

*I have perceived that to be with those I like is enough...  
To stop in company with the rest at evening is enough...  
To be surrounded by curious, breathing, laughing flesh is enough.*

*I do not ask any more delight.  
I swim in it as a sea.*

*There is something in staying close to men and women and looking on them, and  
in the contact and odour of them that pleases the soul well.  
All things please the soul, but these please the soul well.*

Walt Whitman

## **Why the Young Canadian Leadership Challenge? And why now? Towards a Multidisciplinary Solution to Youth Violence**

In 2007, everyone wants the generation growing up to have a life free of violence-- but it is a time, harkening back to the World War II era, when such freedom seems more elusive than at any other point in living memory. What is called for is "*new wine in new wineskins.*"



The 1999 youth violence at Columbine High School was a painful wake-up call, but it was in fact just the ugly tip of the violence iceberg. Our reaction to it, *zero tolerance*, only made matters worse: by 2001-2, we could see that the very youth who need to complete school, to become productive and take their place in the community had been abandoned to the streets. Now is the time to address this problem-- but if not zero tolerance, then *what?*



Let's first look at some of the underlying factors that can contribute to youth violence. Some young people, for example, lack good parenting. These youth are told incessantly by others that what they are doing is wrong (*most often with good reason*) and that their behaviour needs to be corrected. Well guess what? They've long since stopped listening! More correction won't work - but we need to understand why. Recent developments in brain science have helped to supply some answers. It seems that youth simply lack executive decision-making and the ability to learn from negative events in their lives because of the slow development of their brain's prefrontal lobes until age 16 or 17. For this reason, impulsivity reigns, and warnings and scare tactics do not register in the same way that they do for adults, and thus do not deter risky behaviour.

Once young people begin to take life into their own hands (at about age 10), they have no "*truck nor trade*" for our advice. Nor will they, short of having a major "change of heart", be diverted to things that are "*good for them*" by adult standards. But we can we arrange for such a change of heart. We say "yes"!

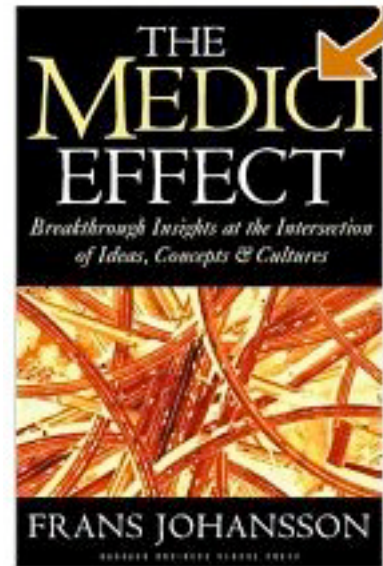
Already at odds with adult *powers-that-be*, many youth are drawn by characteristic impulsiveness into activities which evoke adult criticism. We expect them to take heed of our advice - oblivious to the fact that they are not sufficiently developed to do so. As they rebel against our ceaseless telling them how to be, their impulsiveness becomes increasingly sinister, and their solutions to life's problem often gravitate to shortcuts and quick fixes which expose them to ever-escalating danger.

It used to be families who got them through tough times ... whether it was dad calming a swell of anger at those who apparently had it "easier" or mom helping to process deep feelings of sadness at not finding a place to stand among their peer group. But it is clear that family structures have weakened. Many young people are now raised in subsistence-level single parent homes, and only 11% have any meaningful connection to grandparents. Few, if any, could support themselves financially (*by working at Mac-jobs*) through the costly process of obtaining any higher education. And traditional aids won't always help with these new and numerous stumbling blocks: though counseling may produce clear results for adults, for example, it is often extremely unattractive to youth who often have very little rapport with the "older generation". It is in fact this group that they are usually fingering as the problem in their lives. Few (if any) of the highly specialized disciplines of psychology, psychiatry and social work have offered solutions which take into account the full spectrum of risk factors affecting youth. Many within these fields seem to believe that if only more money were thrown their way, they would be able to provide better services, but we consider this both unlikely and unfeasible.

## Using What We Already Know To Do Better

What is needed is to combine the “*best practices*” of each discipline under one unified approach.

Author **Frans Johansson** describes in his book *The Medici Effect* that this is what happened during the *Renaissance* of the 15th and 16th century Florence under the patronage of the powerful Medici family. This family brought about an enormous breakthrough in creativity simply by allowing for an intersection of ideas which had never before been brought together.



We are not lacking today for ideas or for research that proves these ideas work. For example, *Positive Psychology*, championed by **Martin Seligman** at the University of Pennsylvania, is a relatively new branch which is beginning to focus more on the ways in which human beings can realize their potential, and not simply on everything that can go wrong.



Michael Meade, facilitator and mythologist as seen in the documentary *Boys Will Be Men*

Mythologist and educator **Michael Meade** has developed another stream of thought - and a program which produces excellent results with adolescent boys. He challenges the boys to express their frustrations within the maturation process by producing their own dialogue with the preceding generation. Sadly this requires the unique and seasoned talents of **Meade** himself; there are few who could match his incisive ability to capture the imagination of his young participants single-handedly.

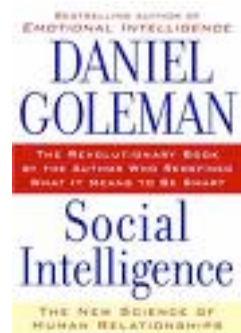
Sports, too, offer opportunities for the athletically talented... but are trained by coaching bent on winning and not on skill development or teamwork .

What we are lacking is an application of such already-proven ideas and methods which addresses the totality of the factors in play. We at YCLC believe that such combination and application is possible, and in fact that it can take place in a single weekend that will have a dramatic and lasting effect on youths' lives. It includes aspects of the branches mentioned above, as well as novel and vital information gleaned from newly-developing fields of research.

## Social Intelligence

A new scientific field, championed by **Daniel Goleman**, has created a powerful intersect between modern MRI-based medicine, enlightened psychology, and the findings of emotional intelligence experts. This field is interested newly in *what can go right*, and its conclusions correspond closely to those of self-styled, forward thinking epidemiologists like **Steven Levitt** (*Freakonomics*).

The field, called *social intelligence*, suggests boldly that the connection between people, the mutual support systems which can arise even from a single significant meeting of strangers, can have a positive impact which will go on for decades. The simple effects of respect and inclusivity between individuals can, according to these thinkers, completely change the course of a person's life.



***While I have quoted only a few of the rich sources of information which can inform our 21st century conversation about what we can do to help youth reach for a self-discovered maturity, suffice it to say that we have plenty. I will draw on others as I develop the methodology which goes into a Young Canadian Leadership Challenge. What we are looking for are ways youth enjoy relating to each other as alternatives to violence.***

## How Do Young People Relate To Each Other?

Before detailing how a brief encounter of minds, hearts and souls like the **Young Canadian Leadership Challenge** works as a practical application of *social intelligence* let us look at how the social exchange between individuals of all ages works in everyday life - from studies in the field.

### The Social Interactions “Game”

Put three strangers (of any age) together. Ask them to examine, in a conversation, how they interact with each other, and then to discuss the impact that these interactions will have on their lives going forward. Some interesting processes will inevitably begin to appear, and shed light on a psychological mechanism based in our very distant past.

### Feeling Excluded As the Reaction To Our Distant Past

Because of the carefully selected *number* of participants, each will be prone to feeling that he or she is the “*odd man out*”. Fear erupts easily and the participants in the inquiry are quick to take umbrage at the slightest indication that they may be the outsider.

If two of the three find common ground for conversation, the other feels awkward - threatened by exclusion - and has a tendency to withdraw from further conversation for at least a short period of time.

We then see one of two responses. Either the third person will give up and feel excluded (*and demeaned in the process*) or will leap *resiliently* back into the fray. If so, what will he or she newly bring to the situation?

For the rare (and fortunate) third person who already has learned confidence, authenticity and initiative, this is a useful place to try it out; such efforts will then be reinforced - and will occur more frequently.

But we also (*and I say we because we all have it*) come to the fray with a default defense mechanism which depth psychologists like **Joseph M. Masling, Robert F. Bornstein** and many others before them have dubbed “*object relations*.” The origin of this mechanism can be found very early in life.

*Object relations* becomes our default position when we lack authentically-tested and true social skills. We learned it in our very early years when adults towered over us in both stature and power to cope with the fact that our parents could never be all good (*and sometimes distressed us or left us to an empty belly or a full diaper*). Sensing ourselves as powerless in relation to these giants (*while still wanting and needing their love*) we hived off an image of the bad side of them - and of ourselves in relation to that image - distorted by the sheer disparity of power inherent in being very small and very young.

Because we got to observe/test this disparity day after day, even year after year, we came to see power in terms of the characteristics of the adults around us - not their loving side, but the side that gave us grief. The adults were usually our birth parents (*mother being the most frequently identified here due to sheer amounts of time we spent with her.*) In relation to that parent we came to see powerlessness through the filter of the almost complete lack of experience, understanding and social skills we had at the time.

Our *object relations* are a locked-together trio (or triad) of images - which includes an image of the powerful other, of the powerless self, and of *the feeling state which we characteristically felt in this power imbalance*. Without doubt, the feeling response to being outpowered was negative - ranging from despair and giving up to anger, rage - and violence .

This *object relations* triad becomes solidified over time and becomes our knee-jerk reaction to a perceived power imbalance (including the sense of exclusion). It will be somewhat added to and subtracted from by the inevitable modifying conditions of life, but we don't generally lose the tendency to see others erroneously as our (bad) mother or father was seen at that crucial time in our lives.

	Empirical
	Perspectives
	on
	Object Relations
	Theory
	Edited by
	Joseph M. Masling
	Robert F. Bornstein

Returning to the “*social interaction game*” - the outcome will be determined by what we *do* when the fleeting memory of our own *object relations* triad emerges at that crucial moment when we feel left out. Make no mistake - even the most seasoned adult feels the fear of being excluded when such circumstances arise. But after the fear can either come more fear - or excitement. Without the emergence of *excitement* we automatically drop down to play the *object relations* card we walk around with tucked into our back pocket.

## Modifying Factors

Life, of course, proceeds with other lessons after the development of our *object relations* trio. Parenting modifies our early responses - for better or for worse - although it never erases them.

Having siblings further modifies our responses to exclusion. Kindly siblings may ratchet our expectations upward. If there are only two children in the family, however, one will characteristically become the winner in the competition for a parent’s attention and the other will be left to fend for themselves. In fact, this arrangement may favour the excluded sibling who learns *resilience* by sheer necessity - when it seems like survival is at stake.

Thus some young people enter the *game* better prepared than others.

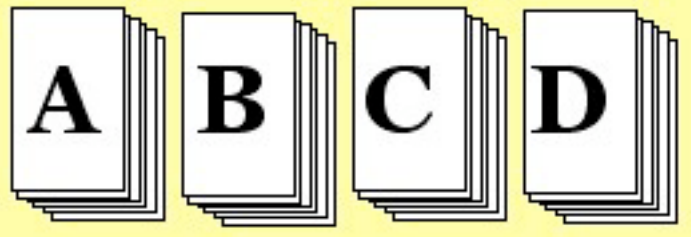
It is known, incidentally, that a healthy percentage (perhaps 25%) of youth coming from poor, disadvantaged and even violent families end up being *resilient* - and as a result thrive. This is why the capacity is so prized, and is in fact seen as the purest antidote to youth violence.

*If there were ever a learned quality or skill that turned fear into excitement - resilience is it. Resilience is the factor which gets us back into the game when we are on the verge of being knocked out.*

*But resilience is not the only quality needed. If we are resilient but lack compassion - our entry into the game will still be potentially violent.*

## Tracking The Still-Developing Adolescent Brain For Resilience and Compassion

The *Iowa Gambling Task*, developed initially to test brain-damaged individuals, enlarges on this understanding. Patients with damage to the prefrontal areas of the brain fail to accomplish the task - as success requires *executive control* over emotional impulses.



Those tested are given four decks of cards and are asked to pick 100 cards in succession - in order to end up with a positive score overall. They are told that each concealed card has a reward of either 100 or 50 points and that some cards also have penalties ranging up to 1250 points. In fact **Deck 1** has only 100 point cards with one *minus-1250* card as every tenth card. **Deck 2** has also only 100 point cards, but with the *minus-1250* cards randomly distributed. **Deck 3** has only 50 point cards with one *minus-250* card as every tenth card, and **Deck 4** has 50 point cards with 1/10th being a randomly distributed *minus-250* card.

**The results are that 89% of adults without neurological disorders win at the task, but only 29% of youth under 18 succeed - and only 1% of bullies and ADHD sufferers.**

Children do better than youths - who are simultaneously caught up in the hormone-induced impulsivity phase of their development. Without the prefrontal brain areas for *executive control* in play yet, they cannot generally learn from negative results (i.e. negative feedback) - and they consistently gamble on the high stakes (*but ultimately losing*) rewards.

*Resilience* is learning to bounce back when adversity strikes, while compassion towards one’s self is the origin of *compassion towards others*. Adolescence - without some outside assistance - is a poor teacher of either. Adolescents are not known for their compassion for each other; in fact, psychologist **Michael Thompson** calls the boy subculture a *culture of cruelty*. A similar phenomenon is seen among adolescent girls, who abandon earlier interests to compete for boys’ attention.

Of course, a minority of children learn these lessons (both resilience and compassion) before the adolescent shift to impulsivity, and proceed to breeze on into adulthood. But we cannot satisfy ourselves with just these few when there's so much at stake. What about the rest of our children?

### The Creation of a *Resilience/Compassion Game* for Youth From 10-19

*We should not see youth as totally resourceless. Even if they don't learn from negative reinforcement (admonishment, teaching better ways to act etc.) there can be hidden merit to their impulsivity.*

*If workable impulses are positively reinforced, they will be repeated, and will replace destructive responses based on knee-jerk object relations. If compassion produces positive results, even if it happens almost by accident - it will be repeated. So here's the game....*

Sixty-four youth and 32 adult volunteers are gathered in gender-specific groups - girls with women and boys with men (*it is known that youth in the 10-19 age group learn best among their own gender. Gender separation is now being used in schools for many subjects as well.*) They are invited to play a game which will last a whole weekend, and which will involve role-playing and *challenge events* (puzzles they must solve ) punctuated by eating and lodging together.



The game will divide them into teams of 8-10, *with friends generally divided up to enhance individual or autonomous learning.* The first order of the day (which is, in fact, a late Friday evening) will be to create a *bivouac* or primitive shelter made from tarpaulins and ropes (whether sleeping inside or out.)

The game opening is a difficult period for the youth - who tend to resort, in the early going, to *object relations* due to their fear as a response to the unknown adventure upon which they are embarking, and to the absence at this point of the real excitement which will come from the next day's challenge events. Nevertheless, the necessity of having some shelter will ensure that the task is accomplished, amidst bickering and vying for surcease from their fears . The volunteer adults will ensure that no one gets hurt in the process but also that the youths are not subjected to the (*usual*) adult answers to the dilemmas in which they find themselves.



#### The Power of Simulation

A scenario is cast to make sense of the game itself , which is centered around accomplishing as many of the 15 challenge events as possible. The scenario-casting makes the game a *simulation game*, thus imbuing the tasks with meaning. We use costumes to make the *simulation game* come alive.

In our game the youth have variously played characters from **Tolkien's** *Lord of the Rings*, heroic *Knights Templar*, and from scenarios which we have made up specially for the process (*it is not*



*important what scenario is cast, as long as it appeals to their imagination).* We can also let participant groups themselves create the scenario e.g. we can teach aboriginal Canadians how to play our game and encourage them to use aboriginal scenarios unknown to others.



The youth, beginning early Saturday morning, undertake *challenge events* which are generally wood and rope apparatuses set up in the forest. These events were invented in England in the closing years of world War II to train officers to "*think outside the box*" and have been standardized to ensure that all available *discovery learning* skills are accessed in several different ways.

These *challenge events* were, until recently, deemed to be unlikely learning tools for youth due to the learning-by-rote that often goes on in school at this age- but anyone watching a young person

playing a video game is quickly persuaded that he or she can acquire skills by simulating and by trial and error. Many youth summer camps have built Ropes Courses with this in mind - but have generally not been able to optimize the use of these *discovery learning games* to the best of their potential. *We are an exception.*

### **New Social Skills - the New Wine in New Wineskins**

The *challenge elements* draw upon a variety of trial-and-error skills - some evoking physical-spatial skills, others intuitive thinking skills and still others relational skills - but all requiring that *each member* of a team complete the task in order for it to be deemed successful by the group as a whole. They were designed so that no task can be done by a single individual, and so teamwork is essential.

Each event is followed by a debriefing by the team itself. The members contribute their own sense of why the event was completed (or not), and what they could adjust to undertake the next challenge even better.

This is the traditional way a *Ropes Course* is used, but by merit of the *simulation game* we can take it further - and we do. We are enabled to add a crucially important element at this juncture - a *public debriefing* - turning *Ropes Course* skill learning into an exercise in *social intelligence*.



In this wrinkle on the *challenge event* design, the team proceeds to what we call *High Council* - made up of 2-4 costumed adults who are holders of pieces of a treasure map (pieces which we call *icons*). *Icons* are awarded not on the basis of the success in completing the event, but on the basis of the team's ability to demonstrate that they have embraced a *quality* that they have learned in the process.

Youth at this age are familiar with sussing out what their teachers want to hear in school, and at first they try to seduce *High Council* with "cutesy" answers. But *High Council* knows what's coming, and are prepared to follow up with much tougher questions- questions which will require *spontaneity* in their answering. It quickly becomes apparent that inauthentic answers will not secure an *icon*.

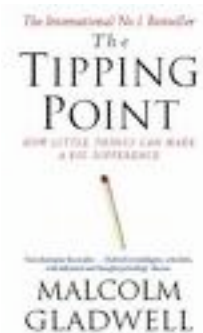
The learning is painful in the beginning - the team rarely earns an *icon* its first time out - but through the process a vacuum is being created into which leadership can spring forth. Bullies are always the first to sense this vacuum and to take up the gauntlet of such a challenge - as bullying is leadership with a dismissive and disdainful edge. By Round 2, competitive as they are, bullies are making sure their team will win - at first in a *clunky* way - but soon after with increasing newfound skill.

Once a team wins an *icon*, *High Council* writes on it the quality which the team has newly manifest in order to get the icon. At first these are fairly simple notions like **TEAMWORK** or **CONCENTRATION**. As they receive the *icon* they are warned that to be discovered not embracing the quality at any time will result in *High Council* taking the *icon* back. We do take *icons* back when we see a team losing focus.

All of the youths' eyes have been focused on the bullies from the outset- everyone knows who they are. But fear becomes excitement as the bullies discover how to get everyone involved as a team. This dramatic shift occurs in the first morning, and it critically moves the team's energy away from fear towards enthusiastic participation as those who are normally quiet and non-participatory (*i.e. those with exaggerated fear responses*) come out of their rabbit warrens.

### **The Tipping Point**

This dramatic shift from bullying to leadership is the *tipping point* (à la **Malcolm Gladwell**) which makes the short time we have multiply in effectiveness - and work optimally to evoke *discovery learning*. The youth are now displaying an energy and enthusiasm completely unknown before, bent on learning and upping the ante, digging for deeper qualities like **COMPASSION, LOYALTY, GOOD LISTENING, PASSION, TOGETHERNESS, AWE, and PATIENCE.**



The role of adults, to this point, has been to create a safe container for this to happen, to be fair-minded referees - and never to teach or instruct. This keeps the focus where the youth want it - on their relationships with each other from moment to moment.

At times quarrels break out, egos are bruised, harsh words are exchanged - but the adults gently nudge the participants back into working it out within the parameters of the game.



And the adults, too, pick up skills as they go: they gradually shift from parental roles by which they “*pull the fat out of the fire*” when things go wrong. We don’t need this. We need a safety net.

Of course, things do go wrong - just as in everyday life. Not every *challenge element* is a win for the team - but overcoming frustration with renewed enthusiasm becomes the order of the day.

At this point the adults start awarding coloured beads for individually and specifically heroic performances. While the team has gelled as a group, it is still our intention to create the game as an individual experience as well. We support *rising-to-the-occasion* autonomy as it manifests.

One heroic performance that comes to mind was the action of an 11-year-old soft-spoken boy who piped up during a team meeting to select a Team Champion as a representative at the *Jousting Challenge*. A 16-year-old, well-built and vociferous Rwandan youth quickly claimed the honour for himself, and had just jumped to the podium when the 11 year old interjected...



“*What about \_\_\_\_\_?*” naming a 13-year-old, 300 pound youth who had struggled to join in because of his weight. “*He hasn’t been able to do anything. We should make him our Champion!*”

Rather than fighting over it as youth are prone to do at this age, others chimed in their support. Even the 16-year-old Rwandan agreed.

The beaming 13 year old stepped up to the podium, winning the event with one satisfied grunt. The 11 year old got a blue bead from me for **SPEAKING UP** and a red bead for **COMPASSION**-- A win for all!

While admonishment and correction don’t work well at this age (the part of the brain used for *executive control* does not in fact develop until age 18), rewards such as these for positive performance prove to yield quite satisfying results-- as long as the reward is truly earned. As the program progresses, adults begin to see that *self-esteem* (often the product of parents or teachers trying to make disconsolate youth feel better with false praise) is a fleeting feel-good experience - while *rewarding performance-based heroism builds self-respect ... and is lasting*.

## **Second Impressions - a Second Chance to Find Our Way Home**

Youth - and many adults - have a marked tendency to categorize others as either *good* or *bad* - *fun* or *no fun* - based on first impressions. We then go on to treat our first impressions as the truth - vilifying some, protecting others. In a fast-moving *game*, however, second impressions become available. The variety of *challenge events* means that youth who don’t do well at one may suddenly emerge with the key answer to the next one. Thus heroism is just around the next corner. Myths are dispelled and deficiencies are accepted in stride. Cultural stereotypes melt.

But all of these experiences, however meaningful and important, are simply *aspects* of what the youths are in the process of building. Now the realizations which have occurred on the run, in rapid succession, need to be integrated into the totality of what they will eventually take away from the program.

Following the feasting of Saturday night supper and a higher level *challenge event* which requires an even greater amount of cooperation, each team has become bonded - and has lost its need to exclude or rebel against adult elders.

Now comes an exercise in which the team gathers into a circle and is posed the question “*What was the best day and the worst day of your life?*”. The atmosphere is set by the adults in the circle who, for the first time, are active participants in the conversation and share something intimate about themselves. It is surprising how willing the youth are now to talk about the heavy times they have had. The pump has been primed - and it is ready to pump water. It may be the first time they have ventured this far in communication, and they are drawn further by the enjoining of the adults without scripted responses. Many are quick to say that this was the best day of their lives.



Meanwhile the *High Council* adults have been preparing a special campfire ceremony. On their way to the ceremony, wrapped in silence and the sounds of haunting background music to set the scene, they pick up a rock and identify to themselves a “burden” they are carrying which has gotten in the way of their participation during the day - and which they would like to be relieved of to make the next day even better. They then cross over an important part of our event equipment-- a bridge which metaphorically depicts being transported to a place where change is possible. The scene is set for a major shift.

A ceremony ensues, marked by rich costuming, special lighting effects and stirring music and drumming. It culminates in the issuing of an even bigger challenge for the next day. *Icons* are shown and laid out, and it becomes apparent that there is still work to do to find the treasure.

We warn the youth that the next day’s activities will be even more difficult (*they will!*) and encourage them to see their rock as something they may be carrying that slows them down (*using the weight of the rock as a metaphor*) and which they may want to leave behind.

*I should make clear at this point that we do not “twist arms” to convince the young people to participate any deeper than they are prepared to. A minority utter cynical responses to our question about burdens, and we respect that everyone comes aboard (or doesn’t) at their own time and in their own way. We know, from experience, that some of the youth will need the next day to venture that far - or may even wait until weeks after the event to respond to this particular cue.*

*In the same vein, not all youth like what they get from our program. “Liking what one gets” is in fact not a criterion for success or failure. Some youth must test out their old habits against venturing forth with new ones. Nor do they have to credit changes they make later to the program. Most say “I did it!” and we accept this - absolutely. We prefer it this way.*

Still, left to their own choice, many youth do venture forth - with surprising articulateness. The challenge is very fully met. Youth - and adults - talk with uncharacteristic clarity, precision and spontaneity of things they hold heavily. The atmosphere is charged.



Youth talk about picking on their younger siblings, their struggle with boredom at school, their sensitivity about their weight, or their hatred of people in their lives. Then they dash their rocks into the fire to the enthusiastic applause of their confreres.

As the last youth drops their rock there is a great stillness that overtakes the gathering, a collective sigh of relief and a feeling of enjoining and camaraderie. We then move to a celebration in the form of drumming, dancing, raucous cheers and letting off of steam ... which sometimes has gone on all night.

As promised, the next day is more challenging- as the teams move to support individuals to make use of the remaining *challenge events* to examine their individual journeys. Each team member receives a T-shirt with a crest with three vacant quadrants on it. During the day, each youth will examine, and mount on their crest, a *personal quality* identified as one they brought with them, one they have acquired since they arrived, and one which they will quest for on leaving.

The *challenge events* of Day 3 deepen their personal look into their true nature - not what they imagined themselves to be at the outset, but what dwells deeply within their youthful psyches.

This culminates in completion of their treasure map and the discovery of a treasure - but not before completing a task which they must do together as an entire group. The treasure itself has little extrinsic value - but points to the intrinsic value they bring to life. No one scoffs at what they have received for their major efforts. There is a knowing that what they have gained is greater than gold. *It is gold to them - and at some level they know this.*



### **The Aftermath - Self Discovery Through Trial and Error**

*A large majority of youth leave YCLC feeling good about who they are - having gained resilience and the compassion to apply it wisely. These qualities will be in even greater evidence in the year to follow. They will practice being "their own person"-- and while their practice will be a mixed bag, they will tolerate frustration.*

A youth who is or who is becoming his or her own person will be a little "clunky" at it at first. Parents may find that their quiet submissive youth now stands up for themselves, and may not be tactful, polite or subservient in doing so. They may find that their usually conversant youth clams up and stops sharing every experience, preferring to savour and refine it on their own.

*But this first step is for themselves - and for their relations with their peers - which is what really matters to them at this stage. This is where they will need to hold their own. Once they become better at relating with those in the schoolyard and the soccer field, they will enter into more mature conversations with parents and other adults. Sometimes they will overshoot the mark in their enthusiasm to make it in their world - and when this happens they find themselves in pain. For example, experimental as they are by nature, submissive youth sometimes will become bullies for a while. This is why we have a second level program which goes on at the same time as the first level program but which is even more demanding, starting where the first program leaves off. Their ceremony on Saturday Night is called "Swords In The Closet." Here, after vision questing on their own for a night, they will examine their anger, hatred, or acting out with play-sword in hand, and will then ceremonially place that sword in a special box, trading it in for a new golden one. This golden sword serves as a reminder of their special commitment to keep the old weapon in the closet except when it is really needed.*

### **The Young Canadian Leadership Challenge and Object Relations**

We have already seen that all people, young and old, are faced with the dilemma of what to do as an alternative to playing out "object relations triads." Of course, it is not a dilemma if one does not see what one is doing-- and we all have ways of simply rationalizing even our most destructive actions. When we give up prematurely in the face of being possibly excluded, we call ourselves "shy." When we overcome our fear by striking out at the threat, we begin to think of ourselves as "bullies." We have stories which explain to us, and sometimes to others, why we do what we do--but, whether or not these stories are true, they are *not* the cause of our failure to grow. In fact, these stories were added on after long after the initial creation of the triads as an attempt to survive our feelings of early childhood powerlessness.

Simply speaking, when powerlessness strikes, we will go one way or we will go another. We will either take what might seem to be the obvious route and play out our *object relations triad* -at the expense of our authenticity and spontaneity -or we won't.

Caught up in the activity that makes up YCLC, working suddenly for the success of all of our newfound friends and teammates, and unravelling challenges that would have seemed impossible to us before, we move naturally toward spontaneity. We realize that the ways we had of "doing it" before are not as helpful as we might have thought: the small self of our object relations triad, the one that we had been protecting for so long, is not the entirety of who we are. In fact, we begin to see something else taking shape, something with a new depth of caring and resources, something that can accomplish, with the help of our comrades, remarkable and noble feats. We become present-and accounted for. We become worthy of the crests we're wearing. And we come to like both ourselves and others better.

While this may well not be the end of our struggle against outmoded and self-diminishing mechanisms from the past, it is a very powerful start - and it is something we have a passion for. We do want deeper friendships. We do want the expanding taste of victory. We have an immediate incentive to "be our own person"-- we want it because it works for us. We want it because it feels more like who we are. We may not even be aware of exactly what we are doing - but it becomes worthwhile for its own sake. And this is our *new wine in new wineskins*.

## Summary

Because there are some fundamental differences between youth and adulthood, the goal of a program like ours should not be to turn out *miniature adults*. We must instead take into account the differing ways in which the two groups learn, for instance the lack of risk-aversion in youth which is so foreign to adults. Keeping these facts in mind, we can take youth where they are in the developmental process, and, with few rules, expose them to *self-discovery*. We can celebrate the positive achievements which risk-taking years have allowed them.

Youth who have had such experiences will be better able to withstand the “*slings and arrows of outrageous fortune*” which life will deal them. We start them on a longer journey of *self-respect, appreciation for others, social skills, authentic communication and initiative*.

This is a powerful toolkit. Violence among youth 10-19, whether directed outwards or inwards, is seen to be another offshoot of the combination of raging hormones (appearing for the first time during this period) and the slow development of the executive control of the brain's prefrontal lobes. It is augmented by the tendency seen in the *Social Relationships Game* for human beings of all ages to revert when threatened to inappropriate knee-jerk responses left over from their days as small children at the mercy of inevitably imperfect parents. Here is a recipe for blowing temporary power imbalances out of proportion, and for failing to see the opportunities for *compassion* towards oneself and others which these moments can hold.



The *Resilience/Compassion Game for Youth* which we call the **Young Canadian Leadership Challenge** provides a laboratory for youth to examine these frequent moments in their lives as they arise in the heat of the *Game*, and to resolve them in favour of staying in the present moment (i.e. being our spontaneous, flexible and resilient self). This gives rise to the skillset referred to above, and the enthusiasm to try it out in everyday life after the event. ***By doing so, violence is less likely to become a habit.***

At the same time as we set *positive* experimentation (*discovery learning*) in play for the youth exiting the *Game*, we leave a community with plenty of *resilient* adults who will own the future of the program, creating gatherings as they see fit to remind the youth of what they have discovered.

We also invite those who have caught the passion for keeping the ball rolling to train as *Community Facilitators* so that they can run their own future events largely with local people - and at a cost which is within their fundraising capacity.

## Applications

The **Young Canadian Leadership Challenge** can be used as a standalone event in response to a community's desire to make a difference with youth with regards to violence.

The **Young Canadian Leadership Challenge** can equally, and at the same time, integrate and train problematic youth to reenter community life or enter it for the first time. A police presence will allow us to increase the inclusion of even more problematic youth than we have ever included -- youth-at-risk and young offenders.

The **Young Canadian Leadership Challenge** can front-end other programs which have desultory results, creating new enthusiasm and enhancing the workability of such programs.

The **Young Canadian Leadership Challenge** can likely serve other purposes as well - for example regenerating community togetherness when disaster has struck.

Let us know how you want to use it.

**Brian C. Bailey M.D.**

**819-827-0561 brian@yclc.ca 128 River Rd. Cantley Québec J8V 3A1**