



THE SELF IN CHILD AND YOUTH CARE

A CELEBRATION

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INTRODUCTION

The Self in Child and Youth Care: A Celebration is an attempt at providing you with a guide and a path to the realization of your own magnificence. You have the potential to achieve excellence in a myriad of professions and life endeavours. Abraham Maslow (1968), along with other humanistic psychologists at the time, referred to this process as “self-actualization.” The term literally means reaching your full potential as a human being. This text is a way for you to begin that long journey towards actualizing your full potential. It is a journey of growth and change and one that requires a great deal of effort and sacrifice, for, as Martin Luther King reminded us, “Change does not roll in on the wheels of inevitability, but comes with continuous struggle.”

What is the Self? There have been countless philosophers, theorists, theologians, and writers who have attempted to convey a plausible explanation or theory of the Self. One writer, Carl Jung (1951), a psychologist, explains the Self as a separate and interrelated phenomenon that originates inside of each of us and among us at the same time. It is a relationship that is solely unique but heavily influenced by the culture and the collective. The definition used by this text will be one I adopted in *Transformation: On Becoming a Child and Youth Care Professional* (2015). The Self is the expression of the union of your mind and your body in relationship to your culture and the environment you occupy. The Self is the sum of all that is you: your experiences, your relationships past and present, your genetics, your mind, and your body—everything about you, conscious and unconscious.

Why study the “Self” in child and youth care? Why should students and novice workers in the field study themselves? The answer is simple and the process is complex. The answer is that the individual worker, more than in any other field in the human sciences, is strongly and, in most cases, intimately connected with the child, youth, or young adult. The field of child and youth care requires you to focus and base your interventions on your heart; yes, you are expected to use your brains and all your faculties to assist children/youth, but it is the heart, or as Siegel (2012) terms it, the “heart-brain” that is your most powerful and significant tool. The child and youth care professional (CYCP) connects with children/youth by means of the heart—an emotional, personal, and sensory connection. The heart is the centre of empathy, compassion, and interpersonal connection and is central to child and youth care. This connection, Levine and Kline (2010) in *Trauma Through a Child's Eyes* point out, provides children/youth with an experience that allows them to connect with their own healing powers. In order to work from the heart, the CYCP must have a strong and healthy connection to his/her Self. That means achieving a healthy and balanced physical, emotional, psychological, social, and ideological Self. The only way to insure that you are giving children/youth a healthy connection—one that is not self-centred and self-serving—is to examine who you are and, over time, grow and develop into a CYCP with a balanced Self—with a pure heart.

SECTION ONE:

SELF-CARE – STRENGTHENING THE SELF

OK, are you ready? Let's get started on your epic story, the journey to Self. It is the type of narrative that storytellers term the "Hero's Journey." The hero sets out on a quest, usually for knowledge or for some powerful artifact. The search is always into the unknown, which usually involves danger and hardship. The hero, after much toil and personal sacrifice, obtains what was sought and returns home to safety. Upon returning home, the hero puts the knowledge or the power obtained from the journey to service for the betterment of humankind. Many of the great myths, legends, and folk tales use the hero's journey as a metaphor for life and as a teaching tool for all those searching for the knowledge of living every day to the fullest.

Self-Care is loosely defined as your ability to take sole responsibility for your physical, emotional, social, psychological, and ideological (spiritual) well-being—quite literally taking care of one's Self. Your journey in search of Self and your chosen career of child and youth care require that you have exceptional self-care skills. The levels of stress and extent of responsibility for workers in the field of child and youth care, and in related fields, require high levels of skill and ability in the area of self-care and self-help. The self-care skills of the child and youth care professional (CYCP) determine the level of care that each child, youth, or family member will receive from that worker.

This section offers a series of questions to allow you to determine your present level of self-care and provides opportunities to set goals to improve your competence in each area. Stress and burnout will be discussed with exercises to make plans to reduce stress and prevent burnout. Finally, this section discusses your decision to include professionals as guides or interpreters on your journey. The exercises provided suggest how to determine who can help and how to select the proper guide.

You yourself, as much as anybody else in the universe, deserve your love and affection.

— Buddha

PHYSICAL HEALTH CARE

Your ability to maintain an age-appropriate diet, level of exercise, and amount of sleep along with adequate stress reduction skills is pivotal to your ability to adequately meet the physical demands placed on a student of child and youth care.

EXERCISE 1:1 PHYSICAL SELF-CARE ASSESSMENT

Take a few minutes and complete this questionnaire and rating of your present state of physical health. Rate your Self from 0 to 10, with 10 as the highest rating.

A) ATTITUDE CONCERNING PHYSICAL HEALTH

It is important to overall self-care for you to maintain a healthy attitude towards physical health. Please rate your attitude towards maintaining optimal physical health.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>

Explain or support your answer.

B) EATING HABITS

What you eat and how often you eat has a bearing on your physical health. Please rate your current eating habits.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>

Explain or support your answer.

SECTION TWO: THE ARTS — APPRECIATING THE SELF

The journey has begun and you are about to handle your first challenge. A small storm is brewing and you must be alert and stay focused in the moment. There is no time to think of the past or future, only the here-and-now. Your journey will have many tasks for you along the way, and this one asks you to become aware of what is happening to you right now. Awareness of the moment and what is happening to you physically, emotionally, psychologically, socially, and spiritually is a key element in the practice of child and youth care. Once the storm has been managed, you will sit back and reflect on your performance and use this knowledge to manage future storms and difficulties that might surface along the voyage.

This section of the text provides you with opportunities to explore your past and present life experiences in a safe and systematic manner. There are many ways to gain an awareness of the Self, and this section highlights the arts. The activities in this section require you to use one or more art mediums to gain insight into your life. The mediums presented begin with creative writing, which includes journaling and poetry, and then moves on to artwork, which includes drawing, painting and sculpting. Next is music, which includes singing, composing, or playing an instrument, and then dance and movement, which focus on free-style. You are encouraged to attempt to complete all the exercises in this section covering the gamut of mediums to uncover hidden talents and to explore mediums that may not be as familiar or as comfortable for you as others.

The storm has abated and the Land of the Arts is on the horizon. It is time to let out all the sails and head for shore. There should be a party of artists to meet you and I will be there as well. Enjoy your journey through the various art mediums of this land. It should prove to be a very rewarding stay.

**Treat a work of art like a prince:
let it speak to you first.**

— Arthur Schopenhauer

SUMMARY: CULTURE

- 1.) Please read over the exercises you completed in this part of the chapter and summarize what you learned about your Self and your thoughts on using reflections on culture as a way to enhance self-awareness.

WHAT I LEARNED ABOUT MY SELF

MY PERSONAL THOUGHTS ON REFLECTING ON MY CULTURE AS A WAY TO INCREASE MY SELF-AWARENESS

PART TWO: EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIOURAL EXPERIENCES

Emotions are directly connected to your behaviour and how you express your Self. When emotions are accepted and encouraged, you are better able to appreciate and understand the Self. When behaviours are managed in a positive manner and appropriate consequences are applied to both positive and negative behaviours, you feel more accepted.

EXERCISE 17:1 CAREGIVERS' MANAGEMENT OF EMOTIONS AND BEHAVIOURS

Take some time now to recall your emotional experiences as a child and a teenager and how the caregivers in your life reacted. What messages did they send you about your emotional life? Write down the answers to the following questions that pertain to your emotional and behavioural experiences within your family.

1.) Explain if and how your emotions were valued or not valued by your caregivers.

2.) Recall a time when you felt they were uncomfortable with your emotions.

SECTION FIVE:

TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING – CULTIVATING THE SELF

Your return voyage has begun. You have sailed to many places and found out a great deal about your Self and perhaps developed a renewed sense of your Self. The Land of the Arts, the Land of the Collective, and the Homeland all had lessons for you, and now it is time to collect all the data you received and analyze it so you can put it into service for the welfare of the children, youth, and families that you will be working with now and in the future. To do this, this final chapter focuses on two proven approaches: critical self-reflection, a method of analyzing your past experiences; and transformative learning, a strategy to convert unhelpful or destructive ways of being to more helpful and constructive ways.

Transformative Learning Theory, originally termed perspective transformation (Mezirow, 1978), refers to the process of uncovering ways of thinking, understanding, and behaving that are not useful or affirming, and changing these into ways of being that are productive and affirming. Mezirow (1990) refers to this as “the process of learning through critical self-reflection, which results in the reformulation of a meaning perspective to allow a more inclusive, discriminating, and integrative understanding of one’s experience. Learning includes acting on these insights ...” (p. xvi).

Transformative Learning, allows you to utilize your level of self-awareness in a way that provides opportunities for considerable growth in the talents and skills required of a child and youth care professional. In transformative learning, the major factor in your success is based on your ability to reflect on life experiences, determine which of these experiences are assets and which are liabilities, and then enlist those assets and the techniques described in this chapter to transform your liabilities into further assets. This text has been preparing you for this final step in the evolution of Self. It has provided opportunities for you to uncover strengths and put them into service to bolster or eliminate some of your weaknesses. It has also provided you with opportunities to strengthen areas of potential into definite skill areas.

This final section can be very rewarding as it is the culmination of all your work thus far. It reflects not only what you have accomplished over the past four sections but also provides you with a history of your Self.

So it is time to set sail once more and head for home. We will be there to greet you and celebrate your homecoming. The journey is not over yet so stay alert and keep an eye on the weather. Storms and squalls can appear before you know it, so it is best to be prepared. Safe voyage and I will see you when you arrive.

Now your journey has come to an end, and the time to assimilate all your wisdom into your daily behaviour is at hand. The process of assimilation takes about three months to complete, and at that time you can expect that your desire for another journey will be stimulated. But for now, sit back and congratulate yourself on all your successes.

There will be many voyages into the unknown, many journeys that will uncover more talents of yours, more abilities, and more ways to continue to evolve into the child and youth care professional you aspire to be. Think of the stories of all the journeys you will be able to tell when you reach 40 years as a CYCP!

Take time now to celebrate your accomplishment. For many of you this has been a three-year process and like all journeys of this nature has been both exhilarating and deflating. So it's time now to rise up and dance in celebration of the amazing and wonderful creature you are and the potential you have to change the world!

