggy-poo is a good thing, but that doesn't mean it's good for you, now does it? Don't be fooled, dog shit is bad for you, even if it's been dished out by dotting parents and dedicated teachers. You don't even have to check this out, you just know. I think this is probably what the Dalai Lama was getting at.

Well I'm not like the Dalai Lama I can't keep saying really deep things that nobody wants to hear or understand. But I can say things that your parents and teachers might not say, whatever their reasons.

For example, let me tell you the biggest con job of them all. The world you were born into is one unholy mess. Your parents, grandparents and all who went before have fucked things up so badly that there's hardly anything worth hanging on to. If they tell you otherwise, just smile and listen carefully. It's never too early to suss out the smell of bullshit. Just don't make any commitments. This is your time for exploring options, not for collecting obligations. If you buy into the claptrap, you'll be slotted into a world in which everybody is competing with everybody else for everything imaginable - power, status, sex, money, trophies, oil, real estate, trees, school grades and, of course, sneakers. I could go on, but you get the point. If your devoted advisors have their way, you'll even be led to believe that you must compete for your freedom because there's only so much to be had. Well you

don't need Uncle Dalai to tell you what a pile of doggy-poo that is.

The good news is that no matter how much they grind you down, you can still be free on the inside. So *just do it*, even if you don't have the right sneakers. Give your imagination a chance to roam and you can dream up a much better world than the one they want you to enlist in. Just don't tell them about it. If you do, they'll call you "childish" and end up tagging you as an idiot. You must understand that any threat to their ambitions and beliefs scares the crap out of them - even if it comes from kids. When it comes from competing adults, they would rather slaughter each other than face the possibility that what they've always believed is a crock.

As long as you're a kid the odds are against you, so stay cool. Play as much as possible, it will help you to experiment with your ideas. If they want to show you how to play, go along for the ride, but keep having fun in your own way whether they like it or not (you can still become a ballet dancer or play pro-football if that's what you really, really want). Read the books you like, even if you have to hide them in your secret place. And when you're imprisoned in school, listen to what they have to say - you'll find some good stuff in among the garbage. Remember, it's not about what they want you to know, but what you're interested in knowing, so create your own program and stay with it. If you get trapped in the mindless competition for grades, medals and scholarships, all is lost. Oh, and one more thing - watch out for the guilt trips. You are not a 'bad' person bound for Hell

because you're not able to please Mommy, Daddy, Pastor Joseph or Mr. Codswallop at Pewk Bay Elementary. On the inside, your goodness is beyond question.

Maybe you think I'm just dissing your parents, teachers and all those helpful experts, so let me say a couple of things on their behalf. They don't mean to be against you. In fact most of them are convinced they're acting in your best interests. The trouble is they're stuck with what was shoveled out to them and will probably cling onto to it even as the world crumbles around them. If you blame them, ignore them, or hit back in anger you'll be just as stuck in your own bullshit as they are in theirs. But if you're respectful, kind and thoughtful, you could break the deadlock. Who knows, you might even help them to get along with

each other. Learn to say your real yes's and no's, even if they don't give a tinker's-toss - it's great practice for when your time comes around, as it certainly will. Then, when it's your turn to call the shots, you'll have everything you need to have fun and create a better world along the way.

You may decide to toss-out everything I've said and that's just fine, as long as it's your opinion and not someone else's. After all, I'm a Fool, but I'm not an idiot. But, whatever else you do, don't call me stupid.

Cedrick was a columnist with *Relational Child & Youth Care Practice* who now works as a serial suicide bomber in a foreign land. He has no fixed abode but can be reached through his editor, Gerry Fewster (fewster@seaside.net)



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Talking about death

Liz Laidlaw

“Do your bones show up when you die?” my son asked recently. He asks a variation of this question almost daily. He is four and a half years old and obsessed with the concept of death. At this age, he thinks that death is temporary and reversible and he also thinks that if you get sick, you die (which is not necessarily a worrisome thing being as it’s impermanent). Or if you’re *old*, you’re going to die. True enough, since we’re all going to die eventually.

My daughter first became interested in the subject when she was three and a half and watched someone fall off a ship in a Disney movie. She became fascinated with where he went and why he wasn’t coming back. The more Disney we watched, the more death seemed to surround us. Mother’s are always dying in Disney – all the first-rate kid heroes need to be orphans I guess. Now that she’s eight, she’s a little more pragmatic about it, but it’s still a cause for anxiety.

In my children’s short lives, they have been exposed to far more death than I was at their age, and not just thanks to Disney. In four short years our cherished dog, two of my mother’s dogs (their grand-dogs?), and an incalculable number

of our pet fish have died. When our dog had a massive stroke, both our young children were present when she was anesthetized. Looking back, maybe that wasn’t so smart, but it all happened so fast and we were so distressed that we weren’t making the best decisions. I didn’t experience any death in my family until I was 16 years old and that was our family dog. It was several years later that my mother’s parents would die, the first “real” people to die in my lifetime. Initially I was hesitant to talk about death with my kids, it made me a little nervous and I was afraid I would say the wrong thing or go into too much detail and upset them. When we finally stopped using all the euphemisms, like “passed”, “gone” and “lost”, things got a little easier. The thought of being lost can actually be a little scarier to a child than being dead.

Recently, my children’s great-grandfather died and in retrospect, it was a surprisingly positive time for all of us. Some friends were horrified to hear that our children spent time with their great-grandfather while he was on his “death bed”. We had all been visiting regularly for a Friday Bingo session at his retirement home, so they were familiar

with the surroundings, the other old folks (some a little disoriented) and the oxygen tubes on his face. It somehow seemed important to me for the kids to get a chance to say goodbye, even if the last time they saw him, my grandfather wasn't really aware of their visit. He was lying in bed, drifting in and out of consciousness and was clearly a little agitated (just because you're 95 doesn't mean you're ready to go.) They are both old enough that, oddly enough, I had hoped this moment would serve as some kind of a memory for them.

When the opportunity arose for us to travel with my parents and accompany my grandfather's ashes across Canada to be buried next to his wife, we hoped it would serve as a further, more positive memory of both their great-grandparents. Aside from getting a bird's eye view of the country (we flew from the west coast to the east coast, some 5000 kilometres), my children were able to participate in a ritual that they hadn't experienced before. The graveside ceremony, or interment, was very powerful. We listened to passages from the Bible and sang along to hymns.

Our children watched us shed some tears, and listened to a Minister, as well as family and friends tell wonderfully tender and funny stories about these people that they briefly knew, but to whom they were so important and special.

After the service, we spent much of our time in beautiful old cemeteries on the East Coast of Nova Scotia, which in the beginning seemed a little macabre, but eventually was very enjoyable. We reveled in the stories we created while reading the names and dates of the tombstones, searched for distant ancestors and speculated about their links to us and took great pleasure and comfort in the scenic and peaceful surroundings.

So if learning about death at an early age helps us understand it better, my kids are off to a roaring start. Many children learn at an early age how tough and unfair life can be. Many experience death in a much more tragic way. Death is obviously such an inescapable part of life. Knowing about it and trying to understand it will occupy all of us, at one time or another. Dealing with death and letting my kids know that it's okay to talk and wonder about has helped solve a bit of the mystery for all of us.

From: *Relational Child and Youth Care Practice*, 21/1, p.57



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The Irritating Child

Merle Allsopp

The problem

I don't know how many other child care workers have this problem, but we have one girl, fourteen, nearly fifteen years old, who is obviously in need of a lot of attention, but whenever she comes into the room, instead of feeling sympathy for her, I become knotted up and resistant.

She asks unnecessary questions, makes obvious remarks, doesn't 'take hints' when it's time for her to go, and (I know this sounds harsh and unhelpful) she just seems to take up space and time.

I find myself saying wearily "Yes, Marie, Yes Marie, Yes Marie..." almost sarcastically. I feel guilty about this — she never gets beyond this rather servile and irritatingly ingratiating style — and

I'm not sure why I feel this way or how I should try to respond.

You have outlined this situation very clearly and honestly. You begin by wondering whether other child care workers experience this kind of problem. Often we assume that we are the only people who have certain problems, but this is seldom the case. The problem you have described is one that child care workers often encounter — you are not alone in this! But as I reassure you, I also remind you that if you feel some hesitance, uncertainty and a sense of exposure in expressing this problem, remember this feeling. The next time you speak to a youngster about some difficulty that he or she may be experiencing, remember your own doubts as to whether this is a normal and natural response to a problem, and you will understand better how hard it is for children to put themselves on the line by expressing their worries.

By being in touch with our own feelings we are able to understand the experiences of our clients.

Working as people and as professionals

You have described your impatience with this child's behaviour quite clearly. You resist giving her the attention and warmth that you know she needs, and

that this makes you feel guilty. You seem to have a good sense of how you should respond to her in order to meet her needs and help her development. But you cannot quite get yourself to respond emotionally to her in the way that your head tells you that you should.

This conflict between ourselves as people (with our limitations and difficulties) and ourselves as professionals often arises in our work. At times our grasp of the needs of a child just does not match with what we, as people, have to offer. This is not comfortable for us, because we want to be of service to our clients.

Not being able to meet our own professional expectations leaves us feeling bad. We often deal with such feelings by blaming others — our organisations, our supervisors and colleagues, and even the children. Instead of doing this, however, you have approached this problem in a thoroughly professional manner. You have taken a hard look at the child and a hard look at yourself, and you admit to yourself that you find it hard to respond to the needs of this child. Well done! Defining your problem so honestly is often half the battle. Now you can go ahead and start working on solving the problem.

If this were a problem we could deal with in supervision, face-to-face, we would need to spend some time exploring your feelings about this child, and try to find out exactly what behaviours trigger your feelings of impatience.

Is it that this child seeks you out during a time that you have set aside to do other important work, and that causes you to feel pulled in two directions? If this is so, why would she choose this time? Is it at a

time when you are not surrounded by other children? Is it something in this child's manner that causes you to feel like this? You describe her as 'servile' and 'ingratiating' — does her neediness perhaps make you feel overwhelmed, as if her needs are too great for you to be able to meet? In supervision it might be useful for you to explore your own feelings of neediness and dependence. For example, do you feel impatient and irritated with yourself when you experience yourself as being needy? How do you feel when others appear to want or need more from you than you are able to give?

All this may seem silly to you, but remember that we as child and youth care workers are not machines — but human beings who bring to each and every interaction our own selves. We bring our personal histories and our personality styles. When we find our actions inconsistent with our expectations of ourselves we are offered some material for self-exploration.

Studying this material usually yields insights into our own emotional lives that have previously been covered up. Uncovering some of this can help us to understand our reactions. This understanding, in turn, helps us to take better control of those feelings. And this reduces the effect that our discomfort may have on the child in question.

Self-awareness

What I'm talking of here is the old thing that we talk of again and again in child care — self-awareness. If you are able to understand your own feelings, it is easier to control them, and react in the most useful

way for the child.

We cannot, at a distance, take this line of thought much further. But perhaps you have someone in your organisation who could help you explore some of those things. It need not be someone in authority, but perhaps a trusted colleague who would be happy to listen to you — don't overlook the value of peer supervision. Alternatively you could spend some time on your own thinking through these questions. Mull over them in your own quiet time and see what understanding emerges. Another thing you could do is write down your thoughts and feelings — putting thoughts down on paper helps us reach clarity.

Looking inwards to yourself would be one way of working at this difficulty — becoming aware of your own “issues” and how they affect your behaviour with this child. The second way would be to look outwards to the relationship.

Some suggestions

Think of things you can do to improve the situation, and to minimize any negative impact your confusion may have when working with this child. Several practical suggestions follow:

1. Arrange to spend a period of one-to-one time with her. Figure out how much time you feel you could manage to be with her in a compassionate, professional and helpful mode. Contract to spend that amount of time, (whether it be 10 minutes or half an hour) as often as is realistically possible. Be sure to be accurate in your estimation of this time span. Then put the contract into

operation sticking to the times you agree with her. Figure out how much time you feel you could manage to be with her in a compassionate, professional and helpful mode. Contract to spend that amount of time, (whether it be 10 minutes or half an hour) as often as is realistically possible. Be sure to be accurate in your estimation of this time span. Then put the contract into operation sticking to the times you agree with her.

2. Be assertive during other time that you spend in her company. In child and youth care we are exposed to children in their life space. You cannot and should not avoid this child, and you cannot limit the time you spend with her to the one-to-one sessions. It is necessary for you to begin to set clear limits for her. You say she does not “take hints” (which is something you probably find annoying) so do not give them. Rather give her firm clear instructions before you become annoyed with her. “We must both be off now; I will see you at suppertime (or at 5 o'clock as we planned).” This will provide necessary and healthy boundaries without rejection. In child and youth care we are exposed to children in their life space. You cannot and should not avoid this child, and you cannot limit the time you spend with her to the one-to-one sessions. It is necessary for you to begin to set clear limits for her. You say she does not “take hints” (which is something you probably find annoying) so do not give them. Rather give her

firm clear instructions before you become annoyed with her. “We must both be off now; I will see you at supertime (or at 5 o’clock as we planned).” This will provide necessary and healthy boundaries without rejection.

3. Listen to what this child is really saying. You say she asks unnecessary questions and makes obvious remarks but use your listening skills to try to understand what she is trying to communicate with these seemingly inane comments. What is the subject matter she discusses? Is she trying to impress you ... or boast ... or perhaps even test you by boring you? Listen to the messages beyond the words. Is she simply saying anything she can think of to fill an awkward silence? Attend to her, and perhaps her meaning will become clearer. Youngsters often say the same things day after day because they think you haven’t really heard them yet. Or does she simply lack social skills? If so, you will know how to follow this up. Is she so much in need of attention that she will take it whether positive or negative? Listen to her with your full attention and try to understand what she says from her point of view.
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the messages beyond the words. Is she simply saying anything she can think of to fill an awkward silence? Attend to her, and perhaps her meaning will become clearer. Youngsters often say the same things day after day because they think you haven’t really heard them yet. Or does she simply lack social skills? If so, you will know how to follow this up. Is she so much in need of attention that she will take it whether positive or negative? Listen to her with your full attention and try to understand what she says from her point of view.

4. Respond to her communication in an attentive and alive manner Often when we have negative feelings towards a person we block these off. Along with the blocked off negative feelings we block off positive feelings too. We hold onto the anger so tightly that no other more light, positive and inspiring feelings can emerge. Be sure to be responsive to her. Express your feeling about the content of her communication. “You told me that yesterday; now I’m sure you have something new to tell me today.” In this way she will get the feeling that you are interested in her. You will also be brightening up the communication from your side.
Often when we have negative feelings towards a person we block these off. Along with the blocked off negative feelings we block off positive feelings too. We hold onto the anger so tightly that no other more light, positive and inspiring feelings can emerge. Be sure to be responsive to her. Express your

feeling about the content of her communication. “You told me that yesterday; now I’m sure you have something new to tell me today.” In this way she will get the feeling that you are interested in her. You will also be brightening up the communication from your side.

5. Engage her in an activity. It sounds as if this young person struggles in social situations. Try to engage her in an activity that she can pursue instead of simply hanging about in the manner you describe — whether that be peeling potatoes or helping to staple papers together. In this way she will feel useful and the activity will provide separate focus for conversation. It sounds as if this young person struggles in social situations. Try to engage her in an activity that she can pursue instead of simply hanging about in the manner you describe — whether that be peeling potatoes or helping to staple papers together. In this way she will feel useful and the activity will provide separate focus for conversation.
6. Make her life more interesting. Perhaps this child has little to offer in a social situation because her life is uneventful. This is often the case with young people who have spent a lot of time in programs. She sounds like someone whose creativity is not being challenged. Providing age-appropriate opportunities for her to experience herself as a human being capable of doing exciting and challenging things will help her to become more interesting to others.

Perhaps this child has little to offer in a social situation because her life is uneventful. This is often the case with young people who have spent a lot of time in programs. She sounds like someone whose creativity is not being challenged. Providing age-appropriate opportunities for her to experience herself as a human being capable of doing exciting and challenging things will help her to become more interesting to others.

7. Provide opportunities for her to give to others. We know that it is important for young people to feel capable of giving, not only taking from others. Some children do this spontaneously but many for whom we care do not, and thus miss the benefit of altruism. Some suggestions for giving or doing something for others need to be provided for these children. This would place her in an altogether different role, of giving something and not only seeking something. We know that it is important for young people to feel capable of giving, not only taking from others. Some children do this spontaneously but many for whom we care do not, and thus miss the benefit of altruism. Some suggestions for giving or doing something for others need to be provided for these children. This would place her in an altogether different role, of giving something and not only seeking something.
8. Use your team. It is likely that other members of your team have similar experiences of dealing with this child

and perhaps others who have an entirely different experience. Discuss this with the team and work out a strategy for optimal engagement with all the adults in her environment.

It is likely that other members of your team have similar experiences of dealing with this child and perhaps others who have an entirely different experience. Discuss this with the team and work out a strategy for optimal engagement with all the adults in her environment.

Conclusion

Clearly this young girl is “stuck” (like a broken record) at a difficult point in her life or in her development. We owe it to her to help her to get past this. You will find that getting her to move on to the

next stage will automatically end the irritating repetition, which is a sign of her being “stuck”. Use this task also as an opportunity to extend yourself — your self-awareness and your own skills. Decide on your approach, apply it consistently over a period of time and then evaluate the situation to see if there has been any change.

Reprinted from the June 2001 issue of *CYC-Online* and originally published in South Africa’s *The Child Care Worker*.



“Well, Duh!”

Ten obvious truths we shouldn't be ignoring

Alfie Kohn

The field of education bubbles over with controversies. It's not unusual for intelligent people of good will to disagree passionately about what should happen in schools. But there are certain precepts that aren't debatable, that just about anyone would have to acknowledge are true.

While many such statements are banal, some are worth noticing because in our school practices and policies we tend to ignore the implications that follow from them. It's both intellectually interesting and practically important to explore such contradictions: *If we all agree that a given principle is true, then why in the world do our schools still function as if it weren't?*

Here are 10 examples.

1. Much of the material students are required to memorize is soon forgotten

The truth of this statement will be conceded (either willingly or reluctantly) by just about everyone who has spent time in school — in other words, all of us. A few months, or sometimes even just a few days, after having committed a list of facts, dates, or definitions to memory, we couldn't recall most of them if our lives depended on it. Everyone knows this, yet a substantial part of schooling — particularly in the most traditional schools — continues to consist of stuffing facts into students' short-term memories.

The more closely we inspect this model of teaching and testing, the more problematic it reveals itself to be. First, there's the question of *what* students are made to learn, which often is more oriented to factual material than to a deep

understanding of ideas. (See item 2, below.) Second, there's the question of *how* students are taught, with a focus on passive absorption: listening to lectures, reading summaries in textbooks, and rehearsing material immediately before being required to cough it back up. Third, there's the question of *why* a student has learned something: Knowledge is less likely to be retained if it has been acquired so that one will perform well on a test, as opposed to learning in the context of pursuing projects and solving problems that are personally meaningful.

Even without these layers of deficiencies with the status quo, and even if we grant that remembering some things can be useful, the fundamental question echoes like a shout down an endless school corridor: Why are kids still being forced to memorize so much stuff that we know they won't remember?

Corollary 1A: Since this appears to be true for adults, too, why do most professional development events for teachers resemble the least impressive classrooms, with experts disgorging facts about how to educate?

2. Just knowing a lot of facts doesn't mean you're smart

Even students who do manage to remember some of the material they were taught are not necessarily able to make sense of those bits of knowledge, to understand connections among them, or to apply them in inventive and persuasive ways to real-life problems.

In fact, the cognitive scientist Lauren Resnick goes even further: It's not just that knowing (or having been taught) facts

doesn't in itself make you smart. A mostly fact-oriented education may actually *interfere* with your becoming smart. "Thinking skills tend to be driven out of the curriculum by ever-growing demands for teaching larger and larger bodies of knowledge," she writes. Yet schools continue to treat students as empty glasses into which information can be poured — and public officials continue to judge schools on the basis of how efficiently and determinedly they pour.

3. Students are more likely to learn what they find interesting

There's no shortage of evidence for this claim if you really need it. One of many examples: A group of researchers found that children's level of interest in a passage they were reading was 30 times more useful than its difficulty level for predicting how much of it they would later remember. But this should be obvious, if only because of what we know about ourselves. It's the tasks that intrigue us, that tap our curiosity and connect to the things we care about, that we tend to keep doing — and get better at doing. So, too, for kids.

Conversely, students are less likely to benefit from doing what they hate. Psychology has come a long way from the days when theorists tried to reduce everything to simple stimulus-response pairings. We know now that people aren't machines, such that an input (listening to a lecture, reading a textbook, filling out a worksheet) will reliably yield an output (learning). What matters is how people experience what they do, what meaning they ascribe to it, what their attitudes and goals are.

Thus, if students find an academic task stressful or boring, they're far less likely to understand, or even remember, the content. And if they're uninterested in a whole category of academic tasks — say, those they're assigned to do when they get home after having just spent a whole day at school — then they aren't likely to benefit much from doing them. No wonder research finds little, if any, advantage to assigning **homework**, particularly in elementary or middle school.

4. Students are less interested in whatever they're forced to do and more enthusiastic when they have some say

Once again, studies confirm what we already know from experience. The nearly universal negative reaction to compulsion, like the positive response to choice, is a function of our psychological makeup.

Now combine this point with the preceding one: If choice is related to interest, and interest is related to achievement, then it's not much of a stretch to suggest that the learning environments in which kids get to make decisions about what they're doing are likely to be the most effective, all else being equal. Yet such learning environments continue to be vastly outnumbered by those where kids spend most of their time just following directions.

5. Just because doing x raises standardized test scores doesn't mean x should be done

At the very least, we would need evidence that the test in question is a source of useful information about whether our

teaching and learning goals are being met. Many educators have argued that the tests being used in our schools are unsatisfactory for several reasons.

First, there are numerous limitations with specific tests. Second, most tests share certain problematic features, such as being timed (which places more of a premium on speed than on thoughtfulness), norm-referenced (which means the tests are designed to tell us who's beating whom, not how well students have learned or teachers have taught), and consisting largely of multiple-choice questions (which don't permit students to generate or even explain their answers).

The third reason is the problems inherent to all tests that are standardized and created by people far away from the classroom — as opposed to assessing the actual learning taking place there on an on-going basis.

This is not the place to explain in detail why **standardized tests** measure what matters least. Here, I want only to make the simpler — and, once again, I think, indisputable — point that anyone who regards high or rising test scores as good news has an obligation to show that the tests themselves are good. If a test result can't be convincingly shown to be both valid and meaningful, then whatever we did to achieve that result — say, a new curriculum or instructional strategy — may well have no merit whatsoever. It may even prove to be destructive when assessed by better criteria. Indeed, *a school or district might be getting worse even as its test scores rise.*

So how is it that articles in newspapers and education journals, as well as pro-

nouncements by public officials and think tanks, seem to accept on faith that better scores on any test necessarily constitute good news, and that whatever produced those scores can be described as “effective”? Parents should be encouraged to ask, “How much time was sacrificed from real learning just so our kids could get better at taking the [name of test]?”

6. Students are more likely to succeed in a place where they feel known and cared about

I realize there are people whose impulse is to sneer when talk turns to how kids feel, and who dismiss as “soft” or “faddish” anything other than old-fashioned instruction of academic skills. But even these hard-liners, when pressed, are unable to deny the relationship between feeling and thinking, between a child’s comfort level and his or her capacity to learn.

Here, too, there are loads of supporting data. As one group of researchers put it, “In order to promote students’ academic performance in the classroom, educators should also promote their social and emotional adjustment.” And yet, broadly speaking, we don’t. Teachers and schools are evaluated almost exclusively on academic achievement measures (which, to make matters worse, mostly consist of standardized test scores).

If we took seriously the need for kids to feel known and cared about, our discussions about the distinguishing features of a “good school” would sound very different. Likewise, our view of **discipline and classroom management** would be turned inside-out, seeing as how the primary goals of most

such strategies are obedience and order, often with the result that kids feel *less* cared about — or even bullied — by adults.

7. We want children to develop in many ways, not just academically

Even mainstream education groups have embraced the idea of teaching the “whole child.” It’s a safe position, really, because just about every parent or educator will tell you that we should be supporting children’s physical, emotional, social, moral, and artistic growth as well as their intellectual growth. Moreover, it’s obvious to most people that the schools can and should play a key role in promoting many different forms of development.

If we acknowledge that academics is just one facet of a good education, why do so few conversations about improving our schools deal with — and why are so few resources devoted to — non-academic issues? And why do we assign children still more academic tasks after the school day is over, even when those tasks cut into the time children have to pursue interests that will help them develop in other ways?

Corollary 7a: Students “learn best when they are happy,” as educator Nel Noddings reminded us, but that doesn’t mean they’re especially likely to be happy (or psychologically healthy) just because they’re academically successful. And millions aren’t. Imagine how high schools would have to be changed if we were to take this realization seriously.

8. Just because a lesson (or book, or class, or test) is harder doesn’t mean it’s better

First, if it’s pointless to give students

things to do that are too easy, it's also counterproductive to give them things that they experience as too hard. Second, and more important, **this criterion** overlooks a variety of considerations other than difficulty level by which educational quality might be evaluated.

We know this, yet we continue to worship at the altar of “rigor.” I've seen lessons that aren't unduly challenging yet are deeply engaging and intellectually valuable. Conversely, I've seen courses — and whole schools — that are indisputably rigorous ... and appalling bad.

9. Kids aren't just short adults

Over the past hundred years, developmental psychologists have labored to describe what makes children distinctive and what they can understand at certain ages. There are limits, after all, to what even a precocious younger child can grasp (e.g., the way metaphors function, the significance of making a promise) or do (e.g., keep still for an extended period).

Likewise, there are certain things children require for optimal development, including opportunities to play and explore, alone and with others. Research fills in — and keeps fine-tuning — the details, but the fundamental implication isn't hard to grasp: How we educate kids should follow from what defines them *as* kids.

Somehow, though, developmentally *inappropriate* education has become the norm, as kindergarten (literally, the “children's garden”) now tends to resemble a first- or second-grade classroom — in fact, a *bad* first- or second-grade classroom, where discovery, creativity, and social interaction are replaced by a repeti-

tive regimen focused on narrowly defined academic skills.

More generally, premature exposure to sit-still-and-listen instruction, homework, grades, tests, and competition — practices that are clearly a bad match for younger children and of questionable value at any age — is rationalized by invoking a notion I've called **BGUTI: Better Get Used To It**. The logic here is that we have to prepare you for the bad things that are going to be done to you later . . . by doing them to you now. When articulated explicitly, that principle sounds exactly as ridiculous as it is. Nevertheless, it's the engine that continues to drive an awful lot of nonsense.

The obvious premise that we should respect what makes children children can be amended to include a related principle that is less obvious to some people: Learning something earlier isn't necessarily better. Deborah Meier, whose experience as a celebrated educator ranges from kindergarten to high school, put it bluntly: “The earlier [that schools try] to inculcate so-called ‘academic’ skills, the deeper the damage and the more permanent the



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‘achievement’ gap.” That is exactly what a passel of ambitious **research projects** has found: A traditional skills-based approach to teaching young children — particularly those from low-income families — not only offers no lasting benefits but appears to be harmful.

Corollary 9A: Kids aren’t just *future* adults. They are that, of course, but they aren’t only that, because children’s needs and perspectives are worth attending to in their own right. We violate this precept — and do a disservice to children — whenever we **talk about schooling in economic terms**, treating students mostly as future employees.

10. Substance matters more than labels

A skunk cabbage by any other name would smell just as putrid. But in education, as in other domains, we’re often seduced by appealing names when we should be demanding to know exactly what lies behind them. Most of us, for example, favor a sense of community, prefer that a job be done by professionals, and want to promote learning. So should we sign on to the work being done in the name of “**Professional Learning Communities**”? Not if it turns out that PLCs have less to do with helping children to think deeply about questions that matter than with boosting standardized test scores.

The same caution is appropriate when it comes to “Positive Behavior Support,” a jaunty moniker for a program of crude Skinnerian manipulation in which students are essentially bribed to do whatever they’re told. More broadly, even the label “school reform” doesn’t necessarily signify

improvement; these days, it’s more likely to mean “something that skillful and caring teachers wouldn’t be inclined to do unless coerced,” as educational psychologist Bruce Marlowe put it.

In fact, the corporate-style version of “**school reform**” that’s uncritically endorsed these days by politicians, journalists, and billionaires consists of a series of debatable tactics — many of them amounting to bribes and threats to force educators to jack up test scores. Just as worrisome, though, is that these reformers often overlook, or simply violate, a number of propositions that *aren’t* debatable, including many of those listed here.

This essay is an abridged version of the introduction to **Feel-Bad Education ... and Other Contrarian Essays on Children and Schooling** (Beacon Press, 2011)

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Goffman's Asylums

Laura Steckley

In a [previous column](#), I wrote about why it is beneficial to engage with theory.

Lately, I've been spending a lot of time with Goffman's theory and have had a related struggle with answering the 'why theory' question.

I can't remember when I first became aware of the work of Erving Goffman, but I've always associated him with his book *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patient and Other Inmates*. In it, he examines the world of the psychiatric hospital, primarily from the view of the inmates (his term for inpatients). It is one of the first sociological explorations of this setting and was important in revealing the dehumanising way inmates were treated. Goffman also coined the term **total institution** in this book, and defined it as:

a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life (p. 11).

Military training camps, prisons, monasteries and orphanages were other total institutions identified by Goffman. One of

his central arguments was that most of the formal activities of the total institution (and many of the informal ones) were aimed at serving the institution and not its inhabitants, and this was achieved through **mortification of the self** – subjecting inmates to humiliating and dehumanising practices in order to diminish their individuality and exact compliance.

Goffman's theorising about total institutions continues to influence the way that some people simplistically identify all things 'institutional' as 'bad'. And while most current residential child care establishments do not meet his definition of the total institution, the sector as a whole still tends to be vaguely thought of as such. This has contributed to an unreflective, anti-institutional ideology that has fuelled attempts to eliminate residential child care and marginalised it as a last resort. So Goffman's *Asylums* is important in understanding how and why residential child care is viewed the way that it is.

I think it is also important to facilitate critical self-reflection about one's own thinking and practice, and the practices in one's place of work. I have recently revisited *Asylums* more thoroughly, and found it an uncomfortable read. Goffman indeed lays bare a horrible world and I under-

stand how this changed people's thinking about psychiatric institutionalisation. I wanted to distance myself from the time, place and practices described. At the same time, I wanted to read it with unflinching honesty.

Generally, I think it would be fair to say that Goffman's word picture of the inmate's world no longer resembles the obvious characteristics of current residential child care. Establishments have become much smaller, a children's rights discourse has become dominant, and the more extreme examples of mortification that were commonplace in Goffman's day would be considered abusive by today's standards.

However, some of what Goffman described was recognisable to me. For the purposes of my column this month, I'm going to focus the rest of my discussion on his concept of **looping**, as I still think it is relevant:

In civil society, when an individual must accept circumstances and commands that affront his conception of self, he is allowed a margin of face-saving reactive expression – sullenness, failure to offer usual signs of deference... Compliance, then is likely to be associated with an expressed attitude to it that is not itself subject to the same degree of pressure for compliance. Although such self-protective expressive response to humiliating demands does occur in total institutions, the staff may directly penalize inmates for such activity, citing sullenness or insolence explicitly as grounds for further punishment.

In other words, in day to day living outside of the total institution, we all encounter situations that erode our sense of self. We may experience attacks on our individuality and pressures to comply, and in some (or many cases), we do comply. However, the key difference is that we tend to have much more latitude around how we 'save face' or preserve some sense of autonomy. We may end up paying the inflated late fee, for example, but no one is going to further penalise us for being snarky in the process of doing it.

I wonder how often we still exert pressure on young people not only to comply with something that feels like an affront to who or how they are, but to comply in a particular way (i.e. 'respectfully'). How many situations are escalated not by the original request or demand, but by our reaction to their reaction? While I'm not suggesting that any and all reactions should be accepted with no recourse, considering the perspective offered by they concepts of looping and mortification makes me look at it differently. Aside from an awareness of young people's need to save face, a need which we sometimes honoured as legitimate and sometimes did not, I don't think such a perspective was present in our discussions or decisions.

Another component of looping describes the process, in a total institution, of desegregating the previously separate roles and settings a person experiences in day to day (non-institutional) life:

In the normal course of affairs in civil society, audience and role segregation keep one's avowals and implicit

claims regarding self made in one physical scene of activity from being tested against conduct in other settings. In total institutions spheres of life are desegregated, so that an inmate's conduct in one scene of activity is thrown up to him by staff as a comment and check upon his conduct in another context. A mental patient's effort to present himself in a well-oriented, unantagonistic way during a diagnostic or treatment conference may be directly embarrassed by evidence introduced concerning his apathy during recreation...minute segments of a person's line of activity may be subjected to regulations and judgements by staff; the inmate's life is penetrated by constant sanctioning interaction from above...Although this process of social control is in effect in all organized society, we tend to forget how detailed and closely restrictive it can become in total institutions .

So if I screw up (or simply experience conflict) in one area in my life, not every-one in every other part of my life is necessarily going to know about it unless I choose to tell them. Even if I do tell them, I have some sense of control over the content and tone of what is shared. Children already experience a degree of desegregation akin to what is described above, as when the school communicates to their parents about serious misbehaviour or truanting from class. However, a kind of fishbowl existence can develop for young people in residential child care, par-

ticularly in secure settings where there is little or no unsupervised awake time. How this is handled and the degree to which we give kids the kind of breathing space we enjoy in our more 'segregated' lives will likely determine whether this desegregation is helpful or destructive. Goffman describes a chronic anxiety about breaking rules as one of the effects of looping. Reading and thinking about it give me a sense of psychological claustrophobia.

Again, I don't think that such a perspective was explicitly present in our thinking when I was in direct practice. I remember some staff seemed sensitive to the 'fishbowl effect', but it was at best a tacit understanding that wasn't explored and didn't adequately inform our practice.

What underlies all of this discussion, for me, is control. I think the degree to which we think we need to control kids affects how we approach the kinds of questions raised by Goffman, and I think it's hard to be honest about this – to ourselves and to each other. This is likely to be the stuff of my next column.

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Changing culture: Learning into practice

Bert Lawrie

Introduction

The impact of unit culture on the life experiences of children in residential care is extremely important. This was recently recognised during the work of the National Residential Child Care Initiative (NRCCI) in Scotland:

The NRCCI is calling for a change in culture whereby properly resourced residential child care would be recognised as an important, valued and integral part of children's services. The NRCCI fully recognises that the workforce is the most important resource in residential child care and the status, skills and training of the workforce, as well as the support they are offered, has to be commensurate with the increasingly demanding and challenging task expected of them (SIRCC, 2009, p.14).

The importance of unit culture has also been acknowledged in the literature (e.g. Clough et al., 2006; Hicks et al., 2007). In general, culture can be described as:

The creation of meaning through which human beings interpret their experiences and guide their actions (Geertz, 1973, p.4).

There can be no doubt that cultures in residential child care can be positive or negative. There is, however, a lack of research on cultural indicators such as staff morale, job satisfaction and retention in the residential child care setting. Savicki (2002) demonstrated that cultural factors were related to burnout in child and youth care workers, and identified teamwork training and support, supervision, and coping strategy training as important contributors to a positive culture. Other studies have highlighted the importance of training as a contributory factor in levels of job satisfaction and staff morale (Ploeg & Scholte, 1998; Sinclair & Gibbs, 1998).

Over the past ten years, Linn Moor has grappled with the issue of how to create a self-sustaining positive culture and have used training as a key feature in this. A recent evaluation (Stevens and Lawrie, 2008) demonstrated the success of these training strategies in reducing physical in-

terventions and creating a positive culture for both staff and young people (or students, as we refer to them). Since 2002, Linn Moor has had a policy of seconding staff away from their normal duties to work as trainers or to provide additional support to new staff or staff experiencing difficulties in managing the challenging behaviour of students. We call this group of staff our 'Culture Carriers'. For us, 'Culture Carriers' are the experienced staff who have synthesised their training, knowledge and experience in such a way that they embody the vision and mission of Linn Moor in thought, word and action. This paper argues that residential child care services may benefit from having a more formal system of developing their experienced support staff to act as their 'Culture Carriers'.

Training in Linn Moor

As stated previously, we believe that training and support are the key elements in developing a positive culture. Over the years, Linn Moor has ensured that all staff have been trained to manage the many challenges presented by our students. Most new staff receive a two-week induction which is designed to meet the Scottish Social Services Council's (SSSC) Induction Framework (SSSC, 2005), as well as to equip staff to work with our students, all of whom have moderate to severe challenging behaviour and complex needs. This is followed by ongoing training opportunities. Once in post for six to nine months, staff are enrolled on our in-house HNC social care programme or are enrolled as SVQ health and social care candidates. We have dedicated staff

on-site to ensure this happens. All training is integral, not marginal to the work, and no-one is permitted to work until they have had their initial induction, even if we run short of staff for three weeks until the next VSA Induction Cycle.

Linn Moor also uses three main approaches to working with our particular client group. These approaches are TEACCH (Training and Education of Autistic and Communication-handicapped Children), Applied Behavioural Analysis (IABA) and Behaviour Support Strategies (BSS). These approaches have been adopted and integrated into the daily lives of the students as well as the day-to-day working routines of staff. By developing 'Culture Carriers' across the three approaches, we have created a large number of staff with different yet complementary expertise. The following is a short description of how we are developing our experienced support staff as 'Culture Carriers'.

Behavioural Support Strategies

All staff are trained in a two-day course on the management on Behaviour Support Strategies (BSS) as soon as they start their employment. BSS is a behavioural approach to the management of challenging behaviour that is linked to a series of physical interventions. However, while physical interventions are taught, the main emphasis is on the use of 'proactive strategies'. The reality is that many of the students come to the school because of their severe challenging behaviour, both to self or others. While it is recognised that we may need to use physical interventions, staff soon learn and accept that good commu-

nication, coupled with calming techniques, distraction and withdrawal are always a preferred option. The trainers at Linn Moor are all experienced support staff who are trained and supported to deliver the training and to then support the staff on an ongoing basis.

Autism Specific Training

All staff are trained on Autism Awareness within the first week and will go on to attend an awareness training on TEACCH. TEACCH offers a holistic approach which develops ways to help individuals with autism and its associated spectrum disorders to function in the culture that surrounds them, taking into account the characteristic cognitive and behavioural patterns of autism. Throughout their first year or so of employment staff are immersed in training as well as discussions on our work with students, the vast majority of whom are challenged by autism. On an annual basis, Linn Moor invites the Division TEACCH specialists from the University of North Carolina to run a five-day TEACCH programme. The vast majority of staff will attend this training within two years service. Division TEACCH also encourage up to five Linn Moor staff per year to work with them during the five-day programme, as 'Shadow Trainers.' Over the years of our involvement, 20 staff have acted as 'Shadow Trainers' and two have become fully independent TEACCH trainers in their own right. The 'Shadow Trainers' are encouraged to take their TEACCH training to a higher level and assist in integrating the approach into the school throughout the year. In addition to

TEACCH, our in-house HNC includes the unit 'Working with Autism' which all Linn Moor staff are required to undertake. For those already qualified, we offer an additional Certificate in Supporting Individuals with Autistic Spectrum Disorders, which is accredited by the SQA. Both qualifications are designed to afford opportunities for staff to integrate their work with students into their learning as well as their assignments.

Applied Behaviour Analysis

In 2001 the school adopted the Institute of Applied Behaviour Analysis (IABA) approach. The IABA approach involves looking at the message behind behaviour and involves very accurate recording of any 'target behaviours' that should be altered or changed. We have sent eight staff to the IABA Summer Institute in Los Angeles since 2001. All students at Linn Moor are assessed using the IABA model prior to admission and Support Plans are developed for many students within the school.

In April 2009, 12 staff volunteers began a fortnightly training programme which ran for nine months, based on the IABA approach. This group were trained to assess / reassess six students between April and June. One of the 12 was selected on the basis of their assessment as well as their presentation of their findings to go over to the IABA Summer School in Los Angeles. This autumn the same group are continuing their training and will go on to develop and implement 'multi-element support plans' for their six students. Over the summer months, 10 of the IABA volunteers undertook some additional

training along with other support workers to develop 'mini' support plans. Five new students have been selected for this pilot work and these 'mini' plans were implemented in October 2009. This opportunity widened the numbers of staff involved in quality assurance and monitoring.

Discussion

Establishing a wide and relevant training and support strategy which is congruent with the mission statement and which has verifiable outcomes for users, is a pragmatic way of creating a positive culture. However, the process is neither easy nor cheap. Linn Moor is situated in the north of Scotland. The reality here is that there are many employment opportunities available and staff turnover is high, particularly where people are able to be selective over whom they wish to work for. All employers in the social care sector have to cope with this reality. The consequences of this for the operation of the school are a constant worry, as new staff take time to settle down. We are aware that too much stress or too many challenges can lead to staff leaving the school. We believe that by instituting 'Culture Carriers', we will be better able to attract and keep good quality staff. Equally, new staff can bring fresh insight, new ideas. Being receptive and supportive to new staff in order for them quickly to become part of the positive culture within the school is vital. Good support systems are in place to ensure new staff want to stay and develop a positive culture across the school that allows staff to feel empowered and supported to develop their skills and talents as well as

learn new ones. This is a group that we encourage the 'Culture Carriers' to spend time with, as they all recognise that it is in the interests of the students and the staff to have a consistent approach. It is clear to us that high staff turnover can limit the development of a positive culture.

Good clear communication is also key to establishing and maintaining a positive culture. At Linn Moor, communication is generally very good but new staff can and do take time to become familiar with the challenges presented by individual students as well as becoming familiar with the school systems and procedures. It is all very well to have a mission or vision statement. However, it takes more than words to create a positive culture. Early indications are that the work of the various 'Culture Carriers' motivates staff and encourages co-operation as well as a healthy atmosphere of debate about what works best. It has taken Linn Moor more than ten years to develop the type of culture which is best for its students. However, we are now seeing the fruits of this work. Apart from the fall in the use of physical interventions, staff attitudes to recording represents a major cultural shift in thinking and approach. The evaluation carried out in 2008 showed that staff see that recording is a tool and not a chore (Stevens & Lawrie, 2008).

Good feedback about the effectiveness of the models used is important in establishing and maintaining a positive culture. One consistent policy we have developed is to use staff as trainers, often releasing them from their normal work duties for part of their working week to train and support others. For some staff this time

out has lasted for a few years but for most it has been part-time. In this way, as many staff as possible get the opportunity to become 'Culture Carriers' for the school. We demonstrate to staff how things are improving, and the 'Culture Carriers' will work alongside staff, willingly supporting them even if it means extra evening and weekend work.

In conclusion, it may seem that unit culture is one of the great indefinable aspects of residential child care. If culture is indeed, 'the creation of meaning through which human beings interpret their experiences and guide their actions' then ways must be sought to create that meaning. From my point of view, training and support are two of those ways. Too often, training and support slip down the agenda, especially in times of financial constraint or extreme challenges presented in work situations. By understanding and facing the challenges, and by investing in staff to prepare them to work with the challenges, positive cultures will develop. Any way that is found to ensure that staff and young people gain benefit and satisfaction from their experience should be encouraged.

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Growing up, but staying focused

Kiaras Gharabaghi

Recently I had the pleasure of delivering the Keynote Speech at the annual conference of the Nova Scotia Association of Child and Youth Workers. This was a special moment for me, as I had lived in Nova Scotia during my graduate school years some twenty years earlier, and I had also worked there as a child and youth care practitioner of sorts (more or less in the capacity of a family support worker). The conference itself was quite remarkable and indicative to me at least that we really are growing up as a field. Nova Scotia is one of the smaller provinces of Canada and given its location in the far eastern end of the country, somewhat isolated from the bustling hubs of Toronto, Montreal or Vancouver. In fact, one doesn't really get a particularly global feel when walking the streets of Truro, the small town where the conference was hosted on the campus of the community college. Yet the conference program included workshops and presentations that span the depth and breadth of our field. I was particularly impressed by a workshop called "Introduction to Islam", which provided

some basic information about the customs and traditions of Muslims. I asked the conference organizers how this workshop came about, and was told that with a rise in the Muslim population in Nova Scotia on the one hand, and the relatively unbalanced representation of Muslims in the media on the other hand, it seemed like a good idea to provide child and youth care practitioners with a sense of what Islam is about, and what sorts of issues and priorities Muslim families might have as they live their everyday lives. The workshop itself was brilliantly delivered, caused no threat or discomfort to anyone, and provided exactly what it promised; a brief but relevant introduction to the lives of Muslims.

There was also a workshop on animal assisted therapeutic work, which featured excellent discussion on the ethics of using animals in this work as well as the possibilities of enriching our work by introducing yet another kind of relationship into the mix. The conference featured several workshops focused on the core of our profession, including themes such as playing with kids, staying connected and creative interventions using music and the

arts more generally. In one of the workshops participants were taught to build a one-string guitar, and actually got to take their creation home.

Perhaps more notable was the range of contexts of the presenters. The conference featured presenters working in publically funded organizations, in the private sector and in post-secondary educational institutions. It featured foci on young people in schools, in residential treatment, in hospitals and in the community. And it featured themes related to behavioural issues, developmental issues and mental health issues. References to core child and youth care concepts such as engagement, relationships and healthy boundaries were abundant.

I think of this as evidence of our profession growing up because it indicates that we can have discussions about what we do from multiple perspectives, in relation to multiple intervention modalities, and featuring multiple cultural/identity contexts even in places that may not always benefit from the presence of global discussions and engagements. The profession, in other words, transcends its geography. In this process, it is helped along by some of the tools we have created over the years, including of course CYC-Net, but also our most Canadian Child and Youth Care Journal that brings the world to every corner of our rather over-sized country (Relational Child & Youth Care Practice). Kelly Shaw, the outgoing President of the Nova Scotia Association of Child and Youth Care Workers represents an invaluable connection for the province to the world. Increasingly, I find that no matter where I

go, I encounter at least one CYC personality who serves to connect her or his local context to the global context. I had, after all, just seen Kelly in Scotland several weeks earlier at the Gathering of the International Child and Youth Care Network.

One of the things I liked the most about this conference was its focus on the core concepts of our profession, across all of the workshops and increasingly globally-oriented themes. Perhaps most importantly, this conference confirmed for me the special nature of child and youth care communities. To illustrate this point, I need to back up and provide some additional context related to my presence at the conference. When I was originally asked to come and speak there, I indicated to the organizers that I would be bringing my eight year old daughter, Siena, along for the trip. I really meant to do so simply as an informative piece, but of course you cannot tell a group of child and youth workers that a child is coming without changing the plan. When we arrived, we were picked up at the airport and driven to the apartment at the College residence, where we were to stay for the duration of the conference. We entered the place and immediately were faced with an enormous basket of goodies and toys, placed there for Siena's benefit (I may also have partaken in some of the goodies). Moving further into the apartment to the bedroom, Siena was delighted to see a wrapped present on the bed with her name on it; it turned out to be a lobster stuffed animal. The next morning when we registered for the conference Siena was handed her very own name tag,

designating her as the 'youth representative'. And while I delivered the Keynote speech, Siena was entertained with various games and engagements from a range of child and youth workers who seemed to not care at all about anything I was saying. Throughout the day, my daughter benefitted from a steady flow of ice cream, French Fries and a range of deserts. And during the workshops we attended, presenters went out of their way to include Siena, providing opportunities for her to participate and make a contribution.

From my perspective, this was an awesome experience. My hosts from Nova Scotia demonstrated in two short days that they could think globally, engage the core themes and issues of our profession through a range of approaches and perspectives, and still maintain their focus on

what they ultimately have committed their lives to; being with children.

So here is to Nova Scotia, its child and youth care practitioners, and all the wonderful people who once again confirmed that the tumultuous process of growing up does not require giving up on the values of our child and youth care communities no matter where these are located geographically.



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Early one morning ...

Brian Gannon



Three months ago this group were amongst a crowd that argued and protested over everything — time to get up and time to go to bed, their rights, not being consulted about how much pocket money they got, and how awful the food was. Of course the child care workers also got the mutters and told the youngsters to “behave yourselves” and such-like. Then one of the staff decided to go on a fitness run around the neighbourhood every morning, and invited anyone who wanted to, to come along. Jeers and unbelieving laughter all round — but soon one, then three, then a whole crowd of kids went along.

Here are some of them now, just back from a run and really looking forward to breakfast — no matter what is on the menu — complaining about how sore their legs are, how steep Pine Hill felt this morning, and how they’d better slow down on the cigarettes.

The staff member had discovered

something that child and youth workers have known for a long time: *it doesn’t matter what you do with kids, so long as you do something!*

Just doing something with kids gives them powerful messages: “you are worth spending time with; you are included and are welcome to join in; we can learn this new activity together ...” The staff member also sensibly picked an activity which had to do with the children’s own lives — their bodies, their growth, their health and having fun. The staff member wasn’t saying “Stop doing that!” but was saying “Come along, *let’s do this!*”

When we can motivate groups of people to do things together, we build the subtle layers of experience and identity — more important, of *shared* experience and identity, making “we’s” where there were just “me’s” — and moving kids away from being rootless and isolated and left out, towards being connected and included.

—
So you can get up now. It’s time for breakfast and (phew!) you’ll need a shower first. And forget those aching muscles and creaking bones — because if you think this was bad, tomorrow we’re going the long way around over that big hill, and you don’t want the kids to think you’re a work-shy, no-good, big-mouth layabout, do you?

I am my own Hero

Emily D.

I was the girl that's been beaten
But always fights.
I was the silent girl
That has no name, no light.
The faking girl with the plastic smiles.
Depressed girl who cries and aches.
Fairy tale girl that does not exist.
I was the distant girl out of sight.
Psycho girl with scars on my mind.
Lonely girl who's out of touch.

Hidden girl who covers her scars.
Hated girl who knows no love.
Alcoholic girl, she'll drink tomorrow.
Stoner tonight,
I thought I could smoke away All my sorrows.
I am angry and I have no care.
Aching girl try another med.
Hurting girl is this the end?

would like you to meet this lonely girl. She comes from a broken home. The thermometer on the wall always reads cold. She was like the tall grass that got out of control then got cut low. Now she's all alone living in this world she does not know. She's living under this metal roof but sometimes she looks for an opening so maybe the sun can shine through. She's been bad, broken laws, committed sinful acts. Till the day she dies she will be running from her past.

This little girl with these blue eyes has so much life in her but so little around her. She cries and cries but that's nothing that adds up to what's inside. This might be deep but this is her life. She does not want it to be perfect. She prays and dreams. But she still gets called worthless – she's not worthless; she's worth more than this. It was like yesterday she was learning to ride a bike; now she is climbing mountains larger than life. She's scarred like a 3rd degree burn. Things she's seen, words she's heard, places she's gone.

They describe it like an unreadable scary movie that has no ending. She asks the critics but they said there's no rating. Her dad still calls her baby. Turns around,

calls her names, not treating her like a lady. Compares her to her birth mother; "Dad, that ain't me." She's living in this world she blinded. She screams "man, I can't see." She speaks but can't be heard. She screams, gets told to calm down.

Doctor adds another milligram, then it all falls down. She asks God "why does it have to be this way? God, I can love but love shouldn't hurt this way." She gets tired every day; they tell her she's stronger but she feels weaker day by day.

Her birth dad got taken away because they said she could not handle the pain. What pain? They put her on more and more meds but no med could ever bring what she lost back. She lost many people at a very young age ... dad, mom and brothers but mainly herself. She's tired of this pain!

She thinks to herself "I am going to heaven. I have to be"; there's one other course, it's hell she believes she lives in right here on Earth itself.

She had a time in her life she doesn't want to go back to. But she takes a deep breath and takes a step in the past to ...

When she remembers she was so weak once, she still remembers it like it

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was yesterday, went into her mom's closet where she keeps the lockbox full of meds. She had a water bottle in her hand and then she swallowed 15 pills; she got ill and was rushed to the hospital. She felt so bad she could not move; she was just there. Then the nurse who took care of her looked her straight in the eye and said baby girl you're a miracle, you're lucky you're here. You're lucky you're alive! She said no I am not! Shut down, laid back and just cried – regretted that day but she can not say she lied. But back then, that was her life.

But after all, she's still dreaming. She can do this. She's believing. She still reaches for the sky because giving up ain't her way. Now she's happy to be here. She knows she's happy to be alive, happy to smile and not scared to cry. She's living the life that she was born to live. She made it this far; she will make it to the end! The past is the past; she's living her future to the fullest. Every thing happens for a reason. My advice to you is keep on dreaming. Cherish everything because it might not be there tomorrow. Don't dwell in your sorrow. Lift yourself up; we are all just living for tomorrow.

I've Found My Way!!

Now I'm the girl who picks her battles.
I'm that loud girl with the bright light.
The real girl whose smile is legit.
The sad girl who can face her tears.
I'm the fairytale girl
That ends with a happily ever after.
The silly girl that has a colorful mind.
The happy girl in touch.

The hidden girl only when she plays
Hide and go seek.
I am the lovable girl who has no hate.
Sober girl, I'm done drinking.
Smoking brought most of my sorrows.
I get mad
But angry has a new meaning for me now.
The aching girl, I'm off all my meds.
We are all hurting but this ain't the end!

I AM MY OWN HERO! WE ARE ALL THE MIRACLE!

*Emily D. was a 16-year-old student at
Warren High School.*

**From: *Reclaiming Children and Youth*, Volume 17
Number 3, pp.26-27**

The ideas and rationale behind the Extended Schools Agenda in England

Fiona Mortlock

The more traditional forms of out-of-school child care in the United Kingdom have recently come under close scrutiny from the government in an effort to reduce unemployment by making affordable child care available to those who require it to enable them to return to employment or study to gain employment. Out-of-school child care has existed in the United Kingdom for many years, but in much less formal guises, with little or no legislation. It was run predominantly by the voluntary sector, men and women who were doing the job for the love of play. Many small and a few larger primary schools had some form of afterschool child care in place, and many had breakfast clubs a long time before the British government hit on the idea of the Extended Schools Agenda.

Political environment

In June 2005 the British government launched the Extended Schools Agenda to complement and add value to the Every Child Matters Framework. Every Child Matters is the British approach to collect and align multiple efforts by organizations such as hospitals, schools, volunteer groups, and afterschool programs for

youth up to the age of nineteen to gain safe passage to adulthood. Funding-840 million pounds-was put in place to support the program. The aim was that by 2008, 50 percent of approximately twenty-four thousand primary schools (serving children four to eleven years old) and one-third of all secondary schools would be able to offer at least some part of the extended schools program, and by 2010 every school can provide access to year-round extended services including learning, sports, and the arts. The agenda also aims to incorporate new partnerships that constitute family support incorporating the health service, social service, and private and voluntary sector.

The Extended Schools Agenda is designed to provide help, support, and opportunities for every family to maximize the potential of every child, especially in the most disadvantaged areas. The Every Child Matters Framework has five core values:

- Be healthy
- Stay safe
- Enjoy and achieve
- Make a positive contribution
- Achieve economic well-being

The Extended

School Agenda itself has five core aims that it must strive to fulfill:

- High-quality affordable child care
- A varied menu of activities
- Support for parents
- Access to swift and easy referral for a range of specialist support services
- Wider community access to school facilities.

This does not all have to take place at each school; it can be at a community center, for example. Nevertheless, the school has the responsibility of directing parents and children to these services, so the youth programs must be able to identify what resources are available to families and how the resources can be accessed.

Ultimately the Extended Schools Agenda is about supporting parents and families in work and bringing economic well-being and advancement to disadvantaged communities. It is not just about the children and young people, but about the whole community and how to get access to a wide range of services into a place that is user friendly. It is not a new one. In order to capitalize on the spotlight that has been thrown on it and a considerable amount of money that is being invested in this agenda, local authorities have realized that involving the young people for whom this service is meant to be designed is imperative.

From New Directions for Youth Development, Winter 2007

Quality Care in a Family Setting A Practical Guide for Foster Carers



Leon Fulcher & Thom Garfat

While training and practice standards are now used in many places to enhance, monitor and evaluate the quality of care given to children and young people in out-of-home care, Foster Carers are often expected to perform miracles without practical assistance. Building from a strengths-based approach, **Quality Care in a Family Setting: A Practical Guide for Foster Carers** seeks to redress that deficit, offering practical help for Foster Carers seeking to do extraordinary things with the kids for whom they care.

Written by Leon Fulcher and Thom Garfat, **Quality Care in a Family Setting**, offers theory, practice tips and everyday advice for helping young people in Foster Care develop the strengths and skills necessary to successfully navigate life's challenges.

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Thinking on Good Things

Franklin T. Hysten

“In my community, people can hardly find a decent bank or grocery store within five square miles, but they can easily find a liquor store on every corner. Finding beer is easier than finding soap. Although we are told that we can become everything we want to be, we are not given many honest examples of how this promise works in action.”

When I hear the African proverb, “It takes a whole village to raise a child,” it sounds to me like someone must have watched me grow up. I will share some of the many experiences in my life that challenged me to emerge successful. But as important as who I am is to understanding why I have overcome these negative experiences and deficits are the people who have served as villagers in my life.

Those people all had one thing in common they seemed to emphasize what I had, not what I didn’t have. They did not help me to grow by showing me what I could not do. Instead, they all embraced my assets and built on them either purposely or unintentionally.

My Parents

My parents divorced while I was in elementary school, and I started to have weekend visits with my mother while I was in junior high school. I grew reluctant to visit her, though, because of her lifestyle. While raising my two sisters, my mother became addicted to crack. She did things to her body that are unmentionable. She disrespected me, my sisters, my grandmother, and our family, but most of all herself.

My father was just as self-destructive as my mother. He was an alcoholic who beat the hell out of his wife until she was able to muster the courage to leave him and chance a life on her own. He has lived in a motel for the past seven years, and it is hard to believe that he actually has a decent job. He shows few signs, if any, that he loves my sisters or me. His participation in our lives has been limited to child support for my sisters and symbolic financial support for me. Every so often my dad will call us, but I have not spent any quality time with him since I was a young boy. My sisters haven’t spent any time alone with him in their lives. He refused to visit them at my grandmother’s house, so they have suffered not having their father in their lives.

It is one thing not to know your father, and yet another when you do know him — even see him — and he treats you like

a distant relative. He never took the time to figure out how I was doing in high school or in my male adolescent life. My father did not teach me any of the things that the boys around me did. There was no ball playing or roughhousing. This may not seem important, but in my community, you may have to prove your strength through sports or even through defending yourself physically.

My mother did eventually seek help for her addiction. After the program, she stayed drug-free for over a year. She no longer smoked crack but did return to smoking marijuana. She tried to get involved with church and to repair the damage she had done to the relationships between her and her children, but in some cases it was too late. My sisters and I had very little respect for her, if any. We did not honor her authority and thought of her as a sick person. I forgave her in word, but there are memories that serve as awful reminders of her time in addiction: Our house that was without electricity for 10 months, but had plenty of strange visitors, and the memories of things stolen from family and lies told to those who loved her most.

One Primary Caring Adult

I flunked a whole year of high school (GPA 0.00) while attending school almost every day. I thought I would be a father at age 15, but the baby turned out not to be mine. I engaged in other activities that were unhealthy in my life, but I still had the will to make myself be successful. What helped me not to be burdened and overcome by my deficits and bad decisions in life?

The first and most important influence that helped me to retain hope was a primary caring adult who was willing to act as a provider and nurturer. Although both of my parents were unavailable to me during my teenage years, my aunt made a tremendous sacrifice and decided to raise me even though she had no kids of her own. She suspended her life to act as my mother. This was so crucial to giving me the hope and drive to become a responsible adult.

My aunt taught me what responsibility was. She was the person there to teach me the little things—how to eat and speak in public places, the difference between talking to our friends and talking to adults and professionals, how to wash clothes, and other life skills. It was necessary for me to have someone at home who could support me when I did engage in positive activities and decisions—someone who would boast about my accomplishments to our family and friends. Sure, my mother was on crack, and my father couldn't say "I love you," but my aunt was there to see me perform with my high school choir and receive my award for being the Gem of the City. She was not the only one, though — there was a whole cavalry of family members, friends, and teachers who all contributed as a "village" to my development.

Recognizing Assets

I remember two teachers in junior high school who gave me important lessons. My seventh-grade English teacher instilled in me a respect for my elders who had paved a way for me. She invited my grandfather to speak at a Black History

assembly. I had never thought of my grandfather as a black history figure or hero. But that day, I realized that many of my elders have a story to tell.

My music teacher was able to release the gift of music that was inside me. Music is the part of me that is extremely creative. This was an important stress outlet for the early part of my life. She was also an example of a caring teacher. She would stay after school in the heart of the ghetto, forming relationships with students as a mentor and role model. She brought me new experiences outside my traditional community. Classical music festivals and dance concerts began to show me that there were other things outside of my neighborhood. My world kept getting a little larger.

Positive Interventions

So many times in my life, I have found myself about to step off an experiential cliff only to find a net there to catch me. Several adults have been involved with events throughout my life and have helped me to look inside myself for answers I already had. These situations have been the most pivotal moments in my life. I am glad that there was an adult to guide me so that I would not have to experience these things alone.

At age 15, I thought my life was about to stop. (My aunt says that's normal for teenagers.) A senior choir member told me that I was going to be her baby's father. How would I tell my family? Would I have to quit school and begin to work? I wasn't ready to be a father. Just about that time, I began to form a relationship with my high school music teacher. She

appealed to my common sense to figure out the plausibility of my being the father. She was there to help me through the depression and there to help me figure out if I was the father.

I later found out that I was not, but the friendship that I formed with that teacher is still lasting. She became a primary adult in my life, helping me to navigate through my adolescence. She always tried to build on my intelligence and encouraged me to expand my thinking. Most importantly, she did this without wanting anything in return. She didn't ask for my profuse gratitude or to be recognized when I received awards, even though she deserved my acknowledgement.

Throughout my life, I have been able to meet people like my music teacher who could show me different perspectives and options. I believe that this is what makes me a cool individual; I have been exposed to different ways people can live their lives. I have seen that there is more than one way to achieve my own definition of success.

Responsibility and Freedom to Make Mistakes

One of the most empowering moments in my life was when I was given a job, fresh out of high school, developing policies related to youth and public health. As an AmeriCorps volunteer, I did a placement at the local public health department, developing and implementing ways that youth could be involved in the county's bureaucracy. They recognized that any institution that wishes to improve the lives of young people must involve them in securing their health and well-being. They believed this so

much that they allowed a group of AmeriCorps volunteers, including myself, to develop a youth commission for the county to meet and discuss issues that were important to them.

Toward the end of my year in AmeriCorps, I was offered the opportunity to apply for a grant to improve the health and safety of the city. My supervisor was key in allowing me to develop this proposal for youth involvement while providing a structure for completing the project. She trusted me to act as an adult—to go to meetings, drive a company car, and speak for the department. It is this experience that truly built on my assets and helped me continue to grow. Later, through this project, I got the chance to hire a youth staff and supervise them, even though some of the youth workers were older than I was. My boss, who was young herself, continued to provide training and the personal bond that was needed for me to develop despite the odds. I had a job that was not just a token position, but one where money was spent doing the things I thought were best. Being entrusted with this responsibility furthered my development into an adult.

The Adult

Now I am a college student studying sociology and history. I go to school in Oakland to be close to my mother, who is sick with HIV, and my aunt, who is like a mother to me. I know that now it is my turn to give back to those who gave to me. It is time for me to prepare myself to be part of another young person's life who may have hard trials to overcome.

Unfortunately, for many young people

in my community, these trials are the rule rather than the exception. There often seems to be no way out of the impoverished lives we live. We look at our school — half is condemned and the other half closed. The dropout rate is at least 60%, and the average GPA is about 1.79. During high school, many of my teachers were in their cars as the final bell rang, rushing off to their homes far away from the madness of East Oakland. In my community, many people are poor and hopeless. They can hardly find a decent bank or grocery store within five square miles, but they can easily find a liquor store on every corner. Finding beer is easier than finding soap. Although we are told that we can become everything we want to be, we are not given many honest examples of how this promise works in action. Some of us, like me, try to realize that promise, and I often wonder, “Why me?”

But I have committed my life to bettering our community and bettering the experiences of those who live in it. I want other young people to be able to look beyond those things that hold them back and reach for things that seem unattainable. But they cannot do this alone. They must have a network—a “Community Circle of Caring,” as this journal puts it — of selfless, concerned adults who can build on a young person's assets, not those things that seem to hold him or her back. Emphasize their creativity, their intellect — not their bad habits or inescapable backgrounds and histories. Be their village.

From: *Reaching Today's Youth*, Vol.2, No.3, p5

RESIDENTIAL CHILD CARE Prospects and Challenges

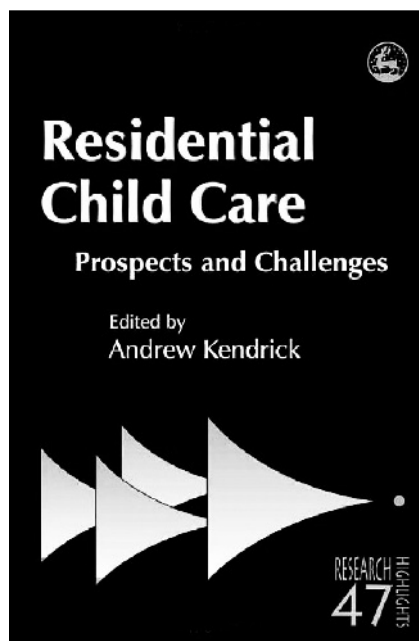
Edited by **Andrew Kendrick**

Jessica Kingsley Publisher (2008)

Reviewed by *Jack Phelan*

There continues to be an impressive flow of useful and well researched CYC literature coming from the UK, in this case from Scotland. The majority of authors in this edition are from Scotland, and they have created an impressive piece of work about CYC residential care.

This book has four sections, Promoting Well-being and Development, discusses education, health, mental health, resilience and aftercare for young people. The six chapters describe the state of recent research and the authors' own recommendations quite clearly. The next section is Addressing Issues of Discrimination, discussing gender, disabilities and ethnic groups. Section 3 is Conflict and Response, describing peer violence fears of young people, physical restraint dynamics and issues for secure accommodation facilities. The final section discusses children's rights, the concept of therapeutic



care, the contrast between Danish and German pedagogical training and English CYC residential training, and finally leadership and management.

The various authors all are well informed about the practice of residential care and use up to date sources for the research cited. It is an impressive collection of thinking covering the various aspects of CYC residential care quite competently. This book is a must read for planners and managers of residential settings here in North America as well as in the UK.

The book takes the position that residential care has recently been validated as a preferred option for many youth who do not see foster care as helpful. This shift away from blaming residential care for being too expensive and often abusive is being hailed as an important step forward in creating a useful option in the continuum of services needed to be effective

with the youth and families we serve.

The authors all take a proactive stance, and see residential care as needing to effect changes in the future lives of youth, not just in the immediate present. Some of the themes that emerge are about increasing autonomy for both youth and the people who work with them, attachment and empathy as key ingredients generally lacking in the youth we serve, seeing youth as more than merely people in need of protection, but also capable and needing opportunities to contribute and have a voice.

Safety and freedom from fear are important concerns for youth that staff and

programs must directly address, and our decision-making processes involving youth need continual monitoring.

There is an excellent chapter on therapeutic approaches which is worth the price of the book, and some very helpful direction for CYC leadership for managers in the final chapter.

The book may not be very helpful for new practitioners, but mature workers, educators, managers, program developers and planners will find this to be an invaluable resource. It also points the direction for researchers to build upon as we continue to move forward.

Writing of the psychotherapist's task, **Anthony Storr** says:

'His basic aim is to help his patient lead his own life more completely, without trying to order that life for him or to convert the patient to his own frame of reference.' For brevity we can call this the aim of *respecting and allowing self-determination*. Obviously this is more feasible with adult patients than with dependent children: the notion that one can, or should, permit children complete self-determination is quite unreal and false. The therapist intervenes in the patient's life and the residential unit intervenes even more so. But essentially the intervention of parents and residential units should be directed to making real understandable choices available to the child at a level at which he can genuinely choose, thus encouraging his capacity 'to lead his own life more completely'.

— Christopher Beedel: *Residential Life with Children*, p.55

nils ling

Superhero in the Family



The other day, I learned that I'm sort of related to a superhero.

I was at a barbecue thrown by my younger daughter's in-laws. They come from a ridiculously large family, and as I meandered around, I got involved in a conversation with a woman about my daughter's age who had recently been involved in a hit-and-run collision.

As well as I can piece the story together, this young woman was walking back to her office after lunch when she encountered a car, up close and personal.

She was crossing at a controlled intersection when she looked to her left and saw a car zooming towards her. The car shot the stop sign and slammed into this young woman, permanently disabling her.

But wait! She wasn't permanently disabled. She could easily have been. Except she saw the car coming and — in a routine move that is one of the very first things they teach in spy/superhero school — she leapt up onto the car's hood, did a barrel roll, and landed lightly on her feet.

Wearing heels and a dress.

At that point, she looked squarely into the eyes of the driver and recognized him as the international terrorist, The Jackal. She tore the car door off its hinges, crushed the gun in his hand with her iron grip, and arrested him.

OK, I made that last bit up. Some people just don't know how to properly embellish a story. But the part about leaping up onto the hood of the car, doing a barrel roll, and landing on her feet? The gospel truth.

And really, that was enough to convince me she was a superhero, right there. Because seriously, who does that?

Not me. The other day I was in the supermarket, and a shopping cart ran over my foot. It was being pushed by a woman who — and I'm guessing here — was in her mid-120s. The only way this cart could have been going slower was if it were set in cement. And still, it ran over my foot. And I was wearing sandals. And man, did it hurt.

If I were a superhero, I could have found a way to dodge that cart. But I'm just a normal guy, with normal life training that tells me not to be rude and to let the nice old lady pass when the aisle is crowded, and she ran right over my foot.

If she had been driving a car and had run a stop sign with me in her path, I would be in a body cast right now. But this young woman at the party was cheerfully chatting away at a family barbeque, having not suffered so much as a scratch.

I was captivated. I had never met a superhero before. I had all sort of questions.

"What were you most afraid of?" I asked.

"Well," she said, "I was wearing a skirt."

I totally got that. She was afraid she would land hard on the concrete on one knee and her co-workers would notice that she hadn't even suffered a minor abrasion on her exposed leg, and her secret identity would be exposed.

Well, not so much.

"I was afraid my skirt would fly up and show my underpants," she said.

So, she wasn't afraid of death or disability. Wasn't afraid of being crushed like a bug under the wheels of a speeding vehicle. See, that's what separates superheroes from the rest of us. She was afraid someone would see her panties. I guess "modesty" is the second thing they learn in superhero school. It probably comes in handy when you have to change in phone booths.

I asked if she arrested the driver. Because if a driver will run one stop sign, that driver will run ten stop signs, and

who knows what babies in carriages or seniors in wheelchairs would be in the way the next time.

"No," she said with a shrug. "I went back to the office."

I nodded and winked. Her secret identity was safe with me.

Later, I tried to work out a special signal with her, in case I spotted a crime in progress and needed to summon her. Maybe like a flashlight shining up against the clouds or something, like the way Commissioner Gordon calls Batman. Except a little lower tech and not quite so expensive.

She gave me a tight little smile and edged away, which I took to mean she was concerned about everybody else finding out her alter ego. I totally respected that.

So criminals beware. I never go anywhere without my flashlight. And if I see you committing a crime, I am not afraid to dial up my own personal superhero..

And as long as she's wearing capris or slacks, your days are numbered.

The Twitter logo, consisting of the word "twitter" in a lowercase, blue, sans-serif font, followed by a blue silhouette of a bird in flight.

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Post Card from Leon Fulcher



Postcard from Tuscany

Buon giorno Friends! Warm greetings from Tuscany where we managed to spend a week during Spring, travelling around this amazing part of Italy, engaging in that favourite pastime of 'people watching'. I am ever mindful of how Henry Maier admonished me to make sure I talked about child and youth care in these Postcards and not about me! Such advice is especially important during this month in which International Child and Youth Care week was celebrated. So I'm trying to stay focused – even while enjoying my holidays!



The Towers of San Gimignano

Founded in the 3rd Century BC and defended against Atilla the Hun and his hordes, during the Middle Ages the hilltop

village of San Gimignano became a stopping point for Catholic pilgrims on their travels to Rome and the Vatican. The place prospered and by the 12th Century, there were 72 towers in this wee village! Then, in the 14th Century the plague virtually wiped out the town, many towers collapsed and now only 14 of the original towers remain.



A San Gimignano Puppet Show

Children were fascinated by the impromptu puppet show set up by a busker in one of the San Gimignano village piazzas. Traditional white and black figures (who was the baddie?) sparred back and forth, with laughter a result whenever the baddie was punished by the goodie! All the kids were mesmerised!



School trip through Firenze Piazza-della-Signoria

The Piazza-della-Signoria still maintains its reputation as the political hub of Florence and the meeting place of Florentines and tourists, just as it has been for centuries. This piazza is a crossroad between the Ponte Vecchio (the only bridge on the Arno not destroyed on Hitler's orders during WW II), the Piazza del Duomo and the Uffizi Gallery with its 50 rooms of priceless paintings and art. Little wonder that school trips come here in droves for art appreciation classes as well as a very good school outing. Adults of all ages enjoy the Florentine piazzas; many for the art and others creating their own artistic opportunities!

Areas for safe play are inevitably a challenge in the medieval towns and villages of Tuscany. With winding streets and hillside portals or staircases criss-crossing these villages where cobble stone pavements feature prominently, it was not surprising to find children practising their rollerblading in car parks where pavements were flat and relatively level. At



Ahh Firenze! To Live is to Love!

least one caring parent had carefully considered her children's safety when her girls wanted to go rollerblading. Helmets, elbow, wrist and knee gear were all carefully colour-toned to enhance safety while supporting the wishes of fashion-conscious kids.



Safe Rollerblading in Lucca

One couldn't help but notice how many of the male nude statues had had their private parts removed. A diligent band of moral crusaders had removed nearly all the penises in public places! I was also staggered to find a 5 X 5 metre sized painting at Volterra Cathedral named the Circumcision of Christ

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Circumcision_of_Jesus) and learn of The Feast of the Circumcision celebrated on January 1. Different from Hogmanay, eh no?!



The Fountain of Neptune by Bartolomeo Ammannati, 1565

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EndNotes



A New Day

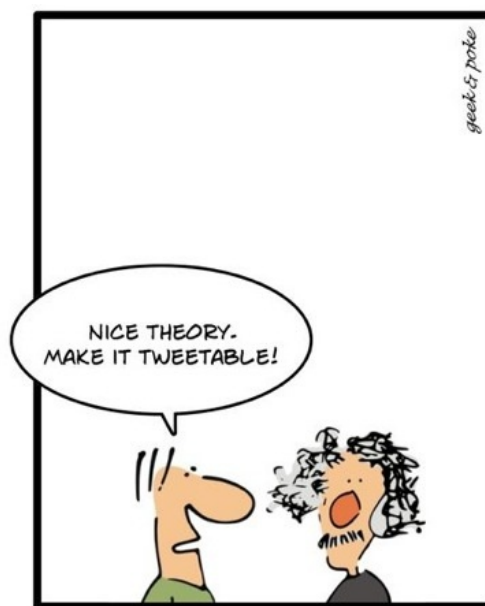
It is often only at the end
of a long night of attrition
against the demons and ghosts
of a troubled kid's mind
that we care workers
may reach through
the resistance and pain
and become the gleam in the eye *
of a previously unreachable youth.
Thereby we may light the fire of hope,
of a new dawn, a new beginning,
a whole new day.

Family quarrels have a total bitterness unmatched by others. Yet it sometimes happens that they also have a kind of tang, a pleasantness beneath the unpleasantness, based on the tacit understanding that this is not for keeps; that any limb you climb out on will still be there later for you to climb back.

— Mignon McLaughlin

In a houseful of toddlers and pets, you can start out having a bad day, but you keep getting detoured.

— Robert Brault



HOW EINSTEIN FOUND $E=MC^2$

The teacher who is indeed wise does not bid you to enter the house of his wisdom but rather leads you to the threshold of your mind.

— Kahlil Gibran

* Acknowledgements to Al Trieschman



Well, then, let's put it this way ... Suppose that instead of the apple, Eve had offered him a shiny sports car? (An early Charles M. Schulz 'Sunday School' cartoon.)

Modern cynics and skeptics... see no harm in paying those to whom they entrust 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 object of teaching a child is to enable him to get along without his teacher.

— Elbert Hubbard

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



“Well, I guess nothing can shock you.”

Feelings of worth can flourish only in an atmosphere where individual differences are appreciated, mistakes are tolerated, communication is open, and rules are flexible - the kind of atmosphere that is found in a nurturing family.

— Virginia Satir

Calvin and Hobbes



By Bill Watterson



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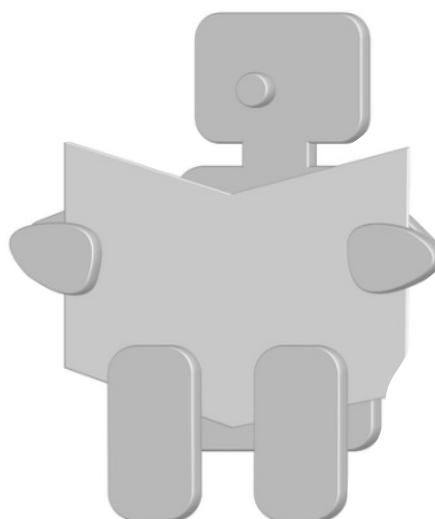
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