

# EPCC Newsletter



## GROWTH MINDSET THEORY

BY DIONNE CLABUGH

When I was in 4th grade, I started clarinet lessons and loved it! But, I squeaked and squawked and couldn't get the notes or rhythms just right. I could hear in my head how the song should go, but my fingers and mouth just couldn't do it, yet. In those times, my grandmother and mother would say, "If at first you don't succeed, try, try again." And so, I did.

My father explained that if air leaked out from under my fingers, then the sounds wouldn't be clear. He said the air had to be blown "fast" so it could spin down the instrument. He played trombone and guitar and had an understandable way of explaining the physics of sound to my 4th grade mind. I adjusted my fingers to better close the holes on the clarinet. I learned to hold my fingers steadily and to move them swiftly on and off each hole and key. I adjusted my mouth to look more and more like our teacher's (I looked in the mirror many times to check!) and I blew through the clarinet with more vigor. My parents got me a Benny Goodman album (33 rpm) so I could hear how a professional jazz player sounded. After several months of practicing and listening to clarinet performers, I began producing a clear sound and correct notes nearly all the time.

Soon, our clarinet teacher asked if I'd help other clarinet students after school. And so, I did. I enjoyed helping my classmates figure out how to hold the clarinet in their hands and mouth so they didn't squeak, and so their tone was clear and strong. I enjoyed seeing their pride and accomplishment when they were asked to play in the group lessons, because they were successful. Their success was partly my success, and this made an impression on me.

My mother's encouragement was an example of growth mindset thinking. Growth mindset is contrasted with fixed mindset and comes from the work of Dr. Carol Dweck at Stanford University. Dr. Dweck found, through years of research with children in elementary school, that when they believed they could improve, they applied more effort to their endeavors. Their effort coupled with belief turned into accomplishment. People who believe they can continuously learn, develop, and increase their potential have a "growth mindset." In contrast, people who believe their intelligence is static and their capacity is determined at birth and have a "fixed mindset." My clarinet students and I believed they could learn and improve, especially if they worked hard and applied effort. And so, they did.



Read Interview with Chevening Scholar Juleus Ghunta on page 4.

## How can I get involved?

*We are honored that you have opened and perused our quarterly newsletter.*

We value your input and support for our peace education work that is so close to our hearts and minds. There are many ways that you can support our work with educators, families and communities across the country.

Here are a few ways to get involved:

- Share your training or workshop experiences with others.
- Think about what you see on our website ([educateforpeace.org](http://educateforpeace.org)) that you might be interested in organizing for your community or sponsoring/funding or participating in yourself
- Tell others about the training opportunities we offer
- Refer others to our website
- Grant writing support, or leads
- Offer leads for training or speaking opportunities
- Offer leads for funding sources
- Offer leads for marketing our project

Please share this newsletter and refer others to our website, [educateforpeace.org](http://educateforpeace.org).

If you have any questions, email us at [pambonzvo@gmail.com](mailto:pambonzvo@gmail.com).

## BOOK HIGHLIGHT

# ROHAN BULLKIN AND THE SHADOWS – A STORY ABOUT ACES AND HOPE

By Juleus Ghunta



## DEAR GROWN-UPS

Over the past twenty years, extensive research on adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) has revealed strong connections between early adversity and many children's academic weaknesses, disruptive behaviours, and negative health and life outcomes. *Rohan Bullkin and the Shadows* aims to help survivors of ACEs and toxic stress by giving them a medium through which to explore their experiences, particularly their struggles with reading and academic work. The book also highlights the need to find transformative ways of engaging with perpetrators of ACEs and the role families and communities can play in helping survivors develop resilience and hope.

This story is based on true events from my childhood. It depicts some of the ordeals, adult behaviours, and social realities that shaped my life and the lives of some of my

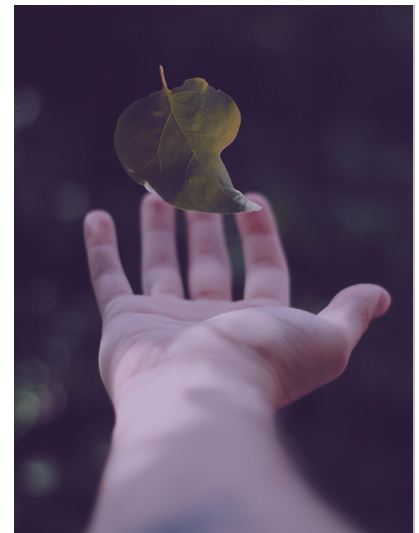
peers. As a survivor of multiple ACEs, I am engaged in a lifelong journey to understand and reduce their impacts. Healing is an ongoing process, but what I have already learned has not only given me an understanding of the complex literacy and health challenges I have endured; it has also led to significant improvements in my wellbeing and relationships with others.

In addition to my life, the book draws inspiration and text from 'How to Read', an essay by Jamaican human rights advocate, Marcus Garvey. It also has an appendix that provides a brief overview of ACEs. We recommend that you use this book as an entry point to conversations on ACEs and toxic stress. We hope it will inspire you to do further research and to join communities that are working to reduce the prevalence of ACEs around the world.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Juleus Ghunta is a Chevening Scholar, children's writer, a member of Jamaica's National Task Force on Character Education, and an advocate in the Caribbean's adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) movement. He holds a BA in Media from The University of the West Indies, Mona, and an MA in Peace and Conflict Studies from the University of Bradford, UK. Juleus' work explores the links between toxic stress and academic underachievement, and the varied effects of false positivity and emotional invalidation on the choices and hopes of survivors of complex trauma. His poems and essays on ACEs have appeared in 30+ journals across 16 countries. His picture book *Tata and the Big Bad Bull* was published by CaribbeanReads in 2018 and he is the co-editor of the December 2019 and March 2020 issues of *Interviewing the Caribbean* (The UWI Press), which are focused on children's literature and ACEs in the Caribbean. He is the co-editor of a special issue of *PREE Magazine* on ACEs and storytelling.



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## OUR ORGANIZATION

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## FIND US ONLINE

[educateforpeace.org](http://educateforpeace.org)

## LEAD THE FIGHT: GIVING CHILDREN WITH TRAUMA A VOICE

Join us on February 22nd for a free virtual, international book reading and conversation about Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and the power of positive relationships.

Learn more and register

# Dear Olive Branch

BY OLIVE



## THIS MONTH'S TOPIC: GROWTH MINDSET

### INTRODUCTION

Growth mindset is defined as the belief that one can learn more or become smarter if one works hard and perseveres. It is generally agreed that having a growth mindset is a good thing, it can help people be open to learning new things and ways of thinking. For more information on growth mindset, please see the article in this newsletter by Dionne Clabaugh, or read *Mindset: The New Psychology Of Success* by Carol S. Dweck.

Change has a way of taking over! It dominates our very existence and while we may resent our subservience to it, we can find the opportunities if we choose to put that mindset into place. We have all seen exactly this situation during COVID. Changes we may have never imagined, much less embraced, have descended upon us! How do we manage? How do we find the opportunities?

Our stories in this Olive Branch column seek to explore the opportunities of growing in the face of change. Our first story shares the success that can happen when parents and teachers form a partnership to give the child they all love the very best possible learning environment that even includes opportunities to make mistakes!

Then we share a story of how to embrace change when there is discontent in the learning community. What events, activities, and ways of doing have evolved over time that could be re-examined for newer, more collaborative opportunities? Many times a great idea happens when one person takes the initiative to get it started, develops it over time, and then somehow becomes the primary director of it. While this is a naturally occurring process that we often don't recognize, it can eventually

lead to resentment and an undercurrent of discontent. Recognizing that others may want to help create and contribute to the process is critical to creating a peaceful community of learners.

And finally, we share a story of re-entry from staying home and doing classes online... to coming back to the classroom in-person. It explores the challenges and the growth opportunities.

Enjoy the following stories about "Growth Mindset" as you consider exploring opportunities within your life and learning community.

### NO DRIPPING PAINT TOLERATED

Once upon a time, many years ago, there was a girl in my preschool class who left me with a searing heartache. She was a bright, sweet child, who would get terribly upset whenever she made a mistake. I remember one instance where she was painting on the easel, and her thickly applied paint began to slowly run down the paper. She got very upset and took the painting down, wadded it up and threw it in the trash. Then she sat and did nothing for a long time. Another clear memory of her behavior was her unwillingness to join in pretend play, like "walk like a duck." She would just sit and watch the other children as they moved like different animals (part of our physical education program).

When I shared my observations with the mother, she wasn't surprised. It turned out that the father demanded perfection. The child wanted to please him, so if she couldn't do something perfect, she didn't want to do it. The mother and I came up with a plan. At school, I began making mistakes and demonstrating how to recover, with things

like "Wow, I goofed. Now I get to do it over again!" The mother had a talk with the father. He was devastated that his behavior had caused so much pain for his child. The father tried to be more accepting of mistakes.

After a few months, the girl was much more relaxed, didn't fall apart when something wasn't right, and even joined in the moving like animals game. As I reflect back on this experience, I recognize that the girl had a fixed mindset, and she was able to change it to a growth mindset. (M.S.)

### ART SHOW

I was a teacher in a preschool that was housed in a church in Colorado. Every year the school had an art show that was developed by one of the teachers to show the children's creativity with a variety of art media. It actually became the teacher's art show rather than a school art show. She came up with the ideas; we all carried out the art activities with the children; the teacher displayed all the art. Those of us on the staff began to resent not really having a voice in this yearly activity.

When I became director of the school, I wanted to change how the art show was done. I didn't want to end the art show because it was an activity that the children and families and church members really enjoyed. I talked with the teacher who developed the art show and asked if she would be willing to look at some changes for how it was done so that she didn't have to do all the work to make it happen. At first, she was reluctant, but at our staff meeting, when I asked for some different ideas for art media and ways to display the children's art, the other teachers jumped on board with new ideas that everyone liked. In addition, all the

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## Olive's Next Topic: Freedom

We are looking for your questions and/or short stories regarding freedom. Submit your ideas by March 18, 2022, to [marilynshelton@gmail.com](mailto:marilynshelton@gmail.com). Please put OLIVE BRANCH in the subject line. Word range: 150-300 words.

[CLICK TO SEND US YOUR QUESTIONS](#)

# Chevening Scholar Juleus Ghunta: His Life and Writing *Rohan and the Shadows*

BY DIONNE CLABAUGH

I met Juleus Ghunta at University for Peace's Gross Global Happiness Summit in March 2021. I was completely immersed during his discussions on the impact of childhood trauma and was eager to read his new book *Rohan Bullkin and the Shadows: A Story about ACEs and Hope*. He articulated his views and experiences with precision and determination, yet Juleus is one of the most soft-spoken and patient people I've ever met. I admire his tenacity, fortitude, and clarity. I learned about Juleus' editing and publishing process, including the approximately 500 drafts of *Rohan* and the thousands of emails to publishers, reviewers, endorsers, and people he reached out to for support and promotion for the book.

This EPCC article introduces Juleus to California educators who want to promote mental health awareness in their classrooms and communities. I interviewed him in December 2021. If you'd like to see our 30-minute interview, [click this link](#).

Juleus Ghunta grew up in Kendal, Jamaica, near the home of Cyril Everard Palmer who wrote many books about life in the Jamaican countryside, including a story about Juleus' maternal grandmother. Years after Mr. Palmer left Jamaica for Canada, Juleus remembers sitting in Palmer's childhood home and dreaming of a life as a writer. But he was illiterate and didn't think it was possible.

Juleus explained that he had experienced considerable childhood trauma, "which reflects the experiences of many Jamaican children, as well as children around the world, including in developed countries. I started schooling at five years old and learned to read when I was twelve. Abuse significantly impacted my health and self-esteem. I struggled, not only due to poverty and a difficult home life, but especially because I did not know what to do with the nightmares, the self-hatred, the violence and rage I felt."

When Juleus learned to read at age twelve, he searched for stories with protagonists who had encountered and overcome similar adversities, but such books were scarce. Now he is trying to fill that void. "Many children's writers do not write books that explore difficult issues, despite the severe adversities our children endure. We often pretend these realities do not exist and ignore our children's complex interior lives: their pain, their traumas, their emotions, and

their longing to be seen as discerning rather than unperceptive. Authors do children and others a disservice when we shy away from exploring problematic themes," he says.

The 'others' include many Jamaican teachers who come from difficult socioeconomic backgrounds. The education system is "populated with teachers who are severely traumatized." As is the case in most developing countries, Jamaican children are usually encouraged to go to medical or law school, but many become teachers because they cannot afford these degrees or want to prevent others from experiencing the trauma they had.

What do we do when teachers pass their stress to children or experience secondary trauma? Reading can help children cope with adversity because the experiences of the book's characters open the child's doors to different experiences and ways of being for knowing people. "When I learned to read, I escaped into the world of books. One of the first books I read was *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. I felt connected to Harry because we shared similar experiences. I needed to have a great imagination to survive my childhood and J.K. Rowling gave me permission to create a magical world for myself. I'm not sure how I would have turned out if I wasn't able to escape into that world."

Juleus says teachers should provide opportunities for children to use their imagination and creativity. Quoting Bessel A. van der Kolk's book *The Body Keeps the Score*, he says "imagination is absolutely critical to the quality of our lives. Our understanding of this is well-established in trauma research and the evidence is all around us. Teachers must be careful to not suppress students' autonomy and individuality."

For many years Juleus played soccer to relieve tension and anger. In 2008, while studying at the University of the West Indies in Kingston, his leg was brutally broken in a soccer match. Unable to play soccer, he turned to writing to reflect on and reimagine the experiences that resulted in his 15 adverse childhood experiences (ACEs).

Juleus did not know about ACEs then or the groundbreaking 1988 ACEs study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDD) and Kaiser Permanente which is central to his current work as a writer and advocate. In that study, researchers collected

data from 17,000+ mostly white, college-educated Americans regarding 10 types of abuse divided into three categories: sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and household disfunctions. Researchers found that 69% of the respondents had at least one ACE.

ACEs increase risks for maladaptive outcomes across a wide range of developmental domains, including postnatal brain development and gene expression, and may cause permanent damage to various parts of children's brains, such as the prefrontal cortex which is responsible for impulse control and decision making. ACEs can be gateways to drug addiction, violence, and other harmful behaviors, and they can result in poor health outcomes such as chronic depression, heart disease and obesity.

*Rohan Bullkin and the Shadows* is inspired by Juleus Ghunta's childhood and long battle with many of the impacts of ACEs. It tells the story of a young boy who struggles to read because of the adversities he faces. He befriends a book that helps him to understand and manage his Shadows which are manifestations of Rohan's toxic stress. Even though the book takes on challenging topics, it is full of magic and hope that will engage and inspire readers. Rohan's journey is a guide not only for children and adults experiencing ACEs but also for others who want to understand how to offer them support. *Rohan* is beautifully illustrated by Jamaican artist Rachel Moss and is published by CaribbeanReads.

CaribbeanReads published Ghunta's first children's book, *Tata and the Big Bad Bull*, in 2018. *Tata* features a young protagonist faced with many of the issues that afflict vulnerable children. Ghunta says he hopes his writing will "encourage people to have difficult conversations about many of the trials our children face. Hopefully, these conversations will help individuals and groups to begin their journeys toward trauma-informed healing and advocacy."

*Rohan Bullkin and the Shadows* has received significant praise from distinguished medical doctors, psychologists, writers and educators, and from key figures in the global positive and adverse childhood experiences (PACEs) movement. Many of them have advocated for the inclusion of the book in education systems across the globe. Children's rights advocate Michael Abrahams,

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## ADVICE

# Dear Olive Branch

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teachers volunteered to give time for set up, being docents and taking down the art when the show was over. Actually, the developing teacher was relieved because she had more home responsibilities with a new child and was glad that the art show responsibilities could be shared.

The art show became more of a collaborative effort as all the staff voices were heard. We were coming up with ideas all year long; some ideas that were tried were successful and some were not - using toothpaste to attach paintings to the hallway's brick walls worked great, BUT removing the toothpaste after the show was over was labor intensive! We all learned together! (J.D.)

## COLLEGE STUDENT MINDSET

Thinking about coming together this last fall after COVID isolation, it has been interesting to consider how we navigated face-to-face classes. I never expected that the students would have so much trouble coming back together. I had expected that my college classes would be as they were before everything was shut down, but that was not what happened. The students needed transition time again, to readjust to a schedule, of being somewhere on time, with the appropriate materials. I had to reestablish a connection with each student to develop a relationship so that they would feel as though they belonged in the classroom scene.

Students would wander in half an hour late to class, interrupting what was happening in the class. Students would schedule other events during class time, without thinking that they would need to attend class. The numbers of students had dwindled to just a few students, and they inconsistently appeared in my classes, which made it difficult to know exactly what I should teach for each class period, as sometimes the students who had missed a class would be there, and want the information repeated from the previous day.

Sending students to laboratory placements with children proved difficult since the childcare centers still did not want visitors, even though the state said that they were welcome to attend. But the centers still had the right to choose whether the students could be present or not. The centers wanted the students to apply for jobs since essential employees seem to be hard to find in the childcare world. The students could be exposed to the virus from the unvaccinated children, and then they could pass it on. Some students have difficulty with transportation to get to the centers, since money for cars and gas has been tight, and pay for childcare essential workers and aides is still very minimal.

My current plan is to work on some growth mindset ideas that will help the adult students be a bit more flexible, open-minded, and using both/and thinking. Assignments can be

turned in on an electronic platform. My non-traditional students tend to plan ahead and be a bit more flexible in their thinking, since they are used to being flexible with the small children. The traditional students seemed to be doing a little better after midterms, as they seem to have settled into the routine of getting to school, mostly on time, and I am getting a steady stream of assignments to grade. Now if we can just keep them coming to classes, and maintaining social distance from each other, wearing masks, and keep trying to stay healthy, we will have managed to accomplish a great deal. (D.S.)



*NOTE: We chose "Dear Olive Branch" as the title for this column for several reasons - foremost as a sign of peace. Also olives come in many colors, sizes, tastes, uses - a sign of diversity just as there are many types of questions and those who send the questions. We hope "Olive's" responses will help you, the reader - if you have a question for Olive send it to our email address. When Olive isn't available to answer questions, members of EPCC and/or P.E.A.C.E. will step up to help.*

## INTERVIEW

# Juleus Ghunta

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MD, said that it "should be required reading in all schools." Founder of PACEs Connections, Jane Stevens, said Rohan "is an enchanting story for all children and adults."

During our conversations these past months, I saw him working to ensure the language flow will spark children's imagination, speak directly to them and realize that they too can succeed.

Watch video of this interview

## Alumni Corner

**WE WANT TO SPOTLIGHT** some of the valuable contributions of recent Alumni of EPCC Level 1 & 2 Trainings. Michea and Elvia did a Spanish Language Anti-Bias Workshop for Orange County AEYC. Romana joined Gaby to do a Social Stories Presentation for EPCC Alumni. Lola joined Wilma to do a presentation on anti-Bias in English. Shira is involved in the Workshop and Training Committee and is interfacing with our Social Media Intern. Dionne and Shirley have joined the Writing Committee (you have probably read some of their work in past issues of this newsletter). Romana and Shirley have joined our zoom Children's Book Group on Wednesday evenings.

**JOIN US.** There are plenty of opportunities. Let the Alumni Committee know if you are interested. Gaby (glitsky@aol.com), Marilyn P. (mpearce4104@gmail.com), Joyce (joycean@sbcglobal.net).