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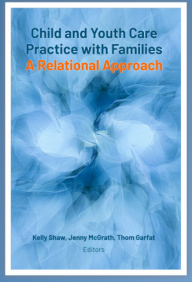
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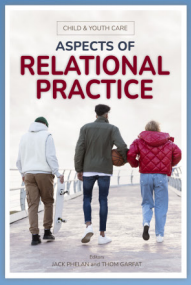
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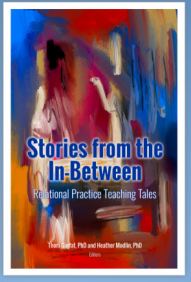
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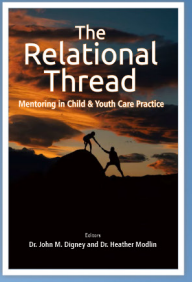
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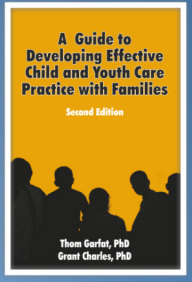
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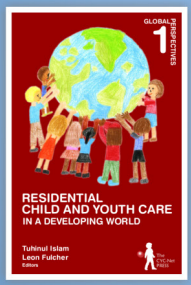


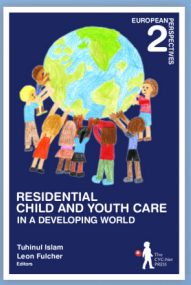


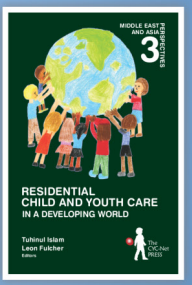


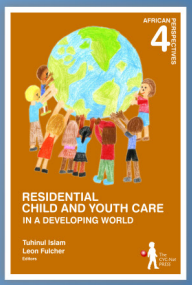


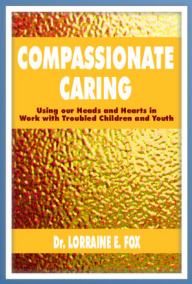


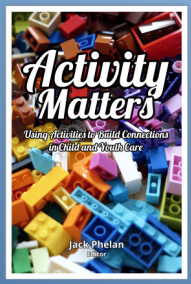






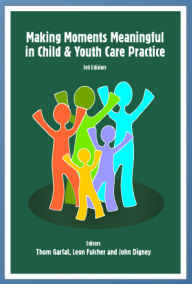


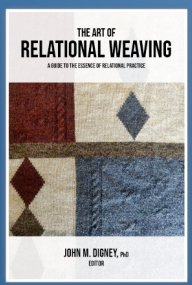




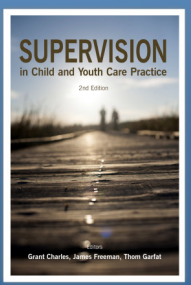


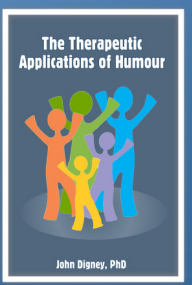


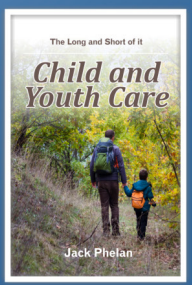












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Editorial Comment

No. 333

Martin Stabrey

This month, *CYC-Online* is published for the 333rd consecutive month. Reaching a 333rd milestone in publishing is rare; sustaining it, every single month since February 1999 is extraordinary. For nearly twenty-eight years, *CYC-Online* has arrived like clockwork into inboxes, staff rooms, and remote corners across the globe. This Issue 333 represents not just an impressive streak of digital print, but a living archive of our Child and Youth Care profession.

What began in the late 1990s as an experiment to connect a dispersed global field has evolved into an essential community bond. And at the heart of the endurance and commitment of *CYC-Online* are the regular contributors who have shared their voices and wisdom across decades. Month after month, year after year, writers like Mark Krueger, Mark Smith, Gerry Fewster, John Digney, Max Smart, John Stein, Karen vanderVen, Laura Steckley, Grant Charles, Leon Fulcher, Jack Phelan, Kiaras Gharabaghi, Hans Skott-Myhre, and of course our founding editors, Thom Garfat and Brian Gannon, did not simply report on the work — they invited us into its evolution. Through personal reflections, provocations, practical

wisdom, and postcards from across continents, these recurring voices established a rhythm that generations of practitioners rely on, speaking regularly of the everyday relational moments that define the field. Most importantly, by "turning up" each month, they modelled what reflective practice looks like, while creating space for emerging writers, frontline workers, and young people themselves to join the dialogue.

But the strength of *CYC-Online* lies in the work it still must do. While we honour the enduring voices that laid our foundations, it must also serve as an invitation for the next generation of storytellers, thinkers, and frontline advocates. You do not need an academic title or a long bibliography to write for *CYC-Online* — you only need an encounter with the work, a reflection, and the courage to share what this field has taught you. Whether you are a student noticing something new on your first practicum, or a practitioner trying a new approach in your community, your perspective is vital to the evolution of Child and Youth Care. Submit that draft, share that reflection, and help us write the next 333 chapters together. As yes, we will help you along the way.

To have published 333 consecutive monthly issues demonstrates an extraordinary level of commitment to children and youth in care. And our commitment will continue to carry the conversation forward, one month at a time.

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

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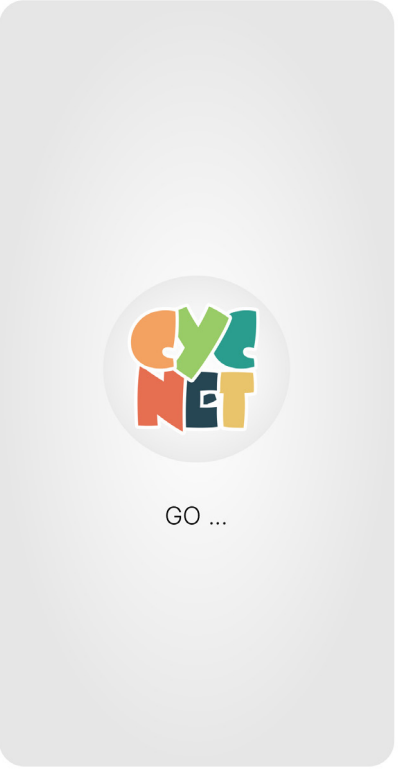
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The End of the Old Bargain

Michelle Briegel

Abstract

This reflective essay explores how using the freewriting model as a pedagogical strategy helps students move beyond the performative act of writing for grades, or "bargain writing," toward a more authentic and genuine approach to engaging with learning. Drawing on experiences teaching in a university child and youth care counsellor program, the essay examines how freewriting activities were integrated into both a first-year introductory course into the profession of child and youth care, and a second-year practicum seminar course. Using ungraded freewriting activities, students were asked to explore their thoughts, experiences, and emerging professional identity. The author contends that freewriting creates opportunities for vulnerability, reflection, and relational connection, allowing students to access deeper levels of meaning and develop their writing voices. Instructor observations suggest that freewriting enhances student engagement, discussion, and quality of written assignments. The article highlights freewriting as a relational teaching practice that supports professional identity, growth, and development within child and youth care education.

Keywords

Freewriting, reflective practice, relational pedagogy, child and youth care education, student voice

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I teach in Mount Royal University's Bachelor of Child Studies, Child and Youth Care Counsellor program, a professional discipline focused on caring for children, youth, and families within their life-space environments, including homes, schools, and communities. Child and youth care counsellors work with young people in the care and custody of child and family services, youth criminal justice settings, schools, and community programs. The primary aim of the discipline is to promote well-being, resilience, and positive developmental outcomes in young people, particularly those who may be at risk or facing challenges such as trauma, behavioural issues, or social exclusion (Stuart & Fryer, 2024).

Practitioners in this field are trained to engage directly with children and youth in their day-to-day lives, offering support through therapeutic relationships, crisis intervention, advocacy, and life skills training (Freeman & Garfat, 2014). This means that I need to teach students the integration of theory and practice, how to act with young people who often display volatile and sometimes violent behaviours, such as screaming and throwing a chair, while at the same time hearing as accurately and sympathetically as possible what the young person is communicating. While being versed in the academic vernacular of the discipline, students must learn to communicate with young people and their families or caregivers in simple language. The writing done by child and youth care counsellors needs to perform many tasks simultaneously. To be accessible to the people most affected by it, it needs to avoid the formality of academic writing (Healy & Mullholland, 2012). Yet since it is also the vehicle used to document case notes, observations, and assessments, it needs to be designed to be useful within institutional settings to ensure that these reports meet professional standards (Healy & Mullholland, 2012). This writing prioritizes clarity, relevance, and accessibility (Healy & Mullholland, 2012). It must often be adaptable to different professional contexts and audiences, such as multi-

disciplinary teams or legal bodies, and may need to convey complex ideas in straightforward language (Healy & Mullholland, 2012).

Students in the Child and Youth Care Counsellor program are often new to the university and the discipline of child and youth care; many are fresh out of high school. This combination creates a challenging environment for students when they are asked to write about their learning. My experience reviewing student writing assignments is that students often require more depth and connection to their writing voice. I have found that students write for their grade, meaning they write to receive something in return instead of writing for personal fulfilment. My teaching experience tells me that, for the most part, students do not enjoy writing and that they see writing as a hoop to jump through to receive the grade that allows them to move on to the next assignment.

Their situation reminds me of my own as a new university student. I was not prepared for academic writing, nor did I have a genuine interest in writing at all. My earlier experience with formal education had taught me that writing was not a positive endeavour. High school had not prepared me for paraphrasing and citing sources, nor had I learned how to present a compelling argument based on critical thinking and evidence. I certainly did not want to write and only did so to meet the requirements of an assignment. I would put together a paper based on the assignment criteria and what I thought the instructor wanted, but I knew I needed to improve at writing. I would never have called myself a writer. Gourlay (2009) confirms my experience, explaining that students need help to decode unfamiliar information, such as the difference between essays and papers or the difference between a bibliography and citation sources or referencing, causing confusion and disengagement. Many students have not experienced a positive outcome in their writing in the past and have yet to reach a sense of legitimacy (Gourlay, 2009). With this in mind, I want to

provide my students the opportunity to learn how to write in higher education and to enjoy writing. In doing so, I aim to help students in my class produce in-depth, well-written papers and to capture their voices.

I am aware that there will always be an element of what, in his introductory comments about freewriting, Richard Harrison called “bargain writing,” based on the fact that students are given grades in exchange for the work they are asked to do in their courses. However, I want to introduce a new kind of bargain, where writing is used as a reflective practice instead of a performance.

Over the last three years, I have been working with scaffolding writing assignments for a cohort of first-year students in a course I teach entitled Introduction to the Child and Youth Care Profession. These students are all part of the same program and are together in most of their core courses throughout their degree. Scaffolding assignments with increasing expectations and levels of technique has been helpful, but something still needs to be added. The missing piece was their authentic voice, which was stuck behind fear. Taking part in the Writers’ Guild provided an opportunity for me to use the freewriting method as a way of helping students find their voice.

Reflecting on learning the freewriting method as a guild member, I connected most personally with how freewriting can help a person overcome their fear of writing. In an excerpt from my freewriting journal, I wrote, “The way to get around bargain writing is by freewriting because it bypasses the hyper level of consciousness about writing and unlocks what writers are thinking about behind the curtain of self-protection.” Realizing this, I changed my approach to help improve students’ relationships with writing assignments. I wanted to allow them to enjoy writing and the process of inner reflection that comes with freewriting.

My teaching philosophy is to teach in relational practice, which means providing a safe environment where the students and I make meaning of our experiences together collaboratively. I wanted to incorporate freewriting relationally by being vulnerable and sharing my freewriting entries as I demonstrate to students the power of the freewriting tool and the connectedness that occurs in the group environment emerging out of the vibrations evoked from vulnerable sharing and noticing done in the group. The freewriting tool unlocks the areas of the mind that have been closed off due to the feeling of being overwhelmed by busy lives, perfectionism, fear, stress, and a collection of other reasons, allowing the writer to get in touch with what is behind the curtain in the mind. The writer can show up in a more present way to engage with the group in conversation or writing activities. With this in mind, I also thought about how impactful the freewriting method could be for a practicum course I teach where students are asked to reflect on their practice learning experiences. Therefore, I used the freewriting method differently in the two courses.



The Child and Youth Care Counsellor program includes clinical competencies required to enter professional practice upon graduation. For second-year students, one area of required competency is to complete a practicum at a partnering community organization. The course accompanying the practicum is a seminar, where experiences and competency are reflected upon and discussed in a group supervision format. I first focused on using the freewriting technique in the practicum seminar. The second place I decided to try the freewriting technique was in a first-year lecture-style course entitled Vulnerable Children, Youth, and Families. It is important to note that I did not assess or assign grades to the freewriting activities I asked my students to participate in.

For the practicum seminar, I asked the students to bring a notebook and pen to each weekly practicum seminar in the second semester of a two-semester practicum experience. I chose the Winter semester because I was learning the freewriting method and technique in the Fall semester myself. Each week, I started the class with a five-minute freewrite, asking students to reflect on their experience at their practicum over the last week. The prompt I used was "This week at practicum I …" The freewriting method allows students to settle down and focus on the seminar and their practicum experiences. I found that this improved how the students engaged in the discussion portion of the seminar compared to the Fall semester, when the conversation was at the surface level, with some students seeming to not even remember their experiences of the week prior. But with a page of their freewriting in front of them, students in the Winter semester were able to speak in detail about the topic or experience under discussion and engage in a deep dialogue about it. As the instructor, I facilitated and guided the conversation occasionally, connecting to the required professional competencies. However, I noticed that much of the

conversation was student-initiated based on what was read aloud from the freewriting activity.

The second course in which I used the freewriting method was a first-year child and youth care counsellor course. In this course, I asked students to do a five-minute freewrite after they had listened to presentations about issues that impact vulnerable children, youth, and families.

Students were asked to reflect on the issues they heard, write down their top three areas of interest, then choose one to freewrite about for five minutes, using the prompt "I have chosen the issue _____ because …" The students were then asked to share what they wrote and notice what stood out about each other's writing. The students who read their freewrites out loud were asked to write down in their notes what the other students noticed in their writing and then go home and continue writing a twenty-minute draft to evaluate if they had enough to continue with a short paper on the issue they chose. I noted that student papers were significantly better written than they had been in previous years in terms of students connecting ideas and writing in a way that was meaningful to them.

The best experience I had using the freewriting method was with the second-year practicum course when an Indigenous guest speaker joined the class to talk about his experience as a young man growing up on a First Nations reservation. The students listened to him give his presentation and afterwards were asked to do a five-minute freewrite about what they noticed about the speaker's presentation. The prompt was "I noticed …" I followed up by asking them to read their freewrites aloud and then asking the other students to respond with what they noticed. This was an incredible experience. Students were open, honest, and vulnerable in their writing and discussion. I did nothing in particular to build the capacity for this experience with this group of students. However, they are part of a cohort of child and youth care counselling students and have built some trust and safety with

one another in their other courses. The cohort model is part of why they could so quickly share the intimate thoughts and feelings expressed in their freewriting. The other factor that helped create the environment for vulnerability was that I participated in the freewriting activity myself and was the first to read my writing aloud. The energy in the room was intense. The connections drawn between what they heard from the speaker and what they experienced in their lives or their practicum experience were deep. If I could only pick one of my experiences to replicate, it would be this one. I will continue to use the freewriting method in my courses as it is a powerful tool to help unlock thoughts and ideas, allowing students to access more depth in their writing by finding their voice.

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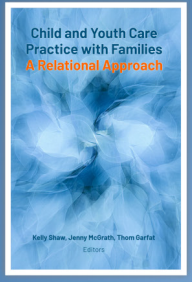
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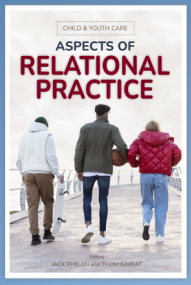
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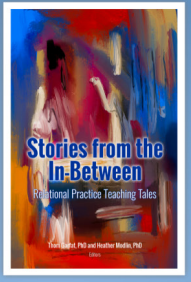
Dr. Michelle Briegel, DHS, CYCC, is an associate professor at Mount Royal University and president of the Child and Youth Care Association of Alberta. She is committed to strengthening the child and youth care profession through education, research, accreditation, advocacy, mentorship, and relational leadership.

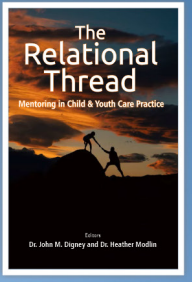
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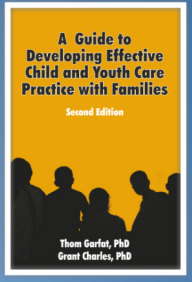
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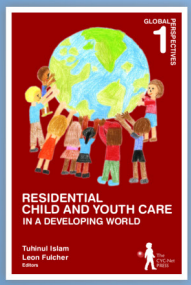


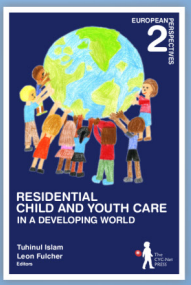


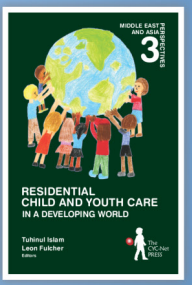


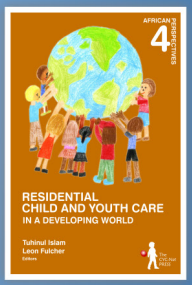


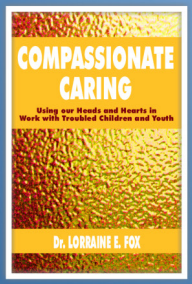


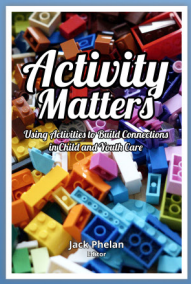






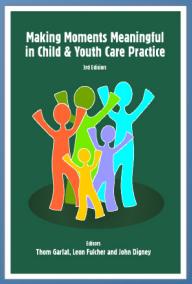


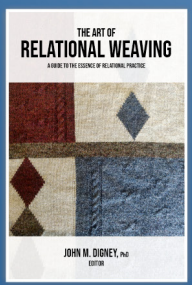




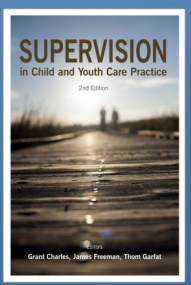


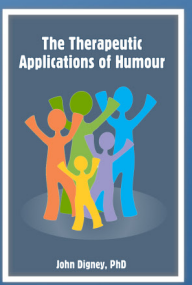


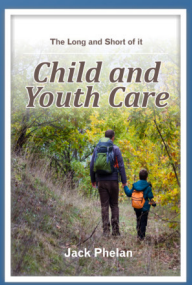












Neurodiversity and Child and Youth Care Practice

Kiaras Gharabaghi

Many years ago, I wrote this essay about child and youth care practice and why we may want to slow down our expansion into areas of practice not traditionally associated with child and youth care. Using a story related to working with a neurodiverse young person, I argued that child and youth care practice, and the training leading to that practice, is not well suited for working in the neurodiverse space. A few years later, a graduate student of mine who now is an emerging scholar and a fantastic critical voice on issues related autism services and Applied Behavioural Analysis (ABA), Dr. Nancy Marshall (along with Catlin Thorn), questioned my argument and instead suggested that neurodiversity is very much within the purview of relational practices, and those, in turn, are the essence of child and youth care practice.

Here we are, a decade later, I am happy to concede that Nancy has ultimately been proven right. Sort of.

What I want to discuss this month is definitely relevant in Canada, I suspect likely relevant in the United States, UK, and Australia, and may be relevant elsewhere, but I am not entirely sure about that. In Canada, notwithstanding many changes in service systems over the years, there continues to be types of services that are largely managed through child and youth care practitioners, at least on a day-to-day basis and in relation

to direct service work. Most notable among these are residential care facilities operated either as live-in treatment programs within the formal and accredited Child and Youth Mental Health sector or both private and public organizations, both for profit and not-for profit, and usually serving primarily young people referred through the child welfare sector. The other very common service type are school programs or specialized classrooms, referred to as Section 23 classrooms in Ontario but using other names in other provinces, that generally are based on a partnership between a School Board and a mental health service provider and offer smaller class sizes with a teacher and a child and youth care practitioner designed to serve the education and mental health needs of young people who were unable to find success in mainstream schools or classrooms. These kinds of programs are considered treatment programs and generally are not about punitive measures taken by schools to deal with poor behaviour (although in practice, this is questionable).



For most of the past few decades, the young people served in these kinds of programs, although very diverse, were neuro-normative young people with mental health challenges, often also with challenging family and ecological contexts, and with varying degrees of overlap between wellbeing issues and youth criminal justice issues as well as psychiatric issues. Child and youth care practitioners were the core of the response to the needs of these young people. And for most of the past 50 years or so, the training received by child and youth care practitioners in Colleges and Universities across Canada was well-suited for doing this kind of work. That training was informed by relational practices as these were articulated in the works of Garfat, Phelan, Krueger, Vanderven, Stuart, Fox, and so many others who are likely familiar to longtime CYC-Net audiences.

Over the past fifteen years or so, changes were introduced to child and youth care curricula that were indeed desperately needed. Although this is a brutal generalization and simplification, very broadly stated these changes were related to a much greater focus on equity considerations, issues of anti-racism, gendered analyses, inclusivity, anti-oppression, and Indigenous epistemologies and ways of being. There is no question that these changes were necessary; our entire field up to that point was largely based on a white lived experience, reflecting stories and ways of knowing that overwhelmingly mirrored that experience. Not surprisingly, it is also true that the way in which child and youth care was being taught, framed, theorized and narrated helped to reproduce systems of care that were not particularly caring, and likely harmful, for many young people, particularly for Indigenous and racialized young people and those identifying with LGBTQ2S+ communities.

At the same time, however, there were also changes in the fields of practice where child and youth care practitioners are the dominant workforce, particularly in residential care settings and in school settings

that combine mental health and education services. And while the nature of those changes is diverse and often complicated to explain, one obvious and very significant change has been the massive influx of neurodiverse young people into these settings. Neurodiversity is a very broad term that captures many different circumstances and young people, but it typically includes autism spectrum disorder (ASD), fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD), and notable cases of regulatory challenges and diagnoses such as ADHD, ADD, anxiety and others. The other notable shift in service systems has been a relatively recent commitment to providing trauma-informed practices in program design and operation.

So here we are, in 2026: we have child and youth care practitioners who are trained to recognize inequities and fight these with determination; we have advocacy efforts and practice guidelines to prevent and undo the criminalization of racialized identities, to mitigate and ideally stop the judgment of non-binary gender identities, and to move beyond Eurocentric ways of knowing and being and incorporate, or even replace these with Indigenous, Afrocentric, and other ways of knowing and being. What those child and youth care practitioners don't have and don't get in their pre-service training is education about neurodiversity in any meaningful way. What they don't get in their foundational texts about child and youth care, or even in the articulation of relational practices, is the fit between these and the lived experience of neurodiverse young people. What is entirely missing from child and youth care curricula is an exploration of families or communities exposed to or dealing with neurodiversity in their midst. What is also missing entirely from the curricula is an examination of the interface of neurodiversity and trauma, and how that might impact trauma-informed practices in institutional or quasi-institutional settings.

And yet, once they arrive on the job, what they are faced with are large numbers of neurodiverse young people placed in the setting not because

that is a good fit or matches their needs, but because no other setting could be identified for them. In the case of neurodiverse young people, residential care and specialized 'mental health 'classrooms, are almost always placements of last resort. The programs, routines, and ways of navigating every day moments are almost never designed for neurodiversity and almost always assume neuro normativity laced with mental health challenges. The separation of working with families while serving young people in residential care or in specialized classrooms continues unabated, notwithstanding pronouncements of more integrated aspirations. But all the available research tells us that this won't work, will do harm, is a disservice to the young people and their families, and has no meaningful chance of offering improved life chances to anyone.

I am deeply worried about the non-response of our field and especially of post-secondary education in our field to these changes and the reality that for many years to come, many child and youth care practitioners will work with neurodiverse populations as their primary client base without any pre-service training on what that means, how that works, and what might be different in the work with this population compared to the work that is presumed as the population in existing curricula. I note that we did in fact do harm for many decades to Black, Indigenous, racialized and other young people by not adjusting our curricula to include critical explorations of racism and Eurocentric epistemological supremacy for far too long. That change was slow and only came after the data on the mass incarceration of Black youth and on the suicide rates of Indigenous youth, became intolerable even for die hard traditionalists in our field. I don't think it is ethical to wait again until we hear about the harms done to neurodiverse young people in what are, after all, still carceral and certainly institutional settings, in ways that our stomachs churn.

I am not advocating for abandoning what we have, and especially the more recent focus on equity and anti-oppression/anti-racism. To the contrary, neurodiversity exacerbates these issues. However, we do have to begin to shift curricular focus on generating familiarity and exposure to neurodiversity in much more substantive ways if we continue to be interested in being the core profession that works in these settings. These days, when I enter these settings I encounter chaos, mayhem, and a very clear orientation to crowd control, containment and ultimately security and safety, largely because professionals of all stripes, including social workers and psychologists, administrators and clinical executives, are overwhelmed and uncertain on how to be with people whose fundamental construction of reality operates outside of the positivist and often very binary logics we have become complacent to. I can clearly observe the criminalization of neurodiversity unfolding, following very similar patterns as past criminalization of specific population groups. We must do better.

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It's football, but not as we know it: Twenty-five years of connection and competence

Phil Coady

Abstract

This is a personal, reflective account of my long-term participation in a football group involving people living in or working in residential child care and invited guests. It explores the benefits of being part of this group, and the rich potential of such groups and activities for the development of connection and competence. It also discusses the process of developing and nurturing a caring culture within the group, and the caring capacities of its members. It explores what is needed to maintain a group of this kind over a period of decades, concluding with a personal account of my own richly rewarding experience of belonging to this group.

Every Monday evening, in a small town near Edinburgh, something quite unremarkable happens. A group, usually of around 12 people, gathers to play a game of football, of sorts. Our game might initially seem similar to those being played on neighbouring pitches. However,

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anyone who looks more closely will notice that some aspects of this version of football are highly unusual.

The game involves players of all ages and, more recently, from many countries. It begins with players being divided into teams, but it is not unusual for players to swap teams during the game. Nobody ever seems to know the score, or to care much about it. When a good goal is scored, players from both teams are likely to applaud or congratulate not just the scorer, but all those involved. More experienced players are likely to give newer or younger players a moment to compose themselves before

tackling them. Players who commit a foul will usually bring this to the attention of others and give the ball back to the other team. If anyone is hurt, even without a foul, the game will stop until everybody is feeling okay and ready to continue. Although 'banter', which often involves teasing or ribbing of others, is common, it has no social hierarchy and is used to include, rather than exclude, and to draw people into the community. More often, encouraging comments will be heard, directed to teammates and opposition players alike.

What started with a decision by a group of young people and adults, over 25 years ago, to play a single game of football, has evolved into a group that has existed ever since, with around 200 participants altogether, and meeting over 1000 times. I think there are things we can learn from how this group was created, how it has evolved, what has enabled it to be maintained for so long, and what it offers its members that might provide useful learning for other aspects of the residential child care sector.

The community in question is a group of people who live or work together in a small residential child care service, along with others who, like me, were part of the community many years ago, and remain connected to it. There is a revolving door of current young people, ex-residents, workers

past and present, friends, and relatives. At any time, there are 20 to 30 active members, with around 10 to 15 attending each week.

What is the value of such an activity? Enjoyment is surely an important reason why many people continue to show up regularly over a significant period. In a sector in which desired 'outcomes' often focus on the future; there is a risk that the value of enjoyment and happiness in the present can be overlooked. As Nicholas Hobbs argued, children should know some joy in each day and look forward to some joyous event for the morrow, stating that, for many, playing football on Mondays has contributed positively to this (Hobbs, 1982). Adults, including workers, appear to benefit too.

However, as important as this is, I believe there is more on offer than enjoyment. Steckley (2005a) makes this case convincingly in relation to a residential school football team. In this exploration of the therapeutic potential of football, enjoyment and excitement are clearly evident. Many other important opportunities, including enhancing resilience and promoting pro-social values, arise and are surely more effective for being offered in this context rather than in more formal learning or talk-based activities. However, as residential child care takes place in increasingly small settings, the question arises as to whether it is still possible to use team games requiring numerous participants as a medium for both enjoyment and developmental or therapeutic purposes. Also worth considering are the ways in which more informal gatherings that do not involve being part of a team or a league might offer different benefits, as part of an alternative experience.

I will argue that, within the everyday experience of playing football together, developmental and therapeutic benefits abound, and are achieved with minimal planning, review or even discussion. The group simply creates the cultural conditions that enable and encourage participants to make

positive contributions, both contributing to and benefitting from being part of the group.

In particular, I want to draw attention to the importance of connection and competence as features that, along with enjoyment of the game, attract participants of all ages. Connection exists at two levels. Firstly, there are important individual relationships. A few of these relationships existed prior to involvement in the game. The group provides a regular opportunity to maintain and develop these relationships. Others have developed as a direct result of involvement in the group, with some having now endured for a decade or more. In addition to individual relationships, there is also an important sense of connection to a community. As well as playing football together, members of this community regularly contact each other via a social media group to make arrangements and check up on anyone who has not been around lately. When we are watching football on TV in our separate homes, we are often connected to this community, as there is frequently discussion in the group as the match progresses. There is a Christmas night out, and occasional games involving other teams. The community is attentive in welcoming and including new members and is open to all, including people who, for various reasons, have not always been included or found positive connection in other parts of their lives. In this group, we all become known and accepted. This is surely the most important function of the group.

Competence is also multi-faceted. There is no doubt that many players significantly improve their football skills and performance and that they enjoy and are proud of this improvement and its acknowledgement within the group. Due to the cultural importance afforded to football, this is valuable as well as satisfying. More importantly, group members also develop and expand important social skills and caring capacities. For example, although it is common to emphasise the competitive element of

team sports such as football, they are also activities in which the ability to cooperate with others is central to successful participation. Our version of football is designed to amplify the cooperative aspects and reduce, without entirely removing, the competitive elements necessary for an enjoyable game. With practice and support, all participants develop the ability to enjoy doing well alongside a capacity to appreciate others doing well and, on most occasions, to find a balance between the two.

As they move into adulthood, group members also develop skills in supporting younger and less experienced players. Jack Phelan (2001) refers to the process of providing a development opportunity such as this as experience arranging. In experience-arranging, the emphasis is on providing opportunities for young people to experience themselves differently. Becoming a person who supports and encourages others, and having this acknowledged, is a powerful, and sometimes novel, experience for some members of the group. We have been able to witness, and bear witness to, the growth of these capacities in ourselves and within our community over the years. As new members have arrived, most recently from a local homeless project and as newly arrived unaccompanied asylum seekers, the welcome offered by the group has gone beyond its originally intended recipients. Young people arriving in a new country, and often knowing nobody, have met people, sometimes from their own countries, for the first time in our community, and have made lasting friendships. For some group members, other areas of their lives also offer such opportunities. For others, belonging to this group might be a rare and significant opportunity to feel a sense of belonging and being valued by others. In return for offering this welcome, the game benefits from the introduction of new members who value their place in the group and contribute to its caring culture. In addition, widening our circle in this way enables a small residential service to continue to run a viable group.

Steckley (2005b) notes that workers participating in competitive activities with young people need to be able to manage their own competitive instincts and their need or desire to perform well in the activity in order to focus on facilitating success and enjoyment for the young people involved. This is certainly true for our group, but it is also something that we encourage, not only in workers, but in all group members, so that the focus can be enjoyment for all, not just the winners. Our experience suggests that modelling is more successful than instruction in achieving this aim.

Although Jack Phelan (2001) suggests that activities that are inherently competitive may be less useful and potentially problematic in terms of creating a 'free space' and allowing for 'experience-arranging' opportunities, our experience with football suggests that, in spite of this potential difficulty, it is possible to create cultures within longstanding activity groups that can alter the activity to make it more amenable to the aims of the group. In addition, I would argue that, by playing a version of a competitive sport together, we give ourselves and each other the opportunity to develop our abilities to manage our responses to competitive situations, as well as to manage feelings of success and failure in manageable doses. While we have all benefitted from this opportunity, for some it is perhaps only within this supportive environment that this could have been achieved.

Holthoff and Harbo (2011) note that when we engage in activities with young people, being competent in the activity is not essential. In fact, lacking competence can present different opportunities. One of our worker community members has demonstrated this magnificently, combining a significant lack of competence with an infectious sense of fun and enjoyment. This models some valuable attitudes to other members. These include that we can enjoy participating without needing to judge ourselves harshly or compare ourselves to others, and that, in doing so, we can accept ourselves as we are, while also enjoying any level of competence

that we do achieve. Being extremely competent in other areas, he also demonstrates that we should not expect ourselves to be competent in every area of life and that we should not judge ourselves or others through consideration of competence in one activity. This worker also enables us to model to the group that, in this community, we accept each other as we are and that people of all levels of competence are welcome in the group. It would be difficult for other members of the group, with higher levels of skill and experience, to offer the kind of reassurance that his presence in the group provides to some of our more anxious or hesitant members.

The group has become one of those rare situations in our field in which the benefits to all members are significant, and the costs are minimal. Yet, the longevity of the group, as well as its composition, seems to be unusual, both within wider society and within a residential child care context. Perhaps one of the reasons for this is that its longevity depends on a commitment to the group that might easily be derailed by other events, or by periods when interest in the group seems to be lower than usual. In our case, the reliable availability of the activity depends on at least one adult participating when they are not being paid to be there. This commitment, more than anything else, has enabled the group to persist through the inevitable difficult spells that have arisen over the course of more than two decades. In addition to its practical benefits, this commitment influences the perception of group members about why we, as adult workers and ex-workers, continue to be part of the group. We are there because we want to spend this time with the group enjoying this activity together. We come to play, not to supervise. Expanding the boundary of our contact with the group transforms the nature of our relationships with each other in ways that would not be possible if the basis of our contact was strictly on a paid-by-the-hour basis.

Most aspects of our game rely on our group culture being modelled by experienced group members and observed and copied by newer members. I have often been surprised, not only by the success of this approach, but by the speed with which it happens. Often, new players join the group and, without anyone explaining, quickly understand and adapt to its highly unusual culture. Even players who arrive speaking no English have little difficulty in quickly understanding the cultural norms therein.

Two factors seem particularly important to this process. Firstly, workers model this consistently for others and are accepted by the group as role models. Secondly, additional culture carriers continually emerge within the group and model its cultural norms to others. Feedback also plays a role here. Positive feedback is even more likely to follow when players take actions that support the caring culture of the group than when they play successfully.

In addition to being accepted as role models, it is important that we are seen as 'safe people' by the group. There are two aspects to this. One is that the group can feel confident that nobody will come to harm or be treated badly through our behaviour. However, it is also important that we are seen as people who can act protectively to maintain the group as a community in which people feel safe with each other, as well as with us.

This involves both setting the tone for acceptable behaviour towards each other and being accepted by the group as people who can gently but effectively manage very occasional difficulties when disagreements arise or tempers flare. Our success in achieving this has enabled us to welcome young people into the group who might otherwise feel fearful of being involved. It has also enabled us to safely and successfully bring people together into a group whom it may not have been wise to bring together in circumstances where safety had not been so successfully established.

It is worth thinking about the kinds of feedback that are useful in situations where people are mainly participating for enjoyment but will also gain satisfaction from developing competence. It is common for adult spectators who have brought a young person to the group to offer effusive and generalised 'praise' telling the young person they were 'fantastic'. This comes from a friendly place, but it is not the kind of feedback that is offered within the group. The message that we want to offer is not that people are fantastic, but that they do not need to be fantastic to belong here. For us, this is a message of acceptance that does not depend on performance. As Timothy Gallwey has pointed out, praise may be positive evaluation, but it is still evaluation. Gallwey argues that, above all, we should not tie performance to self-worth. Carl Rogers (1961) goes further, contrasting praise with acceptance, on the basis that acceptance does not rely on positive evaluation. Rogers suggests that acceptance (later described as unconditional positive regard) is a more powerful basis for positive change, due to the 'paradox of change' that 'when I accept myself as I am, then I can change' (Rogers, 1961, p. 17).

Having said that, feedback and acknowledgement are significant elements of our game, and, as with banter, are not hierarchical. As workers, from the beginning, we offered acknowledgement to each other, as well as to the young people. This modelling altered the meaning of feedback and the way it was given and received in our group.

Providing feedback that is specific and recognisable is important to us. Otherwise, we risk requiring people to choose between trusting their own perception of their experience or our effusive description of it. Focusing on something specific is also a good general guideline. Even better, matching the feedback to the person concerned seems worthwhile. When playing with a teammate who tends to hold onto the ball rather than pass it, I am more likely to acknowledge a good pass, rather than yet another shot. More

importantly, feedback should not only be about performance. Some players contribute a lot to the activity by paying attention to connection, or encouraging the performance of others, especially younger players. This seems worth acknowledging too. I find acknowledgement a better fit for describing what we are trying to achieve than praise. I find Alfie Kohn's (1999) suggestion that praise and blame are, like punishments and rewards, two sides of the same coin, useful.

For me, praise often feels like conditional approval, which does not fit well with the message we want to send. Nevertheless, acknowledgement shows that the helpful contribution is noticed and appreciated.

Despite its potential downsides, football has the advantage that it is comparatively easy to persuade people to engage with, and to sustain their engagement over time. This repeated experience seems to be an important element in its success in offering feelings of both connection and competence, that are reinforced strongly enough to compete with, or at least coexist alongside, more negative messages about and perceptions of ourselves. Although there have been several female group members over the years, it must be acknowledged that most group members have been male. Due to this concern, we also started a badminton group.

Female membership was proportionately higher in this group, but it did not have the same longevity as the football group, and, in general, engagement was lower. This may be a difficulty that is not easy to overcome. However, it seems likely that providing additional opportunities, rather than restricting this opportunity due to its shortcomings, is likely to produce the best results.

Our experience in this group suggests that positive developments, such as the success and longevity of this group, and the benefits it has offered participants, may not always come about in the ways that we expect successful endeavours to emerge, develop, and be sustained. The

popularity of various versions of plan-do-review frameworks might suggest that it is always necessary to know what we are trying to achieve before beginning to develop something new. However, for us, the cycle of planning, implementation, and evaluation, or the idea of planning for long-term outcomes did not play a significant role. One of the reasons for this is that it would have been impossible, over 20 years ago, to foresee the long-term success of this group. It would also have been impossible to expect, and difficult even to ask for, the level of sustained commitment, often unpaid, that contributed to its success. Creating and maintaining an environment in which positive things might develop and flourish seems to have been more important than planning for specific outcomes, even if it was not possible to predict with certainty what these positive developments might be and how long they might last. In some activities, as Frankl (2004, p. xv) suggests, 'success, like happiness, cannot be pursued, it must ensue'.

When I ask myself why people continue to belong to this group, sometimes for years, it seems best to start with my own experience. Part of the reason for using my own experience is that the last thing I would want to do to this group is to turn it into a setting in which organisers set 'learning outcomes', and participants are asked to complete questionnaires about the benefits of participation. Instead, I have turned up over 1000 times to experience and witness these things first-hand.

I am not particularly good (or bad) at playing football, but I enjoy it. I enjoy trying to play well, but, for me, enjoyment is as important as winning, and winning is not just about the scoreline. I enjoy belonging to this group and offering a sense of belonging to others. I feel a sense of responsibility to this group, which I want others to feel too. I believe that this is also true for others, and that the personal commitments that we make to each other are more fundamental than simply enjoying playing a game of football together. It would be perfectly possible for me, and others, to enjoy a

similar experience with other people, entirely separate from our work life and previous work commitments. However, the opportunity to create our own welcoming space in which we and others can grow and develop offers a much more rewarding experience, requiring little more of us than to turn up, be ourselves, and, perhaps, become more than the sum of our parts.

Looking back over the past 25 years, involvement in this group feels like a significant positive experience for me. I believe this has also been the case for many others. It has cost little and provided much, especially in terms of connection and relationships. It is a game with many winners and no losers. It's football, but not as we know it.

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Phil Coady has worked in various roles within and connected to residential child care, within the public, private, and third sectors, for most of the past 44 years. Having started by both living and working within a residential community, Phil developed an interest in the development of significant and enduring residential child care relationships and the active use of boundaries that can enable and support relationships. He has also had a long-term interest in the use of shared activities, including sports and outdoor activities, as opportunities for shared growth, learning, development, and connection as well as positive experiences of achievement and success.

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When the Mentor Becomes the Learner

Kathryn Colford

I have worked in a few different areas during my career. Moving from a mental health treatment centre back into community-based residential care provided a different and challenging experience. I was hired for a particular home because of my experience. The children had just come into care, and initially the home was constant chaos. Every day I was breaking up fights and completing critical incident reports. I didn't realize it at the time, but this home would become one of the most important learning experiences of my career.

What made this home different was that the children came from a culture, religion and upbringing that were different from my own. I was used to understanding the conversations that were around me, but that was not the case in this home. They often spoke another language to each other, so I had no idea what they were saying. To provide the best care and to help meet their need for safety, we created a team where most staff could speak the language their parents had spoken to them, and many identified with their religion. Out of our initial core staff, only two others had grown up in Canada like me. This was unlike any other experience in my career. With more than fifteen years of experience in the field, I thought I would be helping mentor the newly hired Child and Youth Care Workers. While that was true, I also learned so much from my co-workers and the youth.

Many of my co-workers had come to Canada with professional backgrounds and knowledge in many different areas but were starting new careers here. For many, English was not their first language. Several spoke more than one language and could speak to the youth and each other in a language I did not understand. Over time, I picked up words and bits of conversations, and we became more comfortable communicating. It took time for us to learn to joke around and understand one another. I could see the changes in the youth, the staff and myself as we learned and grew together.

Safety was very much on everyone's mind. Not only because of the nature of the job, but because some of my co-workers were also learning what it felt like to feel safe in a new country. I had never lived in another country, and I appreciated the courage it took for some of them to leave loved ones behind, sometimes because of political conflict or safety concerns in their home countries. Many still had family members living abroad and shared stories about worrying for their safety. I often witnessed how co-workers' need for safety affected their interactions with the youth and each other. I made a point to always be there to support my coworkers, to respond to text messages or phone calls even on my days off.

Building relationships with the youth took longer for me than it did in the past. I experienced what it felt like to be an outsider. It took longer for some to trust me because I looked different from them and did not share their religion.

For a few weeks, one of the youths kept taking off my glasses. I couldn't see without them. He never broke them; he would just put them in his pocket. Once, he even took a nap with my glasses in his hoodie pocket. As frustrating as it was, I kept showing up. I knew that building a relationship would take time, and eventually I started wearing contacts for a while. Our relationship grew, and with time and space, I was able to wear my glasses again on shift.

Sometimes relationship building looked much simpler. I was one of the first staff to start reading bedtime stories even bringing in my own books I had read to my own children. I remember being told that this was something they weren't used to or might not like. I did it anyway. Before long, other staff and youth were reading together in their rooms.

The children would often run away from the house when they were upset, frustrated or told no. I followed them in the car to bring them home. One time, I waited outside Walmart for about two hours. I knew the child was still inside because Walmart only has one entrance and exit. Every now and then, the child would pop his head out to see if I was still there. I was. Eventually, he gave up and came out to get into the car and go home.

Some of my favourite relationship-building moments happened around food. The staff were excellent cooks and were proud to prepare dishes from their cultures for the children, helping them remember where their families came from. Most of the meals I ate, I didn't even know the names of. I tried to learn some of them and even began making a few for my own family, like lentil soup and shawarma. I also got to celebrate holidays and traditions from their culture while sharing some of my own.

Somewhere along the way, I stopped allowing differences to create distance. It no longer bothered me when I couldn't understand my coworkers or the youth speaking another language. I started seeing more of what we had in common. I always thought I was a kind and patient person, but this experience taught me that different worldviews can change what respect looks like. I naturally speak quickly and sometimes mumble, so I learned to slow down, speak more clearly and think more carefully about my choice of words. Being the minority in that workplace gave me a small taste of what many of my coworkers experience every day in other circumstances, and I carry that with me.

Sometimes being a good Child and Youth Care Worker means being willing to learn, grow and adapt. I went into that home thinking I was there to mentor others. I left realizing that sometimes the people we think we are there to mentor are the ones teaching us. I left more patient, more curious and a better Child and Youth Care Worker than when I first started.

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Childhood Sexual Abuse Can Cause Lasting Damage

Wendy Smith

When teenagers commit violent crimes, there is always a story behind it.

The case of Christa Pike, now back in prison after surviving a botched execution for the murder of her classmate Colleen Slemmer 30 years ago, raises so many difficult and disturbing questions. Pike was the first woman in the state of Tennessee in 200 years to receive the death sentence.

Beneath all of these events lie the traumatic facts of Pike's early years. I had interviewed people who had committed violent crimes as teens for my book, *Before Their Crimes: What We're Misunderstanding about Child Trauma, Youth Crime, and the Path to Healing*, which made me think about a more specific aspect of the life she had before her crime: sexual abuse that began when she was age 2 and repeated throughout her childhood, up to age 17.

Pike's seizures during infancy revealed that she had sustained brain damage due to her mother's alcohol abuse during pregnancy. She was diagnosed with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, FASD, which describes a range of neurodevelopmental deficits that can result from prenatal alcohol exposure. This can affect physical, cognitive, social-emotional, and behavioral functioning. Involvement in the criminal justice system is known

to be a significant adverse outcome for many people with FASD (Pei, Flannigan, Keller and colleagues, 2018).

Pike was sexually abused more than once at the age of 2 by a boyfriend of her grandmother. It is impossible to imagine this kind of assault by an adult on a toddler or to fully grasp the catastrophic effect on the developing brain and body of a small child. In Pike's case, the early sexual assaults and those inflicted on her by other perpetrators at ages 11, 13, and 17 did further harm to a brain already weakened by damage in utero.

Threat Detection and Behavior

Researchers have found that children who have experienced sexual abuse, when compared to their peers who have not been abused, have structural abnormalities in threat detection and response, causing them to be hypervigilant and impulsive, predisposing them to future behavioral problems. These changes may help them adapt to a negative environment in the short term but can lead to future externalization or other psychiatric problems (Demir, Kaya, Ozalay and colleagues, 2023).

The childhoods of many abused children, including Pike, do not include protective, caring adults who are present to prevent further trauma or to help them heal from what has happened to them. Abused children rarely experience safe, loving relationships—ones that reassure them they are valued and worthy.

When their easily triggered sense of danger is aroused, they have few tools to calm themselves or feel safe—even when their alarm system goes off in situations that do not pose a threat. At the same time, they are often repeatedly victimized as a result of their dysregulated stress response; they fail to identify people who may be dangerous.

It isn't only the brain and body of a sexually abused child that is harmed. The developing sense of self—who I am, what I can expect from others, how they will see and treat me—cannot escape being used as an object by an adult, especially when that adult is a trusted member of the child's life.

Early Trauma and Aggressive Reactions

In the time since Pike committed her crime, scientific knowledge about brain development and the impact of trauma early in life has exploded. We know that the brain's executive functions—decision-making, judgment, ability to weigh future consequences of our actions—do not fully develop until the late 20s.

We also know that early-occurring stress that is severe or chronic can be said to be "built into our bodies" because it leaves marks on our neurological and psychological stress response systems (Shonkoff and Garner 2012, p. 237). This can lead to highly aggressive reactions in high-pressure moments, especially in the presence of peers.

Advances in scientific knowledge have changed sentencing laws for juvenile offenders. The Supreme Court completely banned the death penalty for people under 18 in 2005, 10 years after Pike's sentencing, and 28 states have banned juvenile life without parole. In many states, the youth and early circumstances of juvenile offenders, especially their exposures to trauma and maltreatment, are taken into consideration during sentencing.

Pike would likely have received a different sentence had her crime occurred today. At the same time, though we know so much more now than we did then, the great majority of us still have difficulty understanding the harmful nature of child sexual abuse. We need look no further than the example of the Epstein survivors.

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In the words of Zeanah and Humphreys, “There may be no single greater environmental predictor of mental health difficulties than experiences of maltreatment.” (2019, p. 3.)

Key points

- Adverse childhood experiences are often in the background of those who commit violent crimes.
- Criminal justice system involvement is a significant outcome for people with fetal alcohol syndrome disorder.
- Child sexual abuse affects a child's neurobiological, physiological, and socio-emotional development.



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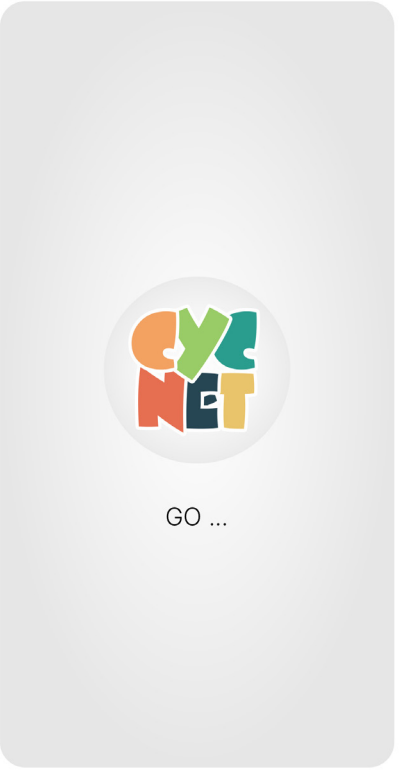
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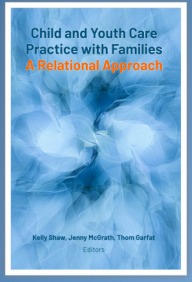
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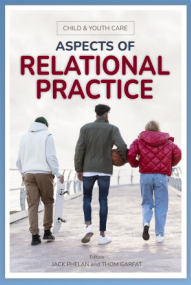
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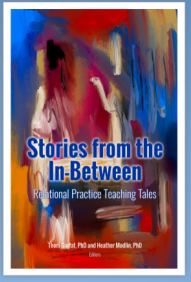
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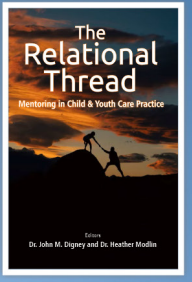
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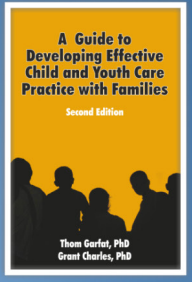
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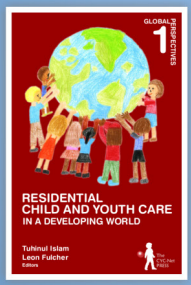


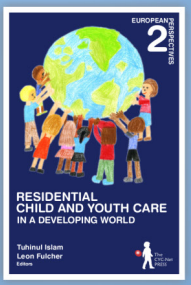


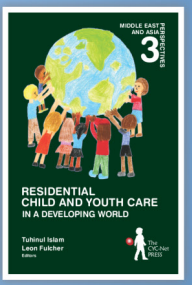


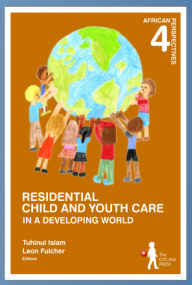


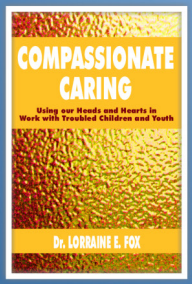


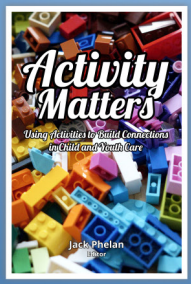






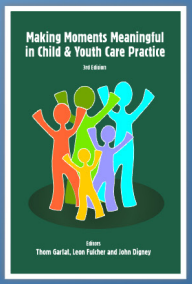


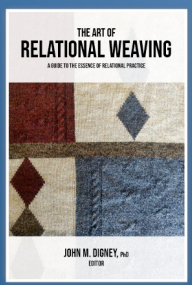




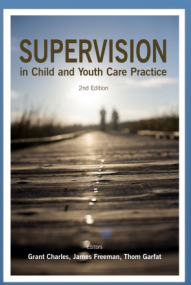


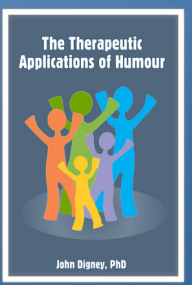


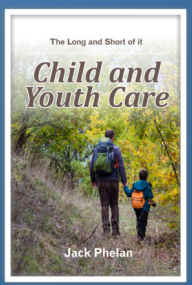












We Have the Unconscious We Deserve

Hans Skott-Myhre

Because I came into the world of CYC from such a peculiar angle, I sometimes find that I have residue from my previous investments that periodically demand my attention. By residue, I mean bits and pieces of my practice and theory that I haven't been able to integrate with my understanding of the fundamentals of CYC. I have spent some time in this column over the years working with the political and relational aspects, but I haven't taken as much time exploring what has informed my practice.

To my way of thinking, it is sometimes useful to ground practice in the broader field of thought that informs how we have shaped what we do. For example, it seems clear to me that many of the foundational frameworks for how we think about CYC practice originate from the zeitgeist of the late 1950s to the late 1960s. For progressive circles of people exploring how to engage with young people in institutional settings during that time, the available frameworks drew heavily from the philosophies of existentialism and phenomenology. These philosophies were filtered through the emerging understanding of human motivation and healing to be found in humanistic psychology.

In the writings of the early thinkers we admire and those who carry the legacy today, the influence of Maslow, Rogers, and Perls is clear. From notions of being and becoming to the importance of the lifespace and the

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centrality of the relational encounter, the echoes of radical humanism are powerful. To say that these ideas were the cutting edge of alternative thinking at the time is to state the obvious. And even today, many of these ideas are of central importance in rehumanizing our lives and the work we do.

The early thinkers and practitioners of CYC used the ideas of the mid-twentieth century to challenge the established orthodoxies of the Freudian psychoanalytic view of children and childhood. They broke the template of psychiatric pathologization of childhood and opened new ways of seeing adult-child relations as humane and hopeful, rather than brutal and deterministic. However, in breaking with psychoanalytic thinking about children, they lost track of something that I would say is quite important. That is the unconscious. In the literature of CYC over the years, there has been little or no discussion of the unconscious. For me, as someone trained in hypnotherapy, this has been an odd omission.

In terms of the foundations of the field, phenomenology and existentialism had to wrestle with the question of the unconscious. After all, in their time, psychoanalysis was at the apex of its influence, and its key concepts had to be addressed in order to be challenged. So, Jean-Paul Sartre, Otto Rank, Viktor Frankl, and Irvin Yalom constructed variations of an alternative unconscious. In doing so, they stepped aside from the Freudian unconscious as a site of repressed desire that, if unattended, would lead to a variety of forms of psychopathology.

The existentialists saw Freud's unconscious as secretly governing human behavior, which they argued was at odds with the existentialist commitment to the idea that human beings are free to act and responsible for their choices. They asserted that having a fundamental aspect of who we are that predetermined our actions outside our awareness would destroy free will and undermine any notion of personal responsibility. Sartre

argued that this could allow for the production of excuses to avoid taking responsibility for our actions and would encourage us to simply accept our circumstances.

However, the concept of the unconscious was so powerful that it couldn't simply be ignored, and so the existentialists produced their own versions. For example, Sartre proposed an unconscious that operated pre-reflexively to determine our project in the world. He made a distinction between explicitly thinking about something and our awareness of something in the background without actively or conceptually focusing on it. The unconscious, in this sense, is the aspect of our world that we are not consciously aware of yet. Otto Rank saw the unconscious as that part of ourselves responsive to the trauma of becoming fully aware of our capacity to act. Viktor Frankl saw the unconscious as a deep human drive focused on meaning, responsibility and spiritual aspiration that operates pre-consciously. Concepts of the unconscious influenced by Irvin Yalom accept the Freudian understanding that people harbor blind spots, defenses, and implicit meanings. These are understood not as repressed libidinous impulses but as ways of avoiding core existential givens like death, isolation, meaninglessness, and freedom. Common to all these approaches was a move away from Freud's focus on biological drives and internal structures such as the id, the ego, and the superego. Instead, the existentialists' unconscious was derived from hidden mental processes responsive to human existence.

In thinking about this legacy for CYC and the absence of the unconscious in our discourse, Sartre's notion of pre-reflexive thought comes to mind. This is the idea that perhaps our sense of the unconscious in CYC operates in the background without any overt theorizing or conceptual focus being placed on it. When Freeman and Garfat assert in the Characteristics of Relational Child and Youth Care that our work focuses on

assisting people to think about and live their lives differently as they live it, could we see this as an affirmation of the existential unconscious? That is to say, work that is implicitly built on the belief that human beings have a deep drive focused on meaning, responsibility and spiritual aspiration that operates pre-consciously. Could our job be to bring young people's *projects in the world* to the surface of their awareness so that they can act on them?

The other foundational thread for CYC that I have noted is phenomenology. If existentialism is centered on the capacity to act as fully and freely as possible, what does phenomenology offer? For CYC, phenomenology offers us the ability to explore how human beings become conscious of their experience in the world. Instead of trying to understand young people from the outside, we are afforded the opportunity to learn how the world appears to them from the inside out. We can learn about it from a subjective first-person point of view.

It is important to note that there is a branch of phenomenology called existential phenomenology that blends both approaches. It posits that we first exist and then, through our encounter with the world, make choices and take action. There is no underlying premade mapping of who we might become. In our encounter with the world, we are not outside observers of reality but actively immersed in all aspects of lived experience: social, historical, and physical. The question for us, then, is: what is the phenomenological unconscious?

Like the existentialists, the phenomenologists rejected the Freudian unconscious as the site of repressed desire and instead conceived of it as a layer under the surface of our conscious awareness. Phenomenologists such as Husserl saw the unconscious as a passive site that contained past habits, emotional capacities, and the edges of past experiences. This layer of possibility supports our active consciousness. The existential phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty conceptualized it as the fundamental

elements of physical reality that connect us to everything else before we can speak. In both accounts the unconscious operates as a set of latent capacities made of real-world elements that can be drawn on in developing and understanding our experience.

In terms of CYC, this version of the unconscious might be thought of as the pool of resources that we seek in strength-based work. It might also be thought of as the ecological understanding we see in more systemic approaches to working with communities and families. For our purposes, it supports a non-pathological, resource-based approach that focuses on the material world and our actions in it. When we co-create an experience with a young person that opens capacities neither of us knew we had, we could be drawing from the phenomenological unconscious.

That said, neither the existential nor the phenomenological account fully explains the unconscious for me. I began by saying that I came into CYC from a peculiar angle, and the way I came to understand the unconscious is a good example. I began my work in a day treatment program for young people coming out of psychiatric facilities, unlike many of my colleagues in CYC, who came through residential programs. My training was focused on what we now call community mental health. It probably had a more clinical focus, with an emphasis on the role of psychiatry and psychology in the "treatment" of the young people we saw.

That said, the particular mental health center where I entered the field as a community volunteer took a rather unconventional approach to the work we did. There were certainly psychiatrists, psychologists, and psychiatric nurses on staff, but generally speaking, very few of them adhered strictly to the medical model. It was a moment in the late 1970s when innovation and creative approaches were accepted, if not encouraged. This meant that as a volunteer with little or no training in conventional approaches to mental health, I was thrown into a milieu that

was rich in alternative ways of thinking and practicing, which I embraced wholeheartedly.

At the time, this meant exploring different explanations of severe psychological and emotional distress. Since many of the young people I worked with were coming out of a psychiatric facility after having a first psychotic break, a non-medical model explanation of what we thought of as radical states of consciousness was on the agenda. Among these were explorations into the thought that psychosis had something to do with trance states and that trance states had something to do with the unconscious. A lot of our thinking here was influenced by the anti-psychiatric movement, the residues of the psychedelic pioneers from the 1960s, the investigations of the alternative states of consciousness found in spiritual practices, and the edges of the emerging therapies associated with cybernetics and systems theory. This framing of madness led the center to bring in several unconventional psychotherapists, and it was through training with these alternative thinkers and practitioners that I began to frame my own ideas about severe psychological and emotional distress.

Among the practitioners I was exposed to was the psychiatric hypnotherapist Milton Erickson. Erickson was and is a controversial figure whom some key figures in the mainstream psychiatric community literally called psychotic. His ideas about using the unconscious to solve seemingly intractable human dilemmas seemed to be extremely successful, but the methods he used were often unconventional, to say the least. He believed that every person who came to see him should receive care tailored to who they were as unique individuals. As a result, he didn't use diagnoses or a particular type of intervention. Everyone he saw got what some of his students called a different Erickson. There is a lot to say here about his approach to working with people, but I want to focus on how he thought about the unconscious.

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For Erickson, the unconscious was composed of everything you have ever experienced, whether fantasy, dream, or material reality. It was not a dark place of repression or a reflection of existential anxiety. Instead, it was a rich source of infinite resources that had the capacity to combine all of the elements of your lived experience into variations of possibility for new actions and thoughts. He saw accessing and using the unconscious as a much more efficient way to develop pathways through the vicissitudes of life than relying on the conscious mind.

He saw the conscious mind as limited by the social milieu out of which it was produced. The concepts and ideas that we have about who we are and what we are capable of are limited by the social prescriptions we are taught throughout our lives. Erickson suggested that the logic of what we have been taught to believe is true about who we are and how the world is composed limits our flexibility to think in new ways. We have a sense of what is logical and true, and we have a hard time violating what has always made sense to us. Erickson believed that to really find a new way to see an old problem, we needed to get our conscious mind out of the way. He saw hypnosis, or the development of a focused trance state, as a way to both distract the conscious mind and allow access to the richness of the unconscious.

Erickson pointed out that trance states are a natural phenomenon. We go in and out of trance all the time: when we are deeply engaged in a conversation, watching a fire, vividly remembering something from our past, or "spacing out." He encouraged us to learn how to focus that naturally occurring state of consciousness in ways that could connect us in a more intentional way to the richness of our lived experience. I have always wondered why we haven't spent more time in CYC exploring how to do this in our work. Of course, we already do this kind of trance work by accident all the time. Wouldn't it be interesting if we could build on those accidents?

The psychoanalyst and activist Félix Guattari said in another context that we have the unconscious we deserve. In paying little or no attention to the unconscious in our work, are we constantly defaulting to an unconscious we have little or no understanding of or wisdom about? It is a troubling question, and one I hope we can begin to explore as we develop our work.

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