

Balancing Survival and Existence: Protecting *Whole Persons*

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“A life full of passion is a life fully lived. A life bereft of passion is one that is merely survived.” – Anonymous

Keywords

whole persons, care settings, survival and existence, developmental needs, quality of life, holistic care practices

Introduction

Some care settings place what is arguably an imbalanced emphasis on young people’s survival needs (i.e. housing, food, medical/medicinal treatment, safety from bodily harm, and stability) to the extent of undermining other core developmental needs (Gharabaghi, 2012; Gharabaghi & Phelan, 2011). A main reason for this stems from fears of legal liabilities related to health and safety, oftentimes trickling down from management and into the views and practices of frontline practitioners (Jackson, 2003). However, child and youth care (CYC) is a profession concerned with fostering the overall needs and capacities of children and youth (Anglin, 2001; Magnuson, 2014). To enable truly effective, ethical, care practices that reflect the holistic nature of CYC, agencies must be committed to delivering programs and services reflecting a holistic vision of care. To further advocacy efforts for a holistic CYC practice, this article will highlight the need for a broader conceptualization of “protection” – one that is not merely concerned with guarding the health and safety of youth as physical bodies, but as *whole persons*.

Survival and Existence

For those involved in CYC, it is crucial to remain consciously aware of the distinction and connection between survival and existence. To survive is to maintain the utmost basic needs of the human body (i.e. food, water, shelter, safety from illness and danger); it is about staying physically alive and safe. Existence, however, could be described as the *way in which one lives* and the *quality of one's life*. It extends beyond the sustenance of the flesh and is characterized by the relationships and connections between self, others, and the world (Freire, 2009). Furthermore, existence is reflected in the activities and endeavours through which one cultivates and evolves one's interests, potential, and identity. It is existence that defines the *richness* and *meaning* of life. Therefore, it is inadequate and unethical for CYC practitioners to merely focus on protecting young people's survival; we must care for them in ways that protect their existence.

Critical Use of Theory and Knowledge Relating to Needs

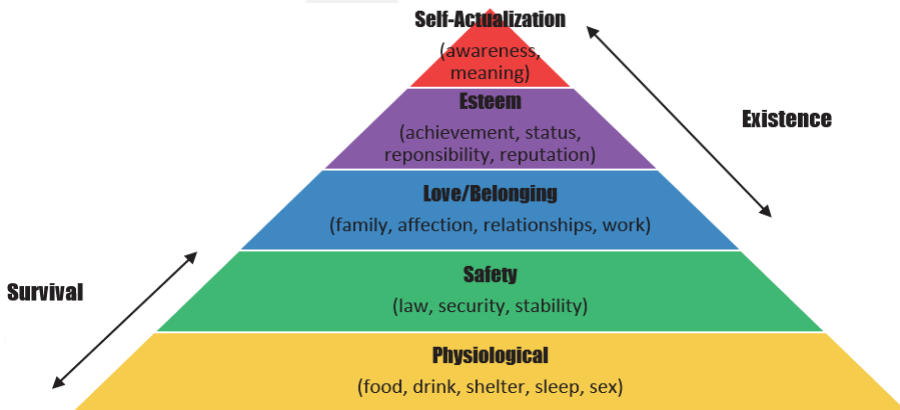
Though CYC practitioners draw upon various theories of human development (Phelan, 2014) to inform their approaches to fostering young people's overall needs (survival and existence), theories can also hinder practice if not critically examined and applied.

Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory informs us about core human needs and how the degree to which these needs are fulfilled can affect overall behaviour and functioning. These are physiological needs (i.e. food, water, shelter, health), safety needs (i.e. security, stability, freedom from harm, danger, and fear), needs for belonging and love (i.e. relationships with family and friends, cultural membership), self-esteem needs (i.e. recognition, status, a sense of achievement, worth, autonomy, and freedom), and needs to self-actualize (i.e. fulfillment of creativity and talents, extending one's potential and abilities) (Maslow, 1943) Furthermore, Maslow posited that these needs are categorically and hierarchically ordered (see Figure 1), and that the fulfillment of each successive category of needs is dependent upon the complete fulfillment of the categories preceding it (Maslow, 1943). Over the course of time, other scholars have added to Maslow's hierarchical model by integrating additional levels of need. Following the category of esteem needs and before the category of self-actualization, a visual rendering of the hierarchical model by Alan Chapman (2001-2004) includes the categories "cognitive needs" (i.e. knowledge and enlightenment) and "aesthetic needs" (i.e. the pursuit of balance, beauty, and form).

Chapman's visual also includes an additional category above self-actualization called "self-transcendence". However, unbeknownst to many (Koltko-Rivera, 2006), self-transcendence was a category of need that Maslow had begun contemplating sometime after developing his initial and most recognizable, five-stage, hierarchical model (see Figure 1). One could say that the additional categories of cognitive and aesthetic needs added could be conflated with Maslow's conceptualizations of self-transcendence.

Drawing on thoughts and musings from some of Maslow's later publications and personal journal entries, Koltko-Rivera (2006) relates that Maslow's ideas of self-transcendence included "... service to others, devotion to an ideal (e.g. truth, art) or a cause (e.g. social justice, environmentalism, the pursuit of science, a religious faith), and/or a desire to be united with what is perceived as transcendent or divine" (p.303). It could also "... involve mystical experiences and certain experiences with nature, aesthetic experiences, sexual experiences, and/or other transpersonal experiences, in which the person experiences a sense of identity that transcends or extends beyond the personal self" (p.303).

Figure 1
Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Adapted from Zalenski & Raspa, 2006, p.1121.



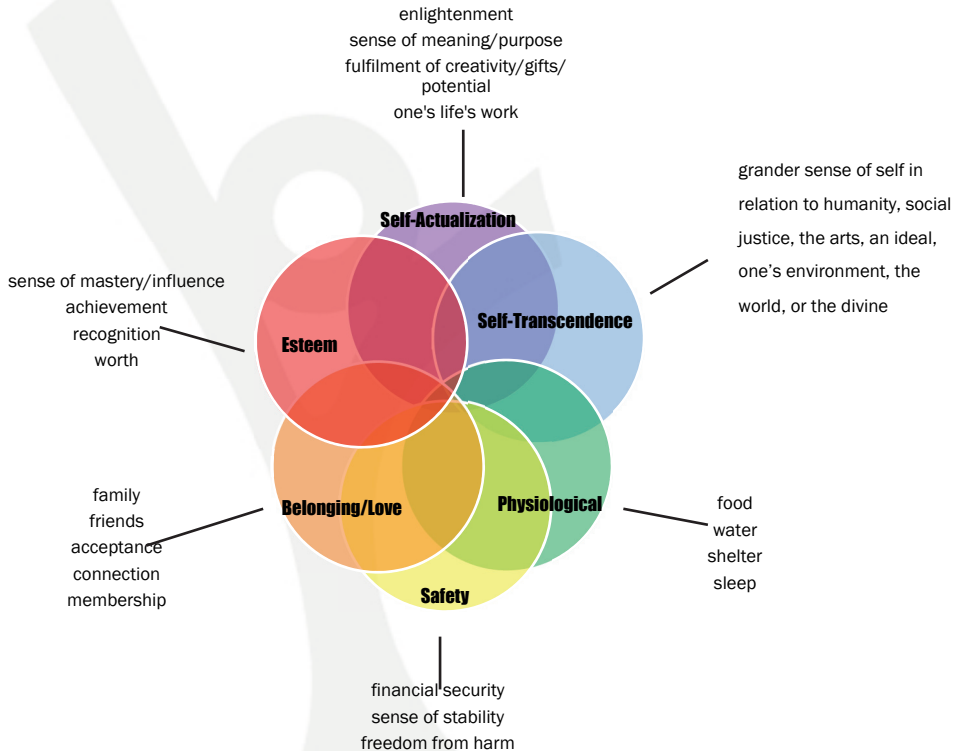
A theory like this one can be useful to understanding the different types of needs youth may have and struggle to fulfill in relation to other needs. However, CYC practitioners must utilize theory critically and in relation to their actual practice experiences. Empirically speaking, there are numerous practice situations that debunk the viewpoint that needs are rigidly categorical and follow a particular sequence. For example, the number of suicides amongst youth who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer (LGBTQ) clearly demonstrates how the need to belong, to feel accepted and loved, can affect the desire and will to simply survive. In a study that assessed the socio-environmental impacts of suicide among LGBTQ youth, Hatzenbuehler (2011) discovered that youth who identified as LGBTQ were 20% more inclined to attempt suicide than heterosexual youth when living in environments where people of non-hetero-normative orientations were subject to harassment, threatening/ violent behaviour, and a lack of LGBTQ advocacy and supportive spaces that offer a sense of belonging and worth. Similarly, many adolescent girls who struggle with body image concerns due to unhealthy societal pressures to be skinny are also seeking love and acceptance to the point of starving themselves, sometimes to the brink of death (Hoek, 2006). As for many street youth lacking a sense of familial support and protection, belonging, community, and achievement, such youth are more inclined to become part of a gang (Howell & Egle, 2005) and put their physical safety in various violent situations to feel connected to others, obtain a sense of identity and, paradoxically, feel safe through the protection of their gang (Peterson, Taylor & Esbensen, 2004). Then there is the case of the CYC practitioner who is so passionately driven by their aversion to social injustice. This type of practitioner will stand and fight for their self-actualization and that of the youth in their care despite authoritarian backlash and the possible loss of employment and income (Skott-Myhre & Skott-Myhre, 2015). In cases like this, one could argue that such commitment stems from needs of self-transcendence, which are implicated in CYC practice principles such as being in relationship with young people, examining context, empowerment, doing *with*, meaning-making, and love (Garfat & Fulcher, 2011). Even Maslow himself became conflicted with his original beliefs of needs being orderly and sequential as he further explored the notion of self-transcendence. Originally, he thought of self-transcendence as a subsequent stage to self-actualization. However, in his paper, titled *Theory Z*, he writes:

I have recently found it more and more useful to differentiate between two kinds (or better, degrees) of self-actualizing people, those who were clearly healthy, but with little or no experience of transcendence, and those in whom transcendent experiencing was important and even central. It is unfortunate that I can no longer be theoretically neat at this level. I find not only self-actualizing persons who transcend, but also nonhealthy people, non self-actualizers who have important transcendent experiences. It seems to me that I have found some degree of transcendence in many people other than self-actualizing ones (as cited in Koltko-Rivera, 2006, p.307.)

Though the examples just provided do not represent an exhaustive list of scenarios that defy modern theoretical constructions of needs like Maslow's popularized, five-stage, hierarchical of needs theory, they are enough to affirm that theories informing our understanding of young people's needs must be critiqued and used mindfully. An imbalanced focus on survival needs places practitioners at risk of overlooking needs related to young people's existence. The examples above denote that a deficient sense of love and connection, acceptance, esteem, self-actualization and self-transcendence (needs related to existence) can sometimes lead to behaviour that ironically places survival needs in jeopardy. This warrants that CYC practitioners regularly review their assumptions and beliefs about young people's needs and how they come to define their prevalence. Doing this ethically requires that we deeply listen to young people and inquire about *their perceptions* of their lived experience so we can be responsive and 'meet them where they are at' (Garfat & Fulcher, 2011).

Below I have offered the reader a more post-modern rendering of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory (see Figure 2). As you will notice, this illustration, unlike the one in Figure 1, refrains from placing needs in any particular order. Also, the circles containing different categories of needs overlap to encourage recognition of the fact that needs cannot always be neatly and separately categorized.

Figure 2
Post-Modern Rendering of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs



Referring back to the example of the street youth who enters gang life due to an absence of protection, needs pertaining to belonging and safety are being sought out simultaneously. Moreover, regarding the example of the CYC practitioner whose devotion to advocacy places her employment (i.e. safety/ survival needs) in peril, it could be

argued that esteem and self-actualization needs are being pursued in tandem. Through the recognition and use of self in practice (i.e. one's knowledge and wisdom, sense of purpose/duty, creativity, and life-force), she is at once imbued by the desire for a sense of mastery and influence over unjust living and practice conditions affecting youth and adults alike (Skott-Myhre & Skott-Myhre, 2015). This fearlessness (Skott-Myhre & Skott-Myhre, 2015, p.590) is both self-actualizing and self-transcendent and may furthermore be construed as an act of protecting survival related needs, as advocacy efforts can advance and reinforce rights legislation, best-practice approaches, and the circumstances conducive to living a life of decency.

Needs and Rights as Mutual Reinforcements

Needs and rights go hand-in-hand. It is through the acknowledgement of our human needs that human rights legislation takes form. Conversely, upon reviewing our human rights our human needs become more apparent to us. Beyond familiarizing ourselves with knowledge about young people's needs and rights, CYC practitioners ought to spend time drawing and assessing connections between the two. In Appendix (A) I offer practitioners a simple chart-tool to help strengthen and/or refresh their awareness of the relationship between needs and rights. However, I do caution readers to use this tool flexibly and modify it as they may see fit.

As you can see, I chose not to reflect all the articles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in the chart, as I encourage readers to read up on the UNCRC and do a further correlational analysis of their own. That said, the collection of articles I selected does correspond with a wide range of developmental needs covering the expanse of Maslow's hierarchical model. For virtually every article presented in the chart, there are at least two or more corresponding areas of developmental need, reaffirming the argument that needs are dynamic and ought to be fostered holistically.

In addition to deepening our awareness of the connection between needs and rights, using the needs-rights correlative chart (or another version or adaptation of this tool) can assist those who work with children and youth in advocating for more holistic attitudes and approaches to care. One way of doing this could involve CYC practitioners posing inquiries to self and others about specific dimensions of their practice and how needs and rights are being dynamically and comprehensively accounted for. For example, life-space practice is about engaging youth in the settings where the daily activities of living,

learning, and growth take place (Garfat & Charles, 2010). Using this aspect of practice as a starting point, one might begin to pose an array of inquiries:

- What human needs are most emphasized in this space's (i.e. residential, hospital, custody, community, recreation, outreach, day treatment) core objectives and services, and why?
- Are there any core needs that we tend to overlook or undermine in this space?
- What types of programming and activities take place in this space, and what combination of needs might these activities be fulfilling or overlooking?
- How do the activities and services in this space, as well as their planning and implementation, reflect the articles of the UNCRC?
- Do we know the best interests of the youth who we engage in this space? If so, what needs are implied in their interests?
- Do the youth in this space know their rights, and what actions have we taken to ensure that they are educated about the UNCRC?
- How do the overarching agency culture, policies, and procedures that structure this space strengthen or hinder the staff's ability to foster and protect the overall needs and rights of the youth in our care?
- How does the agency's respect (or lack thereof) for the needs and rights of the staff in this space correlate with the staff's respect (or lack thereof) for the needs and rights of the youth in this space?

This type of inquiry process could be extended to virtually any aspect of CYC practice, ranging from micro-level inquiries concerning direct interactions between practitioners and youth, to macro-level inquiries about organizational culture and the driving principles of CYC itself.

I highly encourage practitioners to spend time assessing how often they reflect on the relationship between needs and rights and how their approaches to fostering the needs and rights of young people are influenced by the life-space settings they occupy. When survival needs are overtly emphasized at the expense of young people's needs to exist, youth are reduced to physical bodies, as is care reduced to the obsequious application of containment and safety measures (Gharabaghi, 2014).

Conclusion

This article has called upon CYC practitioners to develop a more holistic view of what it means to protect the needs of young people in their care. Over and above providing what is necessary to keep young people alive and safe, it is our duty to protect and foster the development of their connection to others, the world and their identity within it. When we attempt to segregate or fragment how we conceptualize and nurture young people's needs, this only serves to fragment their development as whole persons (Magnuson, 2014). A post-modern approach to understanding and articulating human needs demonstrates that needs are dynamic and must be nurtured accordingly. Finally, by adopting a needs-rights framework to better advocate for holistic care practices, practitioners may become more influential over the people, situations, and settings that impact the quality of life experienced by youth in care.

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Appendix A

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Excerpted Articles)

Correlative Developmental Needs

Article 6

1. States Parties recognize that every child has the inherent right to life.
2. States Parties shall ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child.

Physiological, Safety, Love/Belonging, Esteem, Self-Actualization needs

Article 12

1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views

Esteem (sense of mastery and influence over one's life choices and circumstances, need for recognition)

freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative

proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.

Article 13

1. The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice.

2. The exercise of this right may be subject to certain restrictions, but these shall only be such as are provided by law and are necessary:

- (a) For respect of the rights or reputations of others; or
- (b) For the protection of national security or of public order, or of public health or morals.

Esteem (sense of mastery and influence over one's life choices and societal circumstances, need for recognition)

Self-Actualization (accessing means to developing strengths, interests, capacity and identity)

Belonging (being part of and influencing one's surroundings)

Article 15

- 1. States Parties recognize the rights of the child to freedom of association and to freedom of peaceful assembly.
- 2. No restrictions may be placed on the exercise of these rights other than those imposed in conformity with the law and which are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public safety, public order, the protection of public health or morals or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

Belonging (autonomy over relationships)

Esteem (sense of mastery and influence over one's life choices and societal circumstances, need for recognition)

Article 19

1. States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.

Physiological (nutrition, housing, medical care)

Safety (protection from physical, mental, emotional harm and exploitation)

2. Such protective measures should, as appropriate, include effective procedures for the establishment of social programmes to provide necessary support for the child and for those who have the care of the child, as well as for other forms of prevention and for identification, reporting, referral, investigation, treatment and follow-up of instances of child maltreatment described heretofore, and, as appropriate, for judicial involvement.

Article 29

1. States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to:

- (a) The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential;
- (b) The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations;
- (c) The development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own;
- (d) The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin;
- (e) The development of respect for the natural environment.

2. No part of the present article or article 28 shall be construed so as to interfere with the liberty of individuals and bodies to establish and direct educational institutions, subject always to the observance of the principle set forth in paragraph 1 of the present article and to the requirements that the education given in such institutions shall conform to such minimum standards as may be laid down by the State.

Self-Actualization (accessing means to developing strengths, interests, capacity, and identity)

Esteem (sense of mastery and influence over one's life choices and societal circumstances, need for recognition)

** Education also strengthens one's capacity for independence and financially providing for one's survival.*

Article 30

In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities or persons of indigenous origin exist, a child belonging to such a minority or who is indigenous shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of his or her group, to enjoy his or her own culture, to profess and practise his or her own

Love/Belonging (membership and participation in one's family/community, cultural/religious identity)

Esteem (sense of mastery and influence over one's life choices and societal

religion, or to use his or her own language.

circumstances, need for recognition)

Article 31

1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.
2. States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.

Love/Belonging (membership and participation in one's family/community, cultural/religious identity)

Esteem (sense of mastery and influence over one's life choices and societal circumstances, need for recognition)

Self-Actualization (accessing means to developing strengths, interests, capacity, and identity)

Self-Transcendence (grander sense of self in relation to humanity, social justice, the arts, an ideal, one's environment, the world, or the divine)

** The arts are a vehicle that people across the globe use to express or be inspired by every aspect of self-transcendence. This is especially evident in contemporary art forms such as urban or street art.*



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has been a CYC practitioner since 2003 and has worked in residential care and day treatment settings. Currently he works with a variety of schools and youth-serving organizations by implementing a graffiti-based program he created called "Grafting Youth Voice". Using a relational, empowerment-based, group approach, Paul mentors and engages youth through individual and collaborative graffiti projects that reflect the ideas, insights, and experiences of young people. For Paul, graffiti is a creative extension of his praxis, which he uses to play with CYC concepts and philosophies that reflect his evolving values and beliefs.