

CYC-Online

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

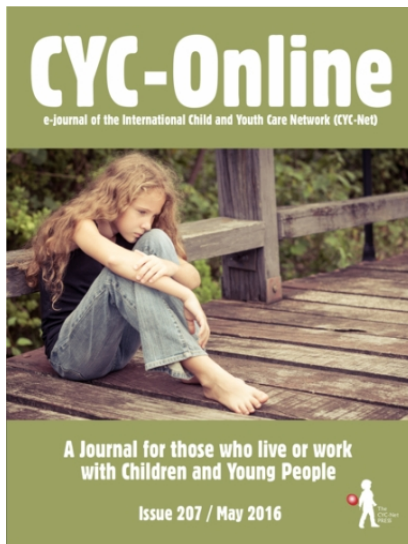


**A Journal for those who live or work
with Children and Young People**

Issue 207 / May 2016



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What Do You Believe?

You are part of a significant profession with abundant resources and opportunities to grow.

Do you believe this statement? I've found it makes a serious difference in how much I enjoy my work based on how true I believe the above statement to be.

In your work you've likely experienced meaningful relationships and witnessed human strengths overcoming the huge obstacles life throws at people. It's inspiring and keeps us doing what we do. At the same time caring for others is challenging work. It's not that difficult to become tired, frustrated, or lose hope. Sometimes we have to pause and take a step back to reset our perspective.

A Significant Profession

Child and youth care offers a unique contribution in the lives of those in our own neighborhoods and communities. We support people in discovering their own potential, finding their strengths, and taking ownership of their lives. This task and craft of caring has a rich history around the globe. We learn from our roots when we look back (as you do when you access a classic reading from the archives of CYC-Net). We also have much potential for the future. We have barely tapped into the power of our collective impact on the world.

Abundant Resources

Think of all the potential resources you have to carry out your work. A co-worker you can ask for feedback. The conference you sought out and the connections you formed there. A supervisor who pushes you to be even better. A book, journal or podcast you read or heard that helps you develop your own way of thinking. Your professional association. A child with whom you have a relationship that changed your whole way of being with others.



Does everyone around the world have all these resources? Surely not. That's one reason CYC-Net exists and why we ask those who can to support it financially for those who can't. CYC-Net is here as a resource for you every day.

Assess your own personal resources and where you find gaps look for ways to fill them. We need support and encouragement to stay sharp with compassion and caring.

Opportunities to Grow

One of the things that makes being in child and youth care so exciting is that it pushes us every day to become a better person and practitioner.

I think of last summer sharing the zeal of South Africans celebrating forty years of their child and youth care association. I think of a few weeks ago in Scotland sharing a meal with residential workers and listening to stories of their own personal growth resulting from their work with children who've had difficult starts in life. I think of this afternoon sitting around a table with colleagues planning how to better support workers around California as they work with families facing difficult circumstances.

For some growth may include career advancement and pay increases. These are necessary things as we support ourselves and our own families. There are also meaningful opportunities to grow our own thinking, skills, connections, relationships, and inner life. We have to own our own personal and professional development. No one else is going to do it for us.

Do child and youth care workers need better pay? Do struggling youth and families need more proactive supports? Does public awareness of needs in their own communities need to grow? Yes, there is a lot more to do. But for just a moment pause and reflect on the privilege we have to do what we do. We are part of a significant profession with abundant resources and opportunities to grow.

Wherever you are on your own journey we hope this May issue of *CYC-Online* will be of support to you.

– James



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CYC-Net Clan Gathering 2016 – Vienna

Bridging the Gaps

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

Sunday, 21st August from 9am to 5pm

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

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

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

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

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

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



A Tribute to Bureaucracy (or Gourmet Grilled Cheese)

Kiaras Gharabaghi

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Recently, I had lunch with a senior bureaucrat at an upscale restaurant. It was a good lunch, as far as such events go. I had a gourmet grilled cheese sandwich, although other than the prefix ‘gourmet’, I am not entirely certain how it was different than a regular grilled cheese sandwich. Perhaps the cheese was of a higher quality. I did notice that the toast was particularly well toasted, and it was served with some green leaves on the plate, which I presumed to be for decoration purposes rather than for eating. After all, who orders a grilled cheese in the hopes of getting some salad with it? I will say that the other difference between a regular grilled cheese and the gourmet version appears to be the price. For that price, I could have had steak at most restaurants I more typically frequent.

Why am I talking about my grilled cheese sandwich? Because I think it is a wonderful metaphor for the meeting itself. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss some recent recommendations I had made related to a specific context of child and youth services. The bureaucrat was tasked with updating me on how her or his



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government department was going to respond to these recommendations. In a demonstration of his or her mastery of political communications, the bureaucrat started by fully endorsing all of my recommendation. “There is much excitement about your recommendations”, he or she said, “and we will fully endorse them all”. As they were saying this, my gourmet grilled cheese sandwich arrived at the table. Naturally, I was delighted. So I thought I would first take a big gulp of my water to get ready for the next step. “But we are not going to simply implement your recommendations step by step; instead, we are going to look to the other systems related to the one you explored, and develop a strategic plan to integrate your recommendations in a larger process”. As they were talking, I noticed the leafs on my plate and started to wonder what they were for. “To move forward, we will engage many different stakeholders in the process, and ensure that young people’s voice are represented; in fact, I just met with a couple of young people who I think will be great”. My more detailed examination of the grilled sandwich was well underway at this point, as I duly noticed the toast, the cheese between the toast, and the tiny bottle of ketchup that came with the plate. It gave me comfort that the gourmet version of this sandwich looked familiar, almost like I had had it before.

“Involving young people is of course a challenge; it always takes some capacity building so that they can participate in our processes”, she went on to say. At this point, I ventured a question: “Do you think these leafs are just here for decoration, or are they meant to add something to this sandwich”? He seemed to ignore my question and went on: “in terms of your human resource recommendations, we are going to study these; naturally, we will have to do a workforce analysis and consider the possible responses from the unions involved”. I only half listened to their comments at this point, because I was desperately trying to get the ketchup out of the tiny bottle; the usual approach of slapping the back of the bottle wasn’t working. In fact, no matter how hard I slapped that bottle, nothing much appeared to be happening. “Change management takes time; I hope you understand”, she ventured. “It will require some significant restructuring even in my own department, but I have already hired consultants to take a look whether the current structure is a meaningful one to undertake this change management process”, they concluded. I took a big bite out of my sandwich, chewed slowly, so that I could fully enjoy the gourmet nature of the moment. Indeed, I thought to myself, change management does take time, especially



when one manages an invisible change.

Like I said, it was a really good sandwich that cost a little more than it should, but it was, after all, not just a regular grilled cheese. One pays extra for knowing that the same old thing is of the gourmet variety. I am sure there is a chef out there somewhere who had to manage the process of creating this meal. The leafs certainly added some very nice window dressing. I left oddly satisfied, knowing that I had borne witness to a definitive moment in the history of child and youth services, or the evolution of grilled cheese. Probably the latter.

VENUE: FH CAMPUS WIEN

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MSc CHILD and YOUTH

CARE STUDIES by DISTANCE LEARNING

Developed within the School of Social Work and Social Policy and the Centre for Excellence for Looked After Children in Scotland (CELCIS), this programme has a fresh, engaging curriculum that covers globalised childhoods, international policy contexts, the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), bringing up children and research methods.

The programme is aimed at students with an interest in developing positive strategies for affirming and developing the professional identity of child and youth care practice.

Launched in 2014, we are now recruiting for our September 2016 intake.

Fees for the programme are:

All students: £4000

The tuition fee is for the entire two-year programme.

To find out more or to apply to join the course:

www.strath.ac.uk/courses/postgraduatetaught/childandyoungcarestudies/

Or contact

Graham McPheat
graham.mcpheat@strath.ac.uk

Socialized Thinking Limitations in CYC Practice

Jack Phelan

Last month I discussed the dynamics that limit practitioners who have a thinking style described by Robert Kagen as “Socialized”. I will continue to describe the professional implications for CYC practice this month.

Socialized thinkers place a great value on how they fit in, how significant others evaluate them. Young adults experience this as doing what their parents, teachers, and mentors would expect of them. There is also a need to follow the religious, political or ideological traditions that these authority figures have prescribed. Part of becoming your own person as an adult is deciding for yourself what you want to believe, yet sometimes it becomes easier to just follow the path laid out by others. Some adults stay comfortably at the Socialized thinking stage and don’t have a need to challenge themselves to become Self-Authoring. Yet professional practice, especially in Life Space work, requires this level of complexity.

So socialized thinkers are limited by relational energy, they need to have comfortable relationships that validate their connections. The expectations of other people and the correctness of their behavior or opinions are important. There is a need for knowing the right answer, whether it is found in a book or from an expert. When socialized thinkers experience conflict, they need to resolve it amicably, since it is really a challenge to who they are.

Most new CYC practitioners are socialized thinkers, both because of their age, as well as because they face a steep learning curve in the first months of practice. The safest approach is to look for the right answer and to rely on the experts (more

experienced staff) when uncertain. It is a major challenge to move beyond this as one advances professionally. Supervision is a key issue during this transition.

Socialized thinkers do well in organizing routines and activities, and supporting educational plans. In fact, until the demands of relational practice become an expectation, around the second year on the job, socialized thinkers seem very competent and professionally on track.

Obvious signs of the limiting effects of Socialized thinking include resentment and blame when youth are aggressive or rejecting or when counter-aggressive responses to youth or families arise. Feeling like your efforts are not being appreciated or that some youth/families are hopeless because they are not responding well seem like legitimate opinions to express to colleagues. Meeting your own needs, even at the expense of the program, becomes justifiable at times, particularly if other team members agree with it.

Awareness of counter-aggressive feelings and reflection on whose needs are being met is less important than whether others agree with me, and policy and procedure become justification for actions. There is a need for hard and fast answers, a rule book that will address complex dynamics. These issues can be handled by supervisors who see that it does not require technical or procedural clarification, but a more complex level of thinking about what is happening.

Relational CYC practice includes the ability to create a shared space, the inter-personal in between (Garfat), where the practitioner can have clear boundaries but also is open to the influence of the other person, since this is what is required by both people. Socialized thinkers, when confronted with beliefs that contradict their own, will need to either argue or join with the other person. Neither of these positions is useful, since the point of relational work is to highlight logical contradictions or legitimate differences and use the conflict as a connection, not a relational problem. Meaning making dynamics are integral to this process, yet Socialized thinkers have not achieved this level of ability. The inability to have a relationship to the relational dynamics occurring is a serious impediment here.

What should be done about this issue? How can supervisors and trainers create a safe place for Socialized thinkers to experience the tension and challenge themselves to think differently? More next month.

With Tentative Certainty: The art of experimental CYC Part II

Hans Skott-Myhre

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In last month's column, I traced the work of the MRI group in developing a way of engaging people in their practice that utilized an approach to working with people that deviated from common sense and prevailing logic. In this age of ever increasing scientism in the field of CYC, from evidence based approaches to neuro/bio/genetic-analysis of anything perceived to be deviant, the idea that what is central to our work is our collective capacities for creative thought and interaction seems to be taking a back seat.

One of the things I have always liked best about our field is the essential quirkiness of both the workers and the young people involved. As someone consistently drawn to the edges, I liked the fact that CYC/youth work seemed to be one of the places ignored by the big disciplines such as psychology, psychiatry and social work. I was reassured by the fact that when I talked about what I did, most people either had no idea what kind of work that was. They tended to see it as an 1) odd, 2) probably benevolent, 3) hard, 4) slightly trivial, thing to do with one's life.

I liked being part of a minor field because it meant that no one in charge was really paying attention to what we did and as a result we could do unusual and remarkable things. We could be experimental, try things out and see what happened. As workers we tended to be unconventional and a bit edgy. We had a tendency to be a lot closer



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in fashion choices, musical tastes, subcultural affiliations and living arrangements to the young people we worked with, than the prevailing social norms of our peer group or the administrators and boards we reported to. Our work was driven by a deep affiliation with young people rather than claims borrowed from other disciplines about the normal course of development, neuro-normality or genetic deficiencies. We weren't trying to generalize our practices to replicate what someone else had done somewhere else with some other group of kids.

I remember as a youth worker taking pride in the fact that when we had to transport a young person to the hospital, jail or some other non-CYC institutional setting, the admitting staff couldn't immediately tell who was the client and who was the staff. We never imagined ourselves as professionals. We worked on the margins and never aspired to becoming mainstream. We worked with "those kids" and were proud to be associated with them.

Perhaps part of my orientation to CYC stemmed from my lack of conventional training in a proper discipline. When I trained at MRI in the late 70's, I was exposed to the idea of working with families. At the time, this was a pretty edgy way to work. The first family therapy conferences I attended were composed of a handful of practitioners. You could easily go and train with Minuchin, Satir, Haley, Carl Whittaker or Milton Erickson and be one of twenty five people. When Steve deShazer arrived with Solution Focused work a few years later, he distributed his ideas about the work through a three to five page mailing called the News of the Difference that we circulated among the few of us who were interested in what he was up to.

Somewhere around the mid eighties I attended a family therapy conference in San Francisco. I was a bit surprised to find it being hosted in a fancy hotel downtown, instead of at someone's agency, but didn't think much of it. As I came up the escalator to the floor where the opening meeting was being held, I saw my mentor, John Weakland, standing outside the closed door to the meeting room. He motioned me over, cracked the door and gestured for me to look inside. I did so and was very pleased and surprised to see that there were several hundred people in the room. I expressed my pleasure to John and said something like, isn't this great we have finally arrived. John shook his head and said; when this many people think they understand something, then we have to consider the possibility that what was interesting about it is over. I had no idea what he meant at the time, but as CYC approaches becoming a



professionalized mainstream field of practice, I find myself thinking of what he said quite a lot.

Now I realize I am now verging on an old man rant about the good old days full of saccharine nostalgic mumblings about what you young CYC practitioners missed out on. However, I don't actually think that the good old days were all that good and I don't think that it is the emerging generation of young CYC practitioners that are shoving our field of practice into the mainstream. Indeed, I might argue that the drive to become respectable is being driven by baby boomers like myself. Perhaps it is a stage of life thing where we want to be finally recognized for a lifetime of contributions to hopefully making the world a little kinder. Or maybe it is just the disease of middle age to become more conventional.

Mind you, there are still any number of my colleagues who are not interested in resting on their laurels or in finding ways to collectively pat ourselves in the back. I have recently had occasion to teach the writings of Kiaras Gharabaghi, Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw, Doug Magnuson, Jennifer White, Janet Newbury, Ben Anderson-Nathe and Mark Krueger to my undergraduate students and I found their work challenging and invigorating as always.

My students found them mind bending and were thrilled with the ways that these writers challenged the existing frameworks for understanding young people they had been taught in their developmental psychology, ecological social work and psychopathology driven coursework. The work of these CYC scholar/practitioners opened the world of youth-adult relations to my students as a field of lived encounter that includes all the messy entanglements and problems often smoothed over in professionalized discourse.

One of the things that became clear, as we discussed the writings of my rather edgy colleagues, was that our lives and particularly the lives of those young people entering our field, as practitioners, are different now as we enter the 12st century. My students repeated this over and over again. They want to learn ways of interacting with young people that are responsive to these differences. It is not sufficient to learn the frameworks and critiques of the 20th century in order to account for the emerging childhood of the 21st.

In this regard, the CYC scholar/practitioner's writings that they found most evocative were those that worked at the critical and experimental edge of human



relationships. These are the writings that engage emerging trends like technology, as a fact that needs serious engagement, rather than something dismissed as a moral panic, social problem or trivial distraction.

Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw's work on video gaming in *Crafting new relationships in child and youth care: Human-nonhuman encounters* takes just such a nuanced and complex approach. In the piece, Veronica learns to play the game Minecraft with her son and his friends. In doing so she engages the world of video games, not as a good or bad thing, but as a force that is shaping the actuality of who we are and who we might become. She argues that the realm of non-human forces, such as technology, are increasingly influential in producing humans as a hybrid form of subjectivity that we ignore at our own peril in our work with children and youth. Young people who grow up with technology as an integral part of their formative years are quite simply different kinds of subjects than those of us raised in the 20th century. To the degree we ignore this actuality, we will become ever distant from the lived reality of the young people we encounter.

In her explorations of the encounter with the non-human world of Minecraft, Veronica asks us to consider what would happen if we stepped aside from the adultist discourses that refuse to take video gaming and other virtual worlds seriously. What if we wondered about its implications outside questions of how much time should be allotted to various devices in our programs? What if we took these encounters and the increasing immersion of young people into the realm of the virtual as increasingly significant to our work?

If we take the often stated conventional position that children's access to this world should be seriously constrained and that we need to return to the world of "playing outside" I would argue that we are putting our heads in the sand and placing ourselves on the wrong side of history. There is no going back. That is not to say that we cannot blend the world of "playing outside" with "playing in the virtual," as Pacini-Ketchabaw does in the broader scope of her work. However, we cannot ignore the emerging world in which the virtual is no longer an exception or anomaly, but an integral part of daily living.

The question becomes, what do we do about this world? How much do we understand about the worlds our children and young people engage? Pacini-Ketchabaw asks us to consider the implications of avatars, coded skins, as well as created and



destroyed worlds as they have implications for our work. Do these virtual experiences have correlates in our work? Do we have avatars that we deploy in our human non-virtual world? Do we put on coded skins in our personal lives and in our work with young people? How flexible are our coded skins and do we permeate each other's codes or only play on the surface? In her experimentation with the realm of the virtual, Veronica brings back questions for us that connect the world of gaming with our daily encounters with young people. She asks us to consider

Why do relationships in child and youth care end at the boundaries of a self? Why do they so rarely account for bodies and corporeality, or for the skins that are implicated in relationships? Can we get under the skin of child and youth care? Is it the messiness of bodies or the slipperiness of skin that troubles us and halts our engagement with them?

In Veronica's work and inquiries into youth-adult relationships, as we enter the twenty first century, there is a spirit of experimentation. She asks the kinds of questions that go beyond our conventional understandings of young people and ourselves. Such work positions our field as the edge, rather than the center of human service work generally. In doing so, it aims us towards the future, rather than continuing to orient us to our past. It is this spirit of experimentation, in both thought and practice that I am advocating for in this short series of columns.

And yes, for those of you who have been patiently waiting, I will get to the non-linearity project before I am done.

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Balancing Care: The After View

Maxwell Smart and John Digney



Do we mean love, when we say 'love'?

Samuel Beckett, *Irish Novelist Poet and Playwright*

*They dreamed no dreams as the stars kept their endless watch.
Then on a fine morning the opened like blossoms.*

Iain Crichton Smith, *Scottish Poet*

As we sit together this afternoon in Killashee House, beginning our reflection of the Social Care Ireland (SCI) conference, we immediately decide that we will write this month's column 'on the hoof' so to speak. The topics we spoke about during our presentation are important areas of Child and Youth Care practices – 'love' and 'laughter' and are topics we have previously written on (see for example, Digney & Smart, 2013). As we had drafted our presentation we had had some anxiety about the subject matter; we knew we cared passionately about these two concepts of caring but we didn't know how our presentation would be received, particularly in a climate of reductionism, regulation and what has been called 'professionalization'. We need not have worried because what we encountered in our workshop was an energy, hope and

enthusiasm that was truly mesmerising.

As always, our workshop was not a ‘chalk and talk’ affair. It was a workshop and as such sought debate and reflection. We covered aspects such as: what they were and do people think they are relevant and appropriate.

A Scary Start – A Rocky Road

... the word ‘love’ scares CYC professionals and the concept of ‘fun’ or the experience of ‘laughter’ are deemed inappropriate or ‘not professional’. (Digney & Smart, 2013)

After acknowledging that these concepts can be scary to care professionals we brainstormed with the audience on what their initial thoughts of the topics were, seeking to get some idea of where we would direct the discussion.

The responses scoped the terrain of this topic in a surprising way, essentially having an overwhelming recognition that despite a desire to use the concepts of love and laughter in practices with kids, there were many obstacles. The responses included:

- ‘The word love creates a professional awkwardness’,
- ‘Yes, but It’s hard to define why we as professional are awkward about this’,
- ‘Both of these things are necessary for good caring but can be deemed inappropriate by many people’,
- ‘There seems to be a tension between professional regulation and the relational connects required through love and fun to do the work in an effective way’,
- ‘They can be both misinterpreted by colleagues and others’,
- ‘Is it appropriate to let kids know we love them if they are to move on to a different services or phases of their lives?’

42 – The Meaning of Love

We interrogated these responses somewhat and introduced the notion of ‘needs theories’ to the group, with a quick overview of theories such as Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, Positive Psychology models, and Glassers Choice Theory – theories in which the constructs of love, belonging, laughter and fun are framed as ‘basic human needs’.

This contextualising seems to allow some of the group permission to begin to freely discuss their unfiltered beliefs. At this point we asked to brainstorm on what they understood the word love to be. Responses included:

- 'There is a necessity to have emotional connection',
- 'Love has to include empathy, respect, a sense of being there, with and for young people',
- 'Love doesn't have to be two-way',
- 'Actions speak louder than words'.

It was interesting that there was no attempt made to offer a simplistic definition of the word 'love'; instead there was a discussion about the possible components of this elusive concept. This demonstrated a sophistication and an understanding that, we cannot reduce, standardise or even attempt to regulate something so fundamental and yet ethereal.

[Love] is alive and well in residential child care, no matter how hard we seek to deny it. Indeed, it is part and parcel of our irrational impulse to care. (Smith, 2012).

As the presentation progressed, we paused to take a straw poll of the concerns that staff may have of using the work love, or expressing such affection. The concerns that were expressed included a mention of;

- (i) ('the manner in which love is shown to the kids',
- (ii) 'saying we love them makes us vulnerable to allegation',
- (iii) 'It can be seen as a weakness, that we are over-caring and can be easily manipulated', and
- (iv) 'It brings up the notion of boundaries and whether we can be professional, provide structure and give affection all at the same time'.

These contributions reflect the responses that have been found in other workshops we have facilitated over the years on the topic of love, indeed they echo finding from other researchers and writers on the topic and go some way to introducing the intricacies of such a narrative:

'Love means so many things to different people. In different cultures there are differing perspectives on whether or not one should love their clients'. (CYC-Net Discussion Thread 2003).

- 'This issue arises every so often in our staff meetings. Some co-workers insist that care staff must love kids because this is what they missed from their own parents. Some think that we cannot give the same kind of love which we can only honestly give to our own children. Others say kids can tell if people don't love them and therefore we should relate only like teachers'. (Steve – CYC Worker),
- 'Love includes kindness, generosity, nurturance, and the capacity to be loved as well as to love'. (Seligman, 2002),
- 'Love and kindness are not concepts that have been massively explored in social care training or parlance and as therapeutic interventions they are certainly not in vogue'. (Digney & Smart, 2013),
- 'We have found that kindness and love in the context of relationship (even in the middle of strife and rancour) can facilitate the very healing required for troubled and troublesome clients'. (Digney & Smart, 2014).

Humour and Laughter

As they presentation entered into the realm of discussing laughter and fun, the group were asked to consider what they considered the potential benefits to be. It was reported back from the small discussion groups that:

- 'Laughter used in stressful situations can relieve tension',
- 'Fun and particularly laughter can help people to feel good in bad situations,
- 'It can break the ice with difficult to reach kids',
- 'Most kids I encounter, when pushed, would prefer to laugh than cry,
- 'Some staff have the ability to see the absurdity in situations and can use humour to draw this to the attention of young people and take the sting out of the tail'.

As with love there was an acknowledgement that laughter is not a panacea. It most certainly could be a double-edged sword which if wielded incorrectly could cause serious harm. Questions were raised on the type of humour that can be

therapeutically helpful and also types that could be hurtful or destructive. It was generally agreed that sarcasm (often considered to be a form of humour) was potentially the most destructive type of humour. This type of humour often speaks to some inappropriate intentionality and can be loaded with issues relating to power and dominance over others. Humour and laughter can also be seen as; collusive, coercive, permissive and undermining of professional competence.

Everybody needs someone who can make them laugh when they think they will never smile again. – Anon

In previous writings on related topics ‘the purposeful uses of humour’ in child and youth care work have been articulated as many and varied, including how we can use humour to; demonstrate caring, communicate with youth, connect with others and cope with the harsh realities of everyday life, a concept known to exist in many a dark place, including concentration camps.

It is well known that humor, more than anything else in the human make-up, can afford aloofness and an ability to rise above any situation, even if only for a few seconds. The attempt to develop a sense of humor and to see things in a humorous light is some kind of a trick learned while mastering the art of living. Yet it is possible to practice the art of living even in a concentration camp, although suffering is omnipresent. – Viktor Frankl

This usefulness was demonstrated also in how other professional disciplines have embraced humour as necessary and therapeutic, for example, in the medical profession, and most noticeably by Norman Cousins (1979) and Patch Adams, who stated, ‘How could anyone feel the need to prove [scientifically] the existence of something so obvious’ (Adams and Mylander, 1992). The ensuing debate opened some doors to the relevance to child and youth care, and early pioneers, such as Fritz Redl, who in 1966 noted, ‘a sense of humour is so obviously the most vital characteristic of the skillful handler of discipline problems or tough group situations’.

A lack of love, a lack of laughter

As we progressed towards the conclusion of our workshop we sought to consider

'what happens in the absence of love and laughter' and what are the implications to quality care and caring if these concepts are not given legitimacy in our profession. It was acknowledged that Child and Youth Carers encounter human pain and suffering on a daily basis; yet they also encounter levity, tenacity, and generosity in daily interactions. Without love and laughter our care and caring can become sterile and reduced to care tasks, as opposed to 'care encounters', reducing the intricacy of Child and Youth Care to standardised regulatory functions. As noted by Sonya Jackson (2001), 'Placing vulnerable, frequently emotionally deprived children in institutional environments where staff are either discouraged or not permitted to offer affection and comfort, is to expose children to a most pernicious form of abuse'.

As the group participants agreed with this sentiment and we closed the proceedings, as we close this article, a reflection that what is becoming clear is that there is a readiness to engage in open and honest discussion on these topics of 'love and laughter', 'affection and humour'. Others have left this door ajar, so let's build on the progress and nudge it further open.

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Falsify that Theory

Doug Magnuson

In child and youth care those who work with youth and those who study that work use a variety of theories and explanations to account for a) the types of work we like, b) differences in effectiveness, c) differences in standards of effectiveness, d) youth behaviour and values generally, including what in the old days was called “youth culture,” e) sociological trends, and so forth. We see and hear these explanations in the office after a work shift, youth “intervention plans,” parent-teacher conferences, the “Life” section of the newspaper, psychiatric/psychological diagnoses, religious youth programs, cultural and arts programs, and the dinner parties of parents. In academia we teach many theories in social work, CYC/youthwork, child and youth studies, and in publications these turn up in the literature review and discussion sections of articles. It is hard to find someone who does NOT have a theory about what is going on with children and youth.

If richness is measured by quantity, we are in fine condition in the culture at large, even if the range of theories used in some sectors of our collective fields is impoverished. The when, where, how, and why those theories are invoked and when they are criticized is fascinating, even in our everyday lives. For the moment I am not interested in which theory is right or wrong. My interest here is in how and why we use theories to explain the work.

The theories and explanations we use influence the things we do with and think about “other peoples’ kids,” as someone once put it, and these then have ethical consequences. More to the point of this occasional column, these have implications for what and how we choose to evaluate our work, including the everyday attributions, inferences, and interpretations. Theories are used to help us make sense of the world, to promote our own interests, protect our egos, project a plan of action into the



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future, narrow the range of information we accept as legitimate, and promote or hinder our own growth and the maturation of our work. Sometimes they even help kids! Sometimes not. You will be familiar with the phrase, “kids survive their parents.” At least most of them. A corollary is that kids survive our theories about them.

What are some signs that something is not quite right about our theories and theorizing?

Karl Popper, the philosopher, was interested in the legitimacy of theories used as explanation. One of his case studies was Freud and the wider family of psychoanalytic theories. He compared the class of justifications of these theories with Einstein’s theories of relativity. There were some really important differences, he noticed. One is that while it was possible to imagine how Einstein’s theories could be disconfirmed, there was no way to do so with Freud. Psychoanalytic theories can accommodate every possible behaviour and consequence, and theorists often did so on an *ad hoc* and *post hoc* basis. That is, they made up explanations on the fly to accommodate all possible cases. No matter how a person behaves, psychoanalytic theory can account for it. If the objects of physics behave in unexpected ways, the theory has to change. In sum, if our theories explain everything, we ought to be suspicious. It is cool, but it is too good to be true. It might also be unethical.

Second, The physicists were quite *critical* when talking about their theories, and the psychoanalysts were often *promoting* their theories. This makes a difference in approach. When we are promoting our theories, we look for evidence for our theories, and we are tempted to ignore other evidence that do not fit our theory. Popper maintained that it never possible to prove any theory, though it is very easy to find evidence in favour of any theory, even in the sciences. Think about the implications of that for a moment. If it is possible in the sciences, it is even easier in child and youth care. To improve our theories we should aim to “falsify” them, said Popper. That is, we should deliberately search for the circumstances in which a theory does not work.

Practically, when theories are offered that are supposed to apply to all types of youthwork, all youth, all ages, all settings, we might want to be a bit skeptical. Even within one sector of the work we ought to be skeptical of comprehensive theories. For (almost) any theory we ought to be able to identify circumstances in which its use



solves problems and circumstances when its use creates problems. Theories, whether interpretive or predictive, must remain open to the lives of actual children and practitioners. They must stand ready to be proven false if they are to do the work we need them to do. A good theory opens up new, interesting questions, and new lines of evaluation and research. A poor theory provides the same answer to every practice challenge, and the answer can often be predicted before any work is done. A poor theory tempts us to “know” we are right before any study is done. Says Popper, a good theory leads to curious and sometimes contradictory results requiring us to revise our theories, in contrast to affirming what we thought we knew.

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Boys Will Be Boys

Liz Laidlaw

My son Sam runs so fast on the carpet that when he inevitably trips, he tumbles and skids, his face literally breaking his fall. Then he laughs and gets up for more, all while nattering a silly running commentary. It's like he's souped up on some high-octane fuel. He is so different from anyone I have ever met, certainly unlike me, or my calm, introspective daughter. And although he has always looked like his dad, I've never seen his father exhibit the type of wildly comical behaviour that Sam does. How



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did he learn to be such a natural ham at this young age? Is this behaviour learned or was he just born this way? The question of nature versus nurture arises.

When Sam was born four years ago, we had no idea what to expect. Our first-born was a stereotypical girl; a quiet watcher who never strayed far and focused on her highly developed fine motor skills. The boy has been a bit of a shock. Although I sometimes have the urge to quash his spirit and shush him, I realize it's only because of my inhibitions and unrealistic expectations. I think our family has a lot to learn from Sam. Wouldn't it be great to go through life so sure of what you want (and equally important, what you don't want), feeling free to let people know exactly how you feel? I'm from the old school of accepting anything people have to offer so as not to offend them, and being seen but not necessarily heard. Sam doesn't believe any of that's necessary, and he may be right.

Since the beginning, Sam's pure self has been in clear view. His needs are always easily expressed and understood. Now that he can speak he has no reservations telling us what he likes or doesn't like. Out of the blue, he will announce to anyone in particular, "I really want a rocket ship", or "I really need that Batman motorcycle". He never gives up asking for things he wants, be it having candy, watching TV or acquiring a new toy. His tenacity is amazing. He'll argue and possibly throw a tantrum when the answer is no, only to bide his time until he can ask again, when he thinks our defenses are weakened. Or better yet, he'll just ask someone else. He has no problem letting total strangers know of his needs. He also has no issues with lying, saying "Daddy said it's okay" when evidently, Daddy didn't. Resourceful, some might say. Alarming, I say.

My son is infatuated with superheroes and has been since before he was two years old. He hasn't watched many on television, as most are too violent. But apparently, his little-boy DNA is built to recognize Spiderman and Superman. Even before he could talk, he would spot their comic-book likeness on posters or boxes of food at the grocery store and squeal with delight. He is happiest with a dishtowel cape clothes-pinned around his neck, chasing bad guys and pretending to fly through the air.

Thoughtful neighbours have handed down Spiderman jean jackets and superhero t-shirts. As considerate parents, we have purchased for him many pajamas and coloring books emblazoned with the mighty idols. The word "sell out" comes to mind. But when he opened his gift of new Buzz Lightyear pajamas last Christmas, the look of



pure joy on his face was addictive and, right or wrong, we do what we can to feed this obsession.

Sam has always been fascinated with guns, and except for a lightsabre (which was a gift) he doesn't have any. This doesn't stop him from creating them out of Lego or cardboard. He used to use his fingers to shoot me with both barrels when he didn't like something I said (usually "no"). I explained how this was inappropriate and that we don't shoot people when we disagree, but we try to use our words. Next, he resorted to raising only his index finger, pointing it at me from behind his back, and pulling his little thumb trigger while making soft shooting noises to express his anger. When he talks about killing bad guys I share my concern and ask him to perhaps capture the bad guys, or maybe just rescue someone instead. I don't like the killing, I say. He rolls his eyes and says, it's just pretend, like I don't understand. And obviously I don't. I didn't interfere in my daughter's imaginary play. I don't remember telling her what her fairy princess or butterfly could or couldn't do.

Sam has always loved singing, usually at the top of his lungs while we're trying to enjoy a meal. My daughter thinks singing must be his hobby. She's convinced he'll be a professional clown when he grows up. Among his first words were "nana-nana-boo-boo". There must be an unwritten law somewhere that little brothers learn this phrase in their first few years of life, and know exactly how to use it to maximum effect on their big sisters. Shortly after this, he began telling me that I smell

Older people sit down and ask, 'What is it?'
but the boy asks, 'What can I do with it?'

Steve Jobs



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like a monkey eating chicken. Thank you very much. His Dad smells like a big blue monkey eating cheese and his sister smells like a monkey eating pizza. This would make him laugh uncontrollably. How did he know this was humorous?

I wonder how much of Sam's behaviour is due to his being a second child and how much is due to our inability as older, busier, more tired parents to pay as much exclusive attention to him as we did his sister. My husband and I watched and diligently recorded our daughter's every breath, step and milestone. We've been present for Sam's firsts too, but they've been acknowledged on the way to soccer practice, swimming lessons, shopping or school. Has he had to ramp things up so we'll notice him? He definitely understands the principle of "any attention is good attention", be it us laughing with (at?) him or screaming at him, it's all the same to him, as long as someone takes notice.

Sam's ability to be the comic and make people pay attention has become a useful tool for him. He is able to employ his special talents when the going gets tough and he gets in trouble. Nothing defuses a situation faster than someone doing an elaborate pratfall off the couch while making funny noises. He also senses when others are in trouble, or when situations are generally tense, and uses his talent for slapstick to change the focus. This allows everyone to have a giggle, take a deep breath and stop taking him- or herself quite so seriously. This is a skill I may not appreciate as much when he is a teenager, but it is also one I wish I had.

So I can't answer the age-old question of nature versus nurture. But if the question is did we assist in the creation of this charming monster, then the answer is, yes, we probably did. However it is happening that he is becoming the person that he is, we are all the richer for being a part of it.

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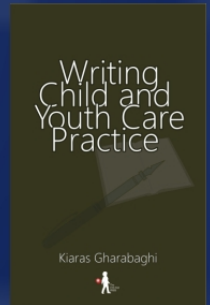
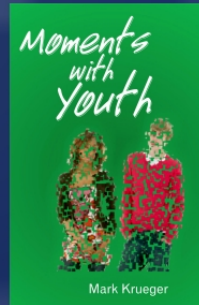
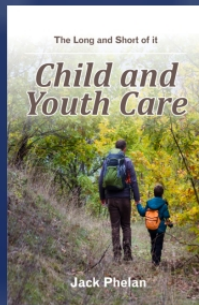
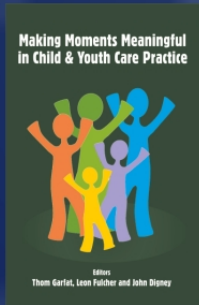
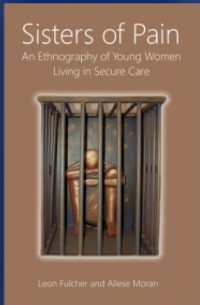
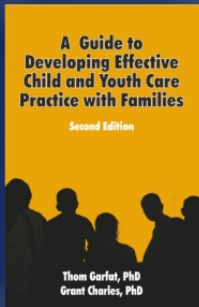
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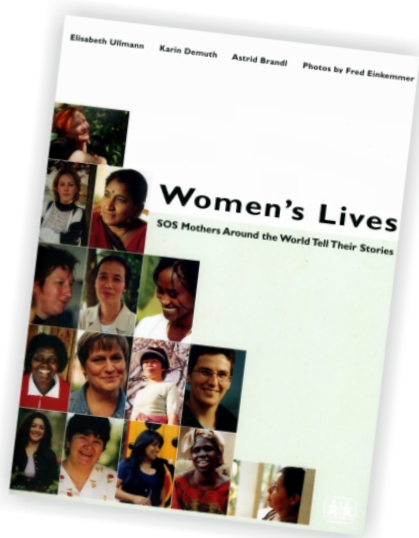


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Women's Lives

SOS Mothers tell their stories

Part 7



Felicia Avila Benitez

Born 23. 8.1954, Paraguay

“By the time I was twenty or twenty-one I wanted to be independent. I didn’t like living at home anymore. I wanted to get out, to work and earn my own money. That was the most important thing for me.”



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Felicia's childhood memories are full of the love and care given by her parents, but also of hard work. Her mother works tirelessly to look after eleven children and also helps her husband in the fields. Her father is strict, especially with the older children and Felicia is the eldest. She wants to continue her education, but the family's economic situation prevents this. Like all her brothers and sisters, she has to work at home on the farm. Today she still enjoys working "with the earth" in the orange plantation or the vegetable garden.

By the time she is twenty-four she cannot bear to stay at home any longer. She has to go away, do a different job and earn money of her own. At this time her aunt is an SOS mother in Hohenau. One day Felicia goes to visit her and have a look at the SOS Children's Village. The hardest thing for her to do is leave her parents. But she goes anyway. She learns a lot about herself during her training and through the years realises how important that is, in order to be able to live with the children.



Felicia's most difficult experience is her illness. She has breast cancer. She carries this knowledge alone for three or four months until she finally decides to tell the children. It is all so much easier from then on.

The Story of Her Life

“That was my dream in those days - to keep on learning.”

My family is very simple. The two sides are that of my mother, Paulina Benitez, and that of my father, Isidro Avila, and I love them both. As far back as I can remember my mother and father looked after me. I could always sense their love towards me. It is a wonderful thing for me to have the two of them. We are eleven brothers and sisters: seven daughters and four sons. It was the same for my parents. My mother was one of twelve and my father was one of eleven. And that's how I grew up, amongst my brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts and cousins. This huge family was very important to me. It is a family of farmers. From when I was small I always worked with my mother and father.

Then I started school and, because the school was a long way away, I lived with my grandparents for a year. But once I reached the second year I walked to school with my sister and the other children from the neighbourhood. It wasn't always easy to get to school, either because of the heat or when it was very cold in winter. For part of the way we had to go through the jungle and we were scared. I can't even tell you what we were scared of. It wasn't of the wild animals. I think it was just because we were on our own. I can remember the cold winters. When temperatures dropped to freezing and the earth was covered in frost, our father used to let us ride the horse to school. Nearly everyone came on horses. We didn't miss a single day.

I finished primary school after six years when I was thirteen. Because we lived in the country, I had no opportunity to continue my education. I can remember the scene when I asked my father if I could carry on at school. He said it wasn't possible, because there were so many of us, but that we would work together on the farm. And so we worked the land together. We had about twenty cows and horses too. I ploughed the land with the horse-drawn plough, milked the animals and took them to the meadows.





Actually, I can do everything on a farm and it makes me happy and contented that I learned how to work the land from my parents.

My mother always told us about God. We would go to church together and pray together at home. The priest came to the village once a month to hold mass. We'd always go there with the horse and cart. We would go to church every Sunday to say a rosary, even if the priest wasn't there. That's how it was in those days. Actually, our father used to talk to us more than our mother did. I am the eldest and I think I'm my father's favourite daughter. I find it hard to break away from my parents. I know that it isn't good to depend on them so much, but I just have a very strong tie to them.

When I was fourteen or fifteen my parents used to take us to fiestas. I can remember the parish fiesta best. That is a big thing where I come from. First of all you go to mass and then there's a big procession. When I was eighteen we started to go out in the evenings. We went to dances. At first my parents would always come with



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us, but later they didn't anymore. It would be midnight or one in the morning and my father would say that we had to go home, but I never wanted to go.

By the time I was twenty or twenty-one I wanted to be independent. I didn't like just being at home. I wanted to get out, to work and earn my own money. That was the most important thing for me. I was twenty-four when my aunt, who was an SOS mother here, said to me, "Come with me and I'll show you the village." I can remember all the details. It was an August day and I came to Hohenau all on my own. I went to the SOS Children's Village and looked for my aunt's house. I stayed with her for two days. Then they told me that I could come back in December, but I wanted to stay straight away. I didn't want to leave at all. In the end they sent me a message and I came back on the 7th of November, 1978.

What did your mother give you on your way? What binds the two of you?

My mother was incredibly industrious and hard-working. I always thought that eleven children were much too much work for her. As I grew older I admired her for it. She also helped our father on the farm. She had to do the housework and look after the children, but she still managed to be out in the fields or with the animals too. I never once saw them arguing. That's a feeling that sits deep inside of me and makes me happy. They are both such simple and unassuming people but they fought and worked together.

Could you tell us something about your grandmother?

When she came to visit us we'd always see her coming from afar and shout, "Grandmother is coming!" The whole family went to visit her with the horse and cart every Sunday. That was lovely. She had a sewing machine and made clothes for all of us, even the boys. Later an aunt used to do that for us. My grandmother had long hair, tied together in a bun at the back. She died when she was forty-two. She was very young. She was an impetuous woman who was happy, funny and had a lot of good ideas. I can remember when I was about eight or nine and was visiting her. She suddenly grabbed my grandfather around the waist and started to dance with him. He was embarrassed, though, and ran out to the fields. That's the way she was.



I would like to ask you something else about your schooldays: what was your favourite subject and did you know what job you wanted to do?

We never thought about the future. It was the present that was important. After I'd finished the sixth year I would dearly have liked to stay. That was my dream – to keep on learning. But, like my father said, it wasn't possible. I liked dancing best, but the problem was that my father would never let me go to parties. I started to play football in the last year of school. I was a good footballer and even though we played together with the boys, they made me the goalkeeper, because I was already quite tall then.

Is there a woman outside of your family that you admire?

I know a lot about the life of Mary. It gives me a sense of security when I think of what she went through with her



twelve-year-old son, Jesus. I can't really explain it, but she is a source of strength and inspiration for me. It was my father who said to me, "You always have to ask the Virgin Mary to make your life a good one." That is deep in my heart. Now I know that he said that out of love. I can understand it now, because I'm living it. The picture of the Virgin Mary is very important to me because, for some reason, God chose her to be the mother of Jesus. That is something quite phenomenal and that's how I want to bring up my children.

What are your particular strengths and talents?

I think I have the gift to get on well with everybody. If I have a problem with somebody, I will go to them and we'll talk about it. I don't know whether that is a talent or a virtue, but I like that. There are a lot of problems in the SOS Children's Village and it's not always easy. You need to have a lot of understanding and patience. You have to use your head and your common sense, both with your family and also with other people in the village.

What do you like to do in your free time?

I like music, reading, visiting people and going for walks with friends. When I drive around I always go and look at things in detail. So far I've only got as far as Asunción, but I would like to travel further and see more new things. I also like to go out to eat or to dance.

Motivation for Her Choice of Profession

"I always thought that if there were children like this, there had to be people for these children."

My main motive was that I wanted to leave home. I hadn't learned a trade but wanted to earn money and to be somebody. Nothing would have changed on the farm at home. I also wanted to be able to help my family and I still do that today with what I earn. I wanted to work and had the idea that I wanted to work in a household with children. Then I found out that these children didn't have any parents. As soon as I





heard the word “orphan”, I felt something. This word moved me. That was even before I knew about the SOS Children’s Village.

Then I came here for two days. There were an SOS mother, an SOS aunt and four children in the house where I was staying. I was only there for a short time but I saw what a family house with children was like. I went home with this knowledge. That was in August. They got in touch with me in November of the same year. The SOS aunt who had been working in that house had left and the SOS mother had a problem with her back. She had a baby in the house, Andres, and because of this baby she urgently needed help. I started as a helper and did the washing and cleaning and looked after the baby. When the SOS mother went into hospital for an operation I stayed in charge of the house for the whole time she was away. It was almost a year. Then she came back and I was the SOS aunt again.



I wanted to be an SOS mother, though, and to have my own family. I had been here for almost two years and thought that I was ready to take on a family of my own. After a while I was told that five new children were arriving in the village and I gladly accepted. The house that we live in now wasn't quite finished then. We started to clean because the children were supposed to arrive any day and I wanted to have the house ready for them. We went shopping and bought everything we needed: an oven, cutlery and crockery and everything else. I can remember it clearly because I couldn't wait for the children to arrive. They came on the 18th of July. There were two girls and three boys. The youngest girl was nineteen months and the oldest boy was ten years old.

How did your family react to you wanting to be an SOS mother?

I didn't tell them at first. I was just employed as an SOS aunt. I made the decision to become an SOS mother myself. When I was told that I would be allowed to take on these five children, I went home and told my parents. They were pleased and happy about it. I didn't have the problem in my family that my parents were against it, but I know it was the case for some of my colleagues. Some of my relatives asked, "Why are you doing it? You're too young. Those are other peoples' children. You should have a family of your own." It's not pleasant if you have to listen to all of that. I always thought that if there were children like this, there had to be people for these children. And I always saw myself as being one of these people. That's why I was sure that everything would be all right and that nothing would go wrong. For as long as God lets me live, I won't have to worry about it. I can sense that.

Did you ever think of starting a family of your own?

I did think about what it would be like to have a family of my own, but I would have had very high expectations of my husband. He would have had to be an extremely good man. My way of life is such that I couldn't have considered a short-term relationship. This attitude has helped me because I can fulfil the demand for permanence here in the SOS Children's Village. I didn't want to have a child without a father either. Those were my demands, and the older you get the more demanding you become, so eventually I gave up the idea. Actually, that's what gave me the strength to



find what I needed here. The permanence is wonderful even if it's not easy. You have to battle a lot, but it is also beautiful. I'm sure that it's good for me. It is my life and it is only here that I have been able to become myself.

Experiences as an SOS Mother

"I have to know what my role is and what I am, for that child."

Of course, I have had all sorts of experiences. There was a lot that I didn't yet understand when I started here. But that is the thing about experience - every year you understand more. I had to learn the most when the first children arrived. It was much simpler with the ones who came later because I had already gained some experience. I'd like to tell you a little story about that: the youngest, Raquel, came when she was nineteen months old and she could just about sit up on her own. She was very



ill. She had diarrhoea, bronchitis, a constant fever and she was malnourished. I had to take her to the doctor's all the time. It was a beautiful moment when she started walking. You see that all the worries you have had and all that you have done for this child have had an affect. Then comes school and first communion and you can see how they progress. The same was true for all five children I began with: Raquel, Victor, Rafael, Maria Isabel and Juan Carlos. These five had every problem imaginable. After about two years I was given two more children. The baby was seven months and Mirta eight years old. And then there were seven.

Juan Carlos went to the youth home in Asunción when he was fourteen. That wasn't a pleasant time for him. He suffered terribly. He never said as much, but it was difficult for him to leave his brothers and sisters. Juan Carlos was the eldest and was like a mother to his brothers and sisters before they came to the SOS Children's Village. They were totally fixated on him and only slowly adapted to me as their SOS mother. I can remember that, to begin with, Victor would often sit up in his sleep and call for Juan Carlos. That moved me. That was, after all, his big brother and I was still a stranger. You have to see something like that to be able to understand it. That is something deep and meaningful and it saps your strength. I am a stranger to the child when he arrives and I have to understand that and be prepared for it to take a while, before the child starts to trust me. I have to know what my role is and what I am, for that child. That was very difficult for me in the beginning and I thought a lot about it. A child who has lost somebody, or even worse, been abandoned, arrives with a huge emptiness. What can I give that child? How can I fill that gap? At some stage I eventually understood that I could only fill the void by giving the child exactly what he needed. You have to make sacrifices and you need a lot of patience. You need understanding, support and you need to listen. You just have to be at the child's side all the time. That's what children need.

And then they grow up. Previously, I used to think that they were small then, but that once they got bigger they wouldn't cause me as much work. I soon learned that that was far from being the case! They still need you when they're older and some of them need you even more. You always have to make sure that you're fair. Even if it's just a sweet, they all want to have one, not just the little ones but the big ones too. If I bring back cornbread, I have to share it out. If I bake a cake and a slice is left over, I have to divide it up amongst them all. They want it that way. And if I go anywhere, they



all want to come with me. I take one with me one time and another the next and so on. I didn't take these little things so seriously in the early days, but it's very important to the children.



Adan is eleven years old and already takes the bus to Encarnación on his own. I give him money and a list and say to him, "Off you go. There's no rush. You don't have to be frightened. You will understand it and if you don't know what to do, just ask somebody." He buys what he needs and comes home again and has done everything well. Gladys is also eleven and takes the bus to the supermarket on her own. I want them to be independent, but it still costs me a lot to let them do something like that on their own. I always used to say, "You're too young. You can't do that." Now I understand that you have to give them a feeling of security when they are small, that they can do things on their own. Sonia is learning to be a hairdresser after school but

she's afraid to cut my hair. I said to her, "Here are the scissors and now my hair is all yours. We'll sit down in front of the mirror and you can get on with it."

Gabriela is fourteen and she's difficult. She wants to be out and about with her friends. She goes to the radio studio, talks to the journalists and sends out greetings to her friends. She's not afraid of speaking. Sometimes I have to get into the car to go and find her. Then I ask her, "Why do you do that? And in the dark? That's not on!" She tells me though, that she's not frightened. Well, all right, she's at that age now. I still worry about her though. I worry about her most of all. You have to be prepared to give a lot for each child. You don't sleep well during the siesta or at night. You spend the whole time worrying about what she's doing or where she is and what's happening to her. It's more than a job, it's a vocation. You have to be brave, strong and understanding. I just tell myself, "This is what I am doing and this is what I will continue to do." Funnily enough Gabriela came to me as a new-born baby. She was just one day old. I thought that at least I could bring this child up in my own way and now she's the one who causes me the most worries!

After the bigger children had left, I still had four children: Gabriela, Gustavo, Sonia and Adan. A month hadn't even passed when four more came: Juanita, Griselda, Fredi and Gladys. They are natural siblings. A year later, Elvira came to us. She was sixteen at the time. She has a crooked spine and needs a lot of love. She had a terrible crisis, because her SOS mother had left. She is so fragile, so gentle and needs so much support. Elvira isn't demanding and that's why it's important to be especially loving to her and to spoil her. Everybody likes that, of course, just as I like it when somebody looks after me. Elvira is nineteen now and is doing two school years in one at the secondary school so that she can finish her "A" levels this year.

When natural siblings arrive together it makes for far greater stability. It's more difficult if a child arrives on his own like Adan did. His mother brought him here and just said she couldn't cope with the child. He was four months old. Now he's eleven and he wants to get to know his mother. However, she has never returned and we haven't been able to find her. He can feel that the others are real brothers and sisters and that he doesn't have any real ones. Gabriela also arrived alone and perhaps that's why she's so difficult now. Sonia was also a single child just like Gustavo who is disabled. I can sense that, in my role as SOS mother. I can sense when the children are missing something. I don't have to say anything to anybody, but I have to be able to feel





with them. I have to approach them with a lot of tact and sensitivity. I can't just say to the child, "That's why you're like that." But I have to know and I have to be able to deal with it. Sometimes you also hear them talking and thinking about this subject amongst themselves.

Here in Paraguay we celebrate the festival of the fifteen-year-olds. It is very important for the girls. It's almost as important as a wedding. It starts with a church service and then there are cakes and a dance. I have to prepare everything just like the girls have imagined it to be. They trust me to organise this party and that I will be proud of them. I love to dedicate myself to the children. If it were only a matter of being present it wouldn't work. It's true that we are paid and paid well, but that can't be the most important thing. You have to dedicate yourself to this task with all your might, because it is an enormous and difficult task. And you have to get things straight with yourself otherwise I don't know how it would work. There's always one problem



or another and if I'm not spiritually prepared for it then I get depressed. That's why I think that the spiritual basis is very important if I want to be able to take on this task. That's how I live and it's deep inside me. Apart from that, I also need the help of the other SOS mothers, the SOS aunts, the village director and the other co-workers, especially if I have a lot of children. They help me, but I have to tell them when I need help, otherwise how are they supposed to know?

How would you describe your working relationship with the village director?

He is the director and guides everything. But at the end of the day, it comes down to me as the SOS mother. The children under this roof have been entrusted to my care and I have to see everything, whether they be good things or sad things. I am also the one who will turn to the village director, but I can't expect him to solve the problems in my house. Perhaps he can't even fully understand, because it's me who spends day and night with the children. He visits us regularly and I tell him a lot about the children and the youths so that he knows what's going on in my house. And sometimes when I don't know how to carry on on my own, he helps me to solve problems with the children.

In general, what is your working relationship with the SOS aunt like?

When a new SOS aunt starts, first of all we talk about her tasks. She watches how I deal with the children. She sees and hears a lot and learns at the same time. If she does something wrong, I tell her that she should ask me. I am responsible for these children and so she should ask me. She should also tell me if there's anything I do that annoys her or distracts her. That's the only way that we can achieve a good result together. A lot of people don't like to criticise, but I'd rather come straight out with it and prefer it if somebody tells me too. We all have the same task and that is the children.

Have you, as a person, changed since you have been working as an SOS mother?

The time at the "Mothers' School" particularly changed me. There we learned to understand ourselves better. It was only then that I could build up a relationship



towards the role that I am playing today. It also helped me to be able to develop better relationships with the people with whom I'm living. I think that it is called the "Centro de Formación" because it "forms" us as people. We need to get to know ourselves better in a lot of aspects. We have to know what has happened to us in our lives, what we have in ourselves, and that brings changes with it. You can only learn that from really competent people. However, you are formed by all the people you come into contact with. That, of course, includes the children. When I realise how they are developing for the better, it makes me happy. They make me stronger and more stable. They give everything a permanence. I think I am becoming more secure and stable myself by living with these children.

I'm interested in the story about the car. I've been keeping an eye out and there aren't many women drivers in Paraguay.

I told the first SOS mother to have a car here that I also wanted to get one and to learn to drive. It looked so easy! So, I bought a car, even though I'd never been behind the wheel before. My colleague brought the car here and asked me if I really dared drive it. "Of course!" I replied. We drove around the football field. She set everything up for me and then let me take over the steering. Off I drove - one bend and then another and that was it. I still didn't know that there were brakes, a clutch, gears or even lights! I didn't even know how to start the car and when I braked, I did it with a jerk. I got quite a fright. But I simply had to learn how. The SOS mother and the village director were very patient with me and I slowly gained more confidence. It was a big event for me the first time I drove home on my own. Everybody was happy and I was the only one who was worried, because I had to drive back here again! My shoulders and neck hurt terribly the next day from all that driving. After all, I was already over forty at the time, but I managed to learn. It's possible to do and you can overcome your fear.

What sort of contacts do you have outside the SOS Children's Village?

Mostly I am in contact with the parents of my children's school colleagues. I've made a few good friends there. My children are at three different schools and each of them has a Parent Teacher Association where we all work together. We organise





parties. We collect money and it is used for the children's end-of-term trips. We visit each other and the children too, of course. They should bring their friends home and their friends should feel at home here. I like knowing lots of people. I'm on the parish council and I also know a lot of people in the village I come from. These days I don't drive there as often as I used to and I don't stay for as long either because I want to get back to my children. I always go to the parish festival, though, because my entire family gathers for that. I'm friendly with the SOS mothers in Asunción and in the Argentinean SOS Children's Village Obera I have three close friends. We all did the course together. I have friends everywhere and most of them admire me for my work. There are a few who do not agree with it. Not everybody can understand it.

What meaning does the term “village community” have for you?

It's the same as a neighbourhood in a town. My closest neighbours are the ones I get on best with. If we lived outside the SOS Children's Village the problem would be that my neighbours wouldn't be able to understand me, because they wouldn't know what my situation is. I would have to be particularly careful of how I lived my life, because people keep a close watch on you. They would say, “She does this and that



because they aren't her real children." They'd also watch out to see if I had any contact with men. Now though, more and more people are getting to know the village and they are not as prejudiced as they used to be. They take part in celebrations, play football and are involved in other groups too.

Could you describe your best and hardest moments in the SOS Children's Village?

The hardest thing for me was when I discovered I had cancer. I just couldn't tell the children. I couldn't tell anybody. That was terrible. I was so scared and thought it wouldn't help anyway. Three or four months passed before I decided, one morning, that I had to tell the children. It was all much better after that. Even my illness. There were a lot of people who supported me and that gave me the courage to continue with the treatment and just to carry on. That was the hardest thing, but it's passed now.

There have been so many beautiful moments, but perhaps the best was when Gabriela came to me as a baby. I'd never had a baby in the family before. I had to go to Asunción to collect her. She was a small, round baby. I spent the night with her and, of course, didn't get a wink of sleep. I got the bus back with her the next day. I wondered, "How is this going to work?" but the lady sitting next to me offered her help and everyone was waiting for me in Encarnación.

Do you have any idea when you will retire?

There's time until I'm sixty. I can still work and do a lot. It's definitely not going to be easy leaving here. These children will all be big by then, but in the meantime I'll probably get another group of three or four new children. The children aren't too impressed when their SOS mother has grey hair. When I go to the parents' evenings Adan says, "Please dye your hair!" He wants his mummy to be pretty when she comes to the school and so you have to make a bit of an effort.

When they were talking about a home for retired SOS mothers, it all seemed too far off for me. Later on, my sister and I bought a plot of land in Encarnación and built a house there. It's not far from the SOS Children's Village or the village I come from. We'll both live there. It is comforting to have something of your own and makes me



feel secure. I spend my days off and my holidays there. It is a house with two bedrooms, a living room, a kitchen and a bathroom.

The Children in Her Care

“All the children know their roots and their families and I talk to them about them.”

I often ask them, “What do you want to be? What would you enjoy?” Some have already got ideas and others haven’t. In that case I tell them, “It doesn’t matter, but think about it. There are so many possibilities.” It will be difficult for Gustavo who is a special child. He is seventeen and knows exactly that he can’t do the same as the others. Sometimes he takes advantage of that and says, “I can’t do that.” Then I tell him, “Yes, of course you can.” I get on so well with him, but who will look after him later on? It will be difficult for him leaving here, but we have to think of the future. He is disabled, but he is very loving and a good person. The others accept that too. I have the following plan: one of the youths, Crescencio, is studying at the agricultural college and later he would like to have his own farm. He would like to take Gustavo with him. I very much hope



that that works out, because then he will be with somebody he has known since he was little and who knows him too. We shall see what happens. As the children grow up they change and so do their wishes and visions for the future. At the moment it's only basketball and dancing that are important!

Are the children in touch with their own families?

All the children know their roots and their families and I talk to them about them. I tell them where they come from, as far as I know myself. I keep having to remind them that they still have a mother or grandparents, or that it isn't their fault that their father has abandoned them. I never speak badly of their families, because everybody would like to see their roots undamaged. They still love their father even if he has left them.

Sonia has a mother who sometimes visits her. When Sonia asked who her father was, her mother told her it was none of her business. I didn't like that and so I had a word with her. Now we know that there's an older sister and a father. We know where they live and want to go there with the village director. She only recently found out the whole story and it's not a pleasant one.

Gustavo met his father when he was thirteen. If he hears me speaking to the others about their real families, he asks, "When are you going to take me to see my father?" You'd think that he wouldn't understand, but he does. We have been to visit his father. Once when we were there one of his little cousins gave him a toy. He still has it and tells everybody that it was a present from a cousin.

Fredi, in particular, often asks me if he can meet his family. I take him in the car. His father left the family and his mother has mental problems. She tells all sorts of fantastic stories about how she will get married and have lots of money. I explain to Fredi that he has to understand his mother and that not everything she tells is really as it is.

We took Gabriela to see her mother about a year ago. She didn't really want to go, and it didn't turn out as I'd imagined. There's a deep rift between them. That hurt me. I can't understand why Gabriela rejects her mother like that. Now she even uses her father's surname, although she doesn't know him at all. She's fourteen and I hope she will be able to deal with it.



To My Colleagues Around the World

Everything that I have experienced has been valuable and made sense to me. My message is that you have to be spiritually at one with yourself and you have to feel at ease. You have to welcome God into your heart so that He will help you. You have to tell Him,



“This is my strength and with Your help I can do it.” I have to want it and then He will help me. I have experienced it and I am living it. It is something great and beautiful. And when I see the fruit it carries, I am fulfilled. You cannot always see these fruits but you cannot give up because of that. You have to carry on fighting. That is exactly where even more demands are made upon me, to look after that child and that person. Even when you have been unsuccessful, you have to make sure that things continue. If a person walks, he will often trip on a stone. You have to pick yourself up and carry on. I thank God for the last twenty years, because I have had the opportunity to give a lot. He gives me the chance and I have to take advantage of it and give of myself too. That has made me very happy.

Felicia on the Situation of Women in Paraguay

I can see how women are used by men and how men take the leading role. I can hear it and see it. Even the children that come to me tell me what is going on in their families. There is still a lot of violence towards women, both physical and psychological. Men do not take women seriously even though they are their partners for life.

I do not understand why women do not do anything about this. Why do they have to put up with being treated like this? I think it has something to do with the fact that they are lacking a good education. There are women in Paraguay, who have taken up



the place in society that is due to them, but it is difficult in rural areas. It will probably remain the same for a long time, if not forever. If a woman does not defend herself she will have a bad time. She has to try to get out of this situation on her own and stand up for her own interests.

Women in Paraguay work as teachers or nurses. There are women doctors and business owners but not many. A woman, who has no education, will always be treated badly. Especially domestic staff get taken advantage of.

There are women's groups who have organised themselves to help others. We also set up a group in the SOS Children's Village to help a woman who had been widowed. She had six children and did not have a proper house. We gave her money so that she could improve the house and buy groceries. We also helped her to get out of her situation in other ways. The project started in the International Year of the Family. We have continued it and even now two or three of the SOS mothers organise an aid activity together.

The family is the starting point for everything in a woman's life. The most important things are to be married and to have a family. But still more important is to have a child, even if you are not married.

SOS Children's Village Work in Paraguay

In 1973, three years after the National Association was founded, the first SOS Children's Village in Paraguay was opened in Hohenau. Construction started on a second village in the capital of Asunción in 1981 and SOS Children's Village San Ignacio followed in 1988. SOS Children's Village Panambí was opened in 1993 and is a facility for disabled children. SOS Children's Village Luque was officially opened in 1999 and the newest SOS Children's Village so far was built in Belén, in the north of the country in 2002. In 4 SOS Social Centres families at risk of breaking down get support. SOS Children's Villages works directly with families and communities to empower them to effectively protect and care for their children and to prevent separation, in cooperation with local authorities and other service providers.

Existing SOS Children's Village Facilities:

6 SOS Children's Villages, 6 SOS Youth Facilities, 4 SOS Social Centres, 1 SOS Vocational Training Centre





Rules of Engagement

Nils Ling

I think there should be a Geneva Convention for common household arguments. It makes sense. They have strict rules for how wars should be fought, and major wars only happen – what? – once a month. But every day, there are couples all over the world, bickering away without any kind of set rules. Chaos. We, as a species, should have evolved past this.

As a public service – and as a person who has been on the losing end of my share of spats – I have a few suggestions along these lines. We'll call this “Ling’s Rules of Household Arguments.”

Rule Number One: arguments have to be about only one thing at a time. I hate it when an argument starts off about how I never put my boxers in the laundry hamper, then begins mutating and growing. First it’s boxers, then it’s about how I’m generally thoughtless and inconsiderate.

From there, it can go anywhere – “thoughtless and inconsiderate” is sort of a Central Clearing House for household quarrels, with connecting links to just about every skeleton that ever rattled around in the relationship’s closet. I say, if you’re talking dirty boxers, stay with dirty boxers.

Rule Number Two: no mothers. You don’t see George W. Bush talking about Saddam Hussein’s mother. I don’t recall any famous Winston Churchill speeches where he mentions “blood, sweat, toil, and tears - oh, and by the way, Mrs. Hitler is no prize...” It doesn’t happen because everybody knows it’s just not fair. So we should leave mothers out of household fights completely. Or at least save them as a last desperate resort.

Rule Number Three: no comparing your spouse to other people’s spouses. I’m sure there are a lot of guys out there who buy their wife roses for just no reason at all, who make dinners and do the dishes and always remember to put the seat down. But for every one of them, there are a dozen others who sit in front of the TV and burp and end up banging on the front door of a flower shop at midnight the day before their 25th wedding anniversary. Trust me – with guys like us, you’re better off if you remember to leave the seat up. Not that we would notice.

Rule Number Four: no arguing with anyone under the influence of alcohol, drugs, etc. There’s not much point, anyway. Even if they do understand the topic, they can’t stick to it. Better to hold off and get them later. There are very few things more satisfying than starting a huge argument with someone who has a deathly hangover. Or so I’m told.

Rule Number Five: the last and most important rule – accept victory with grace. It’s bad enough saying “I’m sorry” without getting, “Well, you should be, you know I told you yadda yadda ...” The proper response to “I’m sorry” is to throw your arms around your spouse while the camera pans up and the music swells. Or at the very least to grunt and move on.

So, okay, I’m not the Marquis of Queensbury. But better a few common-sense rules than the out-and-out free-for-all that goes on in most households. I think if we all adopted this simple code, our fights would be shorter, less nasty, and end far more happily.

I, for one, plan to implement Ling’s Rules in our household. Right after I check with my wife.

Maybe I better pick up my boxers first.



MAY 2016

Lake Waikaremoana, New Zealand

Kia Ora Everyone! Warm greetings from Lake Waikaremoana! We had opportunity to share this special place last week with our son and his family – including grandsons Luke (5) and

Harley (3) visiting from Auckland. It was a real 'life in the city' meets 'life in rural back blocks' experience! The weather turned on a sparkler for the first week of school holidays and we spent three days on the Lake. I thought I might share some thoughts about boating and water sport safety that came up, as well as a few thoughts about life skill learning opportunities that get passed on through generations.

It was important to start by acknowledging *The Children of the Mist* – the Ngai Tuhoë peoples – for whom Lake Waikaremoana represents the tears of their ancestors. We acknowledged the Mist Maiden – *Hinepukohurangi* – as she lifted up from the Lake, returning to the Celestial Realm until her next visitation. Water sports isn't just about getting in or on the water and doing stuff! Too many children and young people here are drowned – young adolescent males especially – who don't stop to think about 'The Waters' into



Hinepukohurangi, The Mist Maiden, Rising Up From Lake Waikaremoana



Learning About Water Safety Begins Very Early



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Picnic Stop at Piripi Bay below Panekiri overlooking Lake Waikaremoana

which they jump, especially whilst on holiday, after alcohol or a dare.

Because New Zealand is an island, swimming is part of the primary school curriculum and virtually every primary school in the country has a basic swimming pool. Much attention is given through the media during summertime about using life jackets, and actually wearing them on a boat at all times.

Thinking about 'the Waters' in

which we engage in boating and water sports activities means learning something about the geography, depth and water conditions into which we engage in recreational activities. Wind is a major factor that is frequently overlooked. Wind direction and speed are closely related to waves and dangerous conditions for many types of water craft! Paying continuing attention to current weather reports is essential. Noticing – that core child and youth care skill – is vitally important to water safety. If Meerkats were water creatures, they'd be good life guard role models!

You don't require a lot of flash gear in order to have fun times near the water. A basic waterproof sheet and what we call 'a travelling rug' or blanket, with a thermos or plastic bottle with juice, a bag with a few basics to eat – sunscreen and a book. Try seeking out opportunities for hanging out together and puttering around without reliance on internet gadgetry. Just be together in nature.



Family Picnics Can Happen Anywhere If We Want To Have One!



An Inter-Generational Introduction to Trout Fishing



Closely associated with water safety, recreational fishing is another a fun activity with children. I never experienced early socialization around ice fishing, as Canadians like Garth Goodwin will have learned growing up in Manitoba. It's just too cold for me! I'm more of a fair weather angler and prefer fishing around the edge of a remote unspoiled Lake to most anything else. I share that passion with others, and this was my first opportunity to share it with grandchildren Luke and Harley.

Two moments were memorable from our short fishing excursion. The first came almost immediately after putting the fly lines out and a big trout made a strike on young Luke's fly! Both the shaking of the rod tip and the whirring of the reel screaming out nearly threw our lad into a spin, only holding on with the help of his father before everything stopped – and the fish was gone. The other moment was catching a small trout and Luke helping to net it, touch it, and then release it to grow bigger.

So what does all this have to do with day to day child and youth care work? Well, for a start,

health and safety for children or young people is a paramount concern. We need to be ever thinking and rethinking, and role modelling safe boating and recreational activities near and on water. Live safety!

Remember, water safety isn't about a long list of 'don'ts'. Safety around water is a life choice for fun!



Learning the Catch and Release Principle Fishing



Packing up the Picnic Site and Preparing for the Boat Ride to Home Bay



The Captain and Captain's Apprentice!



endnotes

Much education today is monumentally ineffective. All too often we are giving young people cut flowers when we should be teaching them to grow their own plants.

John W. Gardner

You can only be young once. But you can always be immature.

Dave Barry

Age is foolish and forgetful when it underestimates youth.

J. K. Rowling



"Just give me the broad strokes."

It takes a long time to become young.

Pablo Picasso

Young people are fitter to invent than to judge; fitter for execution than for counsel; and more fit for new projects than for settled business.

Francis Bacon

No one who is young is ever going to be old.
John Steinbeck

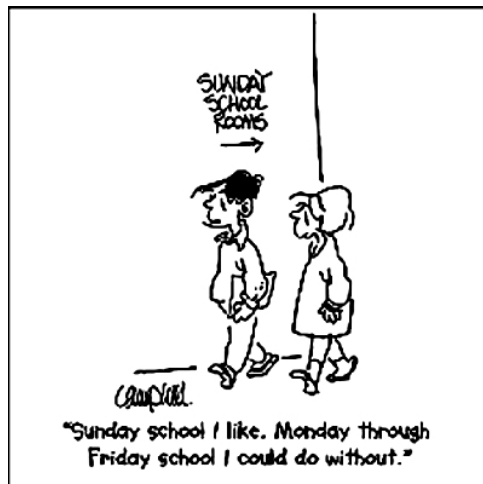
You're only as young as the last time you changed your mind.
Timothy Leary

A lot of 18-year-olds are like old men. They think they've seen everything.
Ben Folds

In youth we learn; in age we understand.
Marie Von Ebner-Eschenbach

Somewhere, something incredible is waiting to be known.
Carl Sagan

One of the things I learned when I was negotiating was that until I changed myself, I could not change others.
Nelson Mandela



information

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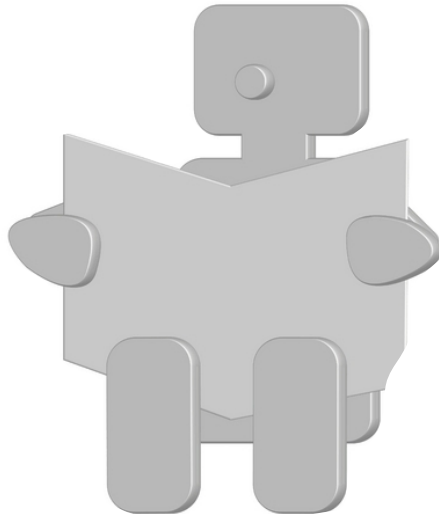
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