

Jan. 02, 2012  
RAP/ Psych 559  
Evaluative Essay #1

In the journal *Reclaiming Children and Youth* (20(3), 51. 2011, Fall), Lisa Shepard, the Administrator of the American Re-EDucation Association, wrote the article, "Counseling Families Using Principles of Re-EDucation". After a very brief introduction of Nicholas Hobb's Re-ED model, Shepard hones in on four core principles that outline the importance of this work within families, not just children and youth. She argues, "While the original model emerged in programs serving troubled youngsters, these are universal truths for all people in caring communities" (pg. 52).

These four principals are:

- Trust between a child and an adult is essential.
- Competence makes a difference.
- Self-Control can be taught.
- In growing up, a child should know some joy each day and look forward to some joyous event for the morrow.

The belief that these principals extend beyond children and into the family unit is made clear as the reader is guided through examples of how they have been used in family therapy to create a healthy environment for all members, adult and children alike. Shepard asserts that, "Families are a living breathing unit" and that of the dozen Re-ED principals Hobb's outlines, these four beliefs have the ability to have a profound effect on parenting, and thus, the family as a whole (pg52).

Of these principals, I most connected with the fourth: *“In growing up, a child should know some joy each day and look forward to some joyous event for the morrow.”*

Joy is so simple and yet becomes quickly complicated when mixed in the emotional baggage we bring and is wrapped with the expectations and needs of others. This article re-states several times Hobb’s take-home message: Humans thrive on joy. Shepard goes on to share an example from a family therapy session where the parents are clearly missing out in creating joyous events and moments for their family, as they are too wrapped up in blame and unhappiness. By simply allowing the youngest boy of the family to talk about his desire to see and experience joy from his family, his parents were able to see their mistakes and be moved to tears by this awareness. Shepard states, “They each wrote down simple ways for easing the tension and creating more joy: celebrating small victories as a family, deciding not to degrade each other in front of the children, creating time in their hectic schedules for kid events” (pg.54).

This article does a great job of expanding the reader’s view of Hobb’s Re-ED principals into a strength-based family approach to thriving. As Shepard says in closing, “These concepts are universal no matter the presenting problem” (pg.54).

Jan. 02, 2012  
RAP/ Psych 559  
Evaluative Essay #2

Jim Natural's article titled, *With "Zest and Joy and Deep Fulfillment" (Reclaiming Children and Youth journal, 19(4), 25. 2011, Winter)* highlights real ways youth programs are creating joyful communities. The sample of activities and "antics" (Hobbs, 1992), are all from youth residential programs that are built upon the Nicholas Hobbs' Re-EDucation principals, and embrace the hope and optimism present in Hobbs' work. The activities and traditions highlighted in the article were "used to forge joyful relationships and a sense of shared community" (pg. 25).

I help run a youth program in Southern Oregon. On a recent visit from the Department of Labor, our Technical Advisor reported that we were not scheduling in enough "fun". We were amazed to hear that programs actually do that ... schedule in fun! So, I found this article refreshing and filled with ideas that have the ability to have an immediate impact on my work with young people.

The article outlines activities such as extended canoe trips, ice cream and pie eating contests, summer Olympics, and Barbeques. These things spell FUN!!! However, the reader begins to see that each nugget of fun is encapsulated by safety, relationship, and opportunities for youth to give, create, and grow. Natural articulates this well, "The power of a collected set of principles is in the synergy these can create. Thus, in re-education, the focus on giving joy to youth is balanced by expectations for responsibility and service to others" (pg. 25).

An example of this balance is seen in the Pressley Ridge Ohiopyle program's extended canoe trips. Youth were not only allowed time to plan and prepare for this adventure on the Potomac or Shenandoah Rivers, but also given time to create and design new shelters and cut firewood that would warm the building during the winter. In this scenario, you see "fun" take on a whole new meaning – building relationships, trust, responsibility, and altruism.

Natural also shares an example of how "fun" can build ceremony, ritual, and symbolism of growth and transformation. He documents Joanne Dobrzanski, the director of Brooke Place, which is a residential girls program in West Virginia.

"Dobranski recently shared a unique *Wizard of Oz* theme the program uses to help the girls understand that their time in the program is a progression through palpable stages. Kids refer to their time in the program as 'a journey down the yellow brick road' with the goal being to move through these stages and return home" (pg.26). As the young women move through these stages they are celebrated. As they reach the final stage, marked by strength, they are lead through a ritual of receiving a necklace with a ruby slipper charm.

This article does a great job of highlighting programs that fully embrace all of the Re-ED principles and then shares very useful examples of how they are weaved together to create purposeful, transformational, and (dare I say) fun activities for youth.

Jan. 03, 2012

RAP/ Psych 559

Evaluative Essay #3

In the article, *The Profound Power of Groups* (*Reclaiming Children and Youth journal*, 19(3), 2010, Fall) Larry Brendtro and Martin Mitchell's ideas, upon first glance, may seem too steeped in neuroscience to be of interest to average reader. It's laced with science and terms like *bioecology*, *epigenetic*, and *epigenome*. However, the reader, if not scared off at a first glance, will find a beautifully simple and elegant article which simply argues that youth, when provided with love and care, can prove to be really amazing people.

The authors toggle back and forth between past and present - indentifying the endless struggles adults have in sharing power with youth. Though heavy with references each reference is used to paint a clear picture of how western culture coercively controls youth, especially those displaying pain-based behaviors, and how this technique has resulted in more pain-based behaviors. The article states, "But by century's end, coercive control was again the norm. Schools reverted to zero tolerance suspensions and expulsion, and courts locked away their most troubled juveniles in prison. Such practices contradicted decades of research on how prosocial behavior results from positive social bonds" (pg. 6).

As Brendtro and Mitchell explain, the brain is social, wired to connect - to belong, while at the same time needing to "exercise power over their own destiny" (pg. 6). When adults believe in youth and allow them to have a voice and to be involved in the democratic process of positive group dynamics, their brains positively respond, and thus their behaviors. When this process is not allowed, emotional and behavior

problems ensue. The article points to a 1992 Martin Gold and Wayne Osgood study of peer group influence among troubled youth as one of many examples of how allowing a democratic group process and its connection to positive youth-adult connections, less group aggression, and ability to learn self-control.

The second half the article, and the part I found most compelling, focused on underscoring the importance of environment, or social ecology, in brain development. In this way, *nurture* beats *nature*. Brentro and Mitchell write, “Emerging research shows that life events, most prominently interpersonal relationships, actually turn genes on or off. A whole new field of science called *epigenetics* has been developed to study these interactions between genes and environment” (pg.8).

I find this field of study is extremely exciting and reinforces a term I heard Dr. Brentro refer to in the Deep Brain Learning course – Elder Deficit Disorder, that we can not always point our finger to the youth and place blame, we, as elders have a role to play in creating healthy children. *Epigenetics*, has the same effect on me – What environment did this child grow up in? How was he loved? Cared for? Fed? These things, as the article points out, shape brains and our ability to connect. “Genes can be changed by love or abuse, by positive thoughts or pessimistic fears. Some life events build resilience, while others lead to maladaptive behavior and mental disorders” (pg.8).

The article also goes on to say that epigenetic damage can be reversed.

I found this article inspiring, reminding me of importance of my job as a youth advocate, and that I can be a part of reversing the damage.

Jan. 05, 2012  
RAP/ Psych 559  
Evaluative Essay #4

“As many as 9 in 10 justice-involved youth are affected by traumatic childhood experiences. Between 75 and 93 percent of youth currently incarcerated in the justice system have had a least one traumatic experience, including sexual abuse, war, community violence, neglect, and maltreatment.” This paragraph is how Erica Adams starts her article, *Healing Invisible Wounds (Reclaiming Children and Youth journal, 19(3), 32. 2010, Fall)*. I read that paragraph twice to really allow it to be absorbed by both my brain and my heart. She immediately gets to the heart of the matter; The systems that are set up to help transform these young lives are failing at the task. Simply stated, Adams writes, “As detailed in the research brief, currently the justice system does not meet the needs of traumatized youth and may increase trauma” (pg.33).

Adams points to research demonstrating a connection between trauma and:

- Personality and conduct disorder
- ADHD
- Depression, anxiety
- Substance abuse disorders
- Learning disabilities and lower IQ
- Increase rates of expulsion and drop out rates

Seeing the results of trauma, and knowing that many of these youth end up in the justice system, one begins to see the failure of the community, school systems, and social services in adequately seeing and addressing the real issue. It seems we see

pain-based behaviors and give up trying to find the reason for the pain. In the juvenile system, youth are once again failed, and in many cases, further traumatized. Adams writes, “Thousands of youth are incarcerated each year, but few are screened for trauma-related symptoms or provided trauma-informed care. In one study, 84 percent of agencies reported either no or extremely limited information provided on the youth’s trauma history, and 33 percent do not train staff to assess trauma at all” (pg. 33).

The following recommendations are made by the Justice Policy Institute for social and justice systems serving youth to aide in the diagnosis and treatment of childhood trauma:

- Improve reporting of and screening for trauma exposure.
- Improve assessment of trauma exposure.
- Provide targeted prevention and early intervention programs.
- Ensure traumatized children receive services and treatment.
- Avoid further trauma within the justice system.
- Consider trauma exposure when deciding sentencing and placement.
- Invest in prevention and trauma-informed programs.

Erica Adams wrote a short but powerful essay on the breakdown and failure of serving youth with trauma in their lives. She does a great job of handing the responsibility back to the adults, judges, social systems, and schools by pointing out unarguable statistics and solid research. The responsibility to help heal these invisible wounds is ours.



Jan. 07, 2012  
RAP/ Psych 559  
Evaluative Essay #5

The final sentence in Lyn Harrison's article, *From Authoritarian to Restorative School* states, "For a new future, we need a new vision and the tools to create it" (*Reclaiming Children and Youth journal*, 16(2), 19. 2007, Summer). It is a powerful statement for me in two ways; first, that entire schools are getting trained in and operating with restorative justice values. Second, we have veered so far from the fundamental needs of youth, that using restorative justice is considered a "new vision".

Harrison writes about Marist Youth Care, a school in Sydney, Australia that uses a whole school restorative justice philosophy. The school reports a reduction of behavioral referrals and detention, reduced number of suspensions, elimination of exclusions, and better engagement by students, teachers, and parents as a direct result of this whole school approach.

The article explains, "Restorative Justice is a philosophy and a set of practices that embraces the right blend between a high degree of discipline encompassing clear expectations, limits and consequences, and a high degree of support and nurturance" (pg. 17). The school uses an "authoritative" rather than an "authoritarian" approach to serving youth – Teachers and staff work *with* youth and families, as opposed to doing things *to* them.

All staff embrace the underlying principals used by Marist Youth Care to ensure a consistent feeling of connectedness by the student. By allowing the student to

experience this by not just one caring teacher, but by the entire school, restorative practices become a powerful catalyst for positive change.

These underlying principals are:

1. Focus on the relationship and how people are affected.
2. Restore damaged relationships.
3. Talk about the behavior without blaming.
4. See mistakes and misbehaviors as an opportunity for learning.
5. Accept that sometimes we cannot get to the ultimate truth.
6. Be future focused and talk about how to make things right.

I was particularly drawn to the first principal, where Harrison writes, “In the traditional school, the focus is on rules and rule breaking with punishment as the primary intervention. In a Restorative School, the focus is on relationships and how people are affected” (pg. 18). The school uses this opportunity to not just teach a young person to follow the rules, or rather to not break the rules, but instead focuses on developing “relational thinking”. This means the focus is on how their action affected others and encourages development of empathy to others. The affect of a lesson like this has far reaching value in transforming lives, building trusting relationships, and developing self-value. Lesson far greater than that of the ability to not break the rules.

I’m inspired by Lyn Harrison’s article and the work of Marist Youth Care. I can see where this whole school approach to restorative practices can become integrated into the school I help run and operate, and is serendipitously called YouthCare.