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Short Article

Progress is not linear, it's cyclical: Old books and our field's enduring vision – a modest proposal for readers of the SJRCC

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On discovering and collecting books

I love books. Perhaps you do too. My passion for books really took hold when I discovered the book stacks in the library of my university during my first undergraduate semester. I fell in love with walking the rows and rows of books, on all subjects and disciplines. I loved the musty smell, and the phantasmagoria of shapes, sizes and colours.

As an aside, on a recent Zoom call, I noticed a law professor had shelved her books by colour, not subject matter. When I commented, she confirmed this was her method, as she found it more soothing to look at. She had also noticed that publishers tended to use colours in a similar fashion: red for controversial subjects, dark blue for positive topics, light blue for family and children's issues, and so on. Who knew?

I have organized my books on child and youth work and residential care in order of publication date, thus (I presume) my tendency to feel somewhat unsettled as I peruse them.

At university, I learned not just to find and remove the specific book I was seeking, but to search above, below, left and right, where I discovered many more interesting texts on the same or related topics that never appeared on any course reading list. Many treasures were discovered and new areas of knowledge opened-up, which added to, or shifted, my perspectives on my work and life.

Today, I imagine this experience has become quite rare. Almost all articles, and many books, can be found on-line, from the comfort of home and a personal workspace. I fear that many contemporary students may never, in fact, even enter a library. And to my horror, libraries tend not to order very many books anymore; I guess they take up too much space and won't likely be taken off the



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shelves anyway. In my experience, libraries only consider donations of rare and valuable texts. (By the way, is there a young-ish scholar who might be interested in my lifetime collection? See more below.)

In terms of books published over the history of the child and youth work profession internationally, some of the early texts are now difficult, if not impossible, to find. This situation seems to be due to a combination of being published by small, private printers or being issued in relatively small numbers due to the “niche” nature of our field.

Many years ago, I decided to collect as many of the English language child and youth work (CYW) texts as I could, especially those focused on either residential care in child welfare or the development of the CYW profession itself. As a result, I have acquired approximately 400 books (including some government, agency and commission reports) published between 1925 and 2025 - the last one hundred years. This collection is largely comprised of books published in North America and the U.K., with a smattering from other countries in Europe and beyond (e.g., Israel, Brazil, Japan, South Africa).

But why read old books?

I know of several instances where post-secondary instructors have stipulated that students doing an assignment should only reference books and articles published over the most recent 10-year period. Certainly, one needs to keep up with the current thinking and research in the field, however I suggest an added criterion. In addition to these texts, “please read and reference at least 2 or 3 texts published at least 20, 50 or 100-plus years ago.”

But why? Because the evolution of thinking, practice and policy (at least in child welfare) is cyclical, not linear. It is simply not the case that the recent literature necessarily contains new, better or more important ideas and knowledge than in previous decades. I learned this lesson very clearly when I decided to research the evolution of parent education and support services in North America. Not only was *parent education* as a service modality not discovered or invented in recent times, I found that it was re-discovered and re-invented every 10 to 20 years or so, and had been for over 100 years (Anglin, 1985). The same or similar ideas and strategies were sometimes re-named, but many of the basic elements were often more or less identical to those in earlier decades, and sometimes useful notions had been lost or forgotten along the way.

An example in the child and youth work literature

Given the focus of this journal, I will offer a case in point in the field of residential child and youth care.



As far as I can determine, the first book published in North America on residential child care was *Wayward Youth* by August Aichorn (1935). However, this was an English translation of the German edition published in Europe in 1925, a full century ago now. According to accounts by some of his colleagues, Aichorn was a born youth worker who pioneered a new approach to working with delinquent young people. He seemed to have well-tuned instincts about what motivated young people and what he termed their 'dissocial behaviours'. To these talents, he added psychoanalytic training under the tutelage of Anna Freud, and the Foreword to his book is written by Sigmund Freud himself.

What I find fascinating is the number of contemporary issues and concepts that can be found in his text. These include, among others: love, therapeutic milieu, children's interests, intuition, pain, trauma and the fundamental importance of carer relationships with young people. To those readers familiar with some of the historical literature in the child and youth work field, a series of key texts published over past decades rediscovering these topics will likely come to mind. For example:

Love is Not Enough: The Treatment of Emotionally Disturbed Children, Bruno Bettelheim (1950)

The Other 23 Hours: Child Care Work with Emotionally Disturbed Children in a Therapeutic Milieu, Albert Trieschman, James Whittaker and Larry Brendtro (Aldine, 1969)

Before the Best Interests of the Child, Joseph Goldstein, Anna Freud and Albert Solnit (The Free Press, 1979)

Intuition is Not Enough: Matching Learning with Practice in Therapeutic Child Care, Adrian Ward and Linnet McMahon (Eds.) (Routledge, 1998)

Pain, Normality and the Struggle for Congruence: Reinterpreting Residential Care for Children and Youth, James Anglin (Haworth, 2002)

The Three Pillars of Transforming Care: Trauma and Resilience in the Other 23 Hours, Howard Bath and John Seita (University of Winnipeg, 2018)

Relational Child and Youth Care in Action, Heather Modlin, James Freeman, Christine Gaitens and Thom Garfat (Eds.) (CYC-Net, 2021)

Hundreds of books have now been published on CYW exploring issues of significant contemporary importance for practice, education, research and policy, and many of them echo messages published initially in 1925, or even before.

It seems that much of our knowledge and writing is concerned with re-discovering and re-interpreting elements and dynamics that have been referred to elsewhere as our field's 'enduring wisdom' (Anglin & Brendtro, 2017). It



seems some old ideas and concepts need to be re-understood within an increasingly complex and ever-changing social, political and service delivery context.

As Winston Churchill has been quoted as saying (perhaps apocryphally): 'the farther backward you can look, the farther forward you are likely to see' (The Socratic Dialogue, retrieved March 15, 2025). Perhaps looking back in the CYW literature can help us to chart a renewed future for our field as well as for the children and families with whom we work.

A modest proposal

Do you have a book from over 10 years ago that has made a difference to your practice or your thinking about CYW? Perhaps others in our field could benefit from reading this text or at least might be inspired by your story of encountering it.

Most book reviews to date in the SJRCC are the result of publishers sending in newly published books. However, the SJRCC Editors have indicated that they would welcome reviews of older texts that have made a difference to readers and their contemporary practice. These reviews should be no more than 500 words, or so, and should emphasize the relevance of the texts to current CYW practice, preferably with personal examples of their impact in your own experience.

The SJRCC book review section is awaiting your submissions, and editors stand ready to assist those perhaps considering undertaking a book review for the first time.

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About the author

James Anglin has been struggling over six decades to understand how we can provide quality care for young people, wherever they live. He is Professor Emeritus at the University of Victoria, Canada, President of FICE-Canada, and a Research Affiliate at the Bronfenbrenner Centre for Translational Research at Cornell University.



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