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with Children and Young People

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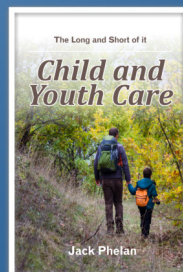
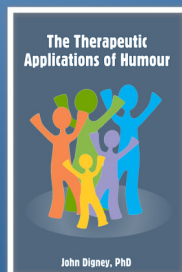
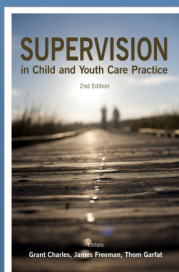
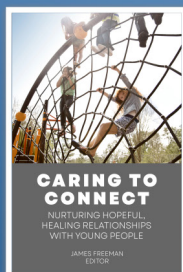
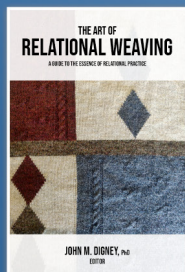
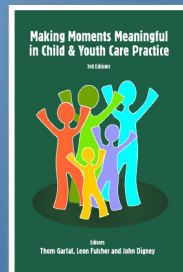
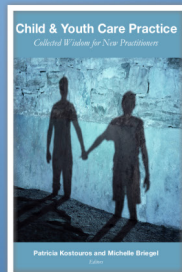
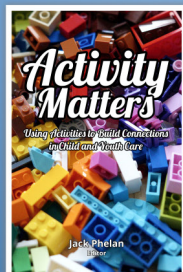
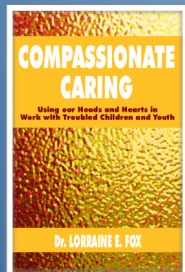
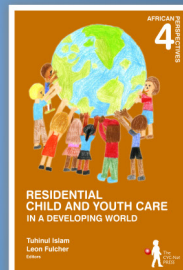
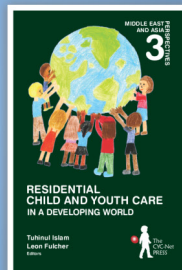
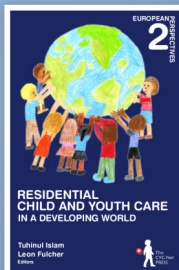
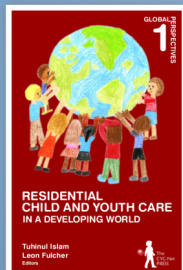
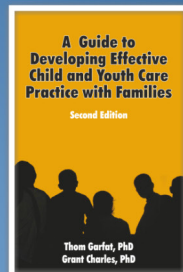
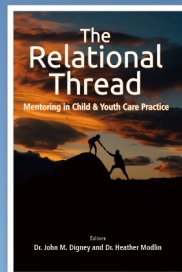
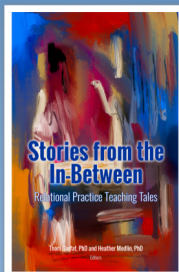
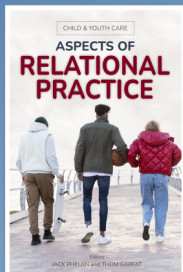
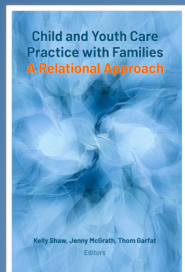


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Editorial Comment

Difficult Kids?

Martin Stabrey

Walk into any residential program, or school, or talk with family members, and the conversation at some point will veer towards how the complexity of children's behaviour has skyrocketed, how they've become more 'difficult'. And to be fair, on the surface the observations might seem fair. But have children really become more 'difficult' than they were in previous generations?

Today's CYC practitioners navigate a landscape consumed by the relentless pressure of digital environments, economic anxiety, and ever-increasing mental health challenges. What's undeniable is that the context of caring for children (whether at home or in care) has become exponentially harder to sustain. This is then lazily passed off as children having become more difficult than they previously were.

Twenty years ago, CYC practice was heavily steeped in behaviour management. Today, CYC practice rightfully demands trauma-informed, relational practice. The work is no longer about compliance; it seeks connection, emotional co-regulation, to practice relationally. This shift has been necessary, but it also requires more emotional labour from



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practitioners, and parents. Establishing relational safety demands time, consistency, and a sustained presence — resources that are increasingly restricted by administrative red tape, stringent risk assessments, and unpredictable care placements.

And inevitably it's the children who carry the weight of stressed support structures. With more families pushed to the brink, the youth who enter care are understandably defensive and reluctant to form new relationships for fear of being hurt all over again. They are simply responding to the instability and adversity of their environmental experiences. And all this while CYC professionals face increased funding challenges, overwhelming duty rosters, and emotional exhaustion. We are attempting to provide relational safety within systems that are themselves structurally under ever-increasing strain.

We must resist the popular narrative that today's youth are inherently more defiant, resistant, 'difficult'. Their needs haven't changed. We're not suddenly dealing with a 'harder' generation of kids. They still want to belong, be trusted, and be socially connected. The challenge now is fighting for the structural resources and systemic stability required to actually practice the relational care that children deserve.

MARTIN STABREY is managing editor of *CYC-Online*. He is a product of the South African residential care system, having grown up at St. John's Hostel, Cape Town. He still lives in Cape Town with his wife, Helen, and their two children, Kirsten and Tamara.



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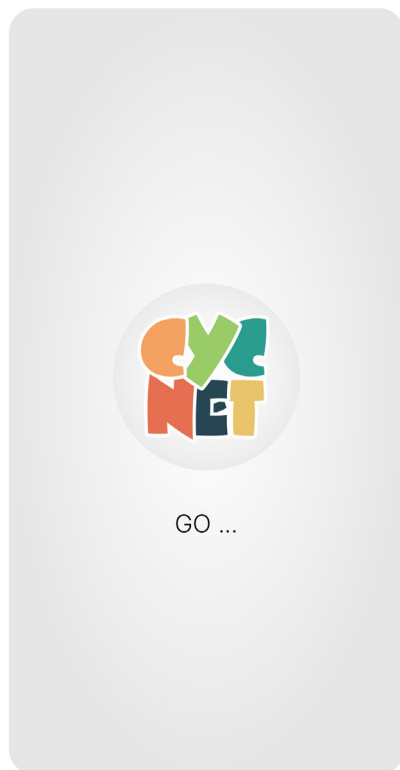


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Growing Our Young in Cultures of Respect

Martin Brokenleg

Cultures exist so groups can function harmoniously and socialize the young. What is the state of contemporary culture and its approach to children?

The Wisdom of the Buffalo

When we Lakota came to live in this world, we survived only because of the help of the *Pte Oyate*, The Female Buffalo Nation. She supplied everything we needed to live in this world. For many reasons, we use a buffalo skull in the center of our ceremonial areas and feature this in our art.

When under threat, buffalo organize themselves into a protective formation most likely to guarantee the survival of the herd. Bulls form the outside perimeter of the protecting circle. They are the strongest ones in the herd and, as males, they are not the most necessary for the herd to survive. Inside that perimeter is the circle of buffalo cows. They are the next strongest members of the herd. As adult females, they are next in importance for herd survival so they are protected by the bulls. Should the attacker get past the males, then the females will still be present to protect that which is the most necessary for the survival of the herd—the young, the buffalo calves.



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When danger arises, the herd encircles the young since they are the future of the herd. The major task of the adult buffalo is to protect the young by enveloping them with care and protection. If the young survive, the herd will continue. Are we human beings living in the 21st century this wise? Without any perceived communication, the buffalo herd uses its cultural behavior to respond to a threat. Animals have cultural patterns as do communities of humans.

Cultural Wisdom

Consider the state of our contemporary culture and its attitudes toward children. I have developed this working definition of culture:

A culture is a pattern of group behavior exemplified in thought, speech, actions, and artifacts in a form that can be taught and learned.

Culture defined in this way can be applied to the ethnic culture of any community. The definition can also explain the differences between youth culture and adult culture. This definition applies to sub-cultures formed around interests such as those who ride motorcycles or those who follow soccer. We can even use this framework of culture to explore gender differences in a community. Each gender may have distinctive patterns that define behavior and values. Of particular importance is the culture we provide for children in our own time.

Cultural forces often function unconsciously, below our level of awareness. Culture is a powerful controlling influence even when we are unaware that it is present. Consequently, we must be culturally conscious if we are going to understand its power and make use of it in intentional ways.



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Consider this example: When you get on an elevator, which direction are you supposed to face? Probably no one has ever given you specific instructions on which direction to face but you know the appropriate direction. Should you doubt the power of cultural teachings, sometime when you are in a place where no one knows you, get on an elevator and face everyone else and watch what happens. Everyone will be nervous and no one will know why, except you.

We are each limited by our own cultural patterns. For example, Native American cultures from the prairies are absolute democracies. Even the chief has no authority to tell anyone else what to do. Once this level of democracy is understood, it will become normal to see that children are not coerced into obedience but influenced in cultures of respect.

From the time of medieval Europe, children were regarded as almost unimportant and more like property than persons. Children were not valued except for their ability to work and accomplish chores. Most children in those times lived with physical poverty and so would have only the barest of physical goods such as clothing and housing. As beings of little value, they were beaten, barely fed, and sometimes sold and purchased.



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The value of being a child was not high even though religious teaching call for adults to become like little children. This inferior status still haunts the English word, *child*. To be told one is “acting like a child” is not a compliment. Contrast this to another cultural system. The Lakota word for child is wakan’heja. The etymology of this word comes from wakan which means sacred and heja to stand. “Standing Sacred” is the Lakota concept of a child. A culture with this concept would demonstrate high respect and honor for a child.

Artifacts

One of the four major areas in which culture is manifested is at the level of artifacts, the physical manifestation of a culture. Examples include clothing, food, architecture, and the arts. In North America, technology is more highly valued than most other places in the world. Certainly the average child in North America would have adequate clothing, shelter, food, and surrounding architecture. But there is an increasing risk factor: pervasive technology. Certainly technology allows for new and vital experiences and fosters learning. The risk comes when technology replaces human interaction, an increasing issue for all children. Television becomes a child-minder so busy parents can tend other tasks. It can entertain children who are tired and in need of activity after school. Computer time and digitally recorded music replaces conversation and sounds of nature. The risk factor is highest when technology replaces face-to-face time with adults and peers. Human relationships should not be sacrificed in favor of technology. When technology replaces human conversation, the child is at risk of losing the emotional support necessary for confidence and growth in responsibility.



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Teachers and researchers now report that students may not know how to use their faces to communicate, perhaps because they have spent too much time in front of screens. Children and adolescents show increasing rates of loneliness and depression with increased immersion in technology. Human contact is crucial for youth development, but current cultural values surrender relationship time for time with technology, putting youth at risk. The antidote is to set parameters and limits to technology in a world designed with their best interests in mind. There is a place for technology, but it is not every place.

Speech

Anthropologists say that speech is the carrier of culture. In our increasingly multilingual society, we may still proclaim an official language, but the reality of many languages exists in cities and towns everywhere.

More importantly language shapes one's reality. We see only what we have words for, and we see reality only the way our language permits us to see it. A complex example comes from the way people who think in a European language believe that time exists. This is not an objective reality but a function of European verb systems which always come in a time tense for past, present, or future. If one thinks with those systems, we believe time is real.

When I began to study German in high school, I was bewildered by the notion of objects having gender and that this was woven into the language. I memorized gender articles but the reality of objects with gender still eludes me. Imagine a Lakota speaker trying to accept the notion that English pronouns have gender. Lakota pronouns are all gender neutral.

Consider how we use language to speak about children and youth. What terms do we have? How old is the term *teenager*, for example? The term did



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not exist in the 1800s, and society consisted of adults and children until the 1920s when the word teenager began to be used. We commonly use the term *kid* to refer to a child but no one before the mid-19th century would have understood our meaning. Similarly, we should ask about pejorative terms such as *the terrible twos*, *rug-rat*, *crumb-grabber*. Is the word child still a pejorative term? Adults use *adolescence* almost as a term for a pathological condition. The language we use to refer to children and youth conveys values about of which we are not conscious.

Actions

Every culture has ways of communicating using gestures, eye behavior, and hand or head signals. These smaller forms of communication are a set of daily ceremonies. A culture will also have complex ceremonies to welcome a person to a group, initiate a youth into adulthood, announce the relationship of two persons, and celebrate birth and death.

For our purpose, we can contemplate the daily ceremonies by which we greet a child, acknowledge her worth, add her to our group, or communicate her status. Each school building has rituals that communicate to the students their value in the adults' eyes. Families mark birthdays, holidays, and family anniversaries with ceremonies, cakes, foods, and decorations. Positive youth cultures develop ceremonies that include the young people, address their psychological needs, and celebrate their role in that community. This is a welcome development since society in general has lost many traditional ceremonies.

Thought

Every culture has a set of intentionally held values and attitudes. These are conveyed through teaching, story, and song. A vibrant community will



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instruct their youth in the ethics of the group. If the group values bravery, youth will be taught to act bravely in the face of doubt or fear. The group's values may be supported by a religious system that defines the important aspects of life, provides instruction in how to live by those values, and uses ceremony and ritual to support the values of the group.

Culture is learned. Culture is not innate but must be taught if it is to continue. This is the dynamic of *enculturation*, learning one's own culture. Many youth are at risk of not learning the culture of their ancestors if adults do not systematically teach their traditions. Individuals who do not learn their own culture will learn another culture, which we define as *acculturation*. If adults are not intentional about teaching their own cultural system, then media culture may become the most influential force in teaching youth.

In summary, as adults intending to create resilient youth, we can make evident our cultural patterns about young people so we can examine them. Cultural assessment will help us become aware of the true message we use to relate to youth. A youth-respecting culture will consistently send positive value messages by language, behavior, policy, and practice.

Martin Brokenleg, EdD, is a psychologist and a graduate of the Episcopal Divinity School. Dr. Brokenleg has been a professor of Native American Studies at Augustana College in South Dakota, and professor of First Nations Ministry & Theology at the Vancouver School of Theology. His most recent book is *Cultures of Respect: Re-Righting History*, co-authored with Larry Brendtro. Dr. Brokenleg is an enrolled member of the Rosebud Lakota tribe and resides in British Columbia. This is adapted from an article by the author originally published in the journal *Reclaiming Children and Youth*.

Courtesy: *Thriving* journal

Growing Our Young in Cultures of Respect, *Thriving*, 11 (1) Growing Edge Training, 2026.

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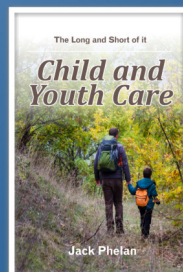
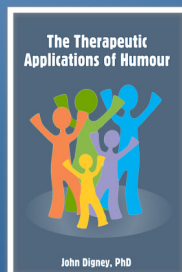
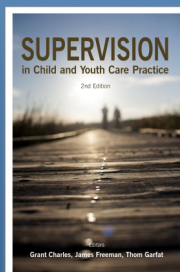
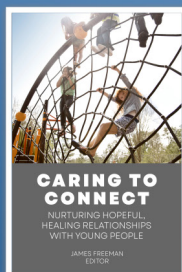
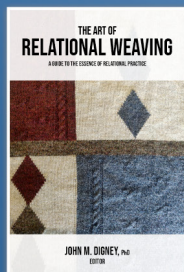
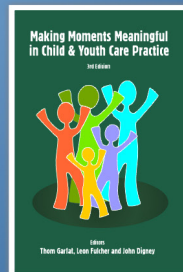
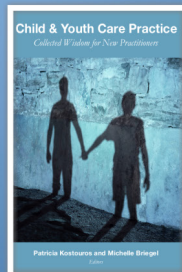
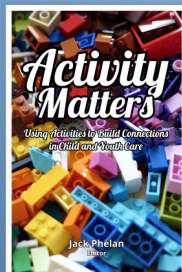
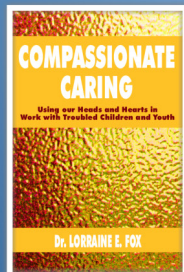
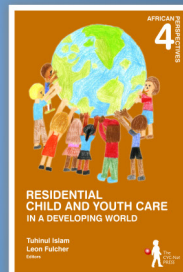
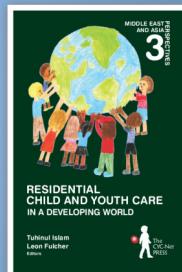
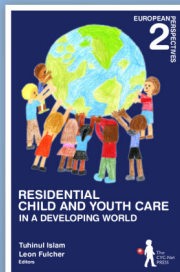
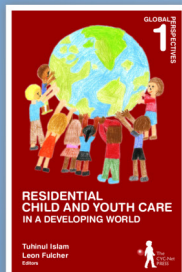
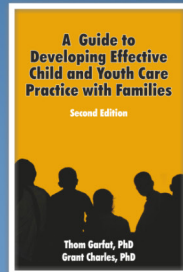
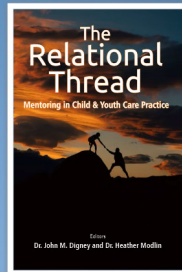
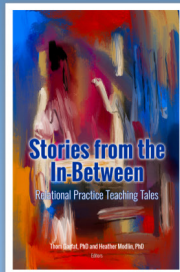
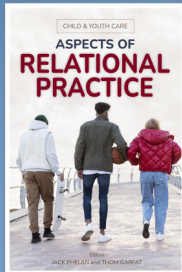
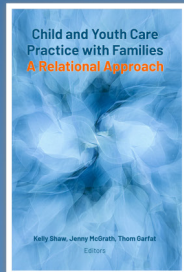


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A Lot of Framing for Not Much Content

Kiaras Gharabaghi

One of the things I love about Jack Phelan's writing is that it typically is not very long. You can review some of his contributions right here on CYC-Net; you'll notice that most of them are less than one page, and yet, every one of them says something important. Sure, there might be repetition across all his writing, but that simply means that he had some very good ideas and found different ways of expressing them. Jack got to the point fast and his goal was not to belabour a point but to transmit it to the reader in ways that stuck. I think everyone who has read Jack's work knows where he stood on issues of relational practice, supervision, developmental pathways of CYCs, and more. He had many topics and said something that mattered on each of these.

Contrast that to other writers, including myself. Many of us write pages to make a relatively simple point. Very often, it seems, we want to pre-empt critique of our point by framing it in ways that respond to any possible disagreement. In so doing, we present one epistemological imposition after another, believing ourselves to be protecting our point from all possible attacks. We are creating the 'super point', the one that is so deeply embedded in absolute truth and/or intuitive reasoning (common sense) that it is clearly the right point to make. We also often add to this a rationale for



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why we are making the point, why it is important, and why not engaging with our point may result in substandard practice.

Jack's approach to child and youth care practice was somewhat un-American. He advocated for an authentic way of being with young people (in his case, that meant mostly teenagers) and he offered at times very direct language as a way of interacting with young people. His stories included some real surprises in terms of how he responded to a particular young person; to many North Americans, such approaches seemed crude and simplistic and absent of the performative aspects of 'therapeutic' and 'evidence-based' practices. Jack swore and labelled, described behaviours in very simple terms (stupid, dumb) and used that language in face-to-face interactions with youth. This does not meet North American sensibilities. We are trained to avoid labels, to refrain from using language that might appear as invalidating or dismissive. We are trained to be empowering, strength-based, and positive in our approach at all times. And yet, Jack likely had an enormous impact on young people when he worked frontline, and he certainly had an enormous impact on young practitioners he either met along the way, or he formally trained in his classrooms or through professional training events, or even in his sessions at CYC conferences.

I think the difference between Jack's approach and that of so many others is that he was not a believer in framing things. By this, I mean that Jack did not create abstract ways of understanding behaviour, personality, or even change and growth. Instead, he focused on how we are with young people one moment at a time, and he believed that the best way to be with young people is to take them as seriously as we take ourselves and to avoid using their circumstances and resulting ways of being as objects to decorate the explanatory frameworks we create for who they are. One might have all kinds of opinions about this approach, but let's contrast it for



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a moment with the more common approach of framing things in theory, science, evidence, and patterns.

Every time I attend a conference these days, someone will be up there as a keynote speaker with a slide deck featuring at minimum an abstract slide of the brain, a slide showing a linear progression from circumstance to behaviour to consequence, and a slide representing some form of relationship. Built around those three slides are 20 more that provide additional context and information about the patterns of child and youth behaviours that arise in the context of trauma, pain, grief, or loneliness. And then comes the grand conclusion, which, no matter what language is used, essential implores us to be nice to kids, to listen to what they say they need, and to understand that whatever they do is driven by a need to serve their pain or grief. Then we are to respond gently, ensuring that the young person feels heard and is not harmed further. We are to center the child and their needs and respond with consistency and clarity without being directive or imposing.



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This is essentially the framing for almost all evidence-based practice currently being advertised and sold as part of the child and youth mental health training industry. This framing seems meaningful and empathetic while also scientifically derived and research-informed. But if we look closer, we might also recognize this framing of relational practices as the one thing we have been trying to avoid. It is a medicalized framing of relational practice that intentionally takes those moments of authenticity, moments that matter, and instead of making them meaningful (as Garfat likes to say), makes them the representation of highly skilled treatment practices. If we just added a white coat to the practice, we could imagine ourselves as doctors.

In current child and youth care settings, both residential settings and community or education settings, the focus is on rendering the work we do appear professional and derived from research, deep knowledge, and science. We are on a quest to prove that what we do provides high-quality care (we really mean treatment) for children and youth who need that. We are increasingly reducing our practices to interventions and cures, and we are framing these in neurological, trauma-based, clinical language. And yet in the end, we arrive at the very same conclusions Jack Phelan arrived at several decades ago, and from which he never deviated. In short, we frame a lot but say very little.

One conclusion I draw from this is that we ought to pay more attention to the humanity of our work, not at the exclusion of the science of our work, but as the desperately needed antidote to the medicalization of everything. Our work is to be human. Sometimes that requires us to get to the heart of the matter, or, in Jack's words, "the long and short of it" and actually be with young people in authentic and imperfect ways. If they behave stupidly, what stops us from saying 'you are being stupid'? Is it really science that



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stops us? Or is it our secret desire to dehumanize this work and put on a white coat?

A wondering (rather than a conclusion) I draw from this is whether we are losing capacity to think of relational practices through the lens of humanity rather than science. In some ways, this should not be a surprise; we already know that relating to one another is changing shape with the rise of technologies that construct relationships virtually and increasingly through artificial decision-making, prompts, expressions of love and of anger. From emojis to AI-generated poetry, we are substituting the complexities of the relational every day in our lives. At what point will we confuse our framing of relational practice with practicing our humanity in relation to that of the young people we encounter? An emoji may not be sufficient in the moment; at some point, we will have to say something that reflects the moment rather than the science, and young people will want to know that what we say or do is reflective of who we are. If we lose that, then the future of CYC is AI, not practitioners showing up.

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Join the

Discussion



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The Ripple Effect

Agustin Castante III

People may not always remember what we tell them, but they often remember what they see us do.

As Child and Youth Care Workers, we often think that teaching happens during planned conversations, structured activities, or intentional life-skills sessions. While those moments are important, some of the most meaningful lessons happen quietly: through our everyday actions. This is what we call *The Ripple Effect*.

Today, Mr. Goalie and I spent the day fishing in Flatrock, Newfoundland and Labrador. It was a beautiful day on the water, and together we caught fifteen fish, including mackerel and Atlantic herring. The fishing itself was enjoyable, but what happened beyond catching fish reminded me why consistency matters so much in our work.

One of the principles I try to practice is allowing young people to see me live the routines and values I hope they will eventually adopt. Rather than simply telling them to build healthy habits, I let them observe mine. Whether it's brushing my teeth before bed, taking a shower in the morning, cleaning up after myself, or following through on commitments, I try to model consistency in everyday life. These ordinary actions may seem small, but they communicate something powerful: *this is how we care for ourselves and others*.



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At the fishing spot, another person nearby was having difficulty catching fish. I took a few moments to help by explaining what lure to use and offering some basic fishing tips. As I did, something unexpected happened. The young person I was supporting stepped in and began helping as well, showing the other person how to cast a fishing line.

I hadn't asked him to do that.

I hadn't given him a lesson about helping others.

He simply observed, and then he acted.

That moment reminded me that our influence often extends further than we realize. Young people are constantly watching how we respond to people, how we solve problems, how we treat strangers, and how we handle everyday situations. Our actions create ripples that spread outward.

On the drive home, I told him how proud I was of him. I praised him for taking the initiative to help someone else and acknowledged the kindness and confidence he demonstrated. His smile said more than words could.



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As Child and Youth Care Workers, we are not only mentors during formal interventions; we are role models in the ordinary moments. Consistency, authenticity, and everyday actions shape relationships built on trust. Over time, those small moments create lasting change.

The ripple effect reminds us that every positive action has the potential to inspire another. A simple act of kindness can encourage another act of kindness. A healthy routine can become someone else's routine. A moment of encouragement can build confidence that lasts well beyond that day.

Our work is not always measured by immediate outcomes. Sometimes the greatest impact is seen when a young person quietly begins to reflect the values they have consistently observed in us.

May we never underestimate the influence of our everyday actions. The ripples we create today may become the waves that carry a young person toward a brighter future.

Agustin Castante III graduated in English and Literature, pursued legal studies, and worked with UNICEF serving out-of-school youth, street children, and vulnerable communities in the Philippines. Since moving to Canada in 2023 they have worked in leadership and youth care roles and now support young people at Amal Youth and Family Centre.



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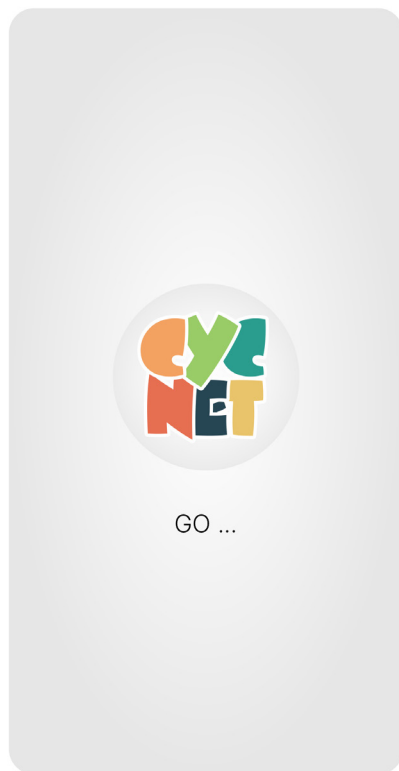
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Attention, Please: Why Children Need Parents Who Look Up

Digital distraction can interfere with learning and connection

Sarah M. Coyne

“Mom! Mom! Watch this!”

“Look at what I made!”

“Did you see me, Dad?”

If you’ve been around kids much, you know these kinds of requests occur like clockwork. Kids are constantly asking us to pay attention to them—from proudly showing us a stick-figure crayon drawing to making sure we’re looking before they jump a whole two inches off the ground.

These requests might seem trivial, but child development research shows they may be an instinctual part of children seeking connection. Children want us to see their block towers and somersault attempts because it allows them to learn the social, language, and emotional skills that come from interacting with other humans. Our attention is a powerful developmental tool.

But winning our attention can be a tough battle; today, kids are competing with the endless entertainment and constant interruptions of the



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digital world. Researchers call it “technoference” when technology interrupts everyday interactions, and parent-child relationships are no exception.

Do these interruptions matter? According to two studies we recently conducted, yes.

Mothers' Media Use and Child Language Development

One study examined how mothers’ digital media use influenced their toddlers’ language environment. We found that mothers who spent the least time on TV, social media, texting, and video games used more descriptive language and engaged in more back-and-forth conversations with their toddlers. In other words, spending less time on devices seemed to create more opportunities for the kind of rich, responsive interactions that help children develop language.

And honestly, it makes sense. Phones so easily divide our attention at just the click of a button or swipe of a screen—even when we’re trying to be responsive. Most of us can probably relate to offering an absent-minded “mm-hmm” before realizing we didn’t quite hear. These distracted moments are normal, but when they become too frequent, young children experience fewer words, fewer conversations, and fewer chances to engage and learn.

Of course, not all media use is equally disruptive. In fact, further results suggested that the *type* of media used matters, not just how *much* it’s used. In our study, mothers who used little media, moderate amounts of media, or even high levels of social media and texting spoke more around their children and had more back-and-forth conversations with them than mothers who reported especially high video game use. We can’t say that video games caused these differences, but the pattern suggests that some



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types of media may pull parents' attention away from children more than others.

Children's Perspectives on Parental Media Use

A second study also looked at parent media use but instead focused on children's perspectives. The results showed that not only are children aware of which form of media their parents use and how much, but they're also opinionated about it. Kids notice when parents' media use interferes with their relationships, when it becomes overuse, how it impacts their home life, and how it makes them feel.

Kids commented on their parents being on devices "*all*/day long" and told our research team about being ignored or having their requests to play denied, only to see their parent absorbed in a device instead. They described having to ask parents to stop using devices to make breakfast or play with them and getting the dreaded, "Just five more minutes."

Why Children's Awareness of Screen Time Matters

Why does it matter that kids notice these screen-centered moments? Because from their perspective, screens are prioritized over *them*. Kids were sad and annoyed at the inescapability of coming up against their parent on a device. They felt replaced by games and videos. They described feeling forgotten or invisible because "Mum is watching her phone" or "Dad was on his tablet" or "They are focused on their games instead of us."

Whether parents are using devices for video games, Duolingo, family scheduling, or work, these comments point to the reality that children—as oblivious as they may be to their own backward shirt or mismatched shoes—notice their parents' media use. And they pick up on when their



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parents choose to spend time on devices instead of with them, often leading to real feelings of sadness and unimportance.

Both these findings and those mentioned earlier show that attention may be more important for children's development than we sometimes realize. Watching your 6-year-old go down the slide or turning away from a new mobile game to talk to your toddler might seem insignificant but can have consequences for their language progression, relationship development, feelings of being valued, and more.

Strategies for Reducing "Technoference"

Families can't eliminate every instance of technoference, nor do they need to. But they can benefit from clear communication and boundaries around technology use. Parents can be mindful of how and when they use their devices, especially during the moments when children are most likely to seek or need connection. Setting aside media-free times and spaces—perhaps at meals, playtime, or bedtime—can create more opportunities for the conversations, responsiveness, and shared experiences that children crave.

Kids don't need parents who never touch technology. They need parents who watch what they can do, look at what they made, and make them feel seen. They need parents who are fully present when they need them and who have their full attention to offer.

Key points

- Children notice when screens take priority and may feel ignored or unimportant.
- Mothers who use less media have richer conversations with their toddlers.



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- Media-free times can protect conversation, responsiveness, and shared family experiences.

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This article was coauthored by **Daniel Frost** and **Hailey Holmgren**, professors at Brigham Young University, and Esther Eberting, a student at Brigham Young University.

From: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-right-media-mindset/202609/attention-please-why-children-need-parents-who-look-up>



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The Leaving

Caroline Moore

Many of us come into the field of Child and Youth Care (CYC) because we want to help kids. Sometimes we think we have the answers and sometimes we know we don't. Either way, we often work from what we think is best. Sometimes it turns out that what we think is best is actually meeting our own needs, and not the needs of the young person. This often happens when we forget about the importance of intentionality as one of the Characteristics of a Relational Child and Youth Care approach. Without intentionality in our work, we can miss moments or miss opportunities, and we make it about ourselves.

* * *

Billy had been living in our program for nearly four years when a foster home was found for him. During his time at our program he had celebrated many milestones, not the least of which was graduating from Junior High School. Youth Care Workers had been with him every step of the way. There were many connections, so when the time came for him to move on to his foster family there were many emotions from many of us in the program. We were extremely happy to know that he would be moving into a family that would care for him and support him. However, there was also a



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sense of sadness as he had become part of the fabric of the program, and he would be missed by so many. I can't count how many moments, conversations, laughs and tears had been shared with him over his time with us.

Once it became official that Billy would be moving to the foster home and a date was set, youth care workers immediately went to task to make something he could take from our program to hold us close and not sever the belonging he felt there. Youth Care Workers reached out to every person who worked with Billy over his time with us, I reached out to the two past supervisors. Each of them almost instantly wrote a few lines to Billy to wish him well on his journey, all filled with messages of praise and gratitude for having known him during his time with us. These were all compiled in a photo album along with many pictures taken of him over the years.

As a team we spent a lot of time talking about how we wanted to be with Billy on the big day of the move. We talked about intentionality and how we wanted to make this a celebration for Billy: a celebration of him starting the next chapter in his life, with a new family. We were very determined that while we would acknowledge we would miss him, and acknowledge any sadness he may feel, we would support him to be excited about his new chapter. This took some work as there was sadness for us as we knew we would miss him! We spent time talking through who would do what so we could make sure we gave him the best possible send-off.

Join the

Discussion



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Billy had not been back to the program in the 10 days before his move and had, therefore, avoided many goodbyes with many Youth Care Workers (clever). Instead, he spent the time in his new foster home. The night before his official move Billy returned to spend the night in our program. Before going to bed that night, he sat with Youth Care Workers and wrote notes to everyone who worked at the program during his time there – some of whom have moved on to other employment. In each of these letters Billy expressed gratitude and a sense of love toward them. One letter started with 'I love you.' In each of them he drew on a special connection he had with each of them, be it a rivalry in sports teams, a game they played together, or any special moment they had shared. He remembered them all. To the extra special Youth Care Workers, he made sure to tell them to contact the program to find out how to contact him if they want to go out for coffee ... including at the end that they need to know they're paying! Finally, Billy wrote a few lines to the organization itself thanking us for his time at our program. Before going to bed that night, Billy said goodbye to the Youth Care Workers hugging one while crying, refusing to let go. The Youth Care Worker didn't let go until Billy did, recognizing there was no rush – and waiting for his own eyes to dry. After Billy went to bed, the Youth Care Workers quickly went to work making him a huge tray of his favorite cinnamon buns to take to his new home the next day.

On the day of the big move Billy picked his 'favorite' two Youth Care Workers to go out for supper with him and they made their way to Montana's Steak House. Montana's was a favorite not just for the food, but also for their tradition of celebrating special occasions with a giant Moose hat that was worn by customers who were celebrating. One of the Youth Care Workers quickly found a server and explained they were celebrating a special occasion. The Moose hat was brought over with a free dessert for



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Billy and they got a picture of all three of them which would be included in his photo album. After they ate, Billy spent time letting them know how much he appreciated them. He said he wished all youth could see that Youth Care Workers are there to help them. He also wanted to make sure that Youth Care Workers know that the kids don't mean it when they call the Youth Care Workers names.

I spent that day helping him pack some things, making sure we had everything he needed to take with him, trying to be helpful, while intentionally hiding my own sadness. During one of my trips out to pick up additional items, I walked back into the house and Billy looked at me and blurted out "Caroline, your favorite player has been traded." Billy and I had connected over our love of the Blue Jays baseball team during our time together. We had countless conversations about the games, players and the team's prospects. So, when Billy abruptly told me my favorite player had been traded, my immediate response was "OMG this is the worst day ever. First, you're leaving and now my favorite player is gone too!" In that moment, all the work on intentionality went out the window and I made it all about me! Thankfully we were able to use the moment to share a chuckle.

Before going out the door that evening, Billy needed to do one more thing. He had Youth Care Workers measure him on the height chart where each youth measures their growth while in the program. He said he needed to compare where he started and where he finished ... needless to say, he grew in every aspect of the word, all thanks to the intentional approaches by a wonderful team of Youth Care Workers.



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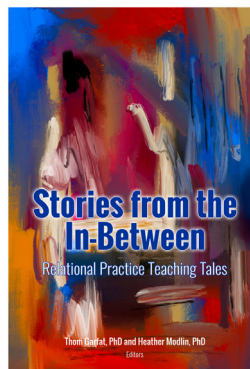
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Reflective Questions

- How does understanding our own needs contribute to Intentionality in our work in Child and Youth Care?
- Think of a time you were not intentional in a moment with a young person. What were you focused on during that time? How did that help or hinder the moment with the young person?
- What are some things we can do to ensure we are being intentional in our work with young people?

Caroline Moore, MSc. CYCS has worked at HomeBridge Youth Society in Nova Scotia, Canada for the last 25 years. For eight years, Caroline worked directly with youth as a CYC worker in both an emergency stabilization setting and in a longer-term community setting. Caroline has been in a CYC supervisory role for the past 17 years and is currently the Director of Youth Care Services for HomeBridge Youth Society. Caroline's interests lie in the concepts of CYC-supervision and development. She recently worked with the HomeBridge CYC supervisor team to develop an internal training curriculum for new and advanced CYC supervisors within HomeBridge.

This is the last of six chapters being published in *CYC-Online* from the new book [Stories from the In-Between: Relational Practice Teaching Tales](#). (Garfat and Modlin, eds. CYC-Net Press)



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The Man Who Planted Acorns

Jean Giono

About forty years ago I was taking a long trip on foot over mountain heights quite unknown to tourists in that region where the Alps thrust down into Provence. All this, at the time I embarked upon my long walk through these deserted regions, was barren and colorless land. Nothing grew there but wild lavender. After three days walking I found myself in the midst of unparalleled desolation. I camped near the vestiges of an abandoned village. I had run out of water the day before. These clustered houses although in ruins, like an old wasp's nest, suggested that there must once have been a spring or well here. There was indeed a spring, but it was dry. The tiny chapel with its crumbling steeple stood about like the houses and chapels in living villages, but all life had vanished.

The wind blew with unendurable ferocity. I had to move my camp. After five hour's walking I had still not found water and there was nothing to give me hope of finding any. I thought I glimpsed in the distance a small black silhouette, upright and took it for a solitary tree. It was a shepherd. Thirty sheep were lying about him on the baking earth.

He gave me a drink from his water gourd, and a little later took me to his cottage in a fold of the plain. He lived in a real house built of stone that bore plain evidence of how his own efforts had reclaimed the ruin he had found



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there on his arrival. It was understood from the first that I should spend the night there.

The shepherd went to fetch a small sack and poured out a heap of acorns on the table. He began to inspect them with great concentration, separating the good from the bad. When he had set aside a large enough pile of good acorns, he counted them out by tens. When he had selected one hundred perfect acorns he stopped and went to bed. There was peace in being with this man. The next day I asked if I might rest here a day. He found it quite natural. He opened the pen and led his flocks to pasture. Before leaving he plunged his sack of acorns into a pail of water.

I noticed how he carried for a stick an iron rod as thick as my thumb and about a yard and a half long. Resting myself by walking, I followed a path parallel to his. His pasture was in a valley. He left the little flock in charge of the dog and climbed towards where I stood. He climbed to the top of the ridge about a hundred yards away. There he began thrusting his iron rod into the earth, making a hole in which he planted an acorn; he then refilled the hole. He was planting an oak tree. On inquiry I discovered that the land was not his and he was not interested in finding out whose it was. For three years he had been planting trees out in this wilderness. He had planted 100 000. Of these 20 000 had sprouted. Of this 20 000 he still expected to lose about half to rodents or the unpredictable designs of Providence. There remained 10 000 to grow where nothing had grown before.

That was when I began to wonder about the age of this man. Fifty-five he told me. His name was Elzaeard Bouffier. He had once had a farm in the lowlands. He had lost his only son then his wife. He had withdrawn into solitude, where his pleasure was to live leisurely with his lambs and his dog. It was his opinion that this land was drying for want of trees. He had added that, having no very pressing business of his own, he had resolved to remedy this state of affairs. I told him that in thirty years his 10 000 oaks



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would be magnificent. He answered quite simply that if God granted him life, in thirty years he would have planted so many more that these 10 000 would be like a drop of water in the ocean. Besides he was now studying the reproduction of beech trees and had a nursery of seedlings grown from beech-nuts near his cottage.

The next day we parted. The following year came the war of 1914, in which I was involved for the next five years. To tell the truth the thing itself had made no impression upon me; I had considered it as a hobby and forgotten it. The war over, I again took the road to the barren lands. The countryside had not changed. Since the day before, I had begun to think again of the shepherd tree planter. I had seen too many men die during those five years not to imagine easily that Elzeard Bouffier was dead.

He was not dead. As a matter of fact he was extremely spry. He had changed jobs. Now he had only four sheep, but instead, 100 beehives. He had got rid of the sheep because they threatened his young trees. For he told me (and I saw for myself), the war had disturbed him not at all. He had imperturbably continued to plant.

The oaks of 1910 were then ten years old and taller than either of us. It was an impressive spectacle. I was literally speechless and as he did not talk, we spent the whole day walking in silence through his forest in three sections, it measured 11 kilometres in length and three kilometres at its greatest width. When you remember that all this had sprung from the hands and soul of this one man, without technical resources, you understand that men could be as effectual as God in realms other than that of destruction. He had pursued his plan and beech trees as high as my shoulder, spreading out as far as the eye could reach, confirmed it. He showed me handsome clumps of birch planted five years before. He had set them out in all the valleys where he guessed, rightly, that there was moisture almost at the surface of the ground.



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Creation seemed to come about in a sort of chain reaction. He did not worry about it; he was determinedly pursuing his task in all its simplicity; but as we went back towards the village I saw water flowing in brooks that had been dry since the memory of man. The wind too, scattered seeds. As the water reappeared, so there reappeared willows, rushes, meadows, gardens, flowers and a certain purpose in being alive. But the transformation took place so gradually that it became part of the pattern without causing any astonishment. That is why no-one meddled with Elzeard Bouffier's work. If he had been detected he would have had opposition. He was undetectable. Who in the villages or in the administration could have dreamed of such perseverance in a magnificent generosity?

To have anything like a precise idea of this exceptional character one must not forget that he worked in total solitude; so total that toward the end of his life, he lost the habit of speech. Or perhaps that he saw no need for it. Some years later he received a visit from a forest ranger who notified him of an order against lighting fires out of doors for fear of endangering the growth of this natural forest. It was the first time, the man told him naively, that he had ever heard of a forest growing of its own accord. At that time Bouffier was about to plant beeches at a spot some twelve kilometres from his cottage.

In order to avoid travelling back and forth, for he was then seventy-five, he planned to build a stone cabin right at the plantation. The next year he did so. The following year a whole delegation came from the government to examine the 'natural forest'. Fortunately, nothing was done except the only helpful thing: the whole forest was placed under the protection of the state. For it was impossible not to be captivated by the beauty of those young trees in the fullness of health.

A friend of mine was among the forestry officers of the delegation. To him I explained the mystery. One day the following week we went together

to see Elzeard Bouffier. We found him hard at work. In the direction from which we had come the slopes were covered with trees 20 to 25 feet tall. I remembered how the land had looked; a desert... Peaceful, regular toil, the vigorous mountain air, frugality and above all, serenity in the spirit had endowed this old man with awe-inspiring health. He was one of God's athletes. I wondered how many more acres he was going to cover with trees. I saw Elzeard Bouffier for the last time in June of 1945. He was then 87. In 1913 this hamlet of ten or twelve houses had three inhabitants. Everything was changed. Even the air. A gentle breeze was blowing, laden with scents. A sound like water came from the mountains, it was the wind in the forest; most amazing of all, I heard the actual sound of water falling into a pool.

Hope had returned. Ruins had been cleared away, dilapidated walls torn down and five houses restored. Now there were 28 inhabitants. The new houses, freshly plastered, were surrounded by gardens where vegetables grew in orderly confusion. It has taken only the eight years since then for the whole countryside to grow with health and prosperity. On the site of the ruins I had seen in 1913 now stand neat farms testifying to a happy and comfortable life. The old streams, fed by the rains and snows that the forest conserves, are flowing again. Their waters have been channeled. On each farm in groves of maples, fountain pools overflow onto carpets of fresh mint. Little by little the villages have been rebuilt. More than 10 000 people owe their happiness to Elzeard Bouffier.

This is a short extract from *The Man Who Planted Trees*, an allegorical tale by French author Jean Giono, published in 1953. It tells the story of one shepherd's long and successful singlehanded effort to re-forest a desolate valley in the foothills of the Alps, near Provence, throughout the first half of the 20th century.

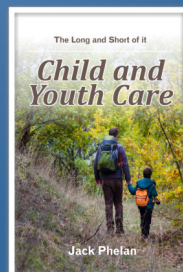
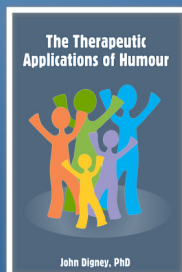
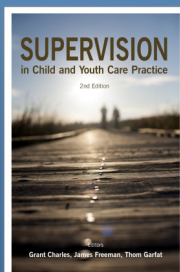
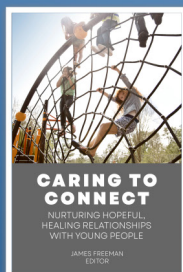
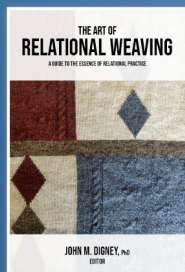
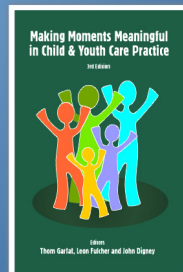
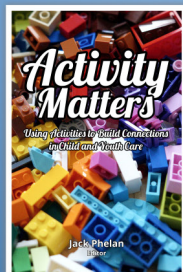
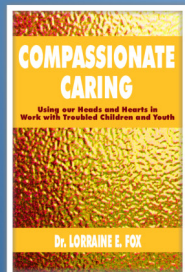
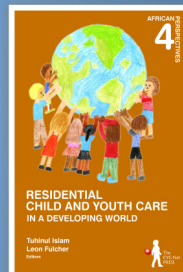
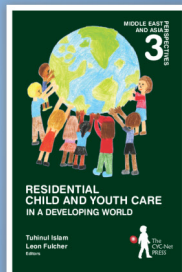
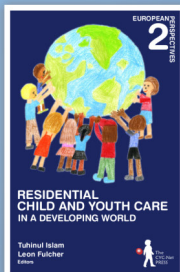
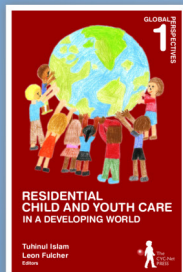
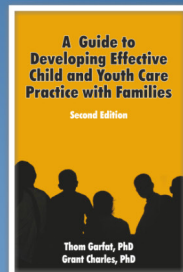
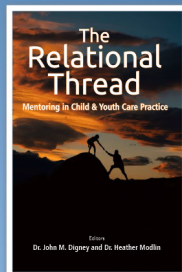
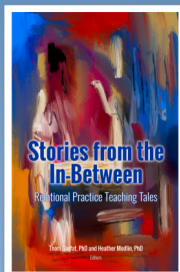
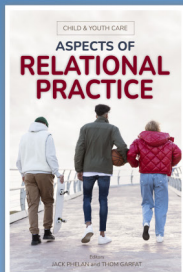
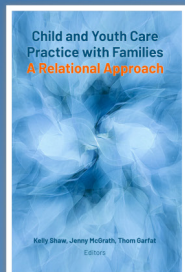


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The Freedom to do What We Love

Hans Skott-Myhre

“For as soon as the distribution of labour comes into being, each man has a particular, exclusive sphere of activity, which is forced upon him and from which he cannot escape. He is a hunter, a fisherman, a herdsman, or a critical critic, and must remain so if he does not want to lose his means of livelihood; while in communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, herdsman or critic.” - [Karl Marx](#)

I would argue that one of the central questions for those of us interested in working with young people is how we might assist them in amplifying their capacities in a way that allows them the greatest degree of freedom to live their lives as they would wish. When I think about care in this way, I am reminded of the foundations of our field in humanism and humanistic psychology. In particular, I find myself reflecting on the work of [Carl Rogers](#). Although he is perhaps best known for his emphasis on



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unconditional positive regard and client centered counseling, his proposals for the conditions necessary for optimal growth as human beings are also both radical and compelling.

As opposed to many models of human growth and change, Rogers did not see any necessity to overcome our flawed human nature, struggle to change our bad habits, or to try to contort ourselves to fit the social expectations imposed upon us by the world around us. He maintained that growth was not changing ourselves into someone new and different from our flawed and broken self. Instead, he saw growth as a process of becoming more of who we already are. He argued for a kind of becoming that is created through a process of discovering the rich and idiosyncratic person that is our living foundation.

For this kind of becoming self, he proposed that we need certain conditions for human growth that are as necessary for us to develop, as sunlight and water are necessary to a tree. He delineated these conditions as producing an environment that is composed of genuineness, acceptance, and empathy. These terms should resonate with us in CYC because they are threaded throughout [Garfat, Freeman, Gharabaghi, and Fulcher's Characteristics of Child and Youth Care](#).

The ability to live in an environment where we are met with genuineness (or what Rogers also called congruence) in our interactions with others means that the encounter with each other is devoid of pretense. We would do away with the socially proscribed necessity to wear a mask or pretend to feel or be something we are not. [Fritz Pearls](#) echoes this in his call for us to make what he called “paper people” into real people.

To feel compelled to expend our energy or living force to mask our capacities in order to “fit in” is a brutal calculus inherent in the logic of our current system of social expectations. So much of who we imagine ourselves to be, under conditions of global capitalist rule, is premised in



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how well we can fake it until we make it. We are taught how to conceal any aspect of ourselves that distracts us from our role as good employees or consumers. Our lived experience is relegated to background noise, so that we can become more in sync with the social media construction of who we portray ourselves to be.

In Roger's terms, we are living devoid of the necessary nurturance of congruent relations that could amplify the capacity of what Garfat has called the between in between us. If what arrives in that space is utterly empty of our actual lived capacities, then such a space becomes devoid of any kind of living force. It is empty of the kinds of interactional nutrients necessary for our development and growth. Like much of the virtual environment in which we spend more time, who we are is just a copy of who we imagine we are supposed to be. In this all of us are so far back in the distance of our encounter that we cannot possibly even feel one another much less the broader contours of our lives. We become ciphers or paper people rather than living breathing human beings.

The second element Rogers identified as necessary for thriving as human is acceptance. Acceptance is the foundation of what he termed unconditional positive regard. To live in a world in which we are accepted in all our rich complexity by the society in which we live is an element not just missing from our lives, but almost an oxymoron under the brutal politics of our time. The current flow of social intercourse in our world today is filled with an ongoing rejection of an ever-shifting array of human attributes. Intriguingly, as we enter the 2nd quarter of the 21st century more and more of us are insisting on our right to express ourselves in ways that contest the dominant norms for behavior and identity. However, that insistence on being able to be idiosyncratically complex faces an ongoing backlash that would deny the very existence of alterity.



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Certainly, the most obvious example of this is the hatred and attempted erasure of difference in politics, religion, and community. The passage of legislation, the declamations from the pulpit, and the shunning by community designed to deny that human beings are richly diverse is both powerful and ongoing. In addition, the capacity of capitalism to appropriate difference, empty it of its living force and sell it back to us as marketing also eviscerates the lived experience of actual difference. Together these forces make a mockery of acceptance.

That said, those of us who work in CYC know first-hand the power of acceptance and unconditional positive regard. As a field we strive to support and care for the idiosyncrasies of young people, their families, communities, as well as our own friends and colleagues. We hold this as a foundational element in our work. And yet, we also know that there are institutional and economic forces that work against our best inclinations daily. Their influence can at times marginalize our ability to nurture difference and threaten to make unconditional positive regard purely aspirational.

The final element in Roger's proposal for an environment conducive to our growth and development is empathy. This is also a key component in the Characteristics of Child and Youth Care. We sometimes think of empathy as a kind of static state of positive receptiveness to the other. In a way we think of it as an aspect of acceptance but with an even deeper sense of who the other is. Rogers adds a dynamic fluidity to our concept of empathy. He sees it as a way of moving with someone in such a way that you sense their living movement and move with it without ever losing your own sense of who you are. [Mark Krueger](#) referred to this as the dance of Child and Youth Care. It is a delicate negotiation of moving in someone else's life without any judgement. Like a good dance partner, you share a sense of the world in motion, constantly checking back to be sure you are



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moving together in harmony. This requires feeling the other without losing yourself.

Once again this supports the idiosyncratic integrity of the other while acknowledging the importance of relationality in producing the dance. Moving together in this way enhances the growing capacity of each partner through the necessity of responsiveness moment to moment. Each moment calls forth something new if we learn to pay attention.

This is substantially different from the dance of capitalism which would force us into formulaic movements of infinitely repetitive gestures that are only rooted in the production of the same. In the capitalist dance, innovation is not responsive to the living force of the bodies involved but in the parasitic appropriation of variation to produce more of the same; the money sign. These dances are not spontaneous expressions of creative force. They hold no empathy because they erase the other by absorbing them into the machinery of production.

As an antidote to the depredations of capital, I would propose the use of love. Certainly, we could easily read Rogers' work in this way and love is another key element in the Characteristics of Child and Youth Care. But I have a particular definition of love in mind here. In our writing on love and CYC, Kathy Skott-Myhre and I proposed what we termed love as a kind of politics. We suggested that the typical forms of love Eros (romantic/sexual), Agape (unconditional love of/by God), and Philia (love of friends) each holds restrictions and traps for anyone interested in love as an avenue to liberation. In each instance we argued that we must give ourselves over to another, be that my beloved, the divine, or my friends. In each case, we must subject ourselves to a form of commandment or rule. For us we were interested in seeking a less hierarchical form of love; a more horizontal set of relations.



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The reason for this is we were seeking a collectivity that thrived on difference. An ecological form of affiliation that allowed for a radical distinctness for each of us, while engaging in common projects. [Hardt and Negri](#) following Spinoza call this Multitude. In the multitude there is no need for sovereign power or commandment. Such a system of rule is directly democratic and evolves using difference for common purpose.

For us the implications of the Multitude for concept of love include the negation of external authority, the removal of preconceived sets of relations, and the celebration of idiosyncratic social relations. As a result, we began to define our political form of love as a set of relations that amplifies the capacities of all bodies involved. We could comfortably include the elements of Roger's work here as key components of the kinds of relational capacity building we propose as a political form of love.

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When we think of how to assist young people in amplifying their capacities in a way that allows them the greatest degree of freedom to live their lives as they would wish, we would propose a form of political love in which the set of relations engaged increases the capacities of everyone involved. To love each other is to encounter the other in such a way as to open the ability to do whatever they love to do as the impetus for living a life.

When we work with young people, or each other, the act of love should never be any act that diminishes the idiosyncratic capacity of each of us or all of us to explore any and all possible avenues of expression. Love as a political force resists any set of relations that restricts the capacity to act and express as many aspects of who are becoming as possible. As Marx suggests we can do a broad range of activities without ever being bound into a life defined by one of them. The richer life's activities, the more human we are and the greater the degree of our capacity to thrive. [Franco Basaglia](#) once said that psychiatry should be dedicated to acts of liberation. I would suggest we might aspire to that as CYC workers as well.

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From Our Archives

To be Awake or not to be Awake: Bringing Presence into Child and Youth Care Practice

Debra Palmer

I'm not exactly sure when I re-experienced being fully awake. Other than my original experience of being born, being awake had become merely a mechanical phenomenon, the act of "doing" from an external perspective. Although I had flickerings of being awake, or experiencing my vitality from my core, it wasn't until I experienced a near fatal accident that I began to understand what being awake was really all about.

I had a life choice to make; would I use medication for chronic pain, or search for another way to manage it? I chose the latter. It was then I discovered the power of breath. Through my personal experience, and years of research, I discovered that not only could breath-work assist in relieving the pain but also help to renegotiate the trauma through my body. I was beginning to experience myself from the inside. I was amazed at my innate potential to be alive and awake at the same time.



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Around this time (during the early eighties) I had a contract with the “Ministry of Social Services” to work with very complex, exceptional children and youth in their family homes. While I had many profound learning experiences during those years, my relationship with one exceptional young woman was life altering. She introduced me to listening. She was (is) a blind quadriplegic, with epilepsy and cerebral palsy.

One day, as we busied ourselves with the nightly routines of bathing, medications, physiotherapy exercises and our evening crossword puzzle (I read out the clues and, hand-over-hand, assisted her to write the words on the paper), she suddenly stopped what we were doing and asked, “Can you hear that dog barking?” I listened, or rather thought I was listening, but heard nothing. “No, I can’t hear a dog,” I replied. “Listen harder,” she insisted, but I still could not hear the dog over the general noise of the house. She became very quiet and closed her eyes. “Listen to your heart beating first and then you will hear the dog,” she whispered. I closed my eyes and went inside. I shut off my thoughts for a moment and allowed my awareness to move to my heartbeat and there it was, in the distance, the sound of a dog barking. I was excited, “I hear it” I exclaimed. She smiled and turned toward me. “I know,” she said quietly.

In that moment of internal awakening and re-connection, I recognized my own ability to stay inside, tune out all irrelevant stimuli and focus on the sound. I realized that what I hear is not simply my vestibular system tuning in to external stimuli “it is a personal choice. No sooner had this dawned on me when my friend took the insight one step further. “Now that you can hear it, do you think he’s happy or sad?” she asked. Once again I went inside and found the place where I could hear the faint howl in the distance. “Definitely sad,” I replied, ... “definitely sad.”

“You’re right,” she laughed. The sense of connection was immediate and overwhelming. She was not only listening to the dog, she was also listening



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to me listening to the dog. We had established a new bedtime routine; we called it “What Do You Hear” and we played it every night for three and a half years.

Our relationship had changed. From that time on, things were different between us. There was a “knowing”, there was attunement, and there was that magical space in which two people find connection. I didn’t know what this was all about then; I was new in the field, and relatively new at being awake. But I knew something had happened. I knew that I had experienced a universal language. I know now that this language contains key components “the universal experience of breath, presence, boundary and contact. I know now that only when I am awake, fully present, and contained in my boundary, can I make energetic and personal contact with an other; and only when that other is awake and in a boundary is there potential for us to meet.

As I meandered through my career as an early childhood educator, special needs educator, infant and toddler educator, infant development consultant, special needs aide, and child, youth, and family counselor, I instinctively knew there was more. There was more to connecting than paraphrasing, more to listening than hearing, more to “being there” than leaning forward with good eye contact, and there was much more to helping than implementing the “intervention strategies” of the trade.

Simultaneously, I pursued further learning, in the fields of Early Childhood Education, Special Education, Child and Youth Care, Clinical Counseling, and Educational Psychology. But I always had a sense that something was missing. Throughout my undergraduate program in Child and Youth Care and my Masters’ program in Counseling Psychology there were smatterings of energetic work, talk of boundaries, discussions about presence, references to internal locus of control, and countless exhortations about making contact. But where was the practice?



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Now as a Registered Clinical Counsellor and Family therapist in private practice, I fully realize how much was missing from my formal university education, and how much was missing from the quality of my interactions with some of my early clients. Through my personal work, enhanced by my training in Integrative Body Psychotherapy (IBP), it became abundantly clear that what was missing from my work, and my life, was ME.

I was initially drawn to the body-mind-spirit perspective toward the end of my undergraduate degree in Child and Youth Care. What I particularly like about IBP is its intricate blend of eastern and western philosophies and its systematic integration of many of the approaches that attracted me during my early training, including Object Relations, Gestalt Therapy, Self Psychology, Reichian Therapy, Bioenergetics, Yoga and Transpersonal Psychotherapy. As Jack Rosenberg (1985), the creator of IBP, acknowledges, “not one element of it (IBP) is new “(it is a method that) “deals with the whole person, integrating the body, mind, emotions, and spirit! A method that brings about profound and lasting changes”.

In my own experience, this model serves to initiate, strengthen and sustain the re-awakening that has been so important to my own growth, both personally and professionally. This involves accessing the full sense of aliveness within the body, primarily through breath work, combined with verbal and cognitive methods that serve to overcome developmental interruptions and promote the full development and expression of the Self. It is not possible for me to offer a detailed description of this model within the confines of this paper, but I strongly encourage the reader to peruse Rosenberg's book *Body, Self and Soul: Sustaining Integration* to develop a richer understanding of the following discussion.

As a certified IBP therapist and instructor, it is evident to me that the principles and methods of this approach could be effectively incorporated into Child and Youth Care practice. Now that I am “awake”, or at least, more



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aware of when I am not awake, I cannot imagine practicing from any other perspective than the gentle authenticity of this model. There is no intent on my part to disrespect or disregard other theoretical orientations, rather to view the IBP model as a template, a home base from which to begin the gentle work of re-connection to core aliveness and authentic self-expression.

In this model, the essential tool is the *practitioner*. There is a reason why certification includes one hundred hours of individual work with a therapist/counselor certified in this method. The practitioner **MUST** be awake, firmly rooted in self-awareness, compassion, and profoundly sensitive to the personal issues that may affect his or her state of presence. Does this mean that only certified practitioners should be eligible to work with children, youth and families? Absolutely not! I do believe, however, that the essence of this approach can and should be integrated to Child and Youth Care practice both from a curriculum standpoint and a personal one.

In terms of curriculum, it is my view that Child and Youth Care programs should not just be concerned about this business called relationship; rather they should *be* the business of relationship. When I reflect back to my prescribed learning about the “tools of the trade”, building rapport, conveying genuineness, demonstrating positive regard, engaging in empathic listening, and responding with immediacy, there is something fundamentally missing. How do I know that I am in the relationship in the first place?

This question brings up the topic of energetic boundary - a topic discussed at some length by Gerry Fewster (2005) in the journal *Relational Child and Youth Care Practice*. Only when I know on the inside where I end and the other begins, can I bring myself fully forward and make contact. For me, understanding and practicing personal boundary is my life's work and has become the anchor from which I engage in any personal or professional



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relationship. As far as I know there is no other therapeutic orientation other than IBP that works with the concept of energetic boundary as the foundation for contact.

In the IBP model, every interaction between the client and therapist begins with the establishment of boundaries. These can be created as a tangible boundary using a piece of string or wool, or energetic, imagining the physical space between and around the relationship. In either case, time is taken to encourage experimentation. Both the client and practitioner take turns moving away from, and closer to each other, mutually establishing a felt sense in the body that indicates what feels right. The awareness is somatic, a kinesthetic sense of containment, safety, and energetic limitation. It is important that all practitioners receive accurate training and demonstration of boundary work so that they understand from their own subjective experience what an energetic boundary feels like.

Using boundary is not limited to therapy or counseling sessions. All interactions with children and youth can start with establishment of boundaries. From my experience, if I take the time to access my own inner experience and acknowledge my boundary within the relationship, I become awake to my own energy. I am more able to engage, and more willing to bring my full self forward. I am present for my client and for myself at the same time. I believe that this level of relational contact between client and counselor is essential if there is any desire for sustained growth or change. I believe that we as humans are starved of contact; we need to re-connect with our potential to achieve presence and connection to core aliveness through training and practice. It seems logical to me that learning how to work with boundaries in Child and Youth Care practice should have as much weight and support as learning how to paraphrase, or “case manage”.

I do not need to imagine what it is like in a room full of professionals, each with their respective file folder of case notes and expected outcomes,



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each with their own agenda about how the meeting should be run, each with the best interests of the child in mind, and each with their Agency's mandate firmly encoded into memory "I've been there many times. Can you imagine, however, the same integrated case management meeting with personal boundaries in place? What would it be like for the facilitator to be genuinely present in the moment with the group? What would it be like for the youth or family in question to be given time to set a personal boundary so that he or she could engage from a place of connection, safety and somatic awareness? I like to think this is possible.

Integrating the key concepts of IBP into a Child and Youth Care curriculum would be a complex task. I believe however, that it is a task that ought to be contemplated. Training in breath work, becoming present, establishing boundaries, working with early development (primary scenario), recognizing holding patterns in the body and defensive patterns of behavior (character-style) can only serve to enhance the methods and material currently being taught.

I know that the current curricula in several schools of Child and Youth Care continue to evolve. I have personally mentored many students and continue to be passionately committed to supporting students as they transition into the field. One thing that seems to remain constant however, is a consistent complaint from students of not feeling ready "a vague uneasiness of self, an unconscious yearning for the "right" way to be in relationship and a fear of risking bringing themselves fully forward. I believe that, with adequate training in the areas discussed above, these fears can be effectively alleviated.

Over the years I have had the privilege of being invited to speak to graduating students about some of my experiences in the field and to discuss some of the mythologies I have encountered in the professional



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world. I would like to conclude by sharing some of the myths I have struggled with and the suggestions that I have offered:

1. *Wake yourself up.* Don't wait to be "taught" how to become awake. Self-initiate your own awakening. Participate in IBP training or engage in personal therapy. Keep yourself open on the inside and connected to the outside in order to grow.
2. *Avoid the mythology of "objectivity".* This idea that counselors must remain objective at all costs continues to permeate many schools of thought. It is the subjective experience of self and other at the contact boundary, that is at the heart of relatedness.
3. *Learn to breathe fully from your core* and experience the difference between sympathetic and parasympathetic breath
4. *Expand your repertoire* from "How are you feeling" to "what do you notice in your body and where." This allows for connection between thoughts and somatic experience.
5. *Watch for the "Paralytic Effect".* This affectionate term is one I use when describing excellent students who enter the field and suddenly become anesthetized to their own experience as well as the experience of the client. They completely lose self in the presence of other. Re-acquaintance with their energetic boundary, in the presence of a caring witness usually alleviates this.
6. *Be aware of the mythology surrounding "passion".* The idea that the counselor shouldn't become too "passionately involved in the lives of others" is interesting to me. Is there anything more passionate than relationship? Why are we so afraid of passion in this culture? As long as there are boundaries and you know that the passion that you are experiencing is yours, then enjoy your energetic experience



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of passion and pass it on. After all, Child and Youth Care stands for Child and Youth Care not “Cautious Young Clone”.

7. *Maintain your courage to be curious.* Explore where you came from without blame. Become aware of your own patterns as they play out in your current relationships, both personal and professional. This is the only way that I know to fully bring into awareness the messages that may have been missing during the early developmental years, and the ways in which we unconsciously seek them out.
8. *As often as possible stay connected to infants and animals;* their pure energy revitalizes my being and reminds me of my core aliveness, of who I was and who I have the potential to re-connect with, in this moment in time.

In conclusion, I have lit a few fires in this field and have also experienced “burn out”. I am eternally grateful for the exceptional teachers and mentors that I have invited into my life, but as I continue to evolve, I continue to co-construct my awareness. I continue, without too much resistance, to remain open. I continue to question what is best practice even when it has meant getting “transferred” from my position.

There have not been many things in my life that I can comfortably say are the “truth”, but I know this much to be true: my experience of life in general has changed; I know the difference between being awake and sleeping; I listen more; I am more willing to wait for responses instead of interpreting; I am more comfortable hanging out in the unknown instead of searching for security; I am more able to “go inside” instead of desperately searching on the outside for verification; and I can now identify and interpret my somatic experience and trust my dynamic boundary.



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Most importantly, though, I have experienced relatedness “my exquisite, felt sense of aliveness in the energetic presence of another. I thank IBP for introducing myself to ME, and I am passionately committed to sharing my experiences with other willing colleagues in the field.

Now that I am “here”, I can recognize “there” and I am no longer willing to stagnate on the lonely continuum between breath and death. Are YOU?

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