

The child care worker

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THE MEANING OF MANIPULATIVE BEHAVIOUR	2
THOM GARFAT WONDERS WHAT FRITZ REDL WOULD SAY	3
CHILDREN WHO MAKE IT — JIM HYLAND ON THE RESILIENCE FACTOR	6
STUDENTS TALK ABOUT THE COURSES THEY DID THIS YEAR	7
STUDENTS' PRACTICAL WORK TO EXTEND YOUR ORGANISATION'S SERVICE	8
DRAMA GROUP TRANSFORMS STREET CHILDREN IN KENYA	10
BRIEF REPORT: EMERGENCY COMMUNITY HOMES IN CAPE TOWN	11
YOUTH JUSTICE: A DELINQUENT LOOKS BACK	12
JACKIE ORBELL: UNMASKING THE MYTH OF INTEGRATION	13
THE INTER-MINISTERIAL COMMITTEE: PROGRESS ON SECURE CARE	14

Cover Picture: The universal language of summertime: Children in Japan playing cricket.
Photograph by Shaun Botterill



NACCW

THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CHILD CARE WORKERS IS AN INDEPENDENT NON-RACIAL ORGANISATION WHICH PROVIDES THE PROFESSIONAL TRAINING AND INFRASTRUCTURE TO IMPROVE STANDARDS OF CARE AND TREATMENT FOR CHILDREN IN RESIDENTIAL SETTINGS.



Federation Internationale des Communistes Educateurs
International Federation of Educative Communistes (IFECED)



Association Internationale des Educateurs de Enfants Handicapés
International Association of Workers with Handicapped Children

Charles Pragnell challenges us with the suggestion that 'manipulative behaviour' may often be a sign of youngsters trying to cope with the unreasonable environments we create for them in residential care ...

Manipulative behaviour — or assertiveness?

A term which is commonly heard in and around residential units is *manipulate* or *manipulative*. It is most often used by residential workers to describe particular clients, often in a derogatory sense, whose behaviour is difficult to control or monitor, and which perhaps presents a threat to the authority of the worker or the accepted social order in the unit. Such clients tend to be looked on with suspicion or apprehension.

Positive skills?

And yet, manipulative skills are probably amongst the most important skills any individual can possess. In order to exercise control over our immediate environment or, at times, to survive in our social group, we all use manipulative skills as a constant part of communicating with other people. Indeed some professions, such as politics or law, develop these skills to a superlative degree even, perhaps, to an art form. To persuade, cajole, or coerce others into the way we wish them to respond or behave is a significant part of establishing, maintaining and controlling social order at all levels — whether in small groups such as the family, or in wider society. Our values, standards and belief systems are consistently under challenge and ever changing. Individuals manipulate others to achieve change or to resist change. Why then do residential workers become so apprehensive, even fearful, of individuals in care, particularly children, who they describe as manipulative?

Firstly, it may be that children are too obvious (or innocent) in their attempts to manipulate. Adults, having had considerably more practice, are able to be more subtle or secretive in their manipulation of others. Secondly, many adults like to feel that they are in charge of a situation and, certainly, residential work can so easily be the easy job for the benevolent dictator.

Such people often have considerable feelings of insecurity in themselves, and only by totally and autocratically controlling their social group, can they create their own security and cope with threats to their own functioning.

A child who challenges this autocracy and displays manipulative skills too overtly, becomes a threat to the worker. The child has not necessarily behaved inappropriately, but too naively. Yet the child himself is merely demonstrating his own insecurity, his own need to exercise some control over his environment in order that the environment more appropriately responds to, and meets his needs.

Such environments, within residential units, may deny the child responsibility or participation in deciding the nature of the social order. Rules and regulations are set by adults both inside and outside the unit, and are rigidly enforced by sanctions.

Critical choices

The child is a captive or prisoner to the rules of others, and then faces the choice of lapsing into helplessness and total depend-

ency — or he challenges the enforced social order. If he chooses the former, he is in great danger of damage to his future development and the pattern of his life will be dependency on others and a lack of confidence and ability to make decisions for himself, or to cope with the daily stresses and demands of living. If he chooses the latter, he will be in danger of being labelled difficult and deviant. His actions will be interpreted increasingly as a threat to others and his motives assessed as malevolent.

The process of labelling as a 'deviant' will then begin. Initially, he may be dismissed as unfortunate, and not really responsible for his actions because he knows no better. If he persists in his behaviour, causing discomfort or annoyance to the adults around him, he will then be labelled mad (stupid, irresponsible) or bad (rebellious, truculent, etc). If attempts to force him into conformity (complacency, apathy) should fail, he must ultimately escape from the oppression. Aggression, violence, and absconding will then be examples of the few behavioural options available to him.

Playing games

This is how the game is played and although every occasion does not unfold in exactly the same way, the rules of the game invariably apply, and each player adopts an allotted role.

In his well-known book *The Games People Play*, Eric Berne illustrates how interactions between individuals follow certain patterns, as in a game, and how manipulative skills are used by the players as they engage in tactical ploys leading to an inevitable result — dominance of one over the other. If it is accepted that manipulative skills are a normal, acceptable part of human behaviour, this raises other questions for residential and day care staff.

□ Firstly, how can these skills be developed or improved as part of each client's social skill development in order to improve functioning in the social groups to which he or she belongs?



□ Secondly, what does it tell us about the social order which exists in the client's environment? If that environment is not responding appropriately to meet the client's needs, why is this, and whose needs is the social order meeting?

These questions are important, as Berne's work further suggests that the client's perception of the world is significantly affected in particular ways according to how the environment responds to, and meets his needs for status and recognition.

Self-perceptions

Any negative view we take of ourselves and of other people is formed at an early age and remains relatively unchanged unless positive action is taken to alter it.

Furthermore, we then live our lives in order to reinforce this view of ourselves and others, behaving in those ways by which we successfully gained recognition in the past, whether this was for behaviour that was socially acceptable or unacceptable.

In considering whether behaviour and attitude change is a desirable objective for a client, we must examine how much our perception of that behaviour is affected by our own values, fears and prejudices, and by the nature of the existing social order in that setting. Should, perhaps, the change be in ourselves or the social structure we have created? □

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This is the time of the year when child care students have finished their courses and exams. One name which they heard again and again in their studies was that of Fritz Redl. **Thom Garfat** reflects on taking Redl's words into direct practice ...

I wonder what Fritz would say?



Well, today's my first day. Sometimes I thought it would never come. It seemed to take forever to get here but, here I am. God, I hope I do okay. I've wanted to be a Child Care Worker for years, almost forever it seems to me when I look back on it all. Not that it took a long time, like a doctor or anything like that, but still ... four years to get my Bachelors degree, all those hours in practicums, all those classes, exams, summer jobs and starving winters. Seems like it took forever.

But here I am. First job, first day, first shift. God, I hope I do okay. I hope I remember all the stuff I learned: especially the stuff by that guy Redl. Practical stuff ... it made a lot of sense compared to some of the other authors I had to read. I wonder if the other child care workers here have read his stuff? I guess they must have. Surely everybody's read it. I better be careful about what I say. I don't want to look like one of those 'fresh out of school know-it-alls.' Maybe I'll just keep my mouth shut for a while and see how it goes.

Well, here I am. May as well go in. I wonder what these kids will be like. What was it that Redl said ...

They are the children who cannot meet the challenge of tasks of every day life without becoming a helpless bundle of drives. (Redl & Wineman, 1952.p. 15)

Not a lot of information to go on but probably as good as anything else I ever read.

There was more to it than that, but that's good enough for now. But I would like to know these kids' classification: that would at least help me know how to approach them.

Will you please just forget about diagnosis? (1982, p. 4)

I go up the stairs and open the door. I hope that the kids will like me. I want to get along with them, I think it's so important but like Redl said they "can't like you too much because you set the rules" (*op. cit.* p. 7).

I step inside and look around for the office. A doorway stands open in the corridor and I head for it thinking that must be it. It is. I peer inside. No one's there. Logs and files lie on the desk. I wonder why it's open. Perhaps it's one of the ways they demonstrate their trust of the children. I remember learning that's important, but Redl has something to say about that as well ...

... Adults must definitely know what kinds of things and situations expose these youngsters to uncontrollable temptation and should not expose them to more of it than their ego can be expected to cope with at that time. (p. 47)

I wonder where the staff is. I'd like to know if the open office with everything 'exposed' says more about the kids or the staff. I remember the rest of that paragraph where Redl says that it is our job to "support what ego strength has remained, not to undermine it by exposing it to entirely unmanageable strain" (p. 47). I close the door as I leave the

office just in case. I decide to wander around the house to see if I can find anyone. At first, it seems too messy to me. In the living room someone has forgotten to put away some games lying on the floor and I stack them neatly on the coffee table as I pass. I pick up a few glasses and some orange peels and head off in search of the kitchen. The pictures in the corridor are hanging crooked and as I straighten them I notice that the frames could use washing. The kitchen is no better than the rest of the house. "God," I think, "doesn't this place have a housekeeper? Doesn't anyone make these kids clean up the place?" I wonder to myself what Redl would have to say ...

Adults in a treatment home need the ability to sacrifice what personal style of house-keeping they happen to be most enamoured with to the clinical strategy needed at a certain time. (p. 48)

Well, I guess if I'm going to listen to Redl and what he had to say, my reaction says more about me than anything else. But it is hard to set your own values aside even if Redl says you should. I guess that's why we spent time on self-awareness in our classes last year. After all, I'm here to deal with *their* business, not *mine*. I don't find anyone in the kitchen so I decide to take a further stroll through the house to see what I can find and get a feel for the place. Maybe it will tell me more about the programme or the kids who live here. I don't know much about them ex-

cept that they are pre-adolescents.

It seems like a pretty average place. Parts of the house could use some paint and there's surely nothing fancy about it. I guess Redl would approve. I remember reading that he thought that it was important that the environment not be too unfamiliar or different from the child's natural environment so as to avoid "sociological shock" and the "newness panic" that could come about if the environment was too much of a change for the child to adjust to easily (p. 43).

I see that the furniture is sturdy stuff, the kind that can take a little rough and tumble, or the occasional outburst, without coming apart at the seams. Most of it looks like it's been around for a while and has seen a number of kids pass through. But it's not worn to the point of looking like somebody else's discard. It has a healthy, lived-in, inviting kind of look to it. It feels like the kind of place where you're supposed to be comfortable. I'm sure he'd approve of that too. He had a lot to say about the environment, and the tools available in working with kids (43-45; 192-198).

But I'd better go and find the staff. If I don't find them soon they'll think I was late. I wander through other parts of the house looking here and there; 'scoping the territory' as the kids in that last place used to say. Finally I hear sounds — laughter, shouting and playful cries — and they lead me to the backyard. From the porch I see two or three youngsters throwing a ball and two others sitting at a picnic table playing cards. Off to the side I see a young woman talking to two youngsters who look about ready to kill each other. Another staff member, also female, sits under the tree consoling a young girl of about ten years. I can tell by how this staff member is sitting that she's keeping an eye on all the action over the child's shoulder. She catches my attention and signals me to come over. As I approach, the little girl runs off to join the others at the table and I stammer an apology to Carol, the Child

Care Worker, "Sorry, Carol, I didn't mean to frighten her away."

"Don't worry," she replied with a slight twinkle showing in her eyes. "Nancy was just getting a little 'tax-free love and affection' (op. cit. p. 61) and she'd taken just about all she could allow herself to take for the moment. She was looking for a good excuse to leave without having to get angry and if you hadn't come along I would have had to ease her into something else. That's a hurdle she hasn't learned to get over on her own yet, and I could sense the anxiety building up (op. cit. p.175-78). Once you get to know Nancy, you'll sense it yourself, but like all the kids, she expresses her anxiety in her own unique way." She paused for a minute as if asking herself a question. "I think you and I should go in the kitchen for a few minutes and talk. I'll just take a second to set it up and then we can go."

Carol stood up and, signalling to her partner (who by now had drifted back into the ball game with her two young charges), she let everyone know that she was going to be in the kitchen with me. Then, after introducing me to all the children and her co-worker, Sally she led me to the kitchen. We sat by the window, overlooking the yard, close to the open door. When all the kids saw her settled in the window, they returned to their play and she turned to me. "So, what do you think of our house?" "What I've seen I like a lot. Of course I haven't been all the way through but there seems to be a lot of space and it has a homey, lived-in kind of look. It feels comfortable," I responded, not sure where she was going with this. She knew. "I'm glad you noticed the space. It's really important to us. Like Fritz said, "space can be of the utmost importance". "Fritz who?" She laughed again; I realised that it was friendly laughter so it didn't offend me. "Why, Redl, or course. You do know his work, don't you?" "Well, well, sure," I stammered. "We studied it in class."

"Good. You see, around here we're really committed to his ideas and approaches. None of us thinks that he has all the answers for all of the kids we see, but in terms of understanding how to work with these kids, no one else has provided such a good foundation for programming." She paused for a moment as she surveyed the scene in the yard smiling and recognising the kids who caught her eye. "What do you think of his work?" she asked.

"As you know, I'm pretty new to all of this and I haven't read as much as you, but I do remember reading *Children Who Hate* (Redl & Wineman 1951). For the first time I felt like I was understanding how children come to be troubled. And when I read the chapter on 'The Delinquent Ego and It's Techniques,' especially the section on being a 'friend without influence,' I understood the difference between the relationship as a *goal* and the relationship as a *tool* in working with kids. It helped me to understand how children can really like a staff member without the staff being able to influence them" (op. cit. p. 224).

"Oh, me too! I remember that I had been working in the field for a number of years before I read that," Carol responded. "As I read that book, so much of my experience seemed to make more sense. That was about ten years ago, and I remember thinking that it could have been written only yesterday. I heard somebody say that once and I thought at the time that it's so true. That book is as useful and meaningful today as when Fritz and David Wine-man wrote it in 1951"

I was curious and had to ask: "You always refer to him as *Fritz*. Did you know him? Was he a friend?" Again the light laugh as she kept her eye on the yard. For a moment she and her co-worker exchanged glances and Sally signalled to her that everything was fine. "No, I didn't know him. But we all feel as if we did. His work is so intimately familiar to all of us that I feel as if he was my personal teacher. It's something about the way that he writes

... as if he's talking directly to you. As if he is a friend." She paused for a minute. "I did hear him talk though, once at a Child Care conference. I remember watching this little man, with an accent so strong that I could hardly understand him, saying some of the most practical things I ever heard about working with troubled kids; and by then I'd been in the field for years. It was right after that that I read all his stuff and realised that the school I went to had cheated us all by not teaching his work. I'm glad to see that they do now." "I know what you mean," I responded. "I read all the other things on the class list but nothing else was as personal or useful as his work. For somebody new to the field it's as if he takes you by the hand and says 'this is what a good programme should look like; this is what it should feel like; this is how the children should experience it.' When I read *Controls From Within*, I wondered why there wasn't more writing like it in the field."

"Because there's only been one Fritz," Carol replied over her shoulder as she moved outside to redirect a couple of kids whose discussion was getting heated up. She was back in a minute and the children who were about to fight were laughing. "As Fritz points out," she said, "a little humour at the right moment can really help."

"But like he also said," I replied, "we shouldn't assume that 'any tense or difficult situation could be successfully handled by humorous reaction' (op. cit. p. 75). That's something else I appreciate about his work — he always cautioned against over-generalising." I was glad that I knew his work as well as I did, but I'd never realised how enjoyable it could be to discuss it with someone who practised it.

"That's true," Carol came back, "when, how, for how long, by whom, where. All of these were important to him. Like when he talked about timing; as in how long a consequence should last for."

"I remember when we discussed that in class," I responded. "That's a hot issue

even today. Like how long should a kid be sent to his room for: five minutes? ten? half an hour? But I can't remember what Redl had to say about it."

"Well then," Carol said, the laugh coming up again, "let that be your first task of the day. Go into the office and get the copy of *Controls From Within*, and read pages 116 to 119. When you're finished come find me and we'll continue."

With that, Carol got up and went back outside. I headed back to the office. Above the desk, which was facing the wall, I found a well-worn copy of the book and sat down to read.

Like always, I found the language to be clear and the ideas useful and well-demonstrated through a little vignette. One line still stays with me even today (Redl & Wineman 1952):

The development of skills in clinically adequate timing constitutes one of the most important problems of the training and self-training of staff (p. 118).

I wish we'd spent more time on that in the class. A note pencilled in the margin referred me to another article (Redl 1982) where I found a more specific reference to our conversation. A line from that article stays with me as well: "... *longer* does not mean that effects are achieved *faster*" (pp. 5-6).

I sat in the chair and thought about what I had read for a few minutes. Redl's writings will do that: make you think. I went out to find Carol and Sally.

I passed Sally in the kitchen doing a "Guilt Squeeze" (Redl & Wineman 1951, p. 257-260) with one of the youngsters she had been with when I arrived. She didn't turn from the child as I passed and I remember how Redl had talked about the need to attend to the children when you're interviewing them. Carol was in the living room with a small group debriefing the afternoon. I sat down and joined her. Her work was true to everything Redl had to say about group interviews being able to serve "the same clinical goals and functions as indi-

vidual interviewing." I could see where I was going to have to review his writings on interviews and interviewing techniques if I was going to work here. (Redl & Wineman 1952, p. 246-273)

When the group was over and it was time to move into the dining room to eat, Carol caught me for a quick aside. "Did you read the article on timing and the discussion about longer and faster?" "I did," I replied. "It made me think."

"Good," she said, "Making people think is probably what Fritz did best. It may have been his major contribution to the field. Not what he said, but how it makes you think: like his comments on what we mean by the use of the word 'therapeutic' (1966, pp. 7229). The more we think about what we do, the better we serve the children. And I'm sure Fritz would agree that that's why we're here."

I thought for another minute as we seated ourselves at the table and then said to Carol, "I think I'll call him Fritz too." "That's good," Carol laughed. "But let me tell you a little technique I learned from Sally. Whenever I look at a situation, or run into something I'm not sure about and I don't really know what to think or do, I ask myself a question and it helps me every time."

"What's the question?" I asked, anxious to learn.

"I wonder what Fritz would say?" she laughed.

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Child Care WORKERS

A Tribute to

Tennyson Shange

**Councillor Yvonne Spain, Chairperson of Khayaletu
6 October 1995**

Tennyson touched many many lives. He touched your lives, he touched my life. More than that he made a difference to so many lives, When I tried to think of something to say, I thought about how Tennyson had belonged to so many families. To the Shange family he was a beloved son. And we share your pain at this sad time and offer you our prayers of support. In the family of Youth for Christ and Khayaletu, he was a dearly loved brother. Your team spirit and faith will see you through. To the Khayaletu children he was a father and committed caregiver. To the children today, I say that the most important thing you can do for Tennyson, his family and his friends, is to remember his love for you. Throughout your lives, you children are going to have to make choices — and sometimes these choices are going to be difficult choices. I ask you to stop and think: "What would Tennyson have me to do here?" As you then decide to do what he would have done, he will live forever in you.

And then Tennyson was rooted in the family of Pietermaritzburg/Umsunduzi. Tributes pour in from former teachers and colleagues, and his friends here today. And truly, at this sad time, we are fortunate to have, under the leadership of Rob and Penny Haswell, a sympathetic and supportive Transitional Local Council. Perhaps in any other city, in any other country, we might have felt abandoned by our mayoral couple, but not in

Pietermaritzburg. They have initiated a national summit for children in distress, which will be hosted by the city council and held in Tennyson's memory. And I know that the Haswells will ensure that the President will be with us here at that summit.

And then this year Tanya Spencer did a photo essay for Pietermaritzburg — which has become a nationwide project — and she will be dedicating the book to be made from this project to the memory of Tennyson Shange.

My co-chairperson, Dr Neil McKerrow is out of town and has not been able to be here today, but he has sent this message: "In trying to accept Tennyson's death, we must not look back, but look forward." He said: "We must try to develop a more effective response that will meet both the needs of our children and our staff. Through our grief we must try to

serve better."

And then we have here at this memorial service a dear friend, Revd Lloyd Smith, who has often been close to me when I have been in despair. And after Boipatong and the death of Chris Hani he gave me a book called *A Book of Hope* in which Emma Maslene writes, "When everyday events seem to say that all is in vain, let us remember the words of encouragement from St Paul assuring us that if we look in 1 Corinthians 10 vs 13, we will know there is no trial in life which you experience that is not common to men and women. But God is faithful; He will not let you experience life's trials more than, you can bear. But when you suffer, He will also provide a way out, so that you can stand up under it."

*Go well Tennyson.
Hamba kahle Tennyson.*

Themba Blose writes:

Tennyson's creative genius also found its outlet in helping to put beauty back in God's creation — that is in children and youth at risk. In this vision, he was motivated and guided by fellow carpenter, the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is in his seven years' association with Youth for Christ that the true marks of Tennyson's servanthood came to the fore. His immediate supervisor, Thulani Nzimande, remembers Tennyson's contribution in the field of child care. He joined him in street work and the Drop-in Centre co-ordination for children living on the streets of Pietermaritzburg. The project is a joint venture between Youth for Christ and the Pietermaritzburg Street Children Project, now operating under the name Khayaletu.

Recalls Thulani Nzimande: "Tennyson was a real child care worker with amazing dedication, commitment and patience. Everything he did was always done neatly and planned well. He was a man of action, who liked to work with his hands. He was very good in counselling, sharing knowledge and skills, and communicating to members of the team."

Dennis Drennan, Pietermaritzburg Centre Co-ordinator of Youth for Christ, said to me as were standing by his body on the cold concrete floor on the night of 1st October 1995, when he was tragically killed: "Themba, I see a parallel between the life of Jesus Christ and Tennyson's life: Jesus was crucified by the very people he came to save; Tennyson by a young person he served."