# CYC-Online

Child & Youth Care
ARCHIVE

A Journal for those who live or work
with Children and Young People

The
CYC-Net
PRESS

# Contents

**COVER PICTURE**
The incredible Child and Youth Care historical archive at Casa Pacifica Centers for Child and Families in California. A definite bucket list item for all Child and Youth Care workers!

# California Dreaming

**Thom Garfat**



As I left for the 3rd World CYC-Net Conference in Ventura California, ice and snow were blasting my hometown. I had images of sandy beaches, avocados and white wine in my head as the plane lifted off. Oops, wait … I had images of connection, networking and learning – yes, right 😊 'California Dreaming' sang through my head. Does that hint of my age?

Never mind the surfers, beaches, wine and avocados – the 3rd World (organised by James Freeman and the folks at Casa Pacifica) was amazing. There was energy, passion, love, connectedness and belonging and we all just fell into it (were swept up by it?) and went with the flow. While *Nurturing Hope* was the official theme, as Nancy Marshall said in a recent CYC-Net discussion group post, *love* was the experienced theme. Openly, clearly, within our field, love came back as a basic characteristic of practice – and why not – can we nurture hope without love? I

think not.  Love has been lingering around the edges of our field for the past few years – this year, in California, it took central stage!

There is something amazing about CYC conferences, especially the CYC-Net World Conferences.  People gather from around the globe (as James said, every continent was present in some way, even Antarctica) and connect together seamlessly, as if we have always been family. There is an energy, a passion, a desire and willingness to connect.  We slip back into connectedness with people we have not seen in a few years, as if it was only a few days.  And the newcomers, the newbies, slip easily into relationship with those who have been in the field for years. There is no 'us and them' – only us.

Years ago, Brian Gannon and I created the International Child and Youth Care Network (CYC-Net) with the intention of creating learning opportunities, networking and connectedness among child and youth care people around the world (among other things). When I was hanging around, and hanging out, in California, feeling the spirit of connectedness, I could not help but think that CYC-Net has succeeded in one of its objectives: connecting others in a network of caring.  Well done, CYC-Net!

I know that everyone cannot have the opportunity to experience a CYC-Net World Conference, and I wish we all could.  But, I write this in the hope that others will realise that there is a global Child and Youth Care family out there to which we all belong.  We are a part of a global family working together to, hopefully, make the world a little better for children and families – and by gathering together, we make it a little better for ourselves as well.

Thank you, James Freeman, Casa Pacifica, and CYC-Net for helping us all to feel connected and supported.

And I hope many of us can gather again in Durban, South Africa in July 2019 at the next CYC World Conference to continue the celebration.

**Thom**

# A Whither CYC 2018

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Recently, there was a thread on the CYC discussion group in response to a query about how to keep up with the burgeoning and proliferating literature in our field. First, let me say how pleased I am that there is an awareness of the ever-increasing richness of the CYC literature both theoretically and in terms of practice. This is great news and I applaud all my colleagues who are making an effort to keep up with this truly exciting and thought-provoking literature. I would argue that the richness and diversity of our literature is a sign that our field is full of life and struggle.

The fact that our literature conveys both life and struggle is important. After all, our work is centered on the development of living material relations within a socio-economic system that largely denies the importance or even relevance of such relations. Under this global regime that would deny the relevance of living things, it would seem to me that struggle and a diversity of thought/practice would seem to be both inevitable and of paramount concern. In a very real sense, the ways in which we think and practice under such conditions cannot help but be at times confusing and troubling at a very deep level. It is Marx who draws our attention to the way that each historical period with its particular way of producing the world is always shaped and defined by what he called contradictions and antagonisms. As it is impossible for our field of working with young people to exist outside the current mode of production, we too are riddled with contradictions and antagonisms.

Some of the key contradictions for CYC are rooted in what Kiaras Gharabaghi (2014) has termed the relationship between practice and purpose. Kiaras points

out that who we say we are and what we propose as the foundational characteristics of our field are often at odds with what we actually do in day to day practice. He notes, that we claim throughout our literature to be centrally concerned with relationship. However, in practice, we more often than not seem primarily concerned with controlling and modifying behavior.  This contradiction is deeply engrained within the history of work with young people and certainly not new to our field as we enter the 21st century.

After all, we could argue that large segments of our field of practice originated in residential schools, orphanages and other institutions designed to assimilate young people to the emerging world of industrial capitalism under regimes of colonial logic. As Foucault (2012) points out, the European colonial/industrial/slavery complex required the production of docile bodies appropriable to industrial scale production. Disciplining the bodies of the young was central to the early projects of the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries. The concept of relational care had little relevance for those engaged in assimilating young people into the machinery of production that founded our current system.

It isn't until we get into the 19th century that we begin to see young people (or at least white young people) as something more than sheer physical resource. Even with the advent of approaches to working with young people that began to see them as people capable and worthy of some form of relationship, the utilitarian view of them prevailed. At the end of the day, children were seen as a social asset or liability. Relationships were to be utilized as a method for shaping a moral and ethical member of society. To paraphrase Foucault, we move from methods of external physical discipline to internalized methods of "self-control." Our disciplinary apparatuses become psychological. This is not to say that we lose the capacity to inflict physical discipline. We simply expand the project to the production of a psychological self who will assist the prevailing system by learning to discipline themselves.

What I want to point out here, is that each of these sets of child/adult relations are shaped by the demands of the historical period in which they occur. The

historical period in turn is shaped by the ways in which geography, technology and value combine to form a system of production. That system of production has a logic of its own that is always, to some degree, out of sync with the needs and desires of the actual people upon whom it is dependent for its existence. This is the contradiction that Marx is describing.

For us concerned with CYC work, that contradiction lies in the historical tension between those of us who wish to work with young people as idiosyncratic creative life force, and the demand that we delimit, homogenize and shape that profoundly powerful set of relations to the abstract demands of capitalism as a social system of value. It is here that the antagonism arises. For those of us who work with young people, we stand the possibility of forming living networks or ecologies of relationships that exceed the capacities of abstract demands for compliance or assimilation into the world of homogenized desire that so often comprises adulthood under capitalism. Our sense that there might be more life available to the next generation can run up against the mandates of the institutions who afford us a livelihood in our chosen field of labor. The gap between purpose and practice delineated by Gharabaghi is one indication of the roots of antagonism and contradiction for us as workers.

Of course, there is a tendency to want to create a life free of worry and tension, contradiction and struggle. While we might enter the field of CYC full of the powerful ideas and concepts we have learned in our schooling, these quickly confront the practicalities of sustaining employment and fitting in as a good CYC worker within an agency or other child and youth serving institution. It becomes easier to stop troubling our lives by reading the literature of our field that makes us uncomfortable or uneasy about the compromises we must make every day as we enforce the rules and mandates of our workplace upon the young people we encounter. This is why I applaud the courage of those workers who still read and challenge themselves to keep up with the literature. Those who are willing to recognize that the world of work has made the field of CYC a bit strange to them. This is the one of the gaps, the contradictions and antagonisms between theory and

practice, scholarly work and lived work, institutional mandates and academic calls to ethical practice.

It is however, more important than ever that we do not give up on our efforts to think together, as academics and workers. The challenge of capitalist rule and its effects on the next generation is nothing short of catastrophic if we give our lives and best thoughts over to its interests and investments.  Its evolving mandate of discipline and control continues to find ever more comprehensive technologies that increasingly verge into the very work we do. Make no mistake, capitalism is learning from us and about us in order to erase any difference between who we are as living beings and who we are as capitalist subjects.

I read the other day about a social experiment being launched in China. Karen Botsman (2017) poses the following scenario in a disturbing piece in *Wired*:

> *Imagine a world where many of your daily activities were constantly monitored and evaluated: what you buy at the shops and online; where you are at any given time; who your friends are and how you interact with them; how many hours you spend watching content or playing video games; and what bills and taxes you pay (or not). It's not hard to picture, because most of that already happens, thanks to all those data-collecting behemoths like Google, Facebook and Instagram or health-tracking apps such as Fitbit. But now imagine a system where all these behaviours are rated as either positive or negative and distilled into a single number, according to rules set by the government. That would create your Citizen Score and it would tell everyone whether or not you were trustworthy. Plus, your rating would be publicly ranked against that of the entire population and used to determine your eligibility for a mortgage or a job, where your children can go to school - or even just your chances of getting a date.*

Botsman goes on to tell us that this is the Social Credit System currently being tested by the Chinese government as a method to "measure and enhance 'trust' nationwide and to build a culture of 'sincerity'." To imagine that some variation of such a system, if effective, would not be exported worldwide by global capital, I would argue, is very possibly naïve in the extreme. I want to point out, that this system takes key elements of ethical imperatives we teach as central to our practice, such as sincerity and trust, and deploys them as virtual measures of social control. This is the most concrete manifestation thus far of what Deleuze (1992) predicted as the society of control and what Antonio Negri (1996) has been writing about as the emerging system of rule that builds itself out of our living capacity for sociality, or what we term in our field, the building blocks of relationship.

This parasitic appropriation of that which most intimately comprises our relations with each other as living beings capable of love, trust, and sincerity is truly a profound threat to everything the field of CYC has proposed as meaningful work. It is now arriving in full extension as we enter the 21st century. If we are to take this seriously, then it is imperative that our thinking and our practices reflect nuanced and sophisticated understandings of the world the next generation (and those after) will be facing. If there was ever a time when we could simply go to work and never read another book or article about our field, this is not that moment. Similarly, if there was ever a time when we as scholars and teachers could simply rehash the corpus of late 20th century CYC literature, as though it were thoroughly adequate to our situation today, this is not that moment either.

As Guattari (2005) has pointed out, this is a moment of terrifying implication, in which entire worlds and ecologies of sociality are at risk for extinction. The investment our field made in the latter half of the 20th century in a foundational phenomenological lived relational encounter is at significant risk of being parasitically emptied of all material actuality. The very root of our work is under threat.

The question is, does our thinking as articulated in the literature reflect this crisis or is it simply business as usual. I would argue that both tendencies are at

play. Some of our literature is struggling to speak to the issues of the twenty first century and some of it is sustaining the key elements of twentieth century thought. This may not be such a bad thing, as long as we read as a much as possible of both literatures as deeply and thoughtfully as we can.

We need to struggle to sustain what is valuable in what we have learned thus far about the absolute value of lived relations. Such struggle, in terms of thought and practice, needs to be true to the origins of our field, while at the same time reconfiguring the relational integrity of the foundational literature within the context of the 21st century. That is to say, we as CYC scholars and practitioners need to continue to build rich ecologies of living relations between workers and young people that are relevant to the rapidly evolving system of rule that is 21st century global capitalism. This is no small challenge and the increasing diversity of the CYC literature and some of the contestations and debates we find there are indicative of the scope of the task.

Hence, the reason I applaud those working in the field who continue to read and challenge themselves, and us, to become relevant to the issues and challenges of a world gone mad. This is my wish for the new year—that we remain a living, vibrant, creative alternative to every form of rule that would deny the primacy of living things. Where we go now in 2018 is up to all of us. I believe we are up to the task. I hope I am right.

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# School's Out. Forever!

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This is the first of my columns this year in which I want to focus on presenting transformative ideas that impact the lives of young people and potentially change how we think of child and youth care practice. I want to emphasize that these are ideas, not well researched or detailed blueprints for change. The purpose of presenting ideas is to stimulate dialogue that might build on them, dismiss them, or build movements to advocate for them. I am doing this because I feel very strongly about always ensuring there is a space in our field, and in human contexts in general, for voices that imagine something different.

Two personal stories to set the stage –

### First Story

Recently, my daughter was sitting at the kitchen table studying for a Science test.  I watched her fidget around, change her position on the chair, leaf through pages of her notes, and stare fixedly at the Periodic Table of Elements.  I could clearly see that she was frustrated, but eventually that frustration turned to sadness and I saw tears welling up in her eyes.

"Can I help you?"
"Probably not; it's chemistry."
"Well, maybe we can try together; what are you supposed to know or do here?"
"That's the thing, I have no idea.
"What have you been learning about in class? What are the topics?"

"I don't know! I don't know anything. I don't remember even one thing I am supposed to know or do!"

Here is the thing; I confess that Chemistry is not my favourite subject. Never has been, and at any rate, it's been about 35 years since the last time I sat in a Chemistry class, and the language spoken in that class was not English. So as I was looking at my daughter's practice questions, I frankly had no idea what these were asking much less how to answer them. But I knew someone who does – Mr. YouTube!

We entered the term 'molecular bonding' into the search bar on YouTube. We got many hits, and clicked on the very first one. It was an eight-minute video that explained molecular bonding and everything you need to know about this topic in order to answer what it described as 'secondary school expectations about molecular bonding regardless of grade level'. Together we watched the video once; the tears slowly stopped coming, the fidgeting started to settle down, and my daughter stopped flipping through her notes. "Let's watch it one more time", I said. We did. Then we looked at the questions and answered all of them as if we were playing a game; it was fun, easy, no stress and informative too! In fact, that night I checked out some other YouTube videos about molecules and related topics, and for the first time ever in my life, I learned about chemistry because I wanted to. My daughter aced the test and now goes around saying that chemistry is easy; I find that a bit annoying!

### Second Story

A few years ago, I had an opportunity to spend six months in Germany with some colleagues at Hildesheim University. At that time, my oldest son was in grade 11, my middle son in grade 7 and my daughter in grade 5. Since we had to take the kids out of school for the six months we were gone, we planned around homeschooling for the younger two, and my oldest son was able to take his high school credits through online courses. Alas, the kids did not cooperate, and

homeschooling turned out to be a constant fight. They wanted to explore Europe, and we wanted them to work on math sheets. They won, and we gave up. We assumed that they might lose the school year, but thought that this would not be the worst thing to happen, and at least we could all have a good time in Europe. As it turned out, when my kids returned to school after a six months absence, they re-joined their classes with about a third of the school year left, and that year they brought home the best report cards they had ever brought home. In fact, both won awards that year for their academic accomplishments.

I realize that these are just two anecdotes. Clearly, they contain no scientific research value whatsoever. But they do raise some questions that are interesting to explore. What does it mean when kids can get better grades by _not_ attending school? What does it mean when missing two thirds of the school year has a positive impact on academic accomplishment? Why is an eight-minute video more effective in teaching a relatively complex scientific concept than weeks of daily 70 minutes classes with a teacher? How can such a video make chemistry 'fun', whereas the three weeks or so of in-class instructions lead to a child becoming sad, discouraged and tearful? For the record, her science teacher is, in my humble opinion, a very good teacher.

Schools have changed over the years; but they have not been transformed. The basic structure of assembling hundreds of young people and placing a professional teacher in front of groups of 30 or so has been in place for hundreds of years. While there have been virtually infinite attempts at improving curriculum, and perhaps making it fit the times, the curriculum has never actually fit the times; it is always well out of sync with the way life unfolds, both in the natural realm and in the socio-cultural realm. And while the professional designation as 'teacher' may have evolved over the years to a much higher status profession in at least some jurisdictions (usually in the global north), the pedagogic innovation within that profession have hardly made a dent in how young people experience school. Let's consider, for a moment, the best-case scenario of school and having professionally designated teachers. We can say, in most cases, that schools have contributed a lot

to much higher rates of literacy, and in most cases, have helped young people find a social context conducive to the development of peer relationships and social skills. By the time young people graduate from school and enter either the employment markets or post-secondary education, they are somewhat equipped to be successful in both of these settings. The benefit of structuring public education systems around the concepts of school and professionally designated teachers is primarily that this method can provide a foundational knowledge and skill base to millions of young people at a time. In other words, it seems efficient.

Let us also consider the negative aspects of school. We know that a good portion of young people are not successful in school. Often, there are patterns amongst the demographics of the young people to whom this applies. In my geographic location, the students who are not successful are disproportionally Black Youth, Indigenous youth, young people with disabilities, young people with mental health challenges, and those who are socially vulnerable to bullying, isolation, and exploitation. Schools have not mitigated the generational aspects of social inequality; young people who grow up in poverty are less likely to be successful in school; young people who grow up in families where parents and grandparents were not successful in school are less likely to experience success themselves. In fact, schools largely mirror the social inequities and injustices we find in society, and some argue that schools are complicit in and perpetuate those social inequities and injustices. We might also take issue with the pedagogic culture of schools, perpetrated, often unwittingly, by professionally designated teachers. That culture is clearly and unequivocally one of compliance and conformity. Schools have, even in geographic contexts of affluence and privilege, maintained mechanisms of thought control and physical containment that we otherwise reject in our societies. Teachers are hardly equipped to deal with the consequences of an institution that demands counter-cultural movement in its relationship with children and parents. So they perpetuate those demands, operationalize them, and prioritize the demonstration of conformity and compliance over the acquisition of critical thinking skills and a zest for innovation. And they do this for a third of every

day for a substantial part of young people's childhood and adolescence. It is perhaps no wonder, then, that by the time young people leave school and enter either the work world or post-secondary education, they rely on instruction, rubrics, clarity, predictability, and generally having their hands held and being protected and shielded from their own sense of autonomy. It is no surprise that those young people become adults who have for centuries and will continue to well into the future maintain the structures of racism, inequality and marginalization in our societies. It is also no surprise that we encounter young people who hold a strong sense of entitlement to these things. In their minds, the structure and safety of their school experience ought to continue indefinitely, so that their experience of life is one they can plan, predict, shape and own as a form of property. I wonder if this model of learning, of education, and of upbringing, reflects the needs or the opportunities of the 21$^{st}$ century world we live in. And I wonder if the structural foundation of schools and professionally designated teachers is actually still the most efficient way of ensuring a foundational skill set and knowledge for all young people.

One reason why schools were necessary for as long as we have had them, is that it simply was not viable to educate millions without doing so in groups. We don't have the resources to teach every child individually how molecular bonding works. We need to bring 30 children into a group setting, and then have one person (a teacher) explain the process. But the efficiency barrier is no longer a meaningful argument. With the availability and accessibility of cyberspace, we can create knowledge and skill modules that are accessible to millions at the same time or on their own time, and we only have to pay for one person to spend eight minutes to put together a YouTube video. It doesn't matter whether this person is a professionally designated teacher or not; it only matters that molecular bonding is a concept that young people can relate to and understand after watching the video. And if they don't understand it the first time, they can watch the video another twenty times until they do get it. Alternatively, we can have four hundred different videos with four hundred different pedagogic methods to explain the same thing,

which would infinitely increase the likelihood that a young person can relate to one of those methods compared with the two or three ways a teacher can explain things in school. The reality is that the internet, which is often more accessible than physical school houses (that could be far away from where a young person lives, that may not be wheelchair accessible, that may have allergens in the walls, and that may present too much social pressure for some young people), can provide educational resources far more efficiently than physical infrastructure can. And the internet does not treat Black Youth differently than white youth; it doesn't demand conformity to behaviour standards, and it doesn't impose sis-gendered, euro-centric or privileged ways of conducting oneself.

I don't want to suggest that schools can be replaced by the internet and everything would be fine. Not at all. We would still have to worry about the contents of what is being engaged with – symptoms of racisms, exclusion, oppression, exploitation, and so on are just as prevalent or at least just as possible on the internet as they are in physical institutions. And we do, of course, worry about the social learning of young people, and how this might be impacted by transferring their time in schools to time spend on their own staring at screens. But I think it is important to note that the internet does in fact eliminate one core reason for why schools are necessary – efficiency.

So let me combine some of the things I have talked about here to offer a different vision of 'school', one that would transform learning in ways much more commensurate with 21$^{st}$ century needs and opportunities.

What if instead of concentrating and centralizing learning in schools and at the hands of professionally designated teachers, we decentralized learning to occur across community settings using a range of mediums and through the wisdom and lived experiences of many different people? Instead of having mandatory school for seven hours per day, we could have one hour of mandatory cross-cultural and cross racial engagement in which young people physically come together in highly diverse groups of people (of all ages interested in learning) in a community setting and use various media (including YouTube videos) to engage history through the

perspectives of African Heritage lenses, Indigenous lenses, and various other cultural, linguistic and political lenses that may be particularly well represented in the geographies of any given young person. And we make mandatory participation in a recreational community organization, where the recreational activities are supplemented with completing one or two learning modules in mathematics with the soccer coach, the artist, or the musician. And another hour is spent exploring the natural environment with a naturalist accompanied by an indigenous person, and perhaps yet another set of learning modules are completed under the supervision of technology-involved professionals who have, as part of their work responsibilities, a requirement to meet with groups of children regularly in their workplace.

I could go on and on providing examples of settings and contexts in which structured learning could unfold in micro contexts. Who ever said that seven consecutive hours in a single physical location is the only way to acquire the knowledge and social foundations required to move toward emergent adulthood? Why can't this take place across settings, through myriad social grouping intentionally geared toward the intersections of identity, and with a heavy and consistent focus on innovation through technology, hard science and complex mathematics? What would happen if we moved toward this kind of model of mass education?

Well, this would indeed be transformative. Young people would learn in the context of peer groupings that shift every day to reflect the diversity of life circumstances and identities. They would learn from a range of people differently located in society, and not necessarily professionally designated as teachers. They could make choices about what modules of learning they want to focus on, while still maintaining some mandatory knowledge and sill acquisition. Learning would be facilitated through many different media, including internet-based learning, but not necessarily (and perhaps not at all) in the form of sitting at home and staring at a screen. Watching a YouTube video with peers and an adult guide, discussing it and

practicing what has been learned is not the same thing as traditional online education.

The implication would go well beyond the pedagogy of learning. Young people would be engaged with social groups, social settings and institutional and organizational actors that schools just can't engage. They would be community-engaged, physically present in multiple settings each day. Community organizations (including corporate organizations) would have a role to play in the upbringing of children and youth, and the social networks of young people would expand accordingly. Social presence for young people would shift from a physical context that necessarily must engage in control measures to maintain order and safety to many different physical contexts that are not containment focused but that instead are themselves real and active participants in community life. In short, the interface of social, cultural, technological, corporate, economic and political settings and social systems would be part and parcel of every young person's life every day. Is this not what the 21$^{st}$ century world is all about? Is this not the complex character of our social relations today? And is this not a far better way of having young people identify those areas of social, economic and political life where they think they can innovate and make a difference?

No innovation has ever flowed from the concepts of control, compliance, conformity and physical containment. This is what schools are. And teachers are the instruments of this, even when they don't want to be. Wisdom, knowledge, skills, reflection, competence, and innovation are centered in community. They are nowhere to be found in increasingly decrepit buildings in which autonomy is seen as the enemy.

What would this mean for child and youth care practice? Well, it would mean that our relational practice focus is needed more than ever. As young people encounter the points of tension, the moments of conflict, the challenges associated with navigating the full complexity of social relations, child and youth care practitioners can be there, facilitate the movements of young people through the world of decentralized learning. They can use all of the core characteristics of child

and youth care practice to assist young people in their encounters with others. They can bridge the experiences of families and young people in this far more democratic learning context. They can enrich the discussions about race and racism, gender and gender politics, technology and its ethical dilemmas. From a structural and institutional perspective, child and youth care practice becomes the face of community relations. Every community organization, corporate actor, institutional form will have to engage with child and youth care practitioners, so that they themselves can learn how to be with young people thirty for knowledge but not inhibited by institutional control mechanisms. In other words, instead of building mechanisms of control, we shift to build ecologies of relational practice across settings, contexts, and social actors. We render the world relational. And then finally, child and youth care will indeed be as Garfat has suggested it ought to be: Child and youth care will be "a way of being in the world".

This would be transformative. It would cost far less, be far more efficient, offer far more choice, be far more inclusive of many lived experiences, and very likely advance the quality of learning in science and mathematics. Yes, I realize that describing a fundamental transformation in five pages necessarily omits many details and raises more questions than it answers. But at least it raises questions, which is often more than one can do at school!

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# Renaming, Reflecting and Apologizing

**Jack Phelan**
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I attended a session at the recent World CYC Conference in Ventura, California where the discussion focused on Critical Incident Reports and how they are labelled and constructed in different agencies and jurisdictions. There were interesting comparisons of how these reports were titled in different countries and types of programs, and how they were ultimately useful or not. At the time, I saw it as just another relatively unimportant distinction, and paid more attention to the rest of the presentation. Yet it stuck in my mind for some reason and now I have thought about this issue quite differently.

I often say to younger colleagues and students that I always learn something new at conferences, and the benefits of attending conferences and trainings outside your own agency are surprising. In spite of myself and a sometimes jaded approach to listening to topics that I might think are basic or well defined, I often come away with new ideas and changed beliefs.

In this session, several people described difficult and disruptive interactions with young people, which required a special report for the files. Aside from my mental critiquing of whether the young person was handled well, I heard a great deal of need for agencies and thus individual staff to justify actions and minimize liability when something dangerous occurred. There was a lively comparison of jargon, supervisory interactions and legalese based on individual programs. I heard a lot of unstated need to ensure that these reports endeavored to protect the adults involved from blame as a major driver.

I have been thinking about this fairly predictable conversation several times since then. I have a suggestion, which is too late to add to the discussion in

California, so I am making it here, that we re-name *Critical Incident Reports* as *How the Program Failed to Meet Your Needs Reports*. Examples of young people or families falling short of our expectations, even acting quite badly at times, are very powerful reminders that we cannot always create useful experiences for the vulnerable people we have chosen to try to help. We often describe our efforts as doing everything possible, trying all the avenues we can conceive, bending over backwards, to support people. Yet, in spite of that, we sometimes have to deal with "critical incidents". These are generally added to the case files and ongoing histories of these people as another example of personal failure, rather than being described as another example of how we have not yet become able to meet their needs adequately.

I learned fairly early in my CYC practice to shift the blame when something goes haywire, from the young person to myself. I found that when I apologize to a young person or family for not being able to meet their needs, even when we might both agree that it may be beyond my capability, the result is that we connect better afterwards, rather than struggle with blame and resentment. I also have suggested to colleagues who may also be involved, that they participate with me in this apology, and have usually met with resistance and criticism. It is very interesting to me that when people who come to us for help act badly, even though we knew they might, we blame them for this. The way we blame them may be indirect, such as calling it a critical incident, but when we do not take full responsibility for being helpful, they end up being diminished and pushed away.

I had a discussion with a parent of a teen who was creating unhappiness in her family recently and I suggested that conflict may be the way that this young woman was attempting to build connection. So, I recommended that this dad apologize rather than criticize as a useful approach. I hope he listens.


Find us on: facebook.

# Relationship in Child and Youth Care – A Deep Dive

**Luke Carty**

In one of my first team meetings in a residential care setting, an experienced worker casually asked me how my relationships were going with both the staff and the children. Due to minimal Child and Youth Care (CYC) training, I was confused by the question and did not feel comfortable nor understand why he was asking that question. The importance of relationship became clear to me as I progressed through stages of learning in child and youth care practice. I was taught that relationship was the base of all the work we do as a vehicle for connection and engagement with young people.

Bettelheim (1950) was one of the first childcare theorists to articulate the importance of every child having a caregiver who would attend to their needs. This idea of the importance of relationship continued to grow through the work of Bowlby (1969) who best articulated the concepts of attachment theory. Attachment theory encompasses the belief that the attachments we form as infants and young children shape our view of the world around us. Of particular relevance to the field of Child and Youth Care is the predictive quality of attachment theory and that many of the young people we come across may have insecure attachments due to past life experiences. Brendtro (1969) discussed how a childcare worker might use relationships with young people to support a change in behaviours. Fewster (1990) focused on the use of self in the relationship with the young person and ideas of connection in the relationship. Garfat (2008) outlined the concern that therapeutic relationships have always been the focus of our work, yet the elements of a therapeutic relationship in child and youth care were never clearly defined. He

proposed the concept of relational child and youth care practice, which tied together several concepts including relationship, self and "meaning-making" (Garfat, 2008).

## Authenticity

In my experience of teaching CYC practice at the college level, students who are experiencing their first field practicum often celebrate their ability or lament their inability to form relationships with young people. In discussing their field practicum experience, almost without exception, they discuss their relationship with the young person before any other concept of professional practice.

These CYC students are under external pressure, from the college to develop natural and authentic relationships with young people. This appears to form a conflict, in that a relationship outside of child and youth care is often formed naturally or based on mutual interests and personalities. We do not often make a conscious choice that we are going to develop a relationship with specific people before first meeting and interacting with them. It must be asked how authentic are these relationships if the successful completion of a degree or diploma rests on the students' ability to form them.

A second challenge for CYC college students is their struggle to articulate what a healthy, therapeutic or professional relationship with a young person would look like in practice. They must ask themselves what is the purpose of forming a relationship. Is it simply a means to an end, if the young person likes the worker then they are more likely to follow direction? Conversely, is the relationship meant to be a deeper connection, which will allow the worker and child to explore concepts of trust, empathy and support?

As child and youth care practitioners, we are being financially compensated based on our ability to work effectively with young people. In multi-disciplinary team meetings, one of the main topics of discussion is inevitably our relationship with specific young people. When, as a team, we decide that we need to intervene with a particular young person we often survey the room to determine which staff

member has a 'good' relationship with that individual young person in order to be the most effective in our intervention. There can often be competition among the staff members and occasionally heated debate about who has a 'good' relationship with the young person, and why they have been able to build that 'good' relationship. Is it factors within our control, such as skill, empathy or approach or outside of our control, such as cultural background, age, gender or sexual orientation?

If we are under external and internal pressure to build these relationships, how authentic are we being in our use of Self, or are we changing our core Self based on the child we are working with? If it is an aggressive or acting out child, we become more guarded and tough hoping that they will respond to the no-nonsense approach. If it is an introverted child, we tap into our sensitive and calm side in our approach in hopes to connect and build a relationship.

I recall a meeting with a young person, who was in residential care and his social worker. The question was asked by the social worker, "who do you have a good relationship with?" The young person, likely feeling put on the spot, responded "with Luke". I was filled with a sense of pride and accomplishment that my hours of working directly with this young man had resulted in him feeling that we had built a 'good' relationship. My bubble was almost immediately burst by the social worker who pointed out that I was paid to work with him, and was not a friend or family member.

The social worker was telling the truth, and made me reflect further on the concept of relationship within my practice. As I was being paid and evaluated on my ability to form a relationship, could it truly be seen as an authentic relationship? My belief is that the relationships we form with young people are at a different level of authenticity than those we form with friends and family. CYC's should be reflecting on the concept of relationship and not force ourselves to feel that we have to build a 'good' relationship with every child in order to justify our success or failure as a CYC. There should also be support from the system we are working in to not pressure workers to form relationships quickly or in a non-authentic manner.

## Commitment

In our most intimate and close relationships, there is an element of commitment in the relationship, which can be stated or unstated. One common example is the marriage ceremony where in front of friends, family and acquaintances we declare that we will commit to our partner forever. These commitments are not always kept as promised but there is at least a ritual addressing the concept of commitment.

In child and youth care, the element of commitment cannot always be guaranteed at such a personal level. In a profession with a high degree of changeover, promotion and burnout, the children we work with often have connections with a wide range of workers throughout their time in care.

With my own children, I build a relationship that, barring a major catastrophe, I will be committed to them until one of us passes on. I can commit to being in relationship with my children, and any future decision about the parent-child relationship will be done by one of us, not, hopefully, based on the constraints of an external system. Often, for the youth we work with, there is an artificial cutoff date proposed which determines when the relationship must come to an end.

At a good-bye party, the novice worker will often tell the youth that they will come visit them at their new placement or home and will definitely keep in touch. In my experience, this promise is often broken due to the realities of the workers professional and personal commitments. With the increase in technology it is now possible to keep in touch after care, however, many agencies fear the loss of control and threat of litigation and discourage this ongoing connection or relationship.

When CYC's move up the promotional ladder, they are often supported and congratulated for the accomplishment by colleagues. This celebration may stand in stark contrast to the feelings of loss of the young people with whom the worker was in relationship.

Garfat (2008) constructs an extensive list of characteristics of relational child and youth care practice. There is focus on engagement, meaning-making, using self

and being in the moment. It is noted that there is not mention of commitment from either the worker or the young person. Commitment is rarely negotiated in our professional relationships likely because we aren't able to commit to a long-term or specific period of time, which we will be in the young person's life. My thought is that in our work with young people, the concept of our commitment to the young person should be explicitly stated at the beginning of care and throughout the treatment period – although this is often a factor outside of our own control.

While I was working in residential care, there always felt like an element was missing from the relationship. I came to understand that what was missing was long-term commitment. I couldn't tell the youth I worked with that I would always be there for them, as I could with my own children. In fact, neither party in the worker-child relationship could make any commitment to the relationship beyond the immediate future. The child could have an incident and could be moved to another placement overnight. As the worker, I could find another job and be gone two weeks later. Perhaps this is part of the reason that CYC literature has not significantly explored this concept of commitment in relational work. The transient nature of both the children and adult professionals in the field of child and youth care makes commitment a difficult concept to grasp and define.



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## Self-Care

The concept of self-care can also find itself in conflict with the idea of commitment to relationship in the short-term. There are several occurrences where worker's personal lives have interrupted their ability to follow through on even short-term promises to young people. The common example of promising to help a young person with tomorrow's homework, then calling in sick the following day. This is often rationalized in our work through the idea of self-care and not wanting to get the young person sick. However, there needs to be extensive follow-up with the young person to ensure that they aren't experiencing the worker's sick day as yet another sign of an adult not following through on their commitment. The young people we enter into relationship with as CYC's have often been let down by adults on a number of levels, from their parents, foster parents and other caregivers.

A common discussion amongst child and youth care practitioners that makes me cringe is the worker who "won't work harder than the kid". This statement is usually made when the young person is not showing enough initiative in completing a task such as homework. The question I always asked was whether that same worker would stay up all night working on their own child's homework problem or school project despite a lack of interest or initiative. The answer to this is usually affirmative, and again points to the different manner in which we form relationships in our professional and in our personal lives.



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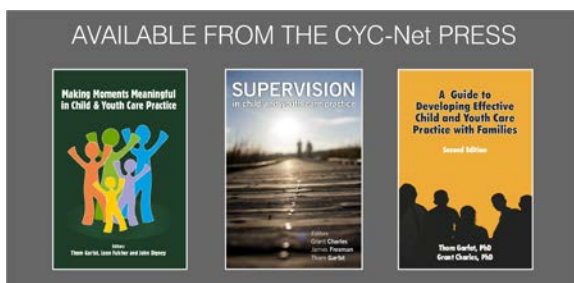
We often have unrealistic expectations of the level of commitment the young people we work with should be displaying. It is not our role to wait for the child to meet our expectation, but to inspire, teach and encourage them. A CYC has to be more committed than the child to the mutual relationship in order for the child to feel supported and trusted. We sometimes need to put aside our own short-term needs in order to focus on the needs of the child.

## Summary

Despite the difficulties in conceptualizing, teaching, communicating and understanding the term 'relationship' in child and youth care, it is still a grounding concept in our practice with young people. There needs to be more in-depth teaching of the concept to young CYC's and emphasizing that they will have a wide variety of relationships with young people and the goal should be to remain authentic rather than trying to attain a 'good' relationship with the young person. The concept of commitment, both short and long term with the young people we work with needs to be further explored in both theory and practice. The idea of using self-care as an excuse to not challenge themselves needs to be confronted by both young and experienced child and youth care practitioners.

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# Why Supervisors Should Be Built From The Floor Up

**Greg Squires**

Being a great Child and Youth Care Worker doesn't automatically set you up to be a good CYCW supervisor. I've been told that I'm a natural on the floor – I have a knack for developing meaningful relationships with young people, I tend to get along well with my peers, and my insights and interventions are generally well received -- but taking on the role of supervisor has been a difficult transition for me. I've been working in residential treatment with teenaged boys and girls for about twelve years, now, and I absolutely love my job. I've worked my way up through the ranks at my current organization by starting at the bottom of the on-call relief list, accepting part-time overnight positions, working weekends, tackling full time overnights, punching in full time hours on the floor, and after years of dedication and hard work I eventually landed a Senior Counselor position. That means I'm second in command to our Program Coordinator at our residential treatment unit, which places me on the lowest rung of our administrative ladder. And now, after finally achieving supervisory status in my chosen field of endeavour, I find myself looking back as often as I look forward along the graduated line that marks my particular career path.

I'm looking both ways because I'm presently riding the margin between my love for the uncertainty, chaos, crisis and connection of the floor and the necessary structure, supervision, paperwork and timelines of the office. I got to where I am because of my love for working with young people, and now if I want to continue pursuing a supervisory role I'm finding that I need to shift my gaze away from the floor. It isn't an easy transition to make because I find myself living with a foot in

each world – some days I spend much of my shift working with our young people, but the requirements and responsibilities of my position are constantly pulling me back to the office for supervisory and administrative purposes. It kills me when I have to tell the young people that I can't play another game of cards with them because I've got reports to write and some phone calls to make that I just can't put off any longer.

It's a difficult balancing act because I'm trying to develop my own skillset while supervising and supporting a group of developing Child and Youth Care Workers and a group of young people with their own unique developmental needs, wants, and demands. And if that parallel process wasn't already complex enough, I'm usually the go-to person for the young people, staff, parents, social workers, ex-residents, and my program coordinator. Most days it feels like I'm trying to change a flat tire on a moving car while still being expected to keep pace with rush hour traffic. I start each day with a list of things to do and know that before the day is through I'll add a few more items to the list, carry over a few from the day before, put some off until tomorrow, and have to decide where sacrifices will have to be made along the way. Fortunately, life experience and my time on the floor with the young people has taught me a thing or two about facing challenges.

When I started working as a Child and Youth Care worker I ran into more than a few situations where I felt overwhelmed and unsure of myself. I've got a Sociology degree and before that I studied Architectural Engineering, so I had no real idea what a group home was when I began working. Needless to say I was in for quite a shock on my first day when I was greeted at the front door of the group home by a teenage boy shouting and banging a hockey stick on the walls. He demanded to know my name and when I told him he said "I don't like you!" then ran down the hallway screaming obscenities. I immediately broke into a sweat and almost quit then and there, not even a minute into my first shift. Thankfully, I didn't, and it was the sure and steady guidance of my mentors and supervisors who got me through the tough times and steep learning curve of those early days. They helped me believe in myself and gave me the encouragement to keep doing what I

was doing, even though I wasn't really sure what was happening from one moment to the next.

Like I said, there's a steep learning curve with our work, and it's as much about self-discovery as it is about learning what makes young people tick. I had a lot to learn, so those times when I received a push in the right direction, a word of encouragement, a pat on the back, or a solid piece of advice meant the world to me because it usually came from someone I respected as a person and as a Child and Youth Care Worker.

I've worked a lot of different jobs before I discovered Child and Youth Care Work and I've learned important lessons from all of my supervisors, both good and bad ones – the good ones have given me an appreciation for empathy and respect, listening rather than talking, and have shown how encouragement, guidance and trust can motivate a person. Good supervisors make everyone around them better by building on their strengths, offering support, and generating a sense of unity and acceptance. The bad supervisors I've had have taught me what doesn't work – negativity, micromanagement, passive aggressive interaction, insensitivity, and lack of belief or encouragement. A bad supervisor will drive away good workers and snuff out the potential of those who stay. Morale in the work place is built or burned from the top down, and you can tell a lot about the supervisory skillset of people at the top by how happy or unhappy the people working beneath them are.

Looking back on my formative days as a Child and Youth Care Worker I now realize that I was happy to step outside my comfort zone and try new approaches on the floor because I felt safe and supported by my supervisors. I remember being taken aside by one of my first supervisors and having her tell me that I was too quiet in staff meetings, that I had a lot to offer but people wouldn't know it because I was so quiet. What choice did I have? I trusted her, believed in her approach on the floor, and knew that she had my best interests at heart, so at our next staff meeting I made the conscious decision to join the conversation instead of being a passive observer. She was right, of course, and since then I have continued to push myself and have been rewarded for my efforts by getting to present at a national CYC conference, sitting in on panel discussions, and becoming a training facilitator. All because someone believed in me and saw some potential. Like a child taking their first bike ride without training wheels, I undoubtedly weaved and wobbled a bit on the way, but I was able to push forward and focus on the road ahead because I knew someone I trusted and respected had my back and believed in me.

So now, a decade later, I'm the one chairing the staff meeting and making mental notes about our staff group and their individual contributions during discussions. It's an interesting place to be because I'm responsible to help supervise the team that I work with each day. We always do our best to support each other as we help the young people through times of crisis, we share ideas and opinions while we develop creative interventions, and we give constructive feedback when necessary. Like I said before, it's an interesting place to be because I get to work with staff who have a wide range of experience on the floor – wide eyed rookies full of optimism and nervous energy, seasoned professionals with a half dozen years under their belts and a presence on the floor that can only come with repeated experiences dealing with crisis, and old pros who were already supervisors when I was wide eyed and more confused than I realized.

I've reached a point where I'm pretty confident in my approach on the floor, and I find myself fascinated as I watch the staff on our team explore their limits and

navigate the uncertain waters between the stability that comes with following rules and policies and the magic that comes with believing in your ability and learning to colour outside the lines -- it's the difference between free form jazz experimentation and following sheet music note for note. One yields predictable results while the other can lead to unexpected discovery.

Part of my job, then, is to offer guidance and support as the staff explore, experiment, and begin to develop a style that works best for them and the young people in their care. I'll know that the staff feel safe and secure if they step outside their comfort zones without knowing what the end result will be. If they are willing to take a chance it means they believe someone has their back whether they succeed or not.

Recently, one of our young people was terribly upset and was weeping uncontrollably, and the staff that she was working with – not someone known to give many hugs -- took a chance and stepped outside of his usual comfort zone and offered her a hug. He didn't know if she would accept the embrace or not, and no doubt felt a bit uncertain as he waited for her response, but he was willing to try,
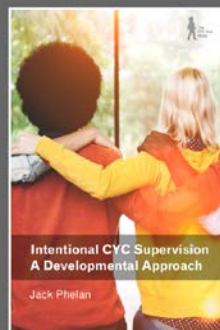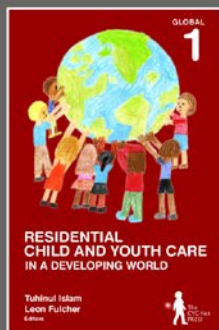
nonetheless. The outcome was that the young person gladly accepted the hug and the unconditional support it implied, and after crying on staff's shoulder for a while she pulled herself together and turned her day around. He took a chance for the young person's sake and it worked. Odds are that he wouldn't have taken the risk and put himself into a vulnerable situation if he didn't believe that he was safe to do so -- safe with the young person, and safe in his work environment.

As a supervisor, I need to work hard to provide that safe space for staff to explore and experiment, I need to look for teachable moments, and offer encouragement and support when the opportunities arise. If I'm doing my job and communicating effectively, the staff group will understand my expectations, and they will know what I think of their work on the floor. Sometimes it will be in the form of advice or constructive feedback, or a conversation about a specific intervention, or a few words of praise to let someone know that they are doing good work. I believe that feedback needs to be an active practice, not a passive one. Telling staff once a year during an annual performance review that they're doing good work is nice, but telling them in the moment and offering praise is a powerful way to demonstrate your belief in them and their process on the floor.

As supervisors we need to celebrate the strengths and successes of our staff whenever possible because they absolutely need to know when they are doing good work and that their efforts are being noticed. If staff members don't feel supported when trying something new they may stop trying altogether and end up getting 'stuck' in terms of their professional development, much the same way the youth that they are attempting to connect with may be 'stuck' in an early stage of their own personal development. This of course, brings us back to the idea of a parallel process, which seems to lie at the very heart of supervision.

The youth and children we work with need a safe space to explore their feelings and try new ways of interacting with their environment and the people in their lives. They require our support as they push their limits and begin to develop new skills, attitudes and beliefs. We can't expect them to grow and develop new concepts of themselves unless they feel that we believe in them and their ability to

change. The same holds true for developing Child and Youth Care Workers, who have accepted the awesome challenge of working with at-risk youth. They need a safe space to grow beyond their comfort zones, and need to know that they will be supported as they try new approaches on the floor. Just as it is a privilege to work with at risk youth, it is also a privilege to supervise and work with the people who provide the care for these young people. It is up to us, their supervisors, to give Child and Youth Care Workers the guidance, encouragement, and support they need to reach their potential.

Hopefully, understanding the process that brought us to where we are as supervisors will inform our actions and attitudes when we work with less experienced staff. If we are mindful to pass along the valuable lessons we have learned along the way, if we act with intentionality when interacting with young people and members of our teams, and if we look for opportunities to offer praise, feedback and support to those who need it the most we will be leading by example. If we are able to do that then we will eventually become the ones running along with the training wheels in our hands, cheering on the next generation of Child and Youth Care Workers as they wobble and weave down the path we've come to know so well. If we're doing our jobs properly they will make their way confidently forward into the unknown, safe and secure in the knowledge that no matter what, we've got their backs.

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GREG SQUIRES is a Child and Youth Care Worker from Newfoundland, Canada. People who know him and his approach on the floor will tell you he's a big teddy bear who believes in the power of hugs and humor. He and his wife, Angela, were hired as CYCs on the same day around 13 years ago -- they fell for each other while falling in love with the work they do. They've been married for ten years, now, and have two beautiful daughters, Emily and Maria. If Greg wasn't a CYC, he'd be working with children in some capacity, or he would be keeping himself busy as a woodworker, chef, writer, or designated hitter for the Toronto Blue Jays.

# Child and Youth Care – The Enhancement of Praxis: Theory to Practice or Theory vs Practice

**Travonne Edwards and Annu Gaidhu**

As two recent graduates of the first Master's program in Child and Youth Care (CYC) at Ryerson University in Ontario Canada, we have spent the past few years and our undergraduate careers actively studying the CYC theoretical concepts and practices. The depth to which we have evolved and transformed has impacted us both to think critically and deeply about the field of CYC. This paper presents a dialogue that examines CYC education and its benefits and drawbacks in the context of Ontario.

Gharabaghi (2016a) brings awareness to common positions and beliefs of what a CYC is. Typical arguments posit that a CYC is someone who has traditional front-line practice (e.g., group care, or schools), while other standpoints argue that CYC's need appropriate formalized post-secondary CYC education. What this suggests is that those who use the CYC title without any formal post-secondary CYC education (e.g., community services workers who self-identify as CYCs), cannot genuinely utilize CYC practices or be considered a "CYC practitioner."

The current body of CYC literature has influenced our understanding of praxis (theory to practice) in multiple ways; many question the authenticity of people contributing to the discourse with limited practical experience in the field (Gharabaghi, 2016a). The result of this is that there are some practitioners who have been directly involved in frontline practice with young people, whereas other practitioners have a more experience-limited, theoretical and research-driven

approach in the CYC. This topic holds great importance to us as we see the value of a practitioner who has a combination of both formal education and direct front-line experiences.

It is critical to examine what influences how a practitioner views their work and what they understand their work and role to be. While there seems to be a general agreement that CYC is an evolving practice and our continuous dialogues for professionalization persist, it is also necessary to further develop our understanding of what constitutes our knowledge of what it means to be a CYC. The purpose of this paper is to provide insights on both the current benefits and areas for improvements within the educational process in the CYC field, as experienced through two Master's students' perspectives, one who has direct-entry experience (progressing from college to university) and practical experience, and one that has the full undergraduate experience in CYC education with international practical experience.

## Child and Youth Care as Practice

When one begins to conceptualize what constitutes the role CYC, it is apparent that the title is often interchangeably utilized by other professions based on setting and practice. Definitions within these are vague; even literature and curriculum across post-secondary institutions is vague and rooted in assumptions and jargon (Snell, 2017). CYC practitioners are also known as Child and Youth Workers (C.Y.W), Child Care Workers (C.C.W) or Child and Youth Counsellors (C.Y.C) (OACYC, 2017). In North America, the term 'practitioner' is used to encompass the many roles of people who *might* be defined as CYC. Various bodies and organizations such as the Canadian Council of Child and Youth Care Associations (CCCYCA, 2014) or the Ontario Association of Child and Youth Care (OACYC, 2017) help define core principles and approaches in the field. The field of CYC offers adult mentor relationships to infants, children, and youth that are focused on promoting positive development in settings such as community-based child and youth programs, family support, school-based programs, mental

health, child welfare, clinical settings, and juvenile justice programs (Mattingly & Stuart, 2010). CYC's embody the passion and commitment to fostering positive relationships, caring, and meaningful engagement in the lives of children, youth, and families (Fewster, 1990; Freeman, 2013; Garfat, 2008; Gharabaghi & Anderson-Nathe, 2012; Kruegar, 2002; Stuart, 2009).

In the CYC discourse, early writers Fritz Redl (1959), Al Treischman (1969) and Henry Maier (1979) , have helped to advance the understanding of our practice. In more recent years, contemporary influencers of CYC have shed light on current models and trends in practice. For example, Garfat & Fulcher's (2013), Characteristics of a Relational Child and Youth Care Approach or Carol Stuart's (2009), Foundations of Child and Youth Care, help inform practitioners in the field. While many themes such as relational practice, relationships, caring, and engagement emerge across current CYC discourses there are also many differences.

In CYC practice, the concept of 'life-space' is considered the foundation within which interventions and practice approaches unfold (Stuart, 2009). It is within the 'life-space' where practitioners engage with children and youth in their daily lives within an ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), using core competencies such as relationship building, communication, activities of daily living, activity programming, group process, teamwork, utilization of community resources and family-centered practice approaches (Gharabaghi & Stuart 2013; VanderVen & Torre, 1999). Often, life-space interventions utilize an ecological systems approach that focuses on the relationship between young people and the increasingly complex systems around them such as their physical, social, cultural and political settings (VanderVen & Mattingly, 1981). 'Life-space interventions' are integral components of a relational CYC practice approach, which is also a core value of CYC work (Garfat & Fulcher, 2011). Krueger (1990) stated that practitioners further develop professional characteristics such as empathy, trust, security, compassion, and sympathy, which are strengthened by understanding the nature of life-space interventions involving young people through direct practice. Today, CYC

workers utilize life space interventions in numerous setting including but not limited to: schools, hospitals, community-based programs, juvenile justice programs, child welfare, family support and clinical settings (Mattingly, 2010; VanderVen & Torre, 1999).

## Areas of Consideration for Advancing CYC Discourse

### *Academic Privilege and its Impact on Praxis*

Discussions about the nature of CYC theory and practice are not new to the field (Beker & Maier, 2001). There have been ongoing dialogues about theoretical approaches such as life-space intervention (Stuart, 2009), relational practice (Garfat, 2003; Krueger, 2004), engagement focused theories (Phelan, 2005), children's rights theories (Collins, 2017), attachment theory (Maier, 1987), and resilience theory (Ungar, 2008); that in many ways reflect the complexities of CYC.

The discussions and conversations in various online journals have helped broaden the definition of CYC. With the development of the CYC Master's program in Ontario and University of Victoria in British Columbia, CYC practitioners are increasingly being immersed in research and will work in places it may have previously been difficult for CYC's (e.g., policy, academia, research) (Ryerson, 2017). This is a powerful enhancement to the praxis, or theory into practice, in the CYC field (Gharabaghi, 2016a). Throughout our CYC learnings at various institutions, praxis has been noted as an essential concept. The implicit premise of praxis is that one can "practice what they preach" (Doherty, 2005). Praxis is seen as the ability to apply theory to practice thereby enhancing theory and practice.

From our perspective, it seems that many up-and-coming practitioners are not required to have work experiences in traditional settings (e.g., schools, residential, community centers) to be engaged in positions of importance and influence (e.g., teaching, policy, research). Many students leave post-secondary education with the plan to teach without focusing on their professional development as a practitioner

(Gharabaghi, 2013b). When a practitioner does not continue their professional development and enters these critical positions, they do not fill the gaps missed from CYC education (Gharabaghi, 2013b). We refer to this type of practitioner as a "CYC academic."

When hiring a CYC educator, front-line practice experience may not directly be required. It becomes problematic when an academic practitioner is educating students in a course that is grounded in practice without having that direct experience. Often, students request and prefer when educators can bring direct scenarios they have experienced into the classroom; "connecting theory to practice requires the ability to have the experience to reflect" (Fraser, 2016, p. 27).

The CYC certification process has been a positive ensuring that children and families are provided with qualified and trained workers (Fraser, 2016). Some practitioners, however, argue that certification allows for an academic backdoor, allowing some to be accredited and use the CYC title without having the practical core knowledge gained through frontline practice (Fraser, 2016). There is an assumption that attending post-secondary institutions is a necessity when pursuing work with young people (Skott-Myhre, 2017). Hans Skott-Myhre (2017) questions the premise that post-secondary education can make you a better CYC; he articulates that some of the best practitioners he has encountered have no formalized education (Skott-Myhre, 2017). When CYC academics are propelled solely by competencies that minimize the importance of practice, they risk giving students a false perspective of what it means to be a practitioner (Skott-Myhre, 2017). "We risk producing CYC workers who are incredibly adept theoretically and philosophically but have no real sense of what they will do when they get out there" (Skott-Myhre, 2017, p.17).

It is challenging to replicate the experience of a direct care practitioner within an educational institution. Though practicums are available in most post-secondary CYC programs, Gharabaghi (2013b) articulates concerns with the current practical experience of those who study CYC in the Greater Toronto Area. CYC students have the opportunity to be exposed to children and youth but are not always

provided with adequate CYC tasks or CYC values and core principles within the setting. "I am left deeply concerned with the outcome of four years of education ostensibly in our field" (Gharabaghi, 2013,b p.14).

Post-secondary education does allow its learners to think critically about day to day practices and beliefs, but this is not something that is exclusive to school (Skott-Myhre, 2017). There are many benefits of education, but in the end, we need theory and practice to go hand in hand. "Marx tells us that what drives history forward are the material struggles of real living human beings, not abstract systems of ideal philosophical precepts" (Skott-Myhre, 2017, p.18).

### Global Perspectives

The role of a CYC practitioner is continually changing. Our overall goal as a field is to practice competently; the reflective process allows us to debate everyday best practices critically and to continuously advance (Gharabaghi, 2016a). Often, when we conceptualize the value of professionalization to advance practice, it is within the North American context and revolves around one being formally educated, which becomes a barrier to those who have done CYC work for many years within North America and globally. CYC practice cannot be thought of in the context of a single geography but requires an international and global perspective. "It is difficult to imagine practitioners trained in relational practices but blissfully unaware of the transformative movements within social relations at local and global levels." (Gharabaghi, 2016a, p.9). The intentions of capturing diverse global perspectives in CYC is not to say that one context is better than the other, but to share best practices and policies of other countries that might be useful in our work to understand the needs of young people better.

Socioeconomic and political realities, for example, have impacted the way CYC practice unfolds in South Africa (Allsopp, 2005). Although it may be true that, across both hemispheres, the socio-economic conditions differ, CYC practice is more than a job, "it is an expression of the spirit of hope, of collectivity and a shared sense of responsibility for those left vulnerable by the ravages of history"

(Gharabaghi, 2009d, p.1). The Isibindi (NACCW, 2014) model embodies an inter-sectoral collaboration, whereby a community-based approach to CYC allows those who directly live within the communities, to be the experts in understanding the relevant conditions that impact young people to provide the needed supports (Friedman & Gool, 2014). This anti-oppressive approach to practice acknowledges that social location and other elements can hinder academic success.

If we accept the reality of a global CYC, then we also need to recognize the need for a fundamental shift within CYC education that places multiplicities of race, culture and socio-economic contexts at the forefront of learning. Without this, efforts for professionalization will create barriers for arguably qualified CYC workers; whereby "some are certified and others not, some will graduate from accredited programs and others not … some members of professional associations and others not, but none of these approaches speak to the experience of young people's education in the field" (Gharabaghi, 2013b, p.17). It is essential to analyze and contrast how the role of CYC's across the world is viewed.

## Conclusion

CYC as a field in Ontario has been very privileged to have academic opportunities to advance our knowledge through educational institutions, but can an academic practitioner effectively educate about CYC without practical experience? Although CYC can be a practice of knowledge and research, it must include partnerships with young people and the front-line practitioner to be legitimate (Gharabaghi, 2016a). "Only hearing the voices of those who lack front-line experience or have education outside of the discipline… prevents our field from advancing" (Fraser, 2016, p.29). Many would argue CYC academics have power and need to continually reflect on their academic privilege and attempt to mitigate any risk of only hearing the voice of the academic CYC's, subsequently minimizing or even silencing the voice of CYC practitioners or young people. CYC's must assure we utilize methods such as participatory action to ensure the voices of those we serve is upheld, and we must be incorporating the experiences

of front-line CYC practitioners into the 'academic' discourse. This field will gain more legitimacy when CYC practitioners who have relevant practical experience, are representative of lecturers in colleges and universities, research and writers (Gharabaghi, 2016a). Also, what does CYC mean to those who do not have access to educational systems that teach CYC practice (e.g., Canada, U.S., etc.)? As our field continues to progress in a very positive direction, we must continue to challenge the current standard. There is importance in ensuring the voices of practitioners and young people globally and in different context are heard.

We in no way believe we are model examples of what constitute CYC's, but as active members within this field, we think there is always a need for critical discussion. By nature, the CYC discourse is a critical practice that perpetually resists and searches to deconstruct the principles of what is ethical or does not seem adequate (Gharabaghi, 2016a). Professionalization in the field of CYC creates a top-down approach that does not enhance our practice within the immediate life space of young people (Skott-Myhre, 2013). Narrow opinions and ideologies that define who we are limit the growth of our discipline. As the field continues to progress, we must work towards finding an inclusive anti-oppressive approach to education, professionalization and practice.
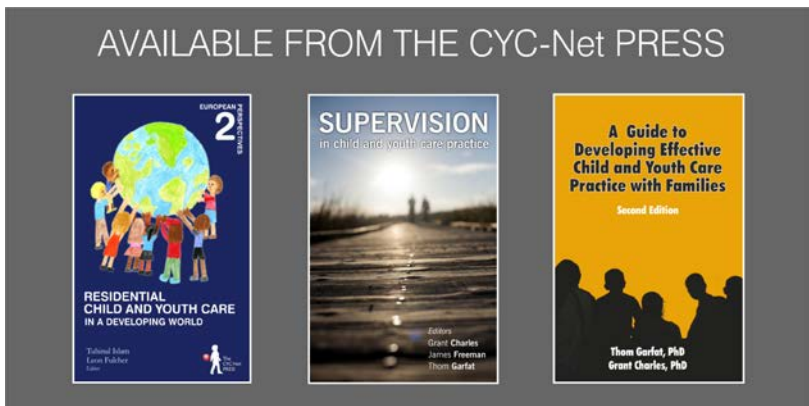
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# Relationships in a different light

**Kelly Shaw**

As Child and Youth Care workers we understand relationship. We practice skills of relationship development. Building rapport, engaging in the dance (Krueger, 1999), finding the rhythm (Kruger, 1994; Maier, 1992) are all pieces of Child and Youth Care training and education and are basic skills we develop as we enter into the evolution of our practice.

We support each other throughout our careers to make sure we are engaged in therapeutically appropriate interactions and we constantly check in with self to ensure we are focussed on the needs of other (Garfat, 1993, 2002; Fewster, 1990, 2001). This is essential to effective practice, and appropriate engagement with children, youngsters and families.

But when do we talk about the reality of relationship? Like, for example, the experience of intimacy which occurs when you really offer yourself to this experience which, I believe, is an integral part of effective Child and Youth Care practice.

I knew a program once where the Child and Youth Care workers were not allowed to have contact with youngsters after they were discharged. The staff I spoke with were unable to explain the rationale for this policy. Though they did not understand it, they followed it (not questioning a policy dictated to them by ... they did not know whom); a policy which told them to behave with young people in a way that was incongruent with what they had come to believe about relationships and about Child and Youth Care practice.

How can this be appropriate for youngsters who have experienced such disruption in their development that they were identified as needing residential treatment? Treatment programs which practice Child and Youth Care work from within a relational framework are a place where children grow – blossom really – then are discharged; often because they outgrow the program. They move back home, or on to independence; they engage in relationships differently than they would have without the intervention offered to them by Child and Youth Care workers who positioned themselves as support, guidance, and mentor for a chunk of their adolescence.

Yet, the youth cannot talk to those now significant people. They cannot call and share successes, proud moments, "I got my driver's licence today." "I had a baby yesterday." "I graduated from college; with honours." Or struggles. "My cat is pregnant and I don't know what to do with the kittens." "I have no groceries. I remember once you talked about a place I could go, I would like the phone number." "My mother died and I talked to her about that stuff. Now I am very sad."

Perhaps this is the result of the closure process so finely expressed as part of the therapeutic relationship cycle. Closure is the conclusion; perhaps paralleling discharge. However, if I am arguing that the relationship changes when a youngster transitions out of a program, is there a conclusion to the relationship? Should there be? If this transition from the program is identified and supported then why can't the relationship transition be supported as well; transitioning into one which is therapeutically appropriate for young people at this new place in their life? This feels more like it fits with a Child and Youth Care approach.

I believe that we need to continue to practice those skills; those basic skills I mentioned at the beginning. Ensuring that we are checking in with self, monitoring the relationship – after all it is still a therapeutic relationship. Changing our relationship does not mean that we have less responsibility in relationship with the young person; it means our relationship is different. Our engagement may be different. Perhaps they are leading from a very different place. The bottom line is that their needs are still paramount.

My question, my concern, my fear, is that this closure process needs to be different in reference to the therapeutic relationship developed in residential care. What are we teaching youngsters about relationship if we follow an all or nothing approach to the change and transition that occurs when they move out of living or staying with us for some of their formative developmental time? Can we do this differently? Should we? Why? These are the questions I want us to all ask; always. About relationships, about treatment plans and about what happens after youngsters leave our direct care.

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# Postcard from Leon Fulcher

*Ventura Beach, California*

Kia Ora and Warm Greetings Everyone! It was so nice spending time and hanging out with many of you at the 3rd CYC-Net World Conference at Ventura Beach, California last week!

The cold Winter dump of snow and ice over the NE States and Provinces of North America gave many from that part of the World respite opportunities in California by the beach. Yay!

The CYC-Net Nurturing Hope Conference was jointly sponsored with Casa Pacifica Child and Family Centers and California Community Services. Thanks to James Freeman and his amazing



*Air New Zealand Flight from Auckland to Los Angeles International Airport*



*A 90 minute shuttle ride to Nurturing Hope Conference a Ventura Beach Hotel*

team of Darlene, Louisa, Tom and the volunteers, all continents were represented.

Travelling always involves parents and children, so I couldn't resist capturing this moment when Mum's new four-wheel carry-on became a ready push-chair for this wee one!

Arriving at the Ventura Beach Crowne Plaza Hotel, it was quickly apparent how close the Thomas Fire came to taking out this coastal community. Further North around Santa Barbara, the fire destroyed property and in the flooding and mudslides which followed, 18 people died.

So it was, that as our international family of child and youth care workers gathered together at Ventura Beach, it was only too apparent just how close the fire had come to the city centre.

The 101 Freeway North was closed around Santa Barbara, while the Amtrak trains were slowed to minimum speed as first responders waded through mud with their dogs, and with long poles searching for bodies. It is amazing what the first responders had to address.



*Quality Multi-Purpose Travelling with Children through airports always amazes!*



*Burned Hillsides overlooking Ventura Beach, California with mudslides north*

*Living on the Edge of the Thomas Fire, California's largest ever wildfire*



*Wildfires stormed down the hillsides to close US Freeway 101 and Amtrak lines*

It soon became apparent that shifts of fire fighters and other first responders were still living at the hotel, and taking their food while off-duty between shifts fighting the fire. There was plenty of scope for us to draw positive metaphors with a clan gathering of child and youth care workers, supervisors, managers and educators



*First Responders in the Thomas Fire lived and took food in our hotel during leave*

in exploration of *Nurturing Hope* with young people and their families, not just putting-out fires whenever things escalate for youths.
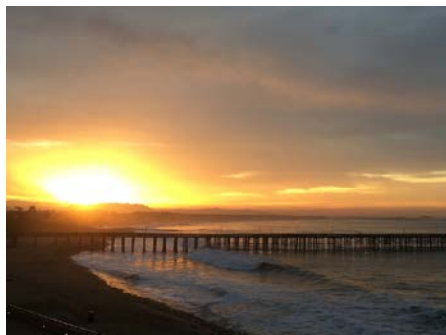
Five excellent plenary sessions were offered, with local elder Dr Lorraine Fox and the Youthful Dance Troupe with Dr Heather Snell from Toronto being especially moving. The Closing Plenary by Dr Tuhinul Islam from Muntada Aid who had just returned from Cox's Bazaar, on the border between Bangladesh and Myanmar. There a million Rohingya refugees are in need after escaping Burmese ethnic cleansing massacre, and rape.



*A Very Successful Silent Auction Garnered World-Wide Attention*

As the International Child and Youth Care Network Family bid each other farewell, so it is that we start planning for the 4th CYC-Net World Conference Gathering in Durban, South Africa from 2 through 4 July 2019 with the National Association of Child and Youth Care Workers and FICE Africa around the theme: *Nation-Building: One Child at a Time!* Start your savings plan now so that you can join us in Africa for a personal and professional experience of a life-time. Think about saving the cost of 2 Grande Cappuccino coffees per week for the next 77 weeks! In so doing, any North American could save up for this trip of a lifetime!



*Everyone from Frozen Parts of North America just loved this view!*

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