

# Psych Perspectives



*A publication of the West Virginia School Psychologists Association*

## School Psychology: The Career of the Future

### An Interview with Kristen Frace

As many know, a supportive school system provides a protective factor to children facing Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). With the issues that West Virginia students are facing, a strong and supportive school community is vital for children's success in the future. With training in mental health and their extensive knowledge of school systems, School Psychologists are in an integral position to serve students in West Virginia. One of the stellar school psychologists in our state who tackles these challenges in her career is Kristen Frace, a school psychologist in Berkeley County. The present interview highlights her admirable career and how she serves her students in the Eastern Panhandle.



Frace has an extensive background in mental health and public service that led up to her current position as a school psychologist. She began her education at Shepherd College (now Shepherd University), where she earned a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology, with a Minor in Education in May 2000. She then served as a residential instructor at Grafton School, where she worked with children facing emotional and behavioral disorders. Frace then worked as a social service worker for eight years, where she worked with individuals in the juvenile justice system and status offenders in the West Virginia court system. Reviewing psychological evaluations at the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Services sparked Frace's interest in school psychology. In 2004, she enrolled in the School Psychology program at Marshall University. Frace earned her Master of Arts in education in 2008, and subsequently graduated the program with her Education Specialist degree in 2009. She then worked briefly in Preston County as a school psychologist. In 2011, she moved back to her hometown and began work as a school psychologist in Berkeley County, WV.

In her present career as a school psychologist, Frace enjoys providing services at three schools (primary, intermediate, and high school). She administers assessments for children for learning disabilities, autism spectrum disorder, intellectual disability, emotional-behavioral disorders, gifted programs, and occasionally Pre-K children who

qualified for services under the eligibility of developmental delay. When conducting comprehensive evaluations, Frace typically incorporates a variety of data and information sources, such as parent and teacher reports, data collection/progress monitoring, documentation, and classroom observations. She also completes Functional Behavior Assessments (FBA) and Behavior Intervention Plans (BIP) and provides technical assistance on intervention implementation and data collection. She is also responsible for attending Student Assistance Team (SAT) meetings, Instruction and Intervention Team (IIT) meetings, and Eligibility Committee (EC) meetings. Frace is additionally a member of the Berkeley County crisis team and a representative for the West Virginia School Psychologist Association Region F.

School psychology is a continuously evolving field. Frace pointed out Response to Intervention (RTI) as one key example of change in our field. In the beginning of her career, Frace shared that the field primarily used the IQ-Achievement discrepancy model to determine if a student had learning disabilities or not. However, this often resulted in children being diagnosed incorrectly and inefficiently. Recently, a significant need for mental health services has risen across levels of the school system. To satisfy this need, the MTSS/ RTI model was implemented to provide additional support to children in the educational system. The model allowed for systematic monitoring of responsiveness to interventions before referral for a psychoeducational evaluation. Furthermore, this new system allowed her to gain the skill set required to assess children's capabilities to ensure success in the educational setting.

Frace stated that continued research on best practices and evidence-based interventions has really helped to shape the field of school psychology as it is seen today. According to Frace, one significant change in our field is the growing population of students who self-identify as LGBTQ (i.e., lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning). In light of this, further supports have been necessary for students in the LGBTQ community to ensure that they are not being discriminated against. One additional change Frace has experienced was Policy 2419 allowing for more systematic criteria to identify Specific Learning Disabilities and Autism Spectrum Disorder. With this, her team of 11 school psychologists were able to bounce newer ideas off one another, leading to better success when being faced with challenging situations.

No career comes without its challenges. When asked about what challenges she has encountered as a school psychologist, Frace stated "I have encountered not having enough time to do everything I am trained to do." She believes that more time and resources, conducting group and individual counseling, and training for teachers on several topics within the school psychology field would be beneficial. However, Frace stated that she was able to efficiently be there for her schools and students while also being able to complete her requirements despite these obstacles.

When asked about advice for new school psychologists, Frace offered this piece of wisdom, "Go in with a positive mindset each day, even when it's difficult." She advised school psychologists to keep an open line of communication among parents and school staff members. She also urged newcomers to pay attention to the new research as it becomes available, as school psychology is an ever-evolving field of practice. She cautioned that school psychologists are faced with many difficult situations, but it is important to remember that the most pressing task at hand is providing the best circumstances for growth for each student. She believes that professionals should not let personal beliefs get in the way of providing the best outcome for each student. This allows

them to maintain professional and ethical standards for the educational community around them.

Frace is confident that the field of school psychology is progressing in a positive direction and that it will continue to do so. With the challenges associated with the recent increase of mental health diagnoses, Frace emphasized that school psychologists will need to remain focused and diligent in their work as new research arises in our constantly changing field.

*This article was written by Jason DeHaven, Brandon Irvin, and Casey Ward as a course requirement for SPSY 601.*

## **Regional Happenings:**

**Region A:** Dr. Kara Lucado, region A representative, plans to hold a meeting in Spring 2020.

**Region B:** Region B representative, Lauren Winter, held a meeting October 2, 2019 in Charleston with group discussions surrounding threat assessments, PBIS, and alternative education. The afternoon featured Michael Dupay, Director of Bereavement at HospiceCare to speak on their children's programs.

**Region C:** Mallory Frampton reports that a regional meeting occurred September 17, 2019 and topics of discussion included evaluation protocol, executive functioning, and trauma implications.

**Region D:** no report submitted

**Region E:** Lori Bailey plans to host a Region E meeting in January 2020.

**Region F:** Region F representative, Kristen Frace, indicates they held a meeting on September 27, 2019. Michael Powell presented on Roots of Behavior, which focused on a deeper understanding of behavior, starting with brain development.

## **Save the Date**

### **NASP 2020 Annual Convention**

Click on the image for conference details



## **Upcoming WVSPA Conferences**

### **Spring 2020 Conference**

**April 2-3, 2020**

**Four Points by Sheraton  
Charleston, West Virginia**

**Featuring Dr. Matthew Burns**

**SLD eligibility using the MTSS  
model**

# Orchid or Dandelion: Exploring a Spectrum of Childhood Development

By Chelsey Uhrig

## The Orchid and the Dandelion

Why Some Children  
Struggle and How  
All Can Thrive

W. Thomas Boyce, M.D.

Humans are a complex species shaped by both genetic makeup and environment. They also possess a strong tendency to categorize items, ideas and, notably, other people, in doing so submitting to the belief that are discrete groups, rather than acknowledging that humans may exist on a spectrum. This spectrum includes a variance of psychological and social environmental needs. As a focus on mental health is emerging within culture and education, policies and evolved practices are being implemented at an ever-increasing rate. This paper will examine the research, clinical studies and personal stories of Dr. W. Thomas Boyce, MD from his book, *The Orchid and the Dandelion*, including metaphors of “the orchid” and “the dandelion” and how to better understand, and respond to, the needs of sensitive children, adolescents and adults.

Boyce presents “the orchid” and “the dandelion” as metaphors for types of children and adults. Orchid children are described as “outliers” when compared to children who develop more typically; they “are uniquely fragile, needing special nurturing to achieve their best” (2019, p. xi). One notable difference discussed is that, though Orchids need greater support, they can oftentimes achieve higher levels of outcomes when given the proper cultivation, underscoring what we know to be true about the effort and unique environment needed to result in a healthy, thriving orchid plant. Boyce makes a case for a better understanding of Orchids and their sensitivities to their environment, parenting, school and social experiences because, as his research has repeatedly revealed, when protected, nurtured, supported and loved, Orchid children “...become exceptional in their positive health, their robust development, and their sometimes-superlative achievements” (2019, p. 233). Comparatively, Boyce describes Dandelions as being more emotionally robust and able to thrive more easily in difficult circumstances. Boyce attempts to disprove the idea that resilient children are rare, revealing research that shows approximately 80% of the children he studied “showed few or no biological compromises during their encounters with moderately stressful challenges and events,” (2019, p. 233). Boyce concludes that these children contain a “...substantial reservoir of resilience and hardiness that gives them the innate ability to persist even when they are faced with very difficult challenges” (Boyce, 2019, p. 233).

One of the limitations of referring to children and adolescents in two distinct categories, as is noted by Dr. Boyce himself, is that all identifiers exhibited within his research and clinical studies are correlations, not preordained outcomes for which persons in said category will manifest, nor will they necessarily display specific, prescribed reactions. There will always be variations within the human population that takes into account nurture, trauma and other individual contributing factors, highlighting a nuance that requires us to acknowledge that children’s reactions will present on a spectrum rather than one of two extremes. Another

limitation is that categorizing children and adolescents in one of two distinct categories is stereotyping and limits our thorough understanding of said child/adolescent.

Boyce's work supports the idea that both genetic makeup and environment shape behavior, and that in varying shades, children fall within a spectrum of Orchid to Dandelion, typically presenting as closer to one category than the other. "Nature versus nurture" is a widely studied topic of human subject, but Boyce took another approach by considering the work of psychologist Michael Meaney, and molecular biologist Moshe Szyf who studied rat mothers' care of their litters. The research studied how the intensity and availability of certain types of nurturing (licking the pups' anogenital areas, grooming their fur and allowing access to teats for nursing) effected pups as they grew into adults. They concluded that a mother's care for an individual rat pup influenced the type of rat adult they would become. Boyce (2019) argued, "Although human parents are not required to lick their pups, there is strong evidence that the adequacy and abundance of caring parental behavior can profoundly influence the development of children's brains, intelligence, and behavior" (p. 118).

During a second study, Boyce spent a winter with Steve Suomi, primatologist and comparative pathologist who studied the behavioral development of Rhesus Macaques monkeys. Although not the foci of the study, Suomi found that behaviorally identified Orchid monkeys also tended to have a higher right ear temperature, presumably due to an increase in blood flow to the right prefrontal cortex. Monkeys with a higher right ear temperature were also found to be more susceptible to injuries, colds, and disorders of psychological and behavioral health. Likewise, and implying that a monkey's physiology may contribute to its personality manifestation and ability to thrive in certain circumstances.

Boyce replicated this study with several hundred young children. He found that there were parallels among the findings for both the monkeys and children. Although this finding may correlate to children, Boyce was quick to point out that having a hotter right ear temperature does not relegate them to a life of depression and negative emotion. He further explains that these studies, when considered together, offer additional proof of his supposition that both nature and nurture contribute to one's ultimate behavior and response to stimuli. In returning to his study of humans, Boyce looked at the frailties, disarray, and ability to thrive of some lives in comparison to others. After years of human experience, research and clinical studies, he has discovered, and deemed that people are either Orchids or Dandelions, as defined earlier in this analysis. Children, both Orchids and Dandelions, and recall there is a spectrum along which all children lie, experience life in different ways. Dandelions, in later life, appear far less affected by the environment and experiences of childhood than their Orchid counterparts. Dandelions have a tendency to be able to overcome harsh early environments with little later-life impact. Boyce does not so much attribute this to resiliency, rather to an ability to resist "...environmental influence - this detachment of early conditions from later consequences - that so characterizes the dandelion child..." (2019, p. 147).

It is a common belief that humans with such sensitivities as Orchids make up a large portion of the population. Surprisingly, Boyce estimates that Orchid children exist at a ratio of 1 out of every 5 children. Boyce (2019) finds, "...orchid kids are especially in need of parental affection and time and particularly benefit from their effects" (p. 161). Who then, is responsible for understanding and creating the environment in which sensitive orchids need to thrive, offering each child the opportunity to develop to his/her potential? Is it the responsibility of the home (parenting)? Of the school (social)? Of the medical community (mental health)? Of society? As the African proverb says, "It takes a village to raise a child." Boyce agrees with this adage, which is a strong argument. Today's educators commonly witness higher levels of success among students whose families, teachers and other involved parties collectively work together for the benefit of the child, even among

those from low socio-economic status (SES) and other challenging environments. Teachers and school leaders, particularly in rural areas with low SES, are seeing a need for social emotional and executive functioning education and skill-building.

While Boyce's arguments are sound, one consideration he does not explore is our current society's ability to provide for this comprehensive caring, nurturing environment for all children. School funding challenges, inactive or absent parents, and other societal factors make it difficult, if not impossible, to create this panacea. Boyce's book would have been more actionable had he delved into examples of communities that have successfully created such environments or highlighted ways that parents and/or educators could facilitate this type of teamwork. Another gap in Boyce's presentation is discussion about the lack of training among today's educators to be able to accurately identify, and support, an Orchid or Dandelion. Likewise, parents do not typically have the education or information to enable them to consider their children along these terms.

Boyce is not an accomplished storyteller, as evidenced by his writing. Although an expert in the field of medicine and research, Boyce's writing came across clunky at times. One weakness the reader may notice is his incorrect usage of vocabulary, and poor word choice or diction. Another flaw is that those less accustomed to reading academic writing regarding scientific research may lose interest as they find the book dry and challenging to parse as academic writing is typically very precise and technical.

Between the gaps of scientific research and clinical studies, Boyce threads a theme of human experience, hope and reflection. This theme is revealed through Boyce's (2019) first person accounts of experiences with Orchids and Dandelions, for example, the environment within his own home that lead his Orchid sister, Mary who fell deeper into struggles with a mental disorder. On the other hand, Boyce and his brother, both Dandelions, maintained average, yet successful adult lives. As noted in the title for chapter 6, "No Two Children Are Raised in the Same Family," (Boyce, p. 109) even growing up as siblings in the same house. Humans, due to their predispositions, internalize and experience the same situation in different ways, which begs the question: Can we intentionally create more nurturing environments and behaviors for children that will outweigh predispositions for frailty and difficulty?

Few negatives aside, Boyce presents a solid argument that will connect with most readers on some level. His passion, use of analogies and metaphors, and the way he shares his raw truths facilitate a connection to a broader audience and makes the reading of scientific research more of a pleasure read. It is this first-person account that allows the narrator, as storyteller, to become a major player in his own research. This creates a connection with the audience that inspires the reader to connect the traits of Orchid and Dandelion to those playing roles within their own daily lives, ultimately creating a deeper connection to the author and his topic.

In the conclusion, Boyce (2019) presents a call to action through the challenge to thoughtfully consider the following question, "How might we best respond, as families and societies, to the recognition of individuals (especially children) who are exceptionally responsive to both the virulence of our society's worst social conditions and the health- and life-giving effects of its best?" (p. 228) These words weave together the final threads of reflection through the presence of hope in a higher power, leaving the reader optimistic about the future of the human race. He leaves us with this thought, "There are winged shadows of iniquity and cruelty that we all hand down, generation to broken generation, grandparent to sleepless child. But there are also moments of grace, when unexpected goodness arrives,

from some deep, unseen reserve of love, and makes it possible for us to rest and sleep and trust that all will finally be well” (Boyce, 2019, p. 217).

Reference

Boyce, W. Thomas (MD). (2019). *The Orchid and the Dandelion*. New York, NY: Alfred A Knopf.

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## **Save The Date!**

*Marshall University will be hosting an Internship Fair on February 28, 2020 from 11:00 AM to 1:00 PM at MUGC. Watch your email for more details.*

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