



# Four Areas of Support for Child and Youth Care Workers

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## ABSTRACT

Developing a competent staff of child and youth care workers is a major challenge for most group care programs for children, youth, and families. Factors such as low pay, lack of preparation, and demanding working conditions have contributed to creating a workforce crisis. Several studies have been conducted to help mitigate the problems. Many of these studies and experience point to daily interactions as a major source of learning and satisfaction. In this article, with an emphasis on the parallel processes of child and youth care and staff development, I draw on the literature and more than 35 years of experience in child and youth care to construct a narrative that discusses how care of self, participation, mentoring, and atmosphere contribute to successful daily interactions. The purpose is to encourage discourse, continued discussion, and action.

Child and youth care workers play a major role in group care (residential treatment centers, group homes, shelters, etc). They form relationships with children and youth, engage them in developmental activities (Trieschman, Whittaker, & Brendtro, 1969; Maier, 1987, 1995; Vander Ven, 1999), teach skills of daily living, listen, counsel, and discipline. Increasingly, they are also working with and supporting families (Knorth, Van Den Bergh, & Verheij, 2002) while using many of the same teaching, relationship, and problem-solving skills they developed in working with children and youth (Garfat, 2004).

Unfortunately, many factors, including low pay and demanding working conditions, make it difficult to recruit, prepare, and keep competent workers. This increases the risk of further abuse and impermanence for children and

youth who have already been abused and abandoned several times. These problems have existed for some time (Krueger, 1986) and are not likely to be satisfactorily resolved until the United States invests in and is willing to make children, youth, families, and the people who care for them in group care programs a greater priority. There is widespread agreement, for example, that something has to be done to provide salaries and benefits for workers that are more commensurate with the valuable work they perform (Cavaliere, 2004), as well as recognition of the need for more training programs, bachelor's, and master's degrees programs to prepare workers (Krueger, 2002).

Studies have been conducted to help mitigate the problems. Many of these studies have resulted from the worldwide effort to professionalize child and youth care

(Anglin, Denholm, Ferguson, & Pence, 1990; Knorth et al., 2002; Krueger, 2002). For example, characteristics, practices, and attitudes related to longevity, commitment, satisfaction, and competent child and youth care have been identified, including training and education, teamwork, career opportunities, and working conditions (Krueger, 1996). Recent studies have focused on learning organizations (Austin & Hopkins, 2004), promoting participation in decision making (Knorth et al., 2002) and helping workers deal with the emotional pain in child and youth care (Anglin, 2002) as avenues to fulfillment and productivity. Further, a growing number of authors have explored how phenomenological and philosophical concepts apply to the development of workers, children, youth, and families (Garfat, 1998; Nukkala & Ravitch, 1998; Magnuson, Baizerman, & Stringer, 2001; Vander Ven, 1999).

These and other writings, as well as experience, point to interactions with other members of the organization and the children, youth, and families as the primary source of satisfaction and learning. In other words, child and youth care staff development occurs largely in daily human interactions, or as we used to say, in "the fray." Further, it is also a parallel process in which the way workers and other members of an organization interact with each other is interconnected with the way they interact with children, youth, and families. If workers, for example, can have empathy for each other, they are more likely to have empathy for children, youth, and families, and vice versa.

In this context, I will draw on the literature and my experience to emphasize how workers and administrators can work together to create an environment that cares for self, mentors new workers, promotes participation, and supports an atmosphere of inclusion and expression. Including, and in addition to, the aforementioned references, my views on the topics have been shaped largely by the child and youth care literature (Krueger, 2002) as documented in journals such as the *Child and Youth Care Forum*, *Journal of Child and Youth Care Work*, and *Journal of Child and Youth Care-Canada* (currently titled *Relational Child and Youth Care Practice*); anthologies (Anglin et al., 1990; Beker & Eisikovits, 1992; Fulcher & Ainsworth, 2005; Garfat, 2004; Knorth et al., 2002); and numerous books from the early works of Burmeister (1961) Mayer (1957), Redl and Wineman (1957), and Trieschman et al. (1969) to the more recent works of Anglin (2002), Fewster (1990, 1999), Garfat (1998, 2004), Maier (1987, 1992, 1995), and Vander Ven (1995, 1999), to name only a very few. Other influences include 25 years experience teaching child and youth care workers, consulting at dozens of agencies across the United States and Canada, and reflections from 11 years as a child and youth care worker. Secondary sources include readings in philosophy, literature, and qualitative inquiry.

## My Lens and Method

Child and youth care work, like child and youth care itself, is a complex, developmental (Maier, 1987), interpersonal (Fewster, 1990; Garfat, 2001), intersubjective (Fewster, 1999), and contextual (Krueger & Stuart, 1999) process of human interaction (Garfat, 1998; Maier, 1987; Vander Ven, 1999). Each person is a unique, developing being (Maier, 1987). Interactions and events occur in unique contexts that are influenced by several factors, including the nature of the activity, the atmosphere, the stories the participants bring to the interactions (Bruner, 1990; Krueger, Evans, Korsmo, Stanley, & Wilder, 2004), and the meaning they make (Garfat, 1998; Garfat & McElwee, 2004). What is satisfying to one person might not be satisfying to another. Just as children and family members do, child and youth care workers experience interactions differently, and they have different developmental needs, attitudes, and temperaments. Thus, there are no simple prescriptions for effective staff development.

To understand complex experiences, such as those that are part of staff development, qualitative researchers use a variety of reflective, ethnographic, and narrative methods (Denzin, 2001). Their goal is to understand rather than prove. They mix genres and let in multiple perspectives with the belief that discourse, personal discovery, and epiphany lead to effective action (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, 2004). In one form of qualitative inquiry, reflective practice (Nukkala & Ravitch, 1998), the researcher or practitioner projects him- or herself into a past situation, reflects, writes about the experience, interprets it, compares it to what others have written, and repeats the cycle each time, deepening his or her understanding of the phenomenon (Krueger, Evans, et al., 2004).

To construct this narrative, I used similar techniques to reflect on and interpret my experiences and to compare my findings to written "texts" (Husserl, 1970; Nukkala & Ravitch, 1998). For example, I examined experiences I had as a youth worker and consultant, and I compared and interpreted these experiences in relationship to what I had learned from the literature and influences mentioned earlier, until I captured what I thought was the heart of what I had experienced and learned. Another way to think of the material is that these are the ideas and practices that percolated to the top as I reflected on my years of experience and compared it to what others had said about the topics. Writing in this manner is a way of knowing. One learns and has new epiphanies as one works and reworks the material until it crystallizes (Richardson, 2000, pp. 934–935).

To exemplify my findings I constructed a few short, simple vignettes (scenes) that are based on hypothetical interactions at a hypothetical group home named Nexus, which is also the name of a book I wrote to exemplify competent child and youth care (Krueger, 1995). Nexus is a group home, but it could be a unit in a residential center, for six to

eight boys and girls ages 14–18. The title symbolizes the way many of interactions, strategies, and attitudes at Nexus are interconnected. Like all group homes, Nexus is strapped for funds and governed by rules and regulations that limit what they can do. Despite these hardships and hurdles, there is a commitment to do everything they can to learn from and promote effective human interactions.

Thus, these are the impressions of someone who, like many others, has struggled with the issues for years and has come to the conclusion that these are some of the concepts, attitudes, and practices that are fundamental to success. Someone who believes in the power of discourse, constructive criticism, discussion, and the action that follows.

### Child and Youth Care: A Brief Definition to Frame the Discussion

A worker at Nexus sits down to listen to a girl who is talking about why she is sad. The worker focuses his eyes and attention on the girl. She has his undivided attention. He hears what she is saying. There is a noise in the kitchen. For a moment the worker is distracted. It is nothing, but the worker's mind continues to wander until he catches himself and tries to get back into the moment.

Child and youth care is a process of human interaction and, as such, is enriched and fraught with all the emotions, challenges, struggles, and discoveries that are part of being human. Workers try their best and learn from their successes and failures. As they interact, they form relationships with youth, learn, develop skills, change their stories, and grow together.

To do it well requires considerable commitment, knowledge, and skill. Just like successful members of any human endeavor, serious workers never stop practicing, studying, and learning. They try to know as much as they can and polish their skills so that when they are with the kids, they are on top of their game. But often even that is not enough. They fail, struggle, get up, and try again.

The goal in staff development is for workers and administrators to find ways to nourish and fuel this process. In this regard, it is helpful to focus on four areas of support in the following sections.

#### Care of Self: Listen

A discussion among the Nexus team members:

"I hugged Tony last night. But I'm not sure if I did the right thing," Angie, one of the newer Nexus workers says.

"Did it feel right?" Carlos asks.

"Yes, but I know that the children have not all had good experiences with physical closeness, and given

his history, I wasn't sure afterwards how Tony might have felt about it," Angie responds.

Camille, the team leader and supervisor, says, "Tony was physically abused by both parents, so you were right to question this. On the other hand, proper touch is something he needs perhaps more than anything else so that he can learn to trust people, and if your intent was good, as I am sure it was, I think it was okay. The main thing is to be sensitive to what it means to the kids, and not to overdo it, or to do it in a way that they can easily misinterpret."

"It's complex, isn't it?" Angie questions herself and the others.

"Yes, but as long as we can talk about it, help each other with our feelings, and be sensitive to the meanings to the kids, we have to keep touching," Carlos says.

"Attachment is grounded in touch," Bill, another worker, says.

"Can we talk more about it in supervision?" Angie asks Camille.

"Yes, of course."

Philosopher Michel Foucault, who studied how people were treated in institutions, wrote about the care of self as the ethic for institutions and civilized societies (Foucault in Rabinow & Rose, 1994, pp 25–42). Referring to the early Greeks, he argued that people who cared for self had "ethos" and were likely to care for others and create healthy ways of living together. Throughout the child and youth care literature this and other notions of care for self are discussed. For example, Maier (1987), in *Developmental Group Care for Children and Youth*, wrote about care for caregivers as a key element in developmental care. To care for children, workers had to be cared for. In a similar vein, Austin and Halpin (1989) described a phenomenological approach to the caring response. Care from this perspective in an organization has to be universal, nonjudgmental, and unconditional.

Recently, Anglin (2004), in a study of group care in Canada, wrote about the importance of helping workers deal with the pain that is part of the work. Sadness, despair, and loss need attending to help workers and youth cope with the stress of everyday living. Savicki (2002) identified a relationship between culture and burnout, indicating a need to create a culturally sensitive environment to help workers overcome the burnout phenomenon. Weaver (1990) spoke about the crisis in cross-cultural child and youth care and the importance of responding with cultural awareness and sensitivity. Gerry Fewster (1990, 1999) has written eloquently and extensively in his novels and essays about the self, self-awareness, and being present in the moment as being at the center of effective child and youth care practice and worker satisfaction.

As Foucault argued, most of these authors see care of self as a parallel process. For example, if staff members are con-

cerned about the safety, well-being, self-awareness, nurturance, and development of the self, they are more likely to be concerned about it with others. If staff members listen with undivided attention, make meaning, and try to understand each other and are aware of their own feelings, thoughts, attitudes and histories, they are more likely to help children, youth, and families achieve the same.

Likewise, organizations where workers and leaders are able to confront in supportive rather than divisive ways are more likely to create an atmosphere where children, youth, and families can learn to confront in healthy ways. Organizations that invite and value worker participation in decision making are more likely to invite, teach, and encourage children, youth, and families to make better decisions for themselves. Organizations that value worker safety are more likely to create safe environments for children. Organizations that focus on the process of human interaction and create moments of connection, discovery, and empowerment (Krueger, Austin, & Hopkins, 2004) promote the growth and development of everyone. Organizations that "touch" people with sensitivity to the meaning of touch are organizations that care for staff and others. And the list goes on.

A few years ago, a director of a group care agency told me his primary focus on staff development for the past few months had been for the staff to practice listening to and hearing each other. Like the work of the staff with the kids, this he thought was the most powerful way to care. Similarly, practicing empathy or the ability to know and value self in a way that it opens one to valuing, being curious about, and wanting to know other creates an atmosphere of care of self. In describing what he considered to be the key challenge of child and youth care, Fewster (1999), in his ongoing work, showed workers how to be self-aware, present, open, and available to mirror back their experience of other.

Recently, I conducted a study with child and youth care workers in which we wrote and interpreted our own stories, so we could understand how these stories biased our interpretations of youth's stories and our interactions with youth (Krueger, 2004). This process also helped us identify what fulfilled us in our work and the different ways we made meaning of our interventions and interactions.

There are obviously many other approaches to care of self. The point is this is good staff and organizational development. While this seems obvious and natural to most of

us, we also know it isn't easy. It takes a great deal of practice, just like most aspects of child and youth care.

Further, sometimes care of self and other takes courage. For example, touch takes on many different meanings for youth who have been previously touched in abusive ways.

Workers have to be cautious about who, how, and when they touch. Yet, what could be more fundamental to care and healthy organizations than touch? Physical touch, and touch as a metaphor for the actions and feelings of others, are an important part of forming attachments and trust. Organizations that "touch" people are organizations that care for staff and others. "No touch" policies, on the other hand, contribute to creating a sense of human

coldness, mistrust, and distance. The challenge, of course, is to hire workers we can trust, and to encourage touch with understanding and awareness of its meaning in different contexts and with different children.

## Mentoring

Angie works alongside of and watches Bill as he helps the kids fix their bikes. He's really into it, totally enmeshed in what he's doing, as if there is no other place he would rather be.

"Here," he says, "watch me."

The youth stop and watch him as he puts the chain back around the sprockets.

"I got it," one of the youth shouts.

"Good," Bill says, and they continue working together.

"Here, let me show you how to put that chain on the sprockets," Ramon, one of the youth, says to Angie, and turns the bike upside down.

Workers may learn more about child and youth care from the people they work alongside with and their clients than from anyone or anything else. Like children, youth, and families, they need role models and mentors they can identify with. If these people are enthusiastic, self-aware, and committed to their work, new workers are more likely to develop similar attitudes. If these people, however, can't stand their jobs or are just biding their time until they find something else, then this undoubtedly will influence the new workers' attitudes.

When asked to reflect on their child and youth care experience, it is not unusual for workers to speak about the early

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positive connections they made with a staff member, or in a negative way about how they were thrown to the wolves without any support. When I ask my colleagues about how they got started on their successful careers in child and youth care, they often speak about a mentor they had.

In general, effective mentors have a sense of presence, or, as Native American poet Simon Ortiz says, a sense of dignity and comfort with the space that is one's self (Ortiz, 1992, p.126). They bring themselves to the moment, open and available to mirror back their experience of the other (Fewster, 1999, p. 51). They show rather than tell. The message they convey is, *I am here and will go with you. If we fail, we will try again. I am confident that if we work together, we can succeed.*

In effective organizations, a culture of mentoring permeates daily interactions with the roles of worker, youth, and mentor interchangeable. Each person in the system has an opportunity at different points in time to mentor others, because each person is seen as having something valuable to give. Mentoring, in other words, is not just assigned to leaders and/or the most experienced members of the organization, it is also seen as a way of being and interacting throughout the organization with the leaders or most experienced mentors showing the way (Fewster, 1990).

One strategy is to create incentives systems designed to keep child and youth care workers who have demonstrated to the capacity to mentor, rather than simply promote the ones who have been there the longest, some of whom may have lost their enthusiasm and vision. When making difficult decisions about how to distribute limited salary dollars, it makes sense to reward the best workers, even if it means sacrificing a small increase for starting salaries for new workers, because these new workers who rely on their mentors for learning and satisfaction need their mentors more than a small increase in salary, and it's important for these mentors to have financial incentives to stay.

The workers I mentioned earlier, who participated in our study, were all good mentors. Their stories and actions showed them to be people others wanted to learn from and be with. These were not highly paid workers. They were educated and curious. Their satisfaction came more from what they did with youth and their colleagues rather than what the organization did for them. When hiring workers who can become mentors, it helps to involve workers like these who can pay attention to their instincts and hearts as much as their heads in making decisions. It takes one, as they say, to know one.

### Participation: Meaning Making

The Nexus team, Nick (one of the older boys), and his parents are present for the team and case-planning meeting. The social worker begins the meeting by asking Nick to give an overview of how he is doing. She will follow this with her assessment and the assess-

ments of the team members and parents, then she will ask Nick and the family to explore with them how to proceed.

The executive director frequently attends team meetings at Nexus. She is there to share her insights and show that she values the process and respects the child and youth care workers' insights. She was a worker, and memories of those experiences are still fresh in her mind. She also tries to be present in the group home and engaged in the activities. Because of the demands of her job, she can't do this as often as she likes, but she tries to be there whenever she can. Today, she sits down at lunch.

The workers are glad to see her; they know she values what they do, and this is another chance to show her. "Hello everyone."

"Hello Ms. Johnson" is the round of greetings from the youth.

"What are we having?" she asks.

"Grilled cheese."

"Oh, my favorite," she responds.

"I hate fucking grilled cheese," Nick, one of the older boys, says.

"Nick, watch your language," Carlos, the youth worker, says.

"Fuck you," Nick says, pushes his chair away from the table, and walks away.

"Go ahead Carlos, I'll stay here with the group."

Carlos gets up and goes after Nick.

After lunch, Bill catches Ms. Johnson in the living room, as she is about to leave.

"Were you able to look at my request to go to the child and youth care conference and association meeting? Camille said she sent it forward?"

"Oh, yes, I'm glad you asked. I did approve it. We have very few funds for conferences. But this one looks right on target, and it will give you a chance to get involved with the child and youth care profession. We'll look forward to what you will bring back."

Much has been written in past and recent years about youth, parent, and family participation (Garfat, 1998; Knorth et al., 2002), learning organizations (Austin & Hopkins, 2004), and teamwork (Anglin et al., 1990). Today it is difficult to find organizations that do not acknowledge the value of learning and discovery, shared decision making, and team building because they recognize the interconnectedness with family, group, and individual work that focuses on helping children, youth, and families discover solutions to their own problems.

For example, in a recent international anthology (Knorth et al., 2002) the authors pointed to participation as the key to the future success of group care along with the

professional development of child and youth care workers. According to these researchers from several countries, organizations that involve the people who work in the organization and the people they serve in decision making on almost all levels and professionalize their child and youth care staff are the ones that will survive and thrive in the future.

In the United States, as elsewhere, there is rich participation and professional literature (e.g., see the child and youth care journals listed earlier and cyc-net.org) that is replete with examples about how to promote competency and professionalism both within and outside a group care organization. There is also deep and exhaustive family and organization systems literature that argues forcefully about the value of inclusion, participation, discovery, and shared action (e.g., see Garfat, 2004; Garfat & McElwee, 2004). Further, much has been written about how participating as part of a broader professional community not only improves one's work but also gives one a sense of being a part of a larger effort with people who share the struggle, offer hope, and point ways to further one's career. The point is that there seems to be little doubt that participation on numerous levels is a key to effective staff development, and therefore everything should be done to support workers' engagement in organizational and professional learning and decision-making processes.

Based on a growing body of literature that discusses child and youth care as an interpersonal, intersubjective, contextual process of human interaction, the processes of participation and professional development are fueled when workers' voices are *heard* and *valued*; they are present *with* one another *in* the work (Baizerman, 1992, 1995; Fewster, 1990; Vander Ven, 1999); they *speak across the spaces* of their cultural, professional (social work, education, child and youth care, etc.), and familial experiences (Garfat, 1998; Sarris, 1993); and they *make meaning* together (Bruner, 1990; Garfat, 1998). Workers' children, youth, and families are also recognized as *ends* in and of themselves, not just the means to positive outcomes (Magnuson et al., 2001; Vander Ven, 1999).

Participation from this perspective is seen as a vital part of daily interactions in which workers, youth, and families are enmeshed together in their activity learning, making decisions together with their focus on the here and now rather than just the outcome. Verbs, such as *act*, *interact*, and *be*, and prepositions such as *in*, *with*, and *through*, take precedence in describing, guiding, and defining their interactions. Further, as with care of self and mentoring, these attitudes and actions are modeled throughout the organization, often with the executive director, top administrator, or senior worker in the organization setting the tone.

A key to this process (as alluded to earlier), as well as care of self and mentoring, is meaning making. During the past 20 years a fair amount has been written in child and youth care literature—as well as most other fields, including psy-

chology, sociology, architecture, art, literature—about how we all build and shape ourselves into the world through a unique set of cultural, familial, and communal experiences that we bring to the moment (Bruner, 1990; Garfat, 1998), and how we have to learn to speak across the spaces of our experiences (Sarris, 1993) to understand the unique ways in which we, the families, children, and youth make meaning of their experiences with us. In this regard, an open mind and curiosity become keys in staff development, cross-cultural communication, and empathy. It is difficult to participate with one another, care, or mentor if we are not open to the experience of others and willing to search for understanding and common ground as we proceed together.

## Atmosphere

"How was it?" the professor asks the student after she returns from her first day on her practicum at Nexus.  
"Good."

"Tell me more?"

"I really like the people. They were warm and caring. I felt welcomed there."

"So you want to go back?"

"Absolutely, I want to work there."

The workers and youth are sitting at the dinner table finishing their dessert, surrounded by paintings the youth did earlier. Quiet music plays in the background. The overhead lights have been dimmed.

"What are we doing tonight?" a youth asks.

"Tonight is gym night," the worker says.

"I'm tired of gym," one of the youth says.

"What would you like to do?"

"Let's hang and play music in the music room."

"Yeah," a chorus of other youth responds.

"Okay, but first, go to your rooms and do your homework and clean up a little, while Nick and I do the dishes."

Atmosphere, which is a combination of mood, tone, expression, culture, human interactions and presence, place, space, and the previous three areas of staff development, is perhaps the hardest area of support to put one's finger on. But there is definitely something about how this all comes together to create an emotional, social, and physical environment with rituals, routines, attitudes, expressions, spaces, and human warmth that contributes to workers' satisfaction, commitment, and effectiveness. Visitors and students often can discern on a short visit some of the better organizations in our community. In some places, as in the preceding example, they feel welcomed; workers are present in the life of the children and families; and the look and feel of the place is congruent with the people who work, live, and visit there. In other places they can quickly tell that a group home or treatment

center is not friendly simply by the looks on people's faces and by looking around at walls covered with rules rather than personal items, colors, and pictures that invite and stimulate curiosity about who lives there and what goes on.

Much has been written in related ways about atmosphere. Throughout the contemporary history of child and youth care there has been a lengthy discussion about the importance of creating a therapeutic milieu for children and families (Anglin, 2004; Childress, 2000; Fahlberg, 1990; Maier, 1987, 1992, 1995; Trieschman, et al., 1969; Redl & Wineman, 1957; Ward, 2004), and the importance of physical and emotional space in their development. Maier (1987), for example, wrote about the importance of public and private spaces, and how the spaces we create control children in good or bad ways. In a more recent study Childress (2000) found that youth "hang" in places where there is a sense of anticipation. And many of the same factors that lead to the development of children, youth, and families support the development of workers. We all gravitate, for example, to places that we feel comfortable, safe, and/or invigorated in, places where we can see and experience self and other, places that reflect sensitivity to the meaning of our environments, and places with a sense of anticipation or quiet depending on our moods. Likewise, an atmosphere that listens and hears draws us in. We all like to work in places where we are heard, understood, and can express ourselves in the physical and social spaces in which we interact with others.

Resources don't necessarily lead to the creation of a positive atmosphere. Some of the better-funded places feel the coldest. These environments are designed to control rather than engage, limit stimulus rather than find stimuli that encourage growth, discourage individual expression, and so forth; whereas I have been in small group homes that run on a shoestring budget that feel like home. The home and furniture may be old and worn, but the human interaction and expression are fresh and invigorating.

Group care organizations that workers gravitate to and connect with have a culture of their own (Krueger, Austin, et al., 2004). The blend of personalities, rituals, and traditions allows people to feel as if this is a place that is safe, familiar, and invigorating. People can see parts of themselves in the constantly evolving montage of attitudes, actions, and feelings. They construct their culture from moments of connection, discovery, and empowerment that feel familiar in terms of the experiences they bring with them. Everything from the smells of the diverse and rich menu of food, to the holidays that are celebrated to the rituals that people follow in their communication with one another comes together to contribute to the sense of "being at home" there.

Rhythm, routine, and ritual play important roles (Fulcher, 1999). Rhythmic interaction "forges human connections," (Maier, 1992, p. 7) and regular routines and positive reinforcements create a dependable and predictable

environment for adults and children and families (Maier, 1987, pp. 116–118). At the same time these environments have a sense of anticipation and unpredictability that stimulates creativity and freedom of expression. These are places where there is always a feeling that something might happen. Structure is present but not at the expense of possibility or diversity of expression, experience, and activity. Routines and rituals honor the cultures and stories of the participants. People are safe primarily because they are actively engaged not because emphasis is placed on "controlling the kids." While structure and control are seen as essential and needed, both are also seen primarily as a by-product of the relationships and human presence that develop in an atmosphere of healthy involvement. Structure and control, in other words, come mainly from the self in the daily atmosphere of programs, once again emphasizing the importance of care of self and participation.

How do we create an atmosphere like this? Well it seems like the best way is to invite participation and ask the staff, youth, and family members to contribute to the process. It also helps to know each other and self, to have a sense of likes and dislikes, rituals and routines, tastes, and so forth. This is another complex process. On the one hand, we know and can feel it almost immediately, and on the other hand, creating it takes work. But again, it's worth the effort because these are places where workers are likely to want to work and grow.

## Summary

In this article I have suggested that child and youth care staff development like child and youth care is an interpersonal, intersubjective, contextual process of human interaction that is fueled and nourished in organizations that encourage care of self, mentoring, participation, and an atmosphere of inclusion and welcoming. My central argument is that a major source of learning and satisfaction is the daily process of interaction and a focus on these four areas makes the process more fulfilling for the participants while increasing their involvement and productivity in the organization. Further, there is nothing suggested here that can't be done. It is being done in different places, programs, and contexts across the country. Thus, while we continue to fight for higher practice standards, higher salaries, and health care, vacation, and retirement benefits, it also makes sense to focus our efforts on many workers' greatest source of learning and satisfaction: their interactions with each other and the children, youth, and families with whom they work.

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