

Child and Youth Care

Critical Perspectives on Pedagogy,
Practice, and Policy

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Preface

A Personal and Professional Journey

ALAN PENCE

I seek the kind indulgence of the reader in allowing me a brief reflection on a journey – a journey that reminds me of T.S. Eliot’s words in “Little Gidding” ([1942], 1965, 114):

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

Eliot captures precisely my sense of this volume not only as part of a personal exploration, which it certainly has been, but also as providing possibilities for further explorations of a profession – that of child and youth care (CYC).

This is a very different volume than the ones that Carey Denholm, Roy Ferguson, Jim Anglin, and I developed in the 1980s (Anglin, Denholm, Ferguson, and Pence 1990; Denholm, Ferguson, and Pence 1987, 1993; Denholm, Pence, and Ferguson 1983). In looking back, those books seem to me like the place “we started” – very important work that helped to establish the broadly based profession of CYC not only in Canada but also beyond. I value those volumes as part of a professional “coming of age” in which we, both as an educational institution

and as a profession, could access our own literature in addition to the literatures of allied professions and disciplines.

I believe those volumes continue to have much to offer – they are not simply historical markers along the way. They were framed within certain paradigms, and they sought to accomplish certain things. Those paradigms and objectives remain relevant and important today.

But, in addition, we now have other paradigms and other objectives available. This volume speaks to them, and it speaks in critical and “post-” frames of reference (see the introduction for the use of terms in this volume). This book was not planned – it basically spoke itself into existence as part of a course that sought to ground and operationalize critical perspectives into the broadly based practices and policies of the CYC field. As the course instructor, I was very pleased as the course moved from initial encounters to fuller engagements with diverse ideas, experiences, and contexts. There was much I wanted to share and much I wished to learn.

Part of what I wanted to share was my own experience in moving from a more positivist and modernist position as an academic and professional to a more critical and post- (post-structural, postmodern, post-colonial, etc.) position and how that had opened up possibilities in my work that lay outside what other paradigms might allow, with each paradigm providing different possibilities and potentials. What I was interested to learn is captured well by the chapters in this volume.

I began to explore critical perspectives and postmodern ideas at the same time that I began to focus primarily on work across cultures. The critical perspectives I had begun to explore not only complemented but also extended in ways not possible through some other paradigms my work with diverse communities in Canada and internationally.

Insofar as personal journeys are not reflected in this volume, it seems appropriate to offer an example of one such journey in which one might arrive where he or she “started / And know the place for the first time.” As suggested earlier, my starting place in the 1970s and 1980s to a great extent referenced “objectivity” as a value and was in alignment with a positivist orientation. Although I was greatly influenced by Urie Bronfenbrenner and his ecological framework (Pence 1988), my ability to move into or understand various perspectives within an ecological

web was limited by the strictures of both “science” and “professionalism.” Both began to be disrupted in 1989-90 when I received an invitation from a large tribal council in northern Saskatchewan to work with them in developing a community-sensitive education and training program.

The story of the First Nations Partnerships Program (FNPP), which grew out of the original invitation from the Meadow Lake Tribal Council (MLTC) but continued through ten other partnerships over eighteen years, has been told in many different publications (one of the earliest is Pence et al. 1993; the most comprehensive is Ball and Pence 2006; also see www.fnpp.org for other references), but the relevance of the MLTC for this volume and this preface is its role as a transformative experience that exposed the limitations of positivist and modernist orientations in regard to promoting services for children and especially when attempting to work across cultures. Of particular importance for me was reading an external evaluation of the MLTC program written by an indigenous elder (Jette 1993) that quickly moved beyond the predetermined criteria for success to explore numerous unanticipated outcomes that centred on dramatic intergenerational shifts in interaction patterns and broad capacity building and social development advances at community and tribal levels. Jette’s report could not have been written by one who stood fully “outside” the community – in the language of positivism, an “objective” observer. It was only through the combination of insider and outsider – not being from the communities but having cultural and historical links to them – that Jette could look “beyond” the predefined “deliverables” and peer more deeply and perceptively into the complex lives of the communities. Her approach to her work, and the insights she was able to provide, were inspiring and transformative for my own future work.

My experiences working with indigenous communities were supplemented by an invitation to participate in the Childhood in Society project led by European sociologists committed to the establishment of a sociology of childhood not based on precepts of universalism (a strong characteristic of psychology’s interest in children – the dominant child discipline in the mid- to late twentieth century). This group’s work in defining childhood as a social construction (Qvortrup et al. 1994) complemented my indigenous work and intensified a search for others

in the early childhood “branch” of CYC who might share my growing concerns about a field too narrowly bound by restrictive, modernist notions of what constituted “best practice” regardless of context.

That search led me to connect with Peter Moss at the Thomas Coram Institute for Children at the University of London. Peter had a similarly long career in early childhood services and academia, and he too had become increasingly concerned about the narrow and limiting discourses available regarding children, children’s services, and concepts of quality care. We shared these concerns with others in the field through an edited volume entitled *Valuing Quality in Early Childhood Services: New Approaches to Defining Quality*, which started with the statement that “quality in early childhood services is a relative concept, not an objective reality” (Moss and Pence 1994, 1) – a position that challenged and continues to challenge the field in North America. With one of the authors from that volume (Dahlberg), we then wrote a book further advancing critical perspectives regarding children’s services entitled *Beyond Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care: Postmodern Perspectives* (Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence 1999). That volume became a strong seller and was subsequently translated into eight languages – providing us with some hope that these ideas might resonate broadly (indeed, the book sells much better outside North America).

These various experiences, starting with the FNPP but including others noted above, influenced my subsequent work in Africa and the Middle East, which was in response to requests from UNICEF and the World Bank to address issues of capacity building in the majority (“developing”) world. The importance of context and local voices, in interaction with “dominant discourses,” became central features of the Early Childhood Development Virtual University (ECDVU; see www.ecdву.org). Sometimes dramatic advances achieved through the ECDVU approach (made possible in part through completion levels in excess of 95 percent over four African deliveries) have provided a strong platform for critiquing more broadly universalist agendas that remain dominant in the United Nations and international development communities (Pence 2011; Pence and Hix-Small 2007) but that have had significant problems regarding community ownership and sustainability (strengths of the FNPP and ECDVU approaches).

In 2005, I had the opportunity to return to a focus on Canada, with support provided by the BC government to explore issues of “quality.” My colleague in this work, Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw, and I saw this as an opportunity to put into practice approaches that had been explored and discussed in *Beyond Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care* and other sources but that had no Canadian-based funding for operational application and evaluation. With receipt of those funds, we initiated a systemic approach to change reaching from practice-focused work with front-line educators, through college instructors, to government officials and university academics. Ten international forums took place over a five-year period, bringing eminent, scholarly innovators to British Columbia for engagement with the various groups identified above (Pence and Pacini-Ketchabaw 2008).

Facets of these experiences, taking place from 1989 to 2009, were key parts of what I hoped to share and discuss with students in the doctoral seminar as part of a broader exploration of critical perspectives used to positively disrupt established assumptions and approaches in our diverse CYC settings. For some, such critiques were relatively new and somewhat troubling, and for others their practice had already begun to embrace such disruption. All experienced uncertainty and disquietude – places that I had come to understand as being useful indicators of meaningful exploration.

Students took on these disruptive influences to varying degrees, but over time the group became comfortable pushing the boundaries of professional “safety.” As the process moved forward, I became increasingly excited by the amount of good academic, professional, and personal work that students were taking on, and the project papers increasingly looked like the basis for a unique contribution to the CYC literature.

I shared my interest in developing such a volume with Jennifer White, a colleague in the school and a fairly recent holder of a doctorate. We decided that we would jointly explore publication possibilities. I had a connection with UBC Press, as it had been a good partner in the 1980s’ work that Anglin, Denholm, Ferguson, and I had undertaken in our efforts to help “define and advance the field.” Jennifer and I decided that, in addition to the current doctoral cohort, we would reach out to several

other colleagues with recent doctorates and to a few other graduate students who shared such interests.

The result of that collaboration is the book that you have in your hands. We are delighted with the collaboration and with the broad range of contexts, issues, and perspectives considered in these pages. It is unlike any other volume in the CYC professional literature. We believe that it not only reflects leading-edge thinking in the field of CYC but also opens up “points of possibility” only imaginable through knowing a place of familiarity “for the first time.”

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Introduction

ALAN PENCE AND JENNIFER WHITE

Over the past several decades, child and youth care has developed a distinct identity as a unique field of professional practice. Although many allied professions work toward promoting human well-being, CYC has differentiated itself from other human service professions through a focus on children and youth using strengths-based, holistic, and ecological approaches and through active engagement with children, youth, and families across multiple and diverse settings.

Modernist Discourses of Professionalism

In establishing its place, the CYC field has generally been guided by a modernist discourse of professionalism that differentiates its knowledge and practice not only from other professions (Bates 2005; Phelan 2005) but also from lay or “non-professional” perspectives. Among other things, this discourse positions specialized education and training, the creation of standards of expertise, the development of a code of ethics, and the promotion of autonomous decision making as central to the formation of a specific professional identity (Beker 2001; Reinders 2008). While there has been considerable historical debate in the field about whether CYC is an emerging profession, a field of practice, or a craft (Eisikovits and Beker 2001), the development of a professional identity typically

means that practitioners are invested with authority and legitimacy from consumers, clients, and other professionals, making it an alluring goal (Prilleltensky, Rossiter, and Walsh-Bowers 1996). Physicians are often held as the exemplars of such professional power. Thus, the path to professionalization that most aspiring professions seek to follow is the one established by the medical profession. Underpinning this inherited and thoroughly modernist project is a belief in an “objective reality” knowable through science, appropriate education, and competency-driven, technical views of practice.

Professionalism as a Contested Idea

In contrast, critical perspectives¹ or postmodern views of professionalism would understand these dynamics differently, calling into question some of the underlying assumptions and beliefs about knowledge, power, and standardized approaches to practice. Through these lenses, a questioning of power and privilege arises as one considers more broadly who is served through the creation of human “services” and for what purpose. Child and youth care, perhaps due in part to its later start on the road to professional status, is somewhat later than some professions in questioning its assumptions, analyzing the forces of power, and considering other paradigms. Education, for example, has a history of approximately two decades of engagement in such critical, reconceptualist activity.

Partially because CYC is an emerging profession and still seeking some of the aspects of power and recognition held by other helping professions, critical and postmodern views are sometimes seen as threatening to the professionalization process. Although this concern is understandable, we believe that a failure to engage with critical perspectives is also potentially problematic for the profession. For example, by not holding our own practices up for critical scrutiny, or by authorizing only a restricted range of methodologies or theoretical perspectives for studying and conceptualizing this work, we run the risk of becoming insular, dogmatic, and hegemonic in our thinking and actions. We believe that a “both/and” position that accommodates diversity, fluidity, and contingency offers a particularly fruitful way forward. We can continue to seek professional recognition through established modernist

approaches; we can also increasingly engage with postmodern and critical perspectives so that we can expose the limits of these received vocabularies and transform how we think about practice, policy, and professionalism. This approach has much in common with what others have referred to as a form of double(d) practice, where we do the work and trouble it at the same time (Lather 2007).

Child and youth care, therefore, finds itself within a contested field – the forces of modernity, universalism, individualism, and positivism remain strong, but at the same time new spaces for questioning and reconceptualizing have opened up. For example, there is growing support for more critical, politicized, and discursive conceptualizations of CYC work as well as approaches that centre the agenda of social justice (Skott-Myhre 2003; Smith 2006). By shifting attention away from a primary focus on the individual toward more comprehensive and critically conscious approaches that recognize a range of socio-political influences on child, youth, and family well-being, these critical perspectives, which form the basis of this volume, ask a number of challenging and provocative questions. What is CYC practice? What might it become? Can the ends of CYC practice be separated from the means? Whom are these interventions designed to benefit? How will we decide whether we are making a useful difference? What unspoken understandings regarding child, youth, or family well-being are privileged? Are socio-political and historical contexts adequately accounted for? In bringing this collection together, we hope to provoke, unsettle, invite fresh perspectives, and generate new questions among readers. Ultimately, we want to showcase the exciting and creative work being pursued by an emerging generation of future CYC leaders as well as to recognize the expanded possibilities for pedagogy, policy, and practice that these ways of thinking open up.

Organizational Threads

In reviewing the collection of chapters, we considered various approaches to this introduction. A minimalist approach would have involved a flexible grouping and sequencing of chapters, allowing them to “speak directly” to the reader, who would undertake her own organization. We

also envisioned a more structured and intensive approach that would have included a full additional chapter inspired by the collection, with introductions woven into the new text. Opting for a middle ground, we have instead chosen a particular metanarrative that will run throughout the chapters, leaving many other threads and possibilities for the reader to generate. The organizational metanarrative we have chosen is the notion of “normative” or, more precisely, what constitutes an “acceptable standard.” Normative is but one critical metanarrative in the work of CYC; there are others, and these chapters both challenge and comply with them.

Within the West, the source of most research on children and youth (Arnett 2008; Pence and Hix-Small 2007), the “science of child development,” is typically promoted as “universal” even though it excludes the vast majority of children and youth living around the world. In other words, it is possible to have normative standards and borders that exclude the majority of child and youth experiences yet are still deemed universally good or right or true. An example from early childhood is the West’s elevation of maternal care above all other forms of care, despite the relative rarity of such exclusivity in the majority of societies of the world (Weisner and Gallimore 1977).

CYC is one of several “helping professions” that work in this “borderland” – a site of practice that exists at the border between what is considered “normative” or acceptable and abnormal or not acceptable. Within a traditional, modernist paradigm, the goals of practice are relatively straightforward, at least conceptually: a norm has been identified, and it is the responsibility of the helper to bring those beyond that norm within it or at least closer to it. From a critical or postmodern stance, the work is less clear. Questions we might ask from this perspective include the following. How has this border come into being? Who has established the border? For what purpose? Based on what information? Does the border primarily serve those within it or outside it? Should practitioners be border enforcers or border disturbers? Over the years, many CYC practitioners have found themselves asking such questions. Although the modernist quest for “objectivity” and the promotion of scientific evidence (or “best” practices) often constrain practitioners’

ability to ask such questions, critical postmodern perspectives actively invite such questions as a way to recognize complexity, partiality, and contingency, allowing multiple border crossings, transformations, and challenges to occur.

Introduction to the Chapters

The authors of these chapters have practised in a wide array of professional settings and contexts, testifying to the diversity of the CYC field. These contexts include street youth outreach, early childhood care and education, residential care, early intervention, parent support, child and youth mental health, juvenile justice, and post-secondary education. Collectively, the authors have engaged with a range of age groups, social contexts, and cultures. Their practices are located in large urban centres, small cities, rural communities, and the far North. Most authors have more than ten years of experience in the field, and they have completed a wide range of undergraduate and graduate degrees, including child and youth care, education, counselling, sociology, social work, criminology, and psychology. What they have in common is a commitment to promoting the well-being of children, youth, and their families as well as an interest in challenging taken-for-granted understandings and received views of practice, pedagogy, and policy in CYC.

The first section, which includes chapters from J.N. Little, Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw, and Jennifer White, explores the linked challenges of defining the field and preparing CYC practitioners in higher education contexts in ways that both enable and trouble professional practice in CYC. Little, who describes her own experience as a “CYC-educated” practitioner who has worked in a diverse array of settings, asks this provocative question: “Will the real CYC please stand up?” Meanwhile, Pacini-Ketchabaw describes how child and adolescent development has taken the position of “natural” knowledge in much of the CYC literature, forming one of the foundational bases of the profession. She argues that the problematic history of developmental knowledge needs to be thoroughly investigated and describes some of the pedagogical processes she has engaged in to think and teach child and adolescent development differently. Finally, White describes an approach to teaching professional

ethics that challenges the traditional and narrow view of ethics that is tightly tethered to individualist conceptions of morality and dominant discourses of professionalism. She argues for a more expansive, critically reflexive view that invites fresh thinking and reimagined understandings of everyday CYC praxis.

The next section, which includes chapters from Jonathan Morris; Sandrina de Finney, Elicia Loisel, and Mackenzie Dean; and B. Denise Hodgins, all take up the issue of gender and other dimensions of diversity across a range of CYC policy and practice contexts. Morris describes his experience as a graduate student in a CYC class in which students were invited to engage in a process of collective biography, which included writing and rewriting their first memories of particular experiences, including their first memories of realizing and resisting being gendered. De Finney, Loisel, and Dean examine structural determinants of well-being in the lives of children and youth. Their intersectional framework maps the role of interplaying processes of racialization, gendering, and sexing (among others) in producing unequal circumstances for some groups of children and youth, with a particular focus on the minoritization of girls in CYC. Finally, Hodgins's chapter explores some of the recent father involvement initiatives in Canada and draws on notions of social inclusion and masculinities to question what these initiatives try to change or uphold and whom they do or do not speak to.

The third section groups together chapters that demonstrate a critically reflective stance toward CYC practice, with a particular focus on challenging individualistic, modernist understandings of what it means to help and to care. Brooke Alsbury, Mark Kelly, and Janet Newbury, though representing very different CYC practice contexts, all exemplify a critical, questioning stance toward practice. Using northern Canada as a context, Alsbury asks the profession and the professional to consider how each can be locally developed and mutually constituted, and she proposes a reconceptualization of CYC professionalization through understanding the socially constructed nature of both profession and professional identity. Drawing from his own experience as a street outreach worker, Kelly examines the structures of Canadian society that impact street-involved youth and provides his current thoughts and

understandings of how the interplay of politics, policy, and practice affects youth experiencing street life. Through an exploration of the functions of loss over time, Newbury questions the increasing individualization of human service interventions. Consideration of loss is offered as one avenue through which conceptual shifts can be made from practice that centres predictability to practice that acknowledges contingency and disperses the onus for change (rather than locating it within help seekers).

The final section includes chapters from Lorinda Stoneman and Kathleen Kummen. Although these authors address very different facets and contexts for CYC, juvenile justice and early childhood education, both draw attention to the role of social and policy discourses in shaping current practices with children, youth, and families. Stoneman takes a critical look at the construction of the “young offender” over time and identifies key philosophical changes throughout the past century in Canada, including the implications of the current “managerial” system of youth justice in which actuarial predictions serve to define and identify individual dangerousness. Finally, Kummen explores the concept of readiness as it relates to Canadian early childhood years social policies. She makes visible how readiness can privilege specific ways of knowing for young children and in doing so further maintain the social inequities that are barriers to the development of young children in Canada.

Collectively, these chapters not only challenge and critique various established discourses and ways of understanding in CYC (and other professions and disciplines) but also open up possibilities for CYC practice, policy, research, and education that are not possible through those established understandings. Again, the intent here is not to postulate “right and wrong,” an oppositional binary, or to supplant what has come before; rather, it is to seek a place of acceptance that allows diverse understandings to engage with diverse realities to more fully appreciate how child and youth well-being can be understood, engaged, and supported. We see this book as adding to the growing body of knowledge that can contribute to effective CYC practice, policy, research, and education. We hope you find it a good and useful addition!

Note

- 1 Critical perspectives, as we are using the phrase in this volume, comprise a range of overlapping theoretical and philosophical paradigms. Some of these perspectives resonate with the diverse and contested intellectual terrain known as postmodernism – or what might be more broadly understood as postfoundational theories (St. Pierre and Pillow 2000). Critically oriented social theories, like some versions of feminism, Marxism, and post-colonial or queer theory, invariably analyze relations of power. Theories that engage with postfoundational thinking, including some versions of social constructionism and post-structuralism, generally concern themselves with analyzing discourses, deconstructing language, exposing plurality and contingency, and unsettling taken-for-granted assumptions. Although each has a rich history and all are taken up in different ways within different disciplines and intellectual traditions, what these perspectives share in common is a skepticism toward objective, value-free, acontextual knowledge or singular truths about reality.

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Acronyms

APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
CYC	child and youth care
DSM-IV	<i>Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders</i> (4th ed.)
EBP	evidence-based practice
ECDVU	Early Childhood Development Virtual University
EDI	Early Development Instrument
ELF	Early Learning Framework
FIRA	Father Involvement Research Alliance
FNPP	First Nations Partnerships Program
JDA	Juvenile Delinquents Act
MLTC	Meadow Lake Tribal Council
NACP	North American Certification Project
PAR	participatory action research
PHAC	Public Health Agency of Canada
PIN	personal identification number
SIR	Statistical Inventory on Recidivism
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WTO	World Trade Organization
YCJA	Youth Criminal Justice Act
YOA	Young Offenders Act

PART 1

Teaching and Theorizing
Child and Youth Care

Articulating a Child and Youth Care Philosophy Beyond Binary Constructs

J. N. LITTLE

The initial question that prompted this chapter was “what exists between the traditional binary of practice and academia?” Note that I did not ask “what exists *outside* the binary?” I understand that we do not exist outside circulating discourses that favour binary constructs and that we cannot step outside the language that inscribes us. Despite claims that we are now in a postmodern age in which multiplicity is championed, my own experience is that either/or and self/other still permeate institutions, professional discourses, and general conversations. These conversations reflect an inclination toward categorization and hence convenient detours to judgment of worthiness or dismissal. I have sought out interdisciplinary contexts where I erroneously assumed the binary would be erased under the banner of creative practices. For example, at a recent art and social practice symposium, I overheard introductions that included the question “are you studio or gallery?” There appears to be a reluctance to occupy “the space between the lines” (Sandi Wright, personal communication, 12 January 2008) as it suggests professional meandering or, at the least, commitment issues. However, the space between the lines is neither neutral nor static and certainly not easy. Rather, it is a sense of balancing multiple “realities,” exploring contradictory passions, and encountering overwhelming potentialities, what Ermine (2007, 193) refers to as “ethical space,” which he defines as the

electrifying space between two “disparate world views [that] are poised to engage each other.” To stand, shift, and shuffle in this space, however, means relinquishing some long-cherished assumptions about professional and personal identities and their articulations. I would like to believe child and youth care is in the process of (re)conceptualizing such spaces as we move our graduates into new career contexts and expand our educational degree-granting capacities. Yet binary and rigid categorizations still block the view of how the space between might be performed.

Various authors have offered up titles for this potential in-between, including transnational feminisms (Mohanty 2003), intersectionality (Anderson 1996; Lee and de Finney 2005), relational politics (Gergen 2006), and appreciative inquiry (Gergen and Gergen 2004). For example, Gergen (2006, 232) speaks eloquently to the idea of ambiguous space as a “new range of poetics.” In the realm of CYC writing, White (2007, 226) has argued articulately for a praxis orientation that would promote “conscious reflection both on and in practice.” And, though these ideas can move us away from binary thinking in our practices with clients, they appear to be underexplored/-utilized/-developed in the overall field of CYC, where the academic and practitioner divide persists and where certain contexts privilege practice over theory and vice versa. In recent faculty recruitment postings, there is a call for a “strong CYC philosophy” without explicitly saying what is privileged in such a definition. Is the call for academic CYC credentials? CYC certification? A CYC tattoo? My hunch, based on conversations with other CYC practitioners, is that the implicit message is “more practice, less theory.” Hence, I want to concurrently trouble and tonic the academy as critical CYC practice. To do this, however, requires playing with existing terms and phrases. Referencing Wittgenstein’s “language games,” Gergen (2006, 20) says that “games of language are essentially conducted in a rule-like fashion; to make sense at all requires that one play by the rules.” But whose rules? I concur with Gergen that “when we can alter the ways in which language is used, develop new forms of talking, or shift the context of usage, we sew [sic] the seeds of human change” (22). I attempt to do this here by arguing for a *theo-practivist* model that is transdisciplinary and transtheoretical

and offering, as Gergen does, “salutary invitations to subverting the traditional binary, and reconceptualizing self and other” (230).

Would the Real CYC Please Stand Up?

Consider this scenario. I swipe my card to the door that divides the waiting room from the offices and invite my client inside. We sit in a grey room in a grey building with a stack of paperwork and the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (4th ed.) close at hand. I conduct my assessment, which is filled with “pathologizing questions” that focus on the presenting problem, previous mental health diagnosis, and maladaptive behaviours such as substance abuse and self-harm. There is no section on how clients resist the problem. At the end of the session, I apply a diagnostic label to indicate which eating disorder the client is presenting with to satisfy the requirements of my organization. No diagnostic label equals no service. The client and I then discuss possible treatment options and collaborate on therapeutic goals, with the understanding that these meetings will continue to be one-hour sessions within these four government-approved walls.

Now consider this scenario. I drive to my client’s house and sit in the living room, petting the family cat and waiting for the Handi-Dart bus to pull up out front. I chat with the dad and the young woman about the events of the week – what went well, what was challenging. When the Handi-Dart arrives, the young woman and I head off to her volunteer job, where I assume more of a partner role, supporting her to do something she loves. I keep an eye on the clock because she has a different sense of time passing, but otherwise she sets the pace. When we are finished, we ride back to her house, and the shift is done.

Or this scenario. It is the Sunday night before, and I have the familiar butterflies about meeting my new students. My job is to create excitement for change theories, to push the boundaries of what is considered “common sense” or “best practice” despite my decidedly unradical textbook. In the classroom, I am alive, animated, totally in the zone. Some students are elsewhere, despite being physically present – worried about community deaths, money, child care, depression, anxiety, relationship breakups, pregnancy; I can smell the stress. So I am also anticipating

the “second shift” of teaching, the emergency interventions, the networking, the “do you have five minutes?” My class is only three hours, but it feels like the shift that never ends.

Given these three examples, which most embodies a CYC philosophy? Or, perhaps more tongue in cheek, a *real* CYC philosophy? My guess is that most CYC practitioners would pick the second as it reflects life-space interventions, strengths-based orientation, and community integration. The first scenario, on the other hand, embodies everything I learned was in opposition to CYC philosophy, especially that notorious axis of evil, the DSM-IV. And the third, of course, is a university classroom, which I argue is a largely unexamined site of critical CYC practice. Yet all are roles I actively engage in, depending on which day of the week it happens to be.

Although I am “purely” CYC on paper, with three degrees from the same school, I am not simply a paper trail of credentials. I have been equally influenced by other life experiences, including shifting geo-social locations, acts of resistance, and a lifetime of joys and sorrows. Although I consider myself a CYC practitioner regardless of which context I practise my skills in, it appears that some of these contexts are considered less authentic CYC practice. For example, Lorde (1984, 110) famously claimed that “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house,” so is it fair to say I hold a CYC philosophy while concurrently holding the DSM-IV? Can I embody an authentic CYC philosophy if I am also beholden to institutional restraint? Although I hold one foot firmly in clinical practice, the other is snug in academia. I need both feet to walk, as it were, just as I need both to inform my practice(s). To assume teaching and research as the culmination of practice, as opposed to practice itself, creates an uneasy tension for those of us who identify the academy as our primary context of critical engagement with young (and not so young) adults. The false dichotomy of practice and research sets in motion a train of identity politics and, ultimately, a spectacular train crash. If the practice train leaves Victoria at 21:00 at 150 kilometres per hour and the theory train leaves Edmonton at the same time but at 200 kilometres per hour, who will reach the national conference first? Or, perhaps more importantly, who will be welcomed as an authentic CYC practitioner with a “real” CYC philosophy?

Binary and Identity Politics

Early in her career, hooks (2000, 113) wrote about division among people working together for an overarching cause (in this case second wave North American feminism):

The tug-of-war ... has existed within [the] feminist movement between feminist intellectuals and academics ... and participants in the movement who equate education with bourgeois privilege and are fiercely anti-intellectual. This tug-of-war has led to the formation of a false dichotomy between theory (the development of ideas) and practice (the actions of the movement), with one group privileging “practice.” As a consequence, there is often little congruity between feminist theory and feminist practice. This intensifies the feelings of some women engaged in activism ... that they are superior to or more “politically correct” than women who concentrate their energies on developing ideas.

I find a parallel in CYC, where, despite our championing of praxis, the theorist/practitioner and academy/community divides still exist. Many years ago, when I was a student engaging in the process of closure with my class colleagues, one student reflected that her biggest fear on graduating was “ending up doing research.” Murmurs of agreement swept through the room. In retrospect, that was the beginning of an implicit and condoned silencing of academic CYC practice and the widening gulf between “real” and “academic” CYC engagement. A more recent example was some coaching I received to “tone down” my research focus in a job application, and any mention of theoretical orientation promoting critical interdisciplinary research would be “the kiss of death,” especially an orientation with the flavour of feminism or post-structural thought. Both examples speak to the pervading myth that you must align with one side or the other, and no one mentions you can be both. Or something altogether different.

Like the second wave feminist movement in North America, energy is needlessly expended in CYC on drawing an arbitrary line in the sand between what constitutes a legitimate CYC philosophy and whether that philosophy is stronger in community-based practice or teaching/research

practice. And, though some readers might argue these conversations are important for critical debate, I witness more identity politics than curious conversations. There is an undercurrent that flows through water cooler conversations, conference themes, and editorials. Some of it is blatant, such as Fewster (2004, 3): “Preference will always be for those with the most impressive academic credentials, not those that possess the personal qualities that reflect the essence of child and youth care.” Such circular arguments are not helpful in creating sustainable solidarity. Akin to the rise of third and fourth wave feminisms, essentialist politics cannot thrive in a postmodern world. It seems a shame to me to quest for a singular “truth” of CYC as opposed to the field’s possibilities. And, as those of us wrestling with ideas and theories recognize, “most truths are less interesting than the complex and dynamic intercrossing of forces, intensities, discourses, desires, accidents, idiosyncrasies, and relations of power that produce those culminations” (Roy 2003, 1). Although theorists are no strangers to the trade of peddling truth, postmodern critical thinkers also recognize that it shifts based on power, privilege, and dissemination.

But What Camp Are You Really In?

I have been attempting to articulate my own CYC philosophy among varied, and often competing, professional dialogues. As I move into the next phase of my CYC career, many faculty descriptions call for a “strong CYC philosophy.” There appears to be an implicit agreement that a so-called strong CYC philosophy is distinct and somehow superior to others (Anglin 1999; Phelan 2005). This is a seductive idea, and, like Thomas (2001), who writes about her experience graduating with a degree in women’s studies, and my MA cohort, in CYC we had our fair share of defending our degree choice, creating a self-perpetuating cycle of why CYC was different and unique. To articulate how “we” are ontologically different from “them,” however, is extremely problematic. This process is reductive and deeply entrenches the “other” (especially so when in reference to social work, which, frankly, is tired). It also promotes a stagnation of identity. So busy are we trying to illustrate our difference that those cherished traditional concepts do not get taken up critically.

Indeed, we risk reifying a “sociopolitical category [that] is applied to individuals as a reductive agent, circumscribing one’s identity, and reducing one’s potential to be otherwise” (Gergen 2006, 227).

It might be an issue not of taking up the binary of either/or but of rearranging identity more broadly. Ropers-Huilman (1997, 337) speaks eloquently about this, and thus I quote her at length:

Identity, then, is a term that is most useful when broadly defined and seen as perhaps not all-encompassing. The “creation” of identity is impossible as there exists no time when a totally new and unchanging being enters a discourse. I cannot distinguish such a point in this research. Rather, the concept of identities is like viewing a borderless map. Many of the landmarks have posted names; indeed, I have lived in places called “White” and “Woman.” Once a location, an identity, is a part of me, I cannot disown it. Yet it need not own me. Rather, I can visit, through careful listening, other cities whose characteristics and opportunities provide lessons and insights as well. While some people travel more frequently and enthusiastically than others, this process of travelling is endless. Our identities are multiple, yet enmeshed with each other in a chaotic balance of life choices and struggles for self.

What I understand from her commentary is that, though identity can be conceptualized as “borderless,” it is still influenced by previous travels. For example, schools of CYC all across the country have been created by practitioners and scholars representing a range of disciplines and intellectual traditions. Those with tenure have come from several other metaphorical and literal cities, and this diversity enriches dialogue about practice, theorizing, and ethical decision making and introduces a host of potentialities of seeing the world of children, youth, families, and communities. I can head left down the halls for a quantitative perspective or opt right for a social constructionist perspective. I can knock on every door in between for perspectives that have emerged out of allied disciplines but that are housed under the banner of CYC. But this interdisciplinary thrust is at risk of disappearing with the rise of graduate

programs that woo those already firmly embedded in the undergraduate discourse of CYC and in turn propagates a field of CYC practitioners who do not critically question the very assumptions therein. This reification of standards, theories, and the apparent urgency for a singular CYC philosophy might actually do us more harm than good. Messer-Davidow (2002, 20) reflects thus:

Disciplines endure through practice, the continuation of practice depends upon reproduction, and reproduction is accomplished by socializing practitioners. When a discipline trains future practitioners, it doesn't just teach them it's knowing contents; it exercises them in ways of perceiving, thinking, valuing, relating, and acting. Once the discipline has credentialed and employed them, it ensures that they continue to observe its "good subject" practices by subjecting them to ongoing evaluations.

You, dear reader, might be thinking, yes! That is exactly what CYC praxis is! An epistemological and ontological *being*. This is what certification reflects – good practice measures! But this is precisely our strength as well as our challenge and, most importantly, why certain areas of practice such as the academy are rendered “less than” direct practice. Those on the fringes of perceptible CYC practice have eschewed some of the grooming inherent in CYC discourse and as such become risky subjects: “Competent practitioners learn (as inept ones do not) to observe the disciplinary norms, and innovative practitioners learn (as merely competent ones do not) which norms they can transgress in order to generate new knowledge. But woe to the practitioner who violates the disciplinary truth ... because the discipline will regard her as a bad subject to be subdued or expelled” (Messer-Davidow 2002, 20-21).

At the same time, these contexts groom their own subjectivities and performances of authenticity, and I do not suggest that those in the academy are somehow romantic nomads. This brings us back to the vexing subtext of “strong CYC philosophy” embedded in certain employer advertisements, including faculty appointments. As an educator who teaches in a professional school of CYC at a university, I am painfully aware of my role in disciplining subjects in the classroom. At

times, it is easier to “speak” CYC discourse than to interrupt it. Phelan (2005) supports the proliferation of this discourse and advocates for a mono-educational curriculum to produce “reflective practitioners.” Although I do not disagree with reflective practitioners, indeed I know I have taught and mentored some, I do not believe that project can be accomplished through placing restrictions on what can be reflected on, which is akin to pouring the old wine into new bottles. If we at least concur that the children, youth, families, and communities we work with are complex and ever evolving, then it seems accurate to assume the same for the field(s) of CYC.

As Bloustien (2003, 51) reminds us, “ultimately identities are narratives – stories we tell about ourselves – and they are fictional.” The story of what constitutes a “strong CYC philosophy,” then, is open to editing and rewriting. At this global juncture, with pressing social and environmental needs, a strong CYC philosophy needs to move beyond the relational and into the political (Bellefeuille, McGrath, and Jamieson 2008). There is an ethical imperative (White, this volume) to do so. What I offer below is my emergent narrative of what constitutes a strong CYC philosophy. I want to be clear that I do not offer this as a static truth, a bundle of essences, or a binary/oppositional argument to the dominant CYC philosophy. Rather, I invite you to consider this a tentative collision of language, ontology, and reflexivity.

Toward a Theoro-Practivist Model

When attempting to articulate my thoughts, I wrestled with familiar word pairings such as scholar-activist, scholar-practitioner, scholar-advocate, social pedagogue, and academic-practitioner. Yet all embody the dichotomous language I seek to dismantle. As I reinvented myself for particular contexts, including job applications, what I created was a theoro-practivist model. Although still a hyphenated word (and I toyed with *acapractivist*), it holds the three aspects I see as being so critical to my orientation to my work: theory, practice, and activism. In some respects, it plays on the academic catchwords *scholarship*, *teaching*, and *service* but resides both inside and outside the academy and between the lines of allied disciplines.

Theory

As a scholar, I am deeply embedded in and embodied by the language of theory and happiest while there. Since I often teach a course on theories as they relate to human change processes, this is probably a good thing. My love of theory is multifaceted – I appreciate the social and historical contexts within which ideas reside; for example, I am curious about the parallel between capitalism and “best practice” theories; and theory allows a languaging of ideas and experiences. I love theory because, despite its historical abuses, it can create a more just and inclusive world (Denzin and Giardina 2009). Most importantly, I am resolved that we all operate from a theoretical paradigm, explicitly expressed or implicitly practised. Where we draw our “ontological and epistemological bits” (Messer-Davidow 2002, 189), however, has ethical implications and consequences. From my training in CYC, I had to look elsewhere to queer heteronormative perspectives (Bechdel 2006; Butler 2004; Calfia 1997; herising 2005; Weeks, Heaphy, and Donovan 2001), I needed a language outside CYC to speak to relational interaction and meaning making in a manner that acknowledged their complexity (Denzin 2003; Gergen 2001; McCracken 2008), and I needed a critical race perspective that transcended a multicultural, singular discourse diversity lens (Maracle 1996; Minh-ha 1999). And, given my exposure to developmental theories, I needed theories that would speak to the complexity of youth experience from a postmodern and participatory lens (Bach 1998; Bloustien 2003; Cammarota and Fine 2008; de Finney 2007; Skott-Myhre 2005). And, perhaps most importantly, much of my learning and methodological development has emerged out of feminist fiction and poetry (Allison 1993; Dykewomon 1997; Feinberg 1993; Pratt 1995; Rich 1981, to name too few). You might notice few CYC practitioners in the preceding list. Grant (2005, 91) suggests that many training traditions “often have no sense of the limitations of their practice, and as a result, are not aware of the wealth of wisdom that lies within reach if only they were to ask different questions from those delineated within their own disciplinary canons.” As such, different questions reside within, and different temporal answers reside outside, common-sense discourses of CYC. By collaging theories, stories, and narratives from multiple

contexts, richer potentials are more easily recognized in terms of interventions and collaborations with co-workers. This cross-contextual curiosity in turn enriches what I can offer in the classroom.

Fewster (2004, 3) remarked once that “no educational courses, training programs or text books can give you what you need in order to be with, understand and guide a young person through the fear, pain, chaos and anger once these demons are at work. We are not dealing with theory and strategic intervention here.” I have concerns that the essentialist movement in CYC is akin to what created fissures in North American feminism – that to claim our difference as natural, biologically determined, and developmentally sequential is to further our own imprisonment and foreclose multiple ways of articulating CYC. Essentialism is a theoretical perspective. Regardless whether you call CYC a calling, a craft (see Eisikovits and Beker 2001; Maier 2001) or just a job, it cannot be denied that we groom students to be good subjects. In doing so, we rob them of the very gift needed in all areas of CYC work – critical reflection and the theoretical language with which to do it. An example of grooming would be a common lament in my classroom: “Well, the pay sucks, but you couldn’t pay me to be one of *them*” (meaning allied disciplines that earn higher wages). Good grooming would be to employ an essentialist argument for heeding one’s calling, and one colleague actually had the nerve to say poor wages made CYC practitioners more appealing to institutions and agencies. Drawing on feminist theories, however, illuminates the gendered nature of this work and historical, culturally specific devaluing of child care and youth work.

Practice

As I explicated above, my practice takes place across a spectrum of needs and institutional delivery. In my career, I have done much of what would be considered traditional CYC work, including family support; (dis)ability inclusion; short-term residential, educational, and life skills tutoring; and group and staff training on subjects such as queer inclusion and safer sexual practices. Yet I found myself ending up in the most hinterland CYC contexts, such as office-based counselling and qualitative methodology conferences that had never heard of CYC. I discovered

being a heretic was much more liberating than attempting to “translate” my multiple perspectives into CYC dogma. Akin to drawing on multiple literacies to inform my theoretical lens, traversing the practice landscape has challenged how I articulate my practice. Specifically, it has compelled me to step out of the dyadic dance metaphor so popular in CYC discourse and to become politically accountable for my interventions in the community, the classroom, and research.

Activism

I have argued elsewhere (Moen, Little, and Burnett 2005) that an oft-missing component of CYC practice is a radical and political edge that takes up non-essentialist and non-hegemonic positions. Others are certainly involved in this project (Skott-Myhre 2005), but I see little evidence of those willing to name themselves as activists. Others appear to have taken up the scholar-advocate position (Cope 2008; Gunderson 2009; Roysirear 2009; Wilcox 2009, not to mention many who created women’s studies programs in North America). Advocacy is not a new concept in CYC, but like practice it needs to be stretched into the realm of political action. Theoro-practivism in the realm of CYC requires teaching as activism. “What is teaching as activism? We believe that our teaching is part and parcel of the anti-globalization demonstrations such as those in Seattle and Quebec City. It includes the teaching that we professors do inside and outside the classroom” (Tripp and Muzzin 2005, 3). So, though I have argued that post-secondary education is overlooked as a viable site of CYC practice, it is also overlooked as a potential site of activism. In some respects, this activism is direct action, such as walking with my students protesting tuition fee increases or demanding state attention to missing indigenous women in British Columbia. Teaching as activism is subversive action on campus as well, for example calling attention to gendered/sexist/heteronormative advertisements on campus for the teaching of feminist theory. Or networking students in a manner that allows space for potentially radical acts. Activism on campus is also the small stuff that counters the commodification of education: letting students know they have one chance to miss tuition and still register (learned in my own undergraduate days), advocating for a reserve copy of the textbook in the library, and supporting students who fall outside

dominant CYC discourse and are willing to challenge the status quo. This can be done through institutional routes, such as directed studies, or off-the-side-of-the-desk mentoring. We fail as activists when we embrace ideas of “natural” consequences (too often socially constructed and maintained) and continue to tokenize cultural locations. We fail as activists and CYC faculty when we move inward in our professional associations and publishing circles and continued participation in individualistic and mono-professional discourses. Don’t get me wrong: according to my own criteria, I fail every week. However, if our propaganda is self-awareness, then activism as a pedagogue requires vigilance in observing when we slip into dominant discourse and watching for opportunities to resist it.

Where I do see promise of radicalizing CYC through resistance is in the creation of theo-practivists in the classroom and participatory action research (PAR) methodologies. This is where “your feminist rubber meets your methodological road” (Gergen 2001, 91) and where some historical ideas of what it means to hold a CYC philosophy can be applied. For example, in my own institution, several students and faculty have engaged or are engaging youth voices in dynamic ways. Some projects hold long-term partnerships (see www.antidote.org as an example). Although it is outside the scope of this chapter to explicate the moral, ethical, and revolutionary potential of PAR in CYC research, I believe that it represents a critical juncture at which to ask several important questions. For example, how does milieu get redefined in temporary and collaborative spaces such as research groups and classrooms? How is power made explicit and negotiated? Who decides what constitutes “best practices”? And, most importantly, what don’t we know that we thought we did?

Conclusion

It is my sense that, given the proliferation of CYC practice contexts, academic programs, and engaged scholarship, we stand at the beginning of a new decade of possibilities: the possibility of multiple CYC philosophies to emerge. As herising (2005, 142) reflects, “by embracing a queer flexibility, we are better able to let difference live, where we can find pleasures in the ambiguities of multifocaled thresholds. In turn,

this openness can create alternative strategies and visions for a radical praxis, where bordered and domesticated claims of knowledge are contested, challenged, decentred in order to engage processes of alteration, regeneration, and transformation.”

In many respects, I have travelled varied terrains within this chapter to challenge mono-educational initiatives and to invite the reader to reconceptualize the academic context as a rich site of contesting CYC norms. What I have spoken to is a need for questioning the academic/practitioner dichotomy and the promise of a theo-practivist orientation. This would, in my opinion, fuse artificially delineated contexts of research, practice, teaching, and activism and challenge us to move the idea of praxis into, well, practice. If we adhere to a mono-educational initiative, we will merely become simulacra. By continuing to delineate practice and academic tracks, the profession becomes potentially embittered and most certainly fractured. How do we avoid this when we secretly believe we are right in our own CYC philosophy? Again, I turn to feminism’s experience and end on the words of Yeatman (1994, 50): “The answer lies not in attempting to preempt the differentiation of expert and non-expert feminist theorizing by making all conform to the homogenizing dictates of the feminist community ... Just what this might mean requires rather different models of political accountability, dialogue and democratic participation than those we inherit.”

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