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 293 | July 2023

ISSN 1605-7406

The CYC-Net PRESS

press.cyc-net.org

cyc-net.org

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In association with

Relational Child & Youth Care Practice

Scottish Journal of Residential Child Care

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CYC-Online

cyc-net.org

July 2023
ISSN 1605-7406

www.rcycp.com

Relational Child & Youth Care Practice

Call For Papers

SPECIAL EDITION

Relational Child & Youth Care Management

Historically, the relationship between management and workers is one of power-relations and a struggle for control, in which workers often experience the interests of management as being at odds with their own interests (Harrison, 2001). This causes an incongruence between workers' experience of relationships with their seniors and the type of relationships they are expected to cultivate with the children and young people whom they service.

While the literature on *Relational Child and Youth Care Practice* has grown over the years, the focus has primarily been between the relationships between practitioners with children and young people; what remains relatively unexplored is the role that management plays in creating a workplace environment and the relationships that support adopting and implementing a relational approach, as well as how the management approach should be aligned with the principles and values of Relational Practice.

Relational Child and Youth Care Practice (RCYCP) is preparing a special issue on "Relational Child & Youth Care Management". We are interested in submissions that explore the relational approach to management within child and youth care practice and organisations, in the following (but not limited to) areas:

Descriptions/definitions of a Relational CYC Management approach;

Stories, experiences and examples of management practices that are experienced as relational in nature;

Exploring how Relational practice can become an integrated approach/philosophy at all levels of an organisation or programme;

Exploring how an integrated Relational approach might impact the development of policies that drive an organisation;

Descriptions or examples of how the characteristics of Relational CYC Practice might show up in a management approach that is aligned with the relational philosophy;

What might be the benefits or drawbacks of a management approach that is aligned to relational CYC practice? Who could benefit and how?

Although we prefer submissions to be less than 5 000 words (excluding references) the submissions for this issue may include various formats eg full-length papers, research, or short narratives.

Further information for authors may be found at www.rcycp.com

Deadline for expression of interest to contribute: July 31, 2023

To contribute to this issue, please email us by clicking this page.

Sharing A Life and World of Wonder

Mark Strother

Many years ago, I led youth on wilderness treks in southern New Mexico. I often took groups up to one of my favorite spots high on a mountain side in the White Mountain Wilderness Area overlooking the Tularosa Basin. Repeatedly, group after group, the reaction was the same. We would climb through the thick canopy of Ponderosa Pines, scramble up the steep precipice and gather atop a large flat outcrop. Coming out of the canyon, the view suddenly opened to a stunning and mixed panorama of desert, canyons, lava flows, forests, and distant mountain ranges. Their eyes would widen, there would be a few quiet gasps and then they would become silent. After they had a bit of time to absorb the miles of scenery, I would begin to point out some landmarks – the Valley of Fires or Carrizozo Malpais, a river of volcanic rock where lava flowed around 5,000 years ago; the Jornada Mogollon village where the Mogollon Mimbres lived in earthen huts continuously for over 400 years (900-1400 AD); land where Billy the Kid hid from a vigilante posse; the Jornada del Muerto or “Dead Man’s Journey” a 90 mile “shortcut” that took many lives; the ranch of cattle baroness, Susan McSween Barber, the Cattle

Queen of New Mexico; the ranch home where Albert Bacon Fall the US Senator was taken by stretcher to serve the rest of his life in prison after the Tea Pot Dome Scandal, the Mescalero Indian Reservation inhabited by Mescalero, Lipan, and Chiricahua Apaches; and the Trinity Site where the first atomic bomb was detonated. All of this could be seen from this single flat ledge. They were looking across an expanse that held an amazing history, however, I knew none of this "detail" was significant in comparison to the overwhelming expanse and beauty. After some time, we would climb back down into the canyon and set up camp, but after this single experience the group would seem to have taken on a different and more cohesive nature.

I have reflected much on those experiences recently while reading Dacher Keltner's "Awe." The book was suggested to me by my wife, Deb, and both she and the book have reminded me to be more mindful of the awe to be found daily. They have also had me pondering the importance of sharing these experiences with youth. Thinking back on those excursions and remembering how the hikers stood in awe, their eyes wide with wonder, I realize that I had held in my hands an extraordinary opportunity. The power of awe had opened a door to their young minds and made them ready to receive the extraordinary.

Awe is defined by Oxford Languages as a "feeling of reverential respect mixed with fear or wonder often inspired by something majestic or powerful." Keltner defines it as a "complex emotion that arises in response to something vast, inspiring, and beyond our ordinary understanding. He states that from the breathtaking beauty of nature to extraordinary human achievements, awe opens us up to a sense of wonder, humility, and

interconnectedness. He also delves into the psychological and physiological effects of awe, highlighting how it can expand our perception of time, alter our sense of self, and even contribute to physical well-being. Fortunately, it doesn't require a two day wilderness trek and a grueling climb. If mindful, we can find wonder and awe every day. It can be found viewing a sunrise or sunset, in close examination of a dandelion or just watching an ant colony. While watching the ants, consider their strength. If we had proportional strength, we could lift the weight of not one, but two cars. An ant can carry fifty times its own weight. Closer study and understanding doesn't diminish awe but intensifies it. Watching a toddler can be entertaining; knowing that the toddler is growing new neural connections at a rate of one million per second is truly awe inspiring. Looking at the night sky also brings wonder. The ability to identify constellations adds interest. Knowing the left shoulder of the constellation of Orion, the red supergiant star, Betelgeuse is satisfying. Understanding that Betelgeuse is 950 times the size of our sun and if placed at the center of our galaxy (our sun's position) its diameter would not only swallow up Mercury, Venus and Earth, but Mars and Jupiter as well is awe inspiring if not "mind blowing." We are ingulfed in a wonderous universe from the grandest concepts to the smallest detail. We need to be aware, mindful, and intentional in sharing the wonder.

Keltner states that by understanding how awe inspires personal growth, cultivates empathy, and fosters a sense of purpose, its potential as a transformative force can be unleashed. Struggling youth trapped in self-defeating cycles can be liberated through awe-inspiring encounters. By exposing them to extraordinary sights, sounds, and ideas, their horizons

can be expanded, introducing new perspectives and enhancing self-discovery. Awe has the potential to ignite personal growth by challenging preconceived notions and expanding the realm of possibilities. When youth are exposed to awe-inspiring experiences they are provided with moments of transcendence that disrupt their existing narratives. These experiences foster a sense of curiosity, stimulating their desire to explore and discover. Through such exploration, they can gain a deeper understanding of themselves and the world around them. Awe promotes reflection, encouraging introspection and self-examination, which can lead to increased self-awareness and personal development.

Studies have shown experiences of awe can cultivate empathy. By exposing youth to diverse and awe-inspiring experiences, we broaden their perspectives and enhance their capacity for understanding others, fostering a sense of interconnectedness and empathy. As youth witness the vastness and complexity of the world, a change in perspective of their own struggles may also change.

Awe can also provide a profound sense of meaning and inspiration, enabling youth to reconnect with their sense of purpose. By exposing them to awe-inspiring experiences, we offer glimpses of the extraordinary potential within themselves. Youth who find awe in their lives often develop a newfound motivation to overcome obstacles and pursue meaningful goals, leading to a sense of fulfillment and greater resilience in the face of adversity.

Harnessing the power of awe is a transformative approach in working with troubled youth. Awe allows troubled youth to transcend their current circumstances and envision a brighter future. As educators, mentors, and

caregivers, it is our responsibility to provide these life-altering experiences and guide young individuals on a path toward self-discovery, empathy, and resilience. By tapping into the power of awe, we can empower troubled youth to rewrite their narratives and embark on a journey of personal transformation.

In my journey of working with the youth, I have come to realize that awe is a gift that we must offer them. It is through awe that we can nurture their sense of wonder and instill in them a lifelong love for learning. By guiding them through moments of awe, we can help them unlock their full potential, fostering a generation of dreamers and achievers.

In the end, it is not just the youth who benefit from the power of awe. As guides and mentors, we too are transformed by the experiences we share. We rediscover the magic of the world through their eyes, and in doing so, we rekindle our own sense of awe. For in the power of awe lies a key to unlocking the boundless potential within us all.

For further insight into the power of awe I suggest –



ISSN 1605-7406

Awe: The New Science of Everyday Wonder and How It Can Transform Your Life by Dacher Keltner, 2023

Greater Good Science Center – Berkeley
www.greatergood.berkeley.edu/topic/awe/definition

For instant awe you can experience and share from your couch, I suggest – *Alexander Tsiaras: Conception to Birth – Visualized*
https://www.ted.com/talks/alexander_tsiaras_conception_to_birth_visualized

The Hidden Beauty of Pollination – Louie Schwartzberg
www.ted.com/talks/louie_schwartzberg_the_hidden_beauty_of_pollination

Louie Schwartzberg: Moving Art
www.movingart.com

Jason Silva: Shots of Awe
www.youtube.com/ShotsOfAwe

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The Human Resource Dilemma in Residential Child and Youth Care Practice

Kiaras Gharabaghi

In Canada, but I am quite sure in other countries too, it is becoming quite difficult to find well trained child and youth care practitioners willing and able to work in residential care settings. There are likely many reasons for this. For one thing, working in residential care often means working at the lower end of pay scales, sometimes without extended health benefits. Upward mobility is not always available, at least not for most. The job remains one that is largely unregulated, which means that there is neither a professional body to belong to (other than voluntary professional associations that are struggling for membership) nor a meaningful advocacy component for the profession. New options for child and youth care practitioners have emerged, particularly in intensive treatment settings such as day treatment and in-home support work, but also in transition work, schools, and other settings. Most of these new opportunities don't involve shift work, and rarely involve working on weekends. The shortage of well-trained child and youth care practitioners

CYC-Online

July 2023
ISSN 1605-7406

impacts the quality of care, and by extension, the quality of the work environment in residential services, and that, in turn, makes the job of working there even less desirable. And for some social groups, notably Black and Indigenous workers, the longstanding problems of racism and oppressive practice make these settings very unattractive. For workers with disability, the profoundly ableist context of almost all child and youth care practice settings renders employment in those settings largely prohibitive. In fact, most group homes and live-in treatment centres in Canada are not accessible from a mobility perspective, and entirely inaccessible for deaf or visually impaired workers. Most of these settings are also particularly incompetent and intolerant when it comes to worker mental health challenges. Ironically, there are no settings that upholds greater stigma associated with mental health challenges than the settings that are specifically focused on mental health service provision.

When students in child and youth care programs are asked about their preferred work settings once they graduate, residential settings almost always rank at the bottom. Schools and hospitals typically rank toward the top of the list. In a way, this should come as no surprise, given that much of post-secondary child and youth care education has painted all residential care settings as oppressive, useless, ineffective, and harmful. In fact, most programs at Colleges and Universities offer, at best, one elective course on residential care and treatment, and usually it is a course that cements the view that these settings ideally should not exist.

To be sure, the argument against residential care and treatment is compelling. One does not have to work too hard to find instances of catastrophic service provision in which young people are commodified for

quick profits for owners and workers are expendable and not supported at all. In some provinces in Canada, where substantial parts of the sector are private and for-profit, such catastrophic service experiences are the norm. I really can't blame anyone for wanting to just get rid of the whole system. On the other hand, there are also instances of excellent service provision, and of residential care settings about which even young people say good things. There are lots of settings that try very hard to improve, to integrate anti-oppressive practice approaches, to ensure trauma-informed care is ever-present, and to develop approaches to care that take account of research, evidence, and relational practices. And there are many settings that pay their workers reasonably well, that provide relatively comprehensive benefits, and that are connected to other types of services such that workers can move from one experience to another with relative ease, thus developing further and gaining new forms of satisfaction from their employment. The problem for these settings is that it is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain high standards, to continue to invest in growth and development, and to continue to ensure currency in best practices and quality measures. This is because many of these settings are experiencing significant shortages of qualified workers who can carry on the tradition of service excellence. Highly qualified child and youth care practitioners don't apply to work in these settings. This creates further problems.

It means that many otherwise excellent settings find themselves constantly dealing with crises generated by their novice work force. Many are so preoccupied with recruitment and hiring processes that they cannot focus on quality processes. And perhaps most significantly, these kinds of under-qualified workforces yield under-qualified supervisors and leaders.

And if there is one thing we know about sustainable excellence in residential care, it is that this requires sustained excellence in supervision.

All of this reflects longstanding issues and systemic problems. It is, for example, quite disturbing that in Canada, carceral settings (youth custody) have always provided for higher pay and better benefits for workers than voluntary treatment or child protection settings. They also provide for greater regulation, more emphasis on quality (of security measures), and are in almost all cases publicly funded or even publicly operated. It seems that there is greater ideological consensus in Canada, that the containment and surveillance of the disproportionally represented racialized, Black and Indigenous youth in custody is of such importance that it deserves decent pay.

What can be done? It is perhaps important to note that I would not want to create measures to improve this situation that inadvertently sustain bad services. On the contrary, my patience with bad services in residential care has run out long ago, and I am quite in favour of shutting these down for good, and while we are at it, perhaps suing, or even criminalizing the profit-seeking behaviours of the owners who have caused untold harm to young people for decades. I would love to see them 'cared for' by the relatively well-paid corrections workers in custody settings.

But I do think that something needs to change to sustain residential services that offer good, healing-oriented, culturally and racially responsive upbringings to young people for whom that might be the best (and only) option and who themselves insist that this is what they want. We must find ways of producing highly qualified human resources for residential care, including direct service workers and supervisors who can support those

workers meaningfully. There is not, in my view, a quick fix for this. But there are some long-term strategies that we might consider.

The first thing is that we need to acknowledge that child and youth care practice, as a field of practice and a discipline in post-secondary education, is diverse and multi-faceted, and therefore cannot be assumed to qualify someone to work in residential services. Most graduates of child and youth care programs learn absolutely nothing about residential care and treatment, and in many cases, learn to loathe this way of being with youth. In fact, most instructors in child and youth care programs themselves know very little about residential care and treatment, and yes, that includes those who thirty years ago worked in a group home for a couple of years. Being able to critique residential care and treatment, even if the critique is entirely valid and reasonable at the systemic and structural levels, does not qualify one to work there.

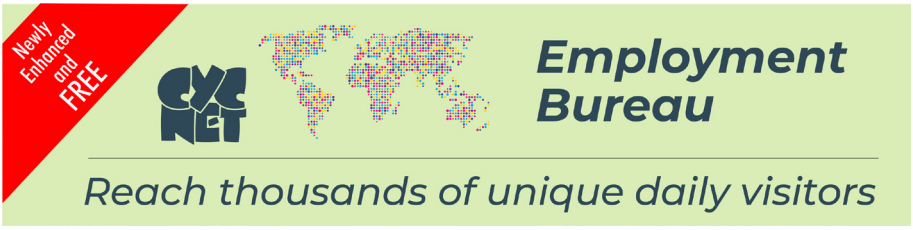
Second, we should acknowledge that we do not need to mass produce child and youth care graduates for residential service settings. Instead, we need to produce small cadres of such graduates and develop their very specialized knowledge and skills. In other words, a residential service stream in child and youth care programs ought to be somewhat exclusive, focusing on child and youth care students who demonstrate particular capacities and skills, as well as academic excellence, such that getting into this stream is far from certain for most. If you are going to work in a sector that features as much harm-doing as healing, you better be damn good at what you do.

Within that stream, we ought to provide special supports, including bursaries and scholarships, that enable students who themselves have

faced or are now facing significant adversities to participate. This applies especially to students who have care experience themselves, or who have lived experience of racism, exclusion, ableism, heteronormativity, sanism, or other ills in institutional and community contexts.

This stream ought to be partnered with residential service providers who we assess ourselves for their service quality. Only those assessed as high-quality services are invited to participate. Those assessed as ineligible are explicitly, and not very politely, told that they do not meet our standards. Furthermore, the stream ought to have curriculum that is, wherever possible, co-developed and co-taught with careleavers, or young people with care experience.

Placements in such a stream obviously unfold in residential care settings. These students are not placed in elementary schools or community-based children's programs. Their learning is focused and the level of supervision and debriefing they experience with respect to their placement experiences is significantly enhanced.



ISSN 1605-7406

These kinds of program streams can feature all kinds of pedagogic innovations, including, for example, simulation-based learning in buildings that used to be group homes (there are lots of those out there and now abandoned given the crisis in residential care). But what really matters is that we limit the number of students admitted to such programs. We intentionally undersupply the market such that demand for these graduates always is greater than supply. Only then will they be recognized as essential to the sector, paid accordingly, and no longer be seen as expendable. The goal is very simple. For years, we have asked that the leaders of residential care sectors make change for the better. They have failed. It is time that we create the infrastructure where the leaders of tomorrow are developed so that they can make change for the better.

One other element of resolving the current human resource crisis in residential services is to focus on the training of supervisors. I will write about this next month, but for now, let me just say that any change in residential care and treatment will rely heavily on the work of supervisors who know how to supervise, which means how to support and develop new child and youth care practitioners in residential services. This is not merely a matter of direct service experience; supervision is a complex activity that requires advanced skills and knowledge. The fact that the child and youth care post-secondary education sector has no post-graduate programs of any kind to train supervisors, and in fact, no current child and youth care college program, undergraduate university program or graduate university program even has a single course in supervision, is quite revealing about how much we have abandoned quality care for young people.

In brief, the current human resource crisis in residential services cannot be solved with band aid solutions. We need to think about how quality care itself and post-secondary training for child and youth care practitioners in residential care is mutually reinforcing. Only then will things change for the better.

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Rituals of Encounter

Travis Sampson

Relationships are grounded in shared experiences. Those experiences can certainly be positive. But, painful experiences, if shared, can also bring folks together. We can also get caught up focusing on momentous experiences when thinking about the forging of relationships (an extravagant vacation, the death of a friend, winning a championship together back in the day). These are important events that burn into our memories and deepen the connection we share with those who we experience them with. But, if we only focus on the 250-foot redwood in front of us, we miss the magnificence of the forest in which it finds itself, never truly appreciating the vast depth and beauty of countless redwoods standing together.

The small moments in our lives are like the forest. Sure, the tree that looms in front of us is terrifyingly stunning, as is staring up at a dwindling clock with your teammates, as a final shot sails through the air to win that trophy. But the steady consistency of the forest of redwoods before us is tranquil and reassuring in its predictability. It is this forest that is the everyday moments we share in relationship with others.

"Ritual is important to identity formation and our existence as social beings" (Freeman, Fulcher, Garfat, Gharabaghi, 2018, p. 33). Rituals are that

forest. They are the daily routines we create and join in on with young people and families. Rituals might be the established and expected greetings (verbal and nonverbal), the activities we enjoy together, and many more. The moments are small, to an observer they might be missed. To those outside of Child and Youth Care their significance is misunderstood, if not flat out ignored. But we know their importance. Rituals become predictable, predictability creates safety, safety is the soil in which a relationship can grow. Rituals, engaged in together, break down the barriers of power in relationship by creating an experience in which the role we *and* the young person play become of equal importance (Freeman *et al*, 2018). The ritual needs Us and Them to have meaning. If rituals require Them (the young people) and Us (the Practitioner) then they are essential to the formation of what Garfat & Fulcher (2012) would call, the 'co-created space between us.' The outside observer might care so little about these things, they don't even notice them happening, but we are much more intentional than the outside observer. Being intentional (we will take a closer look at intentionality in a future story) is what we "Do" (Freeman *et al*, 2018).

The following story is only a few demonstrations of rituals, in one country, in one province, within one practice setting, and in one school, engaged in by one practitioner alongside a particular group of people he shares relationships with. The possibilities for ritual are, quite literally, limitless. Rituals occur when two or more people give a shared experience meaning. So, while the intention of this story is to offer an illustration of what "Rituals of Encounter" might look like, our focus should be on the role they play in creating the space between the Practitioner and those he

shares relationships with while he does what he does in this school-based practice.

Four Out of Seven

The hardest part of this job, sometimes, is to figure out exactly whose needs I'm meeting. While I'm listening to the echo of my feet bounce around the dark, empty gym, I know for sure that this moment is all about me. It has to be. I am alone after all. Who else could it be for?

I *am* tired, though. And I woke up an hour earlier than I needed to in order to meet my contractually defined start time. Just to run a basketball program that, on a good day, 10 kids show up to. Last week one kid came. Maybe this wasn't about my needs.

See what I'm saying? It's hard sometimes.

Anyway, the light chirp of my sneakers on the waxed floor brings me back to my needs (love that sound). I head to the panel at the far end of the gym by the stage. The school is old. 1950s build, North End of Halifax. The gym's got one of those big grey rectangular panels with the fat, black switches that snap the lights on and off. I remember watching gym teachers throw the lights on with them when I was a kid. I thought they were so cool. *Just like the movies*, I remember thinking. Now I get to throw the switches myself. Which I did.

Boom. Boom. Boom. Boom.

The lights flash on and glare off the wax on the floor. I toss my bag against the wall and sit on the bench alongside it, dig out my black Fox whistle and throw it over my head. I check my phone. 7:44am. It's a 7:45am start time, but it's been weeks since a kid showed up that early. I told them,

though, that the start time was 7:45am, and whether they were here or not, that's when the doors were open. I grab one of the big orange pylons stacked in the corner next to the doors that lead out the playground, loudly kick the push handle on the grey steel door, and prop it open with the pylon. I poke my head out. No one waiting.

I hear another push door crashing open behind me and look back to see Jonah walk in. Jonah is the student on practicum that I am mentoring. He's on his third practicum, second with me, and getting ready to graduate. He's moving slowly, bent neck, looking down into his phone.

"There's no one on the waiver wire that's gonna get your team into the playoffs, bro. It's over," I chuckle. It's Monday morning. On Monday mornings, Jonah and I talk about fantasy football. We don't play it together, but we both love (hate?) to play.

He looks up, grins and shoves the phone into his pocket. "Squeaked into the 6th seed last night. Don't need the waiver anymore."

"Don't need it? Or don't have any money left to spend on it?"

Jonah shrugs. "Can't it be both?"

I chuckle. "Fair."

"I was looking at some trades. I'm one piece away from a title run," he assures me.

And we are off. We spend the next 5 minutes talking trades, injuries, cold streaks, and undervalued players. The mentor/ student power dynamic melts away, and, for the length of the discussion, we are just two nerds, pretending to be managers of our imaginary football teams.

Once we finish sharing our (perceived) expert advice with one another, I toss Jonah the keys to the equipment room. “Grab 5 or 6 balls for the kids while I lower these nets, would ya?”

He grabs them two at a time and lines them up under the bench while I start winding down the first net.

“What if only one kid comes again this week?”

I stop winding.

“Then we run him ragged,” I say.

Jonah sighs.

“What?” I challenge him.

“Just. I don’t know. Is it worth it?”

“Worth it to the kid that shows up,” I counter.

“Right,” Jonah trails off.

“Not convinced?”

“No. I am. It just seems like you should- we should….do? I don’t know. More. I guess.”

“I could tell you, ‘If I help one kid it’ll all be worth it.’ Would that make you feel better?”

Jonah grins weakly.

“How ‘bout a question instead: do you think us showing up and opening the gym every Monday and Wednesday has any value for the kids who *don’t* show up?”

Jonah thinks for a second. The power dynamic that dissipated during the fantasy football chatter is back in full force. “Yeah,” he says. “Yeah, I do.”

“OK. Tell me about the value for them.”

I start winding again while Jonah talks.

“Well. Even if they don’t come, they’ll probably know we were here,” Jonah starts.

“Right,” I interrupt, “because we make sure to remind them of that.”

Jonah laughs. “Exactly. And them knowing we’re here creates predictability. They’ll know that when they want to come, the door is open.”

“OK…” I offer.

“Second. We role model adults doing what they say they are going to do.”

“Uh huh,” I grunt, dropping the net down to where it needs to be, the rim 10 feet off the floor.

“And us doing what we say we’re going to do creates trust. Trust helps us connect. The more adults that kids feel connected to, the better it feels coming to school.”

“I like it,” I say before heading down to the net across the court to get it where it needs to be. The door with pylon propping it open squeaks before it lets out a long whine.

“Ansh! What’s up, man. Haven’t missed a Monday yet. Get your indoors on and loosen up.” I turn back to Jonah. “Jonah! You good to run our warm-up while I get this net down?”

* * *

“Why do we have to stretch and breathe at the end all the time?” Ansh complains from his butt, while reaching forward to his outstretched toe. “It hurts.”

“Why do you think?”

“To get my body ready before I go back to class,” Ansh parrots in what I interpret as an imitation of me.

“And your brain,” I add.

“Well. Technically my brain is part of my body.”

Jonah snorts. Ansh grins.

“Fair,” I smirk back. “Deep breath in through the nose.” Inhale. “Relax those muscles down the back of your leg and, out through your mouth, nice and slow. Reach on the exhale.”

Ansh closes his eyes and lets his breath out.

“Count us down, Ansh.”

“Go as deep as you can,” he directs us, “and hold. Breath in. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. Hold. Breath out now and reach further. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. 3 more …”

* * *

“Jonah, Jonah, are we going with you today?” Yusef and Javon barrel down on us.

“You guys are with us Wednesday afternoons, remember?”

“Aww.”

“Yusef. Javon. The bell rang. Come in and get something for choice time before the announcements.” Aneesa (Ms.) White said firmly from the doorway of her classroom.

“Where are you guys expected to be right now?” Jonah asked.

“Our seats,” Yusef surrendered. He and Javon head in.

“A limit framed as a question. Nice one,” I offer to Jonah.

“I’m getting better with it,” he agrees.

“Let’s go see what Keyveah is saying,” I suggest.

We throw out some fist bumps at the kids scrambling to get into their classrooms before the bell and make plans with a group of 6th grade students for a 2 vs. 5 basketball game at recess. Jonah and I have a winning streak to defend after all. We pause as “O Canada” is played on the loudspeakers. The hallways get quiet. One kid stands at attention beside the hook on her coat rack, one shoe on, one shoe off. We all listen together. No one speaks. The song ends, and almost simultaneously, the chatter and noise of the morning shuffle picks back up. As we get to the end of the hall, we hear an all too familiar sound.

“I’ll go in AFTER!” A little girl exclaims, her feet somehow looking dug into the tiled floor and eyes glaring into the face of her cross-armed teacher. She looks ready to die on whatever hill she’s standing on.

“Key,” I yell out in what I intend to be a friendly tone. “What’s up?”

“Francis!” Key yells and runs over to me. It turns out her feet weren’t dug into the tiles. Close one. She holds out her left elbow, we seamlessly transition into our handshake, a leftover from Covid-era protocols. We touch left elbows, then touch right elbows. Next up is left foot to left foot, then right to right. We both stomp our right foot to the ground in unison, wind up a high five and stop just short of touching palms. We throw our hands back like they’re the positive ends of two magnets coming together and say, “PSHHH,” in perfect harmony.

“Are you two good out here,” Ms. Nicole asks me, reaching back and letting her hand search for the doorknob to go back into her class.

“Key,” I say. “We good?”

“I’m NOT going into class yet,” she proclaims.

I take note of Key's use of the word 'yet.' Promising. I give Ms. Nicole a look that I hope says, "We'll be right there."

She exhales loudly and turns around. I choose to take that as the go ahead.

"Let's sit down," I say, pulling a quarter out of my pocket. When we get to the group of desks sitting outside Key's classroom, I hold up the quarter between my thumb and index finger. "Best 2 out of 3?" I ask.

"3 out of 5," Key states.

I hesitate, smile. "If we're going to do 3 out of 5, we might as well make it NBA Playoff rules and go for 4 out of 7."

Key smiles back. "I want to play Jonah, though," she says pointing at him. "You're too easy."

I look at Jonah and raise my eyebrows. "Think you can take her?"

He shrugs. "Who spins first?" He asks Keyveah.

"Me." Key holds out her hand. I drop the quarter into her palm. Without skipping a beat, Key has each of her thumbs pressed against opposite edges of the quarter. She touches the bottom of it to the desk in front of us and flicks. The quarter spins quietly around the table, almost as if daring each of us to take a turn at it. Jonah holds out his index finger and lowers his face to be level with the quarter. Whether he is selling his enthusiasm for Key's benefit or he's just that into it (she consistently kicks our ass at this), I can't tell. Jonah lowers the tip of his index finger slowly, inching it towards the spinning top of the coin, and...

"HA!" Key exclaims while the quarter rattles loudly to rest, flat side down, on the table. "1-0 for me. Your turn."

I lean back in my seat and watch as Jonah takes his turn to spin and Key focuses in on stopping the quarter. She lowers her finger fast and steady, touches it to the top of the quarter. It quietly stands balanced between the table and Key's finger. She grins. "Still 1-0 for me. My spin."

Back and forth Jonah and Key go. Spinning, stopping, spinning, dropping.

"4-2," Key eventually declares handing me back my quarter. "Better than Francis, at least."

I lean back to stuff the quarter into the pocket of my jeans.

"So, Key," I say, "what's up with class this morning?"

"I'm not going in until I make sure my brother paid for his pizza."

"Don't you usually pay for it with Ms. Nicole and she makes sure Jaidon gets his pizza?"

"Yes. But mom says he needs to learn to take care of his own stuff. I'm just supposed to make sure he gave it to Ms. Sparks."

"So, you need to make sure Jaidon paid for his pizza before you can go to class?" I clarify.

Key nods.



ISSN 1605-7406

“Who do you want to head to his classroom with you? Me? Or Jonah?”

Key shifts her eyes back and forth between us. “Hmmm. Jonah!”

“Alright you guys go check on Jaidon, I’ll let Ms. Nicole know you’ll be right back for silent reading.”

I turn the knob quietly on the classroom door, and poke my head in. Ms. Nicole is arranging her schedule magnets on the board, so the kids know what to expect for the day. She sees my head and tip-toes outside. All the other heads in the classroom stay buried in their books.

“I’m sorry,” Ms. Nicole exhales when the door clicks shut. “I shouldn’t get so worked up. It’s just- The morning routine, they needed to get their new books for the week- it's pizza order. I just didn’t have- I guess I should say I just didn’t *feel* like I had time to…”

“All good,” I say. “You really don’t have time.” I look over Ms. Nicole through the glass window on her door. 24 heads silently reading their books. I couldn’t do what she does with a full class of resistant readers. “You don’t have time to play Stop the Quarter for a best 4 out of 7 to get to the bottom of things. That’s why I’m here, Taylor.”

Ms. Nicole (Taylor) offers a weak smile. “Well. Thanks, Francis. Really.”

“No stress,” I wave her off with a hand. “We did figure out the problem though. Key just needs to make sure Jaidon paid for his pizza and didn’t lose the money their mom gave him. Her and Jonah will be back in a minute. Can he sit with her and do silent reading in the Chill Corner this morning? Might make the transition smoother.”

“Absolutely,” Taylor says.

“I’ll let them know!”

“Oh,” Taylor says abruptly. “Friday. You in? We’re going to Compass again. Just for an hour, you won’t be late to pick up the kids.”

“I am a sucker for rituals,” I say, smirking.

“Good, I’ll let Aneesa know!” She disappears back through the threshold and into the classroom.

“He paid for his pizza!” Key yells from halfway down the hall.

“Awesome! I let Ms. Nicole know you’d be right in. Do you want to read at your desk for the rest of silent reading? Or do you want to hit up the “Chill Corner” and read quietly to Jonah?”

“Chill Corner!” Key says without hesitation. “Bye Francis!” She runs to her desk, grabs a book and heads to the corner of the room closest to Ms. Nicole’s desk.

“Controlled choice as a limit,” Jonah notes. “Nice one.”

“Noticing my intentional use of it,” I counter. “Even better”

Jonah grins.

“You good?” I ask Jonah.

“You’re not coming in?”

“You graduate in 2 weeks. Questions as limits. Noticing a controlled choice. It’s time to cut the cord, bro. I’ll be right here, though, don’t worry, we won’t break policy.”

“Thanks, Francis.”

“No stress. Head out after reading and we’ll get set-up for Sketch Club at lunch.”

Jonah slips into the class and closes the door without a sound.

* * *

“So," I start, falling into the driver’s seat and closing my door. “What was the coolest thing you did today?” I smile and think about the difference between being a parent and being a Child and Youth Care Practitioner. Sometimes it’s difficult to find the line, like figuring out whose needs I’m meeting.

“Why do you always ask that, dad?”

“Because I want to know.”

“Oh, well. I forget.”

“OK, easier question: who did you play with today?”

“Guess.”

“Benjamin.”

“Yes. And …”

“Jacob.”

“Yes! And Owen. We played with Maria a little bit too, but she didn’t want to find gems with us. Oh! Dad!”

“What’s up?”

“It’s sunny out …”

“It is.”

“Is it before 4 o’clock?”

“It is.”

“You know what that means…”

“Green playground or Red twirly slide?” I ask.

“Hmmm. Red twirly slide!”

I slip the key into the ignition. “Seat belt.”

“It’s on!”

“Well then, let’s rock.”

"Can we play hide and seek again, dad?"

"Sure, bud."

"3 out of 5?" See what I mean? That line can get blurry.

I smile to myself. "How about 4 out of 7?"

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ISSN 1605-7406





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Youth Work as Social Pedagogy: Toward an Understanding of Non-Formal and Informal Education and Learning in Youth Work

T. Corney, J. Marion, R. Baird, S. Welsh and J. Gorman

Abstract

This paper undertakes a select survey of international literature to identify the points of convergence that support common understanding – and debate – amongst youth workers, researchers and policy makers in regards to definitional commonalities in professional youth work. We find that nonformal education, framed by human rights, appears to offer definitional common ground for youth work practice globally. Drawing on the Australian context to ground the discussion, the paper considers how revision of key definitional documents to reflect the pedagogic basis of youth work could inform the tertiary level training and preparation of youth work students and the state-based codes of ethics that inform and regulate professional youth work practice. This is important for professional youth work in Australia as the only nationally agreed statement on youth work currently lacks a pedagogical definition. While precisely categorizing the practices and programs used by

CYC-Online

July 2023
ISSN 1605-7406

youth workers remains a challenge, there is much common ground found amongst the non-formal and informal education conceptualisations of youth work internationally. While there are differences in the way professional youth work is delivered across countries and jurisdictions, there appears to be an agreed underpinning pedagogical framework, often referred to as social pedagogy, which is commonly applied, and informs the practices and programs delivered to the diverse and complex young people who benefit from them.

Keywords

Youth work; young people; social pedagogy; informal and non-formal education and learning

Introduction

Defining the practice of professional youth work has been described as a 'perennial problem' (Kiilakoski & Kauppinen, 2021, p. 86). The practice has evolved in myriad ways across the globe in a variety of institutional and community settings. At first glance approaches such as European social pedagogy and North American psycho-social human development appear incommensurate, offering little common ground for global consensus. This paper undertakes a select survey of prominent international literature and professional body documents to identify the points of convergence that may support common understanding – and debate – amongst youth workers, researchers and policy makers. We find that non-formal education, framed by human rights, appears to offer definitional common ground for youth work practice globally, extending the work of Eichsteller and Holthoff (2011) on the place of non-formal education in work with young people. This appears to suggest that the underlying basis of

professional youth work is pedagogical, centered on non-formal and informal learning. Following from this, we consider the implications of a transnational definition of youth work as a pedagogic practice for the occupational identity of youth workers globally. Drawing on the Australian context to ground the discussion, the paper considers how revision of key definitional documents to reflect the pedagogic basis of youth work could inform the tertiary level training and preparation of youth work students and the statebased codes of ethics that inform and regulate professional youth work practice.

International context: common pedagogical conceptualisations of youth work

Finding a universally accepted definition of youth work, and in particular its practices, has previously proved difficult (Sercombe, 2010). As Williamson (2015) aptly states, 'youth work is routinely defined in terms of what it is not rather than articulating more precisely what it is' (p. 7). One reason for the previous lack of a consistent definition is the diverse and complex nature of the young people at the center of youth work (Corney, 2021); another is the variety of contexts in which youth work is undertaken, the activities and programs delivered, and the aims and outcomes envisaged.

Cooper (2018) suggests that the heterogeneity of youth work practices and contexts makes the transnational sharing of a practice based 'operational definition' (p. 3) difficult and unrealistic, particularly one that crosses national boundaries and cultural differences. She goes on to state that the specific historical circumstances regarding the development and

provision of youth work, such as its role in the growth of particular countries' public sectors and civil society organizations and services (i.e. education, welfare, employment, justice, politics, and religion etc.) are too great to bridge in practice terms. However, she suggests 'an alternative is to seek conceptual definitions of youth work processes that encapsulate essential features of practice' (Cooper, 2018, p. 4). So what are the common conceptualisations of youth work?

The European social pedagogy tradition

Europe has led the way in this regard, finding common conceptualisations of youth work that cross country-specific contexts and practices. These definitions are found in the documents and declarations of European youth work events such as the European Union and Council of Europe, European Youth Work Conventions ([COE], 2010, 2015, 2020) which have sought to find shared understandings in defining the underpinnings of youth work. The most recent convention declaration (COE, 2020) states that while youth work across Europe is diverse, it '... possesses significant common ground' (p. 4). Two areas of common ground are the place of non-formal and informal education in youth work (Morciano, 2015, p. 69), and its underpinning by human rights. Indeed, in the European social pedagogy tradition, non-formal education and human rights are strongly linked. Youth work is understood as a pedagogic practice that supports the 'young people's full enjoyment of human rights and human dignity' (Council of Europe, 2008). Links between non-formal education and human rights have been forged at the level of practice (Council of Europe, 2020) as well as policy, with the EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027 stressing that 'European

Youth Policy cooperation should be firmly anchored in the international system of human rights' (EU, 2018).

The 2nd European Youth Work Convention clearly defined youth work as 'based on non-formal and informal learning' and connected to the implementation of '... existing and future European agendas on the recognition of non-formal and informal learning' (COE, 2015, p. 15). Further, the declaration 'recogni[sed] and validat[ed] the learning and achievement that takes place through youth work in non-formal and informal learning environments' (COE, 2015, p. 7). The convention declaration elaborated on the diversity of 'spaces', contexts and environments that youth work takes place within, such as the digital space, and also acknowledged the growing cultural diversity across Europe and the increasing focus of youth work on 'bridging' these 'spaces' and, '... on the integration of young people and supporting intercultural learning' (COE, 2015, p. 5).

The 3rd European Youth Work Convention noted that previous convention documents had informed its declaration and one of those recommendations was specifically pedagogical; calling for the 'recognition and validation of learning in youth work ...' (COE, 2020, p. 5). The report went on to state that:

> [B]uilding bridges from the perspective of education and training also means to go beyond the idea of integrating non-formal education and learning into formal education settings and rather work towards a coordinated system enhancing collaboration and cooperation between distinct sectors working on a common purpose. (COE, 2020, p. 13)

While it is acknowledged that there has been both practical and operational difference across European youth work (Williamson, 2015), efforts have been made over some time in Europe to draw together the common strands of youth work theory and its relationship to practice. The white paper, *A New Impetus for European Youth* (European Commission, 2001), is noted by Cooper (2018) as a common starting point, listing youth work as a part of the provision of education and development to young people. This impetus for documenting commonality was further enhanced by the publication of the *History of Youth Work in Europe* series (COE, 2009– 2019) and culminated in a clear definitional statement being issued by the Council of Europe found in the Committee of Ministers recommendation on youth work (2017, p. 3) that declared youth work as a social pedagogic practice:

> Youth work is delivered by paid and volunteer youth workers and is based on nonformal and informal learning processes focused on young people and on voluntary participation. Youth work is quintessentially a social practice, working with young people and the societies in which they live, facilitating young people's active participation and inclusion in their communities and in decision making.

This recommendation from European Committee of Ministers was echoed in 2020 by the EU's European Youth Work Agenda (European Union, 2020). This youth work agenda recognized the breadth of the term youth work, but located it in 'non-formal and informal learning processes

focused on young people and on voluntary participation' (European Union, 2020, p. 1). Summarizing the European view that youth work is a pedagogical practice, Lauritzen (in Rothemund & Ohana, 2008, p. 371) stresses that:

> Youth work is a summary expression for activities with and for young people of a social, cultural, educational or political nature. ... Youth work belongs to the domain of 'out-of-school' education, most commonly referred to as either nonformal or informal learning.

Professional youth work in Britain and Ireland

These examples of shared conceptualisations from European youth work bodies share common ground with Britain and Ireland, with its tradition of professional and critical youth work that is framed by human rights (Corney *et al*., 2022). Ireland defines youth work in law as a 'planned programme of education' (Youth Work Act 2001, s. 3), and describes youth workers as educators in non-formal settings (NYWDP, 2003). The United Kingdom (UK)-based youth work advocacy movement, In Defence of Youth Work (n.d.), define youth work 'as a distinctive educational practice' and Batsleer (2012, p. 287) argues that youth work in the UK is a social pedagogy that has 'been recognized as having a significant contribution to make to education'. Moncrieffe (2016) writing from a Scottish perspective compares non-formal education and learning practices found in Scotland with those of the United States of America. She concludes that non-formal education can be seen as a youth work practice that builds social and

human capital. Moncrieffe (2016, p. 15) suggests that non-formal education with young people in the community is provided as an alternative to formal education, stating that 'Educationists (e.g., community educationists and youth workers) have incorporated the alternative role of non-formal education in order to provide learning for individuals where formal schooling is not present or an option'. This view of youth work as a 'border pedagogy' operating between formal and informal education is consistent with other Scottish youth work academics such as Coburn (2010) and Tett (2010). Moncrieffe (2016) goes on to suggest that non-formal education is focused on young people's learning experiences within a community based context. She notes (2016, p. 17) that 'community education creates learning environments where young people can voluntarily engage in various associational settings. This description of youth engagement is also known as youth work'.

In England, Mark Smith (1980, 1988) was an early advocate for the peda-

gogic basis of youth work and along with Tony Jeffs and Smith (2005, 2010, 2021) they have together spent much of their careers defining youth work as a pedagogic undertaking and detailing the relationship of youth work to that of informal and non-formal education and learning in both theory and practice. Jon Ord (2016, p. 2) also from the UK builds on Jeffs and Smith to highlight youth work's 'unique educational practice' as a curriculum, 'which emphasizes the process of education rather than its products'. This is not derived from the outcomes based 'curriculum of the school' argues Ord but is an experiential, person centered and relational, oriented curriculum.

North America: Youth work as a human development practice

In the North American context, youth work lies within the broad field of child and youth care, which takes place in an array of institutional and community settings (CYCCB, 2010, p. 28). Child and youth care is generally defined as an applied human development practice rather than a specifically educative one. Yet the competencies statement of the US Child and Youth Care Certification Board (2010) suggests alignment with a social pedagogic approach, stating that:

> 'Professional [child and youth care] practitioners promote the optimal development of children, youth, and their families in a variety of settings. The developmentalecological perspective emphasizes the interaction between persons and their physical and social environments, including cultural and political settings'.

This should be done through the application of 'developmentally and culturally sensitive methodologies and techniques' (CYCCB, 2010, p. 22), again suggesting an implicit use of non-formal education. The lack of a stated emphasis on social pedagogy and non-formal education in the US may be due to the strength of the psycho-social discourse and framing – such as Social and Emotional Learning (Walker, 2023) – of child and youth development practice. That US youth work has pedagogic underpinnings is further suggested by the fact that the US peak-body, the Association for Child and Youth Care Practice, is the national chapter of FICE International. FICE is the International Federation of Educative Communities, a body set up under the patronage of UNESCO to support the out-of-home care and

development of young people. FICE endorses and is guided by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, pointing to a commitment to human rights and to community education as another point of convergence with the European social pedagogy tradition.

Beyond the professional body literature, North American youth work scholarship also suggests a non-formal educational basis for the practice. Discussing youth work in Chicago, Illinois, Heathfield (2012, p. 85) suggests a 'strong English influence over youth work training and professional education'. Heathfield (2012, p. 88) goes on to say that in the United States (US) at the federal level a seminal point in the development of youth work has been the delivery of non-formal after school hours education programs that 'expand learning opportunities for young people in areas of high poverty'. Heathfield (2012) building on Pittman *et al.* (2004) warns that a goal for many of these programs is to improve formal education outcomes and that this has the potential to 'override the community association and informal education concerns' important to youth workers. However, Heathfield (2012) goes on to state that a contrasting aim of many non-formal education programs delivered by youth workers has been 'to provide a broad array of enrichment activities' for young people beyond formal schooling. This is consistent with Nitzberg's (2012, p. 190) community education approach to youth work that 'weaves together formal and informal learning services'. Fusco (2012), also writing from a North American perspective and in line with Heathfield (2012) and Huebner et. al. (2003), equates 'youth work' with the practices of 'positive youth development' in the US and suggests that American youth work is often delivered in community based non-formal education settings. It is in this

context that Fusco (2012, p. xv) suggests that American youth work offers a 'potency of learning opportunities' that 'lead to a range of positive development outcomes for young people'. Similarly, Hansen and Crawford's (2011) extensive study of 11 youth programmes in the United States revealed the educational practices of youth workers in non-formal structured youth programmes. Such programmes have been described by Baldridge (2020) as 'community-based youth work', through which young people are engaged in non-formal community-based educational spaces that are separate to and outside of formal schooling. Baldridge (2020) suggests that this pedagogical form of youth work is 'celebrated in America for supporting youth academically, socially, culturally, and politically' and is consistent with the views of Heathfield and Fusco (2016).

In the US context, youth programmes are often developed by private citizens (Hansen and Crawford, 2011) and youth development activities are often linked to political movements (Noguera *et al*., 2013). In such contexts, processes of non-formal and informal learning also occur, as in the 'youth centered apprentices' analyzed by (Kirschner, 2006) where young people were mentored by adult community organizers. Similarly, Pillay and Asadi (2018, p. 2010–11), writing from a Canadian perspective suggest that informal education activities delivered via recreational and outdoor activities with marginalized young people enable social justice and social inclusion outcomes through providing alternative education spaces to formal schooling. Pillay and Asadi (2018, p. 2010–11) provide an example of a 'summer youth camp' where refugee young people access educational 'spaces of belonging' and learn how to negotiate their identities free of the prejudices found in formal schooling. They suggest that the informal

education context of the youth summer camp 'was a counter-hegemonic space' that centered the culture and language of young people and enabled them to engage in a process of 'unlearning and relearning through understanding how they have been positioned in relation to dominant discourses' of formal schooling. These examples of informal and non-formal education and learning from North American work with young people, while selective and not exhaustive, are consistent with those found in continental Europe and the UK.

Youth work in the Global South

Beyond Europe and the North Atlantic Anglosphere, in countries of the Global South, the pedagogic basis of youth work is confirmed by the Commonwealth's Nadi declaration of the Conference of Education Ministers from the Commonwealth of Nations. The Nadi declaration recognized '... the contribution of non-formal and informal learning in building the resilience of young people and the role of youth and community workers in delivering non-formal and informal education' (20th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers [20CCEM], 2018, p. 4). This builds on the Commonwealth Secretariat's (2018) definition of youth work across the 56 countries of the Commonwealth of Nations, which defines youth work as 'all forms of rights-based youth engagement approaches that build personal awareness and support the social, political and economic empowerment of young people, delivered through non-formal learning within a matrix of care' (p. 1). This statement has been further enhanced by recent agreement at the 2022 Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting between the Commonwealth Secretariat and

many of the world's largest youth organizations (such as Scouts and Guides) to form the Commonwealth Alliance for Quality Youth Leadership with the specific objective of:

> '[a]ccelerating youth leadership skills training, using non-formal education and learning approaches …' (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2022). The Commonwealth's youth policy is grounded in human rights and explicitly describes youth workers as:
>
> > 'advocates, facilitating access to human rights, the democratic participation of young people in all levels of decision-making, and partnering with them in the development and transformation of their societies (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2014, p. 7).

Also global in their reach, the so-called "Big Six" global youth organizations[1] agreed a joint position on non-formal education that stresses the 'universal validity of the non-formal dimensions of education and learning by young people, both through the work of global youth organizations, as well as national and grassroots youth organizations' (Rio Declaration 2019 p. 2). These examples from the Commonwealth and Big Six suggest that youth work as an education practice internationally has been influenced in English speaking countries by British exported ideas. Cooper (2012, p. 100) asserts that British Influenced Youth Work (BIYW) 'occurs in post-colonial countries where English youth work education and training has been exported, either formally or informally'. She suggests that this includes, but is not limited to, the countries of Wales, Scotland,

Northern Ireland, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, Malta, and countries of the Commonwealth of Nations 'where the Commonwealth Youth Development Programme operates'. However, as Belton (2014) suggests in his *Global Perspectives on Youth Work,* a primary emphasis of professional youth work is social pedagogy that extends beyond the English-speaking world. Belton (2014) states clearly that 'the focus of youth work is on … the social learning of young people' (p. 4). He defines social learning – in line with Freire's (1972) critique of formal 'banking' styles of education – as one that is not focused on narrow, one-way forms of instruction, but as an informal educational approach where youth workers and young people together develop 'learning opportunities out of everyday experience' (Belton, 2014, p. 4). Belton's views are confirmed by Slovenko and Thompson (2016), who state that youth work is underpinned by a 'social pedagogy that fits with the values of informal education' and that this is 'widely accepted and well researched' (p. 20).



The theoretical basis for the pedagogical nature of youth work

While the contexts in which professional youth work takes place may be diverse, our select review of professional body definitions suggests that pedagogy, guided by human rights, provides a theoretical commonality underpinning the conceptualization of youth work. In this section, we consider the literature on social pedagogy in relation to youth work practice in order to elaborate the theoretical foundations for framing a global definition of youth work in pedagogic terms.

Howell (2021) states that 'youth work is a distinct pedagogical practice, a process of informal education located in supported relationships, with the facilitation of participation and social justice at its heart' (p. 762). Batsleer (2012) argues that youth work operates in a critical space as a border pedagogy utilizing counter-hegemonic practices. Howell (2021) goes further to suggest this pedagogy of social justice is based on the 'youth work pedagogical principles [of] … critical pedagogy' (p. 61). This signals a further nuanced understanding of social pedagogy in youth work literature as critical and transformative, influenced by the work of Paulo Freire (1972).

Hamalainen (2015) notes that 'there is no unanimity on the nature of social pedagogy' (p. 1028). However, it is a concept commonly used across continental Europe to describe youth work (Slovenko and Thompson, 2016, p. 26), with a large evidence base for the practice (Hatton, 2018; Moss & Petrie, 2019; Sting, 2018). Therefore, while it may be difficult to define, there are commonalities that can be identified. Social pedagogy is about how society and communities think about the communal and social learning and development of people (particularly young people), how people and communities relate to each other, and how society and communities deal

with issues of inclusion and exclusion, equality and equity, and of access to resources and power. In essence, it is often conceptualized as a pedagogy of social justice (Mollenhauer, 1964; see also Eichsteller & Holthoff, 2011; Petrie, 2015). The Social Pedagogy Network (n.d.) defines social pedagogy as 'concerned with well-being, learning and growth' and states that it is 'dynamic, creative, and process-orientated rather than mechanical, procedural, and automated.' Eichsteller and Holthoff (2011) identified four overarching aims of social pedagogy:

> [T]o enhance wellbeing and happiness, both at an individual and collective level as well as in the short and long term; to provide holistic learning opportunities and positive experiences throughout the life course; to develop strong, caring and authentic relationships so that people experience themselves as interconnected, as supported by and responsible for others; and to enable individuals and communities to empower themselves, taking responsibility for and control over their own lives. (p. 178)

The origins and development of social pedagogy

The origins of social pedagogy can be traced back through thinkers such as Comenius and Rosseau (Eichsteller & Holthoff, 2011; Hamalainen, 2015). Moss and Petrie, (2019) suggest the term social pedagogy was first used by German educationalist Karl Mager, as he explored theories of social development in education. The idea emerged in response to social issues of industrialization and mobilization (Mollenhauer, 1964), especially in regard to the so-called 'youth question' in Germany, where social

pedagogy was integrated into social work with young people in the 1920s (Hamalainen, 2015, pp. 1023–1024). Following the Second World War, social pedagogy developed a critical stance, 'deconstructing social policies and institutions in examining the relationship between social pedagogy and the state' (Petrie, 2015, p. 99). The concept of social pedagogy is relatively new in English speaking contexts (Hamalainen, 2015), though efforts have been made in the UK to embrace its principles in work with young people in a range of settings (Eichsteller & Holthoff, 2012).

In practice, rather than a distinct set of methods, social pedagogy has been described as 'not so much about what is done, but more about how something is done' (Eichsteller & Holthoff, 2012, p. 33). Social pedagogy is built on a person-centered approach (Jones & Brady, 2022), and views people as 'resourceful, active agents who are experts for their own lives and possess inherent strengths that can be drawn on in overcoming challenges' (Eichsteller & Holthoff, 2011, p. 178). It engages individuals in a holistic manner (U, car, 2012), considering the entire context of their lives and community. The person-centered approach of social pedagogy does not only extend to young people, but to those who work with them; as a dynamic and creative approach, it demands 'social pedagogs to be a whole person' (Eichsteller & Holthoff, 2012, p. 33).

Given its emphasis on the "how" and "who" of the work, it is no surprise that social pedagogy is a values-based approach (Jones & Brady, 2022).

Eichsteller & Holthoff (2012) use the German word *Haltung*, which 'describes how a social pedagog brings [their] own values and beliefs into professional practice' (p. 34) to explain the importance of the social pedagog's ethos and mindset to their work. The social pedagog brings

their whole self, head, heart, and hands, to the process (Eichsteller & Holthoff, 2012). As such, it is the application of their values, rather than a method followed, that underscores the work of social pedagogy. Gruber (2009) identified five key values for social pedagogy: human dignity, responsibility, tolerance, social justice, and solidarity.

As social pedagogy is necessarily concerned with the social, its perspective 'throws light on the way social and political problems are transformed into pedagogical questions' (Vandenbroeck *et al.*, 2011, p. 53). As such, social pedagogy is concerned with questions of politics and justice; for Hamalainen (2003), 'the basic idea of social pedagogy is to promote people's social functioning, inclusion, participation, social identity and social competence as members of society' (p. 76). Rather than discipline and control, social pedagogical approaches encourage participation and collective problem solving (Schugurensky, 2014). As a result '[t]he value of democracy is also central' in the practice of social pedagogy, with democracy 'clearly related to empowerment' (Slovenko & Thompson, 2016, p. 32). As noted above, critical social pedagogy also considers the entire social context of issues, and challenges unjust power relations and exclusion (Moss & Petrie, 2019). As relationships are the driver for change in social pedagogy (Eichsteller & Holthoff, 2011), it is necessary for the 'containment of the hierarchical component in the relationship between the young and the educator in favor of an equal relationship in which each has both the power and responsibility to play their own active role in the design and implementation of the educational project' (Morciano, 2015, p. 83). It is in these genuine and authentic relationships that support and learning processes can occur (Eichsteller & Holthoff, 2012).

Social pedagogy is built on learning by doing. It has a 'life-world orientation' (Eichsteller & Holthoff, 2011, p. 183), meaning that it is focused on the lived experience and day-to-day context of the learner, rather than the artifice of classroom or setting. Instead, through engaging in relationship and everyday life, the social pedagog has an opportunity to embrace 'creation of the conditions that facilitate growth' (Morciano, 2015, p. 72), using what is naturally occurring to help young people explore their perspectives and responses. As such, social pedagogy is an approach that requires creativity and spontaneity from its proponents (Hatton, 2018); the ability to be present in the moment, open to opportunities, and to understand a young person's world. Coussee and Williamson (2011, p. 224) describe this as the "social and pedagogical tension" inherent in youth work practice.

Non-formal and informal learning

As noted, the pedagogy of youth work has been defined as non-formal and informal education and learning. Whilst these approaches reflect the tenants of social pedagogy, they each have their own unique expression and historical development. Non-formal education has been described as education taking place outside of formal settings 'the voluntary, but intentional, planned, and permanently flexible educational process, which is characterized by the diversity of methods, areas, and contents in which it is applied' (Menchen, 2006, p. 13). Often defined in opposition to formal education, such as in the *Make Learning Visible* report (Bjornavold, 2000), non-formal education recognizes both the learning and education that can

happen outside formal settings, and across the life-course (Norqvist & Leffler, 2017).

Conceptual origins of non-formal education can be traced to the Nordic folk schools, based on the ideas of Nikolaj Grundtvig. Their aim was the inclusion of everyday people in nonformal education for the enhancement of social life through knowledge of their history and culture (Lovgren & Nordvall, 2017). A further strand to the origins can be found in various worker and adult education traditions such as the Workers Educational Associations (Friesen & Taksa, 1996). Kelly (1970) documents the important influence of mechanics' institutes, churches, unions and labor colleges, which contributed to the conceptual development of non-formal education ideas. Norqvist & Leffler (2017) note that global interest in non-formal education was strengthened by the world educational crisis of the 1960s, as described by Coombs (1968), and 'dominated most educational discussions in the 1970s and early 1980s' (Rogers, 2005, p. 2). At this time Coombs, Prosser and Ahmed (1973) defined the differences between formal schooling and non-formal and informal education and Simkins (1976) went further – clearly differentiating between informal and non-formal education. Globally, non-formal and informal education were seen as a community response to developmental and literacy needs (Norqvist & Leffler, 2017), and as such were crucial for social and economic development (Rogers, 2005). In this way, non-formal education reflects the notion of social pedagogy as a response to social needs.

Non-formal education in youth work is experience-based learning (Ord, 2016). Although it may be somewhat structured, its objectives are not set by an external or mandated curriculum, but 'expressed directly by the

young on the basis of their interests' (Morciano, 2015, p. 82; Ord, 2016). In engaging young people at their level and in their contexts, it is flexible, creative, multidisciplinary, and adaptive (Mariona et al., 2022). It is unpredictable, with educator workers often exploring ideas as they emerge from and with young people (Stuart & Maynard, 2015). Rather than information, it has a bias toward what is often called 'soft skills' – social and personal development (Stuart & Maynard, 2015, p. 237). In its focus on empowering young people in their development, it can have an emancipatory effect (Mariona et al., 2022). As young people take action and engage in critical dialogue (Freire, 1972), they can develop confidence, as well as explore the reasons for their current social situation (Stuart & Maynard, 2015). In a practical sense, non-formal education challenges exclusion, as it aims to remove barriers that may come with formal education, and is more accessible to those from disadvantaged backgrounds (Mariona et al., 2022).

While non-formal education is a dominant concept in Europe, in the UK, the practice of youth work has been influenced by pedagogical practices described as 'informal' (Jeffs & Smith, 2010; Slovenko & Thompson, 2016, p. 32). Informal learning is experiential in that it is a process that involves transactions between the person(s) and the environment in which the learning occurs (Kolb, 2014). In this way informal learning is first and foremost conceived as a social pedagogy, a process of participation that is embedded within social activity and context (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Jeffs and Smith (2021) describe two uses of the term informal education. The first is education that occurs in non-school settings this can also be described as 'non-formal' education, while the second use of informal education

identifies it as a process of and orientation to learning emerging from experience, reflection and conversation that is profoundly distinguishable from its binary of formal education, which is characterized as being instructional and organized by a curriculum. Whereas the term informal learning can be characterized as relational and 'acquisition learning that is concrete, immediate and confined to a specific activity' (Rogers, 2005, p. 18). Jeffs and Smith (2010) see youth work practice as a process of enabling non-formal and informal education and learning to take place. Hatton (2018) demonstrated the synergies between social pedagogy, informal education, and youth work and argues that these concepts draw heavily on the critical and emancipatory pedagogy of Paulo Freire (1972).

Freirean pedagogy: an emancipatory approach to learning

According to Freire (1972), his emancipatory pedagogy is based on a critical dialogue between participants, portrayed as a *praxis* cycle of proposing provocative questions and reflecting on them critically, enabling the responses to challenge and inform the future actions of the participants. According to Corney et al. (2022), British youth work thinkers (Jeffs & Smith, 2005, 2010; Smith, 1988) have shaped the concept of youth work as an educational practice (non-formal and informal) and its pedagogy as social, critical and emancipatory (Beck & Purcell, 2010; Corney, 2004, 2006, 2019; Freire, 1972; Mayo, 1999). Maunders (1984, 2014) and Smith (1988) see the notion of Gramscian (1971) hegemony as a counter-hegemonic practice in youth work. This concept has been further developed by Batsleer (2012), Chouhan (2009), Beck and Purcell (2010) and Seal (2019). Corney et al. (2022) suggest that this is a counter hegemonic

pedagogy that conceives of the youth worker acting pedagogically as an organic intellectual (Corney, 2006; Corney et al., 2022; Singh & Cowden, 2009; Smith, 1988).

Youth work literature agrees on the importance of Freire's (1972) social pedagogy and in particular his notion of *critical dialogue* as a key part of pedagogical youth work practice with young people (Beck & Purcell, 2010; Coburn, 2010; Cooper, 1999, 2011; Cooper & White, 1994; Corney, 2004, 2006, 2019; Corney et al., 2022; Seal, 2019). Corney et al. (2022) suggest that dialogical conversations concurrently take the views of young people seriously while also challenging young people to critically analyze and engage with the worlds in which they live, to critique the socio-political structures that shape these environments and to act on issues of injustice to bring change (Chouhan, 2009). This is what Freire (1972) describes as the *conscientisation* process inherent in his emancipatory pedagogy.

The influence of Freire's critical pedagogy on the practice of youth work is well documented (Seal, 2019) and commitment to Freire's (1972) pedagogy, as an underpinning theoretical framework for much youth work practice, is most strongly represented in the English context (Clyne, 2020). However, there are critiques of Freire's pedagogy of liberation generally (Biesta, 2017) and its use in youth work is not without criticism (Kirkwood, 2012; Clyne, 2020). The ongoing influence of critical pedagogy on youth work is not unchallenged (Ord, 2016). Clyne (2020) while acknowledging the dominance of Freire has outlined a divergence in pedagogic philosophy in English youth work between that of Freire and to a lesser extent Kolb (1984) with that of Knowles (1970) and Rogers (1969).

However, as Corney et al. (2022) conclude, youth work is generally regarded as a critical social pedagogy and 'therefore, it is important that youth work methods have a dialogical component' (p. 679). As they make plain, alternative pedagogical approaches may lead to individualized and simplistic youth work practices that are educationally 'unreflective and lack consciousness raising' (Cooper, 2012; Cooper & White, 1994; Corney et al., 2022, p. 679). Hatton (2018, p. 164) concurs, stating clearly, that social pedagogy serves as a reminder to youth workers that 'youth work has a radical history' that is not just connected to individual development of young people but to broader movements of social justice and social change.

Youth workers and social pedagogy

For youth workers, understanding youth work as social pedagogy has the opportunity to improve practice. Cameron (2016) analyzed evaluations from residential care settings that engaged explicitly in social pedagogy practices, and found that staff reported positive experiences, for both themselves and young people. A report from the Regional Youth Work Unit North East and the University of Sunderland (2010) noted similar findings, including hearing directly from young people, who thought that it would be beneficial for services to engage in social pedagogy training of youth workers. In these studies and others, youth workers noted that the practices of social pedagogy were not new to them, 'but the difference which social pedagogy seemed to make was that it provided a framework to conceptualize and reflect upon' their work (Eichsteller & Holthoff, 2012, p. 43). Youth workers found the principles to be empowering, giving them

permission to do what they believed in and bring their whole selves to the work (Eichsteller & Holthoff, 2012). In addition, understanding social pedagogy as an ethical orientation (Eichsteller & Holthoff, 2011) encourages workers to critically reflect on their practice, including how they are acting inclusively and empowering young people. In this way, social pedagogical approaches can enhance ethical practice, and aligns with existing commitments to human rights in UK, US and Australian codes of ethics.

This section has traced the historic origins and development of non-formal educational practice, including the role of Freirean approaches in youth work, to demonstrate the rich theoretical conceptualisations for youth work as a pedagogic practice. We suggest that enhancing and supporting recognition of youth work as a pedagogic practice would enable practitioners, policy maker and researchers to draw on these rich theoretical foundations to conceptualize the practice. This could strengthen the occupational identity of youth workers globally, supporting international exchange and comparative analysis. In order to examine how such an alignment might be achieved, we turn now to examine the case of Australia.



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A definitional gap? Evidence of non-formal and informal education and learning in Australian youth work practice

In this final section, we draw on the Australian context, one most familiar to the authors, to ground our discussion and note the practical challenges for and implications of defining youth work as a pedagogic practice. We identify gaps between national and state-level definitions of youth work and empirical evidence of pedagogic practice of youth workers (Baird, 2018) and argue that addressing this definitional gap is important for youth workers, youth organizations and the outcomes for young people.

The Australian context

Professional youth work in Australia and those things that define it, such as pre-service tertiary education, codes of ethics and professional associations, have existed at various times and in various forms since the 1940s (Corney, 2021; Irving et al., 1995; Maunders, 1984). However, a commonly accepted national statement on what constitutes youth work in Australia is relatively recent, with the current definition being enacted by the only federal government funded, and nationally recognized peak body, the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition ('AYAC') in 2014. This national statement was worked out by delegates representing state and territory youth affairs councils and subsequently ratified by those state councils. The impact and import of the statement has been substantial, informing the tertiary level training and preparation of youth work students nationally and the codes of ethics that regulate professional youth work practice in Australian states. Despite the prominence of the AYAC national statement, a recent report regarding youth work in the state of Victoria noted a lack of

clarity regarding the definition of youth work, and suggested that agreement in this area would assist in outcomes for the sector (Deloitte Access Economics, 2022, p. 36).

In relation to defining youth work in Australia, Maunders (2014) has argued historically that youth work has been motivated by the values of its practitioners in tension with the values of the agencies that fund and employ them; whether it be the state or faith-based movements seeking the reform of "delinquents" in the late 19th century, political youth movements in the 1930s, or the focus on youth rights and empowerment by an emerging professional class of youth workers from the 1960s and 1970s onwards (Maunders, 2014). Corney (2004), building on Maunders (1984), identified that what motivates some youth workers to work with young people and what underpins that work, is often informed and shaped by the values and mission of those that educate and train youth workers and prepare them for practice. Hence the importance of definitional statements that inform the preservice training curriculums for youth workers.

Australia has well developed traditions of non-formal and informal education found in the allied practices of adult, popular and radical education (Flowers, 2016; Foley, 2020; Newman, 1993). Yet despite the emerging international consensus, discussed above, on youth work being a pedagogic practice, contemporary Australian youth work practice is located in a variety of mostly government funded welfare services, including housing, health, and justice, This appears to mirror the US context, where youth workers are employed in a large variety of institutional and community settings and are 'known by almost every other

name than what they do, unlike social workers or teachers' (Brooker, 2015). Similarly, in Australia Cooper and Baxter (2019, p. 113) found youth workers 'more likely to be involved in youth welfare services' than is found in other countries such as Britain. Recognizing an 'absence of a shared identity for youth workers' (AYAC, 2013, p. 1) and amid the competing voices of state-based professional associations and various state-based codes of ethics, the national youth sector peak body, AYAC, sought to create a nationally agreed definitional statement of youth work that could be recognized across Australia, and be used to advocate for youth work across state borders. Corney et al. (2022) note that as a result this national statement is the only existing nationally accepted definition of youth work in Australia:

> Youth work is a practice that places young people and their interests first. Youth work is a relational practice, where the youth worker operates alongside the young person in their context. Youth work is an empowering practice that advocates for and facilitates a young person's independence, participation in society, connectedness, and realisation of their rights. (AYAC, 2013, p. 3)

This national description of youth work is admirable and no doubt useful for informing and guiding practice, and while it does emphasize a rights basis to practice consistent with international definitions, it lacks any acknowledgement of the pedagogical basis of youth work and, in particular, a basis in non-formal and informal education and learning. This is also true of the various codes of ethics produced by state youth affairs

councils and state-based professional associations for youth workers. Codes of ethics have been important documents in the youth work professionalization process in Australia; acting as quasi-definitional statements shaping the identity and professional practice of youth workers and informing preservice training (Corney, 2021). In the state of Victoria, the current version of the Code of Ethical Practice (Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, 2007) provides a series of principles and practice responsibilities that are founded in human rights as a framework for youth work practice. While this code is comprehensive and instructively informs practice, it does not mention pedagogic underpinnings as being important to youth work. The same is true of the other state-based codes of ethics derived from the Western Australian code (Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia & Western Australian Association of Youth Workers, 2014; Corney, 2021), which is also silent on the role of pedagogy in youth work.

Evidence of non-formal education in Australian youth work

Yet the silence within professional body statements does not mean that Australian youth work is not pedagogic in practice, as Baird (2018), in concert with the earlier work of Eichsteller and Holthoff (2011) demonstrates. Baird (2018) found that the practices of youth workers engaging with marginalized young people in the western suburbs of Melbourne align with the approaches of social pedagogy. He found that local municipal council funded youth workers, who were working with young aerosol graffiti writers, used non-formal and informal education practices that elicited non-formal and informal learning responses for the young aerosol writers who participated in the youth work programs. Baird's

(2018) case study drew on vignettes that describe informal social learning practices amongst a group of young people involved in an aerosol art program for at risk young people run by youth workers through Local Government Authority youth services.

Baird (2018) described the pedagogical interactions between the youth workers and young people as consistent with a mutual learning and teaching that was in concert with the critical social pedagogy of Freire (1972):

> 'Education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers and students' (p. 72).

Baird (2018) witnessed a clear example of pedagogical practice talk or 'dialogue' (p. 156) that demonstrated the occurrence of non-formal and informal social learning via young people and youth workers talking about aerosol graffiti writing practice and relating it to stories of aerosol writing community lore (Orr, 1990). Baird's (2018) case study analysis demonstrates how youth workers employ informal education and learning outcomes in their professional practice. While the field of formal education studies has largely dismissed young people's informal learning practices and the mutual benefit to education professionals, and caricatured research in this space as legitimizing young people's anti-social behavior (Mills & Kraftl, 2014), Baird's (2018) study confirms a key conceptual principle that education as non-formal and informal learning takes place through pedagogically defined youth work practice in Australia. Baird's (2018) study

not only evidences the presence of non-formal and informal education and learning in Australian youth work practice, but also provides a useful example for practitioners as they conceptualize the pedagogic nature of their work.

Recognizing pedagogy: implications for Australian youth work

Greater acknowledgement of the pedagogic nature of practice by youth work professional bodies could address the definitional gap in Australian youth work practice, ensuring that professional bodies are reflecting the reality of the work for their members. It would support greater understanding of what youth workers do by cognate disciplines such as teaching and social work. Furthermore, addressing the definitional gap in Australian youth work would align Australian practice with the emerging global consensus and support greater international mobility and exchange between practitioners. Baird (2018) argues that there are a number of implications of a greater reflection of the pedagogic nature of practice for the tertiary level preparation and professional regulation of youth work education and training as well as for youth work professional body codes of ethics.

With regard to the training of youth workers, strengthening the emphasis on the pedagogic nature of youth work would require the revision of national training packages to include reference to underpinning pedagogical theories in certificate and diploma level training. Similarly it would require revision of unit content and curriculum in university degree level programs. As social pedagogy is as much a process-driven *how* as a contentdriven *what*, emphasis should be placed on critically reflective

practice, as social pedagogs are 'encouraged constantly to examine their practice and to apply both theoretical knowledge and self-knowledge to the sometimeschallenging demands that confront them' (Moss & Petrie, 2019, p. 399). Finally, educators might place a particular focus on developing the practices of critical dialogue and other Freirean approaches as necessary (Petrie, 2015).

A second implication of a greater emphasis on social pedagogy is the need to amend national definitions, codes and guidance documents. This is arduous and requires diplomacy, but may be supported by recent political developments in the sector. The Australian federal government has refunded the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition as the national peak sector body, and appointed the national youth work professional association, Youth Workers Australia as the body responsible for the accreditation of youth work degrees nationally. These timely developments provides the youth sector with formally recognized regulatory bodies able to facilitate and lead this work.

Conclusions and implications

Embracing social pedagogy as an internationally accepted underpinning conceptualization of youth work has implications for national and statebased definitions that inform pre-service youth work training. Understanding youth work as a social pedagogy would enhance the youth work sector's contribution to public policy development and debate through its emancipatory practices and conceptualization of society (Moss & Petrie, 2019). This is a positive contribution that Hans Thiersch has argued has not been promoted strongly enough by workers

themselves (Schugurensky, 2014). In regard to conceptualisations of youth work, despite theoretical knowledge being foundational to good practice (Petrie, 2015), too often youth work has been devoid of educational theory (Williamson, 2015). Social pedagogy offers youth work a 'theoretical framework around which to position itself' (Williamson & Conroy, 2020, p. 179). This paper has sought to establish non-formal education and learning as definitional common ground that can support greater dialogue, debate and potential for consensus between the youth work traditions of European social pedagogy and North American psycho-social human development. Additionally, it would enhance the sector's ability to explain what it does beyond its own disciplinary borders, thus promoting and advocating for the value of youth work (Cooper, 2018). This is especially important in light of efforts by neo-liberal governments to question the outcomes of youth work and seek to defund and dismantle youth work services (Hatton, 2018). In this environment, the conceptualization of youth work as a social pedagogy provides youth workers with 'tools to defend themselves against accusations of superficiality, improvization, lack of professionalism and an inability to demonstrate the effects of their actions' (Morciano, 2015, p. 90). It also provides concepts and practices for the evaluation and critique of outcomes that are prescriptive, or not in the interests of young people, and narrowly defined by the state or other actors (Morciano, 2015; Plath, 2006; Stuart & Maynard, 2015).

Conceptualizing youth work as a practice of social pedagogy, in international, national and sub-national definitions of youth work would also benefit young people. Social pedagogy enables grassroots youth work to create counter-discourses around young people, as opposed to

narratives of dysfunction and delinquency (de St Croix, 2016; see also Batsleer, 2012). Rather than a focus on young people as a problem to be fixed, or to limit their access to services unless they experience a defined deficit, a social pedagogy approach instead takes a strengths-based approach, empowering young people holistically as positive youth development (Fusco, 2012; Hatton, 2018; Petrie, 2015; Williamson & Conroy, 2020). The emancipatory nature of social pedagogy enhances youth participation, supporting policy that listens to young people's voices and enables their agency in decision making (Slovenko & Thompson, 2016). In addition, Jones and Brady (2022) have described the potential for social pedagogy to be an innovative response to the recent COVID-19 pandemic, as relationships and practices are reimagined in communities. Making youth work's social pedagogic underpinnings more explicit has the potential to benefit both the youth work sector and young people directly. However, an ongoing lack of recognition of the pedagogic underpinnings in national and state-based definitions of youth work, as in the case of Australia, is a problematic definitional gap which requires revision through national and state-based consultation processes.

Note

1. Scouting and Guiding, YMCA, YWCA, the Duke of Edinburgh's International Award and the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent.

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Relational Child & Youth Care Practice

Call For Papers

SPECIAL EDITION

Relational Child & Youth Care Management

Historically, the relationship between management and workers is one of power-relations and a struggle for control, in which workers often experience the interests of management as being at odds with their own interests (Harrison, 2001). This causes an incongruence between workers' experience of relationships with their seniors and the type of relationships they are expected to cultivate with the children and young people whom they service.

While the literature on *Relational Child and Youth Care Practice* has grown over the years, the focus has primarily been between the relationships between practitioners with children and young people; what remains relatively unexplored is the role that management plays in creating a workplace environment and the relationships that support adopting and implementing a relational approach, as well as how the management approach should be aligned with the principles and values of Relational Practice.

Relational Child and Youth Care Practice (RCYCP) is preparing a special issue on "Relational Child & Youth Care Management". We are interested in submissions that explore the relational approach to management within child and youth care practice and organisations, in the following (but not limited to) areas:

Descriptions/definitions of a Relational CYC Management approach;

Stories, experiences and examples of management practices that are experienced as relational in nature;

Exploring how Relational practice can become an integrated approach/philosophy at all levels of an organisation or programme;

Exploring how an integrated Relational approach might impact the development of policies that drive an organisation;

Descriptions or examples of how the characteristics of Relational CYC Practice might show up in a management approach that is aligned with the relational philosophy;

What might be the benefits or drawbacks of a management approach that is aligned to relational CYC practice? Who could benefit and how?

Although we prefer submissions to be less than 5 000 words (excluding references) the submissions for this issue may include various formats eg full-length papers, research, or short narratives.

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A School Behaviour Engagement Program with Special Needs Children in Northern Ireland

Hamido Megahead

Abstract

This research is summary of the implementation of a School Behavioural Engagement program to stop the low-level violence of special education children in Belfast, Northern Ireland. Action research was used in terms of the children's participation in their identified social activities (e.g., school behavioural engagement program). Some children said, "It was a good program as it stopped them from fighting with each other" and other children said, "It was fun". There was a reduction in hitting one another and they felt less anger towards each other. They also demonstrated some positive conduct (e.g. some children even brought their own ball from home and shared with the other children).

Keywords

Action Research, School engagement, School Behaviour, School Social Work, Special Education.



July 2023
ISSN 1605-7406

During the school year in 2021 and 2022, I implemented a children's program titled School Behavioural Engagement with special education children in a Belfast Educational Authority School.

The aim was to support special education children in having positive conduct with one another as well as eliminating or/and reducing disruptive behaviours (Fredricks, Blumanfeld, & Paris, 2004). These special education children were in year eight, aged from 13 to 14 years old. The number of participants were nine children (8 males and one female). In the beginning of the school year, the children were given 25 minutes for a break after their lunch, to play in the playground. As a children supervisor and as an Independent Social Work Researcher committed to propagate the School Social Work in this specific context (Megahead, 2022), I observed a group of children (n=five males and one female).

This group were displaying signs of physical aggression towards each other, using inappropriate words and displaying of bad intentions towards one another, for example, grabbing each other by their clothes. There were three other boys including an introverted child, a cautious moving child and an observing and non-participating child.



Basketball and Creative Play

Underpinned by the childhood studies perspective and sociology of childhood, these children were considered and perceived as social actors. Action research was used in terms of the children participation in their identified social activities (e.g., school behavioural engagement) (Jones, Miller, Luckey, 2013). In addition, children designed and implemented an intervention and assessed the outcome through data analysis (Bastien & Holmarsdottir, 2015). In the beginning of the school year, I observed that the children were hitting and annoying each other, and they did not seem to care about the items that they were provided to play with. I spent time listening and working with them.

These children were able to create certain activities that were the significant key for them. I worked with this group of children to help them identify their perception of their situation. After they identified the key issues in terms of their need for playing and activities, the group identified basketball and some other activities as solutions.

One problem was there was no basketball net available. They children were very creative and made use of a football net, which they adapted to work as a basketball net.

Nearly every day during the school year, I brought different toys and items: basketball, ropes for jumping, flying disks etc. and many more items. At the beginning of each session, I gave a playing instrument to each one of them. For example, I gave the introverted child a football and devoted a specific area for him in the patch to play. For the cautious moving child, I gave him the jumping rope. For the other children (n=five boys and one girl), I gave them the basketball. Only one child was observing and non-

participating. I asked these five boys to give him a chance to try once every five minutes. I also reminded them in each session, "Once you all have finished playing, please return the items safely back to their place." During each session, I observed and supervised them during their practice of these activities.

Procedures to Minimize Power Relations

I used the following procedures to minimise power relations. Firstly, when the children were making a circle in the ground, they asked me to sit beside them in their circle and asked me some questions about kinship of one of them. I responded positively, trying to allow them comfort and a safe space (Robinson & Kellett, 2004). Secondly, I memorized their first names and nicknames. This was one small way I could reduce the power dynamic between children and myself during the playground time. Thirdly, I kept a good conversation going about them, maintaining a good understanding and rapport with the young children.

The Outcomes

At the end of each session, I carried out a daily qualitative evaluation, in which I asked each one of them *"have you enjoyed the activities?"* They would say *"Yes"*. I would reply with, *"I will bring the playing instruments tomorrow"*. Some children asked *"can you bring two hula hoops tomorrow?"* or *"can you please bring jump ropes"*. I have conducted the specific same daily routine and procedures throughout the same specific school year. When there was rain and the patch was wet, or it was

snowing, the activities would be temporarily discontinued. However, it resumed as soon as weather permitted.

At the end of the school year some children said, "*It was a good program as it stopped them from hitting each other*". Some other children said, "*It was fun, I made a new friend through this game*". An observation was noted that this school behaviour engagement program had decreased the levels of aggression, both physical and verbal. They stopped pushing each other, they stopped hitting each other and they stopped annoying each other. Some children even brought their own ball from home and shared with the other children who were also playing. The children became more caring and learned how to better take care of school property. They made sure to return the items to play back to me and to the school storeroom.

Discussion and Implication

This program has influenced school policy and practice regarding the children's lunch break. At the beginning of following school year after completion this program, the school supplied one mobile basketball net (as the children only needed one net.) and it was carefully placed in the patch for the children to use. One of the children has even been willing to bring his own basketball for the children to use. The observing and non-participating children also became active members of this group. The introverted child brought his own ball and used it in a specified area. However, for the cautious moving child, his part of the program remains ongoing.

Acknowledgement

The real names of children mentioned here have not been used to protect their confidentiality, personal privacy and identity.

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Chop Wood, Carry Water: Refusing the Spectacular

Hans Skott-Myhre

In another lifetime I was a spiritual seeker. I spent much of my free time reading various forms of scripture from religious traditions such as Christianity, Taoism, Sufism, Bahai, Buddhism, Voodoo, and Hinduism. I practiced yoga, tai chi, veganism, vegetarianism, attended sweat lodges, threw the I-Ching, fasted, and engaged in different forms of meditation and prayer. I sought out gurus and spiritual teachers and spent considerable time in their company at retreats and workshops.

For a decade or so, the quest for spiritual experiences and understanding was near the center of my life and I still carry many of the teachings that were gifted to me in the way I live today. However, as I have gown older, the urgent necessity to search for spiritual experiences and knowledge has waned considerably. Of course, this would appear to run contrary to the developmental theories that would suggest that as I approach my mortality, my need to understand the purpose of my life in spiritual terms would increase, not decrease.

I have thought about this and as I have gotten older, I sometimes wonder what happened to that hunger for salvation, transcendence, enlightenment, or at a minimum wisdom. But then I am reminded of a teaching I received from a guru nearly 40 years ago. At the time, I was

CYC-Online

July 2023
ISSN 1605-7406

powerfully impacted by the teachings of a spiritual master who taught a version of yogic practice derived from Advaita Vendanta Hinduism. His name was Jean Klein and I found his very presence transformative and highly compelling. I attended yoga retreats, meditations, lectures until I became convinced that I needed to join him in his work as a disciple. So I scheduled a one to one meeting with him to ask him to take me on as a full time student. In our meeting he listened to what I had to say and then after a long moment, he told me that I could certainly join him or any other teacher. I could take on a variety of teachers or spiritual practices if I wanted to, but at the end of the day he told me that there was no discipline for me.

At the time, I was severely disappointed and felt a powerful sense of rejection and failure. I never went back. But, over the years, Jean Klein was right. There has not been any one path or any discipline that has been compelling enough to hold my attention long term. In a way, I guess you could say, I am simply undisciplined. Or perhaps, my lack of discipline is a gift that has allowed me a certain freedom to seek what life has to offer. Without a disciplined or disciplinary focus, all my spiritual training has melded together into an appreciation of living force as it saturates my experience as an embodied transit point of limitless creative production. What I experience as me is so full and rich with everything that life is, it is all I can do on any given day to at least try to be present to some small portion of it. But I have an intuitive understanding that what I experience as a life is stunningly miniscule in relation to the infinite field of creative production that is life itself. That said, I also know that without my life and all its idiosyncratic twists and turns, the rest of everything would be

impoverished. I also know that this is the case for all of us collectively producing the world.

There is an old and somewhat hackneyed Buddhist teaching that says that if you want to achieve enlightenment, you must learn to chop wood and carry water. It is often interpreted to mean that enlightenment (or a full living comprehension of everything and one's place in it) can best be found in the mundane acts of living. For me, I no longer seek any kind of enlightenment, but I am interested in what I can learn from simply living as fully as possible, given the inherent limitations and infinite capacity of how I have to come to be this person I am currently.

During my time of spiritual exploration, I became interested in land-based forms of spirituality and how they played out in gardening. I became fascinated with the way one could work with the land and the spirits of the land to grow food. I read quite a lot about this and designed a quite successful garden built in a spiral with open space for animals and insects to take their share. I tried very hard to work in harmony with the land and found it quite rewarding both in the work and in the crop harvest. Like most of my practices, the details have faded over the years and while I still try to work with whatever land I am on with a degree of sensitivity and conscious attention, I no longer carry out the more prescriptive elements of what I had been taught.

That said, there was one story I have retained over the years that has caused me reflect many times in relation to how I have lived and worked. The story goes that there was a spiritually oriented commune that was practicing spiritual gardening following all the precepts of a particular school. They had diligently laid out the garden in the prescribed fashion,

done the plantings as instructed, allowed space for animals, insects, and spirits and yet their crops were failing, They contacted the teachers of the school of spiritual gardening that they were following and asked for help. The school sent out a couple of representatives to go visit and see what had gone wrong. They toured the garden and then gathered the members of the commune together. They complimented them on their diligent adherence to the principles of spiritual gardening. They then asked how often they watered the garden. The response was silence. In all their work they had not thought to water the garden with any regularity and this was why it was not thriving. To repeat the Buddhist adage, they had literally neglected to carry water.

The importance of paying attention to the material and mundane aspects of our relationships with all things is critically important to our ability to live in harmony with the circumstances of our lives. I remember my guru Jean Klein being asked about paranormal spiritual phenomenon such as past lives, telepathy, levitation, and so on. His answer was that undoubtedly such things are possible, but they are a distraction from the real work of spiritual exploration, He described them as the carnival, lots of flashing light and sounds, fun to ride on but nowhere you would want to live.

The power of the mundane, beyond the lights of the carnival is where I believe the best work with others is achieved. To work relationally in the ways proposed by the field of CYC is a quite ordinary kind of practice. It is composed of engaging in the daily routines of living in a space composed of young people and adults. There is quite a lot of cooking, cleaning, hanging out, daily hygiene, as well as games, walks, outings and so forth.

There are of course spectacular moments of remarkable behavior that can involve high emotions and acts of violence or love. These disruptions of the daily work can be very compelling. But, I would argue that at the end of the day, they are the carnival and not anywhere to live.

They are compelling though, and at times it can seem as though the spectacular is what makes the work worthwhile. The fascinating world of exceptional behavior. We spend an awful lot of time, thinking, theorizing, documenting, strategizing, worrying, and fantasizing about what to do about young people's mad behavior. At times it can appear as though the day to day acts of living together pale in comparison to the spectacular acts of malaise that erupt periodically in the work we do.

Of course, this fascination with extreme behavior or emotional upset is not unique to CYC. It is a global cultural obsession. Everywhere we look there are theories about why the behavior of young people is so disturbed and what we might do about it. I was reminded of this by a recent article about the impacts of social media on young people's mental health. The article begins by stating:

> *There have been increasingly loud public warnings that social media is harming teenagers' mental health — most recently from the United States surgeon general — adding to many parents' fears about what all the time spent on phones is doing to their children's brains. While many scientists share the concern, there is little research to prove that social media is harmful — or to indicate which sites, apps or features are problematic. There isn't even a shared definition of what social*

> *media is. It leaves parents, policymakers and other adults in teenagers' lives without clear guidance on what to be worried about. "We have some evidence to guide us, but this is a scenario where we just need to know more," said Jacqueline Nesi, a psychologist at Brown who studies the topic.*

I am struck by several things here. The first being that we as a culture are seemingly obsessed with protecting young people from harm, even when we are not sure that something they are doing is actually dangerous. We issue warnings that something (in this case social media) is causing our young people to be deeply and profoundly unhappy and lonely. In our concern, we look to anything unfamiliar as the possible source of harm. In this, we are seeking out the spectacular, the flashing lights and sounds of social media as the source of our children's malaise. It is flashy, it is new and we don't understand it, so we create it as an object of worry. If we could just get our children away from the carnival, all would be well.

But there is another cultural imperative that emerges in the article and that is the necessity for adults to worry about young people. The article state that "*It leaves parents, policymakers and other adults in teenagers' lives without clear guidance on what to be worried about.*" To be fair, the quotation refers to the lack of specific information about what parts of social media might be harmful. However, I would argue that adults are trained to worry and to look to experts to tell them what to worry about. In previous generations, this worry was centered around morality and we had an array of what has been called moral panics. Stanley Cohen describes a moral panic as the creation of a social concern that is produced by moral

entrepreneurs, promoted through mass media coverage, and then taken up by politicians. This can lead to new laws aimed at enforcing moral codes and controlling behavior.

Moral panics have included drug use, promiscuity, rock and roll, communism, homosexuality, movies, and fashion trends, to name but a few. Recently we have seen a resurgence of moral panics related to drag queens, transgendered young people, critical race theory, and socialism among others. Moral entrepreneurs and politicians have warned that young and impressionable children need to be shielded from what are portrayed as morally dubious influences. But I would argue that this is the carnival, where there is a lot of noise and mirrors, but no evidence to support the allegations of harm or the imperative to worry.

The social media scare mimics the moral panic playbook, but draws on a different set of entrepreneurs. The new carnival barkers are the purveyors of worry over the emerging social coordinates of mental health. Put simply, we now have mental health panics. Social media is one, trauma is another, faulty neurology/biochemistry are on the list, while music, alcohol, drugs and sexuality make the transition from moral to mental health. The list of social phenomenon that create mental health issues for young people is fluid and expansive with new contributions arriving with regularity. The messages of mental health panic evoke fear and concern and place young people under ongoing surveillance to monitor any slip that might indicate a serious mental health issue. The flaw in all of this is that the evidence to support any clear causal connection, or even to give an unambiguous definition of what mental health means. In short, this is yet another carnival and carnivals are not ideal environments in which to raise children.

What is left out of the mental health panic discourse is the actual material lived reality of young people. While we are encouraged to worry about things like drag queens, social media, hip hop, and sexuality, young people worry about being shot at school, recruited into a militia as a child soldier, inheriting a ecologically compromised planet, having limited access to meaningful education and employment, having access to clean drinking water, food insecurity, gun violence in their neighborhood, among other concrete actual concerns.

The antipsychiatrist Franco Basaglia was once asked if he believed schizophrenia was real. He responded by saying that he didn't know, because the society that we live in was so extremely dysfunctional, it was not surprising people were driven crazy. He said, however, that if we could shift our society so that it actually cared for people, and then schizophrenia still existed, perhaps we could say it was real. In our terms here, if we could dim the lights of the carnival so we could see what was really effecting our children, then perhaps we could do something to make their lives more tolerable. In a very real sense, we are like the commune trying to grow a garden without enough water. We need to come home from the carnival and water our garden.

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CYC-Online

July 2023
ISSN 1605-7406

www.rcycp.com

Relational Child & Youth Care Practice

Call For Papers

SPECIAL EDITION

Relational Child & Youth Care Management

Historically, the relationship between management and workers is one of power-relations and a struggle for control, in which workers often experience the interests of management as being at odds with their own interests (Harrison, 2001). This causes an incongruence between workers' experience of relationships with their seniors and the type of relationships they are expected to cultivate with the children and young people whom they service.

While the literature on *Relational Child and Youth Care Practice* has grown over the years, the focus has primarily been between the relationships between practitioners with children and young people; what remains relatively unexplored is the role that management plays in creating a workplace environment and the relationships that support adopting and implementing a relational approach, as well as how the management approach should be aligned with the principles and values of Relational Practice.

Relational Child and Youth Care Practice (RCYCP) is preparing a special issue on "Relational Child & Youth Care Management". We are interested in submissions that explore the relational approach to management within child and youth care practice and organisations, in the following (but not limited to) areas:

Descriptions/definitions of a Relational CYC Management approach;

Stories, experiences and examples of management practices that are experienced as relational in nature;

Exploring how Relational practice can become an integrated approach/philosophy at all levels of an organisation or programme;

Exploring how an integrated Relational approach might impact the development of policies that drive an organisation;

Descriptions or examples of how the characteristics of Relational CYC Practice might show up in a management approach that is aligned with the relational philosophy;

What might be the benefits or drawbacks of a management approach that is aligned to relational CYC practice? Who could benefit and how?

Although we prefer submissions to be less than 5 000 words (excluding references) the submissions for this issue may include various formats eg full-length papers, research, or short narratives.

Further information for authors may be found at www.rcycp.com

Deadline for expression of interest to contribute: July 31, 2023

To contribute to this issue, please email us by clicking this page.



Safe Space

Garth Goodwin

When you attend a conference the keynotes and workshops inform, entertain and perhaps leave one with a nugget of knowledge or affirmation. The closing keynote of the 2022 Canadian National Child and Youth Care Conference, Mackenzie Brown, through drum song, singing, dialogue, illustrations like the one above and sheer effervescence bought me back to the unique aspect of my childhood, experiencing two families and two cultures while occupying the safe space between the western and indigenous worldview as presented

CYC-Online

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ISSN 1605-7406

above. My best friend roughly from the age of 3 or 4 lived next door and was a constant life presence until different high schools and life separated us. I'll call them the X family and the experience of knowing them had lingered deep in my memory, impacting my lifestyle unconsciously through their Cree Metis lifestyle. At a time when reconciliation and polarisation for indigenous peoples is complex with the discovery of the indigenous graves of infants and children who attended residential schools without any record on one hand and the rollout of indigenous investment in everything from a beaded zipper pull to urban reserves, an interprovincial pipeline, artwork, fashion, tourism and hospitality on the other; impacting the Canadian experience. This column explores aspects of the memories bubbling up in me of this remarkable family as inspired by Mackenzie.

The X family had a Kokum, who had come north from the Manitoba Interlake to live with them as a widow. She did not speak much yet was always a presence, fine grey hair braided into an elaborate round woven circle and always a simple day dress in printed cotton. I thought they were so lucky to have her as my grandmother, who had raised me for almost two years remained a day distant to the south. Respect for seniors was more of a given then as they remained a vital part of the family.

Our parents chose well establishing a fine suburb poking into the wilds literally two blocks or less. To the east ran a range of high stone bluffs which included a rock fall we called the caves, a massive sandpit with walls of fine sand miles above our heads and a lake. High Rock gave one something to climb to take in the view of our town. To the south was our school with its three modes of approach: sidewalk, when you really had to

get there, road, for when the sidewalk was blocked in winter and a park which was just natural forest with trails. Westward was a polluted stream with rapids and miles of barren rock, its wild growth burnt by deadly smelter smoke. Finally, to the north, our water reservoir was a pristine lake, guarded lake, sheltered for our exclusive use. As we aged, we roamed deeper into the far reaches in each direction. Walking, swimming, fishing, hunting, fort building and constant exploration. I often wonder where the kids are in my city. I see them in the school yards but rarely on our street as folks have built ten-to-twelve-foot stockades on rail runners to fortress their yards. Most have experienced being a victim of crime be it simple trespass to break and enter to home invasions. Boundaries, which were once second nature, have broken down over my lifetime. Proper parenting must include explicit instruction in boundary respect.



Mr. X valued the young and created age appropriate yet instructive and healthy activity. He had a friend with a frontend loader create a mountain of snow in the backyard to climb at first but dig out a fort in once it was hard packed. An ice rink followed which meandered around the trees allowing for free skating and net minding. As we aged the activity changed ending in an intense three lake over canoe trip with an overnight stay in a trapper's cabin. Everything had to be carried in and out again with swarms of blackflies bleeding your exposed bits near every lakeshore. Your eyes hurt; you literally swallowed these things but there was no complaining just getting the job done. Once back in the canoe and perhaps ten feet out from shore the swarms ended in a swell of true freedom. One of the lakes had a chalk bottom so looking across it appeared turquoise like a mountain lake while looking down was totally clear to the bottom with ghost like fish coursing along. Fish camouflage altering their colour to match their surroundings. I hooked a massive pickerel who jumped high above us at one point before drilling down straight under the canoe to break the line. As one with a helicopter parent who saw danger in each step in the wild this immersion was exhilarating.

This pattern of enjoying life was ultimately repeated in the building of the X family cottage. My parents viewed cottage life as too much work. They entertained the notion folks would pour in on them every weekend. For many fortunate folks cottaging is a Canadian lifestyle like that of the Nordic countries. Mr. X decided upon blond or clear logs requiring cutting Poplar logs in a distant forest, boating them over to the site, debarking them and building with them. Everyone had a job or role in this from the Kokum on down to us kids. Our job was to use a laundry pail perched on a

baby carriage chassis to haul sand and build the trails over the dark muskeg of the site. We were only to do this fetching and spreading until noon at which time we had the afternoon off and in time all the toys to use. Ultimately, we were left at the lake for the work week for an incredible few seasons I've never forgotten for the immersion into the wild it allowed. You learned to tell time by shadows and/or position of the sun relative to a tree, literally sniff out weather and see its signs in the colour of sunsets and dawns. Along the way we had an orphaned moose, a bald eagle and for a few years, a raccoon come into our lives to tend to.

Mr. X also coached junior hockey setting a few lads up for impressive Stanley Cup careers. Once he hosted Gordy Howe to a day at the cottage sponsored by a beer company. They were more than generous with their product setting the place up with a few summers' worth of the stubby bottles of the day just as we entered the teen years. A neighbour hosted his American clients one weekend. We wandered in, put on a southern drawl and were given a beer for out troubles refreshing our card playing. Things suddenly blew up when a lake friend's mother caught on raiding the cabin and finding case after case of beer tucked away in the bedroom. End of the party although she never learned the true source.

This was a welcome revelation of nostalgia far beyond the warm memories and the contrasts with my family to an appreciation of living that closely with the land and its weather. It gave me an appreciation for indigenous life, culture, the sweat lodge, drum and regalia making. My friend grew up as a professional administrator tasked with grooming an Inuit for his position. Dogs and horses were a constant in his family life. His brothers became wildlife rangers tasked with protecting our polar bears

and cougars in the wild. The grieving and trauma of residential schools skipped them, and their good humor and positive outlook meant much for me. A recent google search suggested the cottage is gone now as is the pine forest and muskeg ground it sat upon. New builds and cut back berms for fire safety and lawns have replaced the string of humble cabins of my youth. In some ways this is the story of one of the opportunities of Canadian life, that your home and lifestyle can involve sharing with diverse cultures enriching that aspect of community living. Still, you must take that opportunity breeching the physical walls and your own tribal heritage. Where I live the lawns are so small, I cut my neighbours when I do mine and they also cut mine in turn. This leads to conversations, sharing and positive moments.

GARTH GOODWIN *spent his 41-year career in CYC in both practice and as a database designer and administrator. In over 30 years of frontline practice he worked for both public/board and private agencies. He was the first recipient of the National Child and Youth Care Award in 1986. He nurtured the Child and Youth Care Workers Association of Manitoba through its formative years and became its representative to the Council of Canadian Child and Youth Care Associations. He has been privileged to witness and participate in significant events in CYC history and remains an active observer in the field.*



Postcard from Leon Fulcher

From New Zealand, as a Driver of a St John Health Shuttle Van

Kia Ora Koutou Katoa and warm greetings child and youth care workers, wherever you are! We have just celebrated International Day of Volunteering and it made me think that I should say something about the St John Health Shuttle Service that we help operate from our rural, mostly Māori Village of Tuai. The national Health Shuttle Service is dependent upon a raft of volunteer drivers who support those needing health appointments and also shopping options.



Dating from the 11th Century St John provides 90% of New Zealand ambulances

Established in New Zealand since 1885, St John has grown to become one of the largest civilian service organisations in the country. Their mission today is the same as it was back then – to prevent and relieve sickness and

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ISSN 1605-7406

injury, and to enhance the health and well-being of all New Zealanders. Patient transport has always been a core service provided by St John. The first ambulance vehicle in New Zealand was a simple, two-wheeled cart that was pushed along the road by four men. Today St John provides emergency and non-emergency ambulance and health shuttle services for approximately 90% of New Zealand's population of over 5 million.



St John helps in 24-hour emergencies and shuttles to out-patient appointments

The St John Health Shuttle is a donation-based community service that transports people to health-related visits, and then brings them home again. Anyone can call up to book a ride to medical appointments and know that a reliable shuttle will pick up in plenty of time – and get them to where they need to go. Riders also enjoy interacting with others who use the shuttle service, and with Health Shuttle volunteers.

For elderly people living in rural areas with few amenities, the Health Shuttle service is especially important. A recurring sub-group of Health Shuttles riders are people who require kidney dialysis. Others need blood

tests or assistance with managing long-term health issues. It came as a surprise to some of our 'oldie' riders that they could ask to see a particular doctor by asking for that person, great news to an older Māori woman who wanted to see a Māori-speaking GP.



Jo lives with lung disease and requires oxygen. St John Health Shuttle is a lifesaver



5 important values underpin St John volunteering

The five values that underpin St John Health Shuttle volunteering are very similar to what one might find for child and youth care workers. ***Do the right thing!*** This requires that one take responsibility, make tough calls and think of others! ***Stand Side by Side*** means that we value and support what others contribute. ***We make it better*** by stepping up, finding solutions, own it and just do it! ***Open Minds*** involves listening

openly, encouraging ideas and welcoming feedback. And finally, being ***Straight Up!*** Means acting with honesty, courage, and kindness.

In practical terms, the new Health Shuttle vans seat 5 people, including the driver. There is space for a wheelchair rider who enters the van using a hydraulic lift at the back with secure anchoring points. The sliding side door has a step down to assist riders with access.

Support for local St John Health Shuttle drivers has been very good. In-service training and development opportunities are offered to all drivers, along with advanced driver assessments.



5-seater Toyota Hiace Van with wheelchair lift and rear-door entry



Local Wairoa, Tuai and Mahia Peninsula Health Transit Drivers and managers

St John supported a uniformed Driver Assistant filled by a local young adult who grew up in Tuai village. Neurodiverse, on the Autism Spectrum, Alan is a gifted artist with minimal language. Still, he helps oldies on and off the Health Shuttle and also collects donation envelopes.

Overall, St John Health Shuttles are a good community service supporting rural communities!



Neurodiverse Alan, a gifted artist without speech became our Driver's Assistant



St John Health Shuttle Service helps many low-income and older New Zealanders

Information

Publishers
CYC-Online is an open-access e-journal published monthly by The CYC-Net Press

Founding Editors
Thom Garfat and Brian Gannon (1939-2017)

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July 2023
ISSN 1605-7406

CYC-Online

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CYC-Online

July 2023
ISSN 1605-7406