

#17 Addendum – Preparing Youth for Adoption (unfortunately this was the best I could come up with)

Radmilovic, S. (April 2005). The capacity to change and child and youth care practice: A program example and framework. *Child & Youth Care Forum*, 34(2), 127-139. Retrieved Thursday, November 9, 2006 from the PsycINFO database.

.... The aim of this paper is to uncover and make explicit perspectives on how people, intentionally or unintentionally, change.... [And] how to use certain change theories in action, especially in the everyday life space of children and youth.... Change is a journey. This simple sentence is a metaphor illuminating a common fundamental perspective on change. The word “journey” suggests the idea of prolonged traveling from place to place: a journey of discovery. Change as a journey intimates a passage, progress or process from one state to another, while perhaps sometimes revisiting familiar locations. “Nothing is permanent except change” is another idiom....

Change Theories We all have rules for living; some are implicit others are explicit. These rules, worldviews, paradigms, mental models or internal working models are a product of our values, beliefs and experiences. It has been noted “that early and repeated experiences with people who care for us set a foundation for our internal working models of relationships with self and other”. This is an attachment-based perspective.... internal working models... also termed “personal realities”. These models become the lenses through which people view the world and relate to it. Although, these working models are entrenched and may be unconscious, they can be altered and modified. At the Maples Adolescent Centre, internal working models are seen as “works in progress which offer optimism about the potential for change”. However, shifts in internal working models do not occur rapidly, nor are they always readily apparent or measurable. Rather, change may occur slowly, incrementally and sometimes unconsciously.... “Second-order change . . . involves a non-linear progression, a transformation from one state to another. The aim would be to enable the individual to behave, think, or feel differently” state that “second order change involves a change in the rules of the system and thus in the system itself”.... The concept of adding new experiences is a fundamental tenet in the practice of child and youth care counselors.... Second order change requires “greater creativity and prolonged investment of time and contact by caregiver and receiver”.... “enduring change in an individual’s behavior occurs only when there is change in the internal working model supported by change in the system(s) that one lives in and there is sufficient time, opportunity and support to integrate the new experience”. Finally, as a change agent, I am cognizant that change is more often a slow process involving the person’s need to maintain homeostasis.

Changing one’s internal working model cannot be done radically or dramatically, as it serves as an integrating and self-protective function. Individuals exploring or making changes must maintain a continuity of self. “When this self-protective tendency is respected and worked with, rather than against, the consequences for the individual are more likely to be positive and developmentally progressive”. In my experience with females who exhibit severe self-injuring behaviors, the clinical team psychiatrist would always direct us to proceed slowly and cautiously when attempting to change self-harming behavior. When a girl went a week without cutting and then severely cut again, the psychiatrist, in anticipation of our feelings of failure, would reframe

her relapse as a temporary backward move to regain equilibrium. He would further reframe the week of not cutting, as a successful attempt at trying on new behavior. This teaching helped to formulate my ideas about the resistance to change; namely, that most people cannot simply and quickly eradicate their continuity of self, their worldview “without jeopardizing [their] psychological integrity (that is, sense of self and reality)”. Thus, according to the change literature, in order for change to happen, novelty must occur or be introduced so that individuals can experience feeling, thinking and being in the world in a different way. Novel experiences provide new meaning and alternative ways of viewing the world. As an individual continues to experience novelty and receive information that is at variance with their world view, eventually their world view or internal working model restructures to accommodate and assimilate new and different perspectives. Therefore, novelty is an essential ingredient for human change.... If the girl who self-injured ceased having brief interludes of not cutting, she would have failed to continue to experience a new way of being, therefore, change may have not transpired. “Novel experiences are rarely sought when an individual feels anxious, vulnerable or depressed”. However, in the context of a safe therapeutic relationship, individuals can seek out novel experiences.... I suggest that cognitive therapy has a place in dealing with change; however, not as a sole intervention. Focusing primarily on thoughts, beliefs, ideas, attitudes, and assumptions is only one third of the change puzzle, the other two-thirds being emotions and somatic shifts. For example, a previous adolescent client was a habitual wrist cutter. She stated that just prior to each cutting episode she would feel her heart flutter and her stomach turn. These somatic feelings were accompanied by negative thoughts and emotions. Each symptom needs to be addressed in treatment, as opposed to just cognitions.... Not considered thus far is the willingness and readiness of adolescents to change. The trans-theoretical model (TTM) of change is a generic, multistage sequential model of change.... [It has primarily been developed] in the area of addictions counseling as well as health psychology.... Counselors are aware of the signs of readiness for change, the stages of change and the most effective interventions to use in each stage.... Most people attempting to change do relapse at some point in their change journey. My role at the point of relapse is to help the person to renew their determination and action without becoming stuck or demoralized.... What is required is an understanding of the change stages, the counselor initiated interventions most effective at each stage, and most importantly, a therapeutic relationship.... In my experience in working with adolescents, change has primarily been dependant on a primary relationship with one or more adults.... One of the key principles of this attachment framework is that change can occur through therapeutic relationships with others, which may provide the impetus for adolescents to experience novel ways of relating to adults.... This “learn by doing” approach permeates every interaction that the child care counselor and youth engage in. Development, learning and change can occur in the minutiae of the day-to-day experiences between the child and youth care counselor and the adolescent, whether in the community or an institution. Almost all new child and youth care counselors wonder why, if we want the children and youth to change, we not having sit down therapy sessions with them. In response, I usually request that the primary counselor discuss during shift change the therapeutic work they did with their youth during the day. The following story illustrates the therapeutic work done, within the context of a unique intimate relationship between one counselor and a youth. One day a child and youth care counselor helped their primary youth set up a small car washing business. The youth and the worker had to negotiate finding and buying essential items

to start the business. They had to make posters, distribute them, speak to staff about prices, and temper some potentially inflammatory comments about expectations related to the quality of the job. Furthermore, they had to negotiate how the money earned was going to be spent, with the explicit expectation that it would not be spent on drugs. In an attempt to pacify and redirect burgeoning hostility in the youth regarding control over his money, the counselor asked questions related to what big item did the youth want to save for and how could the counselor support him. The child and youth care counselor and the youth eventually set up a bank account with a maximum amount that could be taken out at one time. During shift change, the counselor explained how this experience fostered a deeper mutual connection between the youth and the counselor and how the “worker and the youngster see each other as participants in a mutual struggle over how, instead of whether, to be involved”. A myriad of other learning experiences also occurred for the youth. This process built upon the existing strength of his work ethic and aptitude. The youth practiced problem solving, social skills building, and money management. Furthermore, this process helped to build his sense of self-esteem, self-efficacy and autonomy through a positive, pro-social engagement with an adult. Finally, this also appeared to provide new information and a novel experience to modify the lens through which he viewed and related to adults and peers. The relationship between the counselor and the youth was the vehicle used to experientially explore, learn and possibly change....

Systemic Change: A Necessary Component.... Based upon my experience and understanding of the relevant literature, I have come to believe that systemic interventions are necessary to support enduring change in individuals.... Family therapy work and parent education and support groups are built into many of the programs. One of the attachment principles introduced earlier that guides practice at the Maples is: “enduring change in an individual’s behavior occurs only when there is change in the internal working model supported by change in the systems that one lives in, and there is sufficient time, opportunity and support to integrate the new experience” For this reason, admissions to several of the programs are contingent on the presence of a parent or caregiver.... In my work with families, my primary goal is first to establish a relationship with the parents or caregivers. To develop a meaningful and trusting relationship with parents, I have to avoid dichotomous (good or bad) judgments about the individual parents and maintain a systemic, generational perspective, which involves understanding the youth’s, parent’s, and grandparent’s experiences.... be able to understand and empathize with their personal reality.... New knowledge and information is often the first step in producing change.... My professional and personal experiences with change have contributed to my firm belief that people do have the capacity to change; however, change is a slow, incremental process influenced by the human need to maintain stability. This paradox constantly surfaces in my work with children, youth and families. It often causes practitioners to throw up their hands in frustration and exclaim; “nothing has changed”. It has been my experience that the moment novelty has been experienced or new information is received, people begin to change. Throughout life, people are constantly changing and attempting to maintain stability. For example, in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 bombings in New York and Washington, Canadian and American citizens—and perhaps people around the world—recognized that things had to change. But despite this recognition, we steadfastly want to maintain the same liberties, freedoms and democratic rights that we have always enjoyed. Finally, how does one measure change? This is an important question in light of the current political climate permeating the human services field, in which funding will likely only

be given to those practitioners and programs that can provide evidence for the effectiveness of their change interventions.... Indicators of change are often subtle and can be hard to measure. Child and youth care counselors often report that the youth has changed within the context of their relationship. Perhaps, when the same change is not observable to others, it is because they are not participants in the primary relationship. Inevitably, there will always be debate about both the measurement of change and the most effective interventions, as human change processes are destined to be as complex as life.