PEARSON

Right Here, Right Now: Exploring Life-Space Interventions for Children and Youth

EDITION NO. 01

KIARAS GHARABAGHI CAROL STUART

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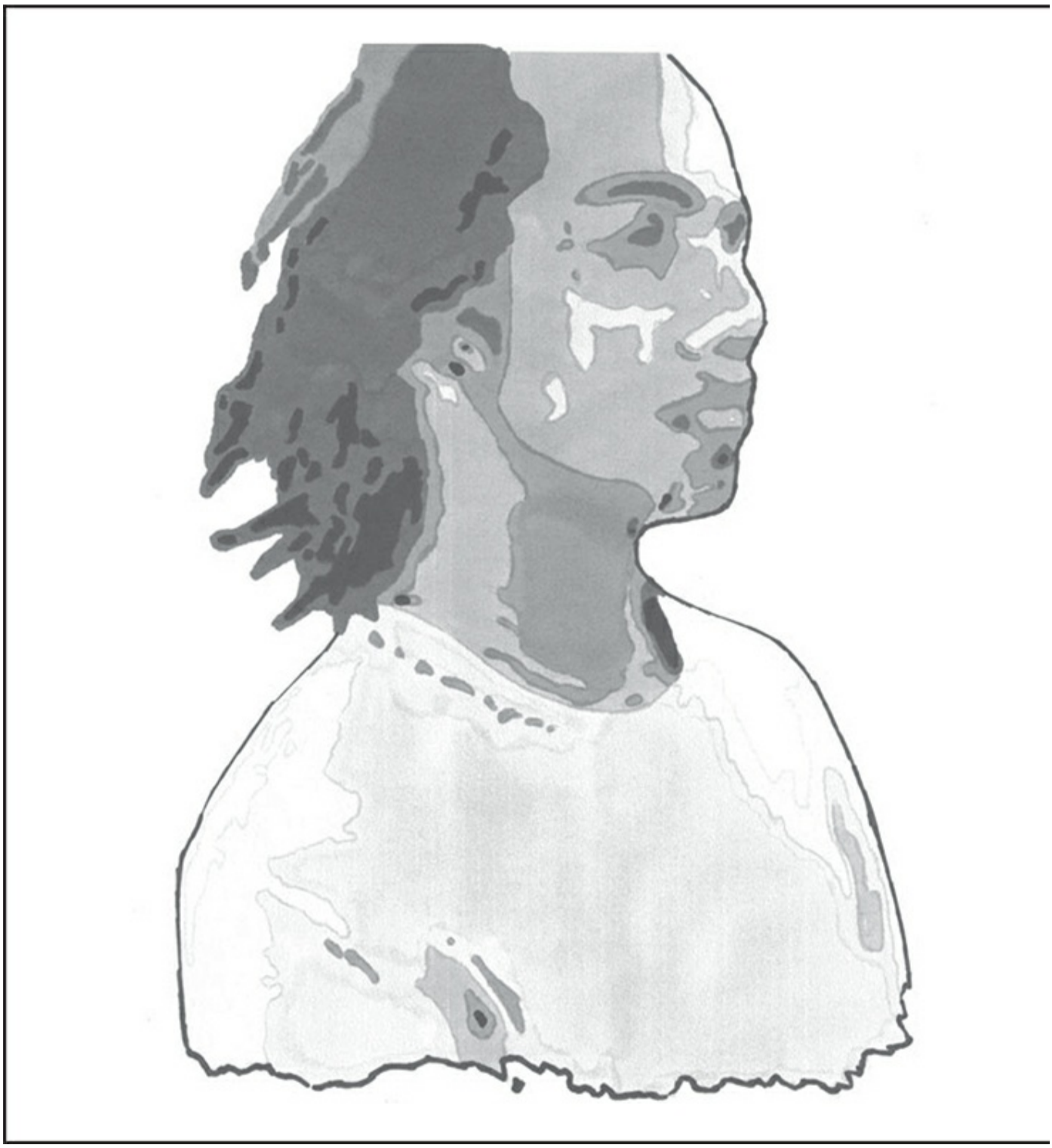
Chapter 1 What is Life-Space?



Andre

Source: Kyle Stewart

Child and youth care practitioners have long recognized that **intervention** in the life-space is a foundational method of working wit children, youth and families. Practitioners from many disciplines are increasingly recognizing that the success of therapeutic interventions is enhanced when intervention is undertaken in environments that are mos similar to the daily lives of "clients." In this book, we will explore the fundamentals of life-space intervention in today's global context.

In this chapter, we will articulate what we mean by life-space theoretical and experientially. We will start by exploring the idea of living space, in contrast to life-space, and we will consider how physical location, social context, and social conventions create expectations about the nature of living spaces and the relationships that we have in them. We will then introduce readers to new ways of thinking about the concept of life-spac suggest that people live in a single life-space, and argue that interventio about how children, youth and families manage and engage with their construction of that life-space.

Where do You Live?

This is a simple question that most people have asked and answered ma times. Whether we are asking the question or responding to it, there is likely some consensus that the question is related to a place, a physical location. Typical responses might include broad indicators of place, such "in Canada" or "in the United States." Or they might be more specific indicators of place, such as a particular neighbourhood or community in the city, "Campbell's Corners" in the country, a street address, or a description of a building. As simple as the question appears, it nevertheless takes on different meanings based on social context and the intention of the person asking. A school principal might ask a student th question as a way of determining not a physical location, but rather the type of home environment. The conventional response might include "I live at home," or perhaps "I live in a group home" or "at the shelter." The same question could probe more deeply to ascertain the social context o someone's living environment. Responses might include "I live with my mom and dad," "I live with foster parents," or "I live on my own."

Living Space

The question “Where do you live?” provides the foundation for the conce of “living spaces.” While the spaces themselves might be articulated as social contexts rather than physical places (as in “I live with my parents” living spaces are physically premised inasmuch as they describe the physical proximity of the person to his or her primary indicators of everyday living. All of the examples of possible responses above have in common the description of place. In some cases the description is limite to the location of a specific place, while in other cases it includes a description of the place itself (house, apartment building, gated community), who else lives there (parents, siblings, peers) or what the social context is (group home, shelter, public housing unit).

Living spaces are subject to social conventions. These conventions appe reasonable and meaningful, but they can sometimes mislead us about th life experiences of another person, and they are often culturally determin and associated with family relationships. One such social convention is that when we inquire about where someone lives, we typically expect th response to reflect something quantifiable – you live where you spend most of your time. This is why we sometimes lightheartedly refer to someone who works many hours as living in his or her office or living at work. You “own” where you live, having paid a price for that ownership. Young people may be characterized as living on the street when they do live at home and yet don’t pay rent anywhere else. We also typically exp the response to have a residential component – you live where you sleep most of the time, and yet youth who sleep in a shelter are considered homeless.

Story: The Places Where Life Unfolds

Andre lives with his dad and his older brother. At 15 he is busy with karate, attending school, and hanging out with his friends. He lives in a house that was built in the late 1940s, after the war. His father's work takes him away for several days at a time. Andre doesn't know his mother or where she lives; it's just always been that way. The house is a small, drafty, square box still decorated in the orange and brown colour scheme of the 1970 renovation, completed just before Andre's grandfather bought the house. His high school is across town, because Acadian New Brunswick only has one high school. He doesn't have much use for academic subjects and is repeating Grade 10 English and taking the Applied Math. Andre has ridden the school bus for years, but recently his friend, who's a year older, got his final driver's licence, so now Andre catches a ride nearly every day. He dreams about getting his own licence and his own car. Karate gives Andre a physical outlet, and he hangs out with a collection of young people around his age. So far he's dated one of the girls and he really hopes to date another. He

admires the sensei, who runs his own business, and Andre hopes to do something similar one day. He has a really good memory for the *kata* that they practise, and he fights well. He's doing well in competition.

The physical spaces where Andre lives his life, including school, the dojo, his friend's car, and his father's house, are quite different from the space where life unfolds for him. Subtle creases and not so subtle tears in the carefully constructed landscape of his day-to-day interactions are revealed when Andre goes to the youth centre on Friday nights. He's been going since he was 12. At first it was practical – his father needed some down-time or had a date, and he would drop Andre and his brother off at "the Youth." Andre first met the sensei during a demonstration at the centre, and was so fascinated that he decided to join. Denis, the youth worker, always checks in with him. "How are you?" A few minutes after the ordinary answer, "I'm fine," is done, Denis asks again. Andre has discovered over the years that he's not "fine." Maybe someone at school has pissed him off, or he's confused about careers, or he misses his mom and is angry at her for vanishing. It's not every Friday that life unfolds for him in this way, but Denis has a good understanding of the spaces and places in Andre's life. Without needing to offer a lot of detail, Andre can explore those spaces and feel accepted, cared about, and engaged in understanding them a little differently.

We also draw on additional social conventions, such as associating living spaces with family or other important social relationships, so that where you "live" is your "home," though not necessarily where you spend the most time. We might encounter someone who travels a great deal and spends the majority of nights in hotels. We would expect an articulation the living space to be based on where that person's family lives, or perha where his or her furniture is placed. A young prostitute may also spend t majority of nights sleeping in hotels and the majority of days on the road but we would not apply

the same social conventions to our expectations of his or her "living space." We can easily recognize the limitations of the concept of living space when it is mediated by social conventions and cultural assumption Expanding the concept to a more global perspective, refugees, war orphans, child soldiers, and those who have nomadic lifestyles – cultura or by choice – do not fit these conventions and assumptions.

Fundamentally, we associate where we live with something different fro where we work, where we play, or where we hang out. The place where we live has primacy over other spaces. While the specific context of any given individual may vary, all people are assumed to have one space tha is primary and considered to be their living space. Yet the person asking the question "Where do you live?" may have a very different set of social

conventions to the person receiving the question. The social constructior living space leads us to the concept of life-space.

Life-Space

In contrast to living spaces, the concept of **life-space** is not meant to correspond to the social conventions associated with concepts such as family or home, where we may have "ownership" of a physical place. If want to know about someone's life-space, we do not ask, "Where do you live?" Instead, we might ask, "Where do you live your life?" or "Where does your life unfold?" While *where* still prioritizes place as the primary focus for a response, by asking where life unfolds, we expand the nature possible places. Such places could include a physical location, but may b static or transient; they could be real space or virtual space; and they cou be real or imagined. Asking about the act of living life as opposed to the location of living expands the conversation from information gathering t **relational** engagement. We might expect the response to include an articulation (at whatever level of depth) of the person's experiences, day-to-day interpretation of those experiences, and relationships to a multitu of places, spaces, and social identities. In short, we begin to understand their social and psychological construction of life. When we ask where li unfolds, we begin the process of being present with another person whe they are, right here, right now.

The Changing Landscape of Life-Space: Rethinking Structure and Agency

Life-space intervention, as a fundamental concept in child and youth car practice, was founded on the creation and manipulation of a therapeutic milieu. This milieu included planned physical environments, routine dai activities, and practitioners who were physically present in the lives of young people and supported therapeutic change in their living spaces. T approach to life-space intervention focuses on the **structures** – includi physical structures, activities, and routines – that are built into residentia and institutional living spaces.

The initial thinking about life-space intervention focused on constructing structure within the child's life by using routines, activities, and stable relationships with child and youth care practitioners. Living spaces were designed to meet the developmental needs of the children, and caretake developed goals for children and youth, primarily in residential settings. Redl and Wineman (1951, 1952) suggested that the goal of life-space intervention was re-education for life in a way that allowed young peopl to transfer new basic life-skills

to other living spaces (family, school, community). Developmental phas pathology, and familial context were all accounted for in the constructio of goals by the caregivers. In essence, the physical aspects of a single liv space (the residence) and the relationships that caretakers developed wi young people in that living space were considered to be the tools of life- space intervention. They created the structure for therapeutic change an the learning of new behaviours and ways of social interaction. There wa little thought given to the young people's capacity for autonomous thou and action, or **agency**, and while adaptations in response to the uniqu needs of particular young people were encouraged theoretically, such adaptation often didn't occur in practice (Lawson, 1998). In well- functioning residential programs, staff were found to be responsive and respectful, and to share power and decision-making (Anglin, 2002). However, even in current research and theory, the thinking continues to equate the 24/7 environment of a residential setting with the "life-space.

From the perspective of the practitioner, the concept of "being present" within this conceptualization of life-space was literal. Being present mea being physically in the residential unit or the institution, and being available to impose the program structure and routines on the children a youth living there. The life-space interventions of the practitioner were primarily created through structure. Therefore, the practitioner was the means by which the therapeutic content of the program was transferred from the program structure to the young person. Within this constructio of being present, neither the practitioner nor the young person was explicitly imbued with agency. That is, neither had the capacity to take

action, either physically or emotionally, in order to affect either each oth or the structure of therapeutic intervention itself. To the extent that youn people did take action, their actions were seen as symptomatic of the identified problem, and the practitioner's responsibility was to "re-educa the young person and negate any impact of those actions. Protecting the purity of the therapeutic intervention – "being consistent" and therefore prioritizing structure over agency – was one of the core components of "being present."

A significant shift in thinking about life-space intervention occurred with the recognition that young people often learn best "in the moment," and the concept of *moment* included not only time (its literal meaning) but al space. Increasingly, it was recognized that the transfer of learning from a institutional context to the living spaces of young people who left the institution was limited and difficult to sustain. By the 1990s, a renewed effort to find more relationship-based approaches to therapeutic intervention was emerging (Fewster, 1990a; Fox, 1985; Garfat, 1998; Krueger, 1991; VanderVen, 1995). As relationships were affirmed as the core of therapeutic approaches to child and youth care practice, a renewe focus on the development of practitioners themselves ensued, manifeste by an increasing interest in the concept of Self (Fewster, 1990b).

With the renewed focus on the practitioner, the primacy of structure ove agency was shaken up. The field recognized that practitioners did in fact exercise agency in their approach to being present, as long as they accepted the idea of being present in the moment. Such presence was n

longer articulated as a mere tool for the imposition of structure. Instead, became the core element of relationship-based work. Through the presence of the practitioner, the engagement with the young person is affected by the individual practitioner. Practitioner values, ethics and biases are tools of agency and components of therapeutic intervention. T

intervention requires a major shift in the responsibilities of the practitioner, away from imposing structure and routines and toward moderating structure and routine so that they correspond to the unique circumstances of that young person's life.

As the field recognized the importance of practitioners' agency with resp to being present in the life of a child or youth, new opportunities for engaging young people have evolved that include a more complex spati understanding of life-space intervention. Rather than limiting the notion life-space to the institution or residential care facility, service providers have deployed child and youth care practitioners in a range of spaces where young people live their lives, including the community, the family home and the school. Service providers recognized that opportunities fo learning "in the moment" occur in many different spaces and are often th result of a perceived crisis in the lives of young people as they struggle t cope with an event that seems beyond their control. When these struggl created a conflict with the caregiver or with a peer, that struggle could be used as a learning opportunity. If practitioners were focused on the structure of the life-space and/or unaware of their own agency in the

interaction, then the conflict could be perpetuated and therapeutic effect would be minimal. Life-space crisis intervention and life-space as therapeutic milieu are two examples of approaches that reflect this expanded understanding of the life-space.

Life-space crisis intervention [LSCI] (Wood & Long, 1991; Long, Wood, & Fecser, 2001) introduced an intervention process that included exploring the young person's construction or understanding of the crisis/conflict, introducing new ways of understanding that conflict, and therefore introducing new ways of behaving in the future. LSCI techniques required practitioners to understand their role or agency in th discussion, which includes control of the young person's escalating and out-of-control behaviour, awareness of their own thoughts, feelings, and actions in the moment, and their values, beliefs and ethics. The conceptualization of life-space in LSCI focuses on the relational aspects o the life-space and the learning opportunities available in the typical livin spaces where young people in conflict travel, such as schools, family, courts, and community centres.

Life-space as a therapeutic milieu is conceptualized by Burns (2006) as having a number of structural elements that the practitioner can manipulate, thereby exerting agency. According to Burns, life-space and life-space intervention include elements of the physical environment, the emotional environment of the participants, the social context within that setting (still a singular life-space defined by where the practitioner works and elements of the other social and cultural contexts in which the young

person participates. Burns also recognizes the ideologies of systemic and organizational structures, and the potential they have to be manipulated order to influence the nature of the young person's learning and therapeutic change.

While life-space intervention has been developed and articulated in increasingly sophisticated ways, it has continued to focus on defining life space to include the structure of a single living space and the agency of t practitioner as central components. We propose that the concept of the li space needs to be re-examined to include the constructions of the young people we work with and their understanding of a unified space in which they exist. The addition of the practitioner's agency to the articulation of life-space interventions and the concept of being present have added considerably to the value of therapeutic interventions. The next logical st is to incorporate the agency of the young

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people with the agency of the practitioners themselves. New technologie and virtual spaces mean that young people understand their life-space differently, construct it differently, and think about it in a more unified manner. Practitioners need to understand young people's role in constructing their life-space as well as the relational aspects of that space not just the practitioner/youth relationship, but other relationships as we As children develop into adolescents and young adults, their ability to understand the abstract and virtual spaces around them increases. This implies that the construction of life-space has a developmental compone

and that how a young person understands life-space changes with the passage of time.

In many respects, our rationale for re-examining the concept of life-spac intervention right here, right now is based on developments in the past and developments we anticipate for the future. As institutional residentia care declines and child and youth care practitioners are more often found in non-institutional and community-based locations, structure is no long the primary focus over agency. Being present simply through physical presence in a specific place has limited applicability when practitioners a engaged with young people in multiple spaces that are mediated throug wide range of social and psychological constructions of identity and relat cultures, ethnicities, gender, sexual orientations, and abilities. In additio we do not think that we have to look too far into the future to recognize that new technologies have altered our presence in the lives of young people. Social networking, texting and other virtual ways of engaging in relationships are clearly present now, and are likely to develop further in significant and potentially dominant spaces of social interaction and relational engagement. What separates such spaces from previous adjustments in our engagements with young people is the degree of agency that the young people exercise in these spaces. In addition to having virtually unlimited access to a network of external relationships (that is, external to the practitioner/youth relationship), young people ar shaping the structure of these relationships based on how they have constructed their identity and sometimes multiple identities. The agency young people in their life-spaces requires the practitioner to re-evaluate t

core elements of a child and youth care approach to life-space interventio
Thus, we explore in this chapter a new model of life-space that leads to
new ways of applying life-space intervention.

Discreet Places and Connected Spaces

If we begin with the question “Where do you live your life?” it surely wil not take long to identify a multitude of places where we experience our day-to-day lives. These spaces and places may be thought of by the you person and/or the practitioner as discreet, unified, or a blend of both. Fo young people, there are some places that simply reflect the experience o childhood and adolescence. Thus, life unfolds at home, at school, with peers in the community and possibly in other places such as the sports club, in the homes of extended family members, and in the homes of individuals with whom they have other significant relationships. When v consider these places, we recognize that the social dynamics associated with each place are quite different. The rules, routines, expectations and activities at school are not the same as those for interacting with peers in the community. In other words, there are differences in the structure of these places, giving each place the appearance that it is discreet and separate from the others.

This discreetness was, for many years, taken for granted in programs an services for young people. Not surprisingly, therefore, child and youth c

practitioners worked almost exclusively in the living space where proble had been identified (usually by parents, but sometimes by other professionals such as teachers or police officers). While there was recognition at the time that the isolation of residential care often did not produce learning or developmental growth that easily transferred to the other locations of young people, the deployment of child and youth care practitioners to the home environment, or even into schools, did not significantly influence the nature of intervention within a life-space perspective. This lack of influence may have been mitigated by the practitioner's ability to use his or her agency in the engagement with the young person, but ultimately the practitioner was still deployed in select and singular life-spaces, restricted by physical location.

There were some exceptions to this limited view of life-space interventio such as the introduction of Multiple Systemic Therapy (MST). MST, originally developed in South Carolina (Henggeler, 1993), is premised o the idea that young people experience their lives in a multitude of places and that any effective life-space intervention must therefore target all of these places rather than selecting only a few. Even within MST, howeve these places were not explicitly articulated as being connected in any wa The focus was on impacting all of the places where young people might influenced to *prevent* them from entering that dreaded of all spaces – the residential youth custody institution – where life-space was so strictly associated with a single physical living space.

It becomes apparent that the concept of life-space intervention takes on a entirely different meaning if we re-examine the discreetness of the multitude of places where young people spend time. One way of challenging the discreet nature of "place" is to consider the connections between places, and to focus on how unified such connections are, both from the perspective of how young people understand them and the perspective of the practitioner.

The idea of life-space as a unified concept is perhaps our most radical departure from previous thinking about life-space. In today's global worl the notion that there are multiple separated life-spaces has vanished, as evidenced by the way in which people, including young people, position themselves in this new world. They log into social networking sites and interact with friends across the country and around the world, sharing information and learning about and meeting people who are friends of their friends. They join groups with common interests and develop relationships with people they have never met, sharing ideas, values and beliefs. People telecommute to work, thereby interacting through email, video conferencing and teleconferencing in order to develop projects with others who are located at great distances. Even sophisticated health and mental health services are delivered at a distance through telehealth and telepsychiatry programs available throughout much of North America. T time and space for "work" has shifted to accommodate different time zones. Internet delivery of educational courses creates asynchronous interaction and the ability to learn at the time that best suits the learner. People meet and develop relationships online. Business and even vacati

travel may be a time for talking with friends or family, reading, or turnin on the computer or smart-phone in order to work or socialize. In other words, travel is no longer about getting away – it now includes relationa interaction with people in other locations. More and more, we carry our life-space with us in imagination, in emotional connection, and in relationship to others,

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as well as in activities and relationships with people and things that blen into a singular understanding of the space in which we live our life.

We recognize that a typology of life-spaces would fail to capture the nuances of connectivity and continuity of different places. We argue, therefore, that it is possible to identify several dimensions of a singular notion of life-space without negating the possibility that a person experiences different places as a fully integrated and unified space. Ther are four dimensions of life-space in particular that we will highlight:

- the physical dimension
- the mental dimension
- the relational dimension
- the virtual dimension

We will provide a brief description of each of these dimensions, and ther use some of the core concepts of child and youth care practice (caring, engagement, relationship, boundaries) to develop these dimensions and their implications for life-space interventions further. In addition, we

believe that the concept of agency in the life-space – specifically the importance of the young person's agency – implies that the core activity therapeutic change is learning. Therefore, a brief discussion of learning a function of the life-space and therapeutic change follows our discussion the four dimensions of the life-space.

Physical Dimension

The physical dimension of life-space is best understood by considering t five senses: Sight, hearing, taste, touch and smell. If life-space is a singu concept for a young person, there is no difference between the meta-environment (Burns, 2006) or the mesosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) a the therapeutic environment where the child and youth care practitioner The relational continuity between different locations negates the distance between such locations, thus creating one unified life-space. A young person may, for example, have different meanings for identifiable spaces within his or her home, such as the kitchen versus the bedroom, but all these spaces are still manifestations of a unified place called "home." Similarly, friendships that extend from the schoolyard to the community playground negate the distance between these locations even if the physical contexts of these locations are discreet. Within the physical dimension of the life-space, then, movement and transition are undoubtedly present, but time blends the physical locations into one environment. Therefore, the changing sensations and experiences of the

different physical locations become important aspects of describing life-space.

The physical aspects of life-space involve what we see, hear, taste, touch and smell, and how those sensations change and influence the unfolding of our lives. For example,

- the impinging sights and busy noise of a crowded street or the relati silence of a lake in the wilderness
- the smell of a mother's perfume or the taste of a favourite food after smelling it cooking for the last three hours
- the soft touch of a kiss good night or the pain of an alcohol-impaired slap as it connects with a young person's head

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The most dominant aspects of life-space for many people are likely the visual and auditory components of the physical dimension of life-space. With the exception of those with visual or auditory impairments, the evidence for the importance of these aspects is reflected in how people a places are captured on film or video. The sensory inputs of the physical life-space affect who we are and how we cope with the problems presen to us.

Story: Physicality and Life-Space

Andre thinks of the whole town as his playground. When he heads to Main Street, he encounters his uncle's hardware store right next to the dojo where he works out and the youth centre where he hangs out. He's recently taken up parkour for fun and to enhance his aerobic fitness for karate. The challenge of moving efficiently from home to school to the dojo and then to the youth centre has given him an even stronger sense of wholeness in the various places that he feels a part of.

Andre is going to the youth centre tonight and has decided to try a new route. He pulls on his running shoes, a special pair that he was able to afford after the summer working as a deck-hand on a fishing boat. The rest of his summer money went to his dad. He enjoys the weightless feel of the light mesh runners with the thin soles. They let him feel the ground and understand intuitively where his body needs to go when he lands lightly on the balls of his feet after a *lache* (swing) or a *passe muraille* (wall hop).

He heads out the door and turns south directly toward the youth centre, whereas normally he would head east before

cutting south. His current route requires that he navigate the railroad tracks and the top of a water control dam, dropping down about 3 metres into an abandoned lot before sprinting to hop a 1.5-metre fence that protects the area from Main Street. He sprints along the railroad tracks, running on the rails to improve his balance. He notices the fall colours along the tracks – the sumacs are brilliant crimson, and the poplars have turned yellow. Mixed in is the occasional oak and maple along with the scrub evergreens.

He is distracted by a memory of his mother and starts to recite the colours in French; somehow they seem more brilliant when he uses the French words. A slight vibration in the rail draws his attention back to the task at hand, and he leaps off the tracks onto the edge of the dam. The concrete is cold and the water is loud but smells refreshing. He slips a little as he pushes forward off the end of the dam, but he lands safely, bouncing up to sprint across the lot and swing over the fence just behind the coffee shop on Main Street. He can smell the roast beans from the open back door, and he waves at his uncle, who is putting out the garbage next door at the hardware store. Then he sprints up the narrow alley between the two buildings to the front, where he can hear the mix of his mother's Acadian French and the Scottish/English dialect of the New Brunswick seniors who are having afternoon coffee in the fall sunshine.

Life-space intervention is about helping children, youth and families manage the challenges that they experience in their life-space. We can intervene to change the structure of the life-space and the way it looks or sounds. We can teach young people how to change the structure of the space, what to look and listen for, and how to create a quiet space in the environment around them and in their own mind. Taste, touch and smell are also essential to the physical aspects of space. Touch, as an activity, is essential to children's health and development. Its essential nature is not just about the communication of love and caring (part of the mental aspect of life-space) – it also promotes healthy brain development and the development of various social capacities, including healthy attachment (Berscheid, 1999). Changing sensations of smell can create physical reactions in the body and affect the way people live in their life-space. Consider the young person with a perfume allergy, for example. Simply taking a shortcut through the wrong aisle in a department store may cau him or her to experience severe medical stress. Similarly, the physical characteristics of a neighbourhood (a significant physical location within the life-space of a child or youth) can change simply because of the addition of families from different cultures and with different culinary preferences. Taste changes over time. Many young children have particularly sensitive taste buds and develop a wider range of tastes as th grow older. Favourite foods may change, or they may remain strongly associated with particular social contexts, such as family dinners or the snacks consumed in the first bursts of freedom as a teenager.

The physical aspects of life-space, when it is considered as a unified spa are under the control of both the practitioner and the young person. Agency can be exerted through physical intervention or physical activity Leaving one location to go to another physical location in the life-space a continue living life is an act of agency. Agency can also be exerted mentally, through the agency of your own interpretation or construction the physical aspects of space. The way young people construct their life-space is often directed by the mental dimension of life-space.

Mental Dimension

We construct the mental dimension of life-space in the thoughts and feelings that are generated in our heads and hearts. These thoughts and feelings are built over time as we develop our understanding of the physical dimension of life-space and its influence on our lives. Helping children manage the changes in the physical and relational dimensions o their life-space occurs in the mental dimension of life-space. Therapeutic strategies such as re-storying through narrative therapy, cognitive behavioural therapy, mindfulness and other approaches are actively applied within the life-space to help young people construct different perceptions of that space. Ungar (2002) suggests that "troubled" adolescents are a construction of their parents and other adults who are threatened by the exuberance of young people. In essence, most adults d not like to have their own life-space disturbed by teenagers. He reminds that only five percent of adolescents in trouble persist with those troubli

behaviours into adulthood. In turn, he believes that young people understand spaces such as jail or the community as locations of safety where they feel good about themselves. These spaces help them cope w feeling unsafe in their home (through abuse) or school (through bullying These examples illustrate the role of the mental dimension of life-space and the importance of understanding life-space as a single space rather than as multiple physical environments. Within this construction of life-space, the selective deployment of the child and youth care practitioner into one particular location no longer makes sense.

Story: Mental Constructions of Life-Space

The challenge of the new parkour route has chased out the anxieties Andre had been having about school. He's now looking forward to seeing his friends at the youth centre and figuring out what the plans are for the weekend. He's a little flushed when he enters the youth centre, and Denis gives him a high-five and a handshake, commenting, "You look like a red maple leaf. Who's chasing you?" Andre laughs. "Just tried a new route to get here, the railway and the old dam. I saw a few nice maples." Denis raises his eyebrows. "Wrong time of day to

be messing with the train tracks; don't you remember the VIA that comes through around now from Montreal?" Andre shrugs. "I was more worried about the dam and how slippery it was," he retorts. "Okay, I'm glad you're thinking about some of the hazards. I wouldn't want to have you disappear on us," says Denis. Andre snorts and walks away. Denis makes a mental note to follow up, thinking that Andre seems a little distracted.

Andre has grown up in the small town and knows only the unique mix of Acadian culture. He brings a fierce Acadian passion to his activities. He was attracted to parkour because of its French roots, and he believes that his training in martial arts helps him to control his temper. Before karate he had a tendency to strike first and talk later, but his training has helped him control himself, and he enjoys the art and precision involved in the *kata*.

Walking to the back of the youth centre, Andre is annoyed with himself for not being able to remember all the colours in French. He can't quite capture the right word for the colour of the sumac trees in English, and he remembers that the word his mother taught him really seemed to describe them. He feels more and more like he is losing her completely. His connection to his father, his uncle and the community, including the dojo and the youth centre, are all strong, but absent his mother or any connection to her. No one talks about her and she has no family in the community, as far as he knows, and no former

> friends. He wonders again how she could just disappear without saying goodbye or making any contact since then.

The actual effects of the physical dimension of the life-space are largely neutral. It is the dynamic nature of life-space and agency that allows you people to make meaning of their interactions with the physical environment. A history of personal expectations is created and carried in current and future interactions in the life-space. In other words, while young people actively engage with the specific physical environments th are in – playing soccer, rearranging furniture, or smelling the cooking po on the stove – they also develop a set of expectations and a history of having fun, feeling comforted by a favourite chair, or missing Grandma and her best curry combination. Sometimes these expectations create a sense of safety in the life-space, while other times they create a sense of anxiety or surprise when the life-space does not match their expectations

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To be aware of these expectations, young people require a certain skill and mindfulness. Based on historical expectations, they form judgments and opinions about the present life-space quickly. Young people react emotionally to the environment around them. In familiar environments, such as home or school, these reactions can intensify and escalate in response to the emotions of others. Reactions may be more muted in oth environments, but they are still present and can be carried into other

locations throughout the life-space. Young people can arrive at school sti carrying the emotional vestiges of a bad dream or a night in a homeless shelter, but practitioners in school expect that they will leave these emotional reactions aside and pay attention to the activities of school.

Values and beliefs are constructed within the social context of the life-space and applied to the physical environments that make up the life-space. Values are those things that we think are important – those ideas, items, and feelings that we value or prioritize over other things. Young people develop values and beliefs from the surrounding life-space and from the active application of their own thinking (agency) about the even that occur there. They are agents in the development of their own values and beliefs. Laws represent the institutionalization of values that are thought to be important to society. Policies in a workplace, school or community centre are the values of that organization, and organizational values are part of the structure that is created to surround young people. Conflicting values in the life-space create tension and prompt attempts t exert agency over the structure of the program. Conflicting beliefs about how people should behave and the way environments should be structured also need to be sorted out in the life-space. Statements such a "Home should be safe," "Home requires a permanent address, parents, and a sense of belonging," and "Home is where the heart is" are embedd in the social constructions of culture, and they influence the mental dimension of the life-space of young people.

The ideologies of cultures and institutions extend the idea of life-space fa beyond just the environments where practitioners are located. This extension suggests that life-space should be focused on the person, not t structures of the environment. People interpret the environment through their thoughts and feelings, as well as the values and beliefs that they ho and carry into other environments. These mental dimensions of life-spac are modified through interactions with the physical environment and the people who are present in these environments. The relational aspects of life-space are central to the interaction between physical and mental dimensions of life-space.

Relational Dimension

Relationships surround us and feed the emotional substance of our life-space. They can support a young person in crisis, or diminish a young person's capacity to deal with challenges in other dimensions of the life-space. Relationships change over time, and they change us and the spac that we exist in. Garfat (2008, p. 20) suggests that relational practice focuses "on the relationship, while recognizing and respecting the characteristics of the individuals involved in that relationship," and that relational work "attends to the relationships itself." Within the relational dimension of life-space, the young person or practitioner consciously attends to relationships, to the nature of those relationships, and to nurturing relationships as part of the life-space he or she travels in.

One cannot *not* have a relationship after having met someone (and possibly even before having met them), and therefore the relational dimension of life-space is about what one does with and within the relationship. Relational aspects of life-space include

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the shared activities that we undertake and the meaning that we make o those. Attending to relationships means caring about other people and thinking about how caring is expressed. It means actively engaging to understand the other person's thoughts, feelings, intents and desires. Th relational aspects of life-space are the core of practitioner interventions (explored in Chapters 3 to 6). Before we consider the activities of life space intervention, however, we will briefly explore the impact that relationships have on how young people construct their life-space.

When a young child enters the schoolyard on the first day of school, the physical environment may be perceived as threatening and intimidating. The school is not yet a place of comfort, and there has been no opportun to develop a sense of belonging or an expectation that this is a safe place This is why a parent often accompanies a child to school on that challenging first day. The presence of the parent in that moment does nc physically alter the space in any substantive way, but it significantly alte the way the child constructs the space. It is the relational safety afforded the presence of the parent that mitigates the threat and intimidation of th new place. In fact, being with the parent (the relational context) mitigate virtually all of the emotions and sensations affecting the child in that moment. In addition to relational safety, the child experiences a sense of

relational comfort, relational belonging, relational attachment and relational hope within the physical place of the school. This transference emotional comfort is the result of the impact of relationship on physical place.

As time passes and the child develops relationships with peers and teachers (and child and youth care practitioners), this relational comfort transferred from the parent to these new relationships. In this way there continuity within the life-space, whereby the relational presence of other serves as a critical connection between locations and different social contexts. Therefore, home and school can be constructed by the child as components of the same life-space. Young people who struggle significantly in the school environment may be unable to construct the necessary continuity between different locations within their unified life-space. For these young people, the separation of place between home ar school is missing a critical relational link. Aboriginal children whose parents were educated and raised in the residential school system strugg through school and often fail or drop out, while their parents are significantly absent in the living space of the school. The expectations of pain and failure associated with schooling means that Aboriginal parents may be absent from the school space both physically and emotionally. Without the capacity to recognize and gain comfort from the relational dimension of the life-space, young people face severe conflict between th physical dimensions of the location and the mental dimension of how th construct the living spaces of the school.

In some social contexts, the relational dimensions of life-space take on even greater significance. If we consider the physical context of a homele youth, for example, we can readily recognize that there are few physical limits – the space is not defined by physical features such as walls, fence or even buildings. The movement of a homeless youth through his or he life-space is defined primarily by his or her relationships with peers (and perhaps family or other significant others), and the physical characteristi are at best secondary to the evolution and day-to-day nature of relationships. A homeless youth may say, "I live on the streets," without indicating any specific street or address. This lack of specificity is indicat of the youth's mental construction of life-space, in which the streets are n a location but a concept that provides a space for relational engagements

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In much the same way that the physical and mental dimensions of life-space change and evolve, so do the relational characteristics. Therefore, again we must consider the role of agency in life-space interventions. Fo the practitioner, any engagement with a young person or family affects t relational characteristics of that person's life-space. Thus, it also changes the structural relationships between the physical, mental and relational dimensions of life-space. Similarly, the young person or family can act to reshape or reconstruct their life-space based on how they make meaning any given relationship. Homelessness, for example, may be a challengin structure in which life unfolds, but the relational characteristics of a "homeless life-space" can present opportunities for caring and engageme

even when an identifiable place to meet regularly is absent. In this way, we are approaching another characteristic of life-space that, like relationa dimensions of life-space, is place-less. We will explore this next.

Story: Musings on Relational Life-Space

Andre felt very connected and at home in his community. Besides his aunts and uncles, who had watched out for him and looked after him when his dad was off fishing in the first few years after his mom left, there were two teachers from elementary school who made sure to look him up regularly. They both volunteered in the homework program at the youth centre and they sometimes offered to tutor him in math or English on their own time, since he struggled a bit with the material. He was trying really hard this year not to use the tutoring. He wanted to make the grades himself. It seemed like cheating otherwise.

Denis kept saying to him, “Smart people know when to ask for help. Stupid people don’t ask. Don’t be stupid.”

But that Scottish stubbornness and independence that he got from his dad was getting in the way.

Andre had been friends with the same group since kindergarten. Some of them were very poor, and he remembered the fun times they'd had picking bottles in the ditches along the Trans-Canada highway so that his friends could help out their families in between the welfare cheques in the winter. He was really glad that his dad was able to work his way off the boats and into the local packing plant. At first it meant his dad had to work midnights. Now, since his dad was in management, he was away sometimes at the head office, but at least there was year-round income. Andre was tight with his friends, but these days some of them seemed really depressed. They were getting into some drug dealing to survive the depression and make a little money.

Andre didn't want to abandon them, but he didn't much like the pressure they sometimes put on him to participate. Sensei had made it really clear that drugs weren't an option if you were training. Besides, a couple of the local RCMP guys trained at the dojo too, and Andre knew full well that they would know if he was using. They knew everything, even if they let on that they didn't.

Denis interrupted Andre's reflections about the people in his life as he poked his head into the homework room at the Youth. "How's it going?" he asked. "What's the struggle today?"

Andre shook his head. “I have to write this essay for English about something that I’m passionate about. She wants us to use lots of adverbs and adjectives. Then we have to go through and label them. It’s stupid.”

“What’s the struggle?” Denis repeated.

“How am I supposed to use them if I don’t know what they are?” asked Andre.

“Yup, that could be an issue.”

“I mean, I sort of know what they are, but I don’t think I’ll get it right. I guess I could just write it, since the computers are open here, and then get Ms. Eddy to help me when she gets here.”

“You know what I always say,” replied Denis.

“Yah, yah. Smart people know when to ask for help, and I’m a smart guy!” said Andre. “At least some people think so. Will you read it when I’m done? I’m going to write about the free-run I just did. Fall colours, thinking about my mom. . . . Should be lots of adverbs and adjectives in that. . . .”

“I’d be honoured to have a look,” said Denis as he withdrew. He was pleased with Andre’s initiative and that he’d get the chance to follow up on Andre’s pensive look from earlier. Then he wondered if *pensive* was an adverb or an adjective.

Virtual Dimension

It is tempting to think of virtual spaces as spaces that lack concreteness, that are not real, and that therefore do not really exist. By doing so, we immediately negate the very concept of life-space and replace it with livi space. Virtual places are very real, so long as we accept that young peop have agency and therefore experience their lives in the context of their social and psychological construction of spaces rather than some objectiv way of defining spaces. As we have just discussed, our "real" life-space i constructed by the complex entanglement of physical, mental, relational and virtual dimensions of life-space. Virtual life-space might include tho environments in which we interact and relate to others, but where all the senses are not fully utilized. The virtual space of a social networking site the Internet is an example. People interact in such a site primarily throug visual and auditory (e.g., sound bites in videos) channels, but many of t visual and auditory components of communication (the nonverbal cues facial expressions and voice tone) are missing. In this example, the virtu dimension life-space interacts with characteristics from the relational and mental dimensions of life-space but misses many of the physical characteristics that are not captured through the use of technology. Did virtual environments exist before the technological revolution of the late twentieth century? We believe that virtual spaces have always existed, a that the technology of today enhances the impact of such spaces in that i allows us to be engaged and to relationally connect with others as we construct these virtual spaces. But virtual environments existed even

before modern technology, including the virtual environment of madnes
the virtual environment of the imagination, and the virtual environment
the spiritual world. All of these have always been present in the life-spac

Story: Temporary Madness in the Virtual Life-Space

Andre opened his eyes and looked straight into the eyes of the nurse who was changing the dressing on his forehead. He noted that her third eye was a different colour than the other two, and that there was purple snot running down her chin. He tried to lift his arm and push her away, but he couldn't move. He screamed instead, but she didn't seem to hear him. "Maybe she's deaf," he thought. Then Sahim looked away from the dressing she was trying to remove and realized that Andre's eyes were open.

"Hi," she said. "You're awake." Then, as his eyes got really wide and filled with terror, she pulled back and said, "You had an accident on the dam. You broke your arm, got a big cut on your head, really ripped up your hamstrings, and broke a few ribs."

Andre struggled to understand what she was saying as he watched the flames shooting out of her mouth and the purple goo on her chin turn into a butterfly and fly off. Finally, he screamed, “Get the fire extinguisher – you're going to burn up!”

Sahim sighed and said, “Okay. Close your eyes and I’ll take care of it.”

She headed off to call the youth worker attached to the Psych unit and let her know that Andre needed some attention. She then called the psychiatrist about the dosage for his pain medication.

Monique appeared by Andre’s bed in the ICU within a few minutes of the call. She wasn’t freaked out by drug-induced psychosis, but she knew that Andre would be. The sooner she helped him understand and explore this new virtual world, the sooner she could connect the virtual and the real back together for him. Then they could figure out together how to manage his injuries and the short-term effects of the medication, and assess whether there were long-term effects.

“Hi Andre,” she said. “I’m Monique. I’m the youth worker here in the hospital. Sahim said you seemed frightened and she was concerned about you.”

Andre screwed his eyes shut even tighter. The voice sounded so re-assuring.

"Hi Mom," he said.

"No, I'm Monique, your mom's not here right now. You can leave your eyes closed but tell me about what frightened you with the nurse."

Monique wanted to find out what he was seeing or hearing, and who and what was present in his life. Then she could start to help him make sense out of the accident and the hospital, and get him back to "normal" life as soon as possible. She hadn't read his chart yet – no time – so she had no idea what had happened to him. But he looked pretty banged up, kind of like he'd been hit by a train. She'd heard some rumours yesterday about a near miss on the VIA tracks. She wondered where his family was. There was no evidence of visitors.

A particularly fascinating context for the virtual environment of madness constituted through the psychiatric disorder known as Munchhausen's syndrome. This disorder is diagnosed when a person articulates experiences and sometimes even an identity based

on entirely fictitious circumstances that often include seemingly impossible situations that create symptoms of ill health. The disorder is named after the main character in a German fairytale, the Baron of Munchhausen, who claimed rather famously that he pulled himself out

quicksand by his own hair. Young persons suffering from this disorder without the diagnosis are frequently identified as pathological liars, attention seekers, or even as manipulative. Yet we know that none of the more common behavioural therapies are particularly effective with these youth. From a life-space perspective, we can argue that one reason for th lack of effectiveness is that in dismissing the life-space constructed throu the disorder we are imposing a life-space that is simply not real to the young person. Ironically, then, the virtual life-space of madness takes precedence in the experience of the young person over the real spaces more commonly recognized by society. We might recognize similar conflicts and tensions in the relationship between real and virtual spaces relation to psychiatric disorders such as schizophrenia, mania or even multiple personality disorder. Madness generates life-spaces that are virtual and yet very real for those experiencing them. We do not need to accept how young people construct their life-spaces, but by understandi and entering the life-space, we can recognize the young person's agency over that space and how that agency within the virtual dimension might usefully employed.

The imagination can also generate constructions of life-space that exist fo some but not for others. Within the context of imagination, life-space ma have physical characteristics, as we discussed earlier. These characteristi are invisible to anyone else unless there is a relational engagement with the person that includes the exploration of imagined spaces. From a life-space perspective, the imagination is similar but not identical to the men dimension of life-space. Whereas the mental dimension of life-space is

constituted through the mental and emotional interpretations of spaces t are physically in common with and accessible to others, imagined life-space is constituted through the mental and emotional interpretation of spaces that are constructed individually and in unique ways such that th are not visible to others unless they are described. However, even if the space itself is inaccessible to others, it still contains physical and relation dimensions. We imagine relationships with famous people and we imagine ourselves in homes, cars, schools, and other locations that we don't actually go to. The imagination transcends the material reality of people and places, and it allows the construction of relationships and spaces that are uniquely suited to meet the needs of the person in the moment.

Virtual life-spaces based on spiritual factors mirror those based on madness and the imagination in most respects. One crucial difference is that the structures of religious doctrine may be imposed, at least when tl spiritual factors correspond to an existing faith or religious movement. In such cases, the agency of the person may be mitigated or reduced by a perceived spiritual imperative that may have controlling or guiding features, and that therefore determine aspects of the virtual life-space an how it affects the person.

Virtual aspects of life-space are powerful and complex. Whether digital, imaginary, a product of madness or spiritual, they are often invisible to others in the young person's life-space, but may be very present for the young person. Our intervention task is to make these virtual aspects

explicit and visible. This is particularly important because while they hav great potential as a therapeutic tool, virtual constructions of life-space als have great potential as unsafe environments for young people. Historica there were safety concerns about the isolation and sometimes unpredictable decision-making of individuals whose lives unfolded primarily in the context of madness or within imagined or spiritual life-space. The introduction of new technologies has further compromised th safety of the virtual life-space given, for example, the increasing prevale of Internet-based predators. Ironically, the incidence of online child abus may be an indication that predators have a good understanding of virtua life-space.

The Virtual Look in the Mirror

Source: Laine Robertson

> Whether we are looking in the mirror or contemplating our lives, we see a unified and logically consistent whole. We don't see separated physical locations or varied expressions. In conversation with others, we share and learn about people whom we've never met, developing a relationship with those people. There is a unified life-space. However, just like the faces in th photograph, the face looking back at a young person represents many thin Different ethnic backgrounds (visible or invisible), emotions, ideas, locatic and possible hallucinations all stare back. This is the complexity and variation of the life-space – changeable and yet completely consistent.

The questions that need to be explored thoroughly include how we can b present in the virtual life-space of a young person, and how we can ensu connectivity between real and virtual spaces and places. As we discusse earlier, intervention from a life-space perspective must take into account the relative discreetness and connectivity, or the entanglement, of all the places, real and virtual, in which young people live their lives through understanding and engaging with the various dimensions of their life-space.

Learning and Life-Space

Learning is an inevitable byproduct of living, and it is therefore a central activity in the life-space. Wherever and however life unfolds, learning characterizes the experience of moving through space and time. As we proceed to explore the concept of life-space intervention in the remainde of this chapter, understanding learning in the context of life-space is essential.

Learning is typically thought of as something that occurs in school, as a result of teaching. This is a limited view of learning when considered fro a life-space perspective. The life-space is an educational "structure," and the manner in which a young person engages the dimensions of life-spa offers opportunities for learning. Learning serves to connect the many places where we live our lives, and it allows us to generate new ways of connectivity between such places. What we learn through our experienc in one context transfers to other contexts, and each new experience is tie to the previous ones, notwithstanding changes in time and place. Teachi is present in the social interactions of the life-space but teaching is not "active" in the same way that it is when lessons are prepared in school. Learning is progressive and gradual in the life-space and is "tested" on th basis of how useful it is for managing life, rather than through exams or assignments.

When we approach young people from a perspective of pathology and problem-focused intervention, we negate the possibilities for learning within their life-space and instead focus on closing off or excluding them from certain components of their life-space as a way of protecting them from adversity. Adversity is an opportunity to learn from undesirable behaviours or habits. From the perspective of life-space intervention, excluding young people or protecting them from specific living spaces al results in the disruption of continuity within their life-space. Therefore, i can have the adverse effect of disrupting the young person's mental construction of life-space in many different locations, including "healthy" places. From a life-space perspective, the response to risks and safety concerns about social networking sites is not to exclude young people fr participation. Rather, it is to join in developing strong protective measur in the life-space as the young person has constructed it. Learning unfold regardless of social context, and the practitioner's role from a life-space intervention perspective is to be present within that learning in order to engage the young person in contemplating his or her agency within that life-space, right here and right now.

Story: In the Moment

Monique started with "the moment," hoping to find a way to understand what had happened and discover the various dimensions of Andre's life-space so she could help him figure

out his next steps. First, she knew that there had to be a return to rationality (though she wasn't sure what that was for Andre), so the moment was the place to start.

"Tell me about what frightened you a few moments ago," she said.

Andre took a big breath and rushed through a few sentences of apparent gibberish about eyes, rouge, les yeux, purple, snot, butterflies, and a few other incomprehensible terms. Then he concluded with "There was fire coming out of her mouth and the purple butterflies kept getting burned when she talked. She shouldn't talk so much."

Monique agreed. "Yes, Sahim likes to explain lots of things and we might have more butterflies around here if she said less. Butterflies are nice to look at." She decided to do a little reality test with him.

"What did Sahim explain to you about where you are and why?" she asked.

"I'm in the hospital," Andre said, opening his eyes. "Hey, you're not my mom. She was here a minute ago. What did you do with her? She likes butterflies."

"I must sound like her," said Monique. "Is she Acadian?"

Andre screwed his eyes shut again. “Stop with the flames,” he said. “You’ll burn her.”

“Keep your eyes closed, Andre, and tell me what you see.”

“There’s butterflies coming out of this purple goo in the air and flying through the flames. Where are they coming from?”

“If you can see them with your eyes closed, maybe it’s your imagination?” asked Monique.

“No, no, it’s really dangerous. I have to save them,” he said, reaching out with his arm.

“Okay, we will. I’ll help.” Monique soaked a washcloth and placed it on Andre’s head to cool him off.

“Thanks, the flames are gone,” said Andre.

“Why don’t you tell me how you got into the hospital?” asked Monique.

Andre proceeded to ramble, partially in French and partially in English, through a story about fall colours, parkour, a train, and the dam. Monique was able to pick out that his uncle was at the hardware store on Main Street and that he was going to the youth centre when he slipped and fell. She knew that the rest of the details were probably only partially accurate, but she was listening for people whom she could call and invite to the hospital. Andre didn’t say anything about his mother or father,

which she found somewhat curious. She figured that people might pull him from the delusions temporarily and they could start to construct a plan for what needed to happen next, so her first priority was to get some familiar people into the room.

Monique knew that there were going to be some difficult decisions for Andre and the inter-professional team about pain management, drug withdrawal, rehab for the broken bones, catching up and returning to school, and getting back to his normal activities. It was all going to take time. The sooner she got a support team together and they all helped each other understand what Andre was facing, the sooner he could start making some decisions about how to manage his newly revised life-space.

In the closing section of this chapter, we will explore how the concept of life-space as we have described it affects the process of life-space intervention. We believe that our focus on one unified life-space as the framework for living one's life in multiple places

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and spaces fundamentally changes the direction of intervention. Further, we believe that focusing on respecting life-spaces constructed by young people provides a foundation for ethical child and youth care practice at a time when technology, culture and social change are accelerating well

ahead of our understanding of ethics and good practice.

Life-Space Intervention Reconstructed

In Europe, the field of child and youth care is embedded in the field of **social pedagogy**, and in Great Britain it is embedded in the field of soc care. In these locations, learning and caring occur in a social context, and practitioners become experts in helping others learn about and manage t expectations embedded in the social structures that surround them, regardless of age, disability/ability, or social circumstance. The focus on social learning, or learning in a social context, is different in Europe than is in North America. Here, social learning has become associated with th concepts of social learning theory, which postulates that people with pow and prestige become agents of social change through reinforcing behavio that they approve of, and/or "role modelling" appropriate behaviour that then imitated by those who admire them. Therefore, in North America, behavioural change and the careful development of plans for change usi goals, rewards, and critical social reinforcement have become the accept basis of intervention. In this book, by reconstructing life-space intervention, we have defined **social learning** as being more akin to th European ideas of social pedagogy.

The focus of intervention in the life-space then becomes "learning in the broadest sense," meaning what the young person learns about how to manage the dimensions of his or her life. A balance must be established between the power of the practitioner and the agency of the young perso in the process of change. Intervention becomes fluid when we focus on opportunities for learning and relationships that support learning and personal growth – we might call this "pedagogy of upbringing." Such opportunities are created only in a climate of caring, engagement and strong relationships. Intervention, guided by the young person, takes tin it requires multiple players, each with unique roles; and it unfolds in the context of the young person's life-space, well beyond a single physical location. We will explore the ideas of learning, pedagogy and the pedago of upbringing in greater detail in Chapter 7.

Thinking and acting to intervene beyond the physical location in which t practitioner and the young person are located opens new possibilities. Th obvious possibilities are that the practitioner joins the young person in multiple places, acting as a connector between those places and helping the young person develop and grow within the social expectations of tho places. Less obvious possibilities for intervention include helping the young person develop agency, self-advocacy, and an understanding of th need for certain social structures and the possibilities and potential for influencing them. The possibilities for action include responding to opportunities in the current physical environment of the young person's life-space, and responding to the needs and opportunities that arise in

locations that the practitioner cannot access, but that the young person must manage.

Additional opportunities and challenges for intervention arise when the virtual dimension of life-space is considered. The technology of today's social world brings new opportunities for connection and learning in extremely different social contexts. Young

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people can connect across the world with other young people who, in spite of poverty, civil unrest, and political or religious conflict, are reachi into the life-space of those in very different circumstances. Intervention may take the form of facilitating global understanding, discussing cultur ideology, or figuring out cross-cultural social etiquette. These interventic may or may not require communication that is strictly text based. The virtual dimension of the life-space includes the possibilities of the imagination and of spirituality as locations for action and intervention in the life-space. Complexity increases when life-space intervention is reconstructed from this perspective, and the demands on the practitione for conscious and principled practice also increase. The practitioner's interventions require critical analysis, conscious awareness and self-determination.

The practitioner must be active and engaged in determining the best choices for intervention at a given moment and from a long-term perspective. Active choice or agency in life-space intervention means tha the practitioner has an understanding of the young person's social conte

or life-space, the social structures of the physical places where the young person travels, and the cultural and historical influences on those structures. The question of what society (or the institutions representing society) expects of this young person must be balanced with the immediate needs of the young person for safety, freedom or autonomy. This is a complex task in which the practitioner cannot simply rely on th plans or structures created by someone else. The practitioner must critically engage and analyze the social spaces and structures of the your person in collaboration with that young person.

The agency of the young person is present within the mental dimension the life-space and, as the practitioner confronts the expectations of the young person, issues related to culture and identity arise. The young person's expectations about the social structure and social norms of an institution where we encounter him or her are embedded in culture and identity, transmitted through the social structures in which the young person was raised. Often, it is in the nexus between these expectations and the expectations of the current social structure that the conflict and need for intervention arises, creating an apparent struggle for power. Intervention can involve imposing social expectations (power over the young person and assimilation into the current social structure) or it can an opportunity for learning. We suggest that intervention must be constructed as an opportunity for learning, not as an imposition of the social expectations of the current location. When intervention is defined an opportunity for learning, the focus for the practitioner becomes learni about the culture and identity of the young person, and learning about th

social expectations of the current life-space. The practitioner and the you person also focus on mutual learning about each other and the relationsh between them.

The need for intervention is identified within the relational dimension of the life-space, which provides the "location" where practitioner and your person "meet," and where the opportunities for learning and change emerge. Practitioners who recognize the multiplicity of relationships that exist for a young person and the social opportunities that they provide fo learning about life are no longer "alone" in the intervention process. Instead, practitioners are travellers in the life-space of the young person, and their role is to open opportunities for learning, convey the expectatio of our social structures, and engage with young people in their journey through life. The tools of intervention in the life-space are used within th tension between the social structures that impose limits and controls and the agency of the young person, which carries individuality and persona

power. The tensions between agency and structure are explored in the next chapter, followed by a more detailed examination of the tools of intervention – caring, engagement, relationships, and boundaries.

Summary

This chapter has introduced an expanded way of thinking about the life-space. Previous writing about LSCI and life-space interviews conceived life-space as a "place" where the young person and the practitioner are both located, and stated that social interactions within the setting can be used to teach the young person new ways of interacting within societal structures. We describe the life-space as a unified space with physical, mental, relational, and virtual dimensions. This way of thinking about life space opens new possibilities for intervention. This chapter reviewed the four dimensions of a unified life-space and briefly introduced the concep of structure and agency.

In a place-based approach to life-space, structure is a primary tool for intervention. However, when life-space is defined as a unified space, the agency of young people and of practitioners is introduced, and life-space becomes the social location for learning about how to manage life. Agen is therefore returned to young people, and practitioners are required to consider issues of power, culture, and identity in their management of th structures within which they work. These tensions are explored further i the next chapter, providing additional background to the consideration o the nature of intervention in the new life-space.

Discussion and Exercises

Reflection in Practice

Awareness of Self and how you create and move through your own life-space is critical to effective and ethical intervention with young people. Reflection in the moment of practice and moment-to-moment during interactions with others is a difficult and learned skill. As you go through the rest of your day, attend consciously to the characteristics of your life-space and consider the four dimensions described here. Try to bring conscious awareness to how they evolve and interact with each other and within your practice relationships.

Reflection on Practice

In the story about Andre, identify or create descriptions of the following:

1. Physical life-space
2. Mental life-space
3. Relational life-space
4. Virtual life-space

Reflection for Practice

Consider a vulnerable young person that you know and apply the conce of structure and agency as described in this chapter.

1. What are the structures that this young person must deal with?
2. What opportunities are there for agency in the life-space? What actions has the young person already taken to establish agency?

Theory in Action

1. Life-space is an evolving concept, both for the field of practice a as a descriptor for the multiple dimensions of a young person's life. Choose five concepts presented in this chapter. Define them and provide an example of that concept from your practice or da life.
2. Complete a search of academic journals to find out how the concept of life-space has been defined historically and where it originated. (Hint: Look for the historical writings of Kurt Lewin.)

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