A MORAL PRAXIS OF CHILD AND YOUTH CARE WORK

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ABSTRACT: The momentum for work with youth, if not its actual practice, is driven by scientific epistemologies of additive, linear, and chronological views of moral development. But an alternative, from the point of view of an existential phenomenology of the "temporal self," suggests a moral youthwork praxis guided by (a) distinguishing between youth as agents rather than things, (b) promoting the primacy of temporal agency rather than linear time, and (c) treating persons as ends rather than means. From this point of view youthwork is a moral "praxis."

"What Works Best?"

Everyone wants better, more effective, lower cost, and faster interventions with youth, especially those who are troubled, troubling, or in trouble. "What works best?" is a driving question of youth policy and derivative programs, services, and youth work. At least this is what the real question is supposed to be and the answers are supposed to drive our work. Even if "politics," yesterday's ways of working, incomplete data, poor theorizing, and the rest are said to diminish the scientific validity of new studies and to deflect the use of existing data, many believe that rational work directly and on behalf of youth is best served by continuing research along these lines and the judicious use of concepts, data, and findings from empirical social science research.

Yet the history of child and youth work ideology and the history of educational psychology has a tension between scientific and practice epistemologies. This tension can be destructive, when one is reduced to the other, or productive, when each is seen as a complement to each other. This is what Kohlberg and Mayer (1972) proposed when, borrowing a familiar philosophical argument, they suggested that a scientific study of morality needs a moral philosophy, and this point was repeated by Kegan (1982).

Similarly, we propose that the question, "What works best?" can be approached both scientifically and, as we propose here, from the point of view of an existential phenomenology. In reference to moral development, both are necessary. From the latter point of view, a

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different question drives work with youth: What claims do youth make on us—individually and collectively—and what are our ways of response? This question is grounded in our moral concern about young people, their everyday life-worlds, their life-chances, and, derivatively, their moral agency as responsible persons.

Most new youth work or youth development initiatives in North America assume a divide between the past and the future and that more research and continued innovation is likely to lead to better, more efficient, and more effective programs. It may be, but that is only part of the moral compass of work with youth. Another part has to do with "ontic" questions, that is, a fundamental choice of "philosophical anthropology," an "account...of what it means to be a human being in the social world" (Jacobs, 1996, p. 3).

A scientific epistemology of child and youth work practice implies an additive, linear, and chronological view of moral development. Here we sketch, as an alternative, the implications of work with youth that is a consequence of a philosophical anthropology of the "temporal self," described by Brockelman (1985), with some assistance from the phenomenological sociology of Schutz & Luckman (1973). From this point of view we suggest a youth work and more general human service grounded as both a moral practice and "practice of ethics" that may be present in any number of different kinds of settings or methods.

Work with youth and human service work can be described as and in terms of method, setting, context, technique, label, personality, temperament, perspective, orientation, competency, or skill, again, in the context of the question, "What works best?" In comparison, beginning with the moral claim of youth, we distinguish between,

1. whether we think about youth as agents rather than things (Brockelman, 1985),
2. whether we promote in our work the primacy of linear time or the primacy of temporal agency, and
3. treating persons as means or as ends.

These are at least necessary conditions for meaningful, purposeful, and ethical youth or youth development work. In these we are expanding on John Dewey's (1918) idea that the heart of education is the "ethical relationship."

Persons as Temporal Agents

Typically, time in youth organizations is used, wasted, invested, scheduled, made-up, and committed. Implicit in the ideas of "program" and "organization" is that these organize time for staff and clients, resolve conflicts over access to resources, and create routines and "events." Program and organization, though, are easily reified into moral and nonmoral "Goods." This is characteristic of a managerial, bureaucratic approach and, we argue, it assumes that youth are things, not agents,

because we choose—usually unintentionally—to make time more important than persons by using time organization as a criterion of effectiveness. As a result, one problematic element of making time primary is that the programmatic focus becomes "behavior," especially behavior that interferes with the schedule and our expectations for the use of time.

Brockelman (1985) proposed thinking about persons as "temporal agents" rather than as objects or things that "cohere" somehow in the world. From this point of view the process of youth development is not the linear, chronological accumulation of attributes, traits, and competencies over time but the increased and increasing ability to act wisely in time to bring about a goal or purpose: "Action is not 'in' time nearly as much as it embodies the movement of time itself" (Brockelman, 1985, p. 22). Our concern with the actions of children and youth has to do with how their actions disclose their purposes, their agency, not with its consonance or dissonance with our program. Action, understood as agency and in contrast to behavior, in this sense conceptualizes child and youth care work as inherently about a) the lived-experience of morality, b) the comparative quality and meaning of the moral and nonmoral goals and contexts of a meaningful life, and c) the healthy and unhealthy tensions between my actions and those of others.

If agency is an essential, fundamental characteristic, work with youth undermines the goal of an "intervention" and the development of youth if it violates this agency, that is, if it coerces or manipulates the choices of youth. As we will describe later, we believe these manipulations are an inherent risk of youth work, and while we believe they are ineffective, the most serious problem is that they are highly immoral. Attempts to "develop youth" or to do "youth development" that violate one's agency inhibits the very capacity we are trying to develop.

Where and when time is subordinated to agency, program schedules and institutional plans are subordinated to the collaborative goals and lived-purposes that children, youth, and adults work out and carry out in the course of daily life. This is why Dimock (1929), the founder of a residential summer camp, said that,

> Camp directors who are also educators and who are not unaware of the implications of psychology and sociology for character education find themselves compelled to operate their camps on the basis of a cooperative, life-centered curriculum. They have entirely lost faith in the notion that character is developed by setting up programs for campers to go through. The findings of psychology have demonstrated that character is not produced in any such convenient way. . . . A growing number of camp directors, therefore, hold the conviction that the curriculum cannot and should not be created in advance. To camp directors of this persuasion, the camp is the curriculum. The recognition that learning and living are identical, that growth is in proportion to purposeful participation, and that experience is valuable in the

> degree to which it is social or shared constitute the earmarks of camp educators. . . . In camps of this type no program of an organized sort exists until it emerges from. . . the community. (p. 41)

Dimock understood the intrinsic relationship between the experience of program curricula and character, simply another way of framing the experience of time. He organized his camp in such a way that it required the exercise of purposive agency, and character is a consequence of the wise use of agency.

Further, when youthworkers recognize and respect the purposive agency of children and youth, their work is recast from a competitive struggle for control of time (getting children to do what youthworkers want) to sharing and negotiating how one "lives time" through one's own actions and to negotiating with youth alternative goals and purposes.

Persons as Ends, not Means

How we come to understand and orient to the clinical symptoms, behavior problems, and other difficulties with ordinary life experienced by children and youth is in part a consequence of the philosophical-anthropology grounding our work. From the point of view of human agency, these problems can be seen as strategies of avoiding the choices that are disclosed in everyday life and invited by each person's ontological and existential freedom to choose oneself, or they can be seen as difficulties resulting from a disruption of the "taken-for-granted" everyday life that is a consequence of our "common experience" (Schutz & Luckman, 1973, p. 68).

In our ordinary life experiences, we come to adopt the "assumption that the life-world accepted by me as given is also accepted by my fellow-man as given" (Schutz & Luckman, 1973, p. 68), and that "I can always test the adequacy of my interpretive schemata, which are used in apprehending the expression schemata of my fellow-man by referring to our common surrounding world" (p. 68).

Thus developmental difficulties can be seen as consequences of the unavailability of experiences of confirmation of the life-world or of the availability only of a destructive life-world.

> . . . a breaking off, or even just a radical restriction, of the continual confirmation of this character has grave consequences for the normal development of its intersubjectivity. The component of self-evidencies which is the underpinning for the life-world to which we are accustomed is, for instance, endangered in solitary confinement, even often demolished. (Schutz & Luckman, 1973, p. 68)

Moral philosophy teaches that we must treat persons as ends, not means (Harris, 1997). Youth who are troublesome to communities present a challenge to this principle, because we are more tempted to violate it when intervening. Yet the consequences of this ethical

perspective ought to be revisited in youth work setting, especially because it has not methodological implications as well. A youth whose troubles draw our attention by definition lives within a life-world, albeit one that may have autistic qualities or that is incompatible with ours. Even so, our moral responsibility is to attend to the functional dimensions of the "behaviors" (because he or she is an agent) within that life-world and to carefully question our own motives for intervening.

The purpose of these considerations is to make sure that we are making persons a priority over outcomes, because the goal of our interventions, usually behavior change, does not logically or morally justify the means of the intervention. Magnuson, Barnes, & Beker (1996), borrowing an argument from MacIntyre (1984), proposed that there is something inherently manipulative about some child and youth care work. This is especially problematic with youth whose troubles originate in experiences of being manipulated and used by others.

This is the heart of the "crisis of legitimacy" (Sherlock, 1986) in education and in child and youth care work, a crisis which many of us have yet to fully grasp. MacIntyre's (1984) main point, in a discussion of the ideal-types of "manager" and "therapist," is that we cannot, for ethical reasons, use "effectiveness" as a criterion for our work.

> Effectiveness is not a morally neutral value. For the whole concept of effectiveness is. . .inseparable from a mode of human existence in which the contrivance of means is in central part the manipulation of human beings into compliant patterns of behavior; and it is by appeal to his own effectiveness in this respect that the manager claims authority within the manipulative mode (p. 74).

This applies not only to managers and therapists, but also to child and youth care workers, who share with managers and therapists the danger of subordinating person to outcome, a way of objectifying persons.

This is so crucial to practice with children and youth with troubles, because often the reason for their troubles has to do with the failure of adults to organize for them and engage with them a life-world of reciprocities and cooperative, shared experience. An intervention whose goal is specifically behavior change is likely to result in the objectification of the youth, whose choices are to capitulate or resist, even with the warmest, most kind-hearted, and best intentioned workers and interventions. In order to be consistent with the ethical demand of treating persons as ends rather than means, we have to give up the goal of behavior change as justification for the means.

Instead, if we are consistent with this phenomenological and moral perspective, our goal is the organization and practice of a type of tenacious everyday life, consistent with our moral commitments, that engages youth through goal and commitment, and, if accepted, allows youth to flourish by mastering this everyday life. It is to this kind of mastery to which we turn next.

PERSONS AS AGENTS: THE PRIMACY OF "KNOWING HOW" OVER "KNOWING THAT"

We began with the assumption that persons are "temporal agents." From this point of view, to be skillful is to "know how," and we propose that "knowing how" developmentally precedes "knowing that." We propose further that everyday life mastery is primarily about knowing how, but that instruction, groupwork, behavior modification programs, most interventions for children with difficulties such as positive peer culture, psycho-educational models, and point or level systems, are aimed at changing structures of experience based on "knowing that."

But most of the difficulties and troubles of youth are not errors of knowledge or information; they are often a lack of accessibility to what Schutz & Luckman (1973) called the "world within reach," the good and right forms of life and thus to the forms of everyday life that invite and disclose right action and right choices. Thus the level of intervention aimed at what a child knows and thinks begins backwards, because what a child knows and thinks is often a consequence of or co-regulated by what he or she knows how to do.

We propose that child and youth care work's initial responsibility is to form opportunities not for the mastery of abstract knowledge, skills, and attitudes, but rather as the practical mastery of the "accomplishment of everyday life," of the participation with others in the forms of life that disclose ethical, good, and healthy living and doing so until they become the "taken for granted."

> That which is taken for granted is the province of the familiar: It presents solutions to problems of my previous experiences and acts. My stock of knowledge consists of such solutions to problems. These become constituted in interpretations of experience. . . . In such explications the perceptions, experiences, and alternatives of action that became questionable were classified into the reference schemata at hand; the latter are, in turn, under certain circumstances modified by them. The explication (which is in principle never "finally" completed) was only pushed as far as was necessary for the mastery. . . of the life-worldly situation. (Schutz & Luckman, 1973, pp. 9-10)

The "taken-for granted" and the "common sense" of adults about how to do everyday life is precisely what youth are learning to master. The inexperienced do not have the stock of "knowing in action," the interpretations of experience, the problem-solving and situation organizing strategies that adults take for granted. A primary goal is the accomplishment of this within everyday life.

When the youth are those who have not been cared for, who have been violated, or who make choices that put them in conflict with society, the expertise of youthworkers is to exercise special skill and care in helping them achieve this mastery. Further, this expertise goes beyond helping; it extends to the purposeful and skillful creation of everyday life settings, the

co-creation with youth of everyday life, and the ability to continually sustain these until a youth is able to succeed.

Here is a clue to one task of child and youth care work: Creating a world of ordinary experience within which a shared, intersubjective world of common experience can be constructed and within which youth can master the everyday world of knowing how. Child and youth care work then does not have the task of direct instruction aimed toward problem behavior but of organizing a life world in which problem behavior "does not work."

From this perspective, "skill" has to do with the ability to bracket given realities of self, environment, and other, and to "accomplish" with youth a lifestyle of ordinary life grounded in healthy youth and human development and in morality in ways that are efficacious. Skill is the ability to "do" everyday life.

The life-world that is accepted by me as given is not always accepted or shared by the youth with whom I work. However, except for the most disturbed children, there is likely to be some common point of reference. Youth work skill is in locating "... the world of our common experience" (Schutz & Luckman, 1973, p. 68) and choosing opportunities to live that common experience with youth in order to invite youth to collaborate in choosing ways to expand that common experience, that intersubjective frame of reference.

The everyday, mundane life of child and youth care work is "there for the taking and making": it can be consciously created and used for the purpose of self-construction, mastery, and even "treatment." Interventions with youth in a wide variety of settings can be seen as the intentional co-creation of everyday life to learn good ways to live as well as "the ways of doing life that won't get me in trouble."

For these reasons development, growth, and change have more to do with a change in how one understands the meaning of everyday life and the meaning of being oneself than they do the successive and sequential ability to perform. It is a "transition from one province of meaning to another [and] can only be accomplished by means of a "leap". . . the exchange of one style of lived experience for another (Schutz & Luckman, 1973, p. 24).

Child and youth care work is the purposive invitation to and the engagement with a youth to join in the mutuality of personal co-creation by learning the possibilities of self, other, us, and everyday life, and the reciprocities among these. Human development and human maturation mean "forms of mastery" of everyday life, the patterned ways of engaging everyday life which create the self and other. This is more than a "therapeutic environment," it is the co-creation and mastery of everyday life as the way to become a responsible self, a good person, and an ethical human being.

WORK WITH YOUTH AS A PRACTICE OF "LIFE VALUES"

In the world of everyday life in which we are immersed, how we act "discloses what matters for us, what we think is fundamental and most 'real,' 'basic,' or 'focal' in living" (Brockelman, 1985, p. 58); Brockelman uses the phrase, "life values,"

> an attitude or sense of what matters or counts in life such that someone would existentially and actively care enough about it to do it. . . . Life values emerge throughout everyday, concrete, temporal activity; in fact they "inhabit" that activity as its *raison d'etre* (p. 55).

We have called the way in which these life-values cohere into an identity a practical anthropology of "vocation": The way in which I am called to act, to choose, and to become a certain kind of person (Baizerman, 1999).

Our actions disclose what we care about, how we understand the world, the goals we choose; all of these reveal our ethical praxis, and all of these are accessible to others who co-act with us and who take the time to pay attention to how we act in the world.

From this point of view one can conceive and perceive child and youth care workers as the lived-experience and lived-embodiment of a particular narrative of self-identity and facticity. Practically, by watching, visiting with, and living with a youth worker one can learn how she (or he) "does life," what she cares about, which criteria she uses to make choices, and the ethic that governs how she lives with and treats other people. These are disclosed in her actions, her interests, how she organizes and interacts "in space and in time," and in her activities, (i.e., how she as agent embodies time).

One can make similar judgments and interpretations about the youth with whom she works. It is here that youth work begins: with initial, shared experiences, shared identities, and shared life values. But the differences between the youth worker and the youth are often where youth work continues, especially with those youth whose troubles have led to the perceived need for a youth worker.

For these youth, clinical symptoms or troubles may be seen as either the inaccessibility of moral and healthy life values or as strategies of avoiding the choices that are disclosed in everyday life and invited by an ontological and existential freedom to choose and craft oneself. Diagnostic nosologies come to play, in our view, a much different role than typically understood. Everyday life is the place where the self and other are disclosed in their (un)willingness, (in)capacity, and (in)abilities.

Psychological illness too can be a life-value. It can give thematic meaning to life, a kind of integration, even a centering of the self. In this sense some child and youth care work unintentionally helps maintain dysfunction. The notion that a troubled kid may have as his or her "life-value" this very trouble seems at first to overstretch its meaning, but

it may be that this trouble is an organizing theme, a best attempt to live in the world with some sense of personal integrity and of authenticity, not "a symptom," but a self-as-lived-now doing the best she can. Her troubles are her conversation with the world. This way of perceiving is not new either, having sources in the works of existential psychoanalysis and in existential philosophy (Izenberg, 1976).

There are numerous implications of this point of view for how we understand the skill of youth work. One is simply the skill of "reading" youth this way, of attending to the vocation, the calling, the life-values disclosed in the choices of youth with whom one works; the consequence of this kind of attending is "understanding," a word which has a double meaning as both the understanding that is a "'significance' or 'for-the-sake-of-which' our actions and everyday work in that world intend or aim toward"—true of us and of the youth with whom we work—and the resulting understanding which we accomplish by attending in this way. Understanding, in contrast to explanation, plays to the idiographic, the unique, to this person in this moment.

A second skill is the ability to create (or co-create) shared experience with youth through which youth disclose their willingness (or unwillingness) and ability (or inability) to be responsible—to choose for themselves (or not)—the boundary of the "taken-for granted" with which the youth may or may not cooperate.

Third, the most meaningful youth work practice has to do with how the worker lives everyday, ordinary life around and with and on behalf of young people. It is her engagement with and invitation to youth around the practical choices and commitments of everyday life that is most powerful about youth work. In this she sustains herself by living a life-way representing her best understanding of how to be a person; if she does, this way of being herself is not threatened by the challenges of youth who engage her by testing its foundation. Testing is one way of beginning a truly mutual conversation, and it is one way for us to learn whether we truly believe what we live.

It is here that our ethical praxis "works."

FROM ETHICAL PRACTICE TO MORAL PRAXIS

Just as Kohlberg & Mayer (1972) attempted to strike a different course of moral psychology by reframing its philosophical foundation, we attempt to strike a different course for the practice of child and youth care work by reframing it from the point of view of a phenomenological notion—our experience of the everyday life world—of the "temporal self," the self lived as agent in and through time. In this view, ethics is "a praxis rather than an inventory of theoretically grounded principles" (Schrag, 1997, p. 101).

A view of persons as temporal discloses "agency," the idea that everyday life is driven by goal-driven action, by meaning, by reciprocity,

by moral claims on each other, and by knowing how rather than knowing that. In this view, child and youth care work has to do with the invitation to co-participate in goal-oriented action and reflection on the "life-values" embedded in it. The temporal agent is ethical "not because it has managed to collect and accumulate abstractive attributes, properties, and predicates, but instead because it *exists ethically*—and to exist ethically is to respond to the prior discourse and action of other selves within the constraints of a communal world" (Brockelman, 1985, p. 102).

We suggest that a core skill of child and youth care workers is creating an everyday life, communal world that discloses life values and that they further learn how to recognize, explore, and create shared experience with youth, even youth who are difficult, making possible youth's mastery (knowing-how) of everyday life.

This is, of course, a conversion of the idea of "what works best" from its roots in causal effectiveness to a consideration of what is best, of what ends or goals are worth pursuing. In doing so it is a conversion of the question, "What should we do about youth?" to the question,"What moral claim do youth have?"

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