

Child & Youth Care Practice

Collected Wisdom for New Practitioners



Patricia Kostouros and Michelle Briegel

Editors

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ISBN 978-0-6399718-0-3

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Published October 2018

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An imprint of Pretext Publishing

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Introduction

The purpose of this book is to assist those new to the field of Child and Youth Care (CYC), whether a student or practitioner, to become more acquainted with this profession. Often, people enter this field with ideals that might be difficult to manifest. As instructors in this field, we have encountered many examples when students or novice practitioners have been surprised by their encounters with children, youth or families, as well as by encounters with other professionals. We hoped to create a text that was easy to read, gives a sense of the field, and shows the rewards and difficulties of the work we do in human services.

This book came out of a meeting with CYC instructors across Alberta, Canada. We lamented that we wished there was some way to orient and prepare students for the realities of what their fieldwork experiences might be like prior to them encountering challenges, particularly in the first year of their CYC education. The themes from our discussion showed us that across all our province programs students were having similar experiences, in that they were often shocked by what they saw, heard and could not do in a practicum or fieldwork placement. For example, people often come to the work of CYC with the notion that if they like the children or youth they work with, they will be liked back, or that all staff will be altruistic about their work and not clash with the children and youth with whom they work. We believe that this is an issue for CYC programs across North America, and perhaps globally. Therefore, regardless of where an author resides or works, what is represented in this text should be transferable to other jurisdictions. In addition, since the field has a variety of labels for our profession, for example worker or counsellor, we use the word 'practitioner' to represent all titles of those who work with children, youth and families and are educated or being educated in CYC.

We chose to create a text that highlighted personal examples of experiences that assisted in learning about the field. Some authors submitted advice and do's and don'ts that are based on their many years of supervising fieldwork and practicum students. Some authors wrote about personal examples of mistakes they had made in their own work and what they learned from those mistakes. Others chose to write about situations

that they have experienced with students, hoping to help avert certain encounters by reporting on those challenges.

We anticipate that this text could increase success in a first fieldwork or practicum setting and help those new to the field. Since the stories shared are of a more personal reflection, we did not require authors to use a referencing format. While this is unusual, we expect that it will be more reader friendly for those just starting out in the CYC profession.

We have attempted to collate the text into sections. We start the text with a poem from a student about to embark on her first practicum. We think it effectively represents some of what we have heard from students over many years. The poem represents the anxiety that is often felt prior to beginning fieldwork and practicum and this may well spark appropriate conversations in classes about how students feel, as well as opportunities for supervisors to converse with those new to the field. Immediately following the poem, the book is presented in sections that we believe represents the flow that is likely to take place in a learning environment. The first section is about practice settings and preparation. The next section is about relational practice, followed by supervision and then self and self-care. The final section contains a bit of levity, pulling together stories about mistakes made and lessons learned.

We hope you will enjoy the stories and understand the need to be honest when reflecting on this work. Mistakes will be made; some children and youth will appreciate your efforts, while other times will be difficult. At the same time, the rewards are great, challenges will pass and the relationships nurtured, incredible.

The Swing

Esther DuBourt

Nervous
Relieved
And nervous again
I'm swinging back and forth, back and forth
Confusion comes, and pushes me
Should I, should I not, my stomach jumps
And anxiety pools, right in my hands, and I hold so tightly on to my
"what ifs"
What if this, what if that; it is all so hard to just let go, and know
That I've got time, to learn, to soar
And help them fly
Yet as I feel this knowledge grow, like wind in sails, and watch the
butterflies float by
Excitement builds, and so will I
On strengths, my own and theirs
And so I slow down, to stop
And take a breath
I'll laugh with them,
I'll eat with them too,
And soon I know, I'll share my recipe; my mix of knowledge and my
growth
I'll pour in patience
And make experience, and even memories too
So they can grow, with the love I'll show, in strength and trust
And I'll find success, for each of us
I'll even lead
And so I'll heed
Our CYC creed
And fulfill the need
For care indeed

SECTION ONE

Practice and Preparation

It is imperative in any new job that one has a sense of the work they will perform. This can also be said of those who are about to embark on a practicum placement. Having some picture of the setting and the practice expectations can assist in success once someone is in the field, whether employed or as a student in practicum.

The section presented first in this text is divided into two areas. The first is related to the practice setting and practice expectations. Initially you are introduced to a variety of settings along with some ideas to engage with children and youth in those settings. You are also invited to consider how to apply the theory and the strategies you might be using in your work. It is important to apply what you are learning or have previously learned since this will increase success, given that what you have learned is likely evidence-based and effective in most cases.

In addition, authors have offered suggestions for ways to achieve success and what you could consider prior to entering a practicum, fieldwork, or workplace setting. You have gained knowledge and putting this into practice can be challenging. It is therefore important to allow yourself to make mistakes and reflect on your practice. Effective communication and honesty can act as your guide as a new practitioner and remembering your roots and being yourself will keep you grounded when it gets difficult.

The second area of this section is related to preparation and ways to ready yourself for what you might encounter once in your setting placement. Being unprepared for the setting you are about to encounter can lead to feeling nervous and less competent. While it may be uncomfortable to ask questions or talk to a supervisor when you first enter a setting, it is imperative for both you and the children or youth with whom you work. You and those you are serving will be safer if you are checking on expectations and recognizing what might be happening internally within the workplace.

Preparation refers both to knowledge about a practice setting – for example routines, rules and how the therapeutic milieu unfolds – and also to self-preparation. Not only do effective CYC practitioners consider their impact on others, they also consider the impact the work has on them. Those who have a similar history to those with whom they work may be reminded of that history and this may or may not affect their work. Reflecting on self and being aware of that which might trigger you and lead to less effective practice leads to work that is safe for everyone in the environment. Sometimes there are environments that are not going to be the best places to practice if they trigger past history or lead to intense interactions.

Being a reflective and a reflexive practitioner can lead to effective and healthy practice. Being able to reflect on an interaction after it has occurred can help us to recognize how we have engaged and think about potential changes we might make in the future. Being able to be reflexive, recognizing what is happening in the moment, can help to process thoughts and feelings as they occur. For example, you might have a similar past to a youth with whom you are working and want to advocate for that person. Potentially, because of your own past you become forceful about the need to advocate even if the youth does not want your assistance. Recognizing this as it happens allows you to process that you may be doing so because of your own history and you may therefore change the interaction to be more collaborative, ensuring you are supporting what the youth wants, and not what you think they should want due to your own agenda.

Throughout this section of the text you will be guided to consider your own trauma triggers and how your past might lead to practice in certain ways. In addition, some authors have offered stories about what they learned due to not having prepared themselves or from events that have occurred. We hope that preparation becomes a common practice prior to entering a new workplace or practicum setting.

Practice

Engagement in Child and Youth Care Settings

Chelan McCallion

CYC students will specialize in the development of therapeutic relationships within a variety of settings. It is important that students are provided with the opportunity to engage in quality interactions with individuals at their respected settings to foster these relationships. Most often students will choose a practicum placement based on their interest in learning more about the population and how to work effectively within this particular setting. It is important to note that some settings may be more conducive for students to engage in daily interactions with children youth and families than others.

Students may be able to take part in day-to-day activities with children, youth, and families by engaging in the morning, afternoon or nightly routines. Students might be able to set schedules within their respective organizations and programs which could consist of shift work (i.e., 7am-3pm, 3pm-11pm, 11pm-7am), school hours, after-school care or evenings and weekends. Most CYC settings are designed for individuals to reside at or to seek out services on a regular basis. However, there is a chance that individuals assigned to these programs could leave without permission, choose not to attend, or become discharged. Therefore, this may limit the number of opportunities for engagement. It is important for students to remember to take advantage of the time they have within their placement and promote quality interactions and build rapport.

Practicum placements that provide services to individuals under 18 years of age tend to have higher occupancy or retention rates as they may be mandated to stay at the program. If individuals residing in residential care placements who are under 18 years of age leave without permission, they are most often returned within 72 hours. When programming is voluntary and recreation based, attendance and participation seem to

remain fairly steady and therefore the quantity of interactions will be consistent.

The following programs are intended to provide highly participatory engagement with children, youth and families –

Group Care Models or Residential Treatment Facilities

These settings provide excellent day-to-day contact. However, there is a risk that individuals could leave the program without permission. Within these settings, individuals reside in the program on a daily basis. Practicum students are encouraged to complete their shifts later in the day. This gives students the highest level of engagement during an evening routine and provides them with the opportunity to spend one-on-one time with children and youth. It is recommended that students avoid day time shifts as most often the children or youth will be attending school or another day program. Therefore, students will see them briefly in the morning, with little to no contact during the day. Also, avoid overnight shifts, as often the youth are sleeping; therefore, there is limited face-to-face time.

School Settings

These settings will provide day-to-day contact with children, youth and families. Be mindful of the school year and make a point of noting holidays and professional days as you may have to make up hours. Often year-round schools will have breaks which can last up to two weeks at any given time. This limits interactions for practicum students as post-secondary semesters will come to an end before the school year. Therefore, taking advantage of the time you do have will help a CYC student make the most of this placement setting. Eat lunch with the students, look for opportunities to facilitate an activity, and attend as many celebrations and school events as possible.

After School/Drop-in programs/Recreation

Most often there is a high attendance rate for programming that is fun, exciting and recreation based. This provides many opportunities for students to engage with various youth on a consistent basis. Due to the number of individuals attending, the interactions could be high in volume; however, the quality of the interaction may be limited. It is also important to acknowledge that in these settings programming may be time sensitive. In other words, the program could run for eight weeks, or takes a hiatus

during the summer months, or is only available on weekends. Therefore, students will need to be cognizant of the short amount of time to build relationships with individuals within these settings and learn how to work effectively within constricted time frames.

Confined Settings

Various confined settings may include court-ordered and mandated provisions which could provide monitored service to youth displaying challenging behaviours such as addictions and youth struggling with substance use and/or mental health challenges who voluntarily seek help. Other settings may include a confined court-ordered and monitored service that assesses and stabilizes youth with suicidal tendencies, violent behaviours, and dangerous lifestyles, which present an imminent risk to themselves or others. These programs typically involve a 30-day stay, with the option to extend if needed. These settings are often at full capacity with a waitlist. Individuals within these programs may seek out extra support or one-on-one time. Individuals could also appear withdrawn and isolate themselves. It is important to note that these settings are once again time sensitive, when students will need to engage in consistent rapport building within a short amount of time. For students placed in settings such as secured facilities, and shelters, it is important to understand that even though students are ready and willing to engage, this may not be reciprocated by the children or youth. The individual may choose not to engage or avoid interactions altogether. Initiative, consistency, patience and time is key to these settings.

The same applies to students seeking practicum placements within young offender centres. Individuals within these programs are serving sentences and/or are awaiting trial. CYC students will need to be creative in their approach to building therapeutic relationships in a setting different from a traditional CYC therapeutic milieu. Consistency will go a long way within these settings. Maintaining a set routine and commitment to this schedule is fundamental. Often, individuals in these settings will look forward to engagement with students as it is a refreshing break from the same mundane tasks within their current environment. In addition, keep in mind that there are limited resources within these settings. As a current CYC practitioner I have found myself visiting individuals within young offender placements. There are the same three games available, no access to social media or technology and little stimulus to hold one's attention for

longer than 10 minutes at a time. A therapeutic relationship will exist in an institutionalized setting with consistent visits, quality one-on-one interactions, acceptance, support and a non-judgmental attitude.

Shelters

Often students are interested in seeking out practicum placements within a street entrenched environment, such as a shelter or drop-in centre. Shifts within these settings can be quite tricky for individuals seeking out a daytime rotation. Often inhabitants of the shelter are asked to leave by a set time in the morning (i.e. 9am) and are not allowed to return until a particular time – late afternoon or evening. Therefore, students will need to be flexible within their schedule to accommodate later evenings or overnight shifts. Being present when individuals arrive at the shelter and ensuring their basic needs are met will help foster safety and security.

Voluntary Services

Students interested in completing practicums with young adults – post 18 years of age – will need to be mindful of limited contact since most adult services are voluntary. Often young adults are expected to engage in a meaningful day program to keep themselves busy and are involved in a routine. However, ultimately it is their choice to participate in the service provided. Students may face several cancellations and rescheduled appointments. Maintaining a flexible schedule and leaving room for impromptu meetings and phone calls is essential.

Within confined settings, shelters and voluntary services students need to be mindful and ensure the quality of the interactions are strong because there is often limited time to connect. Being present, enthusiastic and taking the initiative is important to build relationships within a variety of settings.

Personal Experience

Throughout my time as a practicum student, I found myself in a variety of programs where the interaction levels varied. Regardless of the setting, I would consistently engage in programming and take advantage of opportunities to connect with individuals. This meant attending all practicum activities such as holiday celebrations, birthdays, assemblies, graduations, and field trips. This was above and beyond my regular practicum schedule and helped aid in building relationships with those who were not always present during my regular rotation. It is important for

students to seek out additional opportunities to make their presence known which will, in turn, demonstrate consistency in their efforts and aid in building rapport.

It is important for students to recognize that these extra efforts may not always be appreciated or acknowledged. Early in my practicum experience, I found myself taking it personally when children or youth did not want to engage. For example, I would leave a practicum shift having developed a therapeutic relationship with someone only to come in the next day to find out that they had decided to leave the program. The disappointment I felt became internalized, and I believed the reason they left was because of me. After debriefing with my supervisor, learning about CYC practice within my post-secondary education, and increasing my exposure to a variety of individuals within my practicum placement, I was able to shift the focus away from myself, recognizing these were choices the child or youth made. I adopted a practice of trying my best to truly understand where my children or youth were coming from, their perspective, to validate their experience and to ultimately meet them where they were at during our interactions.

Throughout my time within these placements, I would also engage in limit setting which involved clear boundaries and setting limits for behaviour. In doing so, I was able to create safety for both myself and persons within the setting. This may be a hard task for students to tackle; however, it will make your life easier in the long run. Often these boundaries will be tested, and students will need to recognize the importance of them within a therapeutic relationship. I would also practice demonstrating unconditional positive regard, which involves showing respect, care, and concern regardless of whether it was my first time meeting them, limited interactions or multiple encounters.

Lastly, I consistently took an active interest in the children or youth's values, beliefs, experiences and goals, which demonstrated a sincere attempt to understand and respect a different perspective than my own. Even taking an active interest in their favourite activities will expedite the relationship building process regardless of the setting. For example, I am not a big fan of rides at amusement parks, specifically roller coasters. During an outing with an individual I worked with many years ago, she managed to convince me to go on a roller coaster with her. This individual was often AWOL for long periods of time, would show up sporadically looking for food and a place to rest until she would head back out again. When she returned, I would always greet her with a smile on my face, avoid lecturing her choices

and be with her in the moment. She often didn't acknowledge me and wanted to be alone. When she asked me to go on the ride with her I jumped at the chance since she was reaching out. I screamed from start to finish, and she laughed the whole time. I worked with this individual for several years before she was discharged from the program. To this day, I still receive emails or calls from her reminding me how scared I was on the roller coaster and that we should do it again. Never underestimate the impact you will have – even if it is one interaction.

Meaningful Engagement/Minimal Interaction

There are a few critical yet simple things to do in a placement setting that can increase the chance that a student will build relationships regardless of the setting. The following list can help guide a student's initial practice for success:

- Be present and consistent.
- Find ways to acknowledge the children and youth. Say hello, say that you are happy to see them, compliment them and take an active interest in them.
- Share a meal, coffee, tea or a quick chat. Use yourself as a motivator and, if you can, incorporate food, which is always a selling factor!
- Maintain a non-judgmental attitude. You may not agree with their choices; however, you can be there when they return.
- However brief the interaction, focus on the individual versus the paperwork you need to complete or the tasks left to do before your shift is over.
- Assist individuals in identifying and developing their strengths through activities and other experiences with you.
- Promote participation in activity planning and give them voice and choice! Be an active participant in all activities the children and youth would like to explore.

Summary

Child and Youth Care practice emphasizes direct, day-to-day work with children, youth and families regardless of the milieu. It is important for students to acknowledge that they are guests within individual's

environments. Therefore, students are encouraged to engage with purpose, consistency and care while present in one's life space. It is important for students to be mindful of how it would feel to have someone come into their home, quite unexpectedly, and attempt to build relationships with them. What are some of the most important characteristics they would like to see demonstrated? Try and operate in a manner where respect, consistency, unconditional positive regard and taking an active interest will be in the forefront.

In addition to this, it is critical for students to develop a strong sense of self-awareness during their interactions, overall engagement and in the creation of therapeutic relationships. Students should consistently check in with themselves to reflect on how purposeful their interactions are and for whom they are creating meaningful moments. Child and Youth Care practice is a delicate dance of meeting individuals where they are at and ultimately following their lead. Students should allow room and time for the relationship to transpire holistically, genuinely and without reservation, regardless of the amount of interactions.

Within various practicum settings, students may become frustrated with the lack of progress or impact they believe they have on both the demographic and practice setting. It is imperative that students continue to persevere despite these common feelings and growing pangs. Students should experiment with diverse practicum options and leave their practicum experience with an assortment of memories to reflect upon. Students should not overlook the little things that happen throughout their days. It is crucial to embrace the little wins, terrifying rollercoaster rides and keep in mind that we can only make as much of an impact as another human being invites us to make. Establishing supportive, nurturing, and purposeful therapeutic relationships are the cornerstone of Child and Youth Care practice and is ultimately achievable and viable in all practice milieus.

Remember to Apply Theory to Practice

Michelle Briegel

Practicum is your opportunity as a student to grow your ability, knowledge, and skills. You will go out to a professional practice setting, learn from other CYC practitioners, and practice your skills. Practicum is a time when you can venture into your practice discipline, while still being a little sheltered within your student role. It is a partnership between you and the agency; the agency agrees to teach and offer you opportunities to learn and practice your skills while coaching you along the way. You, as the student, agree to learn while helping the agency in any way that is agreeable within the context of your practicum.

The context of your practicum can take different forms, depending on the post-secondary program within which you are enrolled. Practicum might be a first-year fieldwork observation, when you do not get to experience as much in the way of direct front-line work yourself but are observing professionals in their practice. It may be front line practice, or it may be more of a leadership opportunity. Regardless of the type of practicum, one thing is certain, you are there to learn and experience the practice of CYC.

It is likely that you have taken some classes specific to your discipline before going out into the field. You have probably studied theoretical concepts in CYC, psychology, and other related courses. You are going into your practicum experience with a good amount of knowledge and should be proud of what you have learned so far. It can be intimidating when you first start out in the field and are going to a program that has been around for some time. You know that the people who work in the program have also likely been practicing for some time and have a great deal of experience and wisdom under their belt.

Regardless of the experience of those already in the field, you cannot underestimate the knowledge and skill that you can bring to the program.

As a student, you have had the pleasure of being able to focus on your studies, learn theories of practice, and delve into newer concepts. Now it is time to put your theoretical knowledge into practice. Do not forget to bring your theory with you. You have learned valuable information in school, and it is time to try to implement the skills you have learned. You get to observe settings from the vantage point with a fresh perspective, someone who is coming in with newly acquired knowledge and can look at what is going on in practice with an outside lens.

A fresh set of eyes on a program and the processes within an agency are important for the program, as it allows for reflection on practice. When students arrive at a program to observe and learn, they usually have many questions. These questions are typically based on their attempt to align what they have learned in school to what they see in practice. This can be a positive experience if the agency works from a best practice perspective and is open to reflective evaluation. However, it can also be a frustrating experience. Unfortunately, not all agencies or programs are working from a best practice perspective; and they may not be reflecting on their practice. Some agencies are not regularly evaluating their programs, models, or staffing competencies. As a student this might be confusing. Talk about this with your practicum supervisor, in your seminar class, and with your instructor. Talking about it can bring light to the situation, which sometimes might be what is needed to evoke change. Other times, it can help you understand why an agency or program might continue in their ways of working and thinking. Regardless, you need to practice what you have learned and know to be true. When you can ask questions, talk about what you have learned, provide new models and ways of practice to your colleagues at your placement you enhance the lives of the children and youth in the care of that agency. Sharing your attitudes, knowledge, and skills respectfully are part of your responsibility as an ethical CYC practitioner.

Even if nobody ends up taking your advice, or adopting your new ideas, you have shared the correct information in the space where it may be utilized. You have also had the opportunity to grow and learn while observing the challenges in the field as they relate to procedure, protocol, and policy. Hopefully, you would be able to recognize the various barriers that might be in the way of change and will have more knowledge about the challenges faced by agencies, programs and staff teams. All experience

will be beneficial, regardless of the positive or negative program procedure you observe – you will learn something!

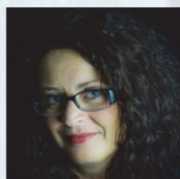
Child & Youth Care Practice

Collected Wisdom for New Practitioners

This book encourages students and those new to the field of Child and Youth Care to feel more confident and prepared when entering the field of practice.

The stories of lived experience and advice from agency supervisors, former students and instructors brings Child and Youth Care practice to life with highlights on practice settings.

Each chapter ends with discussion questions for use in class or in supervision, allowing for dialogue about thoughts and feelings while getting acquainted with the Child and Youth Care profession.



Michelle Briegel is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Child Studies and Social Work at Mount Royal University: Child and Youth Care Major; a Research Affiliate at the Centre for Child Well-Being at Mount Royal University; and a consultant for professional development for Child and Youth Care curriculum. She has been involved in the field of child and youth care for 25 years in residential services, treatment services, youth criminal justice, teaching, and advocacy for the profession with the Child and Youth Care Association of Alberta. Michelle is very invested in practicum initiatives and student success, in her additional role as Director of third-year leadership practice and fourth-year Capstone community project partnerships. Michelle's research interests include the examination of well-being, training and development of child and youth care practitioners, and eating disorders.



Patricia Kostouros, PhD., has worked in most practice setting during her 30-year career in child and youth care. Presently she is a practicing psychologist and Associate Professor in the Department of Child Studies and Social Work at Mount Royal University (MRU) in Calgary Alberta. Her research interests include vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue, intimate partner violence, depicting suffering in post-secondary classrooms and post-secondary student wellness. She developed and taught courses and is the lead editor for the MRU Children's Mental Health Certificate and co-edited Child and Youth Mental Health in Canada: Cases from the Front-Line.



The
CYC-Net
PRESS

ISBN 978-0-6399718-0-3

The CYC-Net Press
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